At the Limits of Presentation
Coming-into-Presence and its Aesthetic Relevance in Jean-Luc Nancy’s Philosophy

Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed, by due permission of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki in auditorium XIII, on the 26th of January, 2007 at 12 o’clock.
Abstract

This study investigates the significance of art in Jean-Luc Nancy’s philosophy. I argue that the notion of art contributes to some of Nancy’s central ontological ideas. Therefore, I consider art’s importance in its own right – whether art does have ontological significance, and if so, how one should describe this with respect to the theme of presentation. According to my central argument, with his thinking on art Nancy attempts to give one viewpoint to what is called the metaphysics of presence and to its deconstruction. On which grounds, as I propose, may one say that art is not reducible to philosophy?

The thesis is divided into two main parts. The first part, Presentation as a Philosophical Theme, is a historical genesis of the central concepts associated with the birth of presentation in Nancy’s philosophy. I examine this from the viewpoint of the differentiation between the ontological notions of “presentation” and “representation” by concentrating on the influence of Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida, as well as of Hegel and Kant. I give an overview of the way in which being – or “sense” for Nancy – is to be described as a “coming-into-presence” or “presentation”. Therefore, being takes place in its singular plurality. I argue that Nancy redevelops Heidegger’s account of being in two principal ways: first, in rethinking the ontico-ontological difference, and secondly, by striving to radicalize the Heideggerian concept of Mitsein, “being-with”. I equally wish to show the importance of Derrida’s notion of différance and its inherence in Nancy’s questioning of being that rests on the unfoundedness of existence.

The second part, From Ontology to Art, draws on the importance of art and the aesthetic. If, in Nancy, the question of art touches upon its own limit as the limit of nothingness, how is art able to open its own strangeness and our exposure to this strangeness? My aim is to investigate how Nancy’s thinking on art finds its place within the conceptual realm of its inherent difference and interval. My central concern is the thought of originary ungroundedness and the plurality of art and of the arts. As for the question of the difference between art and philosophy, I wish to show that what differentiates art from thought is the fact that art exposes what is obvious but not apparent, if “apparent” is understood in the sense of givenness. As for art’s ability to deconstruct Nancy’s ontological notions, I suggest that in question in art is its original heterogeneity and diversity.
Art is a matter of differing – art occurs singularly, as a local difference. With this in mind, I point out that in reflecting on art in terms of spacing and interval, as a thinker of difference Nancy comes closer to Derrida and his idea of *differance* than to the structure of Heidegger’s ontological difference.
Acknowledgements

This study was outlined in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s when I had the
fortune to spend some time in Paris. At the time I was registered as a DEA
student at the University of Paris-XII. Based on the feedback given of my DEA
thesis, I found it relevant to consider writing an entire dissertation on Jean-Luc
Nancy’s work. At that time, reviews and translations of his work were scarce,
which was especially the case concerning his accounts of art. During the past
years, I have had the pleasure of following how the interest towards his work has
grown internationally.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Arto Haapala
for his advice and patience concerning my work. I am also grateful to Professor
Jean-Luc Nancy who in the early stages of my thesis gave me his much-
appreciated encouragement. I would like to extend my thanks to Professor
Paola Marrati and Docent Susanna Lindberg for their valuable comments in
their pre-examination reports.

Yet this thesis would hardly exist without the support of the supervisor of
my DEA study, Professor Éliane Escoubas, who showed me the importance of
Nancy’s philosophy and its relation to the field of aesthetics. I would like to
express my warmest thanks to her, as well as to Professor Françoise Dastur, my
other supervisor in Paris. I would also like to thank Dr. Miguel de Beistegui for
his comments on my research plans when I spent one term as a visiting research
student at the University of Warwick in 2000. I am grateful, too, to Professor
Pauline von Bonsdorff who supervised me in the early phases of my study when
she was Acting Professor of Aesthetics at the University of Helsinki.

My thanks are also due to my colleagues at the Department of Aesthetics,
the University of Helsinki. I am especially grateful to Sami Santanen for his
insightful comments on my work and for the many conversations on Nancy’s
philosophy. I equally want to thank Markku Lehtinen, Ilona Reiners, Janne
Kurki, Miika Luoto, Esa Kirkkopelto and Jari Kauppinen for commenting
on my work in various seminars. I would also like to express my gratitude to
Professor Riikka Stewen and Outi Alanko for our discussions together and for
their support given to my work.

I am grateful to Docent Mark Shackleton for revising my English, as well
as to Harri Granholm for the layout of this study. I also want to thank Tiina
Erkkilä for her friendly help in all sorts of practical matters, and the Department of Aesthetics of the University of Helsinki for providing a room to work in. I gratefully acknowledge The University of Helsinki Funds, Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation and Alfred Kordelin Foundation for financial support.

This study is indebted to the comments and sympathetic attitude of my fellow doctoral students at the Department of Aesthetics: Saara Hacklin, Hanna Mattila and Max Ryynänen. I am especially grateful to my friend and colleague Janne Vanhanen for sharing an office and showing great understanding and generosity.

There are also many friends of mine who helped to bring me back to reality when the going occasionally got tough: especially Saija, Laura, Miia, Eeva and Hanna, as well as my brother Antti. Finally, I want to express my profound gratitude to my mother Pirkko Heikkilä for her unfailing encouragement and support at all stages of my work.
Contents

INTRODUCTION

I PRESENTATION AS A PHILOSOPHICAL THEME 19
1. The Presentation of Thought: On Nancy’s Philosophical Origins 24
   1.1 Heidegger’s Sein and Dasein 30
      Nancy and the Ontico-Ontological Difference 34
      Being and Existence 40
      Finite Existence 50
      Heidegger’s das Man 60
   1.2 Derrida and Différance 64
      Sense, Différance, and the Origin without Origin 66
      Trace 73
      Sense, Spacing, and Interval 75
2. Coming-into-Presence in Nancy’s Thinking: Remarks on the Historical Background 80
   2.1 Presentation and Darstellung: Nancy on Hegel 83
   2.2 Heidegger and Nancy on Coming-into-Presence 91
      On Presence and Coming-into-Presence in Heidegger’s Thinking:
      Vorstellung and Darstellung 92
      Nancy and the Finitude of Presentation 101
3. The Limits of Presentation – The Limits of the Singular Plural 105
   3.1 The Singular Plural of Being: On Nancy’s Notion of Singularity 110
      The Body of Sense 116
      The Who of Philosophy 121
   3.2 The Heideggerian Mitsein vis-à-vis Nancy’s Plurality of Being 128
   3.3 Nancy’s “Social Ontology” 133
   3.4 Community – the Shared Exposition of Being 139

II FROM ONTOLOGY TO ART: AESTHETIC PRESENTATION IN JEAN-LUC NANCY’S PHILOSOPHY 151
4. The Work of Art 157
   4.1 The Uniqueness of Art(s): The Interval and the Withdrawal of the Ground 158
      One Art – Several Arts 159
Introduction
Jean-Luc Nancy’s philosophy has not, until recently, been much researched either in France or abroad. A number of articles have been written concerning his thinking, and the earliest ones published in English are probably those in the anthology *The Sense of Philosophy: On Jean-Luc Nancy*¹ and one volume of the *Paragraph*² review, dedicated to Nancy (b. 1940). As for the Anglo-American response, several articles came out in the early 1990’s in philosophical reviews, mostly in reaction to Nancy’s ideas of community and the political, as well as his indebtedness to philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Georges Bataille, and Maurice Blanchot. However, in the past few years the interest in Nancy seems to be growing rapidly. In 2000 a large study was published, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, by Jacques Derrida.³ Later, after a colloquium held in Paris in 2002, a collection of presentations called *Sens en tous sens* came out in 2004. In 2005 and 2006, two introductions to Nancy’s central concepts were published in the United States.⁴ This brief overview does, I believe, justify my attention to Nancy’s thinking, as well as my discussion of his place and importance in the philosophical continuity that he may be seen to belong to. In my reading of Nancy I have chosen to take notice of relevant commentaries by both French and Anglo-American writers, something which to my knowledge not many thinkers have done before. There is not, so far, any actual tradition for speaking about Nancy and art or the aesthetic, although a part of Ian James’s recent book *The Fragmentary Demand* is dedicated to the topic.⁵

Nowadays the interest in Nancy’s thought is growing, dissertations are being written and essays on different aspects of his work are coming out. Yet references to his account of art have so far been rather scarce, and a comprehensive mapping of their scope and place in Nancy’s thinking has been lacking. This may be due to the nature of his approach to questions of art, which, despite the clarity and precision of his style, often deserve careful attention in working out their relation to their ontological stakes and sometimes involve ambiguous references.

---

³ In this book Derrida takes an interest in Nancy’s notion of “touching” [*le toucher*], from which he makes insights into his thinking as a whole, exploring Nancy’s whole quest as a philosopher of touching and its implications, both in Nancy’s own theory and in that of others.
⁵ See James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p. 202-230. This book was published so recently that I did not have the possibility of taking it into account to any great extent. Let us just state that in his analysis of Nancy and aesthetics James takes a specific interest in Hegel’s idea of the unity of the arts, as well as the notion of touch.
When Nancy examines art, the results neither belong to traditional studies of aesthetics, nor of the history of art, although he offers succinct readings of works coming from various passages in the tradition of the fine arts. Especially from the 1990’s, Nancy has published a number of books, essays and texts in exhibition catalogues on art, and it seems that matters of art are beginning to be part of a broader discussion and to show their relevance to Nancy’s readers and scholars to a larger extent.

In considering Nancy as a representative of a certain current in late twentieth-century French philosophy, his name has generally been connected with some of the key concerns associated with phenomenology, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and what can be widely termed the “post-modern”. Yet with Nancy in particular one should develop or move beyond these tendencies, and this is what I endeavour to show.

This study deals with the problem of the significance of art in Nancy’s philosophy. What I shall argue is that the notion of art deconstructs some of his central ontological ideas. Also, art illustrates them, in particular Nancy’s notion concerning the singularity of existence. In this respect, his thinking on art appears to be a step beyond earlier ontologies, such as Heidegger’s ontology. Therefore, I shall consider art’s ontological importance in its own right – whether, indeed, art does have ontological significance, and if so, how should one think of it, and how should one describe this with respect to the theme of presentation? By examining the division between ontology and art in Nancy’s thought I try to elucidate how, in fact, the coming-into-presence or presentation of being\(^6\) relates to the question of art. How should one define the problem of art in connection with the notion of presentation in Nancy’s general philosophical setting? I shall discuss art’s difference from philosophy, from the interrogation of being as regards the ontological basis of art, which is plural and grounded in diversity. By this, I want to show that Nancy redevelops his deconstruction of the Heideggerian Mitsein, “being-with”, and his own formulation of community.

---

\(^6\) As a rule, I shall use a lower case “b” when referring to what is designed by the German Sein in translations of Heidegger’s texts (or in the French language as l’être). In English translations, both “being” and “Being” may be seen in this context. In speaking of the German das Seiende (or of its French equivalent, étant), I shall refer to “beings”. However, when “Being” appears in quotations, I have kept it in the original form.
The question of presentation belongs to some of the main points of interest in contemporary French theory, and in no way are the viewpoints connected with presentation restricted to any particular philosophical tendency. Rather, the inquiry into presentation seems to characterize a whole range of research that can be described as the philosophy of art. When reflecting on these matters, I have found Jean-Luc Nancy’s philosophy of special interest, though one cannot refer to Nancy’s thinking of the aesthetic without a notion of his general views on ontology. At stake in my study is the relation between the ontology of art and the question of presentation: in speaking of art, how does presentation present itself in the event of touching its own limit?

What I shall argue is that with his investigation of art Nancy attempts to give one viewpoint to what is called the metaphysics of presence and to its deconstruction. More precisely, at stake is something which I call the negativity or the impossibility of art. In the background of Nancy’s elaboration of this question is Martin Heidegger’s thinking of being and Jacques Derrida’s notion of différance. In both, the idea of presence comes to the fore. If, citing Heidegger, “[t]hinking is the thinking of being”,7 the same point of departure nevertheless holds true for Nancy’s philosophy. Proceeding from the question of being is what Nancy obviously needs in order to drive the metaphysical concepts toward their limits and to what this closure reveals: the finitude of being. Heidegger directs his critique of being to the notion of “constant presence”, which he claims to predominate in the history of metaphysics. For Heidegger being is not “present”, but is in a necessary relation to nothingness, to what it is not, and only nothingness lets being unfold and come to presence. Thus, being itself is beyond referentiality, if referentiality is understood as the sphere of logos. As for Derrida, presence cannot be reached otherwise than as trace, since “[e]verything begins by referring back, that is to say, does not begin”.8 Presence is a trace of nothing. If, in Nancy, the question of art touches upon its own limit as the limit of nothingness, how is art able to open its own strangeness, and our exposure to this strangeness?

Based on this questioning, my aim is to investigate how Nancy’s thinking of art finds its place within the conceptual realm of its inherent difference and interval.

This is what I think makes his inquiry into art worth examining. Admittedly, art is not Nancy’s central philosophical concern, nor does he introduce any coherent theory of art or an “aesthetics” in the conventional sense of these terms. However, if we suppose that art resonates with philosophy, what is worthy of considering is how the thought of art contributes to Nancy’s philosophy, and on which grounds one may say that art is not reducible to philosophy.

As for my handling of “art” and “the arts”, I have limited myself to discussion of the visual arts. Nancy’s vision of art is not confined to the fine arts alone; on the contrary, since the 1970’s he has been writing on literature and the philosophy of literature, and later on his interests have covered cinema, auditive arts and recently also dance. Yet Nancy’s most extensive accounts in this field are about the visual arts, dealing most often with painting and photography. What is more, Nancy articulates his thoughts on the ontology of art most consistently in the context of the visual arts, which thus offer the widest perspectives to the understanding of his thinking on art and the aesthetic. As Nancy’s manner of discussing the visual arts in many cases moves on a highly abstract level, I have chosen to consider mostly his theoretical setting, which will be elucidated by practical examples.

My study will be divided into two main parts. The first part, Presentation as a Philosophical Theme, will be a historical genesis of some of the most important concepts associated with the birth of presentation in Nancy, while the second part will be oriented toward art and the aesthetic. The historical part will concentrate on the influence of such thinkers as Immanuel Kant, Heidegger, and Derrida who, in one way or another, have contributed to Nancy’s fundamental conceptions. However, this is not to be taken as only a matter of immediate commentary when speaking about Nancy’s thinking; instead, it might be regarded as a complex way of contributing to other philosophers’ texts and continuously questioning them. At stake in his relation to these philosophers, and to the history of thought in a larger scale, are the most fundamental problems in the history of philosophy.

The problems around presentation in the first part of the study are firmly linked with the inquiry into the question of being itself: being which “is” not, but which comes or is born into presence (naitre or venir à la presence) in an infinite arrival. “Birth”, which is an event, thus refers to a notion of being as a singular event or a taking place. As I attempt to show, in question here is
a thought of coming-into-presence which remains suspended in its passage and in the distance and exhibiting difference.\(^9\) In this matter, I shall approach Nancy’s ontological thinking as it is related to Heidegger’s understanding of the ontological difference and his terms \textit{Anwesung} and \textit{Anwesenheit}, the Kantian and the Hegelian notions of \textit{Darstellung}, as well as Derrida’s thinking of difference. Here my aim is to observe critically what it is that may have led these philosophers to take comparable lines when it comes to their views on coming into presence.

Yet it remains to be questioned, in the manner of Heideggerian \textit{Auseinandersetzung}, where these lines of thought find their equivalents and where they diverge from each other. I shall, moreover, devote some attention to Nancy’s strategies of philosophical working – which, however, should not be called a “method” – and his way of conceiving of philosophy and its phenomena themselves, something that I do not wish to refer to as a single attitude towards a defined number of philosophical problems. Instead, dealing with such matters will involve a more or less constant shifting of horizons, so that what takes place is, finally, a continuous dialogue with the history of philosophy itself.

In thinking of the central conceptions in Nancy’s philosophy, it becomes evident that the most important of them are probably associated with the constitution of his account on the matter of subjectivity; especially because he avoids any use of the term “subject”. Instead, Nancy speaks of \textit{singulars}, which are infinitely finite by character. Other terms used by Nancy to take the place of the metaphysical “subject” are the “existent” or the “self” (\textit{soi}, \textit{ipse}). It should be noted that singularity alone does not account for the nature of existence: instead, the singular being is essentially connected with being as community. Community is, first of all, the place of being-together, in which, according to Nancy’s formulation, nothing is divided but what divides us as singularities.\(^{10}\) What we share is our common existence, when we are exposed to one another: in question is a community with no common substance.

---

9 Nancy, p. 34. Cf. Heidegger, \textit{Pathmarks}, p. 275. A similar structure is at stake in the relation which Heidegger sees between thinking and being: “Thinking is related to being as what arrives [\textit{l’avenant}]. Thinking as such is bound to the advent of being, to being as advent”. Again, Nancy’s idea of the thought that is “yet to come”, or that is interminably only coming, is what Alain Badiou – perhaps not too seriously – calls “the post-Heideggerian style of perpetual announcement” and “secularised prophetism”. Badiou, Alain (2004). “L’offrande réservée”, in \textit{Sens en tous sens}, ed. Francis Guibal and Jean-Clet Martin. Paris: Galiêe, p. 15-16 (p. 13-24).

Only togetherness is shared, without implicating any sense which would be proper to the community. This is why the concept of community leads us to what is most originary to existence as such. Existence precedes the birth of any sense: it either comes after it, or exceeds it, but never coincides with it and it consists of this non-coincidence.\(^{11}\) Involved in the idea of togetherness is the thought that existence takes place in an interval, and that it happens in a plural way. That the “foundation” of art, although itself without foundation, is based in multiplicity, as Nancy holds, does not yet imply that the multiplicity of art and of existence could be identified with each other straightforwardly. I shall suggest that the rethinking of Maurice Blanchot’s notion of death is part of Nancy’s discussion of the plural ground of art.

The second part, *From Ontology to Art*, will draw on the importance of art and the aesthetic in Nancy’s thought with respect to the ontological themes presented above. One critical question touches upon his position among art philosophers: can Nancy be regarded as one of them, and what is his contribution to the field of aesthetics? According to the definition given by Alexander Baumgarten in the 18\(^{th}\) century, “aesthetics” meant perception by means of the senses. As the subject of aesthetics is now understood in the traditional sense, it consists of two parts: first, the philosophy of art, informed by ideas such as style, reference and the expression of psychological states which are intrinsic to the aesthetic appreciation of art, and second, the philosophy of the aesthetic experience and the character of objects or the phenomena that are not art, such as nature.

Rather than an “aesthetician” who concentrates on matters of the experience of art, I see Nancy as a successor to the tradition of the avant-garde philosophy of art, which has, in the first place, questioned the relation between art and the notion of “truth”. This is to say that avant-garde theories of art have put into question the idea that there could be the truth about the world or a consensus that there is an underlying reality that is true which art would be able to present. In this, Nancy follows philosophers like Walter Benjamin, Heidegger, Georges Bataille, Theodor Adorno, or Maurice Blanchot, whom Nancy repeatedly

---

\(^{11}\) Nancy, *La Communauté désœuvrée*, p. 216. For this reason, the communal or shared existence has to be conceived in a way that makes possible the thinking of what is originary. This is the condition of the taking place of something, or of the “there is”. Consequently, it is the condition of the thinking of sense. Nancy’s conception of community derives, in the first place, from the level of being. It consists of being toward oneself, which will never be reached, just because the “self” is always “another”. This is the reason why the community is always a matter of the others, being formed by “we others” (*nous autres*).
cites. Their standpoints on the notion of truth are not similar, however. For example, in Heidegger’s thought art brings forth the truth of being, if truth is to mean “unconcealment”, whereas in Nancy’s view art presents *sense* that he distinguishes from truth, as well as from signification.\(^{12}\)

Art and the limit of presentation is the subject matter of the latter part with view to the plural ontology of art, and the question is raised why is art ontologically distinct from any other thing and from philosophy? In Nancy, such a limit is the very place of spacing, that is, the joining together of time and space. In their turn, the reasons mentioned above may explicate the alleged duality – philosophy and art – involved in presenting the problem of the birth into presence. And, if “being-with” is what Nancy raises to the position of an ontological notion, how does this resonate with the existence of art and of the arts; why is it that art is born in a difference, and how is this idea related to Derrida’s term *différance*. Heidegger’s philosophy of the work of art will be reviewed most closely here, for it gives an important point of view to Nancy’s thinking: on the one hand, to see how Nancy’s discussion of art is both essentially related to it, and on the other hand, on what basis these two are different from one another.

Art is probably not the principal concern of Nancy’s philosophy as a whole, but it is especially in the present decade that he has contributed to the discussion of art and of the concept of the “image” with a growing number of works, essays and articles. However, what I consider his most remarkable work in the ontology of art is *Les Muses*, which was published in 1994. If the originality of Nancy’s thinking – for example, as reflected in the discussion on the political, the community or freedom, or a dialogue with the history of philosophy – lay elsewhere before, it is perhaps possible to see a partial shift of emphasis today, as art has become more and more central to Nancy’s thought. How, as a consequence, does Nancy’s notion of art, of the arts and of the image offer different, even contradictory aspects to his ontology? I shall look at art from the viewpoint of the general ontological treatment, illustrated in the previous part, for his ideas of art are in many ways inseparable from his basic philosophical views. At the same time, however, I shall clarify how art is able to contribute to

---

12 For Nancy, sense is something to be decided on each occasion of its occurrence. Thus, sense is outside of the sphere of truth as meaning; to put it another way, sense does not possess an absolute truth, or truth at all, but sense is just *toward* its truth and perpetually distances itself from it. Cf. Nancy (1997). *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, e.g. p. 147, 161-163 (*Le sens du monde*. Paris: Gallilée, 1993, p. 223, 243-246).
thought: how it is able to push back the frontiers of philosophy. To be considered are concepts such as technique, sensibility, the body, and touching with a view to the plural origin of the arts and their finitude.

From Nancy’s perspective, the questions linked with the conditions of the coming-into-presence of the aesthetic most often fall within the limits of the birth of sense (la naissance du sens). The term “sense”¹³ is liable to have taken different meanings in Nancy’s thinking, and it is greatly from this concept that many of his philosophical ideas seem to proceed. The French sens is the equivalent of the English “sense” in that both of these concepts are polysemantic. They may point to direction, intuition, reason, the five senses, or meaning. In his writings Nancy uses the whole semantic field of “sense”, which often makes the meaning of the word ambiguous. First, he uses “sense” in order to differentiate between “meaning” or “signification”, which indicates something given and fixed. Sense, in turn, refers to what precedes the separation between the sensible and the intellectual: sense exceeds or is beyond any signification. In speaking of the sensuous senses, like sight, hearing, or touch, I shall when necessary refer to them as the “five senses”. An answer to the question concerning the possibility – and impossibility – of art may be found in the fact that, in Nancy’s philosophy, art is a matter of singular senses. “Sense” is a “multiplication of singular fragments”, without any foundation or substance, so that it can only be thought of in terms of its advent or birth into presence. As sense must be understood as a finite concept, there can be no intention of instituting it.¹⁴ This is the point to which Nancy’s interrogation of art constantly returns.

¹³ Depending on the translators, the French word sens is either rendered in English as “meaning”, while some translators have chosen to use the English “sense”. Throughout my text, I translate sens as “sense”. This is in order to avoid confusion with the English “sense” – although confusion seems to occur in the English uses of “meaning”, which can be the translation of both the French words sens and signification. For terminological matters of this kind, cf. e.g. Nancy (1990). “Our History”, trans. Cynthia Chase et al., in Diacritics 20: 3, p. 97-115.

Presentation as a Philosophical Theme
Regarding the task of this dissertation, I see it as an attempt to interpret the critique which Jean-Luc Nancy addresses to the metaphysics of presence, and to examine what the consequences of such a critique are in the context of his notion of art. The first part of the study touches upon the problem of presentation in Nancy’s philosophy. My aim is to give here grounds for the specific question of art, which will be the focus of the second part. In the first part, Nancy’s treatment of the notions of “being” and “existence” will hold a central position. In such an exploration, the point of reference will largely be on Martin Heidegger’s interpretation of the same themes. Yet, what I hope to bring out is that Nancy’s inquiry into the ontology of art is both to be understood in the context of his ontological ideas, and that the philosophical discussion on art contributes to his more general account: what is art able to add to philosophy and to the reflections of the nature of thought?

The questions which I have set myself in Part I include the following: how to describe Jean-Luc Nancy’s notion of presentation, and how is presentation related to art and the aesthetic? In this consideration, the key notions – being and existence – turn out, however, to be objects of deconstruction, or to say the least, of rethinking. According to Nancy, there is nothing in art that might be generalized: art introduces the idea of singularity, which is, however, plural. In the same vein, art undoes any thought of existence “as such”, or of being “as such”. In this way, art diverts the discussion from ontology to its exterior, while still being in a necessary connection with ontology. Thus, it might be suggested that art holds a double position.

Beside ontology, some themes linked to his style of philosophical writing will also be considered. As a number of Nancy’s readers have stated earlier, to speak of a “method” in the context of Nancy’s thinking would be misleading in many senses, and his name can hardly be identified with any single philosophical current in a direct manner. Yet the tradition of deconstruction is perhaps the approach that comes closest to Nancy’s project; simultaneously, he continues Heidegger’s endeavour aimed at the destruction of metaphysics: what the metaphysical tradition has not yet considered.

In this study, “the aesthetic” stands for the ontological foundation of art for Nancy: that is, the plurality and division of different arts and, correspondingly, the division of the five senses. On the other hand, aesthetics means for him

the “transcendental aesthetic”. It is transcendental because his work confronts
the question of space-time in the finite ‘here and now’, which is never present
without being set against its continuum or its ecstasis.

The idea of institution and of accomplishing senses has, according to Nancy,
been a prevalent tendency in aesthetic thinking, in which “every thought of the
beautiful, and even of the sublime, has insisted, up until now, on extending to
infinity … the arc of finitude”.16 As a result, the relation of artistic presentation to
the notion of truth may be more complex than the notions which philosophical
investigation has been willing to prove.17 Consequently, one might say that
in Nancy’s philosophy aesthetics takes a meaning which deviates from most
traditional accounts of this discipline. It probably comes closest to Heidegger’s
understanding of the same issues, aimed at overcoming aesthetics and turning
to the critique of being. However, the position of art in relation to the question
of being is certainly much more complex, nor can Nancy’s idea of “aesthetic
presentation” be identified with his common notion of “presentation” – hence,
the focal question is why is it that the presentation of art does not simply equal
the presentation of being.

It also needs to be asked in what terms should we speak of the one who
has the experience of art – why does Nancy not speak of the “subject” and the
“object” of the aesthetic experience, like more conventional aesthetic theories
do? Is it even possible to articulate something like an “aesthetic experience”, or
how is it that the sense of art opens to someone? And, if art does not present itself
to the subject, to whom does it present itself? What is the coming into presence
of being, after all, and how should one characterize the relation between the
presentation of being and of art in Nancy’s thought? To begin to approach these
questions, I shall first turn to his philosophical foundations, while the second
part of the study is dedicated to art and the aesthetic.

In all, Nancy’s thinking is concerned with some large currents in the history
of philosophy, among which can be named German romanticism, psychoanalysis
and modern theories of literature, to mention just a few. Among individual
philosophers can be cited, first of all, Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, along
with Friedrich Nietzsche and a considerable number of the twentieth-century
French thinkers. I shall return to these below, although I shall not be able to go

---
16 Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 28 (Une pensée finie, p. 49).
into them in any detail, with the exception of Heidegger and, at certain points Derrida and Kant.

Nancy’s work can hardly be placed in just one category, for his philosophical approach consists of constant working and reworking of the conditions of thinking itself. One of his common features is certainly the way of approaching and opening up philosophical concepts by contextualising them. In Nancy’s case, these concern some of the key terms of modern metaphysics, such as sense, community, the political, or art. Yet, his work is not limited to any particular concepts or tendency, but rather tries to approach them as aspects of the labour of thinking, un travail, as articulated by Christopher Fynsk. This makes it possible for him to go straight forward to the aporias of thinking themselves and to have a constant dialogue with tradition.

However, this is not to say that Nancy would seek to negate the tradition and its influence as such – thus, he is part of the traditions of French contemporary philosophy in that their common feature is probably to re-interpret and re-evaluate some of the most classical problems of Western thought. The endeavour of deconstructing metaphysics essentially involves the deconstruction of the concepts of subject and subjectivity, as well as object and objectivity. The principal terms with which Nancy’s deconstructive discourse is related is the attempt to dissolve the identity of the subject and suspending its relation to the world. This happens by opening the subject onto the world, and the opening of the world that both determines and is determined by the subject’s intervention, so that the concept of identity is rejected, being too abstract. In more Heideggerian terminology, this would mean that deconstruction is concerned with the subject’s ecstasis, or “finite transcendence”, and with truth, understood as the opening of a time and a space wherein beings have a meaning and are available to representation. In Nancy’s view, at stake is the deconstruction of the metaphysics of the absolute, whereby “being” itself comes to be defined as relational, as non-absoluteness, as community; that is, as the being-ecstatic

20 Ibid.
of being itself. So understood, the proper object of Nancy’s deconstructive agency would be Heidegger’s notion of *Mitsein*, “being-with” (see Chapter 3).

---

1. The Presentation of Thought: On Nancy’s Philosophical Origins

The sources and style of Nancy’s thinking have their origins in his understanding of the history of philosophy. He relies largely on the history of philosophy, often to an extent that a number of references are required to understand his texts and to do justice both to Nancy and tradition. What guides Nancy’s philosophical style at different stages of his work is the intention to break with tradition and challenge it, while still not abandoning it. He points repeatedly to his own strategies of thinking, giving it a certain transparency by doing so.

The purpose of Chapter 1 is to articulate what guides his understanding of the task of thinking. My hypothesis argues that Nancy’s task is, overall, to reinterpret certain deconstructionist themes: how is it that one may approach the sense of philosophy, the sense of being, or of things, if their “sense” is to be understood as something which withdraws into nothingness as soon as it appears, which appears only to disappear? The introductory chapter will include a treatment of some of his basic points of interrogation: what is to be called “philosophy”, and how Nancy’s way of dealing with the tradition of thinking should be characterized. My aim is to develop this matter in sections 1.1, “Heidegger’s Sein and Dasein”, and 1.2, “Derrida and Différence”, in which I shall take into consideration Nancy’s notion of philosophy in the context of the thinkers who have perhaps had the greatest influence on his thought.22 By introducing notions such as spacing, sense, and syncope, I shall attempt to shed further light on some central notions of Nancy’s œuvre.

The aim of this “methodical” introduction is to lay the grounds for my study as a whole. I first try to find out how one could delineate Nancy’s style or his philosophical way of working and what constitutes it. Yet I hesitate to speak of any “method” as far as his writings are considered, for finding any

---

22 In Nancy’s pre-1990’s works in particular he gives accounts of his philosophical style and approach to the tradition of overcoming metaphysics. This is the case with his books written in the late 1970’s and in the early 1980’s – Le discours de la syncope, I. Logodaedalus (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1976), Ego sum (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1979), or L’impératif catégorique (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1983) – in which he attempts to deconstruct some central theme of the work of Kant and Descartes. Later on, “methodological” introductions, aimed at explicating his style of working, have been less frequent in his works. However, in the texts in which he comments on and challenges other philosophers’ work he offers, of course, a more or less definite account of his manner of writing. In the following I shall take a look at what constitutes Nancy’s approach to the task of philosophizing itself, and what leads him to the themes that constitute his philosophical body of works in the first place.
comprehensive definition for his way of philosophising is difficult – rather, one might speak of strategies of thought. Therefore, I shall try to give reasons for my doubts concerning methodical thinking, even if one understands this term in a manifold or complex sense. Nancy can be counted among those philosophers who constantly work with a range of subjects which can immediately be connected with the history of philosophy or, in a word, to the conditions of thought. This is particularly true of his works published before the 1980’s; later on, he turned from commentaries and monographs to inquiries which focus on particular themes, though one cannot consider these as mere commentaries in the conventional sense of the word.

With this basis I shall in Part II examine the relation of art and finitude in Nancy’s work, the fundamental question being how is it that art and the aesthetic are presented at the limit and as the limit of their coming into presence, as he claims. As soon as something presents itself as a sense, the presence withdraws into itself at its own limit. As Nancy proposes, this is because the presence is organized around its constitutive groundlessness, which itself is grounded in a syncope or an interval. Does sense – the sense of being – thus only touch its limit, and if so, how does it do that? 23

How should one characterise Nancy’s project vis-à-vis the history of thinking, and what are the most important questions from the viewpoint of art and the aesthetic? What I ask is whether or how can Nancy’s philosophy be examined in the context of the task of “destruction” as put forward by Heidegger, and that of Derrida’s “deconstruction”? These notions are understood here in the sense of destroying or deconstructing the history of metaphysics and reflexivity in general – that is, a critical inspection of these traditions. 24 Deconstruction, a term most commonly associated with Jacques Derrida, took form and was developed by him especially in his works of the late 1960’s, but the roots of deconstructive principles can already be located in Husserl’s and Heidegger’s philosophy. In any case, one is able to see the tradition of deconstruction and its operation throughout Nancy’s writing as an attempt to open up and analyse some of the main passages of Western metaphysics, such as the oppositions of space and time, subject and object, body and spirit or self and other, in order to return to the level of being.

If it is possible to state that Nancy’s philosophical style is closest to deconstruction, what in the first place does this tradition refer to? In his work Nancy elaborates some of the central concepts of modern philosophy, though his project can hardly be crystallized in any one of them into a single philosophy. Instead, it is a question of tracing the limits and contours of thinking itself, or rather its dislocation and disorientation.25 This position is articulated by his conception of the “ending” or “closure” of philosophy. To try to give any answers to the question concerning deconstruction in terms of a philosophical style entails an attempt to posit deconstruction as the ground on which arguments may be built. In this way, the quest for a method is liable to mean searching for the absolutely given.26 The alleged end of philosophy is essentially linked with the notion of the end of the West, suggesting a loss of meaning and what he terms as the “misfortune of a desire”. This is, according to Nancy, due to the manner in which metaphysics has presented itself as a representation of the world.

This will be a central question in considering Nancy’s standpoint to the previous ontologies. One of the points on which Nancy builds is the Heideggerian critique of metaphysics. For Heidegger, metaphysics is the thinking of the being of beings as the ground (arche, aition). As the ground, being brings beings to their actual presencing, so that the ground shows itself as presence. Heidegger’s “end of metaphysics” announces that being, not the subject or humanity, provides meaning: “So the point is that in the determination of the humanity of the human being as ek-sistence what is essential is not the human being but Being”. As for the human being, as mortal existence it is “thrown” (geworfen) into the destiny that is given by historical being.27 Moreover, Heidegger says, if metaphysics “thinks beings as being in the manner of representational thinking which gives reasons”, it follows that metaphysical thinking departs from “what is present in its presence”, and thus represents what is present in terms of its ground as something grounded.28 My assumption is that the groundlessness of being is equally the starting point for the thought of being in Nancy, and I try to explore how Nancy develops this theme on the foundations laid by Heidegger.

26 To take an example from Heidegger’s thinking, what lies beyond human consciousness is being and language.
27 Ibid., p. 249.
Heidegger’s thinking on being is chiefly the basis from which Nancy’s account of ontology springs. In thinking of both Heidegger’s and Nancy’s accounts of being, one can perhaps state that they keep commenting on questions which, in a large sense, stem from the tradition of phenomenology. This is the case if phenomenology is defined as a philosophical movement dedicated to describing the structures of experience as they present themselves to consciousness, without recourse to theory, deduction, or assumptions from other disciplines such as the natural sciences. Yet, as I see it, with regard to its “methodological” foundations, Nancy’s position vis-à-vis the phenomenology represented by Heidegger is a matter that demands consideration. Nancy’s thinking most certainly is phenomenological, if phenomenology is to be understood as he does: that is, as the inseparability of “being as such” (being in its essence) and “being as being” (being that “makes” things come into presence and makes the phenomenon appear).  

However, if phenomenology is taken in the sense which derives from Edmund Husserl’s thought, the founder of this philosophical current, Nancy’s definition of its task lies outside its central problematic. Husserl understood phenomenology to be the study of the structures of consciousness that enable consciousness to refer to objects outside of it. In his attempt to use pure description of the structures of experience, Husserl’s slogan was “To the things themselves”. Yet again, as regards the grounds of Heidegger’s idea of phenomenology, he accepts the aforementioned principle, but not Husserl’s view that phenomenology should be understood as epistemology, on which philosophy as a scientific discipline could be built.

