

FRIENDSHIP, ASYMMETRY, SACRIFICE: BATAILLE AND BLANCHOT

Patrick ffrench

Jacques Derrida's *Politics of Friendship* [*Politiques de l'amitié*] carries within it a hope that friendship conceived as 'familial, fraternalist and andocentric' be interrupted.¹ The *other* friendship, which interrupts the friendship of 'brothers' is extended to *any* other, and anticipates the death of the friend; it is a friendship beyond the grave. The friend speaks to the friend already from beyond the grave, if the friend speaks *to* the friend at all, and the friend responds in a situation of survival and of mourning, if response there is. There are two *politics* (at least) of friendship: that of the brothers, of *man*, on the one hand, and on the other friendship as a rupture with any kind of reciprocity or bond. The other friendship ruins reciprocal exchange; it is not of the order of dialogue or of interlocution: friendship of this kind is synonymous with asymmetry. In the final pages of Derrida's book, this friendship without bond and beyond the bond finds an exemplar in the relation (or the non-relation) of Maurice Blanchot and Georges Bataille, and particularly in the text that Blanchot dedicated to Georges Bataille: *Friendship* [*L'Amitié*] (PF 293). The friendship which interrupts the bond is moreover to be linked, Derrida suggests, to the 'community without community' (48) named by Bataille, and on which Blanchot will write in *The Unknowable Community* [*La communauté inavouable*], in response to Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* [*La communauté désœuvrée*]. *Politics of Friendship* thus addresses, obliquely, a community of friends whose links with each other take the written form of a series of ruptures with community, a series of asymmetrical interventions and responses. Friendship, in this sense, exists in the response or the echo that one text gives to another, where this response responds without answering, and where the echo is already another voice; community is inscribed in or rather across a *disjunctive* network of texts. In this context, can it be said that the text addresses or is addressed to the other? How do these conditions affect the mode of address and the character of critical thought? The reciprocity of non-reciprocity, or in other words, the way in which these texts respond to or echo each other by *not* responding to or echoing each other, has important consequences in terms of what does not return in Blanchot's friendship with Bataille, and in terms of what is not addressed in Bataille's work.

A genealogy of texts thus constitutes this series of interruptions of friendship, leading back to the encounter between Bataille and Blanchot in the early 1940s and to the interplay of their writings, which often refer to 'conversations'; this is taken up again in the 1980s with the 'exchange' between Nancy and Blanchot on community (in which Blanchot's mode of responding to Nancy is to write, partly, on Marguerite Duras' *Maladie de la mort* and on the 'community without community' of May 1968). But the first part of *The Unknowable Community* at least is concerned with the theoretical legacy of Bataille's experiments with community of the pre-war period, the 'secret' society *Acéphale*, the Collège de Sociologie, whose contexts are the precise political conjunctures of the 1930s. Blanchot and Nancy's engagements with Bataille tend, to an extent, to disengage him from these conjunctures.² Blanchot's *Friendship* also, while its various articles can be situated as asymmetrical responses to specific moments in Bataille's writing, disengages these moments from their immediate conjunctures. This dis-engagement or de-description is, however, inherent to the mode of friendship envisaged by both Blanchot and Bataille. Their friendship, otherwise their communication, is one which

withdraws from presence and from immediacy in differing ways. In both withdrawing from immediacy, Blanchot and Bataille's texts (*Friendship* and 'Friendship') seem to gesture towards each other, on either side of the limit of Bataille's death, texts on two sides of a tomb, to form an asymmetrical reciprocity.

BATAILLE, 'FRIENDSHIP'

'Friendship' is the title of the first section of the book *Guilty* [*Le Coupable*], which Bataille began to write on the 5th September 1939, two days after the declaration of war. *Guilty*, the second volume of Bataille's *Summa atheologica* [*La somme athéologique*] would originally have been titled *L'Amitié* [*Friendship*], but for the intervention of Raymond Queneau, Bataille's editor at Gallimard. 'Friendship' is also the title of a collection of fragments published separately in Jean Paulhan's review *Mesures* in April 1940, under the pseudonym *Dianus*. They re-appear in *Guilty*. 'Friendship' is thus textually plural and complex. For Bataille, moreover, the word 'Friendship' is written in a time of war or imminent war.³ Bataille writes it under the threat of war, in the period of the 'drôle de guerre' from September 1939 to March 1940. The manuscripts from which this, and the texts of the published works *Guilty* and *Inner Experience* derive read as part journals, part drafts. They are punctuated by the sound of sirens and the movements of the French army. To read the published works with the fragmentary journals from which they derive (moving between the text and the notes of the *Œuvres Complètes*) is to recognise a difficult tension between what we might term completion [*achèvement*] - the complete and coherent book published, in the case of *Guilty*, four years later - and a writing of incompleteness [*inachèvement*], more closely tied to the 'present time', to the war and to Bataille's activities during it, outside the time of writing, yet strangely also withdrawing from this moment through the very attention to it. Two temporalities of reading Bataille suggest themselves here, two chronologies: the chronology of the publication of books and the reading of finished works (works which nonetheless announce their incompleteness as a principle), and on the other hand the daily chronology of writing, close to the event yet in that proximity announcing a withdrawal. 'Friendship', in this instance, is proximate to the event. The term itself, in one of its instances, designates a relation to the other in the time of war, a relation not of identification with 'la patrie', or of support for the political cause of France against Germany, but of complicity with the victim (of destruction, of flight) in sacrifice and tragedy; complicity also with the executioner. If friendship designates a *political* relation, it is not of the order of *politics*, strictly speaking (where this denotes civic or consensual relations and discourses). If in the writing of 'Friendship' Bataille engages with the political, it is not in the same spirit as, for example, his involvement with the pre-war street-action groups of *Masses* or *Contre-attaque* (whose textual mode is the tract), nor in the spirit of analysis which informed the writings on fascism ('The Psychological Structure of Fascism', 'The Problem of the State'), nor in the spirit of public address which distinguish the lectures for the Collège de Sociologie ('The Sacred Conjunction'). In this sense, Bataille *withdraws* from politics from *Guilty* onwards. However, this withdrawal of writing from a public mode of address strangely opens up the dimension in which the addressee exists; previously distinguished by the group, the 'secret society'⁴ or the Collège, Bataille's *withdrawn* or *abandoned* writing addresses the friend. 'Friendship' thus names a relation to the event and to the other which is not of the order of intervention in political debate.⁵ In Bataille's politics of friendship the writer is radically separated from the community, particularly from the community of the nation at war. He will not therefore speak of war, although this is not the sign of a pacifism:

