Rendering the Tone

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What determines the place of community, and more specifically, the place of a philosophical community? If philosophy is a site of response and engagement, perhaps the most important task is to think the very event of its presentation, of what takes place where thought is said to be shared.

It is exceptionally difficult today to isolate a particular form of speech that we name ‘philosophical’. More so than ever, philosophy finds itself with an uncertain address. Yet if a philosophical community exists, it may exist by virtue of an experience of the address. Such a community may pose the following questions — from where do we speak, about what, to whom, and in what manner, and what is it that takes place between ‘us’? These questions are not simply the themes of a thesis on community. If community is avowed, and indeed, invented wherever such questions are posed, what is avowed is the exigency to speak the possibilities of address and invention themselves, and so doing, touch upon the various forms that community may take.

Community becomes a unique place of encounter by means of its language. A philosophical articulation of community assumes an ethical and political charge — to think and open the space of a thoughtful and critical speech. Neither the other nor I may define community, nor less the forms of its communication: what defines the sense of a community, we may say, is a generosity and an affirmation for the sharing of voices. It is here that the question and experience of tone becomes significant.

Kant, Hölderlin, Derrida, and Fichte have all addressed tone. It is Fichte who touches upon tone in the most interesting manner, or rather, the most inventive (perhaps because the most problematic, or comic). Fichte’s provocative Annalen des philosophischen Tons attempts to name the philosophical tone of an age, of his community, what he sarcastically names the ‘republic of scholars’, or, with a more zealous contempt, the ‘literary aristocracy’. Fichte will characterize this aristocracy as a self-justifying elite wherein anything “a member of this elite says is true, and true
because he says it.”¹ This apparent elite speaks for the community, yet has separated itself from and placed itself above the social body. Fichte will address the question of tone to community itself, by means of addressing its end. He begins by declaring: “It is hoped that our celebrated ‘philosophical age’ is now drawing to a close.”² The Kantian philosophy of the age that speaks in the name of reason in fact distorts the use of reason. Fichte will then address the future: it is hoped that this record of the tone adopted by contemporary philosophy will “not seem entirely unworthy to future, more favoured generations.”³ This is to hope for a transformation in philosophical practice. Likewise, for Kant, the tone that pretends to speak with the voice of philosophy in fact presents us with the possible loss of reason in obscurantism. Something like the death of philosophy is heralded. This very possibility will demand a rethinking of what is meant by philosophy, and how philosophy is to continue. Where Kant addresses the ‘assumption of superiority’ to those who ‘act the philosopher’, those who rely upon a so-called ‘inspiration’, this issue is addressed to community as to its failure. Such a ‘superior philosopher’, “through an apotheosis that comes from above and that costs him nothing — no one but this philosopher can come up with the notion of acting superior, because, being up there, he speaks from his own viewpoint, and so he is not bound to speak with anyone.”⁴ For Kant, philosophy as such will only take place within a certain kind of community, one that is not only ethically concerned for its own possibility, but more importantly, lives out this ethic in practice. Both Kant and Fichte identify a certain tone that assumes, perhaps we may say, a ‘pathos of distance’, a separation. Both, it may be said, find this appeal to separation or distinction to ring hollow. The superior tone cannot ground itself: the ‘literary aristocracy’ suffers from laughable pretension.

Kant was less concerned with tone itself as with the assumption of those who speak where rather, they should not. Kant would appear to limit community to a voice and a tone of reason, a toning down in the name of moderation and modesty. Yet Kant’s language is frequently biting and sarcastic. Hearing philosophy spoken in the superior tone is the most ‘ridiculous phenomenon’. The ‘philosophy of feeling’ that proceeds variously by exhalted vision, secret intimation, and ‘high-strung metaphysical sublimation’ is the death of all philosophy.⁵ In order for philosophy to save itself from this death, work is required — the long work of the development of the concepts of the understanding, the application of reason, and the appeal to what is universally valid.

