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The work of friendship : *Blanchot, Bataille, Hegel*

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Summary of thesis

In this thesis I argue that friendship holds a unique and unusual place in the work of Maurice Blanchot (1907-). It traces the appearance of this relation in his essays during the period from 1946 to 1962. Key to his work at this time, I argue, is the work of his friend Georges Bataille (1897-1960), whom he met in 1940. The influence of each writer upon the work of the other, I argue, is inseparable from the thought of friendship which both pursue, albeit in different and apparently conflicting ways: Bataille figures the relation to the friend as complicity, a term which he presents in terms of a quasi-ontological determination 'the labyrinthine constitution of beings'; and Blanchot locates friendship in terms of a movement of discretion or discontinuity which interrupts being in order for there to be relation as such. It is shown how both thinkers reinscribe friendship into their work in general through these figures, which allow them to articulate questions of memory, death and the 'work'. It is in this sense that friendship, for both writers, is 'at work' within their work. Central to this determination of 'the work' is G.W.F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which had been introduced into French intellectual life principally by two commentators, Alexandre Kojève and Jean Hyppolite. The figural differences between complicity and discretion are traced to their respective readings of Hegel. Bataille's debt to Kojève's interpretation forms the starting point of this linkage between the question of friendship and the status of the work. The pivotal role which Kojève ascribes to the relation of mastery and slavery - the emergence of self-consciousness as the work of recognition [Anerkennung] - is used to draw out Hegel's genetic account of intersubjectivity (in recognition, love, and friendship). I show that Bataille's conception of sovereignty not only seeks to oppose this dialectic of mastery "Hegelianly"; it also situates itself within this dialectic at the very moment which Kojève defines in terms of the limited animality of friendship and love. As a result, Bataille's thought of friendship extends to characterise the impossibility into which this dialectic is inevitably collapsed. Yet the question remains as to how far his reliance upon Kojève puts this strategy of collapse under an ever-present threat of having to repeat those 'Hegelian' strategies which he claims to have 'undone'. The final chapter in the thesis, therefore, sets out a characterisation of Blanchot's reading of Hegel. Against the grain of most Blanchot commentaries, I show that Blanchot's reading cannot be derived solely from Kojève. By linking the pivotal function of terms such as 'disquiet' ['Unruhe'] and key passages from Hegel's texts, it is argued that he draws extensively upon the commentaries and translations of Hyppolite: this approach allows him to amplify the importance of language in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*; and to identify in this text key questions of ambiguity - such as the relation of language and negativity; the place of memory in the work of art; and the fate of art in the modern world. It is Hegel's ambiguous linkage of friendship with the latter which leads to his own effacement of Bataille's relation between friendship and art, and to the definition of a 'work of friendship' in the self-effacement of discretion.

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I could not have written this thesis without the help of those named above. But starting and finishing it would have been impossible without Karen. She will be glad finally to see the back of it.

For Karen.

28th September 1999

Abbreviations

Titles are given alphabetically by abbreviation. Texts by Blanchot have a two-letter abbreviation (with the exception of his letters); Bataille's *Oeuvres complètes* are indicated by a single Roman numeral; and all other Hegel or secondary texts are given a three-letter abbreviation. Footnotes are placed at the end of each chapter.

• Works by Blanchot

x Letters to Bataille

[All references to this correspondence are preceded by the '#' symbol, and given by their catalogue number in the "Papiers Georges Bataille" at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.]

Am "L'amitié: Pour Georges Bataille", in *Les Lettres nouvelles*, 29, 1962

AM *L'Amitié*

CI *La Communauté inavouable*

ED *L'Écriture du désastre*

EI *L'Entretien infini*

EL *L'Espace littéraire*

FP *Faux pas*

FS *Friendship*, translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg

IC *The Infinite Conversation*, translated by Susan Hanson

PA *Le Pas au-delà*

PF *La Part du feu*

SL *The Space of Literature*, translated by Ann Smock

SB *The Step Not Beyond*, translated by Lycette Nelson

WD *The Writing of the Disaster*, translated by Ann Smock

WF *The Work of Fire*, translated by Charlotte Mandell

- **Works by Bataille**

I-XII *Oeuvres complètes*, 12 volumes

All references to Bataille's collected complete works are given as a single roman numeral. The relevant contents of those volumes used are listed below:

V La Somme athéologique, I.: *Le Coupable; L'Expérience intérieure*

VI La Somme athéologique, II.: *Sur Nietzsche, volonté de chance; "L'Amitié"; "Collège socratique"; "Discussion sur la péché"*

VII La Part Maudite, I: *La Part maudite, I. La consommation; Théorie de la religion*

VIII La Part maudite, II: *L'Histoire de l'érotisme; La Souveraineté; "L'Amour d'un être mortel"; "Le paradoxe de la mort et la pyramide"*

IX *Lascaux ou la naissance de l'art*

XI Articles 1945-49: "Lettre sur les incompatibilités de l'écrivain"; "De l'existentialisme à la primat de l'économie"

XII Articles 1950-62: "Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice"; "Hegel, l'homme et l'histoire"; "Le non-savoir"; "Le souverain"; "L'au-delà du sérieux"

- **Works by Hegel and secondary texts**

BEC Leslie Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*

GeS Jean Hyppolite, *Genèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel*, 2 volumes

HMC Alexandre Kojève, "Hegel, Marx et le christianisme", in *Critique*

ILH Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*

PhE *La Phénoménologie de l'esprit*, 2 volumes, translated by J. Hyppolite

PhG *Werke. Band 3. Phänomenologie des Geistes.*

PhS *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A.V. Miller

Y aurait-il, cachée dans l'intimité de la parole, une force amie et ennemie, une arme faite pour construire et pour détruire, qui agirait derrière la signification et non sur la signification? Faut-il supposer un sens du sens des mots qui, tout en le déterminant, envelopperait cette détermination d'une indétermination ambiguë en instance entre le oui et le non?

Would there be, hidden within the intimacy of speech, a friendly and hostile force, an arm made for constructing and for destroying, which would act behind signification and not upon it? Must one suppose a meaning of the meaning of words which, whilst determining it, would envelop this determination with an ambiguous indetermination poised between the yes and the no?

“La littérature et le droit à la mort”

Introduction

Friendship and the work: Blanchot, Bataille, Hegel

±± « *Friendship is only given to life itself.* »

Maurice Blanchot ¹

The subject matter of this thesis is not friendship. Nor does this study provide an analysis of the philosophical history of this concept. Instead, the prime concern here is *the work of friendship* in the writings of two friends, Maurice Blanchot and Georges Bataille, and of the German philosopher, G.W.F Hegel. The significance of this phrase lies in the juxtaposition of two terms which do not appear to be commensurate with one another. This incommensurability of ‘work’ and ‘friendship’ is particularly pronounced in the philosophical determination which Hegel gives to ‘the work’ [‘das Werk’] in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). The impact of this book and the dialectical thought it presents can be traced throughout the work of Blanchot and Bataille. It will be argued, in fact, that Hegel’s ‘work’ - the concept and his body of thought - is the single most influential factor in the philosophical development of both writers. Alongside this Hegelian legacy in their work there also lies a shared preoccupation with the relation of friendship, or ‘l’amitié’. Not that either writer presents what one could

call a coherent theory of friendship, or even undertakes a sustained engagement with those conceptions already provided by the philosophical tradition of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Montaigne, or Kant, for example. On the contrary, both Blanchot and Bataille seem to deploy friendship more as a figure of thought in their work. A figure for *what* thought, exactly? What does friendship ‘do’ in their writings? What ‘work’ does this relation perform there? It is this question of the work of friendship which will concern the present study.

0.1 - Blanchot, Bataille and friendship

The guiding question of this thesis, however, is addressed to the enigmatic and, according to some commentators, the ‘exemplary’ way in which friendship is presented in the work of Blanchot. With Blanchot, the first problem that arises is where to start the inquiry. Over a period of more than sixty years, from his early forays into political journalism in the early 1930’s to the publication of his most recent, quasi-biographical *L’Instant de ma mort* (1994), he has not only produced a vast quantity of writing, but these works have been as broad in their range of concerns as they have been demanding of their own generic limits.² Blanchot has written novels, narratives, reviews and articles - some subsequently republished in their own right, others assembled together into collections -; he has also made interventions into contemporary political debates and events - notably the “Déclaration sur le droit à l’insoumission” during the Algerian war and ‘les événements’ of May 1968. Yet such a ‘public’ life in print cannot fail to contrast with the persistent and deliberate anonymity of a writer about whom, at the time of writing, no biography has been written. As soon as one starts to talk about Blanchot, his work or his thought, there is always the silent, quasi-spectral presence of a figure whose scant biographical notice appears at the beginning of *L’Espace littéraire* and *Le Livre à venir*:

Maurice Blanchot, novelist and critic, was born in 1907. His life is entirely devoted to literature and to the silence which is proper to it.

This thesis does not concern itself with a biography of Blanchot, or even speculate on reasons why one has not yet been written.³ Such a task, as we will find out in the course of this inquiry, is precarious given that it raises questions about the relation of 'life' and 'the work' which Blanchot himself addresses only with the utmost care and discretion.⁴ Thus, one needs to take care with this word friendship, so as not to reduce it too quickly to a fixed determination or location within this work, by making of it either a biographical resource, or the conceptual figure of an ethics or a politics.⁵ In fact, the greatest danger lies in having already decided where to place friendship in Blanchot's work, for upon closer inspection it becomes clear that this word does not present an easily encapsulated or readily thematised 'face'. Where should we turn?

This is the 'difficulty' to which the figure of friendship testifies in Blanchot's work. Indeed, it may be claimed that some of the texts in which he addresses friendship - often indirectly, rather than explicitly or thematically - are among his most difficult and enigmatic. This resistance to thematisation is most pronounced in those texts where friendship is allowed to ghost a commentary on the work of a writer who is a friend. It becomes difficult to maintain a textual distinction with regard to the naming of the friend and the naming of friendship: it is uncertain whether a general examination of friendship can be separated from the specific instantiation of a dedication, a quotation or even an allusion to the work of the friend. Consequently, it is difficult to say whether any of these works are actually written 'on' friendship, insofar as this form of indirect reference appears to indicate that thematising friendship would betray this very relation.

This problem of the singularity of friendship brings us to a central problem for this enquiry. What function, if any, can friendship possess in Blanchot's work? Can it tell us anything about the way in which he 'works' in general? Yet as soon as one asks about the possibility of addressing friendship or the friend in general,

there is a conflict with the very thing that this relation names and affirms: the singular occurrence of *this* friendship or *this* friend. This conflict is identifiable throughout Blanchot's work, where it arises at every instant of judgment about a given work. Nowhere is this conflict more acute than in his treatment of friendship; especially if one wishes to ascribe a certain exemplarity to this relation. But exemplary of what, exactly? Is the community of friendship reducible to the simple fact of 'being-together'? Does not the very attempt to deploy friendship as an exemplary philosophical figure both blunt the singularity of the former and blur the rigorous specificity demanded of the latter? Denis Hollier voices just this suspicion with regard to Blanchot's book, *La Communauté inavouable*, and Jean-Luc Nancy's *La Communauté désœuvrée* (both 1983). He suspects that both thinkers 'neutralise' the question of community by raising it to an ontological category, and flattening out of it any existing social dynamic of differences and conflicts:

It is true that with what Blanchot calls "friendship," an androgynous element halfway between the political and the sexual, this joining process had already begun. In this regard, is it not to be feared that a "vague moralism of reconciliation" might divert one from Klossowski's countering quest "for the roots of hatred," especially the reciprocal hatred of the political and the sexual?⁶

Does Blanchot's treatment of friendship reduce it to an indifferent 'joining' of beings? If it did, Hollier's complaint would be justifiable. Yet he seems to almost deliberately misunderstand the level of thought at which Blanchot places friendship. It will be shown in that the relation of friendship in his work has nothing to do with what Hollier disparages as 'moralism' or 'reconciliation'. So *how* should we read the word, friendship, in Blanchot's work?

One possible answer is provided by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in the introduction to *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (1991). The general project of their book as a whole is to develop the possibility of presenting philosophical problems

as figures for the production of thought in general. They call these figures ‘conceptual characters’ [‘personnages conceptuels’]; and the first ‘conceptual character’ to which they turn is that of *the friend*: ‘What does friend mean, when it becomes a conceptual character, or condition for the exercise of thought?’⁷ Their question draws attention to the stakes of considering what it is that friendship names when it appears in a philosophical or theoretical text. It lays open a fundamental philosophical gesture by which the concept is raised out of and over that which is designated as the empirical, or even ‘non-philosophical’. They do not posit this example of ‘the friend’ as an insight into the projected ‘origin’ of how the Greek word ‘philia’ comes to determine the name of philosophy as such. Instead, they turn to the work of Blanchot:

And when today Maurice Blanchot, who belongs to those rare thinkers to consider the sense of the word “friend” in philosophy, takes up this question internal to the conditions of thought as such, does he not again introduce new conceptual characters into the heart of the purest Thought, this time hardly Greek, that came from elsewhere, as if they had passed through a catastrophe which leads them towards new living relations raised to the state of *a priori* figures [caractères]: a detour [un détournement], a certain fatigue, a certain distress between friends which converts friendship itself to the thought of the concept as infinite mistrust and patience?⁸

This lengthy question appears at the beginning of their discussion of the ‘conceptual characters’; in fact, Blanchot’s ‘character’ of the friend appears to be posited as *the* example of what they call ‘the object of philosophy’: ‘to create always new concepts’.⁹ What is of interest here for this inquiry is the description of this figure in Blanchot’s work, the exemplarity given to it, and the constructive force that is drawn from this figure of the friend in his work. Moreover, in an accompanying footnote, they remark that both *L’Amitié* and *L’Entretien infini* bear upon ‘the relation of friendship to the possibility of thought in the modern

world'.¹⁰ Friendship is not found in a particular branch or discipline of philosophical inquiry: it has been placed within 'the conditions of thought as such'; and it is through friendship that Blanchot speaks to us of the very 'possibility of thought' today. The rhetorical sweep of this question leaves unasked many more questions concerning those 'characters' that have 'come from *elsewhere*'; about the fictional 'as if' which qualifies the 'catastrophe' through which they have passed into 'new living relations'; and about the task of philosophy itself as an 'always new' creation of concepts. Leaving aside a more detailed discussion of these individual questions, it must be stressed that it is on the basis of this description that Blanchot is claimed to be among 'those *rare* thinkers' who think friendship 'today'. Are they simply claiming that that Blanchot's 'rarity' as a thinker is to have given the concept of friendship a new lease of life in the present, by drawing on resources that lie 'elsewhere', perhaps outside of the philosophical tradition. Indeed, how does friendship come to be the concept which, as Deleuze and Guattari phrase it, bears his 'signature'?¹¹ From what resources does he 'create' it?

This problem of origin returns us again to the question of how to approach friendship in Blanchot's work. If we are not to decide in advance what friendship means for Blanchot, as Hollier does, it pays to attend to the ways and the places in which it is named or presented. Indeed, the 'place' of friendship in Blanchot's work is neither constant nor accidental. It is this peculiar infrequency, which we should call an economy, perhaps, of *where* and *when* friendship is named, that seems to have become integral to how friendship is to be thought with Blanchot. This topological specificity of this approach to the question of friendship brings us to Blanchot's 1962 essay, "L'amitié", and to his friend, Georges Bataille.¹² A number of commentaries on Blanchot have touched upon the references to Bataille in his work, and have drawn attention to the importance that this relation had for both writers. Invariably, this kind of biographical detail serves the same purpose: a citation from one serving as the ground for an interpretation of the other. A concept which is common to both of them allows for it to be explained in the work

of one through reference to its meaning in the work of the other. However, this temptation to explain the work of one through that of the other has a tendency to obliterate differences that can be as fine as they are profound.¹³ Even when this gesture is undermined by the attribution of a mistinterpretation of one by the other, or a deeper incompatibility, there lies the temptation is to resort to the proper name of one as an *authority* over the work of the latter, whether one seeks to support or subvert it.¹⁴ We are left without any sense of *how* Blanchot and Bataille could maintain such contradictions between them.

It is clear that other approaches are needed. When Roger Laporte, for example, quotes the words, ‘experience cannot be communicated if the bonds of silence, effacement, distance, do not change those it puts into play’, from Bataille’s *L’Expérience intérieure*, he asks: ‘how could we not think of his friendship for Blanchot, that which Blanchot bore for Bataille - the friend *par excellence* -, their “infinite conversation”?’¹⁵ He allows his description of this passage juxtapose biographical fact (their friendship) with a concept taken from Blanchot’s book, *L’Entretien infini*. This slippage of terms between Bataille and Blanchot, in the form of a rhetorical question, at once posits an identity between life and work, and draws attention to this positing. Laporte himself is being discreet: he is not identifying the work with the life, nor using the one to explicate or authorise the other. In fact, all that Laporte posits is the idea that *this* ‘friendship’ between Blanchot and Bataille refuses the possibility of any such identification whilst somehow enacting it at every point. Friendship, it seems, is the name for what binds them *and* their work. Laporte’s discreet juxtaposition gives us a glimpse of how far friendship might take us in understanding the work of Bataille and Blanchot in general. Yet how can we posit the singularity of their relation *and* reserve the right to thematise or generalise from it? Jacques Derrida poses this question on a number of occasions:

That which binds Blanchot to Bataille is unique and “L’amitié” says it in an absolutely singular fashion. [...] Without being able to enter into the

absolute singularity of this relation, without forgetting that Blanchot alone was able to write it and thus speak solely of Bataille, without comprehending, perhaps, and in any case without knowing, we can think what is written there.¹⁶

Derrida's repeated reservations - 'without being able...'; 'without forgetting...' - are similarly sensitive to the singular form of friendship. Like Laporte's discreet juxtaposition, they are articulated through a kind of indirect citation of Blanchot's syntax of the 'without'. For Derrida, although we cannot take part or enter into this relation, but we can always think what it gives to be thought 'in an absolutely singular fashion'. But how far is even this thought an act of trespass? By what right do we excerpt what is given to be thought from a text which speaks of a singular relation? For Derrida, this is the question which Blanchot's "L'amitié" asks of us; and it is in this confrontation that it allows us to think it.

So why persist in reading Bataille alongside Blanchot on the question of friendship? It is possible, of course, that any approach to this question rests too heavily upon a problematic equivalence of biography and the work; and one which Blanchot himself is the first to put into question. Yet when it is a matter of the way in which two friends deploy the 'same' relation of friendship in their respective work, it is important to remain open to the way in which this deployment or presentation takes place. Hence, any parallels and divergences which are to be found in Bataille's work are essential to building an understanding of the way in which this relation is figured by Blanchot. The 'detour' and the 'possibility of thought' which Deleuze and Guattari located in Blanchot's figure of friendship cannot be simply abstracted from the context in which this relation is presented in his work. The problem of biography is not disposed of in this way; the question of the *singularity* of a friendship needs to be negotiated especially carefully in the exchange between these two friends because this very relation between 'work' and 'friendship' is at stake in it. This thesis sets out to follow this exchange or conversation between the two friends as it manifests itself in their

respective works. For example, Blanchot's "L'amitié" is written after the death of Bataille in 1962, and echoes the title of Bataille's own piece, "L'Amitié", published pseudonymously in 1940, the year in which the two first met. The first pair of chapters in this thesis will be occupied with drawing out the different ways in which friendship is presented in these two pieces, whose chronology brackets the duration of their relationship. In the process, these readings will draw upon the relation of "L'amitié" (1962) and "L'Amitié" (1940) to the rest of their work: this will involve questions about memory, fidelity, communication and transgression; and in particular the relation between death and the work. The result of this dual reading is delineation of a 'différend' between Blanchot and Bataille over the figuration of friendship in terms of either discretion and discontinuity or complicity and continuity. This difference is in fact fundamental to their work as a whole for it taps into the contrasting ways in which they respond to the philosophical concept of 'the work' presented in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

0.2 - Blanchot, Bataille and Hegel

The second pair of chapter in this thesis relate these differences in the figuring of friendship to their respective readings of Hegel. For both Blanchot and Bataille, Hegel's philosophy marks the introduction of the concept of death as negativity, or the work, into the heart of all thought. It is here that the question of the work of friendship can be asked what is the relation between the work - the work of art, the literary or poetic work, or even the philosophical work - and friendship for Blanchot and for Bataille? How might one understand this phrase 'work of friendship' in the context of their readings of Hegel? These readings must be understood with respect to their proper sources in two contemporary commentaries on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: Alexandre Kojève's famous lectures from the 1930's, collected as *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (1947); and Jean Hyppolite's *Genèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l'esprit de*

Hegel (1946).¹⁷ It is well-recorded that these works introduced a very particular ‘Hegel’ to an entire generation of French writers and intellectuals. Along with the work of Koyré and Wahl, Kojève and Hyppolite privileged the *Phenomenology* as their point of access to Hegel, often alongside those Frankfurt and Jena writings which prefigured it.

Bataille’s own work in particular testifies to Kojève’s dominant influence in French intellectual life at this time. It will be argued, in Chapter 3, that the relations of death and friendship are thought only from an antagonistic relation to this privileging of the work at a certain ‘moment’ of the *Phenomenology*. This ‘moment’ links the emergence of self-consciousness (the truth of consciousness) to an intersubjective relation, which famously Kojève will call the ‘master-slave dialectic’, thus giving centre stage to the concept of recognition first presented therein.¹⁸ As we will observe, Kojève regards this concept, and the ‘moment’ of the master-slave which figures it, not simply as the schematic heart of his reading of the *Phenomenology*, but moreover as the ‘key-notion’ of Hegel’s entire philosophy: the concept of recognition marks the emergence and development of the human subject into an educated, social and political citizen, whose freedom and rights are guaranteed by the modern state. Kojève portrays this development in terms of the conceptual movement from love to recognition and in the structural transformation of death into work (the ‘work of the negative’). It is this movement that forms the schematic heart of his narrative of History, at whose ‘end’ he located Hegel and the *Phenomenology* itself - the point at which every possibility has been realised or exhausted. Friendship is identified with ‘Love’ as the ‘first description’ of the existential-anthropogenetic dialectic, and consequently both are characterised by a lack of conflict, absence of risk, refusal of socio-political activity and actuality. In short, these feelings do not satisfy Man’s ‘desire for Recognition’: mere ‘love of knowing’ is to be supplanted by ‘actual knowing’.

It is this narrative against which Bataille sets himself in a quite unique way. In one of the many notebooks in which he worked on his *Théorie de la religion*,

Bataille expressed the paradoxical nature of his relation to Hegel with the utmost simplicity:

In a sense, Hegel's thinking is the direct opposite of my own, but I can make sense of this only dialectically, to put it another way, "Hegelianly".¹⁹

In the light of the preceding discussion, one should resist the temptation to read this remark as if the two instances of Hegel - 'Hegel's thinking' and the word "Hegelianly" - were intended to mark an opposition of Kojève's Hegel and another, more accurate or faithful reading of Hegel to which Bataille would have independent access. Although Bataille affirms this opposition, 'in one sense', as 'direct', he also implicitly recognises the Hegelian problematic of such relations of immediacy.²⁰ He does not seek to bypass or overcome the possible gap between Hegel and Kojève's 'Hegel', instead he acknowledges that his only way of articulating his opposition to this totality is to force a way in through this gap and to exploit it. In order to understand the sense in which Bataille seeks to oppose Hegel "Hegelianly", we must grasp the universality and totality which Bataille finds in 'the (*fundamentally Hegelian*) thought' of Kojève. In Chapter 3, therefore, it will be a matter of allowing Kojève's account of Hegel to unfold so that it becomes possible to identify those structures which Bataille exploits and exacerbates in his characterisations of sovereignty, friendship and the work of art.

The question of how Blanchot reads Hegel, therefore, is vital to understanding the exact nature of his differences with Bataille over the relation of friendship. In the final chapter, we will be interested once again in properly differentiating the 'work of friendship' in Blanchot and Bataille, respectively. What is the Hegelian influence on the way that Blanchot relates 'friendship' to the 'work'? Is his reading of Hegel at all compatible with Bataille's? Do they in fact read the *same* "Hegel"? In her recent survey of Blanchot's work, Annelise Schulte-Nordholdt argues that Blanchot is 'very close to Bataille, in whom one finds a similar relativisation of the Hegelian dialectic.'²¹ This similitude finds its root in the interpretation of Kojève:

It is Kojève who provides the amplification of the anthropological dimension of negation, that is to say of death, in the Blanchotian conception of language. It is through the bias of his interpretation of Hegel that Blanchot thinks human activity.²²

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that many accounts of Blanchot's reading of Hegel have identified Kojève (via Bataille) as its sole source.²³ This assumption may hold true at an anecdotal level, insofar as one might assume that Bataille would have introduced Blanchot to Kojève's work (there is little or no reference to Hegel in his pre-1941 writings). However, this assumption does not mean that Kojève's influence is as determinate for Blanchot as it is for Bataille. Chapter 4 of this thesis will therefore present a counter-argument that Blanchot and Bataille do *not* share this dependence upon Kojève and that, as a result, their respective readings of Hegel take quite different paths. It is precisely the nature of this difference that interests us. For this reason, the account of Blanchot's relation to Hegel will not repeat the kind of linear analysis given in Chapter 3. Instead, it will follow a zig-zag course between different texts by Blanchot and Hegel, in order to show how Blanchot reads Hegel sometimes with, sometimes against, but oftentimes quite *apart from* the readings offered by Kojève or Hyppolite.

In fact, as the caveat at the beginning of "La littérature et le droit à la mort" makes explicit, the most explicit characteristic of Blanchot's reading is his *distance* from the claims made by Bataille:

It is understood that the remarks which follow remain quite remote from the text of *The Phenomenology* and do not seek to explain [éclairer] it.²⁴

This is not the kind of comment that one finds in Bataille's *Théorie de la religion*. But why this distance from Hegel's text? How should we understand Blanchot's subsequent 'remarks' in the light of his refusal to 'illuminate' it? As we indicated in the Introduction, the fact that Blanchot draws upon the work of Hyppolite in addition to that of Kojève has to be taken into account. This means that the text(s)

from which he *distances* himself is more likely to be Hyppolite's translation: his 'remarks' will not constitute a line-by-line commentary, such as that provided in *Genèse et structure*. Nonetheless, in the first half of Chapter 4, I will contend that "La littérature et le droit à la mort" bears the mark of Blanchot's familiarity with Hyppolite's reading of Hegel; principally, in the word, 'l'inquiétude'; the citation of a passage on the act of naming from the *Realphilosophie*; and the rendition of the 'life of spirit' passage from the *Phenomenology*. These traces are not all of the same order. The latter only shows us that Blanchot has indeed read Hyppolite's translation (whereas Bataille read only Kojève); but the former two deserve more sustained treatment because of the claims made by both Hyppolite and Blanchot. In each case, however, what interests us is the manner in which Blanchot transforms or rewrites his Hegelian sources. These links require that we follow closely a double gesture in Blanchot's reading of Hegel, as it commences in "La littérature et le droit à la mort": his self-distancing from 'the text' of the *Phenomenology*; and his rewriting of certain Hegelian citations and themes. As we shall see, this double gesture manifests itself in his account of relation between negativity, language, and literature.

This doubleness and the centrality of language mark out the specificity of Blanchot's reading of Hegel. In common with Kojève and Bataille, Blanchot's engagement with Hegel revolves around the idea of death as it is put to work in determinate negation. However, he approaches negativity through the question of *language*. He foregrounds the act of naming, the process of writing, the condition of ambiguity, and the possibility of dialogue, in place of the Kojèvean lexicon of 'Discourse', 'Desire' and 'Recognition' which Bataille adopts. What difference does this approach make? As we will show in Chapter 3, the term 'Discourse' does not have any linguistic specificity for Kojève: although he refers to it as the generic term for the realm of concepts and ideas produced through the operation of determinate negativity, he presents such discursive activity without reference to words or their communication, whether through the relations of speech, the ambiguities of meaning, or even the very act of naming. Nothing happens in

Kojèvean 'Discourse', it only 'reveals' or 'reports' the actions of consciousness. This is because Kojève's entire reading of Hegel revolves around the 'Action' of the master-slave dialectic and, above all, the 'key-notion' of 'Recognition': *actions* count, not words, in his rendition of the dialectic.²⁵ Hence, when Blanchot refers to Kojève's presentation of the act of naming as murder, it is his own fundamental concern with language through which he reads. What will be of interest in this chapter, therefore, is whether Blanchot simply imposes this concern upon the Hegelian text, or whether he draws upon resources that lie within Hyppolite's work.

Unlike Bataille, then, Blanchot does not appear to have a reading of Hegel as such. In fact, whereas Bataille's *Oeuvres complètes* is peppered with references and directives on how Hegel is to be read, Blanchot's only general comments on reading Hegel appear in his later fragmentary texts, *Le pas au-delà* (1973) and *L'écriture du désastre* (1980). A fragment from the latter not only appears to answer our question, but does so with a playful irony that amplifies this importance of the negative: 'One cannot "read" Hegel, except by not reading him.'²⁶ It is no coincidence that these remarks on reading Hegel arrive in a form of writing that tends toward impersonality and interruption (in the paradoxical 'name' of 'le neutre'). Moreover, these fragments disavow any claim to having surpassed, stepped outside or 'inverted' Hegel's speculative system, however these terms might be construed. Indeed, to speak of Blanchot's work in terms of 'post-speculative' or post-Hegelian thought is, in itself, non-sensical and plainly wrong. First, speculative thought articulates (itself as) a conception of time which, far from being empty and formalistic, enfolds both the 'before' and the 'after', both past and future, into the evanescent movement of the present. Second, Blanchot not only acknowledges this condition of the speculative system, but constantly attempts to place his own work in a (non-dialectical) relation to it: he *rewrites* Hegel 'off to one side', as Andrzej Warminski describes it.²⁷ Instead of claiming to have stepped beyond or outside dialectical thought, Blanchot steps *aside*, as if alongside the path of the dialectic, as if accompanying it along an

unforeseeable detour. It is this discreet turning which more than anything comes to characterise the specific nature of his reading of Hegel, and which will bind it all the more intractably to the thought of discretion at the heart of his work.

*

In the first two chapters, then, we will draw closely upon two texts which bear the same title - Blanchot's "L'amitié" and Bataille's "L'Amitié" - in order to follow the different ways in which each presents us with this word 'friendship'. Chapter 1 will negotiate Blanchot's meditation upon the relation of the work and the one who writes, in which he finds already a disturbing relation of discontinuity between the 'self' and 'its' death, a relation of discretion which informs the very possibility of friendship as such. In Chapter 2, we will contrast the way in which friendship takes place, for Bataille, within the 'sovereign operation' of sacrifice and communication, resulting in a very different relation of complicity. In the final pairing of chapters, we will turn to the Hegelian influence on both writers in order to articulate the relation between friendship and the work. By passing through a reading of Kojève's account of the 'master-slave dialectic' in Chapter Three, we will show how Bataille's composition of sovereignty, friendship and the work of art is founded upon his "'Hegelian" opposition' to Hegel and the dialectical 'work' of philosophy. Finally, in Chapter 4, we will return to Blanchot's essays of the late 1940's and 1950's in order to bring together the two strands of the preceding enquiry - friendship and the 'work' - and to ask, once again, about the 'work' of friendship within the more familiar themes of the literary language, and the origins of the work of art in 'le désœuvrement'.

Notes to Introduction

¹ Blanchot, “L’entretien infini”, EI, ix-xxvi, xxi; IC, xiii-xxiii, xx.

² Leslie Hill has recently provided the most comprehensive bibliography so far of Blanchot’s writings from 1931 to early 1997; see Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*, London: Routledge, 1997, 274-98.

³ Unfortunately, the preparation of this thesis preceded the appearance of Christophe Bident’s ‘biographical essay’, *Maurice Blanchot, partenaire invisible*, Seyssel: Éditions Champ Vallon, 1998. As a result, I have only been able to consult it in a cursory manner.

⁴ The genre of biography provides an effective and problematic frame upon which to organise the changes and developments of a writer’s or a thinker’s work. I have drawn on the information presented by Leslie Hill in two separate texts: his “Introduction” to Carolyn Bailey Gill (ed), *Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing*, London: Routledge, 1996, 1-20; and in an extended form, in “An Intellectual Itinerary”, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*, op.cit., 1-52.

A recent attempt at combining a critical study of Blanchot’s intellectual development with an account of his life and political ‘engagements’ has been Pierre Mesnard’s *Maurice Blanchot. Le sujet de l’engagement*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996. His mixture of biographical events and textual exegesis is at best unconvincing; at worst it compromises the care with which Blanchot himself has always approached the question of commentary and biography. I will expand upon this aspect of Blanchot’s thinking in Chapter 1, Section 1.22, and Chapter 4, Section 4.1.

⁵ Both approaches to Blanchot and friendship may be discerned in the citation which follows:

[T]he writer is present only through the voices of his texts and through those of his friends, the few that know him (Levinas, des Fôrets, Mascolo, Laporte, Derrida,...) and those who have read him. But it is precisely this mode of presence-absence, under the sign of friendship, which is able to give us a glimpse, beyond the details of physiognomy, the true face of Maurice Blanchot.

Patrick Kechichian, “Sur les traces de Maurice Blanchot”, *Le Monde*, 12 September 1994. This short text is excerpted from a French radio broadcast on Blanchot, which included contributions from Laporte, Derrida, Mascolo, et al.

⁶ “Foreword: Collage,” in Denis Hollier (ed), *The College of Sociology (1937-39)*, translated by Betsy Wing, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, xviii. Hollier’s criticisms of Blanchot and Nancy echo those directed at Heidegger some forty years earlier by Simone de Beauvoir. Discussing the work of Lévi-Strauss on the structural elements of kinship - “duality, alternation, opposition, and symmetry” -, she concludes:

These phenomena would be incomprehensible if in fact human society were simply a *Mitsein* or fellowship based on solidarity and friendliness. This becomes clear, on the contrary, if, following Hegel, we find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility

towards every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed - he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object.

See the "Introduction" to *The Second Sex*, translated by H.M. Parshley, London: Jonathan Cape, 1953 [Picador, 1988], 17. Also of interest here is the way that de Beauvoir's analysis of 'female friendships', which she finds to be fundamentally determined by a mutual rivalry and hostility, is wholly determined by her 'following Hegel' (and thus Kojève's account of the dialectic of recognition): 'Their relations are not founded on their individualities, but immediately experienced in generality; and from this arises at once an element of hostility.' It is for this reason that she claims that women's 'fellow feeling rarely rises to genuine friendship...'; see 556-9, 558.

The problematic of sexual difference within classical and modern determinations of friendship is too complex to be touched upon in this present study.

⁷ "Ainsi donc la question", introduction to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1991, 9.

⁸ *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, 10.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., n.1.

¹¹ Ibid. It would seem that Deleuze and Guattari would wish to evoke the name of Emmanuel Levinas by this reference to an 'elsewhere' (than Greek 'philia'), although this is never made explicit. We will argue that, whilst Blanchot testifies on many occasions to his friendship with Levinas, it is also the case that his *thinking* of friendship bears a strong relation to that of Bataille, especially if this 'signature' is a mark of genealogy. In his biography of Bataille, Michel Surya includes the following inscription written to Bataille on the publication Blanchot's *Un Moment voulu*:

perhaps this book only addresses itself to friendship, and so, *even* without another sign, you cannot doubt that it is addressed first of all to you.

See Surya, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l'oeuvre*, Paris: Gallimard, 1992, 673.

¹² "L'amitié" (1962), in AM, 326-30. Several commentators have ventured interpretations of this word and of this text in the context of broader studies of Blanchot. A typical example of this cursory reading is Annelise Schulte-Nordholt, *Maurice Blanchot: l'écriture comme expérience du dehors*, Geneva: Librairie Droz G.A., 1995, 283-5. The only thoroughgoing investigation of Blanchot's presentation of friendship is Paul Davies' "Difficult Friendship", in *Research in Phenomenology*, V.18 (1988), 149-72.

¹³ There are too many examples of this use of either Bataille or Blanchot in discussions of the other to list here. Perhaps the greatest frequency of such unquestioned cross-references can be found in the first chapter of John Gregg's recent book, *Maurice Blanchot and the Literature of Transgression*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994, 10-17. Indeed, it is in this chapter that Gregg attempts to set up the meaning of the word "transgression" (via Bataille's 'sacrifice') which, of course, will be central to his argument about the strategic status of Blanchot's literary 'theory/practice'.

¹⁴ Jane Gallop's "Reading Friend's Corpses" provides an example of the former; see Chapter 1, Section 1.23, below. An example of the latter can be found in Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation*, London: Routledge, 1992, 61.

¹⁵ Roger Laporte, "Un cri de coq en pleine silence", in *A l'extrême pointe: Bataille et Blanchot*, Montpellier: Fata morgana, p.29. The citation is from *L'Expérience intérieure*, V, 42.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, "Les morts de Roland Barthes" (1980), in *Psyché. Inventions de l'autre*, Paris: Gallilée, 1987, 297-8.

¹⁷ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, Paris: Gallimard, 1947 [1968]; Jean Hyppolite, *Genèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel*, 2 volumes, Paris: Aubier, 1946. All further references to these two books, and to Hegel's, in the text will be abbreviated to the *Phenomenology*, the *Introduction*, and *Genèse et structure*, respectively.

¹⁸ The principal figures of this dialectic, 'der Herr' and 'der Knecht', will be translated as 'master' and 'slave' throughout. It is acknowledged that this translation is at best inaccurate, and at worst misleading. Miller prefers to use 'lord' and 'bondsmen' in his 1977 translation, a practice that is reflected in most subsequent English language commentaries on this passage. However, this is not at all the case in the French tradition of Hegel interpretation in which Blanchot and Bataille must be placed. Hence, the term 'master-slave dialectic' has been preserved in the present work because it marks Kojève's influence on this tradition.

¹⁹ VII, 615. See also VI, 348.

²⁰ Note that the question of the dialectical reversibility of contradiction has an uncertain history in Bataille's work. He had already scorned Tristan Tzara's dictum that 'the absence of a system is still a system' in his 1929 essay, "Figure humaine": 'It is time to point out that the most striking revolts have recently found themselves at the mercy of propositions as superficial as that which gives the absence of relation as another relation.' See *Documents*, vol.1, n.4 (septembre 1929), 194-200, 197.

Yet in his postwar texts, his fascination with the labyrinthine turns of negativity deepens, as this form of paradox reappears and is affirmed as such:

1. No-one is free not to belong to my *absence of community*. Just as *the absence of myth* is the sole inevitable myth: which fills the depths like a wind which drains it [comme un vent qui la vide].
2. "Night is also a sun" and the absence of myth is also a myth: the coldest, the purest, the most *true*.

See (1.) "À prendre ou à laisser" (1946), XI, 130-1, 131; (2.) "L'absence de mythe" (1947), XI, 236. The importance of these formulations will be discussed in the analysis of sovereignty in Section 3.21.

²¹ Annelise Schulte-Nordholdt, *Maurice Blanchot: l'écriture comme expérience du dehors*, Geneva: Librairie Droz G.A., 1995, 45. For her general and correct reading of Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, see 31-57.

²² *Ibid.*, 44.

²³ In addition to Schulte-Nordholdt, three recent monographs on Blanchot have all attempted to give an account of this relation. By far the most nuanced and authoritative account is given by Leslie Hill, Blanchot. Extreme Contemporary, London: Routledge, 1997, 103-14. Although I have envisioned my own account to be supplementary to Hill's, I disagree strongly with his claim that 'Blanchot's own reading of Hegel is closely based on that of Kojève [...] to whose general thesis - that Hegel's philosophy is a philosophy of death - Blanchot subscribes with little, if any qualification.' (Ibid., 104.) I will have occasion to show that, on the contrary, Blanchot draws upon Hyppolite's account of the Phenomenology, and that to fail to take this into account risks missing the depth of his reading of Hegel.

Unfortunately, the work of Gerald Bruns and John Gregg lack any sense of philosophical finesse and critical rigour: Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997; and Maurice Blanchot and the Literature of Transgression, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1994. We shall have occasion to comment on their commentaries of Blanchot and Hegel in our final chapter.

²⁴ PF, 295, n.1; WF, 302. The effects of this 'distance' will be discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.2, below.

²⁵ On the interpretative consequences of Kojève's schematisation of recognition, see Section 3.1, below.

²⁶ ED, 79; WD, 46.

²⁷ Andrzej Warminski, "Dreadful Reading", in *Readings in Interpretation: Hölderlin, Hegel, Heidegger*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 184.

Chapter 1

Friendship as discretion: Blanchot's "L'amitié" (1962)

*This is thought's profound grief. That it must
accompany friendship into oblivion.*

Maurice Blanchot ¹

The purpose of this first chapter is to take up the general problems raised in the Introduction, and to explore the way in which friendship is presented in this work. In Blanchot's work, addressing friendship will always be a question of naming: writing in the name of friendship will not only address a friend, but will also, perhaps first of all, name a quite singular friend, Georges Bataille. Evidently this involves the question of when this nomination or declaration corresponds with writing the word 'friendship', with actually naming friendship itself. Therefore, what is important for any interrogative approach to 'friendship' is to negotiate and articulate the relation of naming friendship with the name of Bataille, even to the extent that this relation may appear to be inarticulate, inhabiting a region where its presence can only be registered on a scale where subtlety or discretion are the only measure.

In this chapter, therefore, it will be argued that the figure of friendship, and its 'work', in Blanchot's writings is only accessible through its contiguity with the

appearance of the proper name of Bataille. It is with the simultaneous presentation of the proper name and the problem (the propriety) of naming such a relation to it that it becomes possible to address the difficulties outlined above as integral to the presentation and nomination of friendship throughout Blanchot's work. Above all, these first two chapters will present an extended study of this contiguity and will ask about what is at stake in giving the name of 'friendship' together with that of his friend. Only in this way will we be able to discern how far the naming of friendship *through* the work of Bataille can be seen to reemerge throughout Blanchot's other texts and concepts: those which do not explicitly bear the name of Bataille, nor express any testimony to friendship. Thus, although the present study may seek to show that 'friendship' is precisely *not* reducible to a matter for biography, there is no avoiding the need to situate this reading within the general 'development' or 'itinerary' of Blanchot's work. As we have already remarked, Blanchot rarely gives any indication of the events of his life - whether private or public - and it seems that his encounters with friends might exemplify the determined discretion that he displays on any such questions. Such questions are both essential to his own development, yet as such they resist easy encapsulation or expression. On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the magazine *Le Nouvel observateur* in 1984, he responds to a questionnaire about the most important events since the magazine's first appearance. He diverts the given time-frame through remembering his involvement in its predecessor, *France-Observateur*, thus returning him to 'more ancient epochs':

For me, encounters [les rencontres] are what has mattered, where chance becomes necessity. Meeting men, encountering places. This is my share in biography.

Meeting Emmanuel Lévinas (Strasbourg 1925). Husserl, Heidegger, introduction to Judaism.

Meeting Georges Bataille and René Char (1940). Call to irregularity. The limit-experience. Opposition to the occupants and the Vichy regime. Clandestinity.

Èze-Village (1947-1957). Ten years of solitary writing. Meeting with Robert Antelme and his friends (1958). The Algerian war, the declaration of the 121, attempt at an international review.

With the same ones and with everyone

May 1968

M.B.²

This telegraphed style presents two quite different sources of information: first, it gives us a skeletal chronology of events through which Blanchot acknowledges his ‘debts’ (both the selection of proper names and the deployment of ‘weighted terms’ that resonate in his writings, such as ‘irregularity’, the ‘limit-experience’ and ‘solitary writing’); second, the fact that Blanchot should express *his* ‘share’ or ‘part’ in the activity of biography through the idea of a ‘rencontre’ in which ‘chance becomes [se fait] necessity’. How and why do such chance encounters take on the force of necessity? Is it plausible, or even possible, to say that this transformation marks the genesis of friendship - from an encounter to a relationship? Yet perhaps this process has as much to do with the ambiguity and the peculiar impersonality of the ‘ideal’ encounter with ‘everyone and anyone’ in the events of May 1968. This would be the witness borne by Blanchot’s comments on his own ‘inaccessibility’:

Thank you for your letter. But forgive me for not being able to respond as you wished. I do not even receive my closest friends, without friendship being diminished.³

In terms of biographical fact we can draw upon the testimony of Georges Bataille himself, when he records in an autobiographical notice that ‘[at] the end of 1940,

he encounters Maurice Blanchot, to whom he is bound without delay by admiration and agreement.’⁴ The arena of biography, which veers between narration, citation and interpretation, will always present itself as the primary territory for any discourse on friendship, whether literary, political, public or purely ‘personal’. ‘Bio-graphy’ makes its claim in the name of a ‘life’, so friendship takes on a value under this title. Yet it is with this claim that even the most careful biography always casts friendship itself under the sign of a certain expediency: the depth, endurance or warmth - the quantifiable quality - of any friendship will have helped the attentive biographer to reveal *something essential* about the life of the subject (a Bataille or a Blanchot, for example). In this case, one can follow the personal details and impressions of Pierre Prévost; or the more ambitious breadth of Michel Surya’s biography of Bataille, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l’oeuvre*; or even Pierre Klossowski’s seemingly cautious remark concerning Bataille - that his ‘encounter with Maurice Blanchot, that their friendship could not have been more beneficial for himself, that he had recognised in total incommunicability the condition from which a true action can thus be exercised.’⁵ However, Surya’s approach to this friendship gives us the most instructive introduction to the ambiguities to be faced in any biographical account of Bataille: to write a biography of a writer whose own writing always addresses or passes through the question of the biographical, but only in order to deploy and exhaust it. It is Surya who warns that there would be ‘much (essential) to say’ about Bataille and Blanchot, ‘if the silence of the two men on their friendship did not reduce us to conjecture. It is an obvious fact that this encounter was determinant for each of them. But on what grounds [à quel titre]?’⁶ But it is also Surya, the steadfast biographer, who cannot resist offering the opinion - in response to Klossowski’s tentative portrayal of Blanchot as somehow Bataille’s saviour - that ‘it is more than likely that Bataille should be credited with Blanchot’s ideological reversal’.⁷ Thus, Surya’s previous warning seems to be the sign of a reluctant resignation to the insubstantiality of an ‘obvious fact’, rather than its refusal. However much care or discretion the writer of biography displays, such a concern to present the true Bataille or the real Blanchot is not so much a

misplaced desire as a mendacious distortion: it is, says Blanchot, 'to give thinking as spectacle and to create a fictional character [personnage]' without any concern for the 'délicatesses de la vérité'.⁸ Furthermore, Blanchot goes on to add that this is something that can be performed by even 'our closest friends, with the good intention of speaking in our place and in order not to abandon us too quickly to our absence'.⁹ What deserves close attention is the way in which the very naming of a friendship - as an event or encounter in the (biographical) subject's life - both plays into this biographical 'speculative spectacle' that Surya can only recognise in failing to avoid it. Yet it also retains the resources of a certain discretion that Blanchot will draw upon when writing "L'amitié" in the event of Bataille's death in 1962. The question of how to name friendship will in turn work as a resistance to biographical 'spectacle'. Yet Surya's question, 'à quel titre?', always returns: in the name of *what* does this refusal take place? By what 'right' or 'authority' can Blanchot demand delicacy and discretion?

