Chapter 1
The Inoperative Community

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Such an incarnation of humanity, aggregating its absolute being beyo relation and community, depicts the destiny willed by modern thought. \ shall never escape the "unappeasable combat" as long as we remain unal to protect community from this destiny.

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

> If I "mimic" absolute knowledge, I am at once, of necessity, God myself (in the system, there can be no knowledge, not even in God, which goes beyond absolute knowledge). The thought of this self—of *ipse*—could only make itself absolute by becoming everything. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* comprises two essential movements completing a circle: it is the completion by degrees of the consciousness of the self (of human *ipse*) and the becoming everything (the becoming God) of this *ipse* completing knowledge (and by this means destroying the particularity within it, thus completing the negation of oneself, becoming absolute knowledge). But if in this way, as if by contagion and by mime, I accomplish in myself Hegel's circular movement, I define—beyond the limits attained—no longer an unknown, but an unknowable. Unknowable not on account of the insufficiency of reason, but by its nature (and even, for Hegel, one could only have concern for this beyond for lack of possessing absolute knowledge . . .). Supposing then that I were to be God, that I were to have in the world the assurance of Hegel (suppressing shadow and doubt)—knowing everything and even why fulfilled knowledge required that man, the innumerable particularities of *selves,* and history produce themselves—at precisely that moment, the question is formulated which allows human, divine existence to enter . . . the deepest foray into darkness without return; why must there be *what I know?* Why is it a necessity? In this question is hidden—it doesn't appear at first—an extreme rupture, so deep that only the silence of ecstasy answers it.[3]

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

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

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

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

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

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The solidarity of the individual with communism at the heart of a thinkir of immanence, while neglecting ecstasy, does not however entail a simp symmetry. Communism—as, for example, in the generous exuberance th will not let Marx conclude without pointing to a reign of freedom, or beyond the collective regulation of necessity, in which surplus work woul no longer be an exploitive *work,* but rather art and invention—commu nicates with an extremity of play, of sovereignty, even of ecstasy from whic the individual as such remains definitively removed. But this link ha remained distant, secret, and most often unknown to communism itscl (let us say, to lend concreteness, unknown to Lenin, Stalin, and Trotsky) except in the fulgurating bursts of poetry, painting, and cinema at the ver beginning of the Soviet revolution, or the motifs that Benjamin allowed a reasons for calling oneself a Marxist, or what Blanchot tried to bring acros or propose (rather than signify) with the word "communism" ("Com munism: that which excludes [and excludes itself from] every communit already constituted").[5] But again even this proposal in the final analysi went unrecognized, not only by "real" communism, but also, on clos inspection, by those singular "communists" themselves, who were perhap never able to recognize (until now at least) either where the metaphor (o the hyperbole) began and ended in the usage they made of the word, or especially, what other trope—supposing it were necessary to change words—or what effacement of tropes might have been appropriate to reveal wha haunted their use of the word "communism."

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

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

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

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

We will have to return to the question of what brought about—albeit at the cost of a certain naiveté or misconception—the exigency of a literary[6] experience of community or communism. This is even, in a sense, the only question. But the terms of this question all need to be transformed, to be put back into play in a space that would be distributed quite differently from one composed of all-too-facile relations (for example, solitude of the writer/collectivity, or culture/society, or elite/masses—whether these relations be proposed as oppositions, or, in the spirit of the "cultural revolutions," as equations). And for this to happen, the question of community must first of all be put back into play, for the necessary redistribution of space depends upon it. Before getting to this, and without reseinding any of the resistant generosity or the active restlessness of the word "communism" and without denying anything of the excesses to which it can lead, but also without forgetting either the burdensome mortgage that comes along with it or the usury it has (not aecidentally) suffered, we must allow that *communism* can no longer be the unsurpassable horizon of our time. And if in fact it no longer is such a horizon, this is not because we have passed beyond any horizon. Rather, everything is inflected by resignation, as if the new unsurpassable horizon took form around the disappearance, the impossibility, or the condemnation of communism. Such reversals are customary; they have never altered anything. It is the *horizons* themselves that must be challenged. The ultimate limit of community, or the limit that is formed by community, as such, traces an entirely different line. This is why, even as we establish that communism is no longer our unsurpassable