We may say that community divides along lines of tone, not only in regard to what forms and modulations of speech are appropriate to what contexts, but in regard to the political and ethical expectations of a speech that claims to authorize or underwrite the reasonable use of language in the first instance. A philosophical community will divide between reasonable and unreasonable speech. This problem is not only ethical, but touches upon a question of identity. By what modes of speech do we recognize ourselves, and by what forms of writing do we communicate our thinking (this may, for example, touch upon the relation between form and content, such that the meaning of a work is as much its presentation or reflection upon its presentation)? The use of a tone will determine the sense and meaning of a philosophical speech, and will measure the very communicability of that speech. Kant, however, will conclude by taking a step

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2. Fichte, “Annals of Philosophical Tone” 341.
5. See Kant, “On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy” 62, 71.
back, a step that as yet ties tone to its ethical and political significance. What good is a conflict over tone? “Is it much noise about nothing, disunity out of a misunderstanding in which no reconciliation but only a reciprocal clarification is needed in order to conclude a treaty that makes future concord even more heartfelt.” The promise here (if there is one), is that our speech and writing assume forms that trace the sense and meaning of community, that make community, as a place of encounter, possible.

Both Kant and Fichte will find a ‘philosophical voice’ that speaks in an ‘improper’ or questionable tone. This tone appears to undermine the self-understanding of philosophy, and dramatically, demands a response in kind. Fichte will address both the philosophical community and the public at large in a manner that is charged and passionate. He will challenge his critics to show the precise reasons why his system should be refuted. He will call for polemos against not only these critics, but also their very tone.

Fichte must first declare the foundation of his tone. This foundation will be reason: ‘in philosophical literature, the only things which we find worthy of respect are reasons’. Yet so scornful is his address that it remains uncertain that Fichte is speaking as an ‘I’ that belongs to a ‘we’. The place of reason, and who speaks in its name, is itself in dispute. Just as Fichte’s place in philosophy is called into question, it is the reasonableness of Fichte’s critics that is at issue, and in turn, their place in philosophy. Fichte addresses community from a position that is uncertain of its membership, uncertain if it is even worth belonging to this ‘community’, and uncertain of whether or not there is a community to begin with.

Fichte will find two tones at work. These tones are not restricted to philosophy. They ‘spread out from philosophy to include all the other sciences’. The first conceals its superficiality by means of audacity, lofty indifference, and a superior smile. The second tone, the one that principally concerns Fichte, is what he names a plaintive (wehmüthigem) tone. This carping, melancholy or whining tone is often found in the anonymous review. Here, authors feel less likely to suppress their character and turn to insult over analysis. The review in the plaintive tone, with its pretend exasperation and condescension, permits the reviewer to avoid addressing the reasons, the argument itself, of and for a philosophical position. Such a review is not reasonable, not philosophical. It would be marked, for example, where one is pedantically (and/or mischievously) concerned with an economy of thought rather than the substance of an issue. A reviewer may set themselves up as the most reasonable of readers, and, in presenting the text as too difficult to the wider readership, will offer the conclusion that the text is in fact ‘unreasonable’ and unreadable.

It is in order to critique this plaintive tone that Fichte literally invents a moment of community. He invents a dialogue with his ‘fellow citizens’ in order to defend The Foundation of Natural Right against an anonymous review (most probably by Gottlob Ernst Schulze). He provides his own questions against his system, and then proceeds, it must be said, in predictable fashion to turn the tables. For example:

Air and light a priori. No, don’t start to laugh again at once, but tell me what is so strange about this statement.

Well, knowledge of air and light is a posteriori. Air and light are certainly objects of experience. Indeed they are, but who denied this? Isn’t everything a part of experience for us? But you just said that they were a priori! Indeed they are. But in another sense isn’t everything a priori for us? Now, you are no longer laughing. Your eyes are wide with astonishment. Are you saying that the same thing can be both a priori and a posteriori? Let me ask you instead: is there anything a priori which must not, precisely for this reason, be a posteriori? Can anything be a posteriori for any reason except that it is a priori? Now your eyes are even wider. Come on, be serious. Surely you are joking with us because we made fun of you first. On the contrary, are you serious? Is this really news to you still?

Over the course of Fichte’s dialogue it will emerge that the tone that ought to be proper to philosophy will be a reasonable tone (one wonders, though, if it is really possible to arrive at this conclusion given the above quotation, and much of what follows it). However, this tone will not simply be reasonable. It will appeal to reason, at least initially, but more significantly, it will be a responsive tone, a tone and a speech that claims to permit, within itself, a right of reply. Or rather, it claims the right to reply. Fichte is concerned, precisely, about the place and ethics of response.

