

**STAGING COMMUNITY: A NON-PHILOSOPHICAL PRESENTATION OF
IMMANENT SOCIAL EXPERIENCE**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the University of Greenwich
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2017

DECLARATION

I certify that this work has not been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not concurrently being submitted for any degree other than that of Doctor of Philosophy being studied at the University of Greenwich.
I also declare that this work is the result of my own investigations except where otherwise identified by references and that I have not plagiarized the work of others.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Stephen Kennedy and Prof. Gregory Sporton for quietly keeping me on track and making sure I saw it through to the end; and to Prof. Johnny Golding, without whose teaching and support this work would never have begun. I am deeply grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding this research, and to the Department of Creative Professions and Digital Arts at the University of Greenwich for continued support in the later stages, without which I would have been unable to complete.

I am indebted to my peers on the former Media Arts Philosophy programme at the University of Greenwich, for providing an environment that was both challenging and supportive in which to develop my ideas during the early stages of this research. Most especially, to Dr. Mark Walker and Dr. Sheena Calvert, whose friendship, professional support and belief in me have helped me to keep my sanity throughout.

The most special thanks are reserved for my family, without whom none of this would have been possible: to my parents, John and Brenda Lammin, for helping me with everything from costs to childcare, and for having the patience and consistency to always be at the end of the phone through good times and bad; to Matilda Lammin-Herbert, my little philosopher, for forcing me to keep one foot in the real world (despite the endless lack of sleep!); and most of all to my partner, Richard Herbert, who gave up so much of his creative time to be the adult who paid the bills throughout this long research journey. I only hope I will be able to return that gift.

ABSTRACT

This thesis develops a theoretical framework for articulating the experience of “community”, in a way that avoids appealing to hypostatizing identity concepts. It examines two seminal discourses of community, in the work of Georges Bataille and Jean-Luc Nancy, which attempt to grasp such a social experience departing from a philosophical ground, and it argues that each of these approaches constitutes a circular logic that places the reality of its “object” beyond the reach of signifying discourse. In order to break out of this circularity, and to render the reality of community effable, the thesis adopts the posture of François Laruelle's non-philosophy, which offers a way of re-viewing the philosophical materials according to their already-given immanence, and deploying them as real. It makes an original contribution to knowledge by developing a new, non-philosophical syntax for theorizing community in a non-totalising mode. This syntax, which we name a “theatre-fiction”, is occasioned by the thematic of “spectacle” that arises recurrently in Bataille and Nancy's thinking. It entails a non-standard re-conceptualization of *theatre* as a model for representation, and moreover as a ground for community. On this Laruellian basis, the thesis proposes a new way of understanding the performative staging of social identity, giving community as an experience-(of)-thought which manifests itself immanently, whilst tolerating an identity-of-the-last-instance with its concept.

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PREFACE

This thesis proposes a new way of approaching the philosophical problem of how to theorize the experience of community, which draws on the epistemological framework provided by François Laruelle's "non-philosophy". By adopting this non-standard approach to thinking, we do not wish to overturn the existing philosophical discourses of community, but rather to offer a different *usage* of them by re-conceiving their relation to the real. Methodologically, this entails a number of preparatory steps to be taken before we are able to offer a positive presentation of community. We will begin by examining two discursive articulations of community, in the work of Georges Bataille and Jean-Luc Nancy, in order to demonstrate how each is constituted in a circular form, such that its "object" is conceived as an excess that is positioned either beyond, or at the limits of, the space of theory. Following this still-philosophical analysis, we will introduce Laruelle's non-philosophy—exploring both the analytic logic by which he proposes to transcendently reduce philosophy *as such* to a structural invariant at its kernel, and the method of axiomatic abstraction whereby he proposes to suspend philosophy's presupposition of sufficiency, and thus to put its materials to a different use. Such a usage of philosophical materials entails the development of a new syntax for thought. Laruelle posits a radically immanent "One" as the universal condition for thought, and non-philosophical practice is transcendently determined by this One; however, each effectuation of non-philosophy requires that a new syntax be elucidated, using terms extracted from the materials that occasion it. Laruelle further proposes that techniques of creation which are other-than-philosophical may be introduced into non-philosophy's pragmatics, to aid the process of syntactic invention. Drawing out the thematic of spectacle, drama and staging that recur in Bataille and Nancy's philosophies of community, our own effectuation of non-philosophy will develop a non-standard syntax based on a mutation of *theatre* as a model for theoretical representation. Thus we shall also explore the presuppositions of sufficiency in three distinct aesthetic theories of theatre in order that they, too, can be suspended.

Therefore, it is not until our final chapter, where these various threads of preparation are brought together and viewed "in-One", that we claim to make our original contribution to knowledge, which consists not in the development of novel *concepts*, but rather in the elucidation of a syntax that gives a new way of viewing—or better, *experiencing*—the thought of community. Hence, the structure the thesis takes is necessitated by the non-philosophical method. Rocco Gangle, in his commentary on Laruelle's *Philosophies of Difference*, remarks

that the text ‘possesses the somewhat “monstrous” form of an extended preface (chapters one through six) followed by a relatively terse and seemingly underdeveloped argument proper (chapter seven)’—an observation that could similarly be applied to the present work.¹ However, Laruelle's mode of axiomatic abstraction is arguably more indebted to the methods found in the mathematical sciences than in continental philosophy; thus Gangle goes on to suggest that if we consider Laruelle's text by analogy with a mathematical proof, rather than a philosophical one, its apparent “monstrousness” becomes easier to understand—the ‘long series of preparatory constructions and partial results attains its conclusion almost anti-climactically in a relatively simple and straightforward lemma’, but this “result” would lose its sense and power if one were to pass over the preparations.² Ultimately, we hope to demonstrate that, despite the complex and abstract nature of Laruelle's thought, it does make a very particular kind of sense. Moreover, once the extensive preparations have been made, and are finally viewed in-One, we aim to show that the “results” they yield are quite different from those of a philosophical synthesis, and that what is achieved is indeed *simple*: not a new discourse of community, but rather a new vision of how the existing philosophical language relates to the immanence that is its enabling condition—which thus allows us to stage “community” according to the lived experience of its concept.

1 Rocco Gangle, *François Laruelle's Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction and Guide*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 155; cf. François Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-Philosophy*, trans. Rocco Gangle, (London & New York: Continuum, 2010).

2 Ibid.

INTRODUCTION

This research inquires into the sense that might be found in the concept of *community*. It began with the aim of developing a discursive language that would allow us to articulate the nuances of “belonging” at play in the fragile, multi-layered networks of contemporary society. However, our preliminary research revealed that there is no shortage of discursive language in circulation which addresses such questions—from the sociological notion of a “neo-tribal” turn in mass society that heralds the decline of individualism, through philosophical discourses that interpret society in terms of a complex of assemblages, or else conceive community politically, as being constituted in the division of a *dēmos* from the presupposed equality of the *ochlos*, who share the dominant consensus view of social reality.³ These approaches are diverse, but each implies a conception of community as a *collective* whose relative consistency derives from its distinction from wider society—whether on the negative basis of its antagonism with the latter, or on the positive basis of a shared interest. In this way, each accords with the ordinary understanding of community as either a political or social *body* made up of individuals who hold certain things in common, or as the *state* of sharing a sense of common identity.⁴ Yet, Maurice Blanchot observes that the term “community” seems to contain a ‘flaw in language [...] if we sense that [it carries] something completely other than what could be *common* to those who would belong to a whole, a group, a council, a collective’.⁵ Accordingly, rather than add new terms to the discourse of contemporary belonging, our aim is to interrogate the meaning of “community” at a more profound level, inquiring into the transcendental conditions of theoretically grasping this “other” sense that is carried by the word.

The contemporary world is characterized by the proliferation of ever-evolving modes of communication, and the meeting and mixing of people from different cultural backgrounds. An acceleration in technological developments since the latter end of the twentieth century has allowed increasing numbers of people access to global media networks, and the capitalist economic system encourages many to migrate into growing cities and across borders. In this

3 For a theory of neo-tribalism, cf. Michel Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, trans. Don Smith, (London: Sage Publications, 1996); for an application of Deleuzian assemblage theory to the social sphere, cf. Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, (London & New York: Continuum, 2006); on the division of the *dēmos* from the *ochlos*, cf. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

4 Cf. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “community”.

5 Maurice Blanchot. *The Unavowable Community*. Trans. Pierre Joris (Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press, 1988), 1.

context, where different cultures and ideas come into contact like never before, the problems caused by identifying communities as discrete, unified collectives come to the surface. To begin with a simple observation: it is problematic to conceive “community” as a *homogeneous* unit, because within any social collective, there are always elements of diversity (for example, if I am affiliated with a particular religious community, it is possible—and indeed likely—that some of its members will be of a different gender, speak a different language, etc.). Hence it can be seen that a person can inhabit several “identities”—and hence several identifiable “communities”—simultaneously. This thought brings the idea of homogeneous subjectivity into question, both at the level of the individual and at that of the supra-individual collective; it implies that far from being an indivisible whole, the identity of any one subject is internally split and multiple. Thus, the exclusivity and consistency implied by substantive notions of identity becomes problematic for the thought of community, because any criterion given as the predicate for membership of a particular collective has the potential to create conflict both within and between its members, because it will only apply to certain facets of the multiplicitous subject. As such, the unity of the supra-individual collective will only be partial, and the logic that binds it together will at the same time serve to cleave other communities with which its members might also be affiliated, thereby creating an irreducibly antagonistic environment.

This is arguably the reason that, as Elizabeth Fraser observes, there is a conspicuous lack of analysis of the meaning of “community” in communitarian political theories, despite the ubiquity of the term—because a rigorous analysis of the concept would see it unravel, thereby vitiating the fundamental premise of the communitarian programme.⁶ At the time of writing, the negative and antagonistic consequences of attempting to unite the community by emphasizing its internal unity and its difference with what lies beyond it have been brought into sharp relief by a seismic event in British politics, in which the electorate has voted by a small but clear majority for the nation to exit the European Union. The tone of the campaign that led to this result, which often appealed to a rather vague notion of “sovereignty”, suggests that many who voted for this secession did so largely because they perceive their identity as “British” to be incompatible with the identity of “European”—because Europe is seen as fundamentally Other, and consequently membership of a larger, multinational political community is supposed as an effacement of British democracy. However, whilst the government that called this referendum may have hoped to settle a question that had long

6 Cf. Elizabeth Fraser, *The Problems of Communitarian Politics: Unity and Conflict*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 47.

been the cause of much disagreement, at both a party and a national level, the outcome—far from constituting a great moment of *unification* for the British people—has instead revealed profound *inner* divisions along various lines: between regions, generations, social classes, etc. Consequently, some are calling the very future of the United Kingdom into question, with a new referendum on independence being discussed in Scotland, and others fearing for the maintenance of peace in Northern Ireland—which has been established, to no small extent, on the basis that it is possible for persons born in the region to have an identity (and a nationality) that is both British *and* Irish simultaneously. Thus the legacy of this democratic decision, despite the celebratory rhetoric by the exit camp regarding British “independence”, seems to be that internal differences have only been magnified, potentially to the point of an existential rupture. Moreover, these fractures are not confined to the United Kingdom—as Etienne Balibar remarks, the British referendum has revealed the polarizing influence of the European edifice throughout the continent. Hence, ‘what is manifesting itself in the UK as “separatism” is happening everywhere in Europe, as a tendency toward the fragmentation of societies, the aggravation of their internal and external faultlines.’⁷

The question this research addresses is not, however, how we might *solve* these political antagonisms. Rather, we remark on the difficulties that arise from thinking community as a common body in order to show why we believe a different approach to the problem is necessary. Thus we begin from the position that in order to theorize the sense of community effectively, it is necessary to go beyond the limitations of a metaphysical logic of identity, because the social relations at issue involve something that exceeds whatever could be represented in terms of an identity predicate that would bind the collective into a substantive unity. To take such a critical position in relation to the metaphysics of identity is not new in continental philosophy; in the wake of Nietzsche and Heidegger, the so-called “critique of representation”, which calls such identity thinking into question, came to be a dominant theme in the context of the French philosophy that this thesis addresses. Thus, we do not claim any originality in these opening remarks; rather we offer these common-sense observations in order to show at the outset why we consider it necessary not to treat community as an *object*—because, as the above quotation of Blanchot suggests, something in its concept seems to exceed what could be objectivated. Instead, our research explores a strand of philosophical thought that approaches community as an *experience*. Specifically, we examine both Georges Bataille and Jean-Luc Nancy's discourses of community, because of

7 Etienne Balibar, ‘Le Brexit, cet Anti-Grexit’, *Liberation*, 26th June 2016, <http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2016/06/27/le-brexit-cet-anti-grexit_1462429> [accessed 28/06/16]

the way that each positions this experience at the very limits of philosophical thought, and gives community as that which calls the very structure of *logos* into question. This is to say that our reason for studying Bataille and Nancy's thought is that we are broadly in agreement with the aims of their respective projects—and moreover, we believe that they have each contributed to articulating a strong philosophical argument for community's status as an unobjectivizable experience.

The theme of community is one that recurs at many disparate places in Bataille's writings, and can be seen as one of the central threads that holds his diverse thinking together. It is a problematic that he pursues in many forms, connecting community variously with communication, dramatization, politics, an economics of expenditure, sovereignty and death, amongst other things. Moreover, he explores both the question of how community might be theorized, and the problem of how one might found a community without instantiating a hierarchical totality in the same gesture. However, neither his writing nor his practical experiments exhausted, or indeed solved this problematic. Bataille retreated from the question in his later work, concerning himself instead with more the selective social bond between lovers and the rarefied modes of communication of artists—and we might interpret this retreat as an admission of a kind of failure, in his attempt to adequately articulate communal experience in a philosophical mode.⁸

Nevertheless, we begin this thesis with an examination of Bataille—in part because of his importance in influencing contemporary debates in continental philosophy on the subject of community, for example in the work of Nancy, Blanchot, Giorgio Agamben and Alphonso Lingis.⁹ Indeed, it could be argued that Bataille inaugurated “community” as a philosophical problematic that can be seen as a horizon of thinking for our times—Nancy credits him with opening up the question of community for philosophy in the wake of the failure of communism, asserting that ‘Bataille is without a doubt the one who experienced first, or most acutely, the modern experience of community’, and that ‘Bataille has gone furthest into the crucial experience of the modern destiny of community.’¹⁰ As both the “first” to register the modern experience of community, and the one to have “gone furthest”, he takes a

8 Nancy certainly interprets Bataille's “retreat” in this way: ‘Although [the thinking of community] was Bataille's sole concern, [...] he was in the end, in the face of the “immense failure” of political, religious, and military history, able to oppose only a *subjective* sovereignty of lovers and of the artist’. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. and trans. Peter Connor, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 21.

9 Cf. Nancy, *Inoperative Community*; cf. Blanchot, *Unavowable Community*; cf. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); cf. Alphonso Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

10 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 19, 18.

foundational position in the discursive tradition that this thesis examines.

The nature of this foundation, as we shall see, is a somewhat strange one, given that Bataille's thinking constantly struggles against the sense of permanence that philosophy's "architectural" logic sets in place.¹¹ It is interesting that Bataille should have had such influence on philosophical discourse given that his credentials as a philosopher are arguably somewhat questionable. Andrew J. Mitchell and Jason Kemp Winfree comment that:

[c]onsidered as a sociologist, an art historian, a theorist, a pornographer, a novelist, Bataille seems to haven [sic] fallen short of philosophy, at least in the strict sense, and this even by his own admission and in spite of his impact on major philosophical figures of the twentieth century and beyond.¹²

This understanding of Bataille's thought as not quite fitting into the disciplinary boundary of philosophy *in the strict sense* is another reason that his thinking is relevant to our research. Community, in Bataille's writings, is consistently proposed as something that exceeds the limits of conceptual thought, belonging instead to an ecstatic realm of lived experience—thus, in Boris Groys' terms, it forms the ground of an "antiphilosophy".¹³ Given that Bataille had an important role in establishing community as the locus of an essential relation between philosophical thought and its non philosophical other, we might re-cast his "falling short of philosophy" in a more positive light, inasmuch as bringing philosophy into relation with other regions of knowledge and practice could be seen as a creative approach to the problem of community, which appears insoluble from a "strictly" philosophical perspective.¹⁴ Thus,

11 Denis Hollier observes that the word "architecture" takes on many "jobs" in Bataille's writing, as it consistently functions on a metaphorical level: 'When architecture is discussed, it is never simply a question of architecture [...] before any other qualifications, [architecture] is identical to the space of representation.' *Against Architecture, The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing, (Cambridge MA & London: MIT Press, 1992), 31. As such, architecture can be understood to be a structuring metaphor, synonymous with the space of the *logos*, which Bataille's thinking repeatedly pits itself against. We will explore the function of this architectural metaphor in Bataille's reading of Hegel below; cf. *infra*, Section 1.3.

12 Andrew J. Mitchell & Jason Kemp Winfree, 'Editor's Preface', in *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), ix. Mitchell & Winfree continue by naming Foucault, Derrida, Blanchot, Lacan, Kristeva, and Baudrillard—along with Nancy—as philosophers who 'owe a significant debt to Bataille in their formation'. *Ibid.*

13 Groys defines "antiphilosophy" as 'a readymade philosophy that ascribes universal philosophical value to certain already-existing ordinary practices, in the same way in which practices of the artistic readymade ascribe artistic value to ordinary objects. To achieve this goal, the antiphilosopher looks for ordinary experiences that can be interpreted as being universal—as transcending one's own cultural identity.' He suggests that the ecstatic sharing of tears and laughter takes this role as "universal" in Bataille's thought. Boris Groys, *Introduction to Antiphilosophy*, trans. David Fernbach, (London & New York: Verso, 2012), xi. John Ó Maoilearca observes that Groys' notion of antiphilosophy—with its appeal to the logic of the "readymade" found in the "anti-art" of avant-garde artists such as Marcel Duchamp—consists in a reversal of philosophical values which continues to set its objects apart as *exceptional*, thereby perpetuating the authoritative position of philosophy in a displaced manner. In contrast, Laruelle's non-philosophical pragmatics expand *all* aspects of philosophy including its objects, practices and practitioners such that they are levelled, 'distributed according to a democratic code without any exemplariness or exceptionality.' John Ó Maoilearca, *All Thoughts Are Equal: Laruelle and Non-Human Philosophy*, (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 265.

14 We write "non philosophical", without a hyphen, to indicate something that is other-than-philosophical, in

although the persistence of community as a theme in Bataille's thinking may, at least in part, be a consequence of his lack of success in grasping the communal experience in a philosophically watertight manner, there is nevertheless much that can be learned by excavating the *cause* of this failure. By following Bataille's logic, we aim to show how the experience of community that he attempted to articulate is *constitutively* in excess of the form of philosophical conceptualization that his thinking addressed itself to. As such, we will argue that “community” can be understood to name an instance of the real that stands in a critical relation to philosophy itself, insofar as it reveals the limitations of philosophy's syntax (specifically, in its dialectical form). Consequently, we propose that community demands to be theorized by another method—one that is not *antiphilosophical* but rather *non-philosophical*, drawing on the epistemological framework devised by François Laruelle.

Bataille is certainly not the first to ask if and how it is possible to theorize something that seems to exceed the strictures of philosophical objectivation. Indeed, the difference between philosophy and its extra-philosophical other is arguably the central question that European philosophy concerns itself with—Ray Brassier goes so far as to claim, of the post-Kantian tradition, that ‘[c]ontinental philosophy lives of this difference between itself and its specular, imaginary other(s): science, religion, the mystical, the ethical, the political, the aesthetic or even [...] “the ordinary”.’¹⁵ This tendency for philosophy to constitute itself in relation to its outside goes back much further than Kant, however, and the uninhabitable event of death has been given as the excess that opens onto this outside since ancient times. As we shall see, Bataille follows in this tradition. Kalliopi Nikolopoulou draws out a connection between Bataille's conception of death, and European philosophy's origins in the Platonic staging of the Socratic ordeal, which suggests a certain thematic consistency in European thought that, when viewed in Laruellian terms, can be attributed to an invariant structural kernel within philosophy.¹⁶ This preoccupation with death as an enabling limit in relation to which social bonds are generated is a recurrent theme in the philosophical discourse of community—not only in Bataille's thinking, but also in the work of Nancy, Blanchot and Lingis.¹⁷

contrast to the technical sense that Laruelle intends by the hyphenated “non-philosophy”.

15 Ray Brassier, ‘Axiomatic Heresy: The Non-Philosophy of François Laruelle’, *Radical Philosophy* 121, (Sept/Oct 2003), 27.

16 Kalliopi Nikolopoulou, ‘Elements of Experience: Bataille's Drama’, in *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille*, ed. Andrew J. Mitchell & Jason Kemp Winfree, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 99–105. Cf. *infra*, Chapter 4, for an examination of Laruelle's analytic of Philosophical Decision, in which he claims to articulate a structural invariant to all of philosophy; we will demonstrate its applicability to Bataille and Nancy's thought, respectively, in Sections 4.2–4.3, above.

17 As we will see, the uninhabitable event of death is also implicit in Nancy's conception of community as the ontological co-appearance of finite beings, because following Bataille, he conceives the experience of death

The specific philosophical system that Bataille pits himself against, however, is not that established by Plato, but rather the dialectical logic of Hegelianism. We will argue that the reason Hegelianism constitutes the philosophical edifice that Bataille seeks to breach is because of the particular way in which reason comes to dominate experience within the dialectic—which makes it an exemplar of what Laruelle characterizes as philosophy's intrinsic drive to constitute (or at least co-constitute) the reality that it claims to examine.¹⁸ As such, we might say that Hegelianism epitomizes philosophy's way of relating to the real.¹⁹ We will therefore argue that the problem presented by Hegelianism is not an obstacle that is particular to Bataille's thought; rather, it forms the horizon against which the thought of community in general struggles. For this reason, Chapter 1 will examine both how Hegel's philosophy approaches the question of the constitution of the social body, and how and why Bataille challenges this approach in the name of an experience of profound communication that cannot be accounted for within the economy of the Hegelian system.

Laruelle characterizes philosophy as a circular, self-positing structure that, by virtue of its critical reflexivity, is intrinsically “meta-philosophical” in its logic. As such, he argues that ‘all philosophies play for some other the role of meta-philosophy.’²⁰ We aim to show that Bataille's relationship to Hegel is just such a meta-philosophical one, insofar as he enacts an interpretation and critique of the dialectical system, which seeks to *correct* it in order to restore the status of experience. However we suggest that, in spite of this critical view of Hegelianism—and indeed, philosophy *tout court*—Bataille's thinking remains informed by the dialectical framework. This ambivalence leads to an impasse in his thought, where community is posited as an unobjectivizable experience which can only be “theorized”

as that which reveal beings' finitude—although the figure of death takes a less prominent position in his discourse; cf. *infra*, Section 2.1. The same theme forms the basis of both Blanchot's *Unavowable Community*, and Alphonso Lingis' *Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*.

18 Laruelle characterizes philosophy as an essentially circular, self-positing form of reason. This circularity, according to Laruelle, ‘is not a simple syntactic trait whose effects it would be possible to delimit: it is identically the claim of philosophy to be able to co-determine the Real’. François Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Nicola Rubczak and Anthony Paul Smith, (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 4.

19 Laruelle says: ‘philosophy itself tells us what it is, for it exists in the best cases as a system that posits itself and auto-thinks itself; Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz, Kant, and *above all Hegel* and Nietzsche have designed, projected, defined, sometimes effectuated this Idea as a system of a universal *cogito*.’ François Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*, trans. Drew S. Burk and Anthony Paul Smith, (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2012), 193 [emphasis added]. However, the claim that Hegelianism serves as a general model for philosophy is somewhat controversial. Ray Brassier criticizes Laruelle for projecting a Hegelian model onto “Philosophy” in general, (*Nihil Unbound*, 131–3), and we agree that the generalization that “all Philosophy is Hegelian” stretches beyond credibility. Nevertheless, we aim to show as this thesis develops that Laruelle's analysis *can* be reasonably applied to the philosophical materials under consideration, and that it is relevant to the question of if/how it is possible to conceptualize “community” in a non-totalizing way. Cf. *infra* Ch. 4.2–4.3.

20 Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 9.

through a *subjective* participation which is necessarily short-lived and cannot be discursively grasped. Thus Bataille's affirmation of community's experience as the other of philosophical reason does not fundamentally undermine the authority of *logos*; its ecstatic gesture departs from the latter, but ultimately leaves the architecture of representation intact.

Nancy picks up the theme of community as ecstatic experience from Bataille's thinking, and the question of how social experience might be grasped theoretically takes a similarly central position in his own oeuvre. He attributes Bataille's difficulty in thinking beyond the *logos* to the fact that the dialectical underpinnings of the latter's thought indexes an implicit notion of subjectivity that is indebted to the logic of Speculative Idealism, and he suggests that this is what creates the particular impasse in Bataille's attempts to conceive a community that would be genuinely decentred and horizontal in its organization. Nancy's response to this difficulty is to further deconstruct the metaphysical framework that underlies Bataille's discourse, with profound ontological consequences. He places community at the very limits of philosophical reasoning—that is, at the border of the non philosophical—suggesting that:

Perhaps we should not seek a word or a concept for it, but rather recognize in the thought of community a theoretical excess (or more precisely, an excess in relation to the theoretical) that would oblige us to adopt another *praxis* of discourse and of community.²¹

In Chapter 2 we will show how Nancy answers this “obligation” by re-thinking community's place in the ontological order, positing “community”, understood as an experience of originary sociality, as the condition for the appearance of Being *as such*. Nancy thus reinterprets the Bataillean problematic of community by drawing on the ontological framework of Martin Heidegger's existential analytic.²² In this way, Nancy takes the role of “meta-philosopher” in relation to Bataille. However, as we shall see, rather than locating the ground of Being in the singular relation of *Dasein* (Being-there) as Heidegger does, Nancy foregrounds the relationality of *Mitsein* (Being-with), which remains less developed in Heidegger's thinking—hence he not only moves beyond the subjectivism of Bataille's approach to thinking community, but also seeks to correct a tendency he finds problematic in Heidegger's thought, whereby the latter occludes the *social* implications of the ontico-ontological relation. By positing *Mitsein* as the ground, Nancy emphasizes the always plural constitution of Being, claiming that it is only possible for entities to come to presence through

21 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 25–26.

22 Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962).

an experience of mutual exposure with one or more others. This co-appearance or “compearance” is, Nancy says, the experience of community— ‘not, perhaps, an experience that we have, *but an experience that makes us be.*’²³ This originary ecstasis of Being is posited as happening to *singular beings*, prior to their constitution as *subjects*.

This post-Heideggerian ontology entails a shift from a metaphysical understanding of Being as substance, to a dynamic conception of Being as *event*. Nancy suggests that the motivation for this shift is profoundly political, presenting his discourse on community as having a definite political determination, in the sense that it comes ‘*from the left*’; yet he also states that the place from which it originates ‘is not one political place among others’, that is, it is not a position, program or ideal.²⁴ In this way, his deconstruction of community entails a retreat or withdrawal from the empirical concerns of politics into a more ontological realm— what he articulates is an experience of sociality that opens the space for the political, but which precedes the formation of any determinate politics.²⁵ Nancy proposes that community, as identified with the originary experience of *Mitsein*, constitutes an intrinsic resistance to conceptual totalization. On this basis, he suggests that community names that which resists totalitarianism in the political sphere.

Thus a structural relationship is identified between the political and the conceptual spheres, which can be traced this back their roots in the ancient Greek *polis* and *logos*. Nancy suggests that these spheres have a formal similarity—for which the Athenian theatre, understood as ‘the place of the symbolic-imaginary appropriation of collective existence’, serves as a structuring model.²⁶ Nancy seeks to deconstruct this theatrical set-up; one way he does this is by considering the performative function of myth—its supposed power to bind the community into a totality by presenting to its members a common “origin”, thereby rendering the identity of the collective *immanent*. Nancy thus suggests that the scene of myth's

23 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 26.

24 *Ibid.*, xxxvi.

25 Nancy and Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe explore the transcendental conditions of the political under the name of the “*retrait du politique*”, which can be understood both in terms of a “re-tracing” back to the source of politics, and also as a “retreat”, in the militaristic sense of drawing back in the face of a superior force. They suggest that the possibility for a re-tracing of the conditions of the political has been made possible by the disintegration of conventional political economy in the wake of the collapse of communism as an alternative to liberal-democratic ideals. Returning to the ontological conditions of the political entails that the political is imbricated with the philosophical; they state: ‘Taken as a philosophical question, and from the point of view of what we have for the time being called *the essence of the political*, the question of the political evokes the necessity of dwelling on what makes the social relation possible as such; and that is also to say on what does not constitute it as a simple relation (which is never given), but which implies a “disconnection” or “dissociation” at the origin of the political event itself.’ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, ed. & trans. Simon Sparks, (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 180, n.1.

26 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne, (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 2000), 71.

performance—which serves as the original “theatre”, the exemplary space of representation—enacts a kind of conceptual violence on the collective because in transcending towards the immanence of communal *identity*, its members are cut off from the more originary immanence of their compearance as singular beings. However, in his analysis of this mythological absolutism, Nancy argues that such an “immanentist” community is impossible in principle, because the event of ecstatic sociality by which singular beings compear always-already *interrupts* the immanence of the posited collective identity. Thus, the apparatus of representation is destabilized, and the role of *fiction* in constituting a social “world” thrown open. This opens a question that is central to our thesis—namely, how can the ecstatic community, which precedes the immanence of collective identity, be presented *as such*, without realizing itself as essence.

We will suggest that another way of thinking through this question is to ask how “community” might be presented without dividing its immanence. Nancy suggests that such a division might be integral to critical thought in general, inasmuch as underlying the “critical attitude” are a set of presuppositions concerning the oppositional status of reality and appearance.²⁷ He then raises a question as to what other approach to thinking might be necessary to avoid this divisive logic. He approaches the problem, in part, by re-thinking the theatrical paradigm such that in place of the enclosed theatre of *logos*, in which appearances are conceived as transcendent in relation to the immanent reality they index, he posits the originary space of co-appearance as an open “stage” that is performatively constituted through the shared exposition of singular beings. Thus the “spectacular” nature of the social world is no longer thought as belonging to the order of visibility—rather, the communal stage is proposed as the experiential space that is engendered when beings appear in their Being. In this way, the transcendence implied by the theatrical model of representation is replaced by a notion of *appresentation*, which spaces beings on a horizontal plane.

We will argue, however, that whilst Nancy convincingly delimits the vertical transcendence that structures the theatrical model of *logos*, his identification of “community” with the horizontal transcendence of ecstasy means that it is positioned at the juncture of a complex interrelation between immanence and transcendence—and that rather than presenting community in its simple immanence, he thus gives it as an irreducible mixture in which its immanence remains divided. Moreover, having posited the communal relation as the *a priori* condition for sense *as such*, in order to avoid its totalizing hypostatization by discourse he must maintain the Heideggerian notion that the essence of Being is found in its *withdrawal*

27 Ibid., 54.

from objectivation. As such, the event of community is presented as an aporia that is constitutively resistant to conceptualization—its ecstasy always withdrawing into an untouchable “beyond” of thought. In this way, Nancy's discourse of community gestures towards the primordial sociality that is its “object” whilst maintaining the latter's position as out-of-reach.

Consequently, although Nancy's re-conception of the ontological order is consistent in avoiding the latent subjectivism he critiques in Bataille, we argue that because the positioning of community prior to the emergence of discourse means that it is resistant *in principle* to conceptualization, his own discursive articulation of community nevertheless reaches its own impasse. Nancy characterizes the originary event of sociality as a positive experience of freedom without an end-point; yet, whilst this shift from a substantial to a dynamic conception of community appears to escape the strictures of a substantivist metaphysics, Howard Caygill asks: ‘is this any more than another philosophical ruse to remain the master of the community’?²⁸ Caygill suggests that because the primordial sharing of sense is posited as *a priori*, it assumes a *de facto* metaphysical dynamic, exceeding the theatre of *logos* only to reinstate totality in another form. He remarks:

In spite of all its qualifications, the experience of freedom described here in terms of action and relations is analogous in many ways to a substantial, metaphysical concept. To a large extent it is more terrible, because the violence of its breaking open and its overflowing can neither be recognized nor mourned.²⁹

That is, by associating the experience of community with the originary event of Being, Nancy identifies it with philosophy *as such*—hence attributing philosophical thought with the privilege of being *the* proper and sufficient way of experiencing community; moreover, because its withdrawal from the objectivating apparatus of *logos* is given as the essence of this event, this experience is grasped in the mode of a loss which cannot even be witnessed.

Hence, we find in both Bataille and Nancy's discourses a certain circularity of logic which, whilst it maintains the openness of community's concept, nevertheless rests on an aporetic ground whereby the experience in question is ultimately conceived as belonging to the order of a “real” that is constitutively resistant to theorization. Thus we suggest that each offers a philosophy of community that could be seen as *negative* inasmuch as its “object” is given as an experience that is absent from discourse—either as something that can only be accessed by exiting from the *logos*, or else as the latter's enabling pre-condition.

28 Howard Caygill, ‘Philosophy, Violence, Freedom’, in *The Sense of Philosophy: On Jean-Luc Nancy*, ed. Darren Sheppard et al, (London: Routledge, 1997), 22.

29 Ibid, 25.

Consequently, whilst their respective presentations of community each constitute an important questioning of the limits of philosophy as such they also, frustratingly, posit their “object” as the untheorizable *par excellence*.

In order to exit from this circular and aporetic style of thought, which probes the limits of philosophy whilst still at least partially accepting the authority of its syntax, we propose that it is necessary to adopt a different *stance*. To do this we turn to Laruelle's non-philosophy. Although the question of community is not a major focus of Laruelle's thought, his analytic framework is useful to us because it allows us to regard the frustrating circularity we find in Bataille and Nancy as a symptom of the founding “Decision” which forms a structural invariant at the basis of philosophy *as such*, therefore setting the problematic of community in the context of a wider question concerning philosophy's epistemological pretensions to be *sufficient* as a method for grasping the real.³⁰ Laruelle proposes an analytic framework for theorizing philosophy formally, revealing how its decisional structure divides the immanence of the real and mixes it with transcendence—thus he offers a coordinated way of viewing Bataille and Nancy's discourses of community. As we have seen, Nancy suggests that the division of community's immanence is the action of a philosophical mechanism that has implications in the political sphere. He attributes this scissiparity to the metaphysical structure of *logos*; however, Laruelle proposes that *all* philosophy—including “deconstruction”—is founded on a *Decision* which splits immanence and creates an “amphibology” or “*mixte*” in which immanence is yoked to transcendence at a transcendental level. Moreover, because he argues that each philosophy contains a meta-philosophical dimension, by which it positions itself as the exclusive way to grasp the real, this disjunctive binding of immanence and transcendence serves to totalize philosophy's object(s) at this meta-level—a totalization that Laruelle suggests cannot be unworked by any process of philosophical critique. Thus one of the fundamental claims that grounds non-philosophy is that philosophical thought *as such* is constitutively totalizing.³¹

This might appear to be a negative, anti-philosophical position—one that takes a

30 The matter of community is not one that Laruelle has treated at any length, although has written about the real conditions of the community of *researchers*—cf. François Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique, Communauté Scientifique’, in *La Communauté en Paroles*, ed. Herman Parret, 139–164, (Liège: Mardaga, 1991). We will examine this essay in detail in Chapter 3.

31 As we elucidate Laruelle's theory of Philosophical Decision below, we will have cause to limit the scope of this claim somewhat, arguing that it can only be rigorously applied to certain philosophical approaches—namely, those that enact a transcendental deduction; cf. *infra*, 129–31. This restriction should be kept in mind when we use Laruelle's generalizing language. Nevertheless, the decisional structure Laruelle describes can be detected in the work of various philosophers in the European tradition, from Parmenides onward, and we suggest that it is present in much of post-Kantian philosophy. We will demonstrate that it is applicable to both Bataille and Nancy's thought; cf. *infra*, Ch. 4.2–4.3.

reductive view of philosophy in order to dismiss or negate it. However, Laruelle characterizes non-philosophy as something more positive: a heterogeneous practice of philosophy that aims to challenge philosophy's constitutively hierarchical, and indeed totalizing claims by situating it within a broader, more democratic paradigm of thought. He claims to do this by revealing how the possibility of thinking the essence of immanence is excluded from philosophy at the level of its syntax—and then creating a new syntax that thinks *from* this essence. Thus, non-philosophy is both a critique of philosophy and a redeployment of philosophical terms and concepts according to a different syntax, which strips them of their transcendence and uses them instead as mere material. These two aspects—the global critique of philosophy and the putting into play of its materials in another mode—are performed at one and the same time, or as Laruelle says, “in-One”.

Non-philosophy's critique is a radical one that targets ‘the whole of or the identity of philosophy’.³² Radical should be understood here not in the sense of taking an extreme position, but in the etymological sense of getting to the root of something—in this case, discovering the mechanism by which philosophy produces and legitimates itself. Yet, Laruelle states that we need to be cautious with the term “critical”—and this is because, given that critique is itself one of philosophy's constitutive practices, a critical appraisal of philosophy as a whole is a problematic task.³³ To attempt a “critique of critique” would seem to be a gesture that must inevitably lead to an aporia—and it is precisely the limitations of the sort of aporetic logic we observe in both Bataille and Nancy's thought that non-philosophy seeks to avoid. Thus, whilst Laruelle's caution with the term “critical” echoes the question raised by Nancy as to what approach to thinking might be required to escape from the divisive logic of the “critical attitude”, his response to the question differs in terms of its method. In order not to enact a repetition that would result in his thought being recuperated by the very mechanism it is attempting to criticize, Laruelle must find a basis for his theorization of philosophy that is *exterior* to the latter. This is to say he needs to identify an alternative discursive terrain from which to take a view the *phenomenal reality* of philosophy. Laruelle calls this exterior place the ‘terrain of the One or of radical immanence that has shown us the Real itself’, and he claims, moreover, that this change of terrain is not so much a passage to a different place as the realization that ‘we are *already on another terrain*’.³⁴ This realization does not constitute

32 Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 3.

33 François Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference: A Critical Introduction to Non-Philosophy*, trans. Rocco Gangle, (London; New York: Continuum, 2010), xv.

34 Laruelle, *Principles*, 3; Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 155 [emphasis added]. We note that Laruelle's use of capitalization for terms such as “the Real” is inconsistent, and as such, it also varies within English translations of his texts. In general, we will use the lower case in our discussion—except when quoting

an exit from philosophy, but rather a re-visioning of philosophy according to the immanence of the One, understood as the ‘integrally real experience’ that renders possible a critique of philosophy in general.³⁵

Non-philosophy's “One” seems somewhat mysterious from a philosophical perspective. Laruelle defines it as: ‘[a]n ancient transcendental utilized as a first name under the forms One-in-One, One-in-person, vision-in-One’, and in non-philosophy, these various “names” are equivalent to the real—to immanence—itsself.³⁶ We might ask why the real needs to be given a name (or indeed, several), and why these names would be *first*. Laruelle explains that the “first names” of non-philosophy are really *first terms*—the tenets of non-philosophy, which distinguish it from philosophy.³⁷ The small change in language, from first term to first name, indicates the shift from a philosophical perspective to what Laruelle calls a “science-thought”.³⁸ In this context, the “first” indicates an order of *priority-without-primacy*, which grounds non-philosophy's democratizing posture of thought. This is to say that the real-One is *primary* insofar as it precedes thought—and in this sense, we can see a relation between this real and the *a priori* position that Nancy places community in. However, we argue that Nancy's ontological framework effectuates a kind of conceptual domination over the communal experience that it posits as *a priori*—a domination that we have already alluded to as we cited Caygill's criticism of Nancy's “philosophical ruse”, and the *de facto* absolutism that it instantiates. In contrast, Laruelle posits the real as having a particular kind of determining relation to thought, which makes its priority *without-primacy* insofar as this relation does not wield power over thinking.

As well as indicating something which comes first in the order of things, the term “first name” carries with it sense of familiarity and of personal relations. In ordinary language, a first name is a given name, which is used as a familiar or informal mode of address—and the function that these names serve in non-philosophy is indeed *informal*, in the sense that it indicates something that cannot be ascribed a concrete form as a philosophical concept can, and does not conform to any philosophical notion of propriety. The informality implied here can be related to the “formless” [*l'informe*], which Bataille gives as a

directly from sources where it is capitalized.

35 Ibid., 152.

36 François Laruelle, ‘Glossary Raisonné’, in *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith, (London; New York: Continuum, 2010), xxvii.

37 Laruelle, *Principles*, 18.

38 Laruelle, *Principles*, 41. As we shall see, Laruelle proposes non-philosophy as a “science of philosophy” in order to distinguish it from the “meta-philosophical” nature of philosophy's own self-critique. Elsewhere, Laruelle suggests that other “regional knowings”, including the arts, ethics and theology might be used as alternatives to science in the non-philosophical project of democratizing thought, and it is the aesthetic aspect of this possibility that this thesis aims to develop.

heterogeneous extra-philosophical element that problematizes the absolutism of philosophical thought because it cannot be incorporated—at least, not without its base materiality being negated in the process of objectivation.³⁹ However, as we explicate Laruelle's notion of unilateral determination we will see how the formlessness of the real is approached using a different posture, so rather than being conceived in *materialist* terms, it is thought as the minimal *transcendental* condition for thought as such. By adopting Laruelle's method, we can thus suspend the materialist amphibology that remains implicit in Bataille's thought, in order that “experience” be generalized in a non-empirical mode.

Laruelle makes use of the non-philosophical first names in order to speak about the *identity* of the real, which is also to say its *essence*.⁴⁰ Above, we contextualized this research in relation to the “critique of representation”, suggesting that identity-thinking is problematic in approaching the question of community. As such, ascribing an identity or essence to the real might seem to be a regressive or even reactionary gesture. Laruelle's argument, however, is that the essence of the real is not something *to be realized*, but that in which we are always already gripped, *prior* to any process of thought—and it is this radically originary immanence, he claims, that philosophy is unable to think, whilst obscuring this inability from its own view.

Laruelle's innovation, then, is to develop a novel epistemological approach to thinking alongside this primordial real, which appeals to an axiomatic methodology. He begins by naming immanence in order to bring it into discourse, so that its essence can be elucidated. Yet the mode in which this elucidation occurs is a strange one because the grounding axiom of non-philosophy is that the essence of radical immanence is found in its *foreclosure to thought*.⁴¹ Consequently, non-philosophy abandons the idea of thinking *about* the real—which according to this axiomatic description would be an impossible task—and instead constructs a matrix by which to think *from* or *according to* the real. Within this matrix the first names of

39 Cf. Bataille et al, ‘Formless’, in *Encyclopædia Acephalica*, ed. Alastair Brotchie, trans. Iain White et al, (London: Atlas Press, 1995), 51–2.

40 The terms “identity” and “essence” are used more or less interchangeably in non-philosophy, although as Ray Brassier observes, ‘[a]s an assiduous student of Heidegger and Derrida, Laruelle is careful to avoid casual uses of the term “essence” (unless it is to speak of an “essence-without-essence”), preferring to talk of the “identity” of philosophy instead. But what he calls “identity” or “radical immanence” amounts to a non-metaphysical conceptualization of essence which, for present purposes, retains most of the characteristic functional features associated with the concept of “essence” in its philosophical acceptance.’ *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 251, n. 6. Thus when Laruelle talks about the “essence of philosophy”, his meaning is close to that of Nancy's indeterminate “essence of the political”, rather than a hypostatized essence, such as that Nancy critiques in “immanentist” conceptions of community.

41 ‘The non-consistency of radical immanence implies or presupposes, these being the same thing here, the being-foreclosed of the Real to philosophical or non-philosophical thought’. François Laruelle, Summary of Non-Philosophy’, in *Struggle and Utopia*, 33, §3.6.

the real serve as place-holders for something that cannot be conceptualized by philosophical means, but can nevertheless be described—the real phenomenality of the thought-world, which is the “object” of non-philosophical analysis. As Anthony Paul Smith explains: ‘the One functions as a name for what remains not unthought, but rather always insufficiently thought, what is radically immanent and foreclosed to thought, but infinitely effable’, and it is this claim to render the real effable that makes non-philosophy productive in developing a new articulation of the problematic of community.⁴² Accordingly, what this research aims to do is to develop a new effectuation of non-philosophy in order that the experience of community, given as part of the real, is no longer consigned to an *unavowable* beyond of thought.⁴³

Non-philosophical pragmatics entail the construction of an axiomatic matrix which conjugates two orders of causality for thought. The first is the One-real, given as the *necessary condition* for thought as such. However, the One, as absolutely indivisible, is utterly *indifferent* to thought, and thus is *not sufficient* to manifest the latter. Consequently, Laruelle looks to philosophy to provide material for his pragmatics—hence philosophy is given as the *occasional cause* of non-philosophical thought. This second order of causality is contingent, because the axiomatic supposes that all philosophies are equal (which is to say equally arbitrary) in their relation to the real that determines their very possibility; hence any philosophical Decision can be used as material. Once the material has been selected, it is redeployed through a performative usage of its terms, which suspends their decisional claim to sufficiency. In this way, Laruelle proposes a non-philosophical usage of philosophy that is determined, in a very specific way, by the real. This “determination-in-the-last-instance” is the function of a transcendental theorem that, rather than trying to grasp the real, axiomatically supposes it as the necessary transcendental condition *for* thinking, and proposes a unilateral (non-) relation whereby the One is given as the cause-(of)-thought, without this causality being reciprocated. This results in an immanent non-sufficient *experience of thinking*—which we find to be useful in re-conceiving the sense of “unity” in the experience of “community” such that the sense of identity it carries is emptied of all predicates, and thus no longer totalizes its “object”.

We have described—very briefly—the axiomatic matrix that forms the general syntax of non-philosophy; however, Laruelle proposes that each effectuation of non-philosophy

42 Anthony Paul Smith, ‘Thinking from the One’, in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, ed. John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 20.

43 This is Blanchot's formulation; cf. *Unavowable Community*. However, the idea is of community being unavowable is also present in both Bataille and Nancy's conceptions of the communal experience; cf. *infra*, 81, 85, and *passim*.

requires a new syntax to be elucidated, using the terms of the philosophical materials under consideration, and it is through this elucidation that we arrive at an immanent presentation of the philosophical concept in question. The task we set ourselves is to articulate just such a syntax. Laruelle suggests that it is possible to introduce techniques of creation into non-philosophy that come from other, extra-philosophical regions of knowledge including science, technology, theology, the arts, etc., to create transcendental “philosophy-fictions”. Accordingly, we will draw out the theatrical thematic that we identify in both Bataille and Nancy's discourses of community, and take this as an occasion for syntactic invention—elucidating the transcendental apparatus of non-philosophy in terms of a “theatre-fiction”. This framework is useful because it offers a novel way of exploring non-philosophy's particular mode of *performativity*—which is ultimately neither theatrical nor linguistic, but rather consists in the manifestation of the *real identity* of the concept and the experience of community. Thus, the innovation of this research does not consist in proposing new terminology to be added to the discourse of community, but rather to propose a *style of thinking* that allows us to re-envision how the terms already in circulation relate to the experience of community that is their “object”. This allows us to present “community” in an immanent mode that releases it from the theoretical impasse of its deconstruction. In doing so, we make a case for the immanent value of the transcendental apparatus of non-philosophy—which we suggest can only be done by effectuating it.

The structure of the thesis does not follow the vector of non-philosophical causality, which travels from the immanent-real towards thought's manifestation; rather it begins by focusing on the philosophical materials, and then moves towards a more immanent mode of presentation for their concepts. Accordingly, our first two chapters offer an in-depth examination of the notion of “community” and related concepts in our chosen materials, with the aim of articulating *philosophically* where their respective discourses reach their impasses. Chapter 1 examines Bataille's thinking and its relation to Hegelianism. Chapter 2 looks to Nancy, and the influence he takes from both Bataille and Heidegger. In this review of our materials, we explore how the problematic of community is related to the structural question of the possibilities and limits of the philosophical *logos*, and observe how the thematic of theatre—as a model for the architecture of *logos*—comes to be related to the philosophical problematic of community.

Chapter 3 presents a condensed summary of the conceptual framework of Laruelle's non-philosophy, which sketches out its relevance to the problematic of community; it then presents some philosophical objections to Laruelle's theory, which need to be addressed if we

are to defend the validity of his claims. Chapter 4 considers the “critical” aspect of non-philosophy, examining Laruelle's analytic of philosophical Decision, and showing how it can be applied to both Bataille and Nancy's thought. Our aim, with these analyses, is not to unveil a deeper hermeneutic “truth” concerning their contents, but rather to view them formally, rendering apparent the syntactic presuppositions on which they are grounded, and hence the phenomenal reality of their concepts. Chapter 5 explores the *positive* aspect of non-philosophy's method—the way it uses axiomatic abstraction to suspend philosophical sufficiency. Here we will defend Laruelle's theoretical apparatus against some of the philosophical objections raised against it.

However, to this point we will have only presented a transcendent representation of non-philosophy and will be yet to offer our own effectuation of this non-philosophical apparatus. In Chapter 6, we take up Laruelle's suggestion that other techniques of creation may be introduced into non-philosophy to aid syntactic invention, and work towards devising our own non-philosophical syntax for community by examining the principles of sufficiency that underlie three theories of theatrical aesthetics, in the work of Aristotle, Antonin Artaud, and Erika Fischer-Lichte. We will isolate the principles of sufficiency that are presupposed in each of these aesthetic theories by subjecting them to an analysis according to the same decisional matrix we apply to Bataille and Nancy's thought in Chapter 4; this allows us to identify formal correspondences between the aesthetics of theatre and the problematic of community as it arises in the philosophical materials that are our main focus. It is in our final chapter—Chapter 7—that the various preparatory stages are brought together and viewed “in-One”; here we will elucidate non-philosophy's syntax in new terms, as a “theatre-fiction”, and will use this model for the staging of community.

CHAPTER 1

Bataille: Community as Ecstatic Experience

1.1 *The Hegelian edifice.*

The thematic of community arises recurrently in Bataille's thought, appearing as both an exigency for the subject, and a problematic that tests the limits of philosophical reason. His attempts to theorize the experience of community can be understood, in part, as an act of resistance to the totalizing trajectory of Hegelian Idealism. Yet at the same time, Bataille's thought is informed by Hegel's dialectical logic at a fundamental level—and we will argue that for this reason, his attempts to grasp the excessive nature of the communal experience are bound to be recuperated by a dialectical economy. In order to understand the philosophical context in which Bataille's thought is situated, we will therefore begin by outlining Hegel's dialectical process, with a particular focus on the aspects that preoccupy Bataille.

In *The Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel analyses the dialectical movement of the subject of knowledge from the immediacy of the universal towards unified reason, or absolute spirit (*Geist*). This movement is a teleological process, where the absolute is both the *result*, and the principle which causes the motion to begin.⁴⁴ The true, for Hegel, is grasped and expressed, 'not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*.'⁴⁵ Hegel's conception of subjectivity is important to an investigation of community because his method proposes an essential relationality, which is the driving force of the *telos*. The claim that total unity results from the dialectical mediation of the negative sets up a way of understanding how the subject relates to the whole which has both ethical and political consequences.

The pathway that consciousness takes towards the absolute begins with the sensible subject in the ungraspable flux of the "now". Hegel argues that because he begins with the 'element of immediate existence' his system is distinguished from an 'abstract' scientific approach or a 'lifeless schema'.⁴⁶ That is to say, he claims that his phenomenological approach to knowledge roots his thinking in the reality of lived experience, which is pre-philosophical. When we come to examine Bataille's reading of Hegel—and later, Laruelle's theory of Philosophical Decision—we will have cause to question the fate of this "reality" when it is brought into the dialectical system.

Due to the fact that the ever-changing present is the starting-point of his system,

44 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 11, §20.

45 Ibid., 10, §17.

46 Ibid., 20, §35; 29, §50.

Hegel's dialectic produces a supple form of knowledge that is able to include the movement of time, and proposes a teleological account of history. The experiential is incorporated into reason through the process of *Aufhebung* (sublation), which involves a threefold transformation: it negates the object in its individuality, preserves it in its essential being, and elevates it into the higher sphere of the whole of reality. Through this triple movement of transcendence, which allows for the particularity of an object to be preserved *and* superseded at the same time, a synthesis is formed between sensible experience and intellectual cognition. In this synthesis, knowledge is integrated into an organic whole from which nothing is excluded: the essence of spirit is given *form*, and the absolute can be conceived and expressed as a concrete actuality, or notion.⁴⁷ For Hegel, what is produced in this synthetic movement is *identity*, whereas Bataille, as we shall see, puts the *Aufhebung* to a different use in his exploration of the logic of transgression, which he proposes at that which undermines philosophical identity.⁴⁸

Hegel's claim that knowledge is produced by the movement of spirit, of which the experiential is a constitutive part, means that reason is essentially subjective. Hegelian subjectivity is distinguished from mere opinion because the system situates the subject in a reflexive relation to the totality of Being. Hegel posits that 'the disparity that exists in consciousness between the "I" and the substance which is its object [...] can be regarded as the *defect* of them both.'⁴⁹ The difference between the subject and the objective world is only apparent, however, because according to the logic of the dialectic, spirit already contains its antithesis or contradiction at a supersensible level. As such, 'the other is itself immediately present in it', and so the difference that consciousness seemingly experiences between inner and outer worlds, subject and substance, is shown to be, rather, an '*inner* difference, or difference *in its own self*'.⁵⁰ The *Phenomenology* describes the process whereby the subject uses this inner difference to produce meaning, which culminates in the knowledge that it has a relationship of absolute reciprocity with the external whole: 'thus, what seems to happen outside of it, to be an activity directed against it, is really its own doing, and Substance has shown itself to be essentially Subject.'⁵¹ As such, we can understand substance and subject, in Hegel's thinking, to be structurally bound together as an inseparable pair or dyad.⁵² Within this

47 Ibid., 11, §19.

48 Cf. *infra*, 38; 58; n.218.

49 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 21, §37.

50 Ibid., 99, §160.

51 Ibid., 21, §37.

52 We will revisit this structure—the philosophically established dyad of interdependent elements—in Chapter 4 when we examine Laruelle's analytic of Philosophical Decision, in which he proposes that the dyadic form is the kernel of philosophical reasoning. We will apply Laruelle's analytic matrix to both Hegel and Bataille's

coupling, the data of the empirical world become substantive through the mediation of the subject, which is posited as an *a priori* factum. In this way, a hierarchy is established in which subject takes precedence over world. However, the two sides of the pair are essentially interdependent, as the subject also needs what is exterior to it in order to arrive at its own self-knowledge.

Hegel calls the inner difference that binds the substance/subject dyad together into a higher synthetic unity the *negative*, and the need to overcome it is what moves the subject in its teleological becoming. The negative is not something false, but a division within the subject that constitutes its essence. It is the *desire* to integrate the divided parts into a unified identity that drives subjectivity towards self-consciousness. Unity is achieved through dialectical synthesis, which sublates the negative into the whole. However, the internal difference can only be mediated through the relation to another, equally conscious self. As Hegel says: ‘self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another.’⁵³ Thus we can see a lateral movement in Hegel's thinking, which slides from a concern with the knowledge of the *thing*, to the problem of the knowledge of the *other*. Faced with the other, self-consciousness must come out of itself—both losing and finding itself in this other—before it can progress towards actualization. This progression can only occur through the reciprocal movement of the two beings: ‘action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both.’⁵⁴ Thus the motion of the dialectic involves a kind of *circulation* between the subject and its other—and because Hegel specifies that this other must be another (implicitly human) *subject*, this means that his system of knowledge is intrinsically social.

The encounter with the other instigates a dialectical relationship of independence and dependence, or “lordship and bondage”.⁵⁵ We shall see how the servile status that is established in this dialectic is problematic for Bataille, as it denies the possibility of sovereignty, which he argues is necessary for a genuine experience of community. However, for Hegel the master-slave dialectic is a necessary stage in the movement of spirit towards the fully integrated whole—a whole that has both epistemological and social aspects. This is relevant to a consideration of community, because in Hegelian terms it is only in the life of a *people* or *nation* that self-conscious reason's actualization has its reality.⁵⁶ The individual is

thought in Section 4.2.

53 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 111, §178.

54 *Ibid.*, 112, §182.

55 *Ibid.*, 111–119, §178–196.

56 *Ibid.*, 212, §350. Hegel conflates “community” and “nation”; we will have cause to question the equivalence of the two terms below. Cf. *infra*, Ch. 1.4.

sublated into a social whole that embodies the universal substance, ‘speak[ing] its universal language in the customs and laws of its nation.’⁵⁷ The *Aufhebung* fuses subjects into a totality, which Hegel describes as the ‘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”’.⁵⁸ This essential reciprocity between the individual and the collective is, for Hegel, the basis of ethics. Due to the way that the subject intrinsically reflects the whole, and because it is through the mediation of the other that self-consciousness becomes actual, Hegel is able to posit that the subject will choose to *sacrifice* himself in his individuality to the law of the totality. This way self-consciousness becomes *virtue*, and the individual no longer encounters resistance from an external world opposed to it; a “happy consciousness” identifies absolutely with the totality.⁵⁹ This means that ethical choices can be made according to a sense of reason that is shared with the whole nation, and can be said to be universally valid.

It is the fact that Hegel's system is predicated on this relation to totality that makes it problematic for the thought of community. The word *community*, which suggests something *common* and *unified*, would seem to call for a perfect fusion of the one with the whole, as Hegel's vision of the harmonious and integrated nation proposes. But when one begins to ask how the limits of “a” people, or “a” nation are to be demarcated, Hegelian universality begins to blur at the edges. On one level, predicated as it is on an *a priori* notion of subjectivity that belongs specifically to human beings, Hegel's philosophy is a humanism, and his *universal* names that which is shared by humanity as a whole. Indeed, Hegel proposes that ‘it is the nature of humanity to press onward to agreement with others; human nature only really exists in an achieved community of minds’, suggesting that community is the essential state-of-being for all (human) subjects.⁶⁰ However, if the ethical substance is embodied in the shared language, laws and customs of a *nation*, as Hegel argues, then already there are, in practice, numerous such “universals” in existence—and this begs a question as to how the particularity of any given social group is to be understood and articulated, and what follows from this in terms of who is included in or excluded from the collective.⁶¹

We will argue below that the difficulty of identifying the edges of a collective is not simply a pragmatic problem, but reveals a fundamental inconsistency in the Hegelian idea of

57 Ibid., 213, §351.

58 Ibid., 110, §177.

59 Ibid., 217, §359.

60 Ibid., 43, §69.

61 We might add to this that, in a lay sense, the term “community” is often applied to minority groups within a nation, indicating the distinction of its members from the normative majority.

universality. Hegel's system forms such a perfect unity that nothing outside of itself can be admitted, and within itself, all its disparate parts are resolved into a homogeneous identity. Which is to say that the unifying *telos* of the dialectic, although moved by an essential internal contradiction, does not leave any space for thinking difference as diversity. The need to retain the possibility of diversity in the conceptualization of community is being proposed here not as an abstract "human right", but as something that is necessitated by the reality of lived experience, the complexity of which is reduced in its idealized determination as an identity concept. Furthermore, if the real is able to resist the closure of the system, it is not only the identity of the collective that begins to come undone, but also the unified and self-contained nature of the individual subject in which it is reflected. This means that community poses a challenge, not only to the homogeneity of "the people", but also to the constitution of the individual as such.

This disintegration of unified subjectivity calls into question the basis of Hegelian ethics. Hegel calls the unity of "I" and "We" the "ethical substance". However, if unity means the effacement of difference within the social environment, it can also be viewed as a form of violence, which excludes or annihilates those who "do not fit", and so has a coercive influence on all its members at the level of their subjectivity; the option for individuals in this system is: conform or die.⁶² Hegel uses the term *annihilation* to refer to "abstract negation", which in the master-slave dialectic is equated with death, in contrast to the *Aufhebung* which negates and preserves at the same time.⁶³ However, in order for something to be sublated into the dialectic, it must first be grasped according to a relation of logical contradiction. If an element exceeds this contradictory logic, it cannot be identified, and so may be annihilated *without recognition*—which in social terms would amount to the oppression and/or extermination of diversity, i.e. of minority persons or groups. In this sense, we might argue that the fusion of a collective into a common identity is an essentially totalitarian movement.⁶⁴

62 The "double violence" being proposed here as part of the totalizing movement of Hegelianism can be applied to all systems of thinking that identify communities as unified, homogeneous collectives. In *The Politics of Friendship*, Jacques Derrida convincingly deconstructs such a unifying logic in Carl Schmitt's concept of the political, demonstrating that there is a problematic assumption of "fraternity" underlying democratic political systems. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London/New York: Verso, 2005).

63 Cf. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 114–116, §188–190.

64 As we shall see in Chapter 2, this is essentially how Nancy characterizes what he names "immanentism"—i.e. the tendency to conceptualize community in terms of the fusion of multiple human beings into a *body*, which he argues 'constitutes the stumbling block to a thinking of community.' *Inoperative Community*, 3; cf. *infra*, Ch. 2.3. However, as we turn to Laruelle's analytic of Philosophical Decision in Chapter 3, we will see that from a non-philosophical posture, this totalizing tendency is not limited to dialectical thinking, but can be understood to include all *philosophical* attempts to grasp the reality of social existence—including Nancy's. Cf. *infra*, Ch. 4.3.

1.2 *Sacrificial irruption; circular agitation*

For Bataille, who lived under the shadow of Nazism in the 1930s and 40s, the problems that such a dialectically based universal ethics produced are not merely logical ones; we can see his desire to articulate community in an alternative mode as motivated by a real necessity. This necessity derives in part from the political grand-narratives that framed that time-period; but it also comes from the sense—one might call it a *gnosis*—that something in the experience of community exceeds what can be captured by the sterilizing and rationalizing drive of the dialectical *Aufhebung*.⁶⁵ Bataille conceives of this excess in terms of an “inner experience” which is ecstatic in nature, thus constituting a movement at the limits both of the subject, and of reason. By positing this ecstatic movement, Bataille seeks to prevent the closure of the dialectical system. This does not equate, however, to a wholesale rejection of that system so much as an attempt to re-work it so that it no longer totalizes its object. As such, he begins by critiquing the dialectic from its interior, seeking to effect a transgression of its boundaries by bringing the question of the non philosophical *outside* into its logical space. Furthermore, just as Hegel binds the knowledge of things to the relation between the subject and his (also subjective) other, Bataille's probing of the limits of the space of the Hegelian *logos* is bound to the question of communication between beings—which is inseparable in Bataille's thinking from the question of community—and this requires a breaching of the limits of the metaphysical subject. In this way, Bataille's thinking implicitly establishes a connection between community and a spatial experience—a connection that, as we shall see, Nancy will later develop on.⁶⁶

Bataille sees Hegel's master-slave dialectic as:

the decisive moment in the history of the consciousness of self and, it must be said, to the extent that we have to distinguish between each thing that affects us, no one knows anything of himself if he has not understood this movement which determines and limits man's successive possibilities.⁶⁷

Thus Bataille follows Hegel in placing importance on the relation with the other, as a

65 “Gnosis” is a theological term for ‘a special knowledge of spiritual mysteries’, or a ‘redemptive knowledge [...] of God’ (Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. *gnosis*). Laruelle makes use of this theological mode of knowing to develop a “non-gnostic posture”, as an approach to non-philosophical thought, which asserts the primacy of “unlearned knowing” over the onto-theological apparatus by which philosophy grasps at (and consequently co-determines) the real. Cf. François Laruelle, *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith, (London & New York: Continuum, 2010), 140–1.

66 Nancy suggests that Bataille experienced community ‘as space itself, and the spacing of the experience of the outside, of the outside of self.’ *Inoperative Community*, 19. Cf. *infra*, Ch. 2.1.

67 Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*. Trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988) 109, n. Bataille is referring to the section of Hegel's *Phenomenology* entitled “Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage”, 111–115, §178–190.

necessary stage in the development of self-consciousness. However, Bataille emphasizes the way in which this encounter with the other reveals the *limits* of a person, limits that Hegelianism claims to overcome as the individual is sublated into the totality. For Hegel, the reciprocity of substance and subject puts the thinking being into an essential relationship with the divine, which he calls the *for-itself*: God is the one substance, and thought must unite with this substance in order to become actual.⁶⁸ This leads Bataille to say of the dialectic that: ‘in a sense, it is actually a theology, where man has taken the place of God’.⁶⁹ However, where God is an infinite and eternal being, Hegel’s spiritual or dialectical being is necessarily *temporal* and finite, meaning that ‘death alone assures the existence of a “spiritual” or “dialectical” being, in the Hegelian sense.’⁷⁰ The dialectic culminates in this finite being becoming absolute (which is to say becoming God, who is infinite). By drawing out the tension between the finite and the infinite in Hegel’s system Bataille is able to posit that there is, in reality, something *beyond* the totality.

Hegel tells us that it is negativity which moves the subject in its becoming towards absolute knowledge, and that the purest negativity is death: ‘Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself.’⁷¹ It is only by looking death in the face and dwelling with it that spirit can turn negativity into Being. Bataille, citing this passage, proposes that something comic lies beneath Hegel’s reasoning.⁷² Self-consciousness can only be achieved if the subject enters into a sustained relationship with his/her finitude. If the dialectic is based on logical contradiction, every thesis having its antithesis, then death—as the negativity which both holds the dialectical dyad together, and produces its movement—is the one thing that escapes this logic, because of the impossibility of the subject *experiencing* his/her own death, when death is the limit that puts an end to all experience. Therefore, Bataille says,

in order for Man to reveal himself ultimately to himself, he would have to die, but he would have to do it while living—watching himself ceasing to be. In other words, death itself would have to become (self-) consciousness at the very moment that it annihilates the conscious being.⁷³

Thus, Bataille suggests, the subject must both be *and* not be at the same time, thereby

68 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 10, §17.

69 Georges Bataille, ‘Hegel, Death and Sacrifice’, trans. Jonathan Strauss, in *Yale French Studies 78: On Bataille*, ed. Allan Stoekl (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 12.

70 Ibid.

71 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 19, §32.

72 Bataille, ‘Hegel, Death and Sacrifice’, 13.

73 Ibid., 19.

contravening the law of contradiction on which the dialectic is based. In order to make this “impossible” move, Hegel engages in what Bataille calls a *subterfuge*, a kind of tragi-comic performance—indeed, for Bataille, it is the very impossibility of experiencing one's own death that ‘proclaims the necessity of the *spectacle*, or of *representation* in general.’⁷⁴ This necessity for spectacle brings us to one of the major themes of this research—namely, the question of how theatre acts as a structuring model for the conceptualization of community. Bataille alludes to its importance for the question of community when he outlines the fact that the experience of death/finitude can only be approached through the relation to the other—and we can understand this necessary exteriority as essentially *spectacular*, in the sense that we can only incorporate death into discourse vicariously, observing it from a distance, not as a first-hand experience. This fundamental connection between death, spectacle and the relation to the other suggests that there is an originary theatricality underlying social existence as such. Theatricality is one of the themes arising in Bataille's writing on community—which, as we shall see, is also important in Nancy's understanding of social space—that we will draw out and develop on later in this thesis, where we will propose a “theatre-fiction” for articulating communal relationality in a non-decisional, hence non-totalizing, way.⁷⁵

We saw above that for Hegel, in order for the subject to gain independent self-consciousness he/she needs to exist for an other, which is to say that subjectivity needs *recognition*. For recognition to occur, two beings must expose themselves to each other in the form of ‘pure being-for-self’, or as ‘self-consciousness’.⁷⁶ However, neither of these beings can be certain that the other is indeed a like subject until that other has been put to a test, and so initially the self-certainty of each is only abstract. Thus the two beings engage in a struggle, testing each other to the absolute limit—and as we have seen, the absolute limit is death. Because of the reflexive/antithetical relation of the two beings, this means that in testing the limits of the other each must risk his/her own life—which is to say that it is a fight *to the death*. Hegel argues that, in order for the individual to prove itself as a pure consciousness, it must show that it is not attached to any specific *existence*: ‘it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won.’⁷⁷ However, having stated that life is at stake in this

74 Ibid., 20. Bataille also notes that the death of Jesus partakes in the same “comic” logic, ‘to the extent that one cannot unarbitrarily introduce the forgetting of his eternal divinity’ (Ibid., 13). Christ's dual status as both mortal *and* divine is exemplary for the problematic relation of finitude to the absolute that is being set out here. For an examination of the economy of Christian sacrifice, cf. Hannah Lammin, ‘Dancing with Death: The Excremental, the Sacred & Ecstatic Community in Free Party Culture’, *Datacide 14*, Nov 2014, 11–14, <<http://datacide.c8.com/dancing-with-death-the-excremental-the-sacred-ecstatic-community-in-free-party-culture/>> [accessed 21/08/15].

75 Cf. *infra*, Chapter 7.

76 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 113, §186.

77 Ibid. 113–4, §187.

encounter, Bataille observes that Hegel must pull his subjects back from the limit, because ‘this trial by death [...] does away with the truth which was supposed to issue from it.’⁷⁸ Instead, the struggle ends in submission by one party to the other, thereby preserving the lives of both. Thus the “trial by death” turns out to be more of a simulation of death, a *spectacle*. As Bataille says: if a man cannot live through the moment of death, then ‘he must live with the *impression* of really dying.’⁷⁹ Again, we find ourselves here in a theatrical domain, where death is mimed, rather than actualized—we may draw close to death, but our relation with it must, for Hegel, remain asymptotic if the desired result of the struggle is not to be lost.

Hegel notes how the submission that ends the struggle creates an asymmetrical relation, in which the “winner” becomes master, and the “loser” slave. This leads to ‘a recognition that is one-sided and unequal.’⁸⁰ Hegel then demonstrates that the apparent hierarchy in which the master is able to dominate the slave is, in the end, reversed. The problem for the master is that, having defeated the slave, there is no equal in relation to which he/she can attain self-certainty. Having satisfied the desire to negate the other in a fleeting moment of consumption, there is no possibility of synthesizing a concrete self-identity. Whereas the slave is held in subjection because he/she submitted, in realization that in order to develop the desired self-certainty, life (of both self and other) was essential. Thus the slave retreats from the threat of mutual annihilation, submitting to mortal fear, and subserviently *works* upon the other as object; which means, reciprocally, working on him/herself.⁸¹ This leads Hegel to argue that the truth of independent self-consciousness is accordingly the servile consciousness of the slave; consciousness can be truly for-itself only through the work that comes out of the experience of ‘the fear of death, the absolute lord.’⁸² The experience of trembling before death makes everything that is solid and stable shake to its foundations—i.e. all abstract knowledge comes apart, to be rebuilt as concrete; work, ‘fleetingness staved off, [...] forms and shapes the thing. The negative relation to the object becomes its *form* and something *permanent*.’⁸³

Thus for Hegel, it is from the fearful experience of death that “permanence” is constructed: knowledge as a *form* that transcends finitude. Bataille queries this progression, in terms of both its structural logic and its claims to permanence, by bringing the question of sacrifice into the picture. Recall that for Hegel, the virtuous individual makes a rational choice

78 Ibid. 114, §188.

79 Bataille, ‘Hegel, Death and Sacrifice’ [emphasis added], 20.

80 Hegel, *Phenomenology*. 116, §191.

81 Ibid. 116, §190.

82 Ibid. 117, §194.

83 Ibid. 118, §195.

to sacrifice *himself* to the whole—for example, by volunteering to fight in a war for his country. Bataille, in contrast, is interested in religious practices which involve the sacrifice of *another* being, arguing that ritual sacrifice entails an experience of death by proxy that unleashes a force which is heterogeneous to the rationalism of the dialectic. Bataille sees this sacrificial force as an *end* in itself, and argues that Hegel reduces it to a simple *means*.⁸⁴ Insofar as it is a ritual and a performance, sacrifice answers, for Bataille, the need for spectacle in relation to death. Sacrifice *mimes* absolute risk by substituting another's death for one's own, and in so doing doubles the affective response to the experience: rather than provoking a response of pure fear, 'the sacrificial element, the feeling of sacred horror itself, [is] joined, in a weakened state, to a tempered pleasure.'⁸⁵ This suggests a more ambivalent experience of death, one that inspires a sense of anguished joy. Those who participate in the sacrificial rite identify with the victim, who dies in their place, and so gain a certain knowledge of their own finitude—albeit in a “weakened state”. At the same time, Bataille argues, the sharing of this experience of finitude creates a heightened sense of *community*, which is one element of the pleasure that is mixed with the pain.⁸⁶ These simultaneous antagonistic affects cannot be resolved in a synthesis in the Hegelian sense, because joy and laughter do not conform to the logic of *work* on which his system is based. As such, this anguished joy constitutes, for Bataille, an opening in the system, and a way to approach the question of community as an experience, rather than a concept.

Bataille's understanding of sacrifice as an event that generates a social bond is influenced by Emile Durkheim's theory of “collective effervescence”, developed in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.⁸⁷ However, Bataille inverts certain aspects of the logic on which Durkheim's social model is based. Bataille draws out of Durkheim the idea that a tangible energy is generated in the immediate experience of sociality that occurs in relation to what he calls ‘the naiveté of sacrifice’.⁸⁸ In contrast to Hegelian idealism, which proposes that the immediate is always abstract and hence essentially lifeless, Durkheim argues that there is an affirmative experiential aspect to social life, a “collective effervescence”,

84 Bataille, ‘Hegel, Death and Sacrifice’. 26.

85 Ibid. 23.

86 Bataille also sees the imagery of death as being at the base of “erotism”, in which pleasure is connected to the feeling of sin. Ibid., and cf. Georges Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986). This erotic aspect of communal experience is questioned by Nancy, who argues that community precedes subjectivity, and hence the kind of desire that Bataille relates with death, understood in implicitly subjectivist terms. Cf. Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 20, 36–9.

87 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. J. W. Swain, (New York: The Free Press, 1965).

88 Bataille, ‘Hegel, Death and Sacrifice’, 21.

which precedes any rational synthesis.⁸⁹ Durkheim's approach thus takes a far more materialist view of the social environment, which for Hegel is only expressed ideally, in a mediated form, as spirit. However, Durkheim also shares something with Hegelian logic insofar as he sees social life as a cumulative progression towards an ever more unified, rational whole—a movement that he presents as the basis of the religious.

Durkheim argues that a rational explanation can be given for the seemingly irrational ritual of sacrifice, because as a *totem act* it produces a representation of the energy of the collective, which gives strength and meaning to each of its members. The members of the community may naïvely believe that they are giving to and receiving from the gods, but what the ritual actually does is to produce a sacred *symbol*, which is an externalization of the force that already binds the group together. Durkheim proposes that the force of collective effervescence is the “real object” of any cult, that a totem ‘is only the material form under which the imagination represents this immaterial substance, this energy diffused through all sorts of heterogeneous things’.⁹⁰ The symbol produced in a totemic practice represents the group's *identity*, and for Durkheim this externalization is a rational act, because in providing a focus for the social force, it increases the bond of the group. A circulation occurs between the collective and its symbols as rituals are repeated over time, producing a progressive strengthening of the group's identity, and allowing ever more sophisticated externalizations to be developed. As a society progresses, its religious superstitions and practices are superseded by more rational values, and it becomes an increasingly integrated organic whole. As such, Durkheim claims that ‘between the logic of religious thought and that of scientific thought there is no abyss. The two are made up of the same elements, though inequally and differently developed.’⁹¹ In advanced societies, he suggests that reason becomes the secular religion, and the human person is recognized as *the* sacred element—the embodiment of the essential force of the collective.

Durkheim's claim that all religious rites are, at their root, rational is thus based on the presupposition of a progressive movement similar to the Hegelian *telos*, where the subject accedes to rationality by developing knowledge through its relation to the whole. Although this historical progression is not, strictly speaking, a *telos* because it is not oriented towards a specific end point, it does nevertheless operate in a cumulative fashion similar to the Hegelian *Aufhebung*: it is a closed economy where every element, however apparently senseless, is retained and put to work for the benefit of the collective. As we will see, this is precisely the

89 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 258 and *passim*.

90 *Ibid.*, 217.

91 *Ibid.*, 271.

kind of circular logic that Laruelle identifies as the self-positing and self-presupposing identity of philosophy.⁹² Durkheim's understanding of rationality can thus be seen, despite his work being primarily contextualized within sociology, as a totalizing *philosophical* process that serves to constitute any number of disparate elements into a unified system or world.

However, the progressive logic that Durkheim attributes to religion, which he proposes as an essentially civilizing process, is vitiated by the inherent circularity of the system. Durkheim presupposes that the circulation between the vital force of the collective and its symbols will necessarily lead towards rationality; however, having presented the terms of this exchange as symmetrical and essentially reversible, the question arises as to what causes the movement to travel towards unity and order, and not the other way around. The circularity of the model makes it difficult to locate a definitive origin: does the cycle start with the spontaneous irruption of the affirmative force of “society”, or does this force need a symbol in order to manifest itself? Allan Stoekl suggests Durkheim's assertion that representation is produced in a “totem act”, propagated by a *pre-existent* social energy, means that the performative force of collective effervescence is irreducible to the rationality of the symbol.⁹³ As a social scientist, Durkheim sees empirical reality as taking precedence, in the formation of societies, over the rational—which contrasts with the symmetry of Hegel's idealist system where “the real is the rational and the rational is the real”.⁹⁴ Furthermore, if the transition from the force of the social experience to the rationality of representation cannot be contained in a *single*, founding totem act (and the fact that Durkheim refers to the necessary *repetition* of religious rituals in binding a society together suggests that it cannot), then there is *always* an irrational excess at play in the social sphere.⁹⁵ Bataille draws the conclusion from this that the decision to place the social force at the beginning of the cycle cannot derive from a logical necessity, and so is essentially arbitrary; and this calls into question the progressive logic of the whole system.

Bataille uses this line of reasoning to invert Durkheim's logic, proposing that, far from

92 Cf. *infra*, Ch. 4.

93 Allan Stoekl, *Agonies of the Intellectual, Commitment, Subjectivity & the Performative in the Twentieth Century French Tradition*, (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 47.

94 I quote a popular translation of this phrase, although in the standard translation T. M. Knox renders it as: 'What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational', in order to preserve the distinction in Hegel's text between *wirklich* and *real*. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 10, and cf. ‘Translator's Preface’, vi, §3. We will return to this point as we examine Laruelle's critique of the philosophical tendency to co-constitute the real; cf. *infra*, Ch. 4.1 and *passim*.

95 *Ibid.* 49–50. Stoekl relates this play between force and representation to the way that the performativity of language interrupts its constative function, as proposed by J. L. Austin. Cf. J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). We will return to the question of performativity below, when we consider the aesthetics of performance (cf. *infra*, Ch. 6.3), and again when we consider how Laruelle conceives of his non-philosophy as a performative theoretical practice, which radicalizes ordinary language philosophy (cf. *infra*, Ch. 7.3).

being identified with the rational, the affective force unleashed by the experience of community is entirely heterogeneous to rationality and the work that produces and maintains it. Bataille proposes that while Durkheim ‘settled for characterizing the sacred world negatively as being absolutely heterogeneous compared to the profane’, he seeks instead to positively uncover the implicit value of the heterogeneous order, which is strongly identified with the sacred, and hence with the totems which externalize the experience of collective effervescence.⁹⁶ Far from being a rationalizing influence, Bataille posits this force as an exteriority which exceeds the possibility of being incorporated through the process of representation. Instead, it has the potential to irrupt at any moment, interrupting the logical basis of the collective and causing a disintegration of the organic whole. In this way, lived experience comes to function as an irreducible excess that maintains an opening in the system. Bataille's inversion of Durkheim's logic is thus based on an assertion of the force of the real, and its ability to resist incorporation into the philosophical. However, as we continue to examine Bataille's interpretation of Hegelianism, we will have cause to question how this “real” is constituted, and will argue that it is actually co-constituted by the philosophical logic that it is supposed to resist.⁹⁷

Bataille challenges the totalizing claims of Hegelianism with a similar logic, making use of the tension between finitude and the infinite within the dialectic to argue that there is, in actuality, no closure to the system—that its movement is circular, as with Durkheim's model of sociality, and that there is something which escapes the integrating process of the *Aufhebung*. We have seen how for Hegel the negative, which in relation to the subject is equated with death, is necessary for the movement of the dialectic, whilst also being the singular element within the system that escapes the logic of contradiction. The Hegelian subject moves from finitude (which is revealed as he/she trembles in fear of death) to absolute reason—a teleological progression whose meaning derives from the totality that is its result. As Bataille comments: ‘satisfaction turns on the fact that a project for knowledge, which existed, has come to fruition, is accomplished, that nothing (at least nothing important) remains to be discovered.’⁹⁸ Being a *telos*, the work involved in this project unfolds in the medium of a linear, chronological temporality. However, Bataille then raises a question that exceeds the horizon of Hegelianism (which is to say that the necessity of the question is unable to impose itself within the framework provided by Hegel's dialectical system): what

96 Georges Bataille, ‘The Psychological Structure of Fascism’, in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927–1939*, ed. Allen Stoekl, trans. Allen Stoekl et al, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 142.

97 Cf. *infra*, Ch. 4.2.

98 Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 108.

happens *after* the completion of the dialectic?⁹⁹

At the culmination of the Hegelian project the finite human is said to achieve a concrete realization of his/her reciprocal relation with everything. In becoming equal to everything, the subject who attains absolute reason effectively takes on the attributes of God. Moreover, as God, that finite being comes to inhabit a different temporality, where there is no progression: because nothing can exceed absolute reason for Hegel, the completion of the dialectic constitutes the end of history. Bataille suggests that this ‘passing of existence to the state of empty monotony [is,] in a profound sense, becoming dead’,¹⁰⁰ and in this sense, the attainment of absolute knowledge takes on an almost apocalyptic aspect. Having achieved the synthesis of absolute reason, inspired by the fear of death, the subject finds that the result is another kind of death, and a new question emerges: ‘why must there be *what I know?* Why is it a necessity?’¹⁰¹ By raising the question “why?” Bataille shifts into a different discursive register—he forces philosophy into a theological realm, and thus confronts it with its non philosophical other.¹⁰² Bataille sees in this question ‘an extreme rupture, so deep that only the silence of ecstasy answers it.’¹⁰³ Ecstasy, for Bataille, is intimately bound up with the question of community insofar as it is synonymous with the “inner experience” that dissolves the limits of the subject, thus opening it up to the possibility of communication with the other. This ecstatic experience constitutes a movement to the exterior of philosophical rationality. According to Bataille, the question provoked by the attainment of absolute reason cannot be approached through any form of work, and although he does not state it in these terms, we could say that this is because being what occurs after the end of history, it is situated outside of the linear temporality required for any project to come to realization. The reason that the question is answered by silence is that, due to the fact that it exists beyond the rational space and time of the *logos*, it cannot be articulated in language. Bataille argues, therefore, that the question reveals a ‘blind-spot’ in the system, ‘which is reminiscent of the structure of the

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid. 110.

101 Ibid. 109.

102 We could interpret Bataille's appeal to the “why” here as bringing a certain naivety into the discourse, questioning in the style of a child in order to bring to light the absurdity of the Hegelian absolute. Theodor Adorno suggests that ‘[t]he boring for the “why”, for the first cause, is pre-formed’, naming this mode of questioning about Being “the child's question”. *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, (London/New York: Continuum, 2004) 110–11. He continues to suggest that such a theological perspective on the question of Being is unhelpful, and that what is needed is ‘not a philosophical trust in God’, but rather the objectivity of a secularized language. Ibid., 111–12. This criticism is addressed to Heidegger, rather than to Bataille, although as we shall see, Bataille too attributes language with a religious force, in a sense that can be related to Durkheim's notion of *collective effervescence*. However, in this context we might better view Bataille's “playing the child” as a kind of naïve non philosophical intervention that interrupts the dialectic by referring it to what lies beyond it.

