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.[3]

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."[8]

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 incompletes 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 poietic speech, of speech that schematizes a world and that fictions an origin and an end. He says, therefore, that foundation, poiesis, 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*)[1] 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 love[2] 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."[3] 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 dialectizes 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 sublate 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, erotism, 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, pro-pose myself to myself (nor im-pose 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 transsubstantiation in infinity. (The transsubstantiation 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 extralexicographical; 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.)

## *II*

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. Peverse 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 originary 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 originarily *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 *Mit-sein* 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."[5] 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 *joi* 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:[7]

> 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 Marion[2] 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 distinction," 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 some*thing*. 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."[3] 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 relationshp 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 multiiugo 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 Cererem, 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 (*Vorenthalt*) 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 unremittingly 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 (*l'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 (*er-lichtet*) . . . , 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 propositions 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. *Einai 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 (*déliaison*) 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; gnoses). 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 some*thing* or of some*one,* 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 transparence 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 impetuousness 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 brothel[27] 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

# Notes

## 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 socio*political* 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 désoeuvrée* 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 transendence," 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 *"désoeuvré"* or *"désoeuvrement,"* 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 *désoeuvrement* 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 *désoeuvrement* into an active trait of the community he is trying to think, we must surely understand this "activity" more as an un*working* (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 geschiet, noch

immer,/unweit von dir." In Pierre Joris's translation: "Unmouthed lip, announce,/that something's happening, still,/not far from you."

## Preface

1. As every translator of Blanchot knows, the French *désoeuvrement* 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 *Po&sie*, 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 ecsapes 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" (*désoeuvré*), 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 *haeceity,* 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 passional 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 continously 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 1 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, Kerenyi, 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 Détienne, *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), Détienne, 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 Kerenyi 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 inversed. 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 Hölderlin.

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 Détienne, *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 *Sprachgesang* (similar to Schönberg'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 Lévi-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, Hölderlin, Hegel, and the Schlegels crossed paths. Among other texts, see *Le plus ancien programme de l'idéalisme allemand* and the *Discours sur la mythologie* by Friedrich Schlegel. (Cf. P. Lacoue-Labarthe and J.-L. Nancy, *L'absolu littéraire,* 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. Détienne, *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 François Fédier, for example, can write that for Hölderlin 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/Théologie. Hommage à l'abbé Daniel Coppieters de Gibson [1929-1983],* [Brussels: Publications des Facultés 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 Lévi-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 incompleted.

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 intellectuals 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," *Po&sie,* 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 requestioning 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* (Pfüllingen: 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 bleibet 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 allerest 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 Clavel, *Dieu est Dieu, nom de Dieu!* (Paris: Grasset, 1976); Philippe Némo, *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'Evangile," in "Dieu est-il mort?" *Art Press* 19 (1978), pp. 6–8. Referring to Girard, Sollers writes: "L'idée que la Bible et les Evangiles 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 la 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 nähmlich
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'Etre 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 désoeuvrée," 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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