Fichte ends on two final comments. Remarkably, he divides his address between the ‘reviewers’ and the public. Fichte ridicules his intellectual contemporaries, symbolically returning the plaintive tone to its authors. His address to the reviewers appears purely polemical, a challenge to combat. He then appeals to the public, and his tone changes. It again divides, this time between attack and pleading. Believing himself ‘absolved from any duty to be merciful’, he chastises the public — “Why, O public, have you chosen to make me an example of your injustice?” Fichte pleads and bullies. The violence of his tone is provoked by the understanding that “it is the only way to open the ears of the German public, the only way to penetrate your stopped up ears and to shock them at least.” Fichte then appeals to the ‘dear public’ to agree that his tone is in fact appropriate — that is, reasonable: if only the public knew the ‘non-sense sold to them in the name of cash’, non-sense paraded as ‘Kantian Philosophy’. He pleads with the public to allow him the right to correct his critics, to allow him his right to outrage against insult. If the public would then assent to support him, this public would undoubtedly find his “tone to be very mild.”

In this singular text, Fichte invites a response from outside philosophy, a response that may perhaps authorize the tone, the very presentation, of a philosophical dispute. The community in which philosophy takes place will not for this reason be authorized by the tone that takes place within it, even if this tone is but a repetition of what precedes it. No doubt, Fichte’s argument appears contradictory. He claims authority to speak in a manner he derides. His argument is overdetermined and wounded, and perhaps ultimately self-defeating. His tone moves from calm to bitterness, self-indulgent pleading to vicious attack, indignation to cynicism. Yet it is not simply a polemical article in a polemical tone. The tones change and transform, leave behind the ‘reason’

upon which they were based, and in so doing, suggest that other origins and other exigencies determine the place and the force of a speech addressed to others.

Fichte’s tone will change according to the demand he makes, according to the response he seeks. Fichte’s address is not simply an analysis of how philosophy may or should take place. It is also a personal statement of self-justification, a moral self-defence. What is affirmed — the yes that takes place here, despite all the negativity and bitterness — is the necessity to trace a form of community that would take place according to an ethics and a politics of responsiveness. Tone is at issue because tone measures an ethical sensibility, and as such, one’s ‘place’ in the community, the position from which one speaks and writes. This would be the demand and the meaning behind Fichte’s address. However, for so many reasons, Fichte’s very tone may compromise this demand. We may just as easily commiserate with Fichte as we may refuse to take his address seriously. Yet unsure of where to locate himself, the play (or the ‘agony’) of Fichte’s tone traces not a hyperbolic ‘impossibility’ of communication (‘communication at its limits’, etc) but, rather, the very space in which speech and writing take place, and become meaningful according to a force of engagement. Communication will have this character: sustained by a demand or a desire, by the space in which it unfolds, it may exceed us and diminish us, becoming more (or less) than what we had hoped.

To think the relation between response and tone we need to think that what calls us to into question, and to the question, is already committed to response. Wherever there is speech, speech is first in the mode of response. An other’s voice is said to provide the space in which my speech is meaningful. Here, we may cite Georges Bataille, cite a demand that is also cited by Maurice Blanchot,

If I want my life to have meaning for myself, it must have meaning for someone else. 11

Someone else must respond. The meaning must be shared and understood in a language or an idiom. Blanchot responds to Bataille: the experience of communication must remain communicable:

…it is an opening to the outside and an opening to others, a movement which provokes a violent dissymmetry between myself and the other. 12

Strictly speaking, neither Bataille nor Blanchot are philosophers, certainly not in the academic sense. Yet the powerful philosophical thinking of community in their work draws its power from the exigency to maintain the passage of speech and writing. Blanchot says nothing that is not already signed by Bataille. Their thought is profoundly shared. Yet the tone of each could not be more different. One is a tone of fever, perhaps fear, the other of calm exactitude, of measure and clarity. They speak and write to each other across these tones. Blanchot quotes Bataille once more: “What I am thinking I have not thought all alone.” This thinking will not be isolated to one or the other, will

not say where it begins or ends. It will, let us say, decide the place of community, without this place being anything more than an exchange of thoughts, words, tones (and sometimes, actions). What Bataille and Blanchot will ‘share’ is a moment where responsiveness is a yes because it opens to others, even where there is nothing to decide, or even to say, about this ‘yes’ (or this ‘community’), other than to acknowledge that it takes place, that there is a passage of words, and that two writers have left their mark.