Such demands for delicacy will still challenge when reading some of the remnants of Blanchot's correspondence with Bataille, especially to the extent that this exchange of letters bears an intermittent meditation upon the conditions and demands made by their friendship. Yet with this demand it is not merely a question of protecting personal details (as a banal secrecy), but perhaps something more delicate still, more *discreet*. The concern or demand is not for a truth that would bear the accuracy of the 'life-like', but for a 'truth' which escapes both friends, even as it puts them into relation. This is the only level at which the 'obviousness' or facticity of such a friendship might be entertained by either of them. As Blanchot writes to Bataille,

If it doesn't tire you out, you would do me the greatest pleasure by telling me how you are at present. The thought that you were ill was extremely painful for me, and like a threat directed against something which would be common to both of us [une menace dirigée contre quelque chose qui nous serait commun l'un à l'autre]. I bear it with difficulty.¹⁰

In a sense writing such as this could not be more personal. Yet at the same time it must be acknowledged that this communication takes place quite explicitly at the level where 'la pensée' is likened to 'une menace'. This thought is to be thought of as a threat. The 'personal' is already passing through abstraction, the impersonality of 'la pensée' : a thinking that addresses - even as it threatens - the 'something' that is 'in common' for them.

If I speak so indiscreetly of these things which concern you, it is only because it seems to me that they belong to me also, through friendship, but not simply through friendship: something, there, silently, is common to us both.¹¹

This is the level at which their very communication would become possible. Indeed, what emerges from these remnants is the presence of a thinking that both engages with, as well as in friendship. It is a thought that immerses itself within a thinking of friendship.

I think of you with an anxious friendship [une amitié inquiète]. This thought is not much at all. But it seems to me that, even where there is almost no path any more, it opens a power of proximity and a truth of attention that no fatigue - the fatigue of life - can suppress.¹²

I think of you quite constantly and your friendship is also this thought, this transparency.¹³

Although this does not mean that these letters reveal some hidden level of the 'life' behind the writing of the book - that the anonymous younger and older interlocutors in Blanchot's "L'Entretien infini" might conceal the identities of Bataille and Blanchot himself - it is clear that these letters do not simply attest to their friendship at the level of the empirical or 'obvious fact'.¹⁴ Surya himself tries to formulate it in the following manner: for Bataille 'the one with whom friendship comes to bind him with a feeling little enough different from what in his eyes is a communitary feeling, is the one who comes to comfort him in the

idea of the impossibility of all community.’¹⁵ Whilst Surya’s claim essentially follows the same logic as that made by Klossowski earlier, he explicitly derives his formulation from the work of Jean-Luc Nancy. Instead of erasing and overcoming the implied gulf between the impersonal realm of thought and the personal/public life of the individual, the claims that both Surya and Klossowski make simply deepen and extend it. It could be argued that Nancy’s debt to Blanchot makes the substitution of ‘une communauté désœuvrée’ for the name of ‘friendship’ plausible. Yet such an identification must also be encountered at the level of the manner of thinking which both Nancy and Blanchot demand. This is the sentiment expressed by Blanchot’s later approach to Bataille’s thinking on community that marks his recognition of Nancy’s work:

[F]riendship, with the reading in drunkenness, is the very form [la forme même] of ‘*communauté désœuvrée*’ which Jean-Luc Nancy has called us to reflect upon without our being allowed to stop there.¹⁶

It is in this refusal that the thought of friendship is immersed, thereby breaking down any secure identification of the ‘personal reading by personal friends’ through a relation to ‘the anonymity of the book which is not addressed to anyone [ne s’adresse à personne]’.¹⁷ To speak of the ‘life’ of friendship will always involve the impersonality of a movement such as that which ‘la fatigue’ names when it is not distinguished from ‘ma vie’, but ‘constantly exceeds the limits of life’. This process of naming is central to the particular discretion that Blanchot will invoke when approaching the question of friendship in response to the event of Bataille’s death, while writing this response in relation to a body of work that presents itself as ‘written in the fire of the event’.¹⁸

It is the question of a relation that takes place through reading which therefore presents another kind of correspondence between these two friends who are writers: a textual or bibliographical one. To approach Blanchot’s writings wherein the name of Bataille seems to be concurrent with that of friendship is not to be solely guided from Blanchot’s side of this epistolary exchange, but is also due to

Bataille's own meditations pursued along a trajectory that always passed through a thought of friendship. Most notably it is Bataille's essay "L'Amitié" (first published in April 1940, under the pseudonym 'Dianus') that draws attention to another form of exchange or relation between them when it provides both the title and an epigraph to Blanchot's own *L'Amitié*. However, neither is it simply a matter of a repetition of titles, for it is always Blanchot who discerns the maintained presence of 'friendship' throughout Bataille's thinking. In an essay that addresses the work of Foucault, Blanchot writes of the impossible task of 'recapturing the general importance of singular works that culture totally rejects by collecting' as a relation to 'works which thus remain solitary, almost anonymous, even when one speaks of them'. In fact, it is to Bataille that Blanchot addresses this relation to singularity, when he turns and addresses his closing remarks to 'one of the most solitary [works], that to which Georges Bataille, as if through friendship and play [comme par l'amitié et par jeu], lent his name'.¹⁹ For Blanchot it will be a question of pursuing a 'presentation' of friendship that eludes the continuity of a theme and the familiarity of a biographical reference, just as for Bataille (reading *Un Moment voulu* in 1951) it is a question of a 'feeling of distant friendship, of distant complicity' that presents him with 'the paradox of Blanchot'.²⁰

1.1 - 'In the name of' friendship: politics or poetry?

To draw attention to the presence of the word 'friendship', therefore, is not an empirical or biographical claim, but the opening of a philosophical approach to the challenge that, for both Blanchot and Bataille, friendship makes of thought and as thinking. In other words, it is not to claim that Bataille is or was Blanchot's only friend: he is by no means 'le seul ami'. As we discovered in the Introduction, those texts which Blanchot presents 'in friendship' do not address Bataille exclusively. Yet what is perhaps most singular about Bataille's name as it appears in his work (again not with any remarkable frequency, but consistently) is, as has

been shown, the insistence with which it is addressed not just as a friend, but *in the name of* a persistent meditation upon friendship itself. It is in this way that the naming of friendship takes place as a challenge for Blanchot to think, but furthermore this demand is engaged *in response to* Georges Bataille and can therefore only originate in its taking place *between* the two friends. Furthermore, it is with the very terms through which they think this relation that the constitution of the 'between' will generate the force of conflict or discordance. How does this take place? What happens 'between' them?

In a letter dated the twenty-fourth of January, yet which does not give the year, Blanchot writes to Bataille in a manner - common to a sizeable number of letters from their surviving correspondance - that bespeaks both a personal concern and a relentless engagement in a philosophical task. It is cited here almost in its entirety:

I am pleased that you have seen René Char and that you might have conversed with him. To the extent to which all three of us feel intimately close, but perhaps, within this proximity, placed in relation [mise en rapport] with certain differences of thinking, these differences must be represented as a somewhat divergent response to demands [des exigences] that one should be able to explain more clearly. I don't know at all that interest or lack of interest in regard to 'politics' is involved; this is only a consequence and perhaps only superficial. As far as I'm concerned, I see clearly, I see better than I have for some time, to what double movement - both necessary and irreconcilable - I must always respond. The one (to express myself in an extremely crude and simplifying manner) is the passion, the realisation and the speech of the all [la parole du tout], within dialectical accomplishment; the other is essentially non-dialectical, it concerns itself neither with the all nor with unity and does not tend towards power (to the possible). A double language responds to this double movement, and for all language there is a double gravity: one is the speech of confrontation, of opposition, negation, and finally that of

reducing everything opposed and that, in the end, is asserted as the truth in its entirety as silent equality (whence appears political exigency); but the other is speech which speaks before all and outside of all, always a first speech, without agreement, without confrontation and open to welcome the unknown, the stranger (whence the poetic exigency). One names the possible and desires the possible; the other responds to the impossible. There is a constant tension between the two movements, at once necessary and incompatible, often very difficult to sustain and in truth untenable. But one cannot, out of prejudice or bias, renounce the one or the other, nor the measureless research that their necessity demands of men, the necessity of combining the incompatible.

Forgive me for these out of place reflections. But it seemed to me that I owed this effort of clarification (however illconsidered) to your friendship. Perhaps your return to Paris and the possibilities for meeting thus brought about will allow me to respond, other than by abstract affirmations, to this exigency of friendship.²¹

This 'double movement' to which he refers is more familiar, in various forms, throughout Blanchot's work in the 1950's and early 1960's. The essay, "Comment découvrir l'obscur?" (1959), presents it most succinctly: the dual proposal of 'naming the possible' and 'responding to the impossible'; the demand of politics and that of poetry.²² Such a double gesture is central to Blanchot's pursuit of a form of 'research' that works both from within and against those determinations already given by the philosophical tradition. Yet it is also clear from the care and precision of these texts that it is not a matter of limiting such a 'movement' to a strategic ploy, or a defiant gesture, against philosophy as such. First of all, it seems that this 'constant tension' between the possible and the impossible is to be located in accordance with a different kind of strategy: what he calls a manner of 'research', or more precisely 'le recherche sans mesure'. Perhaps this path of research is not even of the order of a 'strategy' - it has no goal as such for it makes

no claim to any form of measurement or calibration. For this unavoidable 'difficulty' of responding to two equally 'necessary' yet 'incompatible' demands is never settled into a concordance, nor harmonised into a unity. They are simply 'given' *as* irreducible.

An irreducible difference, or even discordance, seems to result from this state of affairs between political responsibility which is at once a global and concrete responsibility, accepting marxism as nature and the dialectic as method of truth - and literary responsibility, a responsibility which is a response to an exigency that can only take shape [prendre forme] in and through literature.

This discordance does not have to be set from the outset. It is *a fact*: it exists as a problem, not a frivolous problem, but one to be borne with difficulty, a problem all the more difficult in that each of its discordant terms engages us absolutely and in that their discordance, in a sense, also engages us.²³

This 'désaccord', as a repetition of this relation between the possible and the impossible, is an integral component for his formulation of the relations between literary/poetic language, political discourse and philosophical task. Thus, however crude or 'maladroit' Blanchot claims his letter is, it is this continuity of conceptual formation that appears to dominate upon reading it, almost casting aside the opening references to the difficulties and differences between himself, Char and Bataille - a heated argument for his two friends that took place over the very status of 'incompatibilités'²⁴ - and yet because of this intensity it also returns all the more precisely to the heart of their conflict. How to present and work through such unbridgeable gulfs without destroying the very difference that keeps them rigidly apart? How does one 'combine the incompatible'?

This is a way of articulating an 'essential' concern for Blanchot within the broader context of his published work: to put it quite schematically, it is an

attempt to approach that which is irreducibly different without hypostatizing this difference, either by dividing them absolutely in order to reject one in favour of the other, or reconciling them in order to reduce one to the other. Either possibility would, for Blanchot, would elide both their incompatibility and their inseparability - a perverse dissymmetry which Blanchot designates as the 'plural speech' of conversation [*'l'entretien'*].

Such is the secret sharing of all essential speech in us: naming the possible, responding to the impossible. Sharing which must not, however, give way to a kind of repartition: as if we had, as our choice, a speech to name and a speech to respond, as if, finally, between possibility and impossibility, there was a frontier, perhaps moving, but always determinable according to the 'essence' of one or the other.²⁵

Blanchot names a resistance to the ease with which the conflicts of contraries come to be overcome and resolved: he posits a form of 'dissymmetry and irreversibility' that does not depend upon a relation of 'equality and inequality' or of 'predominance and subordination'.²⁶ In other words, it is a relation of conflict that is irreducible to the form of contradiction which is ultimately resolved into a higher identity, a reconciliation of differences. He stresses the possibility of thinking this 'between' of 'discord' as a 'relation of infinity' which is, however, always 'implicated as the movement of signification itself'.²⁷

But what relation does this letter bear to the published works that it almost seems to ghost? Is it to be read as an early, tentative development of a formulation to be published in the coming years? Such questions, eminently those of the biographical-critic, push towards the speculated origins of a given writer's thinking: reference to conversations, correspondance, friendships and feuds brings biographical authority (i.e., an 'authenticity') to bear upon recalcitrant texts. This particular text is a letter, a communication addressed to a friend. Yet, at the same time, it is both more and less than a confidential exchange between individuals, as Blanchot makes explicit with his apology - '*Pardonnez-moi ces réflexions*

déplacés'. As has been pointed out, the majority of his letter to his friend seems to have been taken over or taken up with a displacement, a shift of emphasis: a movement has taken place with the introduction into the letter of his 'reflections' upon the 'political' and 'poetic' exigencies; a change has occurred in the rules or syntax of such a communication. Furthermore, this shift takes place in the guise of his 'debt' to Bataille's friendship - 'il m'a semblé que *je devais* à votre amitié cet effort ...d'éclaircissement'. Clarification and displacement: a shift of focus (from his personal concerns with Bataille and Char to 'des affirmations abstraites') and a change of context (from letter-writing to the impromptu essay) are both made in the name of friendship. They are both modes in which Blanchot explicitly writes in response to Bataille, to that which he owes to his friend, his friendship.

Not friendship in general, but a friendship that is with a specific other person. This is undisputable. An inter-personal register secures the name of friendship to the form of the letter: it offers the security of a private, hermetic correspondance, as if it were to be valued as just one step away from a face-to-face conversation - 'Pardonnez-moi ... *je devais*...'. However, there are gaps in this register that also pull this strictly one-to-one correspondance askew. If the elision of a informal or personal address is properly noted - '*à votre amitié*' - this letter, as much as any conversation to come after Bataille's return to Paris, cannot be mapped so seamlessly upon the familiar exchange of 'je' and 'tu'. It is as though, through the presence of a debt and the displacement it incurs, his response to Bataille could never be 'direct', 'personal' or 'intimate' in any accepted (or expected) sense of these terms. What comes between them seems to be friendship itself, or rather a thought of it that seems to broach as much on the impersonal as personal. It is not that friendship has lost any sense of relation or proximity, rather that any relation of familiarity with the friend that could be called 'personal' or 'impersonal' (in the sense of a cold abstraction) must pass through a thinking of friendship as rapport that, embracing both 'affirmations abstraites' and 'les possibilités de rencontre', at once raises or clarifies its stakes (the urgency of 'un exigence') and displaces its expression (the conflict of friendship). In other words, what emerges at the close

of this letter delimits the scope of the present enquiry: it is the emergence of a completely other demand for Blanchot, the possibility of 'repondre à cette exigence de l'amitié'.

What is the relation of this 'exigency' to those attributed to the 'political' or 'poetic'? Is friendship to be read as another name for 'responding to the impossible'? Or is this third exigency to form an over-arching, perhaps a more originary demand for thinking? If so, the accession of friendship to a principle of necessity or 'exigency' would negate any emergence of a completely new or singular thought of friendship. What relation could possibly pertain between singularity and exigency, to maintain the specificity of the former while carrying through the necessary urgency of the latter? The force of *this* exigency will have to revolve around its multiplied demands: the necessity of maintaining a certain complex singularity, even against the persistent force of necessity in general or the demands of the particular and the general, that is to say within and against the language and rhetoric of philosophical research itself.²⁸ The depth of any paradox is to be found in the endless conflict of demands: the possible and the impossible.

1.2 - The doubling of *discretion*

This section focusses on the way in which Blanchot responds to the death of Bataille in terms of friendship. How does Blanchot write about his friend in the wake of his death? To what extent does he seek to keep the work separate from the life? In which does he have the greatest investment, and how far would he see the distinction between the life and the work as a legitimate one? Such questions are particularly compelling with regard to the life and work of Bataille, whose *La Somme athéologique* - conceived as his central work - mixes elements of journal, treatise, aphorism, and poetry.²⁹ What kind of demands are placed upon the writer (especially one who is a friend) who writes about another whose work affirms 'the

practice of joy before death', a work to which one might give the title of thanatography, and a life in which death is, already, 'at work'?³⁰

In the few months following the death of Georges Bataille in 1962, Blanchot writes two very different, yet interlocking essays: the first called simply "L'amitié"; and the other, "L'affirmation et la passion de la pensée négative". I will focus on the former essay, one of his most consummately constructed pieces of writing. For reasons that I hope to make clear, it is difficult to say that "L'amitié" is actually a text written about Bataille; in fact, it is more accurate to say that Blanchot comes to write "L'amitié" in the absence of his friend. The difficulty of this piece was underlined with its first journal publication, when the title was supplemented by a capitalised, underlined heading: 'POUR GEORGES BATAILLE'. It strikes one more as an editorial supplement, added for the sake of clarification, than as the author's own dedication: first of all, it is erased when the essay is republished as the end-piece to Blanchot's collection of the same name; and second, because it seems to undermine the entire movement of this piece by affixing it to a proper name which is scarcely mentioned in the text. Indeed, whether one actually can, or should, read this piece as a eulogy or testimony to the life and work of Bataille is a question at the very heart of Blanchot's writing in "L'amitié", as it is again in "L'affirmation et la passion". In both pieces, there is the staging of a resistance to biography, a discretion when faced with speaking of his deceased friend, which seems to structure the impetus and direction of Blanchot's thinking. On the one hand, then, Blanchot eschews any claim to be talking about Bataille; whilst on the other, Bataille's 'presence' in this piece is unmistakable. Blanchot begins "L'amitié" by asking *how* he should begin to write of Bataille, whilst his choice of preposition in the opening line of "L'affirmation et la passion" accents a reluctance to write *about* Bataille:

Permit me, in thinking of Georges Bataille, to think close to an absence, rather than claim to set out what everyone should be able to read in his books.³¹

Blanchot states that his aim is to place his own thinking in proximity to, or in the vicinity of [‘auprès de’] the friend who is absent. One might say, for the moment, that the name of Bataille persists as a question in both essays. In this way, it makes certain demands upon how Blanchot can write “L’amitié”, or how he comes to be writing in the name of *friendship* at all. For it is also this word, ‘l’amitié’, that not only links the two pieces to one another, but also to Blanchot’s work as a whole. Hence, in the course of following the way that Blanchot positions himself ‘close to an absence’, I am particularly interested with the way in which he does two things at the same time in “L’amitié”. On the one hand, by refusing to praise or defend his friend, to divulge secrets in the interest of presenting some truth about him, he attempts to communicate the singularity of this profound experience of loss; and on the other, in the enactment of this refusal, he articulates a thinking of friendship in response to that presented by Bataille in *La Somme athéologique*.

1.21 - Effacement

So, if it is difficult to say whether Blanchot’s essay is actually *about* Bataille, can one say that it is written *for* him, or in his memory? From the beginning, this is not at all clear, for even with the supplementary heading of ‘POUR GEORGES BATAILLE’, there is already a sense of conflict between the title - “Friendship” - and the apparent object of the opening line - ‘this friend’. This disparity is retained in the 1971 version. Yet Blanchot does not claim to be writing either in the mode of the essay (“*De l’amitié*”, for example) or in a more personal mode of a reminiscence. An ambiguity remains as to the address of “L’amitié”: to what, or to whom, is this title directed? If one immediately answers ‘*Bataille*’, as did the editor who added the supplementary heading, the question reappears as the proper name initially is put into question, and by the end completely effaced. Indeed, the necessarily conflictual relation between writing on the death of *this* unique friend and the generality of a discourse on friendship *as such* is at the heart of

“L’amitié”. This is evident even in the way the opening line is re-written. In 1962, Blanchot writes:

How might I consent to speak of this friend, of the man that he was? ³²

When the essay is republished in *L’Amitié*, this line will read:

How to consent to speak of this friend? ³³

The passage of time does not by itself account for the rewriting of this line. It might be tempting to explain this difference by referring to the completion of a work of mourning, where the particularity of the first version - marked by the personal register and conditional tense of ‘comment *j’accepterais* de parler’, and by the temporal specificity of ‘l’homme qu’il fut’ - comes to be replaced by the question of the possibility of ‘consenting to speak’ in general. However, the disappearance of the ‘I’ and the levelling of verb tenses into infinitives - ‘comment accepter de parler...’ - are not necessarily marks of an inevitable accession to a level of generality, but perhaps an exacerbation of a tension between the deictic and the general already implicit within the first writing. The recourse to infinitives can be read as a way of maintaining the opening question in the present, to deepen the sense of absence to be faced in such a task.

This levelling to the infinitive is not the mark of time’s removal or erasure from the concept, as if friendship was to be apprehended as a purely formal ideal; rather, it marks out the persistent presence of a thoroughly temporal event (a death) already inscribed within it. In this way, Blanchot’s re-writing works to unsettle any smooth progression between loss and its recollection or reincorporation in memory. The extent to which this thought bears an essential relation to the name of friendship leads inexorably towards a renewed affirmation of oblivion and impersonality. In both versions of the text the following lines radically dissociate ‘this friend’ from any possibility of using ‘his character’, ‘his life’ or ‘his existence’ to explain the work. All signs of these things are obliterated.

Neither in order to praise him, nor in the interest of some truth. The traits of his character, the forms of his existence, the episodes of his life, even in accord with the research for which he felt himself responsible to the point of irresponsibility, belong to no-one [n'appartiennent à personne]. There is no witness.³⁴

Blanchot's immediate concern does not appear to be with providing a definition of friendship, nor does it claim to tell us about, or narrate, the events of someone's life. Instead, he thematises the conditions which bring him to write this piece: it is written neither as a homage, nor as a critique; and whilst explicitly presenting itself as a question of writing about this friend, "L'amitié" does not yet refer to Bataille by name. There is only an impersonal designation of a disjunctive relation where that which 'belonged' to 'this friend' now belongs to 'no-one'. All of these attributes and characteristics no longer belong to someone, to any identifiable person. It would be tempting to read this deliberated, double negation as obscurantist, as the mark of some ineffable truth in whose name one could lay claim to a reserved realm of silence. However, the form of this double negation - *neither A nor B* - is related to the persistent pressure of the opening question: a continued re-questioning of friendship itself, whose presentation is henceforth marked as the site of an internal conflict (*neither* homage, *nor* critique). Indeed, it appears that the name of friendship brings with it the presence of conflict, arising from the absence of the friend in question: these 'traits', 'forms' or 'episodes' are all 'his', yet they all belong to 'no-one'. Who or what does the name of 'this friend' now name? The only 'witness', the one who could satisfy any claim to this property, this biographical baggage, is absent. In the absence of any 'testimony', it belongs solely to this 'anyone' or 'no-one' ['personne']. In this way, friendship already is bound up in a relation to that which is impersonal or anonymous, and it is with this relation that that friendship comes to be affirmed and articulated through forgetting.

As a result of the abrupt disappearance of 'this friend', one might conclude that to speak of him must involve, as a condition of its possibility, addressing one's remembrance 'to no-one'. But is it the case that, in so far as the first paragraph of "L'amitié" seeks to eradicate any possibility of speaking about this friend, this lexicon of absence and anonymity is, in fact, an attempt to reserve, beyond the reach of biography, the memory of a personal proximity? Whilst this strategy would be equivalent to keeping silent, it also entails a mode of fidelity that, by speaking in terms of 'no-one' in particular, would attempt to keep back the indeterminacy of 'anyone'. What is to be done? To speak or keep silent? It is here that the twin poles of refusing and accepting to speak of the friend collapse into one another: 'It is in vain that we pretend to maintain, by our words, through our writings, that which is absent.'³⁵ For Blanchot, such attachment seeks to keep the friend in hand [*maintenir*], offering him a 'living' place 'in the day', but what this memory forgets is the duplicity of its own project. It is in the very 'attraction of our memories' that there lies the trap or 'the lure' with which we, the living, would hold him to our 'day'.³⁶ Here, all giving of eulogies, all tributes and expressions of debt are implicated: what memory offers is a semblance of life to that which disturbs the very order of the living. The attempt to give back to the dead that 'prolonged life of a truthful appearance', by being faithful to the truth of his memory, is only to bury him all the more completely, to have done with the painful thought that remains. What remains is precisely the vacuum of 'what is absent'. And yet, in writing this, there is always the possibility that by choosing not to speak about his friend, Blanchot is seeking to retain a part of this vacuum for his own. A refusal to speak, which would keep guard over a dedicated silence (in the name of friendship, possibly) still marks the author's possibility of choosing not to respond to this absence; and more fundamentally, reveals his living possibility over it as an expression of his own survival.

Hence, the refusal 'to speak of this friend', as the choice to withhold oneself from speaking of him, easily becomes the apparent opposite: an expression of the power that the living always hold over the dead, which enables one to speak or not

to speak, according to one's will, as if death had finally allowed one to get the better of them. It is at this point that the paradox of speaking about the dead is revealed in its painful inevitability. In "L'affirmation et la passion", Blanchot repeats and extends this thought in an endeavour to avoid those 'epithets' (such as 'mysticism', 'eroticism', 'atheism') which serve as familiar co-ordinates not only for readers of Bataille's work, but also for those who wish to account for the 'life' they discern behind it.

Certainly, as we know, each one of us is menaced by his Golem, a crude clay image, our mistaken double, the derisory idol that makes us visible and against which, living, we can protest by the discretion of our life; but once dead it perpetuates us: how to prevent it from making our disappearance, even the most silent, the moment at which, condemned to appear, we have to respond precipitately to public interrogation by confessing to what we were not? And sometimes it is our closest friends, in the good intention of speaking in our place and in order not to abandon us too quickly to our absence, who contribute to this benevolent or malevolent travesty beneath which, from this moment onwards, we will be seen.³⁷

But how can one hold off the public tribunal of critics, observers, and readers? Blanchot immediately acknowledges that one cannot: 'No, there is no way out for the dead, those who die after having written'.³⁸ How can a life spent writing avoid being read in its turn, when the very condition of its reserve - 'the discretion of our life' - has receded? Blanchot's response to his own question is not to wish that everything could be otherwise, nor to call for a withdrawal into some private sphere; rather, it is the realisation and the warning that even the 'most glorious posterity' is ultimately indistinguishable from the 'pretentious hell' in which 'all of us', every critic, observer, and reader, 'figure as fairly wretched devils'.³⁹ Even friendship fails to provide this protection for the dead, for more often than not it is 'our closest friends' who contribute to this 'travesty' by trying to speak 'in our

place', by trying to set the record straight and secure their friend's reputation. Once again, it is an action born of the fear of the absence or void which the friend, now dead, represents; and one in which *not* saying anything also takes its place.⁴⁰ 'We' - 'all of us', says Blanchot - are complicit in this trial by opinion, anecdote and obituary; and hence, we are all caught within the same double bind of speaking/not speaking of our friends. In "L'amitié", faced with this realisation, Blanchot pushes himself and us - note that again it is a question of a 'we' - towards a simple observation, in which he discerns a 'truth' to all mourning.

We only search [, in truth,] to fill a void, we do not endure the pain of grief: the affirmation of this void.⁴¹

The ineluctable 'truth' of 'our' relation - which is that of the living - to the such a void lies in our desire to 'fill in' or 'compensate for' ['combler'] a deficiency or lack, to make up for such an absence by making it present. Any pressure exerted by this void is to be extinguished by giving it the presence in memory that it had lost in death. Blanchot does not reject this process of mourning, but attempts to discern the possibility of another response to the experience of 'grief' - an *affirmation* of the void *as such*. Hence, the naming of an 'affirmation' becomes the thought of this relation which is no longer (and perhaps, as we will see, never was) a relation of presence. By refusing to speak hastily, or to reserve memory as the domain of a privileged and powerful silence, what Blanchot's writing 'presents' is the thought of a relation that affirms the depth of 'this void'. But how? Is it even possible, in so far as the act of affirming such an absence already shares in the discursive movement of presence?

What is affirmed, then, is a refusal to stop thinking the question posed in the very very first line. From the beginning, this question of how *to accept* to speak of this friend interrupts and postpones the possibility of the memorial measuring up, or being proper to the demand of friendship. To affirm the thought of 'this void' as such would require an impossible recognition of its utter absence of meaning. It is not a case of a work of remembrance that could actively retrieve some lost -

and hence significant - memory. For Blanchot doubts that it is a task for which memory could be proper at all, in the face of 'an insignificance so disproportionate that we do not have the memory capable of containing it and that we would have to slip towards forgetting ourselves in order to bear it'.⁴² How is it possible to affirm or 'to welcome' such a thought, he asks, when it demands that we open 'ourselves' to forgetting, to 'the time of this slippage'?⁴³ It is this demand of forgetting that is affirmed with the thought of 'this void'. All speech, like every effort to hold the friend within the protection of memory, only 'veils' the movement of forgetting that is already, always underway. This is why the affirmation that Blanchot calls for is, in his words, 'unique':

that everything must be effaced, must efface itself [tout doit s'effacer] and that we can remain faithful only by keeping watch over this movement that effaces itself, to which something in us that rejects all recollection [souvenir] already belongs.⁴⁴

An unease strikes us when we read this injunction, here, in a piece of writing whose title seems to announce a reflection on the relation of friendship. What kind of relation is being proposed here? A relation with 'that which is absent' is not a relation to something which, once written, can be equated with a lack or loss to be retrieved through mourning; nor can it be laid to rest and simply put aside. Rather, it is the memory of a life that 'belongs to no-one' which, in so far as the past to which this absence might be said to belong no longer remains fixed once the thought of its representation (its being written), opens us to this temporality of 'slippage'. It is in the present that we are drawn toward forgetting in a relation of *vigilance*, for it is with our affirmation of forgetting that we are drawn towards our own relation to a shared finitude: the movement 'which effaces itself' puts 'us' into relation with the discontinuity which is constitutive of the present - that is, the constant interruption of death.

By affirming this oblivion in terms of 'our' necessary relation to death, Blanchot does not draw closer to 'this friend', for there is no lost proximity to be

regained. If there is any sense of debt to the friend, it lies in the demand to think absence as such, without recourse to a lost presence, by forgetting that which is lost. This is perhaps Blanchot's own 'vain' gesture: to maintain a distance in the sense of a reserve or discretion, a distance which vanishes with the friend. Has he come, therefore, to bury 'this friend' in an act of forgetting which would place him deeper than the grave, and to preserve his name more profoundly than the tomb of mourning? There is, perhaps, a sense of protective defiance: to preserve the singularity of his friend against all those who, already, come to exhume and display the truth about Bataille. It could be said that a gap has been opened up between 'this friend' and the proper name of Bataille, as if the writer sought to rescue the man - or rather, 'the man that he was' - from his 'name' or reputation, to separate the life from the literature. As we have seen, by the time that this piece reappears in 1971, even this reference to 'the man that he was' has been erased. No relation, no reference seems to remain between 'this friend' and the proper name. Blanchot is unambiguous in his contempt for those who would lay claim to an understanding of Bataille's work through a brief glimpse into his biography - he writes that his sense of discretion 'does not lie on the simple refusal to reveal private details (how vulgar that would be, even to consider it)'.⁴⁵ Yet if he seeks to undermine the claims made upon Bataille by those who write about him after his death - whether they come to criticise or to eulogise, to reveal or to defend the 'real Bataille' behind the work -, what does he put in their place?

1.22 - Impersonality

Literary history presents us with the works of a writer as an 'inheritance'; and as such, the seizure of 'what has fallen into heritage' gives this form of history a concrete form, 'the moment of the complete works.'⁴⁶ The possibility of literary history - that is, the very 'moment' when the work can be discussed as 'complete' - takes place in relation to the singular event of a death.

“Everything” has to be published, “everything” has to be said; as though there was only one urgency remaining: that everything be said; as if the “everything is said” were finally to allow us to stop a dead speech: to stop the pitiful silence which comes from it, and to retain it within a well circumscribed horizon that which a questionable posthumous waiting still illusively mixes with our living words.⁴⁷

In this haste to speak - that desire to say everything, to leave nothing out, which very quickly becomes a desperate need to say anything at all - Blanchot discerns the efforts of literary history to incorporate that part of the work which is given as ‘a dead speech’, to put an end to that which already comes to us from the end. This desire to have done with Bataille, to ‘stop’, to ‘retain’, might be read as a reluctance to take the responsibility of asking ‘*how* to accept to speak’. In effect, it aims to plug the gaps through which that ‘pitiful silence’ might return to haunt it. For when “‘everything is said’”, there cannot be anything left to say, and one can remain secure in the knowledge that it thereby circumscribes. When ‘the moment of the complete works’ comes there can be no more challenge to the work, to the idea of what a ‘work’ might become. The work has arrived at its completion; no further work need take place.

The task of the literary historian is to ‘place’ Bataille: to document, sift and weigh the work as it is assembled into its definitive shape. What does not seem to be required is precisely that which Blanchot identifies as the demand of *this* work: to ask, beyond any simple attribution of epithets like ‘scandalous’, ‘mystical’ or ‘a-theological’, about the conditions of this judgement. For Blanchot, the central concern here is what determines the possibility of remembrance, and hence the very formulation of an ‘inheritance’ - the relation of the living to the dead. What happens between ‘a dead speech’ [‘une parole morte’] and ‘our living words’ [‘nos paroles de vivants’]? What is Blanchot asking us to think in this ‘questionable posthumous waiting’, which ‘still illusively mixes’ these two worlds, the living and the dead? One might venture that, through this ‘illusive’

mixture, Blanchot proposes to place 'our living words' as a filter between the blind urge of the "everything is said" and the disturbing silence of 'a dead speech'. What would be at stake in this claim?

What is at stake is our understanding of the work, its origin and its constitution. The formulation of the 'complete works' is essentially bound to that reaction to 'grief' which previously Blanchot had located in the desire to bury the 'void' under the weighty presence of 'something'. In this way, his argument highlights a contradiction that holds up the project of the literary historian or biographer: by completing or filling in this void left by 'that which is absent', like the mourner who buries grief rather than endure it, the literary historian seeks to keep up a familiar and continuous terrain (in the name of 'life', 'art', or 'history'); yet such a model of continuity - which is seen as either progressive or static - functions only through a discrete series of punctuated events (a death, a work or an action). The possibility of such events possessing their own patterns of continuity (a dying, working or acting) would not simply invert this model, but rather it would complicate it by insisting upon the continuity of the discontinuous. This constitution of the event, taking place through an emphasis upon relation and its repetition, refuses the possibility of having done with it. Blanchot gradually leads us into a thinking which comes to mark the sense of this discretion: the quasi-ontological fact that 'we' (already, always) are in the process of removing, or effacing ourselves from every relation of presence. This fact of effacement and distantiation comes to be thought as constitutive of 'our' relation to the present.

It is this relation which brings our attention to the reworking of a 'work of mourning' in this essay - a work that is itself demanded, as we have already seen, by the particular presence of a 'void'. Like Freud's definition of a successful work of mourning, literary history can only function in terms of an unquestioned completion. In spite of such a clumsy comparison, this centrality of completion should not be disregarded: it is the point at which Blanchot reads both conceptions of 'the work'. The very concept of a 'work' derives from a determinate relation to

an unproblematic, singular event of death. This is not to say that the singularity of 'this friend' or 'this void' is thereby dissolved. Instead, it is maintained as a question. For what is at stake for Blanchot here (as it is throughout his work) is an originary non-coincidence of death and its event which removes from death (qua event) any possibility of a simple singularity. It is not simply that, like Freud's melancholic, Blanchot would refuse to recognise the death of his friend, or even to refuse the event of such an absence in the name of a vital presence, which one might call 'the mobility of life'. Such 'mobility' matters little to Blanchot. More disturbing is the fact that even when 'the one who is close to us' was alive, his thinking was only kept open to 'us' through 'the fissure of death', 'the unpredictability that the strangeness of the end introduces into his thinking'. Blanchot goes on to explain that:

And this unforeseeable movement, always hidden within its infinite imminence - that of dying perhaps - does not derive from the fact that the end cannot be given in advance, but from the fact that it never constitutes an event that happens [arrive], even when it occurs [survient], and is never a reality capable of being grasped: ungraspable and maintaining to the end within the ungraspable the one who is destined for it.⁴⁸

Finitude and communication are held together as 'this very relation', as an excessive movement between the words of the dead and the living where it is only the silent pressure of the dead which 'preserves' the space of opening for the latter to think.

I [...] know that, in his books, Georges Bataille seems to speak of himself with an uninhibited freedom which should free us from all discretion - but which does not give us the right to put ourselves in his place, nor give us the power to speak in his absence. And is it certain that he speaks of himself [de soi]?⁴⁹

Hence, it is 'this presence without anybody' which is always 'at stake', as the unsettling presence of an essential self-effacement in Bataille's writings -

recurring within his most 'personal' writings, even within 'the existence of the man who was able to decide to speak of it'. Just as the power of 'preservation' is determined by that which already introduces 'unpredictability' into that thinking - that is, 'the strangeness of the end' where memory only emerges through the co-presence of forgetting - so this 'enigmatic relation' pertains to the opening of 'a lacuna' where any biography, or any claim to be speaking in the place of Bataille only finds that it cannot locate such a place. The 'I' has already become 'Who?'

1.23 - Separation

Now stripped of any unproblematic biographical subject, it is only in the third and final section of his essay that Blanchot makes any explicit reference to a conceptual formulation of friendship. If his opening question, 'How to consent to speak of ...?', has informed the first two sections of this piece as a way of holding open, even accentuating, the tension or pressure of marking the singularity of 'this friend', then this pressure comes to a head in the last section of the essay. Here, Blanchot does not so much give a definition of what friendship is, as draw us into the space of a 'movement' in which he sketches what is at stake within one's relation to a friend.

Friendship, this relation without dependence, passes through the recognition of common strangeness which does not allow us to speak of our friends, but only to talk to them, not to make them into a theme of conversations (or articles), but the movement of understanding in which, speaking to us, they reserve, even within the greatest familiarity, infinite distance, this fundamental separation on the basis of which that which separates becomes relation.⁵⁰

When we read Blanchot's thematisation of his refusal to thematise the name of Bataille, it also becomes evident that he has done nothing but speak around the name of Bataille throughout his essay, in an effort to remain, discreetly, in the

vicinity of his thought. But what distinguishes making one's friends into 'a theme' for discussion from making of them 'the movement of understanding', thereby justifying the latter in Blanchot's eyes? This movement is designated as where our friends speak to 'us', all the while maintaining or reserving an 'infinite distance'. This separation-relation is always there, as a moment of reserve, amongst even the most familiar friends; as if Blanchot was tracing out a genesis of friendship (as the conversion from 'being-separate' to a form of 'being-in-relation'). It is therefore only in terms of separation that Blanchot discerns any relation at all. Does such a form of separation therefore of itself give rise to the 'becoming-relation' of 'that which separates'? How is a process of putting space between objects, or friends, to be converted into what will essentially come to bridge that 'gap'? Here, neither separation nor relation admit of easy resolution. In other words, there is something about 'this separation', whatever makes it 'fundamental', that conditions the process or work of 'that which separates' to become other than what it's action denotes; yet it does not become 'that which relates', but rather it 'becomes relation'. It is separation itself that becomes relation. It is not transformed into its opposite action: it already is the constitutive process of relation. Blanchot adds: 'That which separates: that which authentically puts into relation, the very abyss of relations in which is held, with simplicity, the understanding always maintained in friendly affirmation'.⁵¹ This authenticity of relation, this movement whereby separation is already a becoming-relation is named by Blanchot's qualification and repetition of 'discretion'.

However, in the midst of Blanchot's compact, complex formulations, surely it is incumbent upon us to ask whether this care and discretion is not wholly inappropriate to the reading or remembering of Bataille, the very Bataille whose work bears witness to the virulence of a self-examination carried to the extreme, a thinker whose work seems to demand 'loyalty' least of all.⁵² Should not Blanchot feel (to quote Bataille) 'free from all discretion'? What has happened to this word 'discretion'? Does it signify anything more than the retention of a sense of

‘propriety’ and ‘reserve’ which Bataille’s own work, as it is often claimed, derides and destroys? How, then, should we read Blanchot’s ‘discretion’ - as fidelity or betrayal?

Blanchot defines discretion as ‘the pure interval which, from myself to this other who is a friend, measures everything that there is between us’, which also means, as he goes on to add, that ‘discretion becomes, at a certain moment, the fissure of death.’⁵³ This relation is ultimately, intimately connected to the way in which Blanchot thinks about the event of death, especially in the articulation of memory and forgetting in mourning the death of the other. Hence, it is as much the way that Blanchot names or presents ‘friendship’ that is central to his attempt to think the emergence and sustenance of this event or this relation in the very process of its *happening* or *relating*. And alongside this attention to the act of naming, and the process of maintaining relation inherent to it, something like an ontology has begun to emerge in his work; or an interruption of ontology, an ontology of interruption. The presence of questions concerning time, event, memory and identity have all indicated this direction, but it is with the doubling of sense inherent to the presentation of discretion that this experience can be introduced as a central figure within his thinking as a whole: the experience of discontinuity.

It is not surprising that discretion should be central to the presentation of friendship. As a mode of conduct or behaviour it could be ascribed to the general tone of this essay, a strategic tone nonetheless bearing the mark of circumspection and discernment, even a certain prudence. However, as has been observed, Blanchot has been quick to mark discretion down as something other than a mere reluctance to part with personal insights or secrets. Discretion pertains to friendship in its deployment as that movement of distancing which comes to put into question the formulation of any relation, even that of familiarity or proximity, between friends. It pertains to this co-presence of separation and relation with the pressure of a specificity - a presence that is in some way insistent, trans-formative,

at work - which Blanchot tries to mark as such in order to remove it, rethink and relocate it.

Here, discretion does not lie in the simple refusal to reveal private details (how gross that would be even to consider it), but it is the interval, the pure interval which, from myself to this other person who is a friend, measures all that there is between us, the interruption of being which never authorises me to do what I choose with him, or my knowledge of him (even in order to praise him), and which, far from preventing all communication, relates us to one another in the difference and sometimes the silence of speech.⁵⁴

In other words, what Blanchot calls *discretion* is not merely the conduct of being *discreet* with respect to one's friends; rather, it is a more fundamental expression of how one's difference from the friend can be measured as *discrete*, as the singular being that he or she is. Hence, there may be a relation of discretion between friends, but it is discretion in the (mathematical) sense of discontinuity and separation which gives friends the very possibility of this 'between' which puts them into relation as such.⁵⁵ This is not to conclude that with discretion we have unearthed the transcendental condition of possibility for all relations of communication or knowledge. It would be more appropriate to attempt to trace the way in which, for Blanchot, discretion becomes a process or 'work' that names the very operation to which it is itself subject. While its work is to make discrete, to distinguish and mark out what is singular, it is nevertheless discreet in this work.⁵⁶ Discretion 'works' in a movement of doubling itself.

What at first seems to be a contradiction in fact has turned upon a more interesting problem of writing about or to the dead. Instead of talking *about* Bataille, Blanchot speaks *to* him; instead of discussing the importance of his work, he takes a word that flows through that work and re-works or re-directs it. Blanchot's reticence to mourn or celebrate the death of his friend cannot be reduced to a question of fidelity or betrayal - nor their dialectical inversions -;

instead, it should be read as an *enactment* of this ‘discretion’, which takes place by way of a response to Bataille’s own thinking of friendship. For Blanchot, then, to write in the name of ‘friendship’ does not mean simply to recount an event, a meeting or encounter. On the contrary, it is precisely the effect of this manner of accounting, or ‘*rapporter*’, for one’s rapport to the friend that is under suspicion in “L’amitié”. This is why the heading of ‘FOR GEORGES BATAILLE’ cannot be the work of the one who writes this piece: it flattens out the carefully wrought expression of the condition of this relation as such. Yet it is not possible to divorce the idea of friendship from the fact of an encounter, a shared experience: everything in that text from 1962 hinges around the thought of an event or an encounter through which a relation between friends can emerge: ‘that which separates becomes relation’. It is, after all, in the wake of Bataille’s death that Blanchot writes “L’amitié”, even if he does not write it for or about him.

Notes to Chapter 1

¹ “L’amitié”, AM, 330; FS, 292.

² “Les Rencontres”, in *Le Nouvel observateur*, 1045, hors série, November 1984, 84.

³ Excerpt from a letter to Bernard-Henri Lévy, dated 15th September 1989, in Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Les Aventures de la liberté*, Paris, Bernard Grasset, 1991, 311.

⁴ Bataille, from a “fragment d’une notice autobiographique”, VI, 486.

⁵ Klossowski, ‘De «Contre-Attaque» à «Acéphale»’, in *Change 7: Le groupe la rupture* (Éditions de Seuil, 1970), 107. See also Pierre Prévost, *Rencontre Georges Bataille*, Paris, Éditions Jean Michel Place, 1987, passim; and Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l’oeuvre*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992, 378-84.

⁶ Surya, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l’oeuvre*, op.cit., 379-80.

⁷ Ibid., 381.

⁸ EI, 301. It is in the context of this refusal of biography that it is possible to discern a preliminary force to the question of friendship, where it renders its very presentation as questionable - ‘Where does this need to look for the true or the real [le vrai] only at the level of anecdote and through a false picturesque come from?’

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ #271.

¹¹ See Georges Bataille, *Choix de lettres, 1917-1962*, edited by Michel Surya, Paris: Gallimard, 1997, 592.

¹² #309.

¹³ #284. The importance of this phrase, ‘une amitié inquiète’, will become clear in the context of Blanchot’s reading of Hegel. See the extended analysis of this reading in Chapter 4, below.

¹⁴ Compare this letter with “L’entretien infini”, the ‘conversation’ which prefaces the book of the same title, in EI, ix-xxvi.

¹⁵ Surya, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l’oeuvre*, op.cit., 282.

¹⁶ CI, 43, emphasis added.

¹⁷ Ibid., 45.

¹⁸ The phrase is Bataille’s, from his “Avant-propos” to the first publication of *Le Bleu du ciel*, Paris: Gallimard, 1979 [Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1957], 13. Here Bataille sets out to account for the 22 year delay in the publication of his ‘récit’, adding that:

I am today far from the state of mind from which the book emerged; but in the end with this reason, decisive in its time, no longer applying, I leave the matter to *the judgment of my friends*.

¹⁹ Blanchot, “L’oubli, la déraison”, EI, 299.

²⁰ Bataille, “Silence et littérature”, XII, 173-4. The question of the way in which Bataille links ‘friendship’ to the name of Blanchot in his own work will be pursued in Chapter 2.

²¹ #262.

²² EI, 46-69. It is possible to trace this double movement to Blanchot’s that which *negates* in order to know and communicate, and that which *affirms* the silent and the unknown: the ‘two slopes [deux versants]’ of literary language, in “La littérature et le droit à la mort”, PF, 291-331, 318-9. The questions already raised by such repetition and transformation of vocabulary will become central to exploring the resonances between these texts and those which name or respond to friendship.

