TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

PHILIP ARMSTRONG

. . . l'héritage de Blanchot. L'héritage qui ne nous laisse pourtant rien à hériter.

—JEAN-LUC NANCY

Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Disavowed Community* lies open here like an open wound. Marked by injury and hurt, punctuated by cuts and scars and incisions, this is not a book whose argument is offered as a diagnosis to an illness or to a prior condition (elsewhere, Nancy addresses the history of philosophy's ambivalent relation to its own "medical" claims to "diagnose" a "sickness" or "crisis," a whole pathology of thought or orthopedics in which, at least since Nietzsche, philosophy also seeks to diagnose itself). For the text is a wound that never fully heals and for which there remains no possibility of a conclusive result or final cure. There is nothing here that serves to suture over the laceration, nothing that guarantees the text's immunity from infection or protection from contamination. *The Disavowed Community* is a book everywhere characterized by this sense of exposure and susceptibility, liability and vulnerability—or rather, this is a text characterized by a sense of torn intimacy. Indeed, Nancy refers both to this "sickness" (in relation to Kierkegaard) and to this very "tearing," a term with strong echoes in the writings of both Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot, his closest interlocutors in the pages that follow.

At first glance, *The Disavowed Community*, first published in French in 2014, offers itself as a close reading of Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community*,

a relatively slim volume first published in 1983.¹ In fact, the reading is close enough that it would be instructive for the reader to have a copy of Blanchot's book available in order to follow more closely the exchanges and cross-references between the two texts. Nancy's book thus contributes to the growing reception of Blanchot's writings, setting out a reading of one of Blanchot's texts that has received relatively little critical attention or extensive interpretation, at least when compared to other of Blanchot's writings. However, any suggestion that Nancy's *The Disavowed Community* is simply a close reading of *The Unavowable Community* must also address a much more complex background and an intricate series of references, circumstances, and "conversations" that both texts engage in in different and decisive ways. Given that this larger background informs both of these texts and shapes Nancy's reading of Blanchot—and often in a manner that is more allusive and tacit than direct—my aim in this brief introduction is to offer the reader some initial sense of this larger background, some preliminary guidelines and references for addressing the circumstances in which both texts were written.

A few months before Blanchot published *The Unavowable Community* in December 1983, Jean-Christophe Bailly had edited a volume of *Aléa*. Published by the Christian Bourgois publishing house, the fourth issue of the journal was titled "La communauté, le nombre" ("Community, Number").² In his brief preface, Bailly notes that the volume is devoted to "community" situated in light of "imaginable human numbers," and notably in an increasingly global context where "the panorama of settling accounts [*règlements de compte*] is distressing," a provocation to which the authors included had been invited to respond. Blanchot refers to the volume of *Aléa* in *The Unavowable Community*, both obliquely—he refers to the mass demonstration held in response to the assassination of protesters by the police in 1962 at the Charonne metro station precisely in terms of "number"—and overtly, since it was in this same volume that he had encountered Nancy's "La communauté désœuvrée," which had been included as the opening essay.³ A revised version of Nancy's essay forms the first chapter of *The Inoperative Community*, published three years later in 1986.⁴ Indeed, it was in relation to Nancy's essay in *Aléa* that Blanchot had undertaken, at least in part, to write *The Unavowable Community* in the first place, prompting Nancy to take note of the speed with which Blanchot responded to his

article and published his text. Nancy recalls “the feeling of bewilderment produced at the time by the fact that Blanchot, in the space of only several months, wrote a book in order to respond to a single essay, and that he published it in the same year (1983) as the article, writing as if responding to a sense of urgency.” In the pages that follow, Nancy also suggests that Blanchot’s book was written as “a response or rejoinder—in many ways, as a riposte” to his initial essay. In another context, he writes: “I was also gripped by the fact that Blanchot’s response was simultaneously an echo, an amplification and a riposte, a reservation, and, for that matter, in some ways a reproach.”⁵ Nancy’s *The Disavowed Community* is not then simply a close reading of Blanchot’s book. Given the more than thirty-year span between the publication of Blanchot’s *The Unavowable Community* and Nancy’s *The Disavowed Community*—a distance that is raised with some insistence in the pages that follow—Nancy’s book is the eventual and somewhat belated response to Blanchot’s own response to Nancy’s earlier essay, for which Bailly’s title for the *Aléa* volume provides the initial motivation and provocation (Nancy writes that Bailly’s title, “with its beautiful lexical improvisation whose secret only he knows,” is “already a text, already an act of writing, increasing in number, summoning writing”).⁶