103 Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 109.

eye’, and that uncovering this hidden element in the structure reveals that ‘*absolute knowledge is definitive non-knowledge*.’¹⁰⁴

Thus, at the completion of the *telos*, the subject who has progressed from non-knowledge to knowledge inverses itself at the summit, to be thrown back into the night from which it proceeds.¹⁰⁵ This means that the dialectic can never become total. Rather than a linear progression with a definitive end, Bataille presents the dialectic as essentially circular—the excess of non-knowledge, the blind-spot, causing an agitation that always brings the process back to the start. The existence of the blind-spot means that this circle is not closed. Ecstasy, being heterogeneous to work, cannot be contained by the accumulative movement of *Aufhebung* because it gestures to something *outside* of the system. Instead of being recuperated by the economy of knowledge, this experience of heterogeneous negativity can only be squandered, released as an “expenditure without reserve” (*dépense*).¹⁰⁶ This expenditure may occur in the experience of ritual sacrifice, but also in the form of poetry, a burst of laughter or the *petit mort* of orgasm. These things, in Hegel’s system, are “nothing important” because they are incommensurable—it is not possible to attribute such experiential moments with a *value* according to the scale of equivalence that is implied in the contradictory relation, hence Bataille argues that they can only be released *without reserve*, and without any hope of recuperation. In all cases the expenditure has a relation to death: because it is death (or its simulation) that reveals the excess, and also because, according to the contradictory logic of the dialectic, dwelling in the irrecoverable negativity of ecstasy could only result in annihilation.

The way that one reaches the state of ecstasy, Bataille says, is by, ‘*dramatizing* life in general’—so again, the need for spectacle arises.¹⁰⁷ But this is a strange type of spectacle, one that eludes articulation in language—at least in its representational function.¹⁰⁸ Short of dying, one can only leave these ecstatic states ‘like a thief, dazed, thrown back stupidly into the absence of death: into distinct consciousness, activity, work,’ having grasped nothing that can

104 Ibid. 110; 108.

105 Ibid. 111.

106 The idea of *dépense*, is essential to Bataille’s theory of “general economy”, and can be understood as a kind of anti-*Aufhebung*: instead of recuperating everything, *dépense* acts like a release valve, expending an incommensurable energy to the outside; cf. Derrida, ‘From Restricted to General Economy’; cf. Bataille, *Accursed Share*. As we will see in Chapter 2, however, Nancy questions the viability of this economic model, arguing that the Hegelian law of reserve is able to recuperate the excess; cf. *infra*, 58.

107 Bataille, *Inner Experience*. 10–11.

108 As we will see, Nancy proposes that society is nothing but the spectacle of itself, but that this spectacle has nothing to do with visual appearance or ocular logic. Cf. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 67–68; cf. *infra* Ch. 2.3, Ch. 6.3, Ch. 7.1. However, Nikolopoulou suggests that it is precisely the idea of dramatization, which Bataille calls both the principle and the method of community, that is missing from Nancy’s conception of community as an *a priori* experience of space. Cf. Nikolopoulou, ‘Elements of Experience’, 99–118.

be represented—hence we can see that the relation to death that Bataille is invoking is similarly asymptotic to that at play in Hegel's master-slave dialectic.¹⁰⁹ What Bataille is naming with the term “ecstasy” is thus an experience of something that is foreclosed to the apparatus of representation, and arguably to thought—at least in its rational mode. Here we find another connection with Laruelle's thinking, insofar as one of the tenets of non-philosophy is that the real is foreclosed to thought; although the latter proposes a method for thinking alongside this real, and thus a particular mode of bringing it into discourse.¹¹⁰ Bataille links ecstatic experience with *dramatization* which, although it remains somewhat undefined in his writing, suggests a theatrical process. In the latter part of this thesis, we will revisit the question of drama and how it functions in Bataille's thinking, as we construct a non-standard theatrical model that acts as part of the real, with the aim of rendering the experience of community effable.¹¹¹

Bataille's method of argument, by which he convicts the progressive logic of the Hegelian dialectic of its own absurdity, consists in his positing that there is something beyond absolute reason, while simultaneously insisting on the teleological completeness of Hegel's system: if at its end the *telos* unworks itself by exceeding itself, then this irrationality must have been part of the system *all along*, because the essence of a *telos* is found in its result. This implies that there are two different temporalities at play throughout—the chronological time of work, which is linear, and another, disordered and ungraspable time of ecstasy. In the first, ‘time appears locked—and practically annulled—in each permanent form and in each succession that can be grasped as permanence’; in the latter ‘time is released from all bonds; it is pure change; it is a skeleton that emerges from its cadaver as from a cocoon and that sadistically lives the unreal existence of death.’¹¹² Because this ecstatic time is indifferent to chronological progression, Bataille is able to propose that it can cut into rational discourse at any moment—effectively suspending the *telos*, regardless of whether it has actually been completed or not—by assuming that the *telos* necessarily *will* reach its result, according to its essence.¹¹³ Thus the whole system is shown to be fundamentally unstable, prone to

109 Bataille, *Inner Experience*. 111. Dominic Pettman names the ‘flirtation with death’ that is structural to Bataille's theory of eroticism the “thanatic asymptote”. *After the Orgy: Toward a Politics of Exhaustion*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 48–52. As we shall see, this asymptotic relation with the non philosophical excess is central to Bataille's theory of transgression; cf. *infra*, 38.

110 Non-philosophy takes as its primary axiom that the real is radically immanent—and as we have noted Laruelle states that this immanence, in its non-consistency, ‘implies [...] the being-foreclosed of the Real to philosophical or non-philosophical thought’. Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia*, 33, §3.6.

111 Cf. *infra*, Ch. 7.1 & 7.3.

112 Georges Bataille, ‘Sacrifices’, in *Visions of Excess*, 134.

113 The idea that ecstasy interrupts the continuous temporality of the *telos* is connected to Kierkegaard's claim that faith, understood as a leap out of universality into a relation with the absolute, constitutes a “teleological suspension of the ethical”. Bataille notes that ‘Kierkegaard, having gone to the end of the possible, and in a

interruption by the irrational excess which lies beyond, at any time. Moreover, the excess is *necessary* to the system, because one cannot complete philosophical knowledge without incorporating unknowledge—the ecstatic experience that is excluded from Hegel's system as a heterogeneous excess. In this way, Bataille makes a claim for the exigency of non philosophical elements within the structure of the Hegelian concept.

The paradoxical statement that only unknowledge completes knowledge provokes, as Jacques Derrida says, a ‘burst of laughter from Bataille’, because it reveals that an absurdity lies at the basis of Hegelianism.¹¹⁴ Bataille refuses to take the *work* of Hegel's self-regulating negativity seriously, and plays with the very gravity of Hegelian logic. By insisting on the necessity for something beyond “absolute reason”, Bataille thus calls into question the idea that the end of Hegel's teleological process constitutes the completion of knowledge—on the grounds that the *Aufhebung* is unable to incorporate the reality of lived experience without cleansing it of its sensuous complexity. He argues that ‘Hegel's attitude is less whole than that of naïve humanity,’ not least because *pleasure* (like laughter) is not included in the system.¹¹⁵

For Bataille, the question of pleasure is a matter of *sovereignty*. The Hegelian subject achieves its mastery by way of a submission to work; as such it does not do *what it pleases*, and so according to Bataille it can never be sovereign.¹¹⁶ He proposes, therefore, that there is a fundamental incompatibility between work and sovereignty, that any attempt to approach sovereignty through the work of discourse is bound to remain incomplete because: ‘the *project* of being-sovereignly pre-supposes a servile being!’¹¹⁷ Derrida argues that Bataille's own discourse moves beyond the servility of work by performing a ‘simulated repetition of Hegelian discourse’, which introduces a barely perceptible disjunction on its articulations, sending cracks through the entire system—a simulation that mimes the dialectic as sacrifice mimes the absolute risk of death.¹¹⁸ This sovereign operation (the “sovereign”, which is closely related in Bataille's thinking to the “inner experience” that is both the principle and the method of community, is always an operation rather than an entity) does not *escape* the

certain way to the point of the absurd [...] moves about in a world where it is impossible to rely on anything.’ *Inner Experience*, 12. Bataille follows Kierkegaard in using the totalizing logic of the dialectic against itself. Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alistair Hannay, (London: Penguin Books, 2005).

114 Jacques Derrida, ‘From Restricted to General Economy’, in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), 323. Cf. Bataille, who states that ‘a burst of laughter is the only imaginable and definitively terminal result [...] of philosophical speculation.’ ‘The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade’, in *Visions of Excess*, 99.

115 Bataille, ‘Hegel, Death and Sacrifice’, 25.

116 Ibid.

117 Ibid. 27.

118 Derrida, ‘Restricted to General Economy’, 329.

dialectic, but rather *transgresses* it.¹¹⁹ This transgression ‘provides the economy of reason with its element, its milieu, its unlimiting boundaries of non-sense.’¹²⁰ Revealing the limits of reason, Derrida argues that this operation inscribes the ecstatic into dialectics, making dialectical synthesis ‘function within the sacrifice of sense’.¹²¹

In summary, Bataille offers a meta-philosophical treatment of Hegelianism, making a simulated repetition or mime of the dialectic which effects a transgression of its totalizing structure by asserting the necessity of the irrational excess that lies beyond its limits. In this way, he uses a philosophical method—which can be understood as an important precursor to “deconstruction”—to bind the rationality of the dialectic to its non philosophical other, while simultaneously cleaving a profound separation between them. By re-staging the dialectic in this way, Bataille challenges Hegel's claim that his phenomenological account of reason is able to incorporate the unmediated flux of lived experience into the structure of the *logos*, instead positing the immediacy of ecstatic experience as a necessary relation with the outside, which simultaneously frames and transgresses the dialectic. As such, Bataille establishes *logos* and ecstasy as a dyad, uniting them in their difference.

Community names a particular, and arguably privileged, occasion of lived experience in Bataille's thinking and is identified with the irrecoverable negativity of ecstasy. Thus the passion of communal experience, like that of erotism, can be understood as having an asymptotic relation to death. The thanatic asymptote that constitutes ecstatic experience also establishes a need for representation, understood as a form of spectacle, insofar as experiencing one's own death is the impossible itself. Revealing the “subterfuge” in Hegel's master-slave dialectic, Bataille suggests that there is a theatrical logic underlying the social relationality that the *Phenomenology* presupposes. This introduces the themes of theatre and of dramatization that we will develop on later in this thesis.

Before we explore the parameters of theatre, as a model both for representation and for the *socius*, we will first examine Nancy's critical reading of Bataille's attempts to articulate community as ecstatic. Nancy's critique and re-staging of Bataille's discourse, which will be the discussed in Chapter 2, focuses on the spatiality of social relations. In order to understand what is at stake in this critique, the next section begins with a discussion of the spatiality of

119 Bataille develops his theory of transgression, which is related to the “inner experience”, in *Erotism*.

120 Derrida, ‘Restricted to General Economy’, 329–330.

121 Ibid. 330. We will return to Bataille's dialectical treatment of transgression as we examine “heterology”, his proposed science of heterogeneous things, below; here we will also examine how and why Nancy rejects the idea of sovereignty as an approach to grasping social experience, on the grounds that it is implicitly grounded on a philosophical conception of subjectivity which is bound to inhibit a thinking of community. Cf. *infra* Ch. 1.4.

Bataillian ecstasy, and how this spatiality—which is incommensurable with the structural form of the concept—provides the ground for the separation between the *logos* and its non philosophical other. This spatial analysis will uncover a paradox underlying the Hegelian conception of community/nation. We will argue, however, that revealing the abyssal foundations of Hegelianism does not, in itself, constitute a basis for founding an “ecstatic community” in practice, and this is illustrated by the fact that Bataille's attempts to do this arrive at an impasse. We will conclude this chapter by returning to Bataille's dialectical conception of transgression, and examining his avowed aim to found a “science” of heterogeneous things, thereby demonstrating that his re-staging of Hegelianism is fated to be recuperated by the very system it aims to transgress, due to a problematic presupposition of subjectivity which underlies his thought.

1.3 Toppling the tower: ecstatic spatiality contra architecture¹²²

Ecstasy, which we argued above is an experience that lifts the subject out of chronological time, can also be understood as a spatial movement.¹²³ Thus it poses a spatial, as well as temporal, challenge to the Hegelian enclosure of subjectivity—both of the individual, and of the collective subjectivity that constitutes the social body. We will now explore the spatiality implicit in Bataille's thought, in which ecstasy is proposed as a something that challenges the architectural logic of representation. We will argue that Bataille's approach undermines the symbolic foundations of Hegelian community, revealing an abyssal logic at its base. Hegel tells us that the *actual* produced by the dialectic is not something spatial in the mathematical sense, because the relationship formed by the notion is something infinite that eludes mathematical determination.¹²⁴ The spatiality of spirit is rather the qualitative, immanent motion or *self*-movement of the subject. As the subject attains self-certainty in relation to the other he/she becomes, in a concrete sense, an individual, which is to say *indivisible*, an atom: identity makes of the subject a totality that is impenetrable, and which can be substituted with the other. As we shall see, it is precisely the atomic nature of subjectivity in Hegel's thinking—the way in which the subject, as an interiority, relates to the

122 Part of this section was published as: Hannah Lammin, ‘A Paradoxical Architecture: Babel, and the Founding of Community through the Confounding of Tongues’, *Zētēsis Vol. 1, No. 1: The Cruelty of the Classical Canon*, (2013): 79–87. Cf. *infra*, Appendix.

123 The etymology of “ecstasy” is from the Greek *ekstasis*, meaning ‘put out of place’. *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, s.v. ecstasy.

124 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 26, §45.

other as exterior—that makes it a problematic starting point for thinking community.¹²⁵

The Hegelian subject experiences the external world as a phenomenon, which means, according to the representational and essentially ocular logic of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, that the object is known, initially, by its appearance. Spirit is able to overcome the impenetrability of external appearance, accessing the essence of the object, because the specular reciprocity of thesis and antithesis in their contradictory relation means that to know the other is to know oneself. Hegel says that 'the movements of the whole are the becoming of *patterns of consciousness*' which arrive 'at a point where appearance becomes identical with essence', rendering the other effectively transparent.¹²⁶ Thus the subject is able to change places with the object, stepping through the looking glass, as it were, to inhabit and then sublimate its negative reflection. In this way, the subject, which as we have seen is the *a priori* factum within the Hegelian system, is bound together in a dyad with the data that it encounters in its immediate experience of the world; and as we have noted, for Hegel the other-as-subject which is encountered in the master-slave dialectic is the privileged object that is necessary to the dialectical progression of spirit. Bataille, in contrast, rejects the idea that one can so easily move outside of oneself—ecstasy puts the subject not in the other's place, but moves it to the limits of subjective space, to be opened and suspended at the threshold that Hegelian spirit passes straight through. This movement reveals the boundary that delimits the subject, the finitude that Hegel presupposes and then claims to overcome as spirit circulates between self and other. Ecstasy thereby exposes the subject to an irreducible heterogeneity that cannot be sublated. It is this movement that Bataille calls "inner experience". However, as Nancy points out, this inner experience is 'in no way "interior" or "subjective," but is indissociable from the experience of [the] relation to an incommensurable outside'—and this relation can be understood in spatial terms.¹²⁷

There is a persistent spatial logic in Bataille's thinking, which manifests through his recurrent use of architectural metaphors that function on a conceptual level, the images of buildings taken as symbols of a deeper architectonic logic underlying society. Denis Hollier proposes architecture as a fundamental, organizing theme of Bataille's thinking, a kind of

125 Below, we will examine how Nancy reverses the progression from individual to communal whole in the Hegelian *telos*, suggesting to the contrary that the individual, as atom, is merely the abstract result of a decomposition: 'the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community.' Nancy *Inoperative Community*, 3. Cf. *infra*, 7.2–7.4.

126 Hegel, *Phenomenology*. 56–7, §89.

127 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 18. As we will see in Chapter 2, Nancy identifies this incommensurable outside with an ontological social relation, adding that, 'only community furnishes this relation its spacing, its rhythm.' Community and ecstasy are hence connected, the locus of one another, ecstasy circumscribing the space of community. *Ibid*, 20; cf. *infra* Ch. 2.

“structure of structures” that Bataille's writing repeatedly pits itself against.¹²⁸ Architecture is distinguished from mere building because it always symbolizes something beyond itself, and Hollier states that it is identical in Bataille's thinking with the space of representation.¹²⁹ Bataille proposes architecture as the expression of the true nature of societies, which is to say that buildings constitute a formal externalization of the *ideal* way that a society views itself. This idealizing intentionality causes ‘great monuments [to] rise up like dams, opposing a logic of majesty and authority to all unquiet elements’.¹³⁰ Hence architecture is seen as the authoritative element that, much like Durkheim's totem, drives human beings towards ever more organized and rational ends. Indeed, Bataille suggests that

mathematical order imposed on stone is really the culmination of the evolution of earthly forms, whose direction is indicated within the biological order by the passage from the simian to the human form, the latter already displaying all the elements of architecture. Man would seem to represent merely an intermediary stage within the morphological development between monkey and building.¹³¹

With this remark, Bataille draws attention to the analogous structure of biological organisms and architectural forms, insofar as each constitutes a systemic totality; however, Bataille suggests that only a building can be an *ideal* structure, because biological forms necessarily include “unquiet elements”, including emotions, sexual drives and the need to excrete waste matter. The ascent of humankind from the horizontality of bestial existence toward the vertical rationality of architecture is a recurring theme in Bataille's thought, and by positing the necessity of ecstasy, inner experience and *dépense* he repeatedly moves to topple the edifice.

An architectural logic is evident in Hegel's thinking, in which form is essential to knowledge. He tells us that spirit, ‘is not to be conceived and expressed merely as essence, [...] but likewise as *form*, and in the whole wealth of the developed form. Only then is it conceived and expressed as an actuality.’¹³² Thus the self-movement of spirit is also the self-movement of form, which Hegel explicitly associates with the divine.¹³³ Hollier observes that

128 Cf. Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture, The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing, (Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 1992).

129 Ibid., 31.

130 Bataille et al, “Architecture”, in *Encyclopædia Acephalica*, 35. This “monumental” authority extends through all kinds of spaces that have been organized according to a unifying logic. For an example of the kind of architectural thinking that Bataille is writing against, Le Corbusier proposes that a truly “modern” city must be organized to a new level of planned exactitude in order to exclude all “wilful” and “disordered” elements: ‘The plan is the generator. Without a plan, you have lack of order, and wilfulness. [...] Modern life demands, and is waiting for, a new kind of plan for both the house and for the city.’ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells, (Marston Gate: BN Publishing, 2008) 45.

131 Bataille et al, *ibid.*

132 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 11, §19.

133 Ibid., 10, §19.

if form is essentially divine, then architecture is programmed in advance in a religious and theological perspective: ‘the great architect is, by metaphor God.’¹³⁴ For this reason, Bataille sees architectural form, in its *theological* perspective, as being intrinsically linked to the legibility of the world, because a unifying structure is essential to the *ideological* systems which allow communication to take place. Hollier notes that this kind of system,

tends to be monodic: it has only one voice, the other voice is not heard there. There is a sort of gigantic internal monologue that it organizes. Otherness is excluded; it has no other place than outside. In an exterior which, reduced to silence, has no voice to be heard.¹³⁵

There is thus a structural connection between form and language, architectural logic creating the enclosure that makes discourse possible, while also excluding other perspectives.¹³⁶ For Hegel, language is a transparent medium which allows for the unambiguous communication of concepts between rational subjects—one interiority to another. This formal model of communication is brought into question by Bataille when he seeks to write about the “inarticulable” experience of ecstasy, which touches the otherness outside. It is this openness to the outside that makes ecstasy a necessity in the experience of community, because it allows for the possibility of other voices, introducing difference into communication and breaching the architectural enclosure of subjectivity.

In his *Aesthetics*, Hegel proposes that architecture is the origin (*archè*) of art—both as the first kind of art that came into realization, and as the necessary first step in the conceptual development of aesthetics as a discursive *telos*.¹³⁷ He proposes that the

primary and original need of art is that an idea or thought generated by the spirit shall be produced by man as his own work and presented by him, just as in language there are ideas which man communicates as such and makes intelligible.¹³⁸

This production of material works to represent the ideas of spirit is a process of

134 Hollier, *Against Architecture*, 33–34.

135 *Ibid.*, 33.

136 Hollier cites Hubert Damisch, who ‘has shown that Viollet-le-Duc’s *Dictionnaire de l’architecture française* followed a structuralist method (one since developed by Saussure and the linguists) before the term was invented’, requiring that linguistic analysis be thought of as dominated by architectural vocabulary. *Ibid.*, 32, cf. Hubert Damisch, *L’Architecture raisonnée*, (Paris: Hermann, 1964), 14.

137 G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics, Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975), 630. It is debatable whether architecture was the “first” art, historically speaking; Bataille, in contrast, identifies the cave paintings at Lascaux (which had not been uncovered in Hegel’s time) as the birth of art; older paintings than these have since been discovered. Whatever the historical facts of the matter, it is rather for conceptual reasons that Hegel puts architecture first. Hollier demonstrates that this conceptual choice is arbitrary, because in the *telos*, the end produces or gives meaning to the origin and not the other way around. Which means that the unmediated beginning is essentially an irrational excess in relation to the system, much like the performative force that Stoekl places at the basis of Durkheim’s rationalizing social model (cf. *supra*, 32). This troubles, once again, the closure of the teleological progression of spirit (in this case through the medium of aesthetics). Cf. Hollier, *Against Architecture*. 3–13; cf. Georges Bataille, *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux or The Birth of Art*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse, (London: Macmillan, 1980).

138 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 635.

externalization, as with Durkheim's totemic objects, and is similarly concerned with identity—both individual and collective. Hegel states: ‘whole nations have been able to express their religion and their deepest needs no otherwise than by building.’¹³⁹ Just as Bataille would do a century later, Hegel posits that architecture is concerned with symbolism or representation. Indeed, for Hegel it is this that makes it an aesthetic practice—the fundamental concern of the *Aesthetics* is the process whereby meaning acquires a sensuous reality, which is then superseded by philosophical discourse *about* aesthetics. Therefore, in order to find the beginnings of aesthetics Hegel looks for examples of buildings that are “pure symbols”, independent of any external aims or needs (in other words, of any usefulness), those which stand ‘like works of sculpture, and which carry their meaning in themselves.’¹⁴⁰ That is, buildings which are not *means*, but ends in themselves.

One might ask what exactly differentiates a “building” that has no practical use from a “work of sculpture”. Hegel's text does not make this entirely clear; sculpture is the stage in the aesthetic *telos* that follows after architecture, and because the first form is defined in terms of the second, the distinction between them almost immediately begins to blur. However, the very beginning, the originary type of architecture that Hegel identifies, are those works built for *national unification*; and the example he gives is the biblical story of the ‘Tower of Babylonia’, or Babel.¹⁴¹ Hollier notes that the Tower of Babel is distinguished from utilitarian architecture by the fact that it is a solid structure without an internal cavity, so there is no possibility of the “external aims or needs” which most buildings are subject to penetrating into the inside. The structure is able to function ideologically as a pure symbol because its solidity gives it a homogeneous self-presence, ensuring that there is no risk of confusion between forms, between interiority and exteriority, means and ends.¹⁴² This homogeneous self-presence is analogous to the atomic consistency of the Hegelian subject; and it is this solidity that community calls into question.

There is a distinct irony in the choice of Babel as an exemplary symbol of national unity, which is emblematic of the difficulty that Hegel's unifying philosophical system has for the thinking of community. Hegel relates how all the peoples at that period came together to construct the tower, and that ‘the product of their labour was to be a bond that linked them together (as we are linked together by manners, customs, and the legal constitution of the state).’¹⁴³ Quoting Goethe, he says that the “holy” is that which ‘links many souls together’—

139 Ibid., 636.

140 Ibid., 632.

141 Ibid. 638–9.

142 Hollier, *Against Architecture*. 9

143 Hegel, *Aesthetics*. 638.

thereby proposing, as Durkheim would do after him, that social unity and concord is essentially religious.¹⁴⁴ Yet Babel is a strange symbol for unity, if one considers the end of the tale (and in a *telos* the meaning is always produced at/as the end):

And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth.¹⁴⁵

Hegel attributes the failure of the tower to unify the people to the fact that it was merely in an external way that it expressed what unifies men, which is to say that its form was not generated by the self-movement of spirit. However, according to myth, the Tower of Babel did not simply fail to unite the people—rather, it provoked an irreparable fragmentation in a people that had formerly been united by their shared language, as much as by manners, customs and legal institutions. This confounding of language, the medium of rational discourse, means that far from being a symbol of unity, Babel represents the origin of opacity and confusion in communication, which would seem to cause disjunction in the community. When we turn to Laruelle's analytic of Philosophical Decision, we will see that this disjunction is not simply a matter of Hegel making a poor choice of example in his attempt to articulate both the origin of art and the ground of the nation—rather, we will argue that a certain kind of disjunctive connection is an essential structural element within the philosophical Dyad in general.¹⁴⁶ The purpose of deploying Laruelle's non-decisional method of thinking, then, will be to articulate a way of theorizing communal relations that avoids such a disjunction, at the same time as it avoids totalizing its object.

Hegel says that the Tower 'was built in common, and the aim and content of the work was at the same time the community of those who constructed it.'¹⁴⁷ However for Bataille, insofar as community is inseparable from the experience of ecstasy, it is precisely *work* that makes it impossible—which is arguably the reason that the mythic project to unify the people by constructing a great edifice at Babel was doomed to failure. Rather than relating community to a construction, Bataille argues that 'the fundamental object of the *communal* activity of men' is *death*, 'death and not food or the production of the means of production.'¹⁴⁸ Death is the "object" of community because it is in the sharing of nocturnal terrors that

144 Attributed to Goethe, *ibid.*

145 *The Bible*, Authorized King James Version, Genesis 11, 6–8.

146 Cf. *infra*, Ch. 4.

147 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 638.

148 Georges Bataille, 'Nietzschean Chronicle', in *Visions of Excess*, 208.

communal life takes on an obsessive emotional value—and it is this obsessive emotionality that generates the ecstasy that for Bataille constitutes the real experience of community.¹⁴⁹ Nancy observes that death is a communal necessity, not because it is the negativity that drives the productive movement of the dialectic, but because it names the heterogeneous element ‘of which it is precisely impossible to *make a work* (other than a work of death, as soon as one tries to make a work of it).’¹⁵⁰ The apparent contradiction in this sentence, which begs a question as to what constitutes a “work of death”, emphasizes the dual sense of “death” at play in Bataille’s reading of Hegel, which as we shall see is also important in Nancy’s conception of community as an ontological experience of finitude.¹⁵¹ In articulating this duality we will see why for Bataille, community cannot be an architectural construction.

In Hegelianism, the death of the subject is equated with “abstract negation”, and it is the mortal fear of this annihilation that moves spirit to work towards self-consciousness, and then absolute reason. Yet Bataille sees the attainment of this absolute as ‘the passing of existence into a state of empty monotony’, which is, ‘in a profound sense, becoming dead.’¹⁵² Death, then, is a name for both abstract negation (an utter lack of form, or the failure to synthesize any kind of structure), *and* the absolute (the total closure of form, which binds the subject into a kind of stasis because its structure allows no room for movement, having either rationalized or excluded all “unquiet elements”). Spirit embraces a death by architecture—the “morphological development into a building”—in order to escape another death, formless and abstract. Life, both individual and communal, exists somewhere between these two kinds of death. All “works” of totality, according to this logic, are “works of death”, constructed in order to cover over the emptiness left by abstract negativity. This leads Hollier to argue that the Hegelian structure, in its entirety, is a “tomb of death”, and that the origin and result of architecture, as a *telos*, is not the “symbol of national unity”, but a grand tomb in the form of a pyramid.¹⁵³ Bataille observes how the pyramids take on the immobility of stone and watch all men die, one after the other:

they transcend the intolerable void that time opens under men's feet, for all possible movement is halted in their geometric surfaces: IT SEEMS THAT THEY MAINTAIN WHAT ESCAPES FROM THE DYING MAN.¹⁵⁴

Architecture, its *archè* the tomb, constructs monuments to *take the place* of death, the singular

149 Ibid., 210.

150 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 15.

151 Cf. *infra*, 61.

152 Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 110.

153 Hollier, *Against Architecture*, 13.

154 Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 216.

non philosophical element that absolutely cannot be incorporated into the system. This substitution of structure for finitude can be seen as an attempt by spirit to escape from the movement of time, thereby arresting the passage to the outside which negates everything by morphing into something inanimate.¹⁵⁵ Bataille sees the architectural structure of the dialectic as being ‘a hybrid of time and its opposite, [...] the position of the immutable.’¹⁵⁶

The timelessness of ecstasy, in contrast, is far from immutable; ecstasy breaks from chronological time because it touches on that which is essentially formless and hence ungraspable. Thus when Bataille posits death as the “object of communal activity”, it is not the death that is synthesized into a concrete form, but the experience of death as the limit of all sense—which could also be understood as the limit-case of the non philosophical. This means that, strictly speaking, death is not an *object* but rather the opening of/towards a *space*: the outside. This outside, like ecstatic time, is heterogeneous to form, and so resists structural logic; we might call it an *anarchitectural* space, in the sense that it is constitutively formless, and as such no spatio-temporal origin can be identified there.¹⁵⁷ This means that, insofar as “community” names an experience of this outside, it cannot be conceived as an architectural construction or an enclosure: it is rather the excess which such forms endeavour to exclude lest it should cause them to unravel.

This suggests that *community* is not the same as a *nation*, although the terms are used interchangeably by Hegel in his discussion of Babel. If the Tower is a symbol of national unity, then we could say that this is because its construction was a foundational gesture which sought to organize the people by providing a common aim for their work, and a common *name*: ‘And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and *let us make us a name*, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth.’¹⁵⁸ In Hegelian terms, the Tower constituted a work of architecture—as distinct from mere building—because it had a structuring function on the population that built it and the city in which they dwelt, which projected beyond its material manifestation through the discursive power of the name. In this sense, the name can be understood as the symbolic origin (*archè*) of the nation. The implications of this originary symbolism reach beyond Hegelianism, to

155 Hollier, *Against Architecture*. This could also be seen as a *return* to the inanimate, a movement that Hollier relates to the Freudian death drive. Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. John Reddick, (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 45–102.

156 Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 219.

157 The term “anarchitectural” can be understood in two complimentary senses: firstly, to evoke a construction that is *anarchic* – implying a lack of centre or origin, as well as something of the political meaning of “anarchy”; secondly, the word can be read as *ana-architectural*, indicating the return to a state that precedes the architectonic logic of identity thinking.

158 Genesis 11, 4 [emphasis added].

suggest that any kind of collective that is founded on an identity concept can be understood as an architectural form.

From a Bataillian perspective, however, if the Tower of Babel is an appropriate symbol for community, this is not because it was a great work of communal construction, but because of the necessity of its failure. Babel names a folly that could never have been completed—a work that attempted to unite the people by transcending the horizontality of the mortal world and making them equal with God, building a route to transcendence in bricks and mortar. And insofar as this project required a great expenditure of materials and effort with no “useful” aim, which was abandoned and left to fall down as the people were scattered abroad, we might call it an act of *dépense*. Because of the impossibility of its aim, the incompleteness of the project was constitutive to its architecture—the tower was not designed to a specific size, with a final crowning layer to render it total, but to keep rising until it reached the height of transcendence, wherever that might be. Thus the symbolic centre of the communal body was itself essentially headless. The result of this mythical architectural project was thus not the construction of a nation that was able to communicate its perfect unity through the transparent symbol of the name; rather, what it produced was an irreparable separation between members of the community through the emergence of opacity in language. This opacity of communication renders the other as, at least to some extent, unknowable and hence unoblatable. Thus, far from being a coherent symbol of unity, what the myth of Babel describes is the founding of community through the confounding of tongues.

Much like the Tower that he holds up as an exemplary symbol of community, Hegel's philosophical edifice is vitiated by the opacity of its own abyssal foundations. Bataille's critical re-enactment of the dialectic reveals this problem, demonstrating an absurdity at the basis of Hegelianism's claim to total knowledge. The playful deconstruction that Bataille stages offers a different approach to thinking community, which places social experience at the limits of sense. However, by placing communal experience in the space of ecstasy which is incompatible with the structural logic of the philosophical concept, Bataille reaches an impasse when it comes to thinking the relation between ecstatic community and political practice.

1.4 Paradoxical foundations and the problem of practice

Bataille's critique of Hegelianism, as we have presented it, proceeds according to a

meta-philosophical method, insofar as it seeks to challenge the structure of its object from within—that is, by fundamentally philosophical means. Derrida observes that, ‘[t]aken one by one [...], all of Bataille's concepts are Hegelian’; however, he also suggests that Bataille's writing is effective in its critique of Hegel insofar as he mobilizes these concepts according to a different *syntax*.¹⁵⁹ In the course of his play on/with Hegelian concepts, Bataille asserts the importance of non philosophical elements, and states his aim to found a science of these “heterological” things which are intrinsically resistant to philosophical reasoning (at least in its Hegelian form).¹⁶⁰ We will examine Bataille's proposed science of “heterology” below, and will see that the part that the non philosophical plays in his thinking is principally that of providing a frame that delimits philosophy. Bataille sets up a duality between the rational and the irrational, and then makes a gesture of transgressing philosophy's boundaries; yet, because ecstatic transgression is formally conceived in terms of the asymptotic relation that ecstasy has to death, Bataille can only think its effects as temporary—bound either to be annihilated or to be recuperated by reason.¹⁶¹ As we have seen, this transgressive method is able to figure the abyssal foundations that underlie the self-styled absolute reason of Hegelianism, thus revealing an aporia.¹⁶² However, as we turn now to Bataille's attempts to positively articulate community on the basis of the ecstatic, we shall see that being able to figure the logical abyss at the basis of the Hegelian communal edifice does not necessarily allow for the grounding of a non-totalizing community, either in theory or in practice.

We have identified an anarchitectural excess at the basis of Hegel's dialectically conceived progression from community to nation. The constitutive incompleteness of the Hegelian edifice (both as architectonic foundation of the *logos* and as social construction), implies that any attempt to organize a collective around a centralizing ideal or identity predicate is bound, from its conception, towards a certain disintegration contrary to its

159 Derrida, ‘Restricted to General Economy’, 320. When we examine Laruelle's analytic of Philosophical Decision, we will see that, viewed from a non-philosophical stance, the syntax that Bataille makes use of remains imbricated in the decisional structure of philosophy, and hence is not different enough to think the phenomenal reality of community's concept; cf. *infra*, Ch. 4.2. Our aim, in the latter part of this thesis, is to develop a much more radically altered, non-philosophical syntax for theorizing community; cf. *infra*, Ch. 7.2–7.3.

160 Cf. Georges Bataille. ‘Use Value’, in *Visions of Excess*, 91–102.

161 We will return to the problem of philosophical recuperation in Chapter 4, where we will demonstrate the fundamentally circular character that Laruelle ascribes globally to philosophy in his analytic of Philosophical Decision; cf. *infra*, Ch. 4.1.

162 This aporetic logic has been extremely influential in continental philosophy in the latter half of the twentieth century—not least in the work of both Derrida and, as we will see in Chapter 2, Nancy. Derrida views Bataille's “laughter” at philosophy (that is, at *Hegelianism*) as ‘the form of the awakening—[that] henceforth calls for an entire “discipline”, an entire “method of mediation” that acknowledges the philosopher's byways, understands his techniques, makes use of his ruses, manipulates his cards, lets him deploy his strategy, appropriates his texts’; which can also be taken as a description of the deconstructive method Derrida employs in his own work. ‘Restricted to General Economy’, 319.

unifying aim. The effort to produce community as *a work* will necessarily *unwork* itself, as part of its process, because the non-identical excess is irreducible.¹⁶³ By showing the arbitrariness of communitarian ideals which are grounded in the formless space that frames the system, Bataille reveals the essence of the collective to be necessarily incomplete. However he aims, in practice, to go further than this—not simply showing community at the moment that its supposed integrity crumbles, but inaugurating an actual community that is bonded by something other than an essence: a passion, or the sharing of ecstasy. He posits an affective conception of community as an ‘entirely new element in an elaboration of collective, impassioned forms of life’.¹⁶⁴ Such an affective community constitutes a “paradoxical element”, and requires setting a new kind of foundation in the formless abyss of anarchitectural space.¹⁶⁵

For Bataille, the exigency for such a community derives from a *principle of insufficiency* that exists at the basis of human life.¹⁶⁶ He sees each being, as an isolated individual, as lacking *ipseity* or selfhood. Similarly to Durkheim, he argues that it is only by entering into a relation with other beings that the individual accedes to a properly human existence. Bataille defines man [*sic*] as ‘*a particle that can enter into composition with a whole that transcends it. Being is only found as a whole composed of particles whose relative autonomy is maintained.*’¹⁶⁷ Articulating social being in terms of a transcendent whole creates a tension with respect to the need for individual autonomy. It is because of the problems generated by the transcendence of the collective—which haunts not only Bataille’s thought, but is arguably inherent in the philosophical discourse of community as such—that we will

163 This idea of community as constituted by an *unworking* is developed by Nancy, as we will show in Chapter 2. The positing of an irreducible excess can be related to Adorno’s argument in *Negative Dialectics*, 144–146, where he claims that bringing the non-identical into dialectics leads to a “logic of disintegration”. Adorno challenges the closure of Hegelian idealism by arguing that it is not the organizing drive of thought, but *matter* that brings us to dialectics—where matter is understood to be that which cannot be approached methodically because it resists unanimous interpretation. This means that dialectics cannot be a *pure* method—it is always contaminated by that which Bataille names the “heterological”.

164 Bataille, ‘What We Have Undertaken ...’, trans. Stuart Kendall, in *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille*, ed. Andrew Mitchell and Jason Kemp Winfree, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 190.

165 Ibid.

166 Georges Bataille, ‘The Labyrinth’, in *Visions of Excess*, 172. Bataille credits Blanchot for the idea that *contestation* is both the principle and method of community (*Inner Experience*, 12), a thought picked up again by Blanchot in his response to Nancy’s writing on Bataille. Nancy also talks of “incompleteness”, taken in an active sense, being the principle of community, inasmuch as it designates the activity and dynamic of sharing. (*Inoperative Community*, 35). This passing of ideas between thinkers and friends becomes part of what Blanchot describes as an “infinite conversation”, emblematic of the kind of open-ended communication or “literary communism” that Nancy argues constitutes the community without essence. Cf. Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 71–81; Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) *passim*.

167 Bataille, ‘The Labyrinth’, 174 [emphasis in original]. Bataille’s use of the gender-specific “man” reflects an understanding of subjectivity that privileges the male. Nancy is quietly critical of Bataille’s somewhat unreconstructed manipulation of sexual difference; cf. *Inoperative Community*, 28; 30.

turn to Laruelle's method of thinking according to radical immanence later in this thesis. Blanchot observes that:

The community [...] seems to propose itself as a tendency towards a *communion*, even a fusion, that is to say an effervescence assembling the elements only to give rise to a unity (a supra-individuality).¹⁶⁸

By proposing insufficiency as the principle that organizes individual beings, Bataille implicitly calls into question the idea of the collective as a unified supra-individual. Blanchot elaborates that an individual's 'lack on principle does not go hand in hand with a necessity for completion', continuing to state that: '[a] being, insufficient as it is, does not attempt to associate itself with another being to make up a substance of integrity'.¹⁶⁹ Rather, for Bataille, '[t]he sufficiency of each being is endlessly contested by every other.'¹⁷⁰ Thus, the experience of the social environment is conceived as the immersion in a labyrinth which never ceases to call beings into question, revealing the unbridgeable gulf of separation between them. This radical discontinuity between beings seems to render the idea of a communal fusion as untenable.

However, this begs a question as to how the transcendent social whole is to be understood. As noted above, Bataille often makes use of biological analogies when discussing collective existence, thereby attributing community with a body-like composition and structure. The use of biological language is common in discussions of social structure—for example, Durkheim describes the group as an “organic unity” and the individuals who constitute it as “members”.¹⁷¹ Another example of the collective being conceived in organic terms is Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, in which the nation state is understood to be united in “one body”, for the sake of the commonwealth, under the authority of the “head” or sovereign, who is understood as the ‘*Mortal God* to which we owe, under the *Immortal God*, our peace and defence’.¹⁷² This idea of nationhood is echoed by both Hegel and Durkheim who, after Hobbes, propose that the members of the collective depend on a centre of unification to elevate them from the brutalities of individual existence—although for the later thinkers this unifying power may be contained in a rational ideal, rather than embodied in the person of a king. Bataille continues in this tradition, but with one important difference: in

168 Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris, (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1988), 6–7.

169 Ibid., 5.

170 Bataille, 'The Labyrinth', 172.

171 Cf., for example: 'social groups [...] are unified and, through their unity, form an organic whole'; and: 'the practices of the cult [...] strengthen the bonds attaching the individual to the society of which he is a member'. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 169–70; 257–8.

172 Thomas Hobbes. *Leviathan*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994) 109.

contrast to the hierarchical kind of organization described by Hobbes, Bataille aims to figure the organic relations of community as decentred and non-hierarchical. Accordingly, he compares human, and indeed animal societies with the composite form of the sponge, in which cells that are able to exist in isolation are nevertheless integrated into a larger whole.¹⁷³ Although more highly evolved animals are “discontinuous” (i.e. discrete entities), he argues that they form similar kinds of aggregates, but without giving rise to corporeal links.

In human society, Bataille identifies language as the medium that binds collective existence, determining the modes in which being may appear within each person. Therefore the labyrinthine structure of human existence is inseparable from language. Verbal communication allows one being to know another, thereby composing two beings into a greater whole which Bataille likens to the connective tissue of the body. He says that:

A limited number of exchanged phrases, no matter how conventional, [suffice] to create the banal interpenetration of two existing juxtaposed regions. [...] The *knowledge* of human beings thus appears as a mode of biological connection, unstable but just as real as the connections between cells in tissue.¹⁷⁴

Hence Bataille proposes that there is a material connection between beings—a social fabric—which is constituted by language. In this context, language should be understood as functioning on two different levels: one conceptual; the other bodily, affective, experiential. Bataille says that the knowing of one being by another is only a residue of more essential acts of communication, with which language remains intensely charged; these essential acts are ‘the intimate operations of religious activity, of sacrifice, of the sacred.’¹⁷⁵ This implies that a religious or sacred experience is foundational in the formation of the social bond. Indeed for Bataille, as for Durkheim, the sacred is nothing other than, ‘a privileged moment of communal unity, a moment of the convulsive communication of what is ordinarily stifled.’¹⁷⁶

If language is understood to operate on two levels, it can be seen to lend different aspects to the social body it produces. The affective communal experiences that Bataille calls “sacred” can be understood as generating the *material* of the social tissue, whereas language in its conceptual function gives the body its *form*, its architecture. Bataille describes the structure of the labyrinth as an entanglement of knots and concentrations which form relatively stable centres in the vast incoherence of the whole.¹⁷⁷ He describes these centres as cities, which in their early form enclose a sovereign and god, and later compose themselves into more complex arrangements—empires where lesser cities abdicate their central function

173 Bataille, ‘The Labyrinth’, 173.

174 Ibid., 174.

175 Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 84.

176 Bataille, ‘The Sacred’, in *Visions of Excess*, 242.

177 Bataille, ‘The Labyrinth’, 175.

in favour of a greater capital.¹⁷⁸

Bataille thus identifies a progression—social life evolving from a chaotic animality that is horizontal in its minimal organization, to a centralized, hierarchical and hence vertical structure, such as we have seen symbolized architecturally by the Tower of Babel. However, this structural explanation—which echoes the progressive logic we have examined in both Hegel and Durkheim—creates a problem with respect to thinking the community without essence. The representation of collective existence as an organic body with an architectural structure suggests precisely the kind of supra-individual totality that the principle of insufficiency is supposed to resist. Bataille responds to this problem by asserting the affective force of the essential acts of communication that inhere in language, thereby bringing the disruptive intensity of sacred experience into structural space. Identifying the originary act of communication as the ‘universal experience of religious sacrifice’, Bataille argues that this primal experience ‘finds no place in our intellectual architecture except negatively as a limiting factor.’¹⁷⁹ Rational thought is founded on an act of exclusion, a kind of “intellectual scatology” that forces unassimilable elements—the non philosophical—to the anarchitectural exterior, just as excrement is expelled from the organism.¹⁸⁰ This process in which the non philosophical is expelled from the space of the *logos* can be related to the Freudian idea of primary repression, where certain desires are effectively “sacrificed” in order for subjectivity to be established.¹⁸¹ These drives are not exterminated—they are instead pushed into another, unconscious space, out of the arena of visibility, from where they can, nevertheless, cause irruptions in the space of consciousness. By connecting with the unruly elements that architectural logic consigns to the margins, Bataille seeks to unleash desire, reviving the powers of myth and ritual, and founding a communal body that is *acephallic*—headless and horizontal.

Acéphale is the name of a secret society that Bataille convened in the 1930s, and an associated journal published around the same time, that was symbolized by the figure of a headless man (*fig. 1*).¹⁸² Bataille was a member of numerous collectives, but Blanchot

178 Ibid.

179 Bataille, *Erotism*, 23.

180 Bataille, ‘Use Value’, 99.

181 Sigmund Freud characterizes mental life as being ‘dominated by the conflict between [...] two psychical agencies, which we—inaccurately—describe as the “unconscious repressed” and the “conscious”.’ ‘New Introductory Lectures On Psycho-Analysis’, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXII (1932–1936): New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*, 15. An analogy can be made between these two parts of the psyche and the different modes of cognitive experience that we have been outlining in Bataille's work: the ecstatic sharing characteristic of timelessness being identified with the unconscious; the architectural space of rational thought with the conscious. Within this schema, repression can be understood as the process that separates the two agencies.

182 The journal *Acéphale* was published from June 1936 through 1937, with an additional anonymous issue

suggests that *Acéphale* was ‘the only group that counted for [him], and which he kept in mind over the years as an extreme possibility.’¹⁸³ The secrecy of this group was imperative, as it operated at the margins of, and acted against, “official” society. Stoekl says that the group aimed to stimulate a new engagement with social values, through ‘the rebirth of myth and the touching off in society of an explosion of the primitive communal drives leading to sacrifice.’¹⁸⁴ Bataille saw contemporary society, particularly in the body of the fascist mob, as being of the same nature as that of primitive societies—both being structured by the affective value of ritual and myth.¹⁸⁵ He hoped, with *Acéphale*, to develop an understanding of these affective structures of communal life, and to pass from this understanding into action, constituting an as yet unimagined society that would be held together by affect without being subjugated by its own symbols, as was the fate of the fascist masses.¹⁸⁶ This would constitute a kind of political act, releasing the force of ecstatic communal passion, but in such a way that the energy would not be immediately put back to (dialectical) work, as in conventional political economies.

In response to Kierkegaard, who claims that: ‘[w]hat looks like politics, and imagines itself to be political, will one day unmask itself as a religious movement’, Bataille sought to bring a more originary politics into existence by constituting a “religious experience”.¹⁸⁷ As noted above, such a desire resonates with Durkheim's study of the elementary forms of religion, which concluded that the object of religion was the material energy of collective life, the “effervescence” generated by social contact. Durkheim had himself predicted a return of ecstatic social gatherings in the future. Observing that ‘we are going through a stage of transition and moral mediocrity’, he claimed that ‘[a] day will come when our societies will know again those hours of creative effervescence, in the course of which new ideas arise and new formulae are found which serve for a while as a guide for humanity’.¹⁸⁸ Bataille's ambitions for *Acéphale* were even more ambitious: he stated that the goal of the movement was nothing less than, ‘that of finding or recovering *the totality of being*.’¹⁸⁹

produced in 1939. Contributors included Pierre Klossowski, Jean Wahl, André Masson, and Roger Caillois. The membership of the secret society included: Georges Ambrosino, Jacques Chavy, René Chenon, Henri Dubief, Pierre Dugan, Henri Dussat, Imre Kelemen and Klossowski. Cf. Mitchell and Winfree, ‘Editor's Introduction’, 16, n. 3, and Bataille, ‘What We Have Undertaken ...’, Notes, 194–5, both in *Obsessions of Georges Bataille*.

183 Blanchot, *Unavowable Community*. 13.

184 Allan Stoekl, ‘Introduction’, in Bataille, *Visions of Excess*. xix.

185 Georges Bataille, ‘What We Have Undertaken...’, 192. This essay is the transcript of a lecture that was delivered by Bataille to the *Acéphale* group in 1937.

186 *Ibid.*, 192–193.

187 Attributed to Kierkegaard in Bataille, ‘The Sacred Conspiracy’, in *Visions of Excess*, 178.

188 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, 475.

189 Bataille, ‘What We Have Undertaken...’, 194.

The question of Being is one that has preoccupied philosophy for millennia; Bataille, however, frames *Acéphale's* project in terms of science, rather than philosophy, stating that: '[s]cience is the only authority to which we will submit.'¹⁹⁰ The "scientific" authority that Bataille refers to is a discipline of his own invention, which he calls "heterology".¹⁹¹ Heterology is proposed as both a theory and a practice of knowledge that stands in a critical relationship to philosophy insofar as heterology is concerned with the heterogeneous elements that are unassimilable to philosophical systems. It is not a positive science—Bataille states that heterology is not, 'in the usual sense of such a formula, a science of the heterogeneous.'¹⁹² More particularly, heterology addresses the way in which philosophical appropriation (understood primarily in dialectical terms) necessitates the rejection of these things: '[a]s soon as the effort at rational comprehension ends in contradiction, the practice of intellectual scatology requires the excretion of unassimilable elements'.¹⁹³ Bataille observes that philosophy 'most often envisages these waste products in abstract forms of totality (nothingness, infinity, the absolute), to which it itself cannot give a positive content; ' and that its *sufficiency* is thus based on an identification of an endless and unknowable (noumenal) world with a finite, known (phenomenal) one.¹⁹⁴ He thus makes a critique of representation, based on a Kantian distinction between the thing in itself, and things as they are perceived and conceptualized.

Bataille's heterological critique of philosophy is framed in terms of his 'determination of two polarized human impulses: EXCRETION and APPROPRIATION', and as with his articulation of social collectives, his argument uses both biological and religious metaphors.¹⁹⁵ He identifies the elementary form of appropriation as oral consumption, and states that as a process, it is characterized by a *homogeneity* or static equilibrium between the appropriating subject and the object that results from the consumption. This principle of equilibrium is then generalized from the biological to include the appropriation of all kinds of products, both physical and conceptual. Excretion, in contrast, is understood to be the necessary result of a *heterogeneity*—in the sense that shit is expelled from the body as a potentially toxic excess that would destroy equilibrium and lead to morbidity if it were retained. Bataille thus proposes that "scatology" can be taken as a doublet for heterology, because the latter concerns

190 Ibid., 190. In this sense, a relation can be seen between Bataille's thinking and Laruelle's non-philosophy, which proposes a "scientific" re-visioning of philosophy. We will compare their respective "scientific" perspectives below; cf. *infra*, 135 – 6.

191 Bataille outlines his heterological theory in 'Use Value', 91–102.

192 Ibid., 97.

193 Ibid., 99 [emphasis in original].

194 Ibid., 96.

195 Ibid., 94.

itself with such excremental elements.¹⁹⁶

Bataille opposes heterology to philosophy because, he argues, philosophical systems produce ‘homogeneous representation[s] of the world’.¹⁹⁷ The intellectual process that produces such homogeneous representations also, by necessity, produces its own waste products, therefore Bataille argues that philosophy actually liberates the excremental, albeit in a disordered way. The task of heterology, then, is to take up this scatological process in a conscious manner, rather than covering it over as a shameful failure of human thought. In this way, heterology ‘*leads to the complete reversal of the philosophical process, which ceases to be the instrument of appropriation, and now serves excretion; it introduces the demand for the violent gratifications implied by social life.*’¹⁹⁸ We can thus see that for Bataille, the attempt to find a method of thinking the heterogeneous is connected to the social—to the problematic of community.

The social world, for Bataille, can be divided between the homogenizing/appropriative facts of the profane (including ‘civil, political, juridical, industrial, and commercial organization’), and the heterogeneous/excretive facts of the religious (‘prohibitions, obligations, and the realization of sacred action’).¹⁹⁹ The heterogeneous is identified with the sacred, where “sacred” (that which is *set apart*) is understood to have the double meaning of ‘soiled as well as *holy*’²⁰⁰—Bataille observes that there is an ‘identical attitude toward shit, gods, and cadavers’.²⁰¹ Heterology is thus proposed as being closer to religion than to philosophy, albeit requiring a “scientific rigour” that the former lacks.²⁰² As a “science”, heterology’s province is twofold—firstly, it studies the ‘process of limitation’ (i.e. how the boundary between sacred and profane is constituted); secondly, it observes the reactions that the heterogeneous element elicits, which Bataille suggests alternate between antagonism and love.²⁰³ What constitutes the “heterogeneous element”, however, is not positively defined, as Bataille argues that it can only be determined objectively through a process of *negation*, which would return it to the realm of philosophy’s homogeneous representations. Heterology is therefore somewhat limited in its theoretical aspect, because ‘objective heterogeneity [...] can only be envisaged in an abstract form’.²⁰⁴ The heterogeneous can thus be understood as

196 Ibid., 102, n.2.

197 Ibid., 97.

198 Ibid. [emphasis in original].

199 Ibid., 94.

200 Ibid., 102, n.2.

201 Ibid., 94.

202 Ibid., 96.

203 Ibid., 97.

204 Ibid., 98.

that which is fundamentally resistant to conceptual thought. In order to escape from the regression to homogeneity that philosophical thought essentially constitutes, Bataille asserts heterology's *practical* aspect, which can be understood as a non philosophical supplement to abstract conceptual objectivity. Practical heterology allows the heterogeneity of a particular element to be grasped concretely, but from a subjective, rather than objective perspective. Criticizing the 'vague and distant character of the intellectual domain,' Bataille suggests that 'it suffices to go from a speculation resting on abstract facts to a practice [...] which immediately reaches concrete heterogeneity, in order to arrive at ecstatic trances and orgasm.'²⁰⁵

The "affective community" that Bataille aimed to found with *Acéphale* was predicated on this heterological approach, aiming to 'pass from understanding to action', by embracing the sacred in all its ambiguity.²⁰⁶ With an atavistic interest in the sacrificial practices of "primitive and savage communities", he experimented with the idea that the fervour of an actual human sacrifice would unleash the passions that would bind the participants together, in their own monstrosity—literally *making holy* the communal bond.²⁰⁷ Nancy suggests that Bataille was haunted by this idea, saying Bataille understood that, 'the truth of sacrifice required in the last analysis the suicide of the sacrificer', if the passions unleashed were to be anything more than a simulation.²⁰⁸ If the victim and killer were both to die, then those who witnessed their deaths and survived would experience nothing but the *failure* of communion constituted by the death of the other, the radical inequality that is revealed as one passes beyond the limit and another remains. As such, this attempt to *found* an ecstatic community through sacrifice was bound to fail. Blanchot remarks on the absurdity of a community which would be constituted in the breaking of its own law:

the community, by organizing and by giving itself as a project the execution of a sacrificial death, would have renounced its renunciation of creating a *work*, be it a work of death, or even the simulation of death.²⁰⁹

Nancy says that the "disastrous puerility" of death considered as the work of common life reveals, 'an excess of *meaning*, an absolute concentration of the will to meaning'.²¹⁰ The paradoxical project of creating an origin (*archè*) out of the one element that cannot be placed within the architectural limits could only annihilate itself, or else be recuperated by the

205 Ibid., 99.

206 Bataille, 'What We Have Undertaken ... ', 193.

207 Etymologically, "sacrifice", from *sacer ficus*, means 'to make holy'; *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, s. v. sacrifice.

208 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 17.

209 Blanchot, *Unavowable Community*, 14.

210 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 17.

economy of sense from which it aimed to escape.

This paradox reflects an impasse in Bataille's attempts to theorize community, that can be traced to its ecstatic “foundations”. Nancy argues that this impasse derives from the fact that, although Bataille's thinking is magnetically attracted toward the issue of community as that which exceeds essence, it remains governed by the theme of the sovereignty of a *subject*; and, ‘for Bataille, as for us all, a thinking of the subject thwarts a thinking of community.’²¹¹ Nancy proposes that this paradox is the limit that Bataille's thinking comes up against, causing it to come to a halt; that the supposition of subjectivity is what needs to be overcome if what is *between* beings is to be thought. Although Bataille arguably has no philosophical concept of “the subject” as such, Nancy proposes that Bataille's conception of sovereignty implies a subjective presence-to-self which ‘leads back to the core of a constant thematic in speculative idealism’.²¹² Idealism stages the subject as interiority, necessarily isolated from the outside, as we have argued is the case in Hegel's thought. Bataillean sovereignty cannot escape from this speculative thematic because it is bound up with a certain idea of freedom, being constituted by what Bataille calls a “rigorously autonomous gesture” which, as we have seen, a person can only make when unrestricted by external needs.²¹³ The necessary autonomy of this gesture, which is inseparable from the ecstatic shift that breaches the architectural totality, implies both isolation, and some kind of *will*. The autonomous movement is finite, but it can never be completed because of its asymptotic trajectory. Like the experience of one's own death, to which it is related, this gesture starts in the realm of subjective experience, and then moves towards the outside. However, being anchored in the logic of the subject it can only suspend itself at the limit, unable to fully inhabit the anarchitectural space of the outside.

As remarked above, the sovereign operation, as Bataille conceives it, is constituted by a simulated repetition of dialectical lordship, which doubles Hegelian discourse in such a way that the elements are displaced, causing meaning to slide.²¹⁴ As a repetition, this sovereign operation never *escapes* the dialectic, because it always moves in relation to it—a relation that is parodic or parasitic, and so bound to the dialectic.²¹⁵ This means that, because the dialectic

211 Ibid., 23.

212 Ibid.

213 Bataille, ‘Hegel, Death and Sacrifice’, 25; cf. *supra*, 37.

214 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 1.2; cf. Derrida, ‘Restricted to General Economy’, 329.

215 The idea of a “parasitic” repetition comes from Austin's speech act theory. Austin designates as parasitic certain kinds of citation that are hollow utterances (etiolations), which he seeks to exclude from his consideration of “ordinary language”; cf. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 21–22. Derrida calls this exclusion into question, arguing that citationality is a quasi-transcendental condition of communication as such. I am using the term here to indicate that the relation of dependence between lordship and sovereignty, with the intention of playing on the difficulties of isolating the “original” that Derrida identifies; cf. Derrida,

is inseparable from the self-movement of spirit which constitutes the subject, the sovereign operation can be understood as a transgressive movement that departs from a subjective foundation—sovereignty is thus, to some extent, dependent on subjectivity. This oxymoronic “sovereign dependency” indicates the order of priority in Bataille's thinking, between rationality and ecstatic non-sense. Bataille specifies that the question “why?”, which provokes the slippage into non-sense (or, we might say, the non philosophical) strikes at the heart of knowledge because it is ‘only asked *after* all conceivable answers, aberrant or not, have been made to the successive questions formulated by understanding’.²¹⁶ Although we have argued that the heterological outside is indifferent to chronological time—implying that it has the potential to cut into the rational process at any point—the necessity of the ecstatic experience, as Bataille presents it, derives from the presupposition that the *telos* will to completion, according to its essence.²¹⁷ This means that the ecstatic experience that breaches subjectivity is derived from, and secondary to, the system it is posited as resisting.²¹⁸

Nancy argues that the foundational status of the dialectic in Bataille's thinking means that the ecstatic movement will always end in the subject reappropriating itself in presence, returning to the commensurability of the system. He states that: ‘the “Hegelianism without reserve” that Derrida finds in Bataille cannot not be subject, in the end, to the Hegelian law of a reserve always more powerful than any abandonment of reserve’.²¹⁹ Bataille's analysis of transgression illustrates this point: rather than conceiving it as a return to nature, Bataille emphasizes that transgression ‘suspends a taboo without suppressing it’, stating that ‘[t]here is no need to stress the Hegelian nature of this operation which corresponds with the dialectic phase described by the untranslatable “*aufheben*”’.²²⁰ Consequently, ecstasy as Bataille conceives it cannot serve as a foundation—because of the derivative nature of the sovereign gesture, it can only act as a fleeting release from the structure of subjectivity. A release, moreover, that is always a simulation because, as Nancy observes, ‘sacrifice, glory and expenditure remain simulations as long as they stop short of the work of death, so nonsimulation is the impossible itself.’²²¹ Thus any effort to inaugurate community on the

Limited Inc. We will revisit Austin's notion of performativity below; cf. *infra*, Ch. 6.3.

216 Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 109 [emphasis added].

217 Cf. *supra*, 36–7.

218 The same order of priority between system and non-system can be seen in various writings that feed into Bataille's theory of transgression. Hollier notes, for example, that “barbarism”, in Bataille's thinking, is conceived as a disturbance in the academic expressive code, which means that barbarism is only a meaningful idea insofar as it is considered in relation to civilization. *Against Architecture*, 49–50. The time of the unified system always comes first for Bataille, with transgression manifesting as an interruption, hence as a secondary state.

219 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*. 24.

220 Bataille, *Erotism*, 36, n.1.

221 *Ibid.*, 17.

basis of an always secondary simulation will provoke the kind of circular agitation outlined above in relation to Durkheim and Hegel, a perpetually restless oscillation between totality and its non-identical excess.²²²

This restlessness can be traced to the conceptual ambivalence underlying Bataille's heterological project, with respect to the interplay of an essentially representational rationality and an irrational performative force—of the philosophical and the non philosophical. In identifying the goal of *Acéphale* as, 'that of finding or recovering *the totality of being*', Bataille suggests that the project has an *end*—that of bringing the ecstatic energy and the systematic order together into some kind of unity.²²³ Yet his writings repeatedly resist the systematizing aspects of meaning, taking the side of force at the expense of order, sacrificing the rational side of sense to affect in a grand transgressive gesture. In this way, Bataille inverts the progressively rationalizing logic that Durkheim attributes to the *socius*, but he does so on the basis of an irreducible excess that is imbricated with the architectural edifice that it breaches—he thus posits the non philosophical experience of ecstasy as constituting a dyad with philosophical rationality, which co-constitutes it. Hence, whilst asserting the disruptive force of lived experience, he also binds it to, and at least partially derives it from, the philosophical system. Ultimately, if the project to found an affective community has an end, this will entail deciding between annihilation (embracing the irreversibility of death) and recuperation (accepting the synthesis of experience and rationality that Bataille has critiqued in Hegel), because the desire for ecstasy and the desire for unity move in opposing directions. By refusing to take this decision, Bataille's thought remains in the realm of simulation, rather than the real, and is condemned to inhabit an endless vicious circle.

In this sense, *Acéphale* was Bataille's own Tower of Babel: an edifice (albeit a horizontal one) that was impossible from its conception. It constitutes a gesture that is constitutively impossible to complete, which takes the same form as the asymptotic flirtation with death that Bataillan ecstasy shares with Hegel's master-slave dialectic. Masson's acephallic figure (*fig. 1*) is emblematic of this problem: standing tall and defiant, having apparently performed the impossible gesture of auto-decapitation, the figure remains a vertical and architectural structure, albeit one that exhibits a sign of mutilation and lack. This figure is intended to represent the death of humanistic man, yet it is conceived according to an organic model—and even though its organicity is dismembered, this headless figure remains a symbol that cannot avoid representing an identity, thus betraying the involuntary subjectivism

222 Cf. *supra*, 32–5.

223 Bataille, 'What We Have Undertaken', 194.

that underlies Bataille's thinking. Examining *Acéphale's* ruins, Nancy suggests that a different philosophical ground is necessary to understand the experience of community.

CHAPTER 2

Nancy: Community as Ontological Spacing

2.1 Spacing community: from Dasein's appropriation to Mitsein's exposition

Nancy's approach to theorizing community, which begins from the premise that the totalizing tendency of any metaphysical concept of community should be resisted, is clearly indebted to Bataille. Indeed, Miguel de Beistegui suggests that 'for a very large part of the time, Nancy finds in Bataille the point of anchorage for his thinking and subscribes unreservedly to the project of Bataillean writing'.²²⁴ In *The Inoperative Community* Nancy derives a number of ideas from Bataille, including the association of community with an experience of ecstasy, which is articulated in terms of a relation to death.²²⁵ He states: '[c]ommunity is calibrated on death as on that of which it is precisely impossible to *make a work*.'²²⁶ Similarly to Bataille, then, Nancy sees death as that which reveals community because, as the experience that opens onto non-experience, it is constitutively incomplete—and as such can only be experienced, indirectly, by others. He suggests that '[a] community is the presentation to its members of their mortal truth [...] It is the presentation of the finitude and the irredeemable excess that make up finite being: its death, but also its birth'.²²⁷ "Finitude" can thus be understood as an irreducible reality that delimits philosophical thought. As we shall see, for Nancy only finite beings can experience community, because what "community" names is nothing other than the exposition of finitude.

However, in other respects Nancy challenges the basis of Bataille's thought at a profound level, inflecting and redeploying the latter's analyses in the direction of another, more existential ground. As we have shown, Nancy critiques the implicitly subjectivist ontology on which Bataille's notion of community as ecstatic experience is founded, calling the theme of the subject in the latter's thought 'a limit that prescribed the difficulty and the paradox at which his thinking came to a halt.'²²⁸ This latent subjectivism compromises Bataille's attempts to articulate the experience of community in a decentred and horizontal way because it engenders an endlessly circular movement of thought, whereby the ecstatic

224 Miguel de Beistegui, 'Sacrifice Revisited', in *The Sense of Philosophy: Jean-Luc Nancy*, ed. Darren Sheppard, Simon Sparks and Colin Thomas, (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 157.

225 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 1–42.

226 Ibid., 15.

227 Ibid., 15.

228 Ibid., 23; cf. *supra*, Ch. 1.4.

movement by which the subject touches its limits ends either in annihilation or in recuperation. Nancy's way out of this impasse is to reverse the order of Bataille's logic, positing the ecstatic experience as an *a priori* condition of Being, meaning that the relation between beings precedes subjectivity. Accepting the Bataillean idea that 'community cannot arise from the domain of *work*', Nancy draws the conclusion that '[o]ne does not produce it, one experiences or one *is constituted by it* as the experience of finitude.'²²⁹ He thus proposes community not as a collective subject, but as an originary or ontological "sociality" that precedes the constitution of subjectivity, and takes place in the "unworking" [*désœuvrement*] of its own concept.²³⁰ Nancy argues that this originary social experience creates the space that is necessary for beings to come to presence; as such, the individual-subject can be understood as merely a residue of the dissolution of this space.²³¹ By placing community first in the ontological order, Nancy is able to claim that it is indifferent to the process of individualization that is dependent on it, thereby releasing the communal relation from the dependency on a presupposed subject that thwarted Bataille's attempts at conceiving a genuinely *acephalic* community. This rearranging of the ontological order puts community at the very limits of philosophical reasoning—that is, at the border of the non philosophical; Nancy suggests that:

Perhaps we should not seek a word or a concept for it, but rather recognize in the thought of community a theoretical excess (or more precisely, an excess in relation to the theoretical) that would oblige us to adopt another *praxis* of discourse and of community.²³²

Nancy's argument implies that the paradoxical foundations of Bataille's thinking requires a conception of space which is not predicated on the architectural enclosure that grounds the *logos*—even as the anarchitectural Other of this ordered and contained space. In order to think such a spatiality, Nancy draws on Heidegger's existential analytic, arguably revealing a latent Heideggerianism in Bataille's thinking of which Bataille himself was almost certainly unaware.²³³ By re-thinking the theme of community on Heideggerian grounds,

229 Ibid., 31 [emphasis added].

230 Ibid. Nancy takes the term "*désœuvrement*" from Blanchot. It implies an active passivity which is both before and beyond any process of work, and for Blanchot this state is necessary for finding the inspiration from which literature emerges; cf. Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, (Lincoln NA: Nebraska University Press, 1982). The title of Nancy's book, *La Communauté Désœuvrée*, is translated by Peter Connor as *The Inoperative Community*; however, it should be kept in mind that *désœuvrée* does not only imply a lack of operativity, but also the undoing of a "work" [*oeuvre*].

231 Ibid., 3.

232 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 25–26.

233 Derrida, in 'Restricted to General Economy', 442, n. 42, comments that Sartre was just in noting that Bataille had 'visibly not understood Heidegger, of whom he often and clumsily speaks', although he also notes that 'Bataille's "faults" reflected the faults which, at that time, marked the reading of Heidegger by "specialized philosophers"'—faults, moreover, that were at least partly caused by his only having access to

Nancy is able to escape from certain Hegelian limitations that he finds in Bataille's thought; at the same time, he reorients Heidegger's thinking by bringing the necessarily communal aspect of Being to the fore, aiming to correct the problematic potential for nationalism that the latter's thought permitted, by exploring the possibility of a Heideggerian ground for community beyond that of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.²³⁴ In this way, Nancy plays the role of “meta-philosopher” to both Bataille and Heidegger simultaneously.

Nancy's re-thinking of the ontological order is predicated on a relational understanding of space, which differs from the architectural logic of enclosure that structures the thinking of both Hegel and Bataille. The individual-subject presupposed in the dialectical paradigm is essentially conceived as a self-contained interiority, and as such is closed off from community, because the logic that constitutes this subject as a totality cannot admit to the presence of anything beyond itself. Nancy says that ‘the limit of the individual, fundamentally, does not concern it, it simply surrounds it’.²³⁵ This means that an individual cannot grasp its own finitude, making it effectively infinite. If the subject cannot grasp its finitude, it follows that it will never reach its limits, let alone go beyond them—which is arguably why Bataille's sovereign gesture towards the exterior cannot be completed. In order to correct Bataille's subjectivism, Nancy proposes thinking in terms of the *singular* being, saying: ‘behind the theme of the individual, but beyond it, lurks the question of singularity.’²³⁶ Nancy argues that the question, ‘what is *a* body, *a* face, *a* voice, *a* death, *a* writing—not indivisible, but singular [...] is constitutive of the question of community’.²³⁷ Singularity is conceived by Nancy not as a subject, but as an event—which both precedes and exceeds the limits of the individual. As such, the relation of singularity to the individual is not one of opposition or exclusion, as it would be conceived in a dialectical framework. Thought as an event and an object respectively, the singularity and the individual are instead understood as

Heidegger's texts through Corbin's problematic translation. Rebecca Comay characterizes the exchange between Heidegger and Bataille's thinking as “unlikely”, due to the two figures having little or no awareness of each other's work: ‘the one [Heidegger], typically, not reading, the other [Bataille] more or less, misreading’; however, she finds a certain “communication” between them in spite of this. It is this kind of underlying communication that Nancy brings out in his Heideggerian interpretation of Bataille. Cf. Rebecca Comay, ‘Gifts without Presents: Economies of “Experience” in Bataille and Heidegger’, in *Yale French Studies 78: On Bataille*, ed. Allen Stoekl, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 71.

234 Nancy characterizes Heidegger's fundamental ontology as the last “first philosophy”, and as ‘that which has put us on the way [*chemin*] to where we are, together, whether we know it or not’; however, he also suggests that this ontology allowed its author to ‘compromise himself, in an unpardonable way, with his involvement in a philosophical politics that became criminal.’ *Being Singular Plural*, 26. For a discussion of the political overdetermination of the philosophical in Heidegger's thought, cf. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, ‘Transcendence Ends in Politics’, in *Typography*, ed. Christopher Fynsk, 267–300, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

235 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 27.

236 *Ibid.*, 6.

237 *Ibid.*

constituting two very different experiences of space that are implicated in each other, rather than being set apart. In this spatial model, architectural interiority no longer forms the foundation from which communal experience departs. Instead, the experience of finitude—the limit which Nancy argues is always revealed *between* a plurality of beings, and hence is essentially relational—is proposed as a groundless “ground”.²³⁸

Nancy's prioritizing of the “between” follows from the ontico-ontological structure that Heidegger attributes to *Dasein*.²³⁹ Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* to refer to the kind of Being or “existence” that belongs to persons, as well as any person who has such Being, and he posits that this Being is always relational.²⁴⁰ The Being of *Dasein* includes “inquiring” as one of its possibilities, hence is concerned with the constitution of meaning or sense.²⁴¹ Heidegger points to temporality as the meaning of *Dasein*; however, his existential analytic also offers a rethinking of space.²⁴² He proposes that *Dasein's* basic state is that of “Being-in-the-world”, but this “Being-in” does not imply any kind of spatial enclosure. The space of *Dasein* is not an empty receptacle in which entities manifest (such a conception of space would be ontical); rather, it is the very relationality that constitutes the meaning of Being as such. Therefore “Being-in” essentially means *Being-in-relation*.²⁴³

In spatial terms, the logic that Heidegger calls “ontical” is analogous with that which we have named “architectural” in our discussion of Bataille. Heidegger suggests that ontical space is presupposed by a thinking that is predicated on entities. He says:

when space is “intuited formally”, the pure possibilities of spatial relations are discovered, [...] laying bare pure homogeneous space, passing from the pure morphology of spatial shapes to *analysis situs* and finally to the purely metrical science of space.²⁴⁴

This ontical conception of space, which Heidegger argues obscures the spatiality of *Dasein*, can be equated with the “mathematical” approach to space that Hegel rejects for being merely abstract. However, while Hegel posits that space is constituted as actual by the movement of subjective spirit, Heidegger instead conceives of relational space, the space of the between, as the *a priori* condition for beings to come to presence. By positing the between as *a priori*, Heidegger calls into question the foundations of subjectivity as such—which is why Nancy

238 Ibid., 27.

239 “Ontic” refers to the kind of inquiry that is primarily concerned with entities and facts about them; “ontological” is concerned with Being. Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 31, n.3.

240 Ibid., 27, n.1.

241 Ibid., 27.

242 Ibid., 38. The etymological meaning of *Dasein* (or *Da- Sein*) is “Being-there”, implying a certain spatiality to this kind of existence.

243 Ibid., 134.

244 Ibid., 147.

draws on his thinking in his critical reworking of Bataille's thought.

Because *Dasein* is not an entity, its spatiality cannot be conceived in terms of a position, of being *in* some place. Heidegger characterizes the spatiality of *Dasein* in terms of *de-severance* and *directionality*.²⁴⁵ Indeed, Heidegger states that '*Dasein is essentially de-severance—that is, it is spatial.*'²⁴⁶ De-severance suggests both an act of separation and the abolition of distance, as if the act of recognizing the remoteness of something brings it, in a sense, closer.²⁴⁷ Heidegger uses "de-severance" in a sense that is both active and transitive, implying that the spatiality of *Dasein* is not a pre-given medium in which entities come to presence, but is constituted in the event of *Dasein* projecting a horizon of meaning for itself, constituting a relation to the world that can be understood as ecstatic.²⁴⁸ The double meaning of de-severance, as both separating and bringing close, brings out the tension in this active relationality, which attracts *Dasein* towards the world of meaning, but also draws it back into a space which is "its own".

Nancy draws out the implicit sociality in this relational environment, emphasizing that the world of meaning is always constituted between a plurality of beings; hence *Dasein*, as a relation to meaning, is always a relation to one or more others; 'and so Being "itself" comes to be defined as relational, and, if you will—as *community*.'²⁴⁹ Heidegger touches on this sociality when he defines *Mitsein* and *Mitdasein* as structures of *Dasein* that are equiprimordial with Being-in-the-world.²⁵⁰ He says that Being-in-the-world is *with-like* in character, that the "with" is something of the character of *Dasein*, hence 'the world is always the one that I share with Others.'²⁵¹ There is thus a social dimension to the ontological spatiality of *Dasein*, which implies a certain sameness between beings:

[...] by "Others" we do not mean everyone else but me—those over and against whom the "I" stand out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too.²⁵²

Therefore, in order for *Dasein* to come to presence, there must be a horizon of meaning that is collective or communal. Yet there is also a proprietary dimension to *Dasein* which, as *Being*

245 Ibid., 138.

246 Ibid., 143.

247 Ibid., 138, n.2. The notion of de-severance, as both separating and holding together, is formally similar to the *Decision* that Laruelle proposes as the invariant kernel of philosophy. The philosophical *Decision* enacts a scission in the immanent real, thus producing a transcendence, and transcendently binds the immanent and transcendent terms in a disjunctive Dyad. Cf. *infra*, Ch. 4.

248 Ibid., 139.

249 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 6.

250 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 149. *Mitsein* and *Mitdasein* translate as "Being-with" and "Being-there-with" respectively.

251 Ibid., 154–155.

252 Ibid., 154.

and *Time* progresses, ultimately takes precedence over its communality: Heidegger states that ‘Being-with is in every case a characteristic of *one's own Dasein*’.²⁵³ After briefly outlining the necessarily social constitution of Being, the rest of the existential analytic is mainly concerned with the relationality of each singular *Dasein* with Being, and the communal implications of *Mitsein* remain somewhat underdeveloped. The individualist aspect of *Dasein* becomes even more pronounced in Division Two of *Being and Time*, where Heidegger explores the existential-ontological structure of death. He proposes that it is in standing before death, as ‘the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there’, that *Dasein* is *fully* assigned to its potentiality-for-Being.²⁵⁴ This full potentiality-for-Being is grounded in a temporal relation to the future that is an ecstatic projection, rather than a chronological sequence. Consequently, *Dasein* is able to exist in a way that is “authentically whole” because it is “thrown into death”; such an entity ‘does not have an end at which it just stops, but it *exists finitely*’.²⁵⁵ Heidegger states that when *Dasein* ‘stands before itself in this way, all its relations to any other *Dasein* have been undone. This ownmost non-relational possibility is at the same time the uttermost one.’²⁵⁶ As such, the individualist aspect of *Dasein* can be understood to accomplish an heroic transcendence over the communal aspect. When Heidegger later returns to the question of social Being, he no longer does so in terms of an ordinary *Mitsein*, but rather proposes Being-with-Others as a co-historicizing which determines *Dasein* as destiny [*Geshick*]. He states: ‘[t]his is how we designate the historicizing of the community, of a people’.²⁵⁷ Although he stresses that ‘Destiny is not something that puts itself together of individual fates, any more than Being-with-one-another can be conceived as the occurring together of several Subjects’, by identifying community with “a people” he implies that it is constituted as a supra-individual entity through a movement of transcendence.²⁵⁸

It is this ambiguous status of social relations in Heidegger's thought that Nancy seeks to correct when he posits community, explicitly, as the ground of Being. In order to accomplish this, Nancy draws on Heidegger's later thinking, in which the focus shifts from a concern with how human *Dasein* accomplishes Being, to the advent of Being in the *Ereignis* [Event of appropriation]—thereby bringing the relation *as* relation to the fore. Nancy's discourse on community folds this later thinking, which foregrounds the relation in itself, back into the question of *Mitsein* raised in the first Division of *Being and Time*, whilst passing

253 Ibid., 157 [emphasis added].

254 Ibid., 294.

255 Ibid., 378.

256 Ibid., 294.

257 Ibid., 436.

258 Ibid.

over the heroic transcendence of the second Division. The shift in Heidegger's thought is commonly referred to as the *Kehre*, after the originary “turning” that he proposes as grounding *Dasein* within the *Ereignis*.²⁵⁹ It entails his redefining of the tension between the communal horizon of meaning and the necessarily separate existence of finite beings in terms of identity and difference.²⁶⁰ Heidegger challenges the principle of identity that is the foundation of “metaphysics”, arguing that metaphysical thinking presupposes the meaning of identity, and so is unable to think the way that identity forms a relation with the world. Heidegger proposes that identity implies sameness, or “belonging-together”, which in speculative idealism is established as a synthetic unity through some form of mediation, dialectical or otherwise.²⁶¹ This approach to identity assigns entities a place in the the order of a “together”, combining them into a manifold in the unity of a system.²⁶² This understanding of togetherness, which Heidegger characterizes as an *intertwining*, presents the relation as a rigid structure.²⁶³ In contrast to this, Heidegger articulates a more flexible understanding of the relation by suggesting that the “together” be experienced in terms of “belonging”.²⁶⁴ In order to think belonging as an active relation, Heidegger says that it is necessary to ‘mov[e] away from the attitude of representational thinking’, springing away from the idea of “man” as subject.²⁶⁵ Heidegger describes this “spring away” as ‘the abruptness of the unabridged entry into that belonging which alone can grant a toward-each-other of man and Being, and thus the constellation of the two.’²⁶⁶ It follows that if, as Nancy argues, the ground of Being is the *communal* horizon of meaning, then this “belonging” also names the inclination toward-each-other of beings, the essentially directional nature of ontological sociality. Nancy argues that this unidentifiable *clinamen* is the level at which the the constellation of plural beings, which constitutes community, occurs; and he links this *clinamen* to ecstasy, inasmuch as it names an inclination to the exterior that is constitutive of the singular being.²⁶⁷

259 Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012), §255, 322–324. Cf. Martin Heidegger, ‘The Turning’ in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 36–49.

260 Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*.

261 Ibid. 25.

262 Ibid. 29.

263 Ibid. 32.

264 Ibid. 29.

265 Ibid. 32. I retain the gender-specific “man” for consistency with the standard translation, although it should be noted that Heidegger is referring to humankind in general. The German “*das Mann*” is gender neutral, and Heidegger's discourse on *Dasein*, which is inseparable from the experience of *thinking*, could be characterized as largely gender-blind. Nancy, who conceptualizes Being in a more embodied way, calls this stance into question, emphasizing that, ‘the difference between the sexes is itself a singularity in the difference of singularities’. *Inoperative Community*, 28.

266 Heidegger, Ibid. 33.

267 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 6–7.

By re-casting ecstasy as a relation to other beings, as much as a relation to one's own finitude, Nancy shifts from thinking it as a future-oriented temporal dimension, as in Heidegger, towards a spatial understanding. Heidegger's later thought has a more spatial logic than that of *Being and Time*, and the “spring away” from representational thinking that he proposes arguably resembles the ecstatic movement by which Bataille attempted to breach the limits of architectural space. Heidegger certainly shares with Bataille a desire to escape from the rigidity of the architectonic logic of representation. He names the structural environment that underlies metaphysical thinking the *Gestell* [framework/enframing], which is the configuration of Being and beings that is actively produced as the essence of technology.²⁶⁸ Heidegger traces the essence of technology back to its etymological root in the Greek *technē*, which he argues is a way of revealing that is connected to knowledge [*epistēmē*].²⁶⁹ For Heidegger, *technē* names the intrinsically creative manner of mutual grasping by which Being and beings are appropriated to each other. The *Gestell* is concealed by identity thinking, because such thinking presupposes it, and it is this concealment that allows it to form into a rigid structure. However, by positing that the structure is founded by the active nature of *technē*, Heidegger suggests that the rigidity of the relation could be, to some extent, unworked. Although technology, in the modern age, tends to drive towards an ever more total ordering of the world into “standing reserve” (which names the ontical tendency to calculate and compartmentalize entities), Heidegger argues that, as *technē*, it may also contain a “saving power”.²⁷⁰ The redemptive possibilities of *technē* derive from the active nature of the spatiality of the *Gestell*. This active spatiality differs, in an important way, from Bataille's understanding of representational space as an architectural enclosure, and is essential to Nancy's re-grounding of the concept of community.