²³ Taken from one of Blanchot’s preliminary documents (written around 1959-60?) ‘in circulation’ for the planned, yet never realised project of a *Revue internationale*. Later published in a special issue of *Lignes*, n.11, September 1990, 79-91, 183, emphasis added.

²⁴ See Bataille, “Lettre sur les incompatibilités de l’écrivain”, XII, 16-28. A response to an ‘open letter’ from Char, “Y a-t-il des incompatibilités?”, reprinted in *Recherche de la base et du sommet*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, 41-2. This exchange, at least, helps us to date Blanchot’s letter to around 1950-1.

²⁵ EI, 68-9.

²⁶ “La pensée et l’exigence de discontinuité” (1963), EI, 1-11, 9.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ It is here that Blanchot’s concern with the singularity of a friendship can be related to a problem internal to the conditions of language, that of deixis. The conflictual requirements of the universal and the deictic utterance - one that relates to its own time and place (through the use of demonstrative pronouns or adverbs, such as ‘*this* friend’, for example) - will be seen to be exacerbated in Blanchot’s working through of singularity.

²⁹ *La Somme athéologique* comprises three individual works originally written between 1939 and 1944 - *Le Coupable* (1944); *L’Expérience intérieure* (1943); *Sur Nietzsche, la volonté de chance* (1945). The first two are collected in volume V, and the third in volume VI of Bataille’s *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, Gallimard, both volumes 1973). The role of friendship in this work will be discussed in Chapter 2, below.

³⁰ The two biographies of Bataille currently available both draw upon this preoccupation with death in Bataille’s life and work: Michel Surya’s *Georges Bataille, la mort à l’oeuvre* (Paris, Gallimard, 1987); and Bernd Mattheus’ two-volume *Georges Bataille. Eine Thanatographie* (München, Matthes und Seitz Verlag, 1984 [I], 1988 [II]). For a useful discussion of these two works, which focusses on precisely this question, see Gilles Ernst, “Georges Bataille: position des «reflets» (ou l’impossible biographie)”, in *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, vol. LXXXVIII, n. 224 (October-December 1991), pp.105-25.

³¹ “L’affirmation et la passion de la pensée négative” (1962), in EI, 300-13, 300; IC, 202-11, 202, emphasis added.

³² Am, 7.

³³ AM, 326; FS, 289.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ EI, 301; IC, 203, translation modified.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid. This question of friendship and betrayal is central to Bataille's thinking of 'complicit friendship'.

⁴¹ AM, 326; FS, 289; Am, 7. The parentheses indicate a phrase missing from the 1971 version of the text.

⁴² AM, 326; FS, 289.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ AM, 328; FS, 291, translation modified.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ AM, 327; FS, 290, translation modified.

⁴⁹ Am, 9. AM, 327.

⁵⁰ AM, 328; FS, 291, translation modified.

⁵¹ AM, 329; FS, 292, translation modified.

⁵² After all, it is Bataille who writes, in *Le coupable* - 'I don't propose justice. I bring complicit friendship.'; 'The *saint's* friendship is a confidence, a *faith knowing itself betrayed*. It is the friendship that man has for himself, knowing that he will die, knowing that he can become intoxicated with dying.' *Oeuvres complètes, tome V* (Paris, Gallimard, 1973), p.278. For a criticism of Blanchot's 'strategy' of discretion, see Jane Gallop, "Reading Friend's Corpses", *MLN*, vol. 95, 1017-1022.

⁵³ AM, 328-9; FS, 291, translation modified.

⁵⁴ AM, 328-9; FS, 291, translation modified.

⁵⁵ The doubling of the discreet/discrete is rendered without such immediately apparent differences in the French language where the adjective 'discret' or 'discrète' serves to convey both the notion of restraint or the unobtrusive and the function of discontinuity or separation. As a point of note, this ambiguity can be traced to its Latin root of *discrétus*, from *discernere*, to separate or to perceive. Etymology aside, it is evident that discretion enables Blanchot to re-work friendship into more general questions of judgment and the possibility of criticism itself.

⁵⁶ We will return to this double movement in the final chapter, in which we will relate this reading of “L’amitié” to Blanchot’s practice of the ‘work of an accompanying discourse’; see Section 4.1, below.

Chapter 2

Friendship as complicity: Bataille's "L'Amitié" (1940)

*My complicit friendship: this is all that my temperament brings
to other men.*

Georges Bataille ¹

The previous chapter demonstrated that, for Blanchot, to write *in the name* of friendship does not mean simply to account for an empirical event, a meeting or encounter. On the contrary, it is precisely the effect of this manner of accounting, or 'rapportant', for one's relation to the friend that is under suspicion in "L'amitié". This is why the editorial addition of the phrase "pour Georges Bataille" seems to trample over the careful thinking of relation expressed therein. Yet it is not possible to divorce the idea of friendship from the fact of an encounter, a shared experience: everything in that text from 1962 hinges around the thought of an event or an encounter through which a relation between friends can emerge: 'that which separates becomes relation'. It is, after all, in the wake of Bataille's *death* that Blanchot writes "L'amitié", whether or not he writes it *for* him.

Blanchot defines discretion as ‘the pure interval which, from myself to this other who is a friend, measures everything that there is between us’; which also means that ‘discretion becomes, at a certain moment, the fissure of death.’² If we have been able to conclude that this relation or encounter is intimately connected to the way in which Blanchot thinks about the event of death, especially in the articulation of memory and forgetting in mourning the death of the other, we still do not know what manner or what *concept* of experience is being called for. The very way in which Blanchot names and deploys the term “friendship”, through the complexities and problems inherent in it, is central to his attempt to think the emergence and sustenance of this event or this relation in the very process of its ‘happening’ or ‘relating’. Alongside this attention to the name, and the process of maintaining relation inherent to it, something like an ontology - it’s interruption; or better, an ontology conceived *on the basis of* interruption - has begun to emerge in his work. Questions of time, memory and identity have all indicated this direction, which we have found to be linked to a doubling in the word, *discretion*. It is the presentation of discretion as the very condition for the experience of friendship that allows this it to be seep into the heart of his work. However, before we can follow this figure through Blanchot’s work, we need to be able to answer a number of questions about his relation to Bataille. What does this complex and rather elliptical approach to thinking about friendship have to do with the work of Georges Bataille? Is there any continuity or shared space in common between them? Why does Blanchot insist upon bringing us back to Bataille, his friend, if he is so keen to distance his reflections upon friendship from the grasp of the biography and the complete works? It is because this desire is impossible to achieve. And by tracing this path, following Blanchot back to Bataille, we are always in danger of falling prey to those problems which he diagnoses.

This chapter accounts for the role and importance of friendship in Bataille’s oeuvre, specifically those texts which go to make up *La Somme athéologique*, focussing in particular upon a short piece called “L’Amitié” (published pseudonymously in April 1940) which Bataille will come to characterise as the

guiding thread of that work. Therefore, while the method of carefully working through a single text will be similar to that employed in the first chapter insofar as it attempts to respond to its difficulty and singularity by remaining immanent to it, it will become clear that the singular qualities of “L’Amitié” which mark it out from Blanchot’s “L’amitié” introduce us to some essential, and sometimes quite subtle, differences between Bataille and Blanchot around the problems raised by figuring relation, by the operation of sacrifice, by the response to determinate negativity, and consequently by their respective relations to philosophy and tradition. These similarities and differences in thinking are not only recognised by Blanchot in his letter to Bataille, and negotiated in his presentation of Bataille in “L’amitié” and “L’affirmation et la passion de la pensée négative”, they also run throughout *La Somme athéologique*.³ Bataille’s work as a whole is characterised by a conceptual tension in which opposing terms pull against each other and their own accepted meanings. Nowhere is this tension and internal conflict more apparent than in “L’Amitié”.

2.1 - An ‘impossible’ friendship

The relation of “L’Amitié” to *La Somme athéologique* is a complex one. Strictly speaking, in fact, “L’Amitié” is not a part of this ‘ensemble’, although “L’AMITIÉ” does appear as the heading for the second part when Bataille first gave the ‘general title’ of *La Somme athéologique* in 1950;⁴ and it survives, altered and supplemented extensively, as the opening section of *Le Coupable*. *La Somme athéologique* as a whole is traversed by a great variety of themes, images and concepts, often changing over the years of composition (1939-44), and certainly undergoing varying degrees of modification during Bataille’s constant reorganisation and republication of the volumes up until his death. How does Bataille’s thinking of friendship emerge from out of these themes and the conceptual apparatus at work in this ‘ensemble’? What runs between “L’Amitié” and the other texts which comprise *La Somme athéologique* is the figure of this

communicating thread itself, 'un fil conducteur', or what Bataille himself refers to in *Le Coupable* as 'un fil d'Ariane':

Like Ariadne's thread these notes link me to my fellow beings [mes semblables] and what is left appears to me vain. Yet I could not read them to any of my friends. Hence, I have the impression of writing from inside the tomb. I would like for them to be published when I will be dead, but it is possible that I will live for quite a while, and that publication would happen in my lifetime. I suffer at this idea.⁵

The paradoxical nature of this 'thread' - which can 'link' the one who writes to others, to his 'semblables', only by removing him from their company - highlights Bataille's emphatic and ecstatic formulation of communication, which runs through his central "concepts" of sovereignty, sacrifice and the sacred, and thus introduces key themes such as continuity-discontinuity, completion-incompletion, possibility-impossibility, rupture-closure. We can find these "themes" and "concepts" running through the movement of thought presented in "L'Amitié" and then throughout *La Somme athéologique*. They do not emerge in this short text ex nihilo; they can be found already at work in Bataille's pre-war writings, elements and passages from which sometimes reappear in the texts which actually comprise *La Somme athéologique*.⁶ But this antecedence by no means diminishes the claim being made here for the publication of "L'Amitié" in 1940: it marks the emergence of a particular use of the word, 'friendship', within Bataille's work.

Thus, the object of this second chapter is to determine the place, function and relative importance of friendship within Bataille's thinking; keeping in mind not only the difficult rigour of Blanchot's presentation of "L'amitié", but also series of elliptical references to Bataille and friendship in *L'Entretien infini*. How then should we approach Bataille's "L'Amitié"? A number of aspects of this text need to be explained. It forms part of a 'journal' from which *Le Coupable* is formed ('from September 1939 to the summer of 1943'). Therefore, if Bataille, in his prière d'insérer to the second edition (1961), calls *Le Coupable* 'the narrative

[récit] of a paradoxical “mystical” experience’ (V, 493), it would seem that “L’Amitié” itself can be thought of in this way. Yet we might also say that it marks the beginning of a more or less continuous journal which Bataille maintained during the years of the second world war. This begins with opening phrase of *Le Coupable*:

The date that I begin to write (5 September 1939) is not a coincidence. I am beginning because of events, but not in order to speak about them.⁷

It finishes in the third part of *Sur Nietzsche*, “Journal: February-August 1944”.⁸ The journal spans the period from the beginning of the war to the liberation of France. The continuity of *La Somme athéologique* as a work lies in this form of writing.⁹ It is a form which he seems to have maintained form with some assiduity for dates and times are consistently noted in the original manuscripts, even if “L’Amitié” is published without dating.¹⁰ Moreover, there is no strict chronological continuity between the three volumes. Yet Bataille conceives of *La Somme athéologique* as a collective whole. This ‘ensemble’ is planned and redrafted as a systematic presentation of his thought, albeit one which never comes to rest and only attains a definitive form in the year before his death.¹¹ How should we understand this work as a whole or ‘somme’? “L’Amitié” is never simply a part of this whole. Bataille does not see it as subsumed and taken up into *Le Coupable*; rather, there is the sense that the pseudonymous text from 1940 holds a singular relation with “La Somme athéologique”. In the proofs to the first edition of *L’Expérience intérieure* Bataille planned to include passages from “L’Amitié” following the reworked versions of “Le labyrinthe” and “La communication”; it clearly has a mediating role between these texts from the early 1930’s and his work during the war. Bataille states that ‘I introduced what preceded above all as an - indirect - description of “states of ecstasy” which I had reached. Dianus, in “L’Amitié” makes visible [*rend sensible*] the links of what went before to inner experience.’¹² It is in this sense that “L’Amitié” is not written

as an introduction or as a preface to *La Somme athéologique*, but represents something like a guiding thread through its labyrinthine structure.

“L’Amitié” was published in the journal *Mesures* (15 April 1940) under the pseudonym of Dianus, borrowed from J.G. Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*.¹³ In light of what we have learned about the form and construction of “*La Somme athéologique*”, it should be emphasised that Bataille sees each of his books as a composite entity, each one in turn composing a part of a larger ‘ensemble’. And of all the “parts” that comprised, at various times, *La Somme athéologique*, it seems that “L’Amitié” gave Bataille the greatest trouble and anxiety. Blanchot notes this fluidity of organisation, and Bataille’s unrest, in a note to *L’Espace littéraire*:

when today Georges Bataille gives the title of *Somme athéologique* to a part of his work, he invites us not to read these words in the tranquility of their obvious meaning.¹⁴

The ‘whole’ (*La Somme...*) is not whole. And “L’Amitié” cannot be a ‘part’ of it. It represents both an end and a beginning in his work: he explains that the first pages of *Le Coupable* were written in the midst of his abandonment of a project to found a religion, ‘at least under a paradoxical form’.¹⁵ “L’Amitié” represents the opening blow of an attempt to ‘give an account, at the same time, of the error and the value of this monstrous intention.’ Yet this account is not simply a refutation, nor a rejection of any thought of projects or systems; rather it is presented quite differently as the very ‘impossibility of a project’ - a far more paradoxical situation which begins to emerge ‘from the instant when everything is at stake’. The ambiguous quality that this situation attributes to “L’Amitié” is evident in the fact that Bataille immediately evokes its ‘religious character’, or rather, ‘in a paradoxical sense, sacred’. All in all this state of affairs is what made it much more ‘difficult’ for him ‘to publish as the other books’. However, far from separating this text from the others, it is this quality of being ‘sacred’ that ensures the centrality of “L’Amitié” to the structure of *La Somme athéologique*. The

former seems to have focussed and condensed the singular qualities which Bataille would attribute to his work. It exemplifies what is unique to that work:

I insist [...] on the fact that *La Somme athéologique* differs completely from other books, and that it entirely differs from them in the same way as “L’Amitié” does.¹⁶

These comments are not, however, the final, authorial judgment on the relation between “L’Amitié” and *La Somme athéologique*: what they give us is an initial orientation within the various, yet unified works contained within two volumes of his *Oeuvres complètes*. This is Bataille’s idea of a *sacred* or *sovereign* project. In the reading of “L’Amitié” which follows we will draw out the way in which he presents the sacred, or ‘the sovereign operation’, in terms of the interarticulation of sacrifice and communication. The term which allows for this relation is *complicity*, which places the question of friendship at the core of his thinking.

2.11 - Sacrifice

In his quite remarkable book on Bataille Denis Hollier links the the appearance of “L’Amitié” to a rare ‘suicidal tone’ in Bataille’s life and work.¹⁷ He supports this statement with a contemporaneous unpublished note: ‘All that is left for me is to die.’¹⁸ Hollier then goes on to point out that this feeling is ‘certainly not unrelated to the chosen pseudonym’, so tracing the name of Dianus (linked to Janus) to the links between Frazer’s theory of primitive kingship and Bataille’s concern with sovereignty. The rule of the criminal as “king of the woods” is ‘limited to waiting for death’. This phrase is reminiscent of the first lines to “L’Amitié”:

Love gnaws away at my core and no other *way out* remains for me than a rapid death. What I await is a response in the obscurity in which I am.¹⁹

It is not clear that Bataille, or ‘Dianus’, is discussing the act of suicide - let alone contemplating it. Is there a necessarily suicidal tone in the idea of *waiting* for

death? If we are to read “L’Amitié” as the notes of a man who ‘wrote them and then died’, then we are reading the journal of one who knows he will be *sacrificed*: ‘

One day, I will stop becoming tragic and I will die: it is this day alone, because I have placed myself in its harsh light in advance, which gives its meaning to what I am. I have no other hope.²⁰

The question of whether it is ‘Dianus’ who ‘expects’ or ‘awaits’ sacrifice, or whether it is ‘Bataille’ who wishes to commit suicide, is not the main concern here. Rather, what matters is the relation to death and to dying that permeates “L’Amitié”, and indeed *all* of Bataille’s work. In *Sur Nietzsche*, for example, Bataille depicts the act of suicide in contradistinction to that of sacrifice. He argues that if suicide is driven by a desire to reach the ‘summit’ of death, it is inevitably characterised by a ‘will to act’ which, by definition, misses the severity of sacrifice.

[Suicide is] presented to me as an enterprise demanding - certainly with a disarming pretension - that I place the concern for future time before that of the present moment.²¹

Even suicide represents a ‘project’ whose results and effects are planned, calculated and envisaged before it can be undertaken. It is a resolutely intentional *act*. This economy of recuperating (in the future) what has been lost (in the present) is the constant target of Bataille’s venom throughout *La Somme athéologique*. It is part of the temporal specificity of what Bataille calls “sacrifice” that it needs to be differentiated from any form of death capable yielding *satisfaction*. As we begin to read “L’Amitié” in relation to *La Somme athéologique* we will pay attention to the way(s) in which sacrifice is constituted *and* constitutive for Bataille; although the processes of constitution and composition will always be linked to the forces and drives of de-composition and

destruction, not least because the form of sacrifice would contest precisely that 'self' or 'soi' which is required for any act of 'sui-cide' to be possible.

Let us turn now to read Bataille's "L'Amitié" for ourselves, taking care to follow the unfolding of his 'argument' in order not to ignore what Blanchot refers to as Bataille's invitation 'not to read these words in the tranquility of their obvious meaning'. The opening paragraph runs as follows:

I have hoped for the heavens to tear apart [la déchirure du ciel] (the moment when the intelligible order of known - and yet foreign - objects gives way to a presence which is no more intelligible than it is heartfelt). I hoped for it but the heavens did not open. There is something insoluble in this waiting of a beast of prey huddled up and gnawed by hunger. The absurdity: "Is it God that you wish to tear apart?" As if I really was some beast of prey, but I am sicker still. For I laugh at my own hunger. I don't want to eat anything: I should be eaten instead. Love gnaws away at my core and no other *way out* remains for me than a rapid death. What I await is a response in the obscurity in which I am. Perhaps, instead of being crushed, I might remain like a forgotten scrap! No response to this exhausting agitation: everything remains void. Whereas if... but I do not have God to supplicate.²²

This 'waiting of a beast of prey' does not simply mark the *reduction* of man to a state of animality, nor is it the attainment of animality through the *heightening* of man. In short, it cannot be accounted for by any narrative such as the revelation and consequent burden of an inescapable absurdity of existence, or potential suicide. Rather, this passage conveys an image. It is the *comic failure* of the suicide, whose "sickness" cannot help but exceed the condition of a starving beast of prey precisely because his own situation - the mortal need for sustenance or satisfaction - becomes the source of laughter for him. The mere fact of man's absurdity is no longer enough to bring him to despair, and suicide will have always been still too far ahead for Bataille: his sickness not only exceeds that of a

real beast of prey, it does so through the very fact of his insufficiency. He does not claim any ontological superiority over the animal, but the prospect of his own destruction transforms him precisely insofar as he fails to reach this death. In this “failure” something like a lack of sufficiency or satisfaction - a state of incompleteness - is revealed to man as essential to his being human. The authenticity of man lies in his insufficiency or *dissatisfaction*.

The development of this idea of dissatisfaction during the first section of ‘L’Amitié’ is clearly forms a response to the philosophy of Hegel. Bataille’s use of ‘*la déchirure*’ here draws upon the standard French translation by Jean Hyppolite. It refers to this famous passage from the “Preface” to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

L’esprit conquiert sa vérité seulement à condition de se retrouver soi-même dans l’absolu déchirement.

Spirit wins its truth only on condition of finding itself again in utter dismemberment [Zerissenheit].²³

This idea of undergoing a necessary ‘déchirement’, a ‘tearing apart’ or ‘dismemberment’ which Hegel called ‘Zerissenheit’, is the central to the process of becoming (the experience of consciousness) in which Spirit is engaged in the *Phenomenology*, and as such it functions as *the* figure for the operation of determinate negation. At this point it is enough to note that Bataille, following Alexandre Kojève (whose lectures had had such an impact upon him during the 1930’s), takes the ‘déchirement’ of death as his base level: a ‘searing vision [une vision déchirante] of the *unintelligible*’.²⁴ The way in which Bataille reads and elaborates upon this word comes to form the crux of his challenge to Hegel. If the unfolding experiential development of consciousness is so essentially linked, as Spirit, to the determining operation of a terminus ad quem, then the manner of one’s comportment in the face of death - the very question of the experience of

death and its possibility - must be central. Bataille states this claim without any ambiguity:

The sole element which introduces existence into the universe is death; when a man represents it to himself, he ceases to belong to rooms, to close relations: he is part of the free play of worlds.²⁵

Death opens up the field of existence, and as such it exposes 'man' to the possibilities of freedom.²⁶ However, Bataille immediately indicates two possible relations to death. Both possibilities address death as something unavoidable yet 'unintelligible'; and consequently, both yield a view or 'vision' of that which is supposedly *unrepresentable*. In the first, death is presented alongside or rather through the 'reassuring perspective of theology', which seeks to reconcile the living "viewer" with his disturbing vision by promising the seduction of another 'life' (salvation) In the second, there is a vision that brings him into contact with the absence of any 'response' whatsoever. There is no reconciliation with the fact of his own death: this 'vision' is directly linked to man's perception of his 'abandonment' in a world without salvation.

What is the importance of this distinction between a theological world which offers the hope for salvation and a world that seems only to deliver one from any possibility of repose? It might be claimed that Bataille still retains certain elements of a theological discourse in the articulation of this suspension of solution: the consuming effect of love; a "vision" which sets itself beyond the grasp of comprehension and intelligibility; the transformative operation of death. However, the rejection of all supplication, and therefore all possibility of salvation ('Whereas if... but I do not have God to supplicate.') does not *result from* the any absence or lack of response to his hope. It *produces* it, even exacerbates it.

For if, in the last instance, there exists some immutable satisfaction, why have I rejected it? But *I* know that satisfaction does not satisfy and that man's glory draws upon his consciousness of not knowing anything higher

than glory and dissatisfaction. [...] Joy and love, a relaxed freedom is bound within me to the hatred of satisfaction.²⁷

Thus, the one who sees only the former thinks he or she *will be* satisfied (in the future); the one who only perceives the latter knows that it never can be. Yet if the first ‘vision’ is obviously a depiction of the satisfactions of theology, where does Bataille’s irrepressible dissatisfaction lead him if not toward melancholia? This hostility toward theology marks the origin of Bataille’s description of what he calls, in “L’Amitié”, ‘un anthropomorphisme déchiré’, an anthropomorphism which has been ‘shredded’ or ‘torn apart’.²⁸ What are the conditions and consequences of this ‘déchirement’ at the heart of ‘Man’?

But it is always a matter of an incomplete discovery [une découverte inachevée]. When he dies, a man leaves behind him survivors condemned to ruin what he believed, to profane that which he venerated. I teach that the universe is such but, sure enough, those who follow me will perceive my error.²⁹

Bataille will characterise this difference in terms of a profane, theological world and a sacred, atheological one. In this way, he is already setting out to distance himself from any charges of negative theology or atheistic nostalgia. This distantiation can be seen in the impulse of an expectant desire for ‘la déchirure du ciel’: an impulse that seems to carve out and feed upon its own ‘dissatisfaction’. But will not this fact of dissatisfaction inevitably uncover another, deeper, desire to be satisfied, to be saved? The answer to this question takes us to the heart of Bataille’s thinking here. He continues:

Dissatisfaction is encountered in all forms. Hitler was dissatisfied on the day that he entered into war. Such is the vulgar form that war represents: we imagine that satisfaction demands conquests and glory, we do not imagine that satisfaction is impossible. Only beyond, we perceive that greatness consists in *recognising oneself impossible to satisfy*.³⁰

The demand for satisfaction, the demand made by every military conqueror, can only originate in a condition of dissatisfaction. This would be the familiar pattern of action and desire conceived as 'la volonté d'agir', 'the will to act': dissatisfaction would designate a *lack* of satisfaction which serves as the motor for the movement of desire. Desire would be the drive to satisfaction through effective action, conquest and possession. But where and when are we 'beyond' this desire for satisfaction which warfare characterises? Would we thereby exist "beyond desire" itself, outside of any sphere of activity? Let us reconstruct Bataille's logic: *to know* that satisfaction 'does not satisfy'; *to be* 'beyond' the circle of initial dissatisfaction and resultant satisfaction is the mediated result of a being recognising it's own satisfaction to be impossible. A being is brought face to face with the incompleteness of its own being; and yet, at the same time, this experience is nothing other than the recognition that it is the very impossibility of satisfaction which is *constitutive of this being*. This difference is an ontological one. It describes the very process through which he differentiated himself from the beast of prey: by withdrawing himself from the process so as to undermine its cohesion and to destroy it by indicating its impossibility; whilst, at the same time, identifying with the internal 'fault' or insufficiency of its condition, thus affirming it in its very impossibility. The condition of dis-satisfaction is not sought out in order for it to be rectified or satisfied; Bataille's desire is only to affirm it, to exasperate it without any possibility of a 'result' or recuperation.

As this argument continues, incompleteness emerges from this determinate impossibility into one that radically un-determines, or tears apart, the satisfaction of a death which would ultimately condition truth. Why? Bataille sees that if death ultimately conditions truth through finitude, in the imposition of a mortal closure upon this being as subject, it is only because this inescapable fact of death will have always been what pre-determines 'man' in terms of a historical process. 'Man' becomes nothing more than that very process of his own self-completion.³¹ In taking on this constitution of 'man', Bataille does not simply oppose a raw indeterminacy or immediacy ('Nature') to this complex 'operation' of

determinations and conditioning ('Man'): as far as he is concerned, no-one yet has pushed far enough into the constitution of this process or operation.

[A]ccording to its own rule, this truth can only become true on one condition, that I die and not only myself [moi], everything that man feels inescapably incomplete within him. Now it is clear that if that from which I suffer is evaded and if the uncompleted nature of things [l'inachevé des choses] ceases to ruin human self-importance, it is life itself that will become estranged from man; and, with life, its inevitable and distant truth (the sole truth which is tied to it and expresses it): that incompleteness, death, desire, unquenchable, are the *never closed wound* that belongs to the being, without which it would not differ from a void deprived of light.³²

What is the nature of this 'research'? It is opposed, at first, to science. Science, claims Bataille, is defined by the necessity of its *completion*; and the force of this necessity for completion is what marks 'the greatness of Hegel'. More specifically, Bataille has in mind the importance of 'science' in the *Phenomenology*, to which Hegel originally gave the subtitle, "Wissenschaft der *Erfahrung* des Bewußtseins", "Science of the *Experience* of Consciousness". Bataille has taken on board the exemplarity of the *completion* of knowledge in 'science' as it is laid out by speculative philosophy. Bataille is drawing upon the assumption of absolute knowing in the *Phenomenology*, wherein Hegel sets out to 'help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science', to the point or 'goal' where it can 'renounce its name *love of knowing* and be *actual knowing*'.³³ Philosophy must become 'Wissenschaftlich' in order for it to fulfill or actualise its potential: nothing less than the laying-out of the necessary path of philosophy's self-actualisation as a whole. It is no longer enough for philosophy to remain *philo-sophia*, 'love of knowing' ['Leibe zum Wissen']. For the movement and accumulation of knowledge through the manifold diversity of 'Experience' ['Ehrführung'] to be articulated *as* an interconnected whole, it needs to be thought in terms of a system. Hegalian 'Wissenschaft' is the systematic movement which

can account for the complete sequence of experiences which consciousness has to undergo in this process of becoming 'actual knowing' ['wirkliches Wissen'].

If there is no solidity to Bataille's position - a fact that he wholeheartedly affirms - he even denies that any position is possible for him at all: 'it is not a position but a movement maintaining each operation of the mind [l'esprit] possible in the interior of particular limits'.³⁴ It is this opposition of stasis ('being' *qua* 'position') and movement ('becoming' *qua* 'process' or 'operation') which forms the fundamental axis of Bataille's differentiation from Hegel and the 'philosophy of work', or from any position figured through the dialectic of 'foundation' and 'appearance'. It is this axis which proves to be vital to his 'image stripped of existence'. Yet there are a number of problems with Bataille's reading of Hegel, which should be sketched out here. First of all, has Bataille misunderstood the logic of this completion, which leads him to counterpose the destructive dynamics of movement to the conservative stasis which he finds in Hegel? This mistake is particularly clear in the context of his cursory depiction of the *Phenomenology*, which presents nothing other than the perpetual movement of the process of the becoming of spirit, the continual movement of the 'experience of consciousness'. It is in this context that we should understand the word 'science' for Hegel. But what if Bataille is not saying that Hegel failed to live up to this project? Perhaps, on the contrary, in arguing that Hegel's philosophy is nothing other than its completion, Bataille is insisting that completion is never quite enough, and that the 'failure' of this 'beginning' (as he portrays it) at least pertains to another (equal) necessity, perhaps to something that exceeds (or precedes) the circularity of the first. In this way, Bataille does not seek to oppose himself to Hegel, but seems to be intent on carrying Hegel's thought further into those domains that come to be designated as incomplete or impossible: 'laughter', 'tears', 'ecstasy', 'eroticism' and 'poetry'.

How does a being, dedicated to the path of research, end up as the waste by-product or the 'unexpected residue' of this very process? Bataille does not explain

why exactly, he claims that he is only trying to describe or relate the situation as it appears to him - 'And as the fixed question was that of being and substance, what appears to me with the greatest vivacity, [...] what appears to me is that, where knowledge [la connaissance] sought being, it has encountered the incomplete.'³⁵ Above all, Bataille's manner or mode of presentation is that of *witness*. Yet if "L'Amitié" is presented as a report or account, 'un récit', of an experience, of a path of research, it is not an unproblematic idea of witness. This mode of writing is at once intimate and quite personal; yet it always slips away from any identifiable person or subject - it seems to matter little whether it is 'Dianus' or 'Bataille' who writes. Indeed, the experiences which are thereby communicated are precisely presented in such a way as to make the process of identification untenable in terms of a fixed subject who would possess indivisible duration. It is this impersonal sense of writing which qualifies the 'vivacity' of experience, as the following parenthetical observation reveals:

[this] vivacity (which, at the very moment that I write, opens "the depth of worlds" before me and makes me no longer feel any difference between conscious knowledge and ecstatic "loss of consciousness").³⁶

As his tone suggests Bataille can only celebrate and revel in this 'loss', a gap rent open by his desire for destruction, 'la déchirure du ciel'. But *now*, which means here 'at the very moment' of writing, the "loss of consciousness" ceases to be different from 'la connaissance' itself: the path of research continues because there is always more to say, more to report back. What Bataille finds here is almost exactly what Hegel sought to explicate and demonstrate in the self-projection of the concept:

There is identity between the object and the subject (the object which is known, the subject that knows) when an incomplete and incompletable science admits that its object can be itself incompletable, incompletable.³⁷

If this is, as Bataille says himself, an explicitly 'Hegelian position' - adding that this 'proximity' hardly bothers him - how can such an identity become the crux of the difference that he puts between Hegel's and his own figure of the 'truth' of this relation?³⁸ How can he square the relation of completion and incompleteness other than dialectically? The extremity to which Bataille has pushed this position of identity - where the relation of identity, and hence difference, is to be understood as 'incompletable' - is therefore an act of affirming knowledge and consciousness only in so far as it can flip back over into 'ignorance', not as a condition to be overcome, but to be 'identified with the extreme state of conscious knowledge', an "ignorance of the future" (the *Unwissenheit um die Zukunft* that Nietzsche loved).³⁹ Yet is this inversion enough, as Bataille seems to claim, to dispel the 'malaise' that has plagued man in the guise of the theological imperative of divine perfection (the idea that man, the being who defines himself as 'l'inachevé', forever strives to reach the perfection of god, 'l'achevé')? What is at stake in this formulation of 'ignorance' or 'non-knowing' ['Unwissenheit'; 'non-savoir'] with regard to the future? Bataille goes on to add, in *Le Coupable*:

Theology maintains the principle of a complete world, for all time, in every place [...] It is necessary to kill God in order to perceive the world in the infirmity of its incompleteness.⁴⁰

Implicit in this argument, and this recourse to Nietzsche, is the idea that the logical result of Hegel's thinking demands that man - in the possession of philosophy as the science of its own process of completion - must himself achieve the perfection of god, and so become 'everything'. But man's "ignorance of the future", or rather his "un-knowledge" of it, is revealed to Bataille as the impossibility of this completion. This realisation takes place in the face of 'the incompleteness of worlds', a state of affairs which '« le fond des mondes »' reveals to Bataille at the very moment of writing. Once again, the event or experience which captivates Bataille's imagination is that before which man is only an

‘incident’, without foundation, and as such he can be ‘no more than an adequate representation (and thus equally inadequate)’ of this state of affairs.

Science, like history, is incomplete: I will die without response to essential problems, forever ignorant of results that will change human perspectives (which would change mine as they will change those of survivors).⁴¹

The depth of this denigration of man is final, absolute and unavoidable. It possesses the same force of necessity that Hegel constructs for the idea of completion. Without the model of completion, or the theological principle, is there anything left to orient humanity within the world in terms of *necessity*, or even *obligation*? The form of the imperative may remain, but there is now within it an even more exorbitant and disorienting demand:

In this way it imposes itself upon thought that it would be necessary *to complete* this world, at any price, but here lies the impossible, the incompleted: every reality [réel] breaks down, is fractured, the illusion of an immobile stream is dispersed [se dissipe], the dormant water seeped away [écoulée], I hear the noise of the nearby waterfall.⁴²

At this point the incessant, unfounded, but irrefutable movement of Bataille’s ‘truth’ can only stand on its own (groundless) particularity - it makes its own way. In this way, Bataille’s path shadows that of Hegel’s auto-presentation of the concept, and as such it yields a clue about the function of ‘la déchirure du ciel’. Bataille provokes the question: if his thinking of this immanent self-movement of ‘truth’ is governed by the ripping apart of every satisfaction, doesn’t it draw its power, and therefore its very possibility from the *self*-satisfaction of its own project of relentless destruction and dissatisfaction? When he writes that this conception ‘is an anthropomorphism torn apart’, how are we to understand the act of rending or tearing?⁴³ Is Bataille’s thinking of destruction merely reducible to the determinate negation of a thing, a negation which would cancel yet maintain the content of its action?

2.12 - Communication

In order to respond to this challenge, it is incumbent upon the reader to ask about this movement of thought from within its relation to impossibility, to follow up on the terms of Bataille's own formulations, and therefore also their peculiar anomalies. As opposed to the servility of the incomplete to the completed (of man to god), any reduction or assimilation of 'the incompleteness of worlds' - that is, where the 'incident' of man is equally adequate or inadequate to such task of representation - encounters its own *unavoidable*, but *uninhabitable* limits: it 'can no longer hold itself to them [ne peut pas non plus s'y tenir]'.⁴⁴ This situation or encounter is at once productive - it marks the logical continuum of his research - and yet intolerable as it shatters every hope of coming to a halt or a definitive completion. Once again, it is a situation that Bataille affirms in the extreme:

An *Unwissenheit*, an ecstatic, beloved ignorance thus becomes the accomplished expression of a wisdom that a vain hope no longer obeys. At an extreme point of its development, thought aspires to its own "putting-to-death" [« mise à mort »]: it is precipitated as if by a leap into the sphere of sacrifice and, just as an emotion swells as far as the irresistible instant of sobbing, its plenitude bears it up to the point where a wind that wears it out whistles, the point where the definitive contradiction of minds, raging, holds sway.⁴⁵

No obedience is tolerated at this 'extreme point'. Only the precipitate leap into sacrifice is offered, but it does not even seem to present the 'way-out' that Bataille had once seen in the prospect of a 'sudden death'. As this thought ascends upon the coalescence of 'intellectual plenitude' and ecstatic drunkenness, it is still only awaiting its own '« mise à mort »', but it is repeatedly pushed into a place of persistent, corrosive contradiction. For thought, the 'definitive contradiction' is a

perpetual, violent mobility: this 'extreme point of its development' is not simply attained, but is only accessible through repetition.

I can only, I suppose, broach [toucher à] the extreme in repetition, in that I am never sure of having reached it, in that I never will be sure.⁴⁶

It becomes clearer that Bataille's aim, if he has one, is to exhaust the possibilities of a solution, to expend the resources of satisfaction and completion. This is the force he attributes to repetition: it compels contradiction to 'rage' - the exacting 'point' of the extreme is nothing without its repeatability. And as repetition it unavoidably works against its own completion.

Communication, then, is not a 'social bond', in the sense that Jean-Luc Nancy has referred to as 'the economic bond of recognition.'⁴⁷ It touches upon a quasi-ontological distinction already present in Bataille's thinking. Communication is conceived as the rending apart of every such bond, in the exposure to an extreme limit. This limit is the fundamental, unsurpassable limit of human finitude. Bataille defines friendship in terms of such an 'abandonment' or 'solitude':

For a man, a dryness of the desert, a suspended state (of everything around him) are favourable conditions for a violent detachment. Nudity shows itself to the one enclosed by a hostile solitude. It is the hardest, the most relieving trial: a state of profound friendship requires that a man be abandoned by all his friends, free friendship is detached from close, intimate bonds. Far beyond the shortcomings of *close* friends or readers, I now seek friends, readers that a dead man can find and, in advance, I am faithful to them, innumerable, mute: stars of the heavens! my laughter, my madness reveal you and my death will rejoin you.⁴⁸

If what Bataille seeks to destroy and move beyond is the homogeneous sequence of the philosophical project of man's ambition - the accession of the human to the perfect completion of god which Kojève finds in Hegel - he cannot but realise that the unavoidably comic position in which he has placed "man" is the desire to be

“bigger than god”, or “more perfect than completion”. The first section of “L’Amitié” therefore bears witness to the development of a comic principle of repetition. But what is it that takes place along this scaled relationship between disjunction and conjunction upon which Bataille’s analyses seem to rely? As a path or method of research, however errant, it still seems to present itself with an aim or goal to be reached, and yet this end to which it directs itself is nothing other than ‘chance’.⁴⁹

Throughout, in every accessible reality and in each being, it is necessary to find the sacrificial place, the wound. Each being is touched only at the point where it succumbs, a woman beneath her dress, a god at the throat of the sacrificial animal.⁵⁰

What does Bataille understand by this ‘wound’? And should we not be suspicious of the uneasy coyness with which the oblique reference to a woman’s vagina is metonymically reinforced by the slit throat of an animal? Bataille states quite clearly that such a ‘wound’ is to be uncovered in each and every being, condition or situation - ‘in every accessible reality’. One might take this to mean: ‘it is possible to find the point of accessibility in everything that can be thought’. Yet this is not merely a possibility for Bataille, but a demand - ‘il faut’ - that accompanies everything which occurs or takes place. Every event has its fault-line or wound - which means every being or thing, every body or system, every act or experience. The wound must be sought after because one must locate the ‘sacrificial place’ in order to ‘touch upon’ this reality. That is to say: “in order for something to be thought through, it is necessary to seek the place (the ‘point’) where that thing or being gives way or succumbs”. What this thought seeks, in everything, is a collision with its *own* limits; and yet this is not to say simply that such a search would only ever find its own *reflection* in whatever it came across. On the contrary, if the throat of the sacrificed animal is the ‘point at which [a god] succumbs’, would this mean that the god - having been ‘touched’ - will give way or yield, in the sense of perishing, as a result of this mediated contact. A woman

can be touched without any such offering - rather it is this woman who seems to touch as the offering without being touched. But offered to whom?

There is no causal connection between these two events: touching upon a thing or being; and 'the point where it succumbs'. It is the rupture represented by their relation that attracts Bataille. The sense of 'touch' in thought does not grasp or seize the entity through some privileged access to this 'point', but rather finds itself in some way subjected to it.

A naked woman suddenly opens a field of delights (whilst decently clothed, she was no more troubling than the wall or a piece of furniture): in this way the indefinite expanse tears itself apart and, torn, it is open to the ravished mind which loses itself [se perdre] in it in the same way as the body [is lost] in the nudity which gives itself to it.⁵¹

It is worth paying attention to the tortuous formulation of this sentence. Certainly, the naked woman is by no means the object of this sundering, but neither does she seem to be constituted as the subject of an experience, if the state of 'the ravished mind' could be said to be a subject at all. The problem is not that the formulation of these two passages is deliberately ambiguous or obscure, but rather that the focus of Bataille's attention is at the heart of this obscurity: how much can thought accommodate within its limits? to what can it be subjected and what cannot be its object? what confronts the mind in its unexplored complicity with the erotic charge of the body? To return to Bataille's earlier formulation of the 'extreme point of its development', thought would now think through touching, touching upon its very aspiration toward this point, which he describes as the desire for 'its own "putting-to-death"'. Once again, the obstacle of an impossible condition seems to dis-orient his analysis as the confrontation of 'the savage *impossibility* of our mind' with its unavoidable, yet unavowable limits.

The nakedness of the woman is more that which reveals, than what is revealed - 'the animality in her becomes visible again and the sight of her unleashes my

own incompleteness within me [sa vue délivre en moi mon propre inachèvement]'.⁵² This occurrence disturbs and dissolves the field of experience by opening the more delightful and unbound field of eroticism, 'un champ de délices'.⁵³ As an experience it is nothing other than the opening up of the field of *communication*. However, if it takes place as an act of communication, it is only because the security of communicating between separate and distinct entities has been dissolved: it is this erotic "contact" - the sense of sacred intimacy or continuity, that is to say, *complicity* - which gives rise to the fear of such dissolution in the first place.

To the extent that existences appear perfect, completed, they remain separated, enclosed upon themselves. They only open themselves through the wound of the incompleteness of being within them. But numerous and separated beings *communicate* with one another through that which it is possible to call incompleteness, animal nudity, wound, and it is in the *communication* of the one to the other that they take life by losing themselves.⁵⁴

What would it be to exceed these limits? This is the problem that is researched and refigured throughout Bataille's work:

Even thinking (reflection) is only achieved in us within excess. What does the truth signify, outside of the representation of excess, if we don't see that which exceeds the possibility of seeing, that which it is intolerable to see, as, in ecstasy, it is intolerable to take pleasure [jouir]? If we don't think that which exceeds the possibility of thinking ...?⁵⁵

However, it must be pointed out that if these two passages merely expressed the sense of anxiety in the act of communication, then there would be nothing remarkable to them. As it is, Bataille draws upon the familiarity of these images to introduce the extremity of his meditation upon incompleteness into the experience of communication. He argues in the following way: individual existences can appear

to be complete or whole in themselves, and yet it is always possible to discern their desire or need for others (to share, communicate, possess, dominate or serve); but to the extent that this is so, these individuals actually 'remain separated' or self-sealed - communication cannot take place because while there may be familiarity (as with polite manners) there can be no intimacy -; and therefore the intimate nature of communication is in no way divorced from those aspects of behaviour or conduct that are deemed to be excessive or too much - the perfection of being can only be ruptured by the wound 'in every being' (the impossibility of completion). This act of destruction (the sacrifice, the crime) draws the individual being into communication with another being, which gives rise to the ambiguity of communication itself, to 'take life by losing themselves'. One being does not wound another, Bataille does not use the verb, 'to wound' (an deed which would require a doer), but the wound in the one and in the other is *ontological*: it is what is shared between them, and opens them up to one another. 'They only open themselves through the wound of the incompleteness of being within them': the wound is *being's* [*de l'être*], but only as it takes place in *each* individual being. Has Bataille thus sketched out the beginnings of an ontology? Would it not have to be a thought of such a difference that is not readily reducible to a distinction that would be derived from an ontology (in its widest sense of separating the essence of what manifests itself and the 'form' in which it presents itself)?

2.2 - The sense of complicity

Bataille's pseudonymous essay of 1940 presented 'en abyme' the central concerns of the work that was to occupy him right up until his death: *La Somme athéologique*. The thematic and conceptual elements of death, desire, chance, communication, 'l'erotisme', transgression, sacrifice and the sacred run through it and into that body of work. In "La Somme athéologique", these themes and concepts are related within an attempt to think through the possibilities of

experience, one which itself always forces the individual to its limits. What remains constant throughout this work is Bataille's research deeper into what he initially defined, borrowing from Blanchot in "Collège socratique", as 'expérience intérieure négative': an experience that can only 'affirm of itself that it is authority (but every authority expiates itself)'.⁵⁶ By calling into question the value of every experience - a contestation necessarily 'without limit' -, the individual is pushed outside of "itself", outside of any subsistence of "self" or "ego". With no limits, and without salvation, project or possibility, there is authority *only* in this experience, and only in so far as it *is* this 'limitless contestation'.

Everything would be held, including authority itself, in the movement of a limitless putting-into-question. There would only be authority in this movement, in this putting-into-question.⁵⁷

Consequently, the question should be raised about the specificity of the word friendship - as a *relation* between more than one such individual - with regard to this experience defined as '*the incessant putting into question of existence by itself*.'⁵⁸ What is the relation between the discontinuous force of discretion which figures friendship in Blanchot's work and Bataille's idea of friendship as complicity? Do they share some common function beyond the purely grammatical - that is, as adjectival forms of 'discreet' or 'complicit' friendship? If we now attempt to clarify discretion and complicity in relation to one another, how are we to conceive this relation?⁵⁹

However, it is quite evident from those texts forming *La Somme athéologique* that Bataille already situates them in terms of a fundamental opposition that condenses his pursuit of 'expérience sensible' towards 'l'extrême du possible'.⁶⁰ The following sequence is taken from the first section of "Le supplice", in *L'Expérience intérieure*:

The voices of good apostles: they have an answer for everything, they indicate, discreetly, [discrètement] the path to follow, like the master of ceremonies at a burial.

Feeling of complicity in: despair, madness, love, supplication. Inhuman, frenzied joy of communication, because of despair, madness, love, not a point of empty space which is not despair, madness, love and more: laughter, vertigo, nausea, loss of self as far as death [perte de soi jusqu'à la mort].⁶¹

What could give this possibility of common measure, or further still an authenticity, to discretion and complicity when the latter is deployed by Bataille as such a hostile dismissal of the former (as a form of ceremonial mastery)? How much continuity is there between this passage and the formulation of the 'complicit friendship' in "L'Amitié"? At first sight, the gulf between a controlled, measured discourse ('voices') of answers and a frenzied, desperate 'feeling' of joyful communication seems to be constructed around a simple opposition of the restricted and the general, which guides the pairings of the reasonable and the excessive, or reason and madness. Yet are there further possibilities and problems which this approach to Bataillean 'economics' might ignore or conceal in its turn? Is there anything which might disturb the construction of this sequence of oppositions?