What are the circumstances that provoked this initial exchange between the two authors? With its focus on community, the argument of Nancy’s early essay and its revised version in *The Inoperative Community* is one of the most widely discussed aspects of Nancy’s writings, leading to numerous commentaries.⁷ Suffice it to remark that Nancy rethinks the opposition established by Tönnies between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* while refusing any return to an original, harmonious, or transparent community, understood in its premodern sense—those lost communities that were said to exist prior to “society,” those communities that are said to have lost “the immanence and the intimacy of a communion.”⁸ As Nancy writes, in the desire for locating community’s mythical origins:

The lost, or broken, community can be exemplified in all kinds of ways and by all kinds of paradigms: the natural family, the Athenian city, the Roman Republic, the first Christian community, corporations, communes, or brotherhoods—always it is a matter of a lost age in which community was woven of tight, harmonious, and infrangible bonds and in which above all it played back to itself, through its institutions, its

rituals, and its symbols, the representation, indeed the living offering, of its own immanent unity, intimacy and autonomy.⁹

In this sense, Nancy seeks to rethink all forms of community defined, governed, or founded by an essence, substance, transcendent source, or organicist motif, which he will come to phrase in terms of an “immanentism” in which the identity of the community is understood as fully transparent and self-present to itself. Nevertheless, instead of turning to another term to replace “community,” Nancy remarks, “It is a matter rather of thinking community, that is, of thinking its insistent and possibly still *unheard* demand, beyond communitarian models or remodelings.”¹⁰ We may say that community is what we have, but not as a utopian projection or idea: “Community, far from being what society has crushed or lost, is *what happens to us*—question, waiting, event, imperative—in the wake of [à partir de] society.”¹¹ In short, rather than moving beyond community, we remain “entangled” in community’s “meshes.” At the same time, writing in the early ’80s, Nancy is also responding to the collapse of communism (well before the collapse registered by the events of 1989), in other words, the “real” communism that enacts its own immanentism through its collective self-determination and through the production and self-reproduction of a people and their humanity. Instead of being founded on identity, essence, substance, and interiority, community now becomes a question of exteriority, finite ex-istence, ec-stasis, exposure. Which is also to say—and here Nancy registers his closest debts to Blanchot—a communism “which excludes (and is excluded from) any already constituted community,” a communism, in Blanchot’s own words, that thus remains “without a heritage.”¹²

If Nancy’s emphasis on community foregrounds his distance from those whose writings he is closest to (most notably, Jacques Derrida and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe), in later work this emphasis on community opens toward a wide range of related terms—the common, communism, being-in-common, being-with, being-together, living-together, we, compearance, appearance-with, co-appearing, to name a few. Nevertheless, *The Disavowed Community* should also suggest ways in which the displacements, proximities, and distances between these various terms are nowhere reducible to a linear trajectory in Nancy’s thinking, a trajectory in which community, in a sense, initiates a series of ontological and political interrogations from which it is eventually effaced or withdraws. Indeed, these terms together foreground

the increasingly complex ways in which philosophy, ontology, politics, and “the political” become increasingly displaced and intricately woven across Nancy’s writings, for which *The Inoperative Community* establishes some initial conditions and for which *The Disavowed Community* offers a recent and compelling response.