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The joint suicide or death of lovers is one of the mythico-literary figures of this logic of communion in immanence. Faced with this figure, one cannot tell which—the communion or the love—serves as a model for the other in death. In reality, with the immanence of the two lovers, death accomplishes the infinite reciprocity of two agencies: impassioned love conceived on the basis of Christian communion, and community thought according to the principle of love. The Hegelian State in its turn bears witness to this, for although it certainly is not established on the basis of love—for it belongs to the sphere of so-called objective spirit—it nonetheless has as its *principle* the reality of love, that is to say the fact "of having in another the moment of one's own subsistence." In this State, each member has his truth in the other, which is the State itself, whose reality is never more present than when its members give their lives in a war that the monarch—the effective presence-to-self of the Subject-State—has alone and freely decided to wage.[8]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> If it sees its fellow-being die, a living being can subsist only *outside itself*. . . .
>
> Each one of us is then driven out of the confines of his person and loses himself as much as possible in the community of his fellow creatures. It is for this reason that it is necessary for communal life to maintain itself at a level *equal to death*. The lot

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

* * *

No doubt Bataille has gone farthest into the crucial experience of the modern destiny of community. Whatever the interest accorded his thought (and this remains, despite everything, a meagre and all too often frivolous interest), what has not yet been sufficiently remarked[10] is the extent to which his thinking emerged out of a political exigency and uneasiness—or from an exigency and an uneasiness concerning the political that was itself guided by the thought of community.

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

> For a Marxist, value beyond the useful is conceivable, even inevitable; but it is immanent to man, or else it does not exist. What transcends man (living man, of course, here-below), or in the same way what goes beyond common humanity (humanity without privilege) is without question inadmissible. The sovereign value is man: production is not the only value, it is merely the means of responding to man's needs—it serves him, man does not serve it. . . .
>
> But it remains to be determined whether man, to whom communism refers as the producer, has not taken on this sovereign value on one primary condition: namely, having renounced for himself everything that is truly sovereign. . . . For the irreducible desire that man is, *passionately* and *capriciously*, communism has substituted those needs that can be brought into harmony with a life entirely devoted to producing. (*O.C.* 8:352–53)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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 escapes the power of the dialectic" (Michel Henry, *Marx* [Paris: Gallimard, 1976], vol. 2, p. 46). This might permit me to preface everything I have to say with the following general remark: there are two ways of escaping the dialectic (that is to say mediation in a totality)—either by slipping away from it into immanence or by opening up its negativity to the point of rendering it "unworked" (*désoeuvré*), as Bataille puts it. In this latter case,

there is no immanence of negativity: "there is" *ecstasy*, ecstasy of knowledge as well as history and community.

5. "Le communisme sans héritage," revue *Comité,* 1968, in *Gramma* no. 3/4 (197 p. 32.

6. For the moment, let us retain simply that "literature," here, must above all not taken in the sense Bataille gave to the word when he wrote, for example (in his critique *Inner Experience* and *Guilty*): "I have come to realize through experience that these boo lead those who read them into complacency. They please most often those vague and impot minds who want to flee and sleep and *satisfy* themselves with the escape provided by literatu (*O.C.* 8:583). He also spoke of the "sliding into impotence of thought that turns to literatu (ibid.).

7. See chapter 5, "Of Divine Places."

8. See J.-L. Nancy, "La juridiction du monarque hégélien," in *Rejouer le politique* (Pa Galilée, 1981). Translation forthcoming in *The Birth to Presence* (Stanford: Stanford Univers Press).

9. See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Transcendence Ends in Politics," trans. P. Caws, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics,* ed. C. Fynsk, Harvard University Press, 19 pp. 267-300, and G. Granel, "Pourquoi avoir publié cela?" in *De l'université* (Toulou T.E.R., 1982).