According to Nancy’s point, what is insufficient in traditional phenomenology is that it speaks of nothing but appearing – and yet, as he argues, it falls short of touching “on the being or the sense of appearing”. In other words, phenomenology “does not open us up to that which – in sense and consequently in the world – infinitely precedes consciousness and the signifying appropriation of sense, that is, to that which precedes and surprises the phenomenon in the phenomenon itself, its coming or its coming up”. Thus,

29 Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p. 12-13, 17f., 175, n. 19 (*Le sens du monde*, p. 25-27, 32f., 33, n. 1). What is more, being, according to Nancy, must be taken as a transitive verb: being *is* the entity (*l'être est l'étant*), or rather, being is toward the entity – I shall come back to this.

what Nancy seeks himself and what remains outside of phenomenology, is “that (sense) which exceeds the phenomenon in the phenomenon itself”.  

Let us return to Heidegger’s relation to phenomenology which, however, is closer to Nancy than Husserl’s account. Heidegger gives an explication of phenomenology as a method in *Being and Time*. He seeks in it “to destroy the traditional ontology” in order to retrieve “those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being”. For Heidegger being is a starting point – being does not appear only as a correlate of consciousness, as it is for Husserl after the phenomenological reduction. And, if the task of ontology is for Heidegger “to explain Being itself and to make the Being of entities stand out in full relief” and if “only as phenomenology, is ontology possible”, then ontology proves to be to approach a phenomenon as that which shows itself in itself. While for Husserl we would have to abstract from all concrete determinations of our empirical ego to be able to turn to the field of pure consciousness, in Heidegger’s view the possibilities and destinies of philosophy are bound up with man’s existence, and thus with temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*) and with historicality. Heidegger thus claims that phenomenology should make manifest what is hidden in ordinary, everyday experience, as there seems to be a domain of primordial experience upon which an authentic understanding of being could be founded. Therefore, his consideration of being takes its start

---

31 Ibid.
34 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 7, p. 49, 54, 60. A phenomenon is constitutive for “appearance”, which means the announcing-itself by something that does not show itself, but which announces itself through something that does show itself. *Ibid.*, § 7, p. 52.
35 For Heidegger, *Dasein* is *zeitlich* in the sense of “temporal” or “pertaining to time”, while other entities are *innerzeitlich*, “within time”. *Temporalität*, in turn, only applies to being, not to *Dasein* or any other entity. The adjective *zeitig* applies to *Zeitlichkeit*, which may be translated as “time” or “timeliness”. Timeliness is something that extemporizes; in speaking of *Dasein*, time(liness) is like an activity in the sense that *Dasein* extemporizes itself – in other words, timeliness is ecstatic (*ekstatisch*), that is, it steps outside itself into three “ecstases”: past, present, and future. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 5, esp. p. 40, § 65; cf. Inwood, Michael (1999). *A Heidegger Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 220-221.
36 According to M. C. Dillon, this consideration holds for Derrida’s notion of Heideggerian phenomenology. Cf. Dillon, M. C. (1993). “The Metaphysics of Presence: Critique of a Critique”, in *Working through Derrida*, ed. Gary B. Madison. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, p. 189-190 (p. 189-203). Yet it can be noted that for Heidegger phenomenology bears a meaning which cannot be reduced to Husserl’s thinking. In Husserl, knowledge of essences would only be possible by “bracketing” all assumptions about the existence of an external world and the inessential (subjective) aspects of how the object is concretely given to us. This is what he calls reduction or *epoche*. It is needed in order to discover the ideal, essential structures of consciousness. If for Husserl there is a transcendental *ego* which performs reductions, for Heidegger the transcendence of *Dasein* is finite: being comes before consciousness.

---

28
from beings – that is, from the fact that there is no such thing as being “in general”, 37 nor is being stable or continuous. 38

Whether phenomenology offers something like a “methodological” basis for Nancy in the same sense as for Heidegger, that is, as a reflection on an “authentic understanding of Being”, is not evident either. What gives Nancy the starting point for his thinking of the sense of being, is being as making sense. This notion implies the thought of being as praxis or action; in other words, the Heideggerian difference between being and beings – the ontico-ontological difference – thus comes to be interpreted in terms of an active relation, namely, as man's reality in its opening toward the facticity of being. 39 If we take as a point of departure that in his philosophy Nancy aims, to a remarkable extent, at a re-thinking of Heidegger’s ontico-ontological difference, how should one describe Nancy’s critical stakes in this? 40 In Nancy, being is the relation of existence to itself as the action of sense. 41 Suffice it to say here that such an interrogation of Heidegger’s ontological difference offers central grounds as regards the decisive questions of this study.

Yet what constitutes Nancy’s understanding of existence is the freedom to exist on the ground of the without-essence of being, not identifiable with present things, a substance, or a subject (see Chapters 2 and 3). 42 Nancy’s notion of freedom offers us an articulation of his central notion of the groundlessness of being. Therefore, I think it is questionable to state that the thought of being as difference would belong to phenomenology, to a comprehension of appearance or a so-called immediate “present”, if being comes to presence on the grounds of its groundlessness. If phenomenology in the form which is represented even by Heidegger comes to be interrupted in this way, it seems as if Nancy’s view were

---

37 This is to say that, in Nancy’s view, the existent’s coincidence with itself does not occur generally: there is no such thing as “being in general”, but being exists singularly. Existence is above all what is singular: it happens singularly, and only singularly. However, the existence of each existent is not precisely its “own” and its “existing” happens an indefinite number of times “in” its individuality. Nancy, The Experience of Freedom, p. 190-191, note 12 (L'expérience de la liberté, p. 78, n. 1).
38 Nancy, The Sense of the World, p. 35 (Le sens du monde, p. 59); cf. e.g. Heidegger, The Basic Problems of Phenomenology, p. 22.
39 Nancy, e.g. A Finite Thinking, p. 175 (La pensée dérobée, p. 89).
40 Cf. ibid., p. 186 (La pensée dérobée, p. 101).
41 Ibid.
42 Before Heidegger, the idea of Abgrund, that is, the groundless ground of being, appears in German Idealism – for example, in Schelling and Hegel. It is the principle of essence and existence: how does form give form to itself? How does the modelization of a model take place, if a being's form is always ahead and in retard of itself – in Hegel's words, “er hat der Form, aber ist sie nicht”? Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, for his part, speaks of the “originary mimesis” See e.g. Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe (1989). Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics, ed. Christopher Fynsk. Harvard: Harvard University Press. For Nancy's development of the theme, see Nancy (1993). The Experience of Freedom, trans. Bridget McDonald. Stanford: Stanford University Press (L'expérience de la liberté, Paris: Gallilée, 1988). I shall come back to these questions in the context of art.
closer to Jacques Derrida’s critique of phenomenology. Derrida challenges the core notion of phenomenology, acknowledged by Heidegger: the notion that there is a retrievable domain of primordial experience upon which an authentic understanding of being could be founded.43

Derrida’s challenge derives from the revelation that phenomenology presupposes the very metaphysics of presence that founded the ontology of the transcendental subject. Traditionally, the ground of phenomenology is the phenomenon, and to the subject the phenomenon is conceived as presence. According to Derrida, every “now” point is always already compromised by a trace, or a residue of a previous experience that prevents us from ever being in a self-contained “now” moment.44 Taken all together, rather than in phenomenology, I see a principle for Nancy’s working in deconstruction and the notion of différance as set out by Derrida: the origin of sense without origin. This is one of the aspects which will be discussed below.

1.1 Heidegger’s Sein and Dasein

How should one approach Heidegger’s thought of being from which, in the broadest possible sense, Nancy’s idea of the ontology of art springs? In the background of Nancy’s comprehension of being there is a profound reading of Martin Heidegger and especially his early master work Sein und Zeit (Being and Time, 1927). It would probably be inaccurate to say that Nancy would call into question the basic lines of Heidegger’s philosophy in a radical way. Rather, his strategy is to raise and redevelop Heidegger’s central ontological notions, to which he usually remains faithful.45 Despite the obvious convergences, there are incontestable differences and different points of emphasis between their thinking, and I endeavour to bring out some of them with a view to giving some grounds to the discussion of art in Part II.

When considering Nancy’s work, the Heideggerian influence cannot be expressed by any single concept – rather, Nancy remains in a constant dialogue with Heidegger. However, it is especially in the late 1980’s and from the

---

1990’s onwards that Heidegger’s influence has become increasingly important in Nancy’s thinking, especially in the context of ideas such as finitude, space, time, technique, and freedom. As regards the themes of Heideggerian descent in Nancy’s philosophy, my primary aim is to limit the scope of this study to the elucidation of Nancy’s interpretation of Heidegger’s question of being.

In thinking of, in the absence of a better expression, the “methodical” components of Nancy’s philosophy, the common practice between him and Heidegger can probably be best designated by the German words *Auseinandersetzung* or *Destruktion* in the sense which Heidegger has given to them. For Heidegger, *Auseinandersetzung* means “setting apart”, “confrontation”, or “critical engagement”. This term suggests simultaneous adoption and questioning of the concepts, a relation of both support and of tension and conflict. A similar strategy applies to Nancy in that he seeks to find out what is constitutive of the ontological concepts as they present themselves with his forerunners. By forcing these concepts to their limits he strives to develop those that are most recognisably his own. What one will find particularly challenging is to characterize Nancy’s stance towards the tradition of ontology, especially that brought forth by Heidegger, as there is no evidence of a thought of a downright “method”.

If we first take a brief look at Heidegger’s thinking, one might say that it is characterized by his insistence on the neglect of the advance of philosophy, while yet paying tribute to it, in order to return to the unthought origin of metaphysics. Another appellation for this kind of confrontation in Heidegger’s terminology is *Schritt zurück*, “step back” or “step in reverse”, a retrograde movement. This is simultaneously a step forward toward the forgotten realm,

---

46 What unites, and disunites, Nancy’s thought and Heidegger’s question on being is difficult to take up as a single question. Nancy has largely accepted Heidegger’s “destructive” view in his endeavour to take a position against traditional metaphysics. Speaking generally it might be possible to say that Nancy is preoccupied with the critique of metaphysics as far as it implies a thinking of the destitution of essence and the groundlessness of being. Interestingly enough, the terms *Auseinandersetzung* or *Destruktion* appear in Heidegger’s philosophy well before Husserl: in *Being and Time* Heidegger introduces the central features of destruction. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, esp. § 6, p. 41-49, § 75, p. 439-444.

47 Literally *Auseinandersetzung* can be rendered as “examination”, “debate” or “discussion”, “argument”, or “dispute”. See e.g. *Duden Oxford Großwörterbuch Englisch* (1999). Mannheim: Duden Verlag, p. 120.


toward what has never been thought as such, from which the being of truth and, through it, the whole horizon of metaphysics offers itself to thought. The step back is needed to bring something up into view and then likewise to establish what has been seen, with the idea of reaching out to the supporting ground of philosophy.\(^50\)

The taking of the step back is aimed at repeating the fundamental move in the history of philosophy by remembering something that, in fact, has never been forgotten.\(^51\) This “something” is precisely the difference between being (\textit{Sein}) and beings (\textit{das Seiende}), or the ontico-ontological difference.\(^52\) What remains, however, equally unthought, is the unity (\textit{Austrag})\(^53\) of their difference, which both brings them together and discerns them. However, beings are not only grounded in being, being is reciprocally grounded in beings: being means the being of beings, and beings means the beings of being.\(^54\) As a result, for Heidegger the end of thinking thus proves to be being as difference, or the difference of being: the thought of being is the thought of the difference of being, because being “is” only as a difference from beings.\(^55\)

It is in this way that the so-called “forgetting of being” (\textit{Seinsvergessenheit}) progresses in Heidegger’s philosophy, in order to finally be directed towards Greek pre-Socratic philosophy. Here, as
Heidegger claims, the history of the West must be thought of as the history of being and its revelation or disclosedness.

For Heidegger, there are three questions that we can ask about being. The first one is the “fundamental question” (Grundfrage): “What is (the sense, essence or truth of) Being?”56 This question, according to Heidegger, has been forgotten.57 Secondly, there is the traditional “leading question” (Leitfrage) of metaphysics: “What are beings (as such)?”58 Any answer to the second question must involve some view about the being of beings: for example, “All beings are material” implies that being is materiality. The third question is the “transitional question” or the “question of crossing” (Übergangsfrage): “Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?”59

Heidegger’s investigation has its origins in the historicality of Dasein and its ontological understanding, and as a whole, with the question of being. According to him, by taking “the question of Being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of being – the ways which have guided us ever since”.60 It is only within the way the question of being is formulated that the destruction of the history of ontology, dating back to Antiquity, is possible. This step must be taken in order to descend from the “ontic level and discover being in its unseizable nearness”.61

57 Heidegger, Being and Time, § 1, p. 21.
60 Heidegger, Being and Time, § 6, p. 44.
61 Heidegger, Pathmarks, p. 261. Cf. Richardson, William J. (1963). Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought. The Hague: Nijhoff, p. 543. From one point of view, Heidegger devotes his philosophy to reversing the “Copernican revolution” of Kant’s thought, that is, Kant’s view that the objects of experience have to conform to the subjective mind. In the Critique of Pure Reason Kant attempts to find the universal laws under which an experience is possible. This attempt results in his seeking to answer the question concerning the possibility of knowledge. To put it roughly, Heidegger’s critique of Kant’s epistemology is based on an assumption that sense cannot be constructed by consciousness, whether practical or theoretical, nor by the human mind altogether, but by being. Cf. Heidegger (1973/1997). Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics. Fifth, enlarged edition, trans. Richard Taft. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. In the reflection on the possibility of knowledge, Kant’s crucial step is the separation of the form and the content of knowledge. Form is a matter of subject and is defined as conceptual and a priori by character, that is, form is learned independently of experience, whereas the content of knowledge is empirical and hence a posteriori. Kant focuses his attention on the nature of the operations of consciousness, as well as on the pure form of a judgement. He tries to give an account of the nature of sense experience – the a priori conditions of which are time and space – and of thinking in order to define the form of pure objectivity. According to him, it is our understanding that prescribes the laws for nature on the basis of sense experience. Experience, in turn, is based on the joining together of concept and intuition. In total, this means that Kant takes the question concerning the constitution of consciousness to the sphere of subjectivity, from which also the formal conditions of experience originate. This is basically the reason why Kant states that we are unable to have any knowledge of things as how they are in themselves (an sich). In this matter, it seems to me that Nancy’s effort in his work Le discours de la syncope shows some similarities with Heidegger’s attempt to reverse Kant’s “Copernican revolution”. 
That is to say, what Heidegger wishes to do is to guide the analysis to “that which, within what is said, remains unsaid”. How this thinking is related to Nancy’s notion of being will be illuminated in the next section.

NANCY AND THE ONTICO-ONTOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE

As was indicated above, in interrogating the Heideggerian ontology, Nancy’s understanding of philosophy is, in most general terms, grounded in a questioning of Heidegger’s ontico-ontological difference and the corresponding levels, that is, the ontological (das Ontologisch) and the ontic (das Ontisch). In other words, Nancy’s philosophical project seems to imply the consideration of the difference of being. Also, this is what Nancy’s understanding of philosophy is largely based on.

For Heidegger, understanding of being appears as the boundary between being and beings. We never encounter, with no understanding of being, sheer beings. This is basically Nancy’s view too. If one takes as a point of departure that Nancy aims at a rethinking of Heidegger’s ontico-ontological difference, how should one describe Nancy’s critical stakes in this? In which should we follow his train of thought in his desire to privilege the ontic – the eventual, singular character of being – and hence, grant a privilege to existence instead of the Heideggerian notion of being?

In the following, I attempt to analyse the above-mentioned themes in Nancy’s thought starting from Heidegger’s originary difference, the ontological difference. The relevant Nancyan notions here are sense, the materiality and the singularity of being. In the light of these, I shall approach the eventual differences between Nancy and Heidegger. In this, what comes into play is the question of existence, which the two philosophers articulate with a somewhat different emphasis.

To go further into these questions, I first suggest taking up the very dense reading of Heidegger’s ontico-ontological difference, in the first place as given by Nancy in the essay “Originary Ethics”. Here, one may see that Nancy’s approach somewhat deviates from that of Heidegger’s. For Heidegger man or

---

62 Heidegger, Pathmarks, p. 155.
64 Cf. e.g. Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 186 (La pensée dérobée, p. 101).
humanity is an entity that he calls “Dasein”. Only Dasein has a world, and only Dasein exists. The understanding of being as the existential character of Dasein constitutes the original disclosure of being-in-the-world – the “there” (Da) of Dasein is to be understood as this disclosure (Erschlossenheit). The entity which is essentially constituted by being-in-the-world is itself in every case its “there”. Yet Dasein is always “more” than what it factually is: Dasein lives or exists in its future possibilities, but precisely as something possible and not something that is actual or factual. Dasein “steps forth” into the world and makes something of itself. Thus Dasein is “ecstatic” or “eccentric”, that is, it extends outside of itself.

Nancy’s reflection on the relation between being and beings starts from their difference – yet in question is not the difference of two kinds of being, but the reality of Dasein in its opening toward the facticity of being. The ontico-ontological difference thus appears to him as a praxis: the difference between being and beings is an “essential and ‘active’ relation with the proper fact of being”. It is for this reason that he calls this relation the relation of sense. In Dasein the giving of sense to the facticity of being is in question, and thus being comes to be understood as sense – that is, as the action (l’agir) of sense and as sense. Roughly put, for Heidegger facticity means that one is what one is, or that one already exists within a certain range of possibilities: for example, in having a mood or a state-of-mind, Dasein is always disclosed moodwise as that entity to which it has been delivered over in its being. In this way it has delivered over to the being which, in existing, it has to be. In its existence, Dasein is “uprooted”: it is cut from its origin, from its origin in being and from the being of its origin. In other words, in Dasein, the facticity of being is sense:

---

65 The disclosure must be understood in two ways: through moods and the understanding. Cf. Heidegger, Being and Time, § 23, p. 171.
66 The world is not disclosed as an object that stands outside with this or that properties or attributes, but as having possibilities which are already given. The understanding throws itself forward into these possibilities. This being ahead of oneself in the possible is what Heidegger calls projection (Entwurf). I shall come back to the question of Dasein’s ecstatic being later. In Heidegger, being is in the history of its articulations – that is the finitude of being: being needs humankind. Later, Heidegger thought that freedom engages the human Dasein in the “accomplishment of being”. This was freedom (the Open, the “free” region) to which the human Dasein accedes in answering to the event of being’s advent – one may see a shift or Kehre between these notions. Cf. Heidegger, Pathmarks, p. 97-135.
67 Cf. Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 175 (La pensée dérobée, p. 89-90).
68 Ibid. (La pensée dérobée, p. 89).
69 Heidegger, Being and Time, § 29; cf. § 35, p. 214. To be “uprooted” is “Dasein’s most everyday and most stubborn ‘Reality’” – according to Nancy, it is in this ‘reality’ and as this reality that Dasein is properly open. See Nancy (1993). The Birth to Presence, ed. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellbery, trans. Brian Holmes et al. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 95 (Une pensée finie, p. 126).
it is the conduct (conduite) of sense. Sense thus has its origin in the facticity of being.

In building his view on the closure of metaphysics, Nancy recurrently turns to the interrogation on two opposing concepts and corresponding axes, namely philosophy and metaphysics. Philosophy and metaphysics are not simply in opposition, though: Nancy defines metaphysics as what philosophy reveals itself as in its completion. Philosophy, in turn, is constituted by notions such as “sense” and “presentation”, whereas the key terms of metaphysics are “signification” and “representation”, respectively. This would be to say that in metaphysical discourse, the world is always posited as an object of representation, whereas the properly philosophical attitude means a return to the way in which the sense of the world returns to itself in its infinite unfolding.

What is at stake in the closure of metaphysics and at the hopeful dawn of a new stage in philosophy, is the return of sense as the new opening, meaning thought as openness and “dwelling in what is open”. As such, the question of the future of philosophy goes back to what Nancy calls the difference in sense or the difference of sense, understood as a difference within metaphysics itself. “Sense” is the key word of Nancy's philosophy. Signification is located meaning, while sense resides only in the coming of a possible signification. The structure of signification is involved in such an endeavour, where the sense is present-at-a-distance and which takes place according to a disjunction of “the world” and its “representation” or “vision”. Nancy describes sense as something that is always-only-coming, in a definite place at a definite point in time. At once the sense of a thing is born or presented, it disappears into nothingness – thus, sense is sense only when it comes to its limit. Thinking of the way in which sense comes into existence, is founded in the notion that sense is not its own ground, but its ground is in groundlessness, in nothing. Sense always remains

71 Ibid., p. 47 (L’oubli de la philosophie, p. 68).
72 Cf. ibid., p. 10 (L’oubli de la philosophie, p. 13). In speaking of the return of sense, however, there is strictly no reason to speak of the return of any particular signification; it is a question of the return of an identical sense to itself, which, in Nancy’s view, has nothing to do with “the eternal recurrence of the same” as proposed by Nietzsche. In Nancy’s words, this is because Nietzsche conceives the now in its exposure to an eternity understood as an infinite opening of sense where its signification collapses, so that signification remains simply preserved. Ibid., p. 19 (L’oubli de la philosophie, p. 24).
73 Ibid., p. 47 (L’oubli de la philosophie, p. 69).
unaccomplished and unaccomplishable, and in the state of coming and present-at-a-distance.\textsuperscript{76}

As for the pair of concepts of sense and signification, Nancy separates these by arguing that sense in general is sense understood as signification: that is, sense in the sense of “signification”. As for the history of signification, it seems to Nancy that from Plato to Saussure, “signification’ is the conjunction of a sensible and an intelligible, conjoined in such a way that each presents the other”.\textsuperscript{77} Thus, the meaning of things is presented in the meaning of words and vice versa. Signification does not yield the “meaning” of its own production or its own advent, in other words, the act of movement in which the possibility of sense arises. This, Nancy claims, is enough to turn “the whole of philosophy into a general enterprise of signification and presentation”.\textsuperscript{78} The logic of philosophy, thus, is its own closure, no matter which forms it takes – in this, Nancy mentions fields such as mathematics, morality, aesthetics, or history. His critique of signification is rises from the manner in which metaphysics allegedly has proposed itself to be a representation of the world.

What is thus particular to Nancy’s interpretation of the Heideggerian differentiation between being and beings, is that the understanding of being gives itself actively, as \textit{sense}: being means making-sense.\textsuperscript{79} Being, as the fact of being – the fact that there is being at all – constitutes by itself the desire that this fact be accomplished or acted as sense.\textsuperscript{80} “Sense” – a notion to which I shall return – points, roughly, to Nancy’s assumption that being \textit{is} nowhere other than in its articulations. Therefore, Nancy stresses the singularity of being: being is multiple in character, for which reason it has to be thought as differential and relational.\textsuperscript{81} Thus, being cannot be One, nor a gathering or a collecting. The implications of this aspect are various as regards Nancy’s ontological questioning.

\textsuperscript{76} Cf. \textit{ibid.}, p. 37, 43 (\textit{L’oubli de la philosophie}, p. 56, 64).
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 22 (\textit{L’oubli de la philosophie}, p. 31). In Kant, signification is that through which concepts are no longer empty and intuitions no longer blind. As Nancy clarifies, this is to say that signification realizes the one in the other and the two together. As a result, signification is “\textit{the very model of a structure or system that is closed upon itself}, or better yet, \textit{as closure upon itself}”. What is more, “the self (soi) or “\textit{the selvesame}” (soi-même) “\textit{upon which this system closes itself} … is the \textit{subject}, capable of \textit{presenting the concept and the intuition together}, that is, the one through the other”. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 23 (\textit{L’oubli de la philosophie}, p. 32). Italics in original.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 23 (\textit{L’oubli de la philosophie}, p. 33).
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 177 (\textit{La pensée dérobée}, p. 91).
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 176 (\textit{La pensée dérobée}, p. 90).
\textsuperscript{81} Cf. Fynsk, “Foreword”, in Nancy, \textit{The Inoperative Community}, p. xiii. Comparable to this is Heidegger’s thought of being as “sieheins”, “event”. I shall come to this below.
That the difference essentially stands for an active relation means for Nancy that the reality of Dasein insofar as it is, in and of itself, open and called to an essential and “active” relation to the proper fact of being. Thus, Dasein thus proves to be the fact of being for Nancy. To show that the sense, activity and ethics of being could not originate from anywhere but the fact of being, Nancy argues, there is no way of supposing that “the brute fact of being”, in other words, the being of beings or the fact that there is (il y a) something, would precede the desire for sense for this being.

The ontico-ontological difference works as the foundation for Nancy’s thought of being as sense – at the same time, what he seems to suggest, is that there is no such thing as being which would be antecedent to the difference. This has also been notified by Jean-François Kervégan, who sees here the specific challenge of Nancy’s ontology. According to Kervégan, Nancy attempts to consider the problematic implied in the ontico-ontological difference, while simultaneously trying to avoid all that might suggest a precedence or an antecedence of being in the face of the level on which singular beings come to be exposed to one another (interexposition). Yet it is Heidegger himself who proposes that “Dasein only ‘has’ meaning (Sinn)” (in Nancy, Sinn is translated as “sense”), when “meaning” is “conceived as the formal-existential framework of the disclosedness which belongs to understanding”. Nancy cites Heidegger: “The meaning of Being can never be contrasted with entities, or with being as the ‘ground’ which gives entities support; for a ‘ground’ becomes accessible only as meaning, even if it is itself the abyss of meaninglessness”. As Nancy clarifies, if “sense”, however, were taken as “signification” which would be delivered over or found outside of being, this could not possibly be the sense of being, still less being itself as sense. In my view, Nancy’s thought follows Heidegger’s argument so closely that it does not seem impossible that the critical point addressed by Kervégan could basically be directed at Heidegger’s thinking as well.

According to Catherine Malabou, what is characteristic of Nancy’s notion of the ontological difference, is just its thinking as reality. This is, in Malabou’s view, something which Heidegger has never spoken about. As Malabou’s

82 Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 175 (La pensée dérobée, p. 89).
83 Ibid., p. 176 (La pensée dérobée, p. 90).
86 Ibid., p. 193-194.
87 Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 176 (La pensée dérobée, p. 90-91).
argument goes, on the one hand, the notions of Realität and of Wirklichkeit are deconstructed in Being and Time. On the other hand, and as a consequence, Heidegger has never suggested that existence would still designate, as it does in the metaphysical tradition, something like “reality”.\(^89\) Nancy’s (like Lévinas’s and Sartre’s, Malabou points out) interest lies, then, in “the way in which the ontological difference henceforth constitutes the real of philosophy”, that is, how it “bursts” into reality and as reality.\(^90\) Materiality qualifies the singularity of the finite being.\(^91\)

What Malabou also claims is that Nancy refers to the materiality or concreteness of the ontico-ontological difference: “existence is what returns materially when Heidegger has disappeared”.\(^92\) This reality would be “the materialisation of being inasmuch as it is different from beings, as an effect of the suspension of the beingness of beings or of the existent”, and it appears as “the strange flesh (chair) or stuff (étoffe)”, which has remained unthought by Heidegger. Nancy himself describes the ontological difference as “nothing that is – but only of Being-delivered-over to entities, which is existence”.\(^93\) What Malabou points at is that Nancy defines himself in the following way: “matter” “is first the very difference through which something is possible, as thing and as some”. It means “the reality of difference – and difféance – that is necessary in order for there to be something and some things and not merely the identity of a pure inherence”.\(^94\) Moreover, matter being “a matter of real difference”, it is also “the difference of the res: if there is something, there are several things; otherwise, there is nothing, no ‘there is’”, which makes reality necessarily a numerous reality.\(^95\) Thus, matter is not the pure identity of the thing, or, to cite Nancy himself, it is not “an immanent thickness absolutely closed in itself”.\(^96\)

Christopher Fynsk, for his part, defines the difference between Nancy and Heidegger in a less categorical way: by stressing the singularity of the facticity

\(^89\) Ibid. In her reading, Catherine Malabou wishes to consider the reality of the ontological difference in terms of “the fantastic” in Lévinas, Sartre, and Nancy. For Malabou, these philosophers have transferred the Heideggerian thought of image and of imagination and at the same time, the sense of the ontological difference and of existence, towards another imagination and another difference and existence. The fantastic is the effect of the real: it is what the ontological difference produces, or how it bursts forth into existence. Or, the fantastic is existence conceived of as the real of the ontological difference.

\(^90\) Ibid., p. 41.


\(^92\) Malabou, “Pierre aime les horranges”, p. 41.

\(^93\) Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 91 (Une pensée finie, p. 121).


\(^95\) Ibid., p. 58 (Le sens du monde, p. 96).

of experience Nancy’s aim is to undo some of the abstractness of Heideggerian
discourse. As I see it, this is what Nancy attempts to do by bringing to the
fore the aspects of singularity and materiality in the discourse of the ontological
difference. In Fynsk’s view, Nancy returns to the experiential or existential
dimension of the thought of the finitude of being, which leads him to the
considerations of politics and ethics, among other things. François Raffoul
sees here Nancy’s attempt to articulate what he has called a “transcendental”
or “ontological materiality”, a “mineralogy and a meteorology of being” or a “transcendental aesthetics of gravity”. By emphasising the facticity of
existence, Nancy thus distances himself from the traditional association of
thought with a certain immateriality or ideality. By so doing, he “complicates or
destabilizes the traditional oppositions between materiality and immateriality,
reality and ideality”, in Raffoul’s view. In the following the validity of such
notions comes under consideration.

BEING AND EXISTENCE

In what follows, my leading question concerns the foundation for the thought
of the groundlessness of existence in Nancy. Why, in his philosophy, does it
prove impossible to leap back to recapture the ground of my being – why is it
that one’s “own-ness” is inappropriable, or, to put it otherwise, why is existence
appropriated by expropriation? And how does the “absolute positing”
(Setzung) of finite existence come to be thematised as “being-there”? Nancy
defines the notion of existence in a number of ways: it is the “without-essence”,
the “ek-static” – that is, transcendence, exposition. This means that we are
exposed to sense, and this exposure constitutes us. For Nancy existence stands

98 Nancy, The Experience of Freedom, p. 103 (L’expérience de la liberté, p. 133).
99 Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 171 (Une pensée finie, p. 202). In such matter, one can hear
overtones from the Romantic philosophy of nature. Cf. for example Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature.
100 Nancy, The Gravity of Thought, p. 77 (Nancy, Le poids d’une pensée, Sainte-Foy: Le Griffon
101 Raffoul, “Translator’s Preface”, p. xxviii. See also Nancy’s essay “The Weight of a Thought”, in
1-15).
104 Nancy, The Gravity of Thought, p. 79-81 (Le poids d’une pensée, p. 8-10); cf. Raffoul, “Translator’s
for as a singular event, the fact or being-there of a thing. Namely, existence is a “modified grasp” of existence by and through itself (par elle-même).

According to Catherine Malabou’s interpretation, in Nancy such a modification implies a certain mutability, a certain malleability, and thus a certain materiality or plasticity of existence. This is something Heidegger does not speak of. Nancy understands Dasein, or existence – it is only Dasein that exists – from the standpoint of the being-the-there (être-le-là) of being itself. I shall try to clarify what is implied in Nancy’s stating that Dasein, which is “transitively the there”, is to say that “it entrances – traverses and partitions – the taking-place of the sense of being as the event of being-there, the spacing of an arrival”.

At this point, let us take a look at Nancy’s argument put forward in “Originary Ethics”. Here he states that “being still has to be exposed to – and as – the action of sense (l’agir-du-sens) as such”. In other words, being has to be exposed to the action of sense as the non-given of sense, or “as the gift of the desire of and for this action”. This is the fact of being (or Dasein) as sense, which thus means finitude. To elucidate the problem, Nancy quotes from Heidegger: “There is and must be something like being where finitude has come to exist.” What Nancy concludes from this is that existence is not the factual given: “there is no ‘factual given’ before there is the gift of ‘there is’ in general” – that is, there is no fact before there is the gift of being, or the abandonment to sense.

In Nancy’s reading of Heidegger, existence is “ek-sistence” in that it is entelechy: being’s mode of stretching outside of itself, towards sense, and hence as sense and activity. For Nancy, ek-sistence is the way in which the Heideggerian “Dasein is as Dasein”. Ek-sistence is sense, but it has no sense – instead, existence has various senses. This principle is reflected in the way Nancy interprets Heidegger’s Dasein – man or humanity, which only “ex-ists”

---

106 See Malabou, “Pierre aime les horranges”, p. 53; Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 99 (Une pensée finie, p. 131); cf. Heidegger, Being and Time, § 38, p. 224. The notion of existence as modification is part of a discussion on Nancy’s essay “The Decision of Existence” which will be taken up below.
108 Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 178 (La pensée dérobée, p. 93).
109 Ibid.
111 Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 178 (La pensée dérobée, p. 93).
112 Ibid., p. 180 (La pensée dérobée, p. 95).
113 Ibid., p. 190 (La pensée dérobée, p. 106).
– as “the being-the-there of being itself”.\textsuperscript{114} In other words, Dasein is transitively “the there”: it traverses the taking-place of the sense of being as the event of a being-the-there, the spacing of an arrival.\textsuperscript{115} According to Nancy, this way of being is from the beginning a conduct.\textsuperscript{116} Conduct means to be open to sense, in a way that the openness itself is opened by the desire or the ability (pouvoir) of sense. In Heidegger’s view, in its openness, such a conduct proves to be the exposition of the ek-sistent, through which the self (the subject) may appear. Being ek-sists or is in the measure it opens being.\textsuperscript{117}

Nancy’s idea is that being is the opening to the accomplishment of sense, if being is the relation of existence as the activity of sense. In Heidegger, Nancy claims, making sense every time puts into play the totality of beings. The totality of beings is there, for there must be a being-the-there as such, something which “opens the totality of beings to sense and/or opens itself to the sense of the totality of beings”.\textsuperscript{118}

What Nancy aims at could, to quote his own words, be called “an ontology of the thing’s self-coincidence”, or “an ontology of the existence that is its own essence”.\textsuperscript{119} What does he refer to by such notions? By now we have come to see that being can only be put into play each time as existence: being is existence itself in Nancy’s thought.\textsuperscript{120} He crystallizes his central view in the following way: “being is or exists being, it ‘makes’ them be, makes them make-sense”.\textsuperscript{121} Being thus has a transitive value for Nancy. \textit{Singularity} is what characterizes being: “Being is in no way different from existence, which is singular each time”.\textsuperscript{122} In Catherine Malabou’s view, Nancy’s relation to existence is doubled: existence has both the structures of “right in” (“à même”) and of “being caught in” (“être-
pris dans”)

123: namely, “to exist is right at being” (exister, c'est être à même). What Nancy says is that “bringing into play the Being of existence takes place right in existence. There is no existentiale that is not at once, and as such, caught in the existentiell.”

124: For him this is the major thesis of Heidegger’s analytic: in Heidegger, the status of thought as existential thought, as well as thought in general, thinks only while being at once and as such caught up in the existentiell possibilities of its writing, its reading as caught up in its (mis)understanding.

125: If Heidegger’s initial notion is that being must be thought in its difference from itself; and thus in its existence, understood as an always singular articulation of its withdrawal, I understand that Nancy carries the thought of the eventual, singular character of being – that is, its finitude – back into the questions opened in the existential analytic of Being and Time. This is why, in order to seek the foundations for Nancy’s development of the question of being, I find it necessary to relate it to this theme: that, in Being and Time, existence comes to know itself in and as an exposure to an alterity that it draws out and communicates.

126: For Heidegger, “existential analytic” refers to his notion that the question of man cannot be posed alone, but only in relation to man’s relation to being – or, that the understanding of being lies in man itself. Yet this sort of approach to being is, according to Heidegger, also the most difficult, since “the entity [Dasein] which in every case we ourselves are, is ontologically that which is farthest.” Consequently, an ontological interpretation of Dasein’s kind of being – this is what Heidegger means by the term existential analysis – “should capture the Being of this entity”.

127: Compared with other entities, man has a special distinctiveness, since it is only for Dasein that being is an issue. Existential analytic is the centre of philosophical problems, for Dasein is the area of beings in which all other ontical areas become manifest and to which they refer. “Being” thus means something whereof man has some understanding. Man communicates with other beings, and they are open to him: he may experience that they are, what they are and how they are, and decide about the truth of them. Dasein is able
to comprehend pre-conceptually what makes other beings what they are – that is, their being. Also, the understanding of being is what distinguishes man, as the questioner of being, from all other beings, and thus privileges him among them. This understanding concerns Dasein’s relation to being, rather than to beings – and thus, as is suggested by Heidegger, prepares an overcoming of metaphysics.132

This mode of the being of human beings is precisely what he calls “existence” (Existenz). In Being and Time, the point of departure for Heidegger’s analytic of Dasein exists in a way that other beings do not: “The essence of Dasein lies in existence”.133 What is existence? As Heidegger explains, it is Dasein’s mode of being, but not the fact that it is.134 Existence is the structure by which Dasein, thrown among beings, understands their being. Thus, existence is only possible on these grounds.135 Dasein is its disclosedness, and thus, existence is the relationship to being that corresponds to its “understanding”. In all, for Heidegger existence is the only way to the consideration of being: existence is the only thing which has a relation to its own being, and being in general.

