A Rhetoric of Responsibility

But communication would be impossible
if it should have to begin in the ego, a free subject,
to whom every other would only be a limitation that invites war,
domination, precaution and information.

Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*

The unconditionality of being hostage is
not the limit case of solidarity, but the condition for all solidarity.

Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*

In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke makes a point that perhaps goes without saying in rhetorical studies today: belonging is fundamentally rhetorical (27–28). That insight will serve as the thesis of this present work, but with a twist. According to Burke, belonging is not fixed ontologically by a shared essence but is instead a function of rhetorical identification, which is itself an effect of shared symbol systems. Scholars in rhetorical studies generally accept this elemental insight: what is common among those who "belong together" does not constitute an essence. What is common among the members of a nation, an ethnic group, a gang, or even a family operates not ontologically but symbolically—"blood" every bit as much as "native soil," "cultural history," and "turf colors." Nonetheless, inasmuch as what is common is identified as a *condition* for belonging, inasmuch as it symbolizes a bond or property that is shared by otherwise *discrete* "individuals," it is both retroactively essentialized and grounded in the presumption of a prior essence. The field remains mostly unaware of or unconcerned with an intersection of rhetoric and solidarity that neither references a preexisting essence of the individual (organism) nor installs, as a product of human work, an essence of the community (of the "common").[1]

In the pages that follow, the primary goal will be to expose a sort of commonality oblivious to borders (a *débordement*) that precedes and exceeds symbolic identification and therefore any prerequisite for belonging; or, put another way: the goal is to expose an originary (or preoriginary) rhetoricity—an affect*ability* or persuad*ability*—that is the condition for symbolic action. I get how this may sound, but I'm not going mystical or even particularly abstract on you here. By definition, communication can take place only among existents who are given over to an "outside," exposed, open to the other's affection and effraction. And this "community," without essence or project, this foreign(er) *relation* irreducible to symbolic prereqs, will be the primary focus of our investigation. Let me say provisionally that what's at stake in this exposition of exposedness is the affirmation of a "rhetorical power," as Steven Mailloux might put it, that is not the effect of representation (conscious or unconscious). As anyone who has irrepressibly tapped her foot to an unfamiliar tune will acknowledge, "persuasion" frequently succeeds without presenting itself to cognitive scrutiny. The fact that this extra-symbolic rhetoricity remains irreducible to epistemological frame-ups makes it no less powerful, no less fundamental, no less significant to rhetorical studies.

By pulling into focus this always prior rhetoricity that is the condition for what is called the "art" of rhetoric, I intend neither to drown "little rhetoric" in the sea of "big rhetoric" nor to subordinate rhetorical practice to rhetorical theory. I hope, rather, to begin to articulate a different sort of task for rhetorical studies, a theoretical task indissociable from its practical implementation. The task: to examine the implications of this always prior relation to the foreign(er) without which no meaning-making or determinate (symbolic) relation would be possible. I hope, that is, to nudge rhetorical studies beyond the epistemological concerns that have for so long circumscribed our theories of persuasion toward the examination of a more fundamental affectability, persuadability, responsivity. What would it mean for rhetorical practice, theory, and analysis if we were to acknowledge that communication in the most simplistic sense—as symbolic exchange—does not first of all lead to solidarity or "community" but instead remains utterly dependent upon a sharing and a response-ability that precede it? What would it mean for the field's focus if it could be shown that rhetoric's operations exceed not simply the representations of the intentional subject but the "subject of representation" as such, the symbol using animal who knows itself as and through its representations? What theoretical and analytical practices might emerge if it were admitted that rhetorical identification,

for example, is at work prior to and in excess of symbolic meaning, prior even to the symbolic distinction between self and other? Or if it could be demonstrated that rhetoric is not, therefore, indissociable from hermeneutics? What would it mean for our theories of social change or for public sphere studies if it could be shown that the speaking subject is the product neither of self-determination nor of structural overdetermination but instead emerges, each time, according to a relationality and responsivity irreducible to dramatistic mappings? My aim is not once and for all to answer these questions; it is only to provoke them, to hold them open, to begin a conversation with you that is long overdue.