Three other aspects of Nancy’s original essay in *Aléa* are important to recall. First, Nancy situates his essay in part as the outcome of a yearlong seminar he had just taught on the writings of Bataille, where emphasis had been placed on Bataille’s “politics.”¹³ In relation to Bataille, Nancy recalls: “I had, very specifically, been looking in Bataille for new elements untouched by fascism or communism, and equally free of democratic or republican individualism.”¹⁴ Given Blanchot’s close friendship with Bataille (they had met in 1940, remaining close until Bataille’s death in 1962), a significant aspect of this initial exchange takes place around Nancy’s reading or *misreading* of Bataille (Nancy himself acknowledges “Blanchot’s resistance to the way I addressed Bataille,” suggesting “Blanchot undoubtedly disapproved of the way I had read Bataille”). This (mis)reading turns around different emphases on Bataille’s “politics” within different phases of his writings (a concern with politics that is considerably more prominent and widely discussed today than it was in the early ’80s).¹⁵ If *The Unavowable Community* reads as a forceful if somewhat oblique response to Nancy’s early essay, a significant aspect of *The Disavowed Community* is to respond to Blanchot’s own presentation of Bataille’s writings, which includes both the references to a “community of lovers” to which Nancy outlines a critical response and a response to Bataille’s references to sacrifice and sacrificial death. In this way, the exchange between Blanchot and Nancy offers the reader a compelling contribution to the growing reception of Bataille’s work, and notably around the reception of these writings in relation to different phases of Bataille’s writing, to rethinking fascism within the postwar French context, to rethinking questions of community (the opening epigraph to *The Unavowable Community* is Bataille’s affirmation of “the community of those who do not have a community”), and to rethinking a “communist exigency” shared, in ultimately different ways, by both Blanchot and Nancy (among others).¹⁶

Second, as Bailly notes in his preface to the *Aléa* volume, Nancy’s original essay coincides with the recent lectures and research undertaken at the Centre de Recherches et d’Études Philosophiques sur le Politique, the center

in Paris that Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy had created in 1980 and in connection to which the second volume of texts, *Le retrait du politique*, had also just been published in 1983 (*Rejouer le politique* had been published in 1981).¹⁷ Nancy's essay in *Aléa* is part of this broader reconsideration of what he and Lacoue-Labarthe will term a "*retrait*" of the political (without acknowledging the center or its publications, Blanchot also refers to this same term in *The Unavowable Community*), a term that suggests at once a retreat of the political, in the sense of its withdrawal, and the necessity of re-treating the political, in the sense of retracing its contours. Nancy's essay is also part of a larger reconfiguring of the political that came out of the "Political Seminar" organized by Lacoue-Labarthe and Christopher Fynsk during the "Les fins de l'homme" conference, the conference on the work of Derrida held at Cerisy in 1980, the proceedings of which were published a year later. The center in Paris was in many ways a continuation of that earlier seminar.¹⁸ Combined with "Les fins de l'homme" conference, the center's work and publications frame both Nancy's original essay as well as Blanchot's response.

Third, and perhaps more to the point, Nancy had not only cited Blanchot in the essay for *Aléa* but also redeployed and inflected a prominent term from Blanchot's own writings, evident in Nancy's title, "*La communauté désœuvrée*." This reference to *désœuvrement*—variously translated as unworking or inoperativity—becomes the key term through which Nancy addresses his rethinking of the "immanentism" of community, the argument for which his book *The Inoperative Community* is perhaps most well known. A significant aspect of *The Disavowed Community* is Nancy's response to Blanchot's claim that "unworking" always demands a "work," something that Blanchot claims Nancy overlooks in his rethinking of community. Again, any reading and reception of Nancy's text will have to address the way he responds to Blanchot's rejoinder concerning the question of "work" and "unworking," and to do so in a way that touches on—or that refuses—their dialectical reconciliation. One might even argue that Nancy's entire reading of Blanchot hinges on this question of the dialectic, which includes how to translate Derrida's translation of the Hegelian *Aufhebung* (elevation, lifting up, conservation, negation, abolishing, suspending, sublation) as *la relève*, a term that Nancy frequently employs in the pages that follow to characterize Blanchot's thinking of both work and unworking, as well as his articulation of politics and love. One might further argue that

any reading of Nancy's reading of Blanchot (and of Bataille's references to sacrifice) turns on how this dialectical *relève* is played out in Nancy's argument—and then how, as it were, Blanchot's own (re)reading of "Nancy"¹⁹ will also play out over precisely this same problematic (in what sense does Blanchot's text reinforce this dialectic? in what sense does it unravel and refuse it?).²⁰