In the concept of Dasein Heidegger emphasises its verb-like nature, by pointing out that the being of things is being-there, Da-sein, so that the subject turns out to be a verb. Consequently, being cannot be accounted for in terms of a substance, still less an essence.136 “There is” or “it gives” (es gibt; il y a) being – thus, the “it” which here “gives” is being itself.137 But, on the other hand, Heidegger states that and “only so long as Dasein is (that is, only as long as an understanding of being is ontically possible), ‘is there’ being (gibt es’ Sein”).138 Dasein thus has a spatial and local signification: it attests the relation between man’s being and essence, and the relation of this to the opening of

133 Heidegger, Being and Time, § 9, p. 42.
136 Similarly – and for now I just wish to briefly mention this matter – Nancy’s account of “subject” resembles the character of an event or an evenness of Dasein, so that the taking place of being is itself the subject. According to my interpretation, Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein gives Nancy the very instruments for deconstructing the concept of subjectivity. This explains why a new way of understanding subjectivity is required, so that its character of evenness can be portrayed. As will be shown later in my text, notably in section 2.2, Heidegger and Nancy on Coming-into- Presence, a number of ontological points are fundamentally at stake when regarding this issue. Yet the Heideggerian world of concepts is by no means the sole source of inspiration for Nancy when it comes to understanding subjectivity: in his book Ego sum he provides an analysis based on the Cartesian subject, although the criticism he addresses to Descartes may be closely associated with some Heideggerian views.
137 Heidegger, Pathmarks, p. 254-255.
138 Heidegger, Being and Time, § 43, p. 255.
being. Dasein’s opening to its being is, at the same time, the opening of being to other beings. What distinguishes Dasein from other beings is the central position which it occupies in the unveiling of being. In this, Dasein’s primacy is threefold: it is ontical, since only Dasein exists; ontological, since in its existence, Dasein understands being; and ontico-ontological, since it is the condition of possibility of all other ontologies.

To sum up, the relationship to being – its understanding – is what constitutes Dasein’s ontological structure. Yet the fact which makes Dasein ontically distinctive is that it is ontological. Dasein is in a position of priority over all other entities in two ways. The first one is ontical: for Heidegger, “Dasein is an entity whose being has the determinate character of existence”. Similarly, the second priority is an ontological one in that “Dasein is in itself ‘ontological’, because existence is thus determinative for it”. What does Dasein’s “being-ontological” thus mean, if it is to be defined as something that ontically distinguishes Dasein? According to Heidegger’s explication, Dasein’s ontological being is indeed something “pre-ontological” – not simply “being-ontical”, but exactly “being in such a way that one has an understanding of being”. Consequently, an ontological interpretation of Dasein’s kind of being should capture the being of this entity. Such an analysis is “fundamental ontology”: this term points to Heidegger’s attempt to explain the ontological structure of man, which must be sought in the existential analytic of Dasein and “from which alone all other ontologies can take their rise.”

Yet this sort of approach to being is also the most difficult: according to Heidegger, “that which is ontically closest and well known, is ontologically the farthest and not known at all”. The fact that Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence, is to say that it understands itself in terms of a possibility of itself. Dasein is able either to choose its possibilities, or it may have grown up in them already. To put it differently, it is Dasein’s duty to decide about its existence, either by taking hold or by neglecting. Dasein is a being in the

---

139 Cf. ibid., § 3, p. 33.
141 Heidegger, Being and Time, § 4, p. 32.
142 Ibid., p. 34. Dasein’s third priority is that it provides the ontico-ontological condition for the possibility of any ontologies.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid., § 62, p. 359.
145 Ibid., § 4, p. 34.
146 Ibid., § 9, p. 69; cf. § 63, p. 359; “[T]he entity [Dasein] which in every case we ourselves are, is ontologically that which is farthest”.
147 Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 33. The decision of existence is what Heidegger terms
midst of beings, and it lets beings be (seinlassen), that is, manifest themselves; that is, *Dasein* dis-covers (ent-decken) beings as they are.\(^{148}\)

This view is based on an assumption that the being of beings does not for the most part show itself, but is concealed. Thus understood, Heidegger conceives existence as a “bursting forth” (*Einbruch*) into the totality of beings, by reason of which these beings as beings become manifest.\(^{149}\) This is, for him, the task of phenomenology: to let the being of beings be revealed as it is (that is, as what it is and how it is) – as existence.\(^{150}\)

Such understanding of oneself is what Heidegger calls *existentiell* (*existenziell*), which is synonymous to “ontic”: as a finite comprehension of being, *Dasein* is thrown among beings and is in continual engagement with them. *Existentiell* applies to the range of possibilities open to *Dasein*, its understanding of them and the choice it makes among them, as was indicated above.\(^{151}\) Because existence is finite – I shall come back to this notion – the question of existence belongs to *Dasein*'s ontic “affairs”. The context (*Zusammenhang*) of such structures is what Heidegger calls “existentiality”. Its analytic has the character of an existential understanding. *Existential* (*existenzial*) thus comes to stand for that which relates with *Dasein*'s understanding of the being-structure of beings and hence with the primordial constitution of *Dasein* itself.\(^{152}\) *Existential* applies to the “ontological structure of existence” and to philosophers’ understanding of it. But, if by reason of its understanding of being *Dasein* exists in an ontological, that is, *existential*, dimension, by reason of its finitude *Dasein* exists in an ontic dimension as well.\(^{153}\) That is to say, *Dasein* may achieve transcendence only

---

\(^{148}\) Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 159.

\(^{149}\) Cf. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, p. 44.

\(^{150}\) See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 7, p. 49-58. What Didier Franck states at this point, is that “le regard phénoménologique doit s’orienter sur l’étant pour en laisser ressortir l’être, viser l’étant pour s’en éloigner en revenant à son être”. This is how the phenomenological reduction works as a method. Franck, *Heidegger et le problème de l’espace*, p. 23; see Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, p. 21.


\(^{153}\) The central idea developed in the article is the question of how *Dasein*'s finite transcendence of the world is possible. In this question the relation between finitude and the concept of the world comes to be thematized. Inasmuch as ontological truth is considered, *Dasein* has a dual position: the world is brought before *Dasein* through *Dasein*. *Dasein* grounds or establishes the world only as grounding itself in the midst of beings; this is the projection of one's possibilities, and it entails that in this process *Dasein* in each case *exceeds* itself. Other possibilities are already *withdrawn* from *Dasein* through its own facticity. Corresponding to the two ways of grounding, transcendence at once exceeds and withdraws. Thus, *Dasein* has a kind of double agency: it is not only among beings, it also transcends them. Here is, for Heidegger, a transcendental testimony to the *finitude* of *Dasein*'s freedom. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, p.
through comportment with beings, for the existential analysis is rooted in the existentiell.\textsuperscript{154}

By understanding the being of beings, \textit{Dasein} passes beyond, and therefore transcends, beings to the being-process as such.\textsuperscript{155} What follows, is that the existentiell and the existential, or the ontic and the ontological, become intertwined in the analysis of what constitutes existence: in \textit{Dasein} they are distinct but not separate. As Heidegger formulates it, “The ontological ‘truth’ of the existential analysis is developed on the ground of the primordial existentiell truth”.\textsuperscript{156} Together, they form the phenomenon of finite transcendence. The notion of finite transcendence, based on the assumption that the foundations of the existential analytic prove to be ontic, has various consequences as regards Nancy’s interpretation of Heidegger’s ontological difference. This is what I attempt to show below.

Equally important for Nancy’s thought is the fact that Heidegger’s idea of \textit{Dasein}, as an understanding and discovering of being, is radically finite. What does its finitude mean?\textsuperscript{157} As Heidegger brings out, fundamental ontology is aimed at discerning the being of \textit{Dasein} insofar as this is the ontological structure of man. \textit{Dasein}, however, is intrinsically finite. On one hand, this is because it is not the source of its own being but rather finds itself as an already existing fact. On the other hand, \textit{Dasein} is dependent on other beings.\textsuperscript{158} These two aspects of finitude are designated by Heidegger’s term “thrownness” (\textit{Geworfenheit}).\textsuperscript{159} \textit{Dasein}’s character, as Heidegger brings out, is “determined by thrownness as a Fact of the entity which it is; and, as so determined, it has in each case been delivered over to existence”.\textsuperscript{160} This is to say that through its thrownness \textit{Dasein} makes a relation to its own existence. And, for the reason

\textsuperscript{154} Richardson, \textit{Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought}, p. 49. For Heidegger existence belongs to the ontic sphere, which, however, does not mean that it would only belong to the inauthentic being; authentic existence is a modified way of inauthentic existence, represented by “everydayness”. Cf. e.g. Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, § 38, p. 224.

\textsuperscript{155} Heidegger, \textit{Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics}, p. 165.

\textsuperscript{156} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, § 63, p. 364.

\textsuperscript{157} \textit{Ibid.}, § 1, p. 21.

\textsuperscript{158} \textit{Ibid.}, § 29, p. 173.

\textsuperscript{159} \textit{Dasein}’s thrownness means its experience of nothingness or “nullity”: one finds oneself thrown and experiencing a powerlessness to become anything other than what one is. Christopher Fynsk describes the experience of thrownness as a kind of radical passivity. When \textit{Dasein} is given its thrownness as something possible that can be repeated, it has already resolved to give itself up to this possibility. See Fynsk, \textit{Heidegger: Thought and Historicity}, p. 38-39; Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, § 38, § 60, p. 342, § 68, p. 394.

\textsuperscript{160} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, § 57, p. 321.
that Dasein’s understanding of being is finite, it must continue this process in order to be itself, that is, in order to exist.¹⁶¹

Yet the seizure of being always remains incomplete. Thus, Heidegger claims, the “essence” of Dasein lies in its having-to-be (Zu-sein), in a compulsion to be, which expresses that the characteristics of Dasein are each time possible ways for it to be.¹⁶² If Dasein is the ontological structure of man and ontologically prior to man, this leads Heidegger to the conclusion that “[m]ore original than man is the finitude of the Dasein in him”.¹⁶³ In all, existence itself is shown to be finitude: being is finite, for being “is” only insofar as Dasein exists in its finitude, according to its potentiality-for-being.¹⁶⁴

If, on the grounds of what has been suggested above, the Heideggerian notion of existence is yet to be defined as a modification of the more fundamental level of being, or that the ontic is a modification of the ontological, then the ontico-ontological difference comes to be determined from a somewhat different angle in Nancy’s philosophy. As for what is decisive for the way that inquiry is reflected in his thinking and what problems it poses, let us state for the moment that, in Nancy, philosophy is rather the thought of the existent. In questioning the ontico-ontological difference, he privileges the level which Heidegger’s calls ontic. As Nancy argues, being is existence, since we must think in terms of existence, and our reality is encompassed by existence.¹⁶⁵ In this matter, a quote from Heidegger, used by Nancy himself, is perhaps able to show what Nancy’s interpretation relies on: “the roots of the existential analytic … are ultimately existentiell, that is, ontical. Only if the inquiry of philosophical research is itself seized upon in an existentiell manner as a possibility of the being of each existing Dasein, does it become at all possible to disclose the existentiality of existence”.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Richardson, Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought, p. 38.
¹⁶² Dasein, as an entity of being whose essence lies in the way its being is “imperative” to it, in its “having to be” (Zu-sein), is in each case its own possibility and it can “choose” itself by making a “decision as to the way in which it is in each case mine” (je meines), in a way that in its very being Dasein “comports itself towards its Being”. Heidegger, Being and Time, § 9, p. 67-68.
¹⁶⁴ See Heidegger, Being and Time, § 9. For Nancy being is finite, since there is being only insofar as Dasein exists, and Dasein exists according to its finite, particular possibilities. Thus, the thought of being turns out to be finite in that the being of existence is inscribed in thought in a finite – or infinitely open – way. This is to say, finite existence takes place infinitely.
¹⁶⁶ See e.g. Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 84; Heidegger, Being and Time, § 4, p. 34.
Could one thus say that answering the question “What are beings?” also involves an answer to the question what being is, if being gives itself as the activity of sense, as Nancy holds? Catherine Malabou crystallizes this idea by stating that what is called “inauthentic being” by Heidegger, is authentic for Nancy.\(^{167}\) She does not, however, specify any further aspects of Nancy’s account of the relation between the authentic and the inauthentic being. One should, however, emphasize here that being is not purely ontical to Nancy, nor is it a trivial or given fact. For Heidegger, the question “What are beings?” belongs essentially to the metaphysical register – it is what he calls the traditional “leading question” (\textit{Leitfrage}) of metaphysics: “What are beings (as such)?”\(^{168}\) On the grounds of what has been brought out before, Nancy’s notion of the sense of being in its multiplicity is where this double structure – the acceptance of the differentiation of being and beings, and the eventual non-existence of this distinction – comes under consideration. I shall come to this notion below.

To summarize, since the Heideggerian \textit{Dasein} is firmly linked with, or rather rooted in being, both \textit{Dasein} and being have to be reopened and re-operated. As I understand it, this task marks the grounds of Nancy’s philosophical work. In Heidegger’s case it is possible to speak of the “meaning of being” (\textit{Sinn des Seins}). In Nancy the notion of the meaning or sense of being proves to be an equally valid question, but at the same time it is indissociable from the existence of singular existents in a more profound way than it was with Heidegger.\(^{169}\) Also, Nancy accepts Heidegger’s differentiation between the ontic and the ontological, that is, the differentiation between being and beings, or the entities. Yet Nancy does not consider this distinction to be sufficient enough to give an account of being – instead, he also hopes to deconstruct this distinction and show that these two levels must actually be reduced to one another, or that they cannot be distinguished from each other.\(^{170}\)

Still, this is to say that Nancy repeats what Heidegger himself concedes in telling that the ontic and the ontological aspects of being are inseparable

---

169 See especially the essay “Originary Ethics”, in Nancy, \textit{A Finite Thinking}, p. 172-195 (\textit{La pensée dérobée}, p. 85-113). The existential analytic leads him to formulate a \textit{co-existential} analytic, something that may be called Nancy’s “social ontology”. For the name “social ontology”, cf. Critchley, Simon (1999/1992), \textit{The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas}. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 239-253. In constructing concepts such as “being-in-common” (\textit{être-en-commun}) and “community”, he wishes to question what is implied in the Heideggerian problematic of \textit{Mitsein}, “being-with”. For the latter, being-with is basically an ontic notion, while Nancy wants to give it an ontological position; I shall come to this in Chapter 3.
170 Cf. e.g. Nancy, \textit{The Birth to Presence}, p. 103 (\textit{Une pensée finie}, p. 136-137).
and interdependent. What Nancy does is to radicalize this move by privileging existence. Putting the focus on this angle of Heidegger’s analysis of being is as I see it decisive for the way Nancy interprets Heidegger’s philosophy.

**FINITE EXISTENCE**

Associated with the previous distinctions that are part of Heidegger’s existential analytic one finds Nancy’s concept of finitude. This concept is essentially rooted in the differentiation which Heidegger makes between being and existence.¹⁷¹ Nancy’s understanding of finitude is essentially based on the notion of the abyssal foundation of existence shared by both Nancy and Heidegger. For now we may briefly say that the supposed groundlessness of being implies the thought of finitude: as Nancy argues, existence is its infinite projection to finitude. Finitude is what, for its part, opens the way to the thought of singularity, namely, to the fact that we are infinitely finite, and as such, infinitely inessential.¹⁷² I shall consider the ontological point of finitude in more detail in Chapter 5.¹⁷³

For Heidegger, as a mode of being, existence is in itself finitude, and the fact that Dasein exists singularly does not mean that it would take on a singular essence.¹⁷⁴ In *Being and Time* Heidegger writes that Dasein “is in each case its own”. Dasein, as an entity of being whose essence lies in its “having to be” (Zu-sein, être à soi), is in each case its own possibility and it can “choose” itself by

---

¹⁷¹ By this I mean the differentiations between the ontic and the ontological, existentiell and existential, authentic and inauthentic being, being and beings. For Heidegger, being is in a relation to nothingness: being has the not-being as its other. Being is, thus, “something” and “not-something” or the nothing. This distinction, though seemingly general and empty, is being’s “most unique and fullest decision”. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, § 149, p. 188-189. However, Nancy’s reading of finitude is, for the most part, based on sections 9, 60, 65 and 68 of *Being and Time*.


¹⁷³ Nancy’s notion of finitude owes a debt to Heidegger in many ways. For the latter being is finite, above all because it means being-towards-death (Sein zum Tode), and being-towards-death forms Dasein’s ownmost potentiality-for-being. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, e.g. § 52, p. 299-304. This is what gives each Dasein its singular existence. On the whole, for Nancy the singularity of existence means that we are infinitely finite: being-finite is infinitely inessential, and being-finite is what delivers existence “to the singularity wherein it is itself” [soi]. Existence transcends – that is, continues to accomplish – “the ‘essence’ that it is in the finitude in which it in-sists”. Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, p. 14 (L’expérience de la liberté, p. 18). In this book Nancy addresses the position of empiricism and transcendental philosophy with respect to the notions of freedom, necessity, and determinacy. The freedom to exist comes to mean “presence-beyond”, or the essential presence beyond all (re)presentable presence. Nancy explains that this presence-beyond is, since Hegel and especially since Heidegger, confronted with the exigency of what could be called the hither-side (l’en deçà) of a difference: a difference of being in itself. In addition to converting being into difference and difference into being, it would be “the difference of its existence, and in this existence, inasmuch as it is its own essence, the difference and division of its singularity.

¹⁷⁴ Let us only note that here is one of the Heideggerian counterparts against which Nancy’s statement concerning the different arts in their singular existence should be seen.
making a “decision as to the way in which it is in each case mine” (je meines), in a way that in its very being Dasein “comports itself towards its Being”. 175

Heidegger’s idea of the “mineness” of Dasein, achieved by its “choosing” or “deciding” of itself, comes to be interpreted in a new way in Nancy’s thought. Jeffrey S. Librett points out that it is in “decision” that Nancy displaces and interrupts “all traditional determinations of necessity”. 176 While the traditional determinations of necessity decisively situate the identity of necessity in either reality (existence) or possibility (essence), Nancy insists on the undecidability of the issue. This non-decision must be seen, in Nancy’s view, as a decision for decision.

Librett sees the meaning of the phrase “decision of existence” to be suspended between three possibilities in Nancy. Either the title can refer to a decision that would decide over existence or to a decision that would be reached or decided by existence or, finally, to a decision that is nothing other than existence, an existence that is in turn pure decision. 177 The expression “decision of existence” would thus suggest the displacement of the concept of decision towards the reality it is supposed to determine. At the same time, it displaces the concepts of existence and wordliness towards the subjectivity and possibility they are ordinarily taken to realise or delimit. As a result, Librett writes that “[d]ecision is thereby displaced into the undecidable position that we have specifically identified … as that of necessity itself.” 178

In this way, there is a double structure involved in Nancy’s notion of existence. The being of existence takes place right in (à même) existence. But also, for him “There is no existentiale that is not at once, and as such, caught in [être pris dans] the existentiell”. 179 “This could be, in other words, to say that

175 This position is designed by Heidegger’s term Jemeinigkeit, the “in each case mine” or “in each case mineness”, according to which existence exists. Heidegger, Being and Time, § 26, p. 154; ibid., § 9, p. 67-71. For a further clarification of how the decision is the event in which Dasein “appropriates” its inappropriable being to itself, see Hamacher, Werner (1997). “Ou, séance, touche de Nancy, ici”, in On Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 52 (p. 38-62). The decision of Dasein is the decision for existence as infinite finitude; this is the way Dasein ek-sists. According to Nancy’s interpretation, this “infinite ownability of unownable Being-in-its-ownness” is what is ownmost to existing. Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 103 (Une pensée finie, p. 136).

176 Librett, Jeffrey S. (1997). “Interruptions of Necessity: Being between Meaning and Power in Jean-Luc Nancy”, in On Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 118 (p. 103-139). For Librett, “the traditional decision of necessity as either reality or possibility appears to be an attempt to deny or avoid decision by moving beyond or transcending it as quickly as possible and hence to be a decision against decision”. Ibid., p. 119.

177 Ibid., p. 119.

178 Ibid.

179 Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 99 (Une pensée finie, p. 131). Italics in original. Cf. Malabou, “Pierre aime les horranges”, p. 53. As Malabou sees it, the structures of “right in” and “to be caught in” refer to the fact that existence is understood as the reality of difference, and reality is what starts to exist. Here, in Malabou’s view, existence is equivalent to the body.
the sense of being differs – differs (from) its own difference, coming to be the same as existence and nothing else – and calling to itself, calling for itself, and repeating itself as being the “same”, right at existence, its difference.\footnote{Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 103 (Une pensée finie, p. 285). Further, “The difference of existence is what comes today, here and now, to all discourse, at its fractured juncture, no possibility of this discourse ever being halted – being, on the contrary, what is always coming, and to come.” \textit{Ibid.}}

Nancy’s article “The Decision of Existence” sheds further light on this question. The thoroughgoing theme of this essay is the validity of the distinction between being and existence as made by Heidegger. Right in the beginning, as regards the alleged distinction, Nancy defines his position in the following way: “Decision is not open to, or decided by anything other than, the world of existence, to which the existent is thrown, given up, and exposed”.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 82 (Une pensée finie, p. 108). However, Nancy is not alone in his view as regards \textit{Dasein}’s decision of existence and its belonging to the “they”. For example, Magda King in her interpretation also states: “\textit{Dasein} remains dependent on “them” and “their” world, because its factical possibilities, which are disclosed and determined by resolution, must necessarily be drawn from the factical world of its thrownness”. \textit{King, A Guide to Heidegger’s Being and Time}, p. 199.} This is to say that the decision would be made or it would grasp itself in ontical experience, since for Nancy, there is no other experience – namely, ontical experience “takes place right at the ‘they’, and nowhere else”. The fact that there is no “elsewhere” is what Nancy calls the “sense [\textit{Sinn}] of Being”. Also, that ontical experience occurs at the “they”, is what the major existential characteristic of decision represents: namely, that existence is something which is decided, or the fact that existence is, as such, the decision of existence.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 83 (Une pensée finie, p. 108). Also, we can understand only in common (we: each time mine [\textit{jemein}], each time ours), for we can understand only in common, and we are also, each time, singularity, community, and the experience of these, and the misrecognition of this experience – so that we are each time implicated in the “they”, which, for Nancy, implicates “jeman”.}

In “The Decision of Existence” Nancy makes reference to section 38 of \textit{Being and Time}, where Heidegger holds that “authentic existence is not something which floats above falling everydayness; existentially, it is only a modified way in which such everydayness is seized upon”.\footnote{Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, § 38, p. 224. As regards the differences between Nancy and Heidegger, Nancy strives at bringing forward the argument that the decision of existence is at once a decision of being. In question is, thus, the decision of sense: there are no authentic or inauthentic levels of being, but what comes to be decided in the decision is the singular sense of being. One thus decides toward what being each time is. Cf. Heidegger, \textit{Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics}, p. 160. Here, Heidegger sees the “universality” of being to be “the originality of the innermost ground of the finitude of \textit{Dasein}”. What Nancy stresses is the thought that there is no finitude as such, and its “truth” cannot be known – finitude is not just one possibility among others.} According to Heidegger’s account, in decision, “resoluteness gains its certainty” – it reveals existence wholly to its end. Resoluteness, or decisiveness, holds and binds \textit{Dasein} to its existence and brings the throw back into a factical existence by freely choosing to be this thrown being.\footnote{Cf. \textit{King, A Guide to Heidegger’s Being and Time}, p. 204.}
If, as Catherine Malabou notes, Nancy’s purpose in “The Decision of Existence” is to understand how the passage from inauthentic to authentic takes place for Dasein, how is it that there can be decision (Entscheidung)? Or, how can there be a decision of existence, if the decision is made while caught in existence? What Nancy claims, is that the passage from inauthentic to authentic happens through a shift or a sliding, without changing ground. Based on this, he asks how there can be decision – break or a cutting (Entscheidung) – where there is nothing to cut, since existence is caught in itself and flows from itself towards itself. If there is a question of “decision” of existence at all, is now the thing to inquire.

In his treatise on the existentiality of existence, Nancy starts with the thought of its absence of ground. This means that being is free from all generality, from all categories that would give a phenomenon an essence or a substance. As a consequence, being is to be conceived as “abandoned being”: this means that being has been abandoned by all categories and transcendentals. Existence is, as such, the decision of existence, “made” by being in its thrownness. In “The Decision of Existence” Nancy thus aims at explicating Heidegger’s existential analytic, with a focus on showing that the existential (ontological) and existentiell (ontical) levels of being would prove to be indistinguishable even in Heidegger’s philosophy, or that the difference is both relevant and irrelevant for Heidegger. Also, Nancy claims, Heidegger’s relation to this difference is ambiguous, or he has not fully acknowledged its nature as difference differentiating within itself. That is to say that the ontological and the ontical are, in some sense, to be levelled with each other. What is more, Nancy’s point is that deciding, or undeciding, of being is an (in)decision of existence.

In Nancy’s analysis of the decision, thinking is coextensive with existing. Philosophy’s decision to be what it is means that philosophizing decides to philosophize, that is, to think: existence unfolds in the midst of an understanding

---

185 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 60, p. 345. Nancy’s use of the term of “decision” corresponds with Heidegger’s Entscheidung, which is “always the resoluteness (Entschlossenheit) of some factual Dasein at a particular time”.  
186 Malabou, “Pierre aime les horranges”, p. 52.  
187 Cf. ibid., p. 53.  
188 Cf. e.g. Librett, “Between Meaning and Power”, in *On Jean-Luc Nancy*, p. 118ff.  
189 See e.g. Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 82-109 (Une pensée finie, p. 107-145); *A Finite Thinking*, p. 3-30 (Une pensée finie, p. 9-53). That being is abandoned, means that its position is empty: the empty position mediates the becoming of being in an irremediable scattering in its inexhaustible advent. Being is the “spoken-in-multiple-ways”, with no other identity than its default of identity. Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 36-47, see esp. p. 37 (L’impératif catégorique, p. 141-153, esp. p. 142).
of being. The philosophical decision is philosophy’s decision to be what it is; philosophizing that decides to philosophize, that is, to think. Existence unfolds in the midst of an understanding of being. This would be to say that existence finds itself in a wholly exceptional and precise way, in an essential (or existentiell) relation to its own understanding.

According to Nancy, existence is abandonment to the “there is / there comes to pass”. Here is the sense of thrownness, when thrownness comes to mean Dasein’s potentiality-for-being. This definition corresponds with Heidegger’s account that resolute or decided existence is a factual possibility of Dasein. It is Dasein’s authentic self-being. Dasein’s decision of existence happens in a definite place at a definite point in time – this is what is expressed by “there is [il y a] (existence)”. With Heidegger, a resolutely disclosed “hereness” is called the “situation” – disclosed to Dasein is its “here”. Dasein stands co-originally in truth and untruth, while disguising is resolutely taken over as essentially belonging to “Da-sein’s” falling being. It could thus be said that Dasein’s situation is the understanding forethrow of my possibilities in the particular world into which I have been thrown. It is not a ready-made mixture of conditions and opportunities that are “there” and merely await cognition. Instead, resoluteness “gives” itself the situation; the resolute choice of definite possibilities in the particular world in which I have been thrown. Dasein is never merely “in space” in the same way as an extended thing, but it spaces or gives space (einräumen), by reference to the things of which it takes care.

190 Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 28, The Birth to Presence, e.g. p. 84f. (Une pensée finie, p. 49, 110f.). According to Nancy, the speaking of the coextension of thinking and existence is “the best way” to indicate that it is a question of opening or of reopening, the very opening to what is originally at issue in philosophy, which is the experience of being as the being of entities, of reopening. In question is “a (re)opening of philosophy to its own open-and-decided-being, i.e., to its own historical existence”. Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 94. As I see it, in speaking of what is ownmost to being and of the decision which existence each time makes, Nancy seeks to give an account also of what Heidegger in Contributions to Philosophy defines as follows: “… Be-ing [Seyn] not only grants to beings what they are but also and primarily unfolds for itself that truth that is appropriate for what is ownmost to Be-ing”. Heidegger, Contributions to Philosophy, § 44, p. 64.

191 To be more precise, this is the relation of “philosophy”, or of “thought”: thought is a decision in favour of the understanding-of-being that existence is, or rather in favour of the understanding-of-being according to which existence reaches its decision. Decision, above all, is not to say that philosophy is decisive for the understanding of being but is in fact exactly the opposite. On the level of the decision of philosophy, the finitude of thought means, to Nancy’s mind, the degree to which it is the infinitely open inscription of the finite-being of existence (l’être-fini de l’existence). Ibid., p. 84, 87 (Une pensée finie, p. 110-111, 116).


195 Ibid., p. 203.

Heidegger’s term *Entschlossenheit* can be translated as “resoluteness”, as in *Being and Time*, or as “decisiveness”. Of these two, Nancy uses the latter alternative.\(^\text{197}\) For decisiveness he uses the French expression *ouverture décidante*, “openness that decides (itself)”.\(^\text{198}\) For Nancy, the term denotes the overlapping of “disclosedness” and “decision”, in the sense of “openness” (*Entschlossenheit*). *Entschlossenheit* or decisiveness stands for the eminent, authentic disclosure of one’s being-there, “the reticent, dreading self-forethrow to one’s ownmost owing-being” – resoluteness and utmost disclosedness.\(^\text{199}\) Resoluteness is always the resoluteness of some factual *Dasein* at a particular time, in a particular situation, discovering what is factically possible, since for Heidegger, the situation “is only through resoluteness and in it”.\(^\text{200}\) At this point, Nancy asks what it is that makes the existent exist as a function of possibility: as the entity that in its being has its very being at issue as possibility, and consequently has its being as the (in)decidability of existence.

For this reason, one may call decidedness “owned existence”, in which the truth of existence is at stake, when the truth is understood as *Dasein’s* answer to the call of the self. The call of the self is also caring-for being-with others, a notion which points to Heidegger’s term *Fürsorge*, “solicitude”.\(^\text{201}\) Resoluteness as authentic self-being enables *Dasein* genuinely to-be-in-the-world. To speak of “making present” as such is something that refers to the inauthentic understanding of being. Heidegger’s term for the inauthenticity is “the irresolute” (“irresoluteness” would, in Nancy’s terms, correspond to “undecided being”).\(^\text{202}\)


\(^\text{198}\) See Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 400, n. 1. As the translator of the article points out, with Heidegger terms such as “resoluteness” and “authenticity” carry an air of the exceptional, the great and the heroic, while “decision” seeks to convey something more everyday more open and opened.

\(^\text{199}\) That “decisiveness (*Entschlossenheit*) is a distinctive mode of *Dasein’s* disclosedness (*Erschlossenheit*)”, is to say that being-opened does not resolve itself into any thing other than what it is. Being-open decides itself open, and opens itself up to the decision of this opening. Thus, the existent does nothing but make its ownmost being its own: it appropriates existence itself as disclosedness. This is what Heidegger designates by terms such as *Entschlossenheit*, *Zueignung*, *Ereignis*. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 60, p. 343, see also *Contributions to Philosophy*, § 44f. Cf. King, *A Guide to Heidegger’s Being and Time*, p. 197; Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 101 (*Une pensée finie*, p. 133).

\(^\text{200}\) Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 60, p. 346. As for Heidegger, decisiveness “consists in taking up possibilities which have been proposed and recommended, and seizing hold of them. Decision is precisely the disclosive projection and determination of what is factually possible at that time”. In the existentiale of decision, it is a question of what “possibilizes” the possibilities, of what, each time, makes them possible for an existence, and makes them possibilities of an existence.

\(^\text{201}\) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 60, p. 344.

\(^\text{202}\) *Ibid.*, p. 342-345; § 68, p. 388. For Heidegger, being which temporalizes itself in terms of making present, in terms of the authentic future, is a “moment of vision” (*Augenblick*). It is able to
Truth, as designated by Heidegger, is not presupposed here, nor is it a property, and this is what Nancy specifically underlines when speaking of the finitude of existence. In general, his view is grounded in the thought of the finitude of the ownmost mode of the existent’s being. The end here is to bring forth being, and to let being come forth in advance of the self. Hence, Nancy calls attention to the very possibility of being (the self), if the single property of the existent’s being is found in its advent to existence. This is, for him, what “possibility” means: a relation to the “self”.

All this amounts to the fact that at stake in existence is, in Nancy’s view, “the decision to exist (and/or not to exist), and thus to decide (and/or not to decide)”. In other words, in the decision, existence makes the singular decision, in a definite place and at a particular time, of what is proper to it, so that in the there is can be found the finite nature of existence. “Decision” and “decided-being” are that in which existence makes itself into existence, opens to its own being, “or appropriates the unappropriable event of its advent to Being, from a groundlessness of existence”. To put it shortly, for Nancy, “to be its own essence” is the property of existence. One should note, however, that the register of “existence” is here, in the context of decision, different from that of existential analytic.

Above I pointed out that in Heidegger there is a difference between understanding of being and understanding an entity, their difference being existence. What results from this fact is that, in Nancy’s thinking, the whole

reveal Dasein’s potentiality-for-being. The authentic coming-towards-itself of anticipatory resoluteness is also a coming-back to one’s ownmost Self, and this ecstasy “makes it possible for Dasein to be able to take over resolutely that entity which it already is”. In revealing its potentiality-for-being and thus its truth of existence, Dasein’s temporal structure is futural: it is a forward-running resoluteness unto death. The world in which Dasein exists means the “understanding anticipation” or “forethrow” of how things are to be met. It might thus be said that we are the understanding of our existence and our own being is the understood. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 62, p. 354f.; King, *A Guide to Heidegger’s Being and Time*, p. 203.

206 The “there is”, and thus finitude, is also the “property” of what Nancy, following Heidegger, calls “the thing”. Heidegger, in his essay “Das Ding” ("The Thing"), analyses the thingness of a thing, saying that no representation of the present, when “the present” is thought of in the sense of an object, will ever reach the thing as a thing. Instead, the thingness of a thing remains concealed, and thus the essence of the thing remains hidden. As Nancy understands it, “the thing” means, in all things, in all existences, what does not accede to itself, or to a Self, but still coincides, being the thing “in itself”. This is being-thrown, without supporters or support; the being-there of a thing is the presupposition that one cannot even call “presupposed”. In this respect, the thing’s being-there is finite, incapable of attachment to an infinite concatenation of being. Being therefore never finishes being so. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 169-170, 174; Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 183 (*Une pensée finie*, p. 218).
decision – in which the finitude of existence is at stake – is in the following question: would appropriation not be identical to the inappropriation of a “difference proper”?209

Finally, in what kind of context should one locate the relation of decision and undecidability? With Heidegger, *Dasein* is “suspended”, which is to say that it is uprooted in existence – as Nancy understands it, *Dasein* is “cut from its origin, from its origin of being and from the being of its origin”.210 Heidegger makes a differentiation between the notions of “floating” (*Schwebe*) and “free-floating” (*Freischwebe*). The groundless “basis” of existence is “floating”, that is, suspended. Decision cannot take place in suspension, and thus, undecidability is the rule.211 By contrast, the disclosing of entities – decision – takes place in existence which is thrown to the world. This free-floating kind of behaviour is “capable of disclosing entities in general in a primary way”.212 *Dasein* holds itself in suspension, or “keeps floating unattached” (*er hält sich in einer Schwebe*).213 In *Being and Time*, Heidegger remarks: “Resoluteness, as authentic Being-one’s-Self, does not detach *Dasein* from its world, nor does it isolate it so that it becomes a free-floating “I”. And how should it, when resoluteness as authentic disclosedness, is authentically nothing else than *Being-in-the-world*?”214 It could thus be concluded that even resolute existence can never escape from “them” and “their” world: as *Dasein* is disclosed to itself as its “here”, it stands cooriginally in truth and untruth. The untruth of disguising belongs to *Dasein*’s falling being.215

As existence is groundlessness or “uprooted” in the everyday being, it follows, in Nancy’s view, that “this suspension is the condition and the constitution-of-being of the existent as such; in suspension, decision escapes”.216 What Nancy attempts to show is that “existence in its ownness is not something which

209 *Ibid.*., p. 91 (*Une pensée finie*, p. 121). Hence, Nancy says, “the distinction to be made and decided on is also the difference between the ontical self of the existent and the ‘friend’ that the existent carries with it (the ‘friend’ perhaps names only this difference itself)”.