There may be such a disturbance already embedded within Bataille's approach to the question of 'communication'. This passage does not express the apparent simplicity of such a opposition without in some way indicating the complexity that flows between them and thus constitutes them through disjunction. This complex and productive disjunction is further illustrated if we pay close attention to the troubling presence of what Bataille calls Blanchot's 'final silence', and which Bataille then goes on to characterise as 'a feeling of distant friendship, of distant complicity.' This formulation would seem to express a dispersal and mixture of both terms that bears away the rigidity of an opposition: the differential

distantiation that emerged in the reading of Blanchot's "L'amitié" is not without relation to this action of complicity *at a distance*. The possibility of a scale of complicity at the level of each and every 'point of empty space' - an all-expansive dispersal in the name of a 'loss of self as far as death' - will have to draw upon the impossibility of any *discrete* measure, ratio or relation. Would this then measure effectively the 'loss' of a discrete self or being via the same conceptual movement within which a 'feeling of complicity' is given its *discreet* distribution? Such a conflict of discrete and complicit relations sits at the (geometrical) heart of any distributive network of relations, that is to say, as the question of how the relationality of friendship is to be figured.

Here friendship, as it is informed by a thinking of complicity, might at least generate a logic of presentation in an analogous way to that which takes place in Blanchot's doubling of discretion.⁶² That is to say, an attempt to name that which exists only in and as relation: a figuring of relation as that which, stretching between those terms which are thereby put into relation, is yet not completely accountable in terms of its terms or relata. In short, what has emerged with Blanchot is an attempt to think a relation which remains external to its relata; a relation that is strictly outside its own terms. This leads to two connected problems. First of all, if we grant that both 'discretion' and 'complicity' are attempts at naming the same 'thing' - that is, the exact same *relation* -, how far is it possible to maintain two conflicting versions at the same time? Furthermore, we then have to ask whether both "acts" of naming name what they name in the same manner, insofar as it is possible that each act itself takes place within a conflicting thinking of the relation between the name and what is named? Do they perhaps give us two quite different and irreconcilable ways of naming this relation? To what extent can either discretion or complicity be said to accelerate the conceptual slippage of processes such as those of naming or relation that are imbricated within friendship, as this word soaks through into the main body of a writer's work?

The discordance between discretion and complicity can be seen to slide most violently in Bataille's work, in particular his work which begin to appear with the onset of the second world war and eventually go to make up *La Somme Athéologique*. In *Le Coupable*, *L'Expérience intérieure* and *Sur Nietzsche* they are present in a more expansive conflict between claims for the primacy of *discontinuous* or *continuous* figures of relation. This slippage is at the heart of his quasi-ontological formulation of "being in relation" [« être en rapport »].⁶³ Once again, the principal method for inquiring into this state of affairs will be derived immanently by following the manner in which this naming takes place in a single work - Bataille's "L'Amitié" - which will then help us to see the manner which friendship runs through the *La Somme athéologique* as a whole. To show how Bataille presents or names friendship is therefore invaluable for deepening the condition of conflict inherent in Blanchot's own figuring of relations; and, as a result, it can illuminate the nature of the debt to Bataille within the complexities inherent to his later formulation of discretion.

How then is 'complicity' to be read or understood in this context? Is it conveyed by a similar secretive tone to that inherent in Blanchot's 'discretion'? If so, we might begin by speculating that whoever is complicit in an act or event is thereby held by an "experience" which would exclude (or prohibit) any revelation, expression or communication at the same time as it includes or absorbs the one who undergoes it in a crime. To put it another way, complicity would express an communal experience which necessitates both the reservation of what is unavailable or inaccessible to others, whilst conspiring with others in its possession: to possess and to belong through this possession - this is the principle of a shared experience which underlies the formation of a community. Complicity would be formulated as the communication, or *putting-in-common*, of an experience that binds those to whom it is addressed: not only the common assumption of an experience, but perhaps also the shared assumption of what constitutes experience per se. Yet to *whom* is such a communication addressed? Who are these friends? How will "friends" or accomplices be identified, and thus

differentiated from those others to whom such confidences must remain inaccessible? Are these 'others' necessarily 'enemies' to these 'friends'? Friendship, for Bataille, is not open to us as a value, but exposes us to this sense of communication as complicity: it is an experience which 'awakens' us to the impossibility of ever closing off or limiting such exposure. Yet there is nothing despairing in this impossibility of community:

The awakening to the impossible is not misfortune (no more than it is good fortune). Beyond the rage of unleashing [déchaînement] there is the *calm* of the dawning where, at the conclusion of the tearing to pieces [des déchirements] which it willed, *the friendship of man for himself* begins.⁶⁴

Therefore, it would mean not only grasping an experience and fully comprehending it, but also to be grasped and held by this event itself, to allow oneself to be determined by it: 'être complice de quelque chose' means to be party to something; or one might say, to take or be part in what takes place: to be complicit is to be *a part* (of something). Complicity is then an ambiguous occurrence: it is an event that only ever takes place through acting in collusion under an law. To be 'in complicity' is always to be the accomplice, being in relation to another who is in some way the same, another accomplice, someone who always acts in collusion with another, and so on. There is no numerical limit to those who are complicit. Hence complicity is a potentially infinite self-replicating series of relations. Yet at the same time what this multiplication of parts within a relation of complicity demands above all is that each part remain silent, secret and alone in this relation. But what is the nature of the act or event required to generate this 'with' or 'in' of parts in the first place? How does Bataille's 'complicity' generate or figure itself as relation?

It is at this point that we must break off our reading of "L'Amitié", in order to formulate precisely what is at stake in this sense of complicity through its ambiguous relation to Hegelian recognition. Bataille himself signals this ambiguity in his thinking of sovereignty:

But: there is no extreme either without recognition - on the part of other men (if it is not the extreme point *for others*: I am referring to the Hegelian principle of *Anerkennen*). The possibility of being recognised by a significant minority (Nietzsche) is itself already in the night. Towards which in the end every extreme point is directed.⁶⁵

In the following chapter, therefore, we will explore the way in which the complicity of friendship, together with the concepts of death and the work, can be traced back to Bataille's response to Kojève's Hegel. Furthermore, insofar as we have arrived at the work of Bataille through Blanchot, our present enquiry will be concerned with two key questions, the answers to which will lead us back to the place of friendship in Blanchot. First, how do the concepts of *death* and *the work* structure the privileging of 'Recognition' ['Anerkennung'] in Kojève's reading of the *Phenomenology*? Second, in what way does Bataille's thinking of friendship draw upon and against Kojève's reading of Hegel?

Notes to Chapter 2

¹ Bataille, “L’Amitié” (1940), VI, 303. When Blanchot cites this line as one of the two epigraphs to *L’Amitié*, he uses this 1940 text, rather than the changed 1944 version which appears in *Le Coupable* (‘I bring complicit friendship.’ V, 278).

² AM, 328-9.

³ See letter #262 cited in Chapter 1, Section 1.1.

⁴ Bataille’s original letter to Raymond Queneau concerning ‘*La Somme athéologique*’ (dated 29 March 1950) outlined three volumes - I. ‘LE MOMENT SOUVERAIN’; II. ‘L’AMITIÉ’; III. ‘LA MORT’ -, the contents of which would have outstripped the final form of this series (VI, 360).

Therefore, it is worth taking time to note the reciprocal investment in this word ‘friendship’ within Bataille’s work. For what is at stake is the enigma of this particular reciprocity between Blanchot and Bataille ‘in the name of’ friendship. If Bataille covertly publishes “L’Amitié” in April 1940 at least half a year before his ‘rencontre’ with Blanchot, and the latter only writes under this title after the death of his friend, it could equally be said that these are only events that suspend a *shared* thinking. In one of his many plans or ‘aphorisms’ (written during the ‘Fifties) for the ‘*La Somme athéologique*’, Bataille inscribes the name of his friend beneath that of ‘FRIENDSHIP’:

Somme athéologique :

I. LE MOMENT [L’Existence; La Solitude] SOUVERAIN

L’athéologie

L’Expérience intérieure

Méthode de méditation

Études [sur les moments souverains]

II. L’AMITIÉ

Le Coupable (appendices en partie supprimés)

Histoire d’une société secrète

Maurice Blanchot

III. LA MORT [et la morale] DE NIETZSCHE

Comment Nietzsche est-il mort?

Sur Nietzsche

La Sainteté du mal

Mémoire

See VI, 360-74, 361. Only eight years later Bataille wonders whether to 'join *L'Alleluiah* to *Coupable* at the same time as *Les récits de Maurice Blanchot*?' - a title given to a planned collection of reviews (such as that cited above) published in *Critique* - once again in the name of redeploying the general title of '*La Somme athéologique*'. Yet this is much more than a title given as a 'general heading' for his work: it seems that at one time or another during the 1950's Bataille seems to have seen nearly *all* of his work cascading from this playful, yet privative relation to the Judeo-Christian tradition; and alongside his other (unfinished) project of 'an-economics' - the three volumes of '*La Part maudite*' and the accompanying *Theorie de la religion*. Thus, while he attempts to rewrite the preface to *Le Coupable* as the introduction to another plan for the publication of these varied works, Bataille notes the task of an impossible 'project' in such plans: the '[d]evelopment of the work which has withdrawn from work [l'oeuvre qui est retrait de l'oeuvre]' that seems to name both the assembled texts of '*Somme athéologique*' and those of '*La Part maudite*'. (ibid., 363) Evidently, the doubling of the 'work' as it withdraws from 'itself' is inherent to this movement of a "*retrait*": Bataille sees that the 'work' of *La Somme athéologique* or *La Part maudite* can only undergo the process of development (the 'becoming-work') by repeating and distancing 'itself' from its own completion, just as his numerous plans (for a 'project' that will refuse such a name) continuously go over (or *retrace*) the same ground, the same texts, the same names (Nietzsche, Hegel, Blanchot) without allowing their relations with each other to become fixed. Throughout this time, when these conflicts between 'work' and 'project' are regularly published in successive re-editions and new volumes, friendship maintains a certain centrality that belies its eventual disappearance as a principal branch ('L'AMITIÉ') in the above plan. Only the year before, Bataille had written that 'the first part of *Coupable* (sic.) ['L'Amitié' adapted from its 1940 publication] has remained no less [than *L'Expérience intérieure* (1943)] the most significant in my eyes.' (ibid., p.368) The extent to which it will be possible to speak of a 'work' developed in the name of friendship - that is to say *through* an engagement with friendship at multiple levels - might involve approaching this 'retreat' of the 'work' from itself as the possibility of a '*rencontre*': the point at which the 'work' must keep going back over itself continually in order to develop *against* itself - the sense of a *retrait* as both withdrawal and a return that traces what takes place there. But what is to be encountered in this continual, auto-conflictual movement? and to what extent could this encounter be located in relation to the very different work of Blanchot?

⁵ V, 251-2.

⁶ For example, '*Le labyrinthe*' (1935-6) appears, after extensive alterations, in *L'Expérience intérieure* under the section heading of '*Le labyrinthe (ou la composition des êtres)*' (V, 97-109; see also Bataille's note, V, 421).

⁷ V, 245.

⁸ See VI, 65-182.

⁹ By way of supplementing Blanchot's complication of the relation between the life and the work of a writer in 'L'amitié', we should note that when he writes about having 'a

presentiment of what the journal of the creative experience could be' in reading Kafka, he indicates other examples: Rilke, Jünger, and 'perhaps *L'Expérience intérieure* and *Le Coupable*, by Georges Bataille.' As if to extend the ambiguity of this 'perhaps', he adds: 'One of the secret laws of these works is that the more the movement is deepened, the more it tends to approach the impersonality of abstraction. [...] [I]t is the abstract work which is closest to impassioned experience about which it only speaks impersonally and indirectly.' (LV, 258-9).

¹⁰ See the copious notes assembled by the editors of volumes V and VI of the *Oeuvres complètes*.

¹¹ See VI, 365 and VII, 601. Pierre Prévost records that, for Bataille, 'revision could never be finished'; see *Rencontre Georges Bataille*, op.cit., 103.

¹² V, 455. Also see, on 'Dianus', VI, 369, 373-4.

¹³ The first edition of *Le Coupable* (1944) was prefaced by the following words:

One named Dianus wrote these notes and died. He referred to himself (ironically?) under the name of the guilty [*le coupable*]. The collection published under this title is a complete book. A letter and the fragments of a work begun go to make up an appendix. (V, 239.)

¹⁴ Blanchot, EL, 371.

¹⁵ VI, 373.

¹⁶ VI, 374.

¹⁷ Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1989, p.63.

¹⁸ V, 523.

¹⁹ VI, 292.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ VI, 58.

²² VI, 292.

²³ PhG, 36; PhS, §32. Note that Kojève's translation (ILH, 540-1) differs significantly from that of Hyppolite (PhE I, 29), and that the version given by Bataille in "Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice" varies again (XII, 331). In short, there are *five* different forms of this passage in Bataille's text, as indicated by Jacques Derrida, "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale. Un hegelianisme sans réserve", in *L'Écriture et la différence*, Paris: Éditions de seuil, 1967, 374, n.1. Hegel's rhetorisation of death in this passage, and its various translations, will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, below.

²⁴ VI, 292. Bataille recalls that he attended these courses from 1933-39. He writes: 'At this very time, through innumerable lectures, I was well up on the movement of the sciences. But Kojève's course left me burst, crushed, killed ten times over.' (VI, 416)

²⁵ VI, 305.

²⁶ At points like this the parallel between Bataille and Heidegger seems glaringly obvious. The extent of this awkward similarity -given both the mediating figure of Kojève's Heideggerean reading of Hegel, and the relative superficiality of Bataille's

knowledge of Heidegger - is, however, far more complex than it at first appears and would merit a separate study of its own. A preliminary excursion into these possibilities is sketched out by Rebecca Comay, 'Gifts Without Presents: Economies of "Experience" in Bataille and Heidegger', in A. Stoekl (ed.), *Yale French Studies - On Bataille*, n.78, 1990.

²⁷ VI, 292.

²⁸ VI, 295.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ VI, 292-3, emphasis added.

³¹ See further the discussion and interpretation of Bataille's 'Hegel, l'homme et l'histoire' and 'Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice' (both 1955) in chapter three.

³² VI, 294, emphasis added. The end of the same passage in *Le Coupable* supplements the sense conveyed by this 'void': '..., without which inertia - absorbing death in death [*la mort absorbant dans la mort*], and no longer changing anything - would enclose it.' (V, 260) Note that the verb *absorber* also carries the sense of 'to exhaust' and 'to take over': we will see that the concept of 'inertia' plays an ambiguous role in Bataille's own adoption of Hegelian/Kojèvean negation, as it bears strong links to the sacred sphere of 'intimacy' or 'immanence'.

³³ PhG, 14; PhS, §4.

³⁴ VI, 294.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ VI, 295.

³⁹ VI, 294.

⁴⁰ V, 262.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ VI, 295.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ This citation from Bataille can be found as the epigraph to Roger Laporte's *Suite* (Paris: POL/Hachette, 1979), which also bears a dedication to Maurice Blanchot.

⁴⁷ INC, 29.

⁴⁸ Bataille, "Solitude" (1941), the second part of "Les malheurs du temps présent", in *Le Coupable*, V, 299.

⁴⁹ See VI, 161.

⁵⁰ VI, 295.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ It should be noted that, in the context of the passage, this phrase draws together the sense of “an exquisite taste” [*délice*] with the movement of an experience that both “releases” or “unties” [*déliier*] and risks “delirium”, “frenzy” and “madness” [*délire*]. This matrix recurs throughout Bataille’s writings, particularly in works like *Madame Edwarda*:

The delirium of being nude possessed her: again this time, she spread her legs apart and opened herself up [*s’ouvrir*: also “to cut oneself open”]; the acrid nudity of our two bodies plunged us into the same exhaustion of the heart.

Madame Edwarda - Le mort - Histoire de l’oeil, Paris: Editions 10/18, 1979, 39. This string of terms can also be found throughout Bataille’s discussions that touch upon ‘erotisme’: first of all in ‘La Somme athéologique’; and then in his theories of energy and apathy as (general) economic principles in *La Part maudite* and *L’Erotisme*.

⁵⁴ VI, 296.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 16-17. See also the note to this passage (VI, 20-1).

⁵⁶ VI, 286.

⁵⁷ VI, 289.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ See VIII, 633. Bataille makes it clear exactly *who* lies on what side of this divide between the continuum of complicity and the discontinuity of discretion:

Of the relation of Nietzsche to Hegel (Hegel more destructive, but discreet): one must maintain from it the movement opposing morality and the accomplishment of man, but it is necessary to go all the way to the end of the movement (Sade inasmuch as he is already Kafka) instead of remaining in the equivocal.

We will ask about the possible meaning of Hegel’s discretion, and its implications for Blanchot *after* Bataille, in Chapter 4.

⁶⁰ V, 45; 48.

⁶¹ V, 49.

⁶² See Dionys Mascolo, “Parler de Blanchot”, in his *A la recherche d’un communisme de pensée*, Paris: Éditions fourbis, 1993, 409.

⁶³ V, 99.

⁶⁴ VII, 457.

⁶⁵ VI, 123.

Chapter 3

Complicity *contra* recognition: Bataille's 'Hegel'

*Yet we already possess this concrete concept of freedom
in the form of feeling, for example in friendship and love.*

G.W.F. Hegel ¹

The content of this chapter breaks with the opening investigations in which we drew out the figures of discretion and complicity from the works of Blanchot and Bataille respectively. In this present chapter we will draw out the relation between Bataille's thinking of complicity and Hegel's concept of 'recognition' ['Anerkennung'], in order to grasp the scope and context of Bataille's 'complicit friendship'. We will continue to focus upon two concepts: death and the work, 'la mort' and 'l'oeuvre'. In the first half of this thesis, it was shown that in the work of both writers these two concepts were essential to the articulation of an experience of friendship, orienting it with relation to questions concerning the event of death, memory and forgetting, the finitude of communication, and the nature of the work. As a result, it was through their respective differences over the relation of friendship to death and the work that we arrived at the divergent figures of discretion and 'complicit friendship'. However, while we have mapped discretion and complicity through the theme of the death of the friend and the

relation between 'the work' and 'friendship', we have not yet determined the exact sense and weight of 'la mort' and 'l'oeuvre'. It is for this reason that we must now turn to the philosophy of Hegel.

Bataille's reading of Hegel is wholly determined by the work of Kojève. In the first half of this chapter, we will show how Kojève, in his lectures and other philosophical texts both before and after the war, presents Hegel as the thinker of recognition. Then, in the second half, when we return to Bataille's thinking of friendship as complicity, we will be able to see more clearly how this figure of impossibility and dissatisfaction arises from Bataille's exploitation of gaps and fissures produced by Kojève's privileging of recognition. The structure of this argument does not rest upon a contrary thinking of friendship on the part of Kojève, for he does not make friendship an explicit object of discussion. However, friendship is assigned a place in his account of an earlier stage in the development of Hegel's thinking - 'Love'-, and this placement sheds considerable light upon its role in Bataille's work as a whole. In brief, friendship is presented and thematised in the progression of spirit, together with the concepts of love and the family, as the social relation of feeling, as a particular 'aufgehoben' moment of the concept. Friendship appears only within the context of (familial) love, or at most as the manifestation of the restricted community of an elite, and so it is incorporated and surpassed in the course of human social, historical and political development.

By beginning with Kojève in this way, it becomes possible to observe how Bataille's opposition to Hegel - the distancing of his thinking of sovereignty from the slavery of the master-slave dialectic, and the attempt to rethink intersubjectivity without subjects, outside of recognition, as a relation of complicity - hinges upon concepts which are radically overdetermined in Kojève's reading: the concepts of 'Love', 'Recognition,' death, and the work. The fact that Kojève's reading of Hegel is problematic, therefore, does not immediately invalidate it, nor those interpretations (such as Bataille's) which follow from it. Instead of condemning Bataille's reading of Hegel on the basis of his undeniable

reliance upon Kojève, we will use the latter to lay open the basis and context of Bataille's claims about death, work, complicity and friendship. This will allow the relation of Bataille's thinking of friendship to Kojève's account of Hegelian self-consciousness to appear through the conceptual limits that the former inherits from the latter. Most important, these limits will include both those which Bataille has identified and exploited, and those which may have passed unnoticed into his own work. As Bataille himself recognised, one can neither pass over nor pass beneath Hegel's work; one cannot oppose it without confronting it, and coming up against the way in which its concepts and categories are linked and stratified.² We will see that this realisation comes to Bataille only because of the particular path traced out by Kojève's reading of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, and the schematic importance of the relation of recognition which he finds there. So by granting Kojève's 'Hegel' its due, whilst taking care to mark out the limits and problems of this interpretation, we will be in a position to trace Bataille's treatment of the negativity in the work, which lies at the heart of his own theories of expenditure, the sacred, and the 'sovereign operation'. In particular, we will be able to trace the relation between his thinking of friendship and the presentation of Kojèvean 'Recognition'.

3.1 - Kojève and 'the final analysis'

In this section, we will examine critically Kojève's presentation of the development of 'Recognition' [Anerkennung], and the place of this concept in his reading of Hegelian philosophy as a whole. The concept of recognition first appears in Hegel's Jena philosophy,³ but it reaches its most complete formulation in Chapter IV of the *Phenomenology* - initially, but not definitively, in the relation of the master and the slave. For Kojève, however, this master-slave figure is synonymous with the concept of recognition. Both relation and concept are interchangeable. Indeed, this levelling-off of conceptual and structural differences is characteristic of Kojève's reading as a whole - he does not hesitate to identify

‘self-consciousness’ with the concept of ‘Man’; and ‘natural life’ with the idea of ‘animality’. Nowhere is this tendency more apparent, nor more crucial for his reading in general, than in his account of “A. Selbständigkeit und Unselbständigkeit des Selbstbewußtseins: Herrschaft und Knechtschaft”, the first part of the fourth chapter (“IV. Wahrheit der Gewißheit seiner selbst”), which forms the second division (“B. SELBSTBEWUSSTSEIN”) of the *Phenomenology*. (We shall abbreviate it according to the designated sections as B-IV-A.) Kojève will refer to this section, without apparent discrimination, sometimes as ‘the Master-Slave dialectic’; at other times as ‘the dialectic of Recognition’; and even as the ‘dialectic of Self-consciousness’.⁴ What is at stake in this levelling?

In accordance with the general structure of the *Phenomenology*, the relation of master and slave figures a moment in the *experience of consciousness*. The moment when, through the fear of death and work, the slave gains ‘his own mind’, his own ‘sense of himself’ or ‘direction’ [*eigene Sinn*]. This moment brings the realisation ‘that it belongs to consciousness to be in and for itself’: the fact that it is properly consciousness only when it is *self-consciousness*.⁵ This generative relation in turn comprises the moments of mortal risk, the life and death struggle, fear in the face of the ‘absolute master’ (death), labour [*die Arbeit*] and the formation of the work [*das Werk*]. However, it is far from clear that this relation is recognition. Hegel explicitly states, at the beginning of B-IV-A, that this ‘movement’ by which self-consciousness comes to be what it is as such is called ‘recognition’.

Self-consciousness is *in* and *for itself* when, and by the fact that, it is in and for itself for an other [*für ein Anderes*]; that is, only as it is recognised [*als Anerkanntes*].⁶

In this way, self-consciousness is truly what it is only insofar as it has been recognised as such by other self-consciousness(es). As such, this relation is necessarily reciprocal: every individual is born in and through it’s relation to others; consciousness of self arrives by way of a primary sense of community or

shared existence. Hence, 'recognition' is the name for the 'process' or 'movement' by which this mutual development of *self*-consciousness and *inter*-subjectivity takes place as such.

The detailed exposition [Auseinanderlegung] of the concept of this spiritual unity in its duplication [Verdopplung] will present us with the process [Bewegung] of *recognition*.⁷

This 'exposition' is a laying open of the relation(s) of doubling which are inherent to this 'spiritual unity' in its concept; these relations between the 'one' and the 'other' unfold the 'movement' of recognition; yet all this is done for 'our' benefit - it is only presented to us ['stellt uns... dar'], the philosophical readers of this text. This problem arises from the fundamental, structural distinction of what happens '*for consciousness*' ['für es'] in the course of its manifold experiences, and what takes place '*for us*' ['für uns'], or '*in itself*' ['für sich'], from the vantage-point of apprehending the place of this particular experience or 'Moment' in the context of the pure formal movement of a becoming. 'Ours' is an understanding denied to the consciousness undergoing this experience: the understanding of *how* what happens takes place, which goes on 'for us, as it were, behind the back of consciousness.'⁸ What Hegel writes about recognition (§§178-85), then, takes place as if 'behind the back' of the (self-)consciousness whose doubling is figured in the master-slave relation (§§186-96). This phenomenological distinction between what appears and the appearing *as such* is decisive for the movement of the *Phenomenology*. What is the status of this distinction for Kojève?

At the end of the *Introduction*, Kojève provides a third appendix, "Structure de la Phénoménologie de l'Esprit", in which he gives his sole account of this dual structure.⁹ On Kojève's reading too, these 'dialectical articulations' are of central importance to the *Phenomenology*; yet this distinction of 'für es' and 'für uns' is formalised in such a way that it will have distorted this reading of the right from the beginning. For Kojève this text is phenomenological because it is a 'description of human existence':

Man being called in the *Phenomenology* - “Consciousness” (Bewusstsein), Hegel indicates that it is a matter of a *phenomenological* description, in saying that it describes the attitude in question such as it exists “for consciousness itself” (für das Bewusstsein selbst).¹⁰

This text is so called because it sets out to describe this existence such as it appears ‘to the very one who lives it’. For ‘phenomenological’, read ‘empirical’. Kojève points out, however, that it is also that case that ‘Hegel himself writes the *Phenomenology* after having thought’. To have thought *before* writing this ‘description’ is, therefore, to have ‘known the *totality* of human existence’; to possess “‘absolute knowing’”, the wisdom to see the fragmentary and partial nature of any ‘given, partial or historically conditioned attitude’.¹¹ For Kojève, then, those moments ‘for us’ [‘à nous’] are written ‘from the point of view of “absolute knowing”, which is the point of view of Hegel himself, [...] this “us” being Hegel himself and the reader who comprehends him’.¹² The *Phenomenology* is both more and less than what its title proclaims it to be: it is split between the ‘point of view’ of ‘a philosophical or *scientific* analysis’, which comprehends the truth of that which only appears to be true in ‘*phenomenological* description’. What was a phenomenological distinction, immanent to the fluid movement of ‘consciousness’ experience, has become calcified into an intransigent bifurcation of empirical phenomenology and true science, to be reunited as the ‘coincidence’ of description and analysis in the final chapter, “Das absolute Wissen” (C-(DD)-VIII).

The ‘dialectic of Recognition’ therefore exposes the entire logical schema of Hegelian absolute knowing. Indeed, the orbit with which this concept circumscribes Kojève’s philosophical work is so expansive that we need to divide our analysis into two further stages. First: *From love to recognition*. An analysis of the presentation of ‘Recognition’ as the ‘key notion’ of Hegel’s entire philosophy: first, an account of the initial importance of ‘Love’ as the anthropogenetic figure of the relation to *death*; and second, the transformation of

death into the teleological function of *the work* in the master-slave dialectic. Second: *From the end of History*. A demonstration of the way in which this relation of self-consciousness and intersubjectivity forms the possibility of community: the political and historical centrality of recognition allows Kojève to read Hegel as the philosopher of the 'end of History', and to think the present as the time when all work has been completed and 'Man' is a 'satisfied Citizen'. Kojève bases the development of Hegel's *Phenomenology* upon this transition from the dialectic of 'Love' to that of 'Recognition', so it is by no means an exaggeration to state that the whole of his reading of Hegel is founded in this movement from the former (as a relation of the possibility of death) to the latter (as the 'labour of the negative'). Kojève's narrative of this transition will inscribe a series of oppositions in its progressive movement from family to state, from private to public relations, from the erotic to the political, from particular to universal individuality. This sequence is historical, then, only in a *schematic* fashion: it sets out to show how the entire movement of the *Phenomenology* rests upon the accession to self-consciousness in 'Recognition', which in turn requires that 'Love' remains at the level of the mere self-feeling, excluded from the final, totalising perspective of the 'End of History'.

Kojève's not immodest claim for this schematisation of recognition is that the movement of the *Phenomenology* reveals to us the *entirety* of human existence and history. This in fact follows necessarily from Kojève's grasp of the 'für es'/'für uns' distinction: the idea that Hegel writes the *Phenomenology* 'after having thought' to its conclusion *every* particular, 'historically conditioned' perspective; as if this act placed Hegel himself outside or '*after*' history as such. Hence, the present in which Hegel writes this book is nothing other than the end, finally presented in and for itself in the final chapter: Hegel himself is revealed to be 'the self-consciousness of the Wiseman possessing absolute Knowing'.¹³ Without doubt, this is a fundamentally ambiguous, not to say problematic, 'end'. In the final stage of Kojève's anthropological and historical dialectic there is nothing more to be done, everything (that is, 'History' as the totality of human

possibilities) will have been accomplished, every possibility will have been realised and thus exhausted. It is no accident that Kojève's most persistent rhetorical trait is a phrase of conclusion and summation: Kojève's Hegel is one who's writing takes place, always already 'having thought' of everything, 'in the final analysis', 'en dernière analyse'.

Kojève's reading of the progression of spirit as the development of 'Man' through 'History' aims to encapsulate in this way both the *Phenomenology* and Hegel's work as a whole. For him, the former consists in the presentation of the process of 'anthropogenesis', the generation and birth of the human. Hegelian 'Geist' is resolutely *human*, appearing through the development of Kojève's 'l'Homme'. In the second appendix to the *Introduction*, "L'idée de la mort dans la philosophie de Hegel", we can find Kojève definition of Hegelian philosophy:

Hegel's "dialectical" or anthropological philosophy is, in the final analysis, *a philosophy of death* (or what amounts to the same thing: of atheism).¹⁴

It is clear from this parenthetical qualification that Kojève focusses upon death with the goal of expunging any theological or "divine" content from Hegel's concept of 'Geist'. In the *Phenomenology*, God is supplanted by 'Man':

Hegelian Spirit is therefore really not a "divine" Spirit (for there are no *mortal* gods): it is *human* in this sense that it is a Discourse which is immanent to the natural World and which has for a "support" a natural being, limited in its existence by space and time.¹⁵

For Kojève, everything here revolves around the question of 'Man': his lectures have the express aim of (re-)organising every element and every 'Moment' of Hegel's text under the heading of *anthropogenesis*. In this way, the 'Spirit' that is '*human*' cannot be transcendent (at least not in the sense that Kojève understands the absolute transcendence of the divine) for it is *rooted* in the relation to death and mortality; which is to say that, given this 'limited' spatio-temporal existence,

the human *exists* as a being in the world. Whence there arises Kojève's reliance upon the central, yet ultimately paradoxical distinction between human and animal: the formation of the historical and political existence of 'Man' is presented in opposition to all other natural or animal life, yet at every moment this process is founded in relation to the latter as its ontologically constitutive substratum, or "support". Every aspect of Kojève's Hegel can be traced back to this formulation of the animal-human dualism, and in the analysis which follows, we will examine the function and the effects of this dualism.

'Man' is defined as an *individual*, and is understood as a discursive, dialectical existence. For Kojève, every animal, plant, or 'inanimate thing' can be regarded as a 'simple "example"' ['« exemplaire »'], fully interchangeable with any other member of the "natural" species' to which it belongs. A human being, on the other hand, is always "unique of its kind", '« unique en son genre »'.¹⁶ Rather than characterising every strata of life, this dialectical movement of universality (differentiating itself into particulars to be reassembled in the singular) is embodied in the growth of human individuality alone. Anthropogenesis consists in the dialectical movement by which such singularity comes to reveal itself to itself. For Kojève, 'Man' thus appears *in* and *as* 'Discourse', a term which he uses to encapsulate the entire operation of human thought and language, but which is in fact given no linguistic specificity. In other words, this discursive existence is nothing other than the movement of 'universalising negation'; it is this ability to pass from the particularity of its 'innate' or 'natural' being (which Kojève equates with 'animality'), whilst 'preserving and sublimating' the identity of this "nature", to the appearance of 'Man' as a 'free and historical Individual'. Indeed, as Kojève himself makes clear, this movement is possible only because 'Man' *qua* 'Discourse' is spatially and temporally determined by the "support" of his 'natural' being: his individuality is the result of the 'conserving (universalising) negation of himself taken as given (particular).'¹⁷ The individual, therefore, only appears with the demise of this animality; that is, only through the relation to its *own* death.

Death is *for* 'Man' in the sense that death is *in* him as the (transformative) 'end' of the natural, animal being which is his material existence, his 'body', and thus can be *known* by him as such. As the universal motor of all dialectical becoming, death becomes synonymous with the very processes of discursive thought: what Hegel calls the 'subject', or 'being-for-itself' ['Fürsichsein'], is nothing other than this 'labour of the negative' ['Arbeit des Negativen'].¹⁸ In his own way, Kojève erects his anthropologised 'ontological difference' over Hegel's pivotal distinction of the death of 'natural life' and the negativity of 'consciousness', drawing heavily upon Heidegger's separation of the existential orientedness towards death that is proper to 'Dasein' from the mere "perishing" ['Verenden'] or "demise" ['Ableben'] of something that lives.¹⁹ He emphasises the necessary, structural, and existential relation of death and thought: death is no longer just the demise of a particular being - it is universal, determinate negativity: the pure possibility of change, action and transformation. In the form of the negativity of the 'für sich' death is no longer an event delivered upon 'Man' from outside or from above; it is his '*immanent* law' of '*auto-suppression*', in the sense that this movement does not come through the intervention of an other; rather it is '*his* death, that is to say something which is proper to him and belongs to him exclusively [lui appartient en propre], and which consequently can be known of him, willed or denied by him.'²⁰ Now the originary 'magic power' of determinate negativity, death is the *property* of 'Man': it belongs to him alone and constitutes what is proper to his being.

3.11 - From Love to Recognition

In the *Introduction* and "Hegel, Marx et le christianisme", Kojève portrays Hegel as having 'discovered' the concept of recognition through his work on another dialectic: 'Recognition' is introduced as a substitute for 'Love.' What Kojève sees in Hegel's analysis of love is an initial attempt to account for the development and birth of 'Man'. Hence, in Hegel's 1797-8 fragment on love²¹, and by extension in

all those writings from this period which treat of the systematic relations of religion, morality and spirit, Kojève identifies the ‘dialectic of love’ as the process through which ‘Man’ differentiates himself *qua* ‘Individual’ from all other life, especially the animality of his own ‘given-Being’. He claims that in this text Hegel had thought ‘for a moment’ that he had found ‘the specifically human content of Man’s existence,’ and that it was in ‘analysing the amorous relation that he described, *for the first time*, the Dialectic of this existence, which distinguishes it from purely natural existence.’²² It is the identification of ‘Love’ as a ‘first’ description of this existential dialectic which seals the fate of friendship in his explication of the *Phenomenology*. But what specificity, if any, is there to this word *love*, for Hegel or Kojève? At this level of generality, it would seem that any term could serve this same function: if it is a case of analysing a ‘specifically human’ feeling or emotion, would not envy, hatred or revenge expose this essential, structural differentiation of the human just as well?

So what is it about the concept of love that, according to Kojève, *destines* it for this work?²³ First, he reads this fragment on love as Hegel’s first ‘sketch’ for a phenomenological analysis of ‘Man’, so making love a pivotal concept in the development of Hegel’s thinking. Indeed, the fragment on love first presents the interarticulation of finitude and the infinite, the thinking of difference in unity, as well as the inseparability of intersubjectivity and self-consciousness; all of which will be central to the progress of absolute spirit in the *Phenomenology*; and which is introduced with the accession to self-consciousness in B-IV-A:

[T]his absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: *I* that is *We* and *We* that is *I*.²⁴

Hegelian ‘spirit’ - as that which is both subject (or ‘Fürsichsein’) and substance (or ‘Ansichsein’) at the same time - cannot be grasped as such without this unifying relation between a plurality of selves, who are, in turn, conscious of themselves only through their differences from one another. Hyppolite echoes this

definition as well as Kojève's observation when he remarks that this doubling, which Hegel will locate at the heart of the movement of recognition, can already be seen in 'the dialectic of love':

Love is this miracle by which what is two becomes one, yet without ending up in the complete suppression of duality. Love is what overflows the categories of objectivity and actualises [réalise effectivement] the essence of life in maintaining difference in union.²⁵

Spirit emerges as this dynamic movement of differentiation in unity 'for the first time' in Hegel's 'sketch' or 'outline' of the 'amorous relation.' Both Kojève and Hyppolite present love as the origin for Hegel's concept of spirit, because it is with the relationality of love that the question of *community* as 'being-together' ['Gemeinwesen'] is introduced. It is with the fragment on love that Hegel's thinking of dialectic comes to be manifested as an experience of dialogue and interaction *between* subjects.²⁶ For both interpreters, then, the movement of dialectical experience figured in terms of intersubjectivity is a movement towards the fusion of differences through the formation of a greater unity. From love as the union of two separate lovers actualised in the conception and birth of the child, to the confrontational structure of the master-slave relation in the *Phenomenology*, the growth of self-consciousness is manifested as a relation of inter-subjectivity in which union emerges from diversity, identification through differentiation.

Second, there is the matter of what love *qua* feeling does in this text, for Hegel's presentation of love immediately distances itself from the problem of selecting one feeling from among many other particular feelings. Love is defined as the 'feeling' ['Gefühl'] of life as it touches upon itself as an organic whole, through its own infinitely mediated essence. Hence, it is not a question of an exemplary feeling, but of thinking life itself as a living whole: love in this case is not part of a spectrum of the many particular feelings into which life might be divided; rather, it is to be thought as life feeling itself to be alive, as a unified whole. Thus, Hegel writes: 'in love life finds itself, as a redoubling [eine

Verdoppelung] of itself, and self-same unity. [...] In love the separate still remains, yet not as separate, [but] as unified; and the living touches the living [das Lebendige fühlt das Lebendige].²⁷ This feeling of life as a living whole is as irreducible to the causal laws of reason [‘Vernunft’] as it is to the oppositions of the understanding [‘Verstand’].

Kojève is interested in Hegel’s concept of love only insofar as its dialectical structure *already* uncovers the dialectical structure of that which is ‘specifically human’. He extracts Hegel’s first ‘existential dialectic’ of the ‘Individual’ as a unified, yet radically finite whole from a single passage of the 1797-8 fragment:

It being given that Love is a feeling (Gefühl) of the living (Lebendigen), the Lovers can only distinguish themselves {from one another} inasmuch as they are mortal, {that is to say inasmuch as} they think this possibility of separation, {and} not to the extent that something would be really separated, where the possible reunion with a given being (Sein) would be a real-entity (Wirkliches). There is no {raw or given} matter in the Lovers {as Lovers}, they are a living {or spiritual, for at this time Hegel identified Life and Spirit} Whole; {that} the Lovers have an independence-or-autonomy (Selbständigkeit), {a} proper-or-autonomous (eigenes) vital-principle, {this} simply means: they can die [sie können sterben].²⁸

The ‘Lovers’ are in this sense ‘properly’ mortal [‘sterblich’]. Their individual differentiation [‘sich... unterscheiden’] consists in the *thought* of death as their possible separation [‘Trennung’]; in other words, the very *possibility* of death forms their ‘ownmost life-principle’ [‘eigenes Lebensprinzip’] and relates them one to the other as mortal beings. As Hegel makes clear earlier in this passage, what is central to this movement is the ability to think death as a *possible* event for oneself and for the other: ‘True union, love proper exists only between living beings who are alike in power [Macht] and thus in every sense living beings for-another [füreinander]; in no respect is either one dead for the other [gegeneinander Tote].’²⁹ The possibility of separation is not the arrival of death, but the relation of

the living to the horizon which it forms. Hence, what takes place in this passage, for Kojève, is the fundamental anthropogenetic distinction between the kind of death faced by human beings as the horizon of possibility, and the ‘end’ which befalls every other form of ‘purely natural existence.’³⁰ He formalises this passage in the following way: first, each being in this union exists in his or her *particular* ‘exclusive unicity’; yet this difference is only revealed to them through the *universal* thought of death, hence their only relation is one between ‘two “separated” beings, essentially autonomous or different,’ each constituted by the negativity of their finitude, and as such each is ‘attributed an absolute (= universal) value’ by the other; ultimately then, the whole or ‘Totality’ which they can form together *qua* mortal beings is precisely their synthesis in a separate *individual* - a child who exists in its own right, unique and distinct from its parents.³¹

If the fragment on love uncovers the ‘existential dialectic’ of ‘Man’, it is because the union of the lovers in the birth of the child reveals this ‘primordial role’ played by death as the dialectical movement of the ‘Aufhebung’. The movement of love is one of ‘striving to dialectically suppress’ (as Kojève translates the verb ‘aufheben’) this mortal separation or differentiation of the lovers, ‘this possibility [taken] as pure (blosse) possibility, and to reunite the mortal (Sterbliche) itself, to make it immortal [unsterblich zu machen].’³² Separation is both produced and overcome through the living power of death *qua* negativity: not only is it ‘thanks to *death*’ that each lover has a separate, and therefore free and independent, existence; but it is again ‘on account of *mortality*’ that love can be realised through its *act*, the ‘dialectical “re-union”’ of their separated existences in the child.³³ The process of reproduction as the synthesis of two fundamentally separated beings is thus circumscribed by the *desire* for the ‘re-union’ of the lovers; a “manifestation” of the desire on the part of each lover to be desired in his or her own right; and in this way to overcome the mortal limitations, which give rise to this desire, through the life of the child.³⁴ This process is quite literally ‘anthropogenetic’; yet it is precisely in marking this place

of the birth of 'Man' that the analysis of love serves as a mere *placeholder* for a more authentic and comprehensive phenomenological analysis of 'Recognition'.

Love presents 'only a secondary "manifestation" of Man'.³⁵ The impulse or desire which it manifests is limited in both scope and ambition. As we have already remarked, Kojève's presentation of desire as *the* relation of pure 'Fürsichsein' originates in his reading of 'Desire' ['Begierde'] in B-IV-A. Hence, as a relation between individual subjects, this 'feeling of living beings' is qualified and determined, from the beginning, as desire *for recognition*. In retrospect, love will have turned out to be unsatisfactory for Hegel's analysis of the interdependence of self-consciousness and intersubjectivity precisely because, as 'Gefühl[e] des Lebendigen', they are ultimately *restricted* by a residual animality or 'natural given-being'. Love is refigured, retroactively, under the matrix of recognition: it is now simply 'amorous Recognition':

(Human) Love is also a desire for Recognition: the lover wants to be *loved*, that is to say recognised as an absolute or *universal* value in his or her very *particularity*, which distinguishes it from all the others. Love thus realises (to a certain extent) Individuality, and this is why it can give (to a certain extent) Satisfaction.³⁶

The relation of 'Love' becomes a partial and insufficient determination of a more 'total,' universal dialectic. As desire, it is not aimed at the other as an object (for example, the 'given-being' of someone or something), but rather at another desire: love is not a desire for an other, but a desire for the *reciprocated* desire of an other - one loves in order to be loved *in return*. In this way, Kojève preserves the sense of 'Love' as a relation of reciprocity or doubling, which was expressed in Hegel's original definition of love as 'a feeling of the living', but now it is no longer this 'feeling' for it has been drawn up into a more universal economy of relations.

'Recognition' is the second birth of the human individual, but it is the origin of what is 'specifically human in Man'. It is the 'Aufhebung' of love. Yet it is

exactly at this point, when love becomes ‘amorous Recognition’, that the concept of love begins to oscillate between the orbit of political and historical ‘Recognition’ and the gravity of its adherence to the level of ‘natural, given-Being’; between what is ‘specifically human’ and what remains within the sphere of animality. Even when it is recast as both lovers’ desire to be recognised as ‘an absolute or *universal* value in his or her very *particularity*’, it remains at some remove from the realm proper to ‘Recognition’, from the ‘wirklich’ existence of ‘Man’ in the political, historical and social realm of action, conflict and work.

Struggle and Work [le Travail] (born of the Desire for Recognition proper) alone produce a specifically human *objective-reality* (Wirklichkeit) (a technological and social, that is historical, World); the *objective-reality* of Love is purely natural (sexual act, birth of the child): its human content always remains purely internal-or-intimate (innerlich).³⁷

Love remains a ‘purely natural’ actualisation of the human insofar as this relation does not appear to place any value on action, and therefore its content is withdrawn into its own intimacy. This relation *exteriorises nothing*, neither in the risk of the ‘Struggle’ nor in the productivity of ‘Work’. Merely uncovering the possibility of death is no longer ‘*specifically* human’, for the lovers do not appear to have to face this possibility through their own actions. The actuality of ‘Love’ is necessarily and inseparably connected to the ‘given-being’ of animal life; yet, at the same time, it is still a ‘specifically human phenomenon’, if only insofar as it is determined by the more universal ‘schema’ of the desire for recognition. Hence, at first, love is a point of ambiguity, as it appears to be neither simply natural nor wholly human, but an uneasy combination of both.

If Kojève presents ‘Recognition’ as the ‘Aufhebung’ of love, then no such ambiguity about the latter should remain; yet the problem runs deeper than the need to suppress a subordinate determination of a more universal concept. For Kojève presents ‘Recognition’ as Hegel’s ‘key-notion’, the matrix of his philosophy as a whole, The movement of this concept stands for that of the

concept as such. As a result, 'Recognition' becomes simply another name for 'Aufhebung' (and vice versa). So what happens to the concept of love? Kojève defines it by the *absence* of separation from animality, the *lack* of determinate negation, the *refusal* of action - everything that recognition is not. In other words, the relation of love is inactive and unsatisfactory because it lacks 'the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative'.³⁸ Indeed, by drawing upon love and recognition in order to discuss the dialectical processes of the *Phenomenology* as a whole, Kojève is attentive to Hegel's own contrast of the positivity of 'Liebe' and the negativity of 'Arbeit'. This distinction is, of course, figured by Hegel in terms of the practice of thought and, especially, in the systematicity of philosophy:

To help [mitzuarbeiten] bring philosophy closer to the form of Science, to the goal where it can cast off [ablegen] its name of *Love of Knowing* and be *actual Knowing* - this is what I have set myself to do.³⁹

This transition from '*philo-sophia*' to 'actual' or 'absolute *Wissen*' is familiar to us already from Bataille's "L'Amitié" as well as Kojève's account of the development from love to recognition. Kojève invokes the *seriousness* and *rigour*, the *systematicity* and *actualisation* of scientific knowing against the 'feeling' of the living whole. But how is this distinction incorporated within the *Phenomenology*? Hegel does not present an explicit comparison of the two concepts - recognition and love -, so Kojève must reconstruct an implicit critique of the latter on the basis of his reading.⁴⁰ He writes:

In the *Phenomenology*, what Hegel (implicitly) criticises Love for is, on the one hand, its "private" character (one can only be *loved* by very few people, whilst one can be universally *recognised*), and on the other hand, its "lack of seriousness," given the absence of the Risk of life (this Risk alone is a truly objective realisation of the specifically human content which essentially distinguishes Man from the animal).⁴¹

Two criticisms determine 'Love' as an incomplete actualisation of 'human reality'. First, the lack of truly universal recognition: love does not satisfy the fundamental desire to be recognised as 'an absolute or *universal* value' by each and every other such individual. Second, the "lack of seriousness" of this relation marks the absence of conflict: the very existence of the individual is not put at risk, and so does not have to do anything to prove its worth. As a result, those who are in love do not recognise 'Action' or 'the Work' ['l'Oeuvre'] as 'absolute values', but only the mere fact of the other's 'given-Being'; what is valued is, says Kojève, 'precisely what is not truly human in Man' - the animality of his 'given-Being,' or the natural, living identity of the body ['der Leib'].⁴² Love ['das Liebe'] is irreducibly 'leiblich': it is 'bodily' and 'physical'; it is not spiritual in Kojève's revised understanding of the word, and so belongs solely to the family, to blood relations and to natural 'given-Being'. Hence, this twin lack with regard to the politico-historical schema of recognition draws together love, the family and friendship.