Shared between its voices, the speech of community would address and respond to the place of response itself. Such a speech would think how to answer the promise of response that takes place in communication, and how to trace its claim in our speech. In so doing, response would maintain this promise, understand responsiveness as an obligation to be protected. A response, in order to be a response, must take as its point of departure what has already been said. It must keep close to the words it follows. Yet, a response must also be a new event. A response must say something different. It must initiate and invent. Response must acknowledge and respect the speech that comes before it, accord this speech its right to singularity, its unique share of sense. With an almost imperceptible nuance, a response cannot but repeat, and yet, must be an original moment, clearing the space for what may follow. Communication will not simply be a question of intellectual agreement or dispute, but of the responsiveness that a tone permits — that is to say, its ‘yes’.

Tone pertains to a philosophical politics of the voice and the letter. Traced in the voice and the letter, tone is how (and where) we find ourselves in speech and writing. We respond, address, promise, argue, all within a tone, and never without a tone. Tone is more atmosphere, perhaps ‘spirit’, than the more determined example of a style. Tone is vibration, variation. One tone can only be given or measured in relation to another. What then assures the research into tone? Does one approach tone by means of stylistic, textual, phonic, rhetorical, thematic, and/or semantic modes of analysis? Or as a moral concern? One could indeed tell oneself to use a certain tone as a matter of good conduct, but such a protocol does not tell us about tone itself, of how tone becomes a problem for the presentation of philosophy.

Speech and writing are never without their tone. Even an apparently neutral tone (the ‘no-one’s’ tone in which philosophy may wish to speak) remains a tone. We cannot speak without a tone. This is the facticity of tone. Tone communicates our intent, our feeling. It is the presentation of our identity and sense, the modulation of our words, the pitch and colour of our speech and writing. It is perhaps the thrownness of our speech, the mood of our voice. Tone offers, we may say, the presentation of ourselves in our very presentation, but a presentation that more often than not, surprises us. We may call tone a performance of identity, but an always improvised performance. Our tone may express delight, anger, or hurt. We speak in a confused tone, or with determination and sincerity. We express love in a soft, tender tone of voice, or equally, in an angry, tired and frustrated manner. Tone allows us to encourage and seduce. We may opt to write with a portentous high-seriousness in order to demonstrate our philosophical credibility, only to find upon re-examination a series of tiresome clichés and unquestioned borrowings: the tone hollows itself out with self-serving rhetoric. We may resolve, finally, to speak with conviction and force, only to become meek and uncertain when we open our mouths. We may play with tone, use tone to deceive and lie, or find that our tone betrays us. We may experience the sudden realization that our tone is all wrong, is too harsh, or too light. That what we meant to say was ruined because of the
tone in which it came out. We learn tone along with our language, and just as we make mistakes with language, we make mistakes in tone (for this reason, when learning a language, the specific cultural and social varieties of tone can be the most difficult aspect to master). Not finding the right tone, finding oneself speaking the wrong tone, can be a moment of shock. We hesitate, attempt to alter our tone, and interrupt our speech. Rarely does our tone have the consistency of a univocal pitch. There is always a certain fluctuation or trembling of tone.\footnote{13}

Tone does not appear in and for itself. It is manifest in speech and writing, but not without speech and writing. A tone may be soothing, or unacceptable, but tone itself is not heard without a medium. One could not objectify or idealize tone as a pure phenomenon from a non- or atonal standpoint. We cannot isolate tone itself: tone itself would always have a certain invisibility, a certain ‘withdrawal’, subtracting itself from the very investigation upon it.

Tone may be traced as an invisible presence within communication. Tone is, we may suggest, close to the ‘yes’ of affirmation that we find in the work of Nietzsche and Derrida. I speak, in response, in care or spite, in gentleness or polemos, and I have already said yes to not only a communication, but to the very space and passage of communication. My speech and writing fill the place of this yes, fill out this passage with my identity and my desire. I speak, and I speak already in a tone, as if the tone itself preceded the act of speaking.

If tone cannot be made an object of or isolated from the communication in which it is heard, we may say that tone withdraws, like a ‘yes’, in the very act of communication. May we then think that a certain ‘tone of withdrawal’ permits the yes to somehow echo all the more plaintively, to resound, to somehow be traced in a more ‘visible’ manner? Is this to agree with Kant, to argue then for a more modest, more reasonable speech and writing directed toward a heartfelt future accord? How then may we think the tone of the ‘yes’ and the ‘yes’ of tone? What would it mean to pursue such a question, and to what end?