215 King, *A Guide to Heidegger’s Being and Time*, p. 198-199. What King also points out is that there is an ambiguity between Heidegger’s notions of “authentic Being-together (–with-others)” and each *Dasein*, as it exists primarily for the sake of itself. *Ibid.*, p. 197-198. Nancy’s solution to this problem is, as I see it, the idea of community, which involves the thought of sharing what cannot be shared, or that we share what shares us singularly. For these notions, see esp. section 3.2.

216 Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 96 (*Une pensée finie*, p. 127). Furthermore, to Nancy this attests to the fact that “all of this takes place only through *Being-in-the-world*, and through the taking-place of existence thrown to the world”. Italics in original.
floats above falling”. Further, he holds that existence is the undecidability of sense, “the impossibility of deciding”; it takes place only just at “uprooted” everydayness. How does he give grounds to this? According to Nancy, the grounds are that suspension is suspended (le suspens est suspendu) in the average ontical floating, and that is where it decides or reaches its decision. However, “what we cannot decide in this way is the originary undecidability of Being-thrown-to-the-world (to the ‘they’), in which, by which, and as which the Being of existence takes place”. For Nancy, the finitude of existence means exactly inappropriability: infinite appropriating of what is inappropriable. The inappropriability of being is also to say that there is no sense “in general”; for this reason Nancy transcribes groundlessness (Abgründlichkeit) as sense.

As Nancy’s argument goes, one cannot distinguish between the basis and the suspension, but we must decide “in favour of the impossibility of making the distinction”. I agree with Jeffrey S. Librett’s interpretation that the distinction between authentic and inauthentic existence, or between decision and non-decision, would itself be an inauthentic and non-decisive distinction. What founds human experience as inessential awareness of entities in the absence of the awareness of being is, in fact, the essential situation of humanity. It follows, according to Librett’s reading, that the authentic is situated in the inauthentic, decision situated in indecision, and “the understanding of being itself situated in the ontologically forgetful ontic understanding of mere entities”. At the same time, Librett notes, the thought that all experience is involved in the inauthenticity of non-decision is itself also caught up in inauthenticity and non-decision. In my view, the difference between decision and undecidability thus seems to both exist and not exist: their difference itself remains undecided. Thus, I think, Nancy’s account of the distinction between the authentic and

217 Ibid., p. 99 (Une pensée finie, p. 131).
218 Ibid., p. 97 (Une pensée finie, p. 129).
219 Ibid., p. 96 (Une pensée finie, p. 128).
220 “Sense” thus comes to mean being’s reference to nothing, either to substance or to subject, only to a being-to, to itself, to the world as the openness, the throw or the being-thrown of existence, which is the being-sense of being. What results is that there are nothing but finite senses – finite thinking may touch on its own limit and its own singularity. The absence of solution is “the very site of sense”. Finitude means that all sense resides in the nonappropriation of “being”, whose existence (or whose existing) is appropriation itself. “Finitude” designates the ‘essential’ multiplicity and the ‘essential’ nonreabsorption of sense or of Being. As I see it, “nonreabsorption” is here synonymous with “nonappropriation”, Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 5-6, 9 (Une pensée finie, p. 14-15, 19).
221 Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 97 (Une pensée finie, p. 129).
222 Librett, “Between Meaning and Power”, in On Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 121.
223 Ibid. Cf. also Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 95 (Une pensée finie, p. 127).
inauthentic is based on a *mise-en-abyme* construction, which, as he tries to show, is equally Heidegger's position.

What is to be decided is disclosedness's difference from itself, by reason of which *disclosedness cannot be made one’s own* and thus what it is, in its ownness: to exist. Therefore, Nancy concludes that “‘to decide’ means to expose oneself to the undecidability of sense that existence *is*. The suspension is itself the "ground" and the "basis": we must decide in favour of the impossibility of making the distinction – in one sense, we cannot get beyond this result. This is what could be called the finite thought of the finite access to the originary being of existence. In other words, what is in play in Nancy’s account is solely existence's own mode of being. By this, he aims at pointing out that it is possible to read Heidegger in a way which emphasizes that existence is the mode in which being itself is. If, he states, it is as existence and only as existence that being comes into play, it designates the *without-essence* of existence: “When Being is posited as infinite, it is precisely then that it is determined. If it is posited as finite, it is then that its absence of ground is affirmed”. “Decision” is, then, nothing but the existing by which existence relates itself to itself, in its ownness. As such, there could not be any decision to be made by a subject of existence of any sort whatsoever who would emerge to cut through the possibilities offered in the exteriority of the world, in a way that would be consistent or inconsistent with its own being.

In all, according to Nancy, that there is an interdependency between the ontological and the ontical, would be, as he says, “the best way” to indicate that opening or reopening is in question, the very opening to what is originally at issue in philosophy. This is the experience of being as the being of entities, of reopening: a (re)opening of philosophy to its own open-and-decided-being, or in other words, to its own historical existence. Thus, Nancy wants to point out that by deciding *we* make the infinite difference which resides between the finite exposition to the absence of essence – or that “we make the difference of *Being itself*”.

225 Ibid., p. 97 (*Une pensée finie*, p. 129).
228 Ibid.
229 Ibid., p. 94 (*Une pensée finie*, p. 125).
As stated above, the general horizon of Nancy’s article “The Decision of Existence” is to affirm the groundlessness of being. For the reason that existence has no essence decided for it and outside it, undecidable existence must convoke itself to the decision of existence. Thus being withdraws all the foundations of entities, in the Nichtigkeit of its freedom, which entails that undecidability itself makes the decision. Thought in its decision is only the decision that risks and affirms existence on its own absence of ground; here, existence reaches its own decision, as thought.

Despite the differentiation between being and existence, they are not separable from each other even for Heidegger. According to him, “[T]he roots of the existential analytic are ultimately existentiell, that is, ontical. Only if the inquiry of philosophical research is itself seized upon in an existentiell manner, as a possibility of being of each existing Dasein, does it become at all possible to disclose the existentiality of existence”.

As Nancy interprets this statement, existing has nothing more of its own than the “infinite ownability of unownable Being-in-its-ownness”. That is, he states, the truth of “finitude”: what is to be made our own (to be decided) is nothing but being-thrown-to-the-world, and therefore to the world of what Heidegger describes as the “they” (das Man).

When existence makes itself into existence in “decision” and “decided-being”, existence opens to its own being. In Nancy, this would be to say that existence appropriates the unappropriable event of its advent to being, from a groundlessness of existence. The opening opens itself to the “they”, or decides in favour of the “they”, to the full extent that the “they” is abandonment to the ownlessness of being, which existence must make its own. The thrown

---

231 Ibid., p. 103 (Une pensée finie, p. 138).
232 Ibid., p. 104 (Une pensée finie, p. 138).
233 Ibid., p. 84 (Une pensée finie, p. 110).
234 Heidegger, Being and Time, § 4, p. 34.
235 Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 103 (Une pensée finie, p. 136-137). Cf. Heidegger, Being and Time, § 60. The discourse of the existential analytic is caught up, throughout, in Gerede, “idle talk”, which “offers the first form of the everydayness of Dasein”. Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 89 (Une pensée finie, p. 118). In Nancy’s opinion, this leads to asking how to grant access to the originary or to the authentic if we can content ourselves with speaking about something (about being or existing) and hearing what is thus re-said, the they-say. According to Heidegger, the existential analytic has “Dasein’s everydayness” as its “phenomenal horizon”. Cf. Heidegger, Being and Time, § 34, p. 210. In Nancy’s view, Heidegger’s point is that the thought of decision at the origin (that is, philosophy) says that decision does not belong to the writing-reading of its own text. This is to say that the discourse set down here is not more appropriate to ownness than any other (im)proper discourse would be: it thinks that it reaches its decision to decide. Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 93 (Une pensée finie, p. 123-124).
236 Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 102 (Une pensée finie, p. 136).
“they” points to “the ontico-ontological undecidability in which, and by reason of which, existence must reach its decision as existence, because existence is without essence”. This is to prove that being – through the existent – is wholly in play in the world of entities. Yet the distinction between being and beings must be made: the difference between them is existence.237

In this way, the Heideggerian ontico-ontological difference is something which Nancy wants to show to be rather a non-distinction: Dasein is thrown to the world of the “they”, and it opens itself to the “they”. This is to say that Dasein decides in favour of the “they”, to the full extent that the “they” is abandonment to the ownlessness of being, which existence must make its own.238 In other words, existing proves to be a name for finitude in that existing has nothing more of its own than the infinite ownability of unownable being-in-its-ownness. This is the truth of “finitude”: “what is to be made our own (to be decided) is nothing but being-thrown-to-the-world, and therefore to the world of the ‘they’”.239

The being of Dasein, as Heidegger explains it, is primarily a potentiality-for-being and the disclosure of that potentiality – hence, existence is our ownmost potentiality-for-being, and selfhood is “to be discerned existentially only in one’s authentic potentiality-for-being-one’s-Self”.240 In other words, selfhood is discovered by disclosing one’s factical possibilities of existence. It is by projecting itself upon this potentiality-for-being that Dasein understands itself. This is to say that the idea of existence is founded on the thought that Dasein has already understood itself (even if not with adequate ontological definiteness), and is not just present-at-hand.241 Dasein maintains itself in this being and does so as either authentic or inauthentic existing.242 In other words, Dasein understands itself factically in definite existentiell possibilities, even if its projects stem from the ontical level, that is, from the common sense of the “they”.243

In Heidegger, the question of the “who” concerns who it is that Dasein is in its everydayness.244 In attempting to give an answer to this question, he departs

237 Ibid., p. 103 (Une pensée finie, p. 137-138).
238 Ibid. (Une pensée finie, p. 136-137).
239 Ibid. (Une pensée finie, p. 136).
240 Heidegger, Being and Time, § 63, p. 358, § 64, p. 369.
241 Ibid., § 63, p. 361.
242 Dasein’s primordial being towards its potentiality-for-being is being-towards-death. Anticipation discloses this possibility as possibility, and thus only “as anticipating does resoluteness become a primordial Being towards Dasein’s ownmost potentiality-for-Being”. See Heidegger, Being and Time, § 62, p. 353-357.
243 Ibid., § 63, p. 360; below I come back to the notion of the “they” (das Man).
244 Heidegger, Being and Time, § 25, p. 149.
from the thought that Dasein is an entity which is in each case myself and its being is in each case mine. This definition is both ontological and ontical: it “indicates an ontologically constitutive state” (while it no more than indicates this state), but at the same time, it tells us “ontically … that in each case an ‘I’ – not Others – is an entity”.\(^\text{245}\) Ontically, Heidegger contends, this is obvious; the ontological analytic has to make certain reservations about its horizon.\(^\text{246}\) If Dasein is its self only in existing, the access to this problematic is gained through existential analysis. Namely, as the background for the investigation of the “who” one must see Heidegger’s view that Dasein’s essence is grounded in its existence; as a consequence, “[i]f the ‘I’ is an Essential characteristic of Dasein, then it is one that must be interpreted existentially”.\(^\text{247}\)

On the grounds of Nancy’s definition of the “who” as briefly suggested above, one is able to notice that his interpretation of it recalls Heidegger’s analysis of das Man, “the ‘they’”. For Heidegger the “they” is the nameless “who” of Dasein in its everyday existence; it is the “they” who has already defined the world before Dasein comes to it. Dasein’s existence in the world of the “they” is one of subjection, an existence in which Dasein loses its being.\(^\text{248}\) Let us say for now that, as an ontological characteristic, the “they” is dependent on Heidegger’s problematic of being-with – but this will be discussed further in the next chapter.\(^\text{249}\) Dasein, as everyday being-with-one-another, stands in subjection to Others. However, these Others are not definite Others, but any Other can represent them, in a way that one belongs to the Others oneself and “enhances their power”. In Heidegger’s view, “the Others” are “those who proximally and for the most part ‘are there’ in everyday being-with-one-another”.\(^\text{250}\) To the original question of “who” is Dasein, he now gives the following definition: “the ‘who’ is not this one, not that one, not oneself [man selbst], not some people [einige], and not the sum of them all”. Instead, the “who” comes now to be determined as the neuter, the “they”.\(^\text{251}\)

\(^{245}\) Ibid., p. 150.

\(^{246}\) Ibid., p. 151.

\(^{247}\) Ibid., p. 152.


\(^{249}\) To give further light to this question, one must go the origin of being, which, according to Nancy, is fundamentally plural. The only origin of the world is the singular plurality of the origins: the plurality or multiplicity of the origins of being is always shown to be singular with Nancy. These are some of the complex issues I hope to take up in this chapter. The answer to the question of singularity – and thus, of the subject – must be sought from the concept of being and its origin.

\(^{250}\) Heidegger, Being and Time, § 27, p. 164. Italics in original.

\(^{251}\) Ibid.
On the one hand, the notion of the “they” has connotations which in some connections have more or less negative qualities for Heidegger. The “they” is no one in particular and nothing definite; yet it is what all are and what whoever is. Being-with-one-another is something that dissolves one’s own Dasein into the kind of being of the Others, in such a way that they vanish as distinguishable and explicit. The central existential characteristics of the “they” are everyday being-with-one-another, distantiality, averageness, levelling down, publicness, the disburdening of one’s being, and accommodation – then again, it is just in the aforementioned characteristics that “lies the ‘constancy’ of Dasein which is closest to us”.  

Heidegger’s “they” is there alongside everywhere, and it presents every judgement and decision as its own. For this reason, it deprives the particular Dasein of its answerability. 

On the other hand, one cannot overlook the fact that the “they” is the necessary condition for the constitution of Dasein. The characters of being represented by the “they” reveal the “Realest subject” of everydayness, “Reality” referring to a being with the character of Dasein. As such, the “they” proves to be an existentiale and, thus, a primordial phenomenon, which belongs to Dasein’s positive constitution. Although the Self of everyday Dasein – the they-self – is to be distinguished from what Heidegger calls the “authentic Self”, in other words, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way or which is in charge of its own destiny. If the Self of one’s own Dasein or the Self of the Other has still neither found nor lost itself, then the “they” stands for inauthenticity and failure to stand by one’s Self. The “they” is a much and as little present-at-hand within-the-world (that is, as Things) as is Dasein. What follows from this is that “[p]roximally, factical Dasein is in the with-world, which is discovered in an average way”; and proximally, factical Dasein is not “I”, in the sense of my own Self, but the Others, that is, the “they”. In fact, Dasein is “they”, and for the most part it remains so. What Heidegger terms as “authentic Being-one’s-Self” is not detached from the “they”, but is rather “an existentiell modification of the ‘they’ – of the ‘they’ as an essential existentiale”. Despite the fact that the “they” has not taken hold of its own existence, this would not be possible without the level of the “they”, which is to say that there

---

252 Ibid., p. 166.
253 Ibid., p. 165.
254 Ibid., p. 166.
255 Ibid., p. 167.
256 Ibid.
257 Ibid., p. 168. Italics in original.
could not be authentic being without inauthentic being. In Nancy, however, these two levels seem to be still more radically indistinguishable. This problem will be taken up in Chapter 2, but before that, I turn to Nancy’s central question of difference from the viewpoint provided by Jacques Derrida.

1.2 Derrida and *Différance*

In order to retrace the deconstructive lines in Nancy’s thought, I shall turn here to Jacques Derrida and deconstruction. When inquiring into the historical background of deconstruction, there are probably two main lines to follow. The first can be retraced to Husserl’s term *Abbau*, “dismantling”; the second can be found in Heideggerian destruction of traditional ontology. As Derrida puts it, what is at stake in all of these is the will to reach the “ultimate foundation of concepts”.

According to Rodolphe Gasché, *Abbau* appears in Husserl’s *Experience and Judgment* as late as in 1938. *Abbau* has to be seen against the background of phenomenological reduction or *epokhé*, which means the bracketing of or disposing with any information or supposition concerning the existence of the real world. *Abbau* can thus be called a genetic exploration of the conditions of the validity of judgement. This is done by retrogression in order to return to the original life-world toward the transcendental subjectivity constitutive of the both life-world and the “objective” world. What remains is pure consciousness, something that neither logic nor psychology is capable of revealing. A retrogression to the original life-world requires a radical dismantling of the theoretical world, leading to the “concealed foundation” of the scientific world. The objective is

---

258 It is notably in the essay “Ousia et Grammè” that Derrida is willing to challenge the account that Heidegger gives of the destruction of metaphysics. For Derrida in Heidegger’s philosophy it is not a question of a “destruction” of metaphysics in the proper sense of the term; rather, the destruction of metaphysics remains within metaphysics, only making explicit its principles. Derrida’s objection is mainly directed towards Heidegger’s ability to radically distinguish the “vulgar” concept of time, implicit in traditional metaphysics, as opposed to the originary, more fundamental concept of temporality. In Heidegger’s philosophy the latter must be understood as the dimension of *existence*, which is the dimension of *finitude*. Derrida seeks, however, to show that the destruction of the metaphysical concept uncritically borrows from the discourse of metaphysics itself. See Derrida (1982). *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 48 (*Marges de la philosophie*. Paris: Minuit, 1972, p. 54). See also Gasché, Rodolphe (1986). *The Tain of the Mirror*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, p. 119; cf. Nancy, “Our History”, p. 103.


gaining access to what grounds “the subjectivity of psychological reflection”. As a conclusion Gasché writes that Husserl rejects psychological reflection in the name of a more radical reflection, which is transcendental reflection; yet a “strange ambiguity” sets the operation of dismantling apart from all other forms of phenomenological reduction.\(^\text{261}\)

In this manner, Abbau stands for a nonreflective way of reaching the roots of the pregiven world, its idealization, and the sense-constituting structures of transcendental subjectivity. However, it is not an unmediated approach, but takes place in a mediated nonreflective condition. Gasché says: “The method of dismantling is nonreflective because it allows for a retrogression to something that cannot in principle be given as such”, that is, because the conditions with which it attempts to make contact cannot be beheld in an intuitive act, since it is a question of a reactivation of origins which must remain essentially dissimulated.\(^\text{262}\) Therefore, retrogression through dismantling is at once mediated and nonreflective.\(^\text{263}\) For Gasché, Abbau anticipates deconstruction just because it is a nonreflective turning back.

If we now wish to consider the Derridean notion of deconstruction as an endeavour to seek the “ultimate foundation of concepts”, “the philosophical itinerary to truth”, or “a relation of scientific representation as a form exterior to a given content”, the question remains open whether “deconstruction” can be thought of in terms of a method. In Derrida’s deconstructive practice there is no sign of a Platonic or a Hegelian sense of dialectics, including dividing (diairesis) and reunification (synagoge), aimed at the “conceptual activity of truth as it develops its own coherence”.\(^\text{264}\) Rather, deconstruction finds its motivation in destroying dialectics. What is included in Derrida’s texts is a position exterior to the totality of philosophy, which remains outside the identity of method and concept.

Therefore, deconstruction is also the deconstruction of the concept of method and has to be determined accordingly.\(^\text{265}\) Thus, is it not, in terms of method, its reverse notion that sets the framework for deconstruction? By attempting to negate the traditional concept and function of method, deconstruction is still


\(^{263}\) Ibid., p. 122.

\(^{264}\) Ibid., p. 123.
necessarily related to it. This is also shown by the criticism of the discourse of metaphysics and its concept of method, scientific and philosophical alike. The negative dependency toward the strategies involved in the classical notion of method considered, deconstruction can be determined in a corresponding way: it proceeds from a certain point of exteriority so as to re-inscribe the totality of all regions of philosophy in or with regard to what is exorbitant to it.

**SENSE, DIFFÉRANCE, AND THE ORIGIN WITHOUT ORIGIN**

On what grounds may one argue, as has been done, that Nancy’s work is part of the tradition of deconstruction? And if so, how are the principles of deconstruction interpreted by Nancy? In order to explore these problems, I depart from two of Derrida’s basic concepts, writing and *différance*, as reflected and eventually paralleled by Nancy’s understanding of “sense”, the key concept in his philosophy, and the associated inquiry about the thought of its origin.266 To be interrogated in this context is also the notion of the ontological difference, of its system and of “a Being established in its own difference”, as well as Nancy’s doubt concerning the centrality of such difference in Heidegger’s thought.267 The point of departure is Nancy’s essay “Elliptical Sense” in which he gives a reading of Derrida’s text “Ellipsis”.268

In “Ellipsis” Derrida speaks about the closure of the book and the opening of the text: about “writing” as the origin of the text. Writing is the writing of the origin itself.269 It retraces the origin, but the origin of writing is not present or absent as such: it is “a trace which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun”.270 The repetition of writing is what Derrida calls the first writing. Approximately, this is to say that language is constantly open to re-contextualizing, and it always differs

---

269  For Derrida, all linguistic signs are written. Signs always refer to yet more signs *ad infinitum*, since there is no ultimate referent or foundation of linguistic signs; in other words, there are no ideal meanings in language. As for Nancy, he describes the Derridean “writing” as “altered sense” or “the infinite re-petition of sense”, the access of sense to sense in its own demand, an access that does not accede. Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p. 94-95. With this, Nancy points to a notion of presence as withdrawal, while the withdrawing is exposed as a trace. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 9; Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p. 28, 98 (*Une pensée finie*, p. 50, 279).
with respect to the moment it names. Writing or language does not arrive at a conclusion, in other words, a point of presence or perception which would be outside of writing or non-linguistic.

Nancy’s interpretation of Derrida’s “writing” and *différance* is based on an identification which he makes between these terms and the scope of his own notion of “sense”. What unites these concepts, Nancy argues, is the lack of origin: the origin of writing and sense alike is “the demand that it be given”.

According to him, the sense – the sense of being – cannot be understood in terms of any identity with itself. That is to say, the condition of possibility of sense must be searched in non-self-identity. “The origin or sense”, Nancy says, “if the origin is by definition the origin of sense, contains within itself (and/or differing) the sense of the origin, its own sense, itself being the very sense and site of sense, ‘all sense’.”

What is implied by this idea? As regards the background for this question, Nancy makes reference to Kant and the act of thought that Kant calls *transcendental*: that is, reason discovering itself and making itself available as the principle of its own possibilities.

From such a point arises the condition of possibility which is not itself the origin, but which forms the condition of possibility of the origin itself – the origin which is no longer given.

On this kind of position, Nancy states, is grounded Derrida’s origin of *différance*: the origin that differs and defers, always with an open ending. To clarify this matter, Nancy seeks for a correspondence between “sense” and Derrida’s “writing”, even to the extent of seeing them as synonymous to each other. The central feature of sense is the assumption that it “has to repeat itself by opening in itself (as itself) the possibility of relating to itself in the ‘referral of one sign to another’”. It is in such a referral that sense is recognized or grasped as sense – sense is the duplication of the origin and the relation that is opened, in the origin, between the origin and the end.

For Derrida, nothing can return us to the origin, for the reason that there never was one determinable before the sign: the idea of origin is an effect of the

---

271 Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p. 93 (Une pensée finie, p. 272). Cf. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 373: “…[T]he return to the book is of an *elliptical* essence. Something invisible is missing in the grammar of this repetition. As this lack is invisible and undeterminable, as it completely redoubles and consecrates the book, once more passing through each point along its circuit, nothing has budged. And yet all meaning [sens] is altered by this lack.”


signifying system and not the other way around. Writing is, as a consequence, the “passion of and for the origin”: it is and makes the origin itself. And similarly, sense as presented by Nancy is not the origin: sense is the demand that it be given – sense must interrogate itself anew, sense calls for more sense. Hence sense is repetition, the demand for the singular; singularity is doubled and “thirsts after itself insofar as it is the origin of the text”. No more than writing, sense can be thought of in terms of a transcendental sense, but it refers beyond itself, to other senses. To be exact, however, sense is always ideal in the Husserlian meaning of the term. Without the possibility of ideality no sense, linguistic or otherwise, could exist.

For Derrida deconstruction works as a textual practice, the purpose of which is to break with any notion of a linear writing – be it linear in either spatial or temporal terms. Instead, he introduces a mode of writing which he calls écriture, “writing” or archi-écriture, “arche-writing”. Writing is a process of infinite referral, or it is a process of never arriving at a meaning itself: any text consists of comings into presence in an endless sequence, the openings of presence having no foundation in themselves. For Derrida all linguistic signs are written. Signs always refer to yet more signs ad infinitum, since there is no ultimate referent or foundation of linguistic signs; in other words, there are no ideal meanings in language. It is a question of producing a space of writing which “writes itself and reads itself, presents itself its own reading, presents its own presentation and accounts for this continuous operation”. Here Derrida refers to a writing which always starts again, infinitely and fictively, so that is lacks any decisive beginning and constantly repeats and already refers to another “beginning” or event of the text. This makes the process, called dissemination, multiply itself from its start, which is numerous and diversified. In this way, the text consists of comings into presence in an endless sequence, the openings of presence having no foundation in themselves.

---

275 Cf. e.g. Derrida, Edmund Husserl’s “Origin of Geometry”: An Introduction, p. 92f.
276 Derrida, Writing and Difference, p. 372.
277 Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 93, 96 (Une pensee finie, p. 272, 276).
278 This notion has been explored by, for example, Paola Marrati in her study Genesis and Trace: Derrida Reading Husserl and Heidegger, trans. Simon Sparks. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005. In the present context I cannot, however, go into this question in any further detail.
280 Ibid., p. 333-334.
281 A somewhat similar reasoning as regards the concept of a groundless ground also figures in Nancy’s texts, as well as in Heidegger. I shall return to this later.
Why is writing (or sense) elliptical, then? According to Derrida, as soon as a sign emerges, it begins by repeating itself. This repetition is writing because what disappears in it is the self-identity of the origin. Yet there is something missing in this repetition, that is, in the return to the book: “[r]epeated, the same line is no longer exactly the same, the ring no longer has the same centre”. Writing is the outline of this alteration: the outline is “of an elliptical essence”. In Nancy’s view, ellipsis comes to mean the other in the return to the self, “the geometrical of the pas of meaning [sens], singular and plural [le géométral des pas du sens, des pas de sens]”. Although, according to Derrida, “all sense is altered [tout le sens est altéré]”, nothing however is altered, as there is not a first sense that would then be diverted and disturbed by a second writing. In Nancy’s reading, writing “thirsts after” its own lack; that is its passion, which is to say that sense thirsts after its own ellipsis. If, in Nancy, the Derridean ellipsis is to be understood as the circle which at once closes itself off and fails to do so, then sense, “as sense, does not close off its own sense, or closes it off only by repeating and differing from itself, appealing again and again to its limit as to its essence and its truth”. Sense’s return to itself, to this passion, turns out to be also the moment of its multiplication when its presence divides itself.

If we take for granted that in Derrida différence is “neither a word nor a concept”, this is, for Nancy, also the definition of what he terms as “sense”. What is implied in the identification of différence and sense? Above all, for Nancy this is to say that différence is the sense of sense: both sense and difference are destined to “write out” or exscribe themselves, and thus, to touch the world of existence. “Sense” is beyond all appropriation, before all significations. From this perspective, he claims sense to be comparable to the end of philosophy, which he sees to be a question of style: the end of philosophy is a matter of what sense does to discourse if sense exceeds significations. “Style” proves to be a matter of the praxis of thought and “its writing in the sense of the assumption of a responsibility for and to this excess”.

288 *Ibid.*, p. 19 (Le sens du monde, p. 37). What can this “practical” aspect thus mean? One can make a parallel to what Nancy refers to with the notion of materiality. If sense acquires the meaning of matter forming itself, and if matter, as a consequence, is to mean the reality of difference and différence, it is “the very difference through which something is possible”. If there is something, there are several things – otherwise, there is nothing, no “there is”. *Ibid.*, p. 57-58. With respect to Nancy’s ontology
Furthermore, Nancy describes sense as the infinity of the occurrences of sense which are possible in the world and as the world. Sense corresponds with the truth of Derrida’s *différance*: there is either no truth in it, or it is “the void of its α-semantic truth”.\(^{289}\) This very (non)truth opens (onto) sense; and sense is the *différance* of truth itself. Truth, in this way, is what Nancy terms as being-such (*l’être-tel*), and sense is necessarily presented as deferred by truth. Being as such differs from being to being: in other words, “*essentia* differs from *esse*, of which it is, however, the truth”. Finally, sense defers (itself) in its very truth; sense is differing/deferring signifyingness.\(^{290}\) Nancy himself compares sense with Derrida’s term *dissemination*, insofar as it “sows originally each place of the world, no matter which one, and without privilege, as the possible taking-place of a sense, of a being-*toward*”.\(^{291}\)

In order to reflect some deconstructive practices in the context of Nancy’s work, I find it worthwhile to look at the way Derrida formulates the term of deconstruction in terms of time and space. He relates some of the fundamental features of deconstruction essentially with the Heideggerian understanding of ecstatic temporality, which is inseparable from the questions of spatiality.\(^{292}\) Thus, in Derrida, the centre of writing has been eluded and if nothing has preceded repetition, the “presence” of meaning has now to be taken, not as a continuous modification of presence, but as a rupture in presence in the production of meaning.\(^{293}\) The key notion is “hinge”, also translated as “fracturing”,\(^{294}\) which is the English equivalent of the French word *brisure*, literally meaning “joint” and “break”, among other alternatives. “Fracturing” is a name for articulation and difference, described as the “strange movement” of the trace. A fracturing is the relation of the present to its presence. It takes place in the endless division and multiplication of the presence which is never present, but exists in its difference to itself; this is its possibility as impossibility.\(^{295}\) As Nancy’s interpretation argues,
the joint has already been broken in itself; what joins divides. *Brisure* is the heart, the essence and the passion of the juncture: the exact and infinitely discrete limit upon which the joint articulates itself.\(^{296}\) In “Elliptical Sense”, sense proves to be made up of its own alteration, which means that it not totalizable and thus inappropriable. For Nancy, the sense (of being) is in existence; and existence is the “there is [*il y a*]” of something. What follows is that the “there’ ‘signals’ the place where there is no longer any sign, save for the repetition of the demand, from sign to sign, along all of meaning, toward the limit where existence is exposed”.\(^{297}\) Nancy describes the *there* as “infinitely light”: “it is juncture and *brisure*, the lightening of every system and the ellipsis of every cycle, the slender limit of writing”.

*Différance*, in turn, is the origin of meaning – being of a non-place that differs-defers (*diffère*) at the same time.\(^{298}\) What characterizes *différance* is distance, divergence, delay or deferral. The same principle is expressed in Nancy’s interpretation, according to which *différance* is coming that keeps on coming without arriving, or identity whose presence is a precedence and a prepossessing prevention of itself.\(^{299}\) Similarly, hinge is the origin of space and time, allowing a “psychic imprint” or articulation to appear as a *trace*.\(^{300}\) However, only because there is a difference between the sensory appearing (*apparaissant*) and its lived appearing (*apparaître*) or “mental imprint”, is the temporalizing synthesis able to operate. This synthesis permits differences to appear in a chain of significations. Yet a trace does not let itself be summed up in the simplicity of a present, but it is always-already-there, referring to an absolute past without any possibility of reanimating the evidence of an originary presence. Time is the possibility of the trace in general, as well as the name of the limits of within which the *grammè* is comprehended.

Let us now return to Nancy’s “Elliptical Sense”, which, in its inquiry about writing and sense, tries to determine the element in which an experience becomes possible. The appeal of sense for Nancy can be equated with the demand that

---

“everything should come here” and be altered. It is at such a point, Nancy holds, that the ontological difference comes to be questioned. This happens on the basis that in “the ‘there is’ of existence and in that which ‘comes there’ to presence, being is at stake, as the sense or meaning of being”.  According to him, the idea of being as the transcendental – as something put in reserve, a withdrawal or a retreat of being – is what has dominated philosophy.  Seen against this tradition, the thought of the elliptical sense, or an identity which appears only when it fails to return to the same, does not seem to fit.  There is no being “as such”, out of which singular beings would emerge as instances of the former. Heidegger’s thinking marks a difference in this respect: by reinscribing the sense of being in philosophy, he does not, Nancy says, wish to break through the transcendental, to transcend it and thus penetrate the reserve of its withdrawal. Instead, Heidegger interrogates the withdrawal or reserve itself as the essence and as the sense of being. Being, in Nancy’s interpretation, is “that which is no part of all that is, but which is at stake in existence”.

As a result, he defines the ontico-ontological difference, or the difference between being and everything that exists, as that which “exposes existence as the putting-at-stake of the sense or meaning of being (in and as its finitude)”  The opposition or complementarity between the transcendental (as the withdrawal of the origin, or the retirement of being) and the ontological (as the resource at the origin – the givenness of being) thus loses its pertinence. Instead “another kind of ontology or else a completely different transcendental; or, perhaps nothing of the sort, but an ellipsis of the two”, becomes necessary.  Such a necessity is presence itself, which presents the withdrawal as the nonpresentable. The thought of writing reinscribes the question of the sense of being. As Nancy’s argument goes, all this amounts to the fact that the ontico-ontological difference loses its centrality in Heidegger, although Nancy doubts whether this difference has been

301 Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 99 (Une pensée finie, p. 280).
302 Nancy exemplifies the question by referring to what he calls the major philosophical forms of such thinking. On the one hand, he takes up Aristotle’s notion that being is what keeps itself in reserve over and above the multiplicity of the categories, that is, transcendals through which being is said in “multiple”. On the other hand, there is Kant’s transcendental, which “denotes the substitution of a knowledge of the mere conditions of possible experience for a knowledge of being that would subtend this experience”. Ibid.
303 Nancy, Le discours de la syncope, p. 13. With regard to Descartes and his legacy to the tradition of the modern theory of the subjective constitution as self-foundation, Nancy derives the indecision of philosophy from the subject’s failure to decide its discourse, by pronouncing itself, at a point when metaphysics has exhausted itself and come to an end. Ibid., p. 20.
305 Ibid., p. 100 (Une pensée finie, p. 281).
306 Ibid.
central even for Heidegger himself. Nancy gives reasons for this assumption by stating that being cannot be established in its own difference or juncture, for difference of being “is itself differant”: “it withdraws still further from itself, and from there still calls itself forth”. The sense of the ontico-ontological difference lies “not in its being this difference, nor in its being such and such, but in the fact that it is to come, to arrive, an sich ereignen”. The sense of the difference, thus, takes place in the infinite withdrawal that it traces and effaces at the same time: “it is there but out there, beyond, within repetition”.

In turn, according to Derrida’s interpretation, when the difference between being and beings has been forgotten, the trace of the difference – the trace of the trace – has disappeared as well. The trace can be understood as a vestigial “memory” of non-presence and an irreducible excess that precedes the determination of being as presence. This is how the trace constitutes the possibility of an exit beyond the closure of metaphysics. In Derrida’s view, every attempt to cover a trace leaves another: at least the concealing of the trace is bound to leave a trace, if nothing else. This analysis concerns a world in which beings are determined as objects and the world as a field of objectivity for subjectivity: it is question of the being-represented of beings (Vorgestelltheit des Seienden).

**TRACE**

Derrida’s concept of trace, or the “arche-phenomenon of memory”, belongs to the very movement of signification, which is a priori written, in a “sensible” and “spatial” element that is called “exterior”. Thus, trace is the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside: it is
spacing.\textsuperscript{315} This is the reason why \textit{différance} must be termed temporalization once it is spatiality, for in \textit{différance} time and space are intertwined in an irrevocable fashion. Such an intertwining leads one to think of \textit{différance} as a non-place, a place or region of difference and of different relations.\textsuperscript{316} \textit{Différance} is the “becoming-space of time and becoming-time of space, the ‘originary constitution’ of time and space”\textsuperscript{317}. It is rooted in the problematic of the sign and of writing, as the sign represents the present in its absence, thus taking the place of the present. The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence. According to Nancy’s interpretation, the sense of Derrida’s \textit{différance} lies in the fact that “it is not, but it ‘is made’ or it ‘acts’, and its making and its acting have the essence of decisiveness”. This is what makes the difference according to which “\textit{being withdraws from/within entities}”, so that “\textit{undecidability itself makes the decision}”\textsuperscript{318}.