Samuel Weber observes that there is a tension contained in the word *Gestell*.²⁷¹ In

268 Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 35, and cf. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 3–35.

269 Heidegger, *Question Concerning Technology*, 12–13. Heidegger observes that the connection between *technē* and *epistēmē* was made ‘from the earliest times until Plato’, both being names for knowing; it is Aristotle that distinguishes between the two terms with respect to what and how they reveal.

270 Ibid. 28. The rather religious sounding “saving power” is taken from a quote from Hölderlin.

271 Samuel Weber, ‘Upsetting the Setup: Remarks on Heidegger's “Questing After Technics”’ in *Mass Mediauras, Form, Technics, Media*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 71. Weber draws out a certain ‘practice of language’ in Heidegger's writing, which subjects banal, household terms to such twists and turns as to ‘yield an effect of uncanniness that in turn constitutes a powerful incitement to rethink things often taken for granted’. (Ibid. 57) It is beyond the scope of this research to enter into a detailed analysis of the poetics at play in the texts under consideration, but it should be noted that there is a certain similarity between Heidegger's practice of language and the tendency to ‘make meanings slide’ that Derrida identifies in Bataille's sovereign operation. cf. Derrida, ‘From Restricted to General Economy’, 332. Below, we will explore Laruelle's way of re-purposing language, which, does not entail the sliding of meanings so much as re-envisioning language's mode of effectivity; cf. *infra*, Ch. 7.3.

ordinary usage, as Heidegger notes, ‘the word *Gestell* means some kind of apparatus, e.g., a bookrack. *Gestell* is also the name for a skeleton.’²⁷² However, the lexical root of the word is in the verb *stellen*, which means ‘to set, to place, to set in place.’²⁷³ This means that *Gestell* is not simply an inert framework—it also implies the action or movement of setting-up. Heidegger sometimes hyphenates the word “*Ge-stell*” in order to emphasize the verbal root of the noun, hence the active nature of the set-up.²⁷⁴ Weber translates *Gestell* as “emplacement”, ‘because it signifies not so much the setting-up of an apparatus as the set-up *tout court*, “the assigning or appointing of a definite place”.’²⁷⁵ As such, he brings out the way in which Heidegger’s discussion of technology clarifies the importance, not just of the spatial categories that are indispensable to his thinking from *Being and Time* onwards, but of the idea of *place*.²⁷⁶ The verb *gestellen* means literally “to place”, but Weber emphasizes that this is ‘in the slightly ominous sense of being cornered, entrapped, manoeuvred into a place from which there is no escape’, implying that the ordering tendency of technology is restrictive, just as architectural logic is for Bataille.²⁷⁷ Heidegger also proposes that scientific thinking, which is structured by the *Gestell*, has univocity and ‘contradictory-free judgement’ as its goal, implying a commonality with Bataille’s critique of the unifying ideology of architectonic logic.²⁷⁸ However, the tension between verb and noun in the word *Gestell*, which points to a combination of movement and stasis, associates the sense of place with the active nature of *technē*, out of which a different kind of topography emerges.

As the mutual appropriation between Being and beings that produces knowledge, *technē* is constituted by a movement Heidegger calls *Entbergung* [“revealing”], which grasps by venturing outwards.²⁷⁹ This outward-bound movement, perhaps counter-intuitively, secures knowledge by venturing into the relation, and in the process *unsecuring* self-identity—thus implying both stasis and movement, both safety and danger. As a movement towards the outside, it constitutes a kind of *ecstasy*, but one which precedes, and in a sense *founds*,

272 Heidegger, *Question Concerning Technology*, 20.

273 Weber, ‘Upsetting the Setup’, 70.

274 Heidegger, *Question Concerning Technology*, 19, 20.

275 Weber, ‘Upsetting the Setup’. 71.

276 Ibid. 70.

277 Ibid. 68.

278 Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 123. As we shall see, Laruelle’s understanding of the essence of science is quite different; he conceives of science as an open-ended experimental practice which allows its axioms to be questioned; in contrast, he diagnoses philosophy with the desire to position itself as the only way to grasp the real, thereby excluding other approaches; cf. *infra*, Ch. 3.

279 William Lovitt explains that: ‘*bergen* means to rescue, to recover, to secure, to harbor, to conceal. *Ent-* is used in German verbs to connote [...] a change from an existing situation. It can mean “forth” or “out” or can connote change that is the negating of a former condition.’ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 11, n.10.

architectonic thinking—the anarchitectural ground which is covered over, obscured by the structuring framework of the *Gestell*. Weber proposes that knowledge, as *technē*, ‘starts out from a place that is determined by that which it seeks to exclude. Insecurity is its enabling limit, although it is a limit that must be effaced in order for the place to be secured.’²⁸⁰

Therefore, in contrast to Bataille, whose conception of the anarchitectural outside departs from the contained structure of identity, in Heidegger's thinking an active and supple space constitutes the “groundless ground” on which the framework is formed. This active spatiality, which is produced in the ontico-ontological relation, means that containment no longer serves as the prerequisite of order, and calls into question the integrity of any logical structure that assumes a homogeneous space as its enabling environment. Thought as relational, space cannot be presupposed; it must be reconstituted with each new configuration of Being and beings, meaning that this ontological spatiality also has a temporal dimension. The topography of the *Gestell*, which structures knowledge, is hence less an architectural framework than the ongoing ordering and reordering of space, as the always contingent ground. At the same time, in its more restrictive or militaristic implications, the *Gestell* is also characterized by the continual placing and replacing of orders. In this sense, the architectural and the anarchitectural are not opposed to each other, separated by a boundary as the Hegelian subject is enclosed and separated from what is outside it. Rather, these two spatialities are dissimulated in each other: the homogeneous order of architectonic reason is constituted by the motion of unsecuring-revealing which is outward-bound, and subordinates self-identity to a change of place. This transformational, other-directed movement implies an intrinsic heterogeneity within the system. Taking this dynamic spatial relation as the ground of (always communal) Being, enables Nancy to re-think the relation between knowledge and non-knowledge, avoiding the hard alternative between them that both drives Bataille's thought, and produces its specific impasse.

This systemic heterogeneity is the ontological difference that grants the space in which identity is formed through the mutual appropriation of the *Ereignis*. Difference constitutes a “between” in which the dissimulation of the architectural and the anarchitectural occurs as an act of thinking. Heidegger characterizes this space as a “clearing”.²⁸¹ Difference clears insofar as it holds the ontic and the ontological both apart from and towards each other. Heidegger states that, ‘clearing is the (non-metaphysical) presupposition for revealing and securing. It is

280 Ibid., 67.

281 Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*. 65. “Clearing” should be read both as a noun and a verb in the gerund, indicating, once again, the active nature of the spatiality under discussion.

the most fundamental presupposition for anything to be or to happen at all.²⁸² Clearing has a duration or “perdurance”, so has a temporal, as well as spatial dimension.²⁸³ This means that clearing is less a space than an active spacing which separates what is mutually related, and this spacing is necessary for any kind of occurrence to come to presence. Heidegger characterizes perdurance as: ‘a circling, the circling of Being and beings around each other. Grounding itself appears within the clearing of perdurance as something that *is*’.²⁸⁴ The architectural structure of representational thinking obscures the clearing in which identity is formed, but does not annihilate it—difference remains as part of the framework. However, Heidegger says that although we, ‘encounter it everywhere and always in the matter of thinking, in beings as such—[we] encounter it so unquestioningly that we do not even notice this encounter itself.’²⁸⁵ He suggests that, in order to think the difference as such, it is necessary for *Dasein* to take a “step back” from metaphysical reasoning. The step back sets the matter of thinking free, ‘to enter a position face to face [with difference], which may well remain wholly without an object.’²⁸⁶ In this movement, Heidegger understands *Dasein* to follow difference back to its essential origin in the ontico-ontological relation.

Nancy draws on this idea of relationality as origin in his discourse on community; however, by emphasizing the importance of sociality in Heideggerian ontology he also offers a different perspective on the spatiality of the ontological relation. For Heidegger, difference *gathers* Being and beings into a constellation by constituting the space “between” where meaning is forged. This “between”, as a relation which precedes the terms that it relates, is the ontological condition that allows thinking to grasp entities as subjects and objects. Thus identity can be seen as an after-effect of Being-in-relation, and not the other way around as it is conceived in “metaphysics”. This means that identity, which occurs as a result of the constellation of Being and beings, is dependent on an experience of space, or more particularly, an active spacing. Heidegger, who approaches difference as a movement of, and gap within the process of thought, characterizes the space of the relation as an *abyss*.²⁸⁷ He explores this ontological spacing predominantly in terms of a single *Dasein* both connected to and held apart from “the world”, understood as the projected horizon of meaning. This horizon of meaning, as observed above, is implicitly communal because it is necessarily constituted *between* a plurality of beings. However, Heidegger does not develop the social

282 Ibid., 17.

283 Ibid., 65.

284 Ibid., 69–70.

285 Ibid., 63.

286 Ibid., 64.

287 Ibid., 32.

aspects of the relation, focusing instead on the singular experience of each *Dasein* in its relation to the world. This “world”, although not conceived as a totality—neither as a mathematical sum nor as a place of containment—nevertheless implies a certain “wholeness”, in the sense that it names *all* that is within *Dasein's* grasp.²⁸⁸

Nancy, by emphasizing *Mitsein's* equiprimordiality with *Dasein*, foregrounds the social aspect of the space of difference. By taking the idea that Being-with is the originary state of *Dasein* as the guiding principle of his thinking, Nancy shifts focus from the relation of Being and beings, to the relation between multiple beings: ‘you *and* I (between us)’.²⁸⁹ Nancy argues that difference, as the relation to a communal horizon of meaning, implies a relation to other beings as its foundation, and that the relation to each of these beings is different. Thus, rather than being connected to and separated from the “whole” world of meaning by a singular abyss of thought, Being as *Mitsein* is constituted by a plurality of relations with other beings. Hence difference gathers beings into a *community*, understood as an originary constellation that is formed in terms of “belonging”—as opposed to any predicate of “togetherness”. The spatiality of this gathering is, Nancy says, ‘a groundless “ground”, less in the sense that it opens up the gaping chasm of an abyss than that it is made up only of a network, the interweaving, and the sharing of singularities.’²⁹⁰ This articulation of the ground of Being as a *network* of singularities reveals the horizon of meaning to be decentred, fragmented and heterogeneous. In Nancy's conception of Being as originally social, difference functions simultaneously as the space of belonging that holds the network together, and as the alterity that separates the discrete beings which comprise the community.

As remarked above, a singular being has access to its limits that elude the individual, which as a closed totality is unconcerned with its limits—‘the *singular being*,’ Nancy says, ‘is the finite being.’²⁹¹ He proposes that in the discourse of community, the consideration of singular beings needs to take the place of the thematic of individuation, because the finitude inherent to beings' relation to *Mitsein* reveals that the logic of the individual is untenable. Returning to the Hegelian problematic that Bataille's thought persistently engages with, Nancy observes an irreconcilable tension within the process of individuation: on the one hand, the individual is by definition a self-contained and closed-off entity; but at the same time, as

288 We will argue that the implicit wholeness of the “world”, in both Heidegger's and Nancy's thought, remains too totalizing when viewed from a Laruellian stance, because the philosophically constituted world is self-presupposing and co-constitutes the “real”. The non-philosophical vision-in-One sees the self-occluding nature of ontological difference, which Heidegger supposes-given, as reinforcing the very circular logic that it claims to challenge. Cf. *infra*, Ch. 4.3.

289 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*. 29.

290 *Ibid.* 27.

291 *Ibid.*

Hegel's *Phenomenology* shows, the concrete Being of these individuals can only be constituted through a communication or communion with another, like, subject.²⁹² Hegel seeks to bring these divergent movements of separation and communion together with the action of the *Aufhebung*, resolving the tension by positing that the subject's separation is only apparent, because dialectical synthesis overcomes the limits of the finite being. The result of the *telos* for Hegel is thus the individual's total communion with universal reason, as embodied by the collective subjectivity of the nation—and from this, the subject is claimed to be able to synthesize a knowledge that is absolute. However, as we have seen, Bataille argues that by acceding to the totality of absolute knowledge the Hegelian subject finds itself in the ecstatic space *beyond* the universal—which is to say in a state of god-like isolation that seems to exclude the possibility of communion, and hence community. Nancy reaffirms this idea, observing that the Absolute, or the “divine”, ‘is what it is (if it “is”) only inasmuch as it is removed from immanence, or withdrawn from it’.²⁹³ Nancy thus argues, after Bataille, that community—which is excluded by the logic of the individual, the absolute-subject of metaphysics—‘comes perforce *to cut into* this subject by virtue of the same logic.’²⁹⁴ Which is to say that it is precisely the logic of the absolute that sets the individual in relation, thereby rendering its closure impossible. This is the reason that, in Bataille's thought, *insufficiency* (or incompleteness) is a *principle*—identity, whether individual or collective, is understood as essentially transcendent, it therefore cannot be brought wholly into immanence through any process, dialectical or otherwise.²⁹⁵ For Nancy, community therefore names the excess that undoes the absoluteness of the absolute: ‘the relation (the community) is, if it *is*, nothing other than what undoes, in its very principle—at its closure or on its limit—the autarchy of absolute immanence.’²⁹⁶

Bataille takes the constitutive impossibility of the absolute closure of identity to indicate that the subject is essentially wounded, a never-quite-closed interiority exposed to the outside through its “lacerations”. Nancy, in contrast, takes it as the point of departure from which to challenge the ideal form of the subject at a more existential level, proposing community as the experience of the singular being that *precedes* the individual. He says of singularity that it ‘does not *proceed* from anything. It is not a work resulting from an operation. There is no process of “singularization”’.²⁹⁷ The singular being thus belongs in a

292 Ibid.

293 Ibid. 10.

294 Ibid. 4.

295 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 1.4; cf. Blanchot, *Unavowable Community*, 5–7.

296 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*. 4.

297 Ibid. 27.

different—and arguably more fundamental—place in the ontological order: rather than being a result achieved at the culmination of a *telos* (dialectical or otherwise), Nancy argues that it is instead the immanent ontological condition *for* Being. As such, the singular being is not wounded: ‘[p]roperly speaking, there is no laceration of the singular being: there is no open cut in which the inside would get lost in the outside (which would presuppose an initial “inside”, an interiority).’²⁹⁸ In place of Bataille’s wounded, not-quite-enclosed subject, Nancy posits a being that can be thought, topologically, as a surface without interior which ‘consists only in exposure: the entire “inside” of the singular being is exposed to the “outside”’.²⁹⁹

As something that cannot be produced according to a logic of work, singularity is related to ecstasy. Nancy says it is ecstasy that, ‘defines the impossibility [...] either of an individuality, in the precise sense of the term, or of a pure collective totality.’³⁰⁰ As such, the question of community remains inseparable from the question of ecstasy. However, where Bataille conceives of ecstasy as a movement of the subject that essentially repeats the dialectic, albeit revealing (and perhaps breaching) its limits, and Heidegger conceives it as a temporalizing relation to Dasein’s own finitude, Nancy understands it spatially—as similar to the outward-bound movement of the Heideggerian *Entbergung*, which gives the ground of Being by revealing and [un-]securing. Self-identity, in this ecstatic movement, is subordinated to and determined by the setting-up of place, which can only occur in relation to a shared horizon of meaning. Thus ecstasy cannot be said to have a “subject”; Nancy states, rather, that ‘ecstasy (community) happens *to* the singular being.’³⁰¹

Ecstasy, thought in terms of unsecuring, can be understood as the experience of the outside that places the singular being in the space of difference. Nancy’s fundamental claim is that nothing precedes this experience, that community, as ecstasy, is what *makes us be*.³⁰² This ontological experience is related to Heidegger’s *Ereignis*, the event of Being’s advent. However, where Heidegger figures this event as a mutual *appropriation* between Being and beings in which *technē*, as a process of thinking, grasps at and gathers meaning, Nancy argues that the event which gives ground to Being is one of *exposition*, which implies both an outward-bound spatial movement and the act of being revealed, or making an appearance.³⁰³ What is exposed, in the ecstatic experience, is the finitude that is the condition of a being’s

298 Ibid., 30.

299 Ibid.

300 Ibid. 6.

301 Ibid. 7.

302 Ibid. 26.

303 In French, *exposition*, (from *ex-poser*: to outward-place) can mean “exposure”, “orientation”, and also “exhibition”.

singularity—and this exposition can only occur *in relation*, because it is the presence of other beings that reveals the limits of the self. This means that there can be no singular being without another singular being. Hence Nancy states that ‘finitude always *co-appears* or *compears* [com-paraît] and can only compear: [...] finite being always presents itself “together”, hence severally; for finitude always presents itself as being-in-common and as this being itself’.³⁰⁴

On this basis, Nancy is able to posit that community, understood as *the* originary experience of finitude, constitutes the ontological space that ‘distributes and shares the confines of singularity—which is to say of alterity—between it and itself.’³⁰⁵ The experience of *Mitsein*, which is defined by its sociality, is thus essentially one of a *sharing*—of Being, and of space. Moreover, if each being is formed in relation to the heterogeneity of the space of difference, then the alterity *between* beings can be said to be constitutive of *each* being in its singularity. Thus, according to Nancy's ontological framework, the *singularity* of Being always contains an implicit *plurality*.³⁰⁶ The distribution of “confines” constitutes the network-space that Nancy proposes in place of Heidegger's *abyss*, and is made up of limits or edges without any interiority being implied. By posing relational space in this way, Nancy aims to articulate the *areality* of community (its nature as area, as formed space) in such a way as to show that it ‘is not a territory, but the areality of an ecstasy, just as, reciprocally, the form of an ecstasy is that of a community.’³⁰⁷ Nancy's emphasis on the plurality of beings that are necessary to engender the framework in which meaning is established—i.e. the Heideggerian “*Gestell*”—foregrounds the difference between beings that he argues is essential to the experience of community. In this way, by developing on the notion of primordial *Mitsein* and its implications for the constitution of *Dasein*, he aims to avoid the error made by Heidegger who, ‘when it came to the question of community as such, [...] went astray with

304 Ibid. 28.

305 Ibid. 27.

306 This idea of singular Being implying plurality, introduced in *The Inoperative Community*, recurs in much of Nancy's work. Cf, in particular, ‘Of Being Singular Plural’, where he emphasizes how the three words are imbricated with each other—‘Being singular plural: in a single stroke, without punctuation, without mark of equivalence, implication, or sequence. A single continuous-discontinuous mark tracing out the entirety of the ontological domain, being-with-itself designated as the “with” of Being, of the singular and plural, and dealing a blow to ontology—not only another signification but also another syntax.’ (Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 37). Below, we will argue that, viewed from a non-philosophical stance, the syntax that Nancy evokes here remains essentially philosophical, and we will develop a more radically different syntax on the basis of Laruelle's non-philosophical axiomatic. cf. *infra*, Ch. 7.2–7.3.

307 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*. 20. Nancy comments that “areality” (*aréalité*) ‘is an antique word, signifying the nature or specificity of an “area”. By chance, this word also serves to suggest a lack of reality, or rather a slight, faint, suspended reality’. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008) 43.

his vision of a people and a destiny conceived at least in part as a subject.³⁰⁸ Nancy's articulation of Being in terms of an implicitly plural singularity renders the closure of subjectivity (whether of the atomistic individual, or of any supra-individual collective) constitutively impossible, and thereby positions “community” as *the* ontological experience of resistance to totalization.

2.2 Presenting community: myth, literature and the problem of the political

Positing the ontological priority of community in this way raises questions as to how such an originary sociality might be grasped discursively. This is not merely a scholastic question—for Nancy, finding a *praxis* of discourse that can articulate the experience of community without bringing about its conceptual hypostatization is a political matter; he states the problem thus:

[...] how can the community without essence (the community that is neither “people” nor “nation,” neither “destiny” nor “generic humanity,” etc.) be presented as such? That is, what might a politics be that does not stem from the will to realize an essence?³⁰⁹

The aim of *The Inoperative Community* is therefore framed in terms of a political problematic. Nancy's text suggests that the sharing of Being constitutes a necessary condition for any affirmation of equality or justice. Yet he continues by stating: ‘I shall not venture into the possible forms of such a politics, of this politics one might call the politics of the political, if the political can be taken as the *moment*, the *point*, or the *event* of being-in-common.’³¹⁰ This refusal to engage in or endorse a specific politics is consonant with his earlier questioning into the political that, along with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, he characterizes as a “retreat” [*retrait*], and which can be understood in part as a withdrawal from the ontical logic of politics towards its ontological ground.³¹¹ By focusing his thought on the singular experience

308 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 14. Heidegger's tendency to think the *Volk* as a subject is related to his conception of a “people” in terms of a linguistic community. In relation to the German nation, Heidegger sees the particular destiny of the *Volk* as related to the heritage of its linguistic tradition; as such, he tends to overlook the alterity inherent in any living language. cf. Lacoue-Labarthe, ‘Transcendence Ends in Politics’.

309 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, xxxix-xl.

310 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, xl.

311 Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe explore the transcendental conditions of the political under the name of the “*retrait du politique*”, which can be understood both in terms of a “re-tracing” back to the source of politics, and also as a “retreat”, in the militaristic sense of drawing back in the face of a superior force. They suggest that a re-tracing of the conditions of the political has been made possible by the disintegration of conventional political economy in the wake of the collapse of communism as an alternative to liberal-democratic ideals. Returning to the ontological conditions of the political entails that the political is imbricated with the philosophical; they state: ‘Taken as a philosophical question, and from the point of view of what we have for the time being called *the essence of the political*, the question of the political evokes the

that necessarily *precedes* identity, Nancy effectively rejects in principle the aim to constitute any political process, programme or economy—and in this way avoids the impasse that Bataille found himself at in his attempt to found a horizontal community with *Acéphale*. However, Nancy's profound resistance to subjectivist thinking could also be seen as a limitation inasmuch as it arguably renders political theory or science *tout court* inadmissible, and hence seems to stand in a critical relationship, equally, to *all* forms of political thought—and indeed action—in the empirical sphere.³¹² With this in mind, we might ask whether Nancy's ontological approach genuinely succeeds in allowing him to “present” community in such a way as to avoid its hypostatization, and hence its recuperation by the conceptual system it is said to resist; and equally, whether his rigorous resistance to thinking community as subject actually prohibits him from formulating a satisfactory discursive articulation of community. We will now examine how Nancy approaches the question of presentation raised in the quotation above, by exploring the ways in which communities are performatively grounded through the staging of myth and the sharing of literature. Then we will review some of the responses to Nancy's discourse of community, in order to show how the prohibition against political thought and action arguably instituted by his thought can be interpreted as generating its own impasse.

Nancy opens the second chapter of *The Inoperative Community* by setting the ‘scene of myth’, an ‘ancient immemorial scene’ where a group of people are inaugurated as a horde or tribe by the ritual telling of their shared origin.³¹³ This scene, which Nancy suggests we all know well, involves one person standing slightly apart from the crowd and reciting a narrative that brings the whole group together into an assembly, which did not exist prior to the recitation. Hence in its traditional form, myth can be understood as a narrative with a performative function—that of founding the community by identifying its origin. Nancy states that ‘[m]yth is of and from the origin, it relates back to a mythic foundation, and through this

necessity of dwelling on what makes the social relation possible as such; and that is also to say on what does not constitute it as a simple relation (which is never given), but which implies a “disconnection” or “dissociation” at the origin of the political event itself.’ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, ed. & trans. Simon Sparks, (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 180, n.1.

312 Ian James observes that ‘among the anglophone commentaries on his writing [that] have addressed his political thought, and more specifically his writing on community [...] many of these responses have also been rather critical, mostly on the grounds that his thinking seemingly ignores or misjudges the empirical realm of political events and struggles.’ Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand: An introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 153. This problematic relation to empirical politics is not limited to Nancy—James also notes that the apparent conflict or contradiction in Nancy's thought, which is driven by a profound political exigency whilst resisting the foundation of any political programme, ‘can be viewed within the wider debate surrounding the political dimension of those forms of French thought which have been associated with the labels of poststructuralism, postmodernism, or deconstruction.’ *Ibid.*

313 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 43–4.

relation it founds itself (a consciousness, a people, a narrative).'³¹⁴ This performative functionality is not dependent on the story being “true”; as an originary tale, myth is able to found *through* fiction. The scene of myth, as Nancy describes it, is intrinsically theatrical, and could be perhaps understood as the most elemental form of theatre. He says: ‘[i]t is not just any scene: it is perhaps the essential scene of all scenes, of all scenography or all staging; it is perhaps the stage upon which we represent everything to ourselves or whereupon we make all our representations’.³¹⁵ Here, then, we can see evidence of a theatrical theme in Nancy's philosophy of community, which we will examine in more depth below.³¹⁶ Nancy does not accept the traditional understanding of myth uncritically, however. He suggests instead that ‘this scene itself is mythic’.³¹⁷ As we shall see, this critical perspective on myth corresponds with a broader project within Nancy's thought, which is concerned with rethinking the apparatus of “theatre” as a model for representation more generally.

Nancy proposes that the scene of myth (in the sense of a founding fiction) is itself mythic (in the sense of being fictional), and as such, myth can be understood to constitute a cycle of self-interruption. Nancy's aim is to articulate this mythic constitution; he states that: ‘henceforth, we must try to perceive this interruption of myth.’³¹⁸ What makes perception challenging, in this instance, is that the interruption is not a phenomenon that is available to the senses in any simple way. Myth's interruption is not something that occurs at the level of its content—mythic narratives themselves are not difficult to perceive, or indeed to analyse; Nancy's question is rather what it means ‘*that they are myths*’.³¹⁹ That is, it is a matter of grasping how mythic language functions performatively—to simultaneously inaugurate *and* interrupt—and what this means for our understanding of community. He states that ‘mythic speech is communitarian in essence [...] Myth arises only from a community and for it: they engender each other, infinitely and immediately.’³²⁰ However, the kind of community engendered by myth is not the community of finitude that has been articulated above. Rather, referring to the traditional scene of myth, he states that, ‘[e]ssentially, myth's will to power was totalitarian. It may perhaps even define totalitarianism’.³²¹ This totalitarian essence derives from an overdetermination of meaning within myth, the performative function of which is to project back an “origin” which then serves as an identity predicate that binds the

314 Ibid., 45.

315 Ibid., 44–5.

316 Cf. *infra*, Ch. 6.3; Ch. 7.1

317 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 45.

318 Ibid., 47.

319 Ibid., 45.

320 Ibid., 50.

321 Ibid., 56.

members of the community into a supra-individual collective. Due to the fact that all members of such a collective are attributed with an identical origin, this mechanism totalizes inasmuch as it does not allow a space for the alterity inherent to singular beings.

Nancy suggests that the last awakening of mythic thought belongs to Romanticism, with elements of this romantic tradition living on in both communist and structuralist thought. We can see vestiges of this Romanticism in Bataille's thinking, in the sense that he sought, in projects like *Acéphale*, to reawaken myth as a *living* power, seeing it as a kind of last resort after other forms of creation had failed: 'Myth remains at the disposal of one who cannot be satisfied by art, science or politics. [...] Ritually lived myth reveals nothing less than true being'.³²² However, Bataille also understood myth to be essentially lacking in modern experience, inasmuch as

today's man defines himself by his avidity for myth, and if we add that he defines himself also by the consciousness of not having the power to gain access to the possibility of creating true myth, we have defined a sort of myth which is the *absence of myth*.³²³

Nancy interprets this absence of myth in modern experience in two senses: firstly, after the Enlightenment, the power of myth was exhausted because Western culture could no longer believe in founding fictions; secondly, modern instantiations of mythic society have ended in atrocities, of which the Nazi "final solution" inhabits his text as the limit-case: the most absolute, and the most absolutely horrifying.³²⁴ Bataille's relationship to myth can thus be seen as ambivalent—he clearly exhibits a certain nostalgia for the ritual fervour of the mythic scene, as to the experience of sacrifice; however, Nancy argues that Bataille also recognizes the terrible potential for totalitarianism contained within the logic of mythic communal foundation. Thus Bataille concludes that 'the absence of myth is also a myth: the coldest, the purest, the only *true* myth.'³²⁵

By articulating the mode of this absence or lack as an *interruption*, Nancy seeks to distance himself from such nostalgia in order to avoid the possibility of mythic desire leading towards totalitarianism; and in a gesture that is consistent with his ontological prioritizing of *Mitsein*, he proposes that the interruption is originary. As we have seen, Nancy's response to the totalizing tendencies of identity thinking is to reverse the ontological order, so that instead of community being conceived as the result of a process of fusion, it instead consists in an

322 Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 232.

323 Georges Bataille, 'The Surrealist Religion', in *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, ed. & trans. Michael Richardson, (London & New York: Verso, 1994), 81.

324 Nancy states: 'the will to this power ends in crimes against humanity'; *Inoperative Community*, 47.

325 Georges Bataille, 'The Absence of Myth', in *The Absence of Myth*, 48.

originarily social experience of exposition. Unless interrupted, the myth of myth cannot address the singularity of this experience—its grounding function can only inaugurate community as a collective individual, thereby inhibiting the originary and finite experience of *Mitsein*. It is for this reason that, in line with both Nancy's prioritizing of *Mitsein* and the political orientation of his thought, the interruption must be thought not as a secondary event which follows after the communal scene of myth's telling, but rather as a constitutive part of mythic logic itself. Structurally, myth's constitutive interruption is analogous with the way that the absolute is unworked by its own logic—"interruption" can hence be understood as myth's "principle of incompleteness". If myth's traditional function was to posit a shared "origin" in order to inaugurate the community, then Nancy argues that the very mechanism by which it is supposed to found actually makes community impossible, because such a community would be defined by fusion—and '[t]he fusion of community, instead of propagating its movement, reconstitutes its separation: community against community. Thus the fulfilment of community is its suppression.'³²⁶

Hence, instead of denoting an affirmative founding narrative, "myth" comes to imply the negation of myth's performativity, its relegation to the status of a mere fiction. This is how faith in myth is lost—if myth is absent in modern experience, it is because rather than inaugurating community, it results in community's absence. Hence we come to understand myth as *a myth*. For Nancy, '[t]his is what constitutes the interruption: "*myth*" is cut off from its own meaning, on its own meaning, by its own meaning.'³²⁷ Myth's performative operation is therefore not a simple foundation through fiction, but rather a constitutive interruption. Nancy's text exposes an internal disunion of meaning contained within the word "myth", which can mean both foundation and fiction. He repeatedly plays on the ambiguity of the phrase "myth is a myth", which he says 'harbours *simultaneously* and *in the same thought* a disabused irony ("foundation is a fiction") and an onto-poetico-logical affirmation ("fiction is a foundation").'³²⁸ This chiasmatic formulation mimes a Heideggerian technique, and reveals "myth" as a concept with an abyssal structure.³²⁹

Due to the way that mythic logic acts to cut community off from itself, Nancy suggests that the myth of myth cannot be thought simply as an ontological fiction—instead, he posits it as an ontology *of* fiction or representation, and thus 'a particularly fulfilled and fulfilling form

326 Ibid., 60.

327 Ibid., 52.

328 Ibid., 55.

329 Heidegger articulates the abyss [*Abgrund*] of the difference that "grounds" Being with a similarly chiasmatic formulation: 'The *lack* of the ground is the lack of the *ground* [*Der Ab-grund ist Ab-grund*].' *Contributions*, 300, §242.

of the ontology of subjectivity in general'.³³⁰ The logic of myth is hence related both to the problematic of subjectivity that, according to Nancy, inhibits Bataille's thinking of community, and also to a broader critique of representation in which both thinkers are engaged. As we saw in Chapter 1, for Bataille, representation is both an intrinsic part of the experience of community, and also the extrinsic, architectural structure of discourse that prevents this experience from being grasped philosophically. It is intrinsic insofar as it is the very impossibility of experiencing one's own death that 'proclaims the necessity of the *spectacle*, or of *representation* in general'; and as we have seen, for Bataille community is imbricated with this spectacle because it is through the death of another that community is revealed.³³¹ Hence Bataille's fascination with sacrifice, which can be understood as producing a mimetic relation to death. Re-presentation is thus necessitated by the impossibility of presenting the ecstatic experience that constitutes community in a direct manner. Yet, representation is also extrinsic, inasmuch as it structurally limits the possibility of articulating community. Throughout Bataille's writings it is clear that representation—at least in its philosophical mode—is not adequate to fill the void left by the ineffability of death, or indeed of the ecstatic-communal experience that is indexed on it. Just as architectural monuments cannot 'maintain what escapes from the dying man', so words fail to capture these experiences: '[s]hort of dying of them, one leaves them like a thief, [...] dazed, thrown back stupidly into the absence of death: into distinct consciousness, activity, work.'³³² In this sense, for Bataille—as for Blanchot—the experience of community is *unavowable* in principle, because it belongs to a different level of consciousness from that of language and conceptuality: it can be subjectively experienced, but not objectively reproduced. Rather than trying to represent the experience of ecstasy directly, then, Bataille's practice of writing alludes to it through its poetics, while witnessing the impossibility of ever grasping it in a sufficient manner, often by way of an ironically self-deprecating laugh.

Nancy shares with Bataille this critical position on representation—one way of understanding myth's "totalitarianism" is to say that it imposes a unified *representation* of collective identity onto singular social experience, thereby closing off its intrinsic plurality. In suggesting that the scene of myth is perhaps 'the stage upon which we represent everything to ourselves or whereupon we make all our representations', Nancy identifies it as a—if not *the*—

330 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 55. We will return to this idea of an ontology of fiction below, when we explore Laruelle's notion of a non-philosophical "philo-fiction", as a creative approach to restructuring the syntax of thought. Cf. *infra*, Ch. 7.2–7.3.

331 Bataille, 'Hegel, Death and Sacrifice', 20.

332 Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 216 [emphasis removed]; Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 111.

archetypal model for representation.³³³ This representational scene is unable to ground the community of finitude because it is intrinsically divisive, in more than one way. Firstly, because the essentially theatrical arrangement that sets the teller apart from the audience instantiates a division between performer and spectators, which implies a hierarchical structure where one subject is able to speak for the many. Even if the listeners to the myth might be said to have an active role in receiving it, and making it their own by identifying themselves in it and reiterating it, the theatrical set-up nevertheless implies a unidirectional communication that is qualitatively different from the ontological exposition that constitutes *Mitsein's* mode of coming to presence. The one who speaks, “revealing” to the many their mythic origin cannot be said to *compear* with his/her audience, because the communication of such a message does not constitute an exposition that is participated in equally by all parties. Secondly, by rendering the narrative of origin into a particular form which can be repeated, Nancy suggests that myth transforms time into space: ‘With myth, the passing of time takes shape, its ceaseless passing is fixed in an exemplary place of showing and revealing.’³³⁴ The performative function of myth is thus not only the founding of a totalized community, but also the founding of representation as such: ‘[m]yth is not simple representation, it is representation at work, producing itself—in an autopoietic mimesis—as effect: it is fiction that founds’—and Nancy goes on to suggest that what it founds is not a fictive world, but rather fiction’s ability to fashion a world for the subject—that is, it founds the representational structure that, in Heideggerian terms, *enframes* or *emplaces* subjectivity.³³⁵ This structure, as *re-presentational*, is essentially divisive because it constitutes a relation between reality and its secondary presentation as an object that can be conceptualized and communicated; and as an exemplary space of *showing*, the theatrical structure has an ocular logic, hence the relation it establishes necessarily constitutes a distance. Consequently, Nancy reiterates Jean-Pierre Vernant’s suggestion that we need “a logic other than that of the *logos*” in order to arrive at an understanding of the specific functioning of myths.³³⁶ This claim, which can be situated within a broader critique of “metaphysics” that Nancy inherits from Heidegger, implies that in order to grasp community’s mythic grounding, either philosophy needs to be altered so that it no longer appeals to the theatrical structure of *logos*, or that we need to exit philosophy altogether.

333 Ibid., 44–5.

334 Ibid., 45. Nancy attributes the idea that myth turns time into spatial form to Lévi-Strauss; cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The View from Afar*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel and Phoebe Hoss, (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 219.

335 Ibid., 56.

336 Ibid., 160, n. 8, citing Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mythe et Société en Grèce Ancienne*, (Paris: Maspero, 1982).

Nancy's response is not to try to exit philosophy, but—much like Bataille—to think at its limits, altering its functioning from within. If representation constitutes a distance, then in asking how the community without essence can be “*presented* as such” (rather than re-presented) Nancy can be seen to aim at closing the schism, to communicate the essentially communal experience of finitude in a more direct way, so as to avoid its doubling and separation. The way he does this is by identifying the mutual exposition by which singular beings compear *with* communication. However, this originary exposition is not to be understood as a communication *of* something (a sign, a concept, a narrative, etc.); rather, it is a communication-without-content that occurs ‘prior to any address in language (though it gives rise to this latter its first condition of possibility).’³³⁷ This communication, which makes *logos* possible without being reducible to it, constitutes Being or presence as such, and hence takes an ontological precedence over re-presentation. Thus the community of compearance, which resists the totalitarian will of myth (Nancy suggests that community is, in a sense ‘resistance itself’, inasmuch as it ‘keeps open a space, a spacing within immanence’), is identified *with* Being, and it is not myth that reveals this community, but myth's interruption.³³⁸ By identifying myth's interruption with the originary experience of *Mitsein*, Nancy is able to posit the interruption of myth's staging of communal subjectivity as *a priori*—hence, as we have seen, myth's inaugural function can no longer be understood simply in terms of its autopoietic fictioning, but is rather to be thought in terms of a disjunction that constitutes an opening which is intrinsic to the apparatus of representation.

Having established the originary status of the interruption, Nancy then attempts to articulate the presentation of *Mitsein* in more affirmative terms as “literary communism”, proposing “literature” as a name (albeit an “unsuitable” one) of that which interrupts myth.³³⁹ In this context, literature does not denote a literary thing, it is not an ‘art or style, [...] the production of texts, [...] commerce or communication between thought and the imaginary, etc.’³⁴⁰ Nor is it identified with a specific medium—its expression may occur in writing, but also in music, painting, dance, the exercise of thought, etc.³⁴¹ Nancy characterizes literature's essence in a being ‘composed only in the act that interrupts, with a single stroke—by an incision and/or an inscription—the shaping of the scene of myth.’³⁴² The interruption does not

337 Ibid., 29.

338 Ibid., 58.

339 ‘A name has been given to this voice of interruption: literature (or writing, if we adopt the acceptation of this word that coincides with literature). This name is no doubt unsuitable. But no name is suitable here. The place or the moment of interruption is without suitability.’ Ibid., 63.

340 Ibid., 71–2.

341 Ibid., 64.

342 Ibid., 72.

silence the myth, but rather constitutes the “voice of community”—of the community that is interrupted and exposed. “Literature”, which ‘essentially interrupts its own recitation’, is defined by the fact that it does not come to an end—or what we might call, after Bataille, its *constitutive incompleteness*.³⁴³ It is related to myth inasmuch as it ‘has something inaugural about it [...] each work inaugurates a community’; yet it differs from myth in that it is not *final*, because each work takes up the inaugural act of exposing the finite limits of singular being.³⁴⁴ As such, the community inaugurated by literature is the ‘community *to come*, in the sense that it is always *coming*, endlessly, at the heart of every collectivity’.³⁴⁵ The name “literary communism” thus indicates that literature and communism are mutually implicated in each other, in the sense that each term denotes an exigency for the other: “literature” is necessarily “communist” because its perpetual self-interruption occurs as a consequence of community constituting ‘a stake, an end, and a principle beyond [literature] itself’; conversely, community needs “literature” because the latter is the modality of the communication-without-content, the finite exposition, that is necessary for the former's constitution.³⁴⁶

Nancy identifies the structural traits of “literature” with Derrida's notion of “writing” or “archi-writing”, which he articulates as ‘the “difference” of meaning at the very origin of meaning’.³⁴⁷ For Derrida, meaning does not precede writing, but is constituted in the act of

343 Ibid., 65.

344 Ibid., 68.

345 Ibid., 71. We can read into this a relation to Heidegger's temporal conception of ecstasy. Heidegger posits that the past, present and future be thought as the “*ecstases*” of temporality, which together constitute “*primordial time*”, from which chronological time derives. (*Being and Time*, 377). He goes on to suggest that, ‘the future has a priority in the ecstatic unity of primordial and authentic temporality’, because it is through being-towards-death that Dasein is thrown into genuine finite existence. (Ibid., 378). However, as observed above, Nancy's conception of finitude, whilst similarly indexed on death, also emphasizes the communal nature of the ecstatically projected horizon of meaning. Hence what is *coming*, in this future-oriented community, is not only the potentiality for not-Being, but more importantly the potential for the horizon of meaning to be constituted differently, and thus for newly configured relations-with-others to emerge.

346 Ibid., 66.

347 Ibid., 163, n. 1. This identification with Derrida's thought leads Emine Hande Tuna to characterize Nancy's notion of the interruption of myth as an unreconstructed Derrideanism, and she suggests that this view is common among the secondary literature on Nancy; cf. Emine Hande Tuna, ‘The Underridization of Nancy: Tracing the Transformations in Nancy's Idea of Community’, *Journal for Cultural Research* 18: 3, Sept 2014: 263–272. However, in ‘Putting Community Under Erasure: Derrida and Nancy on the Plurality of Singularities’, *Culture Machine* 8, 2006 <<http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/37/45>> [accessed 24 Sept 2015], Marie-Eve Morin suggests that although there are similarities between the respective “projects” of Derrida and Nancy, the strategies they employ in order to put the concept of community “under erasure” are actually quite different. We would argue that, despite Nancy's appeal to Derridean terms here, it is problematic to simply reduce his thought to a reiteration of Derrida's. As Ian James remarks, ‘while Nancy's philosophy is certainly a deconstructive or post-deconstructive thinking, it also, and from a very early stage, decisively diverges from Derrida. Nancy's “singular plural” ontology, his thinking of finitude, of shared finite existence, sense and world, uses philosophical terms and figures which would be placed under erasure or arouse a high degree of suspicion when seen from a deconstructive perspective: terms such as “being”, “presence”, “experience”, “existence”, “truth”, [etc.]’ Ian James, *The*

inscription. In this sense, ‘writing is inaugural [...] It does not know where it is going, no knowledge can keep it from the essential precipitation toward the meaning that it constitutes and that is, primarily, its future.’³⁴⁸ By relating community to Derridean inscription, Nancy is able to posit that ontological sociality is necessary for, and is inseparable from, the constitution of sense. Where the dialectical underpinnings of Bataille's thought led him to attempt to grasp communal experience in terms of an ecstatic leap out of *logos* into a non philosophical exteriority, Nancy instead posits “literary” exposition as a kind of pure “communication” between singularities that underlies the transmission of any message—a communication that can be understood as the address of language itself. In this way, he can claim to avoid putting communal experience in a relationship of mutual exclusion with conceptual thought. Instead of placing community outside the enclosure of *logos*, Nancy posits it as integral to a more broadly defined understanding of “sense” in which the formal and totalizing aspects of signification exist in a constant tension with the performative force of literature's exposition, which constitutes the enabling limit of communication and thus endlessly resists representational closure.³⁴⁹ Hence, although there is a theoretical differentiation between mythic signification and literary interruption, the two cannot be separated from each other. Nancy states that ‘the writer is always in some way the teller of the myth, its narrator or fabulator [...] Or rather, writing itself, or literature, is its own recital; it stages itself in such a way that once again the mythic scene is constituted.’³⁵⁰

However, if myth and “literature” are imbricated in this way, we might ask to what extent Nancy's placing the literary “interruption” first in the ontological order gets us closer to being able to articulate how community might be discursively grasped, without lapsing into the endless circularity and recuperation that we found in Bataille's thought. Throughout Nancy's text, it is implied that any process of representation that would constitute community as an ontical subject and/or object would have a destructive effect on the originary experience of community, dividing it from itself, totalizing a partial aspect of it through signification and hence diminishing its singular-plural Being—as if any attempt to speak, write, or indeed *think*

New French Philosophy, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 39.

348 Jacques Derrida, ‘Force and Signification’, in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), 11.

349 The idea of a performative force lying beneath language can also be found in Bataille's thought—for example, where he suggests that knowing, in its banal form, is rendered possible by ‘essential acts of communication [... such as] the intimate operations of religious activity, of sacrifice, of the sacred: language, which knowledge makes use of, remains intensely charged with these operations.’ (*Inner Experience*, 84.) However, these originary forces are discussed largely in nostalgic terms by Bataille, as something that has been lost, so that what remains of them is conceived as a mere residue—modern experience being characterized by an absence of the sacred, as much as an absence of myth.

350 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 69.

of community would instantiate a separation of its concept from its ontological reality. Nancy might thus be seen as setting himself an impossible task—that of articulating through language something that language can only inhibit, if not destroy. He states that: ‘in the interrupted myth, community turns out to be what Blanchot has named “*the unavowable community*”.’³⁵¹ In this sense, in spite of his change to the ontological order, positing *Mitsein* as preceding the constitution of subjectivity—and analogously, interruption taking precedence over myth—Nancy could be seen as arriving at his own impasse, effectively placing communal experience beyond the reach of signifying discourse, much like Bataille. Despite identifying community with an originary level within communication, and positing this as a moment of resistance that ‘annuls collective and communal hypostases’, he could be accused—*tu quoque*—of hypostatizing this “community” by his own discursive employment of the word. In order to avoid this objection, it is necessary for Nancy to maintain a clear distinction between the signifying function of language and community’s “literary” exposition. Hence, rather than closing the distance between communal experience and its secondary representation as *logos*, Nancy re-inscribes the division in other terms—as the irreducible difference between the ontological and the ontic.

The consequence of this, in terms of the *political* stakes of the question of presentation, is that Nancy seems to have an ambivalent relationship to politics—his thought simultaneously pulling in two antagonistic directions inasmuch as he frames his discourse as addressing a profoundly political exigency, whilst at the same time positing an irreparable schism between empirical politics and the ontological spacing that constitutes the originary politicality of *Mitsein*. Nancy thereby divides the realm of the political into two, and his discourse on community is thus open to a range of interpretations. In a positive sense, Philip Armstrong suggests that Nancy’s articulation of originary sociality in terms of a *network* space provides a potent resource for understanding how the reticulated nature of the technologized contemporary social sphere displaces classical notions of a self-sufficient

351 Ibid. This quotation suggests an identity between Nancy’s understanding of “community” and Blanchot’s. In *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy treats Blanchot’s *Unavowable Community*—which was written in response to the former’s original essay (which makes up most of Chapter 1 in Nancy’s book)—as if it fundamentally agrees with his position. However he later acknowledges that Blanchot’s response was not only an echo or resonance, but also ‘a retort, as well as a reservation, and in some respects a reproach.’ Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘The Confronted Community’, trans. Jason Kemp Winfree, in *Obsessions of Georges Bataille*, 23. The difference between Nancy and Blanchot can be framed in terms of Nancy’s Heideggerian tendency to prioritize the “with”, versus Blanchot’s Levinasian tendency to prioritize the “Other”. Cf. Robert Bernasconi, ‘On Deconstructing Nostalgia for Community within the West: The Debate Between Nancy and Blanchot’, *Research in Phenomenology* 23 (1993): 3–21; cf. Gregory Bird, ‘Community Beyond Hypostasis: Nancy Responds to Blanchot’, *Angelaki* 13:1 (2008): 3–26; cf. Stella Gaon, ‘Communities in Question: Sociality and Solidarity in Nancy and Blanchot’, *Journal for Cultural Research* 9.4 (2005): 387–403.

ground to the political.³⁵² Furthermore, it might be argued that, due to the consistency with which his thinking avoids lapsing into subjectivism, Nancy's post-deconstructive approach to theorizing community takes the resistance to totalization to its very limit. Timothy J. Deines, for example, judges Nancy's critique to be “decisive” within the philosophical discourse of community, because the latter's ontological prioritizing of *Mitsein* means he can subsume all kinds of political projects and analyses—including not only the obviously fascistic, but also socialist, communitarian and liberal ones—under the heading of “subjectivity” and thereby diagnose them as being totalizing, and hence totalitarian, in essence.³⁵³ Deines contrasts this to the thinking of various of Nancy's contemporaries—including Gilles Deleuze, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Maurice Blanchot, and Giorgio Agamben—where he demonstrates that vestiges of subjectivism can be found.³⁵⁴

However, the consistency of Nancy's theoretical resistance to presuppositions of subjectivity, which Deines judges to be the particular strength of his critique, can equally be interpreted as a limitation because it would seem to prohibit in principle any thought or action that would engage in representational logic. If this is the case, then the interruption of myth, which indicates the presence of an ontological opening in the system, will always lapse into re-mythologization as soon as one engages in empirical politics (whether in theoretical or practical terms). This leads numerous commentators to characterize Nancy's discourse on community as fundamentally negative or pessimistic, understanding the interruption of myth as an aporia that cannot be inhabited because it is always *coming*, and hence always deferred—and this is seen as engendering an unhappy consciousness because community is thus defined as a strictly impossible experience.³⁵⁵

352 Cf. Philip Armstrong, *Reticulations: Jean-Luc Nancy and the Networks of the Political*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

353 Timothy J. Deines. ‘Bartleby the Scrivener, Immanence and the Resistance of Community’, *Culture Machine*, Vol 8, 2006 <<http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/39/47>> [accessed 29/01/2010].

354 Ibid. Deines' inventive essay approaches the question of community via a reading of each of these authors' interpretations of Herman Melville's short novel, ‘Bartleby the Scrivener, A Story of Wall Street’, in *Melville's Short Novels*, ed. Dan McCall, (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2002), 3–34 [first published in *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, November and December 1853]. Deines acknowledges that in some of Agamben's other writings, this residual subjectivism is not present—cf., for example, *The Coming Community*, where Agamben's characterization of community as constituted by “whatever singularities” lacking any identity predicate and always “to come”, suggests, albeit elliptically, an ontological framework similar to Nancy's.

355 For secondary literature that frames Nancy's thought this way, cf. Bernasconi, ‘On Deconstructing Nostalgia’; cf. Caygill, ‘The Shared World’; cf. Simon Critchley. ‘Re-tracing the Political: Politics and Community in the work of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy’, *The Political Subject of Violence*, ed. David Campbell & Michael Dillon, (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 1993, 73–93; cf. Nancy Fraser, ‘The French Derrideans: politicizing deconstruction or deconstructing the political?’, *New German Critique*, no. 33, 1984, 127–54; cf. David Ingram, ‘The Retreat of the Political in the Modern Age: Jean-Luc Nancy on Totalitarianism and Community’, *Research in Phenomenology*, vol 18, 1988: 93–124; cf. Andreas Wagner, ‘Jean-Luc Nancy: A Negative Politics’, *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 32.1 (2006): 89–

Thus, in spite of the fact that Nancy posits the originary sharing of Being as a starting point for any political affirmation of equality or justice, he is arguably unable to account for the possibility that Being may not be equally shared out in the empirical world. Ian James summarizes these objections by asking :

does [his discourse] account for the fact that some bodies will be *born into* and *as* an unequal share of material existence? That is to say, bodies are always born into [...] different geographical and geopolitical situations, and they are born as bodies bearing different markers of identity that will determine or influence their share of existence (e.g. colour, ethnicity, biological sex and, of course, social class).³⁵⁶

By characterizing the mechanism of signification as essentially totalizing, Nancy arguably renders such questions inadmissible on the grounds that they engage in the metaphysical logic of identity, and he could thus be seen as prohibiting any political thought or action that seeks to redress the inequalities that derive from the identity logic which *already* orders the social world—not least because any such activity would necessarily take the form of a project, and thus lead back towards a form of totalizing hypostatization. Hence Andrew Norris suggests that if, ‘[o]n Nancy’s account, every assertion of [...] identity constitutes a denial of our ontology’, then his thought ‘would seem to be implicated in modern nihilism.’³⁵⁷ Consequently, although Norris assesses Nancy’s deconstruction of community as a foundational concept to be important, he ultimately finds it “unsatisfying” because it does not provide a framework for judging between better or worse political choices, or between better or worse political regimes. There is a recurrent suggestion, in Nancy’s thought, that representational logic *as such* is identified with “totalitarianism”, which implicates all political orders, equally, in effacing our ontological freedom.³⁵⁸ This leads Simon Critchley to ask:

is this analysis of the present political condition accurate? Is totalitarianism indeed the horizon of our time that cannot be overcome? What about the societies that pride themselves on being called “the democracies”?³⁵⁹

109.

356 James, *New French Philosophy*, 50.

357 Andrew Norris, ‘Jean-Luc Nancy and the Myth of the Common’, *Constellations* 7:2, (2000), 289.

358 It is perhaps an oversimplification to claim that Nancy identifies all representational thought with totalitarianism; yet there are several points in *The Inoperative Community* which are suggestive of such a position (cf. 3, 22–3, 55–6). In an earlier essay, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe state: ‘there is a logic of fascism. This also means that a certain logic is fascist, and that this logic is not wholly foreign to the general logic of rationality inherent in the metaphysics of the subject.’ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘The Nazi Myth’, trans. Brian Holmes, *Critical Enquiry* 16, no. 2 (Winter 1990), 294. In the next section, we will revisit the question of totalitarianism as we discuss Nancy’s notion of “immanence”.

359 Critchley, ‘Re-tracing the Political’, 78. Critchley goes on to suggest that “democracy” might be understood according to a constitutive incompleteness, not dissimilar to that which Nancy attributes to community: ‘As a response to the claim that actually existing liberal democracy conceals a totalitarian threat, a claim that has much to recommend it in many respects, one must not restrict oneself to conceiving of democracy as the

By labelling all factual or empirical politics as “totalitarian”, and reducing *la politique* to *le politique*, Critchley suggests that Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's ‘retreating of the political’ is actually ‘*an exclusion of politics itself*.’³⁶⁰ Thus Nancy's “nihilism” can be understood as consisting in his apparent condemnation of empirically oriented political thought and action as such.³⁶¹

Consequently, despite affirming community as “resistance itself” inasmuch as it keeps open a space within representational logic, Nancy's ontological prioritizing of communal *Mitsein* arguably acts to silence the discourse of politics (and by extension, to render problematic any political action of a project-like nature) inasmuch as it posits the unavowability of community as a principle, thus implying that any signifying discourse will necessarily efface the experience of ontological sociality that constitutes Being. The “retreat” of the political, which is analogously the withdrawal of community from the ontic towards the ontological, does not therefore succeed in presenting community in such a way as it can be discursively grasped—except by resorting to irreducibly aporetic and chiasmatic linguistic formulations. Rather, it sets the deferred presence of the community in motion, so that the performative force of originary communication and the totalizing aspect of signification interrupt each other. This movement, which always inaugurates without ever finalizing itself into a closed totality, maintains an opening in the apparatus of representation; but at the same time, it would ultimately seem to take a similar form to the endless cycle of “circular agitation” we observed in both Durkheim and Bataille's thought in Chapter 1, inasmuch as any attempt to discursively articulate the inaugural moment necessarily constitutes a recuperation by the economy of *logos*.

description of an existent political form—and certainly not as a descriptive apologetics for Western liberal democracy—and begin to think it instead as a task or a project to be attempted. *Democracy does not exist*; it is rather something to be achieved because it is the incomplete par excellence. In Derridean terms, Democracy has a futural or *différentiel* structure, it is always democracy to come (*la démocratie à venir*). This is the future of deconstruction.’ Ibid., 82. Interestingly, in a more recent essay, Nancy indeed defines democracy in a similar way, as: ‘first of all, the name of a regime of sense whose truth cannot be subsumed under any ordering agency [...] then, the duty to invent a politics *not of the ends* [...] but of the means to open or to keep open the spaces of their being put to work. This distinction between ends and means is not given, no more than the distribution of possible “spaces” is. It is a matter of finding them, of inventing them, or of inventing how not even to find them.’ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Truth of Democracy*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Machael Naas, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 33.

360 Critchley, ‘Re-tracing the Political’, 84.

361 Nancy arguably recognizes this problem—ten years after founding the Centre for Philosophical Research into the Political with Lacoue-Labarthe in 1980, Nancy writes that they had voluntarily interrupted the activity of the Centre 1984 because they perceived that a consensus was forming between its members that its work was ultimately about the essence of the political (rather than politics), and they saw this as being in danger of producing a ‘definitive impasse between thought and praxis’. Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘La Comparution (De l'existence du “communisme” à la communauté de l’“existence”’, in Jean-Christophe Bailly and Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Comparution*, (Paris: Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 2007 [1991]), 95, n. 1.

2.3 *Immanence divided: the infinite finitude of sense*

Nancy's thought following *The Inoperative Community* continues to be informed by the same political exigency, however the explicit question of the political tends to recede into the background, appearing in displaced forms, as he turns his consideration to other matters including the constitution of sense, embodiment, art, and Christianity.³⁶² This suggests that the question of its political efficacy, on which Nancy's thought has been critiqued above, is not the most appropriate way of assessing his philosophy as a whole. While the political question recedes in his thinking, the term “community” also becomes less prominent, although the idea of *Mitsein* as the sociality that constitutes Being remains a constant underlying supposition. Thus, although the “objects” of his thought may vary, we argue that—at the ontological level—it can be read as a relatively consistent *corpus* in which the question of community remains an essential theme. In this section, we will examine how the notion of ontological finitude develops in Nancy's later thought, to ask whether his more mature philosophy allows us to answer the question of how ‘the community without essence [... can] be presented as such’, which arguably remains unresolved in *The Inoperative Community*.³⁶³

Reflecting on Blanchot's *Unavowable Community*—a contemporary response to *Le Communauté Désœuvrée*—nearly 20 years later, Nancy writes:

I have not gone farther, until now, to resume this analysis [...] since as far as the order of my work properly speaking is concerned, I have not pursued this vein or theme of the word “community”. Little by little I have preferred replacing it with the awkward expressions *being-together*, *being-in-common*, and finally *being-with*. There were reasons for these shifts and for resigning myself to this awkwardness, at least temporarily. I could see from all sides the dangers aroused by the use of the word “community”: its resonance fully invincible and even bloated with substance and interiority; [...] It was clear that the emphasis placed on this necessary but still insufficiently clarified concept was at least, at this time, on par with the revival of

³⁶² Nancy continues to explore explicitly political themes in *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), and *La Comparution*. Following this, he does not return his focus to politics as such until more recent essays like *Truth of Democracy*. However, as Ignaas Devisch comments, ‘[r]ather than waning, his interest lies in another way of thinking the political’, namely, in investigating what politics might mean in a time when its traditional forms have become bankrupt, and ‘this has significant political consequences as well’. Devisch, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*, trans. Joeri Schrijvers and Sigi Jotkandt, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 153. On the question of sense, cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Libbrett, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). On embodiment, cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). On art, cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). On Christianity, cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant & Michael B. Smith, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

³⁶³ Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, xxxix–xl. Due to limitations of space, we will read Nancy's extensive corpus selectively, focusing on certain texts which address ontological finitude, and the question of presentation, directly.

communitarian trends that could be fascistic.³⁶⁴

The identification of the discourse of community with a fascistic communitarian tendency returns us to the problematic of totalitarianism that acts as a framing concept for the political aspects of Nancy's thought. As we have seen, Critchley and Norris—among others—are critical of Nancy's arguably sweeping use of this term, seeing it as levelling the terrain of politics in a problematic way, thereby inhibiting the possibility of distinguishing between more or less despotic regimes in the empirical sphere. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy had earlier developed on the theme of totalitarianism that arises in Hannah Arendt's thought, extending its scope beyond the specific understanding that she formulates (and which very few actual regimes could be said to fully embody) into contemporary liberal democracies, positing it as an all-encompassing phenomenon that constitutes the 'unsurpassable horizon of our time'.³⁶⁵ This claim derives from Heidegger's notion of the essence of technology as driving towards an ever more total ordering of the world into standing reserve, which is reformulated by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy in more explicitly political terms.³⁶⁶ Just as for Heidegger the logic of *technē* enframes/emplaces the relation between Being and beings in such a way as to conceal the ontological difference that makes ontical ordering possible, so for Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy technocratic forms of management come to conceal the ontological basis of politics. Thus, the political can be seen to merge with various authoritative discourses in areas such as science, culture, psychology and economics to the extent that "everything" becomes political—with the consequence that *genuinely* political questions are silenced, and community is effaced in favour of a techno-logically organized society. This is, in part, what it means for the political to "retreat".³⁶⁷ Due to this technological appropriation of the political, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy expand the meaning of totalitarianism beyond the "hard" form associated with dictatorships and police states, to include a "softer" form, experienced in the

364 Nancy, 'Confronted Community', 24–5. There is a certain irony here inasmuch as, in *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy criticizes Bataille for having retreated from the question of community in his later writing, commenting that 'the theme of community becomes indistinct[; ...] it is as though the communication of each being with NOTHING were beginning to prevail over the communication between beings.' (Inoperative Community, 22) Yet this later commentary on his own work indicates that Nancy made a similar retreat from the problematic of community. Nancy's suggestion that the particular word "community" is associated with a certain fascistic tendency problematizes the idea that all ontical thought is equally totalitarian, which is the basis on which his thought was critiqued in much of the secondary literature cited above.

365 Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *Re-treating the Political*, 126. Cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2004).

366 Cf. Heidegger, *Question Concerning Technology*, 12–13.

367 For Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, this withdrawal of politics into technocracy provides the occasion for a renewed engagement with and re-tracing of the ontological "essence" of the political; cf. *Re-treating the Political*.

guise of a techno-scientific ideology imprinted at a psychological level.

In *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy's thought continues to be informed by this framework, but he introduces a new term for such a state of affairs: “totalitarianism” [...] might be better termed “immanentism”.³⁶⁸ He thus indexes the *political* problematic of totalitarianism on a *philosophical* problematic concerning the relation between immanence and transcendence. He states that his analysis of community is guided by the principle that: ‘community does not consist in the transcendence (nor in the transcendental) of a being supposedly immanent to community.’³⁶⁹ An “immanentist” community can therefore be understood as one that is formed on the basis of effecting a presupposed essence. Nancy's claim as to the all-encompassing scope of immanentism is thus based on the premise that ‘economic ties, technological operations, and political fusion (into a *body* or under a *leader*) represent or rather present, expose and realize this essence necessarily in themselves.’³⁷⁰ In this sense, the politicization of “everything” that Nancy diagnoses as the horizon of our time is inseparable from the process of philosophy accomplishing itself, as in the Hegelian *telos*, which culminates in an “absolute knowledge” that is equally the realization of a perfectly harmonious society. However, an immanentist community does not necessarily depend on a dialectical contradiction to accomplish itself, because it can occur as a result of mundane economic and managerial processes, as much as by pin-pointing an other in relation to which its identity is defined. This is why Nancy posits immanentism as such an all-encompassing phenomenon.

Framing the problematic of community in terms of immanence allows us to clarify the question of its presentation. We argued above that Nancy shares with Bataille a critical view of representation, and that his posing the question of how the community without essence can be “presented as such” (rather than re-presented) implies that he aims to close the distance instantiated by the representational apparatus, between reality and its secondary presentation as rational object; now we can understand the relational distance intrinsic to the representational apparatus as a *division of immanence*. Hence, when community is constituted by the transcendence of an essence—whether by the traditional “representational” means of the staging of myth, or by the techno-logical apparatus that enframes/emplaces the relation to the ontological that enables the ontical ordering of the world into “standing reserve”—this transcending essence cannot fully achieve immanence because it is detached from its already immanent ground in the ontico-ontological relation. Hence, when Nancy argues that

368 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 3.

369 *Ibid.*, xxxix.

370 *Ibid.*, 3.

communal fusion reconstitutes community's separation, that the fulfilment of the community's immanence is equally its suppression, this is to say that: '[t]o attain immanence is to cut off from another immanence: to attain immanence is to cut off immanence itself.'³⁷¹ Thus there are two types of immanence at play in Nancy's discourse—the transcending hypostatized immanence that is identified with “totalitarianism”, and another more originary immanence—immanence “itself”—from which the former departs. It is this separation of immanence into two that propagates totalitarianism, in Nancy's expanded sense, and also renders the total fusion of the collective impossible. By following Nancy in conceiving of the problematic of representation in terms of immanence, we can interpret the question of how the community without essence can be “presented as such” as asking how community might be presented *without dividing immanence*—that is, without effectuating a transcendence. Hence, rather than judging Nancy's thought on the basis its political efficacy (or lack thereof), we will instead assess his discursive presentation of community in terms suggested by the discourse itself—that is, on the basis of its treatment of immanence.

If the principle guiding Nancy's discourse is that community needs to be thought in a non-immanentist manner, then his response is to reverse the relation between immanence and transcendence. Hence, rather than community being produced by the transcendence of a supposed-immanent essence, Nancy proposes that the community *without* essence ‘consists on the contrary in the immanence of a “transcendence”—that of finite existence as such, which is to say its “exposition”.’³⁷² This immanent “transcendence” has a different directionality than the transcending essence—the transcending essence constitutes a vertical edifice, as critiqued by Bataille, whereas the immanent “transcendence” is horizontal. This is because it is nothing other than the ecstatic inclination towards the exterior, the *clinamen*, that Nancy posits as common to each and every singular being, and which allows such beings to come to presence in the mode of *Mitsein*. We might say that, by identifying “community” with Being, Nancy frames the *political* exigency to think the community-without-essence as an essentially *philosophical* problematic. This follows from his way of conceiving the political and the philosophical as ontologically imbricated which, as we observed above, implies that the former is indexed on the latter. Hence Nancy's approach to the presentation of community, which reverses the relation between immanence and transcendence, is arguably predicated on a reduction of the political to the philosophical.

Thus, we suggest that when Nancy proposes that we should ‘recognize in the thought

371 Ibid., 60 [emphasis added].

372 Ibid., xxxix.

of community a theoretical excess [...] that would oblige us to adopt another *praxis* of discourse and of community’, this “theoretical excess” can be understood as a specifically “philosophical” one—raising a question as to whether there might be other, non-philosophical modes by which community could be better theorized.³⁷³ Furthermore, the fact that this *philosophical* excess calls for another *praxis* of both discourse *and* community simultaneously implies that not only community's presentation, but also community *as such*, are inseparable from a certain practice of thinking—one which will always be enframed/emplaced by philosophy, even as it tries to think at its very limits. Oliver Marchart argues that there is a danger ‘involved in such a purely “philosophical” approach to *thinking* [...] which] can be located in what one might call Nancy's tendency towards a certain philosophism’—a philosophism that consists, according to Marchart, in Nancy's insistence on attempting to think such things as community-without-essence, or being-with *as such*, purely from *within* philosophy, whilst denouncing the resources of any other perspective that he sees as being tainted with ontical concerns.³⁷⁴ We saw in the last section that a number of commentators have critiqued Nancy's thought on a similar basis, reading its essential gesture of *withdrawal* as a rejection of the empirical sphere. By casting his thought as philosophistic, Marchart implies not only that it is withdrawn from empirical concerns, but also that it posits its own self-sufficiency concerning how it grasps its “object”.³⁷⁵ In Nancy's more mature work this “philosophism”, far from retreating, tends to be amplified.³⁷⁶

We have seen that Nancy's response to the problem of immanentism is to propose a reversal, from thinking community in terms of the transcendence of an immanent essence, to approaching it as the immanence of a “transcendence”—that is, of ‘what philosophy calls “finitude”’.³⁷⁷ Nancy states that *The Inoperative Community* is ‘entirely and uniquely devoted to an understanding’ of this “transcendence”.³⁷⁸ In *A Finite Thinking*, Nancy develops on this understanding by attempting to inscribe finitude into thinking, in response to a necessity

373 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 25–6. We aim to answer this question in the latter half of this thesis, as we turn to Laruelle's “non-philosophy”.

374 Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 79.

375 This claim to self-sufficiency will come to be significant when we re-view Nancy's thought according to the terms of Laruelle's analysis of the philosophical Decision Cf. *infra*, Ch. 4.3.

376 Cf., for example, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. Francois Raffoul and David Pettigrew, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 77, where Nancy states: ‘Philosophy begins from itself: this is a permanent axiom for it, which is implicit or explicit in the work of all philosophers [...] from Plato to Heidegger.’ Although Nancy will continue to deconstruct this philosophical auto-initiation through the course of the essay, proposing a withdrawal of origins and ends whereby philosophical self-beginning must be thought as ungrounded and philosophical completion as *finite*, he does not challenge the principle of auto-initiation, but rather inflates philosophy's powers by identifying *metaphysics* as a techno-logical denaturalization that is able to create a world.

377 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, xxxviii.

378 *Ibid.*

identified by Heidegger: “the working out of the innermost essence of finitude must itself always be fundamentally finite.”³⁷⁹ Thus finitude is not only the condition that opens the possibility of community's coming to presence, but also what is required for the new *praxis* of discourse that Nancy calls for in order to grasp it—hence the gap between the experience of community and its theoretical articulation would be closed by making philosophy act in a “finite” mode, thereby taking a similar form to the reality it aims to grasp.

However, Nancy's articulation of *how* thought might proceed finitely remains somewhat elliptical. He states that finite thinking is a “responsibility”, which should *not* be turned into a “doctrine” or “system”, much less an “answer to all questions”; rather he suggests it is an occasion for *rigour*.³⁸⁰ A rigorously finite thought would not, therefore, constitute a method, but would, ‘on each occasion, [think] the fact that it is unable to think what comes to it’, and would be ‘always surprised by its own freedom and by its own history’.³⁸¹ Hence a finite thinking would be one that confronts the excess of thought over itself—the same “theoretical excess” that Nancy finds in the thought of community. Nancy suggests that such a thinking ‘demands a new “transcendental aesthetic”’ in which finitude constitutes the *a priori* condition.³⁸²

Finitude is most easily thought as being in a finite state, as having limits. As we have seen, on one level finitude in Nancy's thought is analogous with *mortality*, a relation to death being intrinsic to the experience of community.³⁸³ However, Nancy's notion of finitude is more complex inasmuch as the limit he invokes is not a partition that would separate beings from some “beyond”; rather, it is the limit to which finite beings are always already exposed, and ‘on which, *infinitely finite*, existence arises.’³⁸⁴ Hence finitude is understood as bringing into existence a world that is whole (without, however, being total) inasmuch as it has no beyond. Such a world is inseparable from the exposition to an unlimited plenitude—that of material worldly existence. Nancy calls this experience “sense”, taken in a singular and absolute way that includes both the materiality of sensation and the ideality of conceptual knowledge. He describes it as:

379 Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 161, cited in Jean-Luc Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Simon Sparks et al, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 5.

380 *Ibid.*, 29.

381 *Ibid.*, 15.

382 Nancy, *Finite Thinking*, 27.

383 ‘A community is the presentation to its members of their mortal truth [...] It is the presentation of the finitude and the irredeemable excess that make up finite being: its death, but also its birth’. Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 15; cf. *supra*, 61–2.

384 Nancy, *Finite Thinking*, 27 [emphasis added]. Nancy further develops the idea of “infinite finitude” in *Sense of the World*, 29–31 and *passim*.

the sense of life, of Man, of the world, of history, the sense of existence; the sense of the existence that is or that makes sense, the existence without which sense would not exist; equally, the sense that exists or produces existing, without which there would be no sense.³⁸⁵

Nancy clearly describes a circle here, in which sense requires Being and Being requires sense.³⁸⁶ Thus “sense” is understood as more originary than any signification, and as intrinsically related to the shared horizon of meaning that constitutes *Mitsein*. Nancy claims that sense is ‘the least shared thing in the world’, yet he also proposes that the *question* of sense is that which is always already shared, without reserve; it is thus originally communal, and inseparable from the problematic of community.³⁸⁷ Sense is never experienced alone, but is rather shared out between all the singularities of existence, ‘[f]rom which it follows that there is no sense that could engage merely one being; from the outset, community is, as such, the engagement of sense. Not of a collective sense, but of the sharing of finitude.’³⁸⁸

Nancy suggests that sense is thus the main concern of thought, perhaps even its only true concern: thinking occurs because there is sense, and because sense presents itself as something that demands to be thought. For sense to be intelligible, Nancy states that ‘the concept and the referent must be one and the same [...] since it's as a concept (or, if you like, as an idea or thought) that the “thing” exists. Sense is the concept of the concept.’³⁸⁹ “Sense” can thus be understood as the self-reflexive act of thought thinking itself, and significantly, Nancy suggests that this constitutes the “existence” (the Being) of a thing. The sensible aspect of sense is similarly reflexive: ‘to sense is necessarily to sense that there is something like sensation. Sensing senses nothing if it doesn't sense itself sensing, just as understanding understands nothing if it doesn't understand itself understanding.’³⁹⁰ Consequently, what Nancy proposes as “absolute sense” can be conceived as a “meta-sense”, a secondary level of sensing at which sense doubles itself. This secondary level is, for Nancy, more originary than any banal thought or sensation—just as “literature” is more originary than any banal piece of text. In part, this is simply to claim that one cannot sense an object without also sensing *that* one is doing so; but more profoundly, the implication of Nancy's text is that, at this meta-

385 Ibid., 3.

386 We note that, in this essay, Nancy suggests “Being”, would be better read as “being”—‘neither substantive nor substance. “Being” is only being, the verb—at least insofar as we can desubstantialize the verb itself, destabilize grammar.’ Ibid., 9. We will continue to write “Being”, to remain consistent with the standard translations, and to mark the distinction between Being and beings that derives from Heidegger's thought; nevertheless, Nancy's use of the gerund in order to avoid Being's hypostatization should be kept in mind.

387 Ibid., 3.

388 Ibid., 13.

389 Ibid., 5. Nancy later suggests that the concept be understood as “the sixth sense”. Ibid., 28.

390 Ibid.

level, *sense is constitutive of the world*. However, like the “literary” exposition of finitude that he proposes as a way of presenting community as such, the question of “sense” also presents serious challenges to discursive articulation. Nancy states that it leads to a chiasmus: ‘what senses sense in sense is the fact that it includes what it senses, and what produces sense in sense is the fact that it senses itself producing sense.’³⁹¹

One interpretation of this circular formulation is that it only pushes back, *ad infinitum*, the question of the sense of sense. Nancy argues that the aporia refers to an age-old philosophical distinction—between the sensible and the intelligible—which each (“metaphysical”) philosophy will in some way claim to conquer, whether by dissolving it or setting it to work dialectically. He proposes, in contrast, to deploy the same aporia differently—to deconstruct philosophy by taking the absence of any solution as the very site of sense. Nancy's question, then, is:

How are we to think everything—sense as a whole, even though it's not as though we could *not* do so, sense being indivisible—in *a* thinking, within the limits of one trifling study? And how are we to think the fact that this limit *is* the limit of *the whole* of sense?³⁹²

The difficulty of thinking “sense” in the absolute thus derives from the need to take the indivisible whole that facilitates both thought and sensation as a partial and finite “object”. Philosophical thought proceeds by delimiting its object(s), dividing the world into discrete elements that can be ordered, controlled, set in relation, etc.³⁹³ Yet Nancy is proposing that “sense” is singularly indivisible and unlimited. We can interpret this as a re-emergence of the problem of immanence raised above, now inscribed into the realm of thought as such—just as the transcending immanence of any communal essence cuts the same community off from the originary immanence of finite “transcendence”, so too does the constitution of discrete objects of sense cut thought off from the indivisible immanence of the “absolute” sense that makes thinking—and indeed “existence”—possible. In this way, Nancy posits sense as an immanence: the immanence of thought's finite transcendence, which constitutes the world. The aporia of sense, in its “infinite finitude”, is thus constituted by the irreducible tension between the limited and the unlimited—between the level at which thought *grasps* its object, and the meta-level at which it *constitutes* its object.

Hence, rather than resolving the aporia, Nancy uses it as a basis to present sense as an

391 Ibid., 6.

392 Ibid., 5.

393 Alexander R. Galloway characterizes philosophy as being ‘rooted in distinction [... relying] on opposition, reflection, or relation between two or more elements’, in *Laruelle: Against the Digital*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), xix. We will further support this claim when we examine Laruelle's analytic of Philosophical Decision; cf. *infra*, Ch. 4.

open relation, which relates to itself as to some other—that is, to the “self” of sense which, like singular plural Being, both precedes and constitutes the condition for any kind of subjective identity. This relation-to-itself engenders the originary spacing or opening within sense. “Sense” is thus not absolute in the way that Hegelian knowledge becomes absolute as a totality— rather, the task is to think its finitude ‘without infinitizing it’, because if it were to reach completion, constituting a stable system of meaning, it would be reabsorbed.³⁹⁴ Hence sense must be experienced *each time* in its finitude, where ‘[f]initude designates the “essential” multiplicity and the “essential” nonreabsorption of sense or of being.’³⁹⁵ Nancy thus seeks to make the reabsorption or recuperation into a totalizing system of thought—which he diagnoses as the inevitable outcome of Bataille's discourse of community due to its subjectivist foundations—impossible in principle by positing sense (a singularity which is here indicated as “essentially” multiple and as interchangeable with Being, hence ontologically prior to categorical thought) as an irreversible ecstasis—that of finite transcendence “itself”. Hence finitude can be understood as: ‘the “*a priori*” irreducibility of spacing’.³⁹⁶ In this way, “sense” takes on a transcendental function, inasmuch as it constitutes the singular connection between the finite materiality of the here and now, and the infinite continuum to which it is exposed. Nancy suggests that without this ecstatic connection, the here and now cannot become *present*.

The question of *presence* thus comes to supplant that of (re)presentation. Nancy proposes that it is no longer a question ‘of presentation for a subject, nor the reproduction of an initial presence’, but rather that of ‘what *coming* or *birth to presence* means.’³⁹⁷ This shift suggests that his question: ‘how can the community without essence [...] be presented as such?’ could equally be read as: “how can the community without essence *come to presence*?”³⁹⁸ On these terms, the question would not pertain to the possibility of discursively grasping community, so much as to community achieving presence of Being. However, if philosophical thought *constitutes* the Being of its object, as Nancy's text suggests, it follows that it would be precisely the philosophical presentation of community that would effectuate its coming to presence. Hence, the division within immanence, between the ontological experience of community and its philosophical presentation, would be closed by positing their imbrication at the transcendental level. This suggests that “community” and “philosophy” are co-originary and share a certain identity within the realm of “sense”—hence Nancy's

394 Nancy, *Finite Thinking*, 11.

395 *Ibid.*, 9.

396 *Ibid.*, 27.

397 *Ibid.*, 23.

398 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, xxxix–xl.

prescription that in finite thought, ‘the concept and the referent must be one and the same’.³⁹⁹

This is not to suggest that Nancy abandons the question of (re)presentation, but rather that, by inscribing it at the transcendental level of “sense”, he now thinks it in terms of a ‘mimesis of *appresentation*, on the condition that one hears in the prefix the sense of spacing, of distance. “Presentation” as the spacing of sense.’⁴⁰⁰ Nancy further develops the questions of presentation and spacing in *Being Singular Plural*, his most developed work of ontology, where he returns to the problematic of *Mitsein*, explicitly seeking to re-write Heidegger's existential analytic as a “coexistential analytic”—and in this way to re-do ‘the whole of “first philosophy” by giving the “singular plural” of Being as its foundation.’⁴⁰¹ Here, *appresentation* is described as:

the realm of coming into presence as coming conjoined, coincidental and concurrent, simultaneous and mutual. This appresentation is that of a “we” that possesses *neither* the nature of a common “I” *nor* that of a geometric place.⁴⁰²

We can interpret this as a return to the question of community, although, for reasons indicated in the quotation at the beginning of this section, Nancy now tends to substitute other terms for the ontological experience that he earlier named “community”, such as: co-appearing”; “being-with”; “being-together”; etc. The use of hyphenation is intended to indicate that Being or appearing can only occur on the condition of a shared horizon of sense; Nancy posits the together as ‘an absolutely originary structure’, and “the *with*” as ‘the most basic feature of Being.’⁴⁰³ He states that ‘the *with* as such is not presentable.’⁴⁰⁴ This is not because it names some absent Other, or even a dimension of intersubjectivity, but because—taken as a preposition, which has no position of its own, but rather creates the spacing required for beings to position themselves within presence—it constitutes the “pre-position” that is ‘the unrepresentability of presentation itself.’⁴⁰⁵

Hence the question of the presentation of “community as such” would seem to be rendered inadmissible. Yet, in his articulation of singular plural Being, Nancy returns to the thematic of theatre—both as a model for (re)presentation, and as the site of being-together—which he previously raised in his deconstruction of myth.⁴⁰⁶ He poses two framing questions for his study, which are also significant for our own, and which we will return to later in this

399 Nancy, *Finite Thinking*, 5.

400 *Ibid.*, 24.

401 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, xv.

402 *Ibid.*, 69 [translation modified].

403 *Ibid.*, 61; 62.

404 *Ibid.*, 62.

405 *Ibid.*

406 Cf. Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 43–70; cf. *supra*, Ch. 2.2.

thesis: Firstly, whether critique remains ‘paradoxically and unconsciously subject to a classical model in which reality is opposed to appearance and unity is opposed to reality’; and secondly, ‘[h]ow can one know if the “spectacle” is [...] a constitutive dimension of society?’⁴⁰⁷ Both these questions can be related to the problematic of immanence. The first suggests that if what Nancy calls the “critical” attitude’ entails a presupposition that the real is opposed to appearance, and that unity is always a transcendent construction, then critique will always result in a division of immanence—hence Nancy raises the question as to what other attitude would be necessary to theorize social experience.⁴⁰⁸ The second question refers to Guy Debord’s argument, in *The Society of the Spectacle*, that “direct” experiences are no longer possible in a social world that is mediated at all levels by the representational apparatus, thus “spectacle” names “separation perfected”.⁴⁰⁹ Hence Nancy could be read as asking: “how can one know if “separation” is a constitutive dimension of society?”, where *separation* implies both the distancing of beings from each other through spectacular mediation, and—perhaps more profoundly—a rift within immanence effectuated by the transcendence of images.

The question of society’s spectacular nature recalls the implication we observed in Bataille’s thought that social existence is originarily theatrical.⁴¹⁰ Seemingly in agreement with this idea, Nancy states: ‘there is no society without spectacle; or more precisely, there is no society without the spectacle of society.’⁴¹¹ He claims that this proposition should be understood as “ontologically radical”, thus it is not only a claim about the mediation that Debord argues is intrinsic to capitalist society, but is also a claim about the coming to presence of being-with as such. Hence the focus of his discussion about the theatrical apparatus shifts from a concern with mythic narratives and their “literary” deconstruction, as in *The Inoperative Community*, towards the question of theatrical *space*, which he now relates to the mimetic spacing of appresentation. In order to think the presentation of community in such a way as to avoid a “critical” division of its immanence, “theatre” must be conceived other than as a re-presentational apparatus which creates a transcendent double of its referent; Nancy states that ‘this “theatre of the world” [...] is not [...] an artificial space of mimetic representation.’⁴¹² Rather, he seeks to dismantle the oppositional model in which reality is

407 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 54; cf. *infra*, Ch. 6.3 & Ch. 7.

408 *Ibid.*

409 Cf. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 11–24 and *passim*.

410 Cf. *supra*, 28.

411 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 67.