Friendship may not be implicated directly in the 'natural' determinations of the sexual act, gestation and birth, but it is identified as an impoverished extension of this determination. By closing off the relation of love from action, and therefore from any 'truly active (= negating) comportment', Kojève finds that it 'remains essentially passive, even ineffective or inoperative.' Furthermore, this situation does not change, for this relation is restricted by the fact that it does not manifest itself through the negativity of action: 'it remains eternally limited by the static limits of the being to which it is related.' As a result, friendship is as far as this form of intersubjectivity can reach.

This is why love, at the very most, can found a human Family on a limited natural base (*hardly enlarged by a "circle of friends"*) which, in the course of history, evolves by growing smaller.⁴³

In fact, not only do love and friendship remain separate from 'specifically human' activity and work by remaining 'eternally limited' to the recognition of a

particular loved one, or ‘at the very most, [that of] the necessarily restricted group’ of friends; they also run counter to human evolution conceived as the universal progress of history. But what precisely does Kojève mean by the idea of love evolving through ‘shrinking’ or ‘contracting’ [‘en se rétrécissant’]? The phrase conveys two senses which Kojève has already set in play: a group of friends may grow smaller, diminish in number (or ‘dwindle’) over time; but an individual can also ‘grow narrow’, in the sense of a diminishing mental acuity or scope of interest. So friendship is introduced as a relation of *entropy*, an irreversible movement of dissolution: in Kojève’s schema it does not, and cannot, work: it is cast as an unproductive, purposeless remainder of energy which cannot be reabsorbed in the operation of a teleological structure or system.⁴⁴ This much is clear from the index of terms which Kojève employs: ‘purely natural’, ‘restricted’ or ‘limited’, ‘passive’, ‘inoperative’. Kojève finds justification in opposition to Goethe’s dictum that one loves someone for what they *are*, rather than for what they *do*.

[T]his is why one can love a dead man, for the man who truly *would do* nothing would be as if he were already dead; it is also why one can love an animal, without being able to “recognise” it: let us recall that there never has been a duel between a man and an animal, - or a woman; let us recall also that it is “unworthy of man” to devote himself entirely to love: legends of Hercules, of Samson, etc.⁴⁵

These three examples illuminate the dialectical insufficiency of love and friendship, which Kojève must demonstrate in order to stage the necessity and universality of his ‘key-notion of Recognition.’ In the first place, love is revealed actually to be no longer a necessarily *reciprocal* relation: it is for this reason that one can love someone even when they are dead. In fact, in contrast to universal recognition, love is a relation to another being in which one relates to the other ‘as if he were already dead’, the position of inactive consumption which defines the master in Kojève’s reading of the dialectic of recognition: ‘the Master is actually

humanly dead in the Struggle: he no longer *acts*, properly speaking, since he remains idle [oisif]; he lives therefore as if he were dead'.⁴⁶ To love someone is merely to love them in their given, natural being; not to recognise them as a 'radically mortal' human being; and therefore, they are as good as dead already. Second, and as a result, it is equally possible to love an animal, for there is nothing at stake between human and animal, yet it is impossible for there to be recognition for precisely this reason. There may indeed be death and servitude, but this is not manifested in a struggle to the death '*for pure prestige*': there is no 'duel between man and animal.'⁴⁷ Finally, as is clear from his inclusion of 'woman' as an afterthought, Kojève also locates the turn from love to recognition, from natural to human, in terms of sexual differentiation: 'the animal desires the female (sexuality), the man desires the desire of the woman (eroticism).'⁴⁸ Love will always fall short of its own desire, because the lover always falls back into passivity and inoperativity, content to limit itself to the merely *particular* individuality of *an* other (the loved one), or a small group of others (the family or friends), instead of struggling and working for the '*universal* recognition of the absolute value of its particularity.' The concept of love is the concept of a *feeling*, the stage at which the concept is manifested as mere feeling, limited by this "support" of natural 'given-Being' and thus restricted and "mediated" within the 'total' or universal revelation of 'human reality' through 'the labour of the negative'.

3.12 - At the End of History

It is with Kojève's presentation of 'the concept of Recognition', in the master-slave dialectic, that the emphasis switches to the historical *re-birth* of 'Man' through risking his own life in the 'struggle for pure prestige'. The ontological primordality of this rebirth is Kojève's prime reason in placing his 'annotated translation' of the master-slave dialectic 'in place of' an introduction to his reading of Hegel. He traces the development of self-consciousness as 'being-in-

and-for-itself' through this narrative: from the initial struggle between two separate self-consciousnesses, the outcome of which proves one to be the victor, the other the vanquished; through the institution of this relation as one of mastery and slavery, and the failure of the master to be satisfied; and finally, to the emergence of the slave as the productive being whose work mediates his recognition by others. In the present analysis, the events of this narrative are less important than the concepts that they introduce and set to work: *recognition*, *risk*, *struggle*, and *the work*.

With the concept of recognition, the 'faculty' of desire is thus divided by an axiological turn, for it is at this stage that Kojève turns to the question of *value*. Kojève's phenomenological and anthropological reduction of desire determines satisfaction as the accomplishment of an intentional act in relation to the desired object: the object of desire is sought, or desired, as the instance of a value. According to Kojève's dualism, therefore, the value sought in any given act of desire will be either that of a particular 'natural or animal' life (that is, its preservation), or that of the autonomous universality present in this particularity (that is, its recognition). This axiological turn gives content to the schema of desire, for animal or natural desire, '*in the final analysis*', is always determined by 'the desire to conserve its life' - the instinct for self-survival which manifests the 'supreme value for the animal', its own 'animal life' -; whilst that desire which is exclusively human finds satisfaction only in a value that is "non-natural", which 'exceeds the given reality' of the former.⁴⁹

Animal desire is the necessary, but not the sufficient condition of self-consciousness. The bifurcation of human and animal desire has become a matter of power and the dominion of the one over the other, for human desire manifests itself only to the extent that it manages to 'prevail over [*l'emporter sur*]' its necessary condition in the former.⁵⁰ Although Kojève holds that 'human reality' comes into existence and is maintained as such only 'within a biological reality, an animal life', his key point is that 'Man' is able to demonstrate his fundamental

difference from this animality by showing himself to be ready to sacrifice his own life for the sake of the ‘pure prestige’ of being recognised. In order to manifest itself as self-consciousness, the (human) desire for recognition must triumph over the desire for preservation of its (animal) life, and dominate this life, by risking its own death. As a consequence, the “origin” of self-consciousness is inextricable from the idea of a struggle between similar, competing desires, each willing to *risk* their ‘(animal) life’ in a ‘struggle to the death with a view to “recognition” as properly human.’⁵¹ In order to be recognised as the value which it takes itself to be (as an individual human subject), this desire requires the presence of another similar desire. What makes human desire ‘specifically human’ is the fact that it wants for the other subject to desire the value that it takes itself to be: it desires recognition.

To desire the desire of another is therefore, in the final analysis, to desire that the value that I am or that I “represent” to be the value desired by this other: I want for him to “recognise” my value as his value, I want for him to “recognise” me as an autonomous value.⁵²

On the one hand, self-consciousness is born of the power to say ‘I’, which is, at first, the empty form of the sheer motivity of desire *qua* negativity (as pure *Fürsichsein*); yet on the other hand, it only truly emerges with the desire to be *recognised* as such an ‘I’. The distinction between a desiring consciousness (which reveals the object and itself) and a passive ‘contemplation’ (which is merely absorbed in its object) has become the ontological division of properly human ‘desire for recognition’ from the animal ‘desire for preservation.’⁵³ In the relation of love, this idea of a ‘desire for desire’ was limited to the sexual, biological, and natural process by which a self-consciousness is born; as the desire for recognition, however, this reflective relation marks a second, historical ‘birth’ into the struggles of a wider social and political world. All things ‘human’ finally come through this second, thoroughly universal, ‘re-birth’ in this other desire:

In other words, every human, anthropogenetic Desire, generator of Self-consciousness, of human reality, is, in the end, a function of the desire for “recognition.”⁵⁴

If the ‘desire for recognition’, akin to the dialectic of love, is a ‘desire of desire’, this means that it names the necessarily *reciprocal* nature of *inter*-subjectivity, the mutual relatedness which is constitutive for all social intercourse and community. Yet what Kojève underlines in this transition from love to recognition is the change in this dimension of relatedness. Like love, recognition entails two distinct yet fundamentally similar beings with the same desire, yet now this desire is not directed at the love of the other for the being that one is; it is the desire for one’s actions to be recognised as those of a being possessing ‘autonomous value’. Like love, recognition involves two beings, each of whom have this same desire; yet in the case of recognition, this common desire can only bring conflict, for in order to recognise the actions of the other a being would have to surrender his *own* satisfaction. Hence, each being enters this relation holding recognition to be its absolute value, so each is prepared to ‘go all the way in pursuit of its satisfaction’, if needs be to force the other, on pain of death, to recognise him as this value.

Recognition is a relation of reciprocity as much as a relation to death. A human being is what it is only insofar as it can satisfy its desire to be recognised as a free, human individual; that is, only insofar as ‘at least two’ such subjects actively confront one another in pursuit of the same aim, or for the sake of ‘pure prestige’. Thus, each subject is ‘ready to risk its life’ or, conversely, ‘to imperil that of the other’ in order to prove itself to be such a subject.⁵⁵ What Kojève calls ‘human reality’ is posited in its essential difference from ‘animal-life’ through desire and action; yet this desire must transcend the general form of desire (the ‘desire for preservation’) in order to be recognised by a like being as such a distinct and autonomous value; and it can only exceed this sphere by risking it, to show that this value takes precedence over the value of its own life. Kojève draws out of the dialectical relationship of the master and the slave the co-originary

status of *finitude*, *conflict*, and *community*. All three elements are bound together in the figure of the ‘struggle to the death for the sake of recognition’. Kojève adds repeatedly, in what is almost a mantra, that ‘there would never have been human beings on the earth’ without either the ‘struggle to the death for pure prestige’; or without the originary fact of a ‘radical mortality’; or if they hadn’t evolved from ‘within a herd’. Sheer numbers, however, are not sufficient for the appearance of a truly social being:

[I]n order that the herd become a society, the multiplicity of beings alone is not enough; again it is necessary that the Desires of each every member of the herd focus on [*porter sur*] - or can focus on - the Desires of the other members. If human reality is a social reality, society is only human as an *ensemble* of Desires mutually desiring one another as Desires.⁵⁶

In this brief passage, Kojève proceeds straight from the bifurcation of animal and human desire, or the herd and the society, to deducing the essence of community from the master-slave relation. As many commentators have noted, and objected, Kojève’s emphasis upon conflict in the figure of the life and death struggle results in ‘the first political community’.⁵⁷ The transition from ‘Love’ to ‘Recognition’ in Hegel’s writings marks the arrival of a truly social, political and historical dimension to his work. Let us briefly recount the events of this narrative, for it is here that the possibility of Bataille’s “‘Hegelian’” critique of Hegel arises.

Hegel’s earlier writings on love and religion are still too bound up with the particularity of the ‘purely natural’ sphere of sexual reproduction and biological necessity - the limitations of the family and the privacy of friendship. Such kinds of human interrelation may disclose the anthropogenetic structure of the dialectic through the basic finitude of individuality and intersubjectivity, but they do not measure up to the progressive universality of the desire for recognition. In fact, they are *retro-gressive*, or *entropic*, in relation to the historical evolution of the humanity of ‘Man’; as the inverse proportion of waste, passivity and inoperativity which ‘remains eternally’ limited as such; and from which the teleological

determination of the 'Work' must separate itself. But as limited forms of human interrelation they are caught up within this movement. Love is *universalised* through the need to 'account for the phenomena of history and of historical man': on the one hand, this is a simple matter of substitution or replacement - 'it is necessary to replace the limited and passive dialectic of love by an universal dialectic of action'; yet, on the other, it is precisely this value of *negativity as action* which has determined Kojève's depiction of this 'first amorous dialectic' as its reverse ("natural") side.⁵⁸ As if there were a separate dialectic of history and animality, a greater and a lesser form of dialectic; as if the movement of negativity as such could be either stronger or weaker.

This matrix of the activity-passivity of the negative and of death is inextricable from the political fate of friendship in Kojève's work. The emphasis upon the 'virile negativity' of doing, acting and working condemns 'l'amitié' to the idleness, incompleteness and dissatisfaction of simple, non-dynamic being; for this originary status of activity, *qua* dialectical negativity, entails that 'not doing', or 'not acting', or 'not working' are already determined, even made possible by this prior operation. This is the very lesson which Kojève drew from the master-slave dialectic: the master's domination of the slave ensured that his own relation to things and to the world was *mediated* by the labour of the latter; hence, although he is not part of the process by which the world of 'human reality' is produced, all the same he 'lives in a historical, technological world, humanised by work'. His idleness does not contribute to this process, but the fact of his mere existence does.

There is no denying that processes of history and politics in the *Phenomenology* are bound up with relations of conflict, violence and passion. But Kojève's thesis runs a peculiar course through these moments because of the way it frames these moments within his own historical narrative. Indeed, this tendency is inseparable from his express pedagogical intentions in the lectures. His aim is to

read Hegel *as a contemporary* by bringing this work to bear upon the present in which he himself is writing.

Indeed, Individuality can be full realised, the desire for Recognition can be completely satisfied, only in and by the universal and homogeneous State. [...] And this recognition is truly universal, for, by definition, the State encapsulates the whole of the human species [genre] (even in its past, through the total historical tradition that this State perpetuates in the present, and in its future, *since from now on the future* [l'avenir] *no longer differs from the present in which Man is already fully satisfied*).⁵⁹

This does, however, pose an immediate problem. How can this reading of Hegel have had such a massive impact upon even those, such as Bataille, who found themselves in radical opposition to its presentation of philosophy as a totalising, systematic 'Work'? As we have shown in our preceding analyses, Kojève's avowedly propagandist 'explication' of Hegel possesses an irreducibly *double* thread: it is *radical* as an attempt to bring Hegel to bear upon the movements and problems of the contemporary world; yet it is equally *violent* in the pursuit of this task, as Kojève obliterates complex and subtle details of the *Phenomenology*. In our close reading of the schematic movement from love and friendship to recognition, we have traced the conceptual core of his reading of Hegel. As a result, we can draw the conclusion that what 'works' in this reading of Hegel is the way that a few motifs or figures are brought into a dynamic and confrontational relation with contemporary 'problems' (political action, historical and technological progress, State and totalitarianism, philosophical nihilism). Kojève's philosophical response to the contemporary is his thesis of 'the end of History', a thesis whose ontological and metaphysical structure, as we have shown, was rooted in the paradoxes and oppositions which formed the movement from love to recognition. From this perspective, it is now possible to connect and survey the conceptual, political and historical terrain upon which Bataille places the relation of friendship, and to understand its import for the 'sovereign

operation' which he opposes (“Hegelianly”) to the work of philosophy, to the thought of philosophy *as* ‘work’.

3.2 - Bataille, sovereignty and friendship

We have read Bataille’s ‘complicit friendship’ as a guiding thread - ‘un fil d’Ariane’ - through the complex interconnections of concepts and themes which are gathered together under the rubric of the ‘sovereign operation’. Under the heading of *La Somme athéologique*, his work subsequent to “L’Amitié” extends those themes of sacrifice, incompleteness, contestation, and eroticism, into a kind of system whose labyrinthine, continuous interrelations he steadfastly opposes to what he refers to as the discontinuous systematisation of philosophical discourse. In this chapter, the conceptual terrain of this ‘operation’ has been traced back to Kojève’s reading of Hegel: death as the ‘labour of the negative’; the dialectical ‘suppression’ of feeling and animality into the dialectic of recognition; and the completion [‘l’achèvement’] and ‘end’ of human historical existence in terms of ‘the Work’. In the wake of this reading of Hegel Bataille’s question is simple. What happens to ‘us’ - this ‘we’ in whose name the completion of philosophy takes place - at the end of history? how are we, today, to think this ‘we’, now that ‘we’ are at the end, today? what has happened to the force of negativity of which this ‘end’, this ‘work’, is the ultimate result?

In retrospect, then, we can now see that Bataille, in writing “L’Amitié”, had already begun to insert himself into the conceptual terrain of Kojève’s ‘dialectic of Recognition’ as a way of contesting and inverting it. And it is perhaps a fortuitous chance that this piece by Bataille, which will form the opening section of the first volume of *La Somme athéologique*, originally appears in the same journal that had published Kojève’s quasi-introductory ‘annotated translation’ of B-IV-A. The naming of friendship is, at least, an expression of this inversion. It offers itself to be read as a sign of clandestine alliance or ‘secret society’. Yet the significance of

Bataille's "L'Amitié" also lay in distancing his thinking from those earlier 'projects' which were concerned with founding a 'religious community' (Acéphale, the Collège). Bataille turns instead towards a more dispersed form of thinking community or "being-in-relation". Hence, the figure of a 'complicit friendship' comes to express 'the idea of negative community': a relation to others oriented by solitude, abandonment and absence - a 'community of those who have no community'.⁶⁰ The word 'l'amitié' becomes unfamiliar in Bataille's hands, as if the accustomed proximity of friends had given way to reveal the possibility of a relation of dislocation across vast distances:

[A] state of profound friendship requires that a man be abandoned by all his friends, free friendship is detached from close, intimate bonds. Far beyond the shortcomings of *close* friends or readers, I now seek friends, readers that a dead man can find and, in advance, I am faithful to them, innumerable, mute: stars of the heavens!⁶¹

Friendship now appears under the sign of an experience marked by 'the impossible' or 'the extreme'. In this way, the activity of writing is increasingly traversed by the question of communication and of a 'literary community', as with the following comment on Proust and poetry in *L'Expérience intérieure*:

I would add friendship, for his way of forgetting, of suffering, a feeling of sovereign complicity.⁶²

Yet this 'feeling' is far from unambiguous, for complicity necessarily expresses a relation of hostility as much as any relation of community. If one simply reads Bataille as positing Proust and Nietzsche against Hegel; poetry *contra* philosophy; the ecstatic loss of self in opposition to the labours of the philosopher -, one must then ignore the necessary complexity of Bataille's relation to Kojève-Hegel and philosophy. This is precisely the problem encountered in the second chapter, where Bataille contested 'completion' by 'incompletion', 'satisfaction' by 'dissatisfaction'. To grant authority to one over the other is to ignore the origins of

these concepts within Kojève's dialectic of 'anthropogenesis', which, as we have seen, takes place through the oppositions and reversals of determinate negativity. This relation proves to be far from unambiguous. Bataille does not understand his inversion of Hegel as a clear-cut reversal or opposition: he opposes Hegel, as he says, "Hegelianly". In a very important sense, then, opposition does not go far enough: his intention is ^{to} take Kojève's reading further than it allows itself to go. What his thinking of friendship allows for is a way of giving expression to, or figuring, this 'operation' and 'method' of his own thinking.

If friendship indeed serves a strategic role in Bataille's 'inversion', it is a paradoxical 'strategy', for it is inseparable from this contestation of authority and of the teleological operation of value. Yet friendship is consistently presented in the name of a 'demand' and a 'rigour':

What chance demands of men: *friendship*.⁶³

I have proposed: the friendship of man for himself, the effacement of ego in the evidence of pride, a "desert" where solitude gains access to the "innumerable", and the greatest possible rigour in the exercise of life.⁶⁴

This presentation of friendship contests the very possibility of a cooperative strategy by selecting 'chance' as its only viable goal or value, insofar as 'chance' is, at the same time, equally non-viable, the absence of every goal and sustainable value. However, to return to the figure of complicity, if the name of friendship necessarily posits the fact of being the accomplice of someone (in a crime, for example), this relation is oriented by an equally necessary sense of being complicit *against* an other, or others. A 'complicit friendship' may leave unspecified the identity (or number) of the first, but it cannot but presuppose the *existence* of the latter. Moreover, if 'sovereign complicity' is the contestation of every value, as directed against the Kojèvean values of 'the work' and 'Recognition', then *in the name of what* is Bataille a friend or accomplice? That is to say, when Bataille proclaims that his friendship is '*for* the impossible that is

man', or that it responds to the 'demand' of chance, does not the teleology and authority which he contests return, with all the more force for being unrecognised as such?

In the discussion which follows, therefore, we will turn to Bataille's post-war writings in order to trace the extent of the strategic relation between his presentation of the 'work of friendship' and his efforts to exceed or invert the Hegelian 'philosophy of work'. Bataille's use of the word 'complicity' accentuates a certain bivalency in his thinking of friendship: the inseparability of friendship and conflict, of friendship and hostility, articulates another sense of 'complicity' - an irreducible relation of involvement in that from which one has removed oneself, and rejected. If the movement of excess and inversion always remains vulnerable to the very system which it overflows or overturns, if his opposition to Hegel 'only makes sense... "Hegelianly"', it is not because Bataille understands Hegelian philosophy as the doctrine of a simple 'unity of opposites'; but rather because he locates the possibility of systematic philosophy, after Kojève, in relation to the 'struggle for recognition' between master and slave. In fact, his adherence to Kojève's schematic of self-consciousness provides the building block for *all* thought: the dialectic of the master and the slave 'is, so to speak, the corner-stone [la pierre angulaire] of all thinking, since in it thought not only finds the explication of things, but of itself'.⁶⁵ Self-consciousness thus remains the central point of reference for Bataille insofar as it is there that thought finds the 'explication' of its own operations, alongside that of 'things': thought thinks itself only insofar as it thinks its relation to what opposes it. His relation to Kojève-Hegel fastens and builds upon these co-ordinates, as well as the fissures and paradoxes opened up by Kojève's dualism; and it is in this way that one can discern another sense of Bataille's 'complicity'. It is no longer possible to praise or condemn Bataille for being resolutely 'Hegelian' or for being steadfastly 'anti-Hegelian'. As Jacques Derrida has remarked, this relation to Hegel is 'hardly definable', save as 'a complicity without reserve that accompanies the Hegelian discourse, "takes it seriously" all the way to its conclusion'.⁶⁶ Is it possible to hear

in this use of ‘complicity’ an echo of Bataille’s assertion that he ‘opposes Hegel “Hegelianly”’? His attention to *sacrifice* is an attempt to shortcircuit the Hegelian ‘Aufhebung’ by returning it outside the economy of sense into an ‘expenditure without return’; just as his thinking of sacred *communication* undermines Kojève’s rigid ontological opposition of human activity (the transcendence of consciousness) and animal passivity or inoperativity (the immanence of material life) by scrambling and reorganising the hierarchical distribution of power and necessity upon a labyrinthine network of composition and decomposition. As a result, for Bataille, the dialectical birth of ‘Man’, ‘History’, ‘State’ and ‘System’ is inextricably bound up with the suppression of that originary turbulence which is unproductive or inoperative negativity. Drawing upon Kojève’s emphasis on the finitude of ‘human reality’ and his critique of the inoperativity of ‘Life’, Bataille gives the name *sovereignty* to this experience of extreme instability. And nowhere is this ambiguity of restriction and excess more acute than in the figure of friendship. It finds expression in Bataille’s formulation of ‘the work of friendship’ is an integral part of the presentation of this inversion of Hegel and philosophy: it is the ‘hinge’ that articulates this inversion as a consciousness of being complicit *in* it and *against*, in the same movement.⁶⁷ Thus, having already located the word ‘friendship’ at the fulcrum of the relation between ‘sacrifice’ and ‘communication’, it is now possible to set out the way in which Bataille’s use of this word deepens and exacerbates those ambiguities which emerged from Kojève’s reading of Hegel.

3.21 - Sovereignty

Sovereignty is not a relation of mastery. In fact, as Bataille repeats on many occasions in *La Part maudite*: ‘Sovereignty is NOTHING.’⁶⁸ Although his own ‘personal interpretation’ of the master-slave dialectic in “Hegel, l’homme et l’histoire” refers throughout to ‘the related form [la forme voisine] of the *sovereign*’, and although this figure draws upon the ontological determinations of

inoperativity as well as the act of 'putting at stake' ['mettre en jeu'; 'daransetzen'] which constitute the appearing of mastery, Bataille insists upon a profound and radical difference from the figure of the master.⁶⁹ In Derrida's well known and exact phrase, sovereignty is 'at once more and less a mastery than mastery, [it] is completely other.'⁷⁰ But how does this absolute differentiation take place? how is it presented? how far is it viable? and how does it relate to Bataille's thinking of friendship? To answer these questions we need to understand what is 'at stake' in Bataille's proximity to Hegel's 'philosophy of work'.

In "Hegel, l'homme et l'histoire", Bataille follows in the steps of Kojève: his approach to Hegel explicitly addresses the state of contemporary thought, 'les jeux de la pensée actuelle'. His diagnosis of a distortion wrought by the 'misunderstanding' of Hegel's representation of 'Man and human Spirit' is, however, more ambiguous than Kojève's pedagogic and propagandist intentions, and the implications of such distortion more complex. This 'méconnaissance' which characterises the relation of 'la pensée actuelle' to the representation of 'l'Esprit humain' is, on the one hand, a measure of the degree to which Hegel's thinking 'imposes itself' as the horizon of the historical and philosophical present. But, on the other hand, since the prevailing relation to this horizon has 'perverted [faussés] the play of current thinking', 'we' have become 'complacent', even 'revelling in it' ['où nous nous complaisons']. Hence, every attempt to think in ignorance of this horizon, or to sidestep ('perhaps deceitfully') it when speaking of man, merely extends the reach of the perversion of 'our' own thinking.⁷¹ This horizon is nothing other than the completion of 'Man' at the 'end of history', and the contemporary 'méconnaissance' is not simply a 'misrecognition' of this 'event', but a failure to recognise it at all:

The event is all the more grave [lourd] because no-one on either side is ready to look at it "in the face". Its meaning [sens] is recognisable and it is never recognised. Yet today a great unease [malaise] holds sway over the world.⁷²

As a result, insofar as this ‘event’ is what Kojève’s ‘dernière analyse’ expresses in a ‘difficult’ and ‘discouraging’ manner, the *Introduction* is both a contributing factor to this state of ‘misunderstanding’, non-recognition and ‘malaise’, but also the only way of exposing them as such. This work, for Bataille, provides the *only* possible diagnosis of the contemporary condition, insofar as it allows the one who reads it to look this ‘end’ “‘in the face’”. As Kojève explains in his long note at the end of his *Introduction*, ‘the end of human Time or of History’ is nothing more or less than ‘the definitive annihilation of Man in the proper sense of the term or of the free and historical Individual’: what ‘ends’ is ‘Action in the strong sense of the term’, the negativity which defined every social, political and historical act of human becoming as such; and as a result, in marking the fact that ‘Man dies as such’ - that is, as the auto-transformative power of ‘work’ -, this ‘end’ marks the disappearance of wars, ‘bloody revolutions’ and even philosophy.⁷³ If Bataille’s thinking of sovereignty remains close to, or ‘complicit with’, Kojèvean mastery - ‘le souverain’ and ‘le Maître’ are, after all, related or ‘neighbouring’ [‘voisine’] terms -, it is with this very proximity and familiarity that he aims to uncover alternate ‘possibilities’ for thinking the future of this ‘event’.

Bataille’s essay begins by carefully shadowing the moments of Kojève’s narrative ‘explication’ of the master-slave dialectic, albeit through the substitution of ‘le souverain’ for ‘le Maître’. Sovereignty too proves to be nothing without the recognition of others:

Now every man is initially sovereign, but this sovereignty is strictly that of the wild animal. If he didn’t battle to the death against his fellow beings, it would be as if his sovereignty, in not being recognised, hadn’t existed.⁷⁴

This shadowing is double-edged, for right from the beginning it is a case of following how ‘the attitude of the Master *implies* sovereignty’, just as the idea of a conflict that does not pursue ‘the satisfaction of animal needs’ is said to ‘*express* sovereignty’.⁷⁵ Furthermore, Bataille pauses this recapitulation at a number of key points. First, he draws attention to the internal division of sovereignty within the

master. The moment that the master becomes a master *of slaves*, this initial ‘absolutely sovereign’ part of his being is ‘limited’; wielding power over others attributes ‘the value and the form of a useful activity’ to the struggle between self-consciousnesses, even though this activity is ‘always diverted towards ends exceeding utility [détournée vers des fins dépassant l’utilité] in the direction [sens] of prestige’. It is with the advent of the master that sovereignty ceases to be purely impotent and without end, for his actions introduce ‘an increasing power’ [‘un pouvoir croissant’] which can be wielded by a sovereign.⁷⁶ This is a vital moment for Bataille. The figure of the master departs from the avowedly religious ‘logic’ of sacrifice and expenditure, the sacrificial logic of sovereign as victim (‘Dianus’). Principally, this departure marks the ascent of the ‘enterprises of war’ as the passage ‘from impotence to power’ [‘de l’impuissance au pouvoir’], and as ‘the time [loisir] to refuse the ritual putting to death’, or sacrifice, by substituting another victim in his place.⁷⁷ Henceforth, sovereignty will be subordinate to actions which maintain and increase the growth of such power. The moment of enslavement thus sparks the ‘degradation of sovereignty’: the instant at which a king pursues recognition ‘for *what he does*, for his power [puissance]’, sets him apart from the desire for ‘pure prestige’, and sets ‘Man’ upon the path of effective ‘Action’ and the productive negativity of the ‘Aufhebung’.⁷⁸ In this way, Bataille complicates the rigid dualism that underpinned Kojève’s narrative of the transition from master to slave. His uncovering of a pre-existing ‘logic’ of sacrifice does not invalidate it, but, as we will see, proceeds from a simple ‘supposition’ shared, but unspoken, by Kojève: the fact that ‘Man can have lived moments of the Master and of the Slave in one and the same individual (or in each individual).’⁷⁹ Before going further into the repercussions of this ‘supposition’, we will turn to the figure of the slave in Bataille’s recapitulation.

As with his repetition of mastery, Bataille’s presentation of the reversal of the master-slave dialectic begins to question the relation of ‘work’ [‘travail’] and the slave within this sequence of ‘moments’. Hegel’s ‘Knecht’ is acknowledged to be the general figure of ‘the man who is not free to do what he pleases’ insofar as all

of his actions ‘belong to others’, insofar as his ‘work’ prepares the thing for his *masters* consumption.⁸⁰ Yet Bataille discerns ‘a properly human existence anterior to the reduction of the vanquished in slavery’. This *anteriority* derives from the fact that ‘work *had to* precede slavery’.⁸¹ What is the status of this anteriority? Bataille recognises that the logical ‘schema’ of recognition cannot be countered by a barrage of historical, ethnological data; indeed, he himself duly grants precedence to the former over the latter. Instead, it is a matter of *a priori* necessity, a different fundamental structure that has been obscured or obliterated by Kojève’s narrative, but which Bataille is able to draw out of concealment precisely because of this obliteration. Bataille claims to have arrived at a ‘logical construction’ still more primordial than that of Hegel’s “‘exteriorised” inner drama’ between master and slave, and which the latter, therefore, *must* presuppose in order to take place at all.

Man as such dwelled alongside death and worked [...]. The distance from the formed object to the one who produced it without immediately consuming it (destroying it), and, in this way formed it in forming itself, could have been the effect of *interdicts* prior to the domination of the Master, purely religious interdicts. It is possible that Man became such, separated (himself) from the animal, by following other paths than those in Hegel’s description.⁸²

Moments, concepts and figures are recognisable from this ‘drama’, but they have been re-distributed and enacted along different ‘paths’. This possibility of ‘*other paths*’ elucidates an important aspect to his work as a whole: Bataille sets himself the task of thinking a *counter-history* of human activity and development, for the specificity of this counter-origin of the relation of ‘work’ and ‘consumption’ is central to all of Bataille’s post-war writings on political economy, religion, and art. However, Bataille’s intention is not to break away from the historical movement which forms the horizon and economy of meaning. Instead, he endeavours to show how this movement itself can only originate in such a break

with what existed *prior* to it, and hence outside the totalising perspective of Kojève's 'dernière analyse'.

Hence, it would appear that the basic thrust in his writings against the coherent totality of the economy of meaning ['sens'] is inseparable from the attempt to reach a position, or an 'origin', more primordial or more 'primitive' than the schema of recognition, from which to contest it. In this way, the distribution of labour between master and slave is traced back to a temporal division of the sacred and the profane in 'one and the same' or rather 'each' individual. What Bataille calls "“profane time”" is the time of work, securing the satisfaction of 'animal needs' (hunger, shelter) and accumulating the 'resources' to be destroyed in the 'massive consumptions' (festivals, celebrations) that characterise "“sacred time”".⁸³ As a result, the Hegelian master-slave dialectic relates to this 'classical opposition' as its 'renversement':

the Master is what he is not and is not what he is, he cannot have the autonomy of "sacred time", [for] he inserts the movement of profane time (in which one acts with a view to a result) right into sacred existence.⁸⁴

The figure of the master forms the main object of Bataille's contestation of Kojève's account of self-consciousness, for with it 'instability of History' is introduced. 'His very being introduces, because he lasts, an element contrary to the *instantaneity* of "sacred time"⁸⁵ Against this impersonal, momentary existence - 'in which the future no longer counts, in which resources are liquidated, in which the victim is destroyed, annihilated, where it is only a matter of being "sovereignly in death", "towards death" [« pour la mort »] (in annihilation and destruction)⁸⁶ -, the mastery is posited as the desire to accrue personal power, ultimately to gain power over death precisely by transforming it into a power. It is by replacing the momentary, mortal opening of sacred 'instantaneity', that it finds its 'glory' in the rewards of a victorious battle, rewards which prove to be 'more solid' than those of sacrifices which expend without return. 'Man' is, from the first, pure 'being-for-self' in the form of desire

for recognition; he acts 'with a view to' ['en vue de'] a result or an end; that is, recognition as an 'absolute value' of individuality. This determination is only reinforced, with more successful results, in the 'work' of the slave.

However, it is important to realise that at no time does Bataille claim to have changed 'anything essential' in the historical dialectic of 'Man'. In fact, he stresses the fact that nothing fundamental has been altered. The recourse to the sacred-profane opposition, and to sovereignty in the practice of sacrifice simply points to 'Man's possibility to *negate* animality in himself *without acting*'. He states that nothing is added in this recapitulation which would dispute the 'central perspectives' to be found in Hegel; that is, in Kojève's *Introduction*.⁸⁷ To do so would be merely to contribute to the prevalent 'misunderstanding', and to fail to recognise the full implications of Hegel's thinking: the perspective of 'the end of history' should be seen, writes Bataille, 'as any truth, as an established truth.'⁸⁸ Furthermore, it is clear that Bataille's preoccupation with the sacred is not simply an expression of nostalgia for some prelapsarian, primitive world, nor a call for the abandonment of, or withdrawal from the modern world. On the contrary, if we are to understand the singular force of what he calls sovereignty, Bataille insists that we must follow the historical dialectic of 'Man' to its ultimate conclusions.

The essential condition [of this end] is clear, it is simply the passage of men into homogeneous society; the cessation of the play by which these men opposed one another, and realised in turn different *human* modalities. [...] Human history will cease when Man will cease to change, and in this way to differ from himself.⁸⁹

The possibility of historical change and human becoming ('Man') has come to its end. This is what Bataille affirms as 'fundamental'. But what *happens* when, in the accomplishment of universal recognition, this process of change and becoming (the *dialectic* of recognition) has been accomplished? He acknowledges that these words, 'the end of history', are without doubt 'strange', even 'brutal' in their formulation, but they must be given their 'precise meaning': '[i]t means that

henceforth nothing new will take place [rien de nouveau n'aura lieu].'⁹⁰ *Nothing 'new' will happen*: no change, no conflict; and hence no more differentiation, nothing that will surprise 'us' - except, perhaps, for this very fact: that 'we' are no longer that which made 'us' what 'we' are. This is the 'reversal' of the very movement which brought us to this point, and thus the 'misunderstanding' against which he writes is not only the failure to recognise this reversal, it is also its result.

If the master-slave dialectic sounds the death-knell for man's 'sacred existence', it is equally the case that its sole, inevitable conclusion is the death of 'Man as such'. It presents the *teleological* orientation of human action towards 'satisfaction', and the subordination of passivity and inoperativity. Sovereignty is obliterated by the desire to be recognised for what one does, rather than for what one is; a shift that echoes Kojève's account of the transition from 'Love' to 'Recognition'. Such teleology is, of course, the originary metaphorisation of (natural or biological) death into the operation of ('human') negativity, wherein death is put to work as the *economic* circulation of meaning and value. Finally, the 'seriousness' of this 'work', as the historical movement of universalising negation, is figured by the development and completion of 'Man' as the 'Work' ['l'Oeuvre'] of this becoming, the autonomous 'Individual' within the context of the homogeneous state. For Bataille, there is no question that this situation defines the present:

The culture susceptible of bringing about the fundamental homogeneity and the reciprocal comprehension of those who incarnate it in diverse ways is technological culture. [...] It is not a question of a scale of superior values, nor of a systematic mistrust [mépris] of disinterested values. It is a question of reinforcing that which brings men together and of suppressing what separates them.⁹¹

In short, according to Bataille's re-reading of the master-slave dialectic, this idea of an existence in which work and sacrifice were necessarily contiguous, has already been 'dialectically suppressed' by the second 'birth' of Kojève's 'satisfied

Citizen'. Bataille's conception of sovereignty, therefore, does not question the teleological and axiological deployment of the negativity of death after the fact, but rather at its very source. Human sovereignty is the contestation of every 'project' or 'work' only insofar as it contests their *origin* in the negative as such. Consequently, if all human productive activity, together with the entire economy of meaning in which it is inscribed as 'work', originally springs from the self-mediating power of the negative, Bataille seeks out that 'part' of this operation of negativity which has not been fully invested in this economy. What remains? Moreover, how can it remain at the 'end'?

What remains of a devastating movement in which there is nothing that humanity thinks which does not pass into dust and which does not fall into ruins: Kojève has underlined Hegel's hidden dissatisfaction and he has successfully highlighted the fact that the Wise-man names satisfaction, a *voluntary* frustration certainly, but absolute and definitive.⁹²

Nothing remains. This 'hidden dissatisfaction' which, in "L'Amitié", is identified with the *Phenomenology*, is revealed by the irruption of a death which is irreducible and prior to the 'work' of philosophy. For Bataille, this represents a 'release':

Nowadays, perhaps, Man is on the point of being released [au moment d'être lâché] by the movement which had borne him forward; perhaps he is already released.⁹³

One must note here not only the temporal markers in this passage, but the senses of the verb 'lâcher' (to loosen, slacken; to release, unleash; to let loose, let fly; to leave, drop, give up; to break, give way, fail). The associated nouns, 'la lâcheté' (cowardice, lowness; weakness) and 'le lâchage' (desertion, abandonment), should also be kept in mind for this passage. The sovereignty of man arrives only in the experience of this loss, abandonment or weakening: a freedom that is not that of a subject, but that of the breaking apart or failing of subjectivity, a weakening of

power rather than an empowerment. Sovereignty is this weakening of the ‘work of the negative’,⁹⁴ the loosening and giving way of negativity; yet only in the sense that it is nothing outside of this negativity, for it is nothing other than the death of ‘Man as such’.

This is precisely why it is possible to sense [sentir], as never before, what Man is: this force of Negativity, an instant suspending the course of the world, reflecting it because an instant breaks it, but only reflecting an powerlessness [impuissance] to break it. If it seemed to him really to break, he would only reflect an illusion, for he does not break it. In truth, Man only reflects the world by receiving death. At this moment, he is sovereign, but sovereignty escapes him (he also knows that, if he held on to it [la maintenait], it would cease to be what it is...). He says what the world is, but his speech cannot disturb the silence which spreads out [qui s’étend]. And he knows something only to the extent that the meaning [le sens] of the knowledge that he has evades him.⁹⁵

If the sovereignty of a being is located in terms of this expenditure [‘dépense’] of negativity without return or result, he must act (or negate) without ‘a view to’ satisfaction in a value or goal. In a very important sense, this has no *effect* or *result*. ‘Sovereignty can change nothing. It is no longer pure sovereignty if it wishes to change that which is.’⁹⁶ Sovereignty can do *nothing*. Unable to ‘change what is’ - in other words, not capable of transforming the world around it; indeed, not *desiring* to transform what Kojève called ‘la vie-animale’ [‘das Leben’] or ‘être-donnée’ [‘das Sein’] - the sovereign being cannot escape the sense of ‘inquiétude’ [‘Unruhe’] which characterises the subject of desire (*qua* ‘Fürsichsein’), for he is never satisfied. Yet this inability to change or develop is presented as the opening of a possibility of liberating man from his subservience to ‘the Work’. Bataille contests the necessary identity between negativity and work: the sovereign does not relate to death as to the source of power and possibility ‘to do...’; instead, as he already insists in “L’Amitié”, the sovereign

relation to death *qua* nudity or 'extreme-limit' precisely strips such activity of all sense. While Kojève's presentation of mastery - in the form of the eventual 'mastery' of the slave through the process of work - is predicated upon 'the labour of the negative', wherein death has become the very production of meaning and value as such, sovereignty relates to death as the absence of sense. For Bataille, this is the true standpoint of Kojève's 'dernière analyse': the realisation that, if every possibility has been brought about through the universalising movement of work, nothing else remains to be done.

3.22 - Impossible friendship and the work of art

The relation between friendship and sovereignty lies in the fundamental role of communication in Bataille's concept of sovereign being. Sovereignty 'is NOTHING' precisely in the sense that it presupposes communication which, in turn, presupposes the sacrifice of sovereignty. In this way, the feeling of sovereignty is inseparable from that originary sense of the sharing of existence which Bataille had first sketched in *L'Expérience intérieure*, as the 'labyrinthine composition of beings', or the complicit sense of '« être en rapport »'. Sovereignty is *shared*: 'any subject maintaining sovereign value in opposition to the subordination of the object possesses his share in [en partage] this value with all men.'⁹⁷ The thought of sovereignty is bound up with the very possibility of community in the same way that the notion of expenditure or sacrifice is inseparable from that of communication. Friendship is thus 'for the *impossible*' in the sense that, if this shared 'value' of sovereignty exists only insofar as it is risked or put into question, there is never any certainty that sovereignty *can exist*. The existence of sovereignty is its own impossibility.

It is important to recognise that Bataille's engagement with Kojève' Hegel is not limited to "Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice" and "Hegel, l'homme et l'histoire". These two articles are contemporary with a book on the origins of prehistoric art.

In *Lascaux, ou la naissance de l'art* (1955), Bataille locates the relation of sovereignty and friendship at the moment of the first production of a work of art, which he defines as the true beginning of 'Man'. Bataille writes from the same quasi-sociological and anthropological perspective which characterises the two Hegel papers, as well as the broader economic project of *La Part maudite*. When he states that his inquiry poses the question of the 'general sense that the work of art has for humanity', he insists that this is not a matter of choice or chance: 'the question imposed itself upon me since it is a matter of the most ancient art, of the *birth* of art, and not just one among many other of its developments'; which means, by extension, that the question of art does not present itself as just one among many other possible branches of inquiry into human history.⁹⁸ Bataille's task in this book, therefore, is directly connected to his critique of Kojève's anthropogenetic reading of Hegel. His stated task is 'to underline' the point in time or 'moment of history' at which 'the "man of Lascaux" definitely and for the first time, [...] resembled us, that evidently this was our resemblant [notre semblable]'.⁹⁹ This moment is the point at which this being begins 'making a work of art': it is 'the birth of art' which marks the first appearing of man's sovereignty; an event that Bataille calls 'the dawning of the human species', and the point at which 'the day is born of the night'.¹⁰⁰ However, this does not mean that 'the "man of Lascaux"' ever intended or desired to make a work of art. In fact, this is perhaps the most important aspect of this event and 'our' relation to it: it is the fact that this being - whom Bataille acknowledges is not, strictly speaking, a 'man' at all - *resembles* us as a being who *works*, who makes things and is productive. It is this creativity, or 'creative virtue' - to use Bataille's phrase - to which this being 'bears witness'.¹⁰¹ Hence, if *Lascaux, ou la naissance de l'art* is named after this event, and if what it aims to do is nothing less than 'show at what point the work of art was intimately bound to the formation of humanity', then this means that the 'event' in question - the '*birth* of art' - is solely a matter of our *recognition* (of ourselves) *in the work*.

What are the consequences of Bataille's method? 'Lascaux' is an event of recognition insofar as we apprehend ourselves in 'the "man of Lascaux"': he is *our* 'resemblant', the one who echoes our own self-mediation of 'Recognition' through the work. Yet this recognition of similarity is not the relation described and analysed by Kojève. Instead, 'our' communication with 'the "man of Lascaux"' takes place, for him, within the 'distant posterity' that we are in relation to his time. What 'we' receive from him, says Bataille, is 'what, in the depths of the earth, leads us astray and transfigures us': what we receive from his work is 'the vision of the most distant'; and whose 'message', whilst demanding of us 'the contemplation of being in its entirety', is nonetheless 'aggravated [...] by *an inhuman strangeness*'.¹⁰² In this case, then, resemblance is that which is the most strange, even 'inhuman', and resistant to all understanding. Resemblance distorts our own relation of recognition in the work. We can sense this similarity, but our desire for an origin is thwarted by a prior setting-into-work of everything which we 'are'. We are faced with a contradiction: we can recognise a similarity in the 'work', yet this relation is removed from the recognisably human. It is in order to explain how this sense of resemblance can still communicate with us that Bataille introduces the relation between friendship and art:

If we go into the cave at Lascaux, a strong feeling grips us which we do not have in front of the display cases where the first remnants of human fossils or their stone instruments are exhibited. This is the same feeling of presence - of clear and burning presence - that masterpieces of every epoch give us. No matter what it seems, the beauty of human works addresses friendship, the pleasure of friendship. Is not beauty what we love? Is not friendship the passion, the always repeated interrogation to which beauty is the sole response?¹⁰³

Bataille is making two different claims on the basis of this 'strong feeling': first, he affirms that it is this 'feeling', rather than any particular 'interest', which attracts us to the paintings at Lascaux; and second, he defines it as 'this feeling of

presence' which, in turn, defines 'the essence of the work of art'.¹⁰⁴ Most important of all, however, is the underlying relation between art and friendship in the form of the beautiful. Beauty in the work, contrary to whatever it may appear to, 'addresses' the sense of friendship first and foremost. The feeling of presence and the pleasure of friendship: this is what this first dawning of the work of art gives to us. It is not, therefore, a matter of our *understanding* of these works. In fact, Bataille freely acknowledges that the 'poverty' and 'inexactitude' of our knowledge is the reason why this feeling of friendship is so important in this case.