Nancy follows the same principle in his commenting on the decision between the ontic and the ontological in Heidegger’s philosophy: in question is a decision for decision, and hence, nothing else becomes decided.\textsuperscript{319} This will probably throw some light on Derrida’s own explication, showing that \textit{différance} is a question of “dissimilar otherness …, an interval, a distance, \textit{spacing}”, and it will “be produced with a certain perseverance in repetition”.\textsuperscript{320} It is neither a word nor a concept. \textit{Diffrerences} are productive, but they are also produced.\textsuperscript{321} Worth noting here is the fact that “neither a word nor a concept” is the definition which, according to Nancy, applies to his concept of sense, too: it is “the sense of sense”. What unites \textit{différance} and sense is that they are “neither signifier nor signified, but sending and divergence”, and their shared destination is “to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{315} Cf. Nancy, \textit{The Sense of the World}, p. 9, 13 (\textit{Le sens du monde}, p. 19, 26). In \textit{Time and Being} Heidegger writes about presencing as the opening up of time-space, openness providing the space for its unfolding, that is, spacing (\textit{espacement}). He states that absence also “manifests itself as a mode of presence, … giving all presencing in the open” (esp. p. 13-14, 17). Heidegger (1969/1972). \textit{Time and Being}, trans. Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row. Compared with indecision, a similar position is occupied by the void as proposed by Heidegger e.g. in his essay \textit{Kunst und Raum}. Heidegger notes that “[o]nly too often it appears as merely a lack [\textit{manque}]. … The void … is not an absence but disclosedness [\textit{un porter-à-découvert}]. The void is nothing. It is not even a lack”. Heidegger (1969). \textit{Die Kunst und der Raum}. St. Gallen: Erker Verlag, p. 12.
\item \textsuperscript{316} Kauppinen, \textit{Atopologies of Derrida}, p. 13-14.
\item \textsuperscript{317} Derrida, \textit{Of Grammatology}, p. 8 (\textit{De la grammatologie}, p. 8).
\item \textsuperscript{318} Kauppinen, \textit{Atopologies of Derrida}, p. 13-14.
\item \textsuperscript{319} Nancy, \textit{The Birth to Presence}, p. 103-104 (\textit{Une pensée finie}, p. 138). See also p. 406, n. 47, in which Nancy gives a definition of Derrida’s \textit{différance} in somewhat more technical terms: “[\textit{difference}] differs/defers (the Being of) the difference-of-Being of existence and its action” (\textit{Une pensée finie}, p. 138, n. 1).
\item \textsuperscript{320} Cf. Librett, “Between Meaning and Power”, in \textit{On Jean-Luc Nancy}, p. 119.
\item \textsuperscript{321} Here again, note the \textit{ék-static} nature of being is referred to, in Nancy’s thought, by his choices of terminology: cf. \textit{exscription} and \textit{exposition}, eventually \textit{expeausition} in the context of the human body (cf. the French word \textit{peau}, “skin”).
\end{itemize}
exscribe itself: to go up and touch the concretion of the world where existence makes sense”. 322 I shall come to these problems later.

**SENSE, SPACING, AND INTERVAL**

This brief account of deconstructive strategies, active in Nancy’s development of some of the central issues in his thought, could now be summed up by presenting his notion of spacing, an intertwining of time and space. In Nancy’s thinking the notion of spacing is a fundamental ontological concept, in which both time and space are incorporated. 323 In terms of Nancy’s ontology, this notion is a non-place: a place and a taking place in between, of in-between, a difference and différance, implicating both differing and deferring, as well as a distance (écartement). The connotations of this conception are numerous, particularly in terms of Heidegger’s and Derrida’s philosophy. As regards the conditions of being and thinking itself, Nancy owes a debt to Heidegger’s ontological concept of Zeit-Raum or time-space – which, in turn, has its origin in Kant’s philosophy, in which time and space provide the formal conditions of any experience. 324

In Nancy’s philosophy the taking place of being opens up spaces in which presence is born; this opening carries the name of espacement, “spacing”. Spacing expresses the manner in which a sense articulates itself by dislocating itself. In Nancy spacing is clearly analogous with Derrida’s différance: as Nancy interprets...
différance as presence-to-self as an interval of the to-itself, implying itself as difference.\footnote{325} Furthermore, difference means the dislocation taking place in the origin of sense, which gives space to an infinite exposition of the limit of sense.\footnote{326} The very concept designed to describe this event in Nancy’s theory is spacing.\footnote{327}

Spacing is inherent in the existence of a human body, which keeps distancing itself from itself within its being, as well as dislocating itself outside of itself.\footnote{328} This implies that the existence of the body always extends outside of itself as it is exposed to sense: to itself and to the world.\footnote{329} All being is being towards something (être-à), which signifies that senses emerge only out of relations between singular beings.\footnote{330} Likewise, with a notion that Nancy opposes to Derrida’s “inscription”, all sense is excised (excrit) or inscribed-outside: written out and thus set outside a text or a discourse. This means that for Nancy “the exscription of a text is the existence of its inscription, its existence in the world and in the community”.\footnote{331}

According to Nancy, the notion of spacing implies a kind of erasure of the limit between time and space, as spacing comes to mark the taking-place of being as a space in which sense is born. Both Nancy’s “spacing” and Derrida’s différance are destined to mark a place where sense is born by showing exactly the space of fracturing, that is, the movement of meaning whereby it does not come back to itself, but unfolds an absence of origin as its origin. This happens where meaning reveals its own différance in regard to itself, thus creating a caesura and a space for the exposition of sense. At the same time, the structure of sense proves to be ecstatic: sense has its “origin” outside of every consciousness, unreachable by consciousness. It is only here that sense may be articulated.\footnote{332}

\footnote{325} See e.g. Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 91-111; \(Une \ pensée \ finie\), p. 269-296; The Sense of the World, p. 34-36 (Le sens du monde, p. 57-60); Nancy, “Our History”, esp. p. 105.

\footnote{326} Nancy, A Finite Thinking, esp. p. 91-95 (\(Une \ pensée \ finie\), p. 270-275).

\footnote{327} See e.g. several essays in the collection \textit{The Birth to Presence}.

\footnote{328} Indeed, its being is being-there (Da-sein; être-là) and ek-static by nature. This is one of the main themes in Nancy’s book Corpus, which is concerned with the Cartesian separation of body and mind. In Corpus Nancy wants to investigate their unity, stating that body is the non-discursive place of thought, in which sense is given and out of which sense emerges. Nancy (1992). \textit{Corpus}, Paris: Métailié, cf. p. 19-25. A partial and strongly modified version of this book has been published in English in \textit{The Birth to Presence}, “Corpus”, trans. Claudette Sartiliot, p. 189-207.

\footnote{329} Cf. Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 9-10, 27-28 (\(Une \ pensée \ finie\), p. 19-21, 48-49).

\footnote{330} Here we can draw a line to Heidegger’s thinking, in which the concept of thrownness (Geworfenheit) appears as Dasein’s mode of existence. Thrownness means being thrown to the openness of being-in-the-world; cf. the scope of Nancy’s notion of “exposition”, which will be examined in Chapter 2 of this study. Cf. Being and Time, § 38; see also Nancy, \textit{The Birth to Presence}, cf. p. 96, 103 (\(Une \ pensée \ finie\), p. 127, 136).

\footnote{331} Nancy, Corpus, p. 12-14; cf. Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 8; \textit{The Birth to Presence}, p. 107 (\(Une \ pensée \ finie\), p. 18, 143).

\footnote{332} See also Nancy, Corpus, p. 37; \textit{The Birth to Presence}, note 45, p. 405-406; Lindberg, Susanna
At the base of Nancy’s philosophical task lies the imperative of thinking, an objective which he terms philosophy’s deciding of itself – in its indeterminacy and undecidability, where neither a problem nor a solution is in question. Here Nancy endeavours to ask what is included in the compulsion of doing philosophy, and what is pre-given in it.

Therefore, the same is not able to decide of itself, that is, it gives rise to a syncope or disappearance of the discourse, for the same in itself proves to be an impossibility. Nancy describes Derridean “writing” as “altered sense” or “the infinite re-petition of sense”, the access of sense to sense in its own demand, an access that does not accede. With this, Nancy points to a notion of presence as withdrawal, while the withdrawing is exposed as a trace. Nancy’s “writing” includes the idea that language is alone: writing is what remains of language when it has unburdened itself of sense. Writing determines the element through which an experience becomes possible. It seems that Nancy follows Derrida’s thinking in the context of the coming-into-presence of being: in the instability of discourse, Nancy states, consciousness appears as identity only when it fails in its presentation. It is then that the indecision lets the experiences come through and speak for themselves, thus giving the impossible an identity of its own.

How to think of the birth of sense in its suspension, then, and what is its relation to Nancy’s notion of philosophy? Some central points of interest may be traced to the idea of nothingness. With “nothingness” I point to a notion of a syncope, an interval or a break, thanks to which ever new senses of a work can emerge. The lexical meaning of “syncope” is either a term quoted from musicology, where syncope suggests the change of rhythm. The sense of a thing is born in a rhythmic and discontinuous manner, and as such, its coming into being reminds one of pulsation. Or, as a medical term, “syncope” means fainting caused by a fall of blood pressure. Nancy’s usage of syncope comes close to both meanings; even more than a change of rhythm, it refers

---

333 The undecidability of philosophy is the central theme of Nancy’s essay “The Decision of Existence”. He states that existence is, as such, “the decision of existence”. The same is proposed by Heidegger in Being and Time with terms of “disclosedness” (Erschlossenheit), “decisiveness” (Entschlossenheit), and “decision” (Entscheidung). Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 82-83 (Une pensée finie, p. 107-108).
334 Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 94-95 (Une pensée finie, p. 274).
335 Derrida, Of Grammatology, p. 9; Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 28, 98 (Une pensée finie, p. 50, 279).
to “fainting” as a momentary rupture and suspension, a *caesura* or “counter-rhythmic interruption”.

There are three reasons why I have chosen to give an account of Nancy’s notion of “syncope” in the present context. First, as I see it, the treatise of syncope or interval allows one to make an interpretation of the Derridean *différance* and its position with respect to Nancy’s understanding of presentation, which is the overriding theme of my study. Secondly, by taking up some questions related to the theme of syncope, my aim is to discuss Nancy’s critique of the tradition of metaphysics and thereby motivate his notion of philosophy. And thirdly, I am willing to think that the points brought forward above will contribute to the consideration of the strategies involved in Nancy’s thinking and to further clarify his relation to the tradition of deconstruction.

Not only does syncope take place in the discourse of one’s identity, the concept of “subjectivity” also proves to be syncopated. The shift to the agent of the decision – be it decision for decision, or indecision – of one’s existence shows without doubt some remarkable similarities with Heidegger’s *Dasein*. *Dasein*’s existence is a decision to exist, not in a way that philosophy would decide in favour of the understanding-of-being, but that the understanding-of-being would decide of itself and, thus, would decide in favour of philosophy.


338 Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 84f. (*Une pensée finie*, p. 110f.). This is, in my view, one of Nancy’s suggested points of view in *Le discours de la syncope*: the undecidability in Kant’s thinking, as well as in that of other philosophers, is able to operate as far as there is something in the presentation which cannot be decided of. According to Nancy, the critical phase of Kant’s theory, and philosophy in general, lies in the moment in which the “philosophical autograph can no longer certify, authorise or authenticate itself – but where philosophy designates, implicates, exhibits and denies *itself* in the form of what is very soon to become the modern notion – thus *exterior* to philosophy – of ‘literature’. This is Kant’s moment”. “[Il arrive ainsi] un moment où l’autographe philosophique ne peut plus en quelque sorte se certifier, s’autoriser ou s’authentifier lui-même – mais où la philosophie se désigne, s’implique, s’exhibe et se désavoue sous les espèces de ce qui va devenir, très vite, la notion moderne – donc extérieure à la philosophie – de ‘littérature’. C’est le moment de Kant.” Nancy, *Le discours de la syncope*, p. 27. If *Le discours de la syncope* is fundamentally a treatise on how to present philosophy, a similar project, in the context of the Heideggerian notion of existence, is further illuminated in Nancy’s essay “The Decision of Existence”, which I shall come to later in the context of the notion of finitude. Existence is “understanding-of-Being according to which existence reaches its decision”. Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 84 (*Une pensée finie*, p. 110-111). In Nancy’s words, it is only since Kant that it is possible and necessary to distinguish philosophy and literature. In examining Nancy’s idea of philosophy and the role of interval in it, it is his three early monographs, *Le discours de la syncope* (1976), *Ego sum* (1979), and *L’impératif catégorique* (1983), as well as “The Forgetting of Philosophy” (*L’oubli de la philosophie*, 1988), which perhaps are the foremost of Nancy’s treatises to give an insight into these matters. The first and the third were dedicated to Kant, while *Ego sum* focuses on Descartes. *Le discours de la syncope* is Nancy’s analysis of Kant’s literary style or, of Kant’s philosophy as literature, read as a literary work. From this point of view, Nancy’s project in reading Kant is in many respects a deconstructive one – in fact, Nancy is concerned with Kant’s reading through the lens of a deconstructive analysis. Nancy targets here Kant’s first critique, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*The Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781) and, above all, the account which Kant gives of subjectivity. The exploration of the constitution of thinking appears in different forms throughout Nancy’s work, from *Ego sum* up to his most recent publications. The structure of *Ego sum* owes partly to Descartes’ second
In their turn, the discourse and its outside are bound to repeat eternally the ways in which they are instituted – be it philosophical, social, moral, political, or economic – and therefore the question of philosophy, constantly deciding of itself, returns to the manner in which the outside of the discourse is produced, as well as the conditions of the discourse. 339 “Indecision” stands for a proposition which can neither be proved nor deduced from any system, nor excluded from it. The term indecision is involved in the failure of discourse and its way of self-demonstration, and is thus a rupture or fracturing of philosophy itself, which can even be termed an aporia. 340 The difference between philosophical and mathematical cognition lies principally in the fact that “discursive (logical) distinctness arises through concepts”, but “intuitive (aesthetic) distinctness arises through intuitions”. 341 So the discourse is the order proper to philosophy in itself, and this order is instituted by the fading (évanouissement) of the originary construction and presentation. 342 For this reason discourse proceeds from the syncope of intuition and replaces it with the mode of exposition. 343

---

339 Le discours de la syncope, p. 10-11. Nancy remarks here that the term “indecision” originates from meta-mathematics, from the model of mathesis and Platonic-Cartesian knowledge.
340 Philosophy, as soon as it comes to be exposed, is fragile and vulnerable by nature; invulnerability is proper to mathematical presentation. Ibid., p. 41-42.
342 Ibid., p. 43.
343 Of terminology, Nancy remarks that in Latin or German “exposition” means roughly the same word as Darstellung (or Vortrag); however, if all discursivity is obtained on the condition that it is roughly the same, this means to Nancy that it is obtained in an undecided identity. Ibid., p. 43.
2. Coming-into-Presence in Nancy’s Thinking: Remarks on the Historical Background

As regards some of the focuses of Nancy’s thought, Martin Heidegger’s philosophy has marked an important point of departure for him from the beginning: Nancy recurrently returns to issues which originate from the question of being as put forward by Heidegger. In examining some themes around the Heideggerian notion of being, my point of view is the differentiation between representation – presencing of what is present – and presentation – being as disclosedness. These concepts are to be examined, however, in order to get a grasp of the interpretations given by Nancy. How does being manifest itself in his philosophy, or what does it mean that being comes into presence?

The notion of presence may be set next to concepts such as Darstellung and Vorstellung, where Darstellung stands for the Latin praesentatio, the corresponding verb being “to present”, while Vorstellung signifies re-praesentatio, having the sense of “to make something present” or “to allow something to present itself” (in French, [se] rendre présent), thus hinting at the presencing of what is present. These issues will be dealt with in this chapter; associated points – such as how is it that anything may come into being in some figure, or the roles of sensibility and intelligibility in this investigation – will be discussed in the later parts of this study.

How should one characterize being in terms of presentation or coming into presence, if this is what being, first of all, “means”? To explore this question, I shall discuss its origins in Nancy. For Heidegger thinking of the present in terms of presence announces a metaphysical approach to the nature of being. First to be considered is the thought of existence. For Heidegger, as has been pointed out above, no notion of being “in general” exists, but it is still possible to speak of the “meaning” or the “truth of being”. Nancy adds to this notion the emphasis on the active position of sense: being as making-sense, or being acted as sense. That Nancy considers, above all, the practical aspect of being, also amounts to the fact that his inquiry into being begins from the existence of existents – which is not to say, however, that this would not also be Heidegger’s

344 Cf. Heidegger, On Time and Being, p. 11-12.
345 Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 176-177 (La pensée dérobée, p. 90-91). Cf. section 1.1.
point of departure in the questioning of being. The theme of existence will be
the main point in section 2.1.

How does Nancy motivate his understanding of the idea of coming-into-
presence? In order to consider this concept, and before going to its alleged origins
in Heideggerian thought, I shall take a brief look at Hegel’s term *Darstellung*,
currently translated as “presentation”. In section 2.1, I shall attempt to illustrate
its relatedness to the problematic of coming-into-presence in the philosophy of
both Nancy and Heidegger. By *Darstellung* Hegel refers to the presentation of an
idea in its sensible figure (sinnliche Darstellung der Idee). To be examined is how
the Hegelian questioning of *Darstellung* paves the way for Nancy’s notion of
presentation. As I see it, Nancy seeks an interpretation of this term which would
bring forward the event-like character of being “as we have inherited it from
Hegel”346 – an idea of being as existence.347 Along with this notion, I shall trace
some ideas linked with Nancy’s related concepts as seen against the background
of Hegel, and also, via Hegel, of Heidegger. Nancy has commented extensively
on Hegel: in his monograph *The Speculative Remark* he aims at deconstructing
Hegel’s notion of Aufhebung, “sublation”, in a way which largely parallels his
dealing with the notions of philosophical discourse and its presentation in his
books on Kant and Descartes, written in the 1970’s and early 1980’s.348

However, to outline the scope of being in Heidegger’s philosophy would
prove to be an impossible task in the context of my dissertation, even with
respect to Nancy’s work alone. Therefore, in section 2.2 I attempt instead to
lay the foundation for the discussion of Nancy’s notion of presentation and
its connection to art, as well as clarify the differences between Heidegger’s and
Nancy’s understanding of coming-into-presence and its roots.

---

346 Nancy (2000). *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne,
347 E.g. ibid., p. 172 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 198).
348 Nancy (2001). *The Speculative Remark (One of Hegel’s Bons Mots)*, trans. Céline Surprenant,
Paris: Galilée, 1973, p. 22-24). *The Speculative Remark* is the first of Nancy’s early monographs, the
others being dedicated to Kant (Le discours de la syncope and L’impératif catégorique) and Descartes
(Ego sum). In *The Speculative Remark* Nancy’s developing of the theme of presentation is already at
an initial stage; it was in the books to come that he took up this notion more extensively. However,
I have found Nancy’s monographs on Kant and Descartes more appropriate with respect to the
treatment of presentation in this dissertation. However, *The Speculative Remark* opens the scheme
of Nancy’s techniques of deconstructive reading which he has repeatedly adopted in the three following
commentaries mentioned above. Later, Nancy wrote another book on Hegel, titled Hegel: The
Restlessness of the Negative, in which he examines, above all, the relation between the concepts of sense
Smith and Steven Miller. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (Hegel: L’inquiétude du négatif,
But before going to the problems of presentation and representation – thus attempting to open a perspective to the question why, with a view to art, presentation comes to the fore in a specific sense – I would like to take up the Kantian separation between the notions of Vorstellung and Darstellung.\footnote{The first book dedicated to Nancy’s notion of presentation was a monograph on Kant, *Le discours de la syncope, I. Logodaedalus*. Here the concept of Darstellung is the centre of attention.} In Kant’s terminology Darstellung is referred to as the sensuous presentation of ideas, as “exhibition” or “exposition”. Darstellung names the intuitive presentation of a thing, without which there is thought but no cognition. By contrast, Vorstellung, a concept related to Darstellung, is the traditional rendering of “representation” or “conception”.\footnote{See e.g. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 961, 980.} Imagination is the faculty of Darstellung, for it is imagination that makes an intuition coincide with the presence of its object. Darstellung refers to the Latin translation of “exhibition”: *subjectio sub adspectum*.\footnote{Here, according to Kant, *Darstellung* offers an example. Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, § 59, see also p. 14-18. Cf. Beaufret, Jean (1973/1984). *Dialogue avec Heidegger, II. Philosophie moderne*. Paris: Minuit, p. 78-80; Derrida, “Sending: On Representation”, esp. p. 306-312 (*Psyché*, p. 119-123); also Escoubas, Éliane (1986). *Imago mundi*, Paris: Galilée, p. 20.} Vorstellung designates the way of making or rendering the thing present. Vorstellung means re-praesentio and, thus, has the sense of repetition – of establishing something before oneself and of keeping things at one’s disposal.\footnote{Cf. Derrida, “Sending: On Representation”, p. 307-309 (*Psyché*, p. 120-121).} Imagination has an intermediate status between sensibility and the understanding. Imagination joins together intuitions and concepts, thus featuring in the schematic synthesis which generates knowledge and experience.\footnote{Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, A 140/B 179. In another formulation, Kant says: “[Only] where the concept of an object is given, the function of judgement, in its employment of that concept for cognition, consists in presentation (exhibition), i.e. in placing beside the concept an intuition corresponding to it”. Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, p. 34.} This is to say that by virtue of this a cognition of the object under a given concept is possible, as Kant explains in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Intuition means reception: it is dependent on the presence of the object; in fact, intuition presupposes the presence of the object. It is a question of knowledge only when concepts are joined with intuitive presentation. In *The Critique of Judgement* imagination obtains a more independent status: it produces representations. It is by virtue of representations that something, that is, forms, are born. Very roughly, one might say that the separation made by Kant between the concepts of Vorstellung and Darstellung is mediated in Nancy’s philosophy, which is reflected in Nancy’s distinguishing between the concepts of “presentation”
and “representation”. In important ways this mediation also happens through Heidegger’s interpretations.

### 2.1 Presentation and Darstellung: Nancy on Hegel

The consideration of G. W. F. Hegel’s (1770–1831) importance to Nancy’s thinking of coming-into-presence and the associated questions could easily entail taking into consideration most of the tradition of Western philosophy. As a treatment like is not possible within the scope of this thesis, I shall limit myself to the viewpoints that are most closely related to the theme of presentation. Fundamental to Nancy’s work on Hegel is Hegel’s understanding of the object of philosophy, which is the Absolute Spirit or God. This is reality without qualification, which can be approached only negatively as that which is, as a whole, not finite, not a part. The motive for dealing with presentation is linked with Nancy’s confrontation with the Hegelian notion of *Aufhebung*, “sublation”, which he studies within the framework of the thought of difference or interval. For Nancy, *Aufhebung* or sublation works for the purpose of self-identification of sense. The Hegelian Absolute unfolds according to a dialectical model of self-development and evolution, which is the activity to recover totality in history. The Absolute is a movement where knowledge and the true are

---

354 Presentation, designed by both terms *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung*, covers Hegel’s understanding of the nature of thinking from *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Bamberg und Würzburg, 1807) to *Aesthetics* (*Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, Berlin, 1820–21) and *The Science of Logic* (1830). In German the verb *vorstellen* means “to introduce or to present something”, as well as “to represent something”, especially in art. The verb *darstellen* is also used of representing or exhibiting something. As Michael Inwood points out in his *Hegel Dictionary*, *Vorstellung* contrasts, on the one hand, with perception, sensation and intuition, in that it does not need to involve the presence of the represented object, and on the other hand, with thought, concept and idea, in that it involves an image or a pictorial element. Hence, *Vorstellung* is the intermediate stage between intuition (*Anschauung*), or the sensory apprehension of individual external objects, and conceptual thought. Inwood, Michael (1992). *A Hegel Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 257-259.

355 In German, the verb *aufheben*, “to sublate”, has a double meaning; “to abolish” and “to elevate”. In this way, it means both preserving and destroying. See Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, p. 284.

356 In his treatise of Hegel, one may notice a parallel between Nancy’s treatment of sublation and his accounts of Kant and Descartes.

357 More generally, the transgressive movement of *Aufhebung* may be called circulation and self-reproduction as the production of meaning.

358 Dialectics is the activity of recovering the totality of history; besides providing a historical model, dialectics gives a model for epistemology and ontology, as well as a method of presentation of ideas or conclusions. Besides providing a historical model, dialectics gives a model for epistemology and ontology, as well as a method of presenting ideas or conclusions. In the dialectic movement Hegel sees Spirit (*Geist*) developing through history, each period having a *Zeitgeist*, a spirit of the age. In repeating the division and unity, the impulses of life gradually approach towards the Idea. These stages
gathered together in their identity; the “substance” is not the same as “the true”, but the true is both substance and the subject. In the movement of sublation the negative is transgressed, as the thesis isnegated by the antithesis, which, in turn, is negated by the synthesis. Sublation is simultaneous preserving and maintaining of what is sublated, and thus it bears the meaning of conserving the stakes in the movement of transgression. What unfolds in the history of thought is the substance, understood as the self-positing of the subject, which, in turn, establishes the unity of the self-identity of the spirit from out of an opposition, diversity or otherness, so that what is required for sublation is the gathering of diversity into unity.

In his early monograph on Hegel Nancy offers a reading of Hegel’s term Aufhebung or the aufheben. Here In this book Nancy creates a number of links between Aufhebung and the production of sense, all seen through a lens which focuses on something that I am willing to interpret in terms of the syncope or the différance. A general idea of Nancy’s treatment of Hegelian dialectics is to show that it cannot determine the uncertain conditions of discourse in which any sense is being produced. According to Nancy’s argument, the world, or will eventually reach the end of self-understanding, that is, when Spirit comes to know itself. Thus, the term “Idea” is used to announce the ultimate unity between a concept and its object: in accordance with its own concept the Idea transposes itself into natural existence. In this constellation, the Idea and its presentation prove to be equally necessary to each other. Art, for its part, is philosophical thought expressed through sensuous means – thus, Hegel establishes art as ontological knowledge. Art forms, together with religion and philosophy, an absolute Spirit. However, art is inferior to philosophy in Hegel’s system. Cf. Schaeffer, Jean-Marie (2000). Art of the Modern Age, trans. Steven Rendall. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 135-137.

As Nancy states, he has dedicated his book The Speculative Remark to the theme of Aufhebung. See Nancy, The Speculative Remark, p. 8f. (La remarque spéculative, p. 16f).

Cf. Derrida, Writing and Difference, p. 322-323 (L’écriture et la différence, p. 375-376). In his philosophy, probably best represented by Phenomenology of the Spirit in the present context, Hegel relies on the conception that absolute Spirit comes to be determined as the unity of the ideal (Knowledge) and the real (Being) in thought; in other words, that knowledge and reality are, finally, one. Everything, including our perceptions and experiences, belong to a procession of thought that is moving towards the end of history. This ultimate and final unity Hegel calls “Absolute Knowledge” or “Absolute Spirit”. Absolute spirit – or reason – is the unity of its concepts and its objectivity, being absolute only inssofar as it is the concept for itself. This is to say that philosophy is always related to its final goal, which is truth, since oppositions are gathered in the Spirit. Through the dialectic of subjectivity and objectivity human consciousness unfolds as it gradually realizes that mind and reality are one; this is called the self-consciousness of the spirit (Selbstbewußtsein), in a way that meaning becomes identical with oneself. Here the role of the subject is prominent – it might be said that the Hegelian dialectic is, more than anything else, the process of the production of the subjectivity of the absolute subject: as its knowing itself is the knowing that conditions all objectivity, the subject is the absolute itself. However, it is in the process of unfolding and taking shape that the subjective and the objective spirit work as the path “on which this side of reality or existence forms itself”. The basis for this metaphysics is that a unity, to be a unity, must be a unity of parts. G. W. F. Hegel (1817-30/1990). Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline, and Critical Writings, ed. Ernst Behler, New York: Continuum (Encyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse, Heidelberg), § 303-304, 453-464.


Cf. Hutchen, Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy, p. 27. It is a commonly known fact that Hegel’s idealism consists of parts and a whole as the dialectical pair: subjectivity is what
sense, in fact has no exteriority or transcendence that could be sublated, or any absent origin toward which it would move. Instead, the presentation of the world turns out to be incessantly strange to mankind, just as the future proves undecidable.\textsuperscript{364} What results is that the world is and ends up with the movement of sense, revealing in itself the work of negativity – hence Nancy’s notion of “open immanence” or \textit{transimmanence} of the world.

As B. C. Hutchens points out, unlike Nancy’s own notion of sense understood as “open” immanence, the Hegelian synthesis stands for “reflective” immanence \textit{par excellence}.\textsuperscript{365} Hence, Hegel’s “Idea” or “concept” as the gathering of diversity into unity is what Nancy calls the “self-subsistent, self-determined unity of distinct moments of becoming”.\textsuperscript{366} Being, or the universal and abstract, is reflected as what is objective in opposition to the subject, and this reflection is determined as mediation in the sense of becoming.\textsuperscript{367} In Hutchens’s view, for Nancy such an account at once “involves closure of the terms of any relation and reduction of the plural singularities of beings to a general or universal foundation”. In the following, I shall consider how the notion of sense resonates with Nancy’s thought of the Hegelian \textit{Darstellung}, and compare the meaning which Heidegger gives to \textit{Darstellung}. How do these interpretations relate to Nancy’s dealing with presentation, and, ultimately, to his thinking of art? These questions are raised in this chapter, and will be developed further in Chapter 4.\textsuperscript{369}

Associated with the previous notions, Nancy approaches the question of presentation (\textit{Darstellung}) explicitly, using Hegel’s \textit{Science of Logic} as his principal source. In this context, Nancy gives \textit{Aufhebung} the meaning of “relief”, the

---


\textsuperscript{365} Hutchens, \textit{Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy}, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{366} Nancy, \textit{The Speculative Remark}, p. 32 (\textit{La remarque spéculative}, p. 47).

\textsuperscript{367} But later Hegel gave history the meaning of actuality (\textit{energeia}). Cf. Hegel, \textit{Werke}, vol. XIV, p. 321, \textit{cit}. Heidegger, \textit{Pathmarks}, p. 330. What I shall clarify in greater detail below is the thought that art is not a presentation of an Idea for Nancy, but just a vestige or a trace, “smoke without fire”, left by the Idea in its disappearing. The trace is not the sensible trace of the insensible, but it is the sensible \textit{traced} or \textit{tracing}, as its very \textit{sense}. This can be equated with the notion of atheism. Nancy, \textit{The Muses}, p. 96-97 (\textit{Les muses}, p. 154-155).

\textsuperscript{368} Cf. Hutchens, \textit{Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy}, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{369} As a foundation for Nancy’s working through Hegel there is Hegel’s understanding of the object of philosophy, which is the Absolute Spirit or God. This is reality without qualification, which can be approached only negatively as that which \textit{is}, as a whole, not finite, not a part.
projection of the figure of philosophical discourse: it is “determinateness right
at itself”, an sich, the one that “the proposition proposes”. Aufhebung is for
Nancy “the word, the speculative” – it is “the word that is speculative but is so
without syntax, without copula”. This is what the Science of Logic begins with:
the “empty word” or the emptiness of the word as the immediacy of being. The
Logic ends by presenting itself as the presentation of the disappearance of the
word, since “logic exhibits the self-movement [die Selbstwegung] of the absolute
Idea only as the original word, which is an outwardizing or utterance [Äusserung],
but an utterance that in being [indem sie ist] has immediately vanished again
[verschwinden] as something outer [Äusseres]”. This is the moment of logic.
Nancy’s deconstructive reading of Hegel would thus result in asking if it is
possible that what must “present” itself does not present itself, but differentiates
itself and alienates itself – does the necessity of manifestation or appearance entail
the necessity of loss? This would be a question of the form of Darstellung.
In Nancy’s view, the aufheben, as the form of the word, as the “vanishing of
the lexicon”, is neither a concept nor a signification, but rather a passage from
one text to another. In his interpretation of Aufhebung he, in this way, questions
the terms of logical identity in Hegelian dialectics. According to Hutchens’s
formulation, what Nancy wonders is whether there might be any place in the
dialectic for undecidability, for meanings that are restless and “lost” – that is, born
between singular existents, and thus are open. Aufhebung is, thus, the principle
for the production of philosophical discourse. In order for the empty word
to be uttered, so that it may give way to its exteriorization and pronunciation,
it has to be thought of departing from its vanishing (Verschwindung). Or rather,

370 What unfolds in the history of thought is the substance, which encompasses both subject and
object when subject is understood as the movement of self-positing. By self-positing Hegel means
establishing the unity of the self-identity of the spirit from out of an opposition, diversity or otherness,
so that what is required for sublation (Aufhebung) is the gathering of diversity into unity. Sublation
is simultaneous preserving and maintaining of what is sublated, and thus it bears the meaning of
conserving the stakes in the movement of transgression.
371 Nancy, The Speculative Remark, p. 106 (La remarque spéculative, p. 132). Cf. Lacoue-Labarthe,
that the concept is the protrusion (saillie) of the figure.
374 Hutchens, Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy, p. 27.
375 In a later study on Hegel, Hegel: L’incertitude du négatif (translated as Hegel: The Restlessness of
the Negative), Nancy takes a new position concerning similar matters from the point of view of the
subject and of negativity: the subject is “what it makes of itself, and what it does is the experience
of the conscience of the negativity of the substance”; as for negativity, history means the sense of its
movement. With Hegel’s philosophy – and, according to Nancy, in fact with all philosophy since
Hegel – we are thus dealing with the thought of philosophical discourse which is transforming itself
the empty word has to resurrect or re-emerge, since always, “from the end the memory has already recited this word”.376 This is Nancy's explication of the aufheben: the passage from representation to philosophical thinking, or in other words, the speculative process in language. From this, he concludes that “Darstellung is the fact of the aufheben, and the aufheben is the process through which the speculative is and presents itself in the outside, in the word”.377 Based on the logic of the constitutive absence that gives rise to any presentation, this statement correlates, of course, with Nancy's fundamental ideas of being.

What is it, more exactly, that allows for the confrontation between the Hegelian process of the unfolding of the Spirit and the notion of presentation, Darstellung, in Nancy's interpretation? This notion is grounded in Hegel's understanding of “history” as becoming, as achieving actuality (Wirklichkeit) and the truth of beings.378 His notion of truth, as read on the basis provided by Logic, is something which Nancy conceives of as the taking place of the true, beyond the true itself.379 Here Nancy makes a difference between, on the one hand, the knowledge of the true “in” the thing which arrives, and on the other, the conception concerning what appears as a simple event or the fact that it arrives, that is, the eventness of its event, or “that something happens”.380

In Nancy, this problem now proves to be that of the sense of the eventness of the event, which, in turn, evokes the problem of the taking place of the sense

376 Nancy, *The Speculative Remark*, p. 108 (La remarque spéculative, p. 134). When speaking of the production of discourse, Nancy now turns his focus to the language of philosophy, which, nevertheless, belongs to an economy in which representation reigns “under the species of dogmatic metaphysics”, that is to say, under the species of the empiricism of meaning, “according to usage, in a word”. Yet philosophy is privileged in terms of representation, namely its ability to define its own use of language. It “has the right to select from the language of common life which is made for the world of pictorial thinking, such expressions that seem to approximate [scheinen … nahe kommen] to the determinations of a concept”. Nancy, *The Speculative Remark*, p. 113 (La remarque spéculative, p. 141); cf. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia of Logic (With the Zusätze)*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991, § 26, cf. § 33, cit. Nancy, *The Speculative Remark*, p. 113-114; p. 186-187, note 12 (La remarque spéculative, p. 141, note 146; p. 142); Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 708, cit. Nancy, *The Speculative Remark*, p. 114 (La remarque spéculative, p. 142).

377 Nancy, *The Speculative Remark*, p. 120 (La remarque spéculative, p. 149). This is in outline of the way in which Nancy introduces the deeper meaning of Hegelian Aufhebung, “the word, the speculative”: “a word [seems to approximate] the speculative” (un mot (paraît s'approcher) du spéculatif). According to Nancy, the concept is not in language but in philosophy, and the passage from representation is also a passage between word and concept. Citing Hegel, “in common life, too, one associates [verbinden] with it the same concept for which philosophy employs it [gebrauchen]; for common life has no concept, but only pictorial thoughts and general ideas, and to recognise the concept in what is else a mere general idea is philosophy itself”. Nancy, *The Speculative Remark*, p. 114 (La remarque spéculative, p. 142).


of being: is sense independent of its eventness?\textsuperscript{381} Or, is it even possible to think of sense in terms other than surprise itself, the singular event of being, without its being reducible to a general foundation?

For Hegel, what unfolds in the history of thought is the substance, which he understands as the self-positing of the subject. The self-positing of the subject, in turn, establishes the unity of the self-identity of the spirit from out of an opposition, diversity or otherness, so that what is required for sublation is the gathering of diversity into unity. Yet Nancy states that Hegel’s position is not sufficient to account for how it is that there are singular events of sense and of thought, since for Nancy, Hegel’s thought disregards the aspect of surprise involved in the notion of the eventness of the event.

