

BEING SINGULAR PLURAL

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Jean-Luc Nancy

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Contents

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Lead, as I do, the flown-away virtue back to earth—
yes, back to body and life; that it may give the earth its
meaning, a human meaning! May your spirit and your
virtue serve the meaning of the earth. . . . Man and
man's earth are still unexhausted and undiscovered.

—Nietzsche

This epigraph is chosen quite deliberately. I run the risk of its seeming to lend itself to a certain Christian, idealist, and humanist tone, a tone in which it is easy to recognize those well-meaning virtues and values that have loosed upon the world all the things that have driven the humanity of our century to despair over itself, where these values are both blind to and complicit in this letting loose. In his own way, Nietzsche himself would have undoubtedly participated in this dubious, moralizing piety. At any rate, the word "meaning" rarely appears in his work, and still more rarely in any positive sense. One would do well, therefore, not to give any hasty interpretations of it here. The above excerpt appeals to a "human meaning," but it does so by affirming that the human [*l'homme*] remains to be discovered.¹ In order for the human to be discovered, and in order for the phrase "human meaning" to acquire some meaning, everything that has ever laid claim to the truth about the nature, essence, or end of "man" must be undone. In other words, nothing must remain of what, under the title of meaning, related the earth [*la terre*] and the human to a specifiable horizon. Again, it is Nietzsche who said that we are now "on the horizon of the infinite"; that is, we are at that point where "there is no more 'land,'" and where "there is nothing more terrible than the infinite."²

Are we finally going to learn this lesson? Are we perhaps finally able to hear it, or is it now impossible for us to learn anything

else? Can we think an earth and a human such that they would be only what they are—*nothing but* earth and human—and such that they would be none of the various horizons often harbored under these names, none of the “perspectives” or “views” *in view* of which we have disfigured humans [*les hommes*] and driven them to despair?

“The horizon of the infinite” is no longer the horizon of *the whole*, but the “whole” (all that is) as put on hold everywhere, pushed to the outside *just as much as* it is pushed back inside the “self.” It is no longer a line that is drawn, or a line that will be drawn, which orients or gathers the meaning of a course of progress or navigation. It is the opening [*la brèche*] or distancing [*l'écartement*] of horizon itself, and in the opening: *us*. We happen as the opening itself, the dangerous fault line of a rupture.

I want to emphasize the date on which I am writing this. It is the summer of 1995, and as far as specifying the situation of the earth and humans is concerned, nothing is more pressing (how could it really be avoided?) than a list of proper names such as these, presented here in no particular order: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chechnya, Rwanda, Bosnian Serbs, Tutsis, Hutus, Tamil Tigers, Krajina Serbs, Casamance, Chiapas, Islamic Jihad, Bangladesh, the Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, Hamas, Kazakhstan, Khmers Rouges, ETA militia, Kurds (UPK/PDK), Montataire, the Movement for Self-determination, Somalia, Chicanos, Shiites, FNLC-Canal Historique, Liberia, Givat Hagadan, Nigeria, the League of the North, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Sikhs, Haiti, Roma gypsies of Slovenia, Taiwan, Burma, PLO, Iraq, Islamic Front Salvation, Shining Path, Vaulx-en-Velins, Neuhof. . . . Of course, it would be difficult to bring this list to an end if the aim was to include all the places, groups, or authorities that constitute the theater of bloody conflicts among identities, as well as what is at stake in these conflicts. These days it is not always possible to say with any assurance whether these identities are intranational, infranational, or transnational; whether they are “cultural,” “religious,”

“ethnic,” or “historical”; whether they are legitimate or not—not to mention the question about which law would provide such legitimation; whether they are real, mythical, or imaginary; whether they are independent or “instrumentalized” by other groups who wield political, economic, and ideological power. . . .

This is the “earth” we are supposed to “inhabit” today, the earth for which the name Sarajevo will become the martyr-name, the testimonial-name: this is us, we who are supposed to say *we* as if we know what we are saying and *who* we are talking about. This earth is anything but a sharing of humanity. It is a world that does not even manage to constitute a world; it is a world lacking in world, and lacking in the meaning of world. It is an enumeration that brings to light the sheer number and proliferation of these various poles of attraction and repulsion. It is an endless list, and everything happens in such a way that one is reduced to keeping accounts but never taking the final toll. It is a litany, a prayer of pure sorrow and pure loss, the plea that falls from the lips of millions of refugees every day: whether they be deportees, people besieged, those who are mutilated, people who starve, who are raped, ostracized, excluded, exiled, expelled.

What I am talking about here is compassion, but not compassion as a pity that feels sorry for itself and feeds on itself. Compassion is the contagion, the contact of being with one another in this turmoil. Compassion is not altruism, nor is it identification; it is the disturbance of violent relatedness.

What does the above-named proliferation require of us, this proliferation that seems to have no other meaning than the indeterminate multiplication of centripetal meanings, meanings closed in on themselves and supersaturated with significance—that is, meanings that are no longer meaningful because they have come to refer only to their own closure, to their horizon of appropriation, and have begun to spread nothing but destruction, hatred, and the denial of existence?

What if this autistic multiplicity, which tears open and is torn

open, lets us know that we have not even begun to discover what it is to be many, even though "la terre des hommes"³ is exactly this? What if it lets us know that it is itself the first laying bare [*mise à nu*] of a world that is only the world, but which is the world absolutely and unreservedly, with no meaning beyond this very Being of the world: singularly plural and plurally singular?

Preface

The first and principal essay of this book, which gives it its title, was not composed in an altogether sequential manner, but rather in a discontinuous way, repeatedly taking up several themes. To a certain extent, then, the sections can be read in any order, since there are repetitions here and there. But this is the result of a fundamental difficulty. This text does not disguise its ambition of re-doing the whole of "first philosophy" by giving the "singular plural" of Being¹ as its foundation. This, however, is not *my* ambition, but rather the necessity of the thing itself and of our history. At the very least, I hope to make this necessity felt. At the same time, apart from the fact that I do not have the strength to deliver the treatise "of the singular plural essence of Being," the form of the ontological treatise ceases to be appropriate as soon as the singular of Being itself, and therefore also of ontology, is in question. This is nothing new. At least since Nietzsche, and for all sorts of reasons that no doubt come together in the reason I invoke, philosophy is at odds with its "form," that is, with its "style," which is to say, finally, with its address. How does thinking address itself to itself, to thinking (which also means: how does thinking address itself to everyone, without its being a matter of a "comprehension" or "understanding" that might be called "common")? How is thinking addressed? (The philosophical treatise, and "philosophy" as such, is the neutralization of address, the subjectless discourse of

Being-Subject [*l'Être-Sujet*] itself.) Put another way, what is the “dialogue of the soul with itself” that Plato talks about, which demonstrates that this question, or this worry, has always been part of our history? If thinking is addressed, then it is because there is meaning in this address, and not in discourse (but it is in the address of discourse). This obeys the primordial, ontological condition of being-with or being-together, which is what I would like to talk about. A treatise, therefore, is not sufficiently discursive. Nor is it enough to dress discourse in the form of an address (for me to address you with the familiar “you” [*tu*] the whole way through). The address means that thinking itself addresses itself to “me” and to “us” at the same time; that is, thinking addresses itself to the world, to history, to people, to things: to “us.” Another ambition springs from this or, better yet, another, more restricted, attempt: to allow thinking’s address to be perceived, an address that comes to us from everywhere simultaneously, multiplied, repeated, insistent, and variable, gesturing only toward “us” and toward our curious “being-with-one-another,” [*être-les-uns-avec-les-autres*], toward our addressing-one-another.²

(By the way, the logic of “with” often requires heavy-handed syntax in order to say “being-with-one-another.” You may suffer from it as you read these pages. But perhaps it is not an accident that language does not easily lend itself to showing the “with” as such, for it is itself the address and not what must be addressed.)

In this, there is an illusion that lies in wait, the illusion of willing the adequation of “form” and “content,” of willing truth itself into presence: as if I could write to every addressee a seismographical account of our upsets, our agitations, our troubles, and our addresses without addressees. My only response is no: no will, “on my life I did not know what it was to will” (Nietzsche). Or I might say the following: willing (or desire) is not a thinking; it is a disturbance, an echo, a reverberating shock.

The latter essays were chosen because their subjects converge with that of the primary essay. As you will see, the first two are connected to the exact circumstances of the most violent events of these last years.

BEING SINGULAR PLURAL

§ Of Being Singular Plural

It is good to rely upon others. For no one can bear this life alone.

—Hölderlin

Since human nature is the true community of men, those who produce thereby affirm their nature, human community, and social being which, rather than an abstract, general power in opposition to the isolated individual, is the being of each individual, his own activity, his own life, his own joy, his own richness. To say that a man is alienated from himself is to say that the society of this alienated man is the caricature of his real community:

—Marx

We Are Meaning

It is often said today that we have lost meaning, that we lack it and, as a result, are in need of and waiting for it. The “one” who speaks in this way forgets that the very propagation of this discourse is itself meaningful. Regretting the absence of meaning itself has meaning. But such regret does not have meaning only in this negative mode; denying the presence of meaning affirms that one knows what meaning would be, were it there, and keeps the mastery and truth of meaning in place (which is the pretension of the humanist discourses that propose to “rediscover” meaning.) Whether it is aware of it or not, the contemporary discourse on meaning goes much further and in a completely different direction: it brings to light the fact that “meaning,” used in this absolute way, has become the bared [*dénudé*] name of our being-with-one-another. We do not “have” meaning anymore, because we ourselves are meaning—entirely, without reserve, infinitely, with no meaning other than “us.”

This does not mean that we are the content of meaning, nor are we its fulfillment or its result, as if to say that humans were the meaning (end, substance, or value) of Being, nature, or history. The meaning of this meaning—that is, the signification to which a state of affairs corresponds and compares—is precisely what we say we

have lost. But we are meaning in the sense that we are the element in which significations can be produced and circulate. The least signification just as much as the most elevated (the meaning of "nail" as well as the meaning of "God") has no meaning in itself and, as a result, is what it is and does what it does only insofar as it is communicated, even where this communication takes place only between "me" and "myself." Meaning is its own communication or its own circulation. The "meaning of Being" is not some property that will come to qualify, fill in, or finalize the brute givenness of "Being" pure and simple.¹ Instead, it is the fact that there is no "brute givenness" of Being, that there is no desperately poor *there is* presented when one says that "there is a nail catching. . . ." But the givenness of Being, the givenness inherent to the very fact that we understand something when we say "to be" (whatever it may be and however confused it might be), along with the (same) givenness that is given with this fact—cosubstantial with the givenness of Being and the understanding of Being, that we understand one another (however confusedly) when we say it, is a gift that can be summarized as follows: *Being itself is given to us as meaning.* Being does not *have* meaning. Being itself, the phenomenon of Being, is meaning that is, in turn, its own circulation—and *we* are this circulation.

There is no meaning if meaning is not shared,² and not because there would be an ultimate or first signification that all beings have in common, but because *meaning is itself the sharing of Being.* Meaning begins where presence is not pure presence but where presence comes apart [*se disjoint*] in order to be itself *as* such. This "as" presupposes the distancing, spacing, and division of presence. Only the concept of "presence" contains the necessity of this division. Pure unshared presence—presence to nothing, of nothing, for nothing—is neither present nor absent. It is the simple implosion of a being that could never have *been*—an implosion without any trace.

This is why what is called "the creation of the world" is not the production of a pure something from nothing—which would not, at the same time, implode into the nothing out of which it could never have come—but is the explosion of presence in the original

multiplicity of its division. It is the explosion of *nothing*; in fact, it is the spacing of meaning, spacing *as* meaning and circulation. The *nihil* of creation is the *truth* of meaning, but meaning is the originary sharing of this truth. It could be expressed in the following way: Being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* and as the *with* of this singularly plural coexistence.

If one can put it like this, there is no other meaning than the meaning of circulation. But this circulation goes in all directions at once, in all the directions of all the space-times [*les espace-temps*] opened by presence to presence: all things, all beings, all entities, everything past and future, alive, dead, inanimate, stones, plants, nails, gods—and "humans," that is, those who expose sharing and circulation as such by saying "we," by *saying we to themselves* in all possible senses of that expression, and by saying *we* for the totality of all being.

~

(Let us say we for all being, that is, for every being, for all beings one by one, each time in the singular of their essential plural. Language speaks for all and of all: for all, in their place, in their name, including those who may not have a name. Language says what there is of the world, nature, history and humanity, and it also speaks for them as well as in view of them, in order to lead the one who speaks, the one through whom language comes to be and happens ("man"), to all of being, which does not speak but which is nevertheless—stone, fish, fiber, dough, crack, block, and breath. The speaker speaks for the world, which means the speaker speaks to it, on behalf of it, in order to make it a "world." As such, the speaker is "in its place" and "according to its measure"; the speaker occurs as its representative but also, at the same time (and this has all the values of *pro* in Latin), in anticipation of it, before it, exposed to it as to its own most intimate consideration. Language says the world; that is, it loses itself in it and exposes how "in itself" it is a question of losing oneself in order to be of it, with it, to be its meaning—which is all meaning.)

~

Circulation goes in all directions: this is the Nietzschean thought of the “eternal return,” the affirmation of meaning as the repetition of the instant, nothing but this repetition, and as a result, nothing (since it is a matter of the repetition of what essentially does not return). But it is a repetition already comprised in the affirmation of the instant, in this affirmation/request (*re-petitio*) seized in the letting go of the instant, affirming the passing of presence and itself passing with it, affirmation abandoned in its very movement. It is an impossible thought, a thinking that does not hold itself back from the circulation it thinks, a thinking of meaning right at [*à même*]³ meaning, where its eternity occurs as the truth of its passing. (For instance, at the moment at which I am writing, a brown-and-white cat is crossing the garden, slipping mockingly away, taking my thoughts with it.)

It is in this way that the thinking of the eternal return is the inaugural thought of our contemporary history, a thinking we must repeat (even if it means calling it something else). We must reappropriate what already made us who “we” are today, here and now, the “we” of a world who no longer struggle to have meaning but to be meaning itself. This is *we* as the beginning and end of the world, inexhaustible in the circumscription that nothing circumscribes, that “the” nothing circumscribes. *We make sense* [*nous faisons sens*], not by setting a price or value, but by exposing the absolute value that the world *is* by itself. “World” does not mean anything other than this “nothing” that no one can “mean” [*vouloir dire*], but that is said in every saying: in other words, Being itself as the absolute value in itself of all that is, *but this absolute value as the being-with of all that is* itself bare and impossible to evaluate. It is neither meaning [*vouloir-dire*] nor the giving of value [*dire-valoir*], but value *as such*, that is, “meaning” which is the meaning of Being only because it is Being itself, its existence, its truth. Existence *is with*: otherwise nothing exists.

Circulation—or eternity—goes in all directions, but it moves only insofar as it goes from one point to another; spacing is its absolute condition. From place to place, and from moment to moment, without any progression or linear path, bit by bit and case by

case, essentially accidental, it is singular and plural in its very principle. It does not have a final fulfillment any more than it has a point of origin. It is the originary plurality of origins and the creation of the world in each singularity, creation continued in the discontinuity of its discrete occurrences. From now on, *we, we others*⁴ are charged with this truth—it is more *ours* than ever—the truth of this paradoxical “first-person plural” which makes sense of the world as the spacing and intertwining of so many worlds (earths, skies, histories) that there is a taking place of meaning, or the crossing-through [*passages*] of presence. “We” says (and “we say”) the unique event whose uniqueness and unity consist in multiplicity.

People Are Strange

Everything, then, passes *between us*.⁵ This “between,” as its name implies, has neither a consistency nor continuity of its own. It does not lead from one to the other; it constitutes no connective tissue, no cement, no bridge. Perhaps it is not even fair to speak of a “connection” to its subject; it is neither connected nor unconnected; it falls short of both; even better, it is that which is at the heart of a connection, the *interlacing* [*l’entrecroisement*] of strands whose extremities remain separate even at the very center of the knot. The “between” is the stretching out [*distension*] and distance opened by the singular as such, as its spacing of meaning. That which does not maintain its distance from the “between” is only immanence collapsed in on itself and deprived of meaning.

From one singular to another, there is contiguity but not continuity. There is proximity, but only to the extent that extreme closeness emphasizes the distancing it opens up. All of being is in touch with all of being, but the law of touching is separation; moreover, it is the heterogeneity of surfaces that touch each other. *Contact* is beyond fullness and emptiness, beyond connection and disconnection. If “to come into contact” is to begin to make sense of one another, then this “coming” penetrates nothing; there is no intermediate and mediating “milieu.” Meaning is not a milieu in which we are immersed. There is no *mi-lieu* [between place]. It is a mat-

ter of one or the other, one and the other, one with the other, but by no means the one in the other, which would be something other than one or the other (another essence, another nature, a diffuse or infuse generality). From one to the other is the syncopated repetition of origins-of-the-world, which are each time one or the other.

The origin is affirmation; repetition is the condition of affirmation. I say "that is, that it is." It is not a "fact" and has nothing to do with any sort of evaluation. It is a singularity taking refuge in its affirmation of Being, a touch of meaning. It is not an other Being; it is the singular of Being by which the being *is*, or it is of Being, which *is being* in a transitive sense of the verb (an unheard of, inaudible sense—the very meaning of Being). The touch of meaning brings into play [*engager*] its own singularity, its distinction, and brings into play the plurality of the "each time" of every touch of meaning, "mine" as well as all the others, each one of which is "mine" *in turn*, according to the singular turn of its affirmation.

Right away, then, there is the repetition of the touches of meaning, which meaning demands. This incommensurable, absolutely heterogeneous repetition opens up an irreducible strangeness of each one of these touches to the other. The other origin is incomparable or inassimilable, not because it is simply "other" but because it is an origin and touch of meaning. Or rather, the alterity of the other is its originary contiguity with the "proper" origin.⁶ You are absolutely strange because the world begins *its turn with you*.

We say "people are strange."⁷ This phrase is one of our most constant and rudimentary ontological attestations. In fact, it says a great deal. "People" indicates everyone else, designated as the indeterminate ensemble of populations, lineages, or races [*gentes*] from which the speaker removes himself. (Nevertheless, he removes himself in a very particular sort of way, because the designation is so general—and this is exactly the point—that it inevitably turns back around on the speaker. Since I say that "people are strange," I include myself in a certain way in this strangeness.)

The word "people" does not say exactly the same thing as the Heideggerian⁸ "one," even if it is partly a mode of it. With the word "one," it is not always certain whether or not the speaker in-

cludes himself in the anonymity of the "one." For example, I can say "someone said to me" ["on m'a dit"] or else "it is said that" ["on dit que"] or else "that is how it is done" ["c'est comme ça qu'on fait"] or else "one is born; one dies" ["on naît, on meurt"]. These uses are not equivalent and, moreover, it is not certain that it is always the case that the "one" speaks of himself (from and about himself). Heidegger understood that "one" would only be said as a response to the question "who?" put to the subject of *Dasein*, but he does not pose the other inevitable question that must be asked in order to discover *who* gives this response and who, in responding like this, removes himself or has a tendency to remove himself. As a result, he risks neglecting the fact that there is no pure and simple "one," no "one" in which "properly existing" existence [*l'existant* "proprement existant"] is, from the start, purely and simply immersed. "People" clearly designates the mode of "one" by which "I" remove myself, to the point of appearing to forget or neglect the fact that I myself am part of "people." In any case, this setting apart [*mise à l'écart*] does not occur without the recognition of identity. "People" clearly states that we are all precisely *people*, that is, indistinctly persons, humans, all of a common "kind," but of a kind that has its existence only as numerous, dispersed, and indeterminate in its generality. This existence can only be grasped in the paradoxical simultaneity of togetherness (anonymous, confused, and indeed massive) and disseminated singularity (these or those "people(s)," or "a guy," "a girl," "a kid").

"People" are silhouettes that are both imprecise and singularized, faint outlines of voices, patterns of comportment, sketches of affects, not the anonymous chatter of the "public domain." But what is an affect, if not each time a sketch? A comportment, if not each time a pattern? A voice, if not each time a faint outline? What is a singularity, if not each time its "own" clearing, its "own" imminence, the imminence of a "propriety" or propriety itself as imminence, always touched upon, always lightly touched: revealing itself *beside*, always beside. ("Beside himself" ["à côté de ses pompes"¹⁰], as the saying goes. The comedy of this expression is no accident, and, whether it masks an anxiety or liberates the laughter

of the ignorant, it is always a matter of an escape, an evasion, and an emptying out of what is closest, an oddity presented as the rule itself.)

"I" take refuge in an exception or distinction when I say "people," but I also confer this distinction on each and every person, although in just as obscure a way. This is undoubtedly why people so often make the judgment "people are strange" or "people are incredible." It is not only, or even primarily, a question of the tendency (however evident) to set up our own *habitus* as the norm. It is necessary to uncover a more primitive level of this particular judgment, one where what is apprehended is nothing other than singularity as such. From faces to voices, gestures, attitudes, dress, and conduct, whatever the "typical" traits are, everyone distinguishes himself by a sort of sudden and headlong precipitation where the strangeness of a singularity is concentrated. Without this precipitation there would be, quite simply, no "someone." And there would be no more interest or hospitality, desire or disgust, no matter who or what it might be for.

"Someone" here is understood in the way a person might say "it's him all right" about a photo, expressing by this "all right" the covering over of a gap, making adequate what is inadequate, capable of relating only to the "instantaneous" grasping of an instant that is precisely its own gap. The photo—I have in mind an everyday, banal photo—simultaneously reveals singularity, banality, and our curiosity about one another. The principle of indiscernability here becomes decisive. Not only are all people different but they are also all different from one another. They do not differ from an archetype or a generality. The typical traits (ethnic, cultural, social, generational, and so forth), whose particular patterns constitute another level of singularity, do not abolish singular differences; instead, they bring them into relief. As for singular differences, they are not only "individual," but infraindividual. It is never the case that I have met Pierre or Marie per se, but I have met him or her in such and such a "form," in such and such a "state," in such and such a "mood," and so on.

This very humble layer of our everyday experience contains an-

other rudimentary ontological attestation: what we receive (rather than what we perceive) with singularities is the discreet passage of *other origins of the world*. What occurs there, what bends, leans, twists, addresses, denies—from the newborn to the corpse—is neither primarily "someone close," nor an "other," nor a "stranger," nor "someone similar." It is an origin; it is an affirmation of the world, and we know that the world has no other origin than this singular multiplicity of origins. The world always appears [*surgit*]¹¹ each time according to a decidedly local turn [of events]. Its unity, its uniqueness, and its totality consist in a combination of this reticulated multiplicity, which produces no result.