In a certain way, this book joins a vast array of other works in the field devoted to examining rhetoric's relation with relationality itself. As Walter Jost and Michael Hyde put it in their introduction to *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Time*, rhetoric is "a practice that by its very nature is *other-oriented*" (29). Indeed, the practice of rhetoric is frequently celebrated for its capacity to create cohesive social bonds, to incite unification where there would otherwise be fragmentation and violence; it is praised for inviting identification through the exchange of shared meaning and values, and for its ability to provoke social change by moving audiences to action or to attitude, either through direct argumentation or, more subtly, through epideictic's display.[2] The flip side to this optimistic take on the role that rhetoric plays in the building and sustaining of social bonds is also frequently explored: the problems of the scapegoat and, more generally, of congregation via segregation.[3] And I have no desire to quibble with any of this or to produce a polemic. I do, however, propose that there is another, prior intersection of rhetoric and solidarity that the field has left virtually unexamined and that could have a profound effect on both its self-understanding and its scholarly practices. For there to be any sharing of symbolic meaning, any construction of a common enemy or collective goal, any effective use of persuasive discourse at all, a more originary rhetoricity must already be operating, a consitutive persuadability and responsivity that testifies, first of all, to a fundamental structure of exposure. If rhetorical practices work by managing to have an effect on others, then an always prior openness to the other's affection is its first requirement: the "art" of rhetoric can be effective only among affectable existents, who are by definition something other than distinct individuals or self-determining agents, and whose relations necessarily precede and exceed symbolic intervention.[4] We are talking here about an intersection of rhetoric and solidarity that would be the condition not only for symbolic action but for the symbol-using animal itself.

Being-With

An obscene amount of political, ethical, and scholarly energy has been invested in "the individual," that indivisible atom, absolutely detached and for-itself, which is situated at the origin of the origin. And yet, "one cannot make the world with simple atoms," Jean-Luc Nancy reminds us. "There has to be a *clinamen*. There has to be an inclination or an inclining from one toward the other, of one by another, or from one to the other. Community is at least the *clinamen* of the 'individual.'" Rephrased for our purposes: solidarity is at least the rhetoricity of the affect as such, the "individual's" irreparable openness to affection/alteration. But "there is no theory, ethics, politics, or metaphysics of the individual that is capable of envisaging this *clinamen*, this declination or decline of the individual within community." What individualism can't quite assimilate is that "the atom is a world" (*IOC* 3–4). Despite the breathlessness of the presentation, this is what Heidegger demonstrates in *Being and Time*: that there is no being that is not already being-with, no Dasein that is not already *Mitsein* or *Mit-da-sein*. Nancy tracks the unplumbed (and perhaps unplumbable) implications of the insight, pointing out that "the 'mit' does not modify the 'sein,' (as if being could already sustain itself in some way, as if being *were itself*, that is as if being *were* or *existed* absolutely)"; but further still, he continues, "the 'mit' does not even qualify the 'Dasein,' but . . . constitutes it essentially." This means that "the *there*" of Da-sein "is not a grounding for existence," Nancy insists, "but rather its taking *place*, its arrival, its coming—which also means its difference, its withdrawal, its excess, its 'exscription'" (*BIC* 2).

   Though Heidegger's split-second explication of the originariness of being-with is elliptical, it nonetheless issues an irrevocable challenge to pre-Heideggerian approaches to ontology: if the "with" is already operative essentially, constitutively, then contamination is originary and ontology's project is busted before it begins. There is no longer any way to pose its defining question, a question of uncontaminated essence: "what is X?" There is no immanent or intrinsic being, no essence in itself that would therefore be capable of presenting itself as such. What Heidegger gives us to think is that prior to the symbolic exchange of any particular content—prior also, then, to the symbolic distinction between self and other—the "I" is already a kind of "we," the singularity is already a collective. Being is not simply posed; it is exposed. "The logic of the 'with,'" Nancy explains, "is the singular logic of an inside-outside," the existential equivalent of a Klein jar or Möbius strip (*BIC* 6). This originary "collective," then—which

Nancy will elsewhere, disappointingly, call "fraternity"[5]—consists not in a shared essence or common being (or even a common purpose or interest or practice or value) but in a sharing out (*partáge*) of being itself. The solidarity from which any sense of the "individual" would have to be extracted takes place as being-*in*-common, precisely to the extent that it is not "common being." "Henceforth," Nancy writes, "the question should be the community of being, and not the being of community. Or if you prefer: the community of existence, and not the essence of community" (*BIC* 1).