The question which at this point guides Nancy’s reasoning could be expressed in the following terms: how is one to retain the event without turning it into a mere object or moment of thinking? How could one think “within” the surprising event?\textsuperscript{382} As I see it, what we need to ask is, in other words, how Nancy retains an ambivalence in his inquiry – how is it that he both tries to think of the event in the midst of its singular, historical taking place, and to see it from a standpoint that is situated above history, above the particularity of each event. How should one thus discuss the possibility that something unforeseeable may happen, and how do we remain open to its irreducible otherness? This is one of the questions which Nancy attempts to answer.

The above-mentioned “surprise” of the event, allegedly lacking in Hegel’s interrogation, means for Nancy the way in which the thought of each singular event of sense is itself an event – that is, how each event is always already a surprise to experience and thought.\textsuperscript{383} Surprise announces that thinking necessarily comes as a surprise to itself. Thus it has no foundation from which it occurs; or, one could say that the event of thought is not determinable in advance, with no greater history beyond it, which would determine the development of thought.

It is probably for this reason that B. C. Hutchens concludes that the surprise of the event, as put forward by Nancy, is negativity as there is no origin from which the surprise occurs. This is, in Hutchens’s opinion, because there is “a ‘disagreement’ between Being and beings”, more exactly, “a friction between

\textsuperscript{381} Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 161 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 187).
\textsuperscript{382} Cf. Hutchens, Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{383} Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 33 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 53); see also Hutchens, Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy, p. 57-61.
Being’s capacity to found the essentiality of beings, and the being’s irreducibility … to such founding”. 384 Nancy’s view, whereby he refers to the idea of the groundless ground of being and the birth of eventuality on such “ground”, is contrary to Hegel, who gives negativity a different sense: in the movement of sublation, negating is “self-relating negativity” and nothing negative in itself. 385

What results from this is that as the positing of itself, the subject is both the subject and the object, the one which posits and the one which is posited. Hutchens, as I see it, has it right in his formulation when he states that Nancy’s concept of “surprise” serves “to fragment the substantialist metaphysics of reflective immanence by opening a rupture in the thinking–event dichotomy”. 386 In other words, Nancy aims the notion of thought as the surprising event at arguing for the singularity of sense: no sense is possible unless – as the event of thinking – it arrives as a “shock” to itself that opens its own possibility. 387 Otherwise, there would be nothing but “anonymous existence” or “the monotony of mere happening”. 388

That in Hegel “truth” means the “identity of concept and thing”, leads Nancy to consider the interrelation of truth and event and, furthermore, the subject of the event. “Concept”, for Hegel, is the phenomenon or appearance, which takes hold of itself as the truth. 389 Now, this corresponds with the fact that the Hegelian “truth” means the taking place of the true (le vrai) “in” the thing which arrives. Such a notion of truth thus differs from the conception concerning what appears as a “simple event” or the fact that it arrives, that is, the eventness of its event. The question is now the following: how is the “taking place” of being – its surprise to thinking – to be defined as truth? As Nancy explains, such eventness differs from, or even contrasts with, a phenomenon; instead, it does this as the “non-phenomenal truth of the phenomenal itself and as such”. The truth of the “taking place” is, then, beyond what is exhibited as true in the “taking place”. 389 Such eventness differs from, or even contrasts with, a phenomenon; in Nancy’s view, it does this as the “non-phenomenal truth of

384 Hutchens, Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy, p. 60.
385 Cf. Heidegger, Pathmarks, p. 331. According to Derrida’s interpretation, such negativity never takes place and never presents itself, because in doing so it would start to work again. Derrida, Writing and Difference, p. 323 (L’écriture et la différence, p. 376).
389 The question culminates now on whether attention should be paid to the fact that the event is conceived or that the event is conceived. Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 160 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 186-187).
the phenomenal itself and as such”. 391 This truth is the event (Geschehen) to which it is closer than any advent, Nancy remarks. 392

Consequently, Nancy’s opinion is that the task of philosophy in Hegel’s thinking should be read, first, in terms of knowing the truth of that which takes place (as event), and secondly, as conceiving of taking place as such. All this comes down to understanding “beyond the true” the truth of the taking place of the true, which marks the “opening of the modernity”, thus inaugurated by Hegel. 393

What is said above would thus come to mean that, at the present point, Nancy finds reasons for making a separation between being as event in its truth and the truth of the event, which is bound to stay outside the advent of the sense. 394 Yet, according to Nancy, it is not so much a question of Hegel’s account of history (Geschichte) as Geschehen, the “entire Being or act”, which is a nonsubstantive verb and as such nonsubstantifiable. 395 Nancy stresses that the happening or the coming is defined by its position as the having-always-already-been, which of course corresponds to Heidegger’s constitution of time. In this way, Nancy explains, Hegel refuses a notion of history in the sense of Geschichte or a simple episode, and adopts instead a thinking of Geschehen in its active and productive meaning of becoming. In brief, what is at stake in Hegel’s thinking is a withdrawal and difference from any notion of essence, if understood as subject, substance or ground. 396

What, then, is the being of Geschehen as such? Nancy sees it necessary to raise this question, as he concludes that what Geschehen misses is precisely any character of “as such”. 397 Instead of “there is” I have to speak of that there is (non le “il y a” mais qu’il y a). This results in the “there is” in Hegel’s philosophy equalling the being of being, which is simultaneously coming and withdrawing. 398 That is, at stake is the event of being that is necessary in order for being to be, which, however, is not the substance, subject, or ground of being. According to Nancy, there is thus a certain similarity between the movement of the Hegelian

---

393 Ibid.
394 Ibid., p. 162, 175 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 188, 201).
395 Ibid., p. 162 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 188).
396 Ibid., p. 163 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 189).
397 Ibid., p. 164-165 (Être singulier pluriel, p.190).
398 Ibid., p. 162-163 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 188-189).
absolute Spirit and the Heideggerian Ereignis. The idea concerning the sameness of being and thinking results in identifying the creation of the world and the thought of God: their similarity demands us “to think of the event [of being] as we have inherited it from Hegel”. The event is the interruption of the process, corresponding to Heidegger’s idea of thrownness (Geworfenheit) into being or Hegel’s words of “an infant being born”.

2.2 Heidegger and Nancy on Coming-into-Presence

In Nancy’s distinguishing between the concepts of “presentation” and “representation”, his point of departure is the Heideggerian term Anwesen, “presence”. In fact, Nancy even lets us know that “no philosophical tradition is possible as such but departing from the point at which philosophy, having as its object and as its condition its own presentation, produces the category

---

399 As a reaction to the interpretation of being as the same as presence, Heidegger aims at returning to the pre-ontological stage of thinking, which includes raising being to the centre of attention in terms of an event (Ereignis): coming into presence, the unfolding of being in its openness or disclosedness. What has not been discussed previously and now arises to the fore, is the distinction between the present and presence. According to Nancy’s interpretation, thinking, truth and the taking place of being, announced by Ereignis in Heidegger’s terminology, are put on a par in the following sentence, a single remark from Hegel’s Science of Logic: “But philosophy is not meant to be a narration of happenings but a cognition of what is true in them, and further, on the basis of this cognition, to comprehend that which, in the narrative, appears as a mere happening.” Hegel, Science of Logic, p. 588. (“Aber die Philosophie soll keine Erzählung dessen sein, was gesehiet, sondern eine Erkenntnis dessen, was wahr darin ist, und aus dem Wahren soll sie ferner das begreifen, was in der Erzählung als ein bloßes Geschehen erscheint.” Wissenschaft der Logik, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969, p. 260.) Cit. Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 159, see also note 2, p. 206 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 185). The connection, associated in the first place with the notion of the event, is suggested by Nancy in his article “The Surprise of the Event”, in Being Singular Plural, p. 159-176 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 183-202). Cf. also Lindberg, Susanna (2001). “Hegelin ja Heideggerin välienselvittely”, Tiede & edistys 2001: 3, p. 182 (p. 177-197). See also note 27 in Lindberg’s article.

400 Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 175 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 201).

401 Ibid., p. 172 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 198); see also Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, § 456, p. 273.

402 Heidegger, On Time and Being, e.g. p. 45-46; see also Derrida, “Sending: On Representation”, p. 307-308 (Psyché, p. 120). In Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics Heidegger discusses the notion of Vorstellung on the basis provided by Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason. In Kant, human knowledge involves the correlation of a singular intuition and a universalizing thought or concept. Despite their diversity, intuition and concept must share a common bond which makes possible their correlation, that is, synthesis. This common denominator is the fact that both are a presentation (Vorstellung). The translation of Vorstellung proves to be problematic; Kant himself suggests “representation” (repraesentatio). Yet “presentation” would be a more adequate rendering of Vorstellung, as the translator of Critique of Pure Reason proposes, for vorstellen is something we do (in other words, what the consciousness of the knower does), not something that Vorstellungen do. Besides, vorstellen in such use never points to “represent” in the sense of “stand for”. See Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A 320, B 376 (p. 366); B xvii, note 73 (p. 22). Heidegger seeks to determine what conditions make possible the synthesis of the two types of presentation in man – intuition and concept – in the unified process of presentation called “knowledge”. Heidegger, Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, p. 21. Later (1942-43), however, he suggests that representation (Vorstellen) connotes presentation by the subject to the subject. Cf. Heidegger (1980). Holzwege. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, p. 128.
and the problem of Darstellung”.403 “Presentation” means to him, first of all, “exposition”, which in every discourse borders the sense of significations, and is always presented at the limits of sense.404 Presentation is nothing else but presence before any signification, letting the thing present itself “in truth”.405

Representation, in turn, takes a signification to its limit, in a way that the thought of representation includes its own limit as its closure.406 This is to say that representation tends to close in itself also what lies outside of its limits, so that representational thinking strives to give a thing a fixed identity, and at the same time to define the ground it emerges from. As a result, nothing will emerge any more on any ground.407 This is also to say that representation has a substitutive function as regards the represented object, if the represented thing is understood as a picture or as an idea that is brought before the subject. Correspondingly, the thought of presentation does not imply a subjective reproduction of an “original presence”. On the contrary, it suggests presenting something which is not to be presented, or could not be completed; referring to Hegel, Nancy states that it is “neither Nature nor Idea, which is to say, finitude itself, insofar as it is a coming into presence without presence (and without secrecy)”.408

This statement is in line with the view that representation has a substitutive function as regards the represented object. Correspondingly, the thought of presentation in Nancy is not designed to imply a subjective reproduction of an “original presence”. How to describe the expression which Nancy gives to the Heideggerian differentiation between Darstellung, “presentation”, and Vorstellung, “representation”, and what are the senses he gives to these concepts, are my questions in the following.

ON PRESENCE AND COMING-INTO-PRESENCE IN HEIDEGGER’S THINKING:
VORSTELLUNG AND DARSTELLUNG

In Heidegger’s view, it was as early as in the post-Hellenic age that the relation to being was conceived of as repraesentatio and Vorstellung, meaning an object

403 Nancy, Le discours de la syncope, p. 73.
404 Ibid., p. 80.
406 Cf. e.g. Nancy, The Gravity of Thought, p. 53-54 (L’oubli de la philosophie, p. 77-81); Nancy, Le poids d’une pensée, p. 129-135.
407 Nancy, Le poids d’une pensée, p. 130.
408 Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 22-23 (Une pensée finie, p. 42-43); cf. e.g. Heidegger, On Time and Being.
present before and for the subject, as well as the equivalence of one representation to another.\footnote{409} According to him, the ancient metaphysics determined the being of beings as permanence and constancy (Beständigkeit und Ständigkeit). From this notion it follows that the authentic being comes to be understood as \textit{ousia} or \textit{parousia} (οὐσία, παρουσία), which, as Heidegger explains, “basically means the ‘estate’ ['Anwesen']\footnote{410} the immediate and always present [gegenwärtigen] possession, the ‘property’”.\footnote{411} This projection betrays the fact that being means \textit{permanence in presence} (\textit{Anwesenheit}).

Using the premises quoted above as the point of departure, I shall now attempt to shed some light on Heidegger’s related notions of \textit{Anwesen} (ἐόν), \textit{Anwesenheit} (ἐόντα) and \textit{Anwesung} and their connections with the concepts of \textit{Vorstellung} and \textit{Darstellung}. As regards the translations of these terms, they seem to be subject to slight variation: \textit{Anwesen} is usually translated as “presencing” or “(constant) presence”\footnote{412}, while \textit{Anwesenheit} is rendered as “presence”\footnote{413} or “the present”\footnote{414} and \textit{Anwesung} as “presence”. For Heidegger, it is by starting from presence that beings may manifest themselves as present, and the antecedence of the horizon of being in reference to beings, can be understood.\footnote{415}

Part of Heidegger’s argument about being is inseparably the concept of time: temporality, as the basic structure of a human being, is the horizon of being.\footnote{416} His “destruction” of the notion of presence involves the temporality of presence, focused on the aporetic nature of the “now”. Since Aristotle, Heidegger says, time has been described as a succession of now-points: as that which is no longer

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\footnotesize

\item 410  In \textit{Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics} the English translator points out that \textit{Anwesen} refers to the way a thing comes to presence or the way it comes to be present before us, as does the verb \textit{anwesen}. In the French translation of the same text, however, \textit{Anwesen} has been rendered here as “présence”. For \textit{Anwesenheit}, the current translation is “presence”. Cf. Heidegger, \textit{Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics}, note 23, p. 232; \textit{Kant et le problème de la métaphysique}, trans. Alphonse de Waelhens and Walter Biemel. Paris: Gallimard, 1953, p. 296.
\item 411  Heidegger, \textit{Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics}, § 44, p. 168.
\item 412  Cf. Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, e.g. § 6, p. 47.
\item 415  Heidegger, \textit{Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics}, p. 92-93. Derrida’s notion of trace comes, of course, close to this account. See Derrida, \textit{Margins of Philosophy}, p. 66 (\textit{Les marges de la philosophie}, p. 76-77).
\item 416  See e.g. Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, e.g. § 5-6, p. 36-49; Heidegger, \textit{On Time and Being}, p. 3; cf. Derrida, \textit{Margins of Philosophy}, p. 39, 46 (\textit{Les marges de la philosophie}, p. 43, 51); cf. also Dillon, “The Metaphysics of Presence: Critique of a Critique”, p. 189-203.
\end{thebibliography}
and as that which is not yet, or the boundary between past and future. Another explanation, equally inherited from Aristotelian metaphysics, is to understand beingness as *ousia*: the presence of the presence is eternal, that which does not change, and thus means the permanent present.

But being is not a thing, nor is it in time. Schematically put, for Heidegger being as presencing remains determined as presence by time, by what is temporal. What constitutes his own thinking of time, however, is the becoming, event or occurrence. Time is ek-static by its nature: it extends outside of itself, the three ecstases of time being the past, the present, and the future. Presence holds both a temporal and a spatial aspect, which cannot be separated. However inseparable the aspects of time and space are in Heidegger's thought of being, my focus is primarily on space, as far as Nancy's account is concerned.\footnote{This passage will be clarified more extensively in Chapter 3 and section 4.1.}

Here, the first and inevitable point of reference is Heidegger's distinction between, on the one hand, the thought that emerges from the epoch of metaphysics and on the other hand, his so-called fundamental ontology or ontology of being, which may be attained only through the giving up of metaphysics and delving into what philosophy has forgotten – the meaning of being. In his criticism of metaphysics Heidegger addresses ontology, which, since the time of the ancient Greeks, he understands to be centred on the transcendental subject. The forgetting of philosophy implies the analysis of the process of bringing one epoch to its end, or better, to its completion. Nancy draws his attention to the metaphysical self-pronouncing subject, the subject of utterance (*sujet de l’énonciation*) and the forgetting of its provenience.\footnote{Nancy, *Ego sum*, p. 13. Cf. Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, p. 37-42 (*L’oubli de la philosophie*, p. 58f.). Here, the forgetting means philosophy's turning away from its original interrogative nature and, thus, its folding and closing on itself, philosophy having itself as the source of questioning.}

Instead of thinking of the subject of philosophy, Nancy starts to think philosophy itself as subject, as the fact that something arrives. He calls the fulfilment of the epoch “the end of philosophy” (*Ende der Philosophie*) and “the closure” or “completion” (*Vollendung*) of metaphysics.\footnote{Cf. e.g. Heidegger (1978). *Basic Writings*, trans. David Farrell Krell. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p. 374.} In the situation of such end and closure, Heidegger suggests that “the question of being should be taken as our clue”. This question is to be thought of in a non-metaphysical way. This is possible if one seeks to destroy the traditional ontology in order to “arrive at
those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being.” 420

As was indicated earlier, the core of Heidegger’s interrogation consists in what he terms the ontico-ontological difference. The metaphysical version of the ontological difference is that between being (or beingness, the most general quality of beings), and particular beings. Thus, Heidegger’s critique on the tradition of metaphysics is directed against the notion of being understood as constant presence or as availability (Vorhandenheit). According to his argument, the being of beings has, since early Greek thinking, been assumed as the presencing of what presents itself. The subsequent confusion in Western metaphysics is the metaphysical difference between presence as the most general quality of beings, and present things. 421 This development has led to the oblivion of the meaning of presencing (ἐόν) and finally to the forgetting of being, which has been reduced to one being among others and which has become a present entity. Yet the oblivion of being belongs to the self-veiling essence of being and to the whole of its destiny, so that the history of being begins with the oblivion of being. 422

Challenged by Heidegger one finds, hence, the metaphysics of presence, which founded the ontology of the transcendental subject. Presence is what is termed by Heidegger the “onto-theo-logical” determination of being; being supposed that metaphysics, ontology, and theology are identical. 423 The focus of the Heideggerian critique is on the metaphysical way of thinking of being as a kind of presence – more exactly, on the idea that the present is unveiled starting from presence. Instead of this, Heidegger’s discussion of presencing is grounded on his view of the antecedence of the horizon of being. How should one then understand being as revealing or unconcealment in non-metaphysical terms, as other than presencing? 424

420  Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 44.
422  Heidegger, Early Greek Thinking, p. 50. See also Krell, David Farrell (1984). “Introduction”, in Heidegger, Early Greek Thinking, p. 8-9 (p. 3-12). Plato introduced the differentiation between coming into presence of goods – their making or fabrication (poiesis) – and their presence – fabricated goods.
423  Cf. Stambaugh, Joan, “Introduction”, in Heidegger, On Time and Being, p. viii (p. vii-xi). Heidegger’s notion of “onto-theo-logy” refers to understanding theology in an ontological sense, that is, as the discourse of “the most perfect being” or God as the absolute measure of beings.
424  This is the question which, to my mind, guides Heidegger’s interrogation toward thinking of being as Ereignis. It was after the so-called turning, Kehre, of his thinking that Heidegger started to define the question of being in terms of Ereignis, “appropriation” or “appropriative event” in the opening up and presentation of being (whereas earlier he had thought of Being starting from fundamental ontology, i.e. Dasein’s ability to unfold being). As being presents itself (wesst), this appropriation (Er-eignung) takes place as withdrawal or dis-appropriation (Ent-eignung), simultaneous opening to openness and withholding. In Contributions to Philosophy Heidegger considers being from
What is above all contested by Heidegger is the assumption that being presents itself as an object for awareness, as an object of sense perception; in a word, as something present (Anwesendes), and therefore as beings. Hence, Heidegger states that metaphysics is objectifying thinking by nature. At stake in his critique of metaphysics is the idea according to which that which is present would emerge from the presencing of what is present, that is, from letting-presentation or allowing-to-presentation, from unfolding and bringing to openness, supposing that being would be thought of in the sense of presencing. In all, presence has replaced the present. The identification of being and beings has amounted to what Heidegger terms as “the forgetting of being”. Thinking of being as presence derives from the same oblivion of being, from which entails that the essence of presencing (das Wesen des Anwesens) remains forgotten. This fact leads him to state that the distinction between presencing and what is present remains unthought, when presencing becomes something present.

Since it is the very ontico-ontological difference that motivates Heidegger’s interrogation of the way in which the present comes into presence, it is also possible to state that Heidegger identifies representative thinking and metaphysical thinking. In illuminating the distinction between representation and presence, Heidegger gives Vorstellung a definition: “to bring what is present at hand [das Vorhandene] before oneself as something standing over against (Entgegenstehendes), to relate it to oneself, to the one representing it (den Vorstellenden), and to force it back into this relationship to oneself as the standpoint of decision (Ent-scheidung) and the impossibility of the decision or undecidability.

“Event” and “eventness” are the current translations of Heidegger’s concept of Ereignis. In the present context, the Hegelian Geschehen has similarities with Heidegger’s Ereignis, which is, in my view, given a strong emphasis in Nancy’s account.

---

the standpoint of decision (Ent-scheidung) and the impossibility of the decision or undecidability. “Event” and “eventness” are the current translations of Heidegger’s concept of Ereignis. In the present context, the Hegelian Geschehen has similarities with Heidegger’s Ereignis, which is, in my view, given a strong emphasis in Nancy’s account.


428  According to Françoise Dastur, breaking with the primacy of representation demands rejecting the theoretical attitude as the primordial access to the world. The theoretical attitude is the thematic understanding of a given presence, of the Vorhandenheit. The objectivation of beings is accomplished by a passage from Zuhandenheit, presence-at-hand, to Vorhandenheit, to the pure “pre-sence”, through which the whole of the pre-sent being is thematized as Vor-handenheit, that is, is re-presented under the figure of given pre-sence. In a similar way, representation or Vorstellen, “bringing before”, is to be understood as Vor-sich-stellen, “brining before oneself”. The Vorstellen, or the reflecting representation, defines the being of beings as objectivity, which implies that beingness (étantité in French) is now thought of as the presence for this mode of representation, which secures its own object. This analysis concerns a world in which beings are determined as objects and the world as a field of objectivity for subjectivity: it is a question of the being-represented or being-installed of beings (Vorgestelltheit des Seienden). Dastur, Françoise (2001). “La critique de la représentation chez Heidegger: présence et représentation”, in Philosophie 71, p. 48-57.
normative realm”. Heidegger’s critique of representation is thus oriented against the metaphysical notion of the world as a picture, according to which a being, or what is present, or a subject would be brought before man as object. He associates the representation of beings with the metaphysical tradition, namely because “to represent” (vorstellen) means to set out (stellen) before oneself and to set forth in relation to oneself. As a result, “That which is, is no longer that which presences; it is rather that which, in representing, is first set over against, … which has the character of object [das Gegen-ständige]”.

For Nancy representation proves to be a problematic notion for philosophy, as its sense lies in meaning’s presence-at-a-distance; this is also what divides philosophy from itself. In his interpretation Derrida brings forward a very similar notion: in his view, the foremost point of reference in Heidegger’s account is the destiny of being in modernity: never does the being of beings consist of an object (Gegenstand) brought before man, fixed, accomplished, and available for the man-subject (sujet-homme) who would have a representation of the object. This would entail a notion of man as the measure of objects which, consequently, would be his own representations. On this basis, Derrida characterizes representation as envoi, destiny, fate or sending (Geschick) of being, bringing before oneself.

For Heidegger “representation” conveys the meaning of letting or making a thing come into presence, in which the sense of repetition and of return is involved. This is how representation points at the duplication of presence when
it is reproduced as an effigy, sign, or symbol and something is brought in its place.

Nancy, as I see it, retains in his questioning the same basic setting as Heidegger as regards the idea of representation as bringing something before oneself (for this would be part of the philosophy of subjectivity) and the occurrence and opening of being.

However, one may trace a shift of emphasis in Nancy’s thinking in relation to Heidegger’s ontology. For Nancy, being comes to be thought, first of all, in terms of existence, and there is no existing without existents: there is no “existing” tout court. Existence has thus no other essence than to exist, “actually and in fact, in experience, ‘hic et nunc’.” Hence Nancy’s emphasis is on the existent, on the who of being, that actual, existent “what” as it exists. At the same time, this is a question of presence – of who is present there and, thus, of the presence of the existent. Hence existing is inevitably finite by nature. Presence here is understood as that which occupies a place and allows that something to come into presence in a unique point in space and time. This entails to Nancy that presence comes indefinitely to itself, and never stops coming and arriving.

If Heidegger refers to “existence” as the existence of Dasein, that is, as human existence, Nancy conceives of it as the structure of every existing singularity, be it human or not. Similarly, being (être) is nothing but the being of a singular being (étant). These levels cannot be separated, since only a being may come into existence in Nancy’s thinking. At this point it is, of course, possible to ask whether being is, in fact, anything else with Heidegger either.

Thus, one could say that the Heideggerian notion of representation conveys the meaning of letting or making a thing come into presence, which implies the sense of repetition and of return. In this sense, representation points at the duplication of presence, which comes to be reproduced as an effigy, sign, or symbol and something is brought back or rendered present, in a repetitive way, in its place. In Heidegger’s words, “In unconcealment [Unverborgenheit] fantasia comes to pass: the coming-into-appearance [zum Erscheinen-Kommen] as a particular something, of that which presences – for man, who himself

436 Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 270 (Une pensée finie, p. 261).
438 Ibid., p. 7.
439 The thought of the singularity of existing necessarily implies the plurality of existence in Nancy, which, as an ontological position, will be discussed in Chapter 3 and further, in the context of the arts, in Part II.
This said, representation would be to keep something at one’s disposal as an idea in mind, which then presents the idea by substituting it with another idea. Representation is already what it is not yet: its own overflowing. In Heidegger’s notion of Vorstellung the experience of beings becomes essentially representation. Hence representation as that which is placed “before” does not correspond to the terms ‘presence’ or ‘presentation’. In his will to disengage with the thought of difference as presence and to think of difference as a destiny, which would not be the destiny or the sending of the self but that of the other(s), Derrida clearly repeats Heidegger’s gesture of interrogating the closure of representation. Namely, in Derrida’s view, Heidegger is seeking a structure which is still foreign to representation, which would not gather itself in terms of the destiny of being through Anwesenheit, if we suppose that it means first ‘presence’ and then ‘representation’. A pre-ontological sending (envoi) of this kind only gathers together by its division and difference from itself. It does not begin from itself, although there is nothing present which would precede it. Sending sends or emits only when it already refers, starting from the other, to the other within it, but without it: everything begins with referral. The difference from itself – designated by Derrida as différence – exceeds all definitions given to what is present, thus giving birth to presence.

441 Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology, p. 147.
443 Ibid., p. 311 (Psyché, p. 122).
444 What is often translated by “presence” is Anwesen and Anwesenheit. The prefix an in these words expresses coming into unconcealment, apparition or phenomenality rather than objective being-before. Anwesenheit indicates division, difference and dissension (Zwiespalt). In his will to disengage with the thought of difference as presence and to think of difference as destiny, which would not be the destiny or the sending of the self but that of the other(s), Derrida repeats Heidegger’s gesture of interrogating the closure of representation. See Derrida, Psyché, p. 128-129.
446 As for “gathering”, Heidegger gives this term a particular definition in the context of Kantian epistemology. Heidegger sees understanding to be the power of representation. Gathering means the principle of the original synthetic unity of apperception: “the first pure cognition pertaining to the understanding” (Critique of Pure Reason, § 17, B 137); this principle is a unifying one, and the “unity” is unifying-gathering, logos in the original sense, but transferred to and relocated in the I-subject. “Being” as a copula gathers or connects the unity – in Kant, “a judgement is the manner in which given modes of knowledge are brought to the objective unity of apperception”. See Heidegger, Pathmarks, p. 347, 349-350 (“Kant’s Thesis about Being”).
447 The thought of presencing as allowing-to-presence – that is, in the sense of representation – evokes the question of the limits of representation, of what is unrepresented or unpresentable. In his interpretation Derrida relies on the Hegelian view on representation: he writes that the Vorstellung marks the limit which is to be sublated. It retains the structure of already and not yet, still staying in subjective unilaterality. In Derrida’s opinion the unrepresentable is not so much that which one is unable to represent, but that which is not allowed to be represented. This is where the still alien pre-ontological structure may be sought. For Hegel the Vorstellung is a mediation between the unfree and the free intellect, that is, thought. According to Heidegger’s interpretation, the form of the passage between the modes of intellect, the Aufhebung of representation, still belongs to the epoch of representation. Derrida, “Sending: On Representation”, p. 313 (Psyché, p. 124, 129).
On the grounds of what has been said above, one may state that in Nancy being comes to presence as a surprise, which I previously discussed in the context of Hegel. Nancy gives the term ‘surprise’ a certain aspect of empiricity in itself: it designates the space of existence and its arrival without ground. The taking over, without possession, exposes the event that takes place. Surprise is, thus, experience.\textsuperscript{448} One should note, however, that the “empiricism” referred to by Nancy is not empiricism in the conventional sense of the term, a type of theory based on the idea that actual experiences (sensations and impressions) have primacy in human knowledge and justified belief.\textsuperscript{449} In Nancy’s hands traditional empiricism becomes a positivity that insists on a foundation in the face of groundlessness, a positivity that “cannot stand ex-istence”, as Peter Fenves defines it.\textsuperscript{450} Nancy’s own understanding of empiricism involves a kind of materialism, but one that relies on an exposition of groundlessness and freedom which withdraws every ground from existence. Such empiricism is founded on the fragmentation of experience, which is itself unfounded and arrives as a surprising, irreducible “burst”, being thus incapable of building or totalizing any world.

On the whole, Nancy thematizes the spacing figured by “surprise” and “leap” of being in Heideggerian terms as Spanne – separation, space, or extension. Spanne is defined in temporal terms, starting from Heidegger’s statement, “Time is intrinsically spanned and stretched”, and not punctualized, as proposed by the ordinary notion of time.\textsuperscript{451} Spanne stands for the spacing of the present that takes place; it allows for the existence to expose itself, being the altered sameness of time.\textsuperscript{452} In a leap being crosses over itself in every instant.

In his discussion of presentation and representation, Heidegger introduces two terms which come close to what is designed by Nancy’s terms as “syncope”, as well as by Derrida’s différance. These Heideggerian key words are the aforementioned surprise and leap (Sprung).\textsuperscript{453} If being were not taken as constant


\textsuperscript{451} Heidegger, The Basic Problems of Phenomenology, p. 264. See also Nancy, The Sense of the World, p. 64 (Le sens du monde, p. 105).

\textsuperscript{452} Nancy, The Sense of the World, p. 66 (Le sens du monde, p. 108).

\textsuperscript{453} Heidegger understands transcendence as “surpassing” (Überstieg). Transcendence is occurrence: it is a spatial “relation”, which passes “from something to something”. To surpassing belongs that toward which such surpassing occurs, that which is called the “transcendent”; there is something that is surpassed in the surpassing. That Dasein exists “spatially” signifies that the spatial “surpassing” includes
presence but, rather, as taking place, grounded in groundlessness, for Nancy this would entail that “an event is a thought: the tension and the leap into the nothing of Being”.454 “Leap” comes to mean “pass from the interrogation of being as ground or as reason (Grund) to the thinking of being as ‘without reason’ in the ‘groundlessness’ of its play”, freedom being the leap into existence, in which existence is discovered as thinking.455 As a result, the leap is shown to be a disagreement between being and the being, the present and given being-ness, and further, difference which is a différend.456 Here the disagreement constitutes the event: the nonpresence of the coming to presence, and its absolute surprise; what leaps up is the “already”, along with the “not yet” and thus the “leap is the coming, or the pre-sense or prae-sens itself without a present”.457 For Heidegger the leap remains “a free and open possibility of thinking”.458 What is implied in this very idea in Nancy’s thought is questioned by B. C. Hutchens – that is, how is it possible to think “within” the surprising event, and still not to turn its singular taking place into a mere object or moment of thinking?459

NANCY AND THE FINITUDE OF PRESENTATION

Heidegger’s reaction to what he called the closure of metaphysics led to his development of the “fundamental ontology”, the quest which is aimed at discovering the truth of being and founded in the fundamental project of each Dasein.460 In Nancy’s thinking of the problematic of presence his focus is on its very sense as the state of birth into presence, or coming-(in)to-presence (venir
or naître à la présence), constant becoming: that is, on being that allows itself to presence in a finite and singular manner.\(^{461}\)

According to Nancy, the end of philosophy – which Heidegger names as the point of departure and motive of his interrogation of being – is “deliverance from foundation” in two respects. The end of philosophy is without foundation in withdrawing existence from the necessity of foundation, and in its setting free from foundation and giving over to unfounded “freedom”.\(^{462}\) It is for this reason that the freedom of being is recognized in its singularity. In asking for the possibility of freedom he raises the question concerning its grounds: how is it that the groundless ground of being – the freedom to exist – may offer itself only at the point where the “essential” and the “existential” meet?\(^{463}\) This I see as Nancy’s interpretation of Heidegger’s saying that the being of Dasein must be developed from the existentiality of its existence.\(^{464}\) Yet, a sense of plurality may be found implicitly in what Heidegger states: being is in every case the being of some entity, and that “we must first bring forward the entities themselves if it is our aim that being should be laid bare”\(^{465}\) – or that “to be the being of beings is the matter of Being.”\(^{466}\)

For Heidegger being is the process by which finite beings emerge from concealment. Nancy’s view on presentation – the exposition of being – and its finitude, or irreducible singularity, can now be described as below:

\[
\text{Finitude} \text{ does not mean that we are noninfinite – like small, insignificant beings within a grand, universal, and continuous being – but it means that we are infinitely finite, infinitely exposed to our existence as a nonessence, infinitely exposed to the otherness of our own ‘being’ (or that being is in us exposed to its own otherness). We begin and we end without beginning and ending: without having a beginning and an end that is ours, but having (or being) the only as others’, and through}
\]

---

\(^{461}\) For him this is the reason why being cannot be determined as the “now”. In this case, \textit{parousia} would be another name for time. Associated with these questions is the theme of difference: the difference in being itself, or the temporalizing difference in the birth to presence, as articulated by Heidegger. See Heidegger, \textit{On Time and Being}, p. 11-12; cf. \textit{Being and Time}, § 81.

\(^{462}\) Nancy, \textit{The Experience of Freedom}, p. 12 (\textit{L ’expérience de la liberté}, p. 16).

\(^{463}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 13 (\textit{L ’expérience de la liberté}, p. 17).


\(^{465}\) Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, § 7, p. 61. There are still further ontological questions which contribute to presentation. One of the most important points shared by Nancy and Heidegger is a critical view of the self-constituted subject, which is replaced by \textit{Dasein} in Heidegger and the “self” or the “singular” in Nancy. As a consequence, Nancy (partially) renounces and modifies the thought of one’s proper being, which is inherent, for example, in Heidegger’s notion of the temporalizing nature of \textit{Dasein}. Instead of stressing the aspect of the “proper” being, Nancy foregrounds the notions of singularity, inclination and being-toward (être-à, être-à-soi; in Heidegger, equivalent terms are \textit{Zusein, Sein zum selbst}). Cf. Lindberg, \textit{Filosofien ystävyys}, p. 79-123.