I will not speak of war but of mystic experience. I am not indifferent to the war. I would willingly give my blood, my exhaustion, and, what's more, those moments of savagery which we reach when around death... But how could I for an instant forget my ignorance, and that I am lost in some dark cellar corridor... This world, a planet and the starry sky, are for me nothing but a tomb...

Je ne parlerai pas de guerre, mais d'expérience mystique. Je ne suis pas indifférent à la guerre. Je donnerais volontiers mon sang, mes fatigues, qui plus est, ces moments de sauvagerie auxquels nous accédons au voisinage de la mort... Mais comment-oublierai-je un instant mon ignorance et que je suis perdu dans un couloir de cave? Ce monde, une planète et le ciel étoilé ne sont pour moi qu'une tombe...⁶

Beyond the immediacy of war and its violence there is a more general abandonment which so to speak installs the writer *already* within the grave. From this viewpoint, the illusion of communal relations is annihilated:

A sort of hallucinatory darkness makes me slowly lose my head, leading my entire being to bend towards the impossible. Towards I don't know what warm, flourishing, mortal explosion... by which I escape from the illusion of solid relations between myself and the world.

Une sorte d'obscurité hallucinante me fait lentement perdre la tête, me communique une torsion de tout l'être tendu vers l'impossible. Vers on ne sait quelle explosion chaude, fleurie, mortelle... par où j'échappe à l'illusion de rapports solides entre le monde et moi.⁷

If a politics of friendship is adumbrated here, it is on one hand through a withdrawal from politics but on the other hand a corresponding attention to the 'political' relation of complicity with the other which is brought out in this time of war, but not only by this. This friendship, or this community, is founded on the ruins of community, of a consensual *world*. Furthermore, as often in Bataille's work, the possibility of community or of a relation to the other is considered bearing in mind the fact *that he writes*. It is *in and through writing* that the possibility of friendship survives the abandonment of the present: 'These notes link me like Ariadne's thread to my fellow human beings and the rest seems vain to me...' ['Ces notes me lient comme un fil d'Ariane à mes semblables et le reste me paraît vain'].⁸ Such a writing cannot be the object of spoken communication, between friends: 'But I couldn't read them to any of my friends. Whence I feel like I'm writing from inside a tomb.' ['Je ne pourrais cependant les faire lire à aucun de mes amis. Par là, j'ai l'impression d'écrire à l'intérieur de la tombe'].⁹ The friendship designated by the title is thus not that of a community of living readers, friends of the living author, who might be involved in a community of speech or in something like a dialogue. It is not directed to a closed set of readers within an intellectual community, secret group or college, but to readers to come, readers who will arrive after the death of the writer.¹⁰ The writing of 'Friendship' is thus distinct in the mode of its address from Bataille's pre-war writings which were more often than not destined for spoken delivery to an assembled community, or to the specific discursive community of a periodical. We should think of these texts as writings of withdrawal from diurnal, discursive communication, projected beyond the ruin of the present community to a community of readers *to come*, written from beyond the grave or from within it and holding within them the anticipated death of the friend who writes. Any publication before the event of the death of the writer, which this writing holds within it and anticipates, will thus be a compromise, a failure: 'I would like these notes to be published after my death, but it's possible that I will live long enough for them to be published in my lifetime. This idea makes me suffer.' ['je voudrais qu'on publie [ces notes] quand je serai mort, mais il se peut que je vive assez longtemps, que la publication ait lieu de mon vivant. Je souffre à cet idée'].¹¹ The writing of friendship, beyond politics, engages with the political space of Derrida's *to come*, the space of that anticipated mourning which constitutes friendship in his account of it.