Whether considered as a "response," "rejoinder," or "riposte," whether "echo," "amplification," "reservation," or "reproach" to his initial essay, Nancy's response to Blanchot in *The Disavowed Community* is informed by this larger background, these larger circumstances shaping his (mis)reading of Bataille and Blanchot.²¹ At the same time, Nancy repeatedly acknowledges in the pages that follow the unusual nature of Blanchot's text in comparison with his other writings, including the way Blanchot simply quotes and reprints a previously published review of Duras's *The Malady of Death* (where it is situated in relation to Levinas) without ever acknowledging it as a source.²² Arguably the same can be said of Nancy's own text. For if *The Disavowed Community* is not a book of essays characteristic of much of Nancy's published work, and if it is not exactly like the monographic studies of individual philosophers characteristic of many of his early publications, it tends to stand out both for his reflexive insistence on rethinking his own earlier work (a rare move within Nancy's voluminous writings) and for its conspicuous attempt to begin to articulate a reading that has clearly haunted Nancy for some time. At the same time, apart from one closely related essay, "Intellectuals under Scrutiny," also from the early '80s, *The Disavowed Community* offers a reading of Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community* that does not seek to take into account other of Blanchot's writings.²³ Even though he also responds extensively in the pages that follow to Blanchot's use of Marguerite Duras's récit, *The Malady of Death* (published in 1982), Nancy does not seek to address either the generation of writers close to Blanchot (Dionys Mascolo, Robert Antelme, Jean Schuster, and Duras herself) whose collaborations and political engagements around rethinking community and communism ("la recherche d'un communisme de pensée"), the signing of the "Manifeste des 121," or the writers' committees they established collectively during May '68, together also inform Blanchot's thinking and response to Nancy in *The Unavowable Community*.²⁴ Similarly, Nancy does acknowledge in a footnote some of the secondary literature on Blanchot's text, but again he does not intend to address these

readings and interpretations in any significant way. *The Disavowed Community* is thus exclusively focused on Blanchot's initial exchange with "Nancy," and then on outlining a response to this exchange thirty years later—at once a reading, an interpretation, an engagement, an "infinite conversation," at times a settling of accounts and a critique, perhaps a "deconstruction," but above all not a "trial." How exactly to characterize Nancy's argument will no doubt become a significant measure of any reading or interpretation of his text.

In the end, in addressing this earlier exchange between Blanchot and Nancy, one might argue that *The Disavowed Community* can be usefully described as an initial mapping out of the displacements and itineraries in Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community* that open toward Blanchot's writings more generally—and Nancy will insist here on the preliminary nature of his book's argument, even as he comes to quite specific conclusions and criticisms. These displacements and itineraries would include retracing what Blanchot himself describes as a "conversion" in his thinking, in other words, a "conversion" that moves between journalistic, political, and literary engagements from the 1930s on—which also includes the Blanchot who writes during "the day" and the Blanchot who writes "at night."²⁵ In this sense, *The Disavowed Community* participates in this renewed and widespread attention to Blanchot's "politics" within the prewar and postwar French context, and in ways that respond to a number of related terms—not just communism and fascism but anarchism, aristocratic anarchism, community, friendship, fraternity—all now situated within a widespread and "profound disenchantment with democracy" since the early '80s when the exchange was first initiated.²⁶ One of the most lasting and incisive contributions of *The Disavowed Community* is to rethink what exactly constitutes "politics" and "the political" in Blanchot's thinking, which not only includes the ways in which community and politics are at once "avowed" and "disavowed" but whether and in what sense "politics" and "the political" are even appropriate for thinking this avowal and disavowal in the first place. In this context, one might note that the early reception of Nancy's *The Disavowed Community* in French has already provoked, even exacerbated, this renewed attention to Blanchot's "politics."²⁷

So *The Disavowed Community* offers itself as a reading of Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community*, even as Nancy is quick to point out in the open-

ing lines that “its subject takes shape in a way that far surpasses both [Blanchot’s] book itself and its author”; in other words, “it concerns our age’s preoccupation with the common character of our existence.” And as we know, it offers a reading of Blanchot’s text thirty years after Blanchot published his text. At the same time, *The Disavowed Community* appears to take place in the interstices of several exchanges, dialogues, and conversations, sometimes mutual but sometimes made up of misrecognitions and interruptions—a text composed of explicit references and identifications but also of allusions, innuendo, suggestive asides, elisions, parataxes, evoking a world of missing dates, missing names, missed encounters.