Such questions may be posed by way of the ‘apocalyptic come’. For Derrida, the tone of ‘come’ is apocalyptic. The ‘come’ ‘addresses without message and without destination, without sender or decidable addressee, without last judgement, without any other eschatology than the tone of the ‘Come’.’\footnote{14} This ‘come’, Derrida argues, has no other trait, no other vehicle of meaning, than a tone. Yet if the ‘come’ has no other trait than a tone, or is nothing other than a tone, what is this tone? What is its colour or pitch? How do we say, within the play of tonal difference, that there is a particular tone, here, and that it is apocalyptic? Certainly, the word ‘come’ is decisive, is final and commanding. It does not open itself to question. Its force does not lie in its meaning, but in the finitude of meaning that it promises — come to the end of everything. It invites, calls, demands, and resonates beyond its place in speech and writing, addressing itself to an event that would be the end of language. ‘Come’ is that word that address itself purely to response, all the while committing itself to exceeding response.

How is ‘come’ heard, how is it responded to, and how may it be communicated? For Derrida, neither ‘yes’ nor ‘come’, in any language, in any tone, allow themselves to be recovered. The ‘yes’ and the ‘come’ appear to speak beyond their origin, beyond the

\begin{footnotesize} 
13. Tone derives from the Latin \textit{tonus}, which in turn comes from the Greek \textit{tonos}, meaning ‘chord’ or ‘tension’, from \textit{teinein}, ‘to stretch’. In speech and writing, due no doubt to the play of tonal difference, to the uncertainty of finding the appropriate tone, there is something ‘tense’, something ‘strained’.

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I or self or community that calls for response. Whoever speaks the ‘come’ is as much subject to its apparent injunction, passive to its imperative. It calls, without determination of address. Derrida will insist, therefore:

In this affirmative tone, “Come” marks in itself, in oneself, neither a desire nor an order, neither a prayer nor a request. More precisely, the grammatical, linguistic, or semantic categories from which the “Come” would thus be determined are traversed by the “Come.” This “Come,” I do not know what it is, not because I yield to obscurantism, but because the question “what is” belongs to a space (ontology, and from it the knowledge of a grammar, a linguistics, semantics, and so on) opened by a ‘come’ come from the other. Between all the “come”s, the difference is not grammatical, linguistic, semantic, pragmatic — and which permits saying: it’s an imperative, it’s a jussive modality, it’s a performative of such and such a type, and so on — the difference is tonal. And I do not know whether a tonal difference finally lends itself to all these questions.15

According to Derrida, ‘come’ makes everything shake and vibrate. The ‘proper’ or unique tonality of ‘come’ is impossible to address (and this is true of almost any word in any language). Its very enunciation strips itself of determination. It is uncertain, but it is affirmative. Come may be said in any and every tone, it is true, but within every tone in which it is said, there is something affirmative. Come invites. It must presuppose (affirm) some other who may respond, or who may invite. Come speaks in an affirmative tone.

Tone will be too uncertain, too difficult to allow the thinking of ‘come’ to arrive at what is considered a properly philosophical destination — a substantial determination of a thing or a truth. The ‘yes’ and the ‘come’, though they must take place in language, speak beyond the site of their enunciation. The yes that is spoken and written, the yes that reaffirms, can be spoken and written in any and every tone imaginable, yet all tones, every single tone, will only ever be the trace of a vibration, the trace of a yes.

Tone withdraws from the speech it enlivens. As the yes withdraws within and from the speech it permits, speech is possible. We take its place, take it over, repeat and reaffirm the yes, enact its event when we invite others into the space of our thought, wherever we seek approval, love, combat, community. By saying yes, touching upon this event and finding in it the means to speak, we may begin to think the ways in which tone presents oneself, the ways in which a tone opens the space of communication. It is to say ‘yes’ and ‘come’, knowing these words are pledged to a certain limit, risking this limit, but perhaps — and more significantly — resisting this limit, resisting the apocalyptic end, holding off and deferring in the name of communicability (hence Kant will call for a moderate tone, Fichte will appeal to his ‘dear public’).