Anticipation, the Derridean *to come*,¹² find their equivalent in Bataille's experience of incompleteness - a principle which informs the form of his writing, his relation to the political, and his experience of war and of loss, and which informs and is proximate also to Blanchot's notion of *désœuvrement* and Derrida's thematics of the disjuncture (*disjonction*) of the present: 'From the vertiginous slope which I'm climbing up, I now perceive truth founded on incompleteness' ['De la pente vertigineuse que je gravis, j'aperçois maintenant la vérité fondée sur l'inachèvement...'].¹³ Against Hegel's hypothetical 'edifice' of human knowledge, based on the postulation of its completion or closure, Bataille poses Nietzsche's love of an 'ignorance in relation to the future',¹⁴ and this joyful ignorance, for Bataille, finds itself most explicitly realised and revealed in the time of war: 'Wartime

reveals the incompleteness of history to the point that it is shocking to die a few days before the end' ['Un temps de guerre révèle l'inachèvement de l'histoire au point qu'il est choquant de mourir quelques jours avant la fin...'].¹⁵ Nietzsche's (affirmation of) ignorance in relation to the future, or, in different terms, the incompleteness of history, parallels the latter's affirmation of friendship not as the love of the next man (*Nebenmensch*) but of the 'most distant'. Bataille writes: 'The destiny of men had met with pity, morality and the most divergent attitudes: anguish or often enough even horror; it had hardly been met with friendship. Until Nietzsche...' ['La destinée des hommes avait rencontré la pitié, la morale et les attitudes les plus opposées: l'angoisse ou même assez souvent l'horreur: elle n'avait guère rencontré l'amitié. Jusqu'à Nietzsche...'].¹⁶ The friendship which Bataille designates with the title of this text is thus intimately tied to the time of war and the uncertainty with regard to the future which it imposes. The affirmation of incompleteness, which war reveals, parallels the projection of the friend beyond the present, outside the present community of friends to whom any direct spoken communication would be destined.

BLANCHOT, *FRIENDSHIP*

Bataille's 'Friendship' elaborates friendship as an intimate relation with the friend from beyond the grave. It elaborates this in a context of imminent bombardment and invasion, of a threat to continued existence. *On the other side of the tomb* Blanchot's *Friendship* is both a response to and an echo of this threat and this voice from the tomb.¹⁷ It develops its response and its echo not as a *commentary* on Bataille, nor as the second voice in a dialogue, but through its attention to a community of other texts. It repeats without repeating, cites without citing and echoes in a different voice Bataille's already multiple title 'Friendship', and includes within itself a text also titled 'Friendship' written as a form of obituary, subsequent to Bataille's death in 1962¹⁸ (in which, however, Bataille is barely named). Outside this text which is specifically intended as a writing of survival and mourning, the book *Friendship* inscribes its asymmetrical relation to Bataille in a number of ways.¹⁹

The first article, 'The Birth of Art' ['Naissance de l'art'], considers Bataille's book *La Peinture préhistorique: Lascaux ou la naissance de l'art* (Skira, 1955), on the prehistoric cave paintings of Lascaux. Here Blanchot announces his own concern with distant beginnings, proximity and distance, appearance and presence. He reads Bataille's *Lascaux*, for example, as introducing us into 'a space of intimate knowledge' ['un espace d'intime connaissance'].²⁰ This intimacy is problematised, however, by the final words of the paragraph, in which Blanchot comments on the power of art, 'which is near us everywhere and all the more so for vanishing from us' ['qui partout nous est proche, d'autant plus qu'il nous échappe' (A 10)]. The most intimate is also the most distant.²¹ Immediacy, intimacy, are interrupted and withdrawn to an infinite distance. Our experience of Lascaux, as read by Blanchot, parallels Bataille's withdrawal of his friendship, and of his writing, from the near-at-hand, and their communication 'from inside the tomb'.²² The choice to begin with an account of the distant birth of art which veils itself anticipates the mourning of the friend, Bataille, and the sentiment of proximity interrupted by infinite distance which his death imposes. Further into the essay, Blanchot notes that the sentiment inspired by Lascaux, and by *Lascaux* is that of the proximity, the closeness, of this distant birth of art. But he then deflects this 'proximity' towards the term *presence*, and more precisely, *appearance*. The paintings of Lascaux are close to us in their spectral appearance on the walls of the cave. This appearance of Lascaux is moreover, instantaneous and fragile, on the point of being effaced. It is an appearance 'made visible by the instantaneous rupture of the night' ['rendues visible(s) par l'ouverture instantanée de la nuit' (A 16)]. The figuration of the instantaneous illumination of the night must (cannot not) introduce the spectral apparition of Bataille.²³ As such the presence of Bataille in this article, through a reading of Lascaux as

an anticipated mourning of Bataille, creates a 'strange feeling of presence' ['étrange sentiment de présence' (A 16)] or imposes 'being as non-presence' ['l'être comme non-présence' (A 18)]. Blanchot's text is scanned by a constant gesture of interruption - proximity without proximity, distance without distance: proximity with distance, presence of non-presence. It suggests a version of friendship, the version of friendship to which the book is dedicated, as intimacy interrupted by infinite distance.²⁴

A further series of disjunctive echoes and relations of relay are performed in Blanchot's essay on Louis René des Forêt's novel *Le Bavard*, where the theme of silence and the withdrawal from speech is predominant. Here these questions are enmeshed with those of speaking, responding, writing and writing on. Blanchot recalls, at the opening of this article, a conversation with Bataille a few days before his death:

I am not going to do the 'work of the critic' here. I would even have given up, in a move I don't have to explain, on any accounting which might appear to be a commentary, if I had not recalled a few words that were spoken to me a little before his death by Georges Bataille on *Le bavard*; this tale appeared to him as one of the most devastating ever written; he felt it to be close to him like a truth which slides away and which pulls you with it. This was one of the last books he read, and, since he almost lacked any desire to write, knowing how much I too was affected by the tale, he asked me if one day I might not have occasion to speak of it. I kept silent. I must try to respond to this silence which is common to both of us now, but which only I remember, by offering something like a continuation of these words between us.