Nancy’s repeated acknowledgment of this expanse of time between Blanchot’s text and his own is both disarming and deceptive, for it is clear that the intervening years do not simply testify to Nancy’s acknowledged inability to respond to Blanchot’s book, based on intimidation, misunderstanding, or the genuine difficulties and challenge of knowing how to circumscribe Blanchot’s original argument. This is especially true for its second part, where Blanchot turns to his reading of May ’68, Duras’s récit, and rethinking Bataille’s “community of lovers.” Those intervening thirty years are not simply absent but deeply instructive, also informing and shaping Nancy’s belated response in numerous and significant ways.²⁸

Here we might begin to recall some of Nancy’s publications since 1984 that can also be read as informing the argument of *The Disavowed Community*. Again, such a schematic overview is hopefully useful to a reader unfamiliar with Nancy’s writings, especially given the ways in which references to these other texts remain largely implicit in the pages that follow. To put it in slightly different terms, rather than the result of overcoming an impasse or inability to respond to Blanchot’s own response adequately, it can be argued that Nancy has been doing nothing else over the past thirty years than preparing himself to write *The Disavowed Community* (again, this would suggest the singular place of the book within Nancy’s writings).

One of the most resonant if also symptomatic episodes comes from 1984, the year after Blanchot’s *The Unavowable Community* was first published. Through the invitation of Michel Haar, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy had been asked to put together one of the prestigious *Les Cahiers de L’Herne* volumes on Blanchot. The failure of that project to be realized—a failure intimately related to the contentious nature of Blanchot’s “politics”—and the impossibility, according to the editors, of finding texts that would do

justice to Blanchot's thinking, became a significant motivation behind the subsequent reception of Blanchot's work, not just by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy but arguably by many others.²⁹ Indeed, it can be argued that the recent proliferation of interest in Blanchot's political writings stems in large measure (and several decades later) from providing a response to this failure and tracing out its critical implications. Elsewhere, Nancy has elaborated on the circumstances surrounding the failed volume, which includes an account of specific letters written to the editors—Blanchot's letter to Roger Laporte about the volume and Dionys Mascolo's letter to Lacoue-Labarthe, both from 1984 and both of which are now included in *Passion politique*, in which Nancy further elaborates on the circumstances surrounding the failed volume.³⁰ The "failure" of that early project both informs and even overdetermines Nancy's desire to address Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community* in the present volume.

Second, the revision of the initial essay from *Aléa* in *The Inoperative Community* includes not just subtle revisions to the original essay but the inclusion of other chapters in the later volume, chapters that already contribute just two years later to reshaping Nancy's response to Blanchot. Specifically, the additional chapters develop references to myth and literary communism (in later editions, to love and history) that are all more or less present in the original essay for *Aléa* but now subject to further critical elaboration. Even though Nancy eventually turns away from the idea of "literary communism" (yet another modification and nuancing of his response to Blanchot), these chapters can be read not only as offering modifications and nuances to his own essay first published in *Aléa* but to Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community*. Combined with later revised editions of *The Inoperative Community* in 1990, 1999, and again in 2004, as well as Nancy's prefaces to translations of the volume into several other languages, his perhaps most well known book already testifies to this continued and sustained concern to respond to Blanchot. More pertinently, in 2001 Nancy wrote "The Confronted Community," the preface to a new Italian edition of Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community*, which he dedicates to Blanchot and which also allowed him to "revisit an episode entailing stakes which I had failed to accurately assess at the time."³¹

Less overtly concerned with rethinking the terms in which Blanchot had engaged his early essay, Nancy also takes up his exchange with Blanchot in more oblique ways in his later project from 1991 with Jean-Christophe

Bailly, published as *La comparution: Politique à venir*; Nancy's essay from this volume is translated as "The Compearance: From the Existence of 'Communism' to the Community of 'Existence'" (one notes here that the closing word in *The Disavowed Community* is *comparutions*, referring us to the "compearances" or "co-appearances" employed in the earlier essay).³² Although Nancy's essay in the volume with Bailly is written in light of the fall of the Berlin wall and has a strong emphasis on Marx rather than on Blanchot, Nancy not only addresses communism in a way that takes up and inflects his earlier reading of Bataille and Blanchot; he also reopens the question of "community" and "number" formulated by Bailly that prompted the earlier exchange in the first place.³³

