

Chapter 2

Myth Interrupted

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

truth and its own realization, its own suppression and entirely new inauguration, and hence the final inauguration of the inaugural itself that myth has always been. Myth realizes itself dialectically; it exceeds all its “mythic” figures to announce the pure mytho-logy of an absolutely foundational, symbolizing, or distributive speech.²²

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It is here that things are interrupted.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Or again:

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If we say quite simply and in all lucidity that present day man is defined by his avidity for myth, and if we add that he is also defined by the awareness of not being able to accede to the possibility of creating a veritable myth, we have defined a kind of myth that is the *absence of myth*.³⁶

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The interrupted community does not flee from itself: but it does not belong to itself, it does not congregate, it communicates itself from one singular place to another. "The basis of communication," writes Blanchot, "is not necessarily speech, nor even the silence that is its foundation and punctuation, but exposure to death, and no longer my death, but someone else's, whose living and closest presence is already an eternal and unbearable absence."³⁷

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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