Behind and beyond the theme of the individual, Nancy proposes, "lurks the question of singularity. What is *a* body, *a* face, *a* voice, *a* death, *a* writing—not indivisible but singular?" Singularity does not have the indivisible and so identifiable nature or structure of the individual; rather, singularity "takes place at the level of the *clinamen*, which is unidentifiable" (*IOC* 6–7).[6] Singularity, then, is not simply an upgraded or more theoretically sophisticated synonym for the individual. Nor—and here Nancy breaks with the early Heidegger—does the singular being emerge through a process of "singularization," as if it rose up "against the background of a chaotic, undifferentiated identity of beings"—that is, against the background of what Heidegger calls "the 'they'" (*IOC* 27).[7] Rather "'singularity' would designate precisely that which, each time, forms a point of exposure, traces an intersection of limits on which there is exposure. To be exposed," Nancy continues, "is to be on the limit where, at the same time, there is both inside and outside, and neither inside nor outside." Singularity is exposedness itself, an "in oneself" that *is* only by virtue of partition: "both division and distribution." This limit, in joining what it also separates, is the site of an "extreme *abandonment* in which all property . . . is first of all given over to the outside (but not to the outside of an inside . . .)." This makes the singularity "a generalized ectopia of all 'proper' places," an inside that is "brought about essentially by a 'cleaving' or by a 'schism.'" Singularity is what it is only inasmuch as it is exposed on and as its limit (*BIC* 7, 8).

In contemporary physics, a singularity indicates a particular anomaly that escapes all known laws of physics (the big bang is a famous example) but that is not simply observable because it resides inside a black hole, which sucks everything inward, including light, and remains hidden beyond an event horizon. A naked singularity, on the other hand, is described as an anomaly that occurs (theoretically) without an event horizon; it therefore would be an observable yet still wildly ungraspable "event." Nancy's sociopolitical use of the term "singularity" is aligned with naked singularity, as both would be observable (exposed)

but not for that reason simply containable or assimilable. The singular being is not enclosed in a form and cannot appear or even exist alone; singularity is by definition shared. As exposedness, says Nancy, the singular being "appears as finitude itself: at the end (or at the beginning) with the contact of the skin (or the heart) of another singular being, at the confines of the same singularity, that is, as such, always other, always shared, always exposed" (*IOC* 28).[8]

Significantly, this "appearing (*apparaître*) is not an appearance (*apparence*); it is on the contrary the at once glorious and destitute appearing (*paraître*) of being-finite itself," Nancy writes (*IOC* 28). The dichotomous energy separating finitude from infinity is here dissolved: "finitude is the truth of which the infinite is the sense," as Nancy puts it elsewhere (*Sense of the World* 29). Infinity is inherent in finitude, which is not about absolute boundaries but about being-on-the-limit, *as* the limit: being as threshold. "It would be foolish to imagine that finitude designates an absolute limit," Avital Ronell explains. "An absolute limit—if it were possible to imagine such a thing—would be a boundary without an outside, without a foreign, neighboring land, an edge without an outer dimension" (*Finitude's Score* 5). But there is no essence or in-itselfness of finitude; it is only inasmuch as it is shared. "Finitude itself *is* nothing," Nancy writes; it is not an essence and so cannot operate as a ground or show up as a substance. But it does appear: "it presents itself, it exposes itself, and thus it *exists* as communication . . . finitude co-appears or *compears* (*com-paráit*) and can only *compear*: in this formulation we would need to hear that finite being always presents itself 'together,' hence severally" (*IOC* 28).[9]

The communication to which Nancy refers is not a bond but consists *in* this exposition and compearance. For "compearance is of a more originary order than that of a bond. It does not set itself up, it does not establish itself, it does not emerge among already given subjects (objects). It consists in the appearance of the *between* as such: you *and* I (between us)." Communication as exposition and compearance has nothing to do with the transfer of messages or the desire for consensus or recognition. It has nothing to do with rules or strategies or communicative competence. Before any of that, before all else, "in 'communication' what takes place is an exposition: finite existent exposed to finite existent, co-appearing before it and with it" (*IOC* xl). Nancy offers a formula for compearance and suggests that we learn to read it in all "possible combinations: 'you (are/and/is) (entirely other than) I' ('*toi [e(s)t] [tout autre que] moi*'). Or again, more simply: *you shares me* ('*toi partage moi*')" (*IOC* 29). Singular beings are given in this communication and as this communication, together, but

"without a bond *and* without communion" (29). Community consists in this communication that neither appropriates nor fuses; it consists in the fact that singularity is exposed to an inappropriable outside that constitutes it, affects and alters it, prior to and in excess of symbolic intervention.