Without this attestation, there would be no first attestation of *existence* as such, that is, of the nonessence and non-subsistence-by-itself that is the basis of being-oneself. This is why the Heideggerian "one" is insufficient as the initial understanding of *existentielle* "everydayness." Heidegger confuses the everyday with the undifferentiated, the anonymous, and the statistical. These are no less important, but they can only constitute themselves in relation to the differentiated singularity that the *everyday* already is by itself: each day, each time, day to day. One cannot affirm that the meaning of Being must express itself starting from everydayness and then begin by neglecting the general differentiation of the everyday, its constantly renewed rupture, its intimate discord, its polymorphy and its polyphony, its relief and its variety. A "day" is not simply a unit for counting; it is the turning of the world—each time singular. And days, indeed every day, could not be similar if they were not first different, difference itself. Likewise "people," or rather "peoples," given the irreducible strangeness that constitutes them as such, are themselves primarily the exposing of the singularity according to which existence exists, irreducibly and primarily—and an exposition of singularity that experience claims to communicate with, in the sense of "to" and "along with," the totality of beings. "Nature" is also "strange," and we exist there; we exist *in* it in the mode of a constantly renewed singularity, whether the singularity of the diversity and disparity of our senses or that of the disconcerting profusion of nature's species or its various

metamorphoses into “technology.” Then again, we say “strange,” “odd,” “curious,” “disconcerting” *about* all of being.

Themes of “wonder” and the “marvel of Being” are suspect if they refer to an ecstatic mysticism that pretends to escape the world. The theme of scientific curiosity is no less suspect if it boils down to a collector’s preoccupation with rarities. In both cases, desire for the exception presupposes disdain for the ordinary. Hegel was undoubtedly the first to have this properly modern consciousness of the violent paradox of a thinking whose own value is as yet unheard of, and whose domain is the grayness of the world. This ordinary grayness, the insignificance of the everyday—which the Heideggerian “one” still bears the mark of—assumes an absent, lost, or far away “grandeur.” Yet, truth can be nothing if not the truth of being in totality, that is, the totality of its “ordinariness,” just as meaning can only be right at [*à même*] existence and nowhere else. The modern world asks that this truth be thought: that meaning is right at. It is in the indefinite plurality of origins and their coexistence. The “ordinary” is always exceptional, however little we understand its character as origin. What we receive most communally as “strange” is that the ordinary itself is originary. With existence laid open in this way and the meaning of the world being what it is, the exception is the rule. (Is this not the testimony of the arts and literature? Is not the first and only purpose of their strange existence the presentation of this strangeness? After all, in the etymology of the word *bizarre*,¹² whether the word comes from Basque or Arabic, there is a sense of valor, commanding presence, and elegance.)

Gaining Access to the Origin

As a consequence, gaining access to the origin,¹³ entering into meaning, comes down to exposing oneself to this truth.

What this means is that we do not gain access to the origin: access is refused by the origin’s concealing itself in its multiplicity. We do not gain access; that is, we do not penetrate the origin; we do not identify with it. More precisely, we do not identify ourselves in

it or as it, but *with* it, in a sense that must be elucidated here and is nothing other than the meaning of originary coexistence.

The alterity of the other is its being-origin. Conversely, the originarity of the origin is its being-other, but it is a being-other *than* every being *for* and *in crossing through* [à travers] all being. Thus, the originarity of the origin is not a property that would distinguish a being from all others, because this being would then have to be something other than itself in order to have its origin in its own turn. This is the most classic of God’s aporias, and the proof of his nonexistence. In fact, this is the most immediate importance of Kant’s destruction of the ontological argument, which can be deciphered in a quasi-literal manner; the necessity of existence is given right at the existing of all existences [*l’exister de tout l’existant*], in its very diversity and contingency. In no way does this constitute a supplementary Being. The world has no supplement. It is supplemented in itself and, as such, is indefinitely supplemented by the origin.

This follows as an essential consequence: the being-other of the origin is not the alterity of an “other-than-the-world.” It is not a question of an Other (the inevitably “capitalized Other”)¹⁴ *than* the world; it is a question of the alterity or alteration *of* the world. In other words, it is not a question of an *aliud* or an *alius*, or an *alienus*, or an other in general as the essential stranger who is opposed to what is proper, but of an *alter*, that is, “one of the two.” This “other,” this “lowercase other,” is “one” among many insofar as they are many; it is *each one*, and it is *each time* one, one *among* them, one among all and one *among* us all. In the same way, and reciprocally, “we” is always inevitably “us all,” where no one of us can be “all” and each one of us is, in turn (where all our turns are simultaneous as well as successive, in every sense), the other origin of the same world.

The “outside” of the origin is “inside”—in an inside more interior than the extreme interior, that is, more interior than the *intimacy* of the world and the intimacy that belongs to each “me.” If intimacy must be defined as the extremity of coincidence with oneself, then what exceeds intimacy in interiority is the distancing of

coincidence itself. It is a coexistence of the origin "in" itself, a coexistence of origins; it is no accident that we use the word "intimacy" to designate a relation between several people more often than a relation to oneself. Our being-with, as a being-many, is not at all accidental, and it is in no way the secondary and random dispersion of a primordial essence. It forms the proper and necessary status and consistency of originary alterity as such. *The plurality of beings is at the foundation* [fondment] *of Being.*

A single being is a contradiction in terms. Such a being, which would be its own foundation, origin, and intimacy, would be incapable of *Being*, in every sense that this expression can have here. "Being" is neither a state nor a quality, but rather the action according to which what Kant calls "the [mere] positing of a thing"¹⁵ takes place ("is"). The very simplicity of "position" implies no more, although no less, than its being discrete, in the mathematical sense, or its distinction *from*, in the sense of *with*, other (at least possible) positions, or its distinction *among*, in the sense of *between*, other positions. In other words, every position is also dis-position, and, considering the appearing that takes the place of and takes place in the position, all appearance is co-appearance [*com-parution*]. This is why the meaning of Being is given as existence, being-in-oneself-outside-oneself, which *we* make explicit, we "humans," but which we make explicit, as I have said, *for* the totality of beings.

If the origin is irreducibly plural, if it is the indefinitely unfolding and variously multiplied intimacy of the world, then not gaining access to the origin takes on another meaning. Its negativity is neither that of the abyss, nor of the forbidden, nor of the veiled or the concealed, nor of the secret, nor that of the unrepresentable. It need not operate, then, in the dialectical mode where the subject must retain in itself its own negation (since it is the negation of its own origin). Nor does it have to operate in a mystical mode, which is the reverse of the dialectical mode, where the subject must rejoice in its negation. In both of these, negativity is given as the *aliud*, where alienation is the process that must be reversed in terms of a reappropriation. All forms of the "capitalized Other" presume this alienation from the proper as their own; this is exactly what con-

stitutes the "capitalization" of the "Other," its unified and broken transcendence. But, in this way, all forms of the capitalized "Other" represent precisely the exalted and overexalted mode of the propriety of what is proper, which persists and consists in the "somewhere" of a "nowhere" and in the "sometime" of a "no time," that is, in the *punctum aeternum* outside the world.

The outside is inside; it is the spacing of the dis-position of the world; it is our disposition and our co-appearance. Its "negativity" changes meaning; it is not converted into positivity, but instead corresponds to the mode of Being which is that of disposition/co-appearance and which, strictly speaking, is neither negative nor positive, but instead the mode of being-together or being-*with*. The origin is together with other origins, originally divided. As a matter of fact, we do have access to it. We have access exactly in the mode of having access; we get there; we are on the brink, closest, at the threshold; we *touch* the origin. "(Truly) we have access (to the truth). . . ." ¹⁶ ["À la vérité, nous accédons . . ."] is Bataille's phrase,¹⁷ the ambiguity of which I repeat even though I use it in another way (in Bataille, it precedes the affirmation of an immediate loss of access). Perhaps everything happens between loss and appropriation: neither one nor the other, nor one and the other, nor one in the other, but much more strangely than that, much more simply.

"To reach¹⁸ [*toucher*] the end" is again to risk missing it, because the origin is not an end. End, like Principle, is a form of the Other. To reach the origin is not to miss it; it is to be properly exposed to it. Since it is not another thing (an *aliud*), the origin is neither "missable" nor appropriable (penetrable, absorbable). It does not obey this logic. It is the plural singularity of the Being of being. We reach it to the extent that we are in touch with *ourselves* and in touch with the rest of beings. We are in touch with ourselves insofar as we exist. Being in touch with ourselves is what makes us "us," and there is no other secret to discover buried behind this very touching, behind the "with" of coexistence.

We have access to the truth of the origin as many times as we are in one another's presence and in the presence of the rest of beings.

Access is “coming to presence,” but presence itself is dis-position, the spacing of singularities. Presence is nowhere other than in “coming to presence.” We do not have access to a thing or a state, but only to a coming. We have access to an access.

“Strangeness” refers to the fact that each singularity is another access to the world. At the point where we would expect “something,” a substance or a procedure, a principle or an end, a signification, there is nothing but the manner, the turn of the other access, which conceals itself in the very gesture wherein it offers itself to us—and whose concealing *is* the turning itself. In the singularity that he exposes, each child that is born has already concealed the access that he is “for himself” and in which he will conceal himself “within himself,” just as he will one day hide under the final expression of a dead face. This is why we scrutinize these faces with such curiosity, in search of identification, looking to see whom the child looks like, and to see if death looks like itself. What we are looking for there, like in the photographs, is not an image; it is an access.

Is this not what interests us or touches us in “literature” and in “the arts”? What else interests us about the disjunction of the arts *among* themselves, by which they are what they are as arts: plural singulars? What else are they but the exposition of an access concealed in its own opening, an access that is, then, “inimitable,” untransportable, untranslatable *because* it forms, each time, an absolute point of translation, transmission, or transition of the origin *into origin*. What counts in art, what makes art art (and what makes humans the artists of the world, that is, those who expose the world for the world), is neither the “beautiful” nor the “sublime”; it is neither “purposiveness without a purpose” nor the “judgment of taste”; it is neither “sensible manifestation” nor the “putting into work of truth.” Undoubtedly, it is all that, but in another way: it is access to the scattered origin in its very scattering; it is the plural touching of the singular origin. This is what “the imitation of nature” has always meant. Art always has to do with cosmogony, but it exposes cosmogony for what it is: necessarily plural, diffracted, discreet, a touch of color or tone, an agile turn of phrase

or folded mass, a radiance, a scent, a song, or a suspended movement, exactly because it is the birth of a *world* (and not the construction of a system). A world is always as many worlds as it takes to make a world.

We only have access to ourselves—and to the world. It is only ever a question of the following: full access is there, access to the whole of the origin. This is called “finitude” in Heideggerian terminology. But it has become clear since then that “finitude” signifies the infinite singularity of meaning, the infinite singularity of access to truth. Finitude *is* the origin; that is, it is an infinity of origins. “Origin” does not signify that from which the world comes, but rather the coming of each presence of the world, each time singular.

The Creation of the World and Curiosity

The concept of the “creation of the world”¹⁹ represents the origin as originarily shared, spaced between us and between all beings. This, in turn, contributes to rendering the concept of the “author” of the world untenable. In fact, one could show how the motif of creation is one of those that leads directly to the death of God understood as author, first cause, and supreme being. Furthermore, if one looks at metaphysics carefully, there is not a God who simply and easily conforms to the idea of a producer. Whether in Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza, or Leibniz, one always finds that the theme of creation is burdened with and misrepresented as a problem of production, right up until the decisive moment of the ontological argument’s downfall. (Hegel’s restoration of the argument, the one to which Schelling assigned significant importance, is nothing but an elaboration of the concept of creation.)

The distinctive characteristic of the concept of creation is not that it posits a creator, but that, on the contrary, it renders the “creator” indistinct from its “creation.” (It has to be said, here, in a general way, that the distinctive characteristic of Western monotheism is not the positing of a single god, but rather the effacing of the divine as such in the transcendence of the world. With respect to the question of origin, this is surely the precise point at which the link

is forged that makes us unfailingly Jew-Greek in every respect. And, with respect to the question of destination, this is the point from which we are sent into the “global” space as such.²⁰ In mythological cosmogonies, a god or demiurge makes a world starting from a situation that is already there, whatever this situation may be.²¹ In creation, however, it is the being-already-there of the already-there that is of concern. In fact, if creation is *ex nihilo*, this does not signify that a creator operates “starting from nothing.” As a rich and complex tradition demonstrates, this fact instead signifies two things: on the one hand, it signifies that the “creator” itself is the *nihil*; on the other, it signifies that this *nihil* is not, logically speaking, something “from which” [“d’où”] what is created would come [*provenir*], but the very origin [*provenance*], and destination, of some thing in general and of everything. Not only is the *nihil* nothing prior but there is also no longer a “nothing” that preexists creation; it is the act of appearing [*surgissement*], it is the very origin—insofar as this is understood only as what is designated by the verb “to originate.” If the nothing is not anything prior, then only the *ex* remains—if one can talk about it like this—to qualify creation-in-action, that is, the appearing or arrival [*venue*] in *nothing* (in the sense that we talk about someone appearing “in person”).

The nothing, then, is nothing other than the dis-position of the appearing. The origin is a distancing. It is a distancing that immediately has the magnitude of all space-time and is also nothing other than the interstice of the intimacy of the world: the *among-being* [*l’entre-étant*] of all beings. This among-being itself is nothing but [a] being, and has no other consistency, movement, or configuration than that of the being-a-being [*l’être-étant*] of all beings. Being, or the among, shares the singularities of all appearings. Creation takes place everywhere and always—but it is this unique event, or advent, only on the condition of being each time what it is, or being what it is only “at each time,” each time appearing singularly.

One can understand how the creation, as it appears in any Jewish-Christian-Islamic theologico-mystic configuration, testifies less (and certainly never exclusively) to a productive power of God than to his goodness and glory. In relation to such power, then,

creatures are only effects, while the love and glory of God are deposited right at [*à même*] the level of what is created; that is, creatures are the very brilliance [*éclat*]²² of God’s coming to presence. It is necessary, then, to understand the theme of the “image of God” and/or the “trace of God” not according to the logic of a secondary imitation, but according to this other logic where “God” is itself the singular appearance of the image or trace, or the disposition of its exposition: place as divine place, the divine as strictly *local*. As a consequence, this is no longer “divine,” but is the dislocation and dis-position of the world (what Spinoza calls “the divine extension”) as that opening and possibility [*ressource*] which comes from further away and goes farther, infinitely farther, than any god.

If “creation” is indeed this singular ex-position of being, then its real name is *existence*. Existence is creation, *our* creation; it is the beginning and end that *we* are. This is the thought that is the most necessary for us to think. If we do not succeed in thinking it, then we will never gain access to who we are, we who are no more than us in a world, which is itself no more than the world—but we who have reached this point precisely because we have thought *logos* (the self-presentation of presence) as creation (as singular coming).

This thinking is in no way anthropocentric; it does not put humanity at the center of “creation”; on the contrary, it transgresses [*traverse*] humanity in the excess of the appearing that appears on the scale of the totality of being, but which also appears as that excess [*demesure*] which is impossible to totalize. It is being’s infinite original singularity. In humanity, or rather right at [*à même*] humanity, existence is exposed and exposing. The simplest way to put this into language would be to say that humanity speaks existence, but what speaks through its speech says the whole of being. What Heidegger calls “the ontico-ontological privilege” of *Dasein* is neither its prerogative nor its privilege [*apanage*]: it gets Being on its way [*il engage l’être*], but the Being of *Dasein* is nothing other than the Being of being.

If existence is exposed as such by humans, what is exposed there also holds for the rest of beings. There is not, on the one side, an

originary singularity and then, on the other, a simple being-there of things, more or less given for our use. On the contrary, in exposing itself as singularity, existence exposes the singularity of Being as such in all being. The difference between humanity and the rest of being (which is not a concern to be denied, but the nature of which is, nevertheless, not a given), while itself being inseparable from other differences within being (since man is "also" animal, "also" living, "also" physio-chemical), does not distinguish true existence from a sort of subexistence. Instead, this difference forms the concrete condition of singularity. We would not be "humans" if there were not "dogs" and "stones." A stone is the exteriority of singularity in what would have to be called its mineral or mechanical actuality [*littéralité*]. But I would no longer be a "human" if I did not have this exteriority "in me," in the form of the quasi-minerality of bone: I would no longer be a human if I *were* not a body, a spacing of all other bodies and a spacing of "me" in "me." A singularity is always a body, and all bodies are singularities (the bodies, their states, their movements, their transformations).

Existence, therefore, is not a property of *Dasein*; it is the original singularity of Being, which *Dasein* exposes for all being. This is why humanity is not "in the world" as it would be in a milieu (why would the milieu be necessary?); it is *in* the world insofar as the world is its own exteriority, the proper space of its being-out-in-the-world. But it is necessary to go farther than this in order to avoid giving the impression that the world, despite everything, remains essentially "the world of humans." It is not so much the world of humanity as it is the world of the nonhuman to which humanity is exposed and which humanity, in turn, exposes. One could try to formulate it in the following way: *humanity is the exposing of the world; it is neither the end nor the ground of the world; the world is the exposure of humanity; it is neither the environment nor the representation of humanity.*

Therefore, however far humanity is from being the end of nature or nature the end of humanity (we have already tried all the variations of this formula), the end is always being-in-the-world and the being-world of all being.

Even supposing one still wished to take the world as the representation of humanity, this would not necessarily imply a solipsism of humanity: because, if that is the case, then it is the representation itself that instructs me about what it necessarily represents to me, an irrefutable exteriority as my exteriority. The representation of a spacing is itself a spacing. An *intuitus originarius*, which would not be a representation but rather an immersion in the thing-itself, would exist alone and would be for itself the origin and the thing: this was shown above to be contradictory. Descartes himself testifies to the exteriority of the world as the exteriority of his body. Because he hardly doubts his body, he makes a fiction of doubting it, and this pretension as such attests to the truth of *res extensa*. It is also not surprising that for Descartes the reality of this world, about which God could not deceive me, is maintained in Being by the *continuous creation* on the part of this very God. Reality is always in each instant, from place to place, each time in turn, which is exactly how the reality of *res cogitans* attests to itself in each "ego sum," which is each time the "I am" of each one in turn [*chaque fois de chacun à son tour*].

Once again, this is the way in which there is no Other. "Creation" signifies precisely that there is no Other and that the "there is" is not an Other. Being is not the Other, but the origin is the punctual and discrete spacing *between us*, as *between us and the rest of the world*, as *between all beings*.²³

We find this alterity primarily and essentially intriguing. It intrigues us because it exposes the always-other origin, always inappropiable and always there, each and every time present as inimitable. This is why we are primarily and essentially *curious* about the world and about ourselves (where "the world" is the generic name of the object of this ontological curiosity). The correlate of creation, understood as existence itself, is a curiosity that must be understood in a completely different sense than the one given by Heidegger. For him, curiosity is the frantic activity of passing from being to being in an insatiable sort of way, without ever being able to stop and think. Without a doubt, this does testify to being-with-one-another, but it testifies to it without being able to gain access to

the existent opening that characterizes *Dasein* in the "instant."²⁴ It is necessary, then, to disconnect the most primitive layer of curiosity, the level on which we are primarily *interested* by what is interesting par excellence (the origin), from this inconsistent curiosity and also from the attention that takes care of others (*Fürsorge*). At this level, we are interested in the sense of being intrigued by the ever-renewed alterity of the origin and, if I may say so, in the sense of having an affair with it. (It is no accident that sexual curiosity is an exemplary figure of curiosity and is, in fact, more than just a figure of it.)

As English [and French] allows us to say, other beings are *curious* (or *bizarre*) to me because they give me access to the origin; they allow me to touch it; they leave me before it, leave me before its turning, which is concealed each time. Whether an other is another person, animal, plant, or star, it is above all the glaring presence of a place and moment of absolute origin, irrefutable, offered as such and vanishing in its passing. This occurs in the face of a newborn child, a face encountered by chance on the street, an insect, a shark, a pebble . . . but if one really wants to understand it, it is not a matter of making all these curious presences equal.

If we do not have access to the other in the mode just described, but seek to appropriate the origin—which is something we always do—then this same curiosity transforms itself into appropriative or destructive rage. We no longer look for a singularity of the origin in the other; we look for the unique and exclusive origin, in order to either adopt it or reject it. The other becomes the Other according to the mode of desire or hatred. Making the other divine (together with our voluntary servitude) or making it evil (together with its exclusion or extermination) is that part of curiosity no longer interested in dis-position and co-appearance, but rather has become the desire for the Position itself. This desire is the desire to fix the origin, or *to give the origin to itself*, once and for all, and in one place for all, that is, always outside the world. This is why such desire is a desire for murder, and not only murder but also for an increase of cruelty and horror, which is like the tendency toward the intensification of murder; it is mutilation, carving up, relentlessness, metic-

ulous execution, the joy of agony. Or it is the massacre, the mass grave, massive and technological execution, the bookkeeping of the camps. It is always a matter of expediting the transformation of the other into the Other or making the Other appear in the place of the other, and, therefore, a matter of identifying the Other and the origin itself.

The Other is nothing more than a correlate of this mad desire, but others, in fact, are our *originary interests*. It is true, however, that the possibility of this mad desire is contained in the very disposition of originary interests: the dissemination of the origin upsets [*affole*] the origin in "me" to exactly the same extent that it makes me curious about it, makes "me" a "me" (or a "subject," *someone* in any case). (It follows, then, that no ethics would be independent from an ontology. Only ontology, in fact, may be ethical in a consistent manner. It will be necessary to return to this elsewhere.)

Between Us: First Philosophy

When addressing the fact that philosophy is contemporaneous with the Greek city, one ends up losing sight of what is in question—and rightly so. As is only fitting, however, losing sight of what is in question returns us to the problem in all its acuity after these twenty-eight centuries.

It returns us to the question of the origin of our history. There is no sense of reconstituting a teleology here, and it is not a matter of retracing a process directed toward an end. To the contrary, history clearly appears here as the movement sparked by a singular circumstance, a movement that does not reabsorb this singularity in a universality (or "universal history," as Marx and Nietzsche understood it), but instead reflects the impact of this singularity in renewed singular events. Thus, we have a "future" [*avenir*] and a "to come" [*à venir*]; we have this "future" as a "past," which is not past in the sense of being the starting point of a directed process, but past in the sense of being a "curiosity" ["bizarrie"] (the "Greek miracle") that is itself intriguing and, as such, remains still "to come." This dis-position of history indeed makes there be *a* history

and not a *processus* (here as elsewhere, the Hegelian model reveals itself as uncovering the truth by way of its exact opposite). One can understand, then, Heidegger's "history of Being," and understand that our relation to this history is necessarily that of its *Destruktion*, or deconstruction. In other words, it is a matter of bringing to light this history's singularity as the disassembling law of its unity and understanding that this law itself is the law of meaning.