10. Except for Denis Hollier, already in *La prise de la Concorde* (Paris: Gallimard, 19 and in particular with the publication of *Collège de sociologie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), Engli translation by Betsy Wing, *The College of Sociology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesc Press, 1988). More recently, Francis Marmande has published a systematic examination Bataille's political preoccupations. See *Georges Bataille politique* (Paris: Parenthèses, 198

11. But it is unfortunately in the name of the most conventional political or moral attitud that the most haughty—and the most vain—critiques of fascism itself and of those who h 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, followi the pattern of a permanent violence done to the word's meaning, both because it impli subjectivity or intersubjectivity and because it denotes the transmission of a message and 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 "communicatio was insufficient: "*To be isolated, communication,* have only one reality. Nowhere do the exist 'isolated beings' who do not communicate, nor is there a 'communication' independe of points of isolation. Let us be careful to set aside two poorly made concepts, the resid 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 Jacques Derrida has undertaken in "Signature, Event, Context," in *Margins of Philosoph* trans. A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), and such as it has been pursue in another manner, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari ("Postulates of Linguistics," in *Thousand Plateaux,* trans. B. Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987] These operations necessarily entail a general reevaluation of communication in and *of* th community (of speech, of literature, of exchange, of the image, etc.), in respect to which th 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 *haecceity,* 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 t the fact that singular death imposes its limit. It is death that makes the unwork dead man is stronger than the SS. The SS cannot pursue one's friend into death. . . . a limit. There are moments when one could kill oneself, if only to force the SS against the limit of the dead object one will have become, the dead body that turn 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 ju* Minuit, 1985).

33. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute,* trans. Ge Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

34. I am leaving aside here community according to the artist, or rather accordi sovereign man of art." Bataille's affront to society and the State comes most exp continously from the community of lovers. But the communication or the contag resents are at bottom those of the community in the "sovereign abandon of art"- from any aestheticism and even from any aesthetic "abandon." This will be take in a discussion of "literature."

35. Faced with the impossibility of referring sociality solely to the erotic or libidina even in a sublimated form, Freud introduced that other "affective" relation, which "identification." The question of community involves all the problems of identific Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, "La panique politique" in *Cahier tations,* no. 2 (1979), and "The Jewish People Do Not Dream," trans. B. Holmes, "The Unconscious Is Destructured like an Affect," in *Stanford Literature Review,* pp. 191-209.

36. But Hegel knew this: This unity [the child], however, is only a point, a seed; cannot contribute anything to it. . . . Everything which gives the newly begotten child a life and a specific existence, it must draw from itself." In a similar vein, he write love is a sensing of something living, lovers can be distinct from one another only they are mortal" ("The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate," in *On Christianity: E ological Writings,* trans. T. M. Knox [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948] 305).

2. Myth Interrupted

1. One would have to name far too many of them, if one wanted to be com us say that the complete version of this scene has been elaborated from Herder passing through Schlegel, Schelling, Görres, Bachofen, Wagner, ethnology, Freud, Jolles, Cassirer. . . . Nor should we forget, in the beginning, Goethe, whose myt symbolic narrative *The Tale* is in sum the archetype of the modern myth of myth. a German theoretician has gathered and reactivated all the grand traits of this scen up again the romantic appeal to a "new mythology" (and he, too, mixes into it, as c expect, the motif of an end of mythology or, more exactly, its self-surpassing): Manfr *Der kommende Gott* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982). But the strains of the mythologi are to be heard pretty much everywhere these last years.

2. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The View from Afar,* trans. Joachim Neugroschel an Hoss (New York: Basic Books, 1985), p. 219.

3. See Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,* app. I *Standard Edition,* vol. 18.

4. Marcel Détienne, *L'invention de la mythologie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981). In more recent article ("Le mythe, en plus ou en moins," in *L'infini,* no. 6, Sprir Détienne, speaking of "the fleeting, ungraspable essence of myth," seems to me to c