Je ne ferai pas ici "œuvre de critique". J'aurais même renoncé, par un mouvement sur lequel je n'ai pas à expliquer, à toute parole qui puisse paraître de commentaire, si je ne me rappelais quelques mots qui me furent dits, peu de temps avant sa mort, par Georges Bataille sur Le bavard: ce récit lui paraissait l'un des plus bouleversants qui aient été écrits; il le sentait proche de soi, comme est proche une vérité qui glisse et vous entraîne dans le glissement; ce fût peut-être l'une de ses dernières lectures; mais comme lui-même n'avait presque plus le désir d'écrire, il me demanda, sachant combien ce récit me touchait, moi aussi, s'il ne m'arriverait pas un jour d'en parler. Je gardai le silence. Ce silence qui nous est commun aujourd'hui, mais dont je suis seul à me souvenir, je dois essayer d'y répondre en donnant comme une suite à cet entretien. (A 137)

Bataille's proximity to Des Forêt's text was experienced, according to Blanchot, 'like a truth that slides away'. Once again we have the incidence of a proximity or a presence contaminated by a withdrawal, a slipping away. Bataille effectively commissions Blanchot to write, after his death, a text on Des Forêt's *Le bavard* (or so Blanchot suggests), and Blanchot's essay is a response to that demand, after keeping silent. However, his response immediately problematises itself as a 'text on *Le Bavard*'. It is at the same time a continuation of the 'entretien' with Bataille, and a response to a shared silence; not only the silence imposed by the death of Bataille, but a silence of withdrawal and discretion, a resistance to 'speaking about', to commentary, which Blanchot is nevertheless enjoined to betray because of the conversation with Bataille. Blanchot's text is entitled 'Vain Speech' ['La parole vaine'], a title which suggests, coupled with the opening paragraph, that to speak about - a book, a friend, is vain, treacherous. *Co-incidentally*, it also accurately evokes the character of the narration of *Le Bavard*. What is demanded is a response to the silence of discretion, proximity and distance - to friendship - that does not speak *of* it, but speaks *to* it. Withdrawn from this appearance of commentary, and from the explicit community of texts and friends it addresses and is addressed to, Blanchot's text speaks *to* Bataille, establishes a valedictory address to a friend bound in a friendship conceived as radically different from any bond - outside any community of friends or of texts. Blanchot reciprocates, responds, not *to* Bataille, but to a prescription to write from beyond the grave, about a strange, third presence which binds both of them to it without binding them to each other. The prescription is not carried out, however, insofar as Blanchot does not effectively 'speak about *Le bavard*' ('en parler'). Not speaking, not responding (not-speaking, not-responding) is the mode of his response.

Writing on Edmond Jabès' *Book of Questions*, Blanchot might thus also be writing to Bataille:

I had promised to say nothing about Edmond Jabès' book, about his books (I have the same tendency to silence with regard to certain austere, even withdrawn works, works which are nevertheless prematurely made clamorous, seized by a strange fame and thus reduced to a significance related to their class, group or use). There are thus works that are confided to our discretion. We do them wrong in pointing to them, or more justly, we steal them away from their space, which is that of reserve and friendship.

Du livre, des livres d'Edmond Jabès, je m'étais promis de ne rien dire (même penchant au silence à l'égard de certains ouvrages austères, voire retirés, mais prématurément ébruités, saisies par une bizarre renommée et ainsi réduites à une signification de classe, de groupe ou d'usage). Il y a ainsi des œuvres qui se confient à notre discrétion. Nous leur faisons tort en les désignant, ou, plus justement, nous les enlevons à leur espace qui est celui de la réserve et de l'amitié. (A 252; emphasis added)

In textual terms, Blanchot's friendship with Bataille goes by way of the conversation with Bataille continued by Blanchot's practice of 'not writing' (not-writing)²⁵ on other texts, of writing on friendship without naming Bataille, or of echoing/citing Bataille in his own text. At all costs, no commentary.

In the final text, 'Friendship', Blanchot resumes and draws together the coded accounts of friendship offered in the book, this time explicitly in relation to Bataille, who, however, is named only once in the four page article. Blanchot's text addresses the friend through an account of the unrepresentable, and of remembrance. We might qualify, betray, Blanchot's deliberation in the following words: the present contains a trauma which cannot be represented or remembered. Attempts to witness, to attest, to communicate or to monumentalise this trauma (the trauma, the disaster of friendship) are doomed to failure, for the experience which gave rise to it was not one which, in the event, was represented or communicated. Friendship is the disaster, which ruins the exchange of dialogue and imposes the asymmetry of writing on either side of the tomb.