This clearly supposes that such a task is as demanding and urgent as it is impossible to measure. The task is to understand how history—as a singular, Western accident—"became" what one might call "global" or "planetary" without, at the same time, engendering itself as "universal." Consequently, it is the task of understanding how the West disappeared, not by reciting the formulas of its generalized uniformity, but by understanding the expansion, by and through this "uniformity," of a plural singularity that is and is not, at the same time, "proper" to this "o/accident." And one must understand that this formidable question is none other than the question of "capital" (or of "capitalism"). If one wants to give a full account of "capital"—starting from the very first moments of history that began in the merchant cities—then it is necessary to remove it, far more radically than Marx could have, from its own representation in linear and cumulative history, *as well as* from the representation of a teleological history of its overcoming or rejection. This would appear to be the—problematic—lesson of history. But we cannot understand this task unless we first understand what is most at stake in our history, that is, what is most at stake in philosophy.

According to different versions, but in a predominantly uniform manner, the tradition put forward a representation according to which philosophy and the city would be (would have been, must have been) related to one another as subjects. Accordingly, philosophy, as the articulation of *logos*, is the subject of the city, where the city is the space of this articulation. Likewise, the city, as the gathering of the *logikoi*, is the subject of philosophy, where philosophy is the production of their common *logos*. *Logos* itself, then, contains the essence or meaning of this reciprocity: it is the com-

mon foundation of community, where community, in turn, is the foundation of Being.

It is within this uniform horizon, according to different versions (whether strong or weak, happy or unhappy) of this predominant mode of inquiry, that we still understand the famous "political animal" of Aristotle: it is to presume that *logos* is the condition of community, which, in turn, is the condition of humanity; and/or it is to presume that each of these three terms draws its unity and consistency from [its sharing] a communication of essence with the other two (where the world as such remains relatively exterior to the whole affair, presuming that nature or *physis* accomplishes itself in humanity understood as *logos politikos*, whereas *technē* subordinates itself to both).

But this horizon—that of political philosophy in the fullest sense (not as the "philosophy of politics," but philosophy as politics)—might very well be what points to the singular situation where our history gets under way and, at the same time, blocks access to this situation. Or instead, this horizon might be that which, in the course of its history, gives an indication of its own deconstruction and exposes this situation anew in another way.²⁵ "Philosophy and politics" is the exposition [*énoncé*] of this situation. But it is a disjunctive exposition, because the situation itself is disjunctive. The city is not primarily "community," any more than it is primarily "public space." The city is at least as much the bringing to light of being-in-common *as the dis-position* (dispersal and disparity) of the community represented as founded in interiority or transcendence. It is "community" without common origin. That being the case, and as long as philosophy is an appeal to the origin, the city, far from being philosophy's subject or space, is its problem. Or else, it is its subject or space in the mode of being its problem, its aporia. Philosophy, for its part, can appeal to the origin only on the condition of the dis-position of *logos* (that is, of the origin as justified and set into discourse): *logos* is the spacing at the very place of the origin. Consequently, philosophy is the problem of the city; philosophy covers over the subject that is expected as "community."

This is why philosophical politics and political philosophy regularly run aground on the essence of community or community as origin. Rousseau and Marx are exemplary in their struggle with these obstacles. Rousseau revealed the aporia of a community that would have to precede itself in order to constitute itself: in its very concept, the “social contract” is the denial or foreclosure of the originary division [*déliation*] between those singularities that would have to agree to the contract and, thereby, “draw it to a close.” Although assuredly more radical in his demand for the dissolution of politics in all spheres of existence (which is the “realization of philosophy”), Marx ignores that the separation between singularities overcome and suppressed in this way is not, in fact, an accidental separation imposed by “political” authority, but rather the constitutive separation of dis-position. However powerful it is for thinking the “real relation” and what we call the “individual,” “communism” was still not able to think being-in-common as distinct from community.

In this sense, philosophical politics regularly proceeds according to the surreptitious appeal to a metaphysics of the one-origin, where, at the same time, it nevertheless exposes, *volens nolens*, the situation of the dis-position of origins. Often the result is that the dis-position is turned into a matter of exclusion, included as excluded, and that all philosophical politics is a politics of exclusivity and the correlative exclusion—of a class, of an order, of a “community”—the point of which is to end up with a “people,” in the “base” sense of the term. The demand for equality, then, is the necessary, ultimate, and absolute gesture; in fact, it is almost indicative of dis-position as such. However, as long as this continues to be a matter of an “egalitarian demand founded upon some generic identity,”²⁶ equality will never do justice [*ne fait encore pas droit*] to singularity or even recognize the considerable difficulties of wanting to do so. It is here that the critique of abstract rights comes to the fore. However, the “concrete” that must oppose such abstraction is not made up primarily of empirical determinations, which, in the capitalist regime, exhaust even the most egalitarian will: rather, *concrete* here primarily signifies the real object of a thinking

of being-in-common, and this real object is, in turn, the singular plural of the origin, the singular plural of the origin of “community” itself (if one still wants to call this “community”). All of this is undoubtedly what is indicated by the word that follows “equality” in the French republican slogan: “fraternity” is supposed to be the solution to equality (or to “equilibrity” [*“égaliberty”*])²⁷ by evoking or invoking a “generic identity.” What is lacking there is exactly the common origin of the common.²⁸

It is “lacking” insofar as one attempts to take account of it within the horizon of philosophical politics. Once this horizon is deconstructed, however, the necessity of the plural singular of the origin comes into play—and this is already under way. But I do not plan to propose an “other politics” under this heading. I am no longer sure that this term (or the term “political philosophy”) can continue to have any consistency beyond this opening up of the horizon which comes to us both at the end of the long history of our Western situation *and* as the reopening of this situation. I only want to help to bring out that the combination philosophy-politics, in all the force of its being joined together, *simultaneously exposes and hides the dis-position of the origin* and co-appearance, which is its correlate.

The philosophico-political horizon is what links the dis-position to a continuity and to a community of essence. In order to be effective, such a relation requires an essentializing procedure: sacrifice. If one looks carefully, one can find the place of sacrifice in all political philosophy (or rather, one will find the challenge of the *abstract*, which makes a sacrifice of concrete singularity). But as singular origin, existence is unsacrificable.²⁹

In this respect, then, the urgent demand named above is not another political abstraction. Instead, it is a reconsideration of the very meaning of “politics”—and, therefore, of “philosophy”—in light of the originary situation: the bare exposition of singular origins. This is the necessary “first philosophy” (in the canonical sense of the expression). It is an ontology. Philosophy needs to recommence, to restart itself from itself against itself, against political philosophy and philosophical politics. In order to do this, philosophy needs to

think in principle about how we are “us” among us, that is, how the consistency of our Being is in being-in-common, and how this consists precisely in the “in” or in the “between” of its spacing.

The last “first philosophy,” if one dare say anything about it, is given to us in Heidegger’s fundamental ontology. It is that which has put us on the way [*chemin*] to where we are, together, whether we know it or not. But it is also why its author was able to, in a sort of return of *Destruktion* itself, compromise himself, in an unpardonable way, with his involvement in a philosophical politics that became criminal. This very point, then, indicates to us that place from which first philosophy must recommence: it is necessary to refigure fundamental ontology (as well as the existential analytic, the history of Being, and the thinking of *Ereignis* that goes along with it) with a thorough resolve that *starts from the plural singular of origins, from being-with.*

I want to return to the issue of “first philosophy” in order to push it even further, but without claiming to be the one who can fully accomplish such an undertaking. By definition and in essence, the above “first philosophy” needs “to be made by all, not by one,” like the poetry of Maldoror. For the moment, I only want to indicate the principle of its necessity. Heidegger clearly states that being-with (*Mitsein*, *Miteinandersein*, and *Mitdasein*) is essential to the constitution of *Dasein* itself. Given this, it needs to be made absolutely clear that *Dasein*, far from being either “man” or “subject,” is not even an isolated and unique “one,” but is instead always the one, each one, with one another [*l’un-avec-l’autre*]. If this determination is essential, then it needs to attain to the co-originary dimension and expose it without reservation. But as it has often been said, despite this affirmative assertion of co-originary, he gives up on the step to the consideration of *Dasein* itself. It is appropriate, then, to examine the possibility of an explicit and endless exposition of co-originary and the possibility of taking account of what is at stake in the togetherness of the ontological enterprise (and, in this way, taking account of what is at stake in its political consequences.)³⁰

It is necessary to add here that there is a reason for this examination which is far more profound than what first appears to be a

simple “readjustment” of the Heideggerian discourse. The reason obviously goes much farther than that, since at its fullest, it is about nothing less than the possibility of speaking “of *Dasein*” in general, or of saying “the existing” or “existence.” What would happen to philosophy if speaking about Being in other ways than saying “we,” “you,” and “I” became excluded? Where is Being spoken, and who speaks Being?

The reason that is foreshadowed has to do precisely with speaking (of) Being. The themes of being-with and co-originary need to be renewed and need to “reinitialize” the existential analytic, exactly because these are meant to respond to the question of the meaning of Being, or to Being as meaning. But if the meaning of Being indicates itself principally by the putting into play of Being in *Dasein* and as *Dasein*, then, precisely as *meaning*, this putting into play (the “there will be” of Being) can only attest to itself or expose itself in the mode of being-with: because as relates to meaning, it is never for just one, but always for one another, always between one another. The meaning of Being is never in what is said—never said in significations. But it is assuredly in them that “it is spoken,” in the absolute sense of the expression. “One speaks,” “it speaks,” means “Being is spoken”; it is meaning (but does not construct meaning). But “one” or “it” is never other than *we*.

In other words, in revealing itself as what is at stake in the meaning of Being, *Dasein* has already revealed itself as being-with and reveals itself as such before any other explication. The meaning of Being is not in play in *Dasein* in order to be “communicated” to others; its putting into play *is identically being-with*. Or again: *Being is put into play as the “with” that is absolutely indisputable*. From now on, this is the minimal ontological premise. Being is put into play among us; it does not have any other meaning except the disposition of this “between.”

Heidegger writes, “*Dasein’s* . . . understanding of Being already implies the understanding of others.”³¹ But this surely does not say enough. The understanding of Being is nothing other than an understanding of others, which means, in every sense, understanding others through “me” and understanding “me” through others, the

understanding of one another [*des uns des autres*]. One could say even more simply that Being is communication. But it remains to be known what “communication” is.

For the moment, it is less important to respond to the question of the meaning of Being (if it is a question, and if we do not already basically respond every day and each time . . .) than it is to pay attention to the fact of its exhibition. If “communication” is for us, today, such an affair—in every sense of the word . . .—if its theories are flourishing, if its technologies are being proliferated, if the “mediatization” of the “media” brings along with it an auto-communicational vertigo, if one plays around with the theme of the indistinctness between the “message” and the “medium” out of either a disenchanted or jubilant fascination, then it is because something is exposed or laid bare. In fact, [what is exposed] is the bare and “content”-less web of “communication.” One could say it is the bare web of the *com-* (of the *telecom-*, said with an acknowledgment of its independence); that is, it is *our* web or “us” as web or network, an *us* that is reticulated and spread out, with its extension for an essence and its spacing for a structure. We are “ourselves” too inclined to see in this the overwhelming destiny of modernity. Contrary to such meager evidence, it might be that we have understood nothing about the situation, and rightly so, and that we have to start again to understand ourselves—our existence and that of the world, our being disposed in this way.

Being Singular Plural

Being singular plural: these three apposite words, which do not have any determined 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. Being is singularly plural and plurally singular. Yet, this in itself does not constitute a particular predication of Being, as if Being is or has a certain number of attributes, one of which is that of being singular-plural—however double, contradictory, or chiasmatic this may be. On the contrary, the singular-

plural constitutes the essence of Being, a constitution that undoes or dislocates every single, substantial essence of Being itself. This is not just a way of speaking, because there is no prior substance that would be dissolved. Being does not preexist its singular plural. To be more precise, Being absolutely does not *preexist*; nothing preexists; only what exists exists. Ever since Parmenides, one of philosophy’s peculiarities has been that it has been unfolding this unique proposition, in all of its senses. This proposition proposes nothing but the placement [*la position*] and dis-position of existence. It is its plural singularity. Unfolding this proposition, then, is the only thing philosophy has to do.³²

That which exists, whatever this might be, coexists because it exists. The co-implication of existing [*l’exister*] is the sharing of the world. A world is not something external to existence; it is not an extrinsic addition to other existences; the world is the coexistence that puts these existences together. But one could object that there exists something [which does not first coexist]. Kant established that there exists something, exactly because I can think of a possible existence: but the possible comes second in relation to the real, because there already exists something real.³³

It would also be worth adding that the above inference actually leads to a conclusion about an element of existence’s plurality [*un pluriel d’existence*]: there exists something (“me”) *and* another thing (this other “me” that represents the possible) to which I relate myself in order for me to ask myself if there exists something of the sort that I think of as possible. This something coexists at least as much as “me.” But this needs to be drawn out in the following way: there does not exist just these “me’s,” understood as subjects-of-representation, because 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. This variation on an older style of philosophizing is only meant to point out that there has never been, nor will there ever be, any [real] philosophical solipsism. In a certain way, there never has been, and never will be, a philosophy “of the subject” in the sense of the final [*infinie*] closure in itself of a for-itself.

However, there is for the whole of philosophy what is exemplified in Hegel's statement "the I is in essence and act the universal: and such partnership (*Gemeinschaftlichkeit*) is a form, though an external form, of universality."³⁴ It is well known that dialectical logic requires the passage through exteriority as essential to interiority itself. Nevertheless, within this logic, it is the "interior" and subjective form of the "Me" that is needed in order to finish the project of finding itself and posing itself as the *truth* of the universal and its community. As a consequence, what is left for us to hold onto is the moment of "exteriority" as being of almost essential value, so essential that it would no longer be a matter of relating this exteriority to any individual or collective "me" without also unfailingly attaining [*maintenir*] to *exteriority itself and as such*.

Being singular plural means the essence of Being is only as co-essence. In turn, co-essence, or *being-with* (being-with-many), designates the essence of the *co-*, or even more so, the *co-* (the *cum*) itself in the position or guise of an essence. In fact, coessentiality cannot consist in an assemblage of essences, where the essence of this assemblage as such remains to be determined. In relation to such an assemblage, the assembled essences would become [mere] accidents. Coessentiality signifies the essential sharing of essentiality, sharing in the guise of assembling, as it were. This could also be put in the following way: if Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the "with" that constitutes Being; the with is not simply an addition. This operates in the same way as a collective [*collégial*] power: power is neither exterior to the members of the collective [*collège*] nor interior to each one of them, but rather consists in the collectivity [*collégialité*] as such.

Therefore, it is not the case that the "with" is an addition to some prior Being; instead, the "with" is at the heart of Being. In this respect, it is absolutely necessary to reverse the order of philosophical exposition, for which it has been a matter of course that the "with"—and the other that goes along with it—always comes second, even though this succession is contradicted by the underlying [*profonde*] logic in question here. Even Heidegger preserves this order of succession in a remarkable way, in that he does not introduce

the co-originary of *Mitsein* until after having established the originary character of *Dasein*. The same remark could be made about the Husserlian constitution of the *alter ego*, even though this too is in its own way contemporaneous (once again, the *cum*) with the *ego* in the "single universal community."³⁵

To the contrary, it can also be shown that when Hegel begins the *Phenomenology of Spirit* with the moment of "sense certainty," where it appears that consciousness has not yet entered into relation with another consciousness, this moment is nonetheless characterized by the language with which consciousness appropriates for itself the truth of what is immediately sensible (the famous "now it is night"). In doing so, the relation to another consciousness remains surreptitiously presupposed. It would be easy to produce many observations of this kind. For example, the evidence for the *ego sum* comes down to, constitutively and co-originally, its possibility in each one of Descartes's readers. The evidence as evidence owes its force, and its claim to truth, precisely to this possibility in each one of us—one could say, the copossibility. *Ego sum = ego cum*.³⁶

In this way, it can be shown that, for the whole of philosophy, the necessary successivity [*la successivité*] of any exposition does not prevent the deeply set [*profond*] order of reasons from being regulated by a co-originary [*soit réglé sur une co-originarité*]. In fact, in proposing to reverse the order of ontological exposition, I am only proposing to bring to light a resource that is more or less obscurely presented throughout the entire history of philosophy—and presented as an answer to the situation described above: philosophy begins with and in "civil" ["*concitoyenne*"] coexistence as such (which, in its very difference from the "imperial" form, forces power to emerge as a problem). Or rather, the "city" is not primarily a form of political institution; it is primarily being-with *as such*. Philosophy is, in sum, the thinking of being-with; because of this, it is also thinking-with as such.

This is not simply a matter of clarifying a still faulty exposition. . . . It is just as much a question of doing justice to the essential reasons for why, across the whole history of philosophy, being-with is subordinated to Being *and*, at the same time and according

to this very subordination, is always asserting [*de faire valoir*] its problem as the very problem of Being. In sum, *being-with is Being's own most problem*. The task is to know why and how this is so.³⁷

Let us take up the matter again, then, not beginning from the Being of being and proceeding to being itself being with-one-another [*étant l'un-avec-l'autre*], but starting from being—and all of being—determined in its Being as being with-one-another. [This is the] singular plural in such a way that the singularity of each is indissociable from its being-with-many and *because*, in general, a singularity is indissociable from a plurality. Here again, it is not a question of any supplementary property of Being. The concept of the singular implies its singularization and, therefore, its distinction from other singularities (which is different from any concept of the individual, since an immanent totality, without an other, would be a perfect individual, and is also different from any concept of the particular, since this assumes the togetherness of which the particular is a part, so that such a particular can only present its difference from other particulars as numerical difference). In Latin, the term *singuli* already says the plural, because it designates the “one” as belonging to “one by one.” The singular is primarily *each* one and, therefore, also *with* and *among* all the others. The singular is a plural. It also undoubtedly offers the property of indivisibility, but it is not indivisible the way substance is indivisible. It is, instead, indivisible in each instant [*au coup par coup*], within the event of its singularization. It is indivisible like any instant is indivisible, which is to say that it is infinitely divisible, or *punctually* indivisible. Moreover, it is not indivisible like any particular is indivisible, but on the condition of *pars pro toto*: the singular is each time *for* the whole, in its place and in light of it. (If humanity is *for* being in totality in the way I have tried to present it, then it is the exposing of the singular as such and in general.) A singularity does not stand out against the background of Being; it is, when it is, Being itself or its origin.

Once again, it is fairly easy to see to what extent these features answer to those of the Cartesian *ego sum*. The singular is an *ego* that is not a “subject” in the sense of the relation of a self to itself. It is

an “ipseity” that is not the relation of a “me” to “itself.”³⁸ It is neither “me” nor “you”; it is what is distinguished in the distinction, what is discreet in the discretion. It is being-a-part of Being itself and in Being itself, Being in each instant [*au coup par coup*], which attests to the fact that Being only takes place in each instant.

The essence of Being is the shock of the instant [*le coup*]. Each time, “Being” is always an instance [*un coup*] of Being (a lash, blow, beating, shock, knock, an encounter, an access). As a result, it is also always an instance of “with”: singulars singularly together, where the togetherness is neither the sum, nor the incorporation [*englobant*], nor the “society,” nor the “community” (where these words only give rise to problems). The togetherness of singulars is singularity “itself.” It “assembles” them insofar as it spaces them; they are “linked” insofar as they are not unified.

According to these conditions, Being as being-with might no longer be able to say itself in the third person, as in “it is” or “there is.” Because there would no longer be a point of view that is exterior to being-together from which it could be announced that “there is” being and a being-with of beings, one with the other. There would be no “it is” and, therefore, no longer the “I am” that is subjacent to the announcement of the “it is.” Rather, it would be necessary to think the third-person singular in the first person. As such, then, it becomes the first-person plural. Being could not speak of itself except in this unique manner: “we are.” The truth of the *ego sum* is the *nos sumus*; this “we” announces itself through humanity for all the beings “we” are with, for existence in the sense of being-essentially-with, as a Being whose essence is the with.

(“One will speak . . .”: Which one? We will speak: Who is this “we”? How can I say “us” for those of you who are reading this? How can I say “us” for me? Although this is what we are in the process of doing, how do we think together, whether we are “in accord” or not? How are we with one another? All of this is to ask: What is at play in our communication, in this book, in its sentences, and in the whole situation that more or less gives them some meaning? [This is the] question of philosophy as “literature,” which is about asking how far it is possible to take the third-

person discourse of philosophy. At what point must ontology become . . . what? Become conversation? Become lyricism? . . . The strict conceptual rigor of being-with exasperates the discourse of its concept. . . .)



What is known as “society,” therefore, in the broadest and most diffuse sense of the word, is the figure [*chiffre*] of an ontology yet to be put into play. Rousseau presented [a glimpse of] it by making the poorly named “contract” the very event that “made a creature of intelligence and a man . . . from a stupid, limited animal,”³⁹ and not simply an arrangement between individuals. (Nietzsche confirms this presentation in a paradoxical way when Zarathustra says, “human society: that is an experiment . . . a long search . . . and *not* a ‘contract’.”⁴⁰) Marx saw it when he qualified humanity as social in its very origin, production, and destination, and when the entire movement and posture of his thinking assigned Being itself to this social being. Heidegger designated it in positing being-with as constitutive of being-there. No one, however, has radically thematized the “with” as the essential trait of Being and as its proper plural singular coessence. But they have brought us, together and individually, to the point where we can no longer avoid thinking about this in favor of that to which all of contemporary experience testifies. In other words, what is at stake is no longer thinking:

- beginning from the one, or from the other,
- beginning from their togetherness, understood now as the One, now as the Other,
- but thinking, absolutely and without reserve, beginning from the “with,” *as the proper essence of one whose Being is nothing other than with-one-another* [l’un-avec-l’autre].

The one/the other is neither “by,” nor “for,” nor “in,” nor “despite,” but rather “with.” This “with” is at once both more and less than “relation” or “bond,” especially if such relation or bond presupposes the preexistence of the terms upon which it relies; the

“with” is the exact contemporary of its terms; it is, in fact, their contemporaneity. “With” is the sharing of time-space; it is the at-the-same-time-in-the-same-place as itself, in itself, shattered. It is the instant scaling back of the principle of identity: Being is at the same time in the same place only on the condition of the spacing of an indefinite plurality of singularities. Being is with Being; it does not ever recover itself, but it is near to itself, beside itself, in touch with itself, its very self, in the paradox of that proximity where distancing [*éloignement*] and strangeness are revealed. We are each time an other, each time with others. “With” does not indicate the sharing of a common situation any more than the juxtaposition of pure exteriorities does (for example, a bench with a tree with a dog with a passer-by).