412 *Ibid.*, 66.

opposed to appearance, and actors to spectators, instead thinking in terms of a more minimally structured space—a simple stage [*scène*]⁴¹³—which distributes singular beings, allowing them to play the role of “self” inasmuch as they are here at a remove from the totalized immanence of collective identity. Hence this “stage” constitutes the spacing of Being’s “exposition” or “co-appearance”: ‘Being gives itself as singular plural and, in this way, organizes itself as its own stage.’⁴¹³

Thus the problem of community’s presentation is not understood in terms of a mimetic image, but rather as that of how we think the stage that constitutes the space-time of a “we”. Yet this formulation arguably continues to beg the question. In a characteristically circular formulation, Nancy states: ‘In order to say “we”, one must present the “here and now” of this “we”. Or rather, saying “we” brings about the presentation of a “here and now”, however it is determined’.⁴¹⁴ Hence the presentation of the “we” (the community) and the space-time of this presentation (the stage) are posited as co-originary inasmuch as they both “appear” in the event of the same performative utterance. This recalls the autopoietic function Nancy attributes to the scene of myth, and explains why there is no society without spectacle. However, Nancy’s assertion that social Being is, in this way, originarily spectacular does not answer the epistemological aspect of his own question: ‘[h]ow can one know if the “spectacle” is [...] a constitutive dimension of society?’⁴¹⁵ Moreover, Nancy’s attempt at rethinking the theatrical apparatus is somewhat elliptical. After stating that being-together consists in ‘a primordial plurality that co-appears’, he goes on to suggest that this “appearing” [...] is not on the order of appearance, manifestation, phenomena, revealing, or some other concept of becoming-visible’, because such concepts presuppose a certain relation to an invisible origin.⁴¹⁶ Nancy thus mostly articulates “appearance”, which can be understood as another term for “coming to presence”, negatively; the only positive indication he gives of what “co-appearing” is is the somewhat tautological assertion that ‘[i]t is to be in the simultaneity of being-with’.⁴¹⁷

Hence, after raising what we judge to be two very important questions for the discourse of community—concerning the underlying presuppositions of critique, and the spectacular constitution of the social world—Nancy stops short of answering them. Instead he states: ‘I will only attempt to open some different ways of approaching them.’⁴¹⁸ In common

413 Ibid., 67.

414 Ibid., 65.

415 Ibid., 54 [emphasis added].

416 Ibid., 67.

417 Ibid., 68.

418 Ibid., 55.

with much of Nancy's writing, his approach, here, is to proceed according to an oppositional logic—rather than offering a positive definition of what co-appearance *is* (which, on Nancy's own terms, would constitute a problematic hypostatization), he instead describes it in terms of what it is not. This negative mode of argumentation is not dialectical, inasmuch as its opposing terms are not conceived as symmetrical and it does not propose to create a synthesis of its constituent parts; rather, it should be understood as subtractive—removing defined obstacles in order to arrive at an understanding of an unobjectivizable “object”. In this way, Nancy's mode of reasoning takes a similar form to the “community” it attempts to grasp, which ‘is made or is formed by the retreat or by the subtraction of something [...] which would be the fulfilled and infinite identity of community’.⁴¹⁹

In summary, by building his thinking on Heideggerian foundations, Nancy arguably succeeds in escaping from the cycle of *subjective* recuperation that Bataille found himself unable to exit from.⁴²⁰ Whereas Bataille attempted to conceive of a “heterological” approach to thought, that breaches the limits of philosophical reason by taking an ecstatic leap into a non philosophical outside—but which can only be experienced subjectively, even as it perhaps, momentarily, constitutes the dissolution of that subject—Nancy instead posits the experience of community as prior to any subjectivity, because it is constitutive of Being as such. Yet its discursive articulation oscillates between unprovable affirmation, and a negative “presentation” whereby what is presented is the *withdrawal* of its “object”, rather than the “object” itself. Hence, because Nancy's discourse is built on aporetic grounds, we argue that his thought constitutes a circular logic of its own.

We have suggested, on the basis of Nancy's discussion of “immanentism”, that his discourse of community might best be judged in terms of its treatment of immanence—that is, on whether it succeeds in presenting community in such a way as to avoid dividing its immanence. As we have seen, in Nancy's later thought, his terminology shifts in subtle ways, building a complex set of relations between community, finitude, sense, world Being (as being-with, being-together, co-appearing), etc. The question of presentation raised in *The Inoperative Community* also returns in renewed terms—for example as that of the spectacular constitution of social Being, now understood as the appresentation that creates the space for

419 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, xxxviii–xxxix.

420 Some might contest this—Simon Critchley, for example, suggests that Nancy's conception of being-with could be read in Hegelian terms—as an intersubjective relation whereby the “self” is constituted through the desire for recognition. Cf. ‘With Being-With?: Notes on Jean-Luc Nancy's Rewriting of Being and Time’, *Studies in Practical Philosophy* 1.1 (1999), 66. We would argue, however, that Critchley is here projecting a notion of (inter-) subjectivity onto Nancy's thought that is inconsistent with the latter's conception of the singular being as pre-subjective.

singular-plural beings to appear, or become-present. Hence the division effectuated by the apparatus of re-presentation—for which the theatre is taken as structuring model—between immanent reality and the transcendent image, is challenged by positing a new conception of the “theatre of the world” as a simple stage that is nothing more than the shared space-time in which beings say “we”, and as such constitute a community. However, Nancy also suggests that this stage is brought into existence performatively, in the same utterance of the “we”. This can be understood as an attempt at closing the gap between immanent reality and transcendent representation, inasmuch as the space of community (the “stage” that is created by the immanent “transcendence” of finite existence as such) and its presentation (the utterance of the “we” that constitutes a minimal statement of co-identity) are posited as mutually constitutive and hence co-originary. Yet, such chiasmatic formulations, which as we have seen are a recurrent technique in Nancy's discourse, not only present us with an irreducible circularity, but also maintain the division between the immanent and the transcendent, even as they posit their imbrication at the transcendental level.

With regard to Nancy's own discursive approach to presenting community, we have seen that he raises an important question regarding the limitations of the “critical” attitude, which he suggests is subject to a model where reality and appearance are opposed. His prescription that finitude be inscribed into thought, making ‘the concept and the referent [...] one and the same’, can be seen as an attempt to think beyond this critical attitude, by positing the identity of thought and reality.⁴²¹ He does this by attributing the “infinite finitude” of “sense” with a transcendental function: that of creating a “world” by joining the transcendence of the concept together with the immanence of the real. Yet in so doing, Nancy arguably subordinates the real to the thought that “senses” it: his claim that it is only ‘as a concept (or, if you like, as an idea or thought) that the “thing” exists’, implies that Being is *constituted by thinking*—and moreover, by a certain *kind* of thinking, namely philosophy.⁴²²

This returns us to the charge of *philosophism*, which Marchart levels at Nancy. We suggested that the philosophism in Nancy's thought consists in its supposition that it is sufficient to grasp its object without appealing to what is beyond it, including other disciplines of thought such as political science. However, we can now see that this “philosophism” functions at an even more profound level. Whilst Nancy admits thought's limited ability to sense “sense”, inasmuch as the tension between the infinite and the finite within sense is

421 Nancy, *Finite Thinking*, 5.

422 Ibid. We note that the idea that Being is constituted by thinking recalls Heidegger's translation of a fragment from Parmenides, which he renders as ‘For the same perceiving (thinking) as well as being’ and interprets as meaning ‘thinking and Being belong together in the Same and by virtue of this Same’—with which Nancy is certainly familiar; Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 27.

irreducible, by positing that sense is constitutive of the world, and hence that there is no “existence” without it, he implies that there is no immanence independent of thought. Consequently, although it resists the transcendence of “immanentist” collective essence, Nancy's philosophical mode of thinking arguably occludes immanence “itself”. Hence, although Nancy's thought is anchored in a materialist conception of sense that includes bodily sensation as an integral part, the transcendental function he attributes to sense at the meta-level means that this material aspect is bound to a philosophical apparatus which inhibits it from grasping the reality of its object because it simultaneously acts to “constitute” that same object at the level of thought. As such, what is problematic about Nancy's “philosophism” is that, despite its claims to be based on the immanent and irreversible ecstasis of finite transcendence which makes reabsorption impossible, it subordinates immanence to transcendence by claiming that the world only “exists” inasmuch as it is grasped as sense. Thus we argue that Nancy's philosophical framework cannot constitute a presentation of community that would avoid the splitting of immanence; instead, we suggest that a *non-philosophical* approach is necessary.

CHAPTER 3

Laruelle: Philosophical *Socius*; Scientific Community

3.1. *Community at war: the impossibility of a philosophically-founded community*

In the preceding chapters we have examined two seminal discourses on the problematic of community, and we have seen how Bataille and Nancy both, in different ways, reach an impasse in their attempts to find a philosophical ground from which to think the experience of community, which is understood as exceeding the contained space of the *logos*. In this chapter we will turn to Laruelle's critical analysis of philosophy as a basis for theorizing community. This “non-philosophical” approach provides a formal apparatus for analysing the circularity that we have argued is propagated by both Bataille's theory of general economy and Nancy's positing of *Mitsein* as originary sociality, in a coordinated way.

Laruelle's work is important, in the context of our research, less for its contribution to the discourse of community, than for the way it proposes to exit the above-mentioned philosophical circularity. The matter of community is not one that Laruelle has treated at any length; however, in ‘Communauté Philosophique, Communauté Scientifique’ [*Philosophical Community, Scientific Community*] he addresses the question of the possibility of a “community of researchers”, and in doing so he offers some clues as to how the problematic of community more generally might be viewed according to his non-philosophical stance.⁴²³ Thus we will begin by examining this text, because it provides a connection with the question of community, and thus the philosophical materials we are examining in this thesis—and also because, due to the way that the notion of community is here related to the problematic of philosophical “sufficiency”, it offers a distillation of Laruelle's non-philosophical posture in One. In order to get a sense of the syntactic logic of Laruelle's thought, we will first follow this argument step-by-step. Then, in Section 3.2, we will look at a number of questions raised by Jacques Derrida concerning Laruelle's claims so as to outline some key philosophical objections to non-philosophy, and will consider the latter's responses to these questions, which present the relationship between philosophy and non-philosophy as an irresolvable *differend*.

423 François Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique, Communauté Scientifique’, in *La Communauté en Paroles*, ed. Herman Parret (Liège: Mardaga, 1991), 139–164. In this essay, Laruelle sketches out the experience on which a non-philosophical conception of “community” would be based; however, his emphasis is less on the philosophical *community* than on the possibility of a *philosophical* community. This perspective is, for reasons that will hopefully become clear over the course of this chapter, entirely consonant with Laruelle's non-philosophical project as a whole insofar as its primary aim is a *global* re-visioning of philosophy, rather than an examination of specific philosophical concepts, which are instead treated as mere material.

In ‘Communauté Philosophique’, Laruelle contrasts the philosophical approach to research with another approach, which he calls “scientific”, in order to make a claim concerning the different ways that philosophy and non-philosophy relate to the real. Laruelle states that his aim is to use the figure of the “*Researcher*”, who occupies ‘the intersection of philosophy and science[...] to elucidate in their difference and their relation the essence of the philosophical community and that of the scientific community.’⁴²⁴ This reference to “essence” might seem regressive following our extended exploration of Nancy’s attempts at presenting the “community without essence” in Chapter 2. However, we will show that what Laruelle calls “essence” is not the transcending essence of the “immanentist” community; it is rather the *real* or *immanent identity* of community—not community “as such”, but community *itself*.⁴²⁵ Furthermore, the terms “philosophical community” and “scientific community” function on two levels in Laruelle’s text. Firstly, the essay addresses the practice of research, and the social relations it both presupposes and propagates, and as such “philosophical community” can be read as “community of philosophers”. Secondly, the essay enquires into the conditions which allow a community to be founded, and in this sense “philosophical community” can be read as “philosophically-founded community”. Hence the question Laruelle addresses is: ‘[c]an we found an authentic community of [...] philosophers on the basis of philosophy?’⁴²⁶ It will become clear that implicit within this is a more general question which this thesis aims to address—namely, whether we can found an authentic community of *any kind* on the basis of philosophy.

Laruelle answers this question with a resounding ‘no’.⁴²⁷ He suggests that the mechanism of a philosophically founded “community” is ‘more that of a society than that of a community’.⁴²⁸ Hence Laruelle establishes a *vis-à-vis* relation between “community” and “society”, and in this respect his thought can be seen to be in accord with Nancy’s.⁴²⁹ In order

424 Ibid., 139.

425 We note that Laruelle’s use of “essence” is closer to Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s use of the term in the context of their questioning into the “*essence* of the political”, than to the identitarian essence of the immanentist community. However, as we elucidate Laruelle’s theoretical apparatus we will show that, due to the philosophical presuppositions that underpin Nancy’s thought, the latter’s attempts to grasp the “essence” of the political, or indeed of community, remain problematically detached from their immanent or real basis inasmuch as they are conceived “as such”, rather than “in themselves”. Laruelle introduces the distinction between the “as such” and the “in itself” in *Le Principe de Minorité* (Paris: Aubier, 1981), 78, where he distinguishes between the *relative* materiality of the philosophical *hyle* (matter “as such”), and *absolute* matter (matter “itself”), which he suggests philosophy has never managed to reach. Cf. Ray Brassier, *Alien Theory: The Decline of Materialism in the Name of Matter*, PhD Thesis, (University of Warwick, 2001), 29–35, <<http://speculativeheresy.wordpress.com/resources/>> [accessed 22nd July 2014].

426 Ibid., 158.

427 Ibid.

428 Ibid., 153.

429 On the *vis-à-vis* relation between “community” and “society” in Nancy’s thought, cf. Bird, ‘Community Beyond Hypostasis’.

to understand more fully what Laruelle means by “community”, it is necessary to examine his characterization of “philosophy”—which in this text is elucidated through an analysis of the transcendental conditions of research. As we follow Laruelle's argument, we will show that what he calls “authentic” or “real” community is in many ways similar to the community *désœuvrée* that both Bataille and Nancy, in different ways, attempt to articulate. However, we will show that the “scientific” approach by which Laruelle proposes to theorize community-as-real diverges in important ways from the modes philosophical deconstruction at play in Bataille and Nancy's thought.

Laruelle characterizes the modern researcher as, not simply one who searches for knowledge, but a “functionary” who is charged with ‘making an actual function of knowledge out of the unknown, or [...] one of its variables.’⁴³⁰ In this environment, he claims that ‘[r]esearch, as a social practice, is inseparable from a rationalization and programming of risk as such’; and in this way the problem of research's social cost are linked to the philosophical problem of its *cost to thought*—that is, its tendency to divide itself into micro-specialisms which meet in a hazy realm of interdisciplinarity, whilst the sense and value of “theory” are lost.⁴³¹ Laruelle describes “proper” research, or “Research” [*LA Recherche*]—that practised in the dominant manner and sanctioned by the State—as “techno-political” or metaphysical in essence’.⁴³² He suggests that, whatever discipline a researcher works in (economics, ethics, sociology, art, etc.), ‘he also, *and moreover*, does ontology’; this is to say that all Research is legitimated by a set of philosophical presuppositions, which in turn determine its practice and ultimately the knowledge it produces.⁴³³

To support this claim Laruelle describes a set of “phenomenal givens”, which he proposes are lived by the researcher in a ‘universal and immediate manner’, in order to arrive at the *principle* that underwrites the heuristic experience of Research. He calls this the “Principle of Sufficient Research” (PSR). The first of these phenomenal givens is the “*heuristic a priori*”, that is, the superior rule that gives Research its specificity.⁴³⁴ Observing that Research is practised at the intersection or interface of opposing couples (the visible and the covert; norms and rule-breaking; science as theoretical and as social process; etc.), he proposes that it is structured by the identity and the simultaneous alternation of a two-sided

430 Ibid., 140.

431 Ibid.

432 Ibid., 141. [In common with many of his other texts, Laruelle's use of capitalization is inconsistent in this essay, with the term “research” sometimes written in lower case, and sometimes capitalized as a proper name; for clarity, we will capitalize “Research” in our own translations whenever the text refers to research in the “proper” or “sufficient” sense, which Laruelle is critiquing.]

433 Ibid., 141[emphasis added].

434 Ibid.

aprioristic structure, which comprises an action (the “search”) and a passion (the “find” or “bright idea” [*trouvaille*]).⁴³⁵ Together, these elements form ‘functions in a universal and necessary rule or syntax’, and Laruelle suggests that, although this syntax may vary depending on whether one chooses a differential, topological or rational mode of thought, in an expanded sense it nevertheless constitutes the essence of the heuristic experience.⁴³⁶ He states: ‘[t]he heuristic *a priori* is given in the form of the following rule: *all search also functions as the finding for another search; and reciprocally: each finding represents a virtual search for another finding.*’⁴³⁷ Taking this as the most elementary diagram of what makes Research possible, Laruelle thus claims that the searching and finding form a relatively undecidable, and utterly unconstrained circle. He suggests that such an unconstrained research may be more originary and less reified than metaphysics, but that nevertheless, metaphysics cannot complete itself through such circularity. Hence “Research” is proposed as ‘the metaphysics of post-metaphysical times.’⁴³⁸

The second phenomenal given that Laruelle identifies is the *Objective Heuristic Appearance*, which he identifies as the *a priori authority* of Research.⁴³⁹ Laruelle characterizes this as ‘the universal and monstrous phantasm of the *Generalized Interface*’, which functions as an Ideal and an imperative, and forms the foundation of the research community.⁴⁴⁰ This foundation is, Laruelle argues, nothing but a phantasmic Image. Laruelle suggests that the State uses the Objective Appearance as a means of controlling the researcher, which implies that Research constitutes, among other things, a set of power relations. He posits that, as the ultimate foundation of the research community, the Objective Appearance is both short of and beyond State politics—hence we can understand it as a structure that both precedes the reification of ontical politics, and remains in excess of it. However, he does not further develop the implications of his argument from the point of view of political science, focusing instead on the transcendental conditions of research, and of community.

The *heuristic a priori* and the *Objective Heuristic Appearance*, taken together with the “subject of research” which we will elucidate below, form the PSR. The meaning of the PSR is that Research supposes itself to be sufficient as a mode of producing knowledge, and that as such it exhausts knowledge, forming a co-extensive or reversible relationship with the latter. Knowledge in general thus comes to be identified with the particular form of *Heuristic*

435 Ibid.

436 Ibid.

437 Ibid., 142.

438 Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 142.

439 Ibid.

440 Ibid.

Reason. Due to the circularity of the heuristic *a priori* and the status of the Objective Appearance as both within and beyond politics, Laruelle posits that the PSR founds the essentially circular movement of “unconstrained research” [*la recherche déchaînée*—which also carries the sense of “destructive research”].⁴⁴¹ The consequences of knowledge having to submit to a mode of research that takes such a circular form at the level of its syntax, is that the authority of knowledge comes to depend on a softer but more restrictive decision. In this way, Laruelle suggests that instead of a theoretician, the researcher becomes a micro-decider, and the governance of the subject of knowledge is transformed into that of management and administration.

Laruelle's characterization of the PSR as “techno-political or metaphysical in essence” can be related to Nancy's broadened definition of totalitarianism/immanentism, where he posits the imbrication of the political with a techno-logic that enframes/emplaces the possibility of discursively grasping the world.⁴⁴² Laruelle's claim that modern knowledge is reduced to micro-management and functional productivity—both at the level of State administration and at that of Research's auto-legitimizing structure—is consonant with Nancy's critique of ontical modes of thought, which the latter proposes obscures both the ontological essence of the political, and ultimately the originary sense of the world. Laruelle's claim about Objective Appearance constituting a phantasmic *Generalized Interface*—which as we shall see, forms the ground of the “philosophical community”—also echoes Nancy's question, after Debord, concerning the spectacular constitution of the social. Hence, just as Nancy sees the totalitarian politicization of “everything” (and hence nothing) as inseparable from the process of metaphysics accomplishing itself, so too does Laruelle see the self-constituting authority of Heuristic Reason as problematic insofar as it imposes a totalizing metaphysical essence on the reality it seeks to examine, whilst obscuring the immanent basis of that reality. Thus Laruelle's understanding of the way that Research intersects with the State and philosophy would seem to be largely in accord with Nancy's. Where the two thinkers diverge, however, is that Laruelle links the PSR to another principle—the “Principle of Sufficient Philosophy” (PSP)—which he claims includes not only “metaphysics” but *all* of philosophy, including deconstructive approaches such as Nancy's.⁴⁴³ This suggests that Nancy's philosophical mode of thought bears a formal relation to destructive “unconstrained Research”, whereas Laruelle proposes to re-view the problematic according to a different, “scientific” posture.

441 Ibid. 144.

442 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 2.3.

443 Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 144.

With the PSP, Laruelle claims to have identified the principle by which all philosophy legitimates itself, which is to say ‘that philosophy suffices for everything [...] and it is also self-sufficient in itself.’⁴⁴⁴ He suggests that the PSP contains all the characteristics of unconstrained research in an amplified form, and thus the principles that underwrite Research and philosophy share a “kinship”.⁴⁴⁵ He offers a four-point description of the PSP:

1) In its supposed sufficiency, philosophy is circular or auto-referential. This circularity is an invariant form that it shares with the PSR.

2) Due to this auto-referentiality, both philosophy and Research essentially operate according to a certain *faith* in their spontaneous or naïve practice. That is to say, if philosophy is founded on an undecidable circle—such as the one we examined in Durkheim and Bataille's thought in Chapter 1—then the positing of one or other part of the circle as foundation, as prior to or more real than another part, necessarily depends on something beyond the circle—a transcendent “outside” that assumes a theological, or at least quasi-theological function.⁴⁴⁶

3) Although it may critique certain parts of itself—metaphysics, representation, identity, etc.—philosophy is not able to critique itself *globally*. This is because the faith that underlies it is concealed, confused with a logical transcendence, thus its modes of criticism never reach the radical level of its founding *decision*, and hence remain under philosophical authority. In a similar way, Laruelle argues that unconstrained Research wants to ‘be its own basis, to auto-legitimate and to establish itself [a] superior value’ in order to dispense with the need to be validated by any exterior instance of knowledge.⁴⁴⁷ Thus we can understand the auto-legitimation of *Research* in general to be of a *philosophical* type.

4) All these traits are then gathered into the most fundamental one: ‘the fundamental pretension [...] to co-produce or co-determine the real.’⁴⁴⁸ The essential circularity of philosophy means that, even while the real is experienced as an Other at the limits of representation, which may—as in the cases of Bataille and Nancy—be claimed on some level to break representation apart, ‘it also belongs to the latter, in a circular fashion, in the capacity of an illusion or simulacrum.’⁴⁴⁹ Laruelle calls this the “amphibology” of philosophy and the real, and its consequence is that both philosophy, and the Research that

444 Ibid., 147.

445 Ibid., 148.

446 Cf. *supra*, 30–3 & Ch. 1.4.

447 Ibid., 147.

448 Ibid.

449 Ibid.

legitimizes itself in this philosophical mode, are unable to grasp their real essence—by which he means their conditions of reality.

If philosophy is unable to grasp its conditions of reality *in principle*, then this raises the question as to what kind of “research” would allow a *real critique* of philosophical sufficiency. Laruelle proposes this cannot be done on the basis of the Heideggerian “step back”, which he suggests is an anti-heuristic instance of “indolent research” that can only constitute a semi-solution inasmuch as it effectively refuses to either search or find, contenting itself instead with enmeshing itself in the undecidable.⁴⁵⁰ In order to found a critique of philosophical sufficiency that is ‘more forceful than any deconstruction’, Laruelle proposes viewing philosophy according to a “scientific” posture.⁴⁵¹ This is not to privilege the exact sciences over other disciplines—Laruelle suggests that to do so would constitute another philosophical thesis.⁴⁵² Nor is the realism being proposed reducible to a materialism, because the “real instance” which non-philosophy proposes is something other than a material infrastructure.⁴⁵³ Rather, Laruelle aims to find the basis for his critique of sufficiency in a “transcendental” experience of the real—a “force-(of)-thought” which he describes ‘the experience or the thought originally given as real’, and which thus has the force to found itself.⁴⁵⁴ He proposes that ‘*only science can occupy this place*’.⁴⁵⁵ “Science” thus implies a phenomenal experience of knowledge—and, as we will show, of community—very different from that constituted by philosophy’s principle of sufficiency, and this in turn entails a transformation of the way the “subject” is understood.

Laruelle proposes that the researcher who is ruled over by the PSR is the subject of philosophy—precisely the kind of subject that Nancy suggests is too over-determined to be

450 We will draw out the consequences of this in relation to Nancy’s own deconstructive thought below; cf. *infra*, Ch. 4.3.

451 Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 148.

452 *Ibid.*, 151.

453 *Ibid.*, 148.

454 Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 148.

455 *Ibid.* We note, however, that elsewhere Laruelle has suggested that other regional knowledges or techniques of creation (e.g. ‘pictorial, poetic, musical, architectural, informational, etc.’) might be introduced into non-philosophy, effectuating a transformation of their own principles of sufficiency at the same time as they transform the philosophical materials under consideration. Francois Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, trans. Taylor Adkins, (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2013), 135. ‘Communauté Philosophique, Communauté Scientifique’ was published during the period Laruelle categorizes as “Philosophy II”; in Philosophy III he recognizes that his tendency to valorize science during the preceding period risks imposing another authority over the real. He states, of Philosophy II’s axiom that posited a “special affinity” between non-philosophy’s vision-in-One and the phenomenal experience of science, that: ‘non-philosophy certainly realized itself [...] by reversing the epistemo-logical hierarchy, within the privileged element of science, thus by an ultimate ruse of philosophy that refused to “lay down arms” before the Real.’ Laruelle, *Principles*, 34. For this reason, as we develop our own non-philosophical re-visioning of the problematic of community we will move beyond the language of “science”, focusing instead on the more affirmative notions of “cloning” and “philo-fiction”.

constitutive of the community *désœuvrée*. In order to think the real community of researchers (rather than the philosophical *socius*), Laruelle suggests that community must instead be conceived as the *cause-(of)-science*.⁴⁵⁶ He proposes that “science”, ‘defines in effect the order of the real, that is, of the most radical immanence, the most devoid of transcendence: that which, elsewhere, we have called the One, which is a rigorously transcendental non-thetic experience-(of)-self.’⁴⁵⁷ Hence “science” names an experience-of-self which is also a self-as-experience, an immanent subjectivity that is devoid of any *transcendent* identity—rather, as “One”, Laruelle will posit that this is a *real identity*. The positing of such a non-transcendent “subject” as real cause implies an ordering that can again be compared to Nancy’s prioritizing of communal *Mitsein* over the immanentist community. However, as we shall see, for Laruelle the community as real cause precedes not only the “immanentist” identity of social groups but also *Being*, and thus he attributes it with an immanence even more radical than the ontological sociality proposed by Nancy.

In order to better understand this claim, we will expand on Laruelle’s characterization of the philosophical “community”. Laruelle proposes that it is philosophers, in general, who consider themselves to be entitled to found communities, whether of science, of Research, etc. Allowing himself to suppose philosophical sufficiency, he goes on to draw out a number of consequences for a community of researchers determined by it, which we will generalize to include any philosophically founded community:

- 1) The philosophical community is founded on a process of identification with Objective Heuristic Appearance. Laruelle posits that this “*Imperative Instance*”, which belongs to the Decision that grounds philosophy, guarantees the entitlement of the researcher.⁴⁵⁸ Conceived as the phantasm of the *Generalized Interface*, the authority of Objective Appearance can be seen to extend beyond the horizons of Research, and understood as the “spectacular” mechanism which compels subjects to identify with a universal instance or Appearance of any kind—Laruelle gives the examples of: ‘reason, project, spirit, common sense, reaffirmation of self, etc.’; a list which recalls the kind of totalizing philosophico-social Ideals critiqued, implicitly of explicitly, by both Bataille and Nancy.⁴⁵⁹ Through these Universals, philosophy legislates over the community inasmuch as it assumes the right to posit the latter’s ground, and as such, the identity of the subject is always *produced*, through a process of subjugation by a transcendent element.

456 Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 149.

457 Ibid.

458 Ibid., 153.

459 Ibid.

2) A philosophical “community” thus implies the *medium* of identification, and hence the division of the subject. Laruelle states: ‘The subject of the PSR is cleaved by Objective Heuristic Appearance in order to be able, in this way, to identify with its sufficiency.’⁴⁶⁰ In the same way, the subject of any philosophical “community” can be said to be cleaved by the Objective Appearance of whatever Universal principle is given as its ground. As a consequence of this cut, Laruelle suggests that the subject is “unrealized” [*irréalisé*] by its division. As such it is constituted concurrently with the Appearance of its identity—thus the only “reality” it experiences is that which it *wills*. Given that Laruelle identifies the real with immanence, or the One-in-person, this claim as to the scission “unrealizing” the subject echoes Nancy’s argument concerning the immanentist community, where he posits that the transcending “immanence” of communal identity cuts the community off from “immanence itself”.⁴⁶¹ However, Laruelle claims that the duality of philosophy and the “subject” of science—the essence of which is identified with the immanence of the One—is originary to the extent that it ‘precedes their difference itself, and consequently ontological Difference.’⁴⁶² Thus, in Laruelle’s terms, the division within immanence that Nancy has begun to articulate would need to be understood more radically, as pre-ontological.

3) Due to its “reality” being grounded in the auto-constituting circle of sufficiency, Laruelle posits that the “City” of philosophy is not an “authentic” community, but rather a society. He then re-articulates the distinction between “society” and “community” in relation to his respective descriptions of the philosophically constituted subject and the subject of “science” as real-cause. Hence he applies the name of “*socius*” to ‘all groups of individuals subjected to a universal or characterized by an Objective Appearance’; whereas “*community*” names a ‘group or universal of another type, determined through and through and not determining, [...] produced by real subjects or by radical individuals absolutely anterior to [all material and ideal effects].’⁴⁶³ In this way, the problematic of community is identified, at the most radical level, with non-philosophy’s global re-visioning of philosophy.

Laruelle suggests that the effect of the mechanism of Objective Appearance on the philosophically-founded *socius* is that ‘War [...] is the condition of [its ...] little bit of reality’.⁴⁶⁴ This is because, lacking a real basis, philosophy needs to will itself a foundation,

460 Ibid., 154.

461 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 60. Cf. *supra*, Ch 2.3.

462 Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 150.

463 Ibid., 155.

464 Ibid., 154.

and each philosophy does this by positing its own sufficiency at the exclusion of all other systems of thought. From this it follows that a “community” constituted by a circular relation with the universal(s) of Objective Appearance will also—in principle—be in a state of conflict with other communities. In contrast, Laruelle proposes that the “authentic” community is empty of traditional social, political and philosophical structures, which can only over-determine it. Again, we can here see certain parallels with Nancy’s critique of the immanentist “community”, and his association of community with an experience that precedes all processes of subjectivation. Laruelle’s solution is to posit, in place of the traditional structures, a radical and unilateral determination by individual “subjects”, who are the cause-(of)-science as non-thetic experience-(of)-self. Such experiential “subjects” are non-constitutable, and are given prior to any identification with Objective Appearance. Hence they have no need to establish a state of war in order to sustain their identity, because this identity is without-relation to any other(s). Thus “community” names a group that is determined by its “subjects” in a specific non-circular way, and yet is empty of “inhabitants” inasmuch as—unlike the philosophical *socius*—it is unable to determine its subjects in a reciprocal fashion. In this way, Laruelle claims to have discovered a mode of thought that is irrecuperable, which would answer to the exigency for a finite thinking proposed by Nancy, but in a more radical—a more real—sense.⁴⁶⁵

4) If the *socius* is condemned, in principle, to being in a state of war, then it follows that ‘[a] community with a philosophical basis is not really a democratic community.’⁴⁶⁶ This lack of “democracy” can be understood as a constitutive internal rupture that derives from the same divisive process of becoming-subject that causes the *socius* to be at war with those outside it. Laruelle proposes that a “community” with a philosophical base is constituted from individuals who are crossed-through—and that the division of subjectivity does not begin with the unconscious, but rather with the transcendence of philosophy’s auto-foundational decision, whether this takes the form of ‘the *meta-* of metaphysics’, or ‘the transcendence which is at the heart of ontological Difference’.⁴⁶⁷ A philosophically constituted subject, thus divided, necessarily posits its own sufficiency *in conflict* with other subjects, in lieu of being able to access its real base. Thus any multiplicity that is philosophically constituted as “community”, being a multiple of crossed-through subjects, is a ‘multiple by division, *because* of it, re-crossed through a new time; the division has

465 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 2.3.

466 Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 156.

467 *Ibid.*, 157.

been augmented and refined, it has not been destroyed.’⁴⁶⁸ In this way, Laruelle claims that the self-presupposing circularity of philosophical reason constitutes an irreducibly conflictual structure, in which relations of power and hierarchy are *a priori*. The *a priori* status of division and conflict means that whatever attempts are made to unify the community through philosophical processes will only result in the scission being reproduced and multiplied.

If philosophy is only capable of founding an irreparably conflictual *socius*, then Laruelle proposes that a real community cannot be theorized by projecting onto it a unitary image that departs from social forms, because this is ‘to inductively elaborate its concept departing from its exterior, transcendent or historico-worldly “realizations”, which are nothing but societies or modes of the *polis*.’⁴⁶⁹ This claim would seem to be in accord with Nancy’s rejection of “immanentism”, and his withdrawal from ontical modes of thought in his elucidation of community as being-with. However, Laruelle suggests that in such a “contemporary solution” to the problematic of community, the primitive communal relation is opened or deconstructed at its juncture with an alterity, with the effect that its reality remains suspended. In this way, Laruelle implies that a thought like Nancy’s continues philosophy’s “eternal amphibology” inasmuch as it confuses community’s radical or real identity with a relation—the ontico-ontological relation from which community *as such* can only withdraw in a relative manner. He asks: ‘[t]his way do we not content ourselves with adding to [the *socius*] a supplement of rupture, an interruption of the socio-centric circle?’⁴⁷⁰ In Laruelle’s terms, such a supplement remains cut off from immanence itself, because of the auto-legislating syntax of philosophy—he proposes that philosophers ‘style themselves as the only ones who can rightly infer the supposedly originary social link’, but suggests that this is but another attempt of the PSP to maintain its authority, by positing a “common sense” that ‘opens onto a space which is incommunicable by law and cannot be interiorized by sociocentrism’.⁴⁷¹ As we aim to demonstrate in Chapter 4, although Laruelle does not address Nancy by name, this description can reasonably be applied to the latter’s positing of a “sense” that is intrinsically

468 Ibid.

469 Ibid., 160.

470 Ibid., 158. Laruelle does not address Nancy’s work directly in this text, and his characterization of the “contemporary solution” as ‘wanting to dissolve all global or specific community in a plurality of partial or molecular communities, connected only in aleatory fashion by the extent of their relative distance’ is perhaps targeted as much towards a Deleuzian approach. However, given that Laruelle’s critique of philosophy makes the claim to be a global one, this critique applies equally to other contemporary philosophical thought, and we will demonstrate below that both Bataille and Nancy’s approaches to theorizing community can be interpreted as precisely “adding a supplement of rupture to the socio-centric circle”; c f. *infra*, Ch. 4.2–4.3.

471 Ibid., 159.

communal inasmuch as it always constituted in the sharing of an ontological exposition that is prior to, and in excess of, signifying discourse.⁴⁷² Thus the implication of Laruelle's critique of a “solution” like Nancy's is that it places communal experience out of reach on the basis of a “law” that is arbitrarily postulated, rather than determined by a real necessity.

In order to escape from such auto-legislating circularity, Laruelle proposes that a change of real base is needed—henceforward:

a community in general, which is also that of researchers, must be founded on knowledge itself—not on knowledge constituted and represented, but on science as that which is of the real, and so unconstitutable, on its subject or the cause-(of)-thought, more than on the always inadequate social or philosophical relation.⁴⁷³

In this way, he explicitly identifies the experience of community with the experience of thought that is at the heart of his own non-philosophical project. Hence, when he suggests that instead of projecting a universal Objective Appearance onto community, it is necessary to ‘search for the phenomenal givens, that is to say the realities, of community’, he means by this that we must discover the force-(of)-thought that would be able to ‘found a new common sense, more democratic and less authoritarian than the philosophical’, and he proposes that “science alone” can do this.⁴⁷⁴ Hence we might say that as for Nancy, “community” for Laruelle is inseparable from a transcendental notion of “sense”—but one given to the “subject-(of)-science” in a particular, non-philosophical mode.

In order to effectuate this escape from philosophy's endlessly conflictual environment, Laruelle posits a “grand principle”, whereby non-philosophy ‘*demands in an immanent manner the equivalence of all philosophical decisions at the heart of their communal contingency, and thus destroy at the root [...] the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy.*’⁴⁷⁵ This would be to bring about a democratization of thought which, according to Laruelle's non-philosophical stance, is also necessary for democratizing community. The equivalence of all philosophical decisions is posited on the basis that, when considered according to their *real* cause, all auto-supposing philosophical systems are merely contingent. Accordingly, we would not need to choose between Hegel and Bataille, between Heidegger and Nancy; we would rather have to re-view their attempts to articulate community *immanently*, thus allowing for community to be born out of the spirit of “science”.

472 Cf. *infra*, Ch. 4.3.

473 Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 160.

474 *Ibid.*, 160, 161.

475 *Ibid.*, 163.

3.2 Derrida versus Laruelle: non-philosophy's differend with philosophy

This somewhat strident claim provoked a heated debate with Jacques Derrida.⁴⁷⁶ Derrida poses a number of questions to Laruelle, which we will now summarize because we judge them to be important ones that non-philosophy needs to respond to if its claims are to be accepted. The first, and most general question, is whether the “community of science” that Laruelle describes is a community without a *socius*—Derrida elaborates that what he means by this is where does one find the “essence of science” if one posits that this essence is prior to ‘its effectivity, to its political and social appropriations’.⁴⁷⁷ Interestingly, this question seems to echo the various critiques of Nancy’s questioning into the essence of the political, which characterized his prioritizing of the ontological over ontical as a rejection of politics.⁴⁷⁸ However, as Derrida poses a set of more specific questions, with the stated aim of “reiterating” this general one, it becomes clear that his enquiry is not concerned with a lack of scientific effectivity in Laruelle’s thought, so much as with the latter’s claim to be able to re-purpose philosophical ideas in a “scientific”, hence *non-philosophical*, mode.

Derrida’s first specific question ‘concerns the reality of this real which you constantly evoked [...] or—and this comes to the same thing—the scientificity of this science’.⁴⁷⁹ He asks Laruelle to explain ‘[u]nder what conditions is research a real activity as opposed to a social illusion’, and calls into question whether it is pertinent for a transcendental philosophy to make a distinction between “real” and “philosophical” critique. Derrida then suggests that by opposing to his critique of philosophy’s totalizing mode of legitimation the description of a new science, Laruelle reintroduces a set of philosophemes into his discourse (“transcendental”, “the One”, “the real” etc.), and in this way he ‘pull[s] the trick of the transcendental on us again, the trick of auto-foundation, auto-legitimation, at the very moment when he claims to be making a radical break.’⁴⁸⁰ Hence, in a gesture that Laruelle will characterize as a “retortion” Derrida implies that non-philosophy is as circular as the philosophy that it aims to globally critique.⁴⁸¹

476 Laruelle presented a version of ‘Communauté Philosophique’ at a conference on ‘The Community of Researchers’, held under the auspices of the Forum of the College Internationale de Philosophie, Paris, in 1988. The debate that followed, which was opened by Derrida, has been published in English as: Jacques Derrida and François Laruelle, ‘Controversy over the Possibility of a Science of Philosophy’, trans. Ray Brassier and Robin Mackay, in *The Non Philosophy Project: Essays by François Laruelle*, ed. Gabriel Alkon and Boris Gunjevic, 74–92, (New York: Telos Publishing, 2012).

477 Ibid., 75.

478 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 2.2.

479 Derrida and Laruelle, ‘Controversy’, 75.

480 Ibid., 77.

481 Ibid., 80.

Developing from this, Derrida inquires as to what Laruelle means when he says that ‘the amphibology of philosophy and the real [...] can only be discovered in accordance with another, generally non-philosophical experience of the real’.⁴⁸² Again, this question returns us to the framing problem of non-philosophy’s self-styled status as a “real” experience, as opposed to philosophy’s “unreality”. Moreover, given that Laruelle identifies this real with “science”, understood as the force-(of)-thought which has ‘the force to found itself’, Derrida observes that the motif of force, which occurs repeatedly in Laruelle’s text, is thus associated with a project of “auto-foundation” or “transcendental legitimation”.⁴⁸³ In order to understand what the status of scare quotes is in such a claim, Derrida asks: ‘What is a transcendental project of auto-foundation and auto-legitimation when it is not philosophical?’⁴⁸⁴ Again, the retortive style is evident here—the implication of Derrida’s question is that Laruelle is doing precisely what he criticizes.

Derrida’s closing questions concern the way that Laruelle distinguishes his non-philosophical approach from the deconstruction practised by the former, along with numerous other thinkers in which we might perhaps include Bataille and Nancy. He asks what the difference is between Laruelle’s “One” and what others call difference. He then suggests that when Laruelle proposes the equivalence of all philosophical decisions, he reduces other ideas that could have accompanied him on his path, and that this reduction is itself a kind a violence or terror, much like the one that the latter critiques in “philosophy”. Derrida asks why Laruelle rejects those philosophical approaches that have put forward propositions that are similar to his own—‘for example with regard to constitution’—and suggests, in a final gesture of retortion, that to proceed in this way is ‘tantamount to socio-philosophical war’.⁴⁸⁵

Laruelle’s response to the suggestion that he is making war, or practising terror, over philosophy is to propose that there are two possible ways of reading his text: a philosophical one, and a non-philosophical one. According to the first perspective, the answer would be yes. However Laruelle suggests that Derrida’s retortive style is indicative of a resistance that is intrinsic to the PSP, and as we shall see, he elsewhere claims that this resistance is *necessary* to non-philosophy’s functioning.⁴⁸⁶ Hence he characterizes Derrida’s ‘impression of terrorism and aggression’ as ‘a mechanism of philosophical self-defence’.⁴⁸⁷ As such, from the second perspective, Derrida’s objections are both entirely to be expected, and do not in any way

482 Ibid., 78.

483 Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 148.

484 Derrida and Laruelle, ‘Controversy’, 79.

485 Ibid., 80.

486 On the necessity of philosophical resistance, cf. Laruelle, *Principles*, 57–8.

487 Derrida and Laruelle, ‘Controversy’, 84.

trouble Laruelle's non-philosophical claims. For non-philosophy, the levelling of the philosophical terrain is neither an act of war nor terror—Laruelle suggests the latter is bound up with the philosophical operation of *overturning*—but rather a limitation of philosophy's authority that is effectuated by non-philosophy in a completely even-handed way, whatever philosophical materials might be under consideration. Laruelle posits that ‘there is no principle of choice between a classical type of ontology and the deconstruction of that ontology’.⁴⁸⁸ He concedes that this might be “wounding” for philosophers, but he also reiterates that he is obliged to stipulate the equivalence of philosophical decisions, because the principle by which philosophy operates can only be discovered from outside the circle of sufficiency—that is, from the point of view of “science”.

Accordingly, Laruelle assesses Derrida's question as to where he derives his claims about the “essence of science” from to be the principal one. Although he wishes to articulate the transcendental essence of science, Laruelle emphasizes that he does not mean by this that “transcendental science” should be differentiated from “empirical science”, because this would be a philosophical distinction. From the non-philosophical perspective, ‘all the sciences, even those philosophy degrades by calling them “empirical”; all these sciences partake in transcendental structures’.⁴⁸⁹ What Laruelle means by “transcendental”, here, is that the sciences have an internal consistency in the way they access the real. He thus suggests that there is ‘in a certain sense a community [...] amongst all the sciences, whether ordinary or transcendental’, inasmuch as their practice already supposes their equivalence—that is, their equal status as real.⁴⁹⁰ What non-philosophy aims to add to this is a simple description of their essence, which is identified with this transcendental structure. Where it claims to differ from philosophy is that this description would be absolutely on the same level as its “objects”, rather than operating at a meta-level and thereby imposing its authority on them. In this way, Laruelle claims ‘to use the term “transcendental” under conditions that are no longer ontological’, by developing a theoretical stance that is internally rigorous and consistent enough ‘to transform the term “transcendental”’.⁴⁹¹

Having clarified his non-philosophical use of the term “transcendental”, Laruelle suggests that the question of where the essence of science is derived from can again be answered in two ways—either “philosophically”, or in a manner that is “rigorously transcendental”.⁴⁹² The philosophical answer would be to say that, having reflected upon

488 Ibid., 83.

489 Ibid., 85.

490 Ibid.

491 Ibid., 89.

492 Ibid., 86.

philosophy's structures and prerequisites, he came to conclude that philosophy assumed the real, but had been unable to elucidate it. This answer, which follows the logic of deconstruction, would make the real or the One the product of a deduction, and thus Laruelle suggests that it is “false”. The non-philosophical response, in contrast is simply that: ‘*I get it from the thing itself*’.⁴⁹³ Derrida suggests that the appeal to “the thing itself” is another philosophical move, and further enquires as to ‘*what is the thing itself?*’, and how can the relation to it be non-philosophical?⁴⁹⁴ Laruelle's response—‘[t]he One is the thing itself’—is clearly unsatisfactory to Derrida; however Laruelle explains that the misunderstanding comes from the philosopher's insistence on perceiving the experience of the One as a *relation*.⁴⁹⁵ Non-philosophy, in contrast, sees this experience as a real *identity*, which is to say that, understood as the One, the “thing itself” is nothing other than the reality of the force-(of)-thought. In this way, non-philosophy can be understood, in terms reminiscent of Nancy's, as a finite thinking that cannot be differentiated from its object.

Laruelle's rejection of the “philosophical” answer, his insistence on responding with the simplicity of the non-philosophical posture which identifies the real with the force of its own thought, returns us to Derrida's—perfectly rational—question as to non-philosophy's own status as an auto-legitimizing and auto-constituting project. The difficulty of Laruelle's position is that, by allowing his claims to rest on what appears to be a simple assertion of its own reality, he could be seen as engaging in a similar “spontaneous faith” to that which he diagnoses as philosophy's blind spot—criticizing the latter for the way it co-constitutes its object, only to performatively inaugurate a new foundation on the basis of an equally illegitimate claim to “reality”. By claiming that the essence of his “scientific” thought is derived from the thing itself, and then positing that the thing itself is nothing other than the One force-(of)-thought, Laruelle himself seems to be making a tautological statement that could reasonably be characterized as having an abstract, and ultimately theological nature. Laruelle recognizes that his vision-in-One bears a certain resemblance to the theological, inasmuch as he identifies non-philosophy as a *gnostic* experience; later we will compare this Laruellian experience to the “inner experience” proposed by Bataille.⁴⁹⁶ However, Laruelle's

493 Ibid., 87.

494 Ibid.

495 Ibid.

496 Laruelle compares non-philosophy's axiomatic assertion of the primacy of the real with ‘an act of *premiere ultimation*’, which is identified with ‘the heretical principle of gnosis’. François Laruelle, *Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith, (London & New York: Continuum, 2010), 128. He stresses, however, that unless the sufficiency of faith and gnostic knowledge are put into parentheses, this “gnosticism” will be philosophically normalized—hence the immediacy of knowledge of the force-(of)-thought can be understood as a *non-gnosticism*. Cf. *infra*, Ch. 7.2–7.3.

claims to have developed, in non-philosophy, a rigorous “science” imply that this “religious” interpretation alone does not do justice to the *theoretical* advantages of his stance. He claims the charge that he ‘use[s] philosophy in order to talk about something which you claim is not philosophical [...] is tantamount to indicting [him] of a crude, rudimentary self-contradiction’, then goes on to argue that it is entirely legitimate ‘to use philosophical vocabulary non-philosophically.’⁴⁹⁷

Ultimately, Laruelle's claims rest on the proposition that he has discovered a *syntax* which is illegible to philosophy, due to the latter's auto-legitimizing structure. He states: ‘[i]t is a defining characteristic of philosophy [...] to believe that all use of language is always ultimately philosophical’, which is to say that from a philosophical perspective, language as such is inseparable from the *logos*, and thus is ‘constitutive of the Being of things’.⁴⁹⁸ In contrast, he proposes that science—including the ordinary or empirical practice of science—makes a different use of language, which in its realist attitude is “deaf” to *logos*, and therefore does not position itself or claim to have a constituting influence on its object. In this way, science can be understood as partaking in a mode of representation that ‘does not have the same “ontological” structures as philosophical representation’.⁴⁹⁹ Hence non-philosophy is proposed as a new way of approaching the problematic of representation which, as we saw in Chapter 2, Nancy suggests is perhaps fundamentally imbricated with “critique”.⁵⁰⁰ Laruelle similarly suggests that we need to be cautious with the term “critical”, because critique names an essentially philosophical mode of inquiry, and as such partakes in the same auto-legitimizing circularity that non-philosophical practice rejects.⁵⁰¹ He does not develop on non-philosophy's mode of representing during his discussion with Derrida, except to assert that rather than being constitutive, the scientific use of language corresponds with the principle that the real is anterior to representation, and it thus contents itself with being “purely descriptive”.⁵⁰² He suggests it is by treating all materials with this non-constitutive realist attitude, that science can bring an undivided “peace” to the warring field of philosophy.

It remains the case, however, that such “peace” is only discernible from the non-philosophical angle—Laruelle states that unless we start from, ‘this One and this real’, then ‘this whole project is an act of force’, just as Derrida argues.⁵⁰³ In this way, he posits the

497 Derrida and Laruelle, ‘Controversy’, 87–8.

498 Ibid., 88.

499 Ibid., 89.

500 Cf. *supra*, Ch 2.3.

501 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, xv.

502 Derrida and Laruelle, ‘Controversy’, 92.

503 Ibid.

relation between the philosophical and non-philosophical approaches to knowledge as what Jean-François Lyotard calls a “*differend*”—defined as ‘a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments’.⁵⁰⁴ This *differend* has a particular asymmetric structure, because non-philosophy claims to be able to view philosophy in a global way that is structurally obscured from the latter. Thus philosophy sees non-philosophy’s criticisms as acts of terror inasmuch as they are abstract and unfounded acts of force. Whereas non-philosophy claims that it is able to view philosophy in its reality, and in this way presumes to be able to judge philosophy as constitutively warlike, whilst claiming that its own scientific practice brings peace. Thus both sides see the other as enacting an injustice on their respective approaches. Given that it is one of the tenets of non-philosophy that philosophy will never accept the former’s representation of the latter, we will not attempt to adjudicate this dispute; instead we will proceed by further explicating Laruelle’s claims via a deeper examination of his analytic of Philosophical Decision, and we will argue that—in its analytic aspect—non-philosophy is perhaps not as incompatible with “deconstruction” as Laruelle polemically proposes. We will then re-view Bataille and Nancy’s attempts to philosophically grasp the experience of community according to Laruelle’s decisional matrix, in order to prepare these materials to be re-deployed non-philosophically.

⁵⁰⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), xi.

CHAPTER 4

Philosophy as Decision

4.1 Laruelle's analytic of Philosophical Decision

Non-philosophy's pragmatics can be separated into two main steps: an analytic re-viewing of the philosophical ideas it takes as its material, which reveals their auto-legitimizing formal structures in their specificity; and a performative redeployment of these materials according to a non-philosophical syntax, which is developed from the terms of the materials under examination. Hence, although Laruelle proposes the non-philosophical instance as a vision-*in-One* (which is to say a shift of stance that not only happens according to the One, but also *in one moment*), its effectuation nevertheless requires considerable preparation—both in order that the materials can be seen in their phenomenal “reality”, and to develop the particular syntax that is occasioned by them.

The first stage of this—the preparation of the philosophical materials—requires an analysis of their way of relating to the real. This analysis in some ways resembles philosophical critique; however, because it requires articulating a ‘universal invariant trait’ that Laruelle claims is common to all philosophy, but which cannot be perceived from a philosophical perspective, the vision-*in-One* should be understood as already at work in it.⁵⁰⁵ Laruelle calls this structure “the philosophical Decision”, and it can be understood as a formal syntax which simultaneously facilitates and delimits the possibilities of philosophizing.⁵⁰⁶ He argues that the reason this syntax cannot be perceived from a philosophical perspective is because it constitutes philosophy's own specular mode of self-legitimation. That is to say, if philosophers do not recognize the decisional form of their own thinking this is not, as Ray Brassier notes, ‘through a lack of reflexive scrupulousness on their part *but precisely because of it*. [...] Decision cannot be grasped reflexively because it is the constitutively reflexive part of philosophizing.’⁵⁰⁷ It is thus the identification of Decision as the essential core of

505 Laruelle, *Principles*, 4.

506 Laruelle develops his theory of Philosophical Decision over a number of texts, including *Philosophies of Difference*, and ‘The Transcendental Method’, trans. Christopher Eby, in François Laruelle, *From Decision to Heresy: Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*, ed. Robin Mackay, 135–172, (Falmouth; New York: Urbanomic/Sequence Press, 2012). The theory is most fully explicated in the ‘Analytic of Philosophical Decision’, in Chapter 6 of Laruelle's *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 231–249. Due to the technical complexity of this analytic, the account of philosophical decision presented below also draws on Ray Brassier's more schematized summaries in: *Nihil Unbound*, 122–7; ‘Axiomatic Heresy: the Non-Philosophy of François Laruelle’, *Radical Philosophy* 121 (September/October 2003): 25–7; and *Alien Theory*, 114–127, 155–6, and *passim*.

507 Brassier, ‘Axiomatic Heresy’, 25.

philosophy which requires that philosophy be viewed from a different—non-philosophical—stance: that which Laruelle names the vision-in-One.

Laruelle describes the ‘most encompassing and least detailed mechanism’ of Philosophical Decision ‘as a structure in 2/3 terms, as a Dyad + One’.⁵⁰⁸ Understood in its simplest form, the kernel of Decision consists in an act of division between two terms—an empirical datum, and an that conditions it—which are articulated in and through a structure of synthetic unity that constitutes, if not necessarily a totality, an interpretation of the real that makes a claim to universality.⁵⁰⁹ As such, Decision can be understood as ‘the Idea of a *relative-absolute whole*’.⁵¹⁰ This whole is both relative and absolute insofar as it comprises a mixture or “amphibology” between the empirical datum and the transcendental unity that conditions its articulation. Due to this “empirico-transcendental parallelism”, Laruelle charges philosophy with the presumption ‘to reach the Real and thus to at least partially constitute it’.⁵¹¹

Laruelle's analysis of Decision articulates the interplay of three essential terms within philosophical thought: immanence, transcendence and the transcendental. The structure of Decision is that of a fractional matrix which, he says, ‘gives itself an interiority and an exteriority, an immanence and a transcendence *simultaneously*, in a synthetic or hierarchical structure’.⁵¹² The synthetic structure of articulation that both joins and differentiates the two terms of a philosophical Dyad constitutes a third term that operates at the transcendental level—the transcendental is thus understood, from a philosophical perspective, as essentially relational.⁵¹³ This third term is relatively independent from the differentiated terms, and yet also inseparable from them. It is thus both extrinsic and intrinsic to the Dyad—extrinsic in so far as it comprises the difference between the two terms, and intrinsic insofar as it functions as the transcendental glue that binds them into a synthetic unity. Decision thus constitutes a disjunctive coupling between the immanence of the empirical datum and the transcendence of the *a priori* factum, brought about by a second, this time transcendental, immanence—which means that immanence is divided within the philosophical matrix, fulfilling both an empirical function, as the necessary corollary of transcendence, and a transcendental function as the

508 Laruelle, *Principles*, 232.

509 Non-philosophy functions at a transcendental level, taking as its material philosophical objects, concepts etc., rather than sense-experience; consequently, “empirical” should be understood here in an expanded sense that does not necessarily relate to perception. As we shall see, the subject of non-philosophy can be understood as a *function* that does not correspond to any phenomenological notion of subjectivity; cf. *infra*, Ch. 5.1 & Ch. 7.3.

510 Laruelle, *Principles*, 232.

511 Laruelle, *Principles*, 4.

512 Ibid.

513 Laruelle describes the transcendental as ‘what *relates-to* ... the transcendent’. ‘Transcendental Method’, 143.

guarantor of their synthetic unity.

Philosophical Decision can thus be considered to have a *transcendental core*, which contains ‘varied but always mixed relations of *identity and difference*.’⁵¹⁴ Its formal structure is that of a transcendental deduction. Kantian philosophy is exemplary in this regard, but Laruelle argues that, despite techniques that differ according to the author, depending on the type of reality under analysis, there is a form of transcendental deduction (whether juridico-critical or ontological in its slant) at play in philosophies both before and after Kant—and what he seeks to do is ‘to rediscover its universal scope—its invariant functions—across the whole of the transcendental tradition.’⁵¹⁵ The transcendental method that he proposes as philosophy’s self-grounding decisional essence is composed of three essential moments that regress from the Real as they gather the philosophical Dyad into a “higher” synthetic unity:

- 1) The first moment is the ‘analytic extrication, or the “inventory of [local] *a prioris*” (Dufrenne) on the basis of either experience, or the type of reality whose conditions of possibility one seeks.’⁵¹⁶ This moment effects a transcendence on the basis of the immanent reality under examination, thereby establishing the division between the two terms of the Dyad. Brassier explains that it ‘corresponds to the moment of metaphysical distinction between conditioned and condition, empirical and *a priori*, datum and factum.’⁵¹⁷
- 2) The second moment is the gathering of the local or regional *a prioris*—which are always multiple because each is tied to a specific form of experience—into a universal Unity by means of a single transcendental *a priori*. Laruelle proposes that this moment is more profoundly transcendental than the first because: ‘it corresponds to an ascent toward the real or absolute condition of possibility of experience.’⁵¹⁸ It is by the means of this absolute condition that philosophy goes about its task of determining the real through thought. However, the absoluteness of the transcendental Unity is compromised because the ‘fundamental and necessary operation’ of the passage from regional to universal *a priori* ‘comes about through the mechanism of an *Aufhebung*’—and as such, it remains imbricated with the transcendent side of the Dyad that it is supposed to surpass.⁵¹⁹ Thus, as Brassier says, ‘the supposedly unconditional

514 Laruelle, *Principles*, 234.

515 Laruelle, ‘Transcendental Method’, 153.

516 *Ibid.*, 147.

517 Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 123.

518 Laruelle, ‘Transcendental Method’, 147.

519 *Ibid.*, 148.

transcendence demanded of the transcendental remains compromised precisely because the structure of transcendence invariably binds it to some reified, transcendent entity.⁵²⁰ Consequently, the entirely synthetic Unity produced by this transcendental *Aufhebung* remains in a state of circular agitation, much as the one that Bataille identifies in the work of Hegel.⁵²¹ Due to its being caught in this “empirico-transcendental circle”, Laruelle argues that the transcendental *a priori* does not manage to ‘ground experience in an absolute knowledge, but it *believes* itself capable of doing so.’⁵²² It is this mistaken belief that constitutes philosophy’s blind spot with regard to the essence of radical immanence.

3) The third and final moment, which Laruelle identifies as the most fundamental, is the transcendental deduction itself—that is, ‘the systematic unification [...] of the *a prioris* and empirical givens under the authority of transcendental or originary Unity.’⁵²³ Where the first two stages of the transcendental method are essentially analytic, moving from concrete experience and its *a priori* conditions towards the transcendental Unity, this final moment—synthetic rather than analytic—moves in the opposite direction, the transcendental Unity being used to derive the way in which the transcendent is able to systematically condition the empirical within the Dyad. What the transcendental deduction thus yields, according to Laruelle, is ‘a particular *a priori* endowed with the specifically transcendental ability to pivot, “turn”, and bend itself towards experience’.⁵²⁴ In this way, the final moment of the transcendental method—where the Unity of all experience both succeeds and supersedes its dismemberment—circles around and provides the ground for the first two. In this moment of transcendental synthesis, as the (dis)joining of the empirical and the transcendent becomes concrete, the logical syntax of the ideal is simultaneously bound to the empirical contingencies of the Real. In this way, Laruelle tells us, ““transcendental” receives its complete and concrete meaning, at once originary and ultimate, of [...] reciprocal immanence between being and thought.”⁵²⁵

It is the two-directional movement of the transcendental deduction, the way it pivots

520 Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 124.

521 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 1.2. As we shall see, Hegelian dialectics are exemplary of the problem of philosophy’s intrinsically circular nature for Laruelle.

522 Laruelle, ‘Transcendental Method’, 148–9.

523 *Ibid.*, 150.

524 *Ibid.*, 151.

525 *Ibid.*, 150.

back in a self-grounding gesture, that constitutes what Laruelle characterizes as philosophy's essentially circular nature insofar as the “result” of the transcendental deduction is also posited as the condition for its possibility. As such, philosophy grants itself ‘the idea of an absolute autonomy’ inasmuch as it always returns to itself—indeed, it *must* return because it always presupposes its own structure in whatever phenomena it articulates.⁵²⁶ Hence, as Brassier notes, ‘the suspicion that philosophy manges to interpret everything while explaining nothing, because the structure of the *explanans*, decision, is already presupposed in the *explanandum*, the phenomenon or phenomena to be explained.’⁵²⁷ The essence of Decision's architecture, considered in its *form*, is thus the circle generated by the “*Auto*”—philosophy's constitutively self-referential and dominating manner of relating to the real. This *Auto* expresses the absolute sufficiency that philosophy believes itself to have in its mode of grounding knowledge.

The Decisional *Auto* has two dimensions, or possible conditions of existence, which Laruelle describes as ‘a dyad of determinations: the givenness of Decision determined by itself as a result or Auto-Givenness; its position determined by itself of Auto-Position.’⁵²⁸ These dimensions, which frame the phenomenological and ontological parameters of philosophical thought, are not dissociable except by means of abstraction. It is this duality of dimensions that necessitates within philosophy the dyadic style of thought, and calls for the presupposition of pre- or semi-philosophical constructs such as that of an “ontological plane” or a set of “general concepts”, which are rendered concrete through the transcendental synthesis that constitutes Decision. In this way, an extra-philosophical element, which is posited as given, as “in-itself” or “as limit”, becomes philosophical—indeed, the Decisional *mill* *needs* to posit something external to philosophy (an empirical datum) in order to generate the circular movement of its own self-grounding. In this way, philosophy is always a relational practice of thought—a philosophy *of* *x* or *y*—but at the same time, due to the way that Decision processes the extra-philosophical element(s) on which it depends by way of an *Aufhebung*, the result of the process is the subordination of its empirical source to philosophy's own *Auto-Donational* and *Auto-Positional* self-relation. As such, all philosophy serves a meta-philosophical function, constituting—whether implicitly or explicitly—a theory of itself which it imposes on its extra-philosophical other in a dominating and hierarchical fashion.

Laruelle identifies a set of “dimensional” *a priori*s that arise from the Auto-Donational

526 Laruelle, *Principles*, 234.

527 Brassier, ‘Axiomatic Heresy’, 26.

528 Laruelle, *Principles*, 234.

and Auto-Positional dimensions, which constitute the structural hinges by which Decision articulates itself. Each of the two dimensions comprises three *a priori* moments, which can be related to the three moments of the transcendental deduction described above—and understood, similarly, as acquiring concretion as the structure of a Dyad + One. From the Donational side, which constitutes Decision's moment of phenomenological (self-)grounding and sets the parameters for the philosophical reception of experience, philosophy is given:

- 1) As *Affection*: the donation of an empirico-regional given, or extra-philosophical datum, which is implicitly identified with a putatively *real* transcendence.
- 2) As the *Reception* of the philosophical as such, the formal codes of the *a priori* factum in its specificity, as a regulative Idea that is not given in experience but relates to every other type of existence as given in a transcendent and exterior way.
- 3) As *Intuition*, understood as the synthesis of the Dyad of Affection and Reception into a higher unity. This moment, which corresponds to the self-grounding gesture that completes the transcendental deduction, is where the divided givenness that occurs throughout the Donational dimension becomes one-Auto-Givenness.⁵²⁹

The Positional side, Laruelle says, 'designates the dimension of ideal transcendence [...]. The "position" in this broad sense is the objectivization of philosophy itself'.⁵³⁰ This auto-objectivizing dimension of Decision is a matter of form, understood in an *a priori* sense (rather than logical), and endowed with a transcendental claim—a claim both *by* and *for* philosophy. The three *a priori* moments of Position, which exist in a state of structural isomorphy with the three moments of (Auto-)Donation, are:

- 1) The *Transcendence*, which produces a position of exteriority for the *a priori* factum in the moment of its scission from the *a posteriori* datum.
- 2) The *Plane*, which forms the philosophical base on which this separation is effected.
- 3) The *Unity* of these two positions in a Dyad, which constitutes the one-Auto-Position whereby Position posits itself.

Having elaborated the six-dimensional structure that Laruelle attributes to Decision,

529 Laruelle, *Principles*, 234–5; and cf. Brassier, *Alien Theory*, 156.

530 Laruelle, *Principles*, 235 [translation modified].

we are now in a position to consider the credibility of his bold claim to have identified the “structural invariant” at the kernel of philosophy, which constitutes its essence. Laruelle is careful to articulate this essence without deducing it from concrete philosophical examples, in order to avoid reconstituting the kind of amphibology that he is critiquing within philosophical thought. He states that he resists the use of examples because he is aiming to produce a ‘rigorous formalization of [...] thought’, that he argues ‘is necessarily pure-transcendental rather than empirico-transcendental’.⁵³¹ Even in the most extended critical analysis of contemporary philosophy that he has published since adopting the non-philosophical posture—*Philosophies of Difference*—Laruelle declares at the outset that he will not use a doxographic method: ‘[n]o inventories of particular works are to be found here, no presentations of authors [...] It will not be so much the names of philosophers we will uncover as [...] the] very work of philosophizing.’⁵³²

However, this formalist approach has attracted reasonable criticisms. Andrew McGettigan suggests that the scarcity of citations or references in Laruelle's work means that his accounts of the philosophers he critiques are “simplifications” which lack ‘the guardrail of scholarship’, and without this ‘there is no testing of misconceptions’ with respect to the “materials” being examined.⁵³³ Brassier further argues that in his critique of philosophical sufficiency, Laruelle is guilty of “ventriloquizing” philosophy, and that in so doing he attributes philosophy *tout court* with an auto-constituting Hegelian tendency—a claim that somewhat stretches credibility.⁵³⁴ Moreover, Laruelle's insistence on discovering a single essence for *all* of philosophy risks enacting just the kind of totalizing gesture that he aims to avoid, by squeezing a hugely diverse range of practices of thought into the same mould. John Roberts remarks that in doing so, Laruelle reduces philosophy to an ‘unwieldy metaphysical lump’.⁵³⁵

We must ask, therefore, whether Laruelle's “discovery” of *the* philosophical Decision is a convincing one. The difficulty presented by the “global” scope of his claims is that one would arguably only need to propose a single philosophical example that did *not* conform to this model in order to undo his whole theoretical framework. We have seen how he describes the formal structure of “philosophy” as having both ontological and phenomenological dimensions, which are brought into a synthetic unity through a transcendental deduction;

531 Laruelle, *Principles*, 9.

532 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, xiii.

533 Andrew McGettigan, ‘Fabrication Defect: Laruelle's Philosophical Materials’, *Radical Philosophy* 175, (September/October 2012): 39–40.

534 Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 131.

535 John Roberts, ‘The Flatlining of Metaphysics’, *Philosophy of Photography*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2011: 135.

given the technical detail of the six-dimensional model he articulates, we suggest that any number of examples could be found that do not, in fact, contain all of these elements. Brassier suggests that unless Laruelle admits the limitations of his “exorbitant” claim about the global scope of the decisional model, then he must somewhat problematically maintain that any system of thinking that does not conform to it is not proper philosophy—‘in which case vast swathes of the philosophical tradition, from Hume to Churchland, must be excised from the discipline’.⁵³⁶

We do not raise this point in order to dismiss Laruelle's theory of philosophical Decision, but rather follow Brassier in suggesting that instead of trying to straitjacket the full diversity of philosophical approaches into the decisional model, it is more productive to delimit its scope to those philosophies it does, accurately describe—namely those that function at the level of *transcendental synthesis*, which would include much of post-Kantian continental philosophy, as well as all forms of dialectical reasoning.⁵³⁷ Indeed, as we have seen, such a limitation to Laruelle's claims is suggested by his own definition of his aim: ‘to rediscover [the] universal scope [of *transcendental deduction*]*—its invariant functions—across the whole of the transcendental tradition.*’⁵³⁸

A survey of Laruelle's early publications, prior to his adopting the non-philosophical stance, provides evidence that his understanding of what constitutes “philosophy” is informed by the post-Nietzschean and post-Heideggerian landscape of French thought in the 1970s, and as such, we further suggest that his model is particularly useful for analysing the mode of auto-constituting circularity intrinsic to “deconstruction”—a mode of philosophizing that has arguably already revealed the aporetic foundations of “metaphysics” quite successfully.⁵³⁹ Laruelle would seem to concur with this point when he states that ‘[i]nsofar as one can judge these “oceanic” matters, the deconstructions of Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Derrida represent the most philosophically advanced point of critical vigilance, the rigorous and sustained effort to put philosophy in relation with its death’.⁵⁴⁰ Furthermore, when Laruelle moves from non-philosophy's analytic aspect—which is intended to prepare philosophical materials—to its

536 Ibid., 134.

537 Brassier suggests that “decision” can be re-interpreted as ‘a cipher for correlationism’, (ibid.) referring to Quentin Meillassoux's term for the ‘the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other’, which he sees as pervasive in post-Kantian thought. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier, (London & New York: Continuum, 2010), 5.

538 Laruelle, ‘Transcendental Method’, 153 [emphasis added].

539 Cf. François Laruelle, *Machines Textuelles: Déconstruction et Libido-d'Écriture*, (Paris: Le Seuil, 1976); cf. François Laruelle, *Nietzsche contra Heidegger*, (Paris: Payot, 1977); cf. François Laruelle, *Le Déclin de l'Écriture*, (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1977); cf. François Laruelle, *Au-delà du Principe de Pouvoir*, (Paris: Payot, 1978).

540 Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-philosophy*, 203.

positive practice, which puts them into play according to another syntax, he states that ‘it is interesting to supply it with a complex material which will have undergone the maximum amount of deformation and enrichment that it is capable of supporting without being destroyed’, and suggests that both Heidegger and “Deconstruction” as examples of such enrichment.⁵⁴¹

This could be seen as contradicting his earlier assertion that there is no way of choosing between one philosophy and another, because all auto-constituting Decisions are equally arbitrary. Whilst non-philosophy makes the claim to function in a non-*decisional* way, it nevertheless requires that a *choice* be made with respect to the philosophical materials that are used to effectuate it. Our own chosen materials—Bataille and Nancy's respective articulations of community—have been selected because we judge them to be the most interesting philosophical attempts to grasp “community” as an unobjectivizable experience. In different ways, each has deconstructed the totalizing effects of the Hegelian logic that Laruelle is so critical of. We will now return to these materials to explore how they relate to Laruelle's characterization of transcendental philosophy.

4.2 Hegel and Bataille: the dialectical Decision

In Chapters 1 and 2 we examined Bataille and Nancy's approaches to the problematic of community in some detail. One of the reasons we have engaged in this thorough reading is that we are aiming to avoid the problem highlighted by McGettigan—that of obscuring the nuances of these complex materials by an overly schematic summary. The approach we took in the first two chapters followed a broadly deconstructive logic, which reflects that used in the materials themselves, and as such it can be considered in Laruelle's terms as a *philosophical* analysis. Now we will re-view the same materials in light of Laruelle's six-dimensional decisional model, with the intention of demonstrating the usefulness of this model inasmuch as it provides a succinct and joined-up way of viewing the formal structures of a range of philosophical materials. By applying Laruelle's model to these materials, we will also be able to assess the extent to which it is legible according to the philosophical perspective from which we have already approached them.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 134. On the basis of Laruelle's extended engagement with Derrida's thought in Chapter 5 of his *Philosophies of Difference*, and various remarks scattered through other publications including *Philosophy and Non-philosophy*, it is reasonable to conclude that Derrida represents the epitome of what Laruelle calls “Deconstruction” here.

As we have seen, Laruelle characterizes the “community” of philosophers as being in a constitutive state of war—and hence as being more a *socius* than a community. Having examined his analysis of the auto-positional circularity of Decision, this claim becomes more comprehensible: in its donational dimension, whilst each philosophy takes an extra-philosophical datum as its object, this object is posited in such a way that its imbrication with an *a priori* regulative idea is presupposed, meaning that the immanence of the object is mixed with a transcendence at the transcendental level; consequently, in the positional dimension that corresponds with this phenomenological structure, the same philosophy simultaneously constitutes a philosophy of itself. In this way, all philosophy, according to Laruelle, is meta-philosophical because it not only theorizes a given object, but it also positions itself as the proper way to do so *at the exclusion of all other philosophical positions*—and indeed, this exclusive claim is necessary in order to maintain the legitimacy of the presupposed regulative idea. Hence Laruelle posits that ‘all philosophies play for some other the role of meta-philosophy’, in the sense that when a philosophy addresses the tradition, it must either reject other positions, or offer a corrective reading of them in order to establish its own position as the “right” way to approach its given object.⁵⁴²

We have seen evidence of this corrective tendency in our analyses of both Bataille and Nancy. In Chapter 1, we observed how Bataille constantly struggles to find ways of breaching the enclosure of Hegelian thought by revealing its aporetic grounds in order to “correct” its excessively totalizing claims; and further, how he uses Durkheim's more materialist approach to do this, but simultaneously “corrects” the latter by changing the order of priority between performative force and representation, in an attempt at interrupting the unifying progress of both theoretical systems. In Chapter 2, we showed how Nancy proposes to “correct” the latent subjectivism he finds in Bataille's thought by appealing to a Heideggerian ontological framework, whilst simultaneously “correcting” Heidegger's conception of Being by emphasizing its originary sociality. In this way, each of the philosophical approaches we have examined offers a meta-philosophical reading of those that preceded them.

Laruelle denounces such meta-philosophical positioning; the purpose of analysing philosophical materials according to the decisional model is thus not to correct them, but to allow the real conditions of their phenomenality to become apparent, in order that they might be put into play in a different way. Hence the aim of our own re-viewing of these materials is not to “correct” either Bataille or Nancy, but to expose the formal philosophical structures that underpin their respective theorizations of “community”, to enable the concept to be

542 Laruelle, *Principles*, 9.

redeployed in a non-philosophical mode that moves beyond deconstruction—not by transcending it, but by allowing it to be determined by its own immanence.

For Bataille, Hegelianism clearly epitomizes the problematically totalizing tendency of philosophy in general. Laruelle would seem to agree with this when he suggests that the auto-positional and auto-donational mode by which philosophy gives itself has ‘the form of an enlarged self-awareness or universal *cogito*’.⁵⁴³ Viewed as a decisional structure, the Hegelian dialectic can be understood as a fractional matrix in which self-relating negativity instantiates the separation between the empirical datum and the idealized subject, which takes the position of *a priori* factum. Through the synthetic function of the *Aufhebung*, the same relational negativity that separates the empirical from the subject simultaneously serves to transcendently join them, and it is through this mechanism that the immanent datum becomes substantive. Hence, if one wishes to conceptualize “community” through the Hegelian model, one first posits community as an extra-philosophical datum, which may be attributed with an immediate “immanence”, yet remains an abstract idea unless it is placed in a contradictory relation with the subject. The notion of community then becomes concrete through the mediation of the negative—the transcendental immanence that binds the whole structure together. The concrete notion then effectuates the transcendence whereby it circles back around to constitute the ground for the whole operation, and in this way it achieves a substantive “immanence” which is posited as the essence of the given datum (“community”). The concrete “immanence” of community, being the result of a transcendental synthesis, is thus permanently conjoined with the transcendent idealized form of the subject.

We will now articulate this structure using the terms of Laruelle's six-dimensional model. On the donational side: the positing of “community” corresponds with the moment of *affection*; the subject with the *a priori* structure for community's *reception*; and the dialectical synthesis that renders community's “immanence” concrete with the *intuition*. On the positional side: the *transcendence* is brought about by the positing of the subject as regulative ideal that conditions the possibility of experiencing “community”, thereby separating the two elements by placing them into a contradictory relation; the *plane* is constituted by the architecture of the dialectic; the *unity* of these positions, which is brought about by the *Aufhebung* that (re-)joins what was first separated circling back to constitute the ground, is the auto-positional moment where Hegelianism posits its own dialectical form of subjective idealism as the *only* way for community to achieve a substantive immanence. Having broken

543 François Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*, trans. Drew S. Burk and Anthony Paul Smith, (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2012), 35.

the structure down into its constituent parts, we can now see that the *essence* of the datum—community—which is presupposed as given, is synthetically *produced*. Hence it is never simply given, but rather given through a specific *a priori* structure of givenness which conditions it—its dialectical relation with the idealized subject, which is underpinned by the auto-positional unity of the whole system. Thus the immanence of community within the Hegelian model cannot be separated from an ideal transcendence which co-constitutes its “reality”.

Although neither Bataille nor Nancy analysed Hegelianism in quite this way, it is fair to say that both were able to perceive its problematically idealizing tendencies, and attempted to grasp community in a more immanent way. Indeed, Nancy's critique of “immanentism”, which identifies a division in immanence that cuts the transcending “immanence” of the community of essence off from “immanence itself” could be said to arrive at a similar conclusion, albeit in slightly different terms.⁵⁴⁴ However, as we now re-view their respective arguments, we will see that, from the perspective of Laruelle's non-philosophy, the ways in which Bataille and Nancy each attempt to think at—if not beyond—the limits of the objectivating logic epitomized by Hegelianism both remain caught within the decisional matrix in their own way.

As we saw in Chapter 1, the problematic of community is linked to numerous other ideas in Bataille's thought, from the ecstatic experience of sacrifice, through the *dépense* of general economy, to the communication of the inner experience—and for this reason, any schematic representation of his thought risks subjecting it to something of a reduction. Nevertheless, as we explored Bataille's thinking, we discerned a recurrently circular movement within it, that in various ways pushes at the structural integrity of philosophical reason (particularly in its dialectical form) and at times breaches its limits, but is unable to sustain itself beyond them.

In Bataille's analysis of the Hegelianism, he challenges the integrity of the dialectic on two levels: firstly, for the way that a simulated death is substituted for real death in the master-slave dialectic, a crucial stage in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*; and secondly by suggesting that, in spite of its claims to be a route to total knowledge, there are in reality numerous things that cannot be incorporated into the dialectic, including both base and formless materiality, and the highly abstract yet non philosophical question “why?” In this way, Bataille convicts Hegelianism of a double absurdity. Internally, by making subjective self-consciousness depend on an impossible experience of death, he suggests that Hegel is forced to engage in a

544 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 2.3.

coup de théâtre, which establishes that a certain spectacle is necessary for the subject to achieve self-consciousness. Bataille remarks on the farcical nature of this “subterfuge”, which would seem to require the subject to die whilst watching himself do so, thereby dividing his experience into two. In Laruelian terms, we might say that the subject, whose immanence is thought within the Hegelian framework as an immanence-to-self, cannot therefore be immanent in the radical sense, because in order for immanence to be presented to the self it must already be separated from the latter. Which is to say that the subject's immanence is divided by the very representational apparatus required for him to accede to self-consciousness. In this way, the *presence* of the subject is always philosophically mediated.

Bataille further ridicules the Hegelian system from the exterior—by suggesting that in spite its self-styled absolute sufficiency, there are “heterological” things that are unthinkable within its architecture. His second method of critique is thus to posit an excess that the system is unable to incorporate in order to breach its enclosure, thereby opening it to the outside. He conceives this excess as an excremental element that is expelled from the philosophical system in a process of “intellectual scatology” that is necessary to maintain the structural integrity of its rational architecture.⁵⁴⁵ Although Bataille does not articulate it in quite these terms, we can interpret the excess as an instance of the real, which philosophy must eject and conceal in order to defend its own claims to be able to appropriate *everything*. In this way, Bataille's heterological critique of philosophy is based on the idea that the latter evacuates the real out of a structural necessity—and we can see Bataille's proposal, with heterology, to found a new “science” that would theorize these excremental elements in a way that did not partake in the rational architecture of *logos*, as an attempt to articulate a non philosophical approach to theorizing the real, which in certain respects resonates with the transcendental science of non-philosophy later devised by Laruelle.

Bataille proposes heterology as both a theory and practice of knowledge, which in its theoretical aspect critiques the architecture of philosophical *sufficiency* that necessitates the exclusion of heterogeneous elements, whilst in its practical aspect, observes the response such elements elicit. At the theoretical level, heterology thus shares a similarity with Laruelle's non-philosophy inasmuch as it entails a practical intervention into theory, the effectuation of which requires a formal analysis of philosophical sufficiency.⁵⁴⁶ A further relation can be seen

545 Bataille, ‘Use Value’, 99. On Bataille's theory of heterology, cf. *supra*, Ch. 1.4.

546 We note, however, that although the practice of non-philosophy requires a preparatory analysis of philosophical materials, Laruelle argues that ‘it does not depart—in any sense of the word—from philosophy’, but rather departs from the One. Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 3. We will argue that it is the affirmative positing of the One as radically prior to philosophical Decision that ultimately distinguishes the “non-philosophical” nature of Laruelle's thought from Bataille's more naïve attempt at

in the way that Bataille posits heterogeneous elements as intrinsically resistant to conceptual objectivation and he argues that philosophy can only grasp these things as ‘abstract forms of totality (nothingness, infinity, the absolute), to which it itself cannot give a positive content’—which suggests that the reality of these things is necessarily obscured by philosophical attempts at grasping them.⁵⁴⁷ Similarly, Laruelle posits the real as being radically foreclosed to thought, with the consequence that philosophy can only grasp it on the condition of creating an amphibology between the immanence of the given and its own transcendent structure by which this “reality” is received.⁵⁴⁸ In this way, the real functions within both Bataille and Laruelle's characterizations of philosophy as a kind of radical indeterminacy that can only be incorporated into reason through an act of division and recombination with transcendent structures of representation.

A Further similarity can be found between Bataille and Laruelle inasmuch as both link their respective “scientific” approaches to thought to the problematic of community—Bataille claiming that heterology ‘leads to *the complete reversal of the philosophical process*’, which thus ‘*introduces the demand for the violent gratifications implied by social life*’; and Laruelle positing that ‘*community [...] must be founded on knowledge itself*—not on knowledge constituted and represented, but on science as that which is of the real, [...] more than on the always inadequate social or philosophical relation’.⁵⁴⁹ Moreover, just as Laruelle articulates this science which is “of the real” as an experiential force-(of)-thought, so too does Bataille define heterology's practical aspect in terms of an *experience*, which we have characterized as a non philosophical supplement to the realm of conceptual objectivity. However, Bataille's heterological “science” remains something of a sketch, and his claim that its practice allows heterogeneity to be grasped concretely by arriving at ‘ecstatic trances and orgasm’ not only seems somewhat tenuous as a method of scientific “rigour”, but also falls back on an implicitly phenomenological *subjectivity*, as the structural condition for the reception of the real.⁵⁵⁰ This returns us to the theme of subjectivism that, as we have seen, Nancy sees as an underlying presupposition in the Bataille's thought, which he suggests leads to the ecstatic gesture of *dépense* being recuperated by the appropriative economy that it aims to breach. In order to clarify the status of the subject in Bataille's thinking, we will now re-view Bataille's thought formally, according to Laruelle's decisional model.

thinking beyond the bounds of *logos*..

547 Bataille, ‘Use Value’, 96.

548 Laruelle states that the immanence of the One ‘renders itself foreign to [philosophy] and condemns it to its own foreclosure, specifically the foreclosure of the Real.’ *Principles*, 22.

549 Bataille, ‘Use Value’, 97 [emphasis added]; Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 160 [emphasis added].