Let us acknowledge it: the response that Lascaux gives us, at first, remains obscure in us, obscure, only half-intelligible. It is the most ancient response, the first, and the depths of times from which it comes are lit up only by the faltering light of dawn. What do we know of the men who will leave behind them only these ungraspable shadows, isolated from every background? Almost nothing. Except that these shadows are beautiful, as beautiful to our eyes as the most beautiful paintings in our museums.¹⁰⁵

The principal difference between these works and the paintings in museums, for Bataille, is that 'we know the date, the artist's name, the subject, the purpose' of the latter.¹⁰⁶ The only relation open to us when faced with these ancient works of art is one of *unitelligibility* and *obscurity*. We may recognise certain elements or figures, but what we cannot discern is the exact nature of their relations and setting. However, it is not simply for want of information that our understanding finds itself blunted. What remains in these works after such a vast passage of time is 'a profound, yet enigmatic communication':

The paintings before us are miraculous, they communicate a strong and intimate emotion to us. Yet they are all the more unintelligible for that.¹⁰⁷

For Bataille, there is no doubt that they communicate: they *give* something to 'us', as if in response to our presence; yet 'we' cannot be but *at a loss* to know precisely what it is. We are moved and affected by what we can only call their

beauty, even if what they are said to portray or relate (a hunt or a journey, for example) may leave us indifferent. Hence, it is this very beauty, devoid of context yet radiant, 'leaves us painfully suspended.'¹⁰⁸ However, if we ask what 'enigmatic communication' and 'unintelligibility' have to do with friendship; or why Bataille turns to this relation when 'the beauty of human works' is already mediated through the memory of the museum; if we ask these questions of Bataille's texts, it is impossible to find any answers. The entire force of this relation between friendship and 'the essence of the work of art' revolves around the terms 'feeling' and 'presence', which are left at the level of evidence, or obviousness. They are simply posited or assumed. It is this experience of *suspension* which holds this evidence together: the opening of a sense of uncertainty and the refusal of mastery. We will return to this sense of suspension in the next chapter, when we turn to examine Blanchot's writing on the museum and the work of art.

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What we have uncovered in this chapter is the key moment of Bataille's adherence and opposition to Kojève's reading of Hegel: whether 'pro' or 'contra', Bataille shares with Kojève a thought of the immanence of community and self-identity through the act of sacrifice. Both the struggle for recognition and 'complicit friendship' posit a relation with a 'resemblant', and therefore ground the very thought of relation in an original and fundamental sense of similarity and continuity between beings. In the final chapter, then, we will return to the work of Blanchot in order to determine whether - and in what way(s) - the thought of friendship and discretion in his work draws upon his reading of Hegel and his presentation of the work of art.

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friendship
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work of
art and
friendship
nor even
between 'work'

in the Platon's sense
(Arbeit) and the work
(Werk) of art.

Notes to Chapter 3

¹ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, translated by H.B. Nisbet and edited by Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, §7, Addition.

² It is above all Jacques Derrida's work on Bataille has allowed the true complexity of this relation to Hegel been recognised. As such his essay, "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale. *Un hegelianisme sans réserve*" (1967), forms the background for the entire discussion of Bataille in Section 3.2, below.

³ Kojève noted the vital linkage between death and recognition in Hegel's Jena writings in ILH, 518, n.1; see also Henry S. Harris, "The Concept of Recognition in Hegel's Jena Manuscripts", in John O'Niell (ed), *Hegel's Dialectic of Desire and Recognition: Texts and Commentaries*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1996, 233-52.

⁴ Instead of giving its full title throughout this chapter, we will use the abbreviated form of B-IV-A. For a clear, tabulated account of the complex overall structure of this work, see Jon Stewart, "The Architectonic of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*", in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. LV, n.4, December 1995; see also Heidegger's more succinct account of these divisions in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by P. Emad and K. Maly, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988, §5a.

⁵ PG, 154; PS, §196. For a useful and authoritative account of the centrality of this transition, both in the *Phenomenology* and for post-Kantian thought as a whole, see Jean Hyppolite, GS1, 139-50. 'Kantian idealism would be summed up well by this formula [...]: "Self-consciousness is the truth of consciousness."' (139)

⁶ PG, 145; PS, §178.

⁷ PG, 145-6; PS, §178.

⁸ See PG, 79-80, 80; PS, §87.

⁹ See ILH, 576-97.

¹⁰ ILH, 576.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² ILH, 576.

¹³ ILH, 577.

¹⁴ ILH, 539.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ ILH, 506.

¹⁷ ILH, 510, emphasis added. For Hegel's triad of universal, particular and singular, see *Werke*, VIII, §163-5; also §13, on the example of the universality of 'fruit' with respect to the unity and systematisation of 'the philosophy. It is interesting to note that, although Kojève does not refer explicitly to this example, it can be said to perform the very function which he ascribes to the *Phenomenology*: 'In philosophy the latest birth of time is the result of all the systems that have preceded it, and must include their

principles'. Andrew Benjamin gives an alternate reading of this presentation of singularity - indeed, one marked by the influence of both Bataille and Blanchot - in *The Plural Event: Descartes, Hegel, Heidegger*, London: Routledge, 1993, 97-111.

¹⁸ PG, 24; PS, §19. See Hegel's distinction of the death of 'a natural life' and the death which belongs to consciousness in the "Einleitung", PG, 74; PS, §80; and also the famous definition of the 'life of spirit' in the "Vorrede", PG, 36; PS, §32. It is the latter which forms the focal point of Kojève's existential analyses of human finitude, in "L'idée de la mort dans la philosophie de Hegel", ILH, 529-575. As a result, it is taken up by Bataille in "Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice", and by Blanchot in "La littérature et le droit à la mort".

¹⁹ See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford: Blackwell, 1962, Part 1, Division Two, Section I, §§46-53; H.241, 247.

²⁰ ILH, 515. In the light of the fundamental status of Hegelian negativity, Kojève never pauses to ask *how* it is that the event of death becomes such a 'property' or 'labour'; nor does he inquire into the possibility of *this* transformation in thinking itself. These are questions which Bataille addresses via the question of *sacrifice*; see Section 2.11.

²¹ The dates for this fragment - first version written in November 1797, and second written in autumn-winter 1798 - are provided by Nohl, editor of *Hegels Theologisch Jugendschriften*, Tübingen, 1907. Kojève dates it, inaccurately, at 1795 (see ILH, 512). We have used the text of 'Die Leibe,' published under the editorial title of '[Entwürfe über Religion und Liebe]' (1797/98), in Hegel, *Werke I. Frühe Schriften*, E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel (eds.), Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1971, 244-50; translated by T.M. Knox and R. Korner, in Hegel, *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings*, New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1948, 302-8.

²² ILH, 513, emphasis added.

²³ There is a noticeable absence of any scholarly contextualisation from Kojève's account of love and, especially, friendship in Hegel's early writings. For example, by sidestepping the centrality of 'Freundschaft' in his work on the positivity and destiny of Christianity - presumably in order to maintain the purity of an *atheist* Hegel -, Kojève also fails to relate this phase of Hegel's development either to the work of Hölderlin or to the productive collision between neo-platonism and Kantian philosophy which both friends absorbed whilst at the Tübingen seminary. For a brief but informative outline of the importance of this atmosphere to both thinkers, see Thomas Pfau's "Critical Introduction" to *Friedrich Hölderlin: Essays and Letters on Theory*, edited and translated by Thomas Pfau, Albany: SUNY Press, 1988, 1-29; and on the philosophical importance of friendship for Hölderlin and the young Hegel, see in particular, 7-11.

We will return to this question of the relation between Hegel's early work and his friend Hölderlin when we turn to Blanchot's reading of the former; see Chapter 4, Sections 4.12 and 4.22, below..

²⁴ PG, 145; PS, 110.

²⁵ GS1, 158.

²⁶ Kojève and Hyppolite both emphasise this figuration of the dialectic in Hegel, in their different ways. Although more circumspect than his contemporary, Jean

Hyppolite places great weight upon the experience of dialectic as the relation of intersubjectivity in the *Phenomenology*:

Experience is *dialectical*, but this *dialectic* manifests itself through the plurality and relation of particular self-consciousnesses, that is, of particular perspectives.

“Dialectique et dialogue dans la *Phénoménologie de l’esprit*” (1956/7), in *Figures de la pensée philosophique. Écrits 1931-1968*, 2 volumes, Paris: P.U.F., 1971 [Quadrige, 1991], I, 209-12, 211.

²⁷ *Werke*, I, 246; *Early Theological Writings*, 304-5.

²⁸ Cited in ILH, 512-3. Kojève cites effectively the same passage in HMC, 349-50. The passage in question is excerpted and composed from *Werke*, I, 246-7, 249; *Early Theological Writings*, 305-6, 307-8. In translating this passage from Kojève’s translation of Hegel, I have tried to maintain the style of the former: the German terms in parenthesis, and all phrases marked thus {...}, are Kojève’s own addition; whilst my own additions and omissions are signalled throughout by square brackets.

²⁹ *Werke*, I, 245-6; *Early Theological Writings*, 304.

³⁰ ILH, 513.

³¹ See HMC, 349; and ILH, 515.

³² *Werke*, I, 247; *Early Theological Writings*, 305-6; cited ILH, 513.

³³ ILH, 515.

³⁴ The lineage of Hegel’s discourse on love from Plato’s famous myth of the origin of sexual relations (‘eros’, ‘philia’) in the *Symposium* (189d-192a) is not acknowledged by Kojève, for his reading sets Hegel’s ‘atheism’ firmly against any reliance upon what he sees as the Platonic origins of Christian theology; see for example, ILH, 536-9.

³⁵ ILH, 514, n.1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ PG, 24; PS, §19. Hyppolite’s interpretation, whilst lacking the violence of Kojève’s reading, identifies essentially the same difference between Hegel’s ‘youthful works’ and the *Phenomenology*:

Love does not insist enough upon the tragic character of separation, it lacks “the force, patience and the work of the negative”. This is why the encounter of self-consciousnesses is manifested in this work as the conflict of self-consciousnesses to make themselves recognised. Desire is less that of love than that of the virile recognition of one desiring consciousness by another desiring consciousness.

See GS1, 158. Both interpreters of Hegel identify love as a lack of ‘*travail*,’ as an absence of the relation of active, productive or ‘virile’ negativity which determines recognition.

³⁹ PG, 14; PS, §5.

⁴⁰ Three ‘moments’ turn out to be central to this reading of Hegel’s implicit criticisms of love in the *Phenomenology*: the master-slave dialectic (B-IV-A), which of course forms the schematic heart of Kojève’s ‘explication’; the relation of ‘imposture’

['Betrug'] between the (Romantic) intellectual and the work (C-(AA)-V-C-a); and the clash between family and authority in the ethical community ['Sittlichkeit'] (C-(BB)-VI-A).

⁴¹ Ibid. Kojève often supports his analysis by telescoping distinct and separate moments of the *Phenomenology*. Kojève himself grants that no direct critique of love exists in the *Phenomenology*. So instead, he relates the concept of recognition to that of love by *implicitly* juxtaposing the master-slave dialectic alongside the tragic conflict of familial love (Antigone) and city-state politics (Creon) which Hegel analyses in the section on *Sittlichkeit*. See PG, 327-54; PS, 267-289. For Kojève's analysis of this section, see ILH, 98-105.

⁴² ILH, 514, n.1.

⁴³ HMC, 350-1, emphasis added.

⁴⁴ *Chambers Concise Dictionary* [Cambridge: Chambers and Cambridge University Press, 1988] gives the following definition:

entropy, (*phys.*) *n.* a measure of unavailable energy, energy still existing but lost for purpose of doing work because it exists as the internal motion of molecules: a measure of the disorder of a system: a measure of heat content, regarded as increased in a reversible change by the ratio of heat taken in to absolute temperature. [Gr. εν, in, τροπη, turning, intended to represent 'transformation content'.]

This use of a concept not only foreign to Hegel, but also unacknowledged by Kojève, plays only a descriptive role at this point, and does not seek to engage with its broader and more complex importance in the physical sciences. For a comprehensive and accessible account of the central role of entropy in the history of modern science, see Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order Out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature*, London: Flamingo/Harper Collins, 1984.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ ILH, 518, n.1. See also the opening lines of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, Paris: Obelisk Press, 1934 [London: Grafton Books, 1965, 9]: 'I am living at the Villa Borghese. There is not a crumb of dirt anywhere, nor a chair misplaced. We are all alone and we are dead.' Bataille's thought of friendship as complicity takes this 'living as if dead' to the extreme; see in particular the reference to Blanchot which follows his comments on this passage in Miller - 'But Blanchot himself is dead.' (VIII, 645**)

⁴⁷ Kojève would discount automatically the *fictional* bear in Heinrich von Kleist's 'On the Marionette Theatre' (1810), collected in Heinrich von Kleist, Charles Baudelaire and Rainer Maria Rilke, *Essays on Dolls*, translated by Ivor Parry, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994, 1-12. However, it is interesting to note the way in which his account of a duel between man and animal mirrors Kojève figure of the struggle for pure prestige. It is unambiguously presented in terms of mastery, recognition and the 'seriousness' of a duel or struggle. As a result, Kleist's duelling bear requires us to ask exactly what Kojève means by 'seriousness,' insofar as the bear's seriousness is described as the ascent of grace over thought, which is by definition given or natural, yet at the same time spiritual in the highest sense: 'grace itself returns when knowledge has as it were gone through an infinity.' (Ibid., 12.) This deeply Romantic conception causes deep problems for Kojève's metaphysical dualism; and once again, this theme

will recur in Bataille's writings on the 'friendship of man and animal'; see the discussion of Lascaux, in Section 3.22, below.

⁴⁸ HMC, 350. The concept of eroticism is, as we saw in the previous chapter, central to Bataille's concerns, and to a large extent determines the role of the figure of woman in his work as a whole. A number of commentators have contrasted Bataille's *erotisme* and Kojèvean 'Reconnaissance': see Suzanne Guerlac, "'Recognition" by a woman!', in Allan Stoekl (ed), *On Bataille. Yale French Studies*, 78 (1990), 90-105; and Allan Stoekl, 'Recognition in *Madame Edwarda*,' in Carolyn Bailey Gill (ed), *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, London: Routledge, 1996, 77-90. However, both essays fail to relate this distinction to the transition from love to recognition in Kojève's interpretation of Hegel. For a more sophisticated account of the relation of Hegelian recognition and 'erotic domination,' see also Jessica Benjamin, 'Master and Slave: The Bonds of Love,' in John O'Neill (ed), *Hegel's Dialectic of Desire and Recognition: Texts and Commentary*, Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1996, 209-222.

⁴⁹ ILH, 14.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ For Kojève, there is a persistent linkage between 'simple' animal being and merely theoretical thought, a combination which reaches its most explicit formulation in the figure of the 'Intellectual' or the 'Romantic'.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ ILH, 13.

⁵⁷ Paul Redding, "Hermeneutic or Metaphysical Hegelianism? Kojève's Dilemma", in *The Owl of Minerva*, v.22, n.2, Spring 1991, 178.

⁵⁸ HMC, 351.

⁵⁹ ILH, 508, emphasis added.

⁶⁰ V, 483.

⁶¹ V, 299. Discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2, above.

⁶² V, 172.

⁶³ V, 446.

⁶⁴ V, 426-7.

⁶⁵ Bataille, "Le paradoxe de la mort et la pyramide" (1953), VIII, 504-20; 508.

⁶⁶ Jacques Derrida, "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale. *Un hegelianisme sans réserve*", in *L'Écriture et la différence*, Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1967, 371.

⁶⁷ On the figure of the hinge, I refer in particular to Roger Laporte's comment that 'the hinge' ['la brisure'] offers itself as 'a single word for designating difference and articulation'; from a letter cited in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press,

1976, 65. The way in which Derrida goes on to develop this comment is, indeed, the ‘hinge-point’ of his thought writing:

Spacing as writing is the becoming-absent and the becoming-unconscious of the subject. [...] Within the horizontality of spacing [...] it is not even necessary to say that spacing cuts, drops, and causes to drop within the unconscious: the unconscious is nothing without this cadence and before this caesura. This signification is formed only within the hollow of *différance*: of *discontinuity and of discretion, of the diversion and the reserve of what does not appear*. [...] The hinge marks the impossibility that a sign, the unity of a signifier and a signified, be produced within the plenitude of a present and an absolute presence.

(Ibid., 69, emphasis added.) Note that central to Derrida’s argument at this point also is Jakobson’s account of how the opposition of oral speech (‘physical continuity’) and written speech (‘discrete constituents’) in communication theory is resolved into the linguistic analysis of the ‘granular structure’ of language through ‘quantal description’.

⁶⁸ VIII, 300.

⁶⁹ “Hegel, l’homme et l’histoire” (1956), XII, 349-69, 350; and see also Bataille’s comparison of the false mastery of slave *versus* the non-work of sovereign (V, 150).

⁷⁰ ERG, 376.

⁷¹ XII, 349.

⁷² XII, 364.

⁷³ ILH, 435, n.1.

⁷⁴ XII, 351. Jean-Luc Nancy notes that the exposure of (and to) communication - which he designates, after Bataille, by the word ‘partage’ - *only* goes by way of ‘the Hegelian desire for recognition’. Yet he adds that the ‘operativity’ of recognition is, nonetheless, preceded by the fact that ‘there is knowing: knowing without knowledge, and without “consciousness”, that *I* am first exposed to the other, and exposed to the exposure of the other.’ See Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, edited and translated by Peter Connor, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, 31. It is this precedence accorded to a ‘non-savoir’ of the shared exposure to finite existence which this present analysis of sovereignty seeks to describe.

⁷⁵ Ibid., emphasis added.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 352.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 353.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 357.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 354.

⁸¹ Ibid., 356, emphasis added.

⁸² Ibid., 357.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid. It is therefore *not* the figure of the slave as such which Bataille criticises, as some commentators seem to think.

⁸⁶ Ibid. For the purposes of focussing on the relation of sovereignty and friendship, we will eschew a more detailed analysis of Bataille's theory of sacrifice which he presents in the companion piece to this essay, "Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice" (1955), XII, 326-45.

⁸⁷ XII, 358.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 363.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 360.

⁹¹ Ibid. The proximity of Bataille's contestation of 'work' and a certain disdain for technology is in evidence here, as it is in his repeated use of machinic or mechanical metaphors to describe the operation of the Hegelian system. It is possible to link this trait to a reliance upon anthropology and naturalism in his presentation of sacrifice or transgression, and hence to a certain irreducible nostalgia. To my mind, Geoffrey Bennington has already broached this problem in his analysis of a 'logic of the frontier', a 'becoming-economical' at the heart of Bataille's thought of the gift; see his "Introduction to Economics, I: Because the world is round", in Carolyn Bailey Gill (ed), *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, London: Routledge, 1995, 46-57. However, this linkage is by no means consistent or unambiguous, as we will discover in Bataille's discussion of the sovereignty of art; see Section 3.22.

⁹² XII, 362.

⁹³ Ibid., 369.

⁹⁴ The phrase 'weakening of the negative' has been borrowed from recent work by Paul Davies. It is being used here, however, to introduce the minimal level of shared 'project' between Bataille and Blanchot - 'the work of friendship'.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ XII, 354-5.

⁹⁷ Bataille, "La Souveraineté", in *La Part maudite: III*, VIII, 285.

⁹⁸ Bataille, *Lascaux, ou la naissance de l'art* (1955), IX, 7-101, 9.

⁹⁹ IX, 11.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² IX, 12, emphasis added.

¹⁰³ IX, 13.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ IX, 14.

¹⁰⁸ IX, 14.

Chapter 4

The discretion of literature: Blanchot and Hegel

Discretion - reserve - is the place of literature.

Maurice Blanchot ¹

Our inquiry into Blanchot's conception of friendship has brought us to ask about his relation to Hegel. In the first two chapters, we found that Blanchot and Bataille present friendship in terms of *discretion* and *complicity*: two contiguous yet incompatible figures for a relation thought on the basis of either discontinuity or continuity. In the third chapter, a closer analysis of Bataille's work revealed that his formulation of 'complicit friendship' articulated a strategic inversion of Kojève's dialectic of Recognition. By presenting this relation in terms of incompleteness and impossibility, Bataille uses it as a figure for his counter-reading of the 'setting to work' of death in the *Phenomenology*. This link between friendship and Hegel's 'work' leads us to ask whether there is a similar correspondence in the work of Blanchot. In this final chapter, then, we need to ascertain whether the relation of his thought of 'discretion' to Bataille's use of 'complicity' is simply paraphrastic or whether - as our analyses in chapters one and two indicated - the apparent proximity in using these two terms as synonyms for friendship, indicates the presence of a more complex 'différend'.

As we have argued in the Introduction, the influence of Hyppolite's translation and commentary of the *Phenomenology*, often overlooked, is in fact fundamental to Blanchot's own readings of Hegel. This perspective provides the context for the following argument: the place of Blanchot's thinking of friendship within his work as a whole cannot be divorced from his reading of Hegel; and that this 'place' is determined precisely in relation to the work of art. This argument will be staged in two sections. In the first section, Blanchot's reading of Hegel will be defined in the relation between the negative, language, and literature in "La littérature et le droit à la mort"; and the figure of friendship will be indicated within his formulation of ambiguity insofar as it sets in place a thinking of *discretion*. We will be concerned with how this word, as the gesture or the figure of friendship, can come to designate the 'place of literature'. The second section shows how, in texts from *L'Espace littéraire* and *L'Amitié*, Blanchot follows Hegel *indirectly* by placing friendship in relation to the reception of works of art from the past and the concomitant appearance of these works 'as such'. It will be argued that, throughout Blanchot's conception of the relation between the fate of art and the work as such, we can discern the double movement of *discretion*, which will allow us to grasp the sense in which Blanchot's own essays can be defined as *a work of friendship*.

4.1 - A 'strange right': literature and negativity

The interplay of negativity, language and literature underpins Blanchot's inquiry in "La littérature et le droit à la mort", the first piece in which his engagement with Hegel becomes central to his work. Indeed, this interplay ~~is~~ is triggered by two citations from Hegel. The first passage is the famous description of 'the life of spirit' from the Preface to the *Phenomenology*:

But the life of spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures [erträgt] it and maintains itself [sich erhält] in it.²

The second passage comes from the Jena *Realphilosophie* of 1803-4, one of the early attempts to construct a philosophical ‘system’, in which Hegel uses the example of Adam to illustrate the essential function of naming as a defining operation of negativity in human intelligence:

The first act, by which Adam established his lordship over the animals, is this, that he gave them a name, i.e., he negated them as beings [seyende], and made them ideal for themselves [für sich ideelen].³

For Hegel’s philosophy, the importance of the conceptual work expressed in these two passages cannot be understated: it is the work of *aufheben*, the operation of negativity which uproots or destroys and preserves or maintains in the same moment. What concerns us in this section is the significance of these two passages for Blanchot. What ‘work’ do they perform in *his* inquiry into the relation between literature and negativity? What does it give us to understand about the general nature of his relation to Hegel? The rethinking of negativity by way of literature and literary language informs Blanchot’s work as a whole; in the words of Françoise Collin, the negative provides the ‘ultimate’ and ‘inaugural’ theme of his work.⁴ In turn, by placing ‘literature’ in this relation to Hegel’s ‘work of the negative’, Blanchot also begins to refigure the ‘work’ along the lines of désœuvrement and discretion.

First of all, a remark about the structure of Blanchot’s essay. It originally appeared in two parts with separate titles, “Le règne animal de l’esprit” and “La littérature et le droit à la mort”.⁵ These two parts constitute a single work; the latter is described as ‘la suite et la fin’ of the former.⁶ There is no sign of this division when the essay is reprinted, italicised throughout, at the end of *La Part du feu* (1949). Even in this form, however, the original division remains, for the

two 'halves' of the essay treat of two distinct topics in quite different ways. In "Le règne animal de l'esprit", Blanchot explores the contradictions of the writer and the act of writing by running through and rearranging a series of 'moments' selected from the *Phenomenology*: the spiritual-animal kingdom; the dependence and independence of self-consciousness; freedom of self-consciousness (stoicism, scepticism, and unhappy consciousness); and absolute freedom (the Terror of the French Revolution). These moments are recognisable, but their sense and order of dialectical unfolding are manipulated in accordance with Blanchot's focus on the literary work as 'the work par excellence'.⁷ Why this privilege of the (Hegelian) work as a work *of art*? Is it justifiable? It is to this end that in the second part he develops an account of the relation of literature to language in general. This account seeks to describe this exemplarity of the literary work on the basis of an irreducible ambiguity which is conceived as the most minimal, incipient state of language. This doubling of sense is at work in the simplest act of naming, as the operation of the most basic and primeval component of language.

In this way, the second half sketches out the paradoxical condition for the contradictions analysed in the first. This means that in effect the second half cuts back beneath those categories (such as 'work', 'writing', and 'experience') whose paradoxes are unfolded in the first half, by refashioning 'literature' as a form of research into the (as yet unnamed) movement of *désœuvrement* as that 'space' within which the 'work' appears as such. It is in this second half of the essay that we will look for Blanchot's rewriting of Hegel; in particular, his appropriation of the two passages from Hegel which figure the work of negativity within the development of consciousness and spirit. Of these two passages only the Jena text is formulated by Hegel in explicitly linguistic terms. However, Blanchot takes both the 'life of spirit' and Adamic naming as figures for the most basic structure of language; and he situates literature as *the* form of research into the relation between language and negativity. In this way, these Hegel citations form the conceptual and thematic bridge which unites the two halves of Blanchot's essay. (Indeed, we shall see that they are interwoven in a decisive passage on literature as

a form of 'recherche'.) The 'life of spirit' passage, prior to the second half, is first cited as a kind of conclusion, at the end of "Le règne animal de l'esprit":

Literature glimpses itself in revolution, it justifies itself in it, and if it has been called the *Terror*, it is because its ideal is indeed this historical moment, the moment when "life bears death and maintains itself within death itself" in order to obtain from it the possibility and the truth of speech. Here is [C'est là] the "question" which seeks to accomplish itself in literature and which is its being.⁸

Up to this point, Blanchot has followed the relation of 'writer', 'literature', and 'world' through a series of irreconcilable contradictions, which culminate and coalesce in the moment when literature 'sees itself' in the 'historical moment' of absolute freedom, 'the Terror'.⁹ Thus, the 'passage from nothing to everything' which characterises revolutionary activity is mirrored by the writer, whose literary activity proceeds 'without pause and almost without mediation.'¹⁰ The citation of the 'life of spirit' figures this moment of reflection; and so it is used to gather up the preceding movement of contradictions, and to maximise their contradictory force. The question of literature is inverted. 'C'est là la « question » qui cherche à s'accomplir dans la littérature et qui est son être.' The question asked 'about' literature becomes what literature 'is about'. In "Le règne animal de l'esprit" this final enigmatic line formed a solitary new paragraph, as if it stood apart from the main body of the text, pointing out the question's arrival, 'there' ['là'], in this 'moment' of ideal identification. How should we understand this tentative "question" which does not appear to ask anything? Does it announce the arrival of something new, perhaps, the result or the truth of preceding contradictions? On the contrary, his caution about this "question" lies in its 'being' literature. It is less a new shape or result of previous contradictions than a stumbling block that exposes literature as such, for the first time: it marks the point - 'là' - at which literature has become a question that concerns itself with its own origin, with 'the possibility and the truth of speech'.

Blanchot does not present this correlation between the ‘right to death’ and the ‘life of spirit’ as an interpretation of the *Phenomenology*. So what does this citation of Hegel *do* here? It shows literature to itself. In the following sections, it will be argued that this correlation draws upon and draws our attention to the question of language in the Hegelian text. It is because this question is already present within the very structure of the *Phenomenology* that Blanchot, in the course of his essay, can rewrite the ‘life of spirit’ as language: ‘language is *the life which bears death and maintains itself within it.*’¹¹ In this gradual rewriting of perhaps the most famous passage from Hegel, Blanchot not only inscribes the operation of determinate negation at the centre of his analysis of language and literature; but more importantly, he places literature at the heart of our experience of negativity. In this first section, then, we will examine the way in which Blanchot rewrites Hegel around the question of language by exploiting the fundamental and unstable sense of ‘disquiet’ (which Hyppolite identifies as the motor of Hegel’s dialectical scepticism). In this way, he opens up the relation of language, memory and negativity in the passage from Hegel’s *Realphilosophie*. Then, in the second section, we will see how his treatment of this passage about Adamic language opens onto the ‘ultimate ambiguity’ of literary language.

4.11 - The disquiet of language

Recall that it is an inversion by which the ‘question of literature’ turns into its very ‘being’ that allows Blanchot to present literature as the relation to an origin. The origin in question is nothing less than that of meaning and communicability in general. This shift in focus from the writer’s experience of writing to the ontological condition of language is fixed in the opening lines of the essays second half - the original “La littérature et le droit à la mort” as it appears in *Critique*:

Literature is bound to language. Language is at once comforting and disquieting. When we speak, we make ourselves masters of things with an ease that satisfies us. I say: this woman, and immediately she is available to me, I push her away, bring her close, she is everything that I desire her to be, she becomes the place of the most surprising transformations and actions: speech is the ease and security of life. We cannot do anything with a nameless object.¹²

Blanchot announces here the main theme for the second half of this essay: the essential ambiguity which lies at the heart of language. ^{le} 'Langage est à la fois rassurant et inquiétant.' It is the simultaneity of 'comfort' and 'unease' that defines our relation to language, and so informs the literature that is 'bound' to it. But what is it 'in' language that comforts us? And what is it that disquiets us? Is it the same thing? The final sentence signals a latent anxiety which returns to haunt Blanchot's inquiry: 'D'un objet sans nom, nous ne savons rien faire.' This 'disquiet' in the face of the 'nameless' arises from the very aspect of language which provides our unconcerned 'comfort' and 'savoir faire':

The word gives me the being, but it gives it to me deprived of being. It is the absence of this being, its nothing [néant], that which remains of it when it has lost being, that is to say the sole fact that it is not. From this point of view, to speak is a strange right.¹³

Hence, the 'lack' ['défaut'] of any immediate relation between words and things does not represent a lacuna in the operations of speech. On the contrary, this 'fault' or 'gap' is the origin of all its 'ease and security'. Our mastery and our unease share this same root: the power of the negative; the 'sole fact that it is not'. For Blanchot, it is this constitutive 'nothing' that makes the act of speaking a 'strange right'.

In unfolding this constitutive relation of language and the negative he draws himself ever closer to Hegel, who conceives of language as the expressive

medium of universality, or the external existence of an inner conceptual intelligence. Hegel's first attempt to work out a speculative account of the development of spirit, the Jena *Realphilosophie* (1803-4), begins with language, 'die Sprache'. Language is conceived as the first stage of this development: the transition from the 'dumb signification' which characterises (merely empirical) 'imagination' to the first 'existence of consciousness' which emerges through memory and the production of names.¹⁴ For Hegel, all thought begins with the name. Consciousness *first* exists insofar as it exists in a nomenclature. Hence his example: the giving of names to the animals is Adam's 'first act', the original mark of man's relation to himself and to the world.¹⁵ This conception of language as the initial form of negativity in name-giving memory, or 'Gedächtnis', is one that Hegel allies to 'the Mnemosyne of the ancients', the mother of the muses.¹⁶ He sets himself against the idea that the intellectual operation of memory is reducible to the recollection and maintenance of a sensible intuition identified as 'something past'. On the contrary, the 'true meaning' of this memory lies in the way that it performs an irreversible transformation on the content of every intuition, making it into a 'matter-of-memory' ['GedächtnißSache'], into something 'thought' ['gedanken'].¹⁷ All thought begins with this 'thinking memory' of names because everything that takes place in consciousness comes *after* this 'Aufhebung'. 'Es ist in Namen, daß wir *denken*.' ['It is in names that we *think*.']¹⁸ In this way, Hegel's concern is not with the origin of language, but with the origin that language *is* for thought. What is the significance of this origin in the *Phenomenology*?

The figure of Adam passes from Hegel to Blanchot via Hyppolite, who uses it to link the most basic characterisation of language in the *Phenomenology* - what Hegel calls 'Beschreiben', a 'description' that is 'a *superficial* extraction of the universal from the sensible' - with the later introduction of art and poetry in the "RELIGION" chapter.¹⁹ Although Blanchot's citation is not an exact transcription from *Genèse et structure*, the discussion here is important for an understanding of his approach to Hegel in "La littérature et le droit à la mort". On the one hand,

Hyppolite (unlike Kojève, for example) accords language a properly originaive role in the *Phenomenology*. He states that the presupposition of communicability in the opening dialectic of sense-certainty is the reason why Hegel ‘returns [to it] ceaselessly throughout the course of this work’: it is the very ‘fact that things can be said’ that bears within it ‘the sign’ of the concept, the identity of nature and spirit in the ‘human Logos’.²⁰ On the other hand, he underlines the fact that such a presupposition is just that, a preliminary position: the word is *already*, but *not yet* the concept; it is still ‘merely a sign’ which remains external to the concept. In short, he reaffirms Hegel’s dictum that language is ‘das Dasein des Geistes’, ‘the (external) existence of spirit’; a phrase which, for Hyppolite, defines the ‘function’ of language that ‘accompanies the principal developments’ of this work.²¹ This is also how Hegel defines the activity of the poet in (implicit) contrast to the work of the philosopher.²² It is to illustrate this point that Hyppolite explicitly ties this most primitive and external beginning of thought to the language of poetry:

Like the poet, particularly the epic poet, who by speaking things gives them the stamp of universality and the form of thought, so in naming things we raise them from the sensible to thought. In the first philosophy of spirit [...], Hegel lay great stress upon this memory of things, which is at the same time a memory of words, the Mnemosyne of the Ancients. Purely sensible intuition is overcome. “In the name, the empirical being is suppressed... it becomes something ideal. The first act by which Adam constituted his domination over the animals is that in which he gave them a name, negating them as being and making them ideal for themselves.”²³

The significance of Adam’s ‘first act’ is that the name can give things only ‘the stamp of universality’ or ‘the form of thought’. It is this *superficiality* of the spoken or written word with respect to the concept that defines language in terms of an ‘already’/‘not yet’. For Hyppolite, the poet is the Adamic figure of the *Phenomenology*: it is ‘particularly the epic poet’ whose naming can ‘raise’ [‘élever’] a thing from sensuous intuition into simple thought. When he appears in

“Kunstreligion”, the ‘epic poet’ or ‘bard’ [‘der Sänger’] presents the transition from the ‘living’ to the ‘spiritual’ work of art insofar as he is the ‘individual and actual spirit’, or the subject of the world, in whom this world ‘is produced and borne’.²⁴ In this way, the “pathos” of the poet-subject marks the existence of the ‘earliest language’ [‘die erste Sprache’], the first and most primitive form of linguistic representation: ‘the *epic* as such’.²⁵ The production of the epic is not an immediate feeling for nature, but the work of mediation and spiritual interiorisation which requires distance and the passing of time. This work too is carried out under poetry’s muse, ‘the *Mnemosyne of the ancients*’: it is this ‘memory of words’ aswell as ‘of things’ which triggers ‘the awakening of consciousness [Besinnung] and a gradually developed inwardness, the remembrance [Erinnerung] of previously immediate essence’.²⁶ What links Adam and the epic poet is (the muse of) memory. It is their receptivity to Mnemosyne that makes them both figures of a double beginning: the *first language*, and language as the *first* ‘existence of spirit’.

So how should we characterise the relation of language and dialectic in the *Phenomenology*?²⁷ Unlike the *Science of Logic*, Hegel does not aim to begin from a state of presuppositionlessness; and unlike the *Realphilosophie*, language is not consigned to a specific moment in consciousness’ development. Hegel purposely begins in medias res: the first chapter begins with the slipperiness of the words ‘this’, ‘here’, ‘now’. Thus, the *Phenomenology* presupposes the existence of (a complex) language. The relation of language and dialectic thus lies in this presupposition of communicability and mediation. (The fact that neither is given any explicit explanation in the text is a mark of their ubiquity.) One can step outside of language as little as one can step outside of the dialectic of history. Hence, language permeates the historical development of consciousness in the *Phenomenology*, whether in the form of the speculative proposition or the epic poem. By beginning with the language of immediacy, Hegel allows its very givenness - the fact *that there is* language; the fact of communicability - to confront us with our own immersion in mediation. It is this very givenness of

language that is expressed in the ‘already’/‘not yet’. The dialectic of sense-certainty enacts this immanence in language, which is what he means by saying that language itself is always ‘more truthful’ than consciousness’ unthinking use of words.²⁸ In this naïve form, consciousness claims to ‘represent’ [‘vorstellen’], *here and now*, this particular being (‘I say: *this* woman’), without realising that what it ‘expresses’ [‘aussprechen’] every time is a pure, empty universal.²⁹ Its claim to unmediated truth is undone by the gap between what it ‘means’ [‘meinen’] and what it *says*.³⁰ The truth of language, for Hegel, lies in this mediation: by exposing the meaning invested in it, language always alters it. In the Hegelian text, the ensuing contradictions are not deficiencies of language, but result from consciousness’ misconceptions of it. What ‘we’ need to grasp, Hegel claims, is what consciousness cannot: the ‘divine nature’ of language, which lies in ‘directly reversing the meaning of what is said [die Meinung unmittelbar zu verkehren], of making it into something else, and thus not letting what is meant *get into words* at all’.³¹ This instability of language is pivotal in Hegel’s text as a whole for two reasons: first, it is *only* through language that the self-certain subject can express itself and be recognised as such by others - that is, self-consciousness ‘finds a voice’; and second, because it is through its use of language that consciousness runs up against its own errors, this process illuminates, for the first time, the state of internal contradiction in which consciousness exists ‘for us’ - ‘we’, the readers, who can grasp this incessant reversal and transfiguration as the truth of language. Thus, Hegel relies upon this ‘divine nature’ - which, by his own definition, is an unwieldy component to rely upon - to introduce ‘us’ to the movement of dialectical inversion.

The structural ambiguity of meaning and expression, which is in the ‘nature’ of language, sets the *form* of dialectical inversion in the *Phenomenology*. In the Introduction, this process of repeated inversion is described as ‘a thoroughgoing scepticism’.³² At every stage of its knowing, consciousness finds that what is most ‘real’ and most familiar becomes ‘*un-real*’ and *un-familiar*; its experience is a state of constant unrest, a becoming without respite. Hegel calls the movement of

this negativity, which constitutes the subject as such, 'die Unruhe' (translated equally well as 'unrest', 'unease', 'disquiet', or 'restlessness'). The transition by which consciousness always exceeds its own limits, spoiling its 'own limited satisfaction', is not without pain and struggle; it does not freely welcome such traumatic disturbance, even preferring to remain in a state of quiescence and untruth.

Yet consciousness can find no peace [keine Ruhe]. If it wishes to remain in a state of unthinking inertia, then thought troubles its thoughtlessness, and its own unrest [Unruhe] disturbs its inertia.³³

At the heart of this scepticism, 'Unruhe' forms the pivot for Hegel's account of the distinction between death as the event which ends all natural life and as that which is proper to consciousness. It describes this effort and effect of thinking; what Hegel calls 'the work of the negative'. Hence, when we read that it is *consciousness*'s unrest ['*seine* Unruhe'], it is important to remember that, for consciousness, this experience is nothing less than its own death; and if it must resist this impersonal force of its own dialectical unfolding, then '*its own* unrest' can only appear as such *to us*. In "Sense-Certainty", natural consciousness may learn from its experience, but it is 'always *forgetting* it and starting the movement all over again.'³⁴ This difference in perspective, therefore, lies between the forgetful 'inertia' of natural consciousness, and the 'Unruhe' of phenomenological recollection; in short, natural consciousness lives in a state of oblivion, whilst its 'own unrest' is already the work of this recollective consciousness as yet unrecognised within it. The impersonal restlessness of this memory is what dispossesses and disorients natural consciousness, forcing it to outstrip its own conception of things and of itself. Yet this sense of disequilibrium is only discernable 'behind the back' of consciousness. It is 'our' perspective on events, our *reading* of the text, which is determined by this remembering. In this sense, the double perspective of 'für es' and 'für uns' is determined by memory. Only from 'our' perspective can the 'subject' of the *Phenomenology* be seen to be

oriented by its own disorientation.³⁵ If such disorientation pushes consciousness from moment to moment, it is always driven towards *recollecting* its orientation in the whole, in the identity of concept and object which is the ‘goal’ of absolute knowing.

It is the movement of ‘Unruhe’ that prompts this recollective structure, insofar as it forms the movement by which the subject undergoes the dissolution of its ‘identity’ in order, ultimately, to find it again in its other. Once again, it is Jean Hyppolite, perhaps more than any other commentator, who is at pains to place this ‘Unruhe’ at the heart of the Hegelian conception of dialectic:

The epithet that returns most often in the Hegelian dialectic is *unruhig*. This life is restlessness, restlessness of the Self which loses itself and finds itself again in its alterity; yet it is never coincidence with itself, for it is always other in order to be itself; it always posits itself in a determination, and always negates itself in order to be itself, because this determination, as such, is already its first negation. This is the being of man “who is never what he is, and is always what he is not”.³⁶

This ‘life’ is the ‘life of spirit’. To say that one must think ‘spirit’ as ‘subject’ means that one must think in terms of ‘Unruhe’. If Hyppolite’s interpretation of Hegel possesses a ‘key’ of any kind, it lies in ‘l’inquiétude’. At the beginning of his translation of the *Phenomenology*, he notes that ‘the dialectic of human disquiet is perhaps one of the fundamental intuitions of Hegelianism’; and again in *Genèse et structure*, he states that this ‘*unruhig*’ subject forms the ‘point of departure of Hegelian speculation’ from the earliest attempts at a systematic philosophy at Jena.³⁷ What kind of claim is being made here? Recall that Kojève posits ‘Recognition’ as the ‘key notion’ of Hegelianism, the final ‘satisfaction of Desire’ and ‘end of History’.³⁸ Like Kojève, Hyppolite emphasises the sense of violent conflict inherent to the historical development of spirit; the negativity of a subject that is never ‘coincidence with itself’; and the central importance of intersubjectivity and community in the *Phenomenology*. But instead of lifting out

one 'moment' to stand for the whole, Hyppolite foregrounds the immanent structure of the text which Hegel had outlined in the Introduction. He locates unrest at the dialectical heart of experience: 'It is this unrest or this instability of natural consciousness which *is* the dialectic of experience.'³⁹ In this way, he recognises that if spirit is to be conceived as subject, then the Hegelian epithet of 'unruhig' cannot describe an attribute of a self, as if were a matter of adding to some pre-constituted personality or identity. Instead, the restlessness of the subject is 'existential' in the sense of an infinite, impersonal movement that passes through all the 'moments' of the text, whether it (the subject) appears as consciousness, self-consciousness, community, a society, or 'world-spirit'.⁴⁰ That which is 'subject' is 'unruhig' in the sense that it 'is' nothing apart from this ceaseless movement of becoming, in all of its historical and cultural forms, which eventually joins all of them together as a recollected whole.

If the act of naming marks the co-belonging of memory and language at the origins of thought, and if thinking is defined by the sense of disquiet experienced in the uprooting and abandonment of meaning, then it is interesting that Hyppolite explicitly locates Hegel's figure of the poet as *the* instance of this origin. In the following section, then, we will show how these elements of Hyppolite's exposition - Adamic naming; the epic poet; 'l'inquiétude' - both inform and are transformed by Blanchot's presentation of literature and literary language in "La littérature et le droit à la mort".

ou : nous les poètes as
 regards l'inquiétude de
 (Wunruhe)

4.12 - *The ambiguity of literature*

After this detour through *Genèse et structure*, it is possible to read Blanchot's description of language in terms of 'l'inquiétude' in its proper context.⁴¹ In fact, Blanchot uses this word in "La littérature et le droit à la mort" to describe not only language in general, but also to denote an 'authentic' or 'essential' experience of literature. In this way, 'l'inquiétude' yields an important clue about the nature of

the relation to Hegel in his work as a whole. In spite of his ‘distance’ from Hegel’s text, he borrows from it what is (for Hyppolite, at least) a ‘fundamental’ concept, and diverts it in another direction. So what does ‘l’inquiétude’ mean for Blanchot? Hyppolite defines it as the structuring movement of, and therefore ‘our’ perspective on, the becoming of consciousness. Blanchot seizes upon this relation of disquiet and the negative in order to describe the constitution of literature:

[L]iterary language is made of disquiet, it is also made of contradictions. Its position is hardly stable and hardly solid.⁴²

Literature has a precarious state of existence. Indeed, for Blanchot, it is a wonder that it exists at all, as the title of an earlier work testifies - “Comment la littérature est-elle possible?”⁴³ This fragility is linked to a sense of impersonality. Just as Hyppolite discerns that Hegel’s restless scepticism carries out an existential intensification of experience only ‘for us’, and *not* for the consciousness that undergoes it, so Blanchot too locates inquiétude at a level that is constitutive of literary experience as such. But what kind of ‘experience’ is this?