In addressing these various texts written over the last thirty years, especially for English-speaking audiences, we should also include here Nancy's involvement in the *Community at Loose Ends* volume, based on a conference organized by the Miami Theory Collective and held at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, in 1988.³⁴ If the publication coincides with the increasingly marked and even overdetermined reception of Nancy's writings in English-speaking contexts around the concept of community (*The Inoperative Community* was first translated and published in 1991, three years later), Nancy's essay "Of Being-in-Common," in *Community at Loose Ends*, marks a slight shift in emphasis to a more sustained rethinking of Heidegger's *Mit-sein* (subsequently taken up in Nancy's *Being Singular Plural*), which marks a transition mentioned earlier from emphasis on community to Nancy's concerns with "being-in-common" and "being-with."³⁵ To be sure, the reference to Heidegger was already discernible in the essay in *Aléa*, notably in terms of an emphasis on exteriority, finitude, exposure, what Nancy in the pages that follow describes as "the transcription of Heidegger's *Ek-sistence* and its *aus-sein*, of being-outside, an 'outside' prior to all 'inside,' to all closure of a subjectivity according to the classical schema of being-in-itself," in other words, another way of rewriting Bataille's "ec-stasy."³⁶ In light of these different emphases, a significant aspect of *The Disavowed Community* is less a "return" to the question of community (even though references to being-with are barely discernible here) than a critical re-elaboration of the ways in which community as a term haunts Nancy's writings, for which, I suggest, the *Community at Loose Ends* volume continues to play an important role.

If the thirty-year period between Blanchot's response and Nancy's response to Blanchot is marked by texts and engagements that inform and

shape Nancy's belated response in numerous ways, readers familiar with Nancy's writings will also encounter a number of terms and concepts in *The Disavowed Community* that Nancy has elaborated at some length in other writings. To name but two, these include an extensive discussion of myth, a term he transforms from Bataille and extends toward a thought of its paradoxical "demythologization" or "interruption." Already the subject of a chapter in *The Inoperative Community* (Nancy notes there that "myth and community are defined by each other"),³⁷ and a crucial aspect of his work with Lacoue-Labarthe on "Nazi myth," the discussion of myth in *The Disavowed Community* has already led since its publication to a series of recent interviews exploring the term at further length.³⁸ Second, readers of Nancy's more recent writings on religion and the "deconstruction of Christianity" will also recognize in *The Disavowed Community* an aspect of Nancy's thinking that was considerably less apparent in the writings of the early '80s. This includes one of the most unexpected insights of Nancy's reading of *The Unavowable Community*, which seeks to understand the fuller implications of Blanchot's brief aside to the Eucharist and which culminates in what is arguably the most challenging, engaging, if also astonishing aspects of Nancy's reading—how the female figure in Duras's *The Malady of Death* opens toward Isolde, the chthonic Aphrodite, Madame Edwarda, all now culminating in the figure of . . . Christ—a reading that should be of continued interest for feminist readings of the exchange among Blanchot's, Duras's, and Nancy's respective texts.

Finally, in the trajectory in Nancy's thinking from "inoperativity" to "confronted" to "disavowed," all these various references and motifs begin to constitute a preliminary outline for rereading *The Disavowed Community* in light of other texts by Nancy written both before and since the initial exchange with Blanchot in the early '80s. Two figures also loom large in this thirty-year period, further informing any reading of Nancy's book—Lacoue-Labarthe and Derrida. Collaborative projects between Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe testify repeatedly to the importance of Blanchot—the early *Misère de la littérature* volume, in which the preface notes that Blanchot is at the origin of the various essays on writing, literature, and the book, and which included a text by Blanchot as well essays by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy;³⁹ the role that Blanchot plays in *The Literary Absolute* as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy rethink literary fragmentation;⁴⁰ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's own mock dialogue, "*Noli me frangere*," written in

the wake of Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster*, in which "Lothario" and "Ludovico" discuss the limits of fragmentary writing;⁴¹ and Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's collaborations around the question of myth, including their essay "The Nazi Myth" that resonates closely with Nancy's earlier discussions of myth in the *Aléa* essay and then expanded in a chapter in *The Inoperative Community*. Nancy recalls in *The Disavowed Community* that "The Nazi Myth" was first published in 1981 in *Les mécanismes du fascisme*, in other words, before the exchange with Blanchot, leaving open the possibility that Blanchot had read the essay before writing his text on Nancy's essay in *Aléa*.⁴²