Ex-centrically structured, the singular being exists as an outside-inside, or an inside-outside. As such it has "access to what is *proper* to existence, and therefore of course to the proper of *one's own* existence," Nancy writes, "only through an 'expropriation' whose exemplary reality is that of 'my' face always exposed to others, always turned toward an other and faced by him or her, never facing myself." And this, Nancy proposes, "is the archi-original impossibility of Narcissus that opens straight away onto the possibility of the political" (*IOC* xxxvii). But this exposition does not constitute an essence:

> [T]he thinking of community as essence—is in effect the closure of the political. Such a thinking constitutes a closure because it assigns to the community a *common being*, whereas community is a matter of something quite different, namely of existence inasmuch as it is *in* common but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance. Being *in* common has nothing to do with communion, with fusion into a body, into a unique and ultimate identity that would no longer be exposed. Being *in* common means, to the contrary, *no longer having, in any form, in any empirical or ideal place, such a substantial identity, and sharing this* (narcissistic) *"lack of identity."* This is what philosophy calls "finitude." . . . Finitude, the infinite lack of an infinite identity, if we can risk such a formulation, is what makes community. (*IOC* xxxviii)

Preceding symbolic identification, exposedness is relationality as such; it is constitutive of being, which is always and only in the mode of exposition and not essence: "Being 'is' the 'in' that divides and joins, that 'partitions and shares,' the limit where partitioning and sharing are exposed" (*BIC* 8).

But it is precisely this "in" that disappears whenever what is in-common is passed off as an essence that can be represented, an immanence that simply appears or presents itself as such; wherever fascistic fusions enable a communion of the One to establish itself, to individually or collectively close in on itself, all community and communication have been effaced. To understand community "as a work or through its works would presuppose that the common being, as such, be objectifiable and producible (in sites, persons, buildings, discourses, institutions, symbols: in short, in subjects)." It would be to presuppose the immanence of what is common, and therefore the capacity to represent it or even

to constitute it through some form of epideictic display. But community is not the work of singular beings; it cannot be built and is not a project or product: "One does not produce it, one experiences or one is constituted by it as the experience of finitude" (*IOC* 31).

It is this experience of community that Nancy tries to spotlight: "I am trying to indicate, at its limit, an experience—not, perhaps, an experience that we have, *but an experience that makes us be*." Inasmuch as this experience resists conceptualization and exceeds our thought, it "tries our thinking," and for this reason, it "demands our thought" (*IOC* 26). The Heideggerian insight is worth reiterating: thinking calls as and through the failure of hermeneutic appropriation. Thinking is not the same as knowing, and the challenge today, the social, ethical, and political challenge is to learn to think the sharing of community without effacing precisely this sharing by conceptualizing it, turning it into an object to be grasped and put to work. How to think a community, without essence or project, shaped by the eruption of an inappropriable outside, "a community," as Ronell has so beautifully put it, "shattered and way past the mirror stage of self-recuperation" (*Finitude's Score* 2)? In place of conceptualization and appropriation, Nancy calls for *exposition,* the exposition of exposedness: "[w]e must expose ourselves to what has gone unheard in community" (*IOC* 26).

Community is not a work and doesn't belong to the domain of work, but a strict reading of Nancy indicates that it is not simply "worklessness," either. According to him, it is instead simultaneously a gift and a *task*: "Community is given to us—or we are given and abandoned to the community: a gift to be renewed and communicated, it is not a work to be done or produced. But it is a task, which is different—an infinite task at the heart of finitude" (*IOC* 35). The task inherent in this gift, then, is to renew it and to communicate it but without turning it into a "work," without essentializing or substantializing it. The task given to "us," in the name of solidarity, is to expose exposedness, "to expose the unexposable *in,*" as Nancy puts it (*BIC* 10). This exposition takes place in writing and through writing—broadly speaking, "writing" as any performance of the inscription, aural, visual, and so on—a sharing that testifies to the shattering limit by "touching" it. Still, Nancy hastens to add: "that does not entail the conclusion that all we have to do is to say it to expose it" (*BIC* 9). The exposition depends on a writing (a saying) that undermines and interrupts language's awesome powers of representation.

Nancy's call "to expose the unexposable *in*" came through to me as an assignment that I could not refuse—I did try for a while—an undeniable charge

to which this present work attempts to respond. The one who writes is first of all called to write, put "on assignment," as Ronell likes to say, so that one is always writing in response to the Other and because there are others. An encapsulated interiority would have no need or desire to write; writing, no matter what it says, testifies to exposedness, to vulnerability—to responsivity. What's at stake in communicating this exposedness is not community, which is already given: "we cannot not compear" (*IOC* 35). What's at stake, rather, is communal sensibility, a supplement of responsivity for which, it seems to me, "being-with" alone cannot adequately account. My receptors are rhetorically tuned, so in this case the charge that announced itself to me was not only to expose exposedness (which I think really should have been enough) but to demonstrate that the *exposure* to exposedness issues a rhetorical imperative, an obligation to respond that is the condition for symbolic exchange.