550 Bataille, *ibid.*, 99.

We have observed two levels at which Bataille critiques the Hegelian dialectic—internally, for the theatrical subterfuge required for the subject to achieve self-consciousness, and externally, by positing a heterological excess that compromises its self-styled absolute sufficiency. We saw above how the subject, for Hegel, is posited as the *a priori* structure of reception by which the datum, given as real, is conditioned. In the positional dimension of the dialectic, this subject is posited as transcendent, and hence the immediacy of its self-experience is always already divided, its immanence bound *a priori* to a transcendence. Consequently, Bataille's diagnosis of the impossible division of experience that is required for the dialectical production of self-consciousness, although expressed in different terms, can be seen to be in accord with our analysis of Hegelianism's decisional form inasmuch as the absurdity he identifies derives from a structurally necessary division in immanence. This critique in itself, however, whilst it may effectively deconstruct the logic of Hegelianism from its interior, remains in Laruelle's terms a *philosophical* one that does not yet touch upon the non-philosophical real. Therefore this critique in itself does not get us closer to theorizing the real experience of community. Hence we will focus on Bataille's attempt to deconstruct philosophy's objectivating logic on the basis of its relation to an experience of community that is exterior to it.

As we have seen, Bataille links “concrete heterology” to the experience of community, understood as ecstatic. In this way, he posits “community” as a belonging to the real. In contrast to Hegel, for whom community can be rationalized by being sublated by the subject, Bataille repeatedly insists on the impossibility of incorporating this experience dialectically, proposing it instead as an excess that, in its heterogeneity, cannot be rendered as a conceptual object. In doing this, Bataille does not reject the dialectical model outright; he rather seeks to reveal its limits by demonstrating that some elements exceed the possibility of appropriation, thereby challenging its claim to absolute sufficiency. In this way he delimits dialectical reason by setting it in relation with other, non philosophical forms of knowledge. This bears a certain similarity to Laruelle's axiomatic positing of the equality of all thought, by which he claims to level the hierarchical terrain constituted by the PSP by setting philosophy's decisions within a broader paradigm of knowledge—much in the way that non-Euclidean geometry does not seek to overturn Euclidean geometry, but rather to demonstrate that other, equally valid, geometric systems can also be conceived and experimented with.⁵⁵¹ However, Laruelle cautions that although some philosophies have a ‘spontaneous non-philosophical appearance

551 Cf. Laruelle, ‘Chapter III: The “non-Euclidean” mutation in philosophy and non-philosophy's scientific foundation’ in *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 97–128.

[...] that seems to aim at or intend a real or an Other outside it [...] this is an appearance in every sense of the word, also in the sense of a transcendental illusion, and *deconstructions are specifically founded on it.*⁵⁵²

In taking the dialectical model as his point of departure Bataille broadly accepts its oppositional structure—but he adds another level to it by further positing an exteriority that is utterly heterogeneous to philosophical reason. Community, as ecstatic experience, is posited as belonging to this outside, which we have characterized as “anarchitectural” inasmuch as it is a utopic and uchronic spatio-temporal milieu. This an-archic environment, which is taken as an aporetic ground for the architecture of the *logos*, would seem to be resistant in principle to any act of positioning—and hence, in a naïve sense, could be seen as a “non-positional” environment. However, Laruelle’s analytic of philosophical Decision suggests that positing a “real” exterior alone is not enough to escape from the auto-positional circle of the decisional matrix. By bringing the Hegelian absolute into relation with a formless outside, Bataille instead effectuates a meta-philosophical bracketing of the dialectical system, which complexifies its dimensionality. In this way, he maintains the integrity of the dialectical system as a transcendent totality, but adds a supplementary layer of opposition—between this transcendent whole and its heterological Other.

Consequently, in the positional dimension, the *transcendence* no longer enacts a rational division between the subject and object as dialectical contraries, but rather entails an ecstatic move to the exterior of “philosophy” (i.e. the dialectic) *as a whole* into its “real” outside. We have seen that Bataille’s thinking proceeds by way of a series of related oppositions: philosophy/heterology; restricted economy/general economy; architecture/formless; profane/sacred; etc. In each of these pairs, the former term indicates the rational system, whereas the latter denotes the gesture that breaches it and/or what is posited as its beyond. “Community”, as ecstatic experience, belongs to this latter gesture. Hence, with respect to the problematic of community, the scission brought about by the positional transcendence in Bataille’s thought is between the immanence of the communal experience and the transcendence of “philosophy”. Bataille strives to resist thinking the *plane* on which this separation occurs in dialectical terms, but taking his later thought into consideration, we argue that it ultimately remains dialectical.

In order to resist its being re-appropriated by philosophical (dialectical) reason, Bataille sometimes suggests that the ecstatic experience of community—which is indexed on the death of another, and hence reveals the impossible experience of one’s own death in a

552 Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-philosophy*, 241 [emphasis added].

mimetic form—is unavowable in principle. This approach maintains community's separation from philosophy, and by refusing to unify the two sides of the dyad does not constitute an auto-positional circle. As such, it appears in a naïve sense to constitute a non philosophical conception of community. However, this approach is distinctly limited inasmuch as it places community *de jure* beyond the reach of signifying discourse—thus articulating community *negatively*, as an excess that cannot be theorized. This is problematic because the reality of this experience cannot be rationally demonstrated, but only asserted as an immediate knowledge in what could be interpreted as a statement of faith. Furthermore, by placing community beyond rational discourse, Bataille arguably constitutes another “absolute”—not an absolute *knowledge*, but a quasi-theological absolute *law* which conditions the reception of community in his thought. Thus, even if it resists the unification of the community/philosophy dyad, the two sides remain transcendently (dis)joined by the law that separates them. Hence, even without resolving the dyad in a dialectical synthesis, Bataille's thought is nevertheless decisional inasmuch as this law constitutes a minimal if disjunctive *unity* by which it positions itself.

Bataille was able to perceive the limitations of such a negative position, and the practical aspect of his theory of heterology can be seen as an attempt to *positively* articulate a non philosophical method for grasping community, by supplementing rational knowledge with a practical aspect. He proposes moving from ‘vague and distant’ philosophical speculation, which rests on abstract facts, towards an experiential *practice* in order to grasp heterogeneity as concrete. Community would thus be grasped by entering into the very ecstatic experience that constitutes it—thus it would be “theorized” through an immanent participation in the thing itself. In this way, Bataille suggests that ecstasy is able to cross the line that divides the philosophical from the heterological, thereby transgressing the law that maintains their separation. He argues that, as such, heterogeneous elements cannot be objectively grasped, but that ‘the subjective heterogeneity of particular elements is, in practice, alone concrete’.⁵⁵³ Thus, at a structural level, he connects the heterogeneous domain with the subject that receives it.

Hence, according to the donational dimension of Laruelle's decisional model, Bataille theorizes community (which belongs to the heterogeneous domain) by giving it as empirical datum (*affection*), which is conditioned by the *a priori* form of the subject which conditions its *reception*—thereby establishing a framework that recalls the Hegelian model. Bataille's “subject” is conceived in a more materialist sense than Hegel's, including all the messy bodily

553 Bataille, ‘Use Value’, 98.

functions and affective responses that Idealism claims to transcend—and it is arguably through this appeal to the immanent materiality of experience that Bataille seeks to exit from philosophy, by positing both “community” and “subject” as excessive in relation to philosophical transcendence. Yet it remains the case that the subject constitutes the *a priori* condition for heterological practice, and hence for the experience of community—which means that the phenomenological dimension that structures Bataille's thought remains a fractional matrix in which community and subject form a (dis)joined dyad.

It is in the synthesis of this dyad—the *intuition* which renders it as one-Auto-Givenness, in Laruelle's terms—that the dialectical plane that underpins Bataille's thought becomes apparent. If his nascent theory of heterology attempts to challenge the idealizing tendencies of Hegelianism by positing a materially “concrete” subjective experience—one that comprises both the psychological and the corporeal—which is opposed to that of the philosophically-constituted transcendent subject-form, in his later book *Erotism* he turns his attention to the *law* that divides these two spheres, in terms of the *taboo* that separates the sacred from the profane. Here, Bataille maintains his interest in the ecstatic “inner experience” in which the erotic partakes, but he now rejects the “scientific” posture of his earlier thought, saying: ‘if I sometimes speak as a man of science I only seem to do so. The scientist speaks from the outside [... whereas m]y theme is the subjective experience’.⁵⁵⁴ This implies that Bataille identifies “science” with objectivity—in contrast to his own approach, which he now identifies with the “religious”, in a general sense that does not stem from any particular theological tradition. Bataille defines erotic or religious knowledge as ‘*an immediate aspect of inner experience*’, and he intends the “inner experience” as that which ultimately transcends the architectural enclosure of the subject, thereby opening it to a pure communication with its outside.⁵⁵⁵ In order to achieve this “immediate” knowledge, he proposes that ‘an equal and contradictory personal experience of prohibitions and transgressions’ is required—hence the possibility of grasping the ecstatic experience is dependent of a theory of transgression.⁵⁵⁶ Bataille suggests that a transgression does not remove a taboo; rather, it consists in suspending its law by crossing the boundary it marks out, whilst being aware that one is doing so. He states: ‘[t]here is no need to stress the Hegelian nature of this operation which corresponds with the dialectic phase described by the untranslatable German “*aufheben*”: transcend without suppressing.’⁵⁵⁷

554 Bataille, *Erotism*, 31–2.

555 *Ibid.*, 29.

556 *Ibid.*, 36.

557 *Ibid.*, 36, n.1.

Hence Bataille returns to a dialectical model in which, in the donational dimension, the “immediacy” of experience remains not simply given, but is constituted as *intuition* through the unification of the dyad that consists of the sacred (as *affection*) and the subject (as its *reception*). It is now evident that the *plane* on which the scission between sacred and profane occurs is not merely demarcated by the taboo that maintains their separation, but also presupposes the operation of the *Aufhebung* as the transcendental glue that binds the whole system together in its *unity* as one-Auto-Position. The immanence of community—which within this structure is identified with the sacred—is thus always-already divided, its putative “immediacy” the result of a unifying process. Consequently, Bataille's approach remains a decisional one, which despite what we might characterize as his efforts to think *immanently* inasmuch as he proposes to inhabit an immediate experience of thought, remains imbricated in a formal structure of transcendence.

4.3 Heidegger and Nancy: the differential Decision

Nancy, who as we have seen argues that Bataille's thought is bound to be recuperated by the appropriative economy that it tries to breach because it presupposes a subjectivity that derives from speculative Idealism, would perhaps broadly agree with this characterization of the latter's attempts to articulate the experience of community. Although he does not state it in quite the same terms, we might say that Nancy's shift towards a more Heideggerian ground is made with the intention of releasing “community” from its structural relation with the subject *a s a priori* condition for its reception. We proposed above that Nancy's critique of “immanentism” is largely in accord with Laruelle's critical analysis of philosophy's decisional form, inasmuch as it identifies the transcending “immanence” of community's essence as cutting the community off from “immanence itself”. On the basis of Nancy's framing the problematic in this way, we suggested in Chapter 2 that his articulation of community as ontological sociality could reasonably be assessed according to whether it succeeds in presenting community without similarly cleaving immanence—and we argued that despite positing its ontological priority, community's immanence nevertheless remains divided in his thought. We will now re-view Nancy's thought formally, in order to demonstrate how this scission operates as community's transcendental ground.

If Bataille at times attempts to think beyond the architecture of the *logos*, in its non philosophical exterior—identified at times with science, at times with religion, the erotic, etc.

—Nancy, in contrast, sees the task of thought to think *at* the limits of philosophy, deconstructing the latter by revealing the irreducibility of its relation with that which exceeds it. As we have seen, “community” is emblematic of this limit for Nancy, who suggests that we should ‘recognize in the thought of community a theoretical excess (or more precisely, an excess in relation to the theoretical) that would oblige us to adopt another *praxis* of discourse and community’.⁵⁵⁸ Hence the problematic of community is once again linked to the question of how one *practices theory*. Nancy’s response to this question is to assert the *finite* character of the communal experience, and hence the exigency to theorize community in a finite mode. Nancy’s appeal to finitude is largely derived from the ontico-ontological relation articulated by Heidegger—although Nancy reorients Heidegger’s existential discourse by emphasizing the social implications of this relation. Looking at Laruelle’s analysis of Heideggerian finitude in his *Philosophies of Difference* can assist us in understanding how the relation between singular beings and being-with, in Nancy’s thought—despite the rigour with which he resists attaching either term to the *a priori* form of the subject—remains imbricated in the decisional matrix.

Laruelle suggests that finitude, which functions in Heidegger’s thought as ‘a thesis of reality’, serves the purpose of critically delimiting “metaphysics” by bringing the weight of the real to bear upon its differential structure.⁵⁵⁹ He proposes that the place of the “real” is occupied by beings, which in “metaphysics” are posited in a dyad with Being as the *factum a priori* that constitutes the horizon ‘that we must have in prior view in order that we may accede to beings’.⁵⁶⁰ Heidegger’s critique of “metaphysics” targets the differential relation between beings and Being, which renders the former objectivizable through a reduction of their empirical particularity that is effectuated by prioritizing the idealized essence of the latter. In “metaphysics”, the relation between the two sides of the dyad is essentially reversible—as in the dialectical economy, where the immanent and transcendent terms within the contradictory relation are conceived as having equal value.⁵⁶¹ However, Heidegger seeks to articulate the essence of Being in a more originary way, which ‘include[s] in itself an irreducible dimension of withdrawal in relation to the object-being’; Laruelle glosses this as ‘precisely what Heidegger calls *Finitude*, which is the distinction of the being in itself in

558 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 25–6.

559 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 47.

560 *Ibid.*, 40.

561 In his analysis of the various forms of Difference, Laruelle includes not only dialectics, but also the idealized or Absolute form of Difference that he finds in both Nietzsche and Deleuze, in his definition of “metaphysics”; cf. *ibid.*, 43.

*relation to the objectivized or present being.*⁵⁶² He thus suggests that Heideggerian finitude can be understood as re-working the Kantian thesis of the “thing in itself”—now understood as the unity and distinction that reside simultaneously within the essence of Being, inasmuch as the latter is imbricated in a chiasmatic relation with ontical beings, for which it serves to differentiate the being-in-itself from its presence as object, whilst also transcendently binding them together. This assertion of the finitude within the essence of Being has the consequence of limiting the scope of philosophical reflection because, ‘[i]nasmuch as it is finite, the essence (of Being) is unobjectivizable in a real mode’, and as such is understood as ‘a real that is indeterminable ideally’; hence “finitude” can be understood as naming an irreversible intervention of the real into the syntax of philosophy, which renders its absolutely idealizing tendencies relative.⁵⁶³

Nancy repeats this gesture when he proposes the necessity of a finite thinking, where ‘[f]initude designates the “essential” multiplicity and the “essential” nonreabsorption of sense or of being’—which implies that finite sense comes to presence through/as an irreversible ecstasis that is indexed on the real.⁵⁶⁴ Furthermore, in positing “community” as that which ‘does not sublimate the finitude it exposes’, but rather is, ‘in sum, [...] nothing but this exposition’, he identifies community with this very ecstatic gesture.⁵⁶⁵ Hence, when Nancy suggests that community be thought as an “excess in relation to the theoretical”, he does not mean by this that it is situated beyond the reaches of philosophy, but rather that it constitutes the immanent or real “transcendence” whereby philosophy withdraws from its objectivity towards its unobjectivizable differential essence, thereby relativizing its claim to total knowledge.

However, because such a withdrawal occurs within the structure of the onto-ontological relation, whilst it delimits philosophy's idealizing claims it nevertheless remains within the decisional matrix. In the context of Heidegger's thought, Laruelle argues that the attempt to potentialize difference by insisting on its finite character, thereby interrupting the absolute symmetry of “metaphysics” with an irreversible instance of the real, does not achieve its desired result because it continues to suppose the invariant structure of the chiasmus between Being and beings as its law.⁵⁶⁶ Hence, although finitude modifies the ontological implications of the chiasmus by introducing the autonomy of the real into it, it does not destroy the decisional logic of its differential structure because ‘finite essence remains the

562 Ibid., 41.

563 Ibid.

564 Nancy, *Finite Thinking*, 9.

565 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 26.

566 Laruelle, *Philosophies of Difference*, 43.

correlation of Being *and* beings’, hence its undivided immanence cannot be grasped.⁵⁶⁷ Laruelle suggests that Heidegger appeals to finitude in order to avoid committing an idealizing reduction of the real, but that he reduces it nonetheless—in a “finitizing”, rather than idealizing, mode. The real resides on the side of *beings* within the ontico-ontological relation, although Laruelle states that the notion of “beings” is ‘fundamentally ambiguous in its generality’.⁵⁶⁸ The ambiguity derives from the “finitizing reduction”, which reduces the real by positing not ‘beings in their pure and simple affection’, but rather the relation of beings to Being—that is, the *presence-of-beings*—a *factum a priori*.⁵⁶⁹ Hence, because finitude is inscribed into the chiasmatic relation, the “real” is inscribed into Being as the ontic transcendence that delimits the illusory Appearance of the idealizing reduction. However, the *a priori* status of the relation means that the finite real remains imbricated in the differential structure, hence Laruelle characterizes the chiasmus as a still-philosophical amphibology, of the type that ‘*defines empirico-transcendental parallelism in general*’.⁵⁷⁰

To re-view this according to the terms of Laruelle's decisional matrix: Heidegger seeks to think the essence of Being, which he argues is obscured both by the everyday forgetting of the ontological, and by the metaphysical structures that render Being substantive whilst forgetting its essential withdrawal. Hence what is given as datum in the moment of *affection* is the essence of Being, which is always-already bound to the presence-of-beings that conditions its *reception*. Finitude thus comes to occupy both sides of the relation: on the side of beings, finitude names the condition for their coming to presence in an ontic or real, rather than objective, manner; whilst on the side of Being, it names the unobjectivizable dimension of withdrawal that constitutes Being's real essence. This withdrawal is understood as an “absolute transcending”, which is not theological because it is a ‘transcendence *in immanence*’ which turns Being towards the real.⁵⁷¹ This “Turning” is the moment of transcendental synthesis, wherein the essence of Being comes to throw itself “*Da*”, into the midst of beings—a projection that clears the space for the latter to come to presence. Hence the presence that is presupposed as the structure of givenness which conditions the affection/reception dyad comes to be posited as the transcendental result of the relation that it conditions; in this way, the Turning constitutes the *intuition* which posits the ontico-ontological relation as one-Auto-Givenness.

In the positional dimension, the *transcendence* names the instance that separates

567 Ibid., 44.

568 Ibid., 41.

569 Ibid., 46.

570 Ibid., 43.

571 Ibid., 51; 50.

beings from Being. The *plane* on which this transcendence occurs is that of Difference—which is posited as finite in essence, in the sense that both sides of the differential dyad contain a dimension of “real” immanence. The Turning, as the moment of transcendental synthesis, brings this immanence back to function a second time—not only is finitude given as a real instance that delimits the idealizing claims of “metaphysics”, but it also serves as the immanence that binds the dyad into a higher *unity*, whereby it posits itself as one-Auto-Position. Hence immanence appears twice, as both the real essence of Being, which is conditioned by the ontic beings that receive it, *and* as the transcendental unity that positions the ontico-ontological relation as ground. Consequently, immanence is not presented in an undivided manner; rather, as “withdrawal”, it is thought as an irreparable ‘gap or tear’ that maintains Being and beings in their essential disjunctive relation.⁵⁷²

As we have seen, Nancy adjusts Heidegger's framework in order to emphasize the originary sociality that is implicit in it. Nancy's notion of “immanentism” can be understood as a broad-ranging critique of any system of thinking that objectivates “community”—whether mediated through the *a priori* structure of subjectivity, or through another technological apparatus. He posits community, in contrast, as “an excess in relation to the theoretical” which necessitates a different *praxis* of discourse. His approach to this problematic is thus to posit “community” as the experience of finitude that resists the transcendence of the collective's supposed-immanent essence. He articulates this exposure to finitude as ‘*an experience that makes us be*’, thereby placing the *experience* of community in a position of ontological priority over its objectivated “immanentist” essence.⁵⁷³ The claim that exposition to finitude *makes us be* implies that nothing precedes this experience. However, this is not to say that the immanence of finitude is simply given—rather, it remains imbricated a decisional structure of givenness. In Chapter 2, we argued that although Nancy critiques the division in immanence that is instantiated by “immanentism”, his own thought divides immanence in its own way, on account of its chiasmatic grounding. As such, we suggest that, because Nancy's thought remains grounded in the ontico-ontological relation, it is essentially differential in its structure, much like Heidegger's. We will now use the terms of Laruelle's decisional model to re-state this in a formalist manner.

When Nancy raises the question ‘how can the community without essence [...] be presented as such?’, he gives “community” as an extra-philosophical datum—a “theoretical excess”—that it is the task of thought to grasp.⁵⁷⁴ He states that community consists in ‘the

572 Ibid., 50.

573 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 26.

574 Ibid., xxxix–xl.

immanence of a “transcendence”—that of finite existence as such’, and thus identifies community as a “presuppositionless” instance of the real that cannot be sup-posed, but only ex-posed.⁵⁷⁵ However, like Heidegger, Nancy situates this “presuppositionless” experience within the relation between finite beings (which he characterizes as *singular*) and Being (the essence of which is identified with the originary sociality of *Mitsein*); hence the immanence of the finite “transcendence” is still articulated in terms of a fractional matrix.

The donation of “community” as real instance is thus not a simple *affection*, but is rather conditioned by the differential structure in which it is situated. The “singular being” is posited in Nancy’s thought as *a priori* condition for community’s *reception*, thereby ensuring that Being cannot be thought in isolation from the ontic environment in which it clears itself a space to come to presence.⁵⁷⁶ Nancy states that ‘[t]here is nothing *behind* singularity’, and that it ‘does not *proceed* from anything’, which suggests that the singular being is *given* rather than *constituted*.⁵⁷⁷ Yet, he also proposes that the singular being only comes to be what it is through the mutual interpellation of its *compearance* with other singularities. Hence the “singular being” is not the simple affection of the ontic being in its mundane particularity, but rather the being whose *appearance* or *coming-to-presence* is conditioned by its relation to another, against the communal horizon of *Mitsein*. In this way Nancy, like Heidegger, enacts a finitizing reduction by positing not beings in themselves, but the *presence-of-beings*, as a minimally transcendent factum *a priori*. Consequently, the presentation of community as such, which Nancy poses as the *explanandum* in question, is offered as the *explanans* through which the question is answered. Hence, although the real is inscribed into both sides of the ontico-ontological relation—as both the ontic finitude of beings, and as the essence of Being that withdraws from “immanentist” notions of substance into the “with”—community’s “presentation” is dependent on an *intuition* that consists in the transcendental deduction of its presence from the donational structure already presupposed as its reception. This intuition constitutes a “turning” whereby community comes to be understood as the very essence of Being, which throws itself not only “*Da*”, but more specifically “*Mit*”, amongst the beings whose compearance it requires, whilst also creating the stage on which this same compearance occurs. In this way, Nancy’s presentation of community *as such* constitutes a

575 Ibid., xxxix.

576 This is why Peter Fenves characterizes Nancy as “a good empiricist”, in the sense that he understands how the “brute facts” of existence undermine all attempts at semantic control, to the point where a doctrine like “empiricism” becomes untenable—a remark that serves as an interesting counterpoint to those critiques of Nancy’s thought that we looked at in Chapter 2, many of which cast the ontological concerns of his thinking as occluding empirical concerns, for example in the arena of politics. Peter Fenves, ‘Foreword’, in Nancy, *Experience of Freedom*, xxxi; cf. *supra*, Ch 2.2–2.3.

577 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 27.

circular auto-donational structure which forecloses the possibility of reaching the simple affection of community *itself*.

In the positional dimension, the *transcendence* consists in the exposition of finite existence as such, by which singular beings come to presence. Nancy takes as a principle that finite community ‘consists in the *immanence* of [this] “transcendence”’, suggesting that such a finite “transcendence” should be understood as a *real transcendence*.⁵⁷⁸ Yet because the *plane* on which it occurs is the differential relation, its immanence—its reality—is divided: on the ontological side, as the originarily social essence of Being finite transcendence is experienced as a withdrawal and hence a gap; while on the ontic side, the immanence of singular beings is reduced by the structure of transcendence necessary for them to come to presence. Hence, for Nancy as for Heidegger, the real is not given in its simple and undivided immanence; its immanence is instead *constituted* as a *unity* through the transcendental turning through which it posits itself as the one-Auto-Position.

When, in Nancy's later thought, he adjusts the terms of his discourse, for example replacing the question of “community” with that of the (implicitly singular-plural, and hence social) “sense of the world”, he nuances this differential framework, but structurally it remains largely consistent—which is why, despite its shifting terminology, we argue that Nancy's *corpus* can be viewed as a largely coherent “whole”. For example, when he posits “absolute sense” as “indivisible”, this suggests an unlimited experience of immanence.⁵⁷⁹ Yet he articulates “sense” through a structure which (dis)joins the finite ontic experience of sensing-some-thing and the *question* of sense as infinite communal horizon for meaning. Hence the immanence of “sense” is not a simple affection, but is produced as unity at a meta-level, through the transcendental synthesis of the finite and the infinite—with the consequence that sense acts to co-constitute the immanence that it seeks to grasp. In this way, transcendence is formally inscribed into the structure of “sense”, and as such its immanence is only *relatively* absolute.

Nancy's reworking of “first philosophy”, which gives the “singular-plural” essence of Being as its ground, is also articulated according to a differential structure—which is again similar to that underlying his discourse of community. Nancy proposes that the three words “Being singular plural”, which can be arranged in various combinations, ‘mark an absolute equivalence’ in the sense that each term can be situated on both sides of the ontico-ontological relation.⁵⁸⁰ Being can be thought equally as singularly plural (in the sense that existence only

578 Ibid., xxxix [emphasis added].

579 Nancy, *Finite Thinking*, 5; cf. *supra*, ch 2.3.

580 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 28.

happens in-relation, as a *shared* horizon of meaning), and as plurally singular (in the sense that this horizon consists in the multiplicity of beings—each singularly finite—whose existence makes a world). In this way, the positions that Being and beings take within the decisional matrix—as *datum* or *factum*—is rendered undecidable, thereby prioritizing the transcendental *relation* that binds them into a dyad, and which renders the finite transcendence through which they exist possible. Nancy, arguably even more than Heidegger, emphasizes the ontical delimitation of Being that renders transcendence finite, and as such he insists on the existence of a “real” that precedes the possible. Yet he continues to posit two levels of difference: ‘along with the *real* difference between two “me’s” is given the difference between things in general, the difference between my body and many bodies.’⁵⁸¹ Thus the simply given ontic difference—the difference between beings *in themselves*—is thought in its relation to the difference between objectivated beings. Nancy makes this point in order to emphasize ‘that there has never been, nor will there ever be, any [real] philosophical solipsism’, in the sense that philosophy needs the real that is exterior to it as its occasion.⁵⁸² However, this “real” remains chiasmatically imbricated with the philosophical structure of givenness that clears the stage for its existence. Consequently, although Nancy posits the “appearance” of beings and Being as a simultaneous event which nothing pre-exists, the immanence of beings—their reality—is always already mediated by the difference that (dis)joins them to the communal horizon of meaning that gives their Being. Hence “existence” is not simply given, but is constituted through the mechanism of Decision.

Nancy explicitly explores this mechanism in ‘The Decision of Existence’, an essay that is proposed as ‘a partial study of “decision” in [Heidegger’s] *Being and Time*’.⁵⁸³ Nancy states that his intention is to engage ‘the *philosophical decision* from which the analytic proceeds’.⁵⁸⁴ He focuses on the mundane aspect of decision—that which is made within ontical experience—bringing out the ambiguity of the notion of “authenticity” in Heidegger’s thought by emphasizing the *existentiell* grounding of the Existential Analytic, thus demonstrating the fundamental position that the finite-real takes in the differential framework, thereby ‘render[ing] unacceptable any interpretation privileging a decision that would be

581 Ibid., 29 [emphasis added].

582 Ibid.

583 Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘The Decision of Existence’, trans. Brian Holmes, in *The Birth to Presence*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 82. This essay continues an exploration of the relation of decision to existence that Nancy had previously developed in *The Experience of Freedom*, 121–147. Here, Nancy links decision—that by which beings can either decide to exist (to come to presence in their Being) or not to exist—with the question of good and evil, thereby seeking to articulate an originary realm of the ethical as an existential “freedom” that would precede the practical reason of ontical ethics. In this way, “freedom” comes to name the *ethos* that Nancy calls for in his discourse of community.

584 Nancy, ‘Decision of Existence’ 83 [emphasis added].

taken in favor of (and on the basis of) something beyond experience [such as] “Being”⁵⁸⁵. This is not to say that Nancy seeks to reverse the hierarchy, to privilege the ontic at the expense of the ontological, thereby establishing a “decisionism” that would cut through to specific possibilities in the world; but rather that he aims to highlight how (philosophical) thought consists in the appropriation of “decision”, as that which decides *for* existence as such. In this way, he posits an order of priority in which existence precedes philosophical reflection, stating: ‘*above all* [this] is *not* to say that philosophy is decisive for the understanding of Being’, but rather that Being’s deciding to be what it is ‘is decisive for the “philosophical” gesture’.⁵⁸⁶ In this way, the “decision” that makes philosophizing possible comes to be understood as ‘the undecidable “object” par excellence’.⁵⁸⁷

Interestingly, Nancy notes ‘a certain proximity to, or affinity with, the manner and tone in which François Laruelle envisages what he calls the “irreflective affect” of the “Philosophical Decision”’, in the sense that the latter proposes that the question as to why we philosophize can only be answered with a gnostic “knowledge” that is nothing other than our very life.⁵⁸⁸ This would seem to suggest an “affinity” between the *existence* that Nancy proposes as preceding philosophical reflection and Laruelle’s notion of the real as radical immanence. Yet here again, we see evidence that Nancy’s notion of existence is not simply given, but given through the transcendental structure of “sense”. He observes that for Heidegger, the *essence* of *Dasein* is not found in an entity’s properties, but rather *in its existence*, hence ‘the “essence” [...] is in the “possibility”, what is “each time possible” for *Dasein*.’⁵⁸⁹ He then glosses the meaning of “possibility” by stating:

The relation to the “possible” is nothing other than the relation of existence to itself—

585 Ibid., 83.

586 Ibid., 84.

587 Ibid., 87.

588 Ibid., 401, n.6, citing François Laruelle, ‘Théorie de la décision philosophique’, in Cahier 3 of *Pourquoi pas la philosophie?* (Paris: 1984). Laruelle, in contrast, has seldom addressed Nancy’s thought directly. However, *Le Déclin de l’Écriture*, (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1977), one of Laruelle’s books from the period he categorizes as “Philosophy I” which precedes his “discovery” of the non-philosophical posture, includes a conversation with Nancy in the appendices. Nancy poses a question to Laruelle concerning the “readability” of his text and its lack of citations—the latter’s writing style already showing signs of impenetrability—and suggests that its auto-referentiality constitutes a parodic agitation of deconstruction. 245–6. Laruelle’s response, which indicates the direction his later experiments in non-philosophy will take him, is to state the problem he is addressing is that of ‘what usage [can be] made of philosophy (of theory) without making an idealist usage of the theoretical media?’ He concludes by suggesting that the critical point of his relation with Nancy and Derrida is around the work of signification—Laruelle is trying to construct and to practice ‘an intense deconstruction without the work of the signifier. Or moreover: a deconstruction for which the work of the signifier and the value of “signification” will no longer be, as for [Nancy], unavoidable’. 247. This suggests that, even prior to his invention of the non-philosophical method, Laruelle distanced his own thought from Nancy’s because he conceived the latter’s usage of language to be too transcendent.

589 Ibid., 85.

which [...] is what constitutes the unsubjectivable mode of the Being of a singular “subject”: a relation to the “self” in which the “self” is the “possible”.⁵⁹⁰

Hence the existence of the singular being which resists subjectivation, and whose compearance constitutes the experience of community, is understood as *relational*. The “existence” of the singular being thus denotes its relation to self-as-possibility—a relation of (in)decision by which the being become passible to ‘the decision [...] by which and as which its existence can make sense’—that is, “decision” names the advent of Being in the *Ereignis*.⁵⁹¹ Consequently, “existence” is not the simple affection of the real, but is *made* by the ecstatic transcendence-in-immanence by which it opens itself to presence. The decision *for* existence, for presence, for sense—being prior to any reflection *on* existence—can only be “known” in an irreflective “gnostic” experience that Nancy suggests is related to Laruelle's vision-in-One. However, because it is made in the differential relation, it remains an intuition that unifies an always-already divided immanence.

Hence, in spite of Nancy's avowed proximity to Laruelle on this question, the latter would undoubtedly see this “gnosticism” as a still-philosophical gesture whose finitude remains relative because it is grounded in an amphibology which constitutes the “real” that it seeks to grasp. Nancy's characterization of thought as arising out of an existential decision indicates that Laruelle's analysis of the decisional structure of philosophy is to a large extent legible from the perspective of post-Heideggerian deconstruction, which suggests that the *differend* between philosophy and non-philosophy—in its analytic aspect at least—is not absolute. Nevertheless, when we consider their respective approaches to conceiving “community”, the distinction between their practices of thinking becomes clear: whilst Nancy contents himself with situating community within the ontico-ontological relation, and hence in the amphibology between the finite-real and the transcendental structure through which beings *make sense* of their existence, Laruelle, in contrast, proposes that the real community is grounded in a radical immanence, the sense of which is given in a simple affection, prior to any supposition of givenness. Hence he suggests that ‘[t]he essence of the authentic community, that of individuals, is perhaps not reducible to a relation, even an originary one’, because the concept of the relation as such carries with it the idea of a reciprocity which propagates the circle by which Objective Appearance installs itself as authority.⁵⁹² Thus, perhaps counter-intuitively, he states that ‘*there is no communal relation*’.⁵⁹³ Accordingly,

590 Ibid., 86.

591 Ibid.

592 Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 158.

593 Ibid.

approaching community, as Nancy does, by inhabiting the philosophical Decision—even if this Decision is conceived as an opening towards the finitude of the real—is not enough for Laruelle. Instead, he proposes a non-relational experience of thought that touches the radically given, undivided *identity* of community. It is here, in the positive practice of a thinking that refuses to enter the decisional circle, rather than in its “critical” delimitation of philosophical reason, that non-philosophy establishes its *differend* with philosophy.

CHAPTER 5

Non-philosophy as positive practice

5.1. *The Axiomatic Suspension of Sufficiency*

In Chapter 3 we presented Laruelle's argument for the impossibility of a philosophically-founded community. Then, in Chapter 4, we expanded on the reasoning behind this claim by examining his analytic of Philosophical Decision, and using it as a framework with which to re-view Bataille and Nancy's discourses of community. We saw that whilst Bataille at times wishes to exit philosophy, positing an "inner experience" that exceeds philosophical conceptualization, the dialectical underpinnings of his thought mean that this gesture is ultimately recuperated by the system it aims to breach; whereas Nancy's thought does not seek to exit philosophy as such, but rather to inhabit the existential decision that constitutes its enabling limit. Both approaches to the problematic of community remain "decisional" and hence "philosophical" in Laruelle's terms, because they articulate the experience of community by way of a relational apparatus in which its immanence is yoked, one way or another, to a transcendence that conditions it. For Laruelle, such philosophical approaches, although they may interrupt the closure of the concept, do not reach community's *real* essence because their decisional grounding means that the "community" they posit 'remains stubbornly within the form of the circle' of auto-constitution.⁵⁹⁴ Thus, whilst philosophers like Bataille and Nancy might make the claim to have inferred a 'supposedly originary social link', Laruelle suggests that '[t]his is the last attempt of the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy to maintain its authority: the common, thought as a site, reformulates [...] the idea of a common sense that opens onto a space which is incommunicable by law'.⁵⁹⁵

The question, then, is how we might restore community's real essence, how we might present it in such a way that its immanence is not divided by Decision. As we have seen, Laruelle suggests that a change of basis is needed, that community must be founded on an unconstitutable experience of knowledge, which he identifies with the "subject-(of)-science" as "cause-(of)-thought". That is, he proposes that the problem is not that of community's *possibility* (as with Nancy, who characterizes the singular "subject" of community as 'a relation to the "self" wherein the "self" is the "possible"'), but rather of community's *reality*.⁵⁹⁶ Hence the task is to 'search for the phenomenal givens, that is to say the *realities*, of

594 Laruelle, 'Communauté Philosophique', 159.

595 Ibid.

596 Nancy, 'Decision of Existence', 86.

community and [...] cease to inductively elaborate its concept departing from its exterior'.⁵⁹⁷

Laruelle describes the subject-(of)-science, which is the basis of the “real” community, as:

a radical lived experience, an immanent or absolute given, that is stripped of transcendence and of worldliness. This means that it does not have to be socially realized, that it does not transcend towards the superior unity of the *polis* as does the subject of philosophy. [...] Its type of reality is an immanence which remains below the coupling of being and becoming, that is to say of their scission or difference.⁵⁹⁸

The essence of this non-philosophical “subject” is proposed as ‘a *One* anterior to the division operated by transcendence or decision’.⁵⁹⁹ Hence Laruelle proposes community's essential condition of reality as radically prior—preceding even to the “originary” social relation articulated by, for example, Nancy.

However, as demonstrated by the discussion with Derrida that we examined in Chapter 3, reasonable philosophical objections can be raised against Laruelle's claim to have found a more radical ground for the experience of thought and—which is the same thing here—of community.⁶⁰⁰ We might ask what distinguishes Laruelle's claims concerning the radical priority of *his* thought of the One—as compared to *philosophical* notions of the One—from a quasi-theological dogmatism. Read in isolation, ‘Communauté Philosophique, Communauté Scientifique’ does not provide a comprehensive answer to this question, and Laruelle's responses to Derrida's questions can appear as somewhat tautological—thereby reinforcing the impression of dogmatism. Thus, in order to better elucidate how Laruelle's approach to thinking “according to the real” might achieve a more immanent presentation of community, we will now begin to look at the positive practice of non-philosophy—that is, at the *method* by which it proposes to re-deploy philosophical materials immanently by developing syntaxes for thinking according to the One. As we elucidate the non-philosophical method, we will further explore its *differend* in relation to philosophy.

If, as Laruelle suggests, philosophy can at best figure the immanence that is its enabling condition as an *aporia* which resists conceptualization, then Laruelle's method for exiting the vicious circularity propagated by the philosophical Decision entails an axiomatic intervention into philosophy that suspends its Principle of Sufficiency *a priori*, thereby adjusting our understanding of the relation between immanence and the transcendent structure through which philosophy tries—and fails—to grasp it. That is, he posits as an axiom that radical immanence is the necessary enabling condition for philosophy (and indeed, all

597 Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 160.

598 Ibid.

599 Ibid.

600 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 3.2.

thought), then uses the posited priority of this immanence as the starting point for developing a new practice of thinking. In *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, Laruelle states that ‘the grounding axiom of non-philosophy [is] that the One or the Real is foreclosed to thought and that this is of its own accord rather than owing to a failure of thought’.⁶⁰¹ In *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*, he further “clarifies” non-philosophy’s axioms as follows:

- 1) the Real is radically immanent;
- 2) its causality is unilaterality or Determination-in-the-last-instance;
- 3) the object of this causality is the Thought-world, or more precisely, philosophy complicated by experience.⁶⁰²

Taken together, these axioms can be understood as a set of principles that both enable non-philosophical practice and demarcate the scope of what, in philosophical terms, we might call its “effectivity”. The order in which the axioms are stated is far from coincidental: one of the main claims of non-philosophy is that, by necessity, the vector of its thought moves from the real or the One towards the “world” constituted by philosophical thinking by way of a specific kind of causality which, as “unilateral”, is a strictly one-way determination.⁶⁰³ It is important to note that the “object” of non-philosophy is thus *not* the real, but rather *philosophy’s way of relating to the real*. Indeed, by positing the One’s foreclosure to thought as non-philosophy’s grounding axiom, Laruelle in effect absolves thinking of the pathos of its failure to reach the real—hence Laruelle’s claim to bring “peace” to philosophers can be understood not only in terms of ending the perpetual war *between* them, but also in the sense that his non-philosophical axiomatic allows them to be at peace *with themselves* because, according to the terms of the axiomatic, they no longer need to measure their thought against an impossible task.

Another consequence of the axiom of the real’s foreclosure to thought is that, whilst placed in a position of absolute priority as the enabling condition for thinking, the One itself cannot serve as the *material* for thought. Laruelle states: ‘[t]he One itself, being only in-One, without any content other than its own immanence-(to)-itself, for all its riches only possesses

601 Laruelle, *Principles*, xxii.

602 Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia*, 45. Non-philosophy’s axioms have changed through the different periods of Laruelle’s thought; for an account of their development, cf. Anthony Paul Smith, ‘Thinking from the One: Science and the Ancient Philosophical Figure of the One’, in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, ed. John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith, 28–30.

603 For Laruelle, as for Nancy, the “world” is synonymous with what we might characterize as a *philosophically constituted* experience of sense—hence “world” is used interchangeably with “philosophy”. In contrast to philosophy’s worldliness, Laruelle posits non-philosophical practice as opening onto “the non-thetic universe”.

the solitude and uselessness of the Real'.⁶⁰⁴ The One is thus understood as the *necessary but not sufficient* cause-(of)-thought; hence non-philosophy—while assuming the radical immanence of the One as its real cause—*also* needs philosophy as material for its effectuation. Non-philosophy's practice of thinking cannot proceed without philosophy because, rigorously speaking, the One is not a thing—it has no Being and so offers no “object” to be thought. Moreover, its foreclosure to thought is not anything so active as a *resistance*, but rather an absolute *indifference* in the sense that, as essentially undivided, it has no parts that could be differentiated from each other—except through the mechanism of Decision which cuts through immanence and then projects the phantasm of its own image, Objective Appearance, back onto the One. We note, here, a resonance with the question Nancy raises in *A Finite Thinking* when he asks: ‘[h]ow are we to think everything—sense as a whole, even though it's not as though we could *not* do so, *sense being indivisible*—in a thinking, within the limits of one trifling study?’, which suggests that “absolute sense”, being characterized by its “indivisibility”, might be identifiable with the undifferentiated immanence of the One.⁶⁰⁵ Nancy responds to this question by proposing to inhabit the relation between the infinite indivisibility of “absolute sense” and the finitude of *each* experience of sense (or, which is the same here, each *theorization* of sense) in a “finite” thinking which we have argued touches on the infinite at a meta-level.⁶⁰⁶ He thereby articulates sense in terms of a differential and hence decisional structure. Laruelle suggests that the amphibology between the partial and the whole forms the very tissue of philosophical effectivity, and hence it ‘[p]erhaps [...] cannot be *effectively* dissolved’.⁶⁰⁷ However, he further proposes that the amphibology ‘can at least be thought as invalidated under the conditions of the force-(of)-thought.’⁶⁰⁸ Thus, by suspending philosophical sufficiency, non-philosophy claims to bring about a thinking whose finitude is no longer imbricated with notions of the infinite. Hence, we suggest that Laruelle's axiomatic approach offers an open-ended method which answers to the need for a rigorously finite thought asserted by Nancy—one which will enable us to articulate a more immanent presentation of community than would be possible on the basis of resting within the “infinite finitude” of a differential notion of sense.⁶⁰⁹

Nancy himself rejects the idea that there could be a *method* for finite thinking, which

604 Laruelle, *Principles*, 139.

605 Nancy, *Finite Thinking*, 5.

606 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 2.3.

607 Laruelle, *Principles*, 183 [emphasis added].

608 Ibid.

609 Nancy, *Finite Thinking*, 29.

would need to, ‘on each occasion, [think] the fact that it is unable to think what comes to it’.⁶¹⁰ Laruelle, in accord with this, dissociates non-philosophy from ‘the “methods” fetishized in the artifact “methodology”’.⁶¹¹ We suggest, however that non-philosophical practice is indeed methodological inasmuch there is a consistency to it (despite various changes in the terms of its axiomatic description through Laruelle's expansive oeuvre) because the unilateral determination by the real that forms the kernel of its pragmatics remains essentially unchanged. As such, Brassier describes non-philosophy precisely as an “immanent methodology”, which makes use of axiomatic abstraction in order to ‘enlarge the possibilities of conceptual invention far beyond the resources of philosophical novelty.’⁶¹² It should be kept in mind, though, that non-philosophy's “method” necessarily mutates with each effectuation, because its syntax is each time developed out of the philosophical materials that occasion it. As such, the syntax is “real” only for the particular occasion that functions as support—hence each non-philosophical syntax is singular and strictly finite.

Thus non-philosophy has two causes: a *real cause* (the radical immanence of the One, which is necessary but not sufficient); and an *occasional cause* (the philosophical material, whose causality is contingent, and hence only relative). As such, due to the real's foreclosure to thought, it is—perhaps counter-intuitively—*through* philosophy that we accede to this thinking-according-to-the-real, by way of a method that might be understood as subtractive, one that suspends the validity of the transcendent structures by which philosophy seeks to determine immanence in order to let immanence determine its own, simple description. However, Laruelle argues that the subtraction or suspension that non-philosophy effectuates is only a secondary effect ‘of the positivity of the vision-in-One, the correlate of its transcendental or determining action’.⁶¹³ Accordingly, he states: ‘non-philosophy does not depart—in any sense of the word—from philosophy’, rather, ‘it departs from the One’.⁶¹⁴ Which is to say that, although non-philosophy's practice might begin with the selection of a body of philosophical material to be taken as its occasional cause, and might *work* on this material by analysing its decisional structure (as we have done with respect to Bataille and Nancy's discourses on “community”), all of this is only made possible by the axiomatic postulation that the immanence of the One is the real cause-(of)-thought.⁶¹⁵ Thus, as we have said, the purpose of analysing the chosen philosophical system's decisional grounds is not to

610 Ibid., 15.

611 Laruelle, *Principles*, 180.

612 Brassier, ‘Axiomatic Heresy’, 24–5.

613 Laruelle, *Principles*, 167.

614 Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 3.

615 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 4.2–4.3.

intervene in the philosophical argument by refuting it or even delimiting it—rather, it is to take the given philosophy *with* all of its claims, but to change our “vision” of it so that we can recognize it as a merely contingent material that is transcendently equal with all other Decisions in its (non-)relation with the Real. In this way, philosophy is subjected to a transcendental reduction that allows it to be taken as an “object” of thought, and thus comes to fulfil the function of “support” for a non-philosophical (i.e. non-*decisional*) thinking.

As we have seen, Laruelle characterizes philosophy in general as amphibological, as comprising a mixture between immanence and transcendence, which he also refers to as a “*mixte*”. From one philosophy to the next the exact constitution of this mixture varies, but in each case a dyad can be identified, in which immanence is divided between the empirical and the transcendental, thus constituting an “empirico-transcendental parallelism”. This means that Laruelle does not cast philosophy as a *purely* transcendent practice, one which would relate to the real in a simply mimetic or reflective fashion (such as in the “classical model” that Nancy suggests “critique” might unconsciously subject to, in which appearance and reality are opposed); rather, understood as a mixture of immanence and transcendence, *philosophy is also part of the real*—even if the self-occluding nature of its founding Decision prevents it from fully recognizing the form that this participation takes.⁶¹⁶ As we saw in our account of his discussion with Derrida, Laruelle proposes that philosophy’s *resistance* to non-philosophy’s view of its auto-presentation (i.e. non-philosophy’s identification of the PSP) is *necessary* as a reference for non-philosophy. This resistance is understood to belong to the *reality* of philosophy—and Laruelle claims to provide the means of analysing both philosophy’s resistance and its reality ‘without simply denying them’.⁶¹⁷ By recognizing philosophical resistance as real, Laruelle grants it a *relative autonomy*, and as such does not attempt to alter the materials it provides in any way—for example by “deconstructing” them. Instead, his method is that of a ‘*transcendental cloning and a dualysis* of the philosophical materials’, which conserves the terms of the *mixte* but allows them to be “unilaterally determined” by the One.⁶¹⁸ Cloning, which can be understood as the kernel of non-philosophical practice, is thus the mechanism that brings about the non-philosophical causality stated in the second axiom listed above—that of determination-in-the-last-instance (DLI), which Laruelle defines as ‘the fundamental concept of non-philosophy.’⁶¹⁹

As we have stated, the One, as foreclosed to thought, assumes the position within non-

616 Cf. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 54; cf. *supra*, Ch. 3.3.

617 Laruelle, *Principles*, 58.

618 *Ibid.*, 186.

619 *Ibid.*, 121.

philosophy as the latter's necessary or *a priori* condition; however, in its axiomatically postulated radical passivity and absence of content, it lacks the ability (and indeed, the motivation) to manifest *itself*. However, Laruelle suggests that whilst the act of manifestation may not be a trait of the One's essence, the latter is nevertheless susceptible to tolerating a “last relation” to the empirical (i.e. philosophical) material that occasions its non-philosophical presentation, albeit whilst maintaining its essential “transcendental indifference” to the latter. Hence, in order for the One to “act” as the real cause of thought, whilst remaining “in-One” (that is, without exiting from or alienating itself in this act), non-philosophy produces a clone of it, a ‘One “in-the-last-instance” which acts in the “intermediary” instance’ of its presentation.⁶²⁰ This “intermediary instance” is the *force-(of)-thought* which Laruelle posits as ‘the “key” to the possibility of non-philosophy’.⁶²¹ The clone thus acts as concrete bearer of the causality of the One as Determination-in-the-last-instance; it constitutes the “subject” of non-philosophy, a subjectivity that is understood not in phenomenological terms, but as a simple function or organon of thought.

Just as non-philosophy has two causes, so its method can be seen from two sides: from the side of the philosophy that occasions it, it is a “dualysis”; whereas on the side of *identity* (i.e. on the non-philosophical side) it is a “cloning”. This difference in terms indicates that the *differend* between the philosophical and non-philosophical views, which we identified in Chapter 3, is recognized—and indeed maintained—right at the core of non-philosophy's pragmatics.⁶²² The analysis of the philosophical material's decisional structure allows it to be viewed as a mixture of immanence and transcendence. Non-philosophy does not seek to resolve the difference between its constituent parts in a unifying synthesis, because the One's absolute indifference means that it does not in any way *negate* the reality of the philosophical mixture; rather, it maintains the separation between the real and transcendent elements of the *mixte*, viewing its structure as a “dual”. Hence it “dualyses” philosophy, allowing the transcendence that is intrinsically resistant to the vision-in-One its relative autonomy, whilst freeing the immanent part of the mixture to identify with the determining reality of the One. Laruelle names the transcendent part that resists the One as a “non(-One)” which, as one side of the dual structure, opposes itself to the One.⁶²³ He notes that, conceived in this way, non-philosophy's method ‘seems to correspond through-and-through with the mixed-form of philosophy and simply to negate or replace it.’⁶²⁴ From a philosophical perspective, dualysis

620 Ibid., 122.

621 Ibid., 149.

622 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 3.2.

623 Laruelle, *Principles*, 144.

624 Ibid., 186.

appears as an act of differentiation which cuts through its object, and thus as a return to the very logic of scissiparity that Laruelle diagnoses as philosophy's problematically divisive essence. However, viewed from the side of the One, the immanence of the real is understood to be *already* separate from the whole realm of separation that is inaugurated by Decision. The One is thus axiomatically described as *separate-without-separation*—any active separation only occurring on the side of transcendence, which removes itself from radical immanence, from the inseparable itself. Thus, in order to grasp the strange positivity of unilateral causality, it is necessary to view it from the non-philosophical side, as *cloning*.

As we have said, the clone is proposed as an “intermediary instance” which is non-philosophy's solution to the problem created by its axiomatic postulation of the One's absolute foreclosure to thought. Laruelle posits this intermediary function as a “One in-the-last-instance”, and hence as a clone *of the One*. However, because the One has no content, *what* the clone “copies” in order to manifest itself is the terms of the philosophical *mixte*; in this way, non-philosophy extracts the terms of its syntax from philosophy. Hence, from the philosophical side, which resists the vision-in-One, it will appear as a clone *of the material*, a mimetic copy that is merely *attributed* with a different causal structure in an arbitrary and dogmatic manner. Whereas, from the non-philosophical side, the clone is understood as the organon that allows the *mixte* to be viewed according to the real causality that already inheres within it, its radical givenness. The clone thus brings about the determination of whatever object=X the philosophical material purports to grasp—but according to the immanence of this “X”, which is given as the *a priori* condition for the philosophical mixture, rather than through the structure of transcendence that decisionally co-constitutes its philosophically-supposed “reality”. Consequently, the intermediary action of the clone effectively allows the object=X to determine *itself* in-the-last-instance. That is, while the term “X” may be extracted from the thought-world, it determines itself only according to the last-relation tolerated by the real, which is itself ‘not an “instance” or a “sphere” [...] insofar as, by definition, it does not belong to the thought-world’.⁶²⁵ In this way, the clone effectuates the unilateral causality posited in the second axiom, which moves from the real towards the thought-world without return. This unilateral determination allows the ontic being=X to be experienced as identical-in-the-last-instance with its “concept”, on the condition that the sufficiency of the latter is suspended by the organon; thus philosophy's thought-world is “complicated by experience”, as stated in axiom 3.

625 François Laruelle, *Introduction to Non-Marxism*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith, (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2015), 46.

The clone can be understood as a minimally mimetic structure inasmuch as, due to the One's absolute indifference, the clone is not the One "itself", but rather the necessary *condition* for thinking or viewing "in-One"; thus it is also called the "(non-) One". Considered as dualism, non-philosophy's pragmatics thus appear as having two parts which form a structural isomorphy: the non (-One) and the (non-) One reflecting each other. From this perspective, non-philosophy seems to constitute a reversible structure that includes a level of transcendence—much like the chiasmatic relationality that Laruelle critiques in Heidegger's thought, and in philosophy more generally.⁶²⁶ However, perceived from the "side" of the One (which is not really a "side", because the One, as the *a priori* transcendental condition for *all* thought, does not take sides), the clone does not *copy* the object=X from the non (-One), but simply enacts a shift in *stance* that enables it to be *seen-in-One*. Laruelle states:

"to-see-everything-in-One" is not to find images or representations of these things in the One as through a mirror. *The images-of-X, its "intentions", are grasped not "in" the One but only in the mode of the One and not in the mode of an image or a transcendence in general reflecting and redoubling itself.* This "image" exists *once*, not a second time or redoubled in the One under the form of another image.⁶²⁷

Hence rather than a mirror, the organon functions more like a lens that *refracts* the One's immanent causality.⁶²⁸ This "lens" is needed because the One, in its radical indifference to Being, does not project its causality beyond itself—it is not the cause *of...*; however, the One tolerates being refracted as the cause *for...*, through the intermediary instance of the non-philosophical organon which determines X in-the-last-instance. This determination is thus not a re-presentation, but a simple presentation of the object=X according to its immanent cause. Laruelle calls this simple mode of presentation "non-thetic" inasmuch as—unlike the decisionally-grounded philosophical concept—it *does not position itself*, but merely appears according to its immanence. As such, non-philosophy's syntax is more properly understood as a "unitax".

Thus the non-philosophical organon effectuates a change in the way both the object and the subject of thought are viewed, so that they can be experienced as identical-in-the-last-instance. Simultaneously, this change of view also determines the reality of the epistemological mixture that occasions it—thus bringing about a theorization of philosophy that Laruelle casts as the "transcendental science" which constitutes a "unified theory" of science

626 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 4.3.

627 Laruelle, *Principles*, 125.

628 Galloway develops on the idea of non-philosophy as refractive or dioptric "lens" in *Laruelle: Against the Digital*, 133–50.

and philosophy.⁶²⁹ As we have seen, in his early experiments in non-philosophical thought, Laruelle had proposed developing a science *of* philosophy (or, as in ‘Communauté Philosophique, Communauté Scientifique’, a ‘science of research’).⁶³⁰ However, in *Principles of Non-Philosophy*—arguably the first full elucidation of his mature “non-philosophy”—Laruelle recognizes that the “special affinity” he had earlier postulated between the vision-in-One and science merely ‘revers[ed] the epistemo-logical hierarchy’, privileging science *over* philosophy in what was, ultimately, a philosophical ruse that continued to resist a genuinely immanent thought.⁶³¹ It is in order to avoid this last vestige of resistance to the real within his own thinking that Laruelle proposes the dual—which is less a structure than a matrix that serves the purpose not only of immanently determining the object=X, but also of determining philosophy’s identity-in-the-last-instance with the essence of science. The “unified theory” is not the same as a “unitary theory” which would produce a synthesis of science and philosophy; rather, it theorizes them in-One, *as* dual, thereby allowing both terms to enter into a new usage which ‘entails a pragmatic of science and of philosophy that takes them in equal and equivalent manner’.⁶³² This “new usage” considers both science and philosophy as phenomena, but brackets their claims to reality, thus—though the intermediary instance of the non-philosophical subject—they can be seen according to the *real* distinction by which they are already given as separate. Through the dual matrix, the force-(of)-thought comes to be seen as the *real cause* that determines both science and philosophy unilaterally, whilst each maintains its relative autonomy as a mode of thinking. Laruelle emphasizes, however, that philosophy and science are not determinations of thought’s essence, but only its provisions; as such, other regional knowledges could equally be used to provide terms within the matrix. He says that ‘[o]n this basis, we introduce democracy between philosophies and between philosophy and the sciences, arts, ethics, etc., and we give [...] an *a priori* peace to the “conflict of the faculties”’.⁶³³

Consequently, the possibility is opened of developing new non-philosophical syntaxes by dualysing philosophy with other forms of thinking and doing, beyond science. Hence, in the third axiom which posits the object of non-philosophical causality as ‘philosophy complicated by experience’, the “complicating experience” might also be understood as philosophy being introduced to another region of thought.⁶³⁴ This idea has been present since

629 Cf. Laruelle, *Principles*, 69–73.

630 Laruelle ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 149; cf. *supra*, Ch. 3.1.

631 Laruelle, *Principles*, 34.

632 *Ibid.*, 45.

633 *Ibid.*, 46.

634 Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia*, 45; cf. Smith, ‘Thinking from the One’, 30;

Laruelle's early experiments in non-philosophical thinking, but comes to the foreground in his more recent work where he proposes the conjugation of philosophy with other disciplines as a method for producing a generic mutation in both. For example, in *Philosophie Non-Standard*, Laruelle elucidates a 'new and perhaps final turn' in non-philosophy (now called "non-standard philosophy"), which amplifies the latter by setting it into a dual matrix which interlaces: 'media inspired by a determined positive science, quantum theory from which we extract the nucleus of thought returned to its principles, with philosophy as object of reference, [...] resulting in a theoretical form which we call [...] the generic'—where "generic" implies the extraction of the common essence of the genre formed by the dual, without however mixing its constituent parts.⁶³⁵ Laruelle's turn to quantum physics, which articulates the relationship between the elements of the dual by analogy with the quantum notion of "superposition", could perhaps be interpreted as a return to what he himself has characterized as the "scientism" of Philosophy II.⁶³⁶ However, in *Photo-Fiction, a Non-Standard Aesthetics*, Laruelle uses the same matricial framework to propose a conjugation of philosophy with *aesthetic* models, stripped of their own principles of sufficiency, in order to: "generalize" all the arts within art-fictions under quantic or generic conditions'.⁶³⁷ This demonstrates that, even if the matrix is informed by the spirit of quantum theory, it can equally be put to use in the context of other regions of thought, thereby supporting the democratic claims of Laruelle's non-standard approach. Here, Laruelle emphasizes the fictive, inventive and innovative aspect of non-philosophical thought, and the horizon of productive possibilities it opens becomes evident. He proposes the dual matrix as 'a new design for thought'.⁶³⁸

It must be acknowledged, however, that the possibilities opened by Laruelle's generic matrix are accompanied by certain losses, not least the possibility of claiming any certainty about the products of his conceptual apparatus. The dual character of the matrix—and hence the *differend* that is inscribed into it inasmuch as Laruelle posits philosophical resistance as necessary to its functioning—leaves the philosophical objections to its supposed "reality" intact. Consequently, the radical equality between regions of thought that Laruelle proposes as bringing peace to the "conflict of the faculties" remains perceptible only according to the

635 François Laruelle, *Philosophie Non-Standard, Générique, Quantique, Philo-Fiction* (Paris: Kimé, 2010), 15; cf. also François Laruelle, *Introduction aux Sciences Génériques*, (Paris: Petra, 2008).

636 On the notion of "superposition" as it is used in non-standard philosophy, cf. Laruelle, *Philosophie Non-Standard*, 61–2 and *passim*.

637 François Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction, a Non-Standard Aesthetics/Photo-Fiction, une Esthétique Non-Standard*, trans. Drew S. Burk, (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2012), 23.

638 *Ibid.*, 2.

vision-in-One; whereas from the point of view of philosophy (or indeed, of positive science, photographic practice, etc.), Laruelle's levelling gesture seems to be but an arbitrary supplement of abstraction imposed upon it, with only a putative claim to accord with the "real". For example, Quentin Meillassoux—whose own philosophical project is framed in terms of attempting to think beyond the *correlation* between subjectivity and objectivity, in order to make sense of the meaningfulness of statements formulated by empirical science about "arche-fossils" which provide evidence of 'events anterior to the advent of life as well as consciousness'—suggests that although the *content* of Laruelle's thought is to claim that the real precedes thought, and is radically indifferent to the latter, the *act* of his discourse, what it does, is quite the opposite.⁶³⁹ He states that Laruelle:

begins by thinking [...] what philosophical thought is, and then progresses to the Real. The Real is truly a notion of the Real that is dependent on thinking, and which is post-philosophical, elaborated from his notion of philosophy. The real order—or the order of acts, not of content—is manifest in the very name of Laruelle's theory: "non-philosophy". Non-philosophy is supposed to think the relation of thinking with a Real which precedes philosophy, but the name "non-philosophy" can only be constructed from the name "philosophy" together with a negation.⁶⁴⁰

Consequently, Meillassoux argues, 'what [Laruelle] calls "the Real" is nothing but a posited Real', and that he has 'only deduced what is necessary to think a posited Real, if we admit that this Real effectively precedes any position'.⁶⁴¹ Meillassoux thus convicts Laruelle of a performative contradiction, which is cloaked by the invention of a new terminology (unilaterality, determination-in-the-last-instance, etc.), and moreover by Laruelle's positing of philosophical "resistance" as necessary to the system. Meillassoux views Laruelle's concept of resistance as belonging to a lineage that includes Marx's notion of "ideology", as well as the Freudian concept of "resistance", and suggests that far from indicating the radical autonomy of *the real*, it is in fact a symptom of Laruelle's secession from any discussion with those who would disagree with his position—namely, philosophers. Thus, in terms that recalls Derrida's questioning of Laruelle's claim to have found the conditions for a "science of philosophy", Meillassoux argues that Laruelle reaches the position of the real's priority 'just by force, by a *coup de force*'.⁶⁴²

639 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 9.

640 Quentin Meillassoux, in Ray Brassier et al, 'Speculative Realism (Annex to Collapse II)', *Collapse III*, ed. Robin Mackay, November 2007, 419.

641 *Ibid.*, 418; 420

642 *Ibid.*, 420; cf. *supra*, Ch. 3.2. It is perhaps ironic that Meillassoux's argument, here, is so similar to Derrida's—given that the latter is a thinker who, according to the terms of his critique of "correlationism", Meillassoux would presumably position himself at a distance from in other respects. This does, however, lend some circumstantial support to Laruelle's claims regarding the "democratic" nature of non-philosophy

Meillassoux's objections to Laruelle's credentials as a “realist” are entirely philosophically coherent—in his own terms, Laruelle presents non-philosophy as a *redeployment of philosophical materials*, as such its pragmatics do indeed take the thought-world, and not the “real”, as its “object”—as stated in the third axiom. Hence, from a philosophical perspective, non-philosophy appears to relate to philosophy in a derivative and somewhat parasitic fashion inasmuch as it needs philosophy as its “support”. However, as we have seen, Laruelle claims that although there is a certain abstraction of philosophy at the core of his method, it does not *depart* from philosophy, but rather from the One. Which view one takes of non-philosophy's self-styled accord with the real depends entirely on one's *stance*. Thus, at the crux of the *differend* is a notion of *posture* which, despite the corporeal connotations of the term, indicates a transcendental disposition *of thought*. Essentially, to adopt the non-philosophical posture means to accept the axiomatic paradigm—a paradigm which Brassier suggests has been ‘constantly belittled and demeaned as un-thinking’ by “continental” philosophy—and to use it as a basis for experimentation in thought.⁶⁴³ Hence, in order to understand what is at stake in the choice of posture, it is necessary to clarify how Laruelle uses the axiomatic method.

Laruelle defines axiomatics as ‘the organization of a theory or a fragment of a theory in order to empty the terms of their empirical or regional contents and to explicitly reveal the logical apparatus that connects them and becomes through this their only contents.’⁶⁴⁴ Although philosophers such as Aristotle have reflected on possibility of axiomatics, Laruelle suggests that very few philosophers have used it as a method, except in an ontological sense that remains largely intuitive, as, for example, in Descartes' “*cogito ergo sum*”. In the sciences, in contrast, Laruelle observes that more complete attempts at axiomatization have been made—for example by David Hilbert in geometry, or Jean-Louis Destouches in quantum physics. However, he suggests that these scientific axiomatics have been produced at times of crisis, when new empirical and/or theoretical discoveries have brought the foundations of the disciplines which the axioms frame into question. Laruelle distinguishes his method from ‘a logico-formal, scientific axiomatization of philosophy’ that would try to reorganize philosophy in the wake of its crisis, which he suggests would be ‘an absurd project that

inasmuch as his proposed “thinking-from-the-One” not only treats all philosophical Decisions equally, but also seems to elicit equal “resistance” from philosophers, despite the diversity of their own approaches to thinking.

643 Brassier, ‘Axiomatic Heresy’, 28.

644 François Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Taylor Adkins et al, compiled by Nick Srnicek and Ben Woodard, 2009 <<http://speculativeheresy.wordpress.com/resources/>> [accessed 22 July 2014] 77–8.

misunderstands [non-philosophy's] irreducibly transcendental style.’⁶⁴⁵ Instead, he proposes axiomatization as the *primary and ordinary practice* of non-philosophy, which inscribes the first names of non-philosophy by suspending their naïve philosophical sense, ‘according to the “abstraction” or the being-separate-without-separation of the Real-of-the-last-instance.’⁶⁴⁶ Consequently, the non-philosophical usage of axiomatization does not constitute a project of philosophical—nor indeed scientific—*foundation*; rather, the axiomatic method is taken as a transcendental instrument to be used within the ordinary practice of thought.

Meillassoux is critical of Laruelle's use of axiomatization, suggesting that the latter appeals to this method in order to avoid having to answer his critics because an axiom is ‘something that can be neither demonstrated nor discussed’—thereby implying that Laruelle's axioms are merely dogmatic assertions dressed up in a lofty “scientific” language.⁶⁴⁷ However, as Michael J. Olsen observes, in mathematics Hilbert's axiomatic system is grounded on a formalist basis, whereby its truth does not depend on its verification by any kind of intuition—meaning that geometric axioms, for example, do not need to be “tested” either intellectually or spatially. Rather, ‘[a]xioms are true and their objects can be meaningfully said to exist as long as the deductive consequences of the collection of axioms do not produce any contradictions.’⁶⁴⁸ Hence, according to Hilbert, the truth of an axiom is structural rather than empirical, and Olsen suggests that the history of mathematics gives us every reason to accept this account. Olsen ultimately draws conclusions that are similarly critical to Meillassoux's, albeit critiquing Laruelle from another perspective—namely, for his appeal to an *experience* of thought that seems to return from this structural logic towards a dogmatic notion of intuition.⁶⁴⁹ However, we suggest that if Laruelle's axiomatic approach “fails” to escape from what Meillassoux calls “correlationism”, this is because there is a discrepancy between their respective understandings of “the real”. Meillassoux frames the problematic to which his own thinking responds in terms of how we might grasp the reality of statements concerning the physical processes and states that preceded life in the universe, but which are evidenced by material traces that can be measured scientifically. By highlighting the existence of such material traces, he calls into question the pertinence of human intuition for ‘grasp[ing] the in itself, to know it whether we are or not’.⁶⁵⁰ This implies that for

645 Ibid., 78.

646 Ibid.

647 Meillassoux, in Brassier et al, ‘Speculative Realism’, 421.

648 Michael J. Olsen, ‘Transcendental Arguments, Axiomatic Truth, Idealism’, in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, ed. John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 181.

649 Whether or not this criticism is relevant depends on the extent to which Laruelle's notion of experience is implicitly human. We will return to this question below; cf. *infra*, Ch. 7.3, and in particular 258, n.979.

650 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 27.

Meillassoux, the real that precedes thought is, at least at his point of departure, identified with the *material* universe. Laruelle, in contrast, clearly states that the problem to which non-philosophy responds is a *transcendental* one—namely, ‘that of *the type of reality*, not of the object, (“philosophy”, “science”, “art”, etc.) but *of the knowledge of that object*’.⁶⁵¹ As such, non-philosophy does not concern itself with material phenomena such as arche-fossils, or any other empirical data provided by positive science, because ‘[t]he only rigorous formalization of which thought will be capable *insofar as it is thought* is necessarily pure-transcendental rather than empirico-transcendental’.⁶⁵² Thus, any attempt to apply non-philosophy to data that are “empirical” in the materialist sense would mean putting it to a use that is extrinsic to its own immanent logic—a *transcendent* usage, which would hence constitute a philosophical recuperation. Laruelle's method may well be “correlationist” in Meillassoux's terms, inasmuch as it concerns itself purely with the reality *of thought*; however, we argue that this criticism does not necessarily disqualify the immanent validity of its transcendental axiomatic.⁶⁵³

The question remains, however, as to how exactly one *does* assess the validity of a thinking that presents itself as a radically immanent practice. Laruelle admits that there is no extrinsic reason for adopting his axiomatic:

[t]here is [...] no imperative fixing a transcendent, ontotheo-logical necessity to “do non-philosophy”: this is a “posture” or a “force-(of)-thought” which has only the criterion of immanence as its real cause [...] which contents itself to posit axioms or hypotheses in the transcendental mode and to deduce or induce starting from them.⁶⁵⁴

Indeed, any external necessity or finality that might be posited as an *aim* for non-philosophy would constitute a transcendent, and hence metaphysical, horizon which would compromise

651 Laruelle, *Principles*, 10–11 [emphasis added].

652 Ibid., 9.

653 Laruelle himself has never framed the aims of his non-philosophy in terms of attempting to exit from correlationism. Meillassoux's critical response to Laruelle is targeted, more particularly, at two claims made by Brassier in Chapter 5 of his *Nihil Unbound*: firstly, the statement that what Laruelle calls “Decision” can be read as ‘a cipher for correlationism’; and secondly, the suggestion that the unilateral duality of Laruelle's thought provides a more effective way of escaping the circle of correlationism than Meillassoux's own approach, which appeals to Speculative Idealism. Cf. Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 134; 149. Meillassoux rejects the first claim on the basis that Speculative Idealist positions such as Hegel's (which, as we have seen, epitomize the philosophical Decision for Laruelle) are not “correlationist”, because they ultimately deny any independent Being to the world that is exterior to the Subject; he refutes the second claim on the basis that Laruelle cannot prove that his “real” is anything other than a *posited* real. From Laruelle's perspective, the problem raised by Meillassoux remains very much within the ambit of the philosophical Decision, and is thus somewhat besides the point. In a London Graduate School seminar at Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 10th May 2012, when asked his views on “Speculative Realism”—a loose term for a collection of philosophical approaches to the problem of grasping the real in the wake of the “correlationist” critique of representation that assumes a central position within post-Kantian Continental philosophy, with which both Meillassoux and Brassier have been associated—Laruelle responded by saying that whilst it raises some interesting *philosophical* questions, from the perspective of his own immanent pragmatics, “Speculative Realism” is a contradiction in terms, because it is impossible to reach the real via speculation.

654 Laruelle, *Principles*, 198–9.

the immanence of its pragmatics (in this sense, we can see an accord between Laruelle and Nancy, inasmuch as both reject the instrumentalization of thinking that would be brought about by the imperative to answer such questions as “what is to be done?”).⁶⁵⁵ Hence, Brassier suggests that ‘the criteria for evaluating the worth of non-philosophy’s function [...] are not available to philosophers’; rather, as an immanent methodology, ‘non-philosophy can only be gauged in terms of what it can do.’⁶⁵⁶ This is to say that non-philosophy can only be assessed on the basis of its performativity, rather than on any constative notion of “truth” that depends on a correspondence with the empirical sphere. Indeed, whilst Olsen argues, after Hilbert, that truth can be deduced from an axiomatic system on the basis of its structural consistency, he also notes that ‘Gödel’s incompleteness theorems undoubtedly affected the aspirations of Hilbert’s axiomatic method’.⁶⁵⁷ Olsen does not develop on this point; however, we suggest that in order to fully understand the scope of non-philosophy’s performative effectivity, as well as its limits, it is necessary to take the implications of Gödel’s theorems into consideration.

Laruelle characterizes Gödel’s demonstration that it is possible to formulate propositions, within the axiomatic system of the *Principia Mathematica*, which can neither be proved nor refuted, as constituting a “critique” of the *foundational* formalist and logicist scientific programmes developed by Hilbert and Bertrand Russell.⁶⁵⁸ He finds in Gödel’s reasoning an “entirely positive” hypothesis: ‘that a science can be really exercised over meta-scientific “phenomena”’.⁶⁵⁹ By treating the meta-language of arithmetic in the same way as one might treat an ordinary language, Laruelle sees Gödel as having discovered ‘a first form of science-thought’—a non-foundational treatment of mathematical materials which sets a precedent for non-philosophy’s unified theory of philosophy and science.⁶⁶⁰ Hence, Laruelle sees the *theoretical* importance of Gödel’s thought as consisting not so much in its results (in *what* the theorems prove), but rather in its method (in *how* it does so)—and he seeks to universalize this method as a “non-Gödelian paradigm” by inserting it ‘*as simple datum in the transcendental problematic of the One-of-the-last-instance and unified theory.*’⁶⁶¹ However, we suggest that the results of Gödel’s theorems cannot be ignored, because his demonstration that a certain formal undecidability is inherent to the *Principia Mathematica* implies that consistency within a deductive system cannot prove anything beyond the limits of that

655 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 2.2–2.3.

656 Brassier, ‘Axiomatic Heresy’, 34.

657 Olsen, ‘Transcendental Arguments’, 190, n. 34.

658 Cf. Kurt Gödel, *On Formally Undecidable Systems in Principia Mathematica and Related Systems*, trans. B. Meltzer, (New York: Dover Publications, 1992).

659 Laruelle, *Principles*, 67.

660 *Ibid.*

661 *Ibid.*, 40.

system. The consequence of this, as R. B. Braithwaite elaborates, is that the “truth” of a proposition cannot necessarily be deduced from its correctness.⁶⁶²

Consequently, after Gödel, we cannot take an axiomatic system alone as a concrete *proof* of anything exterior to it—which means that Laruelle's axiomatic cannot prove that the real is radically immanent and foreclosed to the thought which it is said to precede. From a philosophical perspective, this observation would seem to reinforce Meillassoux's critique of Laruelle's “real” as being merely a *posited* real which cannot help us ‘to grasp the in itself, to know it whether we are or not’.⁶⁶³ However, from the non-philosophical “side”, such a critique carries the implication that the real which Meillassoux aims to think, which we have suggested is at least in part identified with the material universe, is a *determinate entity* about which it is—at least in theory, even if we as yet lack the methods—possible to make truth claims. Laruelle, in contrast, adhering rigorously to the immanent logic of the axiomatic method, insists that ‘[n]on-philosophy must remain an explicative theoretical hypothesis’.⁶⁶⁴ That is, if non-philosophy produces descriptive statements about its “object” that do not *position* themselves in a decisional manner, then these “non-thetic” statements must be considered as *hypo*-thetical—as being less certain than a thesis. Thus, despite the sometimes dogmatic impression created by his style of prose, Laruelle's axiomatic postulations concerning the One's radical priority for, and foreclosure to, thought should be understood to function according to the syntax of the ordinary scientific method inasmuch as it proposes hypotheses and experiments with them—which helps to make sense of Laruelle's claim that non-philosophy, despite the transcendental nature of its “object”, is ‘a science that is absolutely on the same level as the others’.⁶⁶⁵ As a *hypothesis*, the One is posited in an “as if” mode, whereby we begin by supposing that its radical immanence is “true”, and then experiment with the consequences of this hypothetical “truth” in order to enlarge the possibilities of thought—but *without* making any further truth-claims on the basis of the experiment. As such, in order for the system to maintain its immanent consistency, it is necessary that the axiomatically-posited real remains radically *indeterminate*. This means that the causality attributed to the non-philosophical subject in the second axiom—determination-in-the-last-instance—is a *determination by the indeterminate*, which cannot, therefore, be used to verify or falsify statements about the empirical sphere.

Consequently, Laruelle's axiomatic method perhaps seems not to yield very much,

662 Cf. R. B. Braithwaite, ‘Introduction’, in Gödel, *On Formally Undecidable Propositions*, 28.

663 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 27.

664 Laruelle, *Principles*, 11.

665 Laruelle, in Derrida and Laruelle, ‘Controversy’, 85.

inasmuch as it does not produce novel concepts, make any truth claims about nor have any effects on the world beyond the boundaries of its own immanent pragmatics. Nevertheless, it does have a function; Laruelle states that non-philosophy:

must not simply content itself with explaining effective reality, but must rather contribute to transforming it, or at least to making a new usage for it [...] and as such to be more than a verifiable or falsifiable hypothesis which we realize or abandon under the pressure of experimentation [*experience*].⁶⁶⁶

If we recall that, in the third axiom, Laruelle proposes ‘the object of [non-philosophical] causality is the Thought-world, or more precisely, philosophy complicated by experience’, it should now be clear that the “effective reality” he seeks to transform is precisely the *reality of thought*, rather than the empirical or material world.⁶⁶⁷ Thus, whilst from a philosophical perspective Laruelle's characterization of philosophy's structure as a decisional circle that cannot reach its object might seem to constitute a somewhat punitive critique, and his claim to have “discovered” the immanent condition for thought that is necessarily occluded by this circularity may have the appearance of a dogmatic assertion, he proposes non-philosophy's function as a “*generic degrowth*” of philosophy, by the ultimately rather simple means of rescinding its Principle of Sufficiency, whilst retaining everything else it has to offer. What is reduced in this “degrowth” is philosophy's claim to grasp the “truth” of the real, a claim that is revealed as a merely contingent auto-constituted *position*. However, the contingency of philosophical Decisions posited in the non-philosophical axiomatic also has a positive effect inasmuch as the transcendental reduction of effectivity transforms a given Decision ‘*to the state of a productive force*’.⁶⁶⁸ Hence, although Laruelle's axiomatic approach must admit a loss of philosophical certainty inasmuch as it remains hypothetical and determined by the indeterminate, what is gained by reducing certainty in this way is the positive force of *fiction* as a theoretical tool. Thus, whilst the dual matrix *under-determines* philosophy, in a positive sense it also produces new theoretical installations, which Laruelle calls “philo-fictions”.

It is the positivity of fiction produced by the non-philosophical matrix that we suggest provides an opportunity to present “community”, or what Nancy later calls the “theatre of the social”, in a more rigorously immanent manner than we have found either in the latter's thinking, or in that of Bataille. Furthermore, we suggest that Laruelle's notion of unilateral causality enables us to develop a vision of theory that no longer falls back into problematic

666 Laruelle, *Principles*, 11.

667 Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia*, 45.

668 François Laruelle, ‘The Degrowth of Philosophy: Towards a Generic Ecology’, trans. Robin Mackay, in *From Decision to Heresy, Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*, ed. Robin MacKay, (London; New York: Urbanomic; Sequence Press, 2012), 331.

assumptions concerning the opposition of “reality” and “representation”, which Nancy suggests the “critical attitude” is unconsciously subject to.⁶⁶⁹ Thus, if we accept Brassier's argument that non-philosophy's immanent methodology can only be evaluated performatively, on the basis of what it can do, then it will only be possible to assess the possibilities that non-philosophy opens for theorizing the experience of “community” by putting it into practice. Thus far, we have presented an explicative summary and defence of non-philosophy that remains a transcendent *representation* of its method. We suggest, however, that in order to elucidate the non-philosophical approach more fully, it is necessary to not only discuss it in abstract terms, but to experiment with *doing* it. Therefore, as we further explore the pragmatic possibilities of Laruelle's method we propose, in an experimental spirit, to accept its axiomatic matrix and to use it as a starting point for developing a non-philosophical syntax for community, on the basis of our chosen materials.

5.2. On the introduction of extra-philosophical techniques of creation into non-philosophy

In *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, Laruelle lists a set of “rules” or “procedures”, which can be taken as a step-by-step guide to non-philosophical pragmatics (although it is important to keep in mind that, whilst the procedures have been listed in a certain order, the vision-in-One occurs, in-the-last-instance, precisely *in-One*—hence they will ultimately be performed simultaneously).⁶⁷⁰ The exact terms by which these pragmatics are described has continued to evolve through the later phases of his thought; nevertheless, this early summary of non-philosophical practice is a useful starting point because of its relatively schematic format. It begins with a preliminary rule concerning the choice of philosophical material, and its “enrichment”. As we have seen, non-philosophy requires philosophy as its occasional cause; therefore, in pragmatic terms, it cannot begin without some such “material” being selected. Once chosen, the philosophical material then needs to ‘be “worked” in view of reducing it to the invariants that form a philosophical decision (Decision and Position, Reversal and Displacement, etc.)’.⁶⁷¹ Laruelle proposes that any statement or problematic can be reduced in this way, although he also states that ‘it is interesting to supply [non-

669 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 2.3.

670 Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 129–158. We note that the simultaneity we are suggesting here does not exhaust the meaning of the “in-One” in Laruelle's thought; as discussed above, this hyphenated term also carries the sense of seeing the image of thought in the mode of the One, without exiting from the immanence that is thought's enabling condition. Cf. *supra*, 159.