Is one asymmetry cancelled by another? If Bataille's 'Friendship' is written from within a tomb to a friend beyond the grave, does Blanchot's *Friendship*, which withdraws from intimacy and proximity, respond to it, thus restoring symmetry? Paradoxically, it may seem that Blanchot's rendering of Bataille's voice obscures a deeper, other communication, which exceeds the response that Blanchot gives in not(-) responding. *Another* asymmetry, different from that fashioned in Blanchot's *Friendship*, may disturb the equilibrium of this relation either side of or from within and without the tomb.

FRIENDSHIP / SACRIFICE

Friendship is open, withdrawn, reserved. But its reserve is not of the order of closure and of reticence; rather of incompleteness... In Bataille's writing, however, the thematics of incompleteness are enmeshed with those of exposure, with the wound and with the erotic. The incompleteness of history or of the Hegelian project is figured in Madame Edwarda's *cunt* which is rendered as a wound, 'la plaie vive'.²⁶ The incompleteness to which I am exposed, which I experience, in time of war, and the complicity with the other that emerges then *also* qualify the experience of eroticism and of sacrifice. In Bataille's writing lubricity lacerates *like* the knife which opens the throat of the sacrificial victim. If the other friendship interrupts or ruptures the bond, it is because it is open, exposed to the death of the friend. Or, put more

simply, friendship *is* an openness to death, to the wound that the death of the other causes in me. It would be possible to show how the poetics of friendship and of complicity and guilt in Bataille, which echo and reprise those of the gift, of excess and expenditure in Bataille's writing are from the beginning associated with a specific politics of the body and of gender. Consider this affirmation from *Le Coupable*, for example: 'In any accessible reality, in every being, we must look for the sacrificial place, the wound. A being is only touched where it succumbs, a woman under her dress, a god at the throat of a sacrificial animal' ['En toute réalité accessible, en chaque être, il faut chercher le lieu sacrificiel, la blessure. Un être n'est touché qu'au point où il succombe, une femme sous la robe, un dieu à la gorge de l'animal du sacrifice'].²⁷ This politics, which runs throughout Bataille's writing, while it may be tested at specific moments, is one of sacrifice, even while sacrifice in its anthropological or pathological sense might be a specific *moment* of the generalised politics of sacrifice which underlie his work. The body politics of sacrifice is one which privileges the wound as a determining figure. The gender politics which both produces this and is produced by it is one which, more often than not, construes feminine genital sexuality as openness, exposure, wound, site of sacrifice: the body as open rather than closed by the totemic phallus. It is the inverse of a phallogocentrism, but produces the same symbolic economy, where values are symbolically arrayed not around a principle of unity or of symbolic power, but around the lack in the place of such a principle.²⁸

Such an argument would associate the thematics of disjunction, withdrawal and distance which characterise the Derridean and Blanchotian accounts of friendship with an altogether more erotic and in any case bodily register. If friendship, in Bataille's sense, is a sense of complicity in exposure, the friendship 'from beyond the grave', which in 'Friendship' binds him to the suffering other beyond any patriotic or familial bond is also a complicity with the other around the sacrificial site of the body, the wound or the crack, *la fente*.

The friend is *also* the sacrificial victim, the victim of violence or of war, the one whose death is projected, the one who opens in himself a site of sacrifice, a wound, on the basis of which alone communication becomes possible. Bataille also wrote that '[t]he friendship of the saint is a confidence which knows itself to be betrayed. It is the friendship that man has for himself, knowing that he will die, that he could get drunk on dying.' ['L'amitié du saint est une confiance se sachant trahie. C'est l'amitié que l'homme a pour lui-même, sachant qu'il mourra, qu'il pourra s'enivrer de mourir.']²⁹ The friend also seems, in this account, to be the *other man* (the reader of *Madame Edwarda*, of *Story of the Eye*) who is complicit before the exposed 'wound' of the female lover. Friendship as incompleteness, or in another configuration 'an intolerable excess of being' ['un dépassement intolérable de l'être']³⁰ is also staged when Madame Edwarda parts her legs in front of the narrator and says 'See, I am GOD' ['Tu vois - je suis DIEU'].³¹ How can friendship be thought here outside a scene which would feature a community gathered around a sacrificial death, or the frenetic complicity of virile brothers around the feminine which undoes them in the very excess of their fervour?³² Derrida, we can recall, links the whole metaphysics of the *Subject* to the thematics of sacrifice, and implicitly proposes a deconstructive interruption of this mythical scene through a critique of Heidegger and Levinas as (still) endemically humanist in that they 'do not sacrifice sacrifice'.³³ He implies that there is a politics of gender inherent to this economy, with his proposal of the term *carnophallogocentrism*.³⁴ By implication, Bataille's thinking of friendship would remain within the boundaries of a certain humanism, of a community of men and of brothers, as long as the thematics of sacrifice remain tenaciously central to his thought. Might not Blanchot's discretion be overdetermined by this scene in its very blindness to it?

