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EXAMINING THE ISSUE OF ESSENCE AND THE CONCEPT OF
ECSTASY IN SINGULARITY AND COMMUNITY
IN RELATION TO ACTING

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**Examining the Issue of Essence and the Concept of Ecstasy in Singularity
and Community in Relation to Acting**

**Tekillik ve Ortaklıkta Öz Sorununun ve Eks-statis Kavramının Oyunculuk
ile İlişkili İncelenmesi**

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PREFACE

The initial aim of this thesis is to reorganize several dramaturgical thoughts that allow us to think about actors' interactions with others on stage within the context of philosophical notions of community and singularity. I must caution the reader that this synthesis in no way points to an exploration of some sort of "actors' community." Rather, it intends to draw attention to new interpretive opportunities offered by an interdisciplinary reading.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to discuss the relationship between theatre acting and the ideas of community and singularity. In the first chapter, I will draw from Nancy, Blanchot, and Agamben's thoughts on the subject of essences and combine and analyze my findings within the context of acting. If having an essence implies owning, possessing a form of being, refusing to let it go, obstructing any possible change; or if it implies having been attributed a particular property or identity, then this type of ownership/possession is incompatible with the idea of community that I intend to highlight; it also has the effect of reducing the actors' common creative space, their range of possibilities. My claim is that actors hold the potential to change and transform because they refuse to own any property as a part of their essence. This allows them to open up towards others –that is anyone who can be considered their “stage partners.” Refusing to reduce things into a set of essences; refusing to impart immanence to beings; refusing to ignore the distinctions and particularities; and refusing to define the multiplicity of beings through active/passive recognition relationships and through attributed identities they assumed to have, leads to progress along with and despite the presence of the unknown into the possibility of community and creative space. My third chapter will focus on the notion of ecstasy and a particular interpretation thereof. According to which, ecstasy can be seen as a way to step into the community which consists of singularities that are defined mainly by their interactions with others. Community manifests where Being shares a limit with others outside itself, out there, in the external world, where it opens itself up to contestation. Ecstasy is a waypoint, a source of inspiration for the creative process of the actors who explore the inter-spaces between bodies, atmospheres, and histories. Ultimately, I intend to combine philosophical views that are shaped around the ideas of community and singularity with those of dramaturgists and make a comparative, interactive reading between the two.

Keywords: Singularity, Community, Theatre, Essence, Ecstasy

ÖZET

Bu tez, tekillik ve ortaklık kavramları etrafında şekillenen düşüncelerin oyunculuk ile ilişkisini tartışmayı planlamaktadır. İlk bölümde Nancy, Blanchot ve Agamben'in öz ile ilgili görüşlerine başvurulacak ve sonrasında öz meselesinin oyuncu için karşılığı araştırılacaktır. Öz, bir niteliği, bir oluşu sahiplenmek, ondan vazgeçmemek, bir tür dönüşüme değişime izin vermemekse veya bir başkası tarafından bir nitelik, bir oluş, bir kimlik oluş ile anılmaksa, bu tür bir sahiplenme hem ortaklık için engel teşkil etmekte, hem oyuncunun sahne partnerleriyle olan ilişkisinde oyun alanını küçültmekte, imkanlarını kısıtlamaktadır. Zira oyuncu, bir dönüşüm potansiyeli taşımaktadır; bedeninde hiçbir niteliği mülk edinmedikçe, sahne partnerlerine, bir başka deyişle kendinden başka olana doğru açılma imkânı bulmaktadır. Şey'ler özüne indirgenmediğinde, birbirine tabi kılınp içkinlik atfedilmediğinde, aynılaştırılıp farklılıklar yok sayılmadığında veya kimlik-oluşlar üzerinden bir tanıma/tanınma ilişkisine dönüştürülmediğinde, bilinemez olan ile birlikte, bilinemez olana rağmen ilerleme, hem oyuncunun yaratıcı alanı, hem ortaklığa açılan bir alandır. Üçüncü bölümde ise, kendinden başka olan ile ilişki içerisinde kurulacak bir tekilliğin ve ancak ve ancak tekilliklerden oluşabilecek bir ortaklığa açılmanın yolu olarak ele alınabilecek *eks-stasis* kavramı tartışılacaktır. Varlık'ın ancak *kendi dışında, dışarıda*, kendinden başka olan ile sınırını paylaştığı yerde, kendini tartışma alanına açtığı yerde, ortaklık bir imkân olarak belirlemektedir. Bedenler arası, atmosferler arası, tarihler arası gezgin olan, ara-larını arayan, bir *arabulucu* olan oyuncunun kurmaca inşasında, *eks-stasis* bir ilham, yol gösterici bir kavram olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bu anlamda, tez, tekillik ve ortaklık kavramları etrafında şekillenen düşünceleri, çeşitli tiyatro teorisyenlerinin geliştirdiği düşüncelerle yan yana getirmeyi, birbirleriyle konuşturmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Tekillik, Cemaat, Tiyatro, Öz, Eks-stasis

INTRODUCTION

Gravitating around seminal works such as Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*, Maurice Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community* and, Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community*, this thesis aims to connect and examine three main subjects. Initially, I will engage with the idea of individual essence, specifically within the context of discussions around the notions of community and singularity (Chapter 1). I will then revisit the same idea, focusing on its implications for acting (Chapter 2). Finally, I will consolidate the prior examinations within a discussion of the notion of *ecstasy* (Chapter 3). Throughout the thesis, I will argue that critically engaging with the subjects of community and, singularity, can effectively inform the process of constructing an act and can empower the actor who is engaged in that process. Such a discussion can also arm the actor's outlook towards stage acting and text reading with capacities and viewpoints that can carry him/her onwards within the creative field. Methodologically, I intend to argue these points by juxtaposing the claims of the aforementioned authors with those of other thinkers who made substantive claims on similar subjects. Whether one takes individual essence to be something to be possessed or something that is attributed to individuals on the basis of their properties, their identities, their affiliations, or a fixed definition (suggesting the content of these categories is immanent to each person), It must be said that the scholarly literature on individual essence –with contributions from actors, dramaturgists and directors– will come in handy when examining the notions of singularity and community. In the same spirit, I will be engaging with the traditional claims about essence (for instance, the idea of essence as a potential that can lead the actor into the creative field where he/she can contribute to or interact with the works of other creators) and ecstasy within the philosophy of acting while also complementing and comparing these claims with a new context in which the ideas of essence and ecstasy are formed mainly around notions singularity and community.

My investigation will begin with Jean-Luc Nancy's claim that one's revelatory understanding of others' finality is the baseline for the notion of

community.¹ That is to say, the moment when the *self (ego)* realizes that it is unable to consciously experience its own death. According to Nancy “that which is not a subject opens up and opens onto a community.”² This stating position will allow me to investigate key concepts such as “non-subjecthood,” “individuality” and, “singularity” and their differences. According to Nancy, the individual is a product of an atomizing outlook, an indivisible unit that has to be regarded as a totality; and the concept itself excludes the mere possibility of change or transformation. This concept is countered by the “singular being,” whose existence is conditional on the existence of singular beings other than herself. Nancy argues that the convergence of two singular beings allows the possibility of *clinamen*³ or inclination, thus laying the foundation for a relationship that can include the potential to change and transform. Nancy’s *absolute subject*, on the other hand, is taken to have an essence and to be an immanent being. The absolute subject –just as his concepts of *absolute State, History, Idea, Science, and Art* which are also argued to be also immanent– is taken to be an obstacle against the general project of community.⁴ Throughout the thesis, I intend to demonstrate that not only Nancy but also Agamben and Blanchot are preoccupied with these key concepts and the way that they fit together. Accordingly, the question of why and how these three scholars pit the ideas of singularity and community against individuality and society will be an important object throughout the following pages.

Maurice Blanchot builds on Nancy’s thoughts on immanence in his critique of communism. According to Blanchot communism fails to bring about equality between people, creating instead a system where people subjugate one another. A system where people are commensurable is a system where humanity is immanent

¹ Jean- Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, Translated by Peter Connor, Lisa Garpus, Michael Holland, Simona Sawhney, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and Oxford, 1991, p.15

² Nancy, *Ibid*, p. 14

³ Nancy, *Ibid*, p. 3

⁴ Nancy, *Ibid*, p. 4

to human beings.⁵ A community, on the other hand, accepts the impossibility of its own immanence as well as the impossibility of a mode of being as a subject.⁶ Blanchot takes the acts of subjugation, commensuration, and tolerance/recognition to be related with the idea of essence and therefore incompatible with the idea of community. After all, for him, “a being does not want to be recognized, it wants to be contested: in order to exist it goes towards the other”⁷ The idea of singularity which is capable of opening up to others and becoming an object of contestation is quite compatible with the idea of acting in which the actor takes the stage in order to relate to others and enter the common creative field where he can contribute to other creators’ efforts. Motivated by this compatibility, I intend to build on the subject of relating to others, compare the different views on the of relation and examine if, where, and how these views intersect and contribute to each other.

Agamben chooses to use the term “Whatever” for his “coming being.” Whatever is singular in whichever state that it *is* at that moment.⁸ Consequently, his Whatever is not insensitive to features and labels that we attribute to persons: Being Muslim, being red, being French, etc. is always significant to Whatever and it is encountered as a singularity *as it is* in every moment under each circumstance. According to him Whatever, as a singularity, does not belong to any particular identity⁹ and if there are differences between persons these should not be located with reference to their essences.¹⁰ I aim to investigate this line of thought further in the text in order to shed light on the often mysterious links between identity and essence and I intend to ask and attempt to answer several key questions on this subject. For instance, what is the nature of a community that consists of a

⁵ Maurice Blanchot, *Unavowable Community*, Translated by: Pierre Coris, Station Hill Press, New York, 1988, p.2

⁶ Blanchot, *Ibid.*, p.2

⁷ Blanchot, *Ibid.*, p.6

⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, Translated by: Michael Hardt, University of Minnesota Press, New York, 2004, p.1

⁹ Agamben, *Ibid.*, p.66

¹⁰ Agamben, *Ibid.*, p.17

conglomeration of singular beings/singularities, or what do we mean when we say people ascribe/subscribe to identities? If it is the case that we can't ascribe a particular identity to *The Coming Being* –that is to say a singular being– and if we are to examine differences and commonalities between people without reference to an essence, what does it mean to be different or same in a community which seeks the possibility of a universal fellowship/collective?

My working assumption throughout the following pages will be that the actor is an investigator and that the object of their investigation is everyone else other than themselves. The foundation of a role may very well be the actor's self, "the I," but the brick and mortar of the construction consist of questions that target and examine the others, since the actor must recreate a time, a place, a particular atmosphere, a person other than their own on the stage. Therefore, I find it of particular significance to delve further into the duality of sameness and difference with special emphasis on the actor's own place while they are constructing and contributing to the collective construction of fictive worlds.

All three aforementioned scholars engage with and criticize the idea of the modern absolute subject through their analyzes of individual essence. As I noted before, I intend to interlace a specific reading of essence that is formed around the notions of singularity and community with a reading of essence that relates mainly to the acting endeavor. Instead of an outlook where the act of possessing an essence is inverse and even incompatible with the idea of community, where individuality is closely linked with the possession of essence and, where the arrangement of individuals leads to totalitarian outcomes and community structures, I will be examining the viability of an outlook that centers around the ideas of non-belonging, dispossession, and non-qualification.

How the ideas dispossession and non-qualification can function in acting and their potential, has been the subject of at least a few noteworthy scholarly analyses. According to Denis Diderot, the actors "are nothing that they are before all

everything.”¹¹ One of his readers, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, concurs in an article titled “Diderot: Paradox and Mimesis:” the actors “are capable of becoming anything insofar as they are able to become nothing.”¹² The same line of thought can be found in 20th-century dramatics where the likes of Stanislavsky and Jacques Lecoq investigated the possibility of a body without qualities. A recent example is Tulu Ülgen, who in her book *Kurmaca, Yanılsama: Oyunculuk, Hakikat, Deneyim Arasında* (Fiction and Illusion: Between Acting, Truth, and Experience) led an in-depth discussion about both practical and mental aspects of acting and, tackled the relation between genuineness and creativity through her investigation of subtle differences between the notions of fiction and illusion.¹³ Michael Chekov who likens the actor’s being to an immaterial nimbus of light, an “aura,” describes the acting body along similar lines: the actor’s body is merely a membrane, translucent and ethereal.¹⁴ Zeynep Sayın has also a few insightful and vibrant words to add to this subject. According to her, the actor is a headless figure (just like Bataille’s headless but also leaderless Acephale) a praying mantis that keeps on the act of copulating even when its head gets gruesomely severed from its body.¹⁵ Also according to Sayın, the theater belongs to the realm of spirits, and the actor is supposed to die before they enter the stage.¹⁶ Drawing bit by bit from all these lines of thought, I intend to discuss the general idea of “experiencing a living death” and the way it fits into the discussions about community and acting within the general theme of essencelessness.

¹¹ Denis Diderot, *The Paradox of Acting*, Translated by: Walter Herries Pollock, Chatto & Windus, Piccadilly, London, 1883, p.53

¹² Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “Diderot: Paradox and Mimesis”, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1989, p.255

¹³ Tulu Ülgen, *Kurmaca Yanılsama, Oyunculuk Deneyim Hakikat Arasında*, Sub Press., Istanbul, 2018

¹⁴ Burcu Halaçoğlu, “The Concept of “Presence” in Contemporary Actor Training and a Workshop”, Phd Thesis, Istanbul, 2019, p.38

¹⁵ Zeynep Sayın, *Ölüm Terbiyesi*, Metis Pub., 2018, p.54

¹⁶ Sayın, “Kurmaca/ yanılsama: metnin düşündürdükleri” içinde Ülgen, Ibid, p.7-8

Claims about essence and essencelessness can also benefit from a discussion on the notion of ecstasy. Often evoking the feelings of “bliss” “entrancement” and “inspiration,”¹⁷ ecstasy is generally interpreted by Nancy, Blanchot, and Agamben as the *state of being outside the limits or outside the limits of oneself*. More specifically, ecstasy is, for Nancy, the impossibility of absolute immanence;¹⁸ for Blanchot, it is a realm that transcends knowledge that implies un-knowledge;¹⁹ and for Agamben, it is the gift that singularity gathers from the empty hands of humanity.²⁰ For all three of these scholars, ecstasy connotes a limit and refers to the external. Likewise, for the actor who does not *essentially* possess any quality and who seeks the possibility of entering the common creative field, ecstasy is a matter of limits and externality.