The question of Being and the meaning of Being has become the question of being-with and of being-together (in the sense of the world). This is what is signified by [our] modern sense of anxiety, which does not so much reveal a “crisis of society” but, instead, reveals that the “sociality” or “association” of humans is an injunction that humanity places on itself, or that it receives from the world: to have to be only what it is and to have to, itself, be Being as such. This sort of formula is primarily a desperate tautological abstraction—and this is why we are all worried. Our task is to break the hard shell of this tautology. What is the being-with of Being?

In one sense, this is the original situation of the West that is always repeating itself; it is always the problem of the city, the repetition of which, for better or worse, has already punctuated our history. Today, this repetition produces itself as a situation in which the two major elements [*données*] compose a sort of antinomy: on the one hand, there is the exposure of the world and, on the other, the end of representations of the world. This means nothing short of a transformation in the relation [that we name] “politico-philosophy”: it can no longer be a matter of a single community, of its essence, closure, and sovereignty; by contrast, it can no longer be a matter of organizing community according to the decrees of a sovereign Other, or according to the *telos* [fins] of a history. It can no longer be a matter of treating sociability as a regrettable and inevitable ac-

cident, as a constraint that has to be managed in some way or another. Community is bare, but it is imperative.

On the one side, the concept of community or the city is, in every sense, diffracted. It is that which signifies the chaotic and multiform appearance of the infranational, supranational, para-national and, moreover, the dis-location of the "national" in general. On the other side, the concept of community appears to have its own prefix as its only content: the *cum*, the *with* deprived of substance and connection, stripped of interiority, subjectivity, and personality. Either way, sovereignty is nothing.⁴¹ Sovereignty is nothing but the *com-*; as such, it is always and indefinitely "to be completed," as in communism or com-passion.

This is not a matter of thinking the annihilation of sovereignty. It is a matter of thinking through the following question: If sovereignty is the grand, political term for defining community (its leader or its essence) that has nothing beyond itself, with no foundation or end but itself, what becomes of sovereignty when it is revealed that it is nothing but a singularly plural spacing? How is one to think sovereignty as the "nothing" of the "with" that is laid bare? At the same time, if political sovereignty has always signified the refusal of domination (of a state by another or by a church, of a people by something other than itself), how is one to think the bare sovereignty of the "with" and against domination, whether this is the domination of being-together by some other means or the domination of togetherness by itself (by the regulation of its "automatic" control)? In fact, one could begin to describe the present transformation of "political space"⁴² as a transition toward "empire," where empire signifies two things: (1) domination without sovereignty (without the elaboration of such a concept); and (2) the distancing, spacing, and plurality opposed to the concentration of interiority required by political sovereignty. The question then becomes: How is one to think the spacing of empire against its domination?

In one way or another, bare sovereignty (which is, in a way, to transcribe Bataille's notion of sovereignty) presupposes that one take a certain distance from the politico-philosophical order and from the realm of "political philosophy." This distance is not taken in or-

der to engage in a depoliticized thinking, but in order to engage in a thinking, the site of which is the very constitution, imagination, and signification of the political, which allows this thinking to retrace its path in its retreat and beginning from this retreat. The retreat of the political does not signify the disappearance of the political. It only signifies the disappearance of the philosophical presupposition of the whole politico-philosophical order, which is always an ontological presupposition. This presupposition has various forms; it can consist in thinking Being as community and community as destination, or, on the contrary, thinking Being as anterior and outside the order of society and, as such, thinking Being as the accidental exteriority of commerce and power. But, in this way, being-together is never properly [brought to the fore as an explicit] theme and as the ontological problem. The retreat of the political⁴³ is the uncovering, the ontological laying bare of being-with.



Being singular plural: in a single stroke, without punctuation, without a 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. The "meaning of Being": not only as the "meaning of with," but also, and above all, as the "with" of meaning. Because none of these three terms precedes or grounds the other, each designates the coessence of the others. This coessence puts essence itself in the hyphenation—"being-singular-plural"—which is a mark of union and also a mark of division, a mark of sharing that effaces itself, leaving each term to its isolation *and* its being-with-the-others.

From this point forward, then, the unity of an ontology must be sought in this traction, in this drawing out, in this distancing and spacing which is that of Being and, at the same time, that of the singular and the plural, both in the sense that they are distinct from one another and indistinct. In such an ontology, which is not an "ontology of society" in the sense of a "regional ontology," but on-

tology itself as a "sociality" or an "association" more originary than all "society," more originary than "individuality" and every "essence of Being." Being is *with*; it is *as the with* of Being itself (the cobeing of Being), so that Being does not identify itself *as such*⁴⁴ (*as Being of the being*), but *shows itself* [se pose], *gives itself*, *occurs*, *dis-poses itself* (made event, history, and world) as its own singular plural *with*. In other words, *Being is not without Being*, which is not another miserable tautology as long as one understands it in the co-originary mode of being-with-being-itself.

According to this mode, Being is simultaneous. Just as, in order to say Being, one must repeat it and say that "Being is," so Being is only simultaneous with itself. The time of Being (the time that it is) is this simultaneity, this coincidence that presupposes "incidence" in general. It assumes movement, displacement, and deployment; it assumes the originary temporal derivative of Being, its spacing.

In one sense, this is all a matter of repeating the Aristotelian axiom *pollakôs legomenon*; Being is said in many ways. But to say it once more, according to the "with," the "also," the "again" of a history that repeats this excavation and drawing out [*traction*] of Being, the singularity of Being is its plural. But this plurality is no longer said in multiple ways that all begin from a presumed, single core of meaning. The multiplicity of the said (that is, of the sayings) belongs to Being as its constitution. This occurs with each said, which is always singular; it occurs in each said, beyond each said, and as the multiplicity of the totality of being [*l'étant en totalité*].

Being, then, does not coincide *with* itself unless this coincidence immediately and essentially marks itself out [*se remarque*] according to the *co*structure of its occurrence [*l'événement*] (its incidence, encounter, angle of declination, shock, or discordant accord). Being coincides with Being: it *is* the spacing and the unexpected arrival [*survenue*], the unexpected spacing, of the singular plural *co*-.

It might be asked why it is still necessary to call this "Being," since the essence of it is reduced to a prefix of Being, reduced to a *co*- outside of which there would be nothing, nothing but beings or existences [*les existants*], and where this *co*- has none of the sub-

stance or consistency proper to "Being" as such. This is, in fact, the matter in question. Being consists in nothing other than the existence of all existences [*tous les existants*]. However, this consistency itself does not vanish in a cloud of juxtaposed beings. What I am trying to indicate by speaking of "dis-position" is neither a simple position nor a juxtaposition. Instead, the *co*- defines the unity and uniqueness of what is, in general. What is to be understood is precisely the constitution of this unique unity as *co*-: the *singular plural*.

(Incidentally, one could show without much trouble that this is a question that has been taken up and repeated throughout a long tradition: in Leibniz's monadology, in all the various considerations of the "originary division," and, most of all, in all the various forms of the difference between the in-itself and the for-itself. But exactly what is important is this repetition, the concentration on and repeated excavation of the question—which does not necessarily signify some sort of progress or degeneration, but rather a displacement, a fit of, or drift toward something else, toward another philosophical posture.)

At the very least, and provisionally, one could try to say it in the following way: it is no more a matter of an originary multiplicity and its correlation (in the sense of the One dividing itself in an arch-dialectical manner, or in the sense of the atoms' relationship to the clinamen) than it is a matter of an originary unity and its division. In either case, one must think an anteriority of the origin according to some event that happens to it unexpectedly (even if that event originates within it). It is necessary, then, to think plural unity originally. This is indeed the place to think the plural as such.

In Latin, *plus* is comparable to *multus*. It is not "numerous"; it is "more." It is an increase or excess of origin in the origin. To put it in terms of the models just alluded to above: the One is more than one; it is not that "it divides itself," rather it is that one equals more than one, because "one" cannot be counted without counting more than one. Or, in the atomist model, there are atoms *plus* the clinamen. But the clinamen is not something else, another element outside of the atoms; it is not in addition to them; it is the "more" of

their exposition. Being many, they cannot but incline or decline; they are ones in relation to others. Immobility or the parallel fall [*la chute parallèle*] would do away with this exposition, would return to the pure position and not distinguish itself from the One-purely-one (or, in other words, from the Other). The One as purely one is less than one; it cannot be, be put in place, or counted. One as properly one is always more than one. It is an excess of unity; it is one-with-one, where its Being in itself is copresent.

The *co-* itself and as such, the copresence of Being, is not presentable as that Being which "is," since it is only in the distancing. It is unrepresentable, not because it occupies the most withdrawn and mysterious region of Being, the region of nothingness, but quite simply because it is not subject to a logic of presentation. Neither present nor to be presented (nor, as a result, "unrepresentable" in the strict sense), the "with" is the (singular plural) condition of presence in general [understood] as copresence. This copresence is neither a presence withdrawn into absence nor a presence *in itself* or *for itself*.

It is also not pure *presence to*, to *itself*, to *others*, or to the *world*. In fact, none of these modes of presence can take place, insofar as presence takes place, unless copresence first takes place. As such, no single subject could even designate *itself* and *relate itself* to itself as subject. In the most classical sense of the term, a subject not only assumes its own distinction from the object of its representation or mastery, it also assumes its own distinction from other subjects. It is possible, then, to distinguish the ipseity of these other subjects (which is to say, the *aseity*) *from* [d'avec] its own source of representation or mastery. Therefore, the with is the supposition of the "self" in general. But this supposition is no longer subjacent to the self, in the sense of an infinite self-presupposition of subjective substance. As its syntactic function indicates, "with" is the pre-position of the position in general; thus, it constitutes its disposition.

The "self," of the "self" in general, takes place with before taking place as itself and/or as the other. This "aseity" of the self is anterior to the same and to the other and, therefore, anterior to the distinction between a consciousness and its world. Before phenom-

enological intentionality and the constitution of the ego, but also before thinglike consistency as such, there is co-originary according to the with. Properly speaking, then, there is no anteriority: co-originary is the most general structure of all consistency, all constitution, and all consciousness.

[This is] presence-with: *with* as the exclusive mode of being-present, such that being present and the present of Being does not coincide in itself, or with itself, inasmuch as it coincides or "falls with" ["*tombe avec*"] the other presence, which itself obeys the same law. Being-many-together is the originary situation; it is even what defines a "situation" in general. Therefore, an originary or transcendental "with" demands, with a palpable urgency, to be disentangled and articulated for itself. But one of the greatest difficulties of the concept of the with is that there is no "getting back to" or "up to" [*remonter*] this "originary" or "transcendental" position; the with is strictly contemporaneous with all existence, as it is with all thinking.

Coexistence

It is no accident that communism and socialism of all sorts are responsible for an essential part of the set of expectations that belong to the modern world. They are responsible for the hope of a rupture and innovation from which there is no turning back; it is the hope for a revolution, a re-creation of the world. It becomes clearer to us every day that it is not enough to stigmatize the errors, lies, and crimes of "existing versions of socialism" as "national socialisms." Represented primarily in the assured and demanding consciousness of "human rights," moral and political condemnation always runs the risk of using its incontestable legitimacy to mask another legitimacy, which was and still is that of an irreducible demand that we be capable of saying "we," that we be capable of saying we to ourselves (saying it about ourselves to one another), beginning from the point where no leader or God can say it for us. This demand is in no way secondary, and this is what gives it its terrible power to unleash, subvert, resist, or sweep away.

Because not being able to say “we” is what plunges every “I,” whether individual or collective, into the insanity where he cannot say “I” either. To want to say “we” is not at all sentimental, not at all familial or “communitarian.” It is existence reclaiming its due or its condition: coexistence.⁴⁵

If the “socialist” hope as such had to be understood as an illusion or a trick, then the meaning that carried it along, the meaning which violently manifested itself through it, was all the better illuminated. It was not a question of substituting the rule of these people for the rule of those people, substituting the domination of the “masses” for that of their masters. It was a question of substituting a shared sovereignty for domination in general, a sovereignty of everyone and of each one, but a sovereignty understood not as the exercise of power and domination but as a *praxis* of meaning. The traditional sovereignties (the theologico-political order) did not lose power (which only ever shifts from place to place), but lost the possibility of making sense. As a result, meaning itself—that is, the “we”—demanded its due, if one can talk in these ways. What we must remember is that what Marx understood by alienation was both the alienation of the proletariat *and* the alienation of the bourgeoisie (indeed, an alienation of the “we,” but one that was asymmetrical, unequal), and that this is primarily an alienation of meaning. But Marx still left the question of the appropriation or reappropriation of meaning in suspense—for example, by leaving open the question of what must be understood by “free labor.” In time, this suspense opened onto the demand for another ontology of the “generic being” of humanity as “essentially social”: a co-ontology.

Thus, the disenchantment or disarray of our fin de siècle cannot content itself with mourning the passing of socialist visions, any more than it can comfort itself by replacing them with a naive collection of new “communitarian” themes. This disenchantment does something else; it designates our major anxiety, the one that makes “us” what “we” are today; we exist as the anxiety of “social Being” as such, where “sociality” and “society” are concepts plainly inadequate to its essence. This is why “social Being” becomes, in a way that is at first infinitely poor and problematic, “being-in-

common,” “being-many,” “being-with-one-another,” exposing the “with” as the category that still has no status or use, but from which we receive everything that makes us think and everything that gives “us” to thinking.

At the very moment when there is no longer a “command post” from which a “socialist vision” could put forward a subject of history or politics, or, in an even broader sense, when there is no longer a “city” or “society” out of which a regulative figure could be modeled, at this moment being-many, shielded from all intuition, from all representation or imagination, presents itself with all the acuity of its question, with all the sovereignty of its demand.

This question and demand belong to the constitution of being-many as such and, therefore, belong to the constitution of plurality *in* Being. It is here that the concept of coexistence is sharpened and made more complex. It is remarkable that this term still serves to designate a regime or state more or less imposed by extrinsic circumstances. It is a notion whose tone often oscillates between indifference and resignation, or even between cohabitation and contamination. Always subject to weak and unpleasant connotations, coexistence designates a constraint, or at best an acceptable concomitance, but not what is at stake in being or essence, unless in the form of an insurmountable aporia with which one can only negotiate. It is an “unsociable sociability” that probably would not even satisfy Kant himself, now that its paradox no longer serves as a guide to any thinking through of the perfectability of peoples, but rather serves as a *pudendum* to the cynicism known as “liberalism.” But liberalism is showing all the signs of exhaustion—at the very least, exhaustion in terms of meaning—since, at the collapse of “socialism,” it can only respond by designating the “social” and the “sociological” as relatively autonomous spheres of action and knowledge. Repairing fractures or describing structures will never be able to take the place of a thinking of Being itself as being-together. The liberal response to the collapse of communism, then, involves nothing more than an eager repression of the very question of being-in-common (which so-called real communism repressed under a common Being). Now that this particular ques-

tion is the only one to have come to light, it will not leave us alone; it will not stop cropping up again, since “we” are in question in it.

What comes to light, then, is not a “social” or “communitarian dimension” added onto a primitive individual given, even if it were to occur as an essential and determining addition. (Just think of the numerous circumstances of ordinary discourse in which this order is imposed on us: first the individual, then the group; first the one, then the others; first the rights-bearing subject; then real relationships; first “individual psychology,” then “collective psychology”; and above all, first a “subject,” then “intersubjectivity”—as they astonishingly persist in saying.) It is not even a question of a sociality or alterity that would come to cut across, complicate, put into play, or *alter* the principle of the subject understood as *solus ipse*. It is something else and still more. It does not so much determine the principle of the *ipse*, whatever this may be (“individual” or “collective,” insofar as one can speak in these ways), as it codeetermines it *with* the plurality of *ipses*, each one of which is co-originary and coessential to the world, to a world which from this point on defines a coexistence that must be understood in a still-unheard-of sense, exactly because it does not take place “in” the world, but instead forms the essence and the structure of the world. It is not a nearness [*voisinage*] or community of *ipses*, but a co-ipseity: this is what comes to light, but as an enigma with which our thinking is confronted.

In twentieth-century philosophy, the Heideggerian ontology of *Mitsein* is still no more than a sketch (I will come back to this). Husserlian coexistence or community retains its status as correlative to *ego*, where “solipsistic” egology remains first philosophy. Outside philosophy, it is remarkable that it is not social and political theory which has most closely approached the enigma of a co-ipseity (and as a result, the enigma of a hetero-ipseity). Rather what has come closest to co-ipseity is, on the one hand, an ethnology that ends up being more engaged with the phenomena of comembership⁴⁶ and, on the other, the Freud of the second model, the triple determination of which is constituted according to a mechanical coexistence (what are the “id” and “superego” if not being-with, if

not the coconstitution of the “ego”?). The same could be said for the Lacanian theory of “significance,” insofar as it does not bring about a return to signification, but a mutually instituting correlation of “subjects” (to the extent that the Lacanian “Other” is anything but an “Other”: such a name is a theologizing residue that serves to designate “sociation”).

However, it is just as remarkable that psychoanalysis still represents the most individual practice there is, and, moreover, represents a sort of paradoxical privatization of something the very law of which is “relation” in every sense of the word. Curiously, what happens here may be the same as what happens in the economy: “subjects” of exchange are the most rigorously co-originary; *and* this mutual originarity vanishes in the unequal appropriation of exchange, such that this coexistence vanishes in a strong sense. It is no accident, then, if Marx and Freud represent two different, yet symmetrical, projects; each puts forth an indissociably theoretical and practical attempt to get at “being-in-common” as a critical point (of disorder in one, of sickness in the other) of history or civilization. If a brief summary is allowed here, I would say that, because there has been no “socialist economy” (but only state capitalism), just as there has been no “collective psychoanalysis” (unless by means of a projection of an individual model), there lies between economics and psychoanalysis the bare space of a “being-together” whose theologico-political presupposition has been exhausted, and which reappears only in reactive spurts. This space has become global, which does not simply mean it has spread out over the entire surface of the planet and beyond, but that it has emerged as the surface of what is at play in the depths: the essence of being-with.

This process of globalization results in a coalescence, a concentration that seems to be both uniform and anonymous and, at the same time, an atomization, a codispersion that seems to be given over to idiocy. This is idiocy in the sense of the Greek *idiotes*, meaning private or ignorant person, as well as idiocy in the modern sense of stupid impenetrability (“private property” as deprived of meaning). It seems, then, that the dialectic Marx thought he foresaw un-

folding appears to be definitively blocked, the dialectic of an “individual” appropriation that would mediate within itself the moments of private property and collective property. At the same time, this seems to confirm definitively the Freudian contrast between a possible cure of the nervous individual and the incurable malaise of civilization. This dialectic, this contrast, and their uncommunicative and paralyzing confrontation indicate the knot of questions, expectations, and anxieties of an epoch. How can being-together appropriate itself as such, when it is left up to itself to be what it is, when it is presented in a formulation that is stripped down and has no substantial presupposition or, in other terms, lacks symbolic identification? What becomes of being-with when the *with* no longer appears as a com-position, but only as a dis-position?

How are we to understand the *co-* as *dis-*? Which one of these is the “as such” of Being that exposes it as its own sharing and which expresses that, as Being, it is between Being and Being itself? And moreover, what is it that brings together in Being that “as” = “as such” and “as” = “similarly”? Each time, Being as such is Being as the Being of *a* being, and it is this each time, similarly. What is it that makes Being as such a being-similar which circulates from being to being and which, thereby, implies the disparity, discontinuity, and simultaneity required for gauging a “resemblance”? What is this complication (co-implication and complexity) by which humans exhibit—within the discourse of the similar and the dissimilar, a discourse which is very difficult and puts “humanity” as such into play—a certain (dis)similarity of Being that crosses through all being? How can Being as such be anything other than the (dis)similarity of being in its simultaneity?

To say that this question is an ontological question—or even that it is *the* ontological question, absolutely—does not mean we have to leave the realm of economics and sickness, any more than we have to abandon the order of *praxis*. On the contrary, as I have already said, this question is simply that of what is called “capital,” and even the question of “history” and “politics.” “Ontology” does not occur at a level reserved for principles, a level that is withdrawn, speculative, and altogether abstract. Its name means the

thinking of existence. And today, the situation of ontology signifies the following: to think existence at the height of this challenge to thinking that is globalness [*mondialité*] as such (which is designated as “capital,” “(de-)Westernization,” “technology,” “rupture of history,” and so forth).

Conditions of Critique

The retreat of the political and the religious, or of the theologico-political, means the retreat of every space, form, or screen into which or onto which a figure of community could be projected. At the right time, then, the question has to be posed as to whether being-together can do without a figure and, as a result, without an identification, if the whole of its “substance” consists only in its spacing. But this question cannot be articulated in a completely appropriate way until the full extent of the withdrawal of its figure and identity has been grasped. Today, when thinking moves too quickly, when it is fearful and reactionary, it declares that the most commonly recognized forms of identification are indispensable and claim that the destinies proper to them are used up or perverted, whether it be: “people,” “nation,” “church,” or “culture,” not to mention the confused “ethnicity” or the tortuous “roots.” There is a whole panorama of membership and property, here, whose political and philosophical history has yet to be written⁴⁷: it is the history of the representation-of-self as the determining element of an ordinary concept of society.

The retreat presents itself in two ways at once: on the one hand, the theologico-political withdraws into the realm of law⁴⁸; on the other, it withdraws into a self-representation that no longer refers to an origin, but only to the void of its own specularly.

Passing into the realm of law effectively divides the “political” in two: there is the formal abstraction of the law, which undoubtedly “does right” by every particularity and every relation, but without giving this right any meaning other than itself; and then the reality of the relation of forces—whether economic, technical, or the forces of passion—stands out in a pronounced and au-

tonomous fashion, that is, unless law itself undertakes to set itself up as an origin or foundation, in the form of an absolute Law [*la Loi*]. (It is here that psychoanalysis seeks, in a remarkable way, to facilitate a substantial and authoritarian vision of society.) Law as such is necessarily the Law of an Other, or the Law as Other. The Other implies its nonrepresentability. In a theological realm, this can give rise to an "interdiction of representation" that supposes the sacred nature of the Other and, along with it, an entire economy of the sacred, sacrificial, hierarchical, and heirophantic, even where the theophany and theology are negative. Access to Presence, and even to a "super-presence," is always preserved. But within an atheological realm, this interdiction becomes a denial of representation; the alterity of the law either retrieves, represses, or denies its origin, and ends in the singular presence of each one to the others. In this sense, something "unrepresentable" or "unfigurable" runs the risk of revealing itself as completely oppressive and terrifying, if not terrorist, open to the anguish of an originary Lack. In contrast, the "figure" proves itself to be capable of opening onto the "with" as its border, the very limit of its outline.