It is clear in retrospect that, from the mid-1970s, Lacoue-Labarthe's engagement with the writings of Blanchot was as extensive as Nancy's (Nancy informs us of Lacoue-Labarthe's closer proximity to Blanchot through his friendship with Roger Laporte). With the posthumously published *Ending and Unending Agony: On Maurice Blanchot*, perhaps it is only in retrospect that we now know the full extent of Lacoue-Labarthe's more direct engagement with Blanchot's thinking, even though Blanchot's writings clearly play a prominent role throughout Lacoue-Labarthe's career, and right from the beginning, whether in rethinking the relation between philosophy and literature or in his reading of Heidegger in *La fiction du politique: Heidegger, l'art et la politique*, published in 1988 (we recall that Lacoue-Labarthe's text is dedicated to Blanchot).⁴³ If we refer in broad strokes to Lacoue-Labarthe's extensive collaborations with Nancy addressing different aspects of Blanchot's thought or his own writings on Blanchot, it is because readers of *The Disavowed Community* alone would have little sense of this larger background. At the same time, if Lacoue-Labarthe's writings on Blanchot are never directly referenced in Nancy's book, leaving the reader to decide how much Nancy's reading of Blanchot in this volume takes up or responds to Lacoue-Labarthe's own work, it is perhaps just as curious that, given their close collaboration and willingness to cite one another, Lacoue-Labarthe never refers to the earlier exchange between Blanchot and Nancy, whether in the recent *Ending and Unending Agony* or, to my knowledge, elsewhere.⁴⁴

The second figure here is Derrida, notably the several influential essays Derrida published over the years on Blanchot, culminating in the publication of *Parages* in 1986 (the same year in which *The Inoperative Community* was first published in French, though most of the essays included in the

volume were written between 1976 and 1979).⁴⁵ Again, as in the case of Lacoue-Labarthe, Derrida's writings on Blanchot are cited briefly but never addressed in *The Disavowed Community*, just as it remains extremely curious that Derrida also never refers to the earlier exchange between Blanchot and Nancy, whether in *Parages* or, again to my knowledge, elsewhere, and even when Derrida draws up a new introduction to the *Parages* volume just three years after the publication of Nancy's essay in *Aléa* and Blanchot's response in *The Unavowable Community*. More directly, Derrida's meticulously close readings of Blanchot's texts, combined with strong emphasis on singular terms in Blanchot's work ("pas," "viens," "demeure") is a way of approaching Blanchot's texts that informs Nancy's own manner of reading Blanchot, where emphasis is also placed on a few decisive terms. Whether Nancy's *The Disavowed Community* opens another reading of Derrida's essays on Blanchot is certainly one of the intriguing aspects of Nancy's book (just as Blanchot's references to community, friendship, and fraternity shape Nancy's own differences and well-known disagreements with Derrida around these same concepts). Nancy does acknowledge that his insistence on *writing*—"the community of writing, the writing of community"⁴⁶ that is present from the early essay in *Aléa*—comes from both Derrida and Blanchot together, although again it remains to be seen in what ways this appeal to writing—in other words, to questions of sense or "absent sense"—*distinguishes* these writers rather than constitutes a concern imposed by others or that they merely share in common.⁴⁷ Any assumption that all these authors are "deconstructive" effaces the specificities and singularity of political thinking at stake in the pages that follow.

In a note added to the revised essay from *Aléa* included in *The Inoperative Community*, in which he addresses the background and circumstances surrounding his initial exchange with Blanchot a few years earlier, Nancy refers to all those involved or implicated in these exchanges as a "community," "a community *unavowable* because too *numerous* but also because it does not even know itself, and does not need to know itself—intercalated, alternating, shared texts, like all texts, offering what belongs to no one and returns to everyone: the community of writing, the writing of community."⁴⁸ In one sense, any attempt to read and interpret Nancy's *The Disavowed Community* will find its initial measure—indeed, a measure of "responsibility"—

when situated in light of this community, which is to say, in “what belongs to no one and returns to everyone.” Which is also to say, this community in which the question of avowal and disavowal will not only frame the reception of Nancy’s own text but exposes us once again to “Blanchot’s legacy”—“this legacy, however, that leaves us nothing to inherit.”⁴⁹

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