Another central, conditional claim that I intend to test and develop is as follows: If the realm of theatre is the realm of fiction, then the actor must be a person who “contributes to the construction of a fictive world that at the same time reflexively creates the actors themselves.”²¹ The actor who seeks the truth within the labyrinth of un-truth/fiction²² must also be able to abandon their self and enter the external realm with ecstasy in order to enact a self, other than themselves, a place other than their own, an age to which they never belonged. Surely the actor is often building and rebuilding an “I” drawing from their experience of the world; but there is also the sense that when they narrate, act and create the actor steps into the realm of “not (–) I.” The actor often transforms themselves while transforming other, they affect others while being affected in return. I will be suggesting that

¹⁷ <https://tureng.com/tr/turkce-ingilizce/ecstasy>, Last Access Date: 18.09.2021

¹⁸ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.6

¹⁹ Blanchot, p.19

²⁰ Agamben, *Ibid*, p. 67

²¹ Ülgen, *Ibid*, p.39

²² Sanford Meisner and Dennis Longwell, *Sanford Meisner On Acting*, Vintage Books, 1987, p.87

these reflexive moments of change, interaction, transformation, and confrontation are only possible at the limits of the self.

To sum up, this three-part thesis will discuss the idea of the essence in the first chapter while drawing from Blanchot, Nancy, and Agamben's thoughts on the issues of singularity and community. In the second chapter, I will continue developing the idea of essence and considering its implications for acting. Finally, the third chapter will focus on one of the organic inferences from the prior discussion of the notion of essence: the notion of ecstasy.

CHAPTER 1

The Question of Essence Regarding Singularity and Community

*"...to be absolutely alone it is not enough that i be so; i must also be alone being alone..."*²³

In his *The Inoperative Community (La Communauté désœuvrée*²⁴), Jean-Luc Nancy takes pains to argue that human *immanence* is an obstacle against the possibility of community.²⁵ Immanence is the state where the production of one's self can only be attributed to that self; and in the case of a society, an immanent society is the product of its own work (*oeuvre*). The French title (*La Communauté désœuvrée*) refers to a community that is not the product of its own work –an unworked community. The prime example of an immanent individual is the Cartesian skeptic who proves the certainty of their own existence without any reference to any external transcendence. The Cartesian skeptic is the product of their own work in every sense of the word.

²³ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.4.

²⁴ The French title refers to a "community that is not the product of its own work" rather than an "Inoperative Community"

²⁵ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.3

This particular approach towards the nature of humankind leads to a specific understanding of the human as an individual and later as a subject. Approaching this archetype on the basis of a individual essence would suggest that the immanence lies in their capability to realize, substantiate their own essence. It wouldn't be far-fetched to say that the same applies to communities. Nancy claims that "(...) the immanence of man to man or it is man, taken absolutely, considered as the immanent being par excellence, that constitutes the stumbling block to thinking of community. A community presupposed as having to be one of *human beings* presupposes that it effect, or that it must effect, as such and integrally, its own essence, which is itself the accomplishment of the essence of humanness."²⁶ A type of communism that's the product of this particular understanding of community will be totalitarian in nature since as a system it will demand each person to realize the same essence.

Another implication of the approach above is the idea of an "absolute human."²⁷ For Nancy, an absolute being is "disconnected, separate, closed and unrelated."²⁸ Nancy takes the absolute human to be an obstacle against community since "the absolute must be the absolute of its own absoluteness or not be at all".²⁹

"It's logic will always be the same in much as it is without relation. A simple and redoutable logic will always imply that within its very separation the absolutely separate encloses, if we can say this, more than what is simply separated. Which is to say that the separation itself must be enclosed, that the closure must not close around a territory (while still remaining exposed, if its outer edge, to another territory, with which it thereby communicates), but also, in order to complete the absoluteness of its separation, around the enclosure itself. The absolute must be the absolute of its own absoluteness, or not to be at all. In other words: to be absolutely alone, it is not enough that I be so; I must also be alone being alone - and this of course is contradictory. The logic of the absolutes violates the absolute."³⁰

²⁶ Nancy, Ibid, p.2

²⁷ Nancy, Ibid, p.3

²⁸ Nancy, Ibid, p.4

²⁹ Nancy, Ibid, p.4

³⁰ Nancy, Ibid, p.4

Nancy's critique of the "individual" is predicated on a particular reading of the term human wherein the human being is presumed to have an essence and therefore is an "immanent being." He goes on to say that an individual is "by the necessity of its nature –and as the etymology of the word suggests (*individuum*)– indivisible, an atom."³¹ The term "indivisible" connotes completeness and finality while excluding the potential for transformation and change. Nancy's historical reading of the subject, on the other hand, aims to develop an approach where one can see the human beings involved in, instigating or contributing to a change –as the affected and affecting agents of transformation.

Nancy who criticizes individuality as a form of atomism³² rejects this idea through his notion of *clinamen*. *Clinamen* (inclination) can also refer to atoms but, crucially, it implies that the atoms can interact with each other.³³ Atoms that are inclined towards others will inevitably, pull, push, trend towards etc. their peers: that is they will *relate* to others. Though we are still in the realms of the atoms their ability to incline towards each other, opens up the possibility of thinking about them as related "singularities." The mere possibility of this sort of relation is closed to the absolute beings.³⁴ So, the upshot of Nancy's critique of individuality suggests that the idea of the individual which is either deemed to be absolute or immanent is bereft of any potential to or any hope of change. On the other hand, thinking in terms of singularities may point to a way out. Where the idea of the "modern individual" falls silent due to its lack of potential to change and transform, the idea of singularities may take over and enable us to speak about communities.

One way to approach the singular being is exposure. That is to say that the singular being is the being that *exposes* itself. The act of exposition implies that the exposor leaves its subjectivity behind and turns its back to immanence. For Nancy,

³¹ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.3

³² Nancy, *Ibid*, p.4

³³ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.3

³⁴ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.3

the idea of community is predicated on the claim that there is no singular being without another singular being.³⁵ For him the connective in “you and I” is much more than a connective: “It consists in the appearance of the *between* as such: you *and* I (between us) – a formula in which the *and* does not imply juxtaposition, but exposition”³⁶ A solely connective use of “and” implies that it fixes the objects it connects in place, therefore, connoting them as final, determined and complete. Yet, the expository “and” brings us to think of two extremes, two beings and, in general, in terms of “*me and the other.*” “By virtue of this position or this primordial structure, it is at once detached, distinguished, and communitarian.”³⁷

According to Nancy “that which is not a subject opens up and opens onto a community (...)”³⁸ To grasp what exactly he means by “non-subject” we can turn to his comments about death: Since it is impossible for a subject to experience –and therefore– proclaim their own death, metaphysics of subjecthood are not equipped to utter or even truly contemplate the sentence “I died.”³⁹ Subjecthood necessitates a form of consciousness, but since the consciousness is extinguished upon death, the experience of death and the representation thereof is inaccessible to the person who died. Death is a limit which is outside the reach of conscious experience. Therefore, the relation between death and consciousness is not one of immanence but of *transcendence*. Though the death can be attributed to specific past persons, it is an unattainable “excess” for their consciousness. The upshot is that human beings can only witness the death of others, and for a person the only accessible experience of death lies in the others’ deaths.

Nancy claims that the transcendence found in the non-subjecthood of the I who is incapable of representing in their consciousness either the concept of death

³⁵ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.28

³⁶ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.29

³⁷ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.29

³⁸ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.14

³⁹ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.14

or limit, is a window to the community.⁴⁰ So, the locus of community must be precisely the limit. Accordingly, the *I (ego)* always strives for the limit and always seeks *another* to interact due to its inability to consciously experience death. “Community is what takes place always through others and for others.”⁴¹ adds Nancy. This is precisely the way that being opens itself to contestation: through the connection of *I* with *another*. Within the community setting the *I* faces and registers *another* as an unknown. While the community “assumes the impossibility of its own immanence, the impossibility of a communitarian being in the form of a subject.”⁴² In light of these it is possible to conclude—as Nancy does—that the fabric of community therefore occupies a singular place.⁴³

In the community where “there is no singular being without another singular being”⁴⁴ *I* exposes itself to another with some knowledge of the act of exposing. The crux is, says Nancy, this knowledge can’t be located within the bound of consciousness.⁴⁵ For Nancy this epistemic state corresponds to a mirror image of the Cartesian skeptical subject who also gets to know themselves through and because of an act of exposure. However, community and the acts of exposure that relate to it are not realized through work (*oeuvre*). And this is the main difference between the Cartesian subject and the singular/communal being that Nancy examines. According to him we can’t *produce* the community, we can merely experience it as an experience of termination, finality.⁴⁶ Community can’t be produced as work or objectified as a product whether it is through its constituents, its structure, its discourse, its symbols and institutions (i.e. through individual and

⁴⁰ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.14

⁴¹ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.15

⁴² Nancy, *Ibid*, p.15

⁴³ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.15

⁴⁴ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.28

⁴⁵ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.31

⁴⁶ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.31

collective elements of subjecthood).⁴⁷ Thus, according to Nancy community necessarily takes place in what Blanchot has called un-working (*désœuvrement*)⁴⁸

Nancy argues that the continuation of community depends on communication.⁴⁹ What he means by that is writing. “We must not stop writing, or letting the singular outline of our being-in-common expose itself.”⁵⁰ Bataille says that “thus we are nothing, neither you nor I, beside burning words which could pass from me to you, imprinted on a page: for I would only have lived in order to write them, and, if it is true that they are addressed to you, you will live from having had the strength to hear them.”⁵¹ What remains is the writing as an act of exposure and it doesn’t matter who is undertaking the act of writing or even reading. According to Nancy, writing perpetuates sharing and sharing is a *communal* act reserved to those that he defines as “it *is* nothing, *it* is not a collective subject”⁵²

It is clear that Nancy interprets the act of writing as an exposition of limits. Though the act, every instant singular beings share their limits, share each other on their limits. We can conclude from this that, writing singularity exposes itself and its own limits through his written words. The exposed words and previously unperceived limits are the locus and the stratum of the “sharing act.” Through sharing, singularities escape the relationships of society (i.e. “mother-son,” “author-reader,” “public figure-private figure” “producer-consumer”) and enter the un-worked relations of the community.⁵³ We see similar thoughts in the words of Lacoue-Labarthe, who argues that Diderot laid the groundwork for an approach where the actor as a subject can be considered with no reference to a particular

⁴⁷ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.31

⁴⁸ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.31

⁴⁹ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.41

⁵⁰ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.41

⁵¹ Georges Bataille, *The Inner Experience*, Translated by: Leslie Anne Boldt, State University of New York Press, 1988, p.94

⁵² Nancy, *Ibid*, p.41

⁵³ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.41

identity.⁵⁴ According to him the actor “is capable of becoming anything insofar as he is able to become nothing.”⁵⁵ Lacoue-Labarthe puts special emphasis on the idea that the artist should not adopt any particular property as their own. The artist is a subject without a subject, that is, they have lost all ties to the contents of subjecthood: they are anything and nothing at the same moment. Embracing nothingness comes with the gift of finally becoming something. Lacoue-Labarthe’s artist is equally apt at everything: every role, every character and function. And according to Lacoue-Labarthe, art is precisely this gift.⁵⁶ Art, seen through the lens of non-subjecthood, also implies a journey to the limit where revelation and exposition takes place. Paul Klee puts it beautifully, saying: “art does not reflect the visible, it makes it visible.”⁵⁷ It makes us question the stories that we tell ourselves, or the *myths* that hitherto were presented as facts and reality.

Myths are closely related to Nancy’s notion of sharing. Myths are stories that have been told for centuries and they convey narratives about the origins of authority. According to Nancy, “our societies, they have told us, derive from these assemblies themselves, and our beliefs, our knowledge, our discourses, and our poems derive from these narratives.”⁵⁸ He also claims that the idea of myth is perhaps the entire pretension on the part of the West to appropriate its own origin. If it succeeds in that endeavor, it can finally define itself in absolute terms.⁵⁹ This attempt at conquest bears significance because it also relates to the idea of essence. According to Nancy, “we no longer have anything to do with myth.”⁶⁰ Our task lies in suspending and disrupting (as opposed to suppressing) the myth and carry the

⁵⁴ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “Diderot: Paradox and Mimesis”, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, p.256

⁵⁵ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Ibid*, p.256

⁵⁶ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Ibid*, p.255

⁵⁷ Paul Klee, *Bauhaus Ders Notları ve Yazılar*, Translated by: Uluer Emre Özgül, Hayalbaz, 2010, p.9

⁵⁸ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.44

⁵⁹ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.46

⁶⁰ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.46

narrative towards its limit. This disruption happens right at that moment when the myth realizes itself.⁶¹ The myth propels itself to the point of its own realization and inevitably suspends and thereby exposes itself at that very moment. For that reason, Nancy argues that the word “myth” itself designates the absence of what it names.⁶² Furthermore, being in a community is possible insofar as a multitude of singularities co-manifest/compear (comproissent) and they co-manifest insofar as they expose and present themselves to each other. Their compearance is not something that has been externally affixed to their being; it is the very way that they come into existence.⁶³ All those that are defined, named or fabled/storied through an origin-oriented narrative takes us further and further away from the idea of community. According to Nancy, “the community resists this infinite immanence.”⁶⁴

As I noted before, sharing is perpetuated through writing and its locus is where the singularities meet their limits. Regarding myths, the act of sharing manifests where the myth is suspended, disrupted. According to Nancy, determining the exact nature and describing the complete structure of the sharing act is a difficult task. “Sharing divides and shares itself: this is what it is to be in common. One cannot tell its story, nor determine its essence (...)”⁶⁵ Sharing or perpetuating the act of sharing is only possible when there is no reference to an essence or an identity: it is possible through exposition where the person reveals themselves to another at the limit of their being. The possibility of community emerges when the *I* leaves its own self behind and manifests at its own limit during the act of exposure.