(Of course, these two "realms" do not just follow one another in a history. They are each and both implicated in the interdiction against representation and/or the anxiety about it, that is, in the question about gaining access to the origin(s), a question about its possibility/impossibility.)

So it is not so much a question of denying law itself, it is more a question of "doing right" by the singular plural of the origin. As a result, it is a matter of questioning law about what we might call its "originary anarchy" or the very origin of the law in what is "by all rights without any right": existence unjustifiable as such. To be sure, the derivation or deduction of law from the unjustifiability of existence is not immediate or obvious. In essence, it may even escape the process of a "deduction" altogether. But this remains to be thought; in the meantime, law without ontology reabsorbs Being and its meaning into the empty truth of Law. To assume that politics is entirely a question of "human rights" is also to assume surreptitiously that "man" is entirely a question of the Other. This is

what is most often at work in any call to "ethics": a transcendental unrepresentability of that most concrete presence.

On the other side of this retreat, however, it is representation that triumphs, absorbing entirely both the transcendental and the concrete. What does the impoverished word "society" now say when it is emptied of all "so~~ci~~ation" or "association," not to mention emptied of the "communities" and "fraternities" that constitute our images of primitive life (the construction of which has, in general, shown itself to be fantastical)? What is left seems to be nothing more than this "society" face to face with itself, being-social itself defined by this game of mirrors, and losing itself in the scintillating play of light and images. It is not a matter of the Other or others, but of a singular plural that is subsumed by means of its own curiosity about itself, subsumed within a generalized equivalence of all the representations of itself that it gives itself to consume.

This is called "the spectacular-market society" or "the society of the spectacle." This is the post-Marxist or meta-Marxist intuition of Situationism. It thinks of "commodity fetishism," or the domination of capital, as being accomplished by the general commodification of fetishes, in the production and consumption of material and symbolic "goods" that all have the character of being an image, illusion, or appearance (and where, in fact, democratic rights tops the list of such "goods"). The "good," of which the "spectacle" is the general illusion, is only the real self-appropriation of social Being. An order structured according to a visible division of society, the justification for which is found only in an invisible beyond (religion, ideal), is succeeded by an immanent order that, like visibility itself, imitates its self-appropriation at every point. The society of the spectacle is that society which achieves alienation by an imaginary appropriation of real appropriation. The secret of the illusion consists in the fact that real appropriation must consist only in a free, self-creating imagination that is indissociably individual and collective: the spectacular commodity in all its forms consists essentially in the imagery [*imaginaire*] that it sells as a replacement for authentic imagination. As such, then, universal commerce is constituted by a representation wherein existence is both an in-

vention and a self-appropriating event. A subject of representation, that is, a subject reduced to the sum or flux of representations which it purchases, is the placeholder that functions as a subject of Being and history. (This is why the reply to the spectacle is formulated as the free creation of the "situation": the appropriating event abruptly removed from the logic of the spectacle. This is also why Situationism, the offspring of several artistic movements, refers to a paradigm of artistic creation that is nonaesthetic or maybe even antiaesthetic.)

In this way, Situationism (which I do not really want to go into here, but want to treat as a symptom⁴⁹), and some of its offshoots into various sorts of analyses concerning the self-simulation and self-control of our society, understands that Marxism missed the moment of symbolic appropriation by confusing it with that of productive appropriation, or even by thinking that such productive appropriation must be self-producing and, thereby, move beyond itself into symbolic appropriation: the self-suppression of capital as the integral reappropriation of Being as communal existence. More specifically, they understand that it is this sort of self-surpassing that does indeed take place. But it does not take place by bringing about an appropriation of being-in-common understood as symbolic Being (taking *symbol* in the strong sense of being a bond of recognition, an ontological instance of the "in-common," like Marx's bond of "free labor" where everyone produces himself or herself as a subject *with* others and as a subject *of* being-with-one-another). Instead, this self-surpassing takes place as the symbolization of production itself, which allows for coexistence only in the form of the technical or economic co-ordination of the various commodity networks.

Situationism thus understands that the "human sciences" have come to constitute this self-symbolization of society, which is not, in fact, a symbolization but only a representation and, more precisely, the representation of a subject that has no subjectivity other than this representation itself. In fact, it turns out to be quite clear that the "human sciences" (even in their various critical capacities, where these capacities do not turn into an insidious form of "super-representation") are the real strength behind what is known

as the generalized "spectacle." Here, the gravity of the question concerning the "media" comes to the fore. "Mediatization" does not depend on overblown hype, which is nothing new in itself; nor does it depend on technological or economic power as such. It depends primarily on the fact that a society gives itself its representation in the guise of symbolism. This is also why it has such a capacity for absorbing its own critique and its own rebellious, ironic, or distanced presentations. A sort of general psychosociology takes the place of the presupposition of a figure or identity of being-social.

In this respect, Situationism is not wrong to discern misery at the very heart of abundance, a symbolic misery that does not exclude sustained material misery and certain people's deprivation, in particular the misery of much of the southern hemisphere. . . . The misery of the "spectacle" names that coexistence where the *co-* ends up referring to nothing by which existence could symbolize itself according to itself. That is, at the very moment when it exposes itself and proves to be the entire property of Being, it is nothing by which existence says itself as such, nothing by which it makes sense of Being. At that very moment when the only other thing that is given along with existence is existence-with as the space for deployment and appropriation, the *co-* is nothing that can make sense. Being-together is defined by being-together-at-the-spectacle, and this being-together understands itself as an inversion of the representation of itself, which it believes to be capable of giving itself as originary (and lost): the Greek city assembled in community at the theater of its own myths. An example of today's response might be the following advertisement, which itself constitutes a spectacular and disturbing recuperation of the Situationist critique: "Football makes all other art forms insignificant."⁵⁰

In any case, it is precisely this indefinite capacity for recuperating the Situationist critique that demands attention. The denunciation of mere appearance effortlessly moves within mere appearance, because it has no other way of designating what is proper—that is, nonappearance—except as the obscure opposite of the spectacle. Since the spectacle occupies all of space, its opposite can only make

itself known as the inappropriate secret of an originary property hidden beneath appearances. This is why the opposite of deceitful "imagery" is creative "imagination," the model for which is still something like the Romantic genius. According to such a model, the artist plays the part of the productive-subject, but still according to the structure of an ontological presupposition that involves no specific interrogation of the "common" or "in-common" of Being, nor of the meaning of Being that is in question.

We must, therefore, understand how this version of Marxist critique, and all the versions of critical thinking inaugurated by Marx (whether they be the more "leftist" versions or the more "sociological" ones, those of Bataille or the Frankfurt School, and so on), in some way obscured, *in statu nascendi*, the correctness of its own intuition. This was the intuition of society exposed to itself, establishing its being-social under no other horizon than itself—that is, without a horizon of Meaning in which to relate being-together as such, without an instance of composition as society's disposition splayed open and laid bare. But this very intuition is interpreted only as the reign of appearance, as the substitution of the spectacle for authentic presence; appearance is understood, here, in the most classical way, namely, as "mere appearance" (surface, secondary exteriority, inessential shadow), and even as "false appearance" (semblance, deceptive imitation). In this respect, critique remains obedient to the most trenchant and "metaphysical" tradition of philosophy, "metaphysical" in the Nietzschean sense: the refusal to consider an order of "appearances," preferring, instead, authentic reality (deep, living, originary—and always on the order of the Other).

Within this tradition, it is over and against the demand of intelligible reality that sensible appearance has been constituted and disregarded all in the same gesture, just as plurality has been constituted and disregarded for the sake of the requirement of unity. Likewise, public appearance has been constituted and disregarded in favor of an interior and theoretical reality (think of Plato's Thales, who was inept in the affairs of the city), and when authentic reality was demanded in the political or communitarian order, it happened at the cost of relegating the political or the communitarian to inte-

riority, and at the cost of simply disregarding "social" exteriority (the sphere of the exteriority of needs and exchanges, the sphere of worldly appearance, and so forth). The Situationist critique continued to refer essentially to something like an internal truth (designated, for example, by the name "desire" or "imagination"), the whole concept of which is that of a subjective appropriation of "true life," itself thought of as origin proper, as self-deployment and self-satisfaction. In this, Situationism demonstrates the nearly constant characteristic of the modern critique of exteriority, appearance, and social alienation—at least, since Rousseau.

I certainly do not want to suggest by this that the critique of alienation, illusion, or ideology is ineffectual. But we do have to wonder to what extent the critique of alienation is itself in danger of remaining subject to another, symmetrical alienation of the sort that I am trying to point out by referring to different species of the Other, which is still to say the Same or the Oneself of a unique, exclusive, and egoistic appropriation, however *ego* is to be understood (whether generic, communitarian, or individual). On another level, one could say that this is a more or less explicit reference to "nature": universal nature, human nature, natural to each person or natural to a people. The idea of nature retains within itself the dominant theme of self-sufficiency, of self-organization, and of a process oriented toward an end state. This sort of nature is at a remove from exteriority and contingency, which, in other places, are marks of a "nature" that is "outside" us, to which we are exposed and without which our exposition would not take *place*. Similarly, the *ego* is from the very start removed from that exteriority and contingency without which it is impossible to expose it *as ego*.

Both the theory and praxis of critique demonstrate that, from now on, critique absolutely needs to rest on some principle other than that of the ontology of the Other and the Same: it needs an ontology of being-with-one-another, and this ontology must support both the sphere of "nature" and sphere of "history," as well as both the "human" and the "nonhuman"; it must be an ontology for the world, for everyone—and if I can be so bold, it has to be

an ontology for each and every one and for the world "as a totality," and nothing short of the whole world, since this is all there is (but, in this way, there is *all*).

As the last great form of radical critique, Situationism was no stranger to this necessity. Despite everything, its critique worked itself out while giving little play to [the practice of] referring society to a model of some sort. This is undoubtedly where its rupture with various Marxisms was most decisive and where, with some others and partly in Marx's name, it offered one of the first and most virulent critiques of what was until just recently called "real" socialism and also social-democracies. As a result, Situationism has brought to light rather well, although not to its fullest extent, the theme of referring society back to itself. The "society of the spectacle" is both a denunciation (of the generalized spectacle-market) and an affirmation of society facing itself and, maybe even more so, the affirmation of society *as* exposed to itself and only to itself.

We must, therefore, pose the following two questions at the same time:

1. How can one know in what way and just how far critique—both revolutionary critique, including its most recent manifestations, and also so-called reformist critique—remains paradoxically and unconsciously subject to a classical model in which reality is opposed to appearance and unity is opposed to plurality? (This model assumes that a certain Nietzschean lesson is constantly misunderstood or avoided within the critical tradition and, at the same time, that the whole question of what can be called "art" from the point of view of social critique remains more or less untouched.) In other words, to what extent do "critical" thinking and the "critical" attitude as such entail this subjection (if "critique" always presupposes the possibility of unveiling the intelligibility of the real), and what other attitude is necessary, where an attitude of resignation is out of the question?

2. How can one know if the "spectacle" is, in one way or another, a constitutive dimension of society? That is, how can one know if what is called "social relation" can be thought of according to something other than the symbolic order, and if the symbolic or-

der can, in turn, be thought of in some way other than according to the order of "imagination" or "figuration," all of which indicates the necessity of thinking all these terms in a new way? Once again, "art" would come into play, but only according to a thinking that is quite different from asking the trivial question about "art and society" and, at the same time, according to a wholly different thinking of "art" itself, and of what we might include under the heading "critical art."

These questions serve as the programmatic heading of some fuller inquiry. I will not take them both on at once, because each one is too enormous in itself. I will only attempt to open some different ways of approaching them.

At the very heart of the tradition, it must be said that "intelligible reality" can only be the reality of *the sensible* as such—and that the "intelligible reality" of the community can only be the reality of *being-in-common* as such. This is why reduction to or subsumption in intelligibility (Idea, Concept, Subject) regularly comes into tension with *its own* requirement that it provide an intelligibility of the sensible that occurs within sensibility, for it and right at [*à même*] it; this is often so forceful an opposition that it leads to a rupture, where sensible intelligibility either breaks apart or dissolves itself altogether.

What comes to us today is the demand to give the meaning of being-in-common according to what it is—*in-* common or *with*—and not according to a Being or an essence of the common. As such, it is the demand to give the meaning of being-with right at the with, and in a "making sense with" ["faire-sans-avec"] (a praxis of meaning-with [*sens-avec*]) where the opposition of a Meaning (horizon, history, community) and a simple "with" (spacing, exteriority, disparity) would dissolve or break apart. In short, it is becoming a matter of urgency to know whether social critique is to be made by virtue of a presupposition that is not at all social (an ontology of Being-*tout-court*, as it were) or by virtue of an ontology of being-in-common, that is, of the plural singular essence of Being. This is why the subject of "ontology" first of all entails the critical examination of the conditions of critique in general.

Co-appearing

It might be, then, that the current situation of "social Being" has to be understood in some other way than by starting from the schema of an immense, spectacular self-consumption, a schema where the truth of community is dissolved and engulfed—whether community [is understood] as subject or as occurring between subjects. If only we made the effort to decipher it in a new way, it might be that the phenomenon of the generalized "spectacle," along with what we call the "tele-global dimension," which accompanies it and is cosubstantial with it, would reveal something else altogether. What is of primary importance in this is to avoid presupposing that the subject of "social Being" or the subject of Being *tout court* is already established.

But this cannot simply be a matter of the classic gesture of wanting to begin without presuppositions (which always assumes that this desire [*volonté*] itself is not already the whole presupposition). It is a matter of rigorously thinking what Being-without-presuppositions-about-itself means, which is, once again, the "creation of the world." In a general way, indeed in an absolutely general way, the primordial requirement of ontology or first philosophy must now be that Being not be presupposed in any way or in any respect, and, more precisely, that *every presupposition of Being must consist in its nonpresupposition*.

Being cannot be pre-sup-posed [*pré-sup-posé*] if it is only the Being of what exists, and is not itself some other existence that is previous or subjacent to existence by which existence exists. For existence exists in the plural, singularly plural. As a result, the most formal and fundamental requirement [of ontology] is that "Being" cannot even be assumed to be the simple singular that the name seems to indicate. Its being singular is plural in its very Being. It follows, then, that *not only must being-with-one-another not be understood starting from the presupposition of being-one, but on the contrary, being-one* (Being as such, complete Being or *ens realissimum*) *can only be understood by starting from being-with-one-another*. That

question which we still call a "question of social Being" must, in fact, constitute *the* ontological question.

If one really understands the necessity of this groundless presupposition, one would also have to try to say the following: if the situation of being-social is not that of a spectacular self-alienation that presupposes a lost or dissimulated "real presence," neither is it that of a general communicational arrangement, which presupposes a "rational subject" of communication. This does not mean that there is nothing to the illusions of spectacular self-alienation or to the rationality of a general communicational arrangement, but it does mean that "real presence" and "rationality" can only be thought or evaluated by beginning from something else; and they cannot themselves constitute the groundless presupposition. If left to itself, as a sort of grand, hermeneutical antinomy of the modern world (and one that is clearly at work everywhere), this contrary double form of the "[illusory] spectacle" and "[rational] communication" could even switch their predicates around, such that the "spectacle" would be nothing other than "communication" and vice versa. This chiasma or circle worries us in our confused and anxiety-ridden awareness that society just "turns round and around," without substance, without foundation, without end.

In fact, it might be that what is happening to us is just another sort of "Copernican revolution," not of the cosmological system, or of the relation of subject and object, but rather of "social Being" revolving [*tournant*] around itself or turning on itself, and no longer revolving around something else (Subject, Other, or Same).

What happens to us, then, is the stripping bare [*mis à nu*] of social reality, the very *reality* of being-social in, by, and as the symbolicity that constitutes it, where "spectacle," "communication," "commodity," and "technology" would be different figures of this symbolicity. These are, however, perverse figures that still have to be thought.

It is still necessary to understand what this word "symbolic" means. The proper value of symbolism is in making a *symbol*, that is, in making a connection or a joining,⁵¹ and in giving a face [*fig-*

ure] to this liaison by making an *image*. Insofar as the relation is imagined [*se représentée*], and because the relation as such is nothing other than its own representation, the symbolic is what is real in such a relation. By no means, however, is such a relation the representation of something that is real (in the secondary, mimetic sense of representation), but the relation is, and is nothing other than, what is real in the representation—its effectiveness and its efficacy. (The paradigm for this is “I love you” or, perhaps more originally, “I am addressing myself to you.”)

In this respect, it is important to emphasize that the symbolic and the imaginary are far from opposites. But the way in which they are not opposites is even contrary to how the common way of speaking [*vulgate*] conflates the image (understood as manifestation and recognition) with the simulacrum (understood as a captivating and mystifying hypostasis). The simple, or simplistic, critique of “the image” (and of the “civilization of images”), which has become a sort of ideological trope in theories of the “spectacle” and in theories of “communication,” is nothing but the mythic and mystifying effect of the frantic desire for a “pure” symbolization (and a symptomatic manifestation of the weakness of “critique” in general). The sole criterion of symbolization is not the exclusion or debasement of the image, but instead the capacity for allowing a certain play, in and by the image-symbol, with the joining, the distancing, the opened interval that articulates it as *sym-bol*: this word simply means “put with” (the Greek *sun* equals the Latin *cum*), so that the dimension, space, and nature of the “with” are in play here. Therefore, the “symbolic” is not simply an aspect of being-social: on the one hand, it is this Being itself; on the other hand, the symbolic does not take place without (re)presentation, the (re)presentation of one another [*des uns aux autres*] according to which they are with one another [*les-uns-avec-les-autres*].

If I speak of “social” reality’s being stripped bare as its symbolicity, then I am talking about “society” uncovered, society no longer being the appearance of only itself, society no longer reduced to a sort of background “symbolizing” (in the ordinary sense) nothing (no community, no mystical body). I am talking about society

making a symbol of itself, society making its appearance by facing [*face à*] itself in order to be all that it is and all that it has to be. In this way, being-social is not reduced to any assumption of an interior or superior unity. Its unity is wholly symbolic; it is wholly of the with. Being-social is Being that is by appearing in the face of itself, faced with itself: it is *co-appearing* [com-parution].



Co-appearing does not simply signify that subjects appear together. In that case (which is the “social contract”), it would still need to be asked from where it is that they “appear,” from which remote depth do they come into being-social as such, from what origin. We must also wonder why they appear “together” [“ensemble”] and for what other depth they are destined, destined “all together” or “further-on [outré] together.” Either the predicate “together” is only a qualification that is extrinsic to subjects, which does not belong to the appearance of each one as such, but designates a pure, indifferent juxtaposition, or it adds a particular quality, one granted a meaning of its own that must be worked out for all subjects “together” and as “together.” These two questions lead straight to the dead ends of a metaphysics—and its politics—in which (1) social co-appearance is only ever thought of as a transitory epiphenomenon, and (2) society itself is thought of as a step in a process that always leads either to the hypostasis of togetherness or the common (community, communion), or to the hypostasis of the individual.

In either case, one comes to a dead end because being-social as such—or again, what might be called the *association* [sociation] of *Being*—is instrumentalized, related to something other than itself. On this account, the essence of the “social” is not itself “social.” As a result, it is never presentable under the heading of the “social,” but only under the heading of either a simple, extrinsic, and transitory “association,” or of a transsocial presupposition, the unitary entelechy of common Being—which are both ways to repress and foreclose the problem of “association.”

The very meaning of the word “together,” just like the meaning

of the word "with," seems to oscillate indefinitely between two meanings, without ever coming to a point of equilibrium: it is either the "together" of juxtaposition *partes extra partes*, isolated and unrelated parts, or the "together" of gathering *totum intra totum*, a unified totality [*unitotalité*] where the relation surpasses itself in being pure. But it is clear from this that the resources found in the term are situated precisely on the point of equilibrium between the two meanings: "together" is neither *extra* nor *intra*. In fact, the pure outside, like the pure inside, renders all sorts of togetherness impossible. They both suppose a unique and isolated pure substance, but pure in such a way that one cannot even say "isolated," exactly because one would be deprived of all relation with it. As such, then, God is not together with anything or anyone, but is—at least in Spinoza and Leibniz, although in different, but equally exemplary, ways—the togetherness or being-together of all that is: God is not "God."⁵²

Togetherness and being-together are not equivalent. (On the contrary, the equivocation between the two makes the status of the gods of onto-theology uncertain. [Whether it is a matter of] pantheism, panentheism, polytheism, monotheism, atheism, deism, and so on, [are such gods] representable or unrepresentable? [Do they] ground representation or remove it? Or [might they] even be representation itself?) Togetherness, in the sense of being a substantive entity, is a collection (as in the theory of togethernesses [*ensembles*]). Collection assumes a regrouping that is exterior and indifferent to the being-together ("in common") of the objects of the collection. In a general way, the themes and practices of the "collective" or of "collectivism" move in this register. It could be said, then, that the ontological *togetherness* which we must think through is never substantive; it is always the adverb of a *being-together*. But this adverb is not a predicate of "Being"; it brings to it no particular and supplementary qualification. Like all adverbs, it modifies or modalizes the verb, but here modalization is of the essence and of the origin. Being is together, and it is not a togetherness.

"Together" means simultaneity (*in, simul*), "at the same time." Being together is being at the same time (and in the same place,

which is itself the determination of "time" as "contemporary time"). "Same time / same place" assumes that "subjects," to call them that, share this space-time, but not in the extrinsic sense of "sharing"; they must share it between *themselves*; they must themselves "symbolize" it as the "same space-time" without which there would not be time or space. The space-time itself is first of all the possibility of the "with." Very long analyses are called for here. Cutting them far too short, let me say that time cannot be the pure moment [*instant*], or pure succession, without being simultaneity "at the same time." Time itself implies "at the same time." Simultaneity immediately opens space as the spacing of time itself. Starting from the simultaneity of "subjects," time is possible, but above all, it is necessary. For in order to be together and to communicate, a correlation of places *and* a transition of passages from one place to another is necessary. Sharing [*partage*] and passage control each other reciprocally. Husserl writes, "It is essentially necessary that the *togetherness* of monads, their mere *co-existence*, be a *temporal co-existence*. . . ." ⁵³ In fact, simultaneity is not a matter of indistinction; on the contrary, it is the distinctness of places taken together. The passage from one place to another *needs time* [*D'un lieu à l'autre, il faut le temps*]. And moving in place [*du lieu à lui-même*] as such also needs time: the time for the place to open itself as place, the time to space itself. Reciprocally, originary time, appearing as such, *needs space* [il lui faut l'espace], the space of its own dis-tension, the space of the passage that divides [*partage*] it. Nothing and nobody can be born without being born to and with others who come into this encounter, who are born in their own turn. The "together," therefore, is an absolutely originary structure. What is not together is in the no-time-no-place of non-Being.