Jean-Luc Nancy, in *The Unsacrificeable*, locates in Bataille's thought an 'obsession' and a 'fascination' with sacrifice, but also a less known 'slow displacement that led Bataille to denounce the *theatre* of sacrifice and consequently to renounce its successful accomplishment'.³⁵ The thinking of friendship, the genealogy of a friendship 'without bond', beyond the community of men or of brothers, which Derrida 'countersigns', after Blanchot and after Bataille, would nevertheless remain bound up with the whole question of the sacrificeable and the unsacrificeable, with the question of to what extent Bataille is able to think beyond the conceptual limits of sacrifice, and particularly the politics of gender it supposes. A note to the second chapter of *Politics of Friendship* suggests Derrida's suspicion of the tenacity of a fraternal friendship in the work of Bataille,

Blanchot and Nancy: ‘There is still perhaps some brotherhood in Bataille, Blanchot and Nancy, and I wonder, in the innermost recess of my admiring friendship, if it does not deserve a little loosening up, and if it should still guide the thinking of the community, be it a community without community or a brotherhood without brotherhood’. [...] Must not the interruption of this mythical scene also, by some supplement to the question concerning what transpires ‘before the law’, at the mythical moment of the father’s murder (from Freud to Kafka) reach and affect the figure of the brothers?’ (PF 48).³⁶ We might postulate here an imaginary, mythical scene behind the thematics of sacrifice in Bataille *but also* those of friendship in Bataille *and* Blanchot - the murder of the father or the sacrifice of the *dying god* - which deconstructive thought would attempt to interrupt. As long as this mythical scene remained uninterrupted, that is, without critique, tenaciously fundamental to Bataille’s thinking, the thinking of friendship would remain *ultimately* within the limits of the fraternal, a friendship precisely with bond (the bond of the sons of the sacrificed God). The friendship ‘beyond bond’ which Derrida and before him Blanchot claim is Bataille’s, is his only to the extent that he is able to think beyond sacrifice and to the extent that sacrificial structure is shown to be interrupted in his thought. The politics of friendship whose legacy Derrida (with reservations) and Blanchot claim from Bataille functions only on the basis of an effacement of the (primal) scene of sacrifice, which bears further critical analysis.

Patrick French is Professor of French at King’s College, London. His principal research interests are in twentieth-century literature and post-war literary and critical theory; in particular: Georges Bataille, the journal *Tel Quel* (1960-1982), the legacy of French theory and the thought of Gilles Deleuze. He has published a number of books, including *The Time of Theory: A History of Tel Quel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), *The Cut: Reading Bataille’s Histoire de l’oeil* (Oxford: British Academy/OUP, 1999), and *After Bataille: Sacrifice, Exposure, Community* (Oxford: Legenda, forthcoming 2007).

NOTES

1. Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship* trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997), viii; hereafter referred to as PF.
2. Can the notion of ‘conjuncture’ survive the disjunction and the opening up performed here by the concept of friendship? What would be at stake is a confrontation of the *situated* character of Bataille’s interventions in and on community in the 1930s (urgency of the struggle against fascism, disengagement of Nietzsche from Nazi ideology, proximity to the ‘non-conformist’ tendency which will later not be foreign to collaboration, hostility to the union of the left, tensions between the ‘mystical’ interests of Bataille and the sociology of Caillois, Leiris...), a confrontation of this historical embeddedness with the withdrawal from immediacy and from (en)closure which is a distinctive trait of Bataille’s thought. This historical moment, moreover, is not a definitive origin: a wider genealogy still, proposed by Derrida, would situate all of these texts and dialogues as ‘countersignatures to the event signed “Nietzsche”’ (PF 47). See *The Politics of Friendship*, Chapters 2 & 3.
3. It is instructive to pay attention to the chronology and the topography, so to speak, of Bataille’s writing in this period. The texts themselves are not written in the order in which they were published (although in itself this is nothing out of the ordinary), and are intertwined and interleaved with each other in complex ways. *Guilty*, for example, was written between September 1939 and Summer 1943, while *Inner Experience*, which itself includes texts anterior to 1939 published in diverse journals, was written for the most part between Winter 1941 and Summer 1942 but published prior to *Guilty*, in 1943. In the order in which they were written *Inner Experience* interrupts *Guilty* after its second chapter, ‘The Distress of the Present’ [‘Les Malheurs du temps présent’]. Later parts of *Guilty*, moreover, were taken from the manuscript from which *Madame Edwarda* derived, the latter text being written, as Bataille revealed, almost in tandem with *Inner Experience*. The first two chapters of *Guilty*: ‘Friendship’ and ‘The Distress of the Present’ derive from a journal kept by Bataille from September 1939 to June 1941. ‘Friendship’ begins in September 1939 to end in March 1940. The second chapter is divided into two parts: ‘The Exodus’ [‘L’Exode’] and ‘Solitude’ [‘La Solitude’] - the title of the first section referring, it would seem, to the mass exodus of the French people away from the German invader. It begins shortly after the onset of the ‘bataille du Nord’ - the German invasion of Holland and Belgium, following closely the German invasion of France, the entry of the German army into Paris on the 4th of June and the signing of the armistice and the end of hostilities (between Vichy France and Germany) on the 22nd June. This flight is also, to an extent, Bataille’s own. The period sees him move from St Germain-en-Laye (from the house where his lover Colette Peignot - *Laure* - died) to Riom-ès-Montagnes, following Denise Rollin (and her husband) with whom he had been living after Colette’s death, back to Paris and then, when the invasion takes place, back via a circuitous route, to the Auvergne, to finally move back to Paris in August 1940, where he will write the shorter text ‘Solitude’.
4. Cf. Derrida: ‘Those who love only in cutting ties are the uncompromising friends of solitary singularity. They invite you to enter into a community of social disaggregation, which is not necessarily a secret society, a conjuration, the occult sharing of esoteric or crypto-poetic knowledge’ (PF 35). The oblique reference to the ‘secret society’ *Acéphale* with which Bataille was involved in 1936-8 suggests the important legacy of this moment, and the importance of the question of the *secret*, its tension with the *headlessness* which informs the textual materialisms, Derrida’s included, of the 1960s and after. Cf. also Jean-Joseph Goux, ‘Numismatiques I & II’, *Tel Quel*, 36,37, 1969.
5. The journal which features in the notes for *Guilty* relates a chance encounter with two old friends, Raymond Queneau and Theodore Fraenkel, both mobilised, as Bataille notes, marking the interruption of the event into his meditative text. Queneau’s journal, in its account of the same encounter, recalls that neither Fraenkel nor Bataille have anything meaningful to say about the war (Raymond Queneau, *Journaux 1914-1965* Paris: Gallimard, 1996, 395). Later Queneau recalled that Bataille was ‘very sceptical, wanting nothing to do with politics’ [‘Très sceptique, Bataille. [...] il ne veut plus avoir rien à voir avec la politique’], 422.
6. Georges Bataille, *Le coupable* in *Œuvres Complètes V* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 246. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
7. *Ibid.*, 247.
8. *Ibid.*, 251.
9. *Ibid.*
10. The question of death is a difficult one. Since the writer is already within the tomb, actual, physical death is ‘merely’ either a delayed confirmation of something that is already the case, or an exemplary manifestation of the death of the writer. As with the question of sacrifice, it can be asked of Bataille’s work if he makes a distinction between the ‘structure’ of death or of ‘entombment’ and its spectacle, in other words: is physical death necessary?
11. Bataille, *Le Coupable*, 251-2. Fragments of the text of ‘Friendship’ were to be published in the review *Mesures* in April 1940, under the pseudonym *Dianus* (see above). Bataille refers in a footnote to his anxiety about the possibility of the publication of ‘Friendship’ in his lifetime. At the start of 1940, having delivered the manuscript of ‘Friendship’ to *Mesures*, he knew that they were in the station at Abbeville. This town was heavily bombarded during the *bataille du Nord*, but, contrary to the author’s expectations, the issue of *Mesures* was left intact. Chance delivers the fragments of ‘Friendship’ to its readers, beyond any community of friends, despite the author’s hope, perhaps, that war would intervene to postpone or annul this delivery. The friendship of ‘Friendship’ is one beyond the present community, beyond the force of war and national conflict,