Nancy claims that theatre no longer means the scene of representation: it means the extreme edge of this scene, the dividing line where singular beings are

⁶¹ Nancy, Ibid, p.47

⁶² Nancy, Ibid, p.52

⁶³ Nancy, Ibid, p.58

⁶⁴ Nancy, Ibid, p.58

⁶⁵ Nancy, Ibid, p.64

exposed to one another.⁶⁶ Theatre demands an “in here and now” (hic et nunc)⁶⁷ creation with the other creators in the present time, of an other world – a fictive world – a world that is beyond the daily life world which the audience takes place in. So that, despite its textual aspect that comes with the written piece, it also opens up a space in which the notions of essenceless-ness, singularities, community, and the act of opening up to others can be discussed in a reciprocal way when approached from the perspective of acting. Eli Rozik states that “In our attempt to understand the medium of theater we should, therefore, focus on the function of “acting”.”⁶⁸ The actor is never alone on the stage; instead, we always experience them person along someone else, someone *other*. Due to their interaction with their peers on the stage, actors position themselves as subjects and participants of contestation. The being in the community, enters the contestation through its interaction and relationships with the other(s).⁶⁹ Tulu Ülgen argues that the theatrical emerges precisely at this point: “What pertains theatre, perhaps, begins in/where one body’s *not coming to this world in its own loneliness*”⁷⁰ The actor who, owing to their continuous relationship with the other, enters a causal alinement process, changes with each passing moment, surrenders to the role which is being built and becomes a singularity in the production of each new play, each new fictional world. In this particular sense, the profession of acting demands openness towards a workless and essenceless mode of being. However, one must take care not to read Blanchot’s and Nancy’s idea of un-work within the wider discussion of community, as a plea against the usage of texts and writing in theatre.

In *The Unavowable Community*, where Blanchot discusses the need for and the feasibility of the community, and where he re-opens the discussion about the

⁶⁶ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.65

⁶⁷ Grotowski, *Ibid*, p.212

⁶⁸ Eli Rozik, “Acting: The Quintessence of Theatricality”, *Substance* # 98/99, Vol.31 No: 2 and 3, Board of Regents, University of Wisconsin, 2002, p.110

⁶⁹ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.15

⁷⁰ Ülgen, *Ibid*, p.15

ideas of Community and Communism, he includes the following these words from Edgar Morin: “Communism is the major question and the principal experience of my life. I have never stopped recognizing myself in the aspirations it expresses and I still believe in the possibility of another society and another humanity.”⁷¹ What, then, is this possibility? And how does Blanchot present this subject in light of what Nancy wrote about it? More crucially for this thesis which puts heavy emphasis on the relationship between singularity and community, what is the relationship between this possibility and the idea of essence?

According to Blanchot, if communism makes the claim that it is impossible to bring about the community unless all the needs of its constituents are equally satisfied, then it fundamentally creates a scenario where the constituents of the community are represented as (acknowledging Nancy’s terminology) immanent beings. This also means that communism considers the people as “absolutely immanent beings.”⁷² Nancy was adamant in claiming that both the state and the act of immanence was an obstacle to the community. Blanchot also followed in his footsteps, building his critique of 20th century communism on Nancy’s idea of immanence, stating that: the effort to equalize a group of humans is ultimately “an exercise in attributing immanence to human beings.” For him, this is a clear case of “subjugation”. That is to say, the attempt to equalize paves the way for subjugation and a subjugating system will bring forth a totalitarian outlook towards society. As I noted before a totalitarian state system is antithetical towards the idea of community⁷³ since community involves resistance against infinite immanence and is built upon the idea of un-work (*desoeuvrement*).

What, then is the difference between notions of singularity and individuality according to Blanchot, and how does he connect this to the idea of essence? In his words: “The individual affirms himself with his inalienable rights, his refusal to

⁷¹ Blanchot, Ibid, p.2

⁷² Blanchot, Ibid, p.2

⁷³ Nancy, Ibid, p.4

have any other origin than himself, his indifference towards any theoretical dependency in relation to another who would not be an individual as he is, that is to say, in relation to himself perpetually repeated, whether in the past or in the future.”⁷⁴ It follows that, whenever an individual juxtaposes his own origins with those of others, he transforms the relationship between themselves and the other into one of recognition which does not fit well within the idea of community. However, the disavowal of origins is not a wholesale refusal of identity and the idea of community points to something other, deeper than that.

In this sense, both Nancy and Blanchot evoke the notion of *ecstasy*. The term is taken to mean “to stand or be outside oneself.” According to Blanchot “A being does not want to be *recognized*, it wants to be *contested*: in order to exist it goes towards the others (...)”⁷⁵ Following what I’ve discussed so far, this may be taken the mean that ecstasy is a gateway leading both to the idea of singularity that is built through one’s interaction with others and the idea of community constituents of which should be not individuals but singularities that I’ve just mentioned. For now, this introductory remarks on ecstasy will have to suffice since I intend to engage with it in more detail in the 3rd chapter of this thesis.

When talking about community (one of the central ideas to Blanchot’s thought) Blanchot contrasts the idea of recognition with his notions of incompleteness (*incomplétude*) and insufficiency (*insuffisance*). According to this framework the incomplete and insufficient being does not attempt to associate itself with another being to make up a substance of integrity. The awareness of insufficiency arises from the fact that it puts itself in question, which question needs the other or another to be enacted.⁷⁶ In fact, the insufficient being does not wish for a union with the other in order to create a common and complete essence, and neither does it feel the need to be recognized. So, what gives rise to being’s

⁷⁴ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.2-3

⁷⁵ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.6

⁷⁶ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.5

awareness of its insufficiency is not a yearning towards union; instead, it is the result of a skeptical journey at the end of which being realizes that it needs someone other than itself to realize itself. This skeptical effort necessitates, according to Blanchot, *contestation* that is, to be challenged by and together with others. His conclusion from this is as follows: Instead of being accepted, recognized, possessing properties that are attributed to it, or being defined with reference to an identity or essence, being exists through its relation to the other and *in conjunction with* the other.

In order to shed some more light on the notion of insufficiency, Blanchot frames the issue in relative terms: “*An insufficiency in regard to what? An insufficiency to subsist?*” Blanchot clearly states that insufficiency cannot be derived from a model of sufficiency. It is not looking for what may put an end to it, but for excess of a lack that grows ever deeper even as it fills itself up. “No doubt insufficiency wants to be contested, but that contention, even if it arose from me alone, is always exposure to some other (or to the other) who is alone able - because of his very position - to bring me into play.”⁷⁷ Also, “if human existence is an existence that puts itself radically and constantly into question, it cannot of itself alone have that possibility which always goes beyond it, for then the question would always be lacking a question.”⁷⁸ The incomplete question is merely introspective. Only when the question is asked to others, other bodies and in general the outer world, the possibility to grow, open up and move on emerges. When dealing with similar subjects in *The Paradox of Acting*, Diderot (and Lacoue-Labarthe who follows in his footsteps) makes the significant distinction between active and passive mimesis as well as between creative existence and passive fixed subject. The passive fixed subject is unable to relate to Blanchot’s insufficiency and the possibility for it to change and learn does not exist. Diderot likens this to a “contagion.”⁷⁹ The actor, instead, while investigating a character –that is while

⁷⁷ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.8

⁷⁸ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.8

⁷⁹ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Ibid*, p.264

looking for the *other* within themselves- has to ask questions regarding this persona and has to move towards it.

Blanchot questions the exact nature of the thing(s) that makes “the I” fundamentally a subject of contestation.⁸⁰ He claims that “if human existence is an existence that puts itself radically and constantly into question, it cannot of itself alone have that possibility which always goes beyond it, for then the question would always be lacking a question.”⁸¹ Here he refers exactly to one’s act of opening up to someone other than themselves. Blanchot, advocates for moving towards the other instead of finding meaning to one’s existence within their own existence, and not unlike Nancy, invites us to think about the concept of death. According to Blanchot what makes one a subject of contestation is “not my relation to myself as finite or as the consciousness of being before death or for death, but my presence for another who absents himself by dying.”⁸² “The basis of communication is not necessarily speech, or even the silence that is its foundation and punctuation, but the exposure to death, no longer my own exposure, but someone else’s, whose living and closest presence is already the eternal and unbearable absence, an absence that the travail of deepest mourning does not diminish.”⁸³ The word “communication” in French and English stems from the root “*commun(e)*” which imply commonality and joint effort. For Blanchot these two conjoined terms, commune and communication, are closely related to witnessing the other’s death. That is to say, the main point of reference of both being a commune and communicating is one’s existence reflected back in the death of the other. This does not imply immortality or continuation through bonds of origin and identity (race, nationality, homeland and so on). “I do not die because the community of which I am a part (or the fatherland, or the universe, or humanity, or the family) goes on. Rather it is almost

⁸⁰ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.9

⁸¹ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.8

⁸² Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.9

⁸³ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.25

the exact contrary.”⁸⁴ At this point we can say that “the I” who can’t experience its own death, moves toward the community upon experiencing the other’s death. But this community is not about perpetuating an origin, an essence or defining and referring to an identity or, claiming possession of a certain piece of land/country.

According to Blanchot, “community is the presentation of finitude and of excess without possibility of return that founds the finite-being.”⁸⁵ Human beings inhabit this world for a limited amount of time and when they reach the limits of their mortal existence, their finitude, they leave it behind. “Moment by moment, we act within an “impacting and being impacted, that began before our births and that will continue after our deaths.”⁸⁶ Following Ülgen’s words we can say that the persistence of the dead in our lives is due to their continuous impact on the lives of those who remain and not due to their shared ties or common origins with the living. It follows that, those who remain persist because they the ones being impacted as they witness the deaths of others. This alludes to the notion of a common memory (which goes hand in hand with the notion of common amnesia). Indeed, Zeynep Sayın notes that “communities are the carriers of the common memory and amnesia.”⁸⁷

A noteworthy vessel of common memory is the graveyard. In Turkish the term for graveyard (*mezar*) has an etymological relationship to the term for visit (*ziyaret*).⁸⁸ Graveyards are reminders and symbols of mortality and fleetingness. They allow those who remain to visit the ones who passed and maintain their existence on a symbolic level. We must also note that the word “visit” points to the ultimate eventuality of leaving, not staying, not possessing.

⁸⁴ Blanchot, Ibid, p.10

⁸⁵ Blanchot, Ibid, p.11

⁸⁶ Ülgen, Ibid, p.22

⁸⁷ Sayın, Ibid, p.11

⁸⁸ <https://www.nisanyansozluk.com/?k=mezar>, Web, Last Access Date: 02.12.2020

In *Ölüm Terbiyesi* Zeynep Sayın, comments on this subject through the myth of *Acéphale*. *Acéphale* is the name of the public review journal that took a severed head as its symbol. It is also the name of the secret community that Georges Bataille formed.⁸⁹ Commenting on this subject, Zeynep Sayın notes:

“[This is a] community myth that when it faces its mortality when it dies a living death when it falls flat on its face, it doesn’t aspire for power; it doesn’t rely on the possibility of the infinity of immortality; it doesn’t proclaim unquestioning obedience for an origin. Instead, it is the myth of those who surrender themselves to a head-less and leader-less jolt; it is a myth of a community whose headless constituents come together and refuse to inherently debase their existence by ceding this world in exchange for a higher realm beyond. It is a myth of a community wherein the people are aware of their own presence, their own insufficiency, their mortality, physicality, and finitude. It is a myth of a community that consists of the union of those who need someone else to be themselves but refuse to fill this need by seeking others or even themselves; those who know that there is and can be no community that they can count on.”⁹⁰

It’s fair to say that, for Sayın, the contrast between “dying a living death” and aspiring for power, relying on immortality, head-ing and, lead-ing is clear.

The concept of “dying a living death” appears frequently in Blanchot’s discussion on writing in relation to the notion of “erasure” (not unlike Nancy’s writing – no-one parallel). Nancy mentioned an act of sharing that was perpetuated through writing. Blanchot adds his own thoughts to that under the heading “The Literary Community” in *The Unavowable Community* and questions what exactly writing corresponds to within the idea of community. According to him no end there where finitude reigns.⁹¹ A community can only manifest under these circumstances. That is to say, as long as human finitude (death) exists there will always be a potential for community. According to Blanchot, communities appear and disappear, leaving no traces behind them. This can be a source of sorrow as well as joy. Blanchot likens this to the phenomenology of erasure; that is, erasure of written

⁸⁹ Sayın, Ibid, p.7

⁹⁰ Sayın, Ibid, p.31

⁹¹ Blanchot, Ibid, p.20

words that is necessarily a part of act of writing.⁹² According to him, “the one for whom I write” is the unrecognized, the unknown. One’s written relationship with the unknown addressee will allow them to experience death and finitude.⁹³ The community refers to no one while at the same time addressing everyone. It bears repeating that: embracing nothingness comes with the gift of finally becoming something.⁹⁴

In *The Coming Community* Giorgio Agamben writes: “What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging (even in the form of a simple presupposition)”⁹⁵ So let’s take a look at Agamben’s views on community in conjunction with the views of Nancy and Blanchot. For Agamben, community consists of the union of those who do not convene around or identify with a common identity.⁹⁶ Those who claim a community on the grounds of a particular, representative identity do not qualify as members of community for Agamben. However, those who refuse to meet around an identity, those who open themselves up to the others through their singularity are the ones that build the community. No particular identity relation will do. In Agamben’s community, there is nothing to represent the person neither is there a rule or a conceptual framework to organize individuals into a pecking order. According to Agamben, this necessitates a confrontation that the sovereign, the head, the leader⁹⁷ can’t “tolerate.”⁹⁸

⁹² Blanchot, Ibid, p.21

⁹³ Blanchot, Ibid, p.24

⁹⁴ Lacoue-Labarthe, Ibid, p.255

⁹⁵ Agamben, Ibid, p.85

⁹⁶ Agamben, Ibid, p.85

⁹⁷ Sayın, Ibid, p.31

⁹⁸ Agamben, Ibid, p.85

In the *Coming Community* Agamben uses the term “whatever” to describe the “the coming being.” The Latin form of the word, *quodlibet ens*, is not “being, it does not matter which” but rather “being such that it always matters.”⁹⁹ According to Agamben, the grounds for “whatever’s” singularity are not its indifference to or freedom from an attributable property (being red, being French, being a Muslim and so on); rather, “whatever” is a singularity because it is defined through all of its properties as it holds them *as such / as it is*.¹⁰⁰ From this we may conclude that “whatever” which takes part in a community made up of singularities, does so not because it is a shapeless, featureless being that is insignificant in all respects or not because it denies and ignores the attribution of an essence and properties: Instead, it takes part in the community *such as* it exists in each moment. Agamben’s whatever requires being as such — and no more. This type of singular being is defined through its revocation of any particular class or identity.