Being-For

"To begin with," Nancy writes, "the logic of being-with corresponds to nothing other than what we could call the banal phenomenology of unorganized groups of people." Singularities are like passengers in the same train compartment, he says; they are simply seated next to each other "in an accidental, arbitrary, and completely exterior manner." These passengers "are not linked," but they are also "quite together" in this train, traveling in the same space at the same time. "They are between the disintegration of the 'crowd' and the aggregation of the group," Nancy writes, "both extremes remaining possible, virtual, and near at every moment." Being-with is nothing but this suspension between disintegration and aggregation: "a relation without relation, or rather, being exposed simultaneously to relationship and to absence of relationship." Exposed but not linked (or fused), the singularity is faced—at each moment, consciously or unconsciously, in "freedom" and "necessity"—with "the undecided decision" to respond to the other passengers as strangers or as neighbors, and so to move toward "solitude [or] collectivity," nonrelation or relation (*BIC* 7).

To the extent that the passengers on this metaphorical train are simply seated next to each other, side by side, suspended between disinterestedness and concern, they exist in and as their ecstatic (non)relation. These singularities are with-one-another, *Mitsein*-style—which means they share being and therefore states-of-mind (moods) that attest to their being-outside, in-the-world, together (exposed). And yet, they are also perfectly capable of maintaining a

fundamental indifference toward one another, of continuing to file their nails or to read the paper (or *Being and Time*) without offering the slightest gesture of acknowledgment or concern. Indifference is the luxury of exposed existents who are not *faced* with the fact of their exposedness.

According to Nancy, who is with Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot on this one, "community," in the sense of social feeling, crystallizes not around a common essence or goal or project but around "the death of its members"—of those "whom we call, perhaps wrongly, it's 'members'"—that is, around "*the 'loss' (the impossibility) of their immanence*" (*IOC* 14). This loss may become the focus of epideictic effusions, of grand encomiums or eulogies, but the experience is not finally sublatable. Death marks the absolute limit of identification and (so) of understanding. A primordial rupture, the for-good withdrawal of the other—or simply exposure to its possibility—first of all gives the other *as* other, opening "me" to an outside and teaching me both my mortal truth (the inevitability of my birth and my death) and "the irredeemable excess" (the exposedness) that constitutes finite being. "Sharing," Nancy writes, "comes down to this: what community reveals to me, in presenting to me my birth and my death, is my existence outside myself"—my ekstasis, my exposedness (*IOC* 26). And yours. Finitude, "my" finitude, in other words, can communicate itself to me only through "your" mortality. Community is therefore "not the space of the *egos*—subjects and substances that are at bottom immortal" (*IOC* 15); gods, elves, fairies, and egos might form an association, consortium, or society, but they could not share community. Perhaps we could say instead that community is the space of shattered egos—or more carefully, it is where egos are shattered. That is ego's experience of finitude: being shattered.

"The community that is not a community of the gods also is neither a community of heroes nor of sovereigns," Blanchot writes. It produces no work and does not tend toward communitarian fusion. The only "purpose" it serves is to communicate to you your exposedness and so to shove you out of yourself, toward the other, to make you responsive to and responsible for the other (*Unavowable* 11). "If it sees its fellow-being die," Bataille once wrote, "a living being can subsist only *outside itself*."

> Each of us is then driven out of the confines of his person and loses himself as much as possible in the community of his fellow creatures. It is for this reason that it is necessary for communal life to maintain itself at a level *equal to death*. The lot of a great number of private lives is pettiness. But a community cannot

last except at the level of intensity of death—it decomposes as soon as it falls short of death's peculiar grandeur. (Nancy's translation, *IOC* 15)

Responsibility kicks in as *response* to finitude's deadly intensity; it kicks in when communal life holds itself "at a level *equal to death*" rather than sliding into tranquilized comforts and everyday absorptions, such as football or professional conferences or *Oprah*. The exposure to exposedness issues an obligation to respond, and no one has attended to this rhetorical imperative more directly or more concretely than Emmanuel Levinas—who would not in a million years have called it "rhetorical."