anticipatory - that is, open to chance, to risk. Bataille adds the following note to the phrase cited here: 'I had in fact to give some fragments of this text to the journal *Mesures* at the beginning of 1940 (under the pseudonym Dianus). Having returned from the exodus I knew that the copies of *Mesures* were in the station at Abbeville during the battle of the North and, since this town had been heavily bombarded, I thought that the chance of their being published would be postponed for a long time. But *Mesures* was intact. [‘Je devais en fait donner des fragments de ce texte à la revue *Mesures* au début de 1940 (sous le pseudonyme de Dianus). Au retour de l'exode, je sus que les exemplaires de *Mesures* se trouvaient en gare d'Abbeville pendant la bataille du Nord et, comme cette ville avait été très bombardée, je pensais que toute chance de publication était éloignée pour longtemps. Mais le numéro de *Mesures* était intact' (252)].

12. Or, in *Politics of Friendship*, the 'perhaps'.

13. Bataille, *Le Coupable*, 261.

14. *Ibid.*, 260.

15. *Ibid.*, 262.

16. *Ibid.*, 284.

17. The final text, also titled 'L'Amitié' was originally a text published in Maurice Nadeau's review *Lettres nouvelles* on the event of Bataille's death in 1962.

18. Bataille's published correspondance lacks any letters sent by him to Maurice Blanchot, but features a selection of letters sent by Blanchot to him. This asymmetry is by design (Blanchot's?). In letters to other friends and colleagues (Dionys Mascolo) Bataille, in the last years of his life and permanently suffering, refers to the *necessity* of his correspondance with Blanchot [Georges Bataille, *Choix de lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 576]. He refers also, however, to his 'indestructible friendship' (527) with Michel Leiris, and uses the word 'amitié' in the same sense in correspondance with others (Mascolo, for example). Further analysis and argument might suggest a certain monopolisation of Bataille, and of his friendship, by Blanchot and by *blanchotisme*, if such a thing can be identified. 'L'Amitié' is not, in this context, an exclusive relation; indeed it would seem to resist any restriction within context.