671 *Ibid.*, 133.

philosophy] with a complex material which will have undergone the maximum amount of deformation and enrichment’, suggesting that the contemporary philosophies of “Difference and Deconstruction” might offer such a rich source, because these approaches have already multiplied the dimensions of philosophical space.⁶⁷² He further proposes that ‘[i]t is possible to combine several philosophical decisions that are exerted, for example, on a single statement of which they are the interpretations’.⁶⁷³

In the context of this thesis, the problematic under consideration is that of “community”, and our non-philosophical redeployment of the concept will combine Bataille and Nancy’s respective articulations of community as a problematic that is situated at the limits of philosophy. The reason for this choice, as we have previously stated, is that we judge these to be the most “interesting” philosophical articulations of this problematic. In Chapters 1, 2 and 4 we have attempted to “prepare” these materials at some length, revealing the richness of their arguments—first through a “philosophical” reading that follows the deconstructive logic internal to the materials themselves, and then, by re-viewing them according to the terms of Laruelle’s analytic of philosophical Decision. It is necessary that the decisional structures inherent to the materials are ‘made to appear explicitly’ in this way, without losing the specificity of their use of language and structural logic; however, Laruelle suggests that this ‘necessary preparatory procedure [is] not yet a scientific and transcendental procedure.’⁶⁷⁴ Hence, although we have attempted to reveal the decisional form of our materials, we have yet to view them according to a genuinely non-philosophical syntax. Nevertheless, having elucidated the axiomatic logic of Laruelle’s system and accepted as a working hypothesis that thought proceeds from the real, thus rendering all philosophical Decisions contingent, we can view this preparation retrospectively as ‘already scientific-and-transcendental *in origin* because it authorizes a philosophically indifferent choice of decisions.’⁶⁷⁵

The reason that the structural logic and the use of language within the material needs to be preserved is that the non-philosophical syntax *for* the material is to be developed *from* the terms that occasion it. As we are taking two distinct philosophical articulations of the problematic of community as material, the intra-philosophical variations between them will determine corresponding variations in the immanent descriptions of “community” effectuated by the non-philosophical organon. Thus, selecting a multiplicity of materials, has the potential

672 Ibid., 134.

673 Ibid., 135.

674 Ibid., 133.

675 Ibid., 136 [emphasis added].

to generate a more complex syntactic structure, because just as the dual matrix suspends the sufficiency of its materials without intervening in their internal structure or creating a synthesis of its constituent parts, so too does it leave the heterogeneity of its materials intact. Consequently, if we are to subject Bataille and Nancy's articulations of community *simultaneously* to a non-philosophical determination-in-the-last-instance, then we must recognize what their respective discourses have in common, whilst also maintaining what distinguishes them. Clearly, the question of community is a point of convergence, here, as are a number of related thematics that Nancy develops out of Bataille's thought—such as the ecstatic relation to death, the *désœuvrement* of the subject that this ecstasy brings about, and the incompleteness in principle of the subject that this reveals, etc. However, we have argued that there are also significant distinctions between the ontological presuppositions that ground their respective philosophies, and as such, each of these terms is legitimated according to a distinct structural logic. It is important that we continue to recognize these differences as we proceed, because if we accept the axiomatic postulation of the radical priority and indifference of the One, it follows that all decisions are equivalent, and thus their re-description according to the One will do nothing to alter their respective identities. Hence it is not a question of deciding between Bataille and Nancy's accounts of community, but rather of rescinding the philosophical authority that legitimates them, so that the radical identity inherent within these representations is allowed to appear immanently. Laruelle suggests that the radical equality of philosophical decisions, whilst axiomatically posited prior to the preparation as the condition for its commencement, will not be rendered “*transcendentally acceptable*” until we move from this preparatory rule onto the pragmatics of the materials' non-philosophical re-description, which places philosophical decisions outside-the-real, and hence places their terms *in-chôra*—thereby releasing them from their relation to philosophical structures and norms. He states: ‘[a] text of non-philosophy is constructed around a word, a statement, a philosophical text’, and although this guiding-term might continue to function, to some extent, as a ‘pole of thematic unification’, it nevertheless ‘must stop functioning as a hierarchizing and ontological unity’.⁶⁷⁶ The vision-in-One will allow “community” to be determined according to the immanence of the last-instance, whilst its dualysing function will simultaneously grant a relative autonomy to the ontological structures of the philosophies from which the term has been extracted—and this autonomy will apply equally to a dialectical decision, a differential decision, etc.

However, before we are able to effectuate this placing-in-*chôra* of “community”,

676 Ibid., 137.

further preparation needs to be done in order to develop the particular syntax for our occasion. As well as detailing the methods for preparing the material from which the guiding term will be extracted, Laruelle also opens the possibilities for syntactic invention by suggesting that it is possible to introduce ‘techniques of creation’ into the material which come from other disciplines, ‘techniques that would be pictorial, poetic, musical, architectural, informational, etc.’⁶⁷⁷ As we surveyed the various articulations of community that occur through Bataille and Nancy’s thought, we observed the recurrence of a theatrical thematic: from Bataille’s fascination with the impossible experience of death as the limit case that necessitates the communal relation, and which simultaneously reveals the necessity of “spectacle” or “representation” in general; to Nancy’s articulation of society as intrinsically spectacular, with the space-time of community understood as a “stage” that is performatively brought into existence by the compearance of singular beings. We thus argue that the problematic of community is connected to the problematic of representation—for which the theatre acts as a formal model—at a structural level in these materials (that is, at the level of their respective grounding Decisions). Consequently, we propose to proceed by developing on this theatrical thematic in order to use it as a tool for developing our own non-philosophical syntax for thinking community. That is, drawing out the connection between “community” and “theatre” implicit within the material, we will experiment by “introducing” the concept of community to the “technique of creation” of theatre—in order to effectuate a mutation in both that will allow us to present community according to its immanence.

As we suggested above, the idea of introducing philosophy to other regions of knowledge becomes particularly prominent in Laruelle’s more recent publications where he develops the “generic matrix” as a formal syntax for conjugating diverse practices of knowledge, with the aim of under-determining philosophy and its claims to sufficiency. However, the idea is already evident in *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, where Laruelle outlines three different ways that such an introduction might proceed, which we will summarize using “theatre” as our example of a regional practice of knowledge:

- a) The philosophical material can be worked on by other techniques, on the condition that the latter have been adapted to the laws of the PSP. In this case, the extra-philosophical element—theatre—would have already been assimilated with philosophy, ‘i.e. submitted to the auto-affecting circularity that is the essence of every decision’.⁶⁷⁸ Thus “theatre” would be understood according to its philosophical description, and it

677 Ibid., 135.

678 Ibid.

would belong to the material, as either part of its content or its decisional structure, or both. Theatre's function within non-philosophy's pragmatics, along with the concept of community, would hence be that of an occasion; it would then be transcendently reduced to a support along with the rest of the material.

b) The extra-philosophical technique can also be used in a naïve manner, as a way of presenting the philosophical material, and thus also the 'finished "non-philosophical" product'.⁶⁷⁹ In this case, we could envisage theatre being used as a metaphorical tool for explaining both the problematic of community, and perhaps also for explaining the non-philosophical syntax. This would entail using the concept of "theatre" without interrogating it—either philosophically or non-philosophically—and it would thus 'remain in [its] original naivety and [would] not undergo any transformation'.⁶⁸⁰

c) The final way that extra-philosophical techniques of creation can be used is to be first transformed philosophically, as in example a), and 'then in turn treated as an other-than-philosophical-material with the aid of the rules that would be for this material the equivalent of what non-philosophy is for philosophy.'⁶⁸¹ Taking theatre in this way would maximize its transformation, allowing for the creation of a "non-theatre"—or, in the terms of Laruelle's more recent texts, a "non-standard theatre"—which would produce a "philo-fiction" in which philosophical sufficiency would be under-determined by using a non-decisional theatrical model. Laruelle suggests that it is necessary that the technical procedures of extra-philosophical domains be subject to both decisional auto-affectation and non-philosophy's non-thetic *a priori*s, in order for philosophy to become truly creative, as are the arts and sciences.

It is this third possibility that Laruelle develops in *Photo-Fiction, A Non-Standard Aesthetics* where, using photography as an example, he outlines his way of 'construct[ing] non-aesthetic scenarios or duals, scenes, characters, or postures that are both conceptual and artistic and based on the formal model of a matrix.'⁶⁸² The language used here—scenarios, scenes, characters—is suggestively theatrical, although it is noticeable that in general Laruelle seems to have a preference for other creative techniques such as photography, music, painting and poetry over theatre, which is seldom mentioned in his writings. We might speculate that the reason for this near-absence is that theatre is too closely associated with the formal structure of philosophy. As Nancy suggests, the Athenian theatre functions as a paradigm for

679 Ibid.

680 Ibid.

681 Ibid.

682 Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction*, 3.

‘our modern way of grounding the so-called Western tradition’, which involves a ‘triple reference: to philosophy as the shared exercise of *logos*, to politics as the opening of the city, and to the theatre as the place of the symbolic-imaginary appropriation of collective existence.’⁶⁸³ Within this standard conception, theatre serves as a formal model for the presentation of both the political and the philosophical, and so can be seen as the point at which these spheres converge and complete each other, thus producing the “immanentist” environment that Nancy’s thinking seeks to resist. If theatre is formally imbricated with philosophy in this way, then it might seem to be a strange starting point for thinking non-philosophically.⁶⁸⁴ Nevertheless, given non-philosophy’s claim to instigate a democracy of thought which brings ‘an *a priori* peace to the “conflict of the faculties”’, then rigorously speaking theatre should be considered an extra-philosophical technique that can be rendered as valid as any other—on the condition that it is prepared in such a way that theatre, too, can be viewed in a non-standard mode.⁶⁸⁵ Moreover, we hypothesize that if theatre does indeed have such a paradigmatic character for our understanding of both philosophy and of collective existence, as Nancy suggests, then subjecting it to a non-standard theorization will produce analytic tools that will be useful to us when we come to re-view the problematic of community non-philosophically in Chapter 7.

Laruelle proposes that it is of interest for all material not of philosophical origin to first undergo a reduction so that its decisional structures, its dimensions of transcendence and immanence, appear—‘a procedure which does not exclude [...] still philosophical “deconstruction”’.⁶⁸⁶ As such, it will clearly be relevant to examine in more depth Nancy’s

683 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 71.

684 In *The Concept of Non-Photography*, trans. Robin Mackay, (Falmouth; New York: Urbanomic; Sequence Press, 2012), 71, Laruelle makes an oblique reference to the theatrical model for philosophy, when he discusses Plato’s allegory of the Cave: ‘If ideas are given, in the cave, in the form of reflections or shadows, would they not, if they could be given directly to the sensible, give themselves in the form of photos? Platonism is perhaps born of the absence of the photo: from this we get the model and the copy, and their common derivative in the simulacrum.’ Cf. Plato, ‘Part Seven [Book Seven]: The Simile of the cave’, in *The Republic*, trans. H. D. P. Lee, (London: Penguin Books, 1955) 278–83. This suggests that for Laruelle, photography is a more adequate form of *philosophical* representation than the fleeting images of shadow puppets—perhaps because of the particular way that the photographic image congeals to become a “thing” with an objective reality of its own. This then allows the photo to be re-viewed as an *immanent image*, if photography’s principle of sufficiency, its presumption to an indexical realism, is suspended. It would certainly be interesting to investigate how the production of photographic images has changed the experience of “community” since the advent of the contemporary social media culture, in which social relations are often mediated by the digital proliferation of images-of-the-self; however, such an enquiry is beyond the scope of this research. Given that the social “appearance” under consideration here is less a matter of producing images than of an immanent experience of social space, we consider it more relevant to develop our own non-standard syntax for community on the basis of the theatrical model suggested by our chosen materials, than by following Laruelle’s penchant for photography.

685 Laruelle, *Principles*, 46.

686 Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 136.

analysis of the theatrical model and its relation to critique in *Being Singular Plural*.⁶⁸⁷ However, given the complexities of the theatrical problematic as it occurs in both Nancy's and Bataille's thinking, we will first step away from the specificities of their particular texts and follow Laruelle's proposition that 'every art form [be considered] in terms of principles of sufficiency'.⁶⁸⁸ As such, we will proceed by looking formally at how theatre has been theorized in the European tradition, with the intention of identifying the presuppositions of sufficiency that underwrite its concept.

Because the construction of the non-aesthetic matrix is organized around the question of an art-form's sufficiency, Laruelle suggests that the art-form should no longer be considered 'in terms of descriptive or theoretical or foundational historical perspectives'.⁶⁸⁹ Yet, just as non-philosophy takes philosophy as its material, '[p]hilosophy still serves to formulate [art]-fiction and enters into it as an essential part of its materiality'; in which case these perspectives still play an important role as material, albeit that they must be 'deprived of the excess of philosophy's pretensions of the absolute'.⁶⁹⁰ Hence our method, as we proceed—which is in accord with the working order of non-philosophical pragmatics in general—will be to begin by considering three theories of theatrical *aesthetics*, in order to formally isolate the philosophical principles of sufficiency at play in them, which must be suspended in order to begin devising our theatre-fiction.

687 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 2.3.

688 Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction*, 3.

689 *Ibid.*

690 *Ibid.*, 18.

CHAPTER 6

Three standard models of theatrical sufficiency

Our aim, in this chapter, is to analyse the decisional structure of theatrical aesthetics, in order to identify the presuppositions of sufficiency at their core—so that we might suspend them to develop a “theatre-fiction” that will serve as the syntax for a non-standard presentation of community. Theatre has been theorized in various ways within the European tradition, and as such we will examine three different philosophical conceptions, revealing three distinct principles of theatrical sufficiency. We will take as our first occasion Aristotle's *Poetics*, which is arguably the foundational theoretical description of theatrical aesthetics in European philosophy, and which provides us with a canonical example of a logocentric conception of theatrical sufficiency.⁶⁹¹

Following this we will turn our attention to the work of Antonin Artaud, who challenges the hierarchy between transcendence and immanence supposed by the classical model.⁶⁹² Artaud's ideas are relevant to our research because they resonate with Bataille's thinking on a number of levels. We will argue that despite his often strident rejection of linguistic signification and his aim to constitute a more “real” theatrical experience, Artaud's aesthetics are ultimately recuperated by the decisional matrix in a similar way to Bataille's inasmuch as they are structurally constrained by the presupposition that theatre is a representational apparatus, and thus have an ambivalent relation to dialectics.

Finally, we will consider how more contemporary performance makers have attempted to move beyond the representational paradigm by presenting elements on stage that are identified with the unrepresentable “real”, and will examine how Erika Fischer-Lichte addresses these incursions of reality by developing an “aesthetics of the performative” grounded in the active relation between actors and spectators in the performance event. The performative relationality she articulates corresponds in interesting ways with the idea of community as the staging of a shared space-time proposed by Nancy, and seems to challenge theatrical sufficiency in a more profound way than Artaud's reversal of the Aristotelian hierarchy.⁶⁹³ However, we will show that Fischer-Lichte grounds her understanding of this performative relationality in a notion of co-presence, which is conceived as an autopoietic

691 Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath, (London: Penguin Classics, 1996),

692 Cf. Antonin Artaud, *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988); cf. Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, trans. Victor Corti, (London: Calder Publications, 1993).

693 Cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain, (London & New York: Routledge, 2008).

feedback loop that is also decisional in its form—and thus constitutes a still-philosophical presupposition of sufficiency.

We do not claim, with this limited sample of aesthetic approaches, to present a comprehensive review of perspectives on theatre; rather, our aim is to treat theatre formally, in the same spirit that Laruelle seeks to isolate the kernel of philosophy in his analysis of its structuring Decision. Thus the history of theatre (both its theory and its practice) will be taken in a disorganized way, in anticipation of their being placed *in-chôra* when, in Chapter 7 we rescind the principles of sufficiency within these aesthetic theories and view them in-One.

6.1. First standard model of theatre: Aristotle's *Poetics* and the primacy of muthos

The word “theatre”, shares its etymology with “theory”, deriving from the Greek “*theasthai*”, to behold.⁶⁹⁴ This root suggests that theatre should be understood as a *visual* medium, as well as indicating a formal relation with the Classical conception of knowledge, which also has an implicitly ocularcentric inclination. However, when we turn to Aristotle's *Poetics*—a book that Samuel Weber credits with being ‘the founding text of systematical thinking of theatre in the “West”’, and also ‘the most influential, not just in terms of theory, but also with respect to practice’—we find that the visual aspect of theatre has a somewhat ambiguous status.⁶⁹⁵ Indeed, although a large proportion of the text is concerned with an analysis of tragedy—a form that is conventionally presented as a theatrical performance—it should be noted that the object of Aristotle's text is the art of *poetry*, which also includes ‘[e]pic poetry [...], as well as [...] the arts of dithyrambic poetry and [...] of music for pipe or lyre’.⁶⁹⁶ The prominence of the analysis of tragedy in the text derives from Aristotle's conclusion that it is a superior poetic form to epic; although as we shall see, this is not for the reason of its *spectacular* nature.⁶⁹⁷ By classing theatre as a “species” of poetry, Aristotle, from the outset, identifies it with a primarily verbal and/or textual medium, although the inclusion of music in the above list also suggests that “poetry” should be understood as an aural experience. Before entering into a deeper analysis, then, we can already see that theatre is

694 *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, s.v. theatre; *ibid.*, s.v. theory.

695 Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, (New York: Fordham Press, 2004), 99; 101. As Weber notes, however, this “book” was ‘reconstituted long after the fact, apparently from notes, and hence anything but simply complete or finished’. *Ibid.*, 99. For this reason, some of Aristotle's arguments seem to contradict one another, and some of his concepts—such as that of *katharsis*—have been subject to numerous interpretations.

696 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 3.

697 Cf. *ibid.*, 46–8.

here theorized as belonging to an aesthetic paradigm with more than one level of mediality.

The largely positive analysis of theatre that emerges from the *Poetics* can be read, in part, as a defence against Plato's critical view of poetry. In *The Republic*, Plato, through the character of Socrates, famously exiles the poets from his Ideal state, arguing that 'the only poetry that should be allowed in a state is hymns and paeans in praise of good men', on the grounds that the emotions of pleasure and pain excited by the poet's art would come to rule over the audience, 'instead of law and the principles commonly accepted as best.'⁶⁹⁸ In part, this rejection of poetry—especially in its theatrical form—is premised on an understanding of artistic *mimêsis* as the creation of a copy of reality that is itself a copy of the Ideal forms; thus, 'the artist's representation stands at third remove from reality'.⁶⁹⁹ Jacques Rancière elaborates that what is immoral, for Plato, is not so much the content of the fables, their nature as fiction, but more particularly the way that the theatrical setting allows for a mixing of spaces that ought to be kept separate. Hence, '[f]rom the Platonic point of view, the stage, which is simultaneously a locus of public activity and the exhibition space for "fantasies", disturbs the clear partition of identities, activities and spaces.'⁷⁰⁰ Rancière observes that theatre, which can be understood as a structure-giving form for the arts more generally, is linked by Plato with the form of the democratic regime of politics, which involves a similar indetermination of identities and positions of speech. It is this chaotic experience of space and identity that propagates the emotional instability of the population that Plato finds problematic, inasmuch as the breakdown of the proper partition between the aesthetic and political spheres means that the material offered to the theatrical audience consists of simulacra, and the audience may identify with these hollow images without recognizing that they lack a grounding in the Ideal forms. In contrast to such a disruptive aesthetico-political experience, Plato proposes an ethically good form of art, which Rancière describes as: 'the *choreographic* form of the community that sings and dances in its own proper unity', thus constituting 'the authentic movement characteristic of communal bodies'.⁷⁰¹ Hence Plato's conception of an ethical community can be understood as an organic one, in which the collective functions harmoniously as a supra-individual body on the basis of each person being designated a

698 Plato, *Republic*, 384.

699 Ibid., 374. Plato critiques poetry, and particularly the dramatic form of theatre, at more length in Part Three of *The Republic*, where he discusses the types of literature are suitable for educating the young; cf. Ibid., 113–155.

700 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill, (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), 13. Plato views writing as similarly disruptive of spatial partitions inasmuch as the written word is able to circulate, separated from its author and its original context, to be read by any number of anonymous addressees.

701 Ibid., 14.

proper place.

Malcolm Heath observes that where Plato's critique of poetry and theatre 'is based in part on a profound suspicion of emotions [...] Aristotle has a more sophisticated and reasonable view of emotions.'⁷⁰² That is, Aristotle's defence of theatre is in part based on an assumption that emotions are open to ethical evaluation inasmuch as, far from being irrational, they are responses to situations that are grounded in the understanding. As such, the emotional response to a theatrical performance is not necessarily a negative thing; indeed, it might be seen to discharge excessive emotion in less cultivated audience members, and hence to bring a quasi-medicinal sense of relief. This interpretation is suggested by Aristotle's definition of tragedy as:

an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the purification [*katharsis*] of such emotions.⁷⁰³

However, although the inclusion of *katharsis* in Aristotle's definition of tragedy has led to the widespread assumption that the excitation of fear and pity constitutes tragedy's *final cause*, Heath suggests that this is not necessarily the case, because such an effect would not occur for more virtuous members of the audience, whose emotional dispositions are the least disordered.⁷⁰⁴ Thus, despite the prominence of the notion of *katharsis* in the discourse of theatre, it is not here that we will find the Principle of Sufficiency for Aristotelian theatre. Instead, we need to examine the formal argument of the *Poetics*; hence we will follow Aristotle's suggestion that '[w]e should begin [...] by taking first principles first.'⁷⁰⁵

Aristotle identifies poetry, including theatre, as a 'species of imitation [*mimêsis*]'⁷⁰⁶ The conception of poetry as mimetic implies that what appears on the theatrical stage can be understood as a copy of something, and thus establishes a duality between the "original" and its representation. As Richard Schechner remarks, '[a]rt always "comes after" experience; the separation between art and life is built into the idea of *mimêsis*.'⁷⁰⁷ Framing theatrical aesthetics in this way thus instigates a "decisional" cut similar to that which Laruelle characterizes as the kernel of philosophical logic, and Schechner suggests that this presupposition of separation has indeed been "decisive" for the development of theatre in the

702 Malcolm Heath, 'Introduction', in Aristotle, *Poetics*, xxxviii.

703 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 10.

704 Cf. Heath, 'Introduction', xl–xli.

705 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 3.

706 Ibid.

707 Richard Schechner, 'Actuals', in *Performance Theory*, (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2003), 29.

West.

Aristotle goes on to propose three respects in which such imitations can be differentiated—*medium*, *object* and *mode*—which together form a matrix that organizes his analysis. The *media* Aristotle identifies as significant for poetry are rhythm, verse and melody, which may be used separately or combined together.⁷⁰⁸ He observes that in the theatrical forms of tragedy and comedy, all three are used in distinct parts. It is notable that spectacle is not included in this list—an omission that reinforces the observation we made above concerning the ambiguous status of the visual aspects of the theatrical medium in Aristotle's analysis. Of the *object* of poetry, Aristotle states: '[t]hose who imitate, imitate agents'.⁷⁰⁹ He thus identifies the proper object of theatrical representation as subjects (who in the classical understanding are implicitly human) and the actions they perform. These agents can be differentiated in terms of whether they are 'admirable or inferior', and it is according to excellence or defect that *character* is defined. The *mode* of poetic *mimêsis* has two main forms: the object can either be communicated 'by narrating [...] or else with all the imitators as agents and engaged in activity.'⁷¹⁰ The latter clearly describes *acting*, in the theatrical sense, and Aristotle indicates that this mode is preferable when he states: '[t]he poet in person should say as little as possible'.⁷¹¹ This suggests that theatrical performance is a superior form of poetry inasmuch as imitates in a more direct mode than, for example, an epic poem. Nevertheless, the question still remains as to exactly what role spectacle plays in this imitation.

Indeed, when Aristotle begins his discussion of tragedy—the only specifically theatrical form that is analysed in the extant *Poetics*—he observes that '[s]ince the imitation is performed by actors, it follows that the management of the *spectacle* must be a component part'.⁷¹² Spectacle is included in Aristotle's list of the six component parts of tragedy, which also includes 'plot, character, diction [...] and lyric poetry'.⁷¹³ However, the language of "management" used here is suggestive that the visual component is something that needs to be brought under control, and as Aristotle develops his analysis of the components of tragedy, neither spectacle nor lyric poetry are considered. He asserts that the most important component for tragedy, or indeed any drama, is the *structure of events*. Hence plot [*muthos*] is

708 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 3–4.

709 Ibid., 5.

710 Ibid.

711 Ibid., 40.

712 Ibid., 10. Aristotle promises a discussion of comedy "later", (ibid.) which suggests there was a second book to the *Poetics*; this, however, has been lost.

713 Ibid., 11.

placed in a position of primacy over the other elements, and its analysis takes up a large proportion of the *Poetics*. Reasoning that ‘the goal of life is an activity, not a quality’, he argues that the purpose of tragedy (and by implication, theatre more generally) is not the imitation of persons as such, but rather of the actions that constitute the *telos* of a life, ‘[s]o the events, i.e. the plot, are what tragedy is there for, and that is the most important thing of all.’⁷¹⁴ Plot can thus be understood to form the structural foundation for all poetry, inasmuch as the latter is conceived as a species of *mimêsis*; it is described as: ‘the source and (as it were) soul of tragedy’.⁷¹⁵ Starting from this “source”, Aristotle proposes a “ranking” of the components, in which the objective elements (plot, character, reasoning) take precedence over the mode (diction), with media (song, spectacle) the least important. Thus, as Weber remarks, ‘Aristotle defends theater against the Platonic critique both by devalorizing its material environment, the specifically scenic medium of theater—everything having to do with spectacle, with *opsis*—and subordinating it to *muthos*, “plot”’.⁷¹⁶

This hierarchical organization of the components of tragedy points towards the formal presupposition of sufficiency in Aristotle's conception of theatre, which, as we have suggested, does not rest upon its visuality. He states: ‘[s]pectacle is attractive, but it is inartistic and is least germane to the art of poetry. For the effect of tragedy is not dependent on performance and actors’.⁷¹⁷ Furthermore, whilst theatre's cathartic effect, its ability to evoke fear and pity in the audience, may result from the spectacle, Aristotle argues that it is ‘the mark of a better poet’ if this effect instead results ‘from the structure of events itself’.⁷¹⁸ Hence Weber suggests that ‘[i]n the best case, the medium will efface itself and thus be defined by the quality of being *diaphanous*, or transparent’.⁷¹⁹ This explains why the theatrical mode in which imitators directly perform the agents' actions is preferable to narration for Aristotle—because the latter mode adds an extra layer of mediation that is less able to efface itself, and as such, inhibits the audience's identification with the hero to some extent. The theatrical medium is thus construed, at best, a means to an end—that of the imitation of the plot, which constitutes the primary object and cause—and Weber suggests that as such, spectacle serves as ‘instrument, element, a necessary *but not sufficient* ingredient of poetry’.⁷²⁰

Consequently, we can conclude that the principle of theatrical sufficiency does not

714 Ibid., 11.

715 Ibid., 12.

716 Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 99.

717 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 13.

718 Ibid., 22.

719 Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 100–1.

720 Ibid., 100 [emphasis added].

reside in the optical or aural effects of its staging. Furthermore, as he establishes the primacy of plot, Aristotle argues that ‘there could not be a tragedy without plot, but there could be one without character’, in the sense that a coherent plot could be constructed that treated its protagonist impersonally, without developing on the individual characteristics that influenced his choices.⁷²¹ Given that character is second in Aristotle's ranking of the components, it is reasonable to assume that everything positioned below it in the hierarchy is similarly contingent, if not more so—from which we can deduce that, as the most essential element of theatrical aesthetics, it is in relation to *muthos* that we will find the supposed sufficiency of theatre. Hence we will now look at the *qualities* that Aristotle suggests the structure of events should have, to assist us in rendering his principle of theatrical sufficiency apparent.

As stated in Aristotle's definition of tragedy, the action that the plot imitates should be *complete*. This is to say that it should be a ‘*whole* [...] which has a beginning, a middle and an end’, where a beginning is understood as something that does not follow in any necessary way from what came before it, but which has consequences that naturally lead to something else; whereas an end is necessitated by what precedes it, but closes the action so that nothing is required to follow.⁷²² Also stated in the definition is that the plot should have the correct *magnitude*, because the beauty of poetry, as for a physical object, is influenced by scale. The minimum magnitude is that ‘in which a series of events occurring sequentially [...] gives rise to a change from good fortune to bad fortune, or from bad fortune to good fortune’.⁷²³ In general, plots of a larger magnitude (i.e. actions that consist in a longer and more complex chain of events, particularly those involving a “reversal” [*peripeteia*] in which the fortune of the protagonist changes contrary to the intention of his actions, which prepares the way for the “recognition” [*anagnōrīsis*] of their underlying unity) are considered preferable—up to the limit of what can be taken in by the audience simultaneously. This simultaneity is important

⁷²¹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 12.

⁷²² Ibid., 13. We note that the need for the plot to have a beginning, a middle and an end is not a prescription concerning the order of the *narrative*. If the underlying structure of events is complete, in Aristotle's sense, then the narrative may be communicated in a non-linear order, without inhibiting the coherence of the whole. For example, in the case of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*, which is an exemplary tragedy for Aristotle, the action that the plot imitates begins not in front of the Royal Palace at Thebes where the play opens, but rather with Oedipus' decision, made years earlier, to attempt to escape the fate foretold by Apollo's Oracle—that he would kill his father and marry his mother—by leaving his adopted home of Corinth for the land of his birth in Thebes. Cf. Sophocles, ‘King Oedipus’, in *The Theban Plays*, trans. E. F. Watling, (London: Penguin Books, 1947), 24–5. The audience would have been familiar with the myth of Oedipus prior to seeing Sophocles' play, hence the truth that is gradually revealed to the hero would not have come as a surprise. As such, we can see that the cathartic evocation of fear and pity is not dependent on a mystery being revealed to the audience, but rather on their identification with the shock of the protagonist at his change of fortune, which is heightened by the audience's prior knowledge of the underlying truth of the *muthos* adding the intensity of expectation to Oedipus' tragic predicament.

⁷²³ Ibid., 14.

because the plot should be *unified*, by which Aristotle means that it should represent a single action, which is also whole.⁷²⁴ He emphasizes that the unity of the plot is not determined by its being about a single *person*, but rather by the sequence of events following one another as the necessary—or at least probable—consequences of the beginning. From this it follows that the drama should have a *determinate structure*, in which each event is necessary to the unfolding of the plot such that ‘the transposition or removal of any one section dislocates and changes the whole.’⁷²⁵ This means that anything that does not exert a discernible effect on the progression of events is excessive to the plot, and cannot be said to belong to the whole. Finally, Aristotle proposes that the plot should be *universal*, which is to say that the action represented should not depend on the peculiarities of the particular character concerned, but should rather show what a character of that type *would* do, according to necessity or probability, in the given situation.⁷²⁶

We can thus see that the poet constructs the plot—the presentation of which serves as the end, the final cause, of poetic *mimêsis*—according to a highly refined formal model, which is characterized by unity, wholeness and universality, and thus has a determinate structure that is teleological in essence. If a plot is correctly conceived, conforming to these characteristics, Aristotle suggests that it will have the effect of arousing the desired emotions of fear and pity in the audience, irrespective of whether it is actually staged. If, to the contrary, the plot is defective in one or more of these aspects, then no matter how elegant the staging, it will not have such effect. Moreover, a spectacle lacking such rational structural foundations would present groundless simulacra for the audience to identify with, in accord with Plato's critical stance on theatre. In this sense, although Aristotle undoubtedly has a more sophisticated and balanced understanding of emotions than Plato, his defence of theatre as a mimetic art remains premised on a partition of space and identity that is not far removed from that promoted by his predecessor. If theatre can be seen, in Aristotle's terms, to have a place in the ethical society, this is on the condition that it fulfils a mimetic function, and that the object it imitates has a structural integrity such that the action can be universally recognized as virtuous. Hence, the *quality* attributed to theatrical *mimêsis* has nothing to do with the fidelity of the imitation to real-world events, but rather its fidelity to the Ideals that inform the contemporary Athenian society. In this way, Aristotle's formal analysis of what makes “good” theatre entails a subordination of the theatrical medium to a formal, *philosophically* constructed notion of virtue which is inseparable from a presupposition that the *community*

724 Ibid., 15.

725 Ibid.

726 Ibid., 16–17.

constituted by the audience finds harmony in its organic unity.

Theatrical *mimêsis* is thus structurally imbricated with *logos*. This corresponds with a general observation made by Laruelle about standard aesthetic discourses—that between art and aesthetics there are “reciprocal projections”, so that aesthetics is always conceived as ‘a carbon copy of art in philosophy’.⁷²⁷ For Laruelle, this form of imitation does not constitute a *real identity* of art and aesthetics, because the former is over-determined by the latter; hence art comes to be understood as ‘a deficient modality of philosophy’.⁷²⁸ Thus the mimetic relation between the poetic object and its theatrical presentation is underwritten by a supposed mimetic relation between theatre, and the aesthetic discourse that legitimates its practice by defining its essential qualities. In order to make this apparent, we will now re-view the discussion of tragedy in Aristotle's *Poetics* using the terms of Laruelle's decisional matrix.⁷²⁹

In the donational dimension, Aristotle gives tragedy as an empirical datum for aesthetic consideration. He posits it as a form of *mimêsis*, and identifies six characteristic components, which include objective, modal and medial elements. Together, these components constitute the complex phenomenality of tragedy, as it is presented on the stage. However, this *affection* is not a simple one, because the *reception* of the theatrical phenomenon is conditioned by its components being placed into a hierarchy in which the plot is posited *a priori* as both the necessary foundational element and the final cause—‘what tragedy is there for, and the most important thing of all’.⁷³⁰ The plot, which is thus considered as the primary object of the imitation, consists in the structure of the events that underpin the action on stage, which together constitute a unified and complete action; it can be considered as a transcendent element inasmuch as Aristotle separates it from the phenomenological experience of tragedy—its presentation through the medium of theatre—and treats it as a self-sufficient entity on the basis of which the aesthetic quality of the whole experience is to be judged. He thereby places the means (the theatrical medium) and the end (the *muthos*) into a dyadic relationship. He stipulates the qualities that the plot should possess: unity, magnitude, completeness, determinate structure, and universality; taken together, these constitute the formal codes, the *factum a priori*, of Aristotle's aesthetics, which condition the reception of the theatrical spectacle. The role of the poet is thus not only to produce an imitation, but to first constitute the “original” being imitated as an object, in fidelity to a philosophically determined transcendent form. If the imitation is not deficient (i.e. if it conforms to the *a*

727 Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction*, 4.

728 Ibid.

729 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 4.1, 128.

730 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 11.

priori codes of the transcendent factum), then the *intuition* of the audience will be able to synthesize all the components of the tragic performance into a higher *unity*, thereby rendering the Dyad of *muthos*/medium concrete on the basis of the transcendent term.

Thus, the *recognition* of the underlying unity of the action brought about by the tragic reversal of the agent's fortunes functions simultaneously to efface the inessential components of the performance—its media and mode—and to give a higher value to them as part of a synthetically constituted whole. In this way, the poet's craft as aesthetic creator is simultaneously a *philosophical* labour. In this way, tragedy is *positioned* upon a philosophical base by Aristotle's aesthetic discourse; and it is this philosophical grounding that makes a well-crafted tragic plot “good”—not only in terms of it being aesthetically effective, but also in the sense that it is virtuous. It is upon this philosophical *plane* that the *transcendence* occurs, which separates the *a priori* formal necessities to which a good plot must conform from the details of the particular action being imitated, by identifying the former with a set of Ideals that are exterior to the contingencies of worldly existence. Finally, just as object and medium are unified by the intuition in the donational dimension, so too are these transcendent Ideals synthesized into a higher *unity* as Dyad.

Thus in both its donational and positional dimensions, Aristotle's aesthetic discourse subordinates what is specifically “theatrical” about tragedy—both the mediality of its staging, and the dramatic particularities of each specific plot—to an idealized formal paradigm. As we have suggested, Aristotle's statement that ‘the effect of tragedy is not dependent on performance and actors’ already suggests that the *sufficient* ground for judging the aesthetic value of a theatrical production lays with its primary object and final cause—the *muthos*.⁷³¹ Having analysed his argument formally according to Laruelle's decisional matrix, it is apparent that *muthos* and medium are constituted as a dyadic pair in Aristotle's thought, and that *muthos* is the transcendent term within this Dyad. Thus Aristotle's aesthetic discourse can be seen to conform to the decisional structure that Laruelle attributes to philosophy *tout court*. Hence, just as philosophy is accused of co-constituting the putatively real object that it posits as its empirical datum, so too does the mimetic craft of the poet entail not only the imitation of an action, but also the *constitution* of that action, according to a set of transcendent formal Ideals which render it a worthy object for *mimêsis*. As such, the sufficiency of theatre for Aristotle resides less in *how* it represents than in *what* it represents because, although the theatrical staging of poetry might be considered as preferable to narration inasmuch as an imitation that is made available more directly to the senses has the potential to render its

731 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 13.

status as imitation more transparent, the role of the theatrical medium is to efface itself in order to render the underlying unity of the plot apparent. For Aristotle, theatre is sufficient as an aesthetic form only inasmuch as its transcendent primary object, the *muthos*, is constituted by the poet in a philosophically determined form; and any *muthos* thus constituted will be sufficient, regardless of the quality of its staging, or even whether it is staged at all. This is the sufficiency that philosophically over-determines Aristotelian aesthetics; we shall call it the “Principle of Sufficient *Muthos*”, and propose that it must be suspended in order to conceive of a theatre-fiction for staging community.

6.2 *Second standard model of theatre: Antonin Artaud prioritizes the mise en scène*

Although, as Weber observes, Aristotle's aesthetic ideas remain highly influential in Western culture, during the twentieth century the hierarchy the latter establishes by asserting the sufficiency of *muthos*, its primacy over the theatrical medium, has been challenged by numerous performance makers who have sought, in various ways, to produce and theorize theatre differently, so that it is not ruled by such transcendent structures. A canonical example of this tendency is found in the work of Antonin Artaud, who raises the question:

Why is it that theater, at least as we know it in Europe, or rather in the West, why is it that everything specifically theatrical, that is, everything that defies expression in speech, in words, or, if you will, everything that is not contained in dialogue (and even dialogue itself regarded in terms of its possibilities for sound effects on the stage, and of the *requirements* of these sound effects), is relegated to the background?⁷³²

Artaud objects to the scholastic categorization of drama as a subdivision of literature, because this implicitly elevates dialogue—which is not specific to the theatrical medium—over its other components: ‘in [Western] theater, which lives under the exclusive dictatorship of speech, [...] everything I regard as specifically theatrical about theater [...] is] universally regarded as the inferior aspect.’⁷³³ He calls this attitude, which appeals to the *clarity of expression* attributed to words, “Latin”—although we suggest it would more accurately described as “Greek”, inasmuch as it reflects the hierarchy established by Aristotle, in which the mediality of theatre is subordinated to a formally structured plot that is legitimated by the authority of *logos*.

Instead of conceiving theatre according to this Classical model of sufficiency, Artaud

732 Antonin Artaud, ‘*Mise en Scène and Metaphysics*’ [1932], in *Selected Writings*, 230–1.

733 *Ibid.*, 233.

proclaims: ‘we must first of all put an end to the subjugation of theater to the text, and rediscover the notion of a language halfway between gesture and thought.’⁷³⁴ Reasoning that the concrete physicality of the stage-space deserves to be filled with its own concrete language, he proposes that the textuality of classical theatre should be replaced by a sensuous “poetry of space”.⁷³⁵ He suggests that such a language could be discovered by creating plays directly on the stage, thereby bringing the *mise en scène* into the foreground, rather than have it efface itself in service of the plot—and simultaneously abolishing the gap between writer and director, the two roles now being fulfilled by a single “creator”. In this way, Artaud reverses the Aristotelian hierarchy between *muthos* and medium, arguing that ‘[i]t is in terms of *mise en scène*, regarded not merely as the degree of refraction of a text on stage but as the point of departure for all theatrical creation, that the ideal language of theater will evolve.’⁷³⁶ Such a language would achieve concretion on the basis of the ‘active presence’ of the theatrical media, and this presence would lead to ‘the habitual boundaries between feelings and words [being] abandoned’.⁷³⁷ Through this dissolution of boundaries, Artaud aims to instigate a ‘primal theatre sensed and experienced directly by the mind, without language’s distortions and the pitfalls in speech and words.’⁷³⁸

Thus, through the reversal of the classical hierarchy, the theatre is re-conceived departing from the phenomenological experience it generates, rather than the transcendent logic of the object it imitates. Artaud remarks that it seems as difficult to articulate examples of this experiential “poetry” ‘as it would be to communicate in words a sense of a particular quality of a sound or of the degree and quality of a physical pain.’⁷³⁹ The experience of theatre is thus as resistant to discursive representation for Artaud as the experience of community is for Bataille. Indeed, there are a number of levels on which their respective ideas are analogous.⁷⁴⁰ Artaud shares with Bataille a conception of Western metaphysics, the clarity of

734 Antonin Artaud, ‘The Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)’ [1932], in *Selected Writings*, 242.

735 Artaud, ‘*Mise en Scène* and Metaphysics’, 232.

736 Artaud, ‘Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)’, 246.

737 Artaud, ‘*Mise en Scène* and Metaphysics’, 234.

738 Antonin Artaud, ‘The Theatre of Cruelty (Second Manifesto)’, in *The Theatre and its Double*, 83.

739 Artaud, ‘*Mise en Scène* and Metaphysics’, 238.

740 Bataille and Artaud, who were both associated with the Surrealist movement in the 1920s, were acquainted. It is difficult to assess the extent to which they influenced each other’s thought—Bataille’s account of their relationship reports that their exchanges were few and brief, and suggests that he found Artaud unsettling; of a chance encounter on the street he says: ‘[t]he incident gave me a rather disagreeable feeling, but only partly: he frightened me, but not without giving me a strange feeling of sympathy.’ Georges Bataille, ‘Form “Surrealism from day to day”’, in *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader*, ed. Edward Scheer, (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), 17. Nevertheless, Edward Scheer suggests that the two can be considered “fellow travellers” to some extent, inasmuch as Bataille’s theoretical writings echo some of Artaud’s concerns, and that the former’s *Inner Experience* and *Erotism* provide a discursive frame which can assist us in approaching Artaud’s ideas, which are formulated less systematically. Cf. Edward Scheer, *ibid.*, 16.

logos, as producing ‘ideas that are dead and finished’—‘in theater as in everything else’.⁷⁴¹ In place of such logical concepts, which are limited by their inertness, Artaud appeals to an idea of the magical effects created in the ritual performance of myths in archaic and “Oriental” cultures, aiming to revivify theatre by developing a more primal usage of language in which speech no longer signifies, but rather *manifests* a concrete experience of a cosmic order. This linguistic experience can be related to what Bataille conceives as the essential communication enacted through religious practices such as sacrifice, with which he suggests all language—even that put at the service of rational knowledge—remains “intensely charged”.⁷⁴² Artaud claims that a theatre which reflects such experiences would end ‘the intellectual subjugation to language by conveying the sense of a new and more profound intellectuality’, by putting ‘the mind physically on track of [...] the sense of a creation of which we possess only one face, but whose completion exists on other levels’.⁷⁴³ This idea of crossing the sterile boundaries of the intellect through an embodied experience of thought that touches on the cosmic recalls Bataille’s aspiration to found a “heterology” that would inhabit the formless realm excluded by (dialectical) philosophy, by moving from rational contemplation to “concrete” ecstatic experience.⁷⁴⁴ Artaud does not frame this movement as an ecstasis; however he does identify it, in rather Bataillian terms, as a *transgression*: ‘this naked language of the theater, a language that is not virtual but real, must make it possible [...] to *transgress* the ordinary limits of art and speech, in order to realize actively, that is magically, in real terms, a kind of total creation’.⁷⁴⁵ Moreover, this notion of actively realizing a “total creation” recalls Bataille’s aim, with *Acéphale*, to ritualistically recover ‘*the totality of being*’.⁷⁴⁶

It is evident from this that whilst Artaud prioritizes *mise en scène* over *muthos*, positing it as the starting point for theatrical creation, this is not to say that he considers the theatrical medium as an end in itself—rather, he suggests that visual and sonic media should be utilized ‘only insofar as they can converge in a kind of central expression’.⁷⁴⁷ Hence the mediality of theatre is still conceived as a *means*, the end of which is the convergence into a totality. By creating such a totality Artaud aims to render theatre *real*, to ultimately erase the stage; he states: ‘there will be no distinct divisions, no gap between life and theatre.’⁷⁴⁸ This is

741 Artaud, ‘*Mise en Scène* and Metaphysics’, 234.

742 Cf. Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 84; cf. *supra*, Ch. 1.3.

743 Artaud, ‘Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)’, 244.

744 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 1.4.

745 Artaud, ‘Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)’, 245 [emphasis added].

746 Bataille, ‘What We Have Undertaken ...’, 194.

747 Artaud, ‘Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)’, 243.

748 Artaud, ‘Theatre of Cruelty (Second Manifesto)’, 84.

not to say that Artaud's theatre would cease to be differentiated from the banal activities of quotidian existence, but rather that the audience would experience an intensity of sensation that would overwhelm their ability to keep intellect and affect compartmentalized, and would thereby inhabit a moment in which thought is immanently embodied. Thus Artaud's theatre would have a “function”—that of creating a “true illusion” which unifies the internal experience of the spectator, so that thinking becomes genuinely corporeal, thus constituting a more profound philosophical experience, a “*metaphysics in action*”.⁷⁴⁹ Hence we can understand the “totality” that constitutes theatre's end not as the unification of the *spectacle* in a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but rather as an *experiential* totality that breaches the boundaries internal to the subject, violently dissociating it from the habits of rational consciousness—much like the Bataillian “inner experience”. Artaud's writings testify that he *suffers* from an inability to maintain the conventional boundaries between thought and flesh.⁷⁵⁰ His ambitions for the theatre reflect this: he wants to communicate his suffering to the audience in such a way that they feel it too, with the aim of creating a painful intensity that would unify their own internal experience; hence his theatre would be a “theatre of cruelty”. Perhaps ironically then, in spite of challenging the supposed sufficiency of plot by reversing the Classical hierarchy which subordinates *mise en scène* to *muthos*, the *effect* that Artaud envisions his theatre having draws strangely close the “evocation of fear and pity” that brings about the Aristotelian *katharsis*—albeit the universality of the experience of “cruelty” is indexed on an embodied experience of thought rather than a plot that conforms to the transcendent Ideals of *logos*. In both cases, however, the mediality of theatre effaces itself in a moment of identification that brings about a profound sense of unity.

It is questionable whether Artaud succeeded in creating such a unity. Susan Sontag remarks that, ‘[b]oth in his work and in his life, Artaud failed’; that rather than a totality, his works ‘amount to a broken, self-mutilated corpus, a vast collection of fragments’, which do not constitute achieved works of art so much as ‘a poetics, an aesthetics of thought’.⁷⁵¹ His

749 Artaud, ‘*Mise en Scène* and *Metaphysics*’, 237.

750 Artaud's well-documented suffering, as a consequence of both physical and mental health problems, had been much discussed. In some cases, the fragmentary nature of Artaud's writing is characterized as symptomatic of a schizophrenic psychopathology, rather than assessed on its immanent aesthetic merits; cf., for example, Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester, (London & New York: Continuum, 2001), 95–105. This reading had been challenged by Paule Thévenin, who suggests that categorizing Artaud's work according to clinical terminology amounts to a form of abuse, which compounds the violence done to him in life by the medical profession. Cf. Paule Thévenin, ‘Entendre/Voir/Lire’, in *Antonin Artaud: ce Désespéré qui vous parle*, (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1993). It is beyond the scope of this research to assess the extent to which Artaud's work is influenced by mental disorder; moreover, given that our aim is to consider his thought in formal terms, as a model of theatrical sufficiency, uncovering the “truth” of his psychological state is of limited relevance.

751 Susan Sontag (ed.), ‘Artaud’, in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), xix–xx. Other commentators question this reading of Artaud's work as an

writing constantly seems to interrupt itself, compulsively tending towards rupture as much as totality. If Artaud's aim is to engineer a theatre that would efface the boundaries between thought and the apprehensions of the flesh, producing a wholly unified experience of consciousness, then Sontag suggests this project is ever thwarted by his inability to achieve such a unity in his own inner life. Artaud writes that while he is perfectly lucid, he lacks an “inner substance” to which to apply his thoughts; he states: ‘I am no longer myself, [...] my real self is asleep’, and from this it follows that he experiences his thoughts as lacking *reality*, such that they ‘no longer [develop] either in space or in time’.⁷⁵²

Whilst this difficulty could be seen as the consequence of a psychological disorder, we might also interpret it as a problem that is philosophical in origin—Artaud's difficulty in experiencing a unified sense of self deriving from his inability to resolve the tension between language's signifying function and its immanent materiality. Derrida argues that Artaud's desire to constitute a theatrical experience so real that it dissolves the boundary with life is impossible in principle, because such a desire is premised on the notion that there could be ‘a purity of presence without interior difference and without repetition’.⁷⁵³ For Artaud, true theatre, “real” theatre, would consist in gestures that could not be made twice, because ‘an expression does not work twice, does not live twice.’⁷⁵⁴ He thus invokes the finitude of theatrical performance, the fact that, for all the intensity it may generate, it leaves no

unmitigated failure—whilst it is undoubtedly true that he considered much of his own oeuvre inadequate to the aims he set himself, it is possible to see some of his aesthetic works as relatively successful. For example, Kimberly Jannarone, in *Artaud and his Doubles* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010) argues that Artaud's adaption of Percy Shelley's *Les Cenci*, staged in 1935, could be viewed as one attempt to realize the theatre of cruelty. Similarly, Laura Cull, in *Theatres of Immanence: Deleuze and the Ethics of Performance*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 59, proposes that Artaud's late radio play *To Have Done with the Judgement of God* (1947) constitutes a usage of language as a varied material body, rather than as an entity that transcends bodies—and as such can be seen as a ‘key instance of actualized performance practice’; although Helga Finter suggests that Artaud's ‘retreat into the theatricality of radiophonic work’ could be understood as a concession of the “impossibility” of the theatre of cruelty as a *physical* space, a retreat into the utopia of the mind. Cf. Helga Finter, ‘From “Antonin Artaud and the Impossible Theatre: The Legacy of the Theatre of Cruelty”’, in *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader*, ed. Edward Scheer, (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), 49. In which case, Artaud's works for radio could not be considered as belonging wholly to his aesthetics of *theatre*. Moreover, our aim here is not to analyse the aesthetic merits of particular works, but rather to trace the aims and working strategies that Artaud expresses for the theatre in general, in order to render apparent the formal frameworks at play in his “aesthetic theory”, such as it is.

752 Antonin, Artaud, ‘Letter to René Allendy, Nov 30th 1927’, in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, 169–70.

753 Jacques Derrida, ‘The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation’, in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 315.

754 Antonin Artaud, ‘An End to Masterpieces’, in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, 253. This desire to create a singular gesture that cannot be repeated could be seen as a naïve attempt to articulate a non philosophical kind of immanent presentation. It resonates with Laruelle's statement, in *Principles*, 125, that the “image” seen by the vision-in-One ‘exists *once*, not a second time or redoubled in the One under the form of another image.’ Laruelle, *Principles*, 125. cf. *supra*, 159. However, we propose that Artaud was unable to devise a method for the creation of such gestures. We will return to the matter of the singular and finite nature of non-philosophical presentation; cf. *infra*, Ch. 7.3.

objectivizable traces behind. Yet Derrida argues that ‘the theatre of cruelty neither begins nor is completed within the purity of simple presence, but rather is already within representation’, and as such we can see a paradox at the core of Artaud's thinking, inasmuch as his desire to reach the unity of the real is in a constant tension with the divided space of representation—for which the theatre, his chosen medium, serves as structural paradigm.⁷⁵⁵

The singular gestures that Artaud wishes to find would ‘constitute true hieroglyphs’, signs which ‘represent ideas, mental attitudes, aspects of nature, in an effective, concrete manner’.⁷⁵⁶ He proposes that this concrete representation might be achieved by ‘evoking natural objects or details’, implying that these signs would correspond with what they signify in a manner that is no longer arbitrary, as in conventional language; indeed, such an unrepeatable sign would signify nothing but itself.⁷⁵⁷ Derrida suggests that what Artaud aims to produce in his theatre is thus an *originary* representation—one that would not re-present an already existent presence, but rather would rather constitute ‘an experience which produces its own space’.⁷⁵⁸ Such an experience of representation would remedy the lack of “reality” Artaud experiences in his psyche, as a consequence of his thoughts having no concrete space and time in which to unfold, by returning to the origins of representation itself. This representational space, ‘produced from within itself and no longer organized from the vantage of another absent site’, Derrida describes as *closed*.⁷⁵⁹ He suggests that this closed space, in which the division between signifier and signified would be abolished rendering the sign wholly present, exists in a tension in Artaud's thought with ‘the fold, the interior duplication which steals the simple presence of its present act from the theater, from life, etc., in the irrepressible movement of repetition.’⁷⁶⁰ For Derrida, the wholly immanent sign is not possible because iterability—the *potential* for a gesture or mark to be lifted out of its context and repeated elsewhere, that it holds even on the occasion of its original presentation—is a quasi-transcendental condition for communication as such.⁷⁶¹ Hence, even if the “life” of a gesture is singular and finite, it cannot be experienced as a *pure presence* because it carries within itself the originary difference between its finite presence and another potential presentation, which is always deferred. The aspiration for an unrepeatable gesture is therefore

755 Derrida, ‘Theatre of Cruelty’, 313.

756 Artaud, ‘*Mise en Scène* and Metaphysics’, 233.

757 On the arbitrary connection between signifier and signified, cf. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), 65–8.

758 Derrida, ‘Theatre of Cruelty’, 299.

759 *Ibid.*, 300.

760 *Ibid.*, 312.

761 Derrida's notion of “iterability” as a quasi-transcendental condition for writing is developed in reference to J. L. Austin's speech act theory; cf. Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman, (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

analogous to the nostalgia for an originally unified experience of community, which Nancy argues has never existed.⁷⁶²

Thus Derrida proposes that there is “a certain dialectics” contained in Artaud's thinking, which renders fidelity to his aesthetic aims impossible, because the “grammar” of the theatre of cruelty ‘will always remain the inaccessible limit of representation’.⁷⁶³ This is not a “dialectics” in the Hegelian sense, but the dialectical horizon of representation as such, understood as ‘the indefinite movement of finitude, [...] of original repetition’.⁷⁶⁴ This suggests another similarity between Artaud and Bataille—a tendency to oscillate between a desire for experiential unity and a recognition of the necessary dialectical *doubling* inherent to the theatre of representation.

Hence, however forceful Artaud's challenge to textual sufficiency might be, it remains the case that the theatrical apparatus, as he conceives it, is a structure of communication in which a message is passed from one being to another. Thus, whilst seeking to abolish distance in certain aspects of the theatrical experience, disrupting the internal boundaries of both consciousness and signification, in other ways Artaud upholds the divisions that are presupposed in the standard model of theatre: the theatre of cruelty will remain a space set apart, spatially and temporally, from the quotidian processes of life, its auditorium to be entered for a certain time and then exited (like any other “sacred” space, in the Bataillan sense); and although he proposes disrupting the spatial arrangements within the auditorium, so the audience is surrounded by the spectacle (“immersed”, we might say, in more contemporary terms), the standard separation between the *roles* of actor and spectator are maintained. Thus, while Artaud aims to render the spectators more active in their *reception* of

762 Moreover, where Artaud believed he had seen such singular and non-arbitrary gestures—in Balinese theatre—this was based on a lack of understanding of their significance within their local cultural context; as Jerzy Grotowski remarks, ‘His description of Balinese theatre, however suggestive it might be for the imagination, is really one big mis-reading. Artaud deciphered as “cosmic signs” and “gestures evoking superior powers” elements of the performance that were concrete expressions, specific theatrical letters in an alphabet of signs universally understood by the Balinese.’ Jerzy Grotowski, ‘He wasn't Entirely Himself’, in *Antonin Artaud: A Critical Reader*, 61.

763 Derrida, ‘Theatre of Cruelty’, 313. Derrida cites a letter written by Artaud in Sept 1945, in which the latter states ‘dialectics [a certain dialectics] being that which finished me’; *ibid.*, 311. Although Artaud's conception of dialectics might not be particularly Hegelian, there is a certain correspondence between his thought and Hegel's aesthetics, inasmuch as Hegel, too, attempts to articulate a sign with a homogeneous self-presence in the “symbol”. In his *Aesthetics*, 304, Hegel states: ‘the symbol is *prima facie* a *sign*. But in a *mere sign* the connection which meaning and its expression have with one another is only a purely arbitrary linkage,’ whereas, ‘it is a different thing when a sign is to be a symbol.’ He proposes that symbols ‘do possess in themselves the very qualities whose significance they are supposed to possess. [...] Therefore, in these sorts of symbol the sensuously present things have already in their own existence that meaning, for the representation and expression of which they are used; and, taken in this wider sense, the symbol is no purely arbitrary sign, but a sign which in its externality comprises in itself at the same time the content of the idea which it brings into appearance. Yet nevertheless it is not to bring *itself* before our minds as this concrete individual thing but in itself only that universal quality of meaning [which it signifies].’ 304–5.

764 *Ibid.*

the spectacle, this is not to say that he welcomes audience *participation* and the element of chance it brings to the performance context. Derrida comments that ‘the representations of the theatre of cruelty had to be painstakingly determined in advance [...] the stage is not forsaken, given over to improvisational anarchy’.⁷⁶⁵ The spectacle staged in the theatre of cruelty remains a meticulously planned one-way communication. This recalls the setting to the side of the speaker in the originary scene of myth, which both founds the community as unified collective by projecting its “origin”, and serves as the model for representation as such—a scene that Nancy describes as “mythic” (i.e. fictional) in itself.⁷⁶⁶

This raises a question as to the type of community implied by the theatre of cruelty. We saw that for Aristotle, the sufficiency of theatrical aesthetics is indexed on a set of presuppositions concerning the ethical nature of community, and the rational structures that legitimate it—theatre, *polis* and *logos* all partaking in a similar formal structure. In this classical model, the communication that passes from the stage to the audience is conceived as direct and transparent, because its reception is determined by the transcendent Ideals that not only inform the structure of the tragic plots, but are also considered as universal values that inform the society more generally. On this basis, the mythic narratives acted out on the Athenian stage partake in what Nancy characterizes as the “myth of myth” inasmuch as they are understood to have a constitutive function in unifying the community. Artaud, too, presupposes that theatre addresses the *collective*; however, he does not see it as unifying the collective in the classical sense, because the rational grounds of Aristotelian aesthetics are not sufficient for the theatre of cruelty, which departs from the medium, rather than the *muthos*. He states: ‘theater is the only place in the world and *the last collective means* we still have of reaching the organism directly’, and he suggests that this direct communication will serve as an irresistible physical means of attacking the “base sensuality” in which he sees the public as being immersed in everyday life.⁷⁶⁷ That is, Artaud posits the intensely charge co-presence experienced in the event of the performance as pulling the audience away from the banalities of profane existence, mediated as it is by any number of rules, norms and conventions, which operate not only between beings but also within the psyche of the individual. This separation from the shared values of the *socius* is effectuated by means of an illusion that:

provides the spectator with the truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his fantasies, his utopian sense of life and of things, even his cannibalism, pour out on a level that is not counterfeit and illusory, but

765 Derrida, ‘Theatre of Cruelty’, 302.

766 Cf. Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 52 and *passim*; cf. *supra*, Ch 2.2.

767 Artaud, ‘End to Masterpieces’, 257–8.

internal.⁷⁶⁸

As such, the *result* of the theatre of cruelty, if it succeeds, is to create a truthful and unified psychological experience for the individual, at the expense of causing a rupture between them and the universal values of the ethical society. Thus, by rejecting the rational grounds for theatrical communication, he also rejects the “community”, as unified collective.

It might be argued, of course, that a truer kind of community would be propagated in this separation from the universal or normative social values—precisely the kind of acephalic community that Bataille wanted to found by reviving the powers of myth and ritual. Yet the question of community is not one that Artaud develops, occupied as he is with his own internal struggles, nor indeed is the question of communication—the question of *how* the “true illusion” would pass from performers to spectators; or the problematic assumption that one can achieve an *immediacy* of experience, a *direct* communication, through an essentially *medial* apparatus. Thus, in his enumeration of the components of the theatre and how each should be constituted, in relation to the audience, the public (a component that suggestively comes almost at the end of the list) Artaud states only that ‘[f]irst of all, this theater must exist.’⁷⁶⁹ This somewhat enigmatic statement suggests an existential understanding of theatre—that theatre does not “exist” on the pages of a written play, but only in the immediacy of its material manifestation. However, if we bear in mind that this statement comes from a *manifesto*, which expresses the rigour with which Artaud seeks to work on all the aspects of theatrical production, with the spectacle ‘calculated from beginning to end’, we might also interpret the statement to mean that the theatrical *production* must exist as a total form first of all—that is, *prior* to the event of the audience's reception of its singular and finite communication.⁷⁷⁰ This would suggest that he conceives the effects of the theatre of cruelty primarily from the perspective of the creator, rather than the audience. Artaud emphasizes that “*theatre of cruelty*” means a theatre that is difficult and cruel first of all *for myself*.⁷⁷¹

Given the tensions we have highlighted in Artaud's thought, between unity and rupture, presence and representation—which seem to invite a deconstructive reading of his project, such as that offered by Derrida, who suggests that the theatre of cruelty is impossible in principle—we might ask to what extent Artaud's aesthetics can be said to be *sufficient*. If, as commentators such as Sontag suggest, Artaud “failed” to articulate a coherent aesthetics, this would seem to indicate an *insufficiency* to his thought, a lack of philosophical

768 Artaud, ‘Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)’, 244.

769 Artaud, ‘Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)’, 251.

770 Ibid., 250.

771 Artaud, ‘End to Masterpieces’, 256 [emphasis added].

systematicity. Thus his prioritizing of the material aspects of the theatrical medium over the transcendent structures that underpin Classical aesthetics could be interpreted as a rejection of the philosophical. Nevertheless, we suggest that Artaud's aesthetic *aims* do imply that certain philosophical presuppositions inhabit his thought, and having outlined some of the issues that haunt his thinking, we will now re-view his conception of theatre according to the terms of Laruelle's decisional matrix in order to render its structures of sufficiency apparent.

In the donational dimension, the phenomenal experience of the theatrical performance is given as datum in the moment of *affection*, much as it is for Aristotle. However, with Artaud the emphasis is placed firmly on the mediality of the spectacle, its manifestation in space through gesture, colour, sound etc.—precisely those aspects that are devalued by Aristotle in favour of the transcendent formal logic of the plot. Artaud thus reverses the hierarchy that subordinates medium to *muthos*, instead proposing that theatrical creation must depart from the *mise en scène*. In this way, he seems to offer a more immanent understanding of theatre, which rests on experiential practice rather than Ideal formal structures. Hence, just as Bataille attempts to inaugurate a concrete mode of thinking that would “theorize” the heterogeneity of community by participating in the experience that constitutes it, thereby inhabiting the thing itself, so too does Artaud appeal to the immanent experience of theatre in order to resist the latter's overdetermination by *logos*. The similarity with Bataille's thinking continues inasmuch as the experience that Artaud emphasizes presupposes a *subject* that conditions the phenomenological *reception* of the theatrical performance, even if he does not express it in quite these terms. This presupposed subject is itself divided, the immanence of its corporeality separated from the transcendence of its intellectuality. Thus, if the subject functions as the factum *a priori* within the phenomenological dimension of Artaud's thought, we can see that this factum is not purely transcendent, but rather contains its own immanent pole in the finitude of corporeal experience. As such, Artaud shifts the decisional cut so that it no longer cleanly divides datum from factum, because there is a degree of immanence on *both* sides of the Dyad. Hence the scission is doubled: on the side of the datum, it divides the transcendent meaning of the theatrical representation from the materiality of its manifestation; on the side of the factum, it divides the intellect from bodily experience. Thus both sides of the Dyad are themselves conceived as a “*mixte*” in which immanence and transcendence are (dis)joined, and the theatre of cruelty constantly struggles to render these disparate parts into a *unity*.

Indeed, although Artaud posits the theatrical *mise en scène* as the point of departure for theatrical creation, the end which he arguably aims to achieve through the production of a

unified spectacle, is precisely the synthesis of *the subject* into a totality, so that thought becomes not merely transcendent, but *real*—immanent, embodied, concrete. Hence, even if the prioritizing of its medial and experiential aspects place Artaud's conception of theatre on more immanent grounds, the final cause for the theatre of cruelty is a unified experience that is never simply given, but rather is produced as a result of the transcendental synthesis of the immanent and transcendent terms of the *mixte* on both sides of the Dyad, which is brought about by the experience of “cruelty” that violently ruptures the partitions between them. Thus the phenomenology of this experiential totality not only conforms to the fractional structure of Laruelle's decisional matrix, but also doubles it.

Accordingly, the “*metaphysics in action*” that Artaud aims to bring into being is positioned on a philosophical *plane*, on which a *transcendence* is presupposed as separating both thought from the immanent body, and the signifying function of language (in a broad sense) from its materiality. This plane, which forms the base on which Artaud's aesthetics play out, is essentially representational in its logic—thus, even if he ultimately seeks to produce an originary presentation that would be anterior to re-presentation, signifying nothing but itself, his thinking still presupposes *logos* as its implicit (albeit negative) grounding reference. Indeed, whilst Artaud's thought and practice recurrently resists the partitioning of space (physical, psychical, logical) instituted by *logos*, he paradoxically posits the theatre—which, as the archetypal model for representation as such, is a constitutively divided structure—as the means of overcoming the scission internal to both subject and sign. Hence the *means* by which he proposes both to unify the experience of thought with the corporeal, and to close the distance internal to the sign rendering it fully immanent, formally resembles the divided objects which he aims to unify. Whether or not we consider Artaud's aesthetic works to be successful in creating the totality he desires, it is apparent that in theory at least, their destination would be a *unity* that is positioned philosophically. As Sontag remarks, whilst Artaud uses materialistic imagery (treating “theatre” as a concrete space; the mind as an embodied object, etc.), the demand he makes on thinking ‘amounts to the purest philosophical idealism.’⁷⁷²

Thus, although Artaud emphasizes the “concrete” elements of theatre as the necessary point of departure, it is apparent that the aesthetic quality of a production is not assessed purely on the basis of its material effects, but rather in relation to a notion of unity that is at least partly transcendent. As such, whilst *mise en scène* is given as *necessary* to theatrical aesthetics, it is not alone *sufficient*. Consequently, much like Bataille's articulation of

772 Sontag, ‘Artaud’, xxi.

community, Artaud's aesthetics are positioned in an ambivalent relation to the philosophical as such, oscillating between a naïve assertion of material experience as having primacy over transcendent meaning (an essentially *anti*-philosophical posture, a rejection of *logos* as such, which as we have seen is vulnerable to deconstruction), and a desire to create a more substantial totality—a “metaphysics in action” that would constitute an *immanent experience of logos*. The first approach, which we might characterize as an appeal to the ‘spontaneously aesthetic’, cannot undermine the sufficiency of Aristotelian aesthetics because, as Laruelle remarks, ‘art alone, or in its practice, can offer no conceptual resistance to the undertakings of philosophy and assure us of a knowledge that has some rigor.’⁷⁷³ The second approach is arguably more rigorous inasmuch as it places theatre's components into a coordinated system, unifying immanent and transcendent parts into a greater whole; however, in doing this Artaud partakes in the same decisional matrix as the Classical aesthetics he aims to overturn. Hence, despite changing the order of priority between the immanent and transcendent components in Aristotle's *Poetics*, Artaud's aesthetics remain similarly positioned on a philosophically determined base, and are rendered *sufficient* through a transcendental synthesis. Thus we conclude that there is a “Principle of Sufficient Cruelty” which, although it reverses the poles of the “Principle of Sufficient *Muthos*”, nevertheless remains a chiasmatic reflection of the latter. The theatre of cruelty therefore remains a variant of the standard model.

6.3. Third standard model of theatre: Erika Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics of the performative

The philosophical framework that underpins Artaud's aesthetics—both in his theory and his practice—may have prevented him from constituting a theatrical experience that could sufficiently render itself “real”, but his thinking nevertheless remains influential in contemporary theatre practice and beyond. Jerzy Grotowski suggests that Artaud presents us with a paradox inasmuch as ‘it is impossible to carry out his proposals’, but he proposes that we should not deduce from this that the latter was wrong in his aims.⁷⁷⁴ Evidently, the gesture towards immanence implied by Artaud's ideas has served as an inspiration for numerous practitioners, including not only Grotowski, but also Peter Brook, The Living Theatre, John Cage, and many others—and in this way his influence passes into the broader aesthetic landscape.⁷⁷⁵ As Ronald Hayman summarizes, after Artaud:

⁷⁷³ Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction*, 8.

⁷⁷⁴ Grotowski, ‘He Wasn't Entirely Himself’, 60.

⁷⁷⁵ Cf. Ronald Hayman, *Artaud and After*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 145–158.

Generally theatre has become more physical and dynamic, less cerebral and verbal. Face and voice have become less important; body, energy, movement, use of space more important. The rigid segregation of acting area from auditorium has been broken down. Though Artaud was by no means the only cause of these changes, his influence was probably the most powerful of the contributing factors.⁷⁷⁶

Moreover, even the “impossibility” of Artaud's ideas can be seen to have left a positive legacy inasmuch as, according to Sara Jane Bailes, *failure* comes to be inscribed into the very poetics of contemporary performance theatre.⁷⁷⁷ Nevertheless, Artaud does not articulate a consistent method for creating the theatre of cruelty, and as such, the ways in which his influence has been taken up vary widely. Helga Finter proposes that the diversity of examples of theatrical experimentation that have been associated with his name indicates that ‘it has been the questions Artaud posed rather than the individual answers he offered that have contributed to the development of a tradition around his ideas on the theatre.’⁷⁷⁸

Finter traces one particular lineage in this tradition, which derives less from the philosophically overdetermined desire to constitute a totality expressed in his manifestos, than it does from later attempts Artaud made ‘at exploding the boundaries of the theatrical event’ by performing his own suffering.⁷⁷⁹ An example of this is the “*tête-à-tête*” with Artaud at the Vieux-Colombier on 13 January 1947, in which he performed some of his poetry and then began to read his life story from a manuscript, punctuated with improvised interpolations, until he lost his place and finally broke off in a state of confusion with the pages of his manuscript scattered across the stage. Witnesses such as André Breton saw this as a painful exhibition of mental illness; however, Finter suggests that we might also see it as an experiment in “cruelty” which effaces the boundary between theatre and the reality that constitutes its “double”—not by creating a total spectacle, but instead by cultivating a space on stage for “the real”, understood in Lacanian terms, as that which resists or refuses symbolization. Although Artaud ultimately viewed this experiment as another “failure” (he writes later that ‘only bombs could have achieved the desired effect’), Finter observes that similar incursions of the real into the stage space have come to be used commonly as a

776 Ibid., 148. Hayman identifies Artaud's other fields in which Artaud's thinking has had an effect including music, where Pierre Boulez cites him as an influence, and psychology, where R. D. Laing describes his writing as a ‘revelation’, which “played a decisive part” in his development’. Ibid., 144.

777 Bailes traces the emergence of a “poetics of failure” from Samuel Beckett, rather than Artaud; nevertheless, she suggests that the theatrical auto-referentiality of Beckett's works constitutes a paradigmatic shift from modernism to postmodernism which brings about the possibility for theatre to become precisely the space produced from within itself that Artaud wanted it to be. Cf. Sara Jane Bailes, *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 27.

778 Finter, ‘Artaud and the Impossible Theatre’, 49.

779 Ibid., 48.

theatrical device.⁷⁸⁰ Examples include: the incorporation of poisonous snakes into Jan Lauwers' *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1992); electrodes being attached to the body of actor Marc Van Overmir in Jan Fabre's *Who Shall Speak My Thought* (1993), which allowed the director to influence the flow of the actor's speech by delivering electric shocks during a monologue; and the announcement on stage of an actor's actual terminal illness, as in Ron Vawter's last performance, *Philoktetes-variations* (1994).

In each of these cases, something from beyond the “as if” space of the stage as site of *mimêsis* intrudes into the performance—the mortal risk of being in the presence of dangerous wild animals; bodily pain; imminent death. These elements belong to what Bataille calls the heterogeneous, and thus resist incorporation into the *logos*. Bringing such “unrepresentable” things onto the stage can be seen as a strategy for transgressing the division between theatre and reality, and as such it calls on us to reassess our understanding of representation as such. Finter states that ‘[s]uch an irruption of the Real places the notion of the theatre as representation—performance, staging, presentation—in question. And it casts profound doubt on the effectiveness of theatrical staging.’⁷⁸¹ That is, whilst the examples we have given are positioned in a theatrical setting, they call on the heterogeneous as a supplement, suggesting a loss in faith in the affective power of mimetic spectacle alone.

These presentations of the heterogeneous in the performance space transgress the partitioning of space presupposed by the representational apparatus, and thus appear to break down the division between the theatre and its double by offering a direct presentation of the real. This disruption of representational space has consequences for the possibilities of theorizing theatre, because such practices seem to exceed the structures that organize the standard model of critique. As we have seen, Nancy suggests that the critical attitude always, to some extent, ‘presupposes the possibility of unveiling the intelligibility of the real’, where the real is thought as being opposed to appearance.⁷⁸² If the division between reality and appearance is transgressed in performance practice through the manifestation of actual risk and suffering, then this also calls the “critical apparatus” into question, inasmuch as the latter takes the classical, mimetic logic of theatre as its structuring model. Hence Mike Sell suggests that the avant-garde performance practices that emerged in the United States in the 1960s—including “happenings”, Fluxus, the Black Arts Movement and The Living Theatre—reveal the limits of criticism *as such*, because the dissolution of the partition between “art” and “life” implied by the bringing of non-representational action into the performance space connects

780 Ibid. Cf. Antonin Artaud, ‘Lettres à Breton’, *L'Éphémère*, 8, 1968: 20–5.

781 Ibid., 50.

782 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 54.

the experience of performance to the social and political spheres in complex ways that can only be reduced and sterilized by scholastic discourse.⁷⁸³ This idea that the incursion of the real opens the theatrical towards the social in new and complex ways demonstrates that there is a resonance between the question of how to theorize contemporary performance practice and the problem that this thesis addresses—namely, how to theorize the experience of community. However, our aim is to move beyond witnessing the limits of the critical paradigm in order to articulate an innovative, immanent theoretical presentation of community.

Andrew Quick observes that references to non-representational actions which focus on the bodily experience of performer and spectator, are used in certain discourses (often produced by the artists in reflection on their own work) to differentiate “performance” from “theatre”, thereby establishing the former as a distinct genre.⁷⁸⁴ Quick suggests that such discourses invoke ‘a purity in the performance relation which evad[es] the operation of critique and signification’, thus seeking to assert an ontology of performance that is distinct from that of theatre inasmuch as it is no longer positioned in a mimetic frame.⁷⁸⁵ He sees in such an ontology an allusion to Artaud's desire to create theatrical gestures that could not be made twice. “Performance” tends to emphasize bodily experiences such as exhaustion or pain, as well as symbolic objects or interactions, and durational activities; these practices seem ‘to resist the operation of representation, of repetition, of illusion, while somehow presenting or being “the real” itself.’⁷⁸⁶ However, Quick argues that the reality in question remains in the order of appearance, such that the audience does not exactly experience exhaustion, pain, illness, etc. *as real*, but rather as constructed “reality-effects”. Thus, rather than accepting the naïve assertion that the real can be presented in a direct manner simply by placing the signs of reality on stage, Quick instead suggests that a more nuanced understanding of the relation between “reality” and “fiction” is needed—not only in regard to how we view theatre and performance, but also in our consideration of what constitutes “reality” as such. This supports the idea, suggested by both Bataille and Nancy's thinking, that social experience is in some way “staged”.

Richard Schechner concurs with the idea that “reality” cannot simply be presented on

783 Cf. Mike Sell, *Avant-Garde Performance and the Limits of Criticism: Approaching the Living Theatre, Happenings/Fluxus, and the Black Arts Movement*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 59–90 and *passim*.

784 Andrew Quick, ‘Approaching the Real: Reality Effects and the Play of Fiction’, *Performance Research* 1(3), 1996: 12.

785 Ibid.

786 Ibid.

stage, suggesting that even if a performer enters the heterogeneous so absolutely as to actually die within the performance (for example, in the gladiatorial spectacles of ancient Rome), as a performance, the “reality” of this action remains situated in a theatrical frame which serves to reify the living (or dying) entity into a *symbolic* agent.⁷⁸⁷ This is not to say that the theatrical context makes the death less real, but rather that it makes it *differently* real because performance can be understood as *transformative* of reality in a similar way to ritual, and that this transformation, whilst not necessarily carrying a pre-determined message in the representational sense, nevertheless has a certain semantic value as symbol.⁷⁸⁸ This recalls Bataille's ambivalent fascination with sacrifice—a ritual performance, of a kind, which he romanticized as the heterogeneous action that would found an acephalic community, but which he also recognized as loaded with *meaning*, and thus as transgressing the same community's law which prohibited the making of a work.⁷⁸⁹ By drawing attention to the theatricality of the frame that contextualizes “performance” (understood in a broad sense), Schechner invokes an ontology of theatre rooted in the experience of Greek tragedy—not in terms of the “Apollonian” rationality we find in Aristotelian aesthetics, but rather in the “Dionysian” principle that Nietzsche argues is propagated by temporal media such as music and dance, and out of which he proposes tragedy was born.⁷⁹⁰ In contrast to the Apollonian, which rules over the tendency towards individuation, Nietzsche characterizes the Dionysian experience of theatre as shattering the individual, inducing an ecstatic experience as the singing and dancing that originates in the chorus of the satyrs spreads into the spectators, transforming them into a *community*. This locating of the ontology of theatre in the experience generated by the performance event—an experience that can be identified with what Durkheim calls “collective effervescence”—foregrounds the sociality of this event, whilst also collapsing the dichotomy between “performance” and “theatre” so the former comes to be understood as the essence of the latter, rather than its opposite.

Following a similar logic, Erika Fischer-Lichte develops an aesthetic theory for performance (here *not* differentiated from theatre) on the basis of its *transformative* effectiveness.⁷⁹¹ In order to move beyond the problematic dichotomy between theatrical

787 Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2003), 190.

788 Schechner is alluding Arnold van Gennep's anthropological study of ritual, which was later developed in relation to performance theory by Victor Turner; cf. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika V. Vizedom & Gabrielle L. Caffee, (London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960); cf. Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: the Human Seriousness of Play*, (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982).

789 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 1.4.

790 Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy; and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Random House, 1967).

791 Cf. Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance*.

mimêsis and the non-representational style of performance which invokes “the real”—a dichotomy that we have suggested calls traditional critical models into question—she appeals to the notion of *performativity*. We will now examine Fischer-Lichte's “aesthetics of the performative” as our third model for theorizing theatre, and we will show that whilst her aesthetic approach, which is grounded in the *event* of performance, avoids lapsing into the totalizing metaphysical presuppositions that overdetermine theatre in Aristotle's *Poetics*—and also, in a different way, in Artaud's notion of “cruelty” as totalizing experience—it nevertheless implies a certain theatrical *sufficiency*, located in the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators. This analysis is relevant to our argument because the notion of co-presence as the specific *medium* of performance resonates with the “compearance” that Nancy proposes as the condition for the singular experience of a non-immanentist community.⁷⁹²

Fischer-Lichte traces the origin of the notion of performativity from the ordinary language philosophy of J. L. Austin.⁷⁹³ Austin gives the name “performative” for utterances that do not make statements about the world, but instead constitute actions in the world—such as taking a vow or placing a bet. Such *speech acts* cannot be judged on the basis of whether they are true or false because rather than corresponding to an existing reality, as “constative” statements do, they serve to alter that reality. Hence they can be understood as transformative actions, and as such their success or failure needs to be assessed according to pragmatic criteria (i.e. on the basis of the transformation they bring about) because the criterion of correspondence is not relevant. It is notable that although Austin attempts to articulate what makes a performative utterance “felicitous” (i.e. successful), his discussion demonstrates the difficulty of isolating the precise conditions in which a speech act actually effectuates a transformation of reality, rather than only *imitating* such a transformation—partly because these conditions depend on various extra-linguistic factors which include the intentionality of the speaker and the institutional context that enframes an utterance. Interestingly, Austin uses theatrical performance as an example of a non-serious speech act, one that does *not* have a transformative effect. He states: ‘a performative utterance will [...] be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage’—which implies that he does not perceive theatre as a site of performativity.⁷⁹⁴ Nevertheless, due to the way in which the dichotomy between performatives and constatives gradually collapses in the course of Austin's text, Fischer-Lichte suggests that the performative can be seen as a vehicle for a dynamics that

792 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 2.1.

793 Cf. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

794 *Ibid.*, 22.

destabilizes dichotomous terminologies in general, and that this tendency is relevant to the development of an “aesthetics of the performative” which would be able to move beyond fixed conditions for “success” or “failure” and be supple enough to account for the various dimensions of transformation that might occur in the course of a performance. She gives the example of Marina Abramović's *Lips of Thomas* (Innsbruck, 1975), which arguably effectuated a reconfiguration of the dimensions of the theatrical framework, to illustrate performance's transformational possibilities.⁷⁹⁵

Fischer-Lichte further traces the development of the notion of performativity in the work of Judith Butler, who lifts it out of the context of linguistic philosophy to apply it to the cultural construction of gender.⁷⁹⁶ Butler uses the notion of the performative, understood as both “dramatic” and “non-referential”, to reject essentialist notions of gender as determined by biological sex, instead proposing that gender is constantly constituted and transformed in the social performance of the self in everyday life.⁷⁹⁷ She states: ‘gender is no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various speech acts proceed; rather, it is [...] an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*.’⁷⁹⁸ Hence she explicitly links performativity to the stylistics of bodily actions. She thus suggests that the performance of gender holds the potential to transform and enlarge the range of gender and sexual identities it might be possible to inhabit; although she also suggests that if a subject is to perform a gender identity that departs from reiterating the masculine/feminine dichotomy, then this transgression will be “illegible”, and will thus tend to meet with either resistance or exclusion by the normative majority. It is notable that Butler discusses the subversive possibilities of “drag” in this context, thus raising the question of the political potential of the theatrical

795 Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance*, 25–26. In *Lips of Thomas*, Abramović performed a series of self-harming actions—eating a nauseating quantity of honey, swiftly drinking a bottle of wine, self-flagellating until her back was severely lacerated, cutting a star into her stomach with a razor blade, then lying on a cross made of ice, below a heater which made blood well up from the wounds on her belly. She stayed in this position until members of the audience could bear it no longer and put an end to the performance by moving her from this torturous position and covering her with coats. This performance caused transformation in a number of dimensions. On one level, the actions performed by the artist were legitimated by the “theatrical” setting in which they were enframed (in another environment, Fischer-Lichte suggests they would be perceived as symptoms of mental illness, or of a perverted sexuality). However the performance also challenged that framework—by presenting actual self-harm that had more in common with ritual religious practices of the past than mimetic theatre, the “reality-effects” engendered by Abramović's performance eventually stirred the audience to intervene, thereby becoming *actors* rather than spectators, and thus transgressing the “rules” that ordinarily govern conduct in the theatrical environment.

796 Cf. Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution’, in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). Butler further develops her theory of performativity in: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1990); and Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1993).

797 Butler, ‘Performative Acts’, 273.

798 *Ibid.*, 270.

setting as a site for experimenting with non-normative identities—and perhaps rendering them more culturally acceptable. However, just as Austin had difficulty distinguishing between felicitous and infelicitous speech acts, Butler does not succeed in pin-pointing the conditions in which such performances would bring about a *political* transformation. She states:

Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony.⁷⁹⁹

However, *how* this might be understood here remains a rhetorical question; thus for Butler theatre as such stands in an ambiguous relationship to empirical politics.⁸⁰⁰

For Fischer-Lichte, the transformation brought about by a performance is not necessarily a political one; rather, she seeks to develop an *aesthetics* based on the transformative effect of the performative (although this does not exclude the possibility that an aesthetic transformation might also constitute a political or social one). As such, whilst Butler's shifting of the notion of performativity from the linguistic context to use it as a tool for considering the phenomenal process of embodiment is useful for an analysis of performance, Fischer-Lichte proposes that it requires further modification, because situating performance within an aesthetic frame displaces it from the ordinary conditions for the constitution of meaning. That is, although she likens the conditions for embodiment to theatrical *mimêsis* inasmuch as the repetition of acts which constitutes gender 'comprises a "reenactment" and a "reexperiencing" based on a repertoire of meanings already socially instituted [...] Butler only refers to practices of everyday life and not to strictly aesthetic processes.'⁸⁰¹ Thus Fischer-Lichte emphasizes the aesthetic frame as differentiating the

⁷⁹⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 139.