“In this conception, such-and-such being is reclaimed from its having this or that property, which identifies it as belonging to this or that set, or this or that class (the reds, the French, the Muslims) and it is reclaimed not for another class nor for the simple generic absence of any belonging, but for its being- *such*, for belonging itself. Thus being-*such* which remains constantly hidden in the condition of belonging (“there is an *x* such that it belongs to *y*”) and which is in no way a real predicate, comes to light itself: The singularity exposed as such is whatever you *want*, that is lovable.”¹⁰¹

For Agamben, the relationship between love and the whatever which remains constantly hidden in the condition of belonging is this: “Love is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect the properties in favor of an insipid generality (universal love): The lover wants the loved one *with all of its predicates*, its being such as it is.”¹⁰² Lovers are not attracted to a single, particular property of their beloved; neither they can simply ignore any of their individual

⁹⁹ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.1

¹⁰⁰ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.1

¹⁰¹ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.1-2

¹⁰² Agamben, *Ibid*, p.2

properties when asked. Similarly, “*qudlibetalita*” or whatever-ness does not imply indifference. According to Ülgen, the state in which two beings accept and recognize each other just as they are at that moment is related to the idea of “beauty”; her prime examples for this phenomenon are the state of being in love, art and acting.¹⁰³

Agamben cautions against seeking the criterion of difference in an “essence.”¹⁰⁴ Just as singularities can’t be ordered according to their possession of a particular essence, they also can’t be sublated and homogenized according to other measures of discernment. Agamben claims that “in-difference with respect to properties is what individuates and disseminates singularities”¹⁰⁵ Once singularities are taken to be indiscernible, a totalitarian outlook emerges where they are sublated into a whole / totality. This clearly situates the idea of an individual within the framework of totalitarianism or as its “product.” Unsurprisingly, Agamben’s outlook toward the idea of individual is a critical one, just as Nancy’s and Blanchot’s. He points out that we move further and further away from the idea of community as we regard individuals as indiscernible from each other and define them through their sameness. Disregarding sameness works against the idea of human beings as homogenous forms whereas attributing a homogenizing nature to human beings leads to the reduction of singularities into essences and the possibility of amalgamating them into a whole.

Agamben suggests that “whatever” is the being that can embrace the potentiality of not being and can embody the power of its own powerlessness.¹⁰⁶ This un-being does not refer to a refusal of national flags or identity or even any identity or essence. Instead, it encompasses all of those and transcends them. Ultimately it contains all forms of being; it is not bound by dichotomies and binary

¹⁰³ Ülgen, *Ibid*, p.73

¹⁰⁴ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.17

¹⁰⁵ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.18

¹⁰⁶ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.104

relations; neither it calls for a “necessary identity.” The community of those who do not meet around a common identity remains dormant as a potential in the constituents of that community. Perhaps this is the reason that this type of community is referred to as “the community of the impossible” instead of an “impossible community.”

Necessary identity dictates that people are parts of some category or the other (nation, homeland, ethnic identity, and so on) and that it is “theirs.” At the same time, assuming some category to be “mine” puts me in a relation of possession with it. Casting off from this point, Agamben turns his attention to ethics. He claims that the source of ethics is related to neither essence nor to the biological fate of human beings. But Agamben takes care to add that ethics must not necessarily reject those things either since a wholesale rejection implies the possibility of amalgamating the person into the whole of “nothingness” —thereby destroying them. This is unacceptable because persons are responsible for their world, to the construction of which they contribute. Ultimately Agamben claims that, if a person *has to be* something, they can be the naked reality of their being, just as they are, instead of beings defined through an essence:

“The fact that must constitute the point of departure for any discourse on ethics is that there is no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that humans must enact or realize. This is the only reason why something like an ethics can exist, because it is clear that if humans were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would be possible - there would be only tasks to be done. This does not mean, however, that humans are not, and do not have to be, something, that they are simply consigned to nothing-ness and therefore can freely decide whether to be or not to be, to adopt or not to adopt this or that destiny (nihilism and decisionism coincide at this point). There is in effect something that humans are and have to be, but this something is not an essence nor properly a thing: *It is the simple fact of one’s own existence as possibility or potentiality*. But precisely because of this things become complicated; precisely because of this ethics becomes effective.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.42

We can surmise that the only possible identity relationship in Agamben's thought is the identification with essenceless-ness. For more on this thought, we can look at the following passage:

“Because of instead of continuing to search for a proper identity in the already improper and senseless form of individuality, humans were to succeed in belonging to this impropriety as such, in making of the proper being-thus not an identity and individual property but a singularity without identity, a common and absolutely exposed singularity - if humans could, that is, not be-thus in this or that particular biography, but be only *the* thus, their singular exteriority and their face, then they would for the first time enter into a community without presuppositions and without subjects, into a communication without the incommunicable.”¹⁰⁸

According to this, we can't speak of a form of being that we can simply reject or renounce. Instead, Agamben's idea of community invites us to see beyond the amalgamation that is the individual and see beyond its constituent parts/identities.

Agamben's “whatever” is a figure of pure singularity: “whatever singularity has no identity.” That is to say, singularities can't be defined or determined under or according to a single label: instead, —in Kant's words— they share borders with everything in the realm of possibilities. In short, “whatever” does not refer to any particular property (being red, Italian, communist etc.).¹⁰⁹ It must also be added that the discussion of borders, limits as well as being on the limit or manifesting on the limits as well as being on the limit will be one of the main themes of my 3rd chapter on the idea of ecstasy.

Another critical concept for Agamben is the idea of *irreparable*, which refers to “you are sad or happy, atrocious or blessed. How you are, how the world is - this is the Irreparable.”¹¹⁰ Its meaning diverges from its general use and does not imply that something is unchangeable or unable to transform into something new. Irreparable is closer to whatever in the sense that it points to something that

¹⁰⁸ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.64

¹⁰⁹ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.66

¹¹⁰ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.89

exists “as such” “Irreparable is neither an essence nor an existence, neither a substance nor a property, neither a possibility nor a necessity”¹¹¹

“The expositive relationship between existence and essence, between denotation and meaning, is not a relationship of identity (...). The thing of thought is not the identity, but the thing *itself*. The latter is not another thing toward which the thing tends, transcending itself, but neither is it simply the same thing. The thing here transcends toward *itself*, toward its own being such as it is.”¹¹² The relation between being and essence seems hardly possible or even imaginable without reference to some kind of identification. Agamben continues with the following passage, perhaps to shed light on the nature of said relationship:

“Assuming my being-such, my manner of being, is not assuming this or that property, this or that character, virtue or vice, wealth or poverty. My properties and my being-thus are not qualifications of a substance (of a subject) that remains behind them and that I would truly be. I am never *this* or *that*, but always *such*, *thus*. *Eccum sic*: absolutely. Not possession but limit, not presupposition but exposure.”¹¹³

With reference to the relationship between being and essence, Agamben points to a limit instead of a possession; to exposure instead of presupposition. The word assumption refers to thinking and opining about something that doesn't exist. Abundance and lack of opinion as well as overcalculation and miscalculation are related to the process of assumption. According to Bataille “If I “mimic” absolute knowledge, I am at once, of necessity, God myself.”¹¹⁴

The crucial word “mimic” readily brings to mind the practice of acting, illusion, and fiction. The difference between the creative act and the state of being mistaken —that is the difference between fiction and illusion—, within the

¹¹¹ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.91

¹¹² Agamben, *Ibid*, p.95

¹¹³ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.96

¹¹⁴ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.5

framework of acting, relates to the act of coming to awareness about the unknown and the search for a new world “with” others on common ground.

“‘Being here and now’ is not the same as ‘being someone, being somewhere or being at a particular point in history.’ I’m talking about the state of being recognized as an agent disconnected from the communal structure and as someone that belongs to an absolutely determined identity in an absolute spatiotemporal setting. And I’m talking about a judgement, a type of knowledge that excludes the creativity and the existence of this body, here and now, from experience. I’m talking about an illusion that realizes itself through relations, bodies, language as a result of pretending to be able know the truth about the unknown. I’m talking about a pretense (...) Pretense brings to mind theatre and fiction. However, in theatre pretense may point to illusion as a blundering, disconnected instance of acting; or it may point to the complete surrender of the actor to the ‘moment;’ or “to the action that is realized within the surveillance of the unity of the play” or to the construction of the fiction as a skillful instance of acting. (...)”¹¹⁵

The authors that I focused on up until this point converge on a crucial point: attributing an essence to a being, hinders the possibility of community. In this chapter I elaborated on the differences between the notions of individuality, subjecthood and singularity within the general discussion of essences. To reiterate and sum up, for Nancy, the term “immanence” relates to “individuality” while those who participate in the community are “singularities.” Blanchot picks up the discussion where Nancy leaves off and claims that the equalizing project of communism is “imparting immanence by man to man” and this is incompatible with the prospect of a community.¹¹⁶ According to Blanchot the mark of the individuals is their rejection of origins of their own and their indifference towards others who they don’t recognize as individuals.¹¹⁷ It follows that Blanchot’s individual exists in a relation of recognition that involves being recognized by and recognizing (and failing to recognize) others. The idea of community of singularities is incompatible with such “identity politics.” Agamben contributes the idea of “whatever” to this discussion. Whatever refers to beings that will take part in the community and they

¹¹⁵ Ülgen, Ibid, p.39

¹¹⁶ Blanchot, Ibid, p.2

¹¹⁷ Blanchot, Ibid, p.2-3

take part *as such*.¹¹⁸ According to Agamben community is the congregation of those who can't congregate around any particular identity.

For Nancy, community implies that no singularity can exist in the absence of others.¹¹⁹ "Community is what takes place always through others and for others."¹²⁰ Whereas according to Blanchot, Being can exist by moving outwards towards others and by becoming the object of other's contestation.¹²¹ According to Blanchot's idea of incompleteness/insufficiency, people seek for a form of transcendence that gets deeper and deeper the more it is satisfied. The root cause of this insufficiency is the skepticism of the consciousness that needs another to realize itself.¹²² Both authors point to "the other" as the cornerstone of community. And all three of them locate the possibility of interactive, community-constituting singularity in the absence of essence and identity. As I tried to establish throughout the last chapter, for the actor who aims to realize any role and wholeheartedly intends to contribute to the construction of innumerable fictional worlds with others, the absence of an essence, and the lack of property (that is, a refusal to possess a fixed property as one's essence) is significant and is the main basis for creativity. The next chapter will be about the relevance of the discussion of this chapter with regards to the profession of acting.

¹¹⁸ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.1

¹¹⁹ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.28

¹²⁰ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.15

¹²¹ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.6

¹²² Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.6

CHAPTER TWO

The Actor and The Question of Essence

“They are the same so they can hear each other, they are different, so they have to listen each other”¹²³

The philosophers whose thoughts on the ideas of singularity and community, shaped the general framework of this thesis – that is Nancy, Blanchot and Agamben – rejected the idea of an “absolute human” where humanity is defined according to an essence it is supposed to have and discussed around the notion of immanence. Instead, they proposed an alternative understanding wherein the notions of “individual” and “society” are superseded by the notions of “singularity” and “community” respectively. This unlocked the possibility of talking about the key concept of “featurelessness” which is shaped around the aforementioned ideas of dispossession, non-identity, headless-ness, leaderless-ness¹²⁴ and the idea of “co-belonging without any representable condition of belonging”¹²⁵ – similar to the idea of impropry that Lacoue Labarthe associates with the actor’s creative force. In this chapter, I aim to discuss how the search for impropry reflects on and is applied to the practice of acting. My claim is that the troubles that the essentialist approach poses toward the idea of community will re-emerge with regard to the idea of actor who is engaged in a process of creation in real, present time with other creators. To substantiate this claim I will draw on the thoughts of several dramaturgs, actors and directors. I will also combine these thoughts with those of philosophers who wrote on the subjects of singularity and community and explore the potential readings that are unleashed through this combination.

¹²³ Ülgen, Ibid, p.52

¹²⁴ Sayın, Ibid, p.27

¹²⁵ Agamben, Ibid, p.85

What does 'featurelessness' mean with regard to acting?

“The stage renders palpable the practice of acting which accompanies the constantly re-emerging worlds, its timelessness, and placelessness,’ that is, it’s ‘featurelessness’. It renders palpable, visible, and audible the ‘transformation’ of things, people, places, moments into each other, into otherness through the bodies’ refusal of possession of any property as an essence; through their existence as “pure properties. The actors render palpable their bodies’ potential to embody, change, transform and evolve their shapes; their potential to adapt and abandon movements, sounds, mimics, behaviors, attitudes, thoughts, affects, wishes, identities, concepts —that is to say their potential to embody ‘formations’ and ‘transformations’ of things, people, places, times into their alien counterparts by having a space, a place and a possibility of movement for themselves in this world.”¹²⁶

In every play, every text, every persona, every action the actor adopts some properties and discards others. Every adoption brings forth the possibility of recognizing and experiencing that property while every time they discard adopted properties the possibility for new adoptions emerges. For the actor, who creates among and along with other actors, writers, directors, designers and stage partners, openness towards others and otherness is indispensable with regard to the practice of acting —just as it was indispensable for the idea of community in the eyes of Agamben, Nancy and Blanchot. Through the refusal of possession of any property in their bodies as essences, the actor unlocks the possibility of entering the creative sphere and gains the potential of transforming into someone else. Similarly, the *community* “belongs to those who can be someone other than themselves.” It emerges at the point where one reaches their own limits and opens themselves to the others: “Community is what takes place always through others and for others.”¹²⁷ That is to say, the idea of community always invites us to think about *the other*. What is the thing that will make me an object of *contestation* in the most fundamental sense, asks Blanchot. He figures that the one’s attempt to limit the answer to this question to oneself will lead to half-answers and a search that

¹²⁶ Ülgen, Ibid, p.50

¹²⁷ Nancy, Ibid, p.15

inevitably collapses in on itself. Through their stage relationship with others, the actors place themselves within the contestation. They ask questions to themselves, to their personas, to creators of the play on each and every level, to their stage partners and to the moment of time they inhabit. In the community, being exists in a sphere of discussion through its relationships with others. Similarly, the actors take the stage —where there is always some other than themselves present— to open themselves up to others. The actors are situated in a moment where they investigate all possible interlocutors (including themselves) of a body.¹²⁸ They are never alone on the stage, being always in the presence of *another*.

With regards to the relationship between the actor and their *other*, the actors can only enter the creative space when they refuse to possess any property associated with bodies as their own essence. For Nancy the relationship between the person and their essence was a matter of immanence where the reference to the essence becomes a reference to absolute knowledge which he considers to be a falsity/illusion.¹²⁹ For Blanchot, aforementioned relationship was a reminder of finitude and limitation of “the I” which witnessed the death of the *other*.¹³⁰ The relationship appeared in Agamben’s work in relation to his idea of “the whatever” and the associated form of being *as such*.¹³¹ From the intersection of these three partly compatible philosophical views, I concluded that the idea of community is incompatible with a form of being where being is attributed an essence. This leads me to question the actor’s relationship with an attributable essence.