Co-appearance, then, must signify—because this is what is now at stake—that "appearing" (coming into the world and being in the world, or existence as such) is strictly inseparable, indiscernable from the *cum* or the *with*, which is not only its place and its taking place, but also—and this is the same thing—its fundamental ontological structure.

That Being is being-with, absolutely, this is what we must think.⁵⁴

The *with* is the most basic feature of Being, the mark [*trait*] of the singular plurality of the origin or origins in it.

Undoubtedly, the *with* as such is not presentable. I have already said so, but I have to insist upon it. The *with* is not “unpresentable” like some remote or withdrawn presence, or like an Other. If there is a subject only with other subjects, the “with” itself is not a subject. The “with” is or constitutes the mark of unity/disunity, which in itself does not designate unity or disunity as that fixed substance which would undergird it; the “with” is not the sign of a reality, or even of an “intersubjective dimension.” It really is, “in truth,” a mark drawn out over the void, which crosses over it and underlines it at the same time, thereby constituting the drawing apart [*traction*] and drawing together [*tension*] of the void. As such, it also constitutes the traction and tension, repulsion/attraction, of the “between”-us. The “with” stays between us, and we stay between us: just us, but only [as] the interval between us.

In fact, one should not say the “with”; one should only say “with,” which would be a preposition that has no position of its own and is available for every position. But if the unpresentability of “with” is not that of a hidden presence, then it is because “with” is the unpresentability of this pre-position, that is, the unpresentability of presentation itself. “With” does not add itself to Being, but rather creates the immanent and intrinsic condition of presentation in general.

Presence is impossible except as copresence. If I say that the Unique is present, I have already given it presence as a companion (even if such presence constitutes the Unique, and I have split it in two). The *co*- of copresence is the unpresentable par excellence, but it is nothing other than—and not the Other of—presentation, the existence which co-appears.

If we now have to think about social Being in some other way than according to its spectacular-market self-mockery or its communicational self-assurance, both of which take place on the basis of an unlikely and nostalgic inauthenticity, it is quite likely that there would be nothing else for us to meditate on, nothing to ruminate about or mull over between us. What is proper to community is nei-

ther a creativity nor a rationality laid down like some fundamental internal resource, readily available to be put into practice through critique. In this respect, we are definitely no longer in the age of Enlightenment or Romanticism. We are elsewhere, which does not mean we are opposed to them or beyond them, as if we had dialectically surpassed them. We are in a sort of simultaneous drawing together [*tension*] of these two epochs; they are contemporaries of ours and we see them wearing thin. One is worn thin to the point of being an extremely dull platitude; the other is stretched out toward the night of extermination. We are thus in a suspension of history where an enigma is gathering anew; we are contemporaries of ourselves, contemporaries of the stripping bare of being-in-common.

What is proper to community, then, is given to us in the following way: it has no other resource to appropriate except the “with” that constitutes it, the *cum* of “community,” its interiority without an interior, and maybe even its *interior intimo sui*. As a result, this *cum* is the *cum* of a co-appearance, wherein we do nothing but appear together with one another, co-appearing before no other authority [*l'instance*]⁵⁵ than this “with” itself, the meaning of which seems to us to instantly dissolve into insignificance, into exteriority, into the inorganic, empirical, and randomly contingent [*aléatoire*] inconsistency of the pure and simple “with.”

So it appears to us that what is proper to community is nothing more than the generalized impropriety of banality, of anonymity, of the lonely crowd and gregarious isolation. The simplest solidarities, the most elementary proximities seem to be dislocated. As such, then, “communication” is only the laborious negotiation of a reasonable and disinterested image of community devoted to its own maintenance, which constantly reveals itself as nothing but the maintenance of the spectacular-market machine.

It must be said, however, that co-appearance might only be another name for capital. At the same time, it might be a name that runs the risk of once again masking what is at-issue, providing a consoling way of thinking that is secretly resigned. But this danger is not a sufficient reason to be satisfied with a critique of capital that is still held prisoner to the presupposition of an “other sub-

ject” of history, economics, and the appropriation of the proper in general. In pointing to “capital,” Marx designated a general deappropriation [*déappropriation*] that does not allow for the presupposition or preservation of the other, or the Other, which would be the subject of the general reappropriation.

Or more precisely, the presupposition cannot take the form of presupposing a “subject”; rather, it must take the form of being-with-one-another, and must do so in a way that is much more problematic, but far more radical, than Marx could have suspected. It must also be said, then, that the classic critique of capital, even in its latest post-Marxist forms, is not sufficient for taking hold of what capital exposes. At the very least, a thinking of co-appearance must awaken this anxiety.

The intuition buried in Marx’s work is undoubtedly located in the following ambivalence: at one and the same time, capital exposes the general alienation of the proper—which is the generalized disappropriation, or the appropriation of misery in every sense of the word—and it exposes the stripping bare of the *with* as a mark of Being, or as a mark of meaning. Our thinking is not yet adequate to this ambivalence. This is why, since Marx and up through Heidegger, such ambivalence constantly revives a great, undefined hesitation on the subject of “technology,” the limit-object—and perhaps the screen [*l’objet-écran*—of a thinking which projects onto it either the promise of a self-overcoming of capital or the assurance of the implacable character of its machinery carrying on uncontrolled—and, thereby, controlling everything thanks to this absence of control.

This is also why the truth of our time can only be expressed in Marxist or post-Marxist terms. This why it is a question of the market, of misery, of social-democratic ideology, or the substantial reappropriations that give a reply to it (nationalism, fundamentalism, and fascism in all their various forms). But this truth itself demands that it be thought starting from the *with* of co-appearance, so long as bringing it to life and stripping it bare signifies at least this—to put it in a formulaic way: what is at stake is not a reappropriation of the *with* (of the essence of a common Be-

ing), but rather a *with* of reappropriation (where the proper does not return, or returns only *with*).

(This is why we do not make an economy out of an ontology, but it is also why this ontology must be both an *ethos* and a *praxis*, identically. This will have to be developed later.⁵⁶ Let us hold the following in reserve: an ontology of being-with can only be located within the distinction of these terms: to be, to act, event, meaning, end, conduct, just as much as, and because, it must be located within the distinction of the “singular” and the “plural,” the “in oneself” [“à soi”] and the “in several” [“à plusieurs”].)

The Spectacle of Society

If being-with is the sharing of a simultaneous space-time, then it involves a presentation of this space-time as such. 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: as a room, a region, a group of friends, an association, a “people.” *We* can never simply be “the we,” understood as a unique subject, or understood as an indistinct “we” that is like a diffuse generality. “We” always expresses a plurality, expresses “our” being divided and entangled: “one” is not “with” in some general sort of way, but each time according to determined modes that are themselves multiple and simultaneous (people, culture, language, lineage, network, group, couple, band, and so on). What is presented in this way, each time, is a stage [*scène*] on which several [people] can say “I,” each on his own account, each in turn. But a “we” is not the adding together or juxtaposition of these “I’s.” A “we,” even one that is not articulated, is the condition for the possibility of each “I.” No “I” can designate itself without there being a space-time of “self-referentiality” in general. This “generality,” however, does not have a “general” consistency; it only has the consistency of the singular at “each time” of each “I.” “Each time” implies *at one and the same time* the discreteness of “one by one” *and* the simultaneity of “each one.” After all, an “each one” that was not in any way simultaneous, that was not at-the-same-time-and-along-

side-other “each ones,” would be isolated in a way that would no longer even count as isolation. Rather, it would be the pure and simple impossibility of designating oneself and, therefore, of being a “self.” The pure condition of being distributed [*distributivité*] would be transformed immediately into absolute autism. (But this is not to say that the “group,” whatever it is, is of a higher order; it is a stage [that serves as] a place of identification. More generally, the question of the “with” can never be expressed in terms of identity, but rather always in terms of identifications.)

As I have already pointed out, not even Descartes can claim to be alone and worldless, precisely because he is not alone and worldless. Rather, his pretense makes it clear that anyone who feigns solitude thereby attests to the “self-referentiality” of *anyone* [*de quiconque*]. The *ego sum* counts as “evident,” as a first truth, only because its certainty can be recognized *by anyone*. So, to articulate it completely would be to say: *I say that we, all of us and each one of us, say “ego sum, ego existo.”* One is not obliged to read Descartes as Heidegger does, which is as someone who, in staying at the point of substance or *res cogitans*, does not go back as far as the absolutely primordial condition. In fact, one must read Descartes literally, as he himself invites us to: engaging *with* him and like him in the experience of the pretense [to solitude]. Only this thinking *with* achieves the status of evidence, which is not a proof [*une démonstration*]. From its very first moment, the methodological pretense is neither substantialist nor solipsistic: it uncovers the stage of the “at each time” as our stage, the stage of the “we.”

This stage—this “theater of the world,” as Descartes also liked to call it, using the persistent image of his time—is not a stage in the sense of an artificial space of mimetic representation. It is a stage in the sense of the opening of a space-time for the distribution of singularities, each of whom singularly plays the unique and plural role of the “self” or the “being-self.” “Self” does not mean in itself, or by itself, or for itself, but rather “one of us”: one that is each time at a remove from immanence or from the collective, but is also each time coessential to the coexistence of each one, of “each and every one.” The stage is the space of a co-appearing without

which there would be nothing but Being pure and simple, which is to say, all and nothing, all as nothing.

Being gives itself as singular plural and, in this way, organizes itself as its own stage. We present the “I” to ourselves, to one another, just as “I,” each time, present the “we” to us, to one another. In this sense, there is no society without spectacle; or more precisely, there is no society without the spectacle of society. Although already a popular ethnological claim or, in the Western tradition, a claim about the theater, this proposition must be understood as ontologically radical. There is no society without the spectacle because society is the spectacle of itself.

But in a certain sense, this itself must be understood as a play of mirrors (at least insofar as “play” and “mirror” simply designate artifice and unreality). As a concept of being-together [*être-ensemble*], co-appearance consists in its appearing, that is, in its appearing to itself and to one another, all at once. There is no appearing to oneself except as appearing to one another. If this were put in classical terms, terms that presuppose a sphere of proper and isolated individuality as the starting point, then it would be rendered in the following way: one appears to oneself insofar as one is already an other for oneself.⁵⁷ But it is immediately clear that one could not even begin to be an other for oneself if one had not already started from the alterity with—or of the with—others in general. Others “in general” are neither other “me’s” (since there is no “me” and “you” except on the basis of alterity in general), nor the non-me (for the same reason). Others “in general” are neither the Same nor the Other. They are one-another, or of-one-another, a primordial plurality that co-appears. Therefore, “appearing,” and appearing to oneself as well as to one another, is not on the order of appearance, manifestation, phenomena, revealing, or some other concept of becoming-visible. This is because of what that order inevitably entails regarding the invisible origin of such appearance, and what it entails regarding the relation of appearance to this origin as either an expression or an illusion, as resemblance or semblance.⁵⁸ So co-appearing is not “appearing”; it is not a question of coming out from a being-in-itself in order to approach others, nor

is it a question of coming into the world. It is to be in the simultaneity of being-with, where there is no "in itself" that is not already immediately "with."

But "immediately with" does not refer to an immediacy in the sense of an absence of exteriority. On the contrary, it is the instantaneous exteriority of space-time (the instant itself as exteriority: the simultaneous). And this is how co-appearance forms a stage that is not a play of mirrors—or rather, how the truth of the play of mirrors must be understood as the truth of the "with." In this sense, "society" is "spectacular."



Looking at it closely, one will find that the various critiques of "spectacular" alienation are, in the end, grounded on the distinction between a good spectacle and a bad spectacle—[this is true] whether they like it or not. Within the good spectacle, the social or communitarian being presents its proper interiority to itself, its origin (which is itself invisible), the foundation of its rights, the life of its body, and the splendor of its fulfillment. (For the Situationists, then, a certain idea of "art" almost always plays the role of the good spectacle, and it is no accident that the [bad] "spectacle" for them is first and foremost the falsification of art.) In the bad spectacle, the social being imagines [*se représente*] the exteriority of interests and appetites, of egotistic passions and the false glory of ostentation. At the most basic level, this Manichean division not only supposes a distinction between the represented objects, but it also supposes an opposition within the status of the representation: it is what is now in interiority (as manifestation, expression of the proper), now in exteriority (as image, reproduction). As such, the fact that these are intertwined is ignored: there is no "expression" that is not [already] given in an "image," no "presentation" not already [given] in "representation"; there is no "presence" that is not presence to one another.

It is, of course, well known that the distinction between these spectacles is drawn out explicitly by Rousseau, who stipulates that the best spectacle, and the only one that is necessary, is the specta-

cle of the people itself, assembled in order to dance around the tree they have planted as their own proper symbol. What Rousseau thus makes clear, even despite himself,⁵⁹ is the necessity of the spectacle. In modernity, society knows itself as that which takes place in the immanent nonpresence to oneself. That is, it takes place as a *subject*, not so much the "subject of representation" as *representation as subject*: it is presentation-to [*la présentation-à*], or what one could call a-presentation [*l'appréhension*], the realm of coming into presence as coming conjoined, coincidental and concurrent, simultaneous and mutual. This a-presentation is that of a "we" that possesses *neither* the nature of a common "I" *nor* that of a geometric place, in the sense of an ensemble in which all the "I's" would be equidistant from one another. Rather, it is what opens the spacing of co-appearance on this side of every I-subject. "Association" ["Sociation"] does not disclose itself as a being, but rather as an act that, by definition, exposes itself: it is in exposing itself that it is what it is, or that it does what it does. Being-social must testify before itself to the act of association, the act that brings it to be—not in the sense that it produces it (as a result), but rather in the sense that "Being" remains wholly within the act and in the exposition of the act. In this sense, one could say that Rousseau's "social contract" is not in essence the conclusion of an agreement; it is the stage, the theater for the agreement.



Even if being-social is not immediately "spectacular" in any of the accepted senses of the word, it is essentially a matter of being-exposed. It is as being-exposed; that is, it does not follow from the immanent consistency of a being-in-itself. The being-in-itself of "society" is the network and cross-referencing [*le renvoi mutuel*] of co-existence, that is, *ofcoexistences*. This is why every society gives itself its spectacle and gives itself as spectacle, in one form or another.⁶⁰ To this extent, every society knows itself to be constituted in the nonimmanence of co-appearance, although society does not expose this as a "knowledge." It exposes what it knows as its own stage and through its own *praxis* of staging [*praxis scénographique*]; and what

it knows is that, hidden behind being-together, there is not some other Being which would no longer or not yet be being-together; that is, what it knows is that there is not togetherness itself hidden behind being-together—in presence, in person, in body, or in essence. Therefore, it knows that “togetherness” is not a predicate of Being and that “togetherness” is the trace of Being itself. In other words, the togetherness of Being [*l'ensemble de l'être*] is not a being; it shares Being.

Thus, the spontaneous knowledge of society—its “preontological comprehension” of itself—is knowledge about Being itself, absolutely, and not about the particular and subordinate region of beings, which would be the “social” region of Being. Being-with is constitutive of Being, and it is [constitutive] for the totality of beings (I will return to this below); “social” co-appearance is itself the exposing of the general co-appearance of beings. This insight makes its way from Rousseau to Bataille, or from Marx to Heidegger, and it requires that we find a language that is *ours*.

Undoubtedly, we are still stuttering: philosophy always comes too late, and as a result, also too soon. But the stuttering itself betrays the form of the problem: we, “we,” how are we to say “we”? Or rather, who is it that says “we,” and what are we told about ourselves in the technological proliferation of the social spectacle and the social as spectacular, as well as in the proliferation of self-mediatized globalization and globalized mediatization? We are incapable of appropriating this proliferation because we do not know how to think this “spectacular” nature, which at best gets reduced to a discourse about the uncertain signs of the “screen” and of “culture.” The same applies to “technological” nature, which we regard as an autonomous instrument. We do so without ever asking ourselves if it might not be “our” comprehension of “our-selves” that comes up with these techniques and invents itself in them, and without wondering if technology is in fact essentially in complete agreement with the “with.”⁶¹ We are not up to the level of the “we”: we constantly refer ourselves back to a “sociology” that is itself only the learned form of the “spectacular-market.” We have not even begun to think “ourselves” as “we.”

This is not to say that such thinking can only occur to us tomorrow or at some later point, as if it depended on progress or some revelation. It may not be a matter of a new object of thinking that could be identified, defined, and exhibited as such. We do not have to identify ourselves as “we,” as a “we.” Rather, we have to dis-identify ourselves *from* every sort of “we” that would be the subject of its own representation, and we have to do this *insofar as* “we” co-appear. Anterior to all thought—and, in fact, the very condition of thinking—the “thought” of “us” is not a representational thought (not an idea, or notion, or concept). It is, instead, a *praxis* and an *ethos*: the staging of co-appearance, the staging which is co-appearing. We are always already there at each instant. This is not an innovation—but the stage must be reinvented; *we* must reinvent it each time, each time making our entrance anew.



A major sign of the difficulty we have regarding the spectacle is indicated by the paradigmatic character that the Athenian theater has for us. There is certainly nothing accidental in the fact that our modern way of grounding the so-called Western tradition involves a triple reference: to philosophy as the shared exercise of *logos*, to politics as the opening of the city, and to the theater as the place of the symbolic-imaginary appropriation of collective existence. The Athenian theater, both the institution itself and its content, appears to us as the political (civil) presentation of the philosophical (the self-knowledge of the logical animal) and, reciprocally, as the philosophical presentation of the political. That is, it appears to us as the “one” presentation of being-together, yet as a presentation where the condition for its possibility is the irreducible and institutive distance [*l'écart*] of representation. Moreover, this distance defines the theater, insofar as it is *neither* political *nor* philosophical at the same time—and neither of these in a rather specific way. The Athenian theater appears to us as the conjunction of *logos* and *mimesis*, but when we see it in this way, we systematically efface the moment of *mimesis* in favor of the moment of *logos*.

We efface it in our imagining [*représentant*] that there could be

—and especially that there was, once upon a time—a “good” *mimesis* (the sort Plato wanted), a *mimesis* of *logos*, and a “bad” *mimesis* (that of the “sophist,” the prototype of the spectacular merchant who sells the simulacra of *logos*). But we never pursue this logic to its end, for doing so would require that we recognize the following: if there is a necessity to *mimesis*, then it is because *logos* does not present itself of its own accord—and maybe because it does not present itself at all, because its logic is not the logic of presence.⁶²

This amounts to recognizing that “social *logos*,” the logic of “association,” and “association” itself as the *logos* all require *mimesis*. Has there ever been a *logos* that was not “social”? Whatever *logos* means—whether a word or number, a gathering or welcoming in which Being is manifest, reason that is rendered or constructed—it always implies sharing, and it always implies itself as sharing.

By effacing the intrinsic moment or dimension of *mimesis*, we efface this sharing. We give ourselves the representation of a presence that is immanent and enclosed, self-constitutive and self-sufficient, the integrally self-referential order of what we call a “logic” in the most general and basic sense. In this sense, “logic” represents self-referentiality held to its ontological condition, which is the originary—and, as such, existential—plurality or sharing of *logos* itself.

Against this good conjunction of the logical and the mimetic, we now oppose the “bad” one: that where logic remains within its immanent order, cold and faceless (which today, for us, is the “logic of capital”), all the while outwardly producing a *mimesis* that dissimulates it according to its inverted simulacrum, the self-consuming “spectacle.” The self-referentiality of the “image” stands in opposition to the self-referentiality of the process or the force, as its product and truth. As over and against the “Greek” paradigm, this is the way in which our tradition has for a long time set up the “Roman” paradigm: the site of circus games, burlesque theater, and the theater of cruelty; without “civil” identification; the Empire and the reason for Empire [*raison d’Empire*]; the forum emptied of its meaning. . . .⁶³

Aeschylus or Nero . . . our referring to things in this way, which sets the Greek stage in such violent contrast to the Roman circus

(and which also divides—this is a remarkable example—the Christian traditions of Protestantism and Catholicism, or divides the several different forms of the profane theatrical tradition), reveals a consciousness that is itself conflicted, as is demonstrated by its unease with regard to the spectacle: “good” (re)presentation is represented as lost; “bad” (re)presentation is represented as both popular and generalized. But, in fact, both of them are our representations; they compose the double spectacle that we give to ourselves, the double spectacle of the double unrepresentability of social Being and its truth. There is one unrepresentability because of a certain retreat, and another unrepresentability on account of a certain vulgarity. Maybe we have to begin by taking some distance from this double spectacle, by no longer wishing to be Greeks, by no longer fearing that we are Romans, and by simply understanding ourselves as moderns, where being modern means the following: taking note of an exposed “unrepresentability” as such, but which is nothing other than the very presentation of our co-appearing, of “us” co-appearing, and whose “secret” exposes itself and exposes us to ourselves without our even beginning to penetrate it—if it is a matter of “penetrating” it at all.

The Measure of the “With”

The bare exposition of co-appearance is the exposition⁶⁴ of capital. Capital is something like the reverse side of co-appearance and that which reveals co-appearance. Capital’s violent inhumanity displays [*étale*] nothing other than the simultaneity of the singular (but the singular posing as the indifferent and interchangeable particularity of the unit of production) and the plural (itself posing as the system of commodity circulation). The “extortion of surplus-value” presupposes this concomitance between the “atomization” of producers (of “subjects” reduced to being-productive) and the “articulation” of profit (not as an equal redistribution, but as a concentration that is itself more and more complex and delocalized).

One could say that capital is the alienation of being singular plural as such. This would be quite accurate so long as one did not

understand being singular plural as a primitive, authentic subject, a subject to which capital happened as its other and purely by accident. (Nothing could be more foreign to Marx's thinking.) Capital is the "alienation" of Being in its being-social to the extent that it puts this being in play as such. It is not the negative dialectic of some prior community that occurs within a continuous historical process; instead, it exposes a singular-plural constitution or configuration that is neither the "community" nor the "individual." Incalculable "surplus-value"—"value" as indefinite, circulatory, and autotelic growth—exposes the inaccessibility of a primordial or final "value." In a paradoxical and violent way, it immediately poses the question of an "outside-value" or "absolute value"—which would be immeasurable, priceless (what Kant called a "dignity"). There is, then, a certain concomitance between the globalization of the market and that of "human rights": these rights represent the supposed absolute value that capital claims to exchange for . . . itself.