19. Even in the organisation of its chapters Blanchot's *Friendship* seems to incorporate a gesture towards Bataille. The book moves through the following grand themes: Art and Prehistory, the Museum, the Encyclopædia, Anthropology, Marxism and Communism, War, Literature, Death, Transgression, to end with essays on Sartre and Camus, Kafka, and Friendship. Broadly speaking, this reproduces the intellectual trajectory of Bataille, from the early period of *Aréthuse* and *Documents* (prehistory, Art, the Museum) to the politicised time of *La critique sociale* (Communism) through War, to Literature (the time of *La littérature et le mal* - which includes an essay on Kafka and engages specifically in debate with Sartre). 'Friendship' is positioned as the epilogue and the summation of the volume. *Friendship*, moreover, collects articles published for the most part in the *Nouvelle revue française* over the two decades leading up to its publication. Although the earliest article, 'Le Musée, l'Art et le Temps', was published in *Critique*, the review founded by Bataille with which Blanchot was closely involved, in 1950-1, as a review of Malraux's *Le musée imaginaire*, the collection, its title, epigraphs and epilogue seems to suggest that even in writing outside Bataille's community Blanchot writes *to* and *with* Bataille.

20. Blanchot, Maurice *L'Amitié* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 10; hereafter referred to as A.

21. Cf. Jacques-Alain Miller's concept of *extimacy*, taken from Lacan, elaborated in Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Extimacy' in Mark Bracher (ed.), *Lacan and the Human Sciences* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 74-87.

22. As a parenthetical note or echo one could recall here the physical impression of immense *distance* felt by the narrator of Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar, when he hears M. Valdemar speak the words 'I am dead'.

23. This figure makes its first appearance in Bataille's writing in *Story of the Eye*, where a flash of lightning suddenly illuminates the urine stained sheet hung from the window of the 'chateau hanté / maison de santé'. See Patrick French, *The Cut: Reading Bataille's Histoire de l'œil* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999). The figure will be used by Michel Foucault in his obituary article on Bataille, 'Préface à la transgression' (published in the 1962 obituary issue of *Critique*: transgression is 'something like lightning in the night, which, from the depths of time, gives a dense and dark being to what it denies, illuminates it from the inside and throughout, nevertheless owes to it its bright clarity, its lacerating and erect singularity, loses itself in this space which it signs with its sovereignty and is at last silent having given a name to darkness.' [‘Quelque chose peut-être comme l'éclair dans la nuit, qui, du fond du temps, donne un être dense et noir à ce qu'elle nie, l'illumine de l'intérieur et de fond en comble, lui doit pourtant sa vive clarté, sa singularité déchirante et dressée, se perd dans cet espace qu'elle signe de sa souveraineté et se tait enfin ayant donné un nom à l'obscur']; Foucault, Michel (1963), 'Préface à la transgression' in *Critique* (Aug-Sept 1963), 755-6. Foucault's thinking and writing here bear certain similarities with those of Blanchot.

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24. Another asymmetrical series could be suggested here, which would read Bataille's *Lascaux* with Blanchot's 'La naissance de l'art' and Duras's *Les mains négatives*. Cf. Marguerite Duras, 'Les mains négatives' in *Le Navire Night et autres textes* (Paris: Galimard, 1979), which takes its title from the handprints found in prehistoric caves or Southern Europe.
25. The density of Blanchot's *pas* (*Le pas au-delà*) is somewhat lost in English.
26. Bataille, Georges (1971) *Madame Edwarda* in *Œuvres Complètes III* (Paris: Gallimard), 21.
27. Bataille, *Le coupable*, 261.
28. 'Le manque a sa place': a concern with the place of lack and the 'lack in its place' informs Derrida's discussion of Lacan's, 'Seminar on the Purloined Letter' (in *Écrits*) in 'Le facteur de la vérité'. See Jacques Derrida *La Carte Postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), 448-470. If lack has its place and is in its place then the symbolic economy held solid by the (empty) signification of the phallus is not threatened by *différance*. An analysis of the relations between the economy of meaning and the economy of gender in Bataille is overdue.
29. Bataille, *Le Coupable*, 278.
30. Bataille, *Madame Edwarda*, 11.
31. *Ibid.*, 11.
32. See Jane Gallop, *Intersections: A Reading of Sade with Bataille, Blanchot, Klossowski* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1981). Gallop reads the intertextual resonances between these three writers around their readings of Sade. Cf. also Derrida, writing on the exclusion of the feminine in the 'great' discourses on friendship: 'This double exclusion of the feminine in this philosophical paradigm would then confer on friendship the essential and essentially sublime figure of virile homosexuality' (PF 279).
33. Jacques Derrida, "'Eating Well", or the Calculation of the Subject' in *Points: Interviews 1974-1994*, 279; translation by Peter Connor and Avital Ronell of "Il faut bien manger" ou le calcul du sujet' in *Points de suspension* (Paris: Galilée, 1992).
34. *Ibid.*, 280.
35. 'The Unsacrificeable' in *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991): *Literature and the Ethical Question*; translation by Richard Livingston, 21.
36. Elements of Derrida's exploration of the rhetoric and 'structure' of sacrifice may be found in the final part of 'L'oreille de Heidegger: Philopolémologie (*Geschlecht IV*)' which is included as a supplement to the French edition of *Politiques de l'amitié*, and in a short text on the theory of theatre of Daniel Mesguich, 'Le Sacrifice' in *La Métaphore I* (Editions de la différence) and online at: <http://www.hydra.umn.edu/derrida/sac.html>. Derrida's unpublished seminar of 1987-88, on 'Eating the Other: Rhetorics of Cannibalism' also bore upon this issue.