The Handoff. As Nancy was saying, the singularities seated side by side in being-with's train compartment are suspended between relation and nonrelation, held in "the simultaneous immanence of the retreat and the coming of the relation." Alluding, perhaps, to a major Levinasian motif, Nancy explains that this suspension—the exposedness of being-with—"is not yet even to be 'face to face.' It is anterior to entrapment by the stare that captures its prey or takes its hostage" (*BIC* 7). The capacity for indifference drops off in the shift toward the "face," where "I" am trapped, taken hostage. The relation with the face is a relation of nonindifference, Levinas tells us, that pivots neither on shared meaning nor on identification but on an obligation, an imperative that precedes understanding. Somehow, in the face to face, "I" am/is opened to an intensity "*equal to death*": it is the relation of a "host" to her guest or of a "hostage" to his captor, not simply being-with-the-other but being-*for*-the-other. The encounter with the face comes shrink-wrapped, in other words, with an obligation to respond, after which ignoring the other becomes a conscious *effort*. You might whip out your Blackberry or plug into your iPod or feign sleep or complete absorption in your magazine, iPad, or Nintendo DS, but the active refusal to be responsive is a response and so no longer simple indifference.

Levinas's singular descriptions of the face to face, of facing the face of the Other, will be the focus of chapter two. But let me note here that they depict a radically expropriating and nonreciprocal relation with which comprehension never manages to catch up. For him, the "face" connotes neither the front of the head in a literal sense nor the effect of routine figural operations. Face, in Levinas, has nothing to do with the color of the eyes or the shape of the lips or the size of the ears or how much the other resembles, say, the mother—according to him, as long as you are attuned to any of this, you are not encountering a face. Neither visible nor conceivable nor perceivable, face "is what cannot

become content, which your thought would embrace; it is uncontainable, it leads you beyond" (*EI* 87).[10] What one encounters in the face to face *is* the other's finitude, the other's exposedness—that is to say, both his or her mortality (susceptibility to wounding, to ravaging illness, to "the cold and the heat of the seasons") and, simultaneously, his or her transcendence as sheer ungraspableness (*OTB* 91).

Face names the site of "my" encounter with the inassimilable alterity of the other, which provokes an interruption in identification and cognition: "The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face" (*TI* 50). The face puts me into relation with what I can neither appropriate nor abdicate, overwhelming my powers of comprehension and so demolishing my delusions of transcendental symmetry (a.k.a. "intersubjectivity"). In the "face" of the other, "I" am/is under an intractable obligation, an ethico-rhetorical responsibility to respond. One possible response, of course, is to refuse to, or to respond with hostility and violence, to take the other out. It's also possible (even probable) that you will miss the face in an encounter with the other, approaching the other at and with an "angle," with the intent to harm or to persuade; this is why a very Platonic Levinas consistently locates rhetoric on the side of nonethical language. Not every communication with an other signals an encounter with the face. However, once encountered, the face (re)sounds a rhetorical imperative, and nonresponse is not an option.

To the extent that it signifies as a surplus of sociality (exposedness), the face "speaks," Levinas tells us. The relation with the face is already a language relation, a saying or an address, which is why in the encounter with the face "it is necessary to speak of something," Levinas writes, "of the rain and fine weather," of anything at all, "but to speak, to respond to him and already to answer for him" (*EI* 88). Levinas calls this language relation a "first discourse" or simply "conversation" (*entre-tien*). Ronell elaborates:

> Conversation is not that which fuses you to me; but the experience of Conversation induces, once again, the vertigo of expropriation. It is not only the case that I am not identical to myself when I begin to converse with you, but more severely perhaps: you are no longer the one I have interiorized or memorized. Breaking the secret contract that sealed you within me, you, in Conversation, are no longer you, or the you at least of whom I have preserved an image. . . . Conversing with you, I no longer see you, I am not even looking for you: I am oriented toward you generously. This is the non-violent transitivity of my inclination toward you. (*Dictations* xii–xxiii)

Conversation involves not a mutual appropriation but a double deterritorialization, a common but dissymmetrical *unworking* of "identity"—an exposition of exposedness. The relation with the face, then, is itself nonviolent yet expropriating: to encounter a face is to be both called into question and into service. As pure affective appeal, the face subjects one to the scandal of obligation in which ego, finding itself compelled to respond, is stripped of its sense of self-mastery and spontaneity. In his descriptions of the relation to the face, Levinas gives us to think a notion of generosity that is not freely given but compelled, the obligatory "generosity" of the host-age.

"Paradoxically enough," Levinas writes, "thinkers claim to derive communication out of self-coinciding." But the relation with the other "precedes any relationship of the ego with itself" as well as "the auto-affection of certainty to which one always tries to reduce communication." Even "inward dialogue," Levinas insists, is "beholden to the solidarity that sustains it" (*OTB* 119). The experience of or exposure to this fundamental solidarity, which gives "me" to be, takes place in the encounter with the face, in conversation. The face does not simply appear, so unlike intersubjective dialogue—which is a myth according to both Nancy and Levinas—conversation as such cannot be witnessed by a third party. It is the relation with "an addressor whose addressee I am, and about whom I know nothing," as Jean-François Lyotard puts it, "except that he or she situates me upon the addressee instance."