⁸⁰⁰ Although Butler nuances her understanding of gender performativity in later works such as *Bodies that Matter*, we suggest that the Lacanian underpinnings of her thinking lead to an irreducible circularity when it comes to the question of politics, despite how central this question is in motivating her thought. Examining Butler's ideas according to a Laruelian posture, Katerina Kolozova suggests that the aporetic trajectory of her analyses can be traced to an essentially "metaphysical" opposition between "the Real" and "fiction", which the latter argues remains inscribed in Butler's reasoning despite her efforts to deconstruct such oppositions by calling into question the naive belief in 'the "pure body" that is detached from language in a defining way'. Katerina Kolozova, *The Cut of the Real: Subjectivity in Poststructuralist Philosophy*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 52. This is to say that, although Butler destabilizes the opposition between biologically determined "sex" and culturally determined "gender", 'bring[ing] the discussion to the wall of aporia by exposing the dead end of this conflict of duality of concepts in such a way that the binary is subverted', she does this by taking a 'productively paradoxical position in the category of reality that screens the crisis of the perennial dichotomy between the Real and fiction.' *Ibid.*, 54. Hence the binary logic remains, as a presupposition instituted by the decisional cut that founds Butler's—still-philosophical—critique. Kolozova, in contrast, proposes that approaching the problematic non-philosophically can offer a way out of the impasse by refusing to step into the decisional circle at all, proposing a unilateral relation between the Real and fiction in place of a philosophical dualism. We aim to elucidate a similar redeployment of "fiction" below; cf. *infra*, Ch. 7.

⁸⁰¹ Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance*, 28.

performance space from social space more generally.

Nevertheless, Fischer-Lichte does conceive of performance as an essentially *social* practice. Referring to Max Herrmann's proposition that theatre is a "social play—played by all and for all" in which "[t]he spectators are involved as co-players" such that "[t]heatre always produces a social community", Fischer-Lichte asserts that it is '[t]he bodily co-presence of actors and spectators [which] enables and constitutes performance.'⁸⁰² As such, she identifies the bodily co-presence of two groups of people as necessary for a performance to occur, and posits this encounter as constitutive of performance's "specific mediality".⁸⁰³ This is an ontological and hence trans-historical claim, which situates the ground of theatre in the event of its performance. However, Fischer-Lichte also notes that since the "performative turn" of the 1960s, '[t]he pivotal role of the audience was not only acknowledged as a pre-condition for performance, but explicitly invoked as such.'⁸⁰⁴ This foregrounding of the actor-spectator relation renders apparent the *form* of the social relation experienced in the performance setting, which Fischer-Lichte characterizes as a "feedback loop", understood as 'a self-referential, autopoietic system enabling a fundamentally open, unpredictable process'.⁸⁰⁵ Viewing the performative relation as an organic system raises questions as to the underlying conditions that facilitate the interaction, what determines its transformative outcome, and whether the effects of the feedback loop should be considered as primarily aesthetic or social in essence. Given the open nature of autopoietic systems, Fischer-Lichte does not propose a definitive answer to these questions. She observes that since the performative turn of the 1960s, performances 'have increasingly been constructed as experiments', which develop staging strategies that 'mak[e] the functioning of the feedback loop visible'.⁸⁰⁶ This notion of performance as experiment recalls Laruelle's framing of his non-philosophy as an experimental practice of thought, which we have suggested should be judged on the basis of its immanent performativity. However, the singular and finite nature of each performance encounter means that, just as non-philosophy resists being assessed according to transcendent criteria, so 'evaluating the outcome of these theatrical experiments proves difficult', because

802 Ibid., 32, citing Max Herrmann, 'Ueber die Aufgaben eines theaterwissenschaftlichen Instituts', in *Theaterwissenschaft im deutschsprachigen Raum*, ed. Helmar Klier, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981), 19.

803 Ibid., 38.

804 Ibid., 39.

805 Ibid. Fischer-Lichte emphasizes that she is 'using the term "autopoiesis" as defined in cognitive biology by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela and not Niklas Luhmann's definition', which implies that she views the performative feedback loop as a *living* system, rather than using the concept of autopoiesis in an abstract, formalist sense. Ibid., 211, n. 4. Cf. Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*, revised edition, trans. Robert Paolucci, (Boston: Shambhala, 1992).

806 Ibid., 40.

the variability of the interaction makes it hard to establish whether the performance tests the autopoietic system, or merely plays with its parameters.⁸⁰⁷

Rather than attempting to judge particular performance experiments, Fischer-Lichte develops a matrix which can be used to analyse the various dimensions of transformation that a performance might effectuate. Taking the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators as the necessary condition for performance, she identifies three processes within the performance event which have transformative possibilities. Firstly, the reversal of roles between the actors and spectators, as occurred for example in Abramović's *Lips of Thomas* when audience members intervened to prevent the artist from further harming herself; secondly the creation and/or collapse of a "community", which breaches the actor/spectator dichotomy; thirdly bodily contact, the incursion of touch which transgresses the distance established by the proscenium arch, and thus shifts the phenomenality of the performance encounter away from the ocular orientation of representation. Using a range of examples, she demonstrates that these processes can be established and reconfigured in a variety of ways, whilst also reaffirming the "liveness" of bodily co-presence—the sharing of bodies and spaces—as the most essential component of the performance medium.

This raises further questions as to how the *materiality* of performance is to be understood. Whilst physical artefacts such as scenography and props can be important in creating the performance, Fischer-Lichte emphasizes that performance itself 'is fleeting, transient, and exists only in the present[, being] made up of the continuous becoming and passing of the feedback loop.'⁸⁰⁸ As such, its materiality is to be understood as consisting in this contingent circuit which, after Peggy Phelan, Fischer-Lichte proposes cannot be captured by any form of audio-visual documentation.⁸⁰⁹ She identifies several dimensions within which this contingent materiality appears. The first is *corporeal*, and is generated by the tension between the performer's embodiment of character and the phenomenality of their being-in-the-world. She proposes that the "liveness" of the performance event means that an actor never entirely embodies a dramatic role because their being-in-the-world intrudes into the play of fiction; at the same time, the theatrical frame that sets a performance apart from ordinary life always adds a level of signification to a performer's actions such that their being-

807 Ibid.

808 Ibid., 75.

809 Ibid. Cf. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), 146: 'Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.'

in-the-world embodies a semiotic meaning—thus transforming the “reality” of their actions into what Quick calls “reality-effects”. Consequently, Fischer-Lichte proposes that the corporeal materiality of performance consists in rendering apparent the embodiment/being-in-the-world duality. She suggests that this is most often perceived by way of an oscillation between one pole and the other, but also proposes a “*radical concept of presence*”, in which the presence of both performer and spectator are experienced as ‘an embodied mind in a constant process of becoming’.⁸¹⁰

It is striking that this notion of radical presence echoes the “reality” of being that Artaud struggled, and arguably failed to produce and inhabit. Fischer-Lichte suggests that this difficulty is always-already overcome by the simultaneity of the performative relation which is always in the present, and hence cannot be deferred. Thus she posits co-presence as the guarantor of experiential unity, understood not as something extraordinary, but rather as the emergence of the simple nature of the human as embodied mind, developed into an aesthetic event. In the previous section, we saw how Derrida cast the undivided presence Artaud was striving for as impossible in principle—a criticism that could similarly be applied to Fischer-Lichte's appeal to the simultaneity of experience within the feedback loop. However, the latter's positing of co-presence as the necessary condition for performance suggests an ontological framework that is closer to that articulated by Nancy, in which the compearance of singular beings precedes their individuation as subjects, than it is to the Derridean notion of *différance*. Thus, rather than simply rejecting her claim as appealing to a naively “metaphysical” notion of presence, we will continue to elucidate her aesthetic theory, drawing out the correspondences with Nancy's thought—with the aim of further exploring the place of “presence” in the latter's ontology.

The second dimension of performative materiality identified by Fischer-Lichte is spatial. She distinguishes between the pre-existing *architectural* space in which a performance occurs, which can be thought as a relatively stable container, and the fluctuating experiential space that is constituted in the performance event—a “performative space” that ‘opens special possibilities for the relationship between actors and spectators and for movement and perception.’⁸¹¹ The performative spatiality she proposes is thus intrinsically social, and sustains the comparison with Nancy's thought inasmuch as he posits the ontological sociality of community as an experience of *spacing*. This resonance is continued by Fischer-Lichte's characterization of the performative space as an “atmospheric space”, suggesting that

810 Ibid., 99.

811 Ibid., 107.

atmospheres are “spheres of presence” that shape our experience of space.⁸¹² She cites Gernot Bohme's definition of atmospheres as: ‘spaces insofar as they are tinged by the presence of things, people, or their surrounding constellations, that is, their “ecstasies”. These ecstasies themselves are the spheres of something else—their reality in space.’⁸¹³ Nancy articulates the social spacing of singular beings-in-the-world in similar terms; appealing to an “atopical topology”, he states: ‘the circumscription of a community, or better its *areality* (its nature as area, as formed space), is not a territory, but the areality of an ecstasy, just as, reciprocally, the form of an ecstasy is that of a community.’⁸¹⁴ The archaic term *areality* [aréalité] signifies the formation of space into an “area”; however, Nancy chooses it in order to play on an implied double meaning: ‘[b]y chance, this word also serves to suggest a lack of reality, or rather a slight, faint, suspended reality’.⁸¹⁵ This suggests that the ecstatic presence of beings within the performative space can be understood as transformative of their “reality”—furthering the connection between the aesthetic context of performance and the social experience of space more generally.

Fischer-Lichte identifies tonality as a further material element of performance. The tonality of performance includes *voice*, which Fischer-Lichte characterizes as ‘a material that exists only in “ecstasy”’, inasmuch as ‘[i]t comes into existence only when it sounds *out*’—when it is brought forth from out of the body.⁸¹⁶ The focus on tone shifts attention from the ocular connotations of theatre (*theatron*) to the experience of the *auditorium* as an “aural space”; this aurality in turn emphasizes that the performative generation of materiality is not only spatial, but also temporal.⁸¹⁷ Thus temporality, whilst it cannot be subsumed in the category of performative materiality, nevertheless ‘constitutes the condition of possibility for [the] appearance in space’ of the material elements of performance.⁸¹⁸ Fischer-Lichte proposes that the autopoietic feedback loop, which constitutes the specific mediality of performance, ‘is generated by a *continuous* interaction between actors and spectators’, thereby emphasizing the

812 Ibid., 116.

813 Ibid., 115, citing Gernot Bohme, *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Aesthetik*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1995), 33.

814 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 20.

815 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 43.

816 Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance*, 130 [emphasis added]. Nancy alludes to the ecstatic nature of “voice” as constitutive of the community *désœuvrée* when he states: ‘the voice is always in itself articulated (different from itself, differing itself), and this is why there is not a voice, but the plural voices of singular beings.’ *Inoperative Community*, 76. However, “voice” is here intended as another name for the articulated Being that constitutes “literary communism”; this contrasts with Fischer-Lichte's meaning, of a sound made by the human throat. This emphasizes that despite certain similarities between their respective theoretical frameworks, there are also differences, to which we will return below. Cf. *infra*, 229.

817 Ibid., 122–5.

818 Ibid., 130.

analogue character of the performative relation.⁸¹⁹ If we recall that Laruelle characterizes immanence as constitutively *indivisible*, then we can interpret this analogue “continuity” as implying that Fischer-Lichte conceives the emergent materiality as a phenomenon that tends towards immanence, rather than transcendence.⁸²⁰

Fischer-Lichte suggests that interruptions to the co-presence of performers and spectators that are not integral to the feedback loop (and are hence *transcendent* to it)—such as falling curtains and intermissions—constitute disruptions that ‘can only be counterproductive’.⁸²¹ Nevertheless performance's immanent materiality can be given form through the use of *time brackets* and *rhythm*. The former technique juxtaposes pockets of time with each other, thereby rendering the finitude of a particular performative constellation apparent by accenting its beginning and end points. The latter, in contrast, can be understood as a dynamic organizing principle which ‘puts corporeality, spatiality, and tonality into a relationship with one another and regulates their appearance and disappearance in space.’⁸²² The bracketing of time thus has the effect of *cutting* the performance material, thereby constituting an incursion of transcendence; whereas rhythm, as a continually emergent formation that is always in transit, can be understood as an open-ended system of regularization that is immanent to the performative materiality. This notion of rhythm as immanent organizing principle again echoes Nancy's thought, and helps to clarify how the “areality” of community's ecstasy differs from a “territory”—inasmuch as this area is not demarcated by a border, but is rather constituted in the limit experience of being exposed to the plenitude of an incommensurable outside. Nancy states that ‘[o]nly community furnishes this relation its spacing, its rhythm’; this suggests that “community”, the appearance of which Nancy identifies with the spacing of appresentation, is understood as a continually transforming rhythmic organization.⁸²³

According to Fischer-Lichte, this rhythmically organized community, formed by the co-presence of actors and spectators not only generates materiality, but also meaning. Thus her aesthetics of the performative has a semantic dimension, which entails the destabilization of a series of related dualities: signification/materiality; representation/presence;

819 Ibid. [emphasis added].

820 In *Laruelle: Against the Digital*, 56, Galloway proposes that the analogue can be understood as ‘the two coming together as one’, thereby ‘creating relation without distinction’—which corresponds with Fischer-Lichte's claim that the performative feedback loop generates a *community* of actors and spectators. Galloway goes on to suggest that “analogy” (that is, the analogue relation) is a parallelism, and that ‘[t]his is the condition of immanence.’ Ibid., 60.

821 Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance*, 130.

822 Ibid., 133.

823 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 18.

meaning/effect. In each of these pairs, the first term implies an *intelligible* “sense”, whilst the second implies a *sensible* one; the semantic dimension of performative aesthetics can thus be related to the aporia of sense that Nancy identifies in *A Finite Thinking*.⁸²⁴ Whilst the Aristotelian conception of theatre leans towards the former pole, attributing the effects of theatre—and hence its principle of sufficiency—to its foundation in the transcendent ideality of *logos*, Fischer-Lichte suggests, in contrast, that the specifically performative generation of meaning is an emergent process rooted in the material presence that constitutes the performance event—which implies that performance has an immanent “sense” which both precedes and exceeds any re-presentation. This is not to say that words or gestures enacted in performance are necessarily de-semanticized, but that their meaning is not primarily grounded in a transcendent outside. As such, the “reality effect” produced by the incursion of the real into the stage-space—which we observed above is a practice used in contemporary performance to destabilize the representational frame of the theatre—should not be understood as importing something from an *external* reality onto the stage, but rather as constituting a self-referential gesture that ‘means exactly what it performs’.⁸²⁵

Fischer-Lichte suggests that such self-referentiality can be generated by ‘sever[ing] theatrical components from any sort of wider context or causal chain’.⁸²⁶ That is, by isolating an element (sound, object, movement, etc.) from the context in which it ordinarily carries meaning, it is possible to shift the audience's perception of that element so that they no longer “read” what it signifies, but perceive it in its materiality. In this way, the materiality of the signifier coincides with the signified, allowing its immanent meaning to emerge—thereby constituting the symbolic “gesture that cannot be made twice” desired by Artaud.⁸²⁷ By disconnecting emergent phenomena from predetermined contexts, Fischer-Lichte suggests that perceiving spectators are able to create “sensual impressions” which belong to consciousness, but which cannot easily be expressed in words; thus she proposes that performative meanings are generated which: ‘can be equated to states of consciousness but not to linguistic meanings.’⁸²⁸ These performative “meanings” are produced not only by destabilizing the relation between signification and materiality, but also by disrupting the

824 Cf. Nancy, *Finite Thinking*, 5–6 and *passim*; cf. *supra*, Ch. 2.3.

825 Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance*, 140.

826 *Ibid.*, 142.

827 Fischer-Lichte's does not connect her argument to Artaud's appeal to the symbol as a concrete bearer of its originary meaning, but rather to the notion of the symbol found in Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. J. Osbourne, (London & New York: Verso, 1998). However, because she characterizes the symbol as an auratic object whose origin is inscrutable—and which thus absorbs meaning into its “interior”, thereby invoking its “intrinsic meaning”—we conclude that this understanding of the symbol is broadly analogous with Artaud's.

828 Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance*, 142.

related dyads of meaning/effect (that is, the rational understanding of a performance versus the emotional response it evokes), and representation/presence. We have already explored the latter dyad when we examined how the actor's embodiment of a character is inflected, and sometimes interrupted, by the audience's perception of their being-in-the-world—and we saw that Fischer-Lichte proposes a “radical concept of presence” in which the dyad is unified so that both poles are perceived simultaneously, allowing both performer and spectator to appear as embodied minds.

The consequence of conceiving performative “meaning” as a contingent emergent phenomenon is that it cannot be considered as a hermeneutic process. Fischer-Lichte characterizes appearance of theatrical elements in their phenomenal being, which allows an experiential “fusion” of perceiving subject (spectator) with perceived object (performer), as an “interruption” of the *fictive* world of the stage—which recalls Nancy's discussion of the interruption that is constitutive to the ontology of myth.⁸²⁹ Due to the unstable and oscillatory nature of the audience's perception (which, implicitly, achieves “radical presence” only fleetingly), Fischer-Lichte casts ‘[t]he attempt to generate meaning hermeneutically [as] a Sisyphian task.’⁸³⁰ Moreover, she proposes that any attempt to understand a performance by reconstructing its “meaning” retrospectively necessarily entails a translation of the material, which transforms the extra-linguistic “meanings” that are experienced in the performance event into linguistic ones. She thus reaffirms Phelan's position that performance is defined by its liveness, and implies that any attempt to grasp its meaning discursively constitutes a recuperation by *logos* that occludes its real essence. She states that: ‘[e]very attempt at understanding has to overcome the limits of language, ultimately without success’, and as such, ‘the experience remains unfathomable’.⁸³¹

Thus, by locating the essence of performance in its nature as *event* characterized by autopoiesis and emergence, Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics of the performative result in an aporia that is similar to the one we identified in both Bataille and Nancy's articulations of community. She affirms performance as an open-ended organic system which can dissolve dyadic oppositions into one another, thereby constituting a liminal experience that is transformative of participants' perception of reality. Moreover, she proposes that such transformations have the potential to bring about a “reenchantment of the world” by rendering apparent the elusiveness of the invisible forces that shape the world—implying that

829 Ibid., 157. Cf. *supra*, Ch. 2.2.

830 Ibid.

831 Ibid., 160.

performatively generated meaning has an essential dimension of withdrawal.⁸³² This suggests that the experience of performance as an emergent phenomenon is constitutively impossible to comprehend. Hence, whilst the *apparatus* which enable the performative emergence of immanent meaning can be theorized in any number of dimensions, Fischer-Lichte's argument leads to the conclusion that such “meanings”, which cannot be separated from the finitude of the event, should be understood—to borrow Nancy's terms—as an “excess in relation to the theoretical”.⁸³³

Having traced the various axes of Fischer-Lichte's theoretical framework, we can clearly see that her conception of performance as a material event does not place the sufficiency of theatre in the transcendent framework of *logos* as Aristotle's *Poetics* does; rather, she proposes the emergence of performative meaning as an ana-logical perceptive experience that is intrinsically resistant to linguistic representation. She thus articulates a finite process of coming to presence that presupposes the experiential wholeness that Artaud was striving for—not as an Ideal that is impossible to inhabit—but rather as the enabling condition for performance as such. Hence, in a similar way to Nancy—who sought to escape from the ultimately dialectical presuppositions of subjectivity that constituted an impasse in Bataille's thinking of community by positing the sociality of singular-plural Being as prior to any process of subjectivation—Fischer-Lichte proposes an ontology of performance in which immanent experience is not the *result*, but rather constitutes the *ground* of meaning. Indeed, she argues that the spectators of performance (including theatre) are involved in the autopoietic generation of meaning whether or not their responses appear to be “active”: “[a]s long as they remain in the auditorium they cannot *not* participate.”⁸³⁴ This implies that performance necessarily entails a collapsing of the distance implied by the “critical” paradigm—which suggests that the performative aesthetics proposed by Fischer-Lichte might be useful in re-thinking the dyadic relation of reality to appearance called into question by Nancy.⁸³⁵ Moreover, the general collapsing of dichotomies that her analysis witnesses, which includes the disruption of the actor/spectator duality that she posits as constituting an ephemeral “community”, suggests that performance—considered as a transformative event—might be taken as a material model for the immanent staging of the social as such.

Fischer-Lichte addresses the difficulty of clearly demarcating the transformative *aesthetic* performances from other liminal experiences that might occur in life; she arrives at

832 Ibid., 206–7.

833 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 26.

834 Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance*, 155.

835 Cf. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 54.

this distinction: ‘[w]hile I will label those liminal experiences aesthetic which make the journey the goal, the liminal experiences which use the journey to reach “another” goal are non-aesthetic.’⁸³⁶ Accordingly, we might say that for a liminal experience to be “aesthetic”, its goal must be an *immanent* transformation, whereas a transformation with an external or *transcendent* goal would be non-aesthetic. If aesthetic experience is defined as immanent transformation—and if, as Fischer-Lichte suggests, ‘the creation of a community out of actors and spectators based on their bodily co-presence plays a key role in generating the feedback loop’ which allows this transformation to occur—then this suggests that the “community without essence” that Nancy seeks to present might be constituted on the grounds of an aesthetic experience.⁸³⁷ In this case, Fischer-Lichte’s “aesthetics of the performative” might be taken as another name for what Nancy calls “literary communism”, and performance might be seen as a site for the production of non-immanentist communities.⁸³⁸ However, Fischer-Lichte identifies ‘the creation of [...] communities’ and ‘the creation of the social bond’ as external (and hence *transcendent*) goals, which would situate performances with such goals in the non-aesthetic sphere because their liminality would concern ‘the transition *to* something and the resulting transformation *into* this or that’.⁸³⁹ Thus, to stage a performance with the aim of constituting a community would return us to the impasse Bataille encountered with *Acéphale* inasmuch as the transformation into a community would constitute a work of transcendence; whereas ‘aesthetic experience concerns the experience of a threshold, a passage *in itself*’.⁸⁴⁰ Therefore, whilst Fischer-Lichte suggests that the transformation into an “aesthetic community” is immanent to the performance experience, the creation of a community that lasts beyond the duration of the event cannot be considered its end.⁸⁴¹

We can deduce from this that the “community” constituted in the performance event, whilst being in various ways analogous with the community-without-essence that Nancy aims to articulate, cannot simply be identified with the latter. Consequently, if “performance” is to be useful to us in developing a new syntax for the immanent presentation of community, then our conception of it will itself need to be transformed into a non-standard model. Thus we will

836 Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance*, 199.

837 Ibid., 51.

838 Cf. Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 71–81.

839 Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance*, 199.

840 Ibid., [emphasis added].

841 Fischer-Lichte explains the performative community with reference to Gianni Vattimo’s notion of “aesthetic communities”, understood as collectivities ‘that emerge out of a shared aesthetic experience and are bound to fall apart after a short period.’ Ibid. Vattimo proposes that ‘[a]esthetic experience leads us into other possible worlds, and we are made to realize the contingency and relativity of the “real” world in which we live’; he characterizes this experience as a problematic freedom which oscillates between belonging and disorientation. Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, trans. David Webb, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 10.

now re-view Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics of performance according to the terms of Laruelle's decisional matrix, in order to render its principle of sufficiency apparent so that we may later suspend it.

In the *donational* dimension, “performance” is given as the datum to be understood. “Performance” here denotes both traditional theatrical works and those contextualized within fine art, and may include site-specific works and/or the incursion of “reality-effects” into the stage-space; as such it is situated in a frame that exceeds the mimetic logic we have seen in Aristotle. Moreover, where Artaud attempted to overturn the hierarchy of Aristotelian theatrical aesthetics by prioritizing the *mise en scène* over the text, Fischer-Lichte suggests that whilst the former no doubt contributes to the performance experience, it is not fundamental to performance. Instead, she identifies the specific mediality of performance as consisting in ‘the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators’.⁸⁴² She thus emphasizes the finitude of performative materiality, offering a conception of performance as event. Thus, in the dimension of *affection*, “performance” is given as a finite, and hence immanent or real, experience. The co-presence in which the mediality of performance consists is posited as creating a “community” in which roles may become transformed and/or reversed. However, Fischer-Lichte proposes that the most fundamental requirement for a performance to occur is for two groups of people to gather in the same place, for a certain period of time. She states that ‘[t]heir encounter—interactive and confrontational—produces the event of the performance’.⁸⁴³ This “interactive” event is not generated by the simple circumstance of two groups of people sharing a certain space for a certain time; Fischer-Lichte states, using “traditional terminology”, that: ‘performance must satisfy specific conditions of “production” and “reception”’, in which the actors act and the spectators perceive.⁸⁴⁴ Thus the question of the *reception* of the performance experience arises.

The dialectical opposition of actor/spectator is displaced, in Fischer-Lichte's discourse, by appealing to the concept of “performativity”, understood as a process of immanent transformation. Fischer-Lichte attributes the co-presence that both generates and spontaneously determines the materiality of the performance event with the form of an autopoietic feedback loop. This feedback loop can be understood as a contingent relational structure which connects actors and spectators with all the elements of the *mise en scène*. By attributing this circular structure with the ability to constitute performative materiality, Fischer-Lichte implicitly posits the co-presence of actors and spectators as being not only the

842 Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance*, 38.

843 Ibid.

844 Ibid.

fundamental requirement for performance to happen, but also as the *factum a priori* that conditions its *reception*. Thus co-presence occupies both sides of the affection/reception Dyad: firstly, as the simple spatial proximity that is the ontical precondition for the performance encounter; and secondly, as the shared being-in-the-world that generates the specific materiality of performance. Fischer-Lichte posits a “*radical concept of presence*” to name this state of being, in which ‘the spectator experiences both himself and the performer as embodied mind in a constant process of becoming’.⁸⁴⁵ However, because this “radical presence” is produced as an ecstatic effect of the relational apparatus of the performance framework, it cannot be said to be *radically immanent*, in Laruelle's terms. Rather, “the radical concept of presence” names the *intuition* that creates a transcendental synthesis of the datum (the ontical elements that combine to produce the performance) with the factum (the co-presence that generates its materiality as event—which, as ecstatic, can be understood as a transcendence). Thus, the ontology of performance is conceived according to a differential relation that is characterized as a feedback loop, whose circular form unifies the dyad and constitutes the auto-donational structure of performance.

In the *positional* dimension, *transcendence* operates on a number of levels—effectuating not only the separation of ecstatic co-presence from the ontical circumstance of two groups of people inhabiting the same architectural space for a certain time-period, but also establishing a number of other dyads, including: semioticity/materiality; representation/presence; meaning/effect; etc. This multiplicity of dyads together form the variable dimensions of a matrix, through which a performance event is attributed with the ability to generate sense in a singular way. Fischer-Lichte proposes that performativity destabilizes these oppositions, and thus produces non-hermeneutic “meanings” which resist linguistic representation—or indeed, any kind of “capture”, whether by the memory or by recording technologies. In the performance event, the terms of these dyads exist in an oscillatory relation that can collapse into a contingent self-referentiality. Hence performatively generated meanings are posited as resisting the over-determination of performance by the transcendent apparatus of *logos*. However, the Dyads are, in the first instance, established through a scission that separates the terms before mixing them to form an amphibology. Thus the *plane* on which they are staged remains a philosophical one. Thus, whilst Fischer-Lichte argues that the pairs are not dialectically opposed, their collapse into self-referentiality is nevertheless a *unity* that is not simply given, but rather produced through a process of transcendental synthesis.

845 Ibid., 99.

Moreover, whilst the finite performance event is proposed as immanently determining its own sense, it remains the case that the co-presence of actors and spectators is presupposed as both the condition for and the ground of its meanings. As such, the collapsing of dichotomies that produces the non-hermeneutic meanings is dependent on an ontological framework that locates the essence of performance not in its simple ontic reality, but in what we might call the *reality-effect* of “co-presence”, that adds an ecstatic supplement to the real, and hence divides its immanence. Fischer-Lichte's conception of co-presence thus implies a finitizing reduction similar to that which we have identified as being at the kernel of both Heidegger and Nancy's thinking. Hence her aesthetics of the performative are *positioned* on a differential plane in which the relation—co-presence, in the specific form of the feedback loop—is accorded an ontological priority over the terms it serves to unify, thereby not only binding the various dyads into a disjunctive unity but also co-constituting the putative “reality” of performance, thereby producing its “reality-effect”. In this way, the autopoiesis of the feedback loop constitutes the auto-positional dimension of Fischer-Lichte's conception of performance.

Consequently, it is in *co-presence* that performance's principle of sufficiency resides. Fischer-Lichte proposes performance as a site of connectivity, and that ‘*the fundamental bodily co-presence of actors and spectators engenders and guarantees [this connection]*.’⁸⁴⁶ By positing co-presence as both engendering and guaranteeing the connectivity of the feedback loop, she implies that performance is *sufficient* as an autonomous site of meaning production. That is, the grounding presupposition of the aesthetics of the performative—namely, the shared presence that is given as the necessary *condition* for performance—is posited again as the immanent “meaning” that is its *result*. The self-referentiality of co-presence, its circular form, thus constitutes an auto-sufficient and auto-legitimizing structure. As such, although Fischer-Lichte grounds her aesthetics in the finitude of the performative event, positing performance as intrinsically resistant to being over-determined by *logos*, the structure she articulates—which both requires co-presence, and produces “meaning” that is nothing other than the ecstasy of this co-presence—nevertheless conforms to the decisional structure that Laruelle identifies as the invariant kernel of philosophy. Hence autopoietic co-presence constitutes the *Principle of Sufficient Performance*.

We have now examined three theories of theatrical aesthetics, and have identified a distinct principle of sufficiency underwriting each. The first is the Aristotelian *Principle of*

846 Ibid., 44 [emphasis added].

Sufficient Muthos, which positions theatre within a mimetic framework and accords primacy to the plot that is rationally constructed as the object of poetic imitation. This classical conception of theatre is formally determined by *logos*, and its representational logic can be characterized as “metaphysical”. We then looked at Artaud's attempt to challenge this logocentric conception of theatre by asserting the priority of its media—gesture, voice, and *mise en scène*. Artaud aims to unify the material elements of theatre in order to produce a total experience of “cruelty” that would dissolve the boundary between mind and body allowing the subject to experience him/herself as wholly present. However, we argued that this desire for a “real” experiential unity inevitably fails because Artaud's “metaphysics in action”, nevertheless remains grounded in a Decision that disjoins what it seeks to unify. Thus, although Artaud reverses the Aristotelian hierarchy by prioritizing theatre's mediality over *muthos*, his conception of theatre is nevertheless a chiasmatic reflection of the Classical model. As such, his materialist approach remains philosophically over-determined, and constitutes the *Principle of Sufficient Cruelty*. Finally, we have examined Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics of the performative, which seeks to move beyond the representational paradigm of theatre, situating it in the broader context of “performance”. We have argued that the notion of co-presence, attributed with the form of an autopoietic feedback loop, is posited as both the condition for performance, and its resulting “meaning”, and thus constitutes the presupposition of the *Principle of Sufficient Performance*.

Using Laruelle's decisional matrix has allowed us to view each of these aesthetic theories in a consistent formal manner, demonstrating their structural similarities to the philosophies of community we have examined, and to render apparent their dimensions of sufficiency. All of these principles of sufficiency would need to be suspended in order to articulate a non-standard aesthetics of theatre. Our aim in the context of this thesis, however, is not to theorize theatre as such, but rather to utilize a non-standard conception of theatre to assist in developing a “theatre-fiction” as a syntax for the immanent presentation of community.⁸⁴⁷ Thus, having deviated from our central question somewhat in order to prepare

⁸⁴⁷ This is not to say that turning the non-philosophical vision we are developing here towards the “object” of performance, and indeed our non-theatrical matrix, which draws on Laruelle's non-standard *aesthetic* theory could potentially be used to think the relation between performance and theory differently. Tony Fisher proposes adopting a Laruillian posture as a way of staging the ‘radical ambition of performance philosophy’, in ‘Thinking Without Authority: Performance Philosophy as the Democracy of Thought’, *Performance Philosophy* Vol. 1 (2015): 17. The radical gesture of this emergent field, as Fisher elaborates, is to attempt to move beyond the *application* of thought to performance, or the use of performance practice to exemplify a conceptual idea, and to instead accord performance the status of a mode of thought: to make the claim that “performance thinks”. Fisher suggests that performance philosophy is thus inaugurated by a democratizing gesture which seeks to level the hierarchy which would place theory above practice, which is equivalent to Laruelle's axiomatic redeployment of philosophical materials which renders the latter's decisional apparatus contingent, thereby levelling the terrain of thought. Thus, he concludes that

the aesthetic materials we have chosen to introduce into non-philosophy, we will now return to the problematic of community.

‘performance philosophy should in fact be thought less as designating a field so much as asserting a hypothesis—a hypothesis that returns us (“in the last instance” as Laruelle might say) to performance. Specifically, it is the hypothesis that we must hold on to such that thinking *alongside*, *through* and *with* performance might begin on the basis of an equality of thought rather than as a determining thought’ Ibid., 182.

CHAPTER 7

Staging Community

7.1. Mimesis, dramatization and the event of staging: theatre and community in Bataille and Nancy

We have now passed through a number of processes in order to prepare for a non-philosophical presentation of community. Firstly, we engaged in a still-philosophical analysis of two discourses of community, in the work of Bataille and Nancy, in which we followed the deconstructive logic of the materials themselves.⁸⁴⁸ Then we examined Laruelle's claim that *all* philosophical approaches, whilst capable of articulating a *socius*, are prevented from grasping the reality of community by the presuppositions of sufficiency on which they are grounded. Here, we introduced Laruelle's non-philosophy in a condensed form; however, we also presented some objections to his claims raised by Derrida, and suggested that in order to understand the *differend* between philosophy and non-philosophy, and to put Laruelle's theory to the test, we would need to engage in a broader survey of his thought.⁸⁴⁹ Following this, we presented Laruelle's analytic of philosophical Decision, in which he claims to have identified the invariant structure at the kernel of all (transcendental) philosophies, and we showed how it can be applied to both Bataille and Nancy's philosophical articulations of community.⁸⁵⁰ In this way, we have rendered apparent the ways in which immanence and transcendence are mixed in these materials so that we might suspend the transcendent structures of sufficiency and offer a more immanent presentation of community. We then elucidated how Laruelle proposes an axiomatic intervention into philosophy that deploys its terms according to a non-decisional syntax, which allows them to be determined by the radical immanence that he posits as the enabling condition for all thought—thus moving beyond the “critical” aspect of non-philosophy towards its positive practice.⁸⁵¹

Thus far, however, we have only offered a still-transcendent *representation* of Laruelle's method, and are yet to put it into practice. In order to effectuate this positive practice it is necessary to develop a specific non-philosophical syntax for community, which should be occasioned by the materials. We have observed that Laruelle's method also allows for other techniques of creation to be introduced into non-philosophy and, on the basis of the

848 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 1 & Ch. 2.

849 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 3.

850 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 4.

851 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 5.

thematic of theatre that recurs in different ways in both Bataille and Nancy's discourses, we have proposed to develop a “theatre-fiction” for our own immanent presentation of community.⁸⁵² Accordingly, the previous chapter deviated from our central question in order to analyse three aesthetic theories for theatre, with the aim of isolating their inherent presuppositions of sufficiency, enabling us to suspend them; our analyses applied Laruelle's decisional matrix to the materials, and thus took a similar form to our earlier demonstration of the decisional structures within Bataille and Nancy's thought. The reason for undertaking such an analysis is that, according to Laruelle, art practice alone is not adequate to challenge philosophical sufficiency because it is either situated beyond conceptual thought, as its incommensurable other, or else is itself philosophically over-determined by the aesthetic discourse that legitimates it.⁸⁵³ Thus, in order to render theatre a useful tool for syntactic invention, its concept needs to be transcendently reduced and subjected to a non-philosophical mutation—in one and the same shift of stance by which we re-view community. Accordingly, in our final chapter, we aim to demonstrate the immanent validity of Laruelle's non-philosophical method by putting it into practice, positively effectuating this vision-in-One, which will allow us to simultaneously stage community immanently, and to re-conceive the “stage” as the site of a non-sufficient experience of thought. Before we begin this positive effectuation, we will first clarify how theatre relates to community in Bataille and Nancy's thought, referring back to the three principles of theatrical sufficiency we identified in Chapter 6.

Bataille's discourse does not often focus on theatre *per se*; however, we have proposed that his linking of community's ecstasy with the impossibility of experiencing one's own death—which ‘proclaims the necessity of *spectacle*, or of *representation* in general’—introduces an implicitly theatrical framework into his thought.⁸⁵⁴ Bataille proposes that the practice of *fiction* separates humanity from other animals, facilitating an awareness of death which “beasts” remain ‘alien and ignorant in respect to’, and suggests that rites and performances (from religious acts of sacrifice to theatre) serve to awaken the ‘haunting magic’ of such an awareness.⁸⁵⁵ Thus theatrical tragedy is understood as *mimetic* inasmuch as it presents the simulated death of a character with whom the audience identifies. As we have seen, Aristotle posits the mimetic function of theatre as the basis of its aesthetic value; however, the mimetism implied by Bataille's conception of tragedy differs from Aristotle's inasmuch as it is

852 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 6.

853 Cf. Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction*, 8.

854 Bataille, ‘Hegel, Death and Sacrifice’, 20.

855 *Ibid.*

not underwritten by the transcendent Ideality of *logos*. Rather, theatre here serves as an apparatus for producing the ecstatic experience in which the spectator's subjectivity is rendered *désœuvrée* through its proximity to the abyssal lack of meaning evoked by the fictional presentation of the death of another—which itself stands in for the originary sacrificial experience. Thus the value of tragedy for Bataille is found not in its ability to represent a rationally constituted object (the unified action taken by the hero), but rather in the way it mimetically provokes an affective experience that indexes death—the reality of which is unobjectivizable. Bataille posits this mimetic experience as necessary for the existence of community, understood as an event of profound communication with a limitless outside. Yet, he is somewhat ambivalent about *mimêsis* inasmuch as he sees the representational function of theatre, which he posits as necessary for the intuition to affectively grasp “death”, as simultaneously obscuring the latter’s *reality* by objectivating it. Hence, by giving death a *form*—as image, discourse, etc.—the spectacular mechanism divides its immanence.

Thus for Bataille, what is problematic about the discourse of knowledge is that it constitutes its objects by separating them from experience, such that “intelligent” questions result in a ‘feeling of [...] emptiness’.⁸⁵⁶ This recalls Artaud's feeling that he lacked an “inner substance” to which to apply his thoughts: ‘I am no longer myself, [...] my *real self* is asleep’.⁸⁵⁷ Moreover, Artaud's search for a “concrete” symbolism of singular and unrepeatable gestures, whose meaning would correspond with their materiality rather than being arbitrarily attached, can be seen as a desire to respond to the problem identified by Bataille, whereby the identity of myth and ritual (or, analogously, of *muthos* and theatrical *experience*) is effaced, and ‘discourse [...] slip[s] into vulgar self-serving interpretation.’⁸⁵⁸ Bataille states that the need to construct external values for discourse is brought about by ‘the separation of terror from the realms of knowledge, of feeling, of moral life’; again, this implies a kinship with Artaud's notion of “cruelty”, inasmuch as it suggests that the reintegration of extreme affective states such as terror would be sufficient to return us to a more *unified* experience—of both subjectivity and theatre.⁸⁵⁹

Bataille suggests that in order to escape from the feeling of emptiness brought about by discourse's separation from experience, a feeling we might characterize as that of a lack of *reality*, philosophy would need to ‘[put] to rest the analytic division of operations’.⁸⁶⁰ In place of philosophical divisions, he proposes an “inner experience” which is ‘not logically

856 Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 8.

857 Artaud, ‘Letter to René Allendy’, 169–70 [emphasis added]; cf. *supra*, ch. 6.2.

858 Bataille, ‘Hegel, Death and Sacrifice’, 26.

859 Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 9.

860 *Ibid.*, 8.

demonstrable’, but must rather be *lived* in order to ‘grasp the meaning from the inside’.⁸⁶¹ This description of an experience of thinking that resides in the immanent “inside”, refusing to partake in analytic scission, bears a marked resemblance to Laruelle's articulation of the subject-(of)-science on which the “real” community is based, as: ‘a radical lived experience, an immanent or absolute given, [... whose] type of reality is an immanence which remains below the coupling of Being and becoming, that is to say of their scission or difference.’⁸⁶² Moreover, Bataille argues that inner experience cannot be oriented towards any external goal in the realm of the mind (e.g. religious, scientific, aesthetic), that it ‘can have no other value, no other authority’, than itself.⁸⁶³ Thus, like Laruelle, he posits a conception of knowledge which is validated immanently, rather than being legitimated by reference to transcendent ends. Hence, Bataille's notion of “inner experience” can be seen as the desire for an immanent and unified approach to thought, and therefore—to some extent—as a precursor to the non-philosophy proposed by Laruelle.

Bataille states that the immanent value and authority of inner experience ‘imply the discipline of a method’, which he identifies with ‘the existence of a community’, thereby sustaining the comparison with Laruelle inasmuch as the latter proposes radical lived experience as the real basis both for his transcendental “science” and for community.⁸⁶⁴ However, Bataille's “method”, which in contrast to Laruelle he *opposes* to science, differs from the axiomatic abstraction of non-philosophy.⁸⁶⁵ The possibility of theorizing this “method” is also somewhat ambiguous—as Nikolopoulou observes, throughout *Inner Experience*, Bataille gives contradictory answers to the question of *how* this limit experience might be expressed, ‘at times allowing and even demanding for its expressibility, but more often emphasizing its unattainability particularly in discourse.’⁸⁶⁶ What is relatively consistent, however, is his appeal to another theatrical term: “dramatization”, which he posits as both the *principle* and the *method* by which to overcome the analytic scission within immanence, to return to a more real experience of both thought and community. He traces the emergence of this dramatizing principle out of religious practices and through early forms of theatre, where it was oriented towards a transcendent outside (e.g. gods, the collective effervescence of the social group, etc.), but he suggests that in order to become “completely general”, ‘*it is*

861 Ibid.

862 Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 160.

863 Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 7.

864 Ibid.

865 Ibid.: ‘Inner experience [is not] able to have principles [...] in science (knowledge cannot be neither its goal nor its origin)’.

866 Nikolopoulou, ‘Elements of Experience’, 106.

necessary to reject external means’, making the drama “inner”.⁸⁶⁷ Thus, whilst the notion of “dramatization” derives from what Bataille conceives as the origins of theatrical experience, he comes to think it in more generic terms—as the mode in which the finitude that causes the collapse of discourse is disclosed.

Dramatization can thus be understood as a name for a quasi-theatrical experience that is distinct from the representational mechanism of theatre because it indexes the abyss of meaning instantiated by death. Yet, if the finite reality of death is strictly unrepresentable, the question arises as to what *means*—what *media*—are required to bring this experience into being. Sometimes Bataille suggests that dramatization is effectuated by visual means, discussing the way in which the fascination with an image can cause an objective projection of the self that draws the subject into an ecstatic “object point” which ‘give[s] the optical form to experience’.⁸⁶⁸ Such an optical experience breaches the rules of perspective, of critical distance, of separation. Elsewhere, he links dramatization to other forms of non-discursive sensation such as the acoustic or the tactile—for example the sound of the wind, its chill on the skin, as opposed to its concept which can ‘blow like a gale’ without ever cooling us.⁸⁶⁹ Thus, much like Artaud, Bataille appeals to the *materiality* of sense as that which breaches the limits of conceptual thought, suggesting the *medium* of the dramatic method can be understood by analogy with theatrical *mise en scène*. Hence dramatization is thought as an experience in which discursive knowledge is contested by being set within a broader paradigm of “sense”, in which bodily and affective sensation are prioritized.

Bataille states that ‘[e]xperience attains in the end the fusion of object and subject’.⁸⁷⁰ As an experience of fusion, this experience is not a matter of psychological interiority where the subject isolates itself; Nancy suggests that ‘the “inner experience” of which Bataille speaks is in no way “interior” or “subjective”, but is indissociable from the experience of [a] relation to an incommensurable outside’.⁸⁷¹ Bataille calls this point of fusion ‘a place of communication’; it is thus implicitly identified with the experience of community.⁸⁷² If the “inner” does not imply “interiority”, then we suggest that the experience Bataille articulates might better be understood as an *immanent* experience—which again seems to sustain the comparison with the experience of thought proposed by Laruelle. However, Bataille’s ambivalence towards the possibility of discursively articulating this experience, highlighted

867 Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 11–12.

868 *Ibid.*, 118.

869 *Ibid.*, 13.

870 Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 9.

871 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 18.

872 Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 9.

by Nikolopoulou, suggests that although he clearly perceives the need to adopt a different posture of thinking from the standard philosophical approach, he is unable to articulate the “method” of dramatization *theoretically*. This is illustrated by the negative terms in which he discusses the relation of his method to philosophy: he suggests that ‘philosophy properly speaking is absorbed’ by experience—suggesting a reversed Hegelianism where experience sublates reason and not *vice versa*; as such, what is attained in the moment of fusion is an experience of the subject as “non-knowledge” and the object as “the unknown”.⁸⁷³ In this sense, dramatization is not merely distinct from “theatre” as a representational apparatus—as the model for *logos*—but moreover functions to *negate* the latter. Thus the experiential drama has the power to breach the conceptual totality; however, another consequence of conceiving the relation between “theatre” and “drama” in this dualistic way is that the heterogeneity of dramatic experience—its reality—will necessarily be effaced (if not annihilated) by discursive representation.

Thus, despite Bataille's attempt to articulate an experiential unity that is effectuated by prioritizing the materiality of sense, which opens the theatre of *logos* towards the heterogeneous, the spectacular apparatus constitutes an insoluble theoretical problem in Bataille's thought. Much like Artaud, we argue that Bataille's ambivalent attitude towards spectacle leads to a certain “failure” in theoretically constituting a unified experience of thought, inasmuch as he posits a materially-based mimetic apparatus as necessary for provoking the dramatic experience, whilst simultaneously rejecting conceptual *mimêsis* on the basis that it obscures the same experience. Thus the “cruelty” (Artaud) or “terror” (Bataille) that are proposed as *sufficient* for unifying experience in a process of “fusion” instead instantiate an antagonistic relation between the affective and Ideal levels of the theatrical experience. Consequently, if such a fusion is to occur, it must do so as the result of a process of transcendental synthesis similar to the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, which means that its reality is constituted as a mixture of immanence and transcendence. More often, however, Bataille rejects such a formulation, and instead the antagonism results in an oscillation between affective and conceptual experience that stops short of fusion; thus his own discourse—of experience, of community—repeatedly unworks itself.

Hence, as Nikolopoulou suggests, Bataille recurrently places experience beyond the reach of discourse. That is, by articulating the inner experience as an experience of *non-knowledge*, he suggests that experience is incommensurable with knowledge—perhaps not the latter's antithesis, in the dialectical sense, but an order of real alterity that cannot be

873 Ibid.

incorporated into the body of knowledge and which therefore negates the possibility of the latter becoming total. Consequently, his notion of experience implies an excess that cannot be articulated theoretically. This is where we find his thinking to differ from Laruelle's—Bataille posits dramatization (the experiential aspect of theatricality) as the method by which the theatre of representation is transgressed, revealing the limits of *logos* and thereby rendering theoretical discourse ineffectual in relation to experience. Whereas we aim to demonstrate that Laruelle's vision-in-One, whilst similarly conceiving the real as foreclosed to thought, does not posit experience as heterogeneous to theory; rather, it offers a method in which the real *determines* the experience—and correspondingly the theoretical presentation—of community. The non-philosophical syntax that facilitates such a method of theorization suspends the authority of *logos*; however, it still uses linguistic discourse, but in a different mode that does not claim to determine experience reciprocally.

In Nancy's thought, the problematic of theatre is explicitly connected to that of community at a structural level. As we have seen, he suggests that the scene of myth, where the idea of the immanentist community is founded, 'is perhaps the essential scene of all scenes, of all scenography or all staging; it is perhaps the scene on which [...] we make appear all of our representations [...] an exemplary space of showing and revealing'.⁸⁷⁴ In this way, he proposes that the *muthos* of the Greek poets comes to '[take] on a whole series of values that amplify, fill, and ennoble this speech', to the point that the ancient society 'founded their *logos* in it'.⁸⁷⁵ Thus philosophy's roots are identified with an arche-theatrical apparatus that performatively gathers people into a collective by presenting to them their shared "origin"; and as theatrical aesthetics become formalized and valued according to their mimetic relation to the rational Ideals of the ethical society, so the Athenian theatre, 'as the place of the symbolic-imaginary appropriation of collective existence', comes to serve as a structuring model for our understanding of both *logos* and *polis*.⁸⁷⁶ As such, Nancy suggests that '[b]eing-together is defined as being-together-at-the-spectacle', and therefore that this sense of togetherness is not the community presenting *itself* so much as a nostalgia for the "originary" scene of spectacle, in which 'the Greek city assembled in community at the theater of its own myths'.⁸⁷⁷ Thus the isomorphic structures of theatre, *polis* and *logos* form an idealized rational system. Nancy proposes that the essence or meaning of the reciprocity of these structures is contained in *logos* itself: 'it is the common foundation of community,

874 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 44–5; cf. *supra*, Ch. 2.2.

875 *Ibid.*, 48; 49.

876 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 71.

877 *Ibid.*, 51.

where community, in turn, is the foundation of Being.⁸⁷⁸ In this way, the philosophical tradition grounds the thought of community in a transcendent structure of reception that corresponds with the one which legitimates *muthos* as the sufficient condition for Aristotelian aesthetics.⁸⁷⁹

Nancy's deconstruction of myth, in which he proposes *interruption* as constitutive of mythic performativity, challenges the totalizing presuppositions of this Classical rationality.⁸⁸⁰ In *Being Singular Plural* the ontological implications of this auto-interrupting cycle, which prevents identity from forming into a closed "immanentist" totality, are brought to the foreground, and once again the status of the theatrical model in philosophical critique is raised as a problematic. Nancy suggests that one of the consequences of theatre's paradigmatic character in relation to both communal existence and to *logos*, is that it becomes difficult to think *appearance* according to any other model. Hence modern "leftist" critiques (from Rousseau, through the Frankfurt School and Bataille, to the Situationists) come to treat appearance *as such* with suspicion, seeing "spectacle" as a substitution for a more "authentic" presence. Thus: 'appearance is understood, here, [...] as "mere appearance" (surface, secondary exteriority, inessential shadow), and even as "false appearance" (semblance, deceptive imitation).'⁸⁸¹

In contrast to such "critical attitudes", which remain "metaphysical" in Nietzsche's sense because they implicitly refuse to consider the order of appearances in the name of the authentic reality that is presupposed as lying behind them, Nancy suggests that we need to re-think the role played by *spectacle* in constituting the social world. He proposes that the phrase "the society of the spectacle" should be understood not only as a Debordian denunciation of the generalized mediation of images, but perhaps more profoundly, as 'the affirmation of a society *as exposed to itself and only to itself*'.⁸⁸² He thus suggests that appearance needs to be considered as not merely a copy of reality, but rather as the very ontological condition for existence as such, inasmuch as "existence" is understood as always-already social co-

878 Ibid., 22–3.

879 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 6.1.

880 In a recent essay, 'After Tragedy', Nancy offers an analysis of the place of *tragedy* in contemporary thought, which follows a similar logic to his deconstruction of myth and thereby demonstrates the continued relevance of the thematic of theatre in his thought. Here he plays on the sense of the phrase "after tragedy" as implying both that the experience of tragedy is lost (as the experience of myth is lost for Bataille), and that tragedy names the experience of loss *par excellence*. Developing from this indeterminacy of meaning, he argues that tragedy displaces the sacred in its entirety, as well as the experience of sacrifice that was so important to Bataille, and thus tragic speech serves as a kind of "civil religion" which is at the same time a triple aporia which renders apparent the groundlessness of the political, ethical and aesthetic. Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, 'After Tragedy', trans. Micaela Kramer, in *Encounters in Performance Philosophy*, ed. Laura Cull & Alice Lagaay, 278–289, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

881 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 52.

882 Ibid., 54.

existence, and “appearance” as co-appearance.

The challenge that Nancy presents us with, then, is how we might think the spectacular nature of society as originary—that is, to conceive society as ‘nothing other than the spectacle of itself’.⁸⁸³ This either requires a conception of appearance that no longer takes the theatrical apparatus as its model, or else a new way of conceiving this apparatus. Nancy inclines towards the latter approach, appealing to theatrical terminology (“staging”; “theatre of the world”) whilst at the same time proposing to re-think the presuppositions that are tied to the notion of theatre—and analogously, the structure of *logos*—so that “appearing” neither implies the visible manifestation of an object, nor its conceptual presentation, but rather the coming-to-presence of finite existence as such. Thus he posits a notion of “appearance” that is not distanced from reality in a vertical structure of transcendence, but is rather the horizontal “transcendence” of ecstatic *appresentation*, which spaces beings through the ontico-ontological relation whereby they appear in their Being as a consequence of their originary exposure to one another. By ontologizing appearance in this way, and thus reorienting the directionality of the transcendence implied by the theatrical model, Nancy challenges the implicit hierarchy in such oppositions as: society/spectacle, reality/appearance, unity/plurality. Both terms of these respective dyads are posited as appearing simultaneously in the event of being-together, neither taking priority because they are chiasmatically imbricated with each other.

Thus Nancy's notion of the *staging* of the social challenges the sufficiency of *muthos*—not by proposing to fuse the Ideal and affective aspects of *mimêsis* through a dramatic experience of cruelty or terror, but rather by destabilizing the oppositions instantiated by the apparatus of *logos*, placing them on a level plane where each term is equally immanent. The originary event of co-appearance posited by Nancy is analogous with the emergence of what Fischer-Lichte calls *radical presence*, in which dichotomies ‘such as art and reality, subject and object, body and mind, man and beast, or signifier and signified, lose their unambiguous meaning, are set in motion, begin to oscillate, and possibly collapse entirely’.⁸⁸⁴ Thus the theatrical model that most resembles the originary spectacle of the social proposed by Nancy is the aesthetics of the performative, which Fischer-Lichte proposes as producing an ecstatic experience of community in the event of performance.

We can see evidence of this performativity in Nancy's articulation of the social “stage” as the shared space-time of a “we”—that is, as the “here and now” which must be presented in

883 Ibid., 67.

884 Fischer-Lichte, *Performative Power of Performance*, 169.

order that one is able say “we”.⁸⁸⁵ This shared space-time, like Fischer-Lichte's “performative spatiality” is distinct from an architectural space; it might rather be described as an *experiential* space, in the sense that Nancy posits community as an experience—although where participating in a performance event as either actor or spectator might be thought as ‘an experience that we have’, the performativity of the shared space-time of the we articulated by Nancy is originary: it is ‘*an experience that makes us be*’.⁸⁸⁶ Nancy thus ceases to think the “theatre” of the social world in terms of a contained architectural space, instead positing the “stage” as an ecstatic space for the sharing of meaning that is performatively constituted in the event of ontological co-exposure. Moreover, just as Fischer-Lichte posits performance—and hence the performative space it generates—as a ‘self-referential, autopoietic system’, so Nancy, in similar terms, proposes that ‘a space-time of “self-referentiality”’ is necessary for the designation of a self in general; that even if one does not say “we” on the social stage, the very *possibility* of doing so ‘is the condition of the possibility of each “I”’.⁸⁸⁷

Thus the circular mode of spontaneous auto-generation that the former identifies as the defining principle of performance is deployed by the latter as the *a priori* condition for the ontological staging of the self. In this way, the performative conception of space that opens up the contained theatrical structure of *logos* by positing the priority of the “with”, simultaneously unworks the subject as substantive interiority. Nancy argues that even Descartes' claim to solipsistic solitude from which he posits his ontological axiom—“*cogito ergo sum*”—is a ‘methodological pretence’ which actually uncovers ‘the stage of the we’, because ‘anyone who feigns solitude thereby attests to the “self-referentiality” of *anyone* [de quiconque]’.⁸⁸⁸ That is, in *staging* his solitude, Descartes divides the immanence of the experience of thought by presupposing an *audience* for his meditations—and because the “self” he stages is emptied of all predicates except for the supposed-universal experience of

885 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 65.

886 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 26.

887 Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance*, 39; Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 65.

888 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 66. Descartes first formulates this axiom, ‘I think therefore I am’, in his *Discourse on Method*, published in 1673; he further demonstrates the reasoning behind it in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 1641; cf. René Descartes, *Descartes' Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Norman Kemp Smith, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1952), 140, 196–212 and *passim*. Nancy explores the theatrical pretence in Descartes' thought in an earlier essay, ‘Lavartus Pro Deo’, trans. Daniel A. Brewer, in *Glyph 2*, ed. Samuel Weber & Henry Sussman, 14–36, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), where he explores the methodological necessity of the mask of anonymity for Descartes. Nancy identifies an ontological rift between the thinking substance of the ego, which desires to appropriate itself, and the subject, which is constituted in an act of exhibition which renders self-apprehension impossible. Hence he gives the “fictive” (as distinct from the “imaginary”) as ‘a position or a *role* that is structurally indispensable in the production of the *theoretical* truth of the subject.’ 30. Laruelle's analysis of the Cartesian subject gives the latter as a similarly divided structure (cf. *Principles*, 79–120). However, as we shall see, Laruelle's method radicalizes the fictive by posing its immanent essence as the “fictionale”; cf. *infra*, 243–5.

thinking/doubting, it is a generic self; thus, reciprocally, his audience implicitly includes any and all selves. This is why Nancy suggests that:

there has never been, nor will there ever be, any [real] philosophical solipsism. In a certain way, there has never been, and never will be, a “philosophy of the subject” in the sense of the final [*infinie*] closure in itself of a for-itself.⁸⁸⁹

In contrast to such a closed conception of subjectivity, Nancy re-thinks the Cartesian “theatre of the world” not as ‘an artificial space of mimetic representation’, but rather as ‘a stage in the sense of the opening of a space-time for the distribution of singularities, each of whom singularly plays the role of the “self” or the “being-self”.’⁸⁹⁰ Thus the “stage” is posited as the performative space in which singular beings co-appear, prior to their constitution as subjects. As such, the stage is given as the necessary environment for subjectivity—but also, and more generally, for meaningful existence, for the creation of a “world” in the finite act of sharing sense. For Nancy, this “stage” is nothing less than the *event* in which Being gives itself as singular plural—and hence as something, rather than nothing.

Thus, where Bataille seeks to resist the closure of representation by positing an experience of dramatization that opens the subject onto a place of communication that breaches its limits *a posteriori*, Nancy instead posits the social stage as emerging in the originary event of co-appearance—thereby proposing it as the condition *for* the theatre of the subject, the experience in which meaning arises out of the relation of *logos* to the finitude that exceeds the theoretical grasp. The *a priori* position accorded to this performative event guarantees that it cannot be recuperated within the mimetic structure of *logos* because, as the originary presentation of being-with *as such*, it necessarily *withdraws* from any attempt at re-presentation. Thus Nancy's response to the question as to ‘how can the community without essence [...] be presented as such’ is that this “community”, as the performative event in which the shared world of meaning originates, is always-already *being-presented* inasmuch as it constitutes the very condition that makes it possible to ask such a question.⁸⁹¹ However, due to its essential withdrawal from signification, the ontological sociality Nancy proposes as constituting the ground of the “theatre of the world” remains an aporetic ‘excess in relation to the theoretical’.⁸⁹²

Thought as such an excess, the stage of the social eludes re-presentation, and thus can only be described through an irreducible practice of language. Nancy plays on an

889 Ibid., 29.

890 Ibid., 66.

891 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, xxxix–xl.

892 Ibid., 26.

indeterminate syntax in order to discursively express the dynamic *topos* of this stage:

Being singular plural: these three apposite words, which do not have a determinate syntax (“being” is a verb or noun; “singular” and “plural” are nouns or adjectives; all can be rearranged in different combinations), mark an absolute equivalence, both in an indistinct *and* distinct way.⁸⁹³

The syntactic indeterminacy he alludes to here suggests a flat plane on which the meanings of linguistic signifiers are rendered mobile by their reciprocity with each other. As such, he appeals to *poetics* as a method for figuring the spatiality of the originary communication that withdraws from the grasp of discourse. We find Nancy's writing to have a poetic beauty, which is also a theoretical inventiveness inasmuch as his phrasing combines words in such a way as to turn meanings back upon themselves in order to express a *sense* both more unstable and more profound than signifying discourse could denote in a direct manner. This renders language unstable, creating a dynamic space by making words slide without dominating each other, and thus metonymically figures the topology of the stage on which the sociality of Being appears. Yet we suggest that this destabilizing of *linguistic* syntax, while it resists the closure of representation, nevertheless continues to accept the ultimate authority of *logos* because although it unworks the fixity of signifiers (which, moreover, have *always* been able to change places, to form chains in which one meaning is substituted for another), it stops short of challenging globally the way that philosophical discourse relates to the reality it purports to explain.

This appeal to poetics as a way of presenting (or we might say “performing”) his philosophical ideas is a consistent part of Nancy's practice as a writer; an earlier book, *The Discourse of the Syncope: Logodaedalus*, makes the motivation for this practice apparent.⁸⁹⁴ Here, Nancy explores the relation between philosophy's schematic content or “substance” and the style of its presentation through a close reading of Kant, identifying a constitutive gap or “blackout” inscribed into the latter's critical philosophy between the schematic and ultimately mathematical logic that *constructs* concepts and the intuition through which the same concepts are exhibited (*darstellen*) philosophically. Nancy observes that this division between the mathematical, which is for Kant ‘[t]he only invulnerable presentation’, and the discursive mode of philosophy through which it must necessarily be intuited ‘corresponds [...] to the most intrinsic partition undertaken by the *Critique [of Pure Reason]*; that is to say it corresponds in one sense to *critique* itself.’⁸⁹⁵ This is to say that Kant posits mathematics as

893 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 28.

894 Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope: Logodaedalus*, trans. Saul Anton, (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), which was first published in 1976.

895 *Ibid.*, 32.

the only adequate grammar to enable a presentation of both the concept and the intuition that corresponds to it; but because a purely mathematical construct is not available to the intuition *in itself*, the concept must be mediated through discourse, which is thus the proper form of presentation for philosophy—albeit one that is vulnerable because it is to some extent reliant on the rather elusive matter of literary style. Consequently, Nancy observes that the distinction between noumena and phenomena that forms the ground for the Transcendental Analytic is also, implicitly, inscribed into the philosophical *Darstellung* [presentation] as the irreducible gap between the mathematical logic of the schema (which constitutes the *syntax* or meta-language of Kantian critique) and the natural language through which it is presented. Thus *Darstellung* cannot be separated from *Dichtung* [poesy, literary style] even though the latter is the “vulnerable” mode, and Nancy suggests that any distinction between *philosophy* and *literature* is only made possible by this more originary distinction internal to philosophy.⁸⁹⁶

The interplay between these two modes of language thus constitutes a breach at the core of philosophy as such, which Nancy names the “*syncope*” and which we can understand as a kind of interruption.⁸⁹⁷ Nancy’s intention in marking this irreducible gap is not to criticize Kant—he remarks that his questions ‘are posed by Kant and not to Kant’—but rather to bring to the surface an aporia, an undecidability, that he suggests philosophers in Kant’s wake can only repeat.⁸⁹⁸ He states:

Philosophical discourse is pronounced over a syncope or by a syncope. It is held up [*tenu*] by an undecidable moment of syncope. This moment, this mode of production, and this regime of inscription are Kant’s, which means: they are Kant’s *still today*. The Kantian function in philosophy is what exhibits—or should one say *incises*?—the syncope, in spite of everything, in spite of all the will in discourse.⁸⁹⁹

The syncope, then, names an *incision*—a cut that is constitutive of philosophical presentation, and that philosophers are bound to repeat. We can say of this cut that its irreducible undecidability keeps the system open inasmuch as it necessitates a certain *art* in order to be presented, and in a positive sense this is what Nancy’s practice of writing never ceases to do. However, this cutting and dividing can be seen in Laruelle’s terms as the *decision* of philosophy, which is re-inscribed into Nancy’s articulation of community as it is throughout his thought. Consequently, as we have seen, this presentation remains within the circle of

896 Cf. *Ibid.*, 72.

897 The term *syncope* has several meanings on French, all of which Nancy is playing upon. It can mean a moment of passing out, fainting, or missing a heart-beat; rhetorically, a suppressed letter in the middle of a word; an interruption in the flow of a piece of music—syncopation—which can be related to the notion of rhythm that recurs in Nancy’s later work on the spacing of community. It is also used colloquially to refer to a heart attack. Cf. ‘Translator’s Introduction’ in *ibid.*, xvi–xvii.

898 Cf. *ibid.*, 14. Interestingly in the context of our discussion, Nancy suggests that ‘[a]n analogous operation can be performed on “laughter” in Bataille’ as he here performs on Kantian discourse. *Ibid.*, 7.

899 *Ibid.*, 15.

auto-sufficiency, with the “presence” that constitutes the social stage posited as both the necessary condition for *and* ultimate phenomenal effect of community.

Consequently, although Nancy posits the social stage as the *a priori* event of being-with from which the sense of the world derives—which implies that insofar as existence is meaningful “community” is always-already presented—his own *theoretical* presentation of community remains a re-presentation, which projects its own auto-affecting structure onto the “reality” of this supposed-originary experience whilst maintaining that its “object” is ungraspable because it positions the latter in a dimension of irreducible withdrawal. As such, although Nancy challenges the totalizing function of mythic performativity by positing an event of staging that is constitutively open and precedes the community's immanentist identification with its collective “origin”, the performativity of his own discourse totalizes in another manner—because his philosophical articulation of this originary co-appearance, which remains a mimetic double of its “object”, is identified with the latter, and thus assumes a determining relation to the immanent reality it claims to describe. We therefore propose that a more radical syntactic intervention is necessary—one that not only destabilizes meanings within the space of signification, but rather finds a new *usage* for linguistic signifiers by assuming a posture that allows their relation to the real to be viewed differently. This entails a mutation of the theatre of *logos*, which suspends all three levels of theatrical sufficiency in-One and introduces an irreversible determination by the real. In order to do this, we need to re-view the structure of the theatrical *event* non-philosophically, and to articulate a new syntax for this event that radicalizes its performativity.

7.2. Towards a syntax for community: from the philosophy-event to the advent of fiction

Within Laruelle's non-philosophical framework, the term “syntax” refers not to the linguistic rules which govern how the ordering of words affects the meaning that they collectively convey, but rather to the logic by which the real is understood to be connected to the thought-world—which is to say the axioms that govern our conception of the causality of thought, and thus legitimate language's purchase upon the real. Thus we might summarize the claim made by Laruelle in his global analysis of the decisional structure of philosophy by saying that the presupposition of sufficiency serves—implicitly or explicitly—as philosophy's grounding axiom, and therefore as the basis of philosophy's syntax. Non-philosophy intervenes in this syntax by introducing a different axiomatic framework—one which

suspends philosophical sufficiency by initial definition and thereby instantiates a new conception of the causality of thought. This axiomatic framework, which we have elucidated in general terms above, constitutes the syntax of non-philosophy.⁹⁰⁰ It entails the supposition of a unilateral relation between two registers of causality—firstly, the radical immanence of the One as the necessary but not sufficient cause-(of)-thought; secondly the philosophical thought-world, whose materials are taken as the contingent cause which occasions each particular effectuation of non-philosophy. Because non-philosophy's pragmatics require this occasional cause, which is selected from the potentially infinite range of philosophical Decisions, its general syntax is articulated anew with each effectuation, using terms that correspond with those of the material. Thus our aim is to elucidate a non-philosophical syntax using terms that derive from Bataille and Nancy's discourses on community, thereby offering an original articulation of thought's relation to the real, and an immanent presentation of community, in-One.

Let us begin by restating the non-philosophical axioms we introduced in Chapter 5, which follow from the grounding axiom of the real's radical foreclosure to thought, in order to recall the general syntax of non-philosophical thought:

- 1) the Real is radically immanent;
- 2) its causality is unilaterality or Determination-in-the-last-instance;
- 3) the object of this causality is the Thought-world, or more precisely, philosophy complicated by experience.⁹⁰¹

The order of these axioms describes the vector of non-philosophical thought—which travels from the real as immanent and necessary condition, via the causality of determination-in-the-last-instance, to the thought-world that is its object. Laruelle observes that '[t]he relations of the Real and effectivity are delicate', and proposes that it is only through the elucidation of their syntax that they can be understood.⁹⁰² He states that '*determination-in-the-last-instance* is the fundamental concept of non-philosophy'; as the transcendental causality of non-philosophical thought, which is given as the unilateral (non-) relation between the real-One and the organon of the force-(of)-thought, it can be understood as the syntactic kernel of Laruelle's pragmatics.⁹⁰³

Yet, although the non-philosophical posture axiomatically supposes the real as radically prior to and determining for thought, because non-philosophy's pragmatics require

900 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 5.

901 Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia*, 45.

902 Laruelle, *Principles*, 121.

903 *Ibid.*

some transcendent material as occasion its methodological order is contrary to the vectorial directionality of this unilateral determination. Thus we will commence our re-viewing of the problematic of community by considering the *object* of non-philosophical causality, which Laruelle defines as ‘philosophy complicated by experience’.⁹⁰⁴ We have seen how both Bataille and Nancy have proposed complicating the philosophical discourse of community with experience: the former positing dramatization as an experience of profound communication in which subject and object converge, thus opening the subject towards the outside; the latter positing the ex-position of singular-plural beings as the *a priori* condition for their presence-in-the-world, the event of this ecstatic exposure being conceived as ‘*an experience that makes us be*’.⁹⁰⁵ Each thus, in a different way, asserts experience as that which renders the closure of representation impossible in principle, thereby challenging the adequacy of the mimetic structure of *logos* for presenting “community” on the basis that the phenomenal reality of the latter exceeds what could be “immanentized” by objectivating its essence. Hence, each gives the experience of community as the reality which unworks the sufficiency of the theatre of *logos*, for which the Principle of Sufficient *Muthos* serves as paradigm.

However, we have argued that Bataille's experiential complication of philosophy oscillates between an anti-theoretical annihilation of the latter, and a still-sufficient synthesis of materiality and ideality, analogous with the theatrical Principle of Sufficient Cruelty; and that Nancy's experiential complication of philosophy, in which community is posited as the originary event of co-belonging, relies on a mode of performativity that is isomorphic with the form of the philosophical Decision and is thus auto-sufficient in a mode that is analogous with the Principle of Sufficient Performance. Our analysis of the decisional structure inherent to each of these approaches to the problematic thereby demonstrates that whilst these experiential complications of philosophy delimit the theatre of *logos*—challenging the theoretical adequacy of the objectivated “community” it manifests—they do not suspend its sufficiency globally. Non-philosophy's syntax, in contrast, takes the axiomatic suspension of philosophical sufficiency as its starting point, and thus allows us to re-envision philosophy's complication by experience—by giving the latter as the mode of thought's immanent manifestation. In this way, it offers a non-decisional way of conceiving the performativity of the event of thought.

The dramatic and performative conceptions of sociality offered by Bataille and Nancy

904 Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia*, 45.

905 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 26.

both, either implicitly or explicitly, give “community” as an event inasmuch as they affirm its *experiential* nature. These theories can thus be situated within a broader context of “philosophies of the event” in contemporary thought. Laruelle suggests that ‘the event has become a theme that allows one to gather and situate almost all of French philosophy after the period of structuralism in its strict sense’.⁹⁰⁶ He proposes that this near-ubiquity can be explained by the fact that ‘the most general structure of philosophy is condensed within the event as such, so that philosophy becomes the prototype condensing “eventality” [*l'événementialité*]; the figure *par excellence* of the event’.⁹⁰⁷ That is, philosophy turns to the event in order to explain the reality it seeks to grasp because the philosophical Decision is precisely “evental” in its form, and the auto-sufficient structure of philosophy means that rather than articulating the real, it instead articulates its own decisional form—identifying the latter *with* the real, and thus constituting its object in its own image. Accordingly, in order to theorize the event—and hence, the event of community—in a rigorous manner, Laruelle suggests that we must theorize the “philosophy-event” from a non-philosophical perspective.

Laruelle describes the philosophical event as a doubly-articulated structure. Its first articulation is concerned with the relation of entities to Being. He describes this articulation, in Heideggerian terms, as “ecstatico-horizonal” and “ontico-ontological”, and suggests that it forms a “structural *a priori*”.⁹⁰⁸ This description clearly corresponds with our analysis of Nancy's notion of the communal *stage*; we can also relate it to the *principle of insufficiency* proposed by Bataille, whereby he conceives beings as lacking *ipseity* or selfhood unless they enter into relation with Being, understood as a whole that transcends the individual.⁹⁰⁹ Laruelle argues that in such “philosophies of communication”, questions concerning representation and mediality are articulated a second time inasmuch as they are underwritten at a “*meta-*” level by the event of Being, which Heidegger names *Ereignis*. This event is not empirical, but rather indexes an ontological ground from which it detaches itself—it thereby constitutes both a rupture and the emergence of an excess. In this way, the social stage articulated by Nancy (dis)joins immanence and transcendence in two dimensions: firstly, in the finite transcendence towards a shared horizon of meaning by which singular beings co-appear in their Being, which adds a performatively heightened sense of presence to their simple ontic givenness (transcendence of “finitizing reduction”); secondly, in the emergence of the excess which interrupts this presence, and hence positions the essence of finite Being

906 François Laruelle, ‘Identity and Event’, trans. Ray Brassier, in *The Non-Philosophy Project: Essays by François Laruelle*, ed. Gabriel Alkon and Boris Gunjevic, (New York: Telos Publishing, 2012), 139.

907 Ibid., 138.

908 Ibid., 140.

909 Cf. Bataille, ‘The Labyrinth’, 174; cf. *supra*, Ch. 1.4.

beyond the *logos* (transcendence of “the withdrawal of Being”).⁹¹⁰ Laruelle states that ‘the two forms of transcendence are bound together through *co-belonging* [...] and can only be separated through abstraction’; thus the relation of the “co-” (e.g. in “co-existence”, “co-presence”, “co-appearance”, etc.) that Nancy posits as the hinge around which the social stage is constituted should be understood not only as a relation between one singular being and another but also as the gravitational centre of the ontico-ontological relation, at which the event turns and transcends itself in its withdrawal.⁹¹¹ Laruelle describes the second dimension of transcendence as ‘trailing the other at its base or periphery, partially containing it according to a relation of domination’.⁹¹² Accordingly, we can say that Nancy delimits the theatre of *logos* by positing an originary performative event that arises at the juncture with the “*epekeina tes ousias*” [“that which is beyond Being”]—where the latter is identified with the finitude of the real.⁹¹³

However, Laruelle proposes that ‘the event is not the other of the *logos* but the other of/in philosophy defined according to the wider aspect of its complex structure’.⁹¹⁴ As such, the event is not an instance of the real in itself, but merely an effect of the formal structure of Decision, which folds the *epekeina* back into the auto-positional *meta*-dimension of philosophy—without, however, suspending the latter’s sufficiency. Thus, although the *a priori* position Nancy accords to the performative event of community effectively collapses the distance between subject and object, as Bataille seeks to do with his notion of “dramatization”—and arguably in a more philosophically watertight manner, inasmuch as Nancy’s ontologizing of the stage of the social amounts to a refusal to enter the realm of subjectivity/objectivity *tout court*—this experience is conceived amphibologically, and thus the “real” that it presents remains mixed with the transcendent structure of givenness that conditions its reception. Indeed, in *The Experience of Freedom*, where he foregrounds the notion of experience (understood as an intensity rather than a figure) as the “truth” of the groundless ground of existence, Nancy explicitly characterizes this experience—which is inseparable from the event of community—as an auto-founding *decision*.⁹¹⁵ This decision, which enacts a profound freedom inasmuch as it precedes subjective will and is without predicates, delimits a “place” (that which we have articulated as the stage of the social) in an indeterminable *chorā* or ‘pure matter-for-places’ that is posited as prior to any architectonic

910 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 4.3.

911 Laruelle, ‘Identity and Event’, 142 [emphasis added].

912 *Ibid.*, 142.

913 *Ibid.*, 139.

914 *Ibid.*, 143.

915 Nancy, *Experience of Freedom*, 84.

grounding:

The foundation of foundation that is freedom is the very experience of founding, and the experience of founding is nothing other than the essence of experience in general. [...] This foundation is more or less the *nothing* itself, this ungraspable *chorā*, carried to the incandescent intensity of a decision. [...] The decision outlines a limit by bringing itself to the limit that owes its existence only to this founding gesture.’⁹¹⁶

This founding gesture is the very experience of finite transcendence, which Nancy has elsewhere articulated as the coming-to-presence of the community-without-essence: ‘finitude, as such and without escaping its non-essence, decides or decides itself on existence—and this decision is already its existence, at the same time as it is the foundation of its existence.’⁹¹⁷ Thus finitude is not experienced in its simple immanence, but given as an ‘*experience of experience*’, which makes ‘the inaugural incision into the surface of the in-itself’, and as a consequence of this cut exists in a reflexive mode of “*self-surpassing*”.⁹¹⁸

As such, whilst the ontological priority accorded to the social stage renders community's objectivating transcendence, and hence the “immanentist” closure of community within the theatre of *logos*, impossible in principle, it substitutes for the vertical transcendence of “metaphysics” a phenomenological depth which introduces another dimension of distance—in the existential cut between immanent experience and the reflexive experience of experience. Thus experience is conceived as containing an irreducible difference, which is also a “*différance*”, a movement of withdrawal that tends toward a widening of the gap.⁹¹⁹ Nancy states that it is ‘Being-in-common’ that presents the finitude of this experience to “me”, thereby identifying this movement with that of community's ecstasy.⁹²⁰ The differential structure of experience thus places community in the limit-space of alterity that is the beyond of Being: the *epekeina*. This is why Laruelle charges philosophies of the event, such as Nancy's, with remaining affiliated with the philosophical desire to ‘enclose philosophy within itself, to raise it up to the apex of its emerging juncture, to make philosophy gather and transcend itself in its entirety as *epekeina* both towards itself and towards the real as One or One-Other.’⁹²¹ Because the notion of experience to which it is yoked is differential in structure, the eventual staging of community continues to divide its immanence, and totalizes its “object” in its own manner inasmuch as it renders its own philosophical structure of givenness co-constitutive of community's phenomenal reality, even as it posits the latter's

916 Ibid., 84–5.

917 Ibid., 85–6.

918 Ibid., 87 [emphasis added], 85.

919 Ibid., 87.

920 Ibid., 95.

921 Laruelle, ‘Identity and Event’, 144.

essential withdrawal.

Thus, the philosophy of the event is affiliated not only to the multiplicity of singular-plural Being, but also to the One insofar as it *desires* immanence. Laruelle states: '[t]he event matters to philosophy as the real that finally appears at the limits of its ideal abstractions. [...] Philosophy is the desire of the real and hence desire of the event.'⁹²² However, he suggests that philosophy's auto-sufficient syntax posits this "real" as 'the untheorizable *par excellence*, an absolute limit for the theoretical grasp'—such as the experiences of dramatization and of the staging of the social are given by Bataille and Nancy respectively.⁹²³ In order to exit from this theoretical impasse, from the *aporia* of the real, the non-philosophical method substitutes the axiomatic presupposition of the real as the cause-(of)-thought, for the philosophical supposition of the ecstatic transcendence of the real towards the *epekeina* where it remains tantalizingly out of reach. This is to say that as we redeploy the terms of Bataille and Nancy's discourses of community according to the syntax of non-philosophy, 'the event will remain primary but will no longer be the real to which philosophy aspires.'⁹²⁴ The vision-in-One does not identify the philosophical event with the real, because the aspiration to reach the real is suspended in advance by the axiom of the One's radical foreclosure to thought; moreover, as our analysis of the event's decisional structure shows, the event takes the form of a mixture of immanence and transcendence, and thus its "reality" is viewed as relative, rather than absolute. Accordingly, Laruelle asserts that '[t]he real is nothing ontic, nor ontological, nor even heterological'; rather, as radical immanence, it is a non-consistent "*instance of manifestation*" that precedes even the event of Being.⁹²⁵ Due to the radical priority of this instance, Laruelle names the non-philosophical event as the "advent".⁹²⁶

We can elaborate the distinction between the non-consistent real and philosophy's *desire* for the real *qua* event by analogy with the psychoanalytic conception of desire developed by Jacques Lacan. Lacan posits the real as a state of pure plenitude that is "unassimilable" in representation.⁹²⁷ He infers that the real is the state the infant experiences at birth, thereby identifying it with an unmediated naturalness. However, as the infant begins to perceive itself as a discrete entity—first through its interaction with the "mirror" (either in the literal sense of a reflective surface, or through the way it sees itself "reflected" in other

922 Ibid., 148.

923 Ibid.

924 Ibid., 148.

925 Ibid., 150.

926 Ibid., 153.

927 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), 55.

people), through which it enters the “imaginary” order in which experience is mediated through the identification of a visual gestalt; secondly through its accession to the “symbolic” order, where linguistic signification comes to be the dominant way in which meaning is grasped—the plenitude of the real, its immanence, is divided. The ego of the psychoanalytic subject is thus understood as a composite structure, a Borromean knot, in which the real, imaginary and symbolic registers are imbricated. As such, the process of ego-constitution entails a division of the plenitude of the immanent-real—thus the price that is paid for the subject achieving the sense of presence-to-self that renders it *consistent* is that the real comes to take the place of “the impossible”, which is to say that it is *foreclosed to thought*.⁹²⁸ The consequence of the real being placed beyond the reach of conscious experience is that it comes to be the locus that desire strives to reach. However, the foreclosure of the real to conscious thought means that desire cannot locate its real aim, which is unobjectivizable, and this provokes anxiety in the subject. As a consequence, desire creates phantasmic objects that stand in for the lost plenitude of the real, to provide itself with a destination to aim towards. Thus, Lacan says, ‘if an object appears [for desire], this is because [...] the lack is lacking.’⁹²⁹ However, the very process by which these objects of desire are manifested within the imaginary and/or symbolic orders *separates* them from the real, thereby repeating the scission of immanence; as such, even if the object is attained, desire remains unsatisfied because the plenitude of the real does not reside in the phantasm.

Thus we can see that Lacan's psychoanalytic account of the desiring-subject corresponds with Laruelle's diagnosis of the amphibological form of *philosophical* desire, which constitutes the real that is beyond its grasp in the form of the event, and thus occludes immanence in the same gesture by which it strives to reach it.⁹³⁰ Accordingly, the eventual conception of community offered by Bataille and Nancy, which gives its object as the “untheorizable *par excellence*” and positions it in/as the *epekeina*, implies an economy of desire in which the unobjectivizable “object” of their respective discourses is a phantasm whose phenomenal reality as a *mixte* is substituted for the plenitude of the real, which is rendered as a *lack* by the decisional structure of the event. Hence, despite the apparent *positivity* accorded to the experience of profound communication (Bataille) or the ontological irruption of meaningful co-existence (Nancy), the desire for a *real theorization* of community

928 Ibid., 167.

929 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book X: Anxiety: 1962-1963*, ed. & trans. Cormac Gallagher, (London: Karnac Books, 2002), 35.