According to Grotowski: “the theater is an encounter.”¹³² The actor encounters the space around them as well as their stage partners, the lighting, the audience and the text. Sometimes the actor becomes an object which addresses no

¹²⁸ Ülgen, Ibid, p.64

¹²⁹ Nancy, Ibid, p.4-5

¹³⁰ Blanchot, Ibid, p.9

¹³¹ Agamben, Ibid, p.1

¹³² Grotowski, Ibid, p.212

one and nothing.¹³³ According to Adrian Brine, Shakespeare even employed the air itself in his plays.¹³⁴ For Brine, the term “stage partner” may refer to a single person just as it can to everyone and everything on the stage.¹³⁵ Through their interaction with their stage partners the actors create new spaces, atmospheres, moments, and realize new personae. But, within all these encounters, what does it mean for the actor to *accept or refuse to possess an essence* with regard to their relation to themselves, the outside world and the stage partners?

Diderot famously claimed that “the actor can excel at being anything, perhaps because they can also be nothing.”¹³⁶ The capacity to become anything includes possibilities for various forms of being. To recall Agamben for a moment, for him, the discussion about the irreparable was an invitation to ponder on humankind’s possibility of existing as *beings as such*. “The Irreparable is neither an essence nor an existence, neither a substance nor a property, neither a possibility nor a necessity. It is not properly a modality of being, but it is the being that is always already given in modality, that *is* its modalities. It is not *thus*, but rather it is *its thus*.”¹³⁷ Calling out “thus-ness” of a particular being is to attribute absoluteness to it, whereas “its being thus” has the potential to change and transform itself. Similarly, actors’ creative horizon expands as they start existing among other beings in the form of potentials ready to realize themselves.

¹³³ “Is this a dagger which I see before me /The handle toward my hand? / Come let me clutch thee/ I have thee not, and yet I see thee still”, William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Edited by Barbara A. Mowat, Paul Werstine, Folger Shakespeare Library, p.52

¹³⁴ Adrian Brine, Michael York, *Shakespeare Oyunculugu*, çev. Ali H. Neyzi, İş Bankası Kültür Press, p.173

¹³⁵ “These people may happen to be the ones that Henry V. led to victory or they may be the ones that Antonius led in revolt against Rome!”, Brine, York, *Ibid*, p.229

¹³⁶ Denis Diderot, *Aktörlük Üzerine Aykırı Düşünceler*, Translated by: Sabri Esat Siyavuşgil, İş Bankası Press., 2007, p. 42

¹³⁷ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.91

“Acting is accepting to open up to a inter-space. It is a form of acceptance that changes ‘me,’ my interactions, and this body as I actualize interactions and fictional worlds within the moment and as I get involved within the reality of the moment. It requires accepting to transform, embody and encounter an act of creation and shared listening that involves the voluntary gesture of letting things go on their way.”¹³⁸

The art of actors’ existence, practice, relating has to be discussed in relation to their presence in the fleeting moment, their capacity to listen, and their capacity to realize their potential through the embodiment of verbs – their capacity to *verbalize* their potential.

The actor’s practice takes place in the present time. The demands of the present time reemerge in new context within each passing moment. The actor searches their interlocutors exactly within that ‘moment’ and acts in the present time. In German the term “gegenwarten” signifies present time and refers both to the present and the past.¹³⁹ Inspired by that, it is possible to advance the claim that “the present time” is related to moments that precede it as well as those that succeed it. The discussion about present time has multiple connections to Nancy’s notion of *clinamen*/inclination. According to him, the *inclined* atoms point to a special form of association that enables moments of inevitable change and transformation. Similarly, the actor is in a constant state of change (both as the influencer and the influenced) thanks to their association with their stage partners. According to Michael Chekhov, acting is the capacity and the passion for change.¹⁴⁰ According

¹³⁸ Ülgen, Ibid, p.41

¹³⁹ ‘Gegen’ means to be against or across while ‘warten’ means to wait. Gegenwarten refers to waiting for something while positioning yourself across or in front of it. It includes having been(in the past), becoming(in the present) and to become(in the future), Prof. Dr. Zeynep Sayın Balıkcıoğlu 2008 ders notları, “Not defteri ve Dipnotları” içinde Ülgen, Ibid, p.151

¹⁴⁰ Michael Chekhov, *On The Technique of Acting*, Quill A Harper Resource Bookby Mala Powers, 1991, p.99

to Josette Feral, “the notion of change takes centre stage within theatricality”¹⁴¹ The crucial matter for the actor is the constantly reconstructed question of “how to associate with *the other*?” This has obvious connections to “the I” which is constantly being affected by change while affecting others. Grotowski add to this line of thought:

“(…) there are minute changes within this set score such that each time he plays in a slightly different way, and you should watch him closely, listen and observe him, responding to his immediate actions. Every day he says “Good morning” with the same intonation, just like your neighbour at home who always says “Good morning” to you. One day he is in a goog mood, another day he is tired, another he is in a hurry. He always says “Good morning” but with a slight difference every time.”¹⁴²

The actors build their relationships with their partners on the basis of action and reaction. Jacques Lecoq claims that action must always precede the reaction.¹⁴³ The reaction gets registered as something new by the partner and paves the way for the new cycle of action-reaction. Grotowski claims that the actor needs a “score” in the musical sense: the score taking in acting consists of the elements of human interaction, namely “giving and taking.”¹⁴⁴ Ultimately, the actors are not alone on stage, and there are always some *others*, some that are outside, affecting them. Following that, it becomes impossible to attribute constancy and stability to lines, actions, or even the silent gaps.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Josette Feral, *Theatricality and the Specificity of Theatrical Language*, Substance # 98/99, Vol.31 No: 2 and 3, Board of Regents, University of Wisconsin, 2002, s.99

¹⁴² Grotowski, *Ibid*, p.227

¹⁴³ Jacques Lecoq, *The Moving Body*, Translated from *Le Corps poe'tique* by David Bradby, Bloomsbury, 1997, p.35

¹⁴⁴ Grotowski, *Ibid*, p.212

¹⁴⁵ The word silence generates a meaning only in the presence of sound; the word immobility only generates meaning in the presence of movement. “In an interview with Charbonnier in 1951, Matisse said: “Immobility is not an obstacle to the feeling of movement. It is a movement set a level which does not carry the spectator’s bodies along, but simply their minds.” Eugenio Barba, Nicola Savarese, *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology The Secret Art of The*

The actors' relationship with the text can also be construed as a relationship between them and the present. If absolute individuals, ideas, history, state, science, and art are incompatible with the community as Nancy claims¹⁴⁶, so must be an absolute persona and text which will diminish the actors' creative space. For the actor, the text¹⁴⁷ consists merely of letters on a page, and the meaning emerges as the actor engages with it in the present. The actor, the audience, the atmosphere, and the lighting all take part in this meaning. To recall, Nancy claimed that the absolute is the "detached, distinct, and closed: being without relation."¹⁴⁸ To see the text as an absolute object is as a fleeting and futile endeavor as expecting the voiced lines to remain permanently suspended in the air. Instead, the text needs to be contextualized and related to its time, its physical setting, and the present intentions of the creators. In *A Shakespearean Actor Prepares*, Brine compares the text to an empty, lifeless glove; the actor must wear the glove to invigorate it.¹⁴⁹ He imagines Shakespeare setting his quill aside after a day of writing and thinking: "I wrote what I had to write, the rest is up to the actor. It is their job to complete this character through their body, personality, voice, and excitement." According to Brine, the written personae are always ready to be represented yet still retain their independence.¹⁵⁰

Performer, Translated by Richard Fowler, Published by Routledge, New York, 1991, p.39

¹⁴⁶ Nancy, Ibid, p. 4

¹⁴⁷ The actors reproduce and reshape the text as they engage with it: "The word 'text', before referring to a written or spoken, printed or manuscripted text, meant 'a weaving together'. In this sense, there is no performance which does not have 'text'. That which concerns the text (the weave) of the performance can be defined as 'dramaturgy', that is, drama-ergon, the 'work of the actions' in the performance. The way in which the actions work is the plot. Eugenio Barba, Nicola Savarese, *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, Translated by: Richard Fowler, Routledge, 1991, p.66

¹⁴⁸ Nancy, Ibid, p.4

¹⁴⁹ Brine, York, Ibid, p.78

¹⁵⁰ Brine, York, Ibid, p.298

According to Barba we can't speak of a "singular theater. It never existed. There are as many theatres as there are unique, realized relationships between text and the stage."¹⁵¹ Each staging of each play can be considered unique. The attempt to commensurate and generalize different people, times, situations, and acting practices carries the danger of turning them into mere "imitations." It also paves the way for memorized acting, thought, questioning and answering practices. But re-thinking this whole framework unlocks hitherto unreachable possibilities. Konstantin Stanislavski, who inspired several acting methods of our current age, claims that "generality is the nemesis of all arts."¹⁵² If I am to play Juliet, the encounter of *Juliet and me* is a unique encounter no matter the number of Juliets that have been performed before me. Similarly, my encounter with the persona of Juliet *this instance*, is a unique encounter in the sense that it is distinct from my previous encounters with the same role. In this sense, yesterday and today are incommensurable. Just as those two particular days are different, so am I different today from who I was before, and so is the audience of today differs from those of the past: Under this framework, the inclining (*clinamen*) and changing nature of atoms persists and carries on in every instance. "Miss Black's Ophelia will always be different from Miss Smith's Ophelia. The change of setting and time will naturally factor into this difference. Yesterday's Ophelia looks nothing like today's. A Polish actor will embody her in a way that an American actor can't."¹⁵³ Tanıl Bora defines process "as a term that invites us to focus on change rather than essential properties."¹⁵⁴ According to Grotowski, the process constantly renews

¹⁵¹ Barba, Savarage, Ibid, p.270

¹⁵² Cohn Bruder, Pollack Olnek, Zigler Previto, *Oyuncu İçin Pratik El Kitabı*, çev. Deniz Ölmez, Metis Press, 2013, p.31

¹⁵³ Brine, York, Ibid, p.300

¹⁵⁴ Tanıl Bora, "Süreç", *Birikim Journal*, Web, Last Access Date: 05.05. 2021, <https://birikimdergisi.com/haftalik/8872/surec>

itself, but it is valid only *hic et nunc* (here and now). That is the process is “never quite the same.”¹⁵⁵

The language of the present time is about actions, verbs and surrendering oneself to actions. “To play” is to act¹⁵⁶ and the actions corresponds to verbs. If an actor who intends to act out a scene of childbirth, attempts to be “hectic,” “nervous” or “brave,” they run the risk of merely enacting the content of adjectives. On the other hand, if the same actor, wonders about the movements of their individual muscles; pays attention to their surroundings and surrounding people; takes note of the way they look in a particular setting under particular lighting conditions; focuses on the way that the extra weight and bulk in their abdomen impact on their gait; we can say that they are probing into the nature of verbs instead. Lecoq, who—in a way— attributes vitality to words, claims that words probe, investigate into the body. According to him every word includes an action that eventually animates the verbs.¹⁵⁷ The actor probes into their own actions through verbs. “Verb is the source of action. It is the coming together of a world, a style, a reality; the construction of ‘what, who, where, when, along whom and along what. Action is a sequence of verbs, a union of verbs with other verbs.”¹⁵⁸ In English the relationship between the words “actor” and “acting” puts the stage actor firmly in the realm of action, movement, doing, performing, practicing, agency, behavior, proxy, representative, functionary.¹⁵⁹ Stanislavski invites actors to “tally up their actions” during their time on the stage.¹⁶⁰ According to Kerem Karaboğa who is paraphrasing Stanislavski, “the actor, by questioning what exactly it is that brings a text to life, creates a complete record of the role through outside-in and inside-out analysis of

¹⁵⁵ Grotowski, Ibid, p.212

¹⁵⁶ Bruder, Olnek, Previto, Ibid, p. 29

¹⁵⁷ Lecoq, Ibid, p.50

¹⁵⁸ Ülgen, Ibid, p.45

¹⁵⁹ <https://tureng.com/tr/turkce-ingilizce/acting>, Last Access Date: 11.09.2021

¹⁶⁰ Kerem Karaboğa, *Oyunculuk Sanatında Yöntem ve Paradoks*, Habitus, 2005, p.87

the play.”¹⁶¹ Actors, who make use of the interactions of verbs that permeate every text and stage relationship, occupy a constant starting line rather than a fixed, finished, defined location; thanks to the *verb* which contains the concept of time itself, they expand into the realm of others, other roles, their own alterity and to the possibility of shared transformation.

“Acting requires embracing the expansion into a inter-space.”¹⁶² Thomas Richard, who worked extensively with Grotowski, says ““If you are discovering in you your grandmother, through your body’s impulses, then it’s neither ‘you’ nor ‘your grandmother who had sung’: it’s you exploring your grandmother who sings”¹⁶³ Neither ignore yourself nor your grandmother; neither present yourself, nor your grandmother: here lies the invitation for an exploration into the inter-spaces. The actor does not take a side in terms of fixed essences, definitions and identities: they are neither on this nor the other side. Their profession relates to the unknown and expands into inter-spaces that are about others. The moment they take a side, the undesirable possibility of seeing others merely as “other sides” will emerge. The practice of taking sides and the framework that enables it may remind us of the relationship between recognizing and being recognized that I mentioned in the context of community during the first chapter. Blanchot criticized the idea of individual due to individual’s “indifference towards others” and due to its “refusal of others’ origins.”¹⁶⁴ The individual’s refusal of others’ origins implies that it must define itself through another origin. This allows for a framework that positions different origins against each other which is incompatible with both the idea of community and the possibility of inter-spaces that I have been describing. As Diderot says “A great actor is neither a pianoforte, nor a harp, nor a pinnet, nor a

¹⁶¹ Karaboğa, Ibid, p.87

¹⁶² Ülgen, Ibid, p.41.