> The violence of the revelation is in the ego's expulsion from the addressor instance, from which it managed its work of enjoyment, power, and cognition. It is the scandal of an I displaced onto a you instance. The I turned you tries to repossess itself through the understanding of what dispossesses it. Another phrase is formed, in which the I returns in the addressor's situation, in order to legitimate or to reject—it doesn't matter which—the scandal of the other's phrase and of its own dispossession. This new phrase is always possible, like an inevitable temptation. But it cannot annul the event, it can only tame and master it, thereby disregarding the transcendence of the other. (*D* 110–11)

The scramble to "return" to the nominative position, Levinas tells us, is already a false nostalgia. Though ego operates on such hopes, I was never a subject in that sense; I am/is a subject to the precise extent that I respond(s). "By turning the I into its you [*toi*]," Lyotard continues, "the other makes him- or herself master, and turns the I into his or her hostage. The other is not master, however, because he or she dominates the I, but because he or she asks for the I"

(*D* 111). As weird as this may sound, Levinas insists that it is in the nonsubjective donation of the I that I is/am given at all: it's not so much that the subject responds to alterity, then, but that "the subject" *is* the response to alterity. It has no substance beyond this inessential solidarity, this receptivity and responsivity that are the conditions for symbolic exchange, for symbolicity as such.

When Nancy suggests that the singular being's neutral exposedness is anterior to "entrapment" by the face, he indicates that being-with-others is not *yet* being-for-others, that being-for could only derive from the originary and presubjective "fraternity" of being-with. Interestingly, however, in *Otherwise than Being* Levinas proposes something radically different: that if the face to face activates a kind of entrapment by which the I is captured and taken hostage, this can be the case only because the obligation is *pre*originary, because the predicament of being-hostage is the condition for being at all and so simultaneously for being-with. Levinas describes this *pre*originary predicament as "human fraternity itself" (*OTB* 116). (No sororities here; big surprise.) According to him, the existent (the "subject") emerges as such only in *response* to alterity and therefore exists for-the-other (nonindifference) before it ever gets the chance to exist for-itself (indifference). It is the underivable provocation to response that *institutes* the limit, the partition that separates what it also joins. Though he doesn't put it this way, Levinas situates a *rhetorical* imperative (an obligation to respond) prior to and as the condition for the gathering into presence associated with being-there, Da-sein. Forget ontology, epistemology—even ethics. What Levinas shows without seeing is that rhetoric is first philosophy.[11] Not (only) because the generative power of the trope is the ground for all thought, as Ernesto Grassi would have it, but because a nonsubjective persuasive appeal is what *calls* for tropological intervention each time.

Prior even to the contemporaneity of being-with, Levinas proposes, there is the "anachrony" of responsibility, a rhetorical imperative that serves as the condition for being and knowing. According to him, this response-ability is not only what brings an existent into being; it *is* the *clinamen*, the inclination toward the other. Being and knowing surely do follow, but if it were not for this irremissible inclination, this preoriginary obligation to respond, then in the face of the other I would nonchalantly file my nails. The face comes through each time as pure appeal, persuasion without a rhetorician, "command without tyranny" ("Freedom" 18). And there is no way to block it out, no way to "annul the event" of my expropriation, my depersonalization, in which I am turned inside out, ripped out of my "private" shelter *for*-the-other—"substituted" for

the other, as Levinas says. (Blanchot describes it as a "mortal substitution" [*Un-avowable* 9].)

In the facing position, I am/is recalled, back to my responsibility, which in Levinas's hands is no longer restrained by intentional consciousness or the happy clarity of knowledge. The face teaches me an exorbitant responsibility without limits or final payoffs: "The debt increases in the measures that it is paid," Levinas writes (*OTB* 12). Yet, if it were not for this preoriginary obligation, the "unconditionality of being hostage," Levinas tells us, there would be no generosity in the world—no compassion, no pardon, no proximity, "even the little that there is" (*OTB* 117). The priority of the other is "presupposed in all human relationships," Levinas writes. And if that were not the case, "we would not even say, before an open door, 'After you, sir!'" (*EI* 89). What Levinas proposes is that there may be no way to get from being-with to being-for, from neutral exposedness to responsibility (from being to responding), unless a preoriginary "after you"—an underivable obligation to respond—(un)grounds them both. Rhetoric, I submit, is first philosophy.