Can we, in a more determined manner, speak the tone of a ‘yes’, speak in the affirmative tone of a ‘come’? What is the tone of the affirmation? How to say Yes, the spoken Yes that I say or write here and now, to the ‘yes’, in its ‘affirmative’ tone? This will not mean speaking and writing in a purely positive manner, but rather in such a way that speech and writing remark upon their own event. Can we then say that because our tone is uncertain, in order to allow the ‘yes’ to resound, our tone must be uncertain? Should we then employ a quiet, careful, discreet, intimate, tone? Should we permit our

tone to always fail and break apart? Does a withdrawn tone, always failing to find the right tone, communicate the difficult (though not always ‘difficult’ — it may also be excited, joyous) passage of speech and writing? Is there a tone of withdrawal that traces the very withdrawal of tone? Our tone will never be withdrawn enough, for the ‘yes’ will not be heard, no matter even our ecstatic silence: our tone will always be too much, always excessive. Perhaps it is simply a question of a quiet tone, not quite a stillness, in which taking place, also gives place to those whom I address. Maybe therefore it is the question of an echo, or a murmur. Or not even that. Perhaps the most pragmatic justification is all that is required — to speak with the requisite responsibility to appreciate the effects of our words. Speaking in the tone of a ‘yes’, if it is at all possible, would be to think that our communication become something more than a conversation or an argument, more than a speech act, a dispute or an exchange, that it may become remarkable, bear witness to our time and place, to what we think and feel. This will not mean an unlimited or unconditional affirmation (there is no such thing). It will mean that in order for the yes to assume an ethical profile, it must bear, or come to bear upon, a conception of the good — in this way, the yes and the speaking of the yes, becomes a question of responsibility. This responsibility means signing, in and for one’s own words, for the unique and valuable moments afforded to our communication.

What then of Fichte’s polemos? One cannot ignore the ‘violence’ and forwardness that is said to characterize philosophical engagement. Certainly, strife produces its own results. It forces one into taking up a position and defending it. Yet it may also close off response, becoming the annoying, demanding rant of unethical speech forever dissatisfied, always finding fault (one also wonders to what extent the defence of polemos is a justification for the psychological inability to respect others). Conflict is not the whole of philosophical communication, not even its essential part. Fichte’s address to the philosophical community will be divided between a delight in polemos and a desire to see it overcome. His tone will fracture, reassert itself, and move from anger to sadness. It will not remain reasonable. The tones of Fichte’s outrage speak of the ‘violence’, the tension, in the very act of communication. If we say that Fichte’s address most likely would achieve the opposite of its intention, that it would alienate the very community in which it takes place, this is no less a measure of responsibility, and no less a measure of the issue. On the contrary. Fichte cannot control his tone, signifying the very ‘violence’ that takes place in the vulnerable moment of opening one’s mouth, and of beginning to write. This tension may perhaps never be pacified. Fichte’s address speaks of the variation of voices, that a communication is only meaningful given such variation. It will be necessary, then, to appeal to other voices — perhaps to a ‘dear public’ — to find other sources of response, other sources of responsiveness and responsibility. Other ways of communicating, of appealing, and inviting.

This is what a tone of yes, or the yes marked in and by our tone, would trace — the event of community. A yes, if it takes place, if it can be traced, would mark a moment of assent, agreement, understanding, and perhaps even respect. A yes is an acknowledgment, a gesture of support and affiliation. It traces what takes place between us, even given the worst situations. Tracing a yes would trace the passage of communicability itself, marking what it is that takes place in our exchanges and encounters, and would permit us to think more meaningfully what is significant and necessary for us today.
Communication takes place according to a promise — that our exchange be one of friendship and respect, that it be non-violent. It may not always live up to this. Yet the yes that is traced in every act of speaking and writing promises itself to the possibility of agreement and recognition. The yes touches upon the hope, perhaps, that our speech and writing will remain effective within and without the community in which it takes place. This promise commits thought to defending the right of reply, and of defending this right to be inexhaustible. The attempt to fix a tone of speaking and writing, be it moderate, or polemical, would in itself be an act of violence. A tone is not limited or defined by one place of speech, one form of community, or one manner of argument or presentation. Wherever there is conflict, there is also an ethic that measures itself against conflict. The ethical injunction that accompanies speech, precisely, is to reduce conflict, to keep speech open (yet if we do this to an extreme, in the name of annihilating conflict, we cannot speak, not even in our own voice. Yet we cannot speak in a tone of pure conflict — there, communication is paralysed). The passage of communicability will be one of conflict, but a passage that as yet traces something that speaks against all conflict and violence. There will always be a need to measure our tone, to think what promotes, and indeed, denies response. This much would be a task, a work, of community.

We do not decide upon our tone in advance, yet must be responsible for it. In its way, our tone determines the event of speech and the possibility of response, makes our place in the community possible (one of the many things that make our place possible). All the ways in which tone is rendered trace the mood of our encounters and the sense of our time and place. Tone allows us to speak, and to speak to one another.

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