¹⁶³ Thomas Richards, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, Routledge, London, 1995, p.46

¹⁶⁴ Blanchot, Ibid, p.2-3

violin, nor a violoncello; he has no key peculiar to him; he takes the key and the tone fit for his part of the core, and he can take up any.”¹⁶⁵

Nancy’s critique was targeted against the absolute subject and by extension the idea of a person as an individual. Accordingly, the origins of this idea can be traced back to the emergence of modern thought.¹⁶⁶ Nancy claimed that any outlook that is reproduced on the grounds of obedience to a particular origin (as in myths) is incompatible with the idea of community and that these outlooks are an attempt by the Western thought to reclaim its own origins.¹⁶⁷ Community on the other hand invites us to consider a reading of history that does not depend on a necessary return to an origin, an essence. Considering humanity’s historical necessities, a top-down conception of subjectivity stands at odds with communities. The problem does not lie in everything that can be considered modern per se, but in the fact that modernity manipulatively constructs a particular type of subject within the process of creating a bourgeois society. Following this, Nancy invites the reader to share and claims that the main outlet of sharing and perpetuating sharing is writing. Within Nancy’s thought, the participative act of shared writing is only possible for “though it *is* nothing, *it* is not a collective subject.”¹⁶⁸

Ülgen describes the actor as a “voluntary non-subject.”¹⁶⁹ “The actors are playful beings who settle in the role, the character, or the thing that they are going to play: and who despite their lack of a specific form or a set of features, shapeshift and masquerade with each role they play.”¹⁷⁰ The actors seek something, something other than themselves through their bodies, their voices, and through their

¹⁶⁵ Diderot, *Ibid*, p.61

¹⁶⁶ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.5

¹⁶⁷ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.46

¹⁶⁸ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.41

¹⁶⁹ Ülgen, *Ibid*, p.255

¹⁷⁰ Hazal İspirli, “Neutral Mask, Neutrality, Comedy”, *Journal of Theatre Criticism and Dramaturgy*, Issue 32, 2021, p.178-179

costumes... just as if they are playing a game. Huzinga recounts: “A father finds his son playing “train” with the chairs in the room. When he kisses the boy in appreciation of his efforts, the kid retorts: ‘dad you can’t kiss the locomotive, the train cars will get the impression that we’re simply pretending.’”¹⁷¹ To become a locomotive the kid must first leave his self behind.

Sayın claims: “just like Diderot’s actors, the pilgrims are also no-body.”¹⁷² She adds that the act of pilgrimage involves dying and re-dying within every passing moment.¹⁷³ “The pilgrims migrate. They leave their dwellings, draw away; in a way, pilgrims are emigrating from the world of the living.”¹⁷⁴ “Liberating themselves from attributed identities and the veneer of symbols, pilgrims/emigres/sages/corpses, are in-between, between the place where reality hasn’t realized itself and where it is fully actualized.”¹⁷⁵ Sayın makes the parallel between the pilgrim and the artist within the context of death and migration: “It is said that actors must die before they step into stage, before they transform. It is said that dying is a form of migration, a journey from one place to another.”¹⁷⁶ Actors can become everyone since they have the ability to become no-one; they are everywhere since they do not own any place; they can exist anytime since they refuse to get stuck in a single moment. Chekhov points out that “the actor’s bodies are transparent membranes.They can easily be filled with movements rhythms, light, color, heat, and music.”¹⁷⁷ According to Diderot, “a great actor’s foul is formed of the subtle element with which a certain philosopher filled space, an element neither cold nor hot, heavy nor light, which affects no definite shape and

¹⁷¹ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, translated by Mehmet Ali Kılıçbay, Ayrıntı Press, 2015, p.25

¹⁷² Sayın, *Ibid*, p.133

¹⁷³ Sayın, *Ibid*, p.134

¹⁷⁴ Sayın, *Ibid*, p.132

¹⁷⁵ Sayın, *Ibid*, p.134

¹⁷⁶ Sayın, “Kurmaca/ yanılısama: metnin düşündürdükleri” içinde Ülgen, *Ibid*, p.7-8

¹⁷⁷ Chekhov, as quoted by Ülgen, *Ibid*, p. 45

capable of assuming all, keeps none.”¹⁷⁸ It is hard to ignore the connections between the possibility of community that is the home of singularities who reject owning essences and the potential for the action of actors who refuse to own properties as their essences.

Through their body and their voices, actors investigate the other as a persona. The other necessarily has its own conflict, backstory, context and desires. Actors, who embody a multitude of emotions through their facial expressions, invoke a being other than themselves. Jacques Lecoq whose name associated with specific acting methods, has several things to say about actors’ facial expressions and what he calls the “neutral mask.” The neutral mask creates the possibility of looking at, touching, hearing and feeling the fundamentals as fresh, newly discovered concepts.¹⁷⁹ It is a neutral form of being and exists in a stable, balanced manner. “There is no character, only a neutral generic being.”¹⁸⁰ Thanks to the neutral mask, actors who design a character in their mind, can have a deeper look into their actions with no reference to essential properties. As İspirli argues: “A featureless mask, devoid of any expression, has potential to become a featureless body within the person of the actor.”¹⁸¹

The neutral mask also holds the possibility to become a ground to discuss the identity/difference relationship. The revelations of a particular actor’s relationship with the mask will be both different from and the same with the revelations that follow another actor’s relationship with the same mask.¹⁸² Lecoq exemplifies this in his “Farewell to the Boat” exercise. The exercise involves imagining a beloved friend taking a ship to faraway lands, never to return. The next

¹⁷⁸ Diderot, *The Paradox of Acting*, p.61

¹⁷⁹ Lecoq, *Ibid*, p.38

¹⁸⁰ Lecoq, *Ibid*, p.38

¹⁸¹ İspirli, *Ibid*, p.175-176

¹⁸² Exploring sameness and diversity is an interlinked endeavor: “This impossibility of being like other theatre people has gradually rendered us loyal to our diversity.” Barba, Savarage, p.104

step is to imagine running towards the pier just as the ship leaving in hopes to say farewell to the dear friend for the last time.¹⁸³ Lecoq says that this acting exercise is a good test for the actor to find ‘*the farewell of all farewells*’.¹⁸⁴

“The neutral mask puts one in touch with what belongs to everyone, and then the nuances appear all the more forcefully. These are not nuances of character, since there is no character, but all the little differences which separate one performer from another. All bodies are different, but they resemble one another through what unites them: the farewell.”¹⁸⁵

Everybody lifts their arms but each of them does it a little differently, each of them in their own way. In *the farewell of all farewells*, the farewell gesture belongs to everyone, and it can be recognized by everyone as such. At the same time, it holds something uniquely attributable to a single actor because of their stage presence, embodiment and extension of the gesture.

The word neutral has its roots in French “neuter” which refers to impartial things or things that belong to neither of the opposite poles.¹⁸⁶ If we were to contextualize neutrality and impartiality within the idea of community, then neutral refers to that thing which is neither this nor that; it stands “against identity, at the locus of non-identity.”¹⁸⁷ Community demands non-identity. That is to say, community is something wherein those that lack identity, lack power and lack a side participate. Those that are identical and different at the same. Stanislavski, speaking about actors who attempt to connect and emphasize with their role, the unknown and the other, claims: “I am me.” But what would I do if I was an oak with its own particular circumstances? The word ‘if’ is a leveraging force that pulls us away from the quotidian and hurls us into the realm of imagery ... Some conditions create the groundwork for the ‘if’ and the ‘if’ nudges and awakens the

¹⁸³ Lecoq, Ibid, p.40

¹⁸⁴ Lecoq, Ibid, p.41

¹⁸⁵ Lecoq, Ibid, p.41

¹⁸⁶ <https://www.nisanyansozluk.com/?k=n%C3%B6tr>, Web, Last Access Date: 18.12.2020

¹⁸⁷ Ülgen, Ibid, p.99

sleeping imagery.”¹⁸⁸ “I’m speaking of the knowledge that comes when I imagine: if I were to be born in those circumstances, raised by them and encountered those narratives and practices, I wouldn’t have been me, I would have been someone else.”¹⁸⁹

If one fails to establish the framework for “simultaneous identity and difference,” and when one fails to engage the hypotheticals of “how different from me?” or “what if that was me,” then they run the risk of speaking about knowledge that they don’t possess or pretending to have absolute knowledge. Shortly, they would be illuding themselves. According to Lacan, “the moment that I accept that I don’t know is the one when I decide to listen.”¹⁹⁰ Rollo May, who counts ‘will to progress despite/in the face of unawareness’ among the definitions of courage, claims –albeit somewhat paradoxically: “It is seeming contradiction that we must be fully committed, but we must also be aware at the same time that we might possibly be wrong.”¹⁹¹ Ülgen refers to a similar feeling when saying “progress, hand in hand with the unknown.” Along the same lines Bataille claims: “Life will dissolve itself in death, rivers in the sea, and the known in the unknown. Knowledge is access to the unknown. Nonsense is the outcome of every possibly sense.”¹⁹² In a bid to restore some credence to the concept of unknown, Ülgen invites her reader to relate to the unknown *not as a non-being but as a being*.¹⁹³ When we approach unknown merely as “a lack of” [information, knowledge] we can only comprehend it as *nothing*, whereas when we see it and relate to it as a form of “being”¹⁹⁴ we are

¹⁸⁸ Stanislavski, as quated by Ülgen, Ibid, p.56-57

¹⁸⁹ Ülgen, Ibid, p.66

¹⁹⁰ Lacan, as quated by Ülgen, Ibid, p.53

¹⁹¹ Rollo May, *The Courage to Create*, p.9

¹⁹² Bataille, Ibid, p.101

¹⁹³ Ülgen, Ibid, p.32

¹⁹⁴ Eugenio Barba describes the “present absence” and the concept of inter spaces as: “In most traditional Japanese theatre forms, on the contrary, one can easily perceive an intermediate level, a level between the performer’s daily body and what we could call the character’s imaginary body. Let us consider a simple

in fact referring to an *emptiness*;¹⁹⁵ an emptiness that is heavy with the possibility of being filled. This particular outlook towards emptiness also makes it a possible object of contestation. Those that act “because they know;” structures that assume that they are actualizing their essences, arbitrary causalities, economic practices, technology ... all of these smuggle in dogmas and all these bring us closer to totalitarianism.¹⁹⁶ Memorized actions, memorized speech, memorized responses that ignore the context that is revealed through self-examining thought... Thomas Richards, who worked closely with Grotowski recounts: “(...) I started to sing as if I knew it, and there was no more action, only mechanical repetition. (...) Since I thought I knew the song, I was no longer involved in an alive search.”¹⁹⁷ There is a new possibility born from re-examining the unknown in its own context, through its own uniqueness, on its own grounds; we must lend an ear to this possibility.

It is often said that change is the only constant. Similarly, there is a constant search both within the idea of community and the actors’ shared practice of creation. Community can’t be identified with any form of power; it is the powerless –not in the sense that it lacks power but in the sense that it refuses it. This is one of the reasons why we can’t locate the idea of community as a partisan relation, on one side of the opposition or the other. Thus, we can think of the community as a third option, an alternative that refuses to take sides within binary conflicts: “what it looks for is not the culprit (...) it is not the absolute pole. (...) It looks for the possibility of a new, common world, the possibility of every label finding its own place. It looks for it here and now among these bodies. It is at a point of refusal,

example. When a noh actor leaves the stage because to all extents and purposes the performance is over, he has a singular habit: he moves very slowly, as if his exit was an integral part of the performance. He is no longer in character, because the character’s action is finished, but neither is he in his daily reality. He is in an intermediate state. In a certain way, he is performing his own absence. But this absence is performance and is therefore a present absence.” Barba, Savarage, p.225

¹⁹⁵ Toshihiko Izutsu, as quoted by Ülgen, *Ibid*, p.35

¹⁹⁶ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.3

¹⁹⁷ Thomas, Richards, *At Working with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, p.85

where it refuses to be the absolute subject facing the absolute ruler, and where it refuses to be the absolute rules facing the absolute subject.”¹⁹⁸ The constituents of the community leave their identities behind. They don’t take sides. Community is not something that the society discarded or lost somewhere along its historical journey. Rather, society can be counted among the causes of the community. It is a question, an expectation, a happening, a responsibility. Nothing here is lost and therefore nothing can be defined as lost or unfound. If there is no sense of loss then there is no reason to search for something¹⁹⁹, no reason to expect that things are predetermined.

In the stage, there is nothing that is predetermined from the actor’s standpoint. Even though there are rehearsals, they stand as attempts to hear, recognize once practice over and over again –after all the term refers to the act of re-hearing, re-listening.²⁰⁰ The actors shape and sculpt themselves through rehearsal, with rehearsal, by assessing the grounds for their act within its context; by becoming people who are capable of affecting as well as being affected; by creating the necessary atmosphere for the play. The actors need to re-shape themselves because the theatrical lies in that very act of re-shaping. The only thing that can’t be rehearsed is that particular moment itself. The practice of acting which takes place in the present time, holds within the previously rehearsed experiences as well as the act of re-hearing oneself at that particular moment.

On this subject, Zeynep Sayın claims that questions may unlock more interesting doors than answers.²⁰¹ She brings together the idea of actor as the person who asks questions to and about the world on the stage and through this makes the world visible, and the idea of “a community which refuses to produce works or even to call itself a community; a community that instead of finding solutions, makes the

¹⁹⁸ Ülgen, Ibid, p.99

¹⁹⁹ Nancy, Ibid, p.12

²⁰⁰ Ülgen, Ibid, p.71

²⁰¹ Zeynep Sayın, An- Archive Talking, Web, Last Access Date: 05.05.2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwP5wJT6iRM&t=1293s>

awareness of questions more acute and ranks the virgin spaces opened by the questions higher than the answers themselves.”²⁰² “Art does not reflect the visible, it makes it visible.”²⁰³ It invites us to lend an ear to recently opened spaces. That space is not nothingness but emptiness.²⁰⁴ “The potential that I’m talking about is the one that hasn’t yet transformed into the virtual or rather the one that exists where it suspends the virtual: It exists at the place of birth (...) in the whites of the papers, in the emptiness, in the margins, which, instead of generating submission, open possibilities that the extant can choose to use...”²⁰⁵ At the limit, in the margins, in the emptiness, there is a hidden potential that singularities, which reveal themselves at the limits through sharing, can exploit to enter a community. Same is the locus of the force which enables actors to realize their potential. The practice takes place during every moment, jointly, through interaction, change, transformation and finding common ground. The actors act in conjunction with other actors and participate in the construction of the world that builds the actors themselves.