It is to this end that the two Hegel passages are juxtaposed with references to Hölderlin and Mallarmé.⁴⁴ At first, the two poets appear to function as mediators of Hegelian concepts insofar as they are said to bear witness to ‘la merveille inquiétante’ concealed within the Adamic act of naming.⁴⁵ Yet they are much more than ‘literary’ or ‘poetic’ examples of a philosophical discourse, for it is this testimony that makes them representatives of ‘all those for whom poetry has the essence of poetry for its theme’.⁴⁶ In the determination of this ‘essence’ the identity of literature (as well as its relation to philosophy) is under negotiation. Literature has been placed at the heart of our experience of negativity in a way that prefigures Blanchot’s later claim, in *L’Espace littéraire* (1955), that Mallarmé’s ‘Hegelian vocabulary would merit no attention if it were not animated by an authentic experience, [...] that of the power of the negative.’⁴⁷ Like ‘essence’, the word ‘authentic’ here causes the relation between literature and philosophy to hang in the balance. If Blanchot borrows from Hegel in defining

language in terms of ‘unrest’ and ‘contradiction’, these terms also pass by way of the poets’ experience of poetry. It is only after positing poetry as an investigation into its own ‘essence’ that Blanchot introduces the passage about Adamic naming from the *Realphilosophie*. Indeed, one question that arises from this presentation is why Hegel, in *this* passage, is described as the ‘friend and fellow-spirit’ of Hölderlin. (Blanchot locates this relation ‘here’, ‘en cela’.) This reference to Hölderlin gives him a certain purchase upon Hegel’s text, enabling him to rewrite this passage from that ‘point of view’ to which both Hölderlin and Mallarmé are said to bear witness. Let us read the passage in context:

From this point of view, to speak is a strange right. Hegel, in a text from before *The Phenomenology*, here the friend and fellow spirit [prochain] of Hölderlin, wrote: “The first act, by which Adam made himself master of the animals, was to impose a name on them, that is to say that he negated them in their existence (as existents).” Hegel means that from this instant, the cat ceased to be a uniquely real cat, in order to become an idea as well. The meaning of speech demands, therefore, as a prelude to every word, to all speech, a sort of immense hecatomb, a preliminary flood, plunging all creation into a complete sea. God had created beings, but man had to annihilate them. It is in this way that they take on a meaning for him, and he creates them in his turn on the basis of this death in which they have disappeared; only that, in place of beings [êtres] and, as we say, existents [existants], there was only being [l’être], and man was condemned not to be able to approach anything and live anything save through the meaning that he had to create.⁴⁸

It is no exaggeration to say that the entire second half of “La littérature et le droit à la mort” unfolds from this passage. A number of aspects, therefore, are worth noting. The theme of biblical allegory is taken up in the description of language arising from out of ‘un déluge préalable’. The process of signification in the ‘Aufhebung’ of naming is imagined a priori and en bloc. The repetitions of

apriority and totality - 'prelude', 'preliminary', 'on the basis of'; 'all creation', 'every', 'complete sea', 'immense' - convey the sense of language as an originary fact: the very fact *that there is* language. In another essay from the same year Blanchot states that it is the 'example of poets like Mallarmé and Hölderlin' that gives us access to '*the original fact of language*', from which each interlocutor and every act of communication takes its 'sense and existence'.⁴⁹ This 'original fact' also echoes the sense of impersonal necessity expressed by 'Mnemosyne' in Hegel's example. Blanchot makes this sense explicit in the schema of *Genesis*: 'God had created beings, but man *had to* annihilate them.' The act of destruction-creation is the double imperative of our being finite. When he refers to a 'hecatomb', a sacrifice of huge proportions, it is as if what language gives man, in the wake of this necessary and prior oblivion, is already dead, sacrificed to the meaning 'that he *had to* create'.⁵⁰ If words give us access to the 'sense' of things, it is only on the condition of the prior absence of every determinate 'thing', for the existence of the name, as Hegel shows us, must involve the passing of the thing into meaninglessness. It is the moment of sheer universality, originary yet empty. For Hegel, let us recall, the memory of names has nothing to do with indicating 'past-ness' of an intuition or with resuscitating a past present as something 'in-itself'. The 'true meaning' of 'Gedächtnis' is simultaneously that of a thinking constitutive of names and their empty, mechanical repetition. In this sense, both allegories - the flood and Adam's 'first act' - portray a moment that is primordial and prodigal in equal measure. Blanchot seizes upon this dual determination as a way of extending Hegel's argument, with all logical necessity, into the sphere of literature.

Indeed, it is by repeating and deepening Hegelian negativity that Blanchot begins to displace the terms of Hegel's original argument. This fundamental determination of memory draws together language and finitude, binding the act of speaking and the fact of dying to one and the same movement. Blanchot suggests that the fundamental interrelation of language and mortality announces itself in the movement of exchange, such as dialogue and conversation. If an intimation of

death lies at the origin of all communication, binding together speaker and listener as well as words and things, then any apriority of language must lie in this articulation of discontinuity. Death is what comes ‘between us as the distance that separates us’; yet at the same time it is that which ‘prevents us from being separated’, for it contains within itself ‘the condition of all understanding’.⁵¹ The condition of finitude is nothing other than this constitutive separation of beings: it is the interval which irrevocably separates and individuates beings, whilst in that very separation it also makes possible every form of interpersonal relation and interaction. (In this respect, recall that Hegel’s most famous figure for the power of mediation is the act of ‘looking the negative *in the face*’.) Thus, death is ‘in’ language as the communicability of communication, as the spacing of all relation. In our opening chapter, we noted this kind of formulation in “L’amitié”, when Blanchot defines *discretion* as the ‘pure interval’ which measures out the distance ‘between’ friends: ‘this fundamental separation on the basis of which what separates becomes relation.’⁵² What the ultimate event of the friend’s death brings is of course the effacement of this communicating distance. Between these two deaths Blanchot locates the paradox of giving expressive form to the fundamental condition for expression, of communicating ‘communicability’, or of speaking about that ‘on the basis of which’ something like speech can take place. What we approach in such formulae is the limit of expression or communication - that is, the limit of sense which is its condition and origin. He repeatedly states that nothing dies as a result of being spoken, but rather that speech always signals the ‘*possibility* of this destruction’. The idea that death lies embedded within the word means that our speech is ‘a persistent *allusion* to such an event’; and because we always speak *from* such a vast reservoir of memory, so when we speak ‘death speaks’ *in* us.⁵³ The fact that there is language is itself a *sign*; every act of speech, an indication and a warning; every name, an allusion to the finite being of the one who speaks, of that which is named, and of everyone who hears these words.

‘Possibility’; ‘allusion’; ‘sign’: it is not a personal or direct threat of death that disturbs us when we speak. What ‘disquiets’ us in language is rather its

indirection. Even in the “Preface”, when Hegel looks the negative ‘in the face’, it is not a matter of an unmediated face-to-face relation. One cannot ‘*look* the negative *in the face*’ nor ‘tarry with it’ any more than one can hold death at an arm’s length. This most famous figure of speech in the *Phenomenology* installs a discourse on mediation by rhetoricizing death. The originariness of our relation to death must be articulated in the element of language, even as this relation *is itself this originary element*. Death becomes a rhetorical figure or trope with the same stroke that locates it at the origin of all figuration and troping. In this case, it is the trope of prosopopoeia that loans to the negative a ‘face’ into which we can ‘look’ [‘ins Angesicht schaut’], as well as a certain presence ‘by’ which we can ‘tarry’ or ‘dwell’ [‘bei ihm verweilt’].⁵⁴ What is abstract and inanimate is thus given human characteristics. This ventriloquism opens a subtle rhetorical gap into which the negative is able to slip and to *slip away*, for in the name absence and unreality are transformed into being and presence: ‘This tarrying is the magic power which turns it (back) into being [die es in das Sein umkehrt].’⁵⁵ Hegel knows that the ambiguity of reversal [Umgekehrt] remains whether one calls it ‘the negative’, ‘magical power’, ‘death’, ‘determinate negation’, or ‘unreality’. In short, one only succeeds in lending ‘it’ another ‘face’: whatever name we may ‘want’ to give it, it is still just another (human) mask, just another substitute presence for what is not there. The negative remains inextricably bound to the inversions of language.

Hegel introduces the theme of negativity through prosopopoeia. Only through this figuration can death ‘*speak*’, can it ‘face’ or show itself to us as the ‘possibility’ of destruction. But what can it say? What can it *show* us? It says and shows precisely *nothing*. For death is no thing: it is not something that can be an object for consciousness; yet it is precisely from this ‘nothing’ that speech and consciousness first spring. If the task of determining the originary relation of language and negativity itself requires words, metaphors, and figures, then these tropes (by which it turns to gaze upon itself) form an inextinguishable remainder (for which there is no word) which will always confront us at the reflexive limit of language. Speculative thinking lives off this remainder within linguistic

reflexivity: the 'life' of spirit lives on through this relation to death. Hyppolite displays such a rhetorical turn when he refers to the limitation of language as the 'sign' of 'the human Logos': the relation of sign to concept is that of the word to 'the Word'. Thus, Hegel cultivates and incorporates the aporia of language as the power of the sign. This is the 'speculative spirit' or 'divine nature' of language which intimates the essential reversibility of 'being' and 'nothing'. If nothingness is always 'of something' - that is, if it takes on a determinate meaning in the interaction between speakers, sign, and referent - then the word is also *more than* a sign referring to 'something' absent. With the word, meaning is present. To posit something (to speak) is to suspend, in advance, everything except the movement of positing as such. For Hegel, it follows that every sign is posited as a meaning *and* is itself 'the process of meaningfulness'.⁵⁶ Speculative inversion marks every instance of language *as* the process of pure subjective presentation itself. With the birth of meaning, this movement of inversion *never* ends.

This is *the* lesson that Blanchot draws from Hegel. If he states that literary language is made of 'unease' and 'contradictions', it is because the infinite restlessness of the negative, which is at the root of all language, is exposed most acutely in our relation to the literary work. How? Is this incessant reversibility of the negative what he has in mind when he locates the 'disquieting marvel' in the act of naming? Is this the 'essence of poetry' to which Hölderlin and Mallarmé are said to bear witness? What is clear is that an answer to these questions is no longer possible in terms of a substantial essence or a stable identity. Literature itself comes to be defined in terms of an anonymous, impersonal existence which precedes any such determinations: *ambiguity*. Indeed, it is when Blanchot states that literature 'is language turning [se fait] into ambiguity' that we realise quite how far his reading of Hegel has taken us.⁵⁷ Whereas Bataille sought to repeat and invert Kojève's dialectic of Recognition in order to collapse it back into a previously discarded 'moment', Blanchot's technique of repetition is to force the entire structural movement of the Hegelian text to stutter and open onto another direction. It is by understanding the interplay between memory, language and

negativity within Hegel's dialectic in terms of ambiguity that Blanchot carves out a place for literature. Thus, the relation of negativity and language's 'divine nature' is repeated in the form of an 'ultimate ambiguity' which is both the opening of meaning and the 'unstable point' at which literature exposed to an 'indiscriminate change of meaning and of sign'.⁵⁸ This exposure occurs, and remains, as the condition for any determinate signification. Hence it is not simply a matter of being unable to decide between two (or more) conflicting meanings: ambiguity is not reducible to a polysemy that would operate according to the structural laws of a given symbolical system. Instead, as Serge Doubrovsky correctly observes, ambiguity is *existential* in the sense that 'it announces the very being of man'.⁵⁹ For Blanchot, ambiguity describes the condition of man haunted by the effort to remember what is was that disappeared in order for language - his 'admirable power' - to appear.

Ambiguity is the source of the 'infinite disquiet' that man finds in language.⁶⁰ When one asks after what has been lost 'in the beginning' in order for there to be communication and understanding, one touches upon the 'torment' of all language: this is the necessary 'lack' which makes language what it is, and which haunts us because we 'cannot even name it' without turning it into 'something' (else).⁶¹ But in that case, how is it possible to *name* 'ambiguity'? Blanchot repeatedly refers to it in terms of 'an unstable point' or 'a point of instability', yet this solution only appears to throw up yet more problems, because to describe this 'unstable point' as '*something present* in the work' risks fixing ambiguity as a substantial or determinate 'presence'. However, this sense of ambiguity within the work Regardless of the form, content, or subject-matter of the work, ambiguity is the fact that there is 'something present in the work' which, without being dependent upon any of its qualities or characteristics, is always 'at work' altering and transforming its values. This 'point of instability' represents a relentless oscillation between negative and positive values, between 'distress' and 'hope', 'disintegration' and 'construction':

Would there be, hidden within the intimacy of speech, a friendly and hostile force, an arm made for constructing and for destroying, which would act behind signification and not upon it? Must one suppose a meaning of the meaning of words [un sens du sens des mots] which, whilst determining it, would envelop this determination with an ambiguous indetermination poised between the yes and the no [en instance entre le oui et le non]?⁶²

If ‘instability’ is what accompanies meaning in the word, at once protecting its exact signification and yet exposing it to the ever-imminent possibility of a change of meaning and value, what meaning or value does it possess? It is precisely this ‘meaning of the meaning of words’ which has been the elusive ‘object’ of Blanchot’s questions since he introduced the ‘disquieting marvel’ of naming. Ambiguity designates a *reserve* of excess meaning, ‘a meaning of the meaning of words’ which introduces the possibility of determination only alongside its negation in ‘indetermination’: ‘a friendly and hostile force’; ‘an arm made for constructing and for destroying’; ‘poised between the yes and the no’. Ambiguity represents the simultaneous opening and suspension of meaning, and in this it gestures towards what Blanchot will later think under the heading of ‘le neutre’, but only by way of the ‘work’ of discretion which will concern us in the final section of this chapter.

4.2 - ‘Almost friendship’: discretion and the work of art

In the previous section we have shown why Blanchot’s treatment of Hegel is not as reliant upon Kojève as Bataille’s inversion of the dialectic. Indeed, it is at times difficult to see whether Blanchot actually has what one could call a ‘reading’ of Hegel. If it is possible to trace ‘Hegelian’ concepts, figures or motifs within his work - as in “La littérature et le droit à la mort”, where many of these elements appear for the first time - it is in the recognition that they are subject to a certain

displacement, or rewriting. By the same token, however, these ‘borrowings’ from the *Phenomenology* (and from Hyppolite’s commentary in particular) demonstrate how deeply Blanchot’s own thinking is immersed in the language of Hegel’s dialectic. In fact, this immersion seems to deepen even as his explicit distance from Hegel is extended during the 1950’s and early 1960’s - essays which will comprise *L’Espace littéraire* and *Le Livre à venir*, as well as appearing in *L’Entretien infini* and *L’Amitié*. It is to this subsequent work that we will now return in order to show how extensive this process of rewriting Hegel becomes, and to unravel further the link between friendship, discretion and the work of art.

So far we have intimated that Hölderlin’s influence upon Blanchot is, in some way, central to this process. It will be argued here that Blanchot’s reading of Hegel is best described as ‘Hölderlinian’.⁶³ It is no coincidence that he returns time and again to Hölderlin as *the* figure of ‘literary’ discretion. Indeed, if Blanchot’s appropriation of Hegel is accompanied by a figuration of Hölderlin, we may note that Hyppolite already sketches such a parallel in his discussion of “Kunstreligion”: ‘The gods, the poet Hölderlin said, acquire not existence but self-consciousness from the fact that man names them.’⁶⁴ In fact, this parallel runs far deeper, for Hyppolite goes on to argue that if Hegel’s dialectic of religion as art ‘looks to recover the spiritual sense of Hellenic fantasy and myths’, it is because his interest in ‘the religious sense of ancient tragedy’ must be traced to the influence of Hölderlin, ‘his *co-disciple and friend*’.⁶⁵ Consequently, when Hyppolite points to the continuity between Hegel’s examples of Adam’s naming of the animals and the epic poet (the one who ‘names the gods’) in terms of ‘Mnemosyne’, one has to acknowledge an implicit reference to Hölderlin’s hymn of that title. This reference is echoed by Blanchot’s comment that ‘here’, in the *Realphilosophie*, Hegel is Hölderlin’s ‘*friend and fellow spirit*’. What, if anything, do these remarks by Hyppolite and Blanchot tell us about the way in which either one reads Hegel on the question of the artwork? Indeed, if this echo is to have anything more than emblematic significance we will have to dig deeper into the

way that Blanchot treats the Hegelian text, and in particular the narrative of the pastness of art that it presents.

The epic poet is, of course, an integral moment of Hegel's dialectic of religion as art. This linkage of art and religion dominates his thesis on the artwork as 'a thing of the past' ['ein Vergangenes'] in *Aesthetics*.⁶⁶ In this section, however, our attention will be drawn by a passage from the *Phenomenology* in which Hegel places a speculative figure of the museum, a muse-like figure of 'Er-innerung', at the centre of this relation. It is this memorialisation of art in the museum that draws Blanchot into a subtle rewriting of the dialectic presented in "Kunstreligion"; but it interests us above all because, by indirectly calling attention to the mediating role of the museum in our present relation to works of art from the past, Hegel deploys an enigmatic confluence of friendship and the work of art. So where does friendship lie in Hegel's dialectical ordinance of art, religion, and philosophy? The answer is simple. It lies firmly on the side of the recollected and memorialised 'pastness' of the work of art; its spirituality is bound up with the externality of representation. Does Blanchot pick up on this aspect of Hegel's dialectic? Although not analysed for itself by Blanchot, this confluence of art and friendship can be traced from Hegel's text through Blanchot's account of the museum in relation to the modern fate of the work of art. In this way, the memorial figure of the museum allows us to open up the relation between friendship, discretion and the work in Blanchot's oeuvre. What we have been working towards in the course of the preceding chapters is an understanding of the centrality and repetition of this figure of friendship. The 'work' of friendship qua discretion passes by way of this confluence of memory, death and the fate of art which Blanchot finds in Hegel.

4.21 - The 'friendly destiny' of presentation

The theme and scope of this final section are given by a lengthy passage from the *Phenomenology* which, written well in advance of his lectures on aesthetics, addresses precisely this relation with the work of art as 'a thing of the past'. The passage in question holds a pivotal place in the dialectic of religion: it gathers together and unifies the moments which lead up to the appearing of "The Revealed Religion" (Christianity) and the subsequent accession to "ABSOLUTE KNOWING" (and the advent of philosophy). Placed at the beginning of "Revealed Religion", this passage gives an account of the dissolution and re-incorporation of "Religion in the Form of Art" through the moments of the 'abstract', the 'living', and the 'spiritual' works of art. In this way, it addresses our relation to art as a relation with 'a thing of the past' insofar as the end of art is shown to be inextricably bound up with the end of this form of religion. We will cite the passage in three parts, in order keep track of the principal questions which concern us.

In the condition of right, therefore, the ethical world and the religion of that world are submerged and lost in the comic consciousness, and the unhappy consciousness is the knowledge of this *total* loss. It has lost both the worth it attached to its immediate personality and the worth attached to its personality as mediated, as *thought* [gedachten]. Trust in the eternal laws of the gods has vanished, and the oracles, which pronounced on particular questions, are dumb. The statues are now only cadavers [Leichname] from which the living soul has flown, just as the hymns are words from which belief has gone. The tables of the gods provide no spiritual food and drink, and in his games and festivals man no longer recovers the joyful consciousness of his unity with the divine. The works of the muse now lack the power of the spirit, for the spirit has gained its certainty of itself from the crushing of gods and men. [...]

At this point, Hegel's recapitulation becomes a matter for 'us', 'now'. But *when* is this 'now'? It is *after* the realisation of this 'total loss' of the artwork which can no longer 'live' nor replenish us with any spiritual sustenance. Hegel locates this moment 'in dem Rechtszustande', in the world of merely abstract right and individualism which comes after the 'ethical world' ['Sittlichkeit'] of the Greeks, and which represents its descent into unhappy consciousness. Yet the 'we' that identifies these structural moments of the text as 'for us' - 'we', the readers of the *Phenomenology* - is not figured by the 'grief and longing' of this form of self-consciousness.⁶⁷ Hence, when the work of art falls away from the grace of spirit - from the muse, Mnemosyne, who originally gives the epic poet his voice - it is not without the possibility of a 'higher mode' (or a greater depth) of self-consciousness. But what becomes of these works of art?

[...] Now they have become what they are for us - beautiful fruit already picked from the tree, which a friendly destiny has offered us [ein freundliches Schicksal reichte sie uns dar], as a young girl might present [präsentiert] us with fruit. It cannot give us the actual life in which they existed, not the tree that bore them, not the earth and the elements which constituted their substance, not the climate which gave them their peculiar character, nor the cycle of the changing seasons that governed the process of their growth. So destiny does not restore [gibt] their world to us along with the works of antique Art, it gives not the spring and summer of the ethical life in which they blossomed and ripened, but only the shrouded recollection [die eingehüllte Erinnerung] of that actuality. Our act of enjoying them is therefore not an act of divine worship through which our consciousness might come to its perfect, fulfilled truth; rather, it is an external activity - the wiping-off of some drops of rain or specks of dust from these fruits, so to speak - one which erects an intricate scaffolding of the dead elements of their outward existence [außerlichen Existenz], the language, the historical circumstances, etc., in place of the inner elements of the ethical life which environed, engendered and inspired them. And all

this we do, not in order to enter into their very life but only to possess an idea of them in our imagination [in sich vorzustellen]. [...]

With every passing moment and every additional historical fact, we get further away from the 'life' of such works. We remain outside them, whilst the sole path of access at our disposal - *memory* and *imagination* - only conceals their 'actual world' with a complex structure of 'dead elements'. Such 'external activity' includes every form of historical and linguistic representation; everything that may be put 'in place of' ['an die Stelle'] or 'stand for' the 'inner elements' of its originally creative 'life' and 'truth'. This knowledge we have of works of art from the past is precisely the *death* of these works, whatever our intentions or techniques: they are always already dead in our living relation to them, and already forgotten (or 'shrouded') through the very act of recollection. But things are never so melancholic for Hegel. There is still work to be done.

The opposition between 'Vorstellung' - the external existence of language - and the inner inspiration ['begeistenden'] and fruition of the work of art governs this entire passage, even as it comes to be inverted. The figures of a 'friendly destiny' and the young girl at first correlate with the externality of representation; yet the very superficiality of this 'friendliness' will lead to the 'gathering' or 'summing up' ['zusammenfaßen'] of the artwork into a higher mode. It is the moment when these works, for the first time, appear in their own right simply as works of art. This is where the passage turns back to the future, back to the 'now' and to 'us':

[...] But, just as the girl who offers us the plucked fruits is more than the Nature which directly provides them - the Nature diversified into their conditions and elements, the tree, air, light, and so on - because she sums all this up [zusammenfaßt] in a higher mode, in the gleam of her self-conscious eye and in the gesture with which she offers them; so, too, the spirit of the destiny that presents [darbietet] us with those works of art is more than the ethical life and the actual world of that nation, for it is the

interiorisation and recollection [die *Er-innerung*] in us of the spirit which in them was still only *outwardly* manifested; it is the spirit of the tragic destiny which gathers all those individual gods and attributes of the substance into one pantheon, into the spirit that is itself conscious of itself as spirit [als Geist selbst bewußten Geist].⁶⁸

This 'But...' marks the moment of inversion. That which is limited to *Vorstellung*, to the external representation of works, turns out to be 'more' in relation to these works than the 'inner' life from which they took their inspiration and sustenance. But 'more' *what*, precisely? In offering us what is external, this 'destiny' stands as the repetition and re-incorporation of what was expressed in the works of art; and as a result, these works are no longer limited to a being a particular expression of an immediate 'life' or 'world'. They are brought together in a new relation: they are gathered into a single spirit that is now internally mediated and conscious of itself as such. In short, the work is 'more' itself: it is offered to 'us' *as a work*, as something mediated. But this change is far from a simple revelation of essence. It is just that mediated relation is, by definition, more than the immediate. The 'friendly destiny' is this 'gesture of offering' ['der darreichenden Gebärde'], this process of mediation in which the work is 'presented' or held out as such, for the first time.

We can break down this lengthy passage, then, into three distinct moments: the forgetful dissolution or 'total loss' of spirit; external representation in imagination; and interiorising recollection of presentation. These three moments constitute the development of this 'friendly destiny' whose eventual recollection, gathering and unifying of divine substance into a single 'pantheon' marks the 'tragic' self-consciousness of *spirit as spirit*. So how are we read the epithetic addition, 'freundlich', which first qualifies this 'tragic' destiny of self-conscious spirit? How is this gesture at once *more* superficial and *more* profound than the actual life which gave rise to the work? What is the relation between this 'friendly destiny' and friendship? Is it even legitimate to translate 'freundlich' as

‘friendly’?⁶⁹ Answering these questions requires care since with Hegel it is never a matter of a random juxtaposition of the ethical and the aesthetic. Art and religion are fundamentally interwoven in the form of the work: the ‘aesthetic’ here can only bear an ethical content in the shape of a ‘universal work’ [‘das allgemeine Werk’].⁷⁰ Hegel writes: ‘If we ask which is the *actual* spirit that has the consciousness of its absolute essence in the religion of art, we find that it is the *ethical* or the *true* spirit’.⁷¹ Just as this spirit likewise finds its true expression *only* in the work of art, so the externalisation of the ethical exposes it to the same process of dissolution.

There are two principal issues at stake here. First, there is the link between the appearance of this ‘friendly destiny’ and the ‘loss of art’, that moment when art becomes a ‘thing of the past’ for us. How can Hegel’s epithet help us understand the nature of this ‘loss’? Second, this figure brings with it the institutional memory of the museum.⁷² This ‘destiny’, then, would be the self-consciousness of the death of art. But why might such self-consciousness be ‘freundlich’? Does it stand for some kind of recollective love or devotion? One thinks of the ‘gallery of images’ at the end of the *Phenomenology*, where Hegel retrospectively places ‘Erinnerung’ at the heart of the self-presentation of spirit, a ‘slow-moving succession’ [‘Aufeinanderfolge’] of shapes whose presentation grants us our perspective (‘für uns’).⁷³ How are these figures of the museum and the gallery linked? It is this presentation of the work of art over time that connects the loss of art and the museum. Indeed, it might be pointed out that the museum is what Hegel means by ‘a friendly destiny’: the museum conceived as a liberal accommodation and prodigious accumulation of works of art, or artifacts, divorced from their ‘living world’, lost to one another and to us save as ‘something past’. Such a fate is indeed both ‘friendly’ - gracious; genial - and ‘tragic’. Hence, it is not simply a matter of uncovering what Hegel meant by ‘a friendly destiny’, but a question of exploring how this figure feeds off the idea of a relation between friendship and the presentation of the work of art.

4.22 - *The museum, friendship and the work of art*

The concept of ‘the work’, or rather the concept *as* ‘the work of the negative’, in the *Phenomenology* (and the *Realphilosophie*) installs the question of the work of art deep within the structure of Hegel’s speculative thought.⁷⁴ The figures of Adam and the epic poet both figures stand for the first, external existence of spirit. They are both linked to the ‘earliest’ form of language, the act of naming; and so both represent the work of representation and productive memory carried out under the sign of ‘Mnemosyne’. It is in the figure of ‘friendly destiny’, as the presentative gesture which gives us the work of art *as such*, that a relation between the work, memory and friendship is revealed in Hegel. As we discovered in Chapter 3, the relation of friendship has a transitional role both as a moment within the dialectic of spirit and with respect to the development of Hegel’s philosophy as a whole. For the later Hegel, friendship and love represent the fully articulated and actual concept of freedom as it is expressed in the ‘form’ of *feeling*: they are the sign that we ‘already possess’ this freedom, albeit in a *less realised* form.⁷⁵ It is by reversing this diminution of friendship as a limited form of ‘Recognition’ that Bataille exploits and undermines Kojève’s ‘Hegelianism’. Yet he can do this only by drawing upon Hegel’s earliest work on love and religion, which portray friendship as an essential aspect in the birth of Christianity. In “The Positivity of the Christian Religion”, for example, the communion of the Last Supper is the gesture of a ‘voluntary friendship’ [‘der Freundschaft freiwillig’] between men and their god.⁷⁶ In these texts, love and friendship are purely positive insofar as they represent the spontaneous expression of feeling, the overriding of moral duty and reflective judgment, and ultimately form the principle of human community which possesses the dialectical power of absorption and unification.⁷⁷ This becomes Bataille’s ‘general’ dialectic of the ‘sovereign operation’. Moreover, we can see that Hegel identifies friendship with the unification of the gods into a pantheon and the absorption of these pantheons

as modalities of the same divine love. Is it to this movement of gathering and offering - a collective interiorisation of merely external differences - that the epithet 'friendly' refers? Perhaps. Almost certainly. If anything, it is in the figure of 'friendly destiny' that something in the order of this relation of friendship and religion still remains in the *Phenomenology*.

The status of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* itself is open to dispute. It occupies a place at once apart from and at the heart of Hegel's work as a whole. Bataille was right to refer to its project as 'only a beginning and hence a definitive failure', for although it was first conceived as the first volume of a 'System of Science', and in spite of plans for editing the text, Hegel was never able to reintegrate it into his later philosophical system.⁷⁸ This ambiguous status is never more apparent than at the end of the text, when the final chapter, "ABSOLUTE KNOWING", opens onto these lines from Schiller's poem, "Die Freundschaft": 'aus dem Kelche dieses Geisterreiches / schäumt ihm seine Unendlichkeit.'⁷⁹ What should we make of this citation and its placement? These words from "Friendship" are given a privileged position in the *Phenomenology*, for they appear precisely at the moment when the entire dialectic of spirit is recollected and unfolded as its own absolute. Furthermore, Hegel famously alters Schiller's verse by replacing the concept of divine Being as an eternal, transcendent alterity ('Freundlos'; 'kein Gleiches') with the temporal self-mediation of spirit: the final line, 'Schäumt ihm - *die* Unendlichkeit', is rewritten to show that the infinity of spirit is a product of time, 'schäumt ihm *seine* Unendlichkeit'.⁸⁰ That which, in Schiller, is 'friendless' and 'without equal' (save 'eternity'), is no longer 'lifeless and alone' for Hegel: absolute spirit becomes historical and history absolute. This identity is nothing less than the 'goal' of the *Phenomenology*: 'absolute knowing, or spirit that knows itself as spirit'.⁸¹ Even if Hegel's 'friendly destiny' indicates a certain refusal of friendship on his part, this perverse quotation throws up two further problems. First, it uncovers a residual ambiguity in the relation of philosophy (*qua* the prosaic presentation of 'scientific knowing') to poetry and literature. Second, it

binds the idea of friendship into the relation of memory [‘Erinnerung’] and representation.

If there is a relation between the poet’s muse, ‘Mnemosyne’, the ‘friendly destiny’ of the museum, and the concept of friendship in general, it lies with *memory*. It is the very ‘friendliness’ of the destiny of art, the very benevolence of the gesture of presentation that defines ‘our’ relation to the works of art from the past as ‘more than’ that of the culture which produced them. They are present as such for the first time in human memory. In this way, the museum lies at the heart of Hegel’s conception of the modernity of art. Blanchot takes up this question of the museum in three essays published between 1950 and 1957: “Naissance de l’art” (1955), “Le musée, l’art et le temps” (1950-1), and “Le mal du musée” (1957) are collected together at the beginning of *L’Amitié*. The collection ends with a coda - “L’amitié” (the 1962 essay which formed the focus of our first chapter). It is not by accident that the structure of Blanchot’s book is bracketed by questions of art and of friendship. But what, if anything, links the fate of art to ‘the death of the friend’ in this collection?

The first essay in the book, “Naissance de l’art”, is a review of Bataille’s *Lascaux, ou la naissance de l’art*. Blanchot introduces his discussion of the book by repeating the following passage, to which we referred in the previous chapter:

If we go into the cave at Lascaux, a strong feeling grips us which we do not have in front of the display cases where the remnants of the first human fossils or their stone instruments are exhibited. It is the same feeling of presence - of clear and burning presence - that masterpieces of every epoch give us.⁸²

Blanchot asks *why* we have this ‘feeling of presence’: do these first works of art reveal to us the ‘first man’ for whom we always seem to be searching? He goes on to show that the reason why ‘this need for the origin’ cannot be satisfied is bound up with the fact that art puts us in relation to a fundamental *absence* of an origin.⁸³

He does not, however, continue to quote Bataille's immediate linking of this feeling of presence to friendship as the passionate 'interrogation' of the work: 'the beauty of human works addresses friendship, the pleasure of friendship'.⁸⁴ Why does Blanchot erase, or at least elide, these lines about our love of beauty? A clue would seem to lie in the way that he refers to another mention of friendship in Bataille's book. When Bataille posits the evident yet unverifiable link between the 'procession' of animal figures on the cave walls and 'some magical intention... a profound, but enigmatic communication', he gives this relation, too, the name of 'friendship'.⁸⁵ Blanchot in turn refers to this 'mysterious relation' as a 'relation of interest, of conspiracy, of complicity and almost friendship [presque d'amitié]'.⁸⁶ *Almost* friendship. Recall that Bataille attributes a *direct* relation between friendship and the work of art: friendship is nothing less than the 'feeling' of 'clear and burning presence' through which the beauty of the work of art addresses us. Blanchot not only distances his own text from this identification of friendship with the immediacy of presence, he withdraws it ('almost') from Bataille's. The relation of friendship and the work of art is indirect, in a manner that echoes the sense of discretion defined in "L'amitié".

The question of friendship arises in this group of three essays on two counts: they are assembled as the first texts in a work called *L'Amitié*; and insofar as this relation is half-withdrawn from Blanchot's opening commentary of Bataille. Yet what they all share with Bataille's book is a thoroughgoing negotiation with Hegel's dialectic of art. In the original version of "Le mal du musée", for example, Blanchot states that his review of Malraux's *Le Musée imaginaire* is simply a way of addressing its unacknowledged debt to Hegel:

There appears to me no doubt that Malraux's endeavour takes place within the Hegelian perspective, via the ambiguous search for all that art wants to be for itself and of which the Museum is like the impersonal consciousness, a realised and yet unreal consciousness. Hence this research

is not carried by Malraux's own force alone, but by everything today which still seems to open our times to Hegel.⁸⁷

When Blanchot writes (of) 'Malraux', therefore, there can be 'no doubt' that he reads his work, as he writes in "Le musée, l'art et le temps", in terms of 'the movements of a thought whose principles are belong to Hegel'.⁸⁸ Why bother with going through *Malraux* to get to Hegel? It is undoubtedly Malraux's position of influence upon contemporary French culture - he had served as a minister of state in General de Gaulle's post-war government - which makes him the locus of Blanchot's analysis.⁸⁹ However, 'this research' into the sense and place of the museum is no more a question of Malraux's work representing a collective will or national identity, than it is a matter of his 'own' intentions. Instead, Blanchot states that the possibility of this work is 'carried [...] by *everything today* which still seems to open our times to Hegel'. The contemporaneity of Hegel is linked to this comparison of the museum with 'an *impersonal* consciousness', and not to an individual personality or a collective identity. How should we understand this 'consciousness'? Is it the force of history, or 'the End of History'? Is he referring to technology, perhaps? What is at stake in this sense of impersonality?

Blanchot's reference to the contemporaneity of Hegel's thought does not entail that his own work is 'Hegelian', or 'anti-Hegelian' for that matter. On the contrary, he sets out to trace the movement of thought which determines the art of 'our times', and which returns 'each one of us' (including Malraux) to Hegelian 'principles'. This 'thought' is the dialectic by which the total impoverishment of art coincides with the unveiling of its true 'essence'. It is laid bare in "Le musée, l'art et le temps":

When one indicates that today, for the first time, art has somehow doubly unveiled itself, the words "for the first time" have an obvious authority: they indicate that a conclusion has been reached, and this conclusion, even if it does not shut down time, nonetheless permits the observer who speaks in the name of this first time to speak of time as an enclosed truth.⁹⁰

That which defines the position of art 'today' is this uninterrogated determination of historical closure: the art of 'our epoch' is set apart from every other epoch as 'the radiating world of "the first time"'.⁹¹ When we speak 'in the name of' such an event - whether it is "the first time" or 'the End of History' - we give ourselves a position of authority on the basis of what is 'obvious' or '(self-)evident'. Blanchot readily grants that we can all grasp the idea that the work of art appears as such, 'for the first time', only when it becomes, in Hegel's words, 'ein Vergangenes', 'a thing of the past'.⁹² It is that moment in history when art no longer fulfills a divine service or even worldly function; when it no longer means 'for us', today, what it had meant to our predecessors. This is the sense of 'our epoch' which Hegel sets out in the figure of 'friendly destiny'. For Blanchot, too, this is the evidence brought forth by the modern work of art, cut off from its religious vocation, cut off from the world, and prey to the demands of ideology and the market alike. But it cannot be admitted without questioning its very evidence.

Blanchot's central question is deceptively simple: *why* is it that, 'at the very moment when the absolute tends to take the form of history', at the very moment of its disappearance, 'art appears for the first time as a search [une recherche] in which something essential is at stake'?⁹³ What can this state of affairs tell us about the nature of the work of art? And where does this nature or 'essence' lie?

And where - other than in the divine, other than in the world - will the work find the space in which it might take root [s'appuyer] and reserve itself? This is also the question which awakens the work to the experience of its origin, as if, in the research of art whose essence has become its concern [souci], it hoped to find henceforth its support [appui] and its reserve.⁹⁴

Such questions admit of no straightforward answers to such questions, for if it is a matter of understanding what has never existed before ('for the first time'), it is just as much a matter of grasping what has always existed *behind* the work, as it were; that is, the 'space' in which it finds its 'reserve'. Like the "question" of

literature in “La littérature et le droit à la mort”, the question of the work of art becomes the very mode in which the work ‘is’. The ‘search’ for what comes before it, and gives birth to it, defines the very existence of the work of art. Does this form of ontological displacement avoid the question by folding art back into itself? The idea that art is concerned with its own ‘essence’ certainly prompts such suspicions. But it is worth noting the caution with which Blanchot defines this ‘experience of its origin’: it is ‘*as if*’ the work had ‘*hoped*’ to place itself, or ‘reserve’ itself in this reflexive movement of ‘research’. When he goes on to describe the ontological condition of the work of art, in *L’Espace littéraire*, in terms of ‘être en souci de l’art’, he does not mean that art is only concerned with itself, but rather that the work ‘is in a condition of concern’ about what makes it a work.⁹⁵ Why is the work concerned with its own status as a ‘work’?

At the heart of his writings during the 1950’s is a deepening of the interrogation of the concept of ‘the work’ which characterised *La Part du feu*. It draws on his claim, in “La littérature et le droit à la mort”, that the writer or the artist ‘works’ just like everyone else, only ‘to an eminent degree’, insofar as what he produces is ‘the work par excellence’.⁹⁶ The flip-side of this statement is revealed to be the inescapability of history. If we wish to think of the artist as one who works against contingency and the ephemeral, it also must be the case that this effort of memory lies at the heart of all ‘human work [which] has the same power of becoming historical’.⁹⁷ In these three essays on art, Blanchot asserts that the artist does not exist beyond his work, and that if the one who dedicates himself to art belongs to it in some way, it is only insofar as *art belongs to itself alone*. In this way, he counters Malraux’s persistent privileging of the artist as the very model of the creator. Instead, the artist is produced by the work, the doer by the doing. The concept of the work cannot escape its Hegelian determination. It is vital, then, to hear in this phrase, ‘être en souci de l’art’, an echo of the ‘disquiet’ analysed in “La littérature et le droit à la mort”. The restless becoming of art appears to be what the museum communicates to us:

Art is no longer to be found in the “perfection” of *a* work; it is *nowhere*, and if the Museum has meaning, it is because it seems to be this “nowhere” whose disquiet [l’inquiétude] and powerful negation it conveys.⁹⁸

What has happened in order for art to be ‘*nowhere*’ [‘*nulle part*’]? What happens to this ‘disquiet and powerful negation’ when it is mediated by the ‘meaning’ [‘sens’] of the museum? To answer these questions we need to follow Blanchot’s re-writing of Hegel’s dialectic of art.

When he treats of Malraux’s conception of the ‘imaginary Museum’, Blanchot follows its ‘analogy’ with Hegel’s narrative of the fate of art *qua* religion. Although a relation to Hegel’s historical thesis on art is not yet made explicit in the analyses of the literary work in *La Part du feu*, it was already implicit in the way that he introduced Hegel (in “La littérature et le droit à la mort”) as ‘a man who had the highest idea of art that one can form of it, since he saw how art can become religion and religion art’.⁹⁹ We can acknowledge Hegel’s claim that art first appears in the form of religion; or rather, that art *is* religion. But what does this identity entail? The meaning and function of work of art lies in the service of the ‘invisible realities around which the community perpetuates itself’.¹⁰⁰ For Hegel, this relation was consummated by the Greeks, and is denied to us, for we can only grasp these works if we uproot them from the meaning of a community. However, Blanchot points out that a different conception of the ‘life of the work’ is already in place *within it*. This is the abstract ‘life of spirit’: the ‘admirable power’ of change and transformation that puts death to work in a movement of dissolution and resurrection. In other words, it is the work of the epic poet who names the gods because he is *already separated* from them. Even when art is religion, and not yet ‘only itself’, it is still irreducibly bound to a process of (self-)estrangement which already ‘puts it closest to its own truth (without art knowing it)’.¹⁰¹ The process of estrangement does not represent the end for art, therefore, for this relation to exteriority is an ‘essential’ part of the presentation of the work

of art from its very beginnings: it is simply not yet recognised *as such*. But the question remains: does art become impoverished or deficient to the extent that it is ‘only itself’, removed from its religious function?

If the manifestation of the work of art as such is inseparable from that of the museum, it is because the impoverishment of art is also the unveiling of itself to itself in its totality: art is ‘reduced to itself [...] it abandons everything that it was not and it extends itself to everything it has been’.¹⁰² Therefore, if the museum is the site of art’s memory, it is a fundamentally ambiguous one: on the one hand, it gathers together artworks into an ‘eternal present’, giving them the ‘meaning’ and ‘direction’ [‘sens’] of historical spirit in its self-presence (in the form of the History of Art); yet on the other hand, it also affirms an incessant reworking of art as a whole, giving it over to a movement of transformation and becoming.¹⁰³ As a result, this site of memory is not simply a place in which one encounters works of art from every age and epoch. Instead, it is in the fundamental nature of this site that it both conserve *and* transform art *as a whole* in a movement of repetition and becoming. It is for precisely this reason that the museum is the site of the impoverishment *and* the innovation of modern art, often vilified in equal measure for destroying art and for shoring it up against such destruction.

This doubleness is perhaps *the* most important characteristic of the museum. It stands as the image for the new (absolute) freedom of the work of art, the ‘absence’ of any ‘world’ or ‘history’; and at the same time, it also constitutes art as a whole and ‘gives birth to a history’.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the entire premise for “Le mal du musée” is the idea that the historical development of techniques of reproduction - ranging from the postcard to the CD-Rom - has raised the museum to the level of ‘a new category’.¹⁰⁵ This is Malraux’s ‘musée imaginaire’: the sum total of such reproductions of works of art, which Blanchot describes as being endlessly enriched by an irreversible and ‘prodigious generosity’.¹⁰⁶ This technological ‘destiny’ of the museum, for Blanchot, renders both lamentation and celebration inappropriate, for technology ‘gives us art’ on the basis of ‘a power of

domination that frightens some people, excites others, but cannot be halted by anyone.’¹⁰⁷ Yet hostility to the ‘imaginary museum’ finds its justification in a suspicion of technology which Blanchot traces back to the Plato’s disdain for the image and the written word. ‘It is not a question of printing, but of writing.’¹⁰⁸ In an argument that prefigures Derrida’s work on this question, Blanchot shows that writing, like the machine, is mistrusted as that which merely ‘repeats’ or ‘prolongs’. It is this ‘mistrust’ which reappears as a fear for ‘the destruction of art’: the regret that if only the work was intimately bound up with ‘the non-repeatable essence of being’, it would lie beyond the technological reach of reproductions.¹⁰⁹ In a sense, this mistrust is well-placed, insofar as the ‘imaginary museum’ does not have any ‘real’ place. It represents ‘art’ in the n^{th} degree of abstraction: ‘this space which is not one, a locality without location [un milieu sans lieu], a world outside the world’.¹¹⁰ Yet, for Blanchot, regardless of whether this disorientation of art is to be feared or celebrated, the new technologies of the museum demand to be thought because they force us to ask again what constitutes a work of art, what makes a work *a work*.

What the technological advent of the ‘imaginary museum’ brings with it - the dissolution of the ‘*original*, organic link between work and painter’; the possible disappearance of the ‘artist’ himself into an ‘anonymous, impersonal power of “creation”’ - is the possibility of recognising that the work of art is *already* haunted by this lack of place and absence of origin.¹¹¹ What it calls into question is precisely that relation of ‘presence’ which Bataille ascribed to the ‘feeling’ of friendship through which great works of art address us; and the very sense of ‘presentation’ which Hegel inscribed into the ‘friendly destiny’ of the museum. Although both Bataille and Hegel recognise that this ‘presence’ of art is a matter of memory, and that ‘our’ access to the works of art from the past cannot overcome such lacunae, both thinkers nevertheless project what something like ‘the non-repeatable essence of being’, the relation of presence between man and work which would have been ‘in the work’ as its ‘living’ world or meaning. Our relation to these works of art, and our conception of the work of art as such, is

forever fixed as a relation to the absence of something that was present. But what if this very 'essence' of the work were already, at its very core, subject to the force of repetition? What if this appearance of the work as such, "*for the first time*", was not possible except on the basis of an '*again*'?

This is the question posed by technology. For Blanchot, it is at the very moment when the museum finally *removes itself* from any sense of being a 'place' in the world, when it becomes 'imaginary', that we can no longer fall back upon the lost presence of an origin. It exposes 'our illusion': 'the deceptive belief that what is there is there as it was whereas, at most, it is there as a "having-been": *an illusion of presence.*'¹¹² It is by becoming this absent 'place' of a 'locality without location' that the museum reveals the extent to which such an absence already constitutes the work as such.

The work is its own absence: because of this it is in perpetual becoming, never finished, always done and undone [toujours faite et défaite].¹¹³

This means in fact that the museum does not show us anything 'new', but rather puts us in relation to this fundamental and enigmatic belonging of absence and repetition at the heart of every work. In the final chapter of *L'Espace littéraire*, in which he continues his commentary on Malraux, Blanchot defines the work of art as '*always new "now"*', a definition whose tension between the temporality of eternity ('always') and that of the ephemeral ("now") articulates the relation between the work and repetition. But what is this paradoxical force of repetition 'at work' in the work?

The work is always new "now" [« maintenant »], it renews this "now" that it seems to initiate, to render more contemporary [actuel], and finally it is very ancient, terrifyingly ancient, that which is lost in the night of time, being the origin that always precedes us and which is always given before us, since it is the approach of what allows us to withdraw: thing of the

past, in a different sense from Hegel's saying [chose du passé, en un autre sens que ne le dit Hegel].¹¹⁴

The work of art is a 'thing of the past' in the sense that it belongs to an origin that 'always precedes us', a power of beginning which cannot itself begin because it is this movement of incessant *beginning-again*. Blanchot calls this abject power of repetition - which is 'at work' in the work anew each time, and yet is 'terrifyingly ancient' - 'le ressassement éternel' or 'l'éternel recommencement'.¹¹⁵ We may recall that he used the same term to describe the way in which literature, in asking the question of its origin, opens up language to an 'inquiétude infinie', the restless ambiguity that forms its own negativity: 'un ressassement interminable de paroles'.¹¹⁶ The negativity exemplified in the act of naming and the work of art unravels; in fact, it begins to unravel in the work at very moment it 'begins'. The work of the negative is already stamped with the mark of a beginning-again, a repetition which never begins and thus never ends.