However, this is also why there is the stripping bare [*mise à nu*] of being-social and, at the same time, its being brought to life [*mise à vif*], exactly because the "rights-bearing" "human" is "valuable" in itself. In fact, he is nothing other than the idea of a "value in itself" or a "dignity." If "humanity" must be worth something, or if Being in general must "be worth something" under the heading "humanity," this can only be by "being valuable" *singularly* and, simultaneously, in "being valuable" by and for and with the *plural* that such singularity implies, just as it implies the fact of the "value" itself. Indeed, who could be [more] valuable for oneself than oneself? "Being valuable" is worth something only within the context of being-with, that is, only insofar as it concerns *commerce* in every sense of the word. But it is precisely the sharing of these senses—the commerce of goods/the commerce of being-together—that capital exposes: the sharing of the senses of *exchange*, the sharing of the sharing itself. Capital exposes it as a certain violence, where being-together becomes being-of-market-value [*l'être-marchand*] and haggled over [*marchandé*]. The being-with that is thus exposed vanishes at the same time that it is exposed, stripped bare.

To say that this violence exposes being singular plural as an ab-

solute of existence is not to justify it. For this violence violates what it exposes. This, however, does not amount to declaring that the "secret" of capital has been revealed, along with the means of converting it into its opposite. Instead, the violence of capital gives the measure of what is exposed, of what comes to "us" to expose itself: singular plural being-with is the only absolute measure of Being itself, or of existence. But this is an incommensurable measure if it is equal to the "at each time" of each "one" and, *at the same time*, to the indefinite plurality of coexistences *against* which each one *is measured* in turn—according to the indefinite commensuration of the coincidences of commerce, combat, competition, comparison, communication, concurrence, concupiscence, compassion, *co-jouissance*. . . .

There is a common measure, which is not some one unique standard applied to everyone and everything. It is the commensurability of incommensurable singularities, the equality of all the *origins-of-the-world*, which, as origins, are strictly unexchangeable [*insubstituable*]. In this sense, they are perfectly unequal, but they are unexchangeable only insofar as they are equally with one another. Such is the sort of measurement that it is left up to us to take.



"Society" is neither Greek nor Roman—nor Judeo-Christian, to which we will return later. Society knows itself and sees itself as bared, exposed to this common excess [*démesure*]. At one and the same time, it sees itself as something quite evident and transparent, whose necessity eclipses that of every *ego sum*, and as an opacity that denies itself every subjective appropriation. At that moment when we clearly come [to stand] before ourselves, as the lone addresser(s) facing the lone addressee(s), we cannot truly say "we."

But it is through this that we now have to attain to a knowledge of the "we"—attain to a knowledge and/or a praxis of the "we." The "we" is not a subject in the sense of egoistic self-identification and self-grounding (even if this itself never takes place outside of a "we"); neither is the "we" "composed" of subjects (the law of such composition is the aporia of all "intersubjectivity"). However, the "we" is not nothing; it is "someone" each time, just as "each one" is

someone. Moreover, this is why there is no universal "we": on the one hand, "we" is said each time of some configuration, group, or network, however small or large; on the other hand, "we" say "we" for "everyone," for the coexistence of the entire universe of things, animals, and people that is mute and without "us." "We" neither says the "One" nor does it say the adding together of "ones" and "others"; rather, "we" says "one" in a way that is singular plural, one by one and one with one.

Nothing can really be thought about this situation unless the one, in general, is first thought in terms of with-one-another. Yet, it is here that our ontology fails, since we are "amongst us" [*entre nous*"] and since "Being" comes down to just that—if I can say it like this.

(It is as if Being has come back to this "between," which is its true place, as though it had been a matter of a "forgetting the between" rather than "forgetting Being." Or rather, it is as if the invention of Being, throughout the whole tradition, were nothing but the invention of our existence as such—as the existence *of us* and *as us*, us in the world, we-the-world. "We" would be, then, the most remote, absolute priority of every ontology; as a result, "we" would also be the most belated, most difficult, and least appropriate effect of the ontological demand.)

The *with* constitutes a sort of permanent end point of the tradition. It is a minor category; in fact, even up until today, including Heidegger in certain regards, it is barely a category at all insofar as "Being" has been represented as being alone with itself, and as having no coexistence or coincidence. So, when Husserl declares "the intrinsically first being, the being that precedes and bears every worldly Objectivity, is transcendental intersubjectivity: the universe of monads, which effects its communion in various forms,"⁶⁵ this Being constitutes for him nothing less than an ultimate horizon, freed from contingency and the exteriority of coexistents. It corresponds to a transcendental solidarity rather than an empirico-transcendental simultaneity. As a result, it again becomes something like a substratum rather than something open or disposed in itself through its coconstitution. Generally speaking, then, the

Being of philosophical ontology cannot have coessence, since it only has non-Being as its correlate. But what if Being itself *is* the coessentiality of existence?

Since being-social appears to us to lie beyond our reach, whether as community (subsumption under the Subject, pure Being without relations) or as association (accommodation of subjects, relation without essentiality), it is the category of the "other" that crosses through much contemporary thinking. It would be necessary to show how this category, and the obsession [*la hantise*] that it ends up constituting for a good portion of our thinking, both represents the incommensurability of Being as being-with-one-another *and* runs the risk of covering over or deferring this Being's realm, insofar as it is the realm of the *with*, that is, insofar as it is the measure of this incommensurability.

The other is presented as the *alter ego* or as the other of the ego, as the other outside of the self or as the other within the self, as "others" or the "Other"; all these ways of looking at it, all these aspects, all these faces, and all of "those whom we cannot look in the face" [*ces indévisageables*"]—whose necessity is, in every case, incontestable—always bring us back to the very heart of the matter, to an alterity or alteration where the "self" is at stake. The other is thinkable, and must be thought, beginning from that moment when the self appears and appears to itself as a "self."

Yet, this identification of the self as such—its subjectivization in the deepest and richest philosophical sense of the term, the one that reaches its extreme limit in Hegel—can only take place once the subject finds itself or poses itself originally as other than itself, doing so in the infinite presupposition of the self that constitutes it as a subject and according to the necessary law of such presupposition. This would be a self that is older and more originary than itself, a self in itself that is other than the self for itself. This is really not much more than a transcription of Hegel.

Therefore, the self knows itself principally as other than itself: such is the constitution of "self-consciousness." And yet, the logic of this constitution is paradoxical, since it involves simultaneously the opening of the self to the other *and* its closure. In fact, the al-

terity of the other is such that to recognize it is to be denied access to it; there can be access only on the condition of a radical alteration or, more precisely, a radical alienation. A dialectic of the same and the other, of the same in the other, of the same as other, undoes this aporia, but this undoing comes at a price, the price of the dialectic in general. It reveals that the power of the negative which holds the self to the other, the dis-alienating and reappropriative power of alienation itself as the alienation of the same, will always be presupposed as the power of the self, or the Self as this very power. The Self remains alone in itself even as it emerges out of itself. What is properly lacking or passed over in this false emergence is the moment of the *with*.

Open to the other and occurring as other, the self has its originarity in the loss of self. Birth and death become the marks of a point of origin [*provenance*] and destination within the other: an origin/destination as a loss, as the memorial mourning of the immemorial, and as the reconquering or reappropriation of an inappropriable aseity in all its irreducible alterity. This other is not "with"; it is no longer and not yet "with"; it is nearer and further away than every being-together. It does not accompany identity; it crosses through it, and transgresses it; it transfixes it. Within the discourse about alterity, a general mode of *trans-* (transport, transaction, transcription, transfer, transmission, transformation, transparency, transubstantiation, transcendence) continually runs alongside the mode of *cum-*, but it will never be able to eclipse it or replace it.

In and of itself transcendent, the subject is born into its *intimacy* ("interior intimo neo"), and its intimacy wanders away from it *in statu nascendi* ("interfeces et urinam nascimur"). "To exist" is no longer "to be" (for itself, in itself), to-already-no-longer-be and to-not-yet-be, or even to-be-lacking, that is, to-be-in-debt-to-being. To exist is a matter of going into exile. The fact that the intimate, the absolutely proper, consists in the absolutely other is what alters the origin in itself, in a relation to itself that is "originarily plunged into mourning."⁶⁶ The other is in an originary relation to death and in a relation to originary death.

In this way, then, "solitude" appears. This is the Christian event, which does not mean that it was not prepared for well in advance, or that it was not, in its own way, contemporary to our whole tradition. Solitude par excellence is solitude of the self insofar as it relates to itself, outside of itself *in extremis* and *in principis*, outside of the world, ex-isting existence. Consciousness of self is solitude. The other is this very solitude exposed as such: as a self-consciousness that is infinitely withdrawn in itself, into itself—in itself as into itself.

As such, the coexistent—the other person, but also the other creature in general—appears as that which is in itself infinitely withdrawn. It appears inaccessible to "me" because it is withdrawn from the "self" in general, and because it is as the self-outside-itself: it is the other in general, the other that has its moment of identity in the divine Other, which is also the moment of the identity of everything, of the universal *corpus mysticum*. The Other is the place of *community* as *communion*, that is, the place of a being-self-in-other [*être-soi-en-l'autre*] that would no longer be altered or where such alteration would be identification. In this world, the mystery of communion announces itself in the form of the *nearby* [*prochaine*].

Proximity is the correlate of *intimacy*: it is the "nearest," the "closest," which is also to say "the most approximate" or "infinitely approximate" to me, but it is not me because it is withdrawn in itself, into the self in general. The proximity of the nearest is a minute, intimate distance and, therefore, an infinite distance whose resolution is in the Other. The nearest is that which is utterly removed, and this is why the relation to it presents itself (1) as an imperative, (2) as the imperative of a love, and (3) as a love that is "like the love of myself."⁶⁷ The love of self, here, is not egoism in the sense of preferring oneself over others (which would contradict the commandment); it is an egoism in the sense of privileging oneself, one's own-self [*le soi-propre*], as a model, the imitation of which would provide the love of others. It is necessary to love one's own-self in the other, but reciprocally, one's own-self in me is the other of the ego. It is its hidden intimacy.

This is why it is a matter of "love": this love is not some possible

mode of relation; it designates relation itself at the heart of Being—in lieu of and in the place of Being⁶⁸—and designates this relation, of one to another, as the infinite relation of the same to the same as originally other than itself. “Love” is the abyss of the self in itself; it is the “delectation” [“dilection”] or “taking care” of what originally escapes or is lacking; it consists in taking care of this retreat and in this retreat. As a result, this love is “charity”: it is the consideration of the *caritas*, of the cost or the extreme, absolute, and, therefore, inestimable value of the other as other, that is, the other as the self-withdrawn-in-itself. This love speaks of the infinite cost of what is infinitely withdrawn: the incommensurability of the other. As a result, the commandment of this love lays out this incommensurability for what it is: access to the inaccessible. Yet, it is not sufficient to discredit such love as belonging to some intemperate idealism or religious hypocrisy. Rather, it is a matter of deconstructing the Christianity and sentimentality of an imperative the openly excessive and clearly exorbitant character of which must be read as a warning to us; I would even go so far as to say that it just is a warning to us. It is a matter of wondering about the “meaning” (or “desire”) of a thinking or culture that gives itself a foundation the very expression of which denotes impossibility, and of wondering how and to what extent the “madness” of this love could expose the incommensurability of the very constitution of the “self” and the “other,” of the “self” in the “other.”

With regard to this constitution, then, and at the heart of Judeo-Christianity and its exact opposite, it would be a matter of understanding how the dimension of the *with* both appears and disappears all at once. On the one hand, the proximity of what is nearby [*prochain*] points to the “nearby” [“l’auprès”] of the “with” (the *apud hoc* of its etymology). One could even add that it encircles this “nearby” and makes it stand out on its own, as a contiguity and simultaneity of being-near-to as such, without any further determination. That is, what is “nearby” is no longer the “nearness” of the family or the tribe, which may be what the primary meaning of the Biblical precept refers to; it is not the nearness of the *people* or the *philia*, or the brotherhood; it is what underlies every logic of

the group or ensemble, every logic of community that is based on nature, blood, source, principle, and origin.⁶⁹ The measure of such “nearness” is no longer given, and the “nearby,” the “very near” is exhibited as stripped bare, without measure. As such, everyday milling around [*le côtoiement*], the crowd, the mass all become possible—right up until the piling-up of bodies in the anonymous mass grave or the pulverization of collective ashes. The proximity of what is nearby, as pure dis-tance, as pure dis-position, can contract and expand this dis-position to its extreme limit, both at the same time. In universal being-with-one-another, the *in* of the in-common is made purely extensive and distributive.

On the other hand, this is why the “nearby” of the *with*, the simultaneity of distance and close contact, the most proper constitution of the *cum-*, exposes itself as indeterminantness and as a problem. According to this logic, there is no measure that is proper to the *with*, and the *other* holds it there, within the dialectic of the incommensurable and common intimacy, or within an alternative to it. In an extreme paradox, the other turns out to be *the other of the with*.



As a result, there are two different measures of the incommensurable to be found within the very depths of our tradition, two measures that are superimposed, intertwined, and contrasted. One is calibrated according to the Other; the other is calibrated according to the *with*. Because the intimate and the proximate, the same and the other, refer to one another, they designate a “not being with” and, in this way, a “not being in society.” They designate an Other of the social where the social itself—*the* common as *Being* or as a common *subject*—would be in itself, by itself, and for itself: it would be the very sameness of the other and sameness as Other. In contrast, being-with designates the other that never comes back to the same, the plurality of origins. The just measure of the *with* or, more exactly, the *with* or being-with as just measure, as justness and justice, is the measure of dis-position as such: the measure of the distance from one origin to another.

In his analytic of *Mitsein*, Heidegger does not do this measure justice. On the one hand, he deals with the indifference of an “un-circumspective tarrying alongside” and, on the other, an “authentic understanding of others”⁷⁰—the status of which remains indeterminate as long as what is in question is anything other than the negative understanding of the inappropriability of the death of others or the codestination of a people. Between this indifference and this understanding, the theme of existential “distantiality”⁷¹ immediately reverts back to competition and domination, in order to open onto the indistinct domination of the “one” [*Das Man*]. The “one” is produced as nothing other than that conversion which levels out the general attempt by everyone to outdistance everyone else, which ends in the domination of mediocrity, of the common and average measure, common as average. It ends with the “common-mediocre” concealing the essential “common-with.” But, as such, it remains to be said just how being-with is essential, seeing as it codetermines the essence of existence.

Heidegger himself writes that: . . . as Being-with, Dasein “is” essentially for the sake of [*umwillen*] Others. . . . In being-with, as the existential “for-the-sake-of” of Others, these have already been disclosed [*erschlossen*] in their *Dasein*.⁷² The *with*, therefore, designates being-with-regard-to-one-another, such that each one is “disclosed” [“ouvert”]⁷³ then and there, that is, constituted as existing: being the *there*, that is, the disclosure of Being, being an “each time” of this disclosure, in such a way that no disclosure would take place (no Being) if the one “disclosed” did not disclose itself with regard to an other “disclosed.” Disclosure itself consists only in the coincidence of disclosures. To-be-the-there is not to disclose a place to Being as Other: it is to disclose/be disclosed to/through the plurality of singular disclosures.

Since it is neither “love,” nor even “relation” in general, nor the *juxta-position of in-differences*, the “with” is the proper realm of the plurality of origins insofar as they originate, not from one another or for one another, but in view of one another or with regard to one another. An origin is not an origin for itself; nor is it an origin in order to retain itself in itself (that would be the origin of nothing); nor

is it an origin in order to hover over some derivative succession in which its being as origin would be lost. An origin is something other than a starting point; it is both a principle and an appearing; as such, it repeats itself at each moment of what it originates. It is “continual creation.”

If the world does not “have” an origin “outside of itself,” if the world is its own origin or the origin “itself,” then the origin of the world occurs at each moment of the world. It is the *each time* of Being, and its realm is the *being-with* of each time with every [other] time. The origin is for and by way of the singular plural of every possible origin. The “with” is the measure of an origin-of-the-world *as such*, or even of an origin-of-meaning as such. To-be-with is to make sense mutually, and only mutually. Meaning is the fullest measure of the incommensurable “with.” The “with” is the fullest measure of (the) incommensurable meaning (of Being).

Body, Language

The plurality of origins essentially disseminates the Origin of the world. The world springs forth⁷⁴ everywhere and in each instant, simultaneously. This is how it comes to appear *out of nothing* and “is created.” From now on, however, this being created must be understood differently: it is not an effect of some particular operation of production; instead, it is, insofar as it is, as created, as having arisen, come, or grown (*cresco, creo*); it has always already sprung from all sides, or more exactly, it is itself the springing forth and the coming of the “always already” and the “everywhere.” As such, each being belongs to the (authentic) origin, each is originary (the springing forth of the springing forth itself), and each is original (incomparable, underivable). Nevertheless, all of them share originary and originality; this sharing *is itself* the origin.

What is shared is nothing like a unique substance in which each being would participate; what is shared is also what shares, what is structurally constituted by sharing, and what we call “matter.” The ontology of being-with can only be “materialist,” in the sense that “matter” does not designate a substance or a subject (or an antisub-

ject), but literally designates what is divided of itself, what is only as distinct from itself, *partes extra partes*, originally impenetrable to the combining and sublimating penetration of a "spirit" [or "mind"], understood as a dimensionless, indivisible point beyond the world. The ontology of being-with is an ontology of bodies, of every body, whether they be inanimate, animate, sentient, speaking, thinking, having weight, and so on. Above all else, "body" really means what is outside, insofar as it is outside, next to, against, nearby, with a(n) (other) body, from body to body, in the dis-position. Not only does a body go from one "self" to an "other," it is *as itself* from the very first; it goes from itself to itself; whether made of stone, wood, plastic, or flesh, a body is the sharing of and the departure from self, the departure toward self, the nearby-to-self without which the "self" would not even be "on its own" ["à part soi"].⁷⁵

Language is the incorporeal (as the Stoics said). Either as an audible voice or a visible mark, saying is corporeal, but what is said is incorporeal; it is everything that is incorporeal about the world. Language is not in the world or inside the world, as though the world were its body: it is the outside of the world in the world. It is the whole of the outside of the world; it is not the eruption of an Other, which would clear away or sublimate the world, which would transcribe it into something else; instead, it is the exposition of the world-of-bodies as such, that is, as originally singular plural. The incorporeal exposes bodies according to their being-with-one-another; they are neither isolated nor mixed together. They are *amongst themselves* [entre eux], as origins. The relation of singular origins among themselves, then, is the relation of *meaning*. (That relation in which one unique Origin would be related to everything else as having been originated would be a relation of saturated meaning: not really a relation, then, but a pure consistency; not really a meaning, but its sealing off, the *annulment* of meaning and the end of the origin.)

Language is the exposing of plural singularity. In it, the all of being is exposed as its meaning, which is to say, as the originary sharing according to which a being relates to a being, the circulation of a meaning of the world that has no beginning or end. This is the

meaning of the world as being-with, the simultaneity of all presences that *are* with regard to one another, where no one is for one-self without being for others. This is also why the essential dialogue or polylogue of language is both the one in which we speak to one another and, *identically*, the one in which I speak to "myself," being an entire "society" onto myself—being, in fact, in and as language, *always simultaneously "us" and "me" and "me" as "us," as well as "us" as "me."* For I would say nothing about myself if I were not with myself *as I am* with numerous others, if this *with* were not "in" me, right at me, at the same time as "me," and, more precisely, *as the at-the-same-time* according to which, solely, I am.

At this exact point, then, one becomes most aware of the essence of singularity: it is not individuality; it is, each time, the punctuality of a "with" that establishes a certain origin of meaning and connects it to an infinity of other possible origins. Therefore, it is, at one and the same time, infra-/intra-individual and transindividual, and always the two together. The individual is an intersection of singularities, the discrete exposition of their simultaneity, an exposition that is both discrete and transitory.

This is why there is no ultimate language, but instead languages, words, voices, an originally singular sharing of voices without which there would be no voice. In the incorporeal exposition of languages, all beings pass through humanity.⁷⁶ But this exposition exposes humanity itself to what is outside the human, to the meaning of the world, to the meaning of Being as the being-meaning of the world. Within language, "humanity" is not the subject of the world; it does not represent the world; it is not its origin or end. It is not its meaning; it does not give it meaning. It is the exponent, but what it thus exposes is not itself, is not "humanity"; rather, it exposes the world and its proper being-with-all-beings in the world, exposes it as the world. Moreover, this is why it is also what is exposed by meaning; exposed as "gifted" with language, humanity is, above all, essentially ex-posed in its Being. It is ex-posed to and as this incorporeal outside of the world that is at the heart of the world, that which makes the world "hold" or "consist" in its proper singular plurality.

It is not enough to say that the “rose grows without reason.” For if the rose were alone, its growth without reason would enclose within itself, by itself, all the reason of the world. But the rose grows without reason because it grows along with the reseda, the eglantine, and the thistle—as well as with crystals, seahorses, humans, and their inventions. And the whole of being, nature, and history do not constitute an ensemble the totality of which would or would not be without reason. The whole of being is its own reason; it has no other reason, which does not mean that it itself is its own principle and end, exactly because it is not “itself.” It *is* its own disposition in the plurality of singularities. This *Being* exposes itself, then, as the *between* and the *with* of singulars. *Being*, *between*, and *with* say the same thing; they say exactly *what can only be said* (which is called the “ineffable” elsewhere), what cannot be presented as a being among [*parmi*] others, since it is the “among” of all beings (*among*: inside, in the middle of, with), which are each and every time among one another. *Being* says nothing else; as a result, if saying always says Being in one way or another, then Being is exposed only in the incorporeality of the saying.

This does not signify that Being “is only a word,” but rather that Being is all that is and all that goes into making a word: being-with in every regard. For a word is what it is only among all words, and a spoken word is what it is only in the “with” of all speaking. Language is essentially in the with. Every spoken word is the simultaneity of at least two different modes of that spoken word; even when I am by myself, there is the one that is said and the one that is heard, that is, the one that is resaid. As soon as a word is spoken, it is resaid. As such, meaning does not consist in the transmission from a speaker to a receiver, but in the simultaneity of (at least) two origins of meaning: that of the saying and that of its resaying.

As far as meaning is concerned, what I say is not simply “said,” for meaning must return to me resaid in order to be said. But in returning to me in this way, that is, from the other, what comes back also becomes another origin of meaning. Meaning is the passing back and forth [*passage*] and sharing of the origin at the origin, singular plural. Meaning is the exhibition of the foundation with-

out foundation, which is not an abyss but simply the *with* of things that are, insofar as they are. *Logos* is *dialogue*, but the end [or purpose] of dialogue is not to overcome itself in “consensus”; its reason is to offer, and only to offer (giving it tone and intensity), the *cum-*, the *with* of meaning, the plurality of its springing forth.