“The action, which includes momentary transactions, interactions and contact, which searches for an absolute agent/doer, can scantily describe the body with its infinite possibilities. However, the same concept of action, described as the interaction of countless bodies, outgrows and overshadows the body. The action does not speak for, about or instead of the acting body. It does not represent an agent and does not belong solely to action. It is not equal to the agent not it can be summarized by him. I am speaking of the creative practice of acting that points to the place where this body, this world was created; that points to my involvement here and now. A practice that occupies the body in the present, where it is singular, where it has momentum, where I can be aware of that momentum, recognize it, relate to it. It reveals the point, the moment where the difference between looking out for oneself and looking out for the world that returns by itself disappears.”²⁰⁶

This chapter, where I discussed the ideas of community, opening to others, essencelessness and singularity, within the context of acting aimed to deepen the

²⁰² Sayın, Ibid, p. 36

²⁰³ Klee, Ibid, p.27

²⁰⁴ Ülgen, Ibid, p.32

²⁰⁵ Sayın, Ibid, p.126

²⁰⁶ Ülgen, Ibid, p.28-29

readers' understanding about featureless and voluntarily non-subject actors' shared power to create. The reading of essence that I proposed which started off from the discussion about singularities and community, suggests that owning essences will impart immanence on the person and will lead to the idea of a "person as an absolute being." My hope is to clearly demonstrate that actors who do not own any property as their essence can enter the creative space and can participate in the shared practice of challenging the limits and overcoming them.

The next chapter will focus on the idea of ecstasy. Community emerges where being reaches the limit. Agamben takes ecstasy as the gift that singularity gathers from the empty hands of humanity.²⁰⁷ According to Nancy, ecstasy is inseparable from the idea of community and points to the impossibility of absolute immanence.²⁰⁸ Ecstasy destroys the unity of beings and things and helps being liberate itself from totalitarianism. Through this, being redefines itself as being-in-common.²⁰⁹ Blanchot claims that ecstasy involves unknowing and transcends knowing.²¹⁰ All three philosophers take ecstasy to be a way for singularities to congregate and enter community. I will firstly explore the notion of ecstasy as it relates to singularities and community and then will look at the same notion within the context of acting.

²⁰⁷ Agamben, *Ibid*, p. 67

²⁰⁸ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.6

²⁰⁹ Ferda Keskin unpublished lecture note, Lecture Date: 02.03.2020

²¹⁰ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.18-19

CHAPTER THREE

The Notion of Ecstasy as it Relates to the Ideas of Singularity and Community

“If I wish my life to have meaning for me, it is necessary that it have meaning for others: no one would dare give to life a meaning which he alone would perceive, from which life in its entirety would escape, except within himself.”²¹¹

Nancy, Blanchot and Agamben take essences to be incompatible with the idea of community and point to the idea of ecstasy as a way out. Ecstasy implies leaving one’s own bounds and existing in and exposing oneself to the external. The dictionary definition of ecstasy suggests “bliss,” “entrancement,” and “inspiration” among possible meanings.²¹² Alternatively, Nancy, Blanchot, and Agamben interpret the same term to mean *existing as a limit, outside of oneself*. In this chapter, I will first reconstruct what these three philosophers said about the notion of ecstasy and then explore –drawing from a number of dramaturgists, actors, and directors– how this notion can fit in within the practice of acting and how it can be contextualized within the actors’ process of creation. As noted before, the actor who can step into the creative space owing to their refusal to own any property as an essence always investigates “the other” hand in hand with other creators in the process of building a persona. Investigation and opening up to the other –as I shall soon demonstrate– is closely related to ecstasy. Below is Nancy’s definition of the notion:

“Ecstasy answers - if it is properly speaking an “answer”- to the impossibility of the absoluteness of the absolute, or the “absolute” impossibility of complete immanence.(...) Strictly speaking, it defines the impossibility, both ontological and gnosological, of absolute immanence(or of the absolute, and

²¹¹Bataille, Ibid, p.42

²¹² <https://tureng.com/tr/turkce-ingilizce/ecstasy>, <https://tureng.com/tr/ingilizce-esanlam/ecstasy>, Last Access Date: 18.09.2021

therefore of immanence)(...) And for us the question of the community is henceforth inseparable from a question of ecstasy”²¹³

For Nancy, the impossibility of absolute immanence means something like this: the community which fashions and defines itself as a work of itself or defines its constituents through an essence or national, ethnic identity, in effect attempts to impart immanence on itself and its parts. Imparting immanence to human beings by others is categorically incompatible with Nancy’s idea of community.²¹⁴ According to Nancy this impossibility reveals or points the way to the notion of ecstasy. Zeynep Sayın –reading Nancy– claims that death is the only antidote to immanence, the only thing that can transcend it. According to Nancy the first-person utterance of “I am dead” is simply impossible and neither is a conscious representation of one’s own death. We can conclude from this that Nancy refers to finitude instead of infinity when he speaks about transcendence and ecstasy.²¹⁵

“Nancy’s impossible community can only come by through an act of transcendence that aims toward death. Perhaps such a community can come about when the person reaches and touches the limit of their own body; when they abandon their own standpoint, their immanence; when they reject their subjectivity: and when they transcend [their own existence] through ecstasy—in the non-celestial sense.”²¹⁶

For Agamben, Nancy, and Blanchot ecstasy is a matter of limits and it can only happen at the limit which they take to be the locus of the community as well. If the place where people identify themselves with a property or identity is a place that they know; then the limit, the external must be something that is unknown to them. Sayın follows Nancy’s footsteps when claiming that there is a transcendental aspect to unknowing.²¹⁷ Transcendence is an encounter between persons, who are aware that their role in this world includes affecting others as well as being affected by them, and the possibility of unknowing, rather than a reference to

²¹³ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.6

²¹⁴ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.4

²¹⁵ Sayın, *Ibid*, p.56

²¹⁶ Sayın, *Ibid*, p.56

²¹⁷ Sayın, *Ibid*, p.56

“above/heavens.” According to Bataille, only singularities who exist at the limit/margins²¹⁸ and who open up to others can move towards the mysterious unknown –with no delusions– and realize themselves.²¹⁹ In their relationship with the unknowable, persons are not alone, the grounds for commonality still remain.

“(…) each being is, I believe, incapable on his own, of going to the end of being. If he tries, he is submerged within a "private being" which has meaning only for himself. Now there is no meaning for a lone individual: being alone would of itself reject the "private being" if it saw it as such”²²⁰

The community of those who refuse to meet around a common identity is possible on the grounds of commonality and not solitude. “There is a place where everyone meets when they step outside themselves: it is the limit.”²²¹

According to Nancy, the community is sustained through communication and writing.²²² “We must not stop writing or letting the singular outline of our being-in-common expose itself.”²²³ According to Nancy, what is sustained through writing is the act of sharing and the object of sharing is the singularities who reach their limits and partake in each other’s shared experiences. Those who partake in the community, those who refuse to become subjects, and those who chose to become nothing reveal their limits through the act of writing and sharing.

According to Blanchot “even if the community excludes the immediacy that would affirm the loss of everyone in the vanishing of communion, it proposes or imposes the knowledge (the experience, Erfahrung) of what cannot be known; that “beside-ourselves” (the outside) which is abyss and ecstasy without ceasing to be a

²¹⁸ “Margin” means “limit”. <https://www.nisanyansozluk.com/?k=marj>, Web, Last Access Date: 13.09.2021.

²¹⁹ Bataille, Ibid, p.5

²²⁰ Bataille, Ibid, p.42

²²¹ Sayın, Ibid, p.57

²²² Nancy, Ibid, p.40

²²³ Nancy, Ibid, p.41

singular relationship.”²²⁴ According to Blanchot, “a being does not want to be recognized, it wants to be contested: in order to exist, it goes towards the other.”²²⁵ According to Blanchot’s notion of insufficiency, the insufficient being looks for the transcendence within the “never satisfied exigency of human insufficiency” rather than something that would fill the void.²²⁶ Blanchot says that what was important for Bataille with regards to ecstasy was a stubborn form of progress and not an oblivious sense of loss where everything and everyone is forgotten. This progress affirms itself through the looming danger that the insufficient being finds itself in as it fails to deny its insufficiency and in turn steps out of its own bounds. This sense of progress goes against the traditional meanings of immanence and transcendence.²²⁷ This means that ecstasy is not simply a state of trance or bliss but something related to a need, a yearning for the other, and a need for understanding the transcendence of bottomless insufficiency. Thanks to the awareness of their own insufficiency, people investigate the need for others. This investigation, in turn, leads to a *contestation* by and with the other.²²⁸ Transcendence is neither limited to one’s own, nor it is particular, immanent to them; it is neither delegated to an unknowable force nor to the “celestial above.” It is the place where the people reach their limits, where they open up to others. Thus, according to Blanchot, insufficiency calls for contestation, which means eternal exposure to the other who is the only entity who can endanger me through its positions relative to me.²²⁹

“(…) ecstasy is without object, just as it is without a why, just as it challenges any certainty. One can write that word (ecstasy) only by putting it carefully between quotation marks, because nobody can know what it is about, and, above all, whether it ever took place: going beyond knowledge, implying un-knowledge, it refuses to be stated other than through random words that cannot guarantee it. Its decisive aspect is that the one who experiences it is

²²⁴ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.17

²²⁵ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.6

²²⁶ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.57

²²⁷ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.7

²²⁸ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.5-6

²²⁹ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.8

no longer there when he experiences it, is thus no longer there to experience it.”²³⁰

Blanchot says that ecstasy “transcends knowledge that implies un-knowledge.” It is clear that within his thought framework, ecstasy appears in a very close relationship with the unknowable.

Our relationship with the unknowable —ecstasy— is about transforming into another as well as about the acting practice wherein it plays a significant role. Vsevolod Meyerhold’s student Sergei Eisenstein interprets ecstasy as something that can “transcend the limits of the direct and literal perception of what the actor is doing in order ‘to see’ behind the screen of the obvious and the known.”²³¹ According to Grotowski, “the theatre and acting are for us a kind of vehicle allowing us to emerge from ourselves, to fulfill ourselves.”²³² Theodoros Terzopoulos who shapes his acting practice on the physicality of ecstasy agrees with what has been said in the above pages, nothing that ecstasy is not something related only to actors’ “losing themselves and entering an oblivious trance.”²³³ He also sees ecstasy as a possibility to transcend limits and open oneself up to a multi-dimensional life source.²³⁴

When speaking about the relationship between being and essence, Agamben also points to a limit instead of a possession; to exposure instead of presupposition.²³⁵ According to Agamben, “being in coming” – his *whatever*– is a singularity that exposes itself to the outer world *as it is*. Agamben’s notion of *irreparable* suggests that beings and the world exist just the way they are. Regarding the relation between the irreparable and the idea of ecstasy Agamben has this to say: “Irreparable means that these things are consigned without remedy to

²³⁰ Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.19

²³¹ Barba, Savarage, *Ibid*, p.56

²³² Grotowski, *Ibid*, p.260

²³³ Kerem Karaboğa, *Tragedya ile Sınırları Aşmak*, E Pub., 2008, p.88

²³⁴ Karaboğa, *Ibid*, p.76

²³⁵ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.96

their being-thus, that they are precisely and only their thus; but irreparable also means that for them there is literally no shelter possible, that in their being-thus they are absolutely exposed, absolutely abandoned.”²³⁶ Agamben describes ecstasy as a “gift that singularity gathers from the empty hands of humanity.”²³⁷ It is also important to note that Agamben’s whatever singularity does not have a claim on any particular identity. According to him whatever is determined through its relation to the sum of its possibilities. Thanks to that relation, the singularity borders all possibility (Agamben credits Kant as the source of this idea).²³⁸ Whatever is not determined according to a particular notion or a specific property (being Red, Italian or a Communist): it merely borders everything that is possible.²³⁹ In this sense, Agamben’s whatever singularity is *the experience of being-within an outside*.²⁴⁰

“(…) “outside” is expressed in many European languages by a word that means “at the door” (fores in Latin is the door of the house, *thyrathen* in Greek literally means “at the threshold”).”²⁴¹

Community belongs to those that manifest at the limits, who pass a threshold, the ones that lack identity, those who die a living death, the leaderless ones, those who perpetuate sharing, those who perpetuate writing, the marginal, the ones who refuse to be sublated into substances and essences such as “bloodline, nation, homeland,” the ones who refuse to be subjugated by their origins ... in short, community belongs to those without a community. The possibility of this community is closely linked with the notion of ecstasy. The limit is reserved for singularities, for those who lack an identity, those who consider themselves leaderless. The community of those without a community is possible thanks to ecstasy. According to Sayın, “ecstasy is the thought that occurs to the singularities, the thought that takes place

²³⁶ Agamben, Ibid, p.38

²³⁷ Agamben, Ibid, p.67

²³⁸ Agamben, Ibid, p.66

²³⁹ Agamben, Ibid, p.66

²⁴⁰ Agamben, Ibid, p.67

²⁴¹ Agamben, Ibid, p.67

inside them; it can be thought of as an impossible gravitational force that can't be defined."²⁴² Not an impossible community but a community that undertakes the task of impossibility...²⁴³ The community which manifests through leaderless-ness rather than through its thirst for power.

Sayın likens acting/actors to “a mantis that is still able to move and copulate even after its own gruesome decapitation.”²⁴⁴ It is clear that she keeps in mind the actors' ability to actualize their potential. On this Agamben notes that “changes are their [singularities] limits.”²⁴⁵ The singular has the potential to change insofar as it remains without an identity and without a head. Those who share each other at the limit, gain the possibility to impact, change transforms themselves and each other through ecstasy. “Just as being ex-ists, the actor causes God to manifest through a mask –and in that mask– thanks to an act of ex-tasy.”²⁴⁶ In their relationship with the unknown, the actors manifest the other in their own bodies. Oğuz Arıcı, likens the relationship between the words “extant,” “body,” and “ecstasy” (in Turkish “mevcut”, “vücut” and “vecd” respectively. All share an etymological bond in Arabic) to the relationship between the English terms “existence,” “exist,” and “exstasy[sic].”²⁴⁷ Within this context, it is possible to re-define acting along these lines: by becoming ex-ternal and through ex-tasy, the actors manifest the other in their bodies. Starting from this let's look at the relationship between the notion of ecstasy and actors, who by reaching their limits, by connecting and relating to others create a new atmosphere, time, and space and build a fictional world.

²⁴² Sayın, Ibid, p.83

²⁴³ Blanchot, Ibid, p.10

²⁴⁴ Sayın, Ibid, p.54

²⁴⁵ Agamben, Ibid, p.91

²⁴⁶ Oğuz Arıcı, “Maskeyle Varolmak”, *Maske Kitabı*, Habitus Press, 2004, p.6-7

²⁴⁷ Arıcı, Ibid, p.24

According to Meisner “acting is being genuine under imaginary conditions.”²⁴⁸ Fiction, denotes the imaginary²⁴⁹ and the stage play is an imaginary world where the actor is attempting to create something genuine. The actor steps out of their self and experiences someone, someplace other, another atmosphere, another time, and the otherness in general through the process of ecstasy.