930 This phantasmic structure also conforms with the Generalized Interface of the Objective Heuristic Appearance, which Laruelle proposes as the *a priori* authority that underwrites the Principle of Sufficient Research; cf. *supra*, Ch. 3.1.

remains constitutively impossible to satisfy. What non-philosophy offers, in contrast, is a positive *usage* of this desire—it does not claim to satisfy philosophical desire by reaching the real, but rather to *dualyse* it so that the force of desire can be deployed positively to determine the event in-the-last-instance according to the real, whilst the phantasmic object of desire—the event of community as manifested philosophically, in its *mixte*-form—is granted relative autonomy and therefore remains intact.

Thus whilst Laruelle's axiomatic supposition of the foreclosure of the real, and his diagnosis of the amphibological form of philosophy, are arguably indebted to Lacanianism, his *usage* of these ideas differs from the psychoanalytic one—because the Lacanian subject itself partakes in the same decisional structure as philosophy, and thus is similarly constituted in an auto-sufficient form.⁹³¹ Laruelle observes that the psychoanalytic conception of desire as the simple metonymic flux of the passage of a signifier—which stands in for the alterity of the real in the experience of the subject—whilst it without doubt desubstantializes the latter, nevertheless ‘reintroduces the equivalent of a new substance, a new body, a new totality, etc. on the critique or ruin of representation’.⁹³² This “new totality” takes the form of the Borromean knot in which Lacan conceives the real to be bound to the imaginary and symbolic orders, where phantasms appear in the absence of the impossible “object” of desire. This model gives the subject as a *theatrical* structure in which the consistency of self-identity is the product of a representational apparatus that cleaves the simply-given immanence of the real, and in which the process of manifestation entails the production of a phantasmic object to cover the absence instantiated by the division of immanence that founds the self. Thus the Lacanian conception of desire, although it indexes the foreclosed real, nevertheless remains an amphibological structure—isomorphic with the structure of *logos*—in which this real is transcendently (dis)joined with the apparatus of manifestation.

Hence Lacan's conception of the subject can be seen to conform with the “critical attitude” identified by Nancy, in which appearance is opposed to reality, and thought as the

931 Terrence Blake suggests that ‘Laruelle has had trouble freeing himself from the Lacanian [...] vocabulary of his formative years’, and that this has led to his thought being interpreted by some in Lacanian terms, whereby the enclosure of philosophical worlds and their foreclosure to the real can only be overcome through an experience of trauma. However, Blake suggests that Laruelle's appropriation of quantum theory in his more recent work serves to rebut this reading, because his elucidation of the unilateral relation in terms of a *superposition* implies a more permeable understanding of philosophical worlds, and their (non-) relation with the real. Cf. Terrence Blake, ‘Laruelle's Escape from the Dictatorship of the Real’, <https://www.academia.edu/12367809/LARUELLES_ESCAPE_FROM_THE_DICTATORSHIP_OF_THE_REAL> [accessed 15 June 2015].

932 Laruelle, *Théorie des Étrangers: Science des Hommes, Démocratie, Non-Psychanalyse*, (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1995), 245. This suggestion that the desubstantialization of the subject instantiates the equivalent to a new substance recalls the charge that Caygill directs towards Nancy—that the dynamic conception of the emergence of Being as an “experience of freedom” developed by the latter ‘is analogous in many ways to a substantial, metaphysical concept’. Caygill, ‘The Shared World’, 25. Cf. *supra*, 13.

latter's mimetic copy.⁹³³ Moreover, because the phantasm manifested in this “theatre” is a *fiction* created by desire to cover over the lack of the real, it is conceived as a *false* appearance. Thus Laruelle suggests that whilst Lacan's conception of the subject overturns substantive notions of essence, it stops short of proposing a new origin or essence that would be ‘capable of eradicating the Platonism congenital to theory’, because it continues to articulate desire in terms of a desire-of-self that is at the same time a desire-of-the-Other, which reaches towards the alterity of the real positioned as *epekeina*.⁹³⁴ In this way, Laruelle characterizes Lacanian desire as a “transcendental principle”, which is both immanent *and* transcendent—sometimes identified with the real, sometimes with the search for the real. In place of such an amphibological conception of desire, Laruelle proposes a “non-psychoanalytic” mutation which would dualyse it—not by untangling the strands of the Borromean knot from some external perspective, but rather by finding the immanent *essence* of desire, its phenomenal reality. He states:

[t]he internal form of desire, its originary and minimal form, that under which it appears for the first time, in an ante-Platonic manner, is that of a simple, non-autopositional transcendence, structured as unilateral duality itself.⁹³⁵

Thus non-philosophical desire is given as the transcendental organon of the (non-) One—not a desire *of* ... (the real, the event, community, etc.), but rather the essence-(of)-desire as force-(of)-thought, which extracts or manifests the phantasm of desire from the philosophico-analytic experience of the latter, according to the immanence of the One.

It is through this dualysing of desire that the philosophical event is re-envisioned as the non-philosophical *advent*. This non-philosophical mutation does not add anything to the event, but rather looks anew at the conditions of its emergence in thought—that is, of its *manifestation*. By recognizing the phantasmatic structure of the philosophical event, and granting it a relative autonomy, non-philosophy thus re-deploys desire in more positive terms as cause-in-the-last-instance of the event of thought. As such, it does not seek to *breach* the theatrical structure that is given in the philosophico-analytic paradigm as isomorphic with *logos*, subjectivity, and the space of the social; rather, it offers a vision of thought in which the event of its manifestation is experienced as a *non-thetic* transcendence—that is, as a transcendence that does not position itself and hence is not supposed as co-constitutive of the real. Thus non-philosophy does not reject the mimetic function of the theatrical paradigm *tout court*, but rather proposes to rigorously theorize the phenomenal reality of the theatrical

933 Cf. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 52.

934 Laruelle, *Théorie des Étrangers*, 245.

935 *Ibid.*, 246.

structure, in order that the fiction it manifests is radicalized—‘modifying the experience and concept of “fiction” and of de-subjecting them from the philosophical yoke.’⁹³⁶

The de-subjection of fiction from the yoke of philosophy entails a suspension of the philosophical claim ‘to trace an always unstable line of demarcation between the fictional and the real, a critical line by which the latter is a degraded form of the former and, at the same time, claims to belong to it and determine it in its becoming’.⁹³⁷ This modification to our understanding of fiction, which would allow for a positive theorization of the manifestation of thought, again recalls Nancy’s question regarding how we might conceive the implicitly social staging of “appearance” without appealing to the divisive apparatus of critique. We have suggested that this question implies a certain kinship between the aim of Nancy’s thinking and that of Laruelle. However, the non-philosophical *theorization* of the event, which the latter names the “advent”, is distinguished from Nancy’s *positing* of the event as the spontaneous appearance of beings-in-their-Being by the method of dualysis, with which Laruelle proposes to disentangle this instance of manifestation—and the force, the desire, that it personifies—from its philosophically-supposed essential relation to Being. This is achieved not by enacting an analytic scission between Being and immanence, but rather by supposing the latter as already-given, as separate without having gone through any process of separation, prior to the constitution of the former. This description of immanence as *separate-without-separation* indicates non-philosophy’s *unilaterality*, because it describes the (non-) relation between immanence and transcendence whereby the former is given *a priori* as the indivisible One, whilst the latter gains its relative autonomy by separating itself—however, due to the radical *indifference* of the One, the impossibility of its being divided, this separation is only partial, constituting a *mixte* of immanence and transcendence. Moreover, because radical immanence is supposed as separate from Being in this unilateral manner it is given as empty of content, consisting neither of any substance nor of any relational dynamics that could assume a quasi-substantial form.

The axiomatic supposition that immanence is separate-without-separation from the thought-world is the first necessary operation for the radicalization of fiction, because it serves to complete the derealization of fiction that philosophy has, according to Laruelle, consistently failed to achieve.⁹³⁸ Fiction is “derealized” in the non-philosophical matrix

936 Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 230.

937 *Ibid.*, 229–30.

938 Laruelle identifies four modes in which philosophy has conceived fiction’s relation to the real: 1) in dogmatic rationalism, fiction is ‘least-being, indeed a nothingness that echoes the supposed real’; 2) Kant and Fichte attribute imagination with being the essence of reason, hence fiction ‘stops being simply opposed to the real so as to assume the synthesis of opposites that is the real—in a new sense of the word—content of

inasmuch as the One's supposed separateness from thought suspends the latter's pretension to co-constitute reality. That is, '[i]f the real is experienced as nothing-but-real, then fiction will no longer be of the order of the false, of the least-real and of non-being', because *all* the phantasms that constitute the thought-world will be recognized as the products of a unilateral separation from the One, and thus as equally non-real.⁹³⁹ This equalizing of thought according to its unilateral (non-) relation with the real is the democratizing posture assumed by non-philosophy. Laruelle suggests that this operation is the condition for a rigorous theorization of the phenomenal reality of fiction, which grants it a new positivity in manifesting the non-thetic *effects* of non-philosophy. Thus, once we stop seeing fiction as opposed to Being—because Being *comprises* fiction inasmuch it already implies a separation from the real—we are able to view fiction positively as: '*a mode of the (non-) One [...] as an effect of the real's unilaterality.*'⁹⁴⁰ In this way, we are able to '[s]top subordinating fiction to philosophy's authority, but make philosophy re-enter through fiction: conceive philosophy as a mode of this more radical experience, as a "philosophy-fiction".'⁹⁴¹

The name "philosophy-fiction" (or "philo-fiction") indicates the mutation of the philosophical apparatus which enables us to theorize the performativity of thought in a more positive mode; we have proposed that the philosophical apparatus with which the concept of community is articulated in our materials can be identified with the paradigm of the theatre; hence we will elucidate this mutation as a "theatre-fiction". Laruelle emphasizes that the non-philosophical theorization of fiction, being distinct from philosophy, does not claim to produce a mimetic copy of its object—because to do so would be to constitute the fictional [*le fictionnel*] as a mixed empirico-transcendental concept. Rather, its aim is simply to describe the immanent givens of fiction *as such*—the irreducible kernel of all possible fiction, which Laruelle calls the "fictionale" [*le fictionnal*]. The fictionale names the non-thetic essence of fiction. Laruelle characterizes it as the most general form of reception for the World or language, hence it can be understood as the minimal condition for the possibility of all thought: '*the possible in the originary state*'.⁹⁴² He suggests that the fictionale can be directly experienced without needing to exit from the One and to determine it in return, but that it can

Unity', hence playing an indispensable role in the constitution of the Objective Appearance critiqued in 'Communauté Philosophique' (cf. *supra*, Ch. 3.1); 3) Nietzsche intensifies and romanticizes fiction by positing it as the 'capacity of synthesis that is co-extensive, without limits, with truth and the real', thereby making a "headlong flight" into fiction'; 4) deconstruction posits an Other that is beyond any fiction, which 'affects the concept or the logos with finitude, it constrains them to abandon their claim to reality and to recognize their fictional nature', whilst the Other takes the place of an *un-fictionalizable* real. Ibid., 227–9.

939 Ibid., 230.

940 Ibid., 231.

941 Ibid., 230.

942 Ibid., 234.

also become *effective* when it is put to use in an aesthetic context. In art or literature, it is possible that the *fictionale* may return to a worldly perspective, as the *fictional*, without rescinding its identity with the One. In this way, the fictional comes to be understood as an aesthetic object, whose effectivity is unilaterally added to its reality without, however, occluding its immanence.

Thus the aesthetic is conceived as a refraction of the immanent experience of thought, where all thought is identified with fiction inasmuch as it is constituted through its unilateral separation from the real. The unilateralizing of fiction is thus the basis for the “theatre-fiction” we propose as the syntax for staging community non-philosophically. Conceiving fiction in this way provides a framework in which the concept of community can be theorized as a relatively autonomous manifestation of thought that is determined-in-the-last-instance by experience—thus, the concept and experience of community are viewed according to their real *identity*. In this way, we can conceive of a usage of philosophical language which neither positions the experience that is its cause, nor subjects it to a totalizing objectivation, because the concepts manifested by language are recognized as *fictionale* in essence. It follows from this that we are able to rethink the performativity of community's staging, its dramatization, such that the name of community no longer indicates an auto-interrupting cycle of signifying sense, but rather the irreversible positivity of the real advent of thought.

7.3. A theatre-fiction for community

Let us recall Blanchot's remark, which we cited at the beginning of this thesis as a framing reference for our research, in which he questions the possibility of either understanding community or of living it, because the word seems to contain ‘a flaw in language [...] if we sense that [it] carr[ies] something completely other than what could be *common* to those who would belong to a whole, a group, a council, a collective’.⁹⁴³ For Blanchot—as for Bataille and Nancy—this “other” sense carried by the term is inscribed, in principle, in our experience of community's concept because the latter occupies a singular space where: ‘it takes upon itself the impossibility of its own immanence, the impossibility of a communitarian being as subject.’⁹⁴⁴ Hence “community” unworks itself. Moreover, any objectivating process that would unite the community as a collective subject is hence seen as

943 Blanchot, *Unavowable Community*, 1; cf. *supra*, 3.

944 *Ibid.*, 11.

destructive of its finite essence, because the constitution of community as a work is viewed as a destitution of the communal experience. By this logic, *unity* comes to be thought as a problematic totalization of community's immanence—and thus the *concept* of community and the *experience* of community are positioned in an antagonistic relationship. This identification of unity with totality is the consequence of unity being conceived as the result of a synthesis of discrete entities—whether these be thought as subjects, singular beings, etc. We therefore propose that in order to move beyond the unresolvable antagonism between the concept and the experience of community, it is necessary to think the unity of the common non-philosophically—not as a result of a conceptual synthesis, but as the immanence that is given prior to thought.

As we have seen, Laruelle gives “the One” as a first name for the real, and this first name is privileged within the non-philosophical order because it describes the essential attribute of radical immanence—its indivisibility. The One can be understood as a “unity” that is simply given, without having been subject to any process of unification. Thus the unity of the One is not the result of a synthesis; it is neither a project nor an object, but the minimal, necessary but not sufficient condition for all thought. Accepting the axiomatic supposition that this unity-without-unification is the real condition for thought, allows us to re-view the relation between the experience of community and its concept, so that we no longer destitute the former by constituting the latter. Thus, rather than seeing the experience/concept relation as an antagonism, we re-view it as an identity-of-the-last-instance. As such, our own effectuation of non-philosophy begins by giving “community” as a *first name for the real*. Thus we can restate the three non-philosophical axioms in terms specific to our effectuation:

- 1) Community is radically immanent.
- 2) Its causality is unilaterality or determination-in-the-last-instance.
- 3) The object of this causality is the concept of community, complicated by experience.

We use this axiomatic supposition as a point of departure from which to elucidate the theatre-fiction with which we shall present community according to its immanence. The mode of this immanent presentation differs from both the experience of dramatization proposed by Bataille, and the eventual staging of the social articulated by Nancy. Both Bataille and Nancy think community as a *worldly* experience, which constitutes an excess precisely because it is the event of finitude whose ecstasy reveals the limits at which conceptual thought is brought *into relation* with that which it cannot grasp. As such, the “co-” in community indicates not only the *with* that (dis)joins a plurality of beings, but also the juncture between two orders of experience: the philosophical experience of conceptual thought and heterological experience,

which includes a sensuous engagement with the material world (Bataille); or the ontic and the ontological (Nancy).

Laruelle, in contrast, suggests that a more radical reconfiguration of the theatre of *logos* is necessary in order to think the real phenomenality of community. He proposes that ‘the essence of the authentic community [...] is perhaps not reducible to a relation, even an originary one.’⁹⁴⁵ This is because the notion of relationality *as such* implies a potential reciprocity or reversibility between terms. When considering a relationship between *entities*, this reciprocity has an equalizing effect, creating the potential for hierarchies to be dismantled, or at least reconfigured—thus, in the social sphere, it would seem to guarantee a certain mobility and freedom, and the possibility of a horizontal “acephalic” communal order. Yet, when considering the relation between different *levels of experience*—in which immanence and transcendence are differently mixed—the reciprocity of terms has a contrasting effect whereby it introduces hierarchical structures that dominate immanence by projecting an Objective Appearance onto the real. Thus Laruelle proposes that, ‘[i]f all relation is in effect reciprocal, [...] then *there is no communal relation*—to affirm the contrary is a contradiction or at least an amphibology.’⁹⁴⁶

The shift of terrain from the philosophical to the non-philosophical thus entails an acceptance of the perhaps counter-intuitive proposition that the real community does not consist in the *relation* of one entity to others, but rather in a non-relational experience of *identity*. This identity is without predicates, because it is nothing but the identity of the One, which we posit axiomatically as the radically non-consistent cause of thought. Having substituted the first name “community” for the name of “the One”, we must now think community according to the same description—as empty of Being and of consistency. Hence we give the real community as radically *indeterminate*. In this way we radicalize the notion of the “anarchitectural” which we proposed as a description of the ecstatic outside in which Bataille locates community; now, rather than describing the qualitatively different *space* of the *epekeina*, the anarchitectural is given as the transcendental *cause* of the thought of community.⁹⁴⁷ Conceived in this way, the identity of community is strictly unobjectivizable. However, according to the logic of the non-philosophical axiomatic, the supposition of the radical indeterminacy of the real—and hence of community—whilst it renders the latter *unobjectivizable*, does not consequently consign it to the *unavowable* realm of the *epekeina*. Thus in order to arrive at an immanent presentation of community, we need to elucidate the

945 Ibid., 158.

946 Ibid.; cf. *supra*, Ch. 3.

947 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 1.3.

syntax that manifests it as a *non-thetic concept*; this manner of conceptual presentation does not totalize the experience it indexes because concept and experience are viewed according to their identity-of-the-last-instance.

We name this syntax a “theatre-fiction”, and its effectuation entails the adoption of a non-theatrical *posture*, according to which we axiomatically suspend in-One all the presuppositions of theatrical sufficiency identified above, whilst positively conjugating the immanent properties of theatre—as an apparatus of manifestation, of vision, of performativity—in a non-standard mode. This allows us to re-envision the staging of community's concept as an effect of the unilateral causality of the real. The elucidation of this non-standard theatre does not entail taking the architecture of the theatre (even in a mutated form) as a *paradigm*—in the way that we have argued, after Nancy, the Athenian theatre serves as a paradigm for *logos*. Laruelle proposes instead that the creation of a philo-fiction requires an inversion of the Platonic relation between Ideas and the objects that imitate them, such that we take an aesthetic apparatus—in this context, theatre—‘and treat it as a “model” in the sense of a model for an axiomatic without making another model in the Platonic sense of the paradigm’.⁹⁴⁸ This is to say that Laruelle uses “model” in the *mathematical* sense.⁹⁴⁹ Hence, by inverting the Platonic order, Laruelle means to alter the relation between *representation* and *represented*, so that rather than constituting a model in the former sense (as an iteration of the Ideal architecture of theatre), he proposes philo-fiction as a model in the latter sense (as the transcendental *reality* that the language of non-philosophy aims to describe). Thus “theatre-fiction” is simply a name for the apparatus with which we effectuate a non-philosophical presentation of community. The form of this apparatus is not *representable* in the sense that one could make a copy of it, because it is not an architectural structure, but rather a transcendental function that alters our way of seeing. Hence, topological explanations of this

948 Laruelle, *Photo-Fiction*, 12–13.

949 Jesús Mosterín offers this explanation of the meaning of the term “model” in the mathematical context of model theory, which clarifies Laruelle's non-Platonic usage of the word: ‘In ordinary language, as well as in scientific language the word *model* is used in two distinct and opposite senses. They both have to do with the relation between a representation and that which is represented. The problem lies in that the model is sometimes identified with the first term of the relation (i.e. the representation), and sometimes with the second one (i.e. that which is represented). Thus, in the first sense, it is said that the artefact in reduced scale which represents a boat or an airplane is a model of the boat or airplane. Also, in economy or in cosmology one speaks of econometric models or cosmological models, where those are understood as certain mathematical representations of the market or the universe. In mathematical logic, on the contrary, the representation is called theory, and that which is represented is a model of the theory. This use is contrary to the usual one in the empirical sciences, but it coincides with that of painters and photographers, when they speak of a model (that which is represented) as the object of the painting or of the photograph (the representation). It is in this sense that one needs to understand the word model which appears in the theory of models developed by mathematical logicians’. Jesús Mosterín, ‘Preface’, in *Model Theory*, Maria Manzano, trans. Ruy J. G. B. De Queiroz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xi.

non-standard theatre are untenable, because it is not a spatial entity—either in empirical or Ideal terms.⁹⁵⁰ Instead, we will begin by recalling the three standard models of theatrical aesthetics we identified above, considering the effects of axiomatically suspending the principle of sufficiency that underwrites each in turn, in order to elucidate the dimensions of our “theatre-fiction” for the immanent staging of community.

We deduced the first standard model from Aristotle's *Poetics*, and we named its structure of sufficiency the Principle of Sufficient *Muthos*.⁹⁵¹ According to this principle, the aesthetic value of a work is dependent on it producing an imitation—not of a simply *given* reality, but of a reality that is *constituted* to conform with an Ideal. It is thus isomorphic with the representational apparatus of *logos*. The Principle of Sufficient *Muthos* presupposes a *mimetic* relation between the aesthetic object and an ideally constituted “original” that it reproduces. As we have seen, non-philosophy is articulated according to a matrix that conjugates two modes of causality: firstly, that of the immanent-One, as necessary but not sufficient cause-(of)-thought; secondly, that of philosophy as contingent, occasional cause and support. Hence, in order to understand the fate of *mimêsis* within the non-philosophical order—and therefore in the non-standard theatre—we will consider the method of dualysis according to both modes of causality.

From the side of the occasional cause, non-philosophical pragmatics require the selection of an object=X (in this case, *community*) from the philosophy that is taken as material (Bataille and Nancy's discourses). In its spontaneous philosophical form, “community” is given as a mixture of immanence and transcendence, as we have shown by analysing the decisional form of each of these materials.⁹⁵² Theatre-fiction redeploys the philosophical concept of community by performing it according to the immanence that we axiomatically suppose as its real condition—thereby suspending the effectivity of the transcendent part of the mixture. In this sense, we could view non-philosophy as a repeat performance that *mimes* the object=X, implying that—from the side of the occasional cause—the non-standard theatre indeed stages a *mimetic* performance, albeit one that mutates the

950 In the most recent period of Laruelle's work, which he names “Philosophy V”, he appeals to the quantum notion of the “superposition” to move beyond spatial metaphors. Cf. Laruelle, *Philosophie Non-Standard*. This analogy with the undulatory indeterminacy of the subatomic wave/particle is useful to bear in mind, as it emphasizes that whilst the real is posited in the non-philosophical axiomatic as foreclosed to thought and determining of the latter, this determination-by-the-indeterminate nevertheless entails a certain permeability between thought and the One, rather than an absolute enclosure of the latter, or its consignment to the *epekeina*. Nevertheless, we will not dwell on the quantum model because we consider it adequate to our non-philosophical presentation of community to elucidate a syntax in terms that are immanent to the materials that occasion it.

951 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 6.1.

952 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 4.2–4.3.

original that it imitates.⁹⁵³ In this sense, it might seem to be an inversion of the Aristotelian model, inasmuch as rather than over-determining its object by constituting it according to a transcendent structure of Ideality, it under-determines it by re-presenting it whilst suspending its sufficiency. However, the object that non-philosophy targets is ultimately the identity of philosophy *as such*; thus the non-philosophical performance of a particular transcendent concept (e.g. community), being grounded by the axiomatic equalizing of all philosophical Decisions, is a singular and finite manifestation of the miming of philosophy as a whole. Thus the “object” that is re-enacted in this mime is not the transcendent concept of *community*, but the transcendental form of *philosophy*; and it is at this transcendental level that the suspension of sufficiency functions.

Moreover, it is only from the side of transcendence that non-philosophy is viewed as a dualising syntax.⁹⁵⁴ From the “side” of the One, in contrast, the method is named *cloning*; and the syntax conceived as a unitax, because ‘[t]he real-One is not a term, barely an instance and in no way comprises a duality with any term whatsoever, not even with its transcendental clone’.⁹⁵⁵ Cloning names the transcendental function whereby the essence of the One is extracted, using the term=X that derives from the occasional material. It results in a *unilateral duality* in which the material is reduced to a relatively autonomous support, whilst the term=X (“community”) is accorded a simple identity-of-the-last-instance with the real. Hence the “miming” of the philosophical concept of community should be understood not as a repetition, but rather as a transcendental re-envisioning of it, which renders its phenomenal reality apparent whilst leaving its *mixte*-form intact.

As we have seen, Laruelle calls this mode of viewing the “vision-in-One” by which the image-of-X (the *image-of-community*) is grasped:

*not “in” the One but only in the mode of the One and not in the mode of an image or a transcendence in general reflecting and redoubling itself. This “image” exists once, not a second time or redoubled in the One under the form of another image.*⁹⁵⁶

Consequently, from the “side” of the One, the suspension of the sufficiency of *Muthos* can be understood as a suspension of the mimetic function of theatre. Hence what appears on the “stage” of the non-standard theatre is not a transcendent imitation of community, but rather the thought-of-community performed according to its simple immanence. Thus, the image-of-

953 Indeed, this is what Meillassoux suggests when he critiques non-philosophy as deriving from philosophy, as a negation of the latter, and hence as only having an abstract relation to the real; however, we have seen that Laruelle characterizes such objections as symptoms of the philosophical resistance that non-philosophy puts to pragmatic use. Cf. Brassier et al., ‘Speculative Realism’; cf. *supra*, Ch. 5.1.

954 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 5.1.

955 Laruelle, *Principles*, 31.

956 *Ibid.*, 125; cf. *supra*, Ch. 5.1.

community is a clone neither in the sense that it is a copy of the putatively real datum “community” (because the notion that community can be presented as a *real datum* is suspended *a priori* by the axiomatic supposition of the foreclosure of the real), nor in the sense that it reiterates the philosophical concept of community (because it merely re-views the latter, as a finite part of the fiction that is philosophy as a whole). Rather, it is a clone in the sense that the image-of-community produced by philosophy is re-envisioned, such that it is seen to share what we might call its *genetic material* with the One. Hence, according to the axiomatic of our theatre-fiction, *there is no mimetic relation between the real and the image*, because the image, viewed as a fictionale manifestation of the (non-) One which is the result of the transcendental function of cloning, is identified with the real in-the-last-instance. Hence, the non-standard theatre remains a place of *vision*, but the image that appears there is *in-One*, and as such does not double its object; instead, it manifests the simple *non-mimetic correspondence* between the image and its immanent cause.

The ocular connotation carried by the term “vision-in-One”, which names the non-philosophical experience of thought, brings us to our second standard model of theatre, in which we deduced a Principle of Sufficient Cruelty from Artaud's writings.⁹⁵⁷ Artaud attempts to undermine the idealizing logic of the Aristotelian paradigm by prioritizing the material aspects of theatrical mediality. However, we have argued that his according of priority to the *mise en scène* does not succeed in breaking from the circle of sufficiency because in prioritizing the sensuous aspects of the theatrical experience, including its visible manifestation, Artaud presupposes a phenomenological subject as structure of reception—and thus the unity of experience he aims to create is not simply given, but is instead an amphibology that results from a process of scission and synthesis. We have seen that, in his still-philosophical deconstruction of community, Nancy implicitly challenges this phenomenological framework, rejecting the immanentizing mechanism of the theatre of *logos*—for which the archi-theatrical scene of myth, as the ‘exemplary place of showing and revealing’, serves as paradigm—and proposing instead that the “appearance” of community on the social stage needs to be thought as ‘not on the order of appearance, manifestation, phenomena, revealing, or some other concept of becoming-visible’.⁹⁵⁸ Nancy thus suggests that the presentation of community cannot be thought in terms of a visual experience. In contrast, Laruelle's recurrent use of terms such as “vision”, “view” “seeing”, etc., implies a certain visuality to the non-philosophical order. We also note that Laruelle tends to

957 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 6.2.

958 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 45; Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 67.

characterize non-philosophy as a *theory*, thus using a term that we have observed to share its etymology with “theatre”, and hence to similarly carry a sense of spectacle; however, this “theory” is distinguished from “philosophy”, implying that the “visuality” of the theoretical apparatus of non-philosophy is *not* isomorphic with that of the theatre of *logos*.⁹⁵⁹ Hence, we need to positively elucidate theatre-fiction's mode of *vision*, which remains after we have axiomatically suspended the phenomenological presuppositions that underwrite the sufficiency of Cruelty.

Let us explore the manifestation of community as non-thetic effect of the vision-in-One by analogy with the visuality Bataille proposes as a means of *dramatization*. Above, we observed a certain comparability between Bataille's notion of dramatization, which collapses the distance between subject and object until they converge in an “object-point” where they can no longer be differentiated, and the experience of radical identity proposed by Laruelle.⁹⁶⁰ Bataille gives dramatization as an experience that unworks the architecture of *logos*; however, he posits a certain visual experience as a *means* of dramatizing which suggests the presupposition of a minimally theatrical structure as his point of departure. To explain the method of dramatization, he gives the example of contemplating a photograph of a Chinese torture, which communicates a pain so excessive it lays the viewer to ruin.⁹⁶¹ The relation he establishes between spectator and visual object thus conforms with the standard theatrical set-up, common to each of our three sufficient models, in which the audience looks towards the exemplary space of showing that is the stage. Bataille proposes that contemplating this photograph engenders the ‘optical form’ of experience in which ‘*the mind is an eye*’.⁹⁶² He thus suggests a movement from an empirical experience (looking at a physical object) to an experience of ecstatic thought which estranges the subject from him/herself through a projection towards the object. Whilst we have argued that—like Artaud—Bataille's appeal to sensuous experience as a means of breaching the architecture of *logos* leads to an experiential unity which is constructed amphibologically, we nevertheless suggest that this notion of an estranged subject for whom thinking and seeing are identical is to some extent analogous with the non-philosophical form of vision. Hence the function of our theatre-fiction could be said to be a mode of dramatization.

959 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 6.1.

960 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 7.2.

961 Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 120. Bataille describes the photograph, which shows a man undergoing a death by cuts, thus: ‘The Chinese executioner of my photo haunts me: there he is busily cutting off the victim's leg at the knee. The victim is bound to a stake, eyes turned up, head thrown back, and through a grimacing mouth you see teeth.’ Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, trans. Stuart Kendall, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 38–9.

962 Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 118.

What the axiomatic suspension of sufficiency alters, however, is the vector of this experience. Bataille thinks the visual form of experience as an ecstatic movement that departs from the subject, which he presupposes as the phenomenological structure of reception that conditions experience in general. By departing from a subject/object relation, which presupposes the separation of its terms, the visual form of experience he articulates is essentially that of a synthetic communicative relation between self and other—indeed, this is how dramatization is imbricated with the problematic of community for Bataille. Yet we have seen that Laruelle rejects the idea that community is founded on the basis of a relation. Accordingly, we radicalize the notion of dramatization, reversing its vector so that rather than departing from an amphibologically structured visual experience which results in an *a posteriori* synthesis of subject and object, dramatization is given *a priori* as the experience-(of)-vision that manifests the real identity of community, as a unity-without-unification.

Hence the non-philosophical conception of the visual form of experience is thought simply as the mode of manifestation by which the vision-in-One extracts the immanent essence of the One—without, however, exiting from the latter. Thus what is manifested by dramatizing in the non-standard mode is of a transcendental, rather than empirical, order. This is to say that theatre-fiction is an apparatus which enables us to stage community in such a way as to bring it back from the untheorizable *epekeina*—not by rendering *the real* visible, but rather by theorizing (by rendering visible) the *phenomenal reality* of community's *concept*. As such, the non-philosophical “vision” is neither ecstatic nor communicative because it does not travel anywhere and is radically non-relational. Rather, to “see” non-philosophically is simply to enact a postural shift that enables the viewer to experience the manifestation of community's concept according to its phenomenal reality—as a fiction that is unilaterally separated from the real, but identified with the latter in-the-last-instance. Thus the dramatizing function of our theatre-fiction is not to collapse the distance between two terms, or indeed two entities, but rather to render apparent the transcendental conditions of manifestation as such.

Thus we might say that the suspension of the Principle of Sufficient Cruelty entails the axiomatic supposition of a vision-without-distance. Such a notion would be nonsensical in a phenomenological context, because visibility implies distance inasmuch as a space between subject and object is necessary for ocular perception. However, this non-philosophical dramatizing “vision” does not belong to the empirical realm, nor to any amphibological mixture of the empirical and the transcendental. Rather, it is a pure-transcendental experience-(of)-vision. As pure-transcendental, it rigorously fulfils the desire for an optical form of experience in which “the mind is an eye” articulated by Bataille—and does so *a priori*,

according to the vector of thought described by the non-theatrical axiomatic. This transcendental vision does not regard an already-constituted object, but is instead identified with the force-(of)-thought that manifests the object=X in a non-thetic mode. Hence, the shift from theatre-of-*logos* to theatre-fiction entails a radicalization of the *philosophical* notion of the transcendental, so that rather than being conceived as ‘what *relates-to* ... the transcendent’ (that is, as ‘an *internal experience* [...] that relates to a given’), it is understood as an immanent experience of identity—which is to say as a *non-relation*, or more precisely, the unilateral (non-) relation between relation (philosophy) and non-relation (the One).⁹⁶³ Thus, what the non-philosophical “vision” manifests is the *form* of the experience of thought, rather than the latter’s *object*; this “form”, which we have named “theatre-fiction”, is characterized by its unilateral duality. This unilateral duality is rendered apparent by the transcendental dramatization of philosophy as a whole, which is occasioned by the particular object=X provided by the materials—in this case, *community*.

Our third standard model of theatre is the performative paradigm developed by Fischer-Lichte; we named its presupposition of sufficiency the Principle of Sufficient Performance. This model gives the specific mediality of performance as an ecstatic experience of Being which is spontaneously generated in the performance-event, in the form of an autopoietic feedback loop. Fischer-Lichte explicitly links the ecstasy of this performative event with the constitution of a community, and suggests that the *co-presence* of actors and spectators is *sufficient* to engender this effect. Hence we have observed that the structure of sufficiency in this theatrical paradigm is analogous with that which is implicit in Nancy’s notion of the staging of the social, which gives co-presence as an auto-constitutive event—although the latter thinks this “staging” at a more ontological, and less empirical, level. Laruelle, in contrast, proposes that the phenomenal reality of community resides in its radical identity, and not in the relationality of the “co-”. Thus we need to elucidate the mode of *performativity* that manifests “community” according to the vision-in-One, following from the suspension of the Principle of Sufficient Performance.

Just as Fischer-Lichte adapts the concept of performativity from ordinary language philosophy in order to put it to use in the aesthetics of performance, so too does Laruelle seek to redeploy the performative, generalizing it beyond its linguistic context, ‘in order to characterize the kind of radical immanence, compared to the efficacy of language or to the action of Being in a regime of *logos*.’⁹⁶⁴ He notes that in the sphere of linguistics,

963 Laruelle, ‘Transcendental Method’, 143 [emphasis added].

964 Laruelle, *Principles*, 175.

performativity concerns statements in which the signifying function of language is *identified* with its practical value as an action. Thus performative utterances are purported to ‘say what they do and do what they say’.⁹⁶⁵ However, because linguistic claims about performatives are, at least partially, under the influence of the philosophical Decision, he suggests that there is an implicit internal limit to the efficacy of performativity as a transcendent concept—which is illustrated by the difficulty, revealed by Austin, of defining the conditions of a “felicitous” speech act.⁹⁶⁶ Reciprocally, the identity between the performative and constative functionality of transcendent concepts is compromised by the Decision that legitimates them. That is, due to the auto-constituting form of Decision, philosophy is constitutively unable to do what it says, because its amphibological structure co-constitutes that which it gives as putatively real. Hence all decisional philosophy, for Laruelle, enacts a performative contradiction.

Yet, ordinary language philosophy does not fit neatly into the decisional matrix, because it targets the pragmatics of language, approaching philosophical questions without considering it necessary to compile a formalized syntax. Hence, as Gangle remarks, Austin's methodology, like that of Ryle, and Wittgenstein in his later period, ‘may be understood as a practice of immanence in its own right’.⁹⁶⁷ Laruelle thus develops on the pragmatic aspect of this linguistic approach, radicalizing the possibility of the *identification* of theory and practice by positing it as a transcendental *identity*, simply given, prior to any process of identification. As such, the performativity of non-philosophical thought cannot be understood according to a *coupling* with its constative function, as in linguistics, because this would imply a redoubling of language, or a *hinter-language* that would be concealed behind that which is manifest. Instead, non-philosophical performativity is posited as a radical ‘to-do-in-saying, to-say-in-doing’, which unilateralizes the saying/doing doublet as an identity-of-the-last-instance.⁹⁶⁸ Ó Maoilearca observes that non-philosophy is thus ‘always a practice, a material practice’—one that performs the equation “Practice = Thought” such that ‘the *dualism* of practice and theory dissolves’.⁹⁶⁹ Laruelle proposes that the instance which is able to say and do in this manner is nothing other than the (non-) One itself, which is characterized by its ‘deafness to the *logos*’.⁹⁷⁰ Accordingly, he gives “performed-without-performance” as an axiomatic first-name for the real, which indicates its identity-(to)-itself. This name describes the real as it is

965 Ibid.

966 Cf. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*; cf. *supra*, Ch. 6.3.

967 Rocco Gangle, ‘Laruelle and Ordinary Life’, in *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy*, ed. John Mullarkey & Anthony Paul Smith, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 68–9.

968 Laruelle, *Principles*, 175–6.

969 Ó Maoilearca, *All Thoughts Are Equal*, 244.

970 Laruelle, in Derrida and Laruelle, ‘Controversy’, 89.

phenomenally given, and displaces the philosophico-linguistic notion of performativity, because it ‘signifies the definitive destruction of hinter-worlds: there is no longer even any performance reconstituting a world sketched out behind the One’.⁹⁷¹

Thus once again we can see that the radical identity of the One and its unilateral relation to thought are proposed as suspending the amphibology that (dis)joins reality and appearance, thereby answering to Nancy’s question regarding what attitude other than the “critical” one would be necessary to think beyond such dualisms.⁹⁷² The name of performed-without-performance indicates a mutation of the performance paradigm articulated by Fischer-Lichte, because the performed is ‘stripped of its fetishes of “performativity” and in general of activity and the *causa sui*’.⁹⁷³ Thus it is not a performative *event*, but the radically-performed *advent* of the manifestation of thought, which is not auto-constituting because it is determined-in-the-last-instance by the real which precedes it. Laruelle’s claim concerning this radical performativity is essential to non-theatrical pragmatics; he states that the radical non-philosophical *a priori* manifests itself only ‘on the condition of residing in the depths of experience and emerging theatrically’.⁹⁷⁴ His usage of performance-related language corresponds with the theatre-fiction we are elucidating here, suggesting that the vision-in-One can indeed be thought in quasi-theatrical terms, as a mode of *immanent presentation* for the object=X (i.e. community).

Having proposed “community” as a first-name for the real, we can now describe it as an instance of the *performed-without-performance*. This description radicalizes Nancy’s notion of the staging of the social by positing the phenomenal manifestation of community as prior to the “originary” sociality of the ontico-ontological (co-) *relation*. Nancy proposes that each performative utterance of a “we” presents, ‘a stage [*scène*] on which several [beings] can say “I”, each on his own account, each in turn’; and that this performative “we” is not a synthetic result of the adding together of a collective of “I’s”, but rather ‘the condition for the possibility of each “I”’.⁹⁷⁵ In this way he gives “staging” as the structure of givenness that conditions the appearance of singular beings—thereby unworking substantive subjectivity (both of the individual and the supra-individual collective) by asserting the *a priori*

971 Laruelle, *Principles*, 177.

972 Cf. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 54; cf. *supra*, Ch. 2.3 and *passim*.

973 Laruelle, *Principles*, 177.

974 *Ibid.*, 241. Thus, as Ó Maoilearca emphasizes, it is neither a case of philosophy taking a “theatrical turn”, nor of theatre or some other extra-philosophical creative practice ‘*becom[ing]* an “essence or a priori” through theory, as philosophy would have it’; rather, non-philosophy’s theatricality is found in ‘the *actual* performance *immanent in this* act of philosophy here and now (doing in saying, saying in doing)—as opposed to a theory *about* performativity or theatricality that occurs elsewhere or later’. *All Thoughts Are Equal*, 260–1.

975 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 65.

relationality of the sharing of sense that brings pre-subjective singular beings to presence on the “stage of the world”. Yet, we have argued that this eventual conception of community's co-appearing assumes a quasi-substantive dynamic, because the appearance of beings on this performatively constituted stage entails a finitizing reduction, which presupposes community as a coming-to-presence that occludes its simple givenness. This conception of staging thereby continues to divide community's immanence, because by positing its appearance as an ontological irruption, it consigns radical immanence to a hinter-world. Accordingly, we can view the appearance that performatively constitutes the social stage in this relational manner as a *fictional* phantasm of the philosophical desire for the real. By naming community as an instance of the performed-without-performance, in contrast, we are able to view it as an immanent manifestation of the *fictionale*, which is radically prior, and thus conceals no hinter-world.

Giving the manifestation of community as an instance that is performed-without-performance allows us to re-view the *subject* of community's non-theatrical staging as a transcendental function of the One, and thus as radically non-substantivizable. As a function, the non-theatrical subject is not an entity; it is rather the causality—the positive force-(of)-desire—by which the mechanism of cloning extracts the essence of the One in order to manifest community in the immanent mode of the *fictionale*. Laruelle describes this causality—which he posits as the *real cause of community*—as the identity-without-identification of a ‘*One non-descisional and non-positional-(of)-self, a force-(of)-thought undivided and lived as such*’.⁹⁷⁶ This description of the cause-(of)-thought as *lived* [vécue] indicates its *experiential* nature. However, as we suggested above, this lived experience does not happen to, nor in any way depart from a phenomenological subject as Bataille's “inner experience” does; nor indeed is it the ecstasy of the singular being—‘*an experience that makes us be*’—as proposed by Nancy.⁹⁷⁷ Rather, as a *function*, it describes the positive force of the vision-in-One, an experience-(of)-thought which manifests the concept of community not by objectivating it, but by “living” its concept *in-One*. This is to say that the “subject” of this experience is nothing but the One-in-person; thus, if we take community as a first name for the real, we can understand this experience-(of)-thought to belong to community *itself*. In this way, non-theatrical causality gives community, axiomatically, as *subject*—not in the sense that it constitutes the community as a substantive totality, but rather in the sense that it accords community the “agency” to determine its own manifestation. This “agency”, however, is not

976 Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 153.

977 Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, 26.

exercised as a process which results in a work; it is rather a:

subject-without-process and, in the most literal sense of the word, an “individual” who remains by itself, a force-(of)-thought which has no need to exit from itself and which is sufficiently real by itself to have no need to find its reality in a universal.⁹⁷⁸

Hence the *experience* of the non-theatrical staging of community should be understood in radically non-phenomenological terms—as *community presenting itself*, according to its immanent identity.⁹⁷⁹

Thus, the non-theatrical subject's performative function is to engender an experience-(of)-community which manifests its own concept non-thetically, as identified-in-the-last-instance with the real. Viewed from the side of the occasional cause, as a dualysis, this can be conceived as an experience of thought that estranges the phenomenological subject from itself, which is analogous with the visual form of experience proposed by Bataille as resulting from the dramatization that collapses the distance between subject and object. However, viewed from the “side” of the One, the vector of this experience is envisioned differently, so that rather than an ecstatic movement that departs from the phenomenological subject, it is understood as both *originating* in the One as real-cause, and *remaining* in-One because it transcends non-thetically, and thus remains identified-in-the-last-instance with the real. As such, the immanent identity of community manifests itself, while the phenomenological subject merely functions as support.

978 Laruelle, ‘Communauté Philosophique’, 153.

979 This non-phenomenological understanding of experience raises the question of the place of the human in non-philosophy. Laruelle proposes the “Name-of-Man” as a non-philosophical first-name which indicates ‘the determining cause for the non-philosophical posture’ in a manner that is ‘oracular as much as axiomatic’. *Struggle and Utopia*, 19. This seems to suggest that the non-philosophical “lived” is indexed on a specifically *human* experience of thought. Brassier argues that this privileging of the “Name-of-Man” arbitrarily identifies the real with the human, and thus constitutes a surreptitious re-ontologizing of radical immanence which is counter both to the democratizing claim of Laruelle's axiomatic, and also to the internal rigour of his system. Cf. *Nihil Unbound*, 136–8. This is to say that, although it is perfectly coherent to pose the problem of thinking the genericity of the human as a *question* for non-philosophy, Brassier claims that by proposing the generic human as the *answer* to non-philosophy's contemplation of any material whatsoever, Laruelle allows an external (i.e. *transcendent*) end to inform his pragmatics, thereby undermining his claim to a wholly *immanent* practice of thought. Accordingly, we would need to reject the idea that the real essence of community would necessarily be found in what Laruelle calls “humaneity”, because—as Nancy observes—‘it is not obvious that the community [...] is limited to “man” and excludes, for example, the “animal” [...] the “inhuman” or the “superhuman”, or, for example [...] “woman”’. *Inoperative Community*, 28.

However, Ó Maoilearca observes that whilst ‘Brassier’s point as regards humanizing the Real is valid at face value [...] the validity weakens as soon as we understand that what is being hypothesized is not a definite logical essence but an indefinite Real identity’, and he argues that Brassier himself practices an *anthropic epistemology* based on his faith in the objectivity of the mathematically determined “scientific image”—which ‘remains a model of human intelligence that has only been extended by degrees.’ *All Thoughts are Equal*, 286. In contrast, Laruelle’s notion of generic humanity consists in ‘not knowing who this public is, what this society is, or what the human is, according to the non-philosophical posture.’ *Ibid.* Thus, when we describe experience as “non-phenomenological” we do not seek to reject the place of the human outright, instituting an “anti-humanism” as Brassier attempts to do, but rather to propose a subject-posture that is empty of any determinate logical essence—thereby instituting a non-humanist experience of community. We will further elaborate this subject-posture below; cf. *infra* 255–6.

Thus, in contrast to Nancy's proposition that the implicit relationality of the Cartesian theatre-of-the-world undoes the possibility of philosophical solipsism, because even in staging his solitude to himself the philosopher presupposes a generic audience as structure of reception for his thoughts, our theatre-fiction stages the non-phenomenological subject in the radical solitude of its immanent non-relationality—hence we might characterize the non-theatrical experience of thought as a *transcendental solipsism*. Yet this solipsism differs from a philosophical one because it does not presuppose its “subject” as an interiority, as ‘the final [*infinie*] enclosure in itself of a for-itself’, but rather as a function of the causality of radical immanence.⁹⁸⁰ Hence the image-of-community it manifests does not exclude or annul the phenomenological subject, however the latter might be conceived. Rather, theatre-fiction stages the subject by dualising it, thereby giving the experience-(of)-community as the *real* subject-(of)-thought, whilst granting the phenomenological subject relative autonomy. In this way, the structure of the phenomenological subject remains intact, but its effectivity is transcendently reduced because it is articulated according to its real-cause in the One, as a simple support to the non-theatrical subject, rather than by reference to any other transcendent structures in relation to which it might be philosophically contextualized (for example, its dyadic relation to the object, or its structural isomorphy with theatre, *logos*, etc.).

Thus the solipsism of the non-theatrical subject can be understood as a radicalization of what Fischer-Lichte characterizes as the performative generation of meaning, which emerges as a consequence of disconnecting theatrical elements from the contexts in which they are usually attributed with a signifying sense:

Emerging in isolation, these elements appear de-semanticized because they are perceived in their specific materiality and not as carriers of meaning; they are neither put in relation to other elements nor to any other context.⁹⁸¹

For Fischer-Lichte, the isolation of a theatrical gesture from its usual signifying context highlights its self-referentiality, such that it is viewed as ‘mean[ing] exactly what it performs’.⁹⁸² In this way, she suggests that theatrical performativity is able to produce “sense impressions” with an *immanent meaning*.⁹⁸³ The axiomatic apparatus of our theatre-fiction proposes a similar process of isolation; however the “material” it isolates from the normative context is not of a sensuous nature, but is rather the transcendent material of philosophical Decisions—what we might call, in Quick's terms, the “reality-effects” of philosophy—which

980 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 29.

981 Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance*, 140–4; cf. *supra*, Ch. 6.3.

982 Ibid.

983

are axiomatically rendered indifferent to the authority of *logos*.⁹⁸⁴ Hence, whilst the transcendental isolation of the non-philosophical subject can similarly be said to produce self-referential immanent meanings, rather than consisting in a sense impression in which the materiality of the signifier is identified with the signified, these immanent meanings are non-phenomenological. Thus, in place of the “radical presence” that Fischer-Lichte proposes as the *result* of the performative experience—which she posits as a synthetic unity created in the relation between performer and spectator, which creates a sense of community inasmuch as the latter experiences both self and other as embodied mind—theatre-fiction gives the *radical identity* of the experience and concept of community, as performed-without-performance. As such it supposes a pure-transcendental vision which radicalizes the Bataillian experience in which “the mind is an eye”—not only by turning this vision-without-distance towards the transcendental as its “object”, but also by attributing the force of its “perception” to a subject which is a simple organon, rather than a “mind” that is structured amphibologically (e.g. as Borromean knot). Thus the dualysing of philosophical desire which accords the concept the force to manifest itself non-thetically is performed in-One with the dualysing of the philosophico-psychoanalytic subject.

This non-theatrical dualysis, which reduces the philosophico-psychoanalytic subject to mere support whilst according community the force to manifest itself non-thetically, allows us to re-envision the relation between the “I” and the “we”, which Nancy proposes as constituting the social stage. Nancy posits the performative utterance of the “we” as that which conditions the possibility of each “I”, but thinks this “we” as the articulation of a *relation*, thereby presupposing the *a priori* separation of singular beings. Our non-theatrical staging of community radicalizes the priority of the “we”, inasmuch as it gives “community” as first name for the real, and hence as the radical cause that precedes any process of individuation. In this sense, the stage that is performatively constituted in the utterance of the “we” remains the condition of possibility for each “I”; however, by assuming the non-theatrical posture, the ontological effectivity of this performative utterance is re-envisioned transcendently, as performed-without-performance and unilaterally determining for thought. Hence, rather than being articulated as a relation, the “we”—the community—is axiomatically

984 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 6.3. This is not to say that we reject the possibility that some performance practices might themselves be viewed as non-standard, and so as enacting a suspension of theatrical sufficiency by re-visioning their own sensuous materials—despite Laruelle’s claim that ‘art alone, or in its practice, can offer no conceptual resistance to the undertakings of philosophy and assure us of a knowledge that has some rigour.’ *Photo-Fiction*, 8. For an exploration of non-philosophical performativity *thought alongside* performance practice, including experiments in “non-acting” or “found movement” by such pioneers as Allan Kaprow, Richard Schechner and Yvonne Rainer, cf. Ó Maoilearca, *All Thought Are Equal*, 243–81.

given as the unity-without-unification that is the real cause-(of)-thought. As such, this non-thetic staging of community conditions the possibility for any process of individuation that would determine a discrete being—whether as a singular-plural being, a philosophico-psychoanalytic “I”, or a collective “we”, etc.

Yet, because the priority of this non-theatrical staging is *without-primacy*, it wields no power over the individuated subject—it simply gives community as a manifestation of the indivisible immanence of the One. Thus, the isolation of the non-theatrical subject-(of)-community in the performance of its transcendental solipsism does not serve to *enclose* it, but rather to render apparent the absolute plenitude of its immanence by reducing the effectivity of the transcendent structures of sufficiency that would serve to dominate it. In this way, the non-theatrical staging of community gives the latter according to the unilateral causality of the real. By prioritizing the (non-) relation with the real, we accord community the performative force to effectuate its own manifestation—to *stage itself*—but not the power to determine predicates that would *decide* its membership. Axiomatically defined as a manifestation of the One, community is given, *a priori*, as a *non-exclusive* instance of immanence. Because the One is supposed as the necessary condition for all thought, equally, this instance tolerates a last-relation to individuated structures, including that of the philosophico-psychoanalytic subject. In this way, the “I” is able to identify with the subject-(of)-community in a non-determining—and hence, non-totalizing—mode. This identity-of-the-last-instance is not a synthesis of discrete elements, and as such does not result in an immanentist hypostasis—but merely in the manifestation of a *non-mimetic correspondence* between the experience of the individual, and the experience of community, as an instance of the real.

Laruelle proposes that this mode of non-thetic performance—which unworks the enclosure of the subject *a priori* by dualysing it—is ‘the only solution for [...] the exigency of universal democracy’, inasmuch as the non-sufficient subject that manifests for the vision-in-One is radically indeterminate, and hence non-totalizable—and thus cannot constitute a site of exclusion or the basis for negativity and hate.⁹⁸⁵ As such, we might say that in staging community in this dual manner, we radicalize the essence of the political, by placing it on the terrain of the immanent-real which is prior even to the ontological experience of freedom proposed by Nancy. This is significant, because the unilaterality of the (non-) relation by which community’s immanent experience-(of)-manifestation determines its concept in-the-last-instance means that the latter does not in any way destitute the former, because the causality of the real is strictly irreversible. Consequently, the theatre-fiction apparatus allows

985 Laruelle, *Théorie des Étrangers*, 130.

for the possibility of programmatic political thought to be deployed in a non-determining mode, according to its identity-of-the-last-instance with the real. Thus, the positing of community as the immanent basis of the political does not constitute a prohibition of politics, thereby releasing us from the impasse of the political we found in both Bataille and Nancy's thought.⁹⁸⁶

In summary, we have assumed a postural shift that has allowed us to propose a theatre-fiction as a transcendental apparatus for the staging of community. We have elucidated this apparatus by identifying the structures of sufficiency that underwrite the standard paradigms of theatre, then extracting the immanent dimensions of these paradigms by axiomatically suspending their presuppositions of sufficiency. The model we have arrived at is proposed not as a paradigm, but rather as a transcendental apparatus with which to manifest community according to its immanence. This model retains the immanent functions of theatre, as a site of *manifestation*, of *vision*, and of *performativity*, but radicalizes these functions in order to deploy them at the transcendental level.

First, we suspended the Principle of Sufficient *Muthos*, re-envisioning the mimetic function of theatre so that rather than providing a site for the re-presentation of community, it instead provides a means of viewing the manifestation of community's concept differently. By shifting our view from the transcendent space of representation to the transcendental function of manifestation, we have reduced the mimetic sufficiency of theatre—instead rendering apparent a simple non-mimetic correspondence between the immanent cause-(of)-thought and the concept of community.

Secondly, we suspended the Principle of Sufficient Cruelty. This has allowed us to propose a radically non-phenomenological experience of vision-without-distance, which is identified with the non-mimetic manifestation of the concept. Such an experience-(of)-vision does not presuppose a separation between perceiving subject and perceived object, and as such, allows us to give the experience of community *a priori* as a unity-without-unification.

Thirdly, we suspended the Principle of Sufficient Performance, which gives co-presence as both necessary condition and performative result of the performance event. Thus we radicalized the notion of performativity, deploying it at a transcendental level by giving “community” as an instance of the performed-without-performance. In this way, we re-staged community as the non-relational advent of thought. This radicalized notion of performativity enabled us to dualyse the subject of thought, giving community as an immanent experience-(of)-thought, and thus according it the force to determine its own immanent manifestation—to

986 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 1.4; Ch. 2.2.

stage itself—whilst granting the manifest concept of community its relative autonomy. By dualysing the subject in this manner, we have been able to articulate a non-mimetic correspondence-of-the-last-instance between the individuated subject and the experience of community—hence re-envisioning the relation between the “I” and the “we” in a non-exclusionary mode, which re-opens the possibility of political thought and action.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this thesis we have attempted to articulate a new manner of presenting the elusive sense of “community”. We began by proposing that community cannot be thought simply as an object, because this would be to reduce it to a set of predicates; we affirmed, to the contrary, that there is an irreducible dimension of *experience* involved in community’s conceptualization. As we have shown by tracing the development of the experiential approaches to the problematic of community in Bataille and Nancy’s philosophies, this position is not in itself new; each has, in a different way, made a hugely important contribution to our understanding of the event of sociality, and we judge their analyses to be among the richest philosophical articulations of this problematic. Our own contribution, then, has not been to propose any new concepts to add to the discourse of community; rather, we have sought to perform a postural shift which allows us to re-envision the philosophical materials we have examined in a non-philosophical mode. The innovation of this research has thus been to elucidate a non-theatrical syntax that allows us to present the materials differently—to stage community as a non-thetic concept and thus to allow it to manifest conceptually without positioning it in the same gesture.

We do not claim that it is necessary to look at the philosophical materials we have examined in this manner; however, we have aimed to show that our Laruellian framework is adequate to them, inasmuch the destination which both Bataille and Nancy’s thought aims towards—that of a more experiential presentation of community—is arguably similar to that of Laruelle’s immanent pragmatics. However, the epistemological stance we have assumed is distinct from that of the philosophical discourses we have utilized, and with it we have proposed a positive way of exiting from the aporetic circularity of their respective dialectical and differential approaches, both of which position the experience of community in the unavowable beyond of thought. At the same time, our choice to examine Bataille and Nancy’s thought has brought material into the purview of non-philosophy that has not been examined at any length according to its vision-in-One before, and this has allowed us to make apparent a certain sympathetic communication between non-philosophy and these philosophical discourses, whilst dualysing them—and so not dissolving the *differend* between them.

The method we have employed is an axiomatic one, and as such, we do not make any truth-claims about the *reality* of community in a worldly sense, but rather offer a pragmatic approach to a transcendental problem—that of the identity of the concept and experience of community. We re-state our stance that the model we have elucidated is highly abstract, and

that it must be considered, in all rigour, as an experimental hypothesis which in no way negates or overturns the materials it re-deploys. Instead, it uses the theatrical terms found in the materials to effectuate a new transcendental vision of the manifestation of thought as such, which allows us to stage the concept of community according to the radical immanence of the real that is its enabling condition. In this way, we have endeavoured to present both a defence of the immanent validity of its pragmatics, and an original articulation of Laruelle's non-philosophical method. Community is not a prominent theme in Laruelle's own thought, and as we showed in Chapter 3, his only discussion of this concept appeals to *science* underdetermine its decisional sufficiency and situate it in a broader theoretical terrain. Our focus on Bataille and Nancy has occasioned a different means of suspending the sufficiency of community—effectuating a similar postural shift in new terms, by elucidating a “theatre-fiction”. Thus we have brought another technique of creation into our non-philosophical treatment of the problematic of community, which draws on Laruelle's discussions of aesthetics, rather than science.

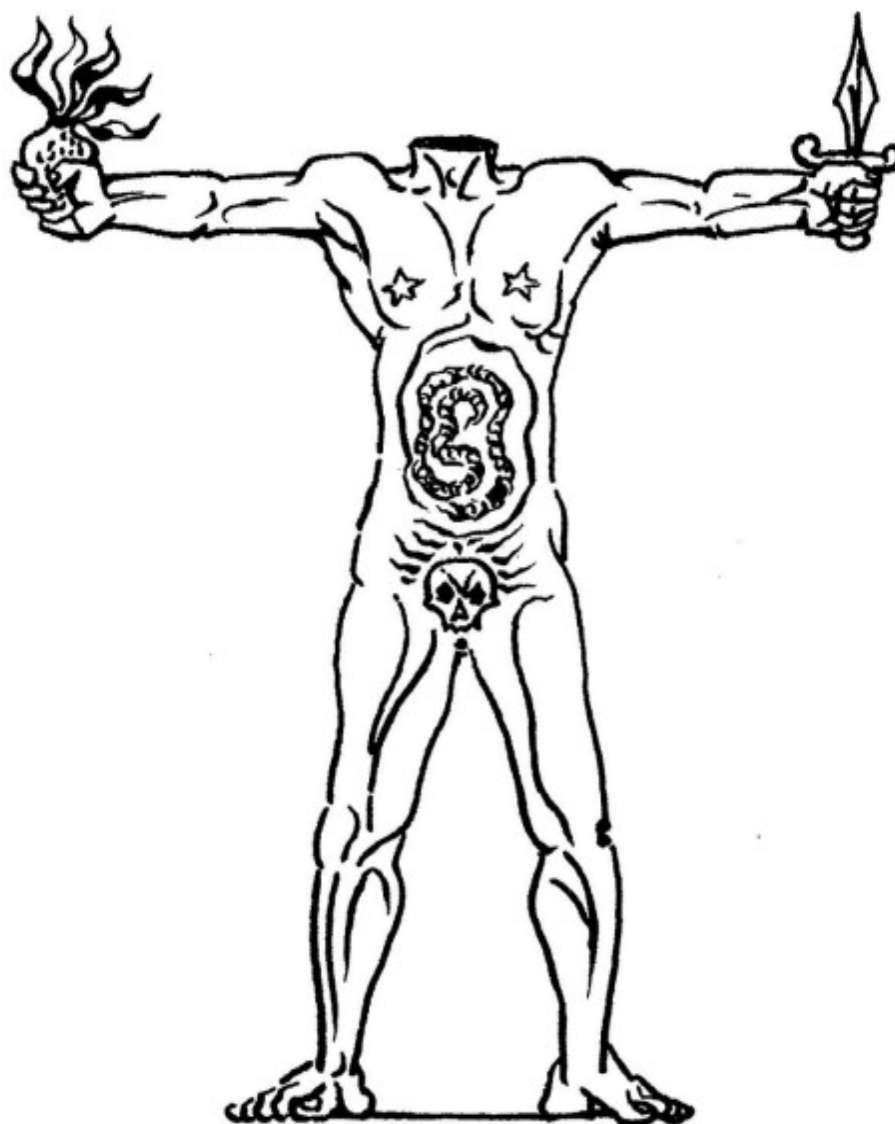
Our argument thus took a diversion from the thematic of community to explore the presuppositions of sufficiency that reside in the theory and practice of theatre and performance. We do not claim to have exhausted the question of theatrical sufficiency, but have examined three theoretical examples to render apparent the way that each conforms to the same decisional structure that Laruelle attributes to philosophy. In order to bring some methodological consistency to our analysis—both in our treatment of the divergent discourses of community, and of the different aesthetic discourses of theatre—we utilized the dimensions identified in Laruelle's *Analytic of Philosophical Decision* as a matrix. This brought to the surface the formal similarities between the whole range of materials and enabled us to suspend their various principles of sufficiency in-One, and in the process to support Laruelle's claims about the invariant structure of decisional logic in the same gesture as positively elucidating our theatre-fiction. In this way, we have transcendently reduced the sufficiency of *Muthos*, *Cruelty* and *Performance*, whilst retaining theatre's characteristics as a site of *manifestation*, *vision* and *performativity*. Thus we have identified our non-theatrical apparatus as manifesting a simple non-mimetic correspondence between the conceptual image of community and the real; as consisting in a non-phenomenological experience of vision-without-distance of the phenomenal reality of community's concept; and as a mode of radical performativity in which “community” is accorded the agency to present *itself* according to its immanence. This agency belongs to the non-theatrical subject, which is not an entity but a function—that of the immanent causality of the force-(of)-thought, the lived-experience of

radical identity. All of this is brought about by the postural shift of the vision-in-One, which changes the focus of theoretical description from the object=X (i.e. community) to the transcendental apparatus of manifestation for the concept as such.

The argument we have presented opens possibilities for further research in at least two directions. Firstly, we have proposed the non-theatrical staging of community as a radicalization of the essence of the political, and that the non-exclusionary correspondence-of-the-last-instance between the experience-(of)-community and its concept opens the potential for a politics that does not destitute communal experience. However, developing the practical possibilities of such a politics would require a bringing the non-philosophical apparatus into a new relation with the empirical sphere, which would perhaps entail a fundamental mutation in its transcendental logic, and as such would require the development of new non-philosophical methodologies. Secondly, in the course of our analysis, we considered a selection of aesthetic theories for theatre, to assist in the development of our non-theatrical syntax, but have not tested the applicability of our theatre-fiction in the aesthetic sphere, as an apparatus with which to think about theatre and performance art—or indeed, to allow such artworks to think themselves. As with the question of politics, to answer such a question by proposing something like a “performance non-philosophy” would entail the development of new methods, which would extend into areas of practice that non-philosophy has yet to fully explore.⁹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, given the spirit of experimentation and innovation with which Laruelle has offered us his transcendental apparatus, we consider that such developments would be consistent with its democratizing *ethos*.

⁹⁸⁷ Important work has been done in this direction in Ó Maoilearca, *All Thoughts Are Equal*; Fisher, ‘Thinking Without Authority’; Laura Cull ‘Performance Philosophy—Staging a New Field’, in *Encounters in Performance Philosophy*, ed. Laura Cull and Alice Lagaay, 15–38, (Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

FIGURE



ACEPHALE

RELIGION · SOCIOLOGIE · PHILOSOPHIE · REVUE PARAISSANT 4 FOIS PAR AN

1^{re} année

LA CONJURATION SACRÉE

24 juin

1936

PAR GEORGES BATAILLE PIERRE KLOSSOWSKI ET ANDRÉ MASSON

Figure 1. André Masson, *Acéphale* (front cover), 24th June 1936.

<<http://collegeofsociology.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/georges-bataille-life-of-works-seeking.html>> [Accessed 15th May 2010].

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APPENDIX

Material from the thesis (Chapter 1.3), published in *Zētēsis*, Vol. 1 No. 1 *The Cruelty of the Classical Canon* (2013): 79–87.

A Paradoxical Architecture:

Babel, and the Founding of Community through the Confounding of Tongues.

Abstract

Hegel, in his *Aesthetics*, proposes the Tower of Babel as an architectural symbol that is foundational in the establishment of social unity. This article argues that Babel is a paradoxical symbol for unity, and is emblematic of the difficulty that Hegel's philosophical system presents for understanding community. This problem is shown to be structural, deriving from the essentially architectonic logic of dialectics, and connected to language at a fundamental level. Drawing on the thought of Bataille, Blanchot and Nancy, the spatiality of Hegel's system is turned inside-out, with an “anarchitectural” topology proposed, instead, as the ground of community.

Key words: community; architecture; paradox; dialectics; language.

Article text:

‘In the wide plains of the Euphrates an enormous architectural work was erected; [...] The ensemble of all the peoples at that period worked at this task and since they all came together to complete an immense work like this, the product of their labour was to be a bond which was to link them together by means of the excavated site and ground, the assembled blocks of stone, and the as it were architectural cultivation of the country.’

G. W. F. Hegel¹

‘Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.’

Genesis²

Hegel, in his *Aesthetics*, locates the origin of art in symbolic architecture, and the first

1 G. W. F. Hegel, ‘Architectural Works Built for National Unification’, in *Aesthetics, Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975), 638.

2 Gen. 11: 9 (*The Bible, Authorised King James Version*).

example he offers of such architecture is the Tower of Babel. He says that the tower, ‘was built in common, and the aim and content of the work was at the same time the community of those who constructed it.’³ This structure, that according to Hegel functions as a symbol of national unity, forms the foundation of his aesthetics, which describes a dialectical *telos* that moves towards the total conceptual and social unification of Absolute Reason. However, Babel is a strange symbol for teleological unity considering that, according to myth, its construction was never completed, and the project resulted in the confounding of tongues whereby a people who had previously had one language could no longer understand one another, and were scattered across the earth.

It will be argued that the choice of Babel as an exemplary symbol of national unity is emblematic of the difficulty that Hegel's unifying philosophical system presents for understanding community. This problem is structural, deriving from the essentially architectonic logic of dialectics, and connected to language at a fundamental level. This article excavates the uncertain foundations of the dialectic, calling into question the integrity of Hegel's system. In place of the dialectical structure, an “anarchitectural” space is proposed as the ground of community.⁴ This reorientation suggests that the dialectical *telos*, like the Babylonian tower, is constitutively incomplete and reveals an intrinsic opacity to language. As such, Babel is shown to be an appropriate symbol for community—not for its unifying function, but because of its impossibility as a project, and the failure of communication that it represents.

In his *Aesthetics*, Hegel proposes that symbolic architecture is the origin of art—both historically, as the first kind of art that came into realisation, and philosophically, as the necessary first step in the conceptual development of the aesthetics *telos*.⁵ He proposes that,

The primary and original need of art is that an idea or thought generated by the spirit shall be produced by man as his own work and presented by him, just as in a language there are ideas which man communicates as such and makes intelligible to others.⁶

But where language communicates at the level of the sign, in which meaning is external and

3 Hegel, ‘Architectural Works Built for National Unification’, 638.

4 This article is extracted from my doctoral research, which is concerned with articulating a non-essential ontology of community. I use the term “anarchitectural” in two complimentary senses: firstly, to evoke a construction that is *anarchic*—implying a lack of centre or origin, as well as something of the political meaning of “anarchy”; secondly, the word can be read as *ana-architectural*, by which I mean to indicate the return to a state prior to the architectonic logic of identity thinking, from where the ground of community can be thought anew. This is related to Heidegger's claim that metaphysical thought is built on a “groundless ground”. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

5 Hegel, ‘Independent or Symbolic Architecture’, in *Aesthetics*, 630.

6 Ibid. 635.

arbitrary in relation to the material form of the expression, Hegel argues that art has a sensuous presence that corresponds to its meaning.⁷ This correspondence between essence and appearance defines the symbol, which, ‘is no purely arbitrary sign, but a sign which in its externality comprises in itself at the same time the content of the idea which it brings into appearance.’⁸ Art consists precisely in this kinship of meaning and shape. It is therefore able to make visible essential thoughts that are *universal* in nature.

The symbolic names the first of three aesthetic moments, which each of the five particular arts passes through in the development of aesthetics. Through the dialectical movement of the *Aufhebung*, the symbolic is superseded by the classical and then the romantic: first in architecture, then in sculpture, painting, music and poetry. The *telos* reaches its completion when all of these sensuous forms of art are sublated by aesthetics itself—that is, philosophical reflection about art. As such, art is incorporated into spirit as it progresses to fully-formed Universal Reason.⁹

Being a linear unfolding, every *telos* must have a beginning, and this beginning has an essential correspondence with its end. The movement of the *Aufhebung* preserves what it supersedes, allowing the origin to reappear as a foundation in each successive stage of dialectical development. So Hegel's choice to put architecture at the origin reveals much about the nature of the system as a whole. I say “choice”, because in spite of certain initial claims, the text suggests that the identity between the historical beginning and the conceptual origin of art are not self-evident. Directly after stating that architecture's priority in the sequence is not only determined by the nature of art, but also because ‘it comes first in the existence of art in the world’, Hegel seems to disavow this “fact”, claiming that ‘we must throughout exclude [...] the empirical facts of history’.¹⁰ Instead, what he wishes to demonstrate is the conceptual or essential nature of art, and Hegel proposes that ‘the first task of art consists in giving shape to what is objective in itself.’¹¹ Strikingly, and in line with Denis Hollier's remarks on architecture's inaugural value for aesthetics as a whole, we find the reverse is true. Hollier writes, ‘instead of a serenely confident description of his object, we find the anxiety of someone attempting to grasp at an object that is elusive.’¹²

7 Ibid.

8 Hegel, ‘The Symbolic Form of Art’, in *Aesthetics*, 305.

9 Hegel describes the process whereby the subject accedes to Universal Reason in the *Phenomenology*. Art is linked to religion as it plays a role in the development of spirit, but along with all sensuous experience it is eventually superseded by knowledge in its pure/total form. cf. G. W. F. Hegel, ‘Religion in the form of Art’ and ‘The Revealed Religion’ in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 424-479.

10 Hegel, ‘Independent or Symbolic Architecture’, 630.

11 Ibid. 631.

12 Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture, the Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge MA:

First, Hegel identifies ‘the earliest beginnings of architecture, the first things that can be accepted as its commencement, [as being] a hut as a human dwelling, and a temple as an enclosure for the god and his community.’¹³ But then he rejects these structures as the origin of *aesthetics* because, ‘such erections are mere *means*, presupposing a purpose external to them’¹⁴ Whereas art is a pertinent concept only for objects that have as their end the manifestation of the idea of beauty. However, the distinction between internality and externality, means and ends, is continually called into question throughout this foundational section of the text.

In order to find the beginnings of aesthetics Hegel looks for examples of buildings that are pure symbols, independent of any external aims or needs (in other words, of any usefulness), those which stand ‘like works of sculpture, and which carry their meaning in themselves.’¹⁵ One might ask what exactly differentiates a “building” that has no practical use from a “work of sculpture”. Hegel’s text does not make this entirely clear. Sculpture follows after architecture in the aesthetic *telos*, but serves as a controlling model for it. Hollier points out that ‘this paradoxical situation [leads] Hegel to define, contrary to any proper hierarchy, architecture, the first of arts, as a type of the second, sculpture’.¹⁶

However, as already observed, the *telos* must have a beginning, and if the first task of art is to give shape to what is objective, then this beginning must be an object. The object that Hegel identifies as the originary type of symbolic architecture is that of works built for national unification: ‘the *primary* purpose behind explicitly independent buildings is only the erection of something which is a unifying point for a nation or nations, a place where they assemble.’¹⁷ And the example he gives as the very first of such structures is the biblical story of the Tower of Babylonia, or Babel.¹⁸ The Tower of Babel is distinguished from utilitarian architecture by the fact that it is a solid structure without an internal cavity, so there is no possibility of the “external aims or needs” which most buildings are mediated by penetrating into the inside. The structure is able to function ideologically as a pure symbol because its

MIT Press, 1989), 5. Hollier proposes that resistance to “architecture”, which names an ordering and hence dominating form of logic, functions as an organising thread that runs through Bataille’s oeuvre, and I should acknowledge Bataille’s influence in this work. However, my challenge to the totalising claims of the Hegelian dialectic differs from Bataille’s due to varying ontological approaches. Bataille breaches the totality by posing a question (“why?”) *after* the completion of the *telos*, whereas I am claiming that the dialectic is always already incomplete *from the beginning*, because of the uncertain foundations on which it is built. Cf. Georges Bataille, ‘Hegel’, in *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 108–111.

13 Hegel, ‘Independent or Symbolic Architecture’, 631.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid. 632.

16 Hollier, *Against Architecture*, 8.

17 Hegel, ‘Independent or Symbolic Architecture’, 637.

18 Hegel, ‘Architectural Works Built for National Unification’, 638–9.

solidity gives it a homogeneous self-presence, ensuring that there is no risk of confusion between forms, between interiority and exteriority.¹⁹

But on another level, the separation of internality and externality is not so simple. If the primary purpose of the Tower, and structures like it, is to function as a place of assembly, this would seem to make them precisely a means to an end which is external to that of beauty. And this was the very reason that the hut and the temple were disqualified from being categorised as aesthetic objects. The aim of constituting human community seems to take precedence over the properly aesthetic aspect of the symbol, even in the chapter in which Hegel describes what corresponds to the purest form of symbolism in art.²⁰ Indeed, as Hollier observes ‘[t]he word “symbolic” is scarcely used.’²¹ That community predominates over the symbol in this discussion emphasises the importance of sociality in Hegel's ideas about Reason. If community is the purpose of the architectural symbol, this is because, for Hegel, it is only in the life of a *people* or *nation* that self-conscious Reason's actualisation (the result of the *telos*) has its reality.²² But the question remains as to the value of the architectural symbol as a purely aesthetic object.

At the opening of the section entitled *Architectural Works built for National Unification*, Hegel cites Goethe, who says that ‘[w]hat is holy’ is ‘[w]hat links many souls together’.²³ And Hegel suggests that ‘the holy, with the aim of this concord, and as this concord, [is] the first content of independent architecture.’²⁴ Which is to say that “holy concord” is both the aim of the architecture, and what it already contains, indicating some confusion, or at least conflation, between present and future, what *is* and what *will be*. And this confusion continues—throughout the section on symbolic architecture, the result of the process is presupposed as a requirement for its beginning. This produces a kind of circular agitation, which is what makes it so difficult for Hegel to locate a stable origin. This circularity, I would argue, is the sort of movement that's generated by a paradox—which is quite different from a contradiction. Which suggests that the paradox, rather than dialectical

19 Cf. Hollier, *Against Architecture*, 9. A relation can be seen between the homogeneous self-presence of the architectural symbol and the structure of the metaphysical subject. Jean-Luc Nancy proposes that thinking in terms of the subject as interiority is what thwarts a thinking of community, suggesting instead that beings be thought as surfaces that are constituted as they are exposed to the outside. Although he does not discuss architecture in this context, his ontology is based on a topological spatiality which does not conform to the euclidean logic on which architecture is based, thus implying the kind of anarchitectural ground that I am proposing here. cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 1–42.

20 Hegel, ‘Independent or Symbolic Architecture’, 635-659.

21 Hollier, *Against Architecture*, 11.

22 Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §350, p.212.

23 Hegel, ‘Architectural Works Built for National Unification’, 638.

24 Ibid.

negation serves as a foundation for this architecture.²⁵

Hegel says that the Tower of Babel, his first actual example of independent architecture, ‘was built in common, and the aim and content of the work was at the same time the community of those who constructed it.’²⁶ Now, in order for this project to commence, to be built “in common”, there must already be a social bond, the foundation of which, Hegel tells us, had already superseded unification on patriarchal lines.²⁷ This means that a social unity, which results from familial ties being sublated into a wider whole, exists prior to the architectural work of National Unification. Hegel offers no account of how the ‘purely family unity [that] has already been superseded’ itself came into being—patriarchal unification is presupposed. But if the family unit comprises a number of individual subjects fused into a greater whole, then it seems that (at least) two levels of communal unification have already been passed through prior to the commencement of the architectural project. Which suggests a certain complexity in the sociality that is a prerequisite for the architectural work.

All of this means that community precedes nation, and indeed serves as its ground. What the architectural work builds onto this communal ground is a symbol, which represents the identity of the nation. So architecture brings a pre-existing, intuitive communal bond into the realm of representation, of language. This association between architecture and language is not unique to Hegel—structural linguistics, for example, uses of an architectural vocabulary to explain the workings of language. In this sense, linguistics seems to owe a debt of foundation to architecture. Indeed, as Hollier comments, ‘Viollet-le-Duc’s *Dictionnaire de l’architecture française* followed a structuralist analytical method (one since developed by Saussure and the linguists) before the term was invented.’²⁸ Similarly, for Jacques Lacan, it is an edifice that, ‘remind[s] us of what distinguishes architecture from building: namely, a logical power that governs the architecture beyond what the building allows for by way of possible utilization.’²⁹ Architecture, then, as distinct from mere building, has a logical power – the power of the *logos* – which governs language as such, and systems more generally. Consequently, as Hollier observes:

25 For Deleuze, the paradox forms the ground of sense. In contrast to the negativity of Hegelian contradiction, he proposes that sense is produced in the affirmation of a positive distance, which is characteristic of the surface, not of depth. cf. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester. (London/New York: Continuum, 2004) 197. This surface is topological, hence Deleuzian sense can be related to the ontological sociality proposed by Nancy (*supra*, n.19). The paradox, as that which, ‘destroys good sense as the only direction, but is also that which destroys common sense as the assignation of fixed identities’, always implies an anarchitectural spatiality. (Deleuze, *ibid.* 5).

26 Hegel, ‘Architectural Works Built for National Unification’, 638.

27 *Ibid.*

28 Hollier, *Against Architecture*, 32.

29 Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York/London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), [698] 586.

There is no way to describe a system without resorting to a vocabulary of architecture. When structure defines the general form of legibility, nothing becomes legible unless it is submitted to the architectural grid. Architecture under these conditions becomes archistructure, the system of systems. The keystone of systematicity in general, it organizes the concord of languages and guarantees universal legibility.³⁰

And yet, returning again to the beginning—this time, to the account of the Babylonian tower in Genesis—the foundational position of architecture in relation to language is, once again, called into question. Because *before* the inaugural architectural project commenced, the Bible tells us:

And the whole earth was of one language,
and of one speech.

And they said, Go to, let
us build us a city and a tower, whose top may
reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name,
lest we be scattered abroad across the face of
the whole earth.³¹

Universal legibility and concord of language were, it seems, already in existence prior to the originary work of architecture. Architecture comes after language. What the edifice aimed to create was not language-in-general, but “a name”—an identity. Hegel suggests that the product of building this symbol of identity was to be a bond that linked the workers together ‘(as we are linked together by manners, customs, and the legal constitution of the state)’.³² But is language not the condition that allows manners, customs and legal structures to be instituted (not to mention the expression of identity)? If so, the community was already unified by its shared language, indeed it must have been, or the tower would never have been built. Which makes Babel a paradoxical symbol for unity, if one considers the end of the tale (and in a *telos* the meaning is always to be found as/at the end):

And the LORD said, Behold, the people is
one, and they have all one language; and this
they begin to do: and now nothing will be
restrained from them, which they have
imagined to do.

Go to, let us go down, and there confound
their language, that they may not understand
one another's speech.

So the LORD scattered them abroad from
thence upon the face of all the earth.³³

30 Hollier, *Against Architecture*, 33.

31 Gen. 11:1, 11:4.

32 Hegel, ‘Architectural Works built for National Unification’, 638.

33 Gen. 11:6-8.

Far from organizing concord and legibility, the so-called inaugural architectural work provoked an irreparable fragmentation in a people that had formerly been united by their shared language. This confounding of language, the medium of rational discourse, means that far from being a symbol of unity, Babel represents the origin of opacity and confusion in communication, which would seem to cause disjunction in the community.

Hegel attributes the failure of the tower to unify the people to the fact that it was only in an external way that it was able to express what is holy, that it could only hint at the social bond. Here again, he contradicts himself, if we recall that earlier, the symbol was defined as a sign in which the sensuous manifestation corresponds with the essential idea that it represents. Time and again, the foundation seems to unwork itself, and I argue that Hegel's difficulty in identifying the architectural object, and establishing its originary position, derives from a blind-spot in the architectonic logic of his own edifice—that is, the dialectical *telos* as a hierarchical and totalising system. And this blind-spot, in turn, makes it impossible for him to think community as such.

The problem is that Hegel wants to define community according to what comes after it in the teleological process—the nation, unified by an identity concept that is constituted through the work of construction, and manifested as an architectural symbol. But community, as that which necessarily precedes this process, is neither a *work*, nor an identity concept. Unable to conceptualise this prior state of sociality in its complexity, because it doesn't conform to the structural logic of his system, Hegel can only project a symbolic meaning backwards onto it, designating it as origin with hindsight. By attributing architecture with the status of origin, Hegel conceals what came before it—which would be the beginning, properly speaking, the same beginning that Hegel seems unable to locate. And so community is excluded from architectural space, and remains an excess in relation to the dialectic, consigned to the exteriority of the space of representation.

All of this means that Hegel is unable to see the foundation on which his own, dialectical edifice is built, this exteriority, which is “anarchitectural” in nature—de-centred and structured according to a different spatial logic. This anarchic space, which forms the groundless ground of the system poses a threat to the integrity of the edifice, and must remain excluded, lest it cause the structure to unravel. And so the dialectic, which is claimed to accede to a total Knowledge from which nothing is excluded, is constitutively incomplete.

In this sense, the Hegelian edifice resembles the Tower of Babel, as a folly that could never have been completed—a work that attempted to unite the people by transcending the horizontality of the mortal world and making them equal with God, building a route to

transcendence in bricks and mortar. Hegel, too, claims to have conceived a system, an architecture, that can reach the height of transcendence, an Absolute Knowledge that could be characterised as divine. In this architectonic system language is presented as a transparent medium that is able to communicate all ideas. But as long as the anarchitectural ground is obscured by the assumed completeness of the structure, there remains an opacity at the root of communication. The same opacity of language inaugurated by the communal project of the Tower. On a certain level, community is nothing other than this failure of communication, the excess that cannot be incorporated by the structure that is dependent on it. So the myth of Babel can be seen as a symbol, not of unity, but of the founding of community through the confounding of tongues.