\(^{466}\) Heidegger, \textit{Early Greek Thinking}, p. 50.
others. My beginning and my end are precisely what I cannot have as mine, and what no one can have as mine, and what no one can have as his/her own.467

Yet finitude is not privation. According to Nancy, finitude is affected by its end – limit, cessation, or beyond-essence – both by its end – goal, finishing, completion – and by transcendence, and not as a limit imposed from elsewhere. Its relation to the end is a passing away, which is the most originary end of all: no origin can be found in the beginning, since origin itself has been abandoned.468 In my view, this probably means that there is nothing present in the origin to be deprived; in fact, there is nothing at all in the origin. One can thus say that we are finite because we are not deprived of anything.469 Hence there is nothing to be appropriated: there can be no appropriation of that of which there is privation, a fact which thus entails the annulment of privation. Instead, privation annuls itself, while finitude affirms itself.470 As Jeffrey S. Librett interprets it, in Nancy’s philosophy finitude relates to infinity as essence to existence or truth to sense: as instantaneous presentation to deferral or spacing, as punctuation to concatenation or enchaining, and as semantics to syntax.471

Nancy’s formulation of finitude conveys, apart from its incontestably Heideggerian source, some definite overtones of Derrida’s deconstructive vision. In Nancy’s view, “[F]initude is the truth, of which the infinite is the sense”; finitude is always in excess of itself, since ‘existence’ and ‘truth’ mean the infinite.472 This problematic gives evidence of the position of the whole of today’s philosophy in its inner division. Namely, what divides philosophy, in my view resonates with the Heideggerian distinction between metaphysics and ontology and Vorstellung and Darstellung alike: for Nancy this is the distinction between sense and signification. What he explains is that philosophy “is led before that which divides it from itself: Meaning’s presence-at-a-distance. This point of division is thus the point of its identity”.473 In other words, the place

468  Nancy, The Sense of the World, p. 31-32 (Le sens du monde, p. 54).
473  Nancy, The Gravity of Thought, p. 54 (L’oubli de la philosophie, p. 79). Here the French sens has been translated in English as “meaning”. However, I have chosen to systematically render sens as “sense”, which, with all its connotations, is, as I see it, the equivalent term.
of philosophy is where presence and distance intersect; truth, in turn, is what puts an end to presence-at-a-distance, and to the reign of its presentation. In so doing it “makes another meaning of presentation, or at least of presence, emerge”.\textsuperscript{474} Truth, then, is of the order of the will to sense only according to a metaphysical conception: what is lacking in truth when it is no longer to be conceived as presence-at-a-distance – when the presentable is represented – is the will to be presentable. The movement inherent in presentation and its truth which Nancy seeks here is not the (re)presentation of the presentable; rather, it is something like the bursting forth of a presence. It designates for him the coming into presence of a presence, which is neither presentable nor unpresentable, but presentation before signification.\textsuperscript{475}

To summarize, for Nancy, the question concerning Heideggerian finitude of being is, first of all, a question of the finitude of \textit{Dasein}.\textsuperscript{476} It is the finitude of being as sense’s desire to act, in a way that it does not mean a limitation which would relate man – either negatively, positively, or dialectically – to another instance which would yield him sense, or the lack of it. Indeed, the sense for Nancy is being-there, the \textit{da} or the “there” of \textit{Dasein}.\textsuperscript{477} Finitude signifies precisely the non-fixation of such a signification: not, however, as an inability to fix it, but as an ability to leave it open. Thus finitude means “unaccomplishment as the condition for the accomplishment of action (or for the accomplishment that action \textit{is}) as sense.”\textsuperscript{478} Being has to be exposed to the action of sense, and it has to be thought of as action of sense as such. Being, moreover, has to be exposed to the fact that sense is \textit{not} given, which is the fact of being as sense. Thus being must also be exposed to finitude.\textsuperscript{479} The concept of finitude, as interpreted by Nancy, leads him to state that the possibilities of \textit{Dasein} are limited from the beginning.\textsuperscript{480}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{474} Ibid., p. 55 (\textit{L’oubli de la philosophie}, p. 81).
\item \textsuperscript{475} Ibid., p. 55 (\textit{L’oubli de la philosophie}, p. 82).
\item \textsuperscript{476} Nancy, \textit{A Finite Thinking}, p. 177-178 (\textit{La pensée dérobée}, p. 92).
\item \textsuperscript{477} Nancy, \textit{The Sense of the World}, p. 29 (\textit{Le sens du monde}, p. 51).
\item \textsuperscript{478} In French: “l’inaccomplissement comme condition de l’accomplissement de l’agir (ou qu’est l’agir) en tant que sens”. Nancy, \textit{A Finite Thinking}, p. 178 (\textit{La pensée dérobée}, p. 93). Italics in original.
\item \textsuperscript{479} Ibid., p. 179 (\textit{La pensée dérobée}, p. 93).
\item \textsuperscript{480} The problematic of finitude opens up the question concerning the singularity of \textit{Dasein} once it is a question of the world and its being is without a horizon. This has also been pointed out by Rodolphe Gasché, who explores Nancy’s notions of finitude and infinity in the connection of the notion of the world. The world appears here in the light of the figure of Europe – or \textit{Euryopa}, as Nancy writes it – in its will to arrive at the horizon of universality and to hold a position as “the world”, that is, as an idea. Ultimately, the limits of the infinite may be outlined: for Nancy the infinite means the infinity of finitude, of the infinitely finite. What results is that there is no idea that goes beyond the world by giving it any end, reason or ground. A world is a space for the infinite of truth and existence: a world free of a horizon. The world is made up of beings that are infinitely exposed to existence as a non-essence. Thus they are singular or finite beings that make up the finite and horizonless world, a
\end{itemize}
3. The Limits of Presentation
– The Limits of the Singular Plural

In dealing with the concepts of presence, presentation and representation, I have attempted to suggest that Nancy tends to turn away from any notion of being as presence carrying an objectified sense. This task requires that we explore Heidegger’s thought from a broad perspective, and also confront his central notions, most importantly those brought forth in Being and Time. The basis of Nancy’s enterprise lies in the Heideggerian conceptions of “the end of philosophy” and “the closure of metaphysics”; what I suggest is that they entail, in both Heidegger and Nancy, the critique of the notion of the subject. In Nancy’s view, according to the metaphysical conception of subjectivity, the traditional idea of the subject connotes something that is without predicates. That is to say, Heidegger and Nancy start from the idea that the ontology of subjectivity is the ontology in which being, as subject, is foundation. In other words, the subjective ontology is ahistorical or nonsituated thinking whose place is defined by the metaphysics of subjectivity, and this is, in the first place, what Nancy’s critique addresses.

Why is it, to be more precise, that one should take up the problem of the subject in the present context, and what are its consequences with respect to the main question of this study, that is, art? To my mind, Nancy’s response to the constitution of the concept of the subject is, in the first place, linked with his search for art’s ontological idea: namely, the thought of art’s fundamental multiplicity. Nancy raises the thinking of ontological multiplicity or plurality of being in particular in connection with the concept of “being-with”, which also leads us to his questioning of Heidegger’s Mitsein. Nancy, however, gives the problematic of being-with another name and perhaps another nuance, that of être-en-commun, “being-in-common”. Whether this is something that may be called his “social ontology” will be discussed in the following.

481 Nancy, The Experience of Freedom, p. 6 (L’expérience de la liberté, p. 46). See also Heidegger, Being and Time, § 64.
482 See also Fynsk, Heidegger: Thought and Historicity, p. 23.
As regards the history of the notion of the subject, Nancy points out that the Latin root word *subjectum*, literally “that which is thrown under”, means the same as the Latin *suppositum*: “the supposed”, “the sub-posed” or “that which lies beneath”.484 As interpreted by Heidegger, the *subjectum* implies the thoughts of “consciousness in itself” or the “form” of representation. According to Nancy, Western philosophy has been given birth to, by, and as the notion of supposition. The subject, or supposition, refers to the idea that a person or thing may be acted upon. Thus, the subject means foundation of a proposition: the subject is subjected or submitted to something other, and it is exposed to what happens to it – that is, to an authority, a law or a sovereign.485

The subject can be equated with the Greek word *hypokeimenon* (ὑποκειμενον), literally “underlying thing”, which also means that which lies beneath, primal matter or the substrate of all entities. As a nomination for the subject, this word refers to the notion that the “I” always underlies.486 *Hypokeimenon*, as defined by Aristotle, is the subject of change: it stands for substance that persists throughout all change, the substratum, which has a function analogous to matter (*hyle, ὄλη*). It is matter that persists through the changes that form (*morphe, μορφή*) imposes upon it.487 For Aristotle, the substance or supposition proves to be the gesture of supposing oneself, which, in Nancy’s view, becomes the gesture of one’s “self-addressing oneself” (*s’adresser à soi*).488

What kinds of interpretations of the subject does Nancy call into question with his explication of its history? According to his assumption, from the philosophy of Anaxagoras up to Hegel a tradition has prevailed in which the subject has been understood as something that supposes or presupposes itself. Furthermore, ever since the times of Socrates, a thought of the presence to the self (*présence à soi*) has been the condition for the reflection of the subject, which is equal to the concepts of the supposed, more or less synonymous with “support” ([**suppôt**], which may even be understood as “henchman”, as Nancy wishes to point out). Alternatively, as Nancy explicates, the subject has been understood as *substantia prima singularis*, which is again another definition for “the supposed”, and stands for the singular being or the individual, “the

485  Ibid., p. 56, 60.
486  Cf. Heidegger, Being and Time, § 64, p. 367.
487  See Aristotle, Physics and Metaphysics.
488  Aristotle, Physics, I, 7; Nancy, “Un sujet?”, p. 72.
one” (l’un). The thought of the one is what was already expressed by the term of ekastos (ἐκάςτος), “each (one)”, used by Aristotle. If we now assume that the notion of the subject corresponds etymologically to “the substrate” or “the supposed”, beneath what is it, then, that something is posed? And as soon as a thing underlies another thing, why not suppose one more thing beneath it, and so on, indefinitely? 489

Apart from the singularity of each subject or substance, the traditional notion of the subject has been characterized by the thought of unity. Yet unity does not fit into Nancy’s scheme: as it appears to him, the principal reason is that singular subjects do not have anything in common or anything to share. Instead of unity, he suggests that the idea underlying subjectivity should be rethought in terms of someone (quelquin). How should one describe this “someone”? In answering this question Nancy presents something that I see as a close reading of Heidegger’s existential analytic. 490 Nevertheless, Nancy’s reading is perhaps best described by the term of Auseinandersetzung: a repetition and an occasional confrontation that is also the elaboration of Heidegger’s position. 491

What is it that follows from this statement? For Nancy, the consequences of the fact that the subject has been understood in terms of supposition are many and far-reaching. More exactly, he wants to put into question the notion of the subject in three different ways. First, the idea that a subject presents the representations in itself as itself, attests in the philosophy of Kant to the fact that “my representations have to be mine”. 492 This refers to the subject as a transcendental “I”, in other words, to a logical form which is empty in itself. Because of “the Copernican revolution” of Kant’s philosophy – that, as Kant puts it, it is the subjective representation that makes the object possible rather than the object that makes the representation possible – the Kantian subject is structured by the supposition: what has to be supposed to be the conditions of

489 According to Nancy, the discussion around the notion of the subject has had two major motifs: first, the discussion between philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalysis, and secondly, the debate inside philosophy itself, namely that between “the philosophy of the subject” and “the philosophy of the non-subject” or “without subject”. Nancy, “Un sujet?”, p. 50-51.
490 See especially § 25-27 and § 62-64 of Being and Time.
491 This chapter is titled “Being-in-the-world as Being-with and Being-one’s-self: The ‘They’”. (p. 149-168). The coessentiality and originary of being-with is equally indicated in Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy (from p. 224 to the end). See also Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 94 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 118).
492 Nancy, “Un sujet?”, p. 54. In Heidegger’s view, the Kantian subject, the “I”, must be taken as “I think”, that is, as res cogitans. The “I think” is thus the formal structure of representing: it is the form of apperception. And if “the ‘I’ is understood as the form of representation, this amounts to saying that it is the ‘logical subject’. Yet what is positive in Kant’s definition is that the “I” cannot be ontically reduced to a substance. Heidegger, Being and Time, § 64, p. 367.
the possibility of experience? Thus, a subject is “someone” in the sense that it can have representations and volitions, acts of willing.

If the first condition which lays the grounds for Nancy’s critique of the subject is the Kantian understanding of the transcendental “I”, then secondly, in questioning the subject, one may point to Heidegger, who speaks of existence as Jemeinigkeit, or something which is “in each case mine”. In this, Nancy sees an appropriative event which constitutes the event of existing. As a third point, there is the idea of “presence to the self” (présence à soi) as difference or distance to the self, put forward by Derrida. What Nancy asks now is how is this possible. Hegel, for his part, understands the subject in terms of substance, and makes of it movement and process: a relation to itself, through which the subject becomes what it is. This process of becoming represents for Nancy “the absolute logic of supposition”: in Hegel supposition is shown to be an infinite chain and a process of self-constitution, which calls for ever-new suppositions. Or, there can be a final end, the absolute or the “one”, which does not suppose anything any more.

As Nancy concludes, the constitution of the philosophical subject is now accomplished as it has come to a closure. In its infinite (pre)supposition of itself, the subject is never present to itself: it is always beyond itself – the subject is always already arrived (advenu), and always only coming. How is this subject present, if it is present at all? This is Nancy’s question which, as I see it, paves the way to his entire project concerning the nature of subjectivity and its critique. At the same time, the traditional subject – as propounded by Descartes, Kant, and Nietzsche, among others – is a supposition which turns out to be disappearance and an illusion. The subject’s consistence and presence, or stability and permanence, ends up by disappearing, in being nothing but a supposition. This is “the end of the subject”.

What is it, then, that Nancy aims at in outlining the history of the subject in terms of supposition, the chain of underlying things or the thought of the final “one” or the Absolute? As it soon becomes apparent, with this introduction he motivates the question “who is the subject?”, instead of asking “what it is?”, its quiddity. If the structure of the subject, understood as the subject which

---

494 Ibid., p. 55.
495 Ibid., p. 82-83.
496 Ibid., p. 84-85.
497 Ibid., p. 89.
presupposes itself, is abyme, infinite repetition which takes place inside the subject itself in its seeking of its own foundation, then it also proves to form an abîme, “abyss”.

The subject, when it comes to be defined as the “who”, is something that exists. How should one describe this subject who comes as the “who”? According to Nancy, it is the fact that the substance announces its presence or presents itself as someone. As he suggests, the subject, when it is taken as quis, the “someone”, implies becoming another at the same place (devenant autre à la même place), in the place of the subject or of substance. The subject is, thus, taken as “someone” who “is no longer supposed, and still less supposed”, but who instead would be the exposed one or the one who exposes itself (“exposé” ou s’exposant).498 “Is there someone?”, Nancy asks, and answers: there must be someone in order to pose the question.499 “Someone” is the self, namely, the act of existing, the existing of the singular (l’exister du singulier). Why is this someone needed, here and now? Nancy holds that it is because “someone” is the answer and the guarantee, given by some one by its being-there, and by thus exposing its presence.500 By answering the question “Is there someone?”, someone already ends up by giving a response from its (own) part.

It is by contesting these positions – above all, the idea of the self-supposing subject which gives itself its own foundation – that Nancy moves toward an altogether different notion, in which being shows itself as the existent, a self or a singularity. On the whole, in criticizing the notion of subjectivity Nancy is not alone, for the critique of the subject has been a prevalent motif in contemporary French philosophy, for example in the thinking of Derrida, Emmanuel Lévinas and Maurice Blanchot, Jean-François Lyotard, and Gilles Deleuze, to mention just a few. To put it in very broad terms, it might be stated that all the philosophers mentioned above share a more or less common point of departure in that their deconstruction of subjectivity bears upon interiority, self-presence, consciousness, mastery, and the individual or collective property of an essence.

As I have attempted to suggest, this holds true for Nancy too.501 Namely, for him the subject has a dual meaning: as the property of the self, “[I]t is the thought that absorbs or exhausts all possibility of being-in-the-world, … and this same thought designates and delivers a thought of the one and that of the

498 Ibid., p. 90-91.
499 In French, “Y a-t-il quelqu’un?”. Ibid., p. 92-93.
500 Ibid., p. 96, 94.
some one, of the singular existent that the subject announces, promises, and at the same time conceals”. In the place of the subject enters a singular existent in its specificity, punctuality or “hereness” (haecceitas), qualities which, however, cannot be returned to those of an “individual”. This fact is, to my mind, the critical starting point from which Nancy’s thinking on singularity and its relation to Heidegger’s notion of Dasein must be sought. These problems will serve as discussion points in this chapter.

3.1 The Singular Plural of Being: On Nancy’s Notion of Singularity

I have pointed out above that the centre of Nancy’s attention lies in the event or taking place of being, termed as coming-into-presence. The question that follows from the interrogation of presence is now, who is present there? Whose identity are we talking about? What is it that allows something to come into presence? And how to characterize the traditional concept of subjectivity and the re-definitions Nancy gives to it?

To construe Nancy’s position, one has to first clarify what is meant by the notion that the metaphysical subject is essentially based on substantiality, as was indicated above. This notion has its modern roots in the cogito sum of Descartes, which announced the certitude of the subject insofar as it is capable of representing. As a consequence, the metaphysical idea of being is being-represented (for which Heidegger’s term is Vorgestelltheit) and the human subject is the foundation of this being. Regarding the philosophy of the “subject”, Nancy stresses that the metaphysical position is always that of a supposition, that is, a supposed substantial support for determinations and qualities. The subject appears as a point of presence supposed to be the source of representations and as a relation to the self, as a power of realization supposed to engender reality or as the supposed being of the existent.

502 Ibid.
503 Ibid., p. 5.
504 E.g. Ibid., p. 7.
505 Cf. Fynsk, Heidegger: Thought and Historicity, p. 29.
This results in a synthesis in which “subjecthood” is called “God”. Typical to the philosophy of the subject, on the one hand, is that it posits itself as its own foundation and is, on the other hand, “the hypothesis of its own hypostasis, fiction, or illusion”. Between the subject and its foundation Nancy sees a paradox or an infinite abyss, as he terms it, which is the truth of the subject. He states that the prefix sub- of the sub-jecthood can be revealed to be the inverted form of the prae- of presence: “the present that precedes itself and thus also remains behind itself”. In this way, Nancy’s idea of the subject necessarily refers to that which is “before” oneself and thus always belongs to either the anterior or the posterior sphere, allowing the “pure” or “true” subject or “being-the self without qualities” appear. The presence, as Nancy contends, “occupies a place in – site, situation, disposition – in the coming into space of time”, and hence as its spacing.

In the following chapter I shall first make an attempt to account for the position that Nancy takes towards the metaphysical notion of ‘subject’ and its relation to the Heideggerian notion of Dasein. In Nancy’s philosophy the essence of being is existence, a view which can already be found in Heidegger’s philosophy. As regards his reformulation of the theme of the subject, Nancy’s guideline can be drawn from Heidegger’s statement, “The essence of Dasein lies in its existence”. Being-there is, for Nancy, a question concerning presence, more exactly the presence of the existent. However, for him the central problems may be located in the notions of singularity of the existence, as shown by Heidegger, and as its condition, plurality, “being-with” (être-avec) of singularities, community and communication being constitutive of individuality; what communal individuals “share” among themselves, is their existences outside themselves, in other words, what their relations reveal to them.

This is to say that Nancy’s notion of existence is based on the finitude of a singular existent. As I understand it, Peter Fenves is right in stating that

---

507 Ibid, p. 69 (Le sens du monde, p. 112).
508 Ibid. As well as the present, the presence of the present has to be considered. Nancy calls this præ(s)ens: being-before-itself (être-en-avant-de-soi) or being which precedes or anticipates itself. See also Nancy, Jean-Luc (2001). Les Muses, édition revue et augmentée. Paris: Galilée, p. 182-183.
510 Heidegger, Being and Time § 9, p. 67.
in Nancy’s thought we encounter the other as existing, in other words, in its finitude: as opening to us out of its own relation to alterity.\textsuperscript{514} Or, the thinking of the other’s existence could be clarified by Maurice Blanchot’s idea that the relation to the other is indissociable from the experience of mortality, by which the other’s presence is marked, and in this encounter it is probably the condition of all knowledge of finitude, since the other must “call us to our freedom”.\textsuperscript{515} Existence, according to Nancy, necessarily always shows itself as someone's being at a definite moment in time and place. However, as soon as being takes place, it is dislocated: since, following Heidegger, being is “always already” and “not yet”, there cannot be a return to the same being, for being takes place at its limit.\textsuperscript{516}

Nancy finds the metaphysical position inadequate to render what constitutes the foundation of singularities or some ones: namely, the foundation consists of the singular, contemporaneous existence of each singular one. At this point he largely follows Heidegger, for whom being must be thought of in its difference from itself, and thus in its existence, understood as an always singular articulation of its withdrawal.\textsuperscript{517} In articulating this difference Dasein communicates itself by opening to what is other than itself; in fact, Dasein is nowhere other than its articulations.\textsuperscript{518} In its singularity Dasein’s opening to alterity is always a finite event. This is what is meant by finite transcendence in Heidegger’s philosophy. But how should we characterize the common ground between Nancy’s and Heidegger’s explanation of the subject as singularity? In Nancy’s thinking the singularity of the self knows itself as opening to alterity, the term for opening a relation being exposition: he conceives of being as exposure to inappropriable alterity. This is one of the points to be emphasized when inquiring into his interpretations of the sense of being as declared by Heidegger. Namely, in his exploration of the subject, Nancy departs from Heidegger’s notion that being is differential and relational, not One; this is because the articulation of being opens itself in Dasein. Here resides the singular nature of Dasein wherein it opens to being.\textsuperscript{519}

\textsuperscript{514} Fynsk, “Foreword”, in Nancy, \textit{The Inoperative Community}, p. xvii.
\textsuperscript{516} This is one of Nancy’s central themes. See e.g. \textit{The Experience of Freedom, A Finite Thinking}, and “Introduction”, in \textit{Who Comes after the Subject?}
\textsuperscript{517} Cf. e.g. Heidegger, \textit{Contributions to Philosophy}.
\textsuperscript{518} Cf. Fynsk, “Foreword”, in Nancy, \textit{The Inoperative Community}, p. xii-xiii, xxiii. This is also what is termed as historicality by Heidegger. See \textit{ibid.}, p. viii.
\textsuperscript{519} Fynsk, “Foreword”, in Nancy, \textit{The Inoperative Community}, p. xiii-xiv.
The singularity of all that is singular ones is also named sense, for sense is their finitude, which is common to all but proper to none, according to Nancy’s formulation, it is “common impropriety, communicating yet neither communicated nor communion”.⁵²⁰ For him, one more crucial point that metaphysics is unable to account for is the relation between the totality and the uniqueness of the singularities. This claim is based on the view that existence is always an existence and each time singular. Contrary to the metaphysical subject, existence means predicates without support and holds each other predicate together mutually and singularly.⁵²¹ Existence, a certain someone (quelqu’un), is “inimitable and unique”, as soon as it is “identical to all”. As I see it, this definition can be seen in the light of Nancy’s account that someone exposes himself as the “self” each time it enters a disposition, or, being as being—there is each time exposed as such.⁵²² This is, moreover, why there cannot but be numerous someones, or some ones. That is to say that the mode of existence is what Nancy calls the “plural singular”, which, “‘is’ the response that answers the question of the ‘sense of the world’”.⁵²³ It is possible to ask this question because there is something (il y a quelque chose); yet someone is no one, that is, no one in particular, but “being-here, exposed there”.⁵²⁴ Exposure, according to François Raffoul’s explanation, is finitude itself in Nancy’s thought: as “that which is exposed to such an exposure, thought or philosophy will have to give up its pretensions to a total appropriation [of sense]”.⁵²⁵ Instead of any appropriation of a pre-existing sense in opening to the other, Nancy speaks of further openings to its exposure and openings to further exposures, when a singular self “trembles on the edge of being” in coming to itself in the presence of the other.⁵²⁶

For Nancy, the idea that being is singular and plural at once, indistinctly and distinctly, means that being is singularly plural and plurally singular.⁵²⁷ Such a constitution of being undoes or dislocates every single, substantial essence of being itself.⁵²⁸ This is also to say that being does not pre-exist its multiple singularity; what exists simply exists. Furthermore, existence is co-existence; and since, following Heidegger, if it is supposed that the essence of being is

---

⁵²¹ Ibid., p. 70 (*Le sens du monde*, p. 115).
⁵²⁴ See also Nancy, *Le poids d’une penser*, p. 6f.
⁵²⁸ Ibid., p. 29 (*Être singulier pluriel*, p. 48).
grounded in its existence, one must, according to Nancy, turn to what he calls the common essence, the co-essence, to search for the essence of being.\textsuperscript{529} Hence Nancy maintains that co-essence, or being-with – that is, being-with-many – points at the essence of the co- (the cum), or that the co- appears here in the position of essence. In thinking of being-with, the “with” is what constitutes being, but not in a way that the with would be simply an addition.\textsuperscript{530}

In all, being-with proves to be “Being’s own most problem”\textsuperscript{531} for Nancy. Why and how this is, is the thing to be asked; however, it is a not question first of the being of beings, but beings determined as being-with-one-another (étant l’un-avec-l’autre). In this scheme a singular stands each time for the whole, in its place and in light of it. In its being it is indivisible in each instant, within the event of its singularization. Yet Nancy does not want to say that a singularity would stand against the background of being: a singularity “is, when it is, Being itself or its origin”.\textsuperscript{532} Correspondingly, all singularities taken together is singularity “itself”, “assembling” them as it spaces them. Such an “itself” is not, however, the “subject” in the sense of the Cartesian ego, that is, the relation of a self to itself, but rather something which Nancy terms an “ipseity” (ipséité).\textsuperscript{533} Rather than singularity, what delivers the “ground” for the thought of being thus appears to be “being-with”, which contributes to the thought of the groundlessness of such ground. This, for its part, leads one to think of the groundlessness which founds Nancy’s idea of art and the arts.

However, the singular is plural from its origin: it is necessary that there be more than one thing in the world. What exists co-exists, for the origin of being is itself shared out (partagée).\textsuperscript{534} What is thus formed is described by Nancy as “community”. Community is a “we” without a community, without anything to share but the sense that there is nothing to be shared. In saying that being is “being-with”, “with” comes to mean the sharing of space and time for Nancy.\textsuperscript{535} Being has to be thought of as departing from the spacing between beings or the way they are exposed to one another. Yet the difference or distance cannot be equated with any substance.\textsuperscript{536}

\textsuperscript{529} Ibid., p. 30 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 50).
\textsuperscript{530} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{531} Ibid., p. 32 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 52).
\textsuperscript{532} Ibid., p. 32 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 52).
\textsuperscript{533} Ibid., p. 33 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 52-53).
\textsuperscript{534} Nancy, The Sense of the World, p. 67 (Le sens du monde, p. 109); Being Singular Plural, p. 28-29 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 48-49).
\textsuperscript{535} Cf. Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 35 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 55).
\textsuperscript{536} Cf. e.g. Lindberg, Filosofien ystävyys, p. 84; Nancy, Corpus; Nancy, “Un sujet?”. One possible
Hence the singular existent is the end of the coming without end of sense, being at the same time “unique”, “whatever” and “exposed”. With “unique” Nancy means the uniqueness of the singular, which essentially consists in its multiplicity – this is what he calls the *existentiell* and existential determination of the singular. As he suggests, it is supposed to open any consideration of notions such as “individuality” and “autonomy”, which are part of the philosophy of the subject.\(^{537}\) Uniqueness or the unconditioned existentiality of each one means that it “cannot exist through consisting by itself and itself alone” as pure autonomy.\(^{538}\) What is the proper way to describe the relation between “someone” and community in Nancy’s thinking? What he says is that one cannot think of any “someone” on the basis of one’s belonging to a group of “someones”, nor a community formed by them. Instead, all that can be pointed at is the contemporaneous relation between singulars, their being-with and mutual exposition to each other’s sense.\(^{539}\) How is it that the singular singularizes itself, then? This happens only by or through its singularity, without, however, its singularity being its own: “what shares it out and what it shares with the totality of singular multiplicity” is singular uniqueness.\(^{540}\)

Despite its unicity, the singular proves to be *whatever* (*quelconque*). This means for Nancy that every one is just as singular as every other one, and consequently substitutable. Communication both singularizes them and divides them out; what is commensurable is their incommensurability. This thought is, of course, comparable with Heidegger’s view on death as something that allows every *Dasein* its singularity: just as there is no access to the death of the other – nor is there access to one’s own.\(^{541}\) It is worth noting that in Heidegger the motive of death is essentially connected with his conception of time. The idea of death implies the notion of my own death: even time ends with my own death. Instead of stressing one’s own death, Nancy moves to consider the *sharing* of
death, which no longer singularizes man, but brings him together with other men. Thus, in Nancy’s thinking death is associated with space.542

This fact amounts to that, in the community, every one exemplifies singularity. For Nancy, being exposed to one another is “presence itself”: what is exposed is exposition itself.543 What is presented is the coming-into-presence of presence and the *différance* of its being-present. This entails that the sharing of the distance is the only thing which comes to be shared. Taken all together, the sharing of the distance – that is, sharing the fact that there is nothing substantial in common – is *everything* that is shared between the members of a community.544

THE BODY OF SENSE

If for Nancy there cannot be a thought of the subject “in general”, that is, if one cannot assume a consistent and permanent subjectivity but only singular existents, where is the place of singularity, of “someone” or the self? What does it mean that the self is the arrival, the coming and the event of being, as Nancy puts it?545

Speaking of singular beings, however, implies at the same time the consideration of being, which in Nancy’s philosophy is practically another name for the notion of sense: being necessarily makes sense. Sense, as well as being, is transitive, which means that it is necessarily towards something. According to Nancy, sense is necessarily *inclined* or *declined* in the way it is exposed or exposes itself. Singular beings are their own sense and each of them is “being-such” (*être-tel*), that is to say, singularity. Being-such is also what alterity means to Nancy. One’s relation to the other is that of *partes extra partes*, namely, that someone or some thing exists in a singular relation to another.546

This notion opens a new sphere when it is discussed in the context of the body, which is elaborated in Nancy’s book *Corpus*. In it he identifies the sense of being with the inclination or declination of the self. The self, like the sense,

544 Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 80.
546 Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 29.
does not possess the nominative form, but it is always the object or complement of some action, of an address or attribution.\textsuperscript{547} As regards Nancy’s understanding of the body, his central thesis is that the body is “the body of sense”. The thinking of the body of sense, which implies the reflection of the sense or meaning of being, is of course to be read simultaneously as Nancy’s commentary of the metaphysical division between mind and body.\textsuperscript{548} Yet, in opposition to more traditional philosophical accounts, according to Nancy, to speak of the body of sense is not to say that there would be any discourse of the body. Why? Because, according to his central argument, there is no totality of the body, but only its locality: its separation and sharing out. This was referred to above with the notion of the body as \textit{partes extra partes}. Being is, for Nancy, being “here or there”: sharing places and making spaces, and the \textit{here} is abandoned – or exposed – in its movement. Thinking cannot think “the body”, as it cannot return to the place from which it originates.\textsuperscript{549} To put it another way, the body is irreducible to a discourse, since the sense of the body is born from nowhere else but interlacings with other bodies, in which productions and reproductions of sense emerge.

As regards the production of sense, in question are singular relations between bodies, such relations composing the relation of sense itself. It follows that sense appears as \textit{circulation} between bodies, and no discourse is able to reach the distances which are required for the circulation. In fact, what Hutchens wants to point out is that the very contact between singular bodies, which permits the circulation of sense, results in the fact that the participation in the community of bodies is the absolute of the body.\textsuperscript{550} For the same reason discourse cannot

\begin{footnotes}
\item[547] Ian James is probably right in remarking that Nancy’s thinking of the body offers a way of responding to the demand to think of embodiment beyond the abstraction or symbolic structures. These approaches to the body were developed in France especially in the cultural theories of the 1970’s, which may have their roots in a historical relationship between phenomenology and structuralism. The body of so-called cultural studies is understood, according to James, primarily as a site of meaning, at which culture and cultural identity is expressed and articulated. In other words, such a conception of the body is grounded in an experience of social construction. This means that the body appears as a signifying or symbolic entity, thus failing to engage with the materiality and situatedness of embodiment. As an example of such approaches James offers Michel Foucault and his \textit{Surveiller et punir} (1975). This is what Nancy’s account of the body responds to. James, \textit{The Fragmentary Demand}, p. 115-118.
\item[548] Nancy, “Un sujet?”, p. 102. “Somebody” refers to the entire problematic of the “body”: to the relations between being, sense, and the self – “the materiality of pure spirit; this \textit{body}, this whoever-body, is the transcendental and at once eschatological feature of singularity. In this way, the singularity, the somebody, exposes itself and engages its unicity with the others.” (“[L]a matérialité du pur esprit; \textit{ce corps}, ce corps-chacun, est le trait transcendental et en même temps eschatologique de la singularité. C’est ainsi que le singulier, quelqu’un, s’expose et engage son unicité avec celle des autres.”) \textit{Ibid.}
\item[550] \textit{Ibid.}, p. 55.
\end{footnotes}
think of singularities, and still less can it think of the corporeity of the body from which discourse is evoked.\textsuperscript{551} Rather, to call it “the body of sense” at the same time implies that co-present with it is the sense of the body: the body is sentient \textit{immediately} it is intelligible, or that sense is united with the senses.\textsuperscript{552} Thus, in Nancy’s terminology “the body of sense” refers to the idea that the materiality of the body \textit{is} sense itself and that every discourse is \textit{from} the body.

As B. C. Hutchens formulates it, the body stands for “the repository from which sense originates surprisingly”.\textsuperscript{553} Here he points to Nancy’s words, according to which the body is the end of the ideality of sense in that “it ceases to refer to itself and to relate to itself”, instead keeping “at this limit which makes its ownmost ‘sense’, and that it exposes as such”.\textsuperscript{554} Based on this, Hutchens draws the conclusion that the body is a challenge to thinking for the reason that it is a sign that produces and projects signs. The body withdraws from its own thinking when it touches itself: it has sense from which it receives signification and to which it provides signification.\textsuperscript{555}

The breaking of the sense, which is “absolutely and simply” constituted by existence, is exposed by the body; thus, the body is “the absolute of the sense itself properly exposed”.\textsuperscript{556} As a consequence, the sense of \textit{ego} is existence, for the Cartesian \textit{ego} cannot be located in the body of the \textit{ego}, nor in “my” body. For Nancy, this is not a relevant view: there cannot be pure space or time, but only places, which are simultaneously locations and extensions of bodies.\textsuperscript{557} What does this notion imply? According to Derrida’s interpretation, it is the very notion of \textit{touch}, located in the body in its “absolute realism”, that in Nancy’s thinking resists all subjectivism, as well as idealism, be it transcendental or psychoanalytic.\textsuperscript{558} The body is a sensing body only in the \textit{distance} and division

\textsuperscript{552} Nancy, \textit{The Birth to Presence}, p. 194.
\textsuperscript{553} Hutchens, \textit{Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy}, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{554} Nancy, \textit{Corpus}, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{555} Hutchens, \textit{Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy}, p. 54-55. To be exact, in Hutchens’s view, the body defies its own discourse because it disrupts the distinction between the “inside” and the “outside” of its own representation. In the interval of touching (between singular bodies) subjectivity and objectivity become effaced; instead, there is the world, which consists of places and distances. However, Hutchens asks whether Nancy’s thought of “sense sensing itself”, which Nancy sees as the condition of any sensation, is, in fact, anything else but another formulation of the differentiation between the sensuous senses and the intellect. See Nancy, \textit{A Finite Thinking}, p. 5-6 (\textit{Une pensée finie}, 14-15); Hutchens, \textit{Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy}, p. 56. I shall come to related questions, such as the differences of the five senses and the heterogeneity of the aesthetic, in Part II, see esp. section 4.1.
\textsuperscript{556} Nancy, \textit{Corpus}, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{557} Nancy, \textit{The Gravity of Thought}, p. 77 (\textit{Le poids d’une pensée}, p. 3).
of senses. This is the entire propriety of the aesthetic body – “the aesthetic body” thus being an expression which proves to be a tautology.\textsuperscript{559} I shall for now leave the problematic of touch and return to it in Chapter 5.

Instead of ego, one has to speak about corpus ego, which is not ego until it is articulated; and it is not articulated only as a spacing and as bending or inflexion of a place. The articulation of ego does not just take place: it is place, it gives sense a place and is always localized. This makes ego equal to “here” (là), but dislocated and taking distance from its enunciation.\textsuperscript{560} Corpus ego remains without propriety and without “egoity”. Rather, its being is in the tone of the place in which a body exposes itself and utters itself. Created bodies are, in fact, always bodies to come, and their coming spaces are the “here” and the “there”, placing the bodies into the world and connecting them to be part of a larger system in order to create the world of bodies.\textsuperscript{561} In this world there is neither transcendent nor immanent sense, but these take place in one another without any dialectical connection, as one another, and the taking place is this place.\textsuperscript{562}

Thus, the task of the body lies in its being its self, which, in turn, is creating oneself or exscribing (exscrire), “writing out” itself: the being of existence is what presents itself exscribed.\textsuperscript{563} Nancy’s version of Derrida’s term of writing is that it opens, within itself, to itself, to its own inscription as the infinite discharge of sense. From this follows that a thing is only when it is exscribed. The being of existence is not unpresentable: it presents itself exscribed.\textsuperscript{564} Sense, in turn, is the sharing and splitting of language, thanks to which language does not complete itself, nor initiate itself, but is the difference between languages,
double articulation, the *disseur* of sense, the sharing of voices, writing, and its exscription.\footnote{Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p. 28 (Une pensée finie, p. 50).}

“Exscription” refers not only to language, but to the way the body – or one may also say existence – exists only by virtue of its exposure to other bodies and to the world. The body is necessarily extensive or spread out, and two bodies cannot occupy the same place simultaneously. This is what is meant by Nancy’s stating that bodies exist *partes extra partes*. What is thus opened up by bodies between them is spacing or “areality”, a pure space, the *extra* in which the body exposes itself; in fact, the body is the being-exposed of being.\footnote{Ibid., p. 27-28, 31-34 (Le sens du monde, p. 48-50; *La pensée dérobée*, p. 27-29). Cf. Nancy, *Le poids d’une pensée*, p. 7. The condition for the thought of the body is its weight: in its finitude, a thing does not accomplish the sense it thinks of; this is how the thing is given a weight, which distinguishes it from an accomplished, presented and signified sense. The finitude is existence, that is, the sense and value of a singularity, and the sense is weighed by the weight of a thought. With the notion of the body, Nancy deconstructs the metaphysical problems related to, for example, the subject and the birth of sense, with interlinked concepts of spacing and areality, among others. Cf. *Corpus*, esp. p. 57, 77-85; *The Birth to Presence*, p. 199).}

Still, exposition and spatiality are essentially a function of the privacy of the body, for privacy exposes pure to-itself (*aseitas*) as the spacing – departure, partition, separation, communication and sharing out – which it *is*, always coming back to itself.\footnote{Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p. 32.} The body is thus the closing of itself in order to open up the “infinity of the entrenchment” of the self. And, for this reason, the body is also departure from itself and its coming back to itself, or, one might also say, a balancing oscillation from oneself to oneself. This distance is sense.\footnote{Ibid.; cf. what Nancy writes of one’s existence as a presence-*to* (être-*à*): “Thought weighs at the point where reason, being (present) *to* itself, (*étant à soi*), distances itself *from* itself and does so with the whole distance of this *to*. This is the distance of the presence-to-itself. Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, p. 77 (Le poids d’une pensée, p. 3).}

A corresponding view is maintained by Heidegger in his saying that *Dasein* “ek-sists”: it exists only outside itself and in relation to the other. The body thinks of itself, it weighs itself without that its *self* is any propriety or at “its” disposal, coming back to itself on the condition that it first distances itself from itself.\footnote{*Corpus*, p. 97-98.}

When considering the connection between the thinking of the body and its relation to art, the notion of touch comes to the fore, however. This will be explicated in a more sustained manner in section 5.1. From the perspective of the limit of touch, I shall there discuss matters such as spacing and interval, or the syncope of presentation, thanks to which being is exposed as a singular sense – that is, as the sense of existence.\footnote{See Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, p. 47.} How can one state that body is the place of

\footnotesize
565 Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p. 28 (Une pensée finie, p. 50).