It is not enough, then, to set idle chatter in opposition to the authenticity of the spoken word, understood as being replete with meaning. On the contrary, it is necessary to discern the conversation (and sustaining) of being-with as such within chatter: it is in “conversing,” in the sense of discussion, that being-with “sustains itself,” in the sense of the perseverance in Being. Speaking-with exposes the *conatus* of being-with, or better, it exposes being-with as *conatus*, exposes it as the effort and desire to maintain oneself as “with” and, as a consequence, to maintain something which, in itself, is not a stable and permanent substance, but rather a sharing and a crossing through. In this conversation (and sustaining) of being-with, one must discern how language, at each moment, with each signification, from the highest to the lowest—right down to those “phantic,” insignificant remarks (“hello,” “hi,” “good” . . .) which only sustain the conversation itself—exposes the with, exposes itself as the with, inscribes and *ex-scribes* itself in the with until it is exhausted, emptied of signification.

“Emptied of signification”: that is, returning all signification to the circulation of meaning, into the carrying over [*transport*] that is not a “translation” in the sense of the conservation of one signification (however modified), but “trans-lation” in the sense of a stretching or spreading out [*tension*] from one origin-of-meaning to another. This is why this always imminent exhaustion of signification—always imminent and always immanent to meaning itself, its truth—goes in two directions: that of common chatter and that of absolute poetic distinction. It is exhausted through the inexhaustible exchangeability of “phantic” insignificance, or exhausted by the pure “apophantic” significance, declaration, or manifestation (“apophansis”) of this very thing as an unexchangeable spoken word, unalterable as this very thing, but there as the thing *as* such. From one to the other, it is the same *conatus*: the “with” according

to which we expose ourselves to one another, *as* “ones” and *as* “others,” exposing the world *as* world.

Language constitutes itself and articulates itself from out of the “as.” No matter what is said, to say is to present the “as” of whatever is said. From the point of view of signification, it is to present one thing as another thing (for example, its essence, principle, origin, or its end, its value, its signification), but from the point of view of meaning and truth; it is to present the “as” *as such*. That is, it is to present the exteriority of the thing, its being-before, its being-with-all-things (and not its being-within or being-elsewhere).

Mallarmé’s phrase “I say ‘a flower’ . . .” expresses [the fact] that the word says “the flower” as “flower” and as nothing else, a “flower” that is “absent from all bouquets” only because its “as” is also the presence *as such* of every flower in every bouquet. Giorgio Agamben writes, “The thinking that tries to grasp being *as* beings retreats toward the entity without adding to it any further determination . . . comprehending it in its being-such, in the midst of its *as*, it grasps its pure non-latency, its pure exteriority. It no longer says *some thing* as ‘*some thing*’ but brings to speech this *as* itself.”⁷⁷ Every spoken word brings to speech this “as itself,” that is, the mutual exposition and disposition of the singularities of the world (of a world of singularities, of singular worlds, of world-singularities). Language is the element of the with *as such*: it is the space of its declaration. In turn, this declaration as such refers to everyone and to no one, refers to the world and to its coexistence.



Although he was certainly not the first to do so, La Bruyere put it in the following way: “Everything is said, and one comes to it too late. . . .” Certainly, everything is said, for everything has always already been said; yet, everything remains to be said, for the whole as such is always to be said anew. Death presents the interruption of a saying of the whole and of a totality of saying: it presents the fact that the saying-of-everything is at each time an “everything is said,” a discrete and transitory completeness. This is why death does not take place “for the subject,” but only for its

representation. But this is also why “my death” is not swallowed up with “me” in pure disappearance. As Heidegger says, insofar as it is the utmost possibility of existence, it exposes existence *as such*. Death takes place essentially as language; reciprocally, language always says death: it always says the interruption of meaning as its truth. Death as such, [like] birth as such, takes place as language: it takes place in and through being-with-one-another. Death is the very signature of the “with”: the dead are those who are no longer “with” and are, at the same time, those who take their places according to an exact measure, the appropriate measure, of the incommensurable “with.” Death is the “as” without quality, without complement: it is the incorporeal as such and, therefore, the exposition of the body. One is born; one dies—not as this one or that one, but as an absolute “as such,” that is, as an origin of meaning that is both absolute and, as is necessary, absolutely cut off (and consequently, immortal).

It follows that one is never born alone, and one never dies alone; or rather, it follows that the solitude of birth/death, this solitude which is no longer even solitude, is the exact reverse of its sharing. If it is true, as Heidegger says, that I cannot die in place of the other, then it is also true, and true in the same way, that the other dies insofar as the other is with me and that we are born and die to one another, exposing ourselves to one another and, each time, exposing the inexposable singularity of the origin. We say in French “mourir à” [“dead to”]—to the world, to life—as well as “naître à” [“born to”]. Death is *to* life, which is something other than being the negativity through which life would pass in order to be resuscitated. To put it very precisely: death as fertile negativity is that of a single subject (either individual or generic). Death *to* life, exposition *as such* (the ex-posed as ex-posed = that which turns toward the world, in the world, the very *nihil* of its creation) can only be being-with, singular plural.

In this sense, language is exactly what Bataille calls “the practice of joy before death.” Language is not a diversion, not an arrangement with the intolerability of death. In one sense, it is the tragic itself. But it is joy as the destitution of meaning, which lays bare the

origin: the singular plural as such. It is the *with* as such, which is also to say the being-such as such: perfectly and simply—and immortally—equal to itself and to every other, equal to itself *because* and *as* it is equal to every other; it is, therefore, essentially *with* every other equally. As is often said, this is a “common fate”: we have nothing in common except our telling ourselves so (and I have nothing in common with myself except in telling myself so); we exchange, and we do not exchange; we un-exchange [*in-échangons*] this extreme limit of the saying in every spoken word, as speaking itself. Language exposes death: it neither denies it nor affirms it; it brings it to language, and death is nothing but that, that which is essentially brought to language—and that which brings it there.

“Death speaks in me. My speech is a warning that at this very moment death is loose in the world, that it has suddenly appeared between me, as I speak, and the being I address: it is there between us at the distance that separates us, but this distance is also what prevents us from being separated, because it contains the condition for all understanding.”⁷⁸ As such, then, “literature” is language stretched out [*en tension*] toward birth and death, exactly because it is, and insofar *as* it is, striving toward address, understanding [*entente*], and conversation. And it is stretched like this since it occurs as recitation, discourse, or singing. (Each of these, in turn, forms the dis-position of language itself, language’s exteriority to/in itself; each forms language’s sharing, not only the sharing of languages, but that of voices, genres, or tones; it is a multiple sharing without which there would be no “as” in general.) “Literature” means the being-in-common of what has no common origin, but is originally in-common or with.

If, as Heidegger says, this is why the relation to one’s own death consists in “taking over from [one]self [one’s] ownmost Being,” this taking over does not imply, contrary to what Heidegger himself says, that “all Being-with Others, will fail us when our ownmost potentiality-for-Being is the issue.”⁷⁹ If being-with is indeed co-essential to Being *tout court*, or rather is to Being itself, this ownmost possibility is coessentially a possibility of the with and as the with. My death is one “ownmost” co-possibility of the other existences’ own possibility. It is, or it “will be,” my death that says “he is dead” in their speaking; in this way, my death is not, it will not be, anywhere else. It is “my” possibility insofar as it withdraws the possibility of the “mine” into itself: *that is to say*, insofar as this “mineness” is returned to the singular plural of the always-other-mineness. In “he *is* dead,” it is indeed Being that is in question—and as being-with.

“Death,” therefore, is not negativity, and language does not know or practice negativity (or logic). Negativity is the operation that wants to depose Being in order to make it be: the sacrifice, the absent object of desire, the eclipse of consciousness, alienation—and, as a result, it is never death or birth, but only the assumption of an infinite supposition. As such, then, Being is infinitely presupposed by itself, and its process is the reappropriation of this presupposition, always on this side of itself and always beyond itself; it is negativity at work. But things work out completely differently if Being is singular plural dis-position. The distancing of disposition is *nothing*; this “nothing,” however, is not the negative of anything. It is the incorporeal by which, according to which, bodies are with one another, close to one another, side by side, in contact and (therefore) distanced from one another. This *nothing* is the *res ipsa*, the thing itself: the thing as being-itself, that is, the being-such of every being, the mutual exposition of beings that exist only in and through this exposition. *Such* is a demonstrative; being-such is the demonstrative essence of Being, the being who shows itself to another being and in the midst of beings.

Moreover, whether they are aware of it or not, all the different ways of thinking negativity lead to the same point (they at least pass through it, even if they refuse to stop there). It is that point where the negative itself, in order to be the negative (in order to be the *nihil negativum* and not just the *nihil privatum*) must avoid its own operation and be affirmed in itself, with no remainder; or else, on the contrary, it must be affirmed as the absolute remainder that cannot be captured in a concatenation of procedure or operation. (It is the critical, suspended, inoperative point at the heart of the dialectic). Self-presupposition interrupts itself; there is a syn-

copation in the process and in its thinking, a syncopation and instant conversion of supposition into dis-position. Dis-position is the same thing as supposition: in one sense, it is absolute antecedence, where the "with" is always already given; in another sense, it does not "underlie" or preexist the different positions; it is their simultaneity.

The non-Being of Being, its meaning, is its dis-position. The *nihil negativum* is the *quid positivum* as singular plural, where no *quid*, no being, is posed *without with*. It is *without* (at a distance) precisely to the extent that it is *with*; it is shown and demonstrated in being-with, [which is] the evidence of existence.

In addition, evil is only ever [found] in an operation that fulfills the *with*. One can fulfill the *with* either by filling it up or by emptying it out; it can be given a foundation of plenitude and continuity or an abyss of intransitivity. In the first case, the singular becomes a particular within a totality, where it is no longer either singular or plural; in the second case, the singular exists only on its own and, therefore, as a totality—and there too it is neither singular nor plural. In either case, murder is on the horizon, that is, death as the operative negativity of the One, death as the *work* of the One-All or the One-Me. This is exactly why death is [actually] the opposite of murder: it is the inoperative, but existing, "with" (such that murder inevitably lacks death).

The "with" is neither a foundation nor is it without foundation. It is nothing except for being-with, the incorporeal *with* of the being-body *as such*. Before being spoken, before being a particular language or signification, before being verbal, "language" is the following: the extension and simultaneity of the "with" insofar as it is the *ownmost power* of a body, the propriety of its *touching* another body (or of touching *itself*), which is nothing other than its definition as body. It finishes itself there, where it is-with; that is, it comes to a stop and accomplishes itself in a single gesture.

In this sense, "to speak with" is not so much speaking to oneself or to one another, nor is it "saying" (declaring, naming), nor is it proffering (bringing forth meaning or bringing meaning to light). Rather, "to speak with" is the conversation (and sustaining) and

conatus of a being-exposed, which exposes only the secret of its own exposition. Saying "to speak with" is like saying "to sleep with," "to go out with" (*co-ire*), or "to live with": it is a (eu)phemism for (not) saying nothing less than what "wanting to say" means [*le "vouloir-dire" veut dire*] in many different ways; *that is to say*, it says Being itself *as* communication and thinking: the *co-agitatio* of Being. "Language" is not an instrument of communication, and communication is not an instrument of Being; communication *is* Being, and Being *is*, as a consequence, nothing but the incorporeal by which bodies express themselves to one another *as such*.

Coexistential Analytic

The existential analytic of *Being and Time* is the project from which all subsequent thinking follows, whether this is Heidegger's own latter thinking or our various ways of thinking against or beyond Heidegger himself. This affirmation⁸⁰ is in no way an admission of "Heideggerianism"; it completely escapes the impoverished proclamations of "schools." It does not signify that this analytic is definitive, only that it is responsible for registering the seismic tremor of a more decisive rupture in the constitution or consideration of meaning (analogous, for example, to those of the "cogito" or "Critique"). This is why the existential analytic is not complete, and why we continue to feel its shock waves.

The analytic of *Mitsein* that appears within the existential analytic remains nothing more than a sketch; that is, even though *Mitsein* is coessential with *Dasein*, it remains in a subordinate position. As such, the whole existential analytic still harbors some principle by which what it opens up is immediately closed off. It is necessary, then, to forcibly reopen a passage somewhere beyond that obstruction which decided the terms of being-with's fulfillment, and its withdrawal, by replacing it with the "people" and their "destiny." This is not a matter of saying that it is necessary "to complete" the merely sketched-out analysis of *Mitsein*, nor is it a matter of setting up *Mitsein* as a "principle" like it deserves. "In principle," being-with escapes completion and always evades occupying the

place of a principle. What is necessary is that we retrace the outline of its analysis and push it to the point where it becomes apparent that the coessentiality of being-with is nothing less than a matter of the co-originary of meaning—and that the “meaning of Being” is only what it is (either “meaning” or, primarily, its own “precomprehension” as the constitution of existence) when it is *given as with*.

There is no “meaning” except by virtue of a “self,” of some form or another. (The subjective formula of the ideality of meaning says that “meaning” takes place for and through a “self.”) But there is no “self” except by virtue of a “with,” which, in fact, structures it. This would have to be the axiom of any analytic that is to be called coexistential.

“Self” is not the relation of a “me” to “itself.”⁸¹ “Self” is more originary than “me” and “you.” “Self” is primarily nothing other than the “as such” of Being in general. Being is only its own “as Being.” The “as” does not happen to Being; it does not add itself to Being; it does not intensify Being; it is Being, constitutively. Therefore, Being is directly and immediately mediated *by itself*; it is itself mediation; it is mediation without any instrument, and it is nondialectic: dia-lectic without dialectic. It is negativity without use, the *nothing* of the with and the *nothing* as the with. The with as with is nothing but the exposition of Being-as-such, each time singularly such and, therefore, always plurally such.

Prior to “me” and “you,” the “self” is like a “we” that is neither a collective subject nor “intersubjectivity,” but rather the immediate mediation of Being in “(it)self,” the plural fold of the origin.

(Is mediation itself the “with”? Certainly, it is. The “with” is the permutation of what remains in its place, each one and each time. The “with” is the permutation without an Other. An Other is always the Mediator; its prototype is Christ. Here, on the contrary, it is a matter of mediation without a mediator, that is, without the “power of the negative” and its remarkable power to retain within itself its own contradiction, which always defines and fills in [*plombe*] the subject. Mediation without a mediator mediates nothing; it is the mid-point [*mi-lieu*], the place of sharing and crossing

through [passage]; *that is, it is place tout court and absolutely*. Not Christ, but only such a mid-point; and this itself would no longer even be the cross, but only the coming across [*l'croisement*] and the passing through, the intersection and the dispersal [*l'écartement*],⁸² radiating out [*étoilment*] from within the very di-mension of the world. This would be both the summit and the abyss of a deconstruction of Christianity: the dis-location of the West.)

“Self” defines the element in which “me” and “you,” and “we,” and “they,” can take place. “Self” determines the “as” of Being: if it is, it is *as* [en tant que] it is. It is “in itself” prior to any “ego,” prior to any presentable “property.” It is the “as” of all that is. This is not a presentable property, since it is presentation itself. Presentation is neither a propriety nor a state, but rather an event, the coming of something: of its coming *into the world*, where the “world” itself is the plane [*la géométral*] or the exposing of every coming.

In its coming, that which exists appropriates itself; that is, it is not appropriated, neither by nor into a “self” (which could only preexist what exists by removing and neutralizing the coming in itself). What is born has its “self” *before* self: it has it *there* (which is the meaning of Heidegger’s “Dasein”). *There* means *over-there*, the distance of space-time (it is the body, the world of bodies, the body-world). Its appropriation is its moving [*transport*] and being-moved through [*transpropriation*] this dispersal of the *there*; such is the appropriating-event (“Ereignis”). But its being determined as such does not signify that there is some event in which the “proper self” would spring forth, like a jack-in-the-box, but that the coming is in itself and by itself appropriative as such. (As a result, differencing [*differant*] is in itself the propriety that it opens.) This is why “self” does not preexist (itself). “Self” equals what ex-ists as such.

Thus, insofar as “self,” or “ipseity,” means “by itself,” relation to itself, returning into itself, presence to itself as presence to the “same” (to the sameness of the “as such”), ipseity occurs or happens to itself as coming; and such coming is anticipation, which is neither preexistence nor providence, but instead the unexpected arrival [*sur-venance*], the surprise and the being-placed back [*remise*] into the “to come” as such, *back into what is to come*. “Self” is neither a

past given nor a future given; it is the present of the coming, the presenting present, the coming-*to-be* and, in this way, coming into Being. But *there where* it comes is not “into itself,” as though into the interior of an determined domain; it is “beside itself.”⁸³ *Beside itself* means into the dispersal of the dis-position, into the general element of proximity and distance, where such proximity and distance *are measured against nothing*, since there is nothing that is given as a fixed point of ipseity (before, after, outside the world). Therefore, they are measured according to the dis-position itself.

From the very start, the structure of the “Self,” even considered as a kind of unique and solitary “self,” is the structure of the “with.” Solipsism, if one wants to use this category, is singular plural. Each one is beside-himself insofar as and because he is beside-others. From the very beginning, then, “we” are with one another, not as points gathered together, or as a togetherness that is divided up, but as a being-with-one-another. Being-with is exactly this: that Being, or rather that *to be* neither gathers itself as a resultant *commune* of beings nor shares itself out as their common substance. *To be* is nothing that is in-common, but *nothing* as the dispersal where what is in-common is dis-posed and measured, the in-common as the with, the beside-itself of *to be* as such, *to be* transfixed by its own transitivity: *to be* being all beings, not as their individual and/or common “self,” but as *the proximity that disperses [écarte] them*.

Beings touch; they are in con-tact with one another; they arrange themselves and distinguish themselves in this way. Any being that one might like to imagine as not distinguished, not dis-posed, would really be indeterminate and unavailable: an absolute vacancy of Being. This is why the ontological moment or the very order of ontology is necessary. “*To be*” is not the noun of consistency; it is the verb of dis-position. Nothing consists, neither “matter” nor “subject.” In fact, “matter” and “subject” are nothing but two names that are correlates of one another; in their mode of consistency, they indicate the originary spacing of the general ontological dis-position.

As such, then, “being-there” (*Dasein*) is *to be* according to this transitive verbal value of the dis-position. Being-there is [the] dis-posing [of] Being itself as distance/proximity; it is “to make” or “to

let” be the coming of all with all *as such*. *Dasein* (that is, humanity as the index of Being) thus exposes *Being-as-to-be*.

Someone enters a room; before being the eventual subject of a representation of this room, he disposes himself in it and to it. In crossing through it, living in it, visiting it, and so forth, he thereby exposes the disposition—the correlation, combination, contact, distance, relation—of all that is (in) the room and, therefore, of the room itself. He exposes the simultaneity in which he himself participates at that instant, the simultaneity in which he exposes himself just as much as he exposes it and as much as he is exposed in it. He exposes himself. It is in this way that he is [a] “self,” that he is it, or that he becomes it as many times as he enters into the disposition and each time that he does. This “at each time” is not the renewal of the experiences or occurrences of one self-same subject: so long as “I” am “the same,” there will still always need to be an *other* time where I dis-pose myself according to this “sameness.” This, in turn, implies that another time in general—that is, other times, indefinitely—are not only possible, they are real: the “each” of the “each time,” the taking place of the *there* and as *there*, does not involve primarily the succession of the identical; it involves the simultaneity of the different. Even when I am alone, the room is at the same time the room where I am close to, next to, alongside of all its other dispositions (the way it is occupied, how it is passed-through, and so on). One is not in the disposition without being with the other-disposition, which is the very essence of dis-position. These “times” are discontinuous, but they are their being-with-one-another in this discontinuity. “Each time” is the singular-plural structure of the disposition. Therefore, “each time mine” signifies primarily “each time his or hers,” that is, “each time *with*”: “*mineness*” is *itself only a possibility that occurs in the concurrent reality of being-each-time-with*.

The world, however, is not a room into which one enters. It is also impossible to start from the fiction of someone who is alone and finds him- or herself in the world: in both cases, the very concept of the world is destroyed. This concept is that of being-with as originary. That is, if the meaning (of Being) is dis-position as

such, then this is being-with as meaning: the structure of *with* is the structure of the *there*. Being-with is not added on to being-there; instead, to be there is to be with, and to be with makes sense—by itself, with nothing more, with no subsumption of this meaning under any other truth than that of the with.

In being-with and as being-with, *we* have always already begun to understand meaning, to understand ourselves and the world as meaning. And this understanding is always already completed, full, whole, and infinite. We understand ourselves infinitely—ourselves and the world—and nothing else.



“With” is neither mediate nor immediate. The meaning that we understand, insofar as we understand it, is not the product of a negation of Being, a negation destined to represent itself to us as meaning, nor is it the pure and simple ecstatic affirmation of its presence. “With” neither goes from the same to the other, nor from the same to the same, nor from the other to the other. In a certain sense, the “with” does not “go” anywhere; it does not constitute a process. But it is the closeness, the brushing up against or the coming across, the almost-there [*l’à-peu-près*] of distanced proximity.

When we try to evaluate this closeness (as if in a marketplace or railway station, or in a cemetery, we were to ask what are the meanings and values of these hundreds of people, of their restlessness and passivity), it comes out as frantic or distraught. But the meaning of the “with,” or the “with” of meaning, can be evaluated only in and by the “with” itself, an experience from which—in its plural singularity—nothing can be taken away.

In understanding ourselves, we understand that there is nothing to understand; more precisely, this means that there is no appropriation of meaning, because “meaning” is the sharing of Being. There is no appropriation; therefore, there is no meaning. This is itself our understanding. This is not a dialectical operation (according to which “to understand nothing” would be “to understand everything”), nor is it a matter of turning it into the abyss (to understand the nothing of this same understanding), nor is it a re-

flexivity (to understand, for all understanding, that we understand ourselves); instead, it is all these replayed together in another way: as *ethos* and *praxis*.

To put it in Kantian terms, if pure reason is practical *by itself* (and not by reference to and according to any reverence for some transcendental norm), this is because it is essentially “common reason,” which means the “with” *as* reason, as foundation. There is no difference between the ethical and the ontological: the “ethical” exposes what the “ontological” disposes.

Our understanding (of the meaning of Being) is an understanding *that* we share understanding between us and, at the same time, *because* we share understanding between us: between us all, simultaneously—all the dead and the living, and all beings.