According to Zeynep Sayın, the person can achieve *ecstasy* insofar as they can refuse their subjectivity.²⁵⁰ As Lacoue-Labarthe says, the actors abandon “being themselves” to reach *active mimesis* or a creative form of being. Ülgen, who draws from these ideas, claims that actors are *voluntary non-subjects*.²⁵¹ For the actors, the potential to open themselves up to another on the stage is contingent upon the refusal of their own subjectivity. Şahika Tekand claims that “actors do not embody the emotions of others as proxies, instead what they feel is real affection towards others.”²⁵² The possibility of stepping outside one’s own standpoint and refusing one’s own subjectivity is also possible through feeling affection towards others. Just as it is for Bataille that being can’t reach the end of its existence alone,²⁵³ and just as it is for Blanchot that being can only exist as becoming an object of contestation,²⁵⁴ so the actors require the help of their affection towards others to build their own practice of *affection*. Their potential to become someone else can only be unlocked through the refusal of their own subjectivity – which is not to be confused with ignoring/ rejecting oneself.

²⁴⁸ Sanford Meisner and Dennis Longwell, *Sanford Meisner On Acting*, Vintage Books, 1987, p.87

²⁴⁹ <https://tureng.com/tr/turkce-ingilizce/fiction>, Last Access Date: 14.09.2021

²⁵⁰ Sayın, Ibid, p.56

²⁵¹ Ülgen, Ibid, p.255

²⁵² Tekand, quoted by Ülgen, Ibid, p.68

²⁵³ Bataille, Ibid, p.42

²⁵⁴ Blanchot, Ibid, p.6

It is important to reiterate that ecstasy does not imply “uncontrolled freedom.”²⁵⁵ Kerem Karaboğa, who reads Terzopoulos’ acting technique with emphasis on the physicality of ecstasy in his book *Transcending the Limits Through Tragedy (Tregedyä ile Sınırları Aşmak)*, defines the ecstatic state of “self-abandonment” as a property of a primitive body which leaves all learned habits aside and manifests in its most unbiased and vulnerable form. He takes care to note that it would be a mistake to take this state to be a completely mechanical abstraction.²⁵⁶ According to Karaboğa, this technique found in Terzopoulos does not suggest that the actors lose themselves in a trance and enter a state of oblivious bliss.²⁵⁷ The actors who “do not own any property as part of their essences”²⁵⁸ “leave their learned habits aside”²⁵⁹ and thus unlock the possibility of analyzing the capacities of their bodies. Thus, the actor looks into what a “primitive body” looks like. And this idea is also connected to the state of essenceless-ness, as was the idea of community. According to Terzopoulos, “nationalistic and sexist cultural codes hold no sway over the actors’ bodies because everyone is equal before death and destruction.”²⁶⁰ Community has the potential to manifest only when defined on grounds other than identity and essence: It has to be a coming, yet unknown community.

A creative space that is specifically formed on the grounds of community is only possible through a relationship with the unknown, According to Ülgen, creativity is related to constantly being able to reassess the operating framework, to the ability to stalwartly face hardships, and finally to the courage to move and progress along with the unknown.²⁶¹ As I’ve mentioned before, Blanchot thinks that

²⁵⁵ Kerem Karaboğa, *Tragedya ile Sınırları Aşmak*, E. Pub., 2008, p.

²⁵⁶ Karaboğa, *Ibid*, p.105

²⁵⁷ Karaboğa, *Ibid*, p.88

²⁵⁸ Ülgen, *Ibid*, p.50

²⁵⁹ Karaboğa, *Ibid*, p.105

²⁶⁰ Karaboğa, *Ibid*, p.108

²⁶¹ Ülgen, *Ibid*, p.95

ecstasy requires transcending knowledge and the known and it includes the unknown.²⁶² Arıcı imagines that the first actor of ancient Greece must have assumed the mask of a God, Dionysus, and must have manifested him: “Similar to the way that being becomes ex-ternal to itself, the actor, through an ecstatic act manifests the God in and through the mask.”²⁶³ According to Karaboğa, “it is crucial for Terzopoulos’ Dionysian transcendence technique that the actors keep going regardless of physical exhaustion and pain. The moment that the body signals to stop is the moment where conscious control of one’s body ends. It is a limit but one that reveals the potential to confront an unexpected and multi-dimensional life source.”²⁶⁴ The unexpected can be considered in close kinship with the unknown. Terzopoulos invites the actors to search for limits in their own bodies through the experience of ecstasy and claims that the actors can find there a creative force that is closely linked with the unexpected and the unknown. The actors, through their interaction with the unexpected and the unknown, bring the other into being into their ecstatic bodies.

If ecstasy can be considered a limit,²⁶⁵ then it is the place where the actors will meet their others. The word limit implies liminality, the state of being at the threshold.²⁶⁶ Victor Turner, while speaking about being at the limit, points to “liminality” as “the place where we can re-think everything; debate, re-interpret and re-formulate every norm during a time of crisis.”²⁶⁷ Generally, Turner takes liminality to mean “re-interpretation and re-thinking.” For him, creative space manifests away from the memorized actions, thought, and speech. There is a calling, an invitation where one refuses to act from memory and decides to move

²⁶² Blanchot, *Ibid*, p.19

²⁶³ Arıcı, *Ibid*, p.6-7

²⁶⁴ Karaboğa, *Ibid*, p.76

²⁶⁵ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.88

²⁶⁶ <https://tureng.com/tr/turkce-ingilizce/limit>, <https://tureng.com/tr/turkce-ingilizce/liminality>, Last Access Date: 22.09.2021

²⁶⁷ Marvin Carlson, *Performance: a critical introduction*, Routledge, 2004, s.16

towards the good, the right, and the beautiful: “In the act of opening hitherto closed doors and the act of cracking open the illusion to see what’s hidden inside, there is clearly a search for joy; certainly there is an action towards the good, the right and the beautiful; certainly there is something creative hidden there, waiting to be revealed.”²⁶⁸

According to Rollo May, *the encounter* is the first thing that will catch our eyes during the analysis of creative action.²⁶⁹ Actors transform others as well as get transformed themselves during this encounter which is crucial for creating a new world along with others. The grounds for the relation between *the I* and *the other* is a common ground. It can endanger the I or cause for it to get snuffed out just as well it can make it a part of a “safe” world. According to Ülgen, “the possibility of our actions is closely connected to the existence and non-existence of others’ actions. We can act because someone else can or cannot ... Our existences are interlinked: we can be saved, be hurt, and be destroyed by others.”²⁷⁰ This connection points to a sharing of limits: Those who share each other at each other’s limits can be considered in each other’s interactive sphere.

Ecstasy is the limit where the possibility for community can manifest itself. It holds a crucial place within the actor’s relationship with the unknown especially within the contexts of the actor’s creative act; the creative space that the actor occupies with others; and their refusal to appropriate any property as an essence. The idea of community that provides for the actors the opportunity to step outside their bounds, and through this, the opportunity to open up to others is inseparable from the actors’ process of creation.

²⁶⁸ Ülgen, Ibid, p.116

²⁶⁹ May, Ibid, p.63

²⁷⁰ Ülgen, Ibid, p.28

CONCLUSION

This thesis analysed the ideas of Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot, and Giorgio Agamben who argued for the substitution of ideas of individuality and society with the ideas of singularity and community respectively. I intermeshed this subject with the discussions surrounding essences and the idea of ecstasy and contextualized it within the practice of acting. My claim is that, if the understanding of the term essence denotes attributable identities, properties, definitions, or a sum of all those, then owning an essence or imparting *immanence* to human beings on the condition of owning and actualizing an essence will inevitably lead to the Western understanding of ideas of individuality and subjectivity.²⁷¹ I demonstrated that this understanding is incompatible with the idea of community, which manifests itself on the grounds of essenceless-ness.²⁷² Starting from these points, I investigated the notion of immanence on the level of both individuals and societies. The process of actualization of one's essence, from what I called the essentialist standpoint, imparts immanence to human beings. Communist ideologies achieve a similar result since they claim that community is an essential property of human beings and that creating a community is one way of actualizing one's essence.²⁷³ This, I suggested, can be read as a totalitarian approach. This is the main reason that this thesis is consolidated around the notions of singularity and community instead of individuality and subjectivity. I tried to establish that the idea of community, which is taken to be a possibility for singularities to open themselves up to the external on the basis of essenceless-ness and the idea of acting where the actors can step into the creative space on the same basis, can be read in conjunction as two compatible ways of being. The support for this interpretation came from the works of Agamben, Nancy, and Blanchot as well as thoughts of various dramaturgs, actors, and directors.

²⁷¹ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.46

²⁷² Nancy, *Ibid*, p.4

²⁷³ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.4

For Nancy, Blanchot, and Agamben refusal of the essence, identity and possession is the key to a special form of interaction of singularities that unlocks the possibility for community. What the search for impropriety and dispossession means for actors within the general discussion of essences and what kind of possibilities are available as a result of this search has been a central question of this thesis. The discussion around this question was enriched by the thought of various thinkers, writers, and dramaturgists including Denis Diderot, Lacoue-Labarthe, Jacques Lecoq, and Michael Chekhov. Thanks to this discussion, I intended to make clear that the actors' choice of dispossession (the refusal of owning essences, identities, subjugating themselves to a myth, a history, a person, or text) could create the conditions necessary for operating in the creative space.

For Nancy, a building block for the idea of community is the act of witnessing the other's death where the witness is unable to consciously experience their own death.²⁷⁴ In this sense, death drives us to think about someone other, distinct from ourselves. Opening up to the other is only possible for non-subjects.²⁷⁵ To support these claims I investigated the differences between the notions of subjectivity, individuality, and singularity throughout the thesis and concluded that subjectivity and individuality are incompatible with the idea of community; and that the possibility for the community lies in the refusal of these notions. In the case of the actors, they have to become "voluntary non-subjects"²⁷⁶ in order to open up to others. For the actors "who refuse to own any property as their essence"²⁷⁷ the possibility to assume any form, become anyone, and to create a time, place, and atmosphere foreign to their own remains within reach. To that end, I brought the notion of "non-subjectivity," which holds the possibility of communal existence, and the idea of actors as "voluntarily non-subject"²⁷⁸ creators together and delved

²⁷⁴ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.19

²⁷⁵ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.20

²⁷⁶ Ülgen, *Ibid*, p.255

²⁷⁷ Ülgen, *Ibid*, p.50

²⁷⁸ Ülgen, *Ibid*, p.255

into the possible contributions of these notions towards the framework that supports them.

Nancy claims that community cannot be constituted as a work (*oeuvre*); instead, it can only be experienced as a sense of finitude.²⁷⁹ This sense is possible through perpetuating the act of writing²⁸⁰ or suspending, disrupting the age-old stories and myths – an act that will lead to singularities revealing themselves to each other or manifesting in front of others at their limits.²⁸¹ According to Nancy, theatre is not a matter of representation anymore. Similar to the idea of community, it becomes possible at the shared line, which will lead singularities towards revealing themselves to others.²⁸² This line, the limit where singularities manifest also reveals the necessity for the existence of others. According to Tulu Ülgen, the birth of theatre is only possible due to the fact that bodies never come into the world alone.²⁸³ The investigative opportunity made possible by these thoughts of Ülgen led me to delve deeper into the meaning of otherness and distinction within the contexts of theatre and community. This in turn led me to comment on the hidden potential that lies in the relationship between the actors and their others. Blanchot argues along similar lines, claiming that opening up to others is the most fundamental way to become an object of contestation. Similarly, the actor, while collaboratively building a fictional world within the creative space, must ask questions about the other, and must cover some ground towards understanding it.

According to Agamben, the conditions for distinction cannot be found in a discussion of essences.²⁸⁴ The subject of sameness/distinction within the context of essenceless-ness, appears within the discussion of acting as hypotheticals “what if

²⁷⁹ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.31

²⁸⁰ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.45

²⁸¹ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.58

²⁸² Nancy, *Ibid*, p.58

²⁸³ Ülgen, *Ibid*, p.15

²⁸⁴ Agamben, *Ibid*, p.17

I was that person/thing” and “in what way something could be different than me?” Agamben juxtaposes possession of things with reaching one's limits; assuming an essence with opening oneself up to the external. Following this I explored the idea of ecstasy which corresponds to opening up, revealing oneself to the outside within the context of the idea of acting as “the practice of opening up to inter-spaces.”²⁸⁵ This is because the actors are in a constant search for inter-spaces between themselves and their role, the people and their worlds, the space and the time, the mind and the body, the good and the beautiful, the ethical and the political...²⁸⁶ Actors who can only be at their limits when occupying these inter-spaces and singularities which can only exist communally as it occupies the limit, allow us to think of the possibility of a “world together.” To this end, I’ve comparatively read Grotowski’s interpretation, which suggests that acting is a tool to escape and complete one’s self²⁸⁷, with Agamben’s who locates “the whatever” (his *being in coming*) as an “external”²⁸⁸ form of being.

Finally, Blanchot’s (who claims that ecstasy requires transcending knowledge and the known and it includes the unknown²⁸⁹) theoretical and practical work about the actors’ creation of fictional worlds and about the idea that their performance can lead to both delusion and fiction proved extremely enlightening. In acting, the difference between creativity and delusion points to the collaborative search for a new world through gaining awareness and to the idea of the unknown. Actors’ assumed thoughts carry the risk of delusion while such thoughts may lead to, according to Bataille, the danger of “deifying oneself” within the context of a

²⁸⁵ Ülgen, Ibid, p.41

²⁸⁶ Ülgen, Ibid, p.70.

²⁸⁷ Grotowski, Ibid, p.260

²⁸⁸ Agamben, Ibid, p.67

²⁸⁹ Blanchot, Ibid, p.19

community. According to Bataille “If I "mimic" absolute knowledge, I am at once, of necessity, God myself.”²⁹⁰

To conclude, I claimed here that attributed essences are incompatible with the idea of community and that the notion of ecstasy is a cornerstone for opening up to a community. My discussion around these subjects demonstrates that actors, who have the potential to collaboratively create a fictional world, and singularities can be discussed on common theoretical grounds as a “cooperative” and “synergetic” couple.

²⁹⁰ Nancy, *Ibid*, p.5

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