Like Bataille's sovereignty, Blanchot's 'ressassement' speaks of a weakening in Hegel's 'admirable power' of negativity. Its work is 'unworked' ['déœuvrée'] in being exposed to its own 'inexhaustible depths' in repetition: it is not the determination and mastery of our own death that faces us in the work, but the 'dark, unmasterable powerlessness of death as a beginning-again.'¹¹⁷ Blanchot does not blindly repeat Hegel's dialectic of art, nor does he blindly oppose it. It is worth noting that in the original version of the passage cited above, instead of saying that the work of art is a thing of the past 'in a different sense from Hegel's saying' ['en un autre sens que ne le dit Hegel'], he writes: 'chose du passé, *comme dit Hegel*.'¹¹⁸ The turning that takes place in this space of time, which is the period spanned by these essays, is subtle yet profound. So what happens to the 'friendly destiny' from the *Phenomenology*, or to the 'passion' of friendship from *Lascaux*? Blanchot's depiction of the museum as a profoundly ambiguous site - the destitute non-place from which every world is abstracted; one which supposedly shelters and conserves works from the vagaries of time, only to subject them to an endless

becoming - introduces a discreet change in the 'friendly destiny' of the museum. This is 'le mal du musée' of Blanchot's title: the 'self-consciousness of spirit as spirit' becomes indissociable from the sheer 'will to spectacle' of art.¹¹⁹ The work is suspended in a uncertain movement where 'everything recurs to infinity because nothing has really taken place there': the imaginary museum shelters such works, insofar as it echoes a sense of eternity - 'l'éternel, peut-être' - and yet never allows the work to reveal itself in its entirety. It is as if Hegel's narrative of the dissolution of art had become frozen at the very point when it oscillated between the positive and negative values of its 'friendly destiny'. Hence, it is not certain in what sense the destiny of art is 'friendly', nor in what way friendship can be addressed by the work of art. Unlike Bataille and Hegel, Blanchot withdraws friendship from any relation of presence with the work. Yet in the movement of withdrawal there is revealed the fundamental relation of the work to its own absence of origin. This is what Blanchot formulates in terms of the 'reserve' or the 'discretion' of art and literature. In other words, he withdraws or reserves the relation of friendship by revealing the 'work' of the very thing which makes it possible as a relation: *discretion* - 'the pure interval'; 'the interruption of being'; 'this fundamental separation on whose basis that which separates becomes relation'. Furthermore, this movement of withdrawal is nothing other than discretion; and its revelation as such in the 'absence' of the work marks the 'work' of discretion. By effacing all presence of friendship from the texts of both Bataille and Hegel, he reinscribes it, discreetly, as this very relation of effacement.

The discreet relationship between friendship and the work of art brings us full circle back to the same doubling of discretion which emerged in our reading of "L'amitié". Indeed, in the year after Bataille's death, Blanchot encodes these two strands of friendship and the work of art - in this case, the *literary* work - in the following definition of discretion:

Discretion is not merely a courtesy, a social comportment, a psychological ruse, or the address of one who would like to speak intimately about

himself without declaring himself. Discretion - reserve - is the place of literature.¹²⁰

Discretion in this case is ambiguous and uncertain, 'unruhig' even. This very gesture of withdrawal, by which he displaces discretion from what is 'merely' a matter of 'comportment', begs the question: does not Blanchot posit the value of the (universal) concept over and above the (accidental) biographical conditions of the work? Or, inversely, does it not remain bound to an intentional act of a subject, such as a writer's choice to leave something out of the work? In short, we either risk discretion falling back into a calculable effect of a writing subject, or, if we resist this, we simply repeat the philosophical gesture par excellence. Yet, as we argued in the first chapter, discretion is double: the separation it introduces is constitutive of the relation to the other; it is never completely identical with itself, for it opens *itself* up as a fundamental discontinuity in being without being able to reserve itself or calculate itself in advance.¹²¹ Peter Banki identifies this reserve of discretion - the discretion of discretion, as it were - in terms of uncertainty: '*It is not certain that discretion exists.*'¹²² Thus, the word discretion can no more confirm the impersonal, nameless 'place' of literature than it can assure the integrity of personal silence, or even the essence of friendship, for that matter. It would be precisely because of this ambiguity within the status of discretion that the work can still take place in relation to an absent origin. Discretion is 'of the work': it names that reserve, or reservoir, which is necessary in order for the work to maintain and present itself; yet discretion itself, as this reserve, must always efface itself in the movement of its own 'work'.

*

One may conclude that Blanchot simply repeats Hegel, whether unwittingly or not. He finds the dialectical reversibility of language, or the presentative figure of ‘friendly destiny’ in the relation of the work of art to its origin in ‘eternal recommencement’. Even the ‘perhaps’ which marks this relation of ‘the eternal’ is never far from Hegel’s temporalising rewriting of Schiller’s ‘eternity’ as ‘*seine Unendlichkeit*’. But it is not the same relation. The change in the ‘pastness’ of art, from ‘as Hegel said’ to ‘a different sense from Hegel’s’, is like Blanchot’s ‘distance’ from the *Phenomenology*: it responds to the possibility of rethinking the thought of mediating negativity in the work in terms of an always prior relation of ‘un-working’ or ‘*désœuvrement*’. If something *happens* from Hegel to Blanchot, it is this location of ‘an always other possibility’ which disperses the work. It is the idea of a turning (away from Hegel) which is never certain, and a work that is never completed.¹²³ Blanchot has a pair of interlocutors discuss just such a turning in “*Sur un changement d’époque*” (1960), when one asks the other: ““Do you accept this certainty: that we are at a turning [*un tournant*]?”” The other replies:

If it is a certainty, it is not a turning. The fact of belonging at this moment in which a change of epoch (if there is such) is underway also affects the certain knowledge that would wish to determine it, rendering both certainty and uncertainty in appropriate. We are never less able to circle around ourselves [*nous contourner*] than at such a moment: the discreet force of the turning lies first in this fact.”¹²⁴

The force of the turning is ‘discreet’ precisely because it is not certain, and never affords us our total presence to ‘ourselves’. Blanchot’s work continually addresses this experience of maintaining a relation with that which is impossible to experience, and resists being ‘got around’ [*contournée*]. Resisting melancholic nostalgia as much as apocalyptic declamation, he maintains a rigorous, perhaps belligerent affirmation of impossibility in the face of all attempts to finally have done with questions. This is the work of discretion. Whereas Bataille deploys the concept of ‘friendship for the impossible that is man’ as a reversal within

Kojève's dialectic of Recognition, Blanchot moulds his thinking of friendship to an experience of the work which, above all, is marked by a writer's sense of discretion and self-effacement before the work, but only insofar as it remains without any point of stability. In the effects of Blanchot's writing of discretion, the thought of friendship can be seen to remain, discreetly and restlessly, at every point in his work.

Notes to Chapter 4

¹ Blanchot, “Le rire des dieux” (1963), AM, 192-207, 194.

² PhG, 36; PhS, §32.

³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke. Band 6. Jenaer Systementwürfe I*, K. Düsing and H. Kimmerle (eds.), Hamburg, Felix Meiner, 1975, 288; *First Philosophy of Spirit* (1803-4), translated by H.S. Harris and T.M. Knox (eds.), 221-2.

⁴ Françoise Collin, *Maurice Blanchot et la question de l'écriture*, Paris, Gallimard, 1971, 18.

⁵ “La règne animale de l'esprit” was first published in *Critique*, 18, November 1947, 387-405. This title is taken from Jean Hyppolite's translation of “Das geistige Tierreich und der Betrug oder die Sache selbst”, from the “REASON” chapter (C-AA-V-C-a). “La littérature et le droit à la mort” was published in *Critique*, 20, January 1948, 30-47; taking its title from Hölderlin's unfinished tragedy “Empedokles”: ‘*Denn sterben will ja ich. Mein Recht ist diß.*’ [‘For death is what I seek. It is my right.’] See Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, Third Edition, translated and edited by Michael Hamburger, London, Anvil Press, 1994, 346.

There is no significant variation between these original versions and the single text that appears in *La Part du feu*, so the discussion in this chapter will refer to the latter. Here, the second half begins with the line, ‘La littérature est liée au langage.’ (PF, 311)

⁶ See “La littérature et le droit à la mort”, in *Critique*, op.cit., 30, n.1.

⁷ PF, 305; WF, 314.

⁸ PF, 311; WF, 322.

⁹ PF, 311; WF, 321. In an authoritative essay on “La littérature et le droit à la mort”, Rodolphe Gasché correctly refers to these contradictions as ‘positively irreconcilable’. See “The felicities of paradox: Blanchot and the null-space of literature”, in Carolyn Bailey Gill (ed.), *Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing*, London, Routledge, 1996, 34-69, 45. As Gasché points out, Blanchot's equation of literature and the Terror in fact refers to Jean Paulhan's *Les Fleurs de Tarbes ou la Terreur dans les Lettres* (1941). A review of Paulhan's book had already provided Blanchot with the opportunity to write “Comment la littérature est-il possible?” for *Journal des débats*, 25 November 1941 (I) and 2 December 1941 (II); reprinted in FP, 92-101.

¹⁰ PF, 308; WF, 318, emphasis added.

¹¹ PF, 324; WF, 336. This tendency to read as language and writing what Hegel calls spirit raises important questions about the relation between language, consciousness and thought in the *Phenomenology*. The depth of these problems - which concerns nothing less than the relation between the *Phenomenology* and Hegel's philosophical ‘system’ - far exceeds the scope of this study, and represent an important yet understudied aspect of Hegel scholarship. There are currently only two English language studies which treat of the question of language in Hegel: Daniel J. Cook, *Language in the Philosophy of Hegel*, The Hague, Mouton, 1973; and John McCumber, *The Company of Words: Hegel, Language, and Systematic Philosophy*, Evanston IL, Northwestern University Press, 1993. Both works have been consulted in the writing of

this chapter, and we will have occasion to refer to them in subsequent notes when they shed light on questions raised by Blanchot's reading of Hegel.

¹² PF, 311-2; WF, 322.

¹³ PF, 312; WF, 322.

¹⁴ *Gesammelte Werke. Band 6. Jenaer Systementwürfe I*, 285-7; *First Philosophy of Spirit*, 220-1. This basic schema of 'Phantasie' and 'Gedächtnis' at the origin of names reappears in the *Encyclopedia*. The important difference, however, is that this schema is *stratified* in the Jena text: imagination alone is 'mute', external and contingent; it is only with memory that consciousness first takes on its own existence. On this relation between imagination and memory in the development of Hegel's theory of language, see Cristophe Bouton, "L'építaphe et le tombeau: imagination et raison dans la *Psychologie de Hegel*", in *Philosophie*, n.52, 1 decembre 1996, 54-76; esp. 62-7.

¹⁵ The reference, of course, is to the book of *Genesis* (2: 19):

And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

This figure of Adam's 'first act' seems to have had a particular resonance for Hegel. It appears in at least two other, pre-1807 texts: the *Differenzschrift* (1801); and the *Jenaer Realphilosophie* of 1805-6. Indeed, Blanchot's phrase about the 'strange right' of speech seems to echo this reference from the latter: 'Adam gave a name to all things. This is the *sovereign right* of Spirit, its primal taking-possession of all nature'; cited in Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy*, op.cit., 285-6, n.12, emphasis added.

It should be noted that Hegel's turn to Genesis and Adam also may refer to Kant's corrective of Rousseau when he treats of that book in his short essay, "Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History". See Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*, translated by H.B. Nisbet and edited by Hans Reiss, Cambridge University Press, 1991, 221-34. Kant steadfastly refuses to speculate on the question of the origins of language, reprimanding Rousseau for so doing, and choosing instead to give free rein to the more restrained, conjectural 'fictions' of the imagination (221-2). (My thanks to Simon Sparks for this reference.)

¹⁶ Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke. Band 6 - Jenaer Systementwürfe I*, 287; *First Philosophy of Spirit (1803-4)*, 221. Hegel is referring to the *Theatetus*: Socrates appeals to 'the gift of the Muses' mother, Memory', as the guardian of faithful discourse (191d). Elsewhere, Plato has Socrates explain that the invocation of Mnemosyne properly precedes all acts of description and recollection; see *Euthydemus*, 275c, and *Critias*, 108d.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Hegel, *Werke. X. Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1970, §462 & Zusatz; *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, translated by William Wallace and A.V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971. Note that 'die Gedächtnis' is rooted in the past participle of the verb 'to think', 'gedanken'.

¹⁹ GeS, I, 227, emphasis added. Hyppolite is discussing the first section of "REASON", "Observation of Nature" (C-AA-A-a).

²⁰ GeS, I, 228.

²¹ For example, PhG, 478; PhS, §652. Hegel gives this formulation a number of times in the section on 'Culture'. In his translation, Hyppolite renders '*Dasein*' as '*être-là*'. His comment occurs in PhE, II, 184, n.84.

²² This dialectical progression from poetic word to philosophical concept, from poetry to prose, is fundamental to Hegel's response to the Romantics. We shall return to this relation of philosophy and poetry in the Phenomenology in Section 4.22, below.

²³ GeS, I, 227-8. On comparing the two versions of this passage, it becomes clear that Blanchot does not take it straight from the pages of this book. Hyppolite's translation attempts to follow Hegel's text word for word, whereas Blanchot is not so encumbered by scholarly concerns: he renders '*Herrschaft*' as '*la maîtrise*', instead of '*la domination*'; '*geben*' as '*imposer*', rather than '*donner*'. (Indeed, these two changes indicate a Kojèvean vocabulary.) Finally, he cuts out the final sub-clause, '*et les faisant idéels pour soi*', and replaces it with a final clause which reflects the Levinasian distinction between 'existence' and 'existents', which he will reintroduce towards the end of his essay (see PF, 324-5; WF, 336-7).

So why has the instance of Adamic naming in Hyppolite's text been neglected hitherto in commentaries of "La littérature et le droit à la mort"? Is it down to these differences in translation? No. In fact, Blanchot's source for this citation has caused some confusion among commentators; not least among those who have tended to regard Kojève as his sole Hegelian source. This tendency overlooks the fact that what interests Blanchot here is the focus on naming as a primordial manifestation of the negative. As we have already argued, this is not even a theme in Kojève's interpretation. In my view, two comments by Blanchot have aided this confusion:

1. Blanchot attributes this citation to 'Essays collected together under the name of *System of 1803-1804*', but does not indicate whether this text is a translation or a German edition. In fact, it does not appear to have existed under this title in either language... Blanchot simply seems to have made it up!
2. In the same footnote, he adds that Kojève has 'shown in a remarkable way how for Hegel comprehension was equivalent to murder' (PF, 312, n.1). This contiguity of references gives the impression that Blanchot has found this passage in the *Introduction*; but Kojève does not refer either to this passage or to the figure of Adam at any point in his lectures. In any event, Blanchot does not actually make this connection: the equivalence of comprehension and murder is traced to Kojève's 'interpretation of a passage from the *Phenomenology*', and *not* the Jena text (*ibid.*).

This latter point is crucial. Gerald Bruns, for example, picks up on this reference to Kojève in order to link Blanchot's comments to a discussion in the *Introduction* (553-4). He compounds his own confusion by failing to notice that, at this point, Kojève is not actually referring to the *Phenomenology* (the text to which Blanchot refers in his note), but is reprising his theme of the anthropogenetic (and non-linguistic) function of death in the 1803-4 *Realphilosophie*. See *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy*, op.cit., 297, n.15. So what is this 'passage from the *Phenomenology*'? It can only be the 'life of spirit' passage from the Preface which is central to Kojève's

lecture, “L’idée de la mort dans la philosophie de Hegel”. See ILH, esp. 540-55; and see also my discussion of his interpretation of Hegel in Chapter 3, Section 3.1, above.

But why should we turn to Hyppolite? If he translates the passage in question from the 1932 Hoffmeister edition - vol. XIX, *Hegels Jenenser Realphilosophie I* - is it not possible that Blanchot too cites this edition? This possibility could account for strong differences in their translations, but it cannot account for the fact that he still refers to this text as the ‘*System of 1803-1804*’. In fact, it is far more likely that Blanchot is citing Hyppolite’s translation from memory, or even adapting it to his own needs, as he does on more than one occasion. On this aspect of Blanchot’s ‘scholarship’, see Leslie Hill’s comments on his audacious ‘rewriting’ of two lines from Hölderlin, in BEC, 91.

²⁴ PhG, 531; PhS, §729. The epic poet that Hegel has in mind, of course, is Homer.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., translation modified. Hyppolite translates ‘*die Besinnung*’ [‘contemplation’; ‘reflection’] as ‘*l’éveil de la conscience*’ (PhE, II, 243).

²⁷ According to Daniel J. Cook (whose work acknowledges a debt to Hyppolite), the relation of language and dialectic is not only the main theme of “CONSCIOUSNESS”, but also of the *Phenomenology* as a whole. He argues that the major change in Hegel’s thinking from the *Realphilosophie* to the *Phenomenology* lies in this place of language: it is no longer confined to an explicit level in the development of consciousness (that is, Adam’s ‘first act’), but has become immanent to the very process of this development. Thus, in the latter, the ‘linguistic dimension of experience extends to all levels of consciousness’; see Cook, *Language in the Philosophy of Hegel*, op.cit., 42. Cook’s view may be contrasted with that of John McCumber, who deliberately disregards the *Phenomenology* on the grounds that the ‘peculiar characteristics’ of its dialectic result from the conflictual context of communication (the ‘*für es*’ and the ‘*für uns*’) which it must presuppose. In this way the 1807 text falls outside Hegel’s philosophical ‘System’; see McCumber, *The Company of Words*, op.cit., 148-54.

²⁸ PhG, 85; PhS, §97.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ PhG, 87; PhS, §102.

³¹ PhG, 92; PhS, §110. Hegel’s formulation of ‘divine nature’ prefigures his general comments in the *Science of Logic* on the ‘speculative spirit’ of language, manifested in the inherent ‘speculative meaning’ of certain words with opposed meanings - such as ‘*Aufheben*’. See *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, translated by A.V. Miller, Atlantic Highlands, Humanities Press, 1969, 32; and also the “Remark: The Expression ‘To Sublate’”, 106-8.

³² PhG, 72; PhS, §78. This scepticism is ‘thoroughgoing’ or ‘self-accomplishing’ [‘*sich vollbringende*’] in the sense that it does not obey an external authority, nor does it follow the internal authority of personal conviction.

³³ PhG, 75; PhS, §80.

³⁴ PhG, 90; PhS, §109, emphasis added.

³⁵ Heidegger makes this point emphatically in his commentary on this passage. He notes that this movement is not something that can be attributed to consciousness ‘after the event’:

Consciousness is in itself the disquiet of the auto-distinction between natural knowledge and real knowing. The movement of historical process resides [*beruht*] in this restlessness of consciousness, from which it also receives its orientation [*Richtung*]. Consciousness is not moved after the event [*nachträglich*]; it is not possible to show its orientation at the start.

See “Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung” (1942-3), in Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. Band 5. Holzwege*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1977, 158-9. (I have consulted Wolfgang Brokmeier’s French translation, in *Chemins qui ne mènent nulle part*, Paris, Gallimard, 1962, 194.)

³⁶ GeS, I, 145.

³⁷ PhE, I, 71, n.14; and GeS, I, 147. Hyppolite cites Hegel’s formulation of the ‘annihilation restlessness of the infinite’ from his Jena *Logic* (*ibid.*, n.3). One might also choose to cite further passages from the *Phenomenology*, such as the description of the ‘sheer restlessness of life and absolute distinction’ (PhG, 45; PhS, §46); and see also the *Encyclopedia* (III, §378) and the *Science of Logic* (see SL, 106, 545). More recently, Jean-Luc Nancy has highlighted this word in Hegel’s work; see *Hegel. L’inquiétude du négatif*, Paris, Hachette, 1997, *passim*.

³⁸ The experience of unrest, like everything else in Kojève’s account (including language and speech), is subsumed by the anthropogenetic structure of ‘desire for Recognition’ and the repose of the ‘end of history’. The only occasion on which Kojève refers to the experience of ‘*l’inquiétude*’ during his lectures is in his opening definition of desire and recognition: the negativity of ‘Desire’ disturbs man’s ‘passive ease [*quiétude*]’ by forcing his consciousness back upon itself, making him ‘un-easy [*inquiét*]’ at his ‘lack’ of recognition, and driving him into action to satisfy it; see ILH, 11.

³⁹ “Dialectique et dialogue dans la *Phénoménologie de l’esprit*” (1956-7), in Hyppolite, *Figures de la pensée philosophique. Écrits 1931-1968*, two volumes, Paris, P.U.F., 1971, I, 209-12, 210.

⁴⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy makes this point in *Hegel. L’inquiétude du négatif*, *op.cit.*, 5-11.

⁴¹ Although he does use this word in at least one previous essay its function in “La littérature et le droit à la mort” is unprecedented. The previous occasion is “Le paradoxe d’Aytré” (1946), in which he describes the constitutive absence of relation between word and thing as the foundation for the ‘poetic future’ within every word: ‘an order [of images] in which every figure is passage, unrest, transistion, allusion, act of an infinite trajectory.’ The context of this discussion is parallel to that in “La littérature et le droit à la mort”. See PF, 66-78, 69.

Literary ‘unrest’ in Blanchot resurfaces in Jean-Philippe Miraux’s recent introductory monograph: *Maurice Blanchot. Quiétude et inquiétude de la littérature*, Paris, Éditions Nathan, 1998. Yet Miraux does not treat of this word in any depth, nor does he trace it back to Hyppolite’s rendition of Hegel. He simply uses it to set the parameters of Blanchot’s conceptual vocabulary. I am arguing that, at the very least, Blanchot’s repeated use of this word marks the impact of *Hyppolite’s* description of the Hegelian

'dialectic of human unrest'. Let us note that in "De l'angoisse au langage" (1943), Blanchot had linked the writer's experience of language to 'anguish' and 'anxiety'. But what is denoted by this change from '*l'angoisse*' to '*l'inquiétude*'? Very little, perhaps. Except that in *Faux pas* Blanchot's treatment of a similar set of themes is less developed, more rigid in its oppositions, and furthermore, there is no recognition of using implicitly Hegelian themes and concepts. See FP, 9-23, esp. 12. In fact, the use of '*l'angoisse*' (as well as '*la réalité humaine*') throughout *Faux pas* can be traced to Henri Corbin's 1937 translations of Heidegger. On the context of these terms, see Leslie Hill, BEC, 78.

⁴² PF, 315; WF, 325.

⁴³ See note 12, above.

⁴⁴ For example, '*le droit à la mort*' and '*Je dis: cette femme!*'; see PF, 312, 316; WF, 322, 327. On the Hölderlinian origin of the title of this essay, see note 12, above. The Mallarméan reference, which Blanchot also repeats in full, is '*Je dis: une fleur! ...*', from "Crise de vers", in Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, Gallimard-Pléiade, 1945, 368. For further examples of this echoing of Mallarmé, see Jean-Philippe Miraux, *Maurice Blanchot. Quiétude et inquiétude de la littérature*, op.cit., 16. My own discussion in this chapter will focus upon the relation between Hegel and Hölderlin in Blanchot's work.

⁴⁵ PF, 312; WF, 322. The relation between these three proper names in Blanchot's work is as consistent as it is complicated. Some thirty years later in *L'Écriture du désastre*, Blanchot sets out the task of the writer in terms of a necessary recognition of the lexical 'horizon' demarcated by philosophy:

To write in ignorance and rejection of the philosophical horizon, punctuated, assembled or dispersed by the words which delimit this horizon, is necessarily to write with facile complacency (the literature of elegance and good taste). Hölderlin, Mallarmé, and many others, do not allow us this.

See ED, 160; WD, 103. What Hölderlin and Mallarmé do not allow 'us' is the ease of writing within this horizon without knowing it, without taking into account the language in which one writes - even in opposing 'philosophy', 'system' or 'Hegel' (who is an unnamed yet implied presence here). It is just such a 'philosophical horizon' that Gerald Bruns runs the risk of ignoring in his overdetermination of the word '*refusal*'; see *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy*, passim. See also note 4, above.

⁴⁶ PF, 312; WF, 322.

⁴⁷ EL, 136-7; SL, 109.

⁴⁸ PF, 312-3; WF, 322-3.

⁴⁹ "La main de Pascal" (1947), in PF, 249-62; 254, Blanchot's emphasis. This original 'fact' is manifested in the work of poets because it is in 'its poetic claim' that language 'affirms itself as an absolute'; it is 'spoken [*se parle*] without anyone who speaks it or at least without depending upon the one who speaks.' In this way, the argument in this essay is strictly identical with that in "La littérature et le droit à la mort".

⁵⁰ Strictly speaking, for the ancient Greeks, a public sacrifice of a hundred oxen. See OED: 'hecatomb' [Gr. *hekatombê*, f. *hekaton* hundred, *bous* ox]. Here Blanchot touches

upon, as he does a number of times in the essays collected in this book, the sense of ‘*la part du feu*’: literally, that part which is sacrificed in order to maintain the whole; for example, the cutting of a fire-break, in which an area of forest is burnt clear in an attempt to limit the progress of an advancing fire. The phrase, ‘*faire la part du feu*’, means ‘to make a deliberate sacrifice’, ‘to cut one’s losses’. It bears the double sense of a destruction whose purpose is to preserve; another figure, perhaps, of the speculative ambiguity that Hegel cherishes in the word, *Aufhebung*. It articulates the same sense of a ‘*both-and*’/‘*neither-nor*’ which recurs in “La littérature et le droit à la mort” as the ultimate ambiguity of literature; and foreshadowed in the two epigraphs from Hölderlin and Heraclitus.

⁵¹ PF, 313; WF, 323.

⁵² AM, 328. See the discussion of this essay in Chapter 1, Section 1.23, above.

⁵³ PF, 313; WF, 323, emphasis added.

⁵⁴ PhG, 36; PhS, §32. See OED:

prosopopeia *n.* M16. [L f. Gk *prospopoiia* representation in human form, f. *prosopon* face, person + *poiein* make.] **1 Rhet.** **a** A figure of speech in which an imaginary or absent person is represented as something speaking or acting; the introduction of a pretended speaker. M16. **b** A figure of speech in which an inanimate or abstract thing is personified or given human characteristics. L16. **2 transf.** A person or thing as *the* embodiment of a quality. E19.

The fundamental role of prosopopeia in Hegel’s “Preface” has been drawn to our attention by Werner Hamacher. See “The Second of Inversion”, in Hamacher, *Premises: Essays on Philosophy and Literature from Kant to Celan*, translated by Peter Fenves, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1996, 340.

⁵⁵ Ibid., translation modified. Note that the verb ‘*umkehren*’ bears the sense of *return* (‘to turn back or retrace one’s steps’) as well as *inversion* (‘to reverse or overturn’; ‘to turn inside out or upside down’).

⁵⁶ See Werner Hamacher’s extended analysis of this characteristic in “The Second of Inversion”, *op.cit.*, 341.

⁵⁷ PF, 328; WF, 341.

⁵⁸ PF, 329; WF, 342.

⁵⁹ See Serge Doubrovsky, “Critique et existence”, in Georges Poulet (ed.), *Les Chemins actuels de la critique*, Paris, Union générale d’Éditions (10/18), 1968, 143-57; 149-50. He goes on to add: ‘The experience of language therefore does not *translate* a metaphysical experience: it *is* this very experience. This is the essential point that Blanchot’s meditation takes up and goes over again and again.’ (Ibid.) As I have already argued, the terms for this ‘metaphysical experience’ are to be found in Jean Hyppolite’s ‘transcendental’ reading of the *Phenomenology*.

⁶⁰ PF, 316; WF, 327.

⁶¹ PF, 316; WF, 326-7.

⁶² PF, 330; WF, 343.

⁶³ This phrase is Paul Davies' characterisation of the development by which, he argues, Blanchot during the 1950's begins to 'step away' from his focus on the work (which would define "La littérature et le droit à la mort", for example) towards the idea of the *oeuvre* solely within *désœuvrement*, as presented in *L'Espace littéraire* and *L'Entretien infini*. See "The work and the absence of the work", in C. Bailey Gill (ed.), *Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing*, op.cit., 91-107, 94. However, Davies does not make clear exactly what is at stake in the phrase, and its approximative prefix: the discussion in this chapter is intended to offer a possible elucidation of this phrase.

⁶⁴ GeS, II, 532.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 512, emphasis added. Even if Hegel becomes sceptical about the possibility and desirability of any such 'recovery', the traces of this reflection on the aesthetic sense of religion are imprinted on the development of Hegelian thought as a whole. However, it is worth noting that Hölderlin had already disavowed such a project before his friend's arrival in Jena. We will discuss the nature of this relationship with respect to the end of "Kunstreligion", in Section 4.2, below.

⁶⁶ Hegel, *Werke. Band 13. Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1970, 25.

⁶⁷ PhG, 549; PhS, §754.

⁶⁸ PhG, 547-8; PhS, §753.

⁶⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy offers an interpretation of Hegel's 'friendly destiny' in "Portrait de l'art en jeune fille", in Nancy, *Le Poids d'une pensée*, Les éditions Le Griffon d'argile / Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1991, 33-63. Whilst he postpones what he says would otherwise be 'a very lengthy commentary' on the motif of friendship in Hegel, he does give a brief account of the meaning of this adverb which helps to bring our own inquiry into relief. Hegel's phrase evokes 'an obliging, cordial sympathy' (ibid., 55). Citing Hyppolite's translation - '*un destin amical nous les a offertes, comme une jeune fille présente ces fruits*' (PhE, II, 261) - he notes that '*freundlich*' does not necessarily bear the sense of '*amical*', or '*friendly*', but signifies '*aimable*' or '*gracieux*', '*amiable*', '*genial*', or '*gracious*'.

⁷⁰ PhG, 325; PhS, §439.

⁷¹ PhG, 512; PhS, §700.

⁷² Jean-Luc Nancy draws attention to this identification when he defines Hegel's figure as 'the interiority of the "museumish" [muséal] or archeological exteriority to which art is dedicated'. See "Portrait de l'art en jeune fille", op.cit., 50.

⁷³ PhG, 590-1; PhS, §808.

⁷⁴ Jacques Taminiaux gives a careful examination of the relation of art and speculation in his essay, "Speculation and Difference", in Taminiaux, *Poetics, Speculation, and Judgment. The Shadow of the Work of Art from Kant to Phenomenology*, translated and edited by Michael Gendre, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, 41-54.

⁷⁵ Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, translated by H.B. Nisbet and edited by Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, §7, Addition.

⁷⁶ Hegel, “Der Positivität der christlichen Religion” (1795-6), in *Werke. Band 1. Frühe Schriften*, edited Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971, 128-9.

⁷⁷ For a partial examination of this role of friendship in Hegel’s early writings on Christianity, see H.S. Harris, *Hegel’s Development: Towards the Sunlight, 1770-1801*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, 413-14.

⁷⁸ Bataille, “L’Amitié”, VI, 294; see Chapter 2, Section 2.1, above. Jean-Luc Nancy presents a discussion of its status as a ‘written text’ in “Portrait de l’art en jeune fille”, *op.cit.*, 39-40. Michael Inwood is more representative of many Hegel scholars, however, when he states that the *Phenomenology* is ‘a rich, if chaotic, work’, valuable only for that ‘material’ which does not appear elsewhere. See the entry for the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, 216-19, 219.

⁷⁹ PhG, 591. Miller’s translation gives: ‘from the chalice of this realm of spirits / foams forth for him his own infinitude.’ (PhS, §808.)

⁸⁰ See William Desmond’s account of this alteration, in *Beyond Hegel and Dialectic: Speculation, Cult, and Comedy*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, 78-9. Although I have drawn on his book in my own comments here, I have drawn quite different conclusions regarding the reducibility of the friendship to a thinking of the absolute: where he reduces all relation of alterity to the self-mediation of an ‘erotic absolute’, I remain unconvinced that all further ambiguity and contradiction can be thus ‘silenced’.

⁸¹ PhG, 591; PS, §808. The original reads: ‘Aus dem Kelch des ganzen Seelenreiches / Schäumt ihm - die Unendlichkeit.’ “Die Freundschaft” (1782), in Friedrich Schiller, *Werke. Band I. Gedichte 1776-1799*, edited by J. Peterson and F. Beißner, Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1943, 110-11. Hegel’s free adaptation of Schiller here compares with Blanchot’s appropriation of lines from Hölderlin.

⁸² Bataille, *Lascaux, ou la naissance de l’art* (1955), IX, 13.

⁸³ Blanchot, “La naissance de l’art”, AM, 10.

⁸⁴ Bataille, IX, 13. See the discussion of this passage in Chapter 3, Section 3.22, above.

⁸⁵ IX, 14.

⁸⁶ AM, 11; FS, 3. Note that Elizabeth Rottenberg translates ‘et presque d’amitié’ as ‘and even of friendship’.

⁸⁷ “Le mal du musée”, in *Nouvelle revue française*, 52, April 1957, 696.

⁸⁸ “Le musée, l’art et le temps”, AM, 21-51, 26.

⁸⁹ On 27 July 1958 Malraux takes up the position of Minister of State, charged with the ‘influence and expansion of French culture’, in the government of de Gaulle’s Fifth Republic. It is worth noting that it is de Gaulle’s ‘assumption’ of power in 1958, and in particular his escalation of the conflict in Algeria, which triggers Blanchot’s own return to politically directed writing. One such piece, “Le refus” (1958), reprinted in *L’Amitié*, bears the affirmation:

At a certain moment, in the face of public events, we know that we must refuse. [...] Those who refuse and who are linked by the force of refusal, they know that they are still not together.

In default of a political community - any sense of which had been removed by this quasi-dictatorial seizure of power - Blanchot locates a sense of solidarity and unity in the irreducibility of shared refusal; what he calls 'the friendship of this certain, unshakeable, rigorous No.' (AM, 130.) The issues of Blanchot's politics will need to be addressed in a separate study; nevertheless they press through the conception of friendship in the works under discussion.

⁹⁰ AM, 26.

⁹¹ AM, 26-7.

⁹² See G.W.F. Hegel, Werke. Band 13. Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1970, 25.

⁹³ EL, 292.

⁹⁴ EL, 311.

⁹⁵ EL, 313.

⁹⁶ PF, 305.

⁹⁷ AM, 41.

⁹⁸ AM, 50.

⁹⁹ PF, 295.

¹⁰⁰ AM, 25.

¹⁰¹ AM, 33.

¹⁰² AM, 27.

¹⁰³ AM, 39.

¹⁰⁴ AM, 45.

¹⁰⁵ AM, 52.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ AM, 52. Blanchot's relation to technology presents another point of difference with Bataille, for whom 'technological culture' remains within the confines of Kojève's 'universal, homogeneous State'. Blanchot sets himself against this Heideggerean tendency to reduce technology to a geo-political value alone. In one of his preparatory texts for the failed project of a *Revue internationale* - on the recent 'conquest of space' - he writes:

Certainly, technology is dangerous, but less dangerous than "spirits of place". There is something to be said, perhaps, against the paganism in which anti-Christianism voluntarily takes cover - Heideggerean paganism, a poetic paganism of *enrootedness*. Truth is nomad.

See Blanchot, "Textes préparatoires, lignes, définitions de la « Revue internationale »" (1961), in *Lignes*, n.11, September 1990, 179-91, 189.

¹⁰⁸ AM, 53.

¹⁰⁹ AM, 56. At this point in *L'Amitié*, Blanchot refers to his own essay, "La Bête de Lascaux", originally published in 1958, in which counters Plato's *Phaedrus* with the idea that 'impersonal knowledge' (represented by the book) is in fact essential to the development of truth 'in the world of everyone'. It is this very impersonality which, he claims, 'is tied to the development of technology in all its forms and it makes speech, writing, a technics'. See "La Bête de Lascaux" (1958), reprinted in *René Char. Cahier de l'Herne*, Paris: Éditions de l'Herne, n.15, 1971, 71-7; esp. 71-2.

¹¹⁰ AM, 59.

¹¹¹ AM, 56.

¹¹² AM, 60.

¹¹³ AM, 48.

¹¹⁴ EL, 305.

¹¹⁵ AM, 44; 61.

¹¹⁶ PF, 320.

¹¹⁷ AM, 51.

¹¹⁸ Blanchot, "L'art, la littérature et l'expérience originelle (I)", in *Les Temps modernes*, 79, May 1952, 1921-51; 1947, emphasis added.

¹¹⁹ AM, 56.

¹²⁰ Blanchot, "Le rire des dieux" (1963), AM, 192-207, 194.

¹²¹ At this point, another path of inquiry begins to address the importance of Hölderlin in Blanchot's work on the 'reserve' of the work of art. It soon becomes clear that the full extent of this topic far exceeds the remit of this present study. It is worth noting, however briefly, that he describes the poet's exemplarity in terms of *discretion*. In a short article on Hölderlin, written a year after the publication of *La Part du feu*, Blanchot himself asks why we identify the name of Hölderlin with the 'essence of poetry': 'Why is Hölderlin so present to us today? Why does his voice seem to us to be the poetic voice par excellence?' He grants that these questions cannot be answered satisfactorily, nor are they illuminated by the facts of the poet's life. Indeed, for Blanchot, it is the biographical fact of Hölderlin's mental collapse, his 'madness', that proves deceptive precisely because, on the one hand, it was '*the reserve, the extreme limit of discretion* which overflowed the work and transformed it into a pile of scribbled papers'; whilst, on the other hand, 'this same madness which had shrouded Hölderlin in silence was also what revealed him' and made his name known, even at the expense of the work. See Blanchot, "Hölderlin", in *L'Observateur*, n.17, 3 August 1950, emphasis added.

¹²² Peter Banki, "« La discrétion - la réserve - est le lieu de la littérature »", in *Ralentir travaux*, n.7, hiver 1997, 41-6; 45. His account of '*the discretion of discretion*' is close to my own in this chapter and Chapter 1.

¹²³ PF, 330.

¹²⁴ Blanchot, "Sur un changement d'époque: l'exigence du retour", in EI, 394; IC, 264.

Conclusion

The discretion of the work

- ◆ *It is as if he had said to him, saying it in such a friendly manner:
friendship withdraws from us [l'amitié se retire de nous].*

Maurice Blanchot ¹

At the beginning of this study, we posed the central problem of how to read friendship in Blanchot's work. We asked: how and where does it 'take place' in Blanchot? Is there a 'place' at all for friendship in his work? Or is friendship, by definition, excluded from all 'work', belonging instead to that which originally opens the space of the work, and yet at the same time already ruins it?

In the reading which followed, unfolding in four distinct stages - two on Blanchot, two on Bataille -, we have proposed that in order to respond to the full implications of this problem it is necessary to go by way of Bataille's thinking of friendship and complicity; and also, therefore, by way of his relation to a certain Hegel. This detour has been decisive for the orientation of our reading of Blanchot in general, insofar as it has allowed us not only to see that fundamental differences remain between them concerning, amongst other things, the status of the work of art; but also to observe that these differences are integral to the ways in which they

figure the relation of friendship - as discretion or as complicity; as the demand for discontinuity or as the desire for a continuum. However, it was also made clear at the beginning that this detour through Bataille (and Hegel), although necessary, does not end with him (or them), nor puts an end to Blanchot's thinking 'in proximity' to him.

Indeed, as we have seen throughout this enquiry, the problem of friendship already points in other directions: directions which one might call 'political', such as the 'friendship of a rigorous No' with which Blanchot makes an intervention into the quasi-militaristic events of October 1958, or the affirmation of the 'fraternally anonymous and impersonal movement' of the 'events' of May '68;² but also other directions indicating the importance of his relationship to other thinkers, such as Emmanuel Levinas. Indeed, only the relation to Levinas seems to have had such a great, eventually perhaps even greater, impact on the development of Blanchot's work. At the end of "Pour l'amitié" (1993), an essay which prefaces a collection of work by Dionys Mascolo, and which Blanchot dedicates 'To all my friends, known and unknown, near and distant', it is Levinas to whom he turns, 'le seul ami - ah, ami lointain - que je tutoie et qui me tutoie'.³ As a guide to this other direction, it is possible to cite another essay which Blanchot addresses to Levinas, "Notre compagnon clandestine" (1980), in which he writes of their friendship as passing by way of an encounter with philosophy:

Philosophy would be our companion always, day and night, whether by losing its name, becoming literature, knowledge, unknowledge [non-savoir], or by absenting itself; our clandestine friend whom we respected - loved -, and which did not allow us to be bound to it, even whilst forewarning us that there was nothing awakened in us, vigilant to the point of sleep, which was not due to its difficult friendship. Philosophy or friendship. But philosophy is precisely not an allegory.⁴

The friendship of philosophy, 'its difficult friendship',⁵ permits 'us' neither to bind ourselves to it nor to have done with reading and thinking in its wake. This

rings strangely in with our preceding examinations, if one recalls that Blanchot's discretion in the naming of friendship articulates the discontinuity which first 'puts into relation' by spacing and interrupting. It is at this point, when 'discretion' as such comes to figure friendship at the heart of Blanchot's thinking, that 'l'amitié' returns to the question of philosophical discourse, a discourse which 'always loses itself at a certain moment: it is, perhaps, nothing but an inexorable way of loss and of losing itself.'⁶ By locating this 'certain moment' of 'inexorable' loss (of itself) *as* the definitive moment of philosophy, Blanchot brings this essential powerlessness - it is '*sans droit [...] un possible sans pouvoir*' - into relation with the movement which he had traced in the 'discreet force of the turning': what philosophy 'supposes' or 'demands' ['exige'], before all else, is 'the effacement of the one who would support it or, at least, a change in the position of the philosophical subject'.⁷ Yet 'effacement', as well as the 'impersonality' to which it attests, is never sufficient. For both philosopher and writer, who are, says Blanchot, 'very close', any such anonymity must remain 'suspect'; otherwise, it soon ceases to be anything other than 'a game to conceal the name and finally to exploit it [le faire valoir].'⁸ It is possible to hear this dual-edged 'demand' in terms of Blanchot's thinking of discretion.

Consequently, further work in those directions indicated above, particularly paying attention to the way in which Blanchot's writing, already during the late 1950's and early 1960's, but specifically *after* 1962, begins to move away from Bataille and further towards Levinas and philosophy, would be necessary. What we have attempted to do here is to show how far Blanchot's thinking of friendship saturates the way in which he himself sets out the demand for thought as such. Thus, in having limited the scope of this study, both to the relation with Bataille and to specific texts, we have been able to follow how the figure of the relation of incompatibility, the double relation of the possible and the impossible, brings with it a thinking of friendship that is in no way reducible to either an 'inter-personal' or 'inter-subjective' relation. Instead, Blanchot calls friendship, using a phrase borrowed from Levinas, a 'rapport sans rapport': a relation without being related

to anything ultimate, only taking place as the 'pure interval' that separates finite beings; and yet also a relation of indirection, or without horizon, which always introduces the third person ('impersonality') precisely as this interruption.

What we have brought forth from Blanchot's work, then, is the way in which friendship never allows one to read it with ease (either as an ethical, political concept, or even as an emblematic, exemplary figure). It is not bound to any fixed value or end, even that of 'itself'. Blanchot's presentation of friendship in terms of discretion is difficult to read precisely because it affirms, and communicates, the impossibility of thought coming to rest at any such value, 'sufficiency' or 'meaning'. The always singular experience of friendship does not suit it to any theoretical or practical 'purpose' or 'end'; it is not assigned a 'place' as such by Blanchot, but instead it is presented in terms of what demands to be thought outside of any final value and meaning. It is in this sense that Blanchot refers to friendship as a relation which is inseparable from the the movement of discretion (in dying, for example). Discretion names that form of relation in which thinking *affirms* that which interrupts and unsettles it ('l'inquiétude'), thus withdrawing itself from the satisfaction of a reconciling 'presence' as much as from the abyssal supremacy of the 'nothing'. Yet at the same time, this effect or 'work' of discretion is always subject to itself: it is never certain - and never can be if it is to remain discreet.

Therein lies the true *difficulty* of friendship, for it is part of the nature of Blanchot's writing that it is always tempting to read 'l'amitié' as simply another way of naming 'le désœuvrement', or even the originary namelessness of 'le neutre'; and thereby to read the latter as unproblematic conditions of possibility for experience in general. This reading must be resisted. Such a movement of identification would fail to read the caution with which Blanchot names friendship: it would be to make it the centre of one's thinking, or the essential condition for the work, *without* such 'thinking' or 'work' being altered and displaced by *this* experience. At the same time, however, it is also clear that the

very difficulty of friendship is intimately bound up with Blanchot's thinking of the latter, insofar as this conflictual movement of withdrawing and manifesting 'acts' or 'works' *discreetly*: the 'neutre' is, always and already, to be thought as an unpresentable movement of reserve. To think this relation of discretion is always, therefore, to run a risk, to expose oneself to the 'demand of friendship'. What is at stake, therefore, in Blanchot's formulation of this other 'demand', 'the demand of friendship', is precisely this double movement *between* the 'naming the possible' and 'responding to the impossible', between the 'political demand' and the 'poetic demand'.

It is true, therefore, that Blanchot never explains what friendship means to him. This meaning nevertheless informs his work as a whole. Friendship is 'present' in these texts only through this thought of discretion. Equally, discretion is never allowed to become a concept in his work. It is *performed* there as that movement which makes the work a work. As a result, we can say that, through this double movement of discretion, friendship is a part of 'the reserve' of literature; it is there in 'the demand of discontinuity'; it is there in the conflicting demands of 'naming the possible' and 'responding to the impossible'; it is there in 'the discreet force of the turning'. This *is* does not mean that friendship somehow provides an answer to all of the questions which Blanchot poses about the work of art, literature, or the relation to the other. To borrow a phrase from "L'amitié": 'it would be crass, even to consider that'. Friendship is not meant to answer anything in Blanchot's work. It only provides a way of holding open these questions and of maintaining a relation to that which still demands to be thought within them. We might venture that friendship brings with it a way of affirming the intractability of contradictions without absolving their tension; a way of maintaining thought 'in suspense between the yes and the no'. The demand of friendship lies in this balance (which is also a slippage) between the demand of the naming the possible and of responding to the impossible.

Notes to Conclusion

¹ PA, 117.

² See “Le refus” (1958), AM, 130-1; and CI, 55.

³ “Pour l’amitié”, in Dionys Mascolo, *A la recherche d’un communisme de pensée*, Paris: fourbis, 1993, 5-16, 16.

⁴ “Notre compagnon clandestine”, in François Laruelle, *Textes pour Emmanuel Levinas*, Paris: Éditions Jean-Michel Place, 1980, 79-87, 80.

⁵ Paul Davies has shown us how to read this passage *between* Blanchot and Levinas, in “Difficult Friendship”, *Research in Phenomenology*, v.18 (1988), 149-72, 170.

⁶ “Le ‘discours philosophique’”, in *L’arc*, 46 (1971), 1-4, 4.

⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁸ Ibid.

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