Methodology

I hope you're still with me. After a few false starts I realize that there is really no way to assume a masterful scholarly pose here, as if I had a clear sense of how to proceed. It's not as if what I'm trying to present in these pages could be confirmed by a trip to the archive or some well-crafted empirical study, whether quantitative or qualitative. Let's just say that the question of method has proved quite agonizing. The task here—to expose a solidarity that precedes symbolicity—cannot be accomplished through representation (alone), through tireless exegesis, the constative work of describing and explicating; there is also, of course, no way to skip that work. The performative event of the saying takes place at (or as) the limit, the "unexposable *in*," but the saying by necessity gives a said that offers itself up once again to thematization and appropriation. Perhaps the most I can hope for here is that this text will testify to the saying's tortured rapport with the said, in which it barely hangs on. Heidegger claims that this sort of testimony is what poets are for, and I don't disagree; but I don't have the gift, and in any case I'm not sure that poetry alone would reach you, the ones for whom I write. Literature more broadly or even literary criticism would have been other ways to go, especially given fiction's remarkable powers of exposition (Ronell reminds us of "what Hegel drew from *Antigone* or Freud

from *Oedipus Rex*" [*CW* 11]). A strictly philosophical or psychoanalytic frame
might also have panned out. And if I were Avital Ronell, I might offer all of the
above, and toss in some street theater, as well.[12] But given my specific limita-
tions and capabilities, I will hold on to a specifically rhetorical perspective: I'll
attempt to use rhetorical leverage to expose a preoriginary rhetoricity.

Still, the disciplinary boundaries wobble in the face of this "task." As Nancy
notes, "the necessity of being-in-common is not that of a physical law, and who-
ever wants to expose it must also expose himself (that is what we call 'thought,'
'writing,' *and* their partition and sharing)" (*BIC* 9). There is no said without the
saying, no meaning or sense without exposure, which indicates "the impossi-
bility of communicating anything at all," as Nancy observes, "without touching
the limit where all meaning [*sens*] spills out of itself, like a simple ink stain on a
word, on the word 'meaning'" ("Exscription" 319). Sender-receiver theories of
communication that focus narrowly on "speakers" and "messages" miss the fact
that to address "you," in writing or speech (or, say, dance—any performance of
the inscription), is already to touch the limit; and to be addressed, to "receive"
an address, is first of all to be exposed to that exposedness. There is no com-
munication except on this limit, this "site" of exposure where the address takes
place and where the "masterful scholarly ethos" is toast. Hope lies in the fact
that the appropriation of what is inscribed (the said) necessarily testifies to the
inappropriable exposure that insists and resists. Writing and speaking are func-
tions of this inessential solidarity, expositions not of who one is (identity) but
of the fact that "we" are (relationality). "We do not seize control, we do not ap-
propriate what is offered up [as the *in*]," Nancy writes (*BIC* 10). The exposure
cannot be grasped in a concept or represented in significations. And yet, this
"solidarity" is what is exposed in any address—in this address.

So far, I've been attempting to trope that which no figure can contain, to
mediate a trace of the immediate, to attend to the unthematizable by necessarily
and simultaneously thematizing it. Despite the built-in betrayal, this will have
been the primary method of approach: a cautious figuring of the unfigurable,
a reduction of the saying to the said. The secondary method, which is perhaps
less familiar and which I have lifted from *Otherwise than Being*, involves a kind
of reversal or rewinding—the reduction of the said to the saying. In Levinas's
words, this approach attempts "to awaken in the said the saying which is ab-
sorbed in it" (*OTB* 43). It attempts, that is, to allow the saying to show itself
within the said by performatively interrupting it. Levinas acknowledges that it
is necessary that "the saying on the hither side be thematized, that is, manifest

itself, that it enter into a position and a book" (43). But he goes on to argue that the "reduction" of the said to the saying is also necessary; indeed, he insists that it's the task of philosophy to not allow "what is beyond essence" to "congeal into essence" (44). One philosophical approach that had taken up the task of this reduction long before Levinas labeled it as such is, of course, deconstruction, which I would describe as a *rhetorical* philosophy. I would further argue, contra Levinas, that this reduction is first of all the task of rhetoric: philosophy picked it up when it took its rhetorical turn.

These two methods, these opposing reductions, will operate in tandem here, without much ado or metacommentary. And the goal, simultaneously modest and overreaching, will be twofold: to offer a theoretical contribution to rhetorical studies and to excavate the rhetorical basis for contemporary theories of relationality. To that end, this text offers itself up—tentatively, experimentally (let's see if this works)—*as* a rhetoric of the saying, a work devoted specifically to excavating, examining, and affirming the saying *as* rhetoric, as an extra-symbolic rhetorical appeal.