566 Ibid., p. 27-28, 31-34 (Le sens du monde, p. 48-50; *La pensée dérobée*, p. 27-29). Cf. Nancy, *Le poids d’une pensée*, p. 7. The condition for the thought of the body is its weight: in its finitude, a thing does not accomplish the sense it thinks of; this is how the thing is given a weight, which distinguishes it from an accomplished, presented and signified sense. The finitude is existence, that is, the sense and value of a singularity, and the sense is weighed by the weight of a thought. With the notion of the body, Nancy deconstructs the metaphysical problems related to, for example, the subject and the birth of sense, with interlinked concepts of spacing and areality, among others. Cf. *Corpus*, esp. p. 57, 77-85; *The Birth to Presence*, p. 199).

567 Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p. 32.

568 Ibid.; cf. what Nancy writes of one’s existence as a presence-*to* (être-*à*): “Thought weighs at the point where reason, being (present) *to* itself, (*étant à soi*), distances itself *from* itself and does so with the whole distance of this *to*. This is the distance of the presence-to-itself. Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, p. 77 (Le poids d’une pensée, p. 3).

569 *Corpus*, p. 97-98.

570 See Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, p. 47.
philosophizing? These, as I see it, are the themes which guide us to thinking of the connections which “touch” has with art in Nancy’s philosophy, and which may also allow a closer view to some issues concerning Nancy’s relation to Heidegger, among other philosophers.

THE WHO OF PHILOSOPHY

What does it mean, then, that the self or the someone is factual and historical? For Nancy, “someone” is somebody, a singular material body. As such, somebody is the same as others: it is “the self”, the ipse. With terms like “the self” or “selfhood” he aims at giving some notion of a singular relation to the self (à soi-même), a relation which would not be one of identity. This is because Nancy sees a similarity in identity and substance, whereas the self is only that through which an existent or an ego proves to be an existent or attests to its own existence.

As Nancy remarks, it is at this point, however, that one ends up with the same presupposition as is implied by the Cartesian ego sum; yet the guarantee of one’s existence should now be understood without an idea of identity, God, world or anything else that might support or lie beneath one’s existence. Furthermore, “someone” does not come alone: what presents itself is not only essentially, but also necessarily multiple, and the essence of multiplicity lies in its existence. In attesting to its existence someone singularizes or distinguishes itself – in its singularization, every someone is as singular as another.

Let us just state for now that, as I see it, Nancy develops the theme of singularity in a direction which has several consequences as regards his thinking of community: what singularities have in common is their distinction from and common incommensurability with one another.

573 Ibid., p. 98-99, 103. Clearly, Nancy’s treatment of “someone” recalls Heidegger’s thought of das Man, the “they”, which belongs to the ontical level of being. I shall come back to this.
574 Nancy’s concept of “politics” (la politique), and even more importantly, “the political” (le politique) are essentially associated with “community”. According to Nancy, these two concepts should be rigorously distinguished: Despite the fact that politics and the political are probably the single notions which have aroused most responses among those who have commented on his work, I have decided not to give them an explicit treatment. The reason is that ontologically Nancy’s “politics” and “the political” derive in large part from his understanding of community (the withdrawal of the unity, totality, and effective manifestation of the community) and being-with, among several other ontological notions, whereas I see “community” and “being-with” as contributing more to the subject matter of my study in a direct way. In turn, community and being-with are something that prove to be implicitly political for Nancy. And more generally, it can be said that the political is essentially philosophical in Nancy: the moment of the political is the moment when we can address ourselves
For Nancy, at stake at this point is being as fundamental praxis, or being-as-act which is always the singular existence of existents, in their actuality and with their predicates. A singular existing is the act of existing, which takes place through itself, *per se*. By contrast, for Nancy there is no sign of *poiesis* here, as nothing comes to be produced by the act of singularization: there is no operation of self-constitution, self-engendering (*auto-engendrement*) or presupposition.  

The question leads one now to ask, *who is there* in its *Dasein*, that is, in its being-there, and whose existence does it question? For Nancy, being cannot possess any substance or an essence, and neither can singularity – the self or somebody, the who of philosophy. Thus, in his thinking the problem of subjectivity turns into a problematic of *who*, and to thinking of the agent of philosophy, of the thinking the *who* of philosophy, the *who* who decides of thinking. Who is *who*, and how to characterize its being? This “who”, in fact, is nothing and no one to Nancy; and equally, he is whoever and someone. The existence of someone has to be approached from how someone exposes himself to the world.

What Nancy wants to critically address is the allegedly metaphysical notion of the “who”, which gets the meaning of something identical throughout changes in its experiences and ways of behaviour – in other words, as something as “we”, or when a “we” may pronounce itself. Yet one may say that everything is political. The point of departure for his questioning is the conception that the signification of the political has come to a closure or completion: it has retreated, but it “is” on the basis of its own retreat, that is, the political appears as disappearance. Nancy Fraser, for example, defines the “retreating of the political” (*le re-trait du politique*) as the withdrawal of the transcendence or alterity of the political vis-à-vis other social instances. First, this retreating means *withdrawing* the political in the sense of its being the ‘well-known’ and in the sense of the obviousness (the blinding obviousness) of politics, the ‘everything is political’ which can be used to qualify our enclosure in the closure of the political; but also as re-*tracing* of the political … as the question of its essence”. Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe and Jean-Luc Nancy (1997). *Retreating the Political*, ed. Simon Sparks. London: Routledge, p. 112. And, as Simon Sparks formulates it, it is only in the face of such a retreat that the political can be re-traced or re-treated by raising it in a new way in Nancy. As for its philosophical legacy, Nancy’s notion of the political draws on Marx, Freud, Hannah Arendt and Derrida, along with Heidegger. In the early 1980’s, Nancy developed linked questions in collaboration with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. Most of these essays were originally prepared for the Centre de recherches philosophiques sur le politique (The Centre of Philosophical Research on the Political), which Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe founded in 1980, after the conference *Les fins de l’homme*. The themes of this conference were Derrida and politics, and it was organized in Cerisy-la-Salle in Normandy in the same year. See *Les fins de l’homme: à partir du travail de Jacques Derrida* (1981). *Idem. *Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy. Paris: Galiéee, e.g. p. 194-195; Fraser, Nancy (1993). “The French Derrideans: Politicizing Deconstruction or Deconstructing the Political?”, in *Working through Derrida*, ed. Gary B. Madison. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, esp. p. 68 (p. 51-76). Nancy’s account of the political was reviewed especially by the Anglo-American audience in the early 1990’s, after the English translation (by Peter Fenves) of his *Inoperative Community* had come out in 1991.

575 Nancy, “Un sujet?”, p. 96.
577 Cf. ibid., p. 13 (Étre singulier pluriel, p. 31).
578 This is, as I have stated above, the theme in Nancy’s works *Le discours de la syncope* and *Ego sum*. Cf. also Lindberg, *Filosofien ystävyys*, p. 92-96.
which lies at the basis, in a very special sense, as the *subjectum*. On the one hand, following Heidegger, Nancy states that one still cannot speak of this “who” in terms of personal identity, despite the fact that the “who” is a question of a factual situation of being-there – this stance, which may seem paradoxical, is what I wish to illuminate in what follows. For Heidegger, the “who” is shown to be identical with existence: as he defines it, “any entity is either a ‘who’ (existence) or a ‘what’ (presence-at-hand in the broadest sense)”. On the other hand, Nancy agrees with Heidegger that it is the question of the “who”, which is not authentically itself, that answers itself in terms of the “I” that always underlies, that is, the subject or the Self. Heidegger’s inauthentic “Self” implies the character of something selfsame in manifold otherness. This sort of ontological concept of the subject characterizes the “selfsameness and steadiness of something that is always present-at-hand”, and not from the authentic self, that is, *Dasein* that has taken hold of its existence.

Still, although the structure of disclosing one’s ownmost possibility is the condition for the authentic existence of *Dasein*, by which *Dasein* recovers its proper being and founds its individuality, does this imply that *Dasein* is alone? Heidegger’s answer is that *Dasein* is by no means committed to solipsism, but knowing oneself is grounded in the being of others, that is, in being-with. In fact, *Dasein* has already encountered the other when it comes to assume itself as a self. In disclosing its own truth (in the sense of *aletheia*) *Dasein* necessarily also discloses the truth of the other, since being with others belongs to the being of *Dasein*. Would this not mean that *Dasein* and the other are co-originary? As Christopher Fynsk formulates it, *Dasein* has already encountered the other when it comes to assume itself as a self. Yet for Heidegger the other belongs to the world of the “they”, that is, to the ontical world. Hence, the other remains other to *Dasein*. Nancy pursues this thought further: for him, ontologically there is not one without the other. One is always *more than* one.

---

580 In the everyday existence of the “they” Heidegger’s *Dasein* is subject to infinite exchangeability. For Nancy, the same principle is reflected in that “who” is essentially *whoever*. Cf. Fynsk, *Heidegger: Thought and Historicity*, p. 31.
582 According to Heidegger, for the most part *Dasein* is lost in the they-self, which is an *existentiell* modification of “the authentic Self”. Cf. *Being and Time*, § 64, p. 365, 367.
583 For the problem of *Dasein’s* individuality, see Fynsk, *Heidegger: Thought and Historicity*, p. 28-54.
For Nancy the self is based not on an idea of selfsameness, but on the relation of the self to itself, on its coming and presence to itself, of the coming into the world and of being-towards (être-à) the world, with the sense of inclination. Furthermore, being is only “as such”, and Nancy’s ‘self’ is what determines the “as” of being. If being is, it is as it is, prior to any presentable property and without that the self would pre-exist itself – one is not in the disposition without being with another disposition. This is because in question is being’s coming-into-presence itself, which takes place as its being-there.\textsuperscript{587}

What, however, comes to the fore in Nancy’s thinking of the agent, the “who”, of philosophy, is that he grounds his account on the notion that the Heideggerian existential analytic is to be read as a coexistential analytic. Schematically, this is the way he gives grounds to saying that being and being-with are co-originary or that the structure of the “Self” is the structure of the “with”. In this sense, Nancy’s ‘self’ does not seem to be very different from the scope of Heidegger’s term \textit{Zu-sein}.\textsuperscript{588}

However, “someone” proves to be a somewhat problematic notion for Nancy. To speak of “someone” requires accounting for the following facts: if there is “someone”, where is “someone”, what is it to be “someone” or who is this “someone”? In other words, speaking of “someone” still implies for Nancy a notion of “unity and/or uniqueness”.\textsuperscript{589} That someone “is toward oneself” (être à soi) is the same as “having oneself” (s’avoir).\textsuperscript{590} Thus understood, since the times of antiquity, the traditional subject has been associated with a relation to the self, which, in turn, is the condition of true knowledge – and this entails that knowledge is to be conceived of as related to the self, as self-knowing.\textsuperscript{591}

Is there anything that might separate Nancy’s view from that of Heidegger’s? Nancy himself suggests that Heidegger does not give enough emphasis on the specificity of the “who” or someone.\textsuperscript{592} This is not to say that Heidegger would not

\textsuperscript{587} Nancy, \textit{Being Singular Plural}, p. 94-95, 97 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 118-119, 121). Being is thus also an appropriating event: the appropriation of the \textit{there}, or the distance of time-space, is its moving and being-moved through the dispersal of the \textit{there}; cf. Heidegger’s \textit{Ereignis}.

\textsuperscript{588} Cf. Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, § 26, p. 157. For a further clarification of how the decision is the event in which \textit{Dasein} “appropriates” its inapprobriable being to itself, see Hamacher, “Ou, séance, touche de Nancy, ici”, in \textit{On Jean-Luc Nancy}, p. 52. Thus the decision of \textit{Dasein} is the decision for existence as infinite finitude; this is the way \textit{Dasein} ek-sists. According to Nancy’s interpretation, this “infinite ownability of unownable Being-in-its-ownness” is what is ownmost to existing. Nancy, \textit{The Birth to Presence}, p. 103 (Une pensée finie, p. 136).

\textsuperscript{589} Nancy, “Un sujet?”, p. 53. As Nancy points out, the notion of the subject as “someone” was already expressed by Plato’s term \textit{tis} (τίδ).

\textsuperscript{590} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 54.

\textsuperscript{591} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 64-65.

\textsuperscript{592} Nancy, “Introduction”, in \textit{Who Comes after the Subject?}, p. 5.
raise the question on the “who” of *Dasein*, though; he does, stating that the Self of *Dasein* is “I myself”. Still, Heidegger hesitates whether the formal givenness of the “I” is able to disclose *Dasein*. Nancy maintains that Heidegger’s notion that being is “in each case mine” cannot finally stand for any appropriation of every taking-place by “me”. Nancy confirms that the Heideggerian *Dasein* is neither “man”, “subject” nor “one”, but always only “the one, each one, with one another” (*l’un, chaque un, de l’un-avec-l’autre*). Although this fact allows to speak of *Dasein* itself and consequently of the co-originarity of being, this view cannot, for Nancy, account for anything else but “the possibility of speaking ‘of *Dasein*’ in general, or of saying ‘the existing’ or ‘existence’”.

For this reason Nancy finds himself compelled to ask where being is spoken, and who speaks being – what is thus required is taking into consideration how to speak unless in terms of “we”, “you” and “I”. As I see it, this would be to say that as being is thus spoken out, also the one who speaks cannot be described otherwise than the subject of utterance (*sujet de l’énonciation*). By the same token, in question is just the who and not the what or essence of the one who utters, since being is to be searched for in the event of its speaking out. In Nancy’s philosophy the singularity of existence appears as a “burst” (*éclatement*) of being, existence deprived of essence and delivered to its own inessentiality, to its surprise and decision or indecision. This is what Nancy implies by the concept of freedom – not a quality or an operation of the existent, but its coming into the presence of existence. Freedom is one’s “own” without being subjective. Rather, the existence of the existent takes place as an inappropriable burst that happens to the existent itself each time singularly, unexpectedly and as a surprise. This kind of a burst has no foundation, nor does anything necessitate it.
What Nancy calls “the ontico-ontological privilege” of *Dasein* in Heidegger’s philosophy, is that its being is the being of beings.\(^{600}\) *Dasein* is in the world as well as the world is *its* own exteriority; this fact is understood by Nancy as the proper space of its being-out-in-the-world. In humankind existence is exposed and exposes the singularity of being as such in all beings.\(^{601}\) For Heidegger, it is for this reason that existence cannot be termed a property of *Dasein*, since it is the original singularity of being that *Dasein* exposes for the whole of being.

How does Nancy explicate the way in which Heidegger’s *Dasein*, in its singularity, exists? As in Heidegger, for Nancy the notion of spacing has an ontological significance for the birth of a singular sense, but he takes an approach to it which does not figure in Heidegger in the same mode. In Nancy’s view, the nature of singularity can be derived from the fact that a singular existent is always a body, and all bodies exist as singularities.\(^{602}\) The body is the condition of a spacing “of all other bodies in myself and a spacing of ‘me’ in ‘me’”.\(^{603}\) Hence, reality is “in each instant, from place to place, each time in turn”.\(^{604}\) As a consequence, there is no Other – which is the meaning of “creation”: being is not the Other, but the origin is the punctual and discrete spacing between us. Alterity exists, which exposes “the always-other origin, always inappropriable, and always there, each and every time present as inimitable”.\(^{605}\)

Yet one may make a somewhat critical remark as regards the nature of the body’s selfhood in Nancy. If every body is absolutely singular in exposed, sentient contact with others and thereby circulates sense, then the absolute of the body is participation in the community of bodies that pose impenetrable resistances to one another and dissolve into one another’s limitations.\(^{606}\) Moreover, if the contact of the bodies is the absolute of existence, then this untransgressible limit collapses into sense at the instant of contact. It is entailed that there are no longer contacting entities but merely a relation of singularities constitutive of sense itself. Hutchens thus points to the question that asks on what conditions the body, as described by Nancy, can be both the “inside” and the “outside” of its own representation: how is it that sense is both produced in the body and to which sense returns or to which sense is given?

---

602 Ibid.
603 Ibid. Cf. Nancy, *Corpus*.
605 Ibid.
For this reason the correlate of creation, understood as existence itself, is, in Nancy’s interpretation, “a curiosity that must be understood in a completely different sense than the one given by Heidegger”.607 This difference lies in the incapacity to have access to the existent openness of Dasein in “the instant”.608 The idea of curiosity is what separates Nancy’s thought from Heidegger at this point. For Heidegger curiosity is a way of seeing, “not in order to understand what is seen … but just in order to see”, seeking novelty “in order to leap from it to another novelty”.609 Therefore, curiosity is not to be “knowingly in the truth”; rather, it is a way “of not tarrying alongside what is closest” and a kind of being in which Dasein is constantly uprooting itself.610 In question is the restless search for excitement and distraction. Nancy gives ontological curiosity a more positive meaning: it is that which is involved in our basic relation to the world and to ourselves, which exposes its origin as always-other. Ideally, such curiosity is for Nancy something that does not seek to appropriate the other’s origin, but contents itself with looking for the singularity of the origin in the other, thus retaining its alterity – otherwise, the other will become the correlate of one’s desire, and in question is something like murder.

Finally, for Nancy in question here is simultaneously the exposition of sense, which comes to mean what he terms “measuring the immeasurable”; immeasurable, since there is nothing that is given as a fixed point of ipseity, of “self”, that is, which would be before, after or outside the world. This is the way in which, according to Nancy, Dasein spaces itself: Dasein’s being is being toward (être-à) something – toward its own self or being.611 I shall leave the notions of spacing and body for a moment and return to them below.

608 Cf. Heidegger, Being and Time, § 36-37, § 68C.
609 Ibid., § 36, p. 216.
610 Ibid., p. 217.
611 Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 96 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 120); cf. Lindberg, Filosofien ystävyys, p. 108-109.
3.2 The Heideggerian *Mitsein* vis-à-vis Nancy’s Plurality of Being

In Nancy’s philosophy the absolute value of being lies in its being-with, in a way that existence is “with” or “together”.\(^{612}\) If this is the ontological question for Nancy, as he claims, what are its consequences for the present problems? First of all, “we” can be read as a radicalization of Heidegger’s term of *Mitsein*, “being-with”. What I would like to advance as a preliminary notion is that Nancy’s interpretation does not merely refer to Heidegger’s “being-with”, but rather is inseparable from it: in other words, as I see it, to a great extent Nancy builds his idea of being-with on sections 25–27 of *Being and Time*, while at the same time confronting Heideggerian thinking.

The question which leads Nancy’s exploration in this matter, formulated in his *Being Singular Plural* in the first place, is why being-with throughout the history of philosophy has been subordinated by “subject” or by “being”. With this, he tries to work out our singular plural being as the essential ontological structure of how we exist. The “with” is not just a mode of being in the world, but our “transcendental” condition, anterior to any presence, consciousness or intentionality.\(^{613}\) For Nancy, the coessentiality of being-with is shown to be “nothing less than a matter of the co-originarity of sense – and that the ‘meaning of Being’ is only what it is … when it is *given as with*”.\(^{614}\) To be explored are the implications of this statement and the way it appears to be a rewriting of Heidegger’s notion of being-with.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger announces that “being with others belongs to the being of *Dasein*”.\(^{615}\) As I have attempted to point out above, in question in Heidegger’s analytic of being-with is one of the characters of *Dasein* called “existentials”. Existentials, or “existentialia”, are to be distinguished from “categories”, that is, “characteristics of Being for entities whose character is not that of *Dasein*”. Together, “[e]xistentialia and categories are the two basic possibilities for characters of Being”.\(^{616}\) *Dasein’s* way of being is being-in-the-world, which is one of the existentials: the world is always the one that I share.

---

613  See Nancy, “La Comparution / The Compearance: From the Existence of ‘Communism’ to the Community of ‘Existence’.”
with Others. Being with Others is another existential, for “a bare subject without a world never ‘is’ proximally, nor is it ever given; an isolated ‘I’ without Others is just as far from proximally given”. Being with Others is an ontological concept which defines human existence. If the world of Dasein is a with-world, as Heidegger holds, does this very thought not seem to incorporate the co-originality of Dasein and Mitsein, on which Nancy’s reading relies from the start?

Heidegger states that the basis for Dasein is its being-in-the-world by which every mode of its being gets co-determined. That is to say, what Nancy targets in his redeveloping of the Heideggerian Dasein, or of every singularity, is its essentially plural structure, the critical point being Nancy’s estimation that “Dasein’s ‘being-toward-death’ was never radically implicated in its being-with – in Mitsein – and this implication remains to be thought”. Let us note here that for Heidegger temporality is primordially finite, for Dasein’s being-toward-death is what secures its individual integrity and self-constancy. Heidegger’s conception of death is, then, something unique, whereas in Nancy death is primarily a question of sharing.

In what terms can the Dasein of Others as entities in the world be spoken of, then? For Heidegger, such entities are neither present-at-hand nor ready-to-hand, but they are like the Dasein which encounters and frees them: they are in the world with it, the “with” being “something of the character of Dasein”. And who are these “Others”? Heidegger responds that they are “those among whom one is too”; here both the “with” and the “too” must be understood existentially, and not categorially. Consequently, the world is always the one which is shared with Others, so that the world of Dasein is a “with-world”, Mitwelt. “Being-in” in the world is being-with Others, and their “Being-in-themselves within-the-world is Dasein-with [Mitdasein]”.

Dasein, which addresses itself as “I here”, is to be thought of in terms of authentic spatiality, or “Being-alongside the world spatially”, prior to any differentiation of locative adverbs and personal pronouns. This explains why the Other is encountered in his Dasein-with in the world. Dasein’s being-in-

617 Ibid., § 25, p. 152.
618 Ibid., § 26, p. 153.
620 This theme will reappear in section 3.4.
621 Heidegger, Being and Time, § 26, p. 154.
622 Ibid., p. 154-155.
623 Ibid., p. 155.
624 Ibid., p. 156.
the-world is essentially constituted by and identical with being-with, Heidegger writes, no matter whether Dasein is alone or not, that is to say, if there is any Other present-at-hand or perceived. The structure of being-with of one’s own Dasein is thus the condition for the fact that the Dasein of Others may be encountered in the world, as there is no isolated I without others. Yet it is possible to question Heidegger’s ends in his introduction of the being-with alongside of Dasein: why did he take so long to elaborate the “with”, if the “with” is really accorded the status of being co-original with the “there”? And, why still develop a Dasein and a being-with instead of only a being-with, if the two are genuinely co-original?

Insofar as Dasein-with is constitutive of being-in-the-world, it is to be interpreted in terms of care (Sorge); however, the encountered entities are not ready-to-hand, but Dasein themselves. For this reason they are objects of solicitude (Fürsorge). In solicitude the Other is disclosed in its Dasein for the sake of one’s being-with: because Dasein’s being is being-with, its understanding of being already implies the understanding of Others. Since for Heidegger being is “being towards Others” (Zu-sein), he ends up by summarizing his analysis of being-with by stating that Dasein, as being-in-the-world, already is with Others, for they are there with us (mit da sind). In Nancy’s philosophy, this notion gives rise to the thinking of the community of sense: one’s being is possible by virtue of “we” – or rather, “in us” or “between us” – that the opening of sense may take place. In Nancy, that we are in-common through the act of sharing the world and a spacing in-common in which we are thrown is the horizon in which community has to be thought of. Thus, it seems evident that co-existence or being-with becomes the ontological question to be posed in the development of a social ontology. As a consequence, Nancy’s question is: how is it that we are in common?

For him, being-with or being-in-common cannot be added in a secondary and extrinsic manner to being. It should be understood, Nancy maintains, that the “mit” of Mitsein does not qualify the “sein”, nor does the “mit” of Mitdasein qualify the “dasein”, as if being subsisted by itself or “as if it were itself, that

---

625 Ibid., p. 157.
627 Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 157.
628 Ibid., p. 160-161.
is, if it were or existed, absolutely.630 Instead, the “mit” essentially constitutes the “sein” as well as “dasein”, “with” being the proper, exclusive and originary modality of being-there (être-là et être-le-là). A similar supposition underlies Heidegger’s concept of Jemeinigkeit, the “in each case mine”: it departs from the idea that the “self” could be revealed by way of the “I”. In this case existence would be given an individual, subjective and unilateral meaning.631

Consequently, Nancy directs the question to the community of being, to being in common, which is the position – Setzung in the active sense of the word – of existence.632 The self is the other before any relation between the same and the other (autrui): the self is the other of its declination, in a way that being-self (être-soi) is being-to-self or being-toward-oneself (être-à-soi), namely, to being exposed-to-self. Here the self is nothing but exposition. The condition for this thought is that being is abandoned to the world: “abandoned being” corresponds to the exhaustion of transcendentials, that is, above all, to the suspension of discourses and categories – that being is abandoned, means that it has been left us to be, as having to be.633 This thought relies on the Heideggerian notion of being whose position is empty, the truth of the empty position being nothingness – that is, nothing but the openness of being, that is, the idea that being is spoken in multiple ways and has thus no other ground than groundlessness.634 This thought, as I see it, lies in the background of Nancy’s notion of existence. Existence thus becomes synonymous to exposition or presentation, presence to self.635

This given, one may see that Nancy’s modifications of the fundamental ontological structures are ontical.636 If being-with is not added on to being-there, but to be there is to be with, and to be with makes sense, as Nancy explains, then the “with” is also shown to be the co-existential foundation of any sense of self and any making of sense. Yet, in Critchley’s opinion, it is the same ontology that makes Nancy unable to describe the relation between being and the particular being or between singularity and plurality. This is because

630 Nancy, La communauté désœuvrée, p. 203.
631 Ibid., p. 205.
632 Ibid., p. 201-204.
635 Nancy, La communauté désœuvrée, p. 207-208.
636 Critchley holds that this tendency is visible in particular in Nancy’s accounts of the encounter with the other. Critchley, Ethics – Politics – Subjectivity, p. 248. Cf. Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 93-94 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 117-118).
Nancy always understands singularity and plurality from within being. With Heidegger, being-with and the existence of Dasein depend on each other. As it seems to me, what distinguishes Nancy’s thought from Heidegger’s is the fact that in reflecting on the constitution of the self, Nancy raises being-with to a more decisive position. The themes of Nancy’s critique rejoin the ones that Heidegger introduced under the name of fundamental ontology. Yet, what Nancy seems to be doing is to discuss ontological questions by applying criteria which are adopted from the level that Heidegger terms ontical. Or, to put it differently, Nancy gives ontical being a position which is more or less equivalent to and inseparable from the ontological one.

What is it, then, that makes Nancy radicalize Heidegger’s Mitsein, and how is this supposed to happen? In Nancy, the question of co-existence becomes so essential and originary that the whole of Nancy’s ontology might be described as “social ontology”, as Simon Critchley suggests. What Nancy brings out in this so-called social ontology, leads to a situation in which the Heideggerian Seinsfrage (the question on being) has to be posed and pursued through die Mitseinsfrage (the question on being-with) or in other words, that the question of being is equiprimordial with the question of being-with. Nancy even calls the “co-existential analytic” a “first philosophy”, that is, ontology. This can be understood as a radicalization of Heidegger’s statement that the human being or Dasein, as being-in-the-world, already is with Others, for they are there with us (mit da sind).

In Heidegger, as Nancy sees it, the existential analytic is meant to respond to the question of the meaning of being, or to being as meaning. Yet, the meaning of being seems to be indicated itself by the putting into play of being in Dasein and as Dasein. The bottom line of Nancy’s argument is the following: this

---

637 Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 98 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 122); Critchley, Ethics – Politics – Subjectivity, p. 250. Hence, according to Critchley, Nancy’s co-existential analysis is at once ethical and an originary ethics: ontology is ethical and ethics is ontological. However, Critchley criticizes Nancy’s modification of the existential analysis for appropriating absolute otherness, and by so doing, neutralizing ethical transcendence. Critchley’s argument thus calls for a more Lévinasian notion of ethics on Nancy’s side. Ibid., p. 251. I consider this claim to be untenable; cf. notes 664 and 682 below.

638 For this problematic, see also Nancy (1990). “Sharing Voices”, in Transforming the Hermeneutic Context, ed. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift. Albany: SUNY Press, p. 211-259 (Le partage des voix; Paris: Gallilée, 1982), in which he offers an analysis of “hermeneutics”, understood as the multiplicity of voices. In Nancy’s view, every speaking is shared and divided – community is the totality of voices. Cf. also Fynsk, Heidegger: Thought and Historicity, p. 31-35, 44-46.


640 Ibid., p. 247.

641 Aristotle defines the area of inquiry as “first philosophy” (philosophia proté), later called “metaphysics”. See ibid., p. 239.

642 Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 27 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 46).
putting into play can only attest to itself or expose itself in the mode of being-with. This is because “as relates to meaning, it is never for just one, but always for one another, always between one another”. In the last analysis, being thus proves to be equal with communication, that is to say, in accordance with Nancy’s central theme of the circulation of sense. In Nancy’s philosophy, this notion gives rise to the thinking of the community of sense: one’s being is possible because “we” are in the world. Or rather, the opening of the sense of being may take place “in us” or “between us”. Concerning our common appearance Nancy uses the concept of comparution.

Nancy’s idea of being-with rests on a notion that being exposes its “as such” as its own sharing, and that each time, being as such is being as the being of a being. If being as such is a being-similar which circulates from being to being, then it also “implies the disparity, discontinuity, and simultaneity required for gauging a ‘resemblance’”. Thus, Nancy supposes that there is a “certain (dis)similarity of being that crosses through all being”, and asks: “How can Being as such be anything other than the (dis)similarity of being in its simultaneity?”

3.3 Nancy’s “Social Ontology”

Having now explored Nancy’s understanding of the notions of singularity and the self, I shall now discuss Nancy’s suggestion that the existence of a singularity

643 Ibid.
644 Ibid., p. 28 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 47).
646 Cf. Critchley, Ethics – Politics – Subjectivity, p. 245; Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 65 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 87). Here Nancy makes the point that comparution, “common appearing”, is not only an ontology but it is, and must be, also an ethos and a praxis. This theme was further developed by Nancy in the article “Originary Ethics”. See Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 172-195 (La pensée dérobée, p. 85-113). Critchley’s interpretation of Nancy’s notion of “we” and being-with, however, proves to be problematic. According to Critchley, for Nancy, “to say ‘we’ is for existence to reclaim its due or to find its condition in co-existence” (Critchley, Ethics – Politics – Subjectivity, p. 241). As regards the relation of “we” and co-existence, it seems evident that it implies a dialectics. This is what Critchley formulates in the following way: “Nancy’s conception of being-with risks reducing intersubjectivity to a relation of reciprocity, equality and symmetry” (ibid., p. 251). Yet what Nancy emphasizes, is that “we” is neither a collective subject nor intersubjectivity. Hence reciprocity and symmetry are notions which Nancy’s “with” or “being-in-common” are opposed to, nor does “with” go from the same to the other, no more than it is a process. Instead, our being is related to something or someone other than ourselves and what constitutes ourselves – being, as being-with-one-another, is always incommensurable. This makes us “we others” to ourselves, for the self is or poses itself originarily other than itself. This ontological condition is what Nancy calls transcendence in immanence, or “transimmanence”. See Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 77, 94, 98 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 100-101, 118, 122); cf. Devisch, “A Trembling Voice in the Desert: Jean-Luc Nancy’s Rethinking of the Space of the Political”.
647 Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 46 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 66).
cannot be thought of unless from the perspective of multiplicity. For him this idea works in a symmetrical way: the togetherness of singulars is singularity “itself”, and at the same time being-together provides a movement which both assembles and spaces the singulars.\textsuperscript{648} Being is being-with or being-shared and being in common, only since sense as singularity can be born from its touch with other senses. The spacing which opens up between singularities thus proves to be the condition for sense and Being alike for Nancy. As I hope to have shown above, the primary points of interest here are his reactions to the metaphysics of the subject, as well as to Heidegger’s thinking of \textit{Dasein}, \textit{Dasein} meaning that which exists ecstatically. The same criterion of ecstatic existing qualifies the “self” in Nancy, if it comes to be understood as an affective disposition towards the world (\textit{être-le-là}).\textsuperscript{649}

The similarities between Nancy’s notion of singularity or of the self and the analytic of \textit{Dasein} certainly cannot be denied – their common ground is in groundlessness, as their essence lies in existence, existence being the same as sense of being and occupying a definite place at a definite point in time. Still, for Nancy \textit{Dasein} is unable to account for one’s singular being: it does not answer in a satisfactory way \textit{whose} existence one is speaking about. This is the view Simon Critchley has put forward. The specificity of existence does not, however, lead Nancy to ask what is \textit{proper} to someone quite in the same way as Heidegger does.\textsuperscript{650} For Nancy “someone” is its exposition to the sense of the world, and a singular sense emerges momentarily in the place of someone. Hence, according to Susanna Lindberg’s interpretation, Nancy’s idea of being exposed to the sense of the world is a singular event. Yet it does not amount to thinking of what

\textsuperscript{648} See e.g. Nancy, \textit{Being Singular Plural}, p. 33 (\textit{Être singulier pluriel}, p. 53).

\textsuperscript{649} Cf. Critchley, \textit{Ethics – Politics – Subjectivity}, p. 249. When it suggests the same as Heidegger’s \textit{Dasein (être-là)}, Nancy sometimes uses the term \textit{être-le-là} to include a reference to the “self” in the expression. \textit{Être-le-là} designates “being-there” (\textit{Da-sein}) with the transitive verbal value of its “disposition”, that is, “[t]he disposing of being itself as distance/proximity” and the disposing into the there of the world (là), which is supposed “to make” or “to let” the coming of all with all \textit{as such}. \textit{Dasein} thus exposes \textit{being-as-to-be} (\textit{être en tant qu’être}). The English language has difficulty in trying to render the specific transitive nature of the expression \textit{être-le-là}. The translator of \textit{Being Singular Plural}, for example, has simply put “being-there”, which is the standard translation of Heidegger’s \textit{Dasein}. See Nancy, \textit{Being Singular Plural}, p. 96-97 (cf. \textit{Être singulier pluriel}, p. 120-121).

\textsuperscript{650} Lindberg, \textit{Filosofien ystävyys}, p. 106-110. Lindberg suggests that Nancy, partly at least, renounces the thought of one’s “proper” being. As she explains, what is “ownmost” to \textit{Dasein}, according to Heidegger, are repetition and fate. These are \textit{Dasein}’s practices of temporalizing itself: in their infinite singularity they make someone just this particular “self”, the one he or she is, and make oneself responsible for one’s fate. For Heidegger conscience gives \textit{Dasein} its selfhood, it is what measures the immeasurable: namely, conscience is what measures the interval between fate and repetition. Cf. Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, § 72-75. In Lindberg’s view, Nancy gives up any logic (such as return, repetition, expectation, grief, or fate) of temporalizing which is needed to determine one’s conscience. If for Nancy thinking presents itself at the moment of the syncopation of philosophical conscience, this also means that thinking does not submit itself to be guided by conscience.
is proper to oneself in the way historicality singularizes *Dasein* in its current situation by means of *Dasein*’s fateful repetition of its possibilities.\(^{651}\)

In more metaphysical terms, one could here speak of a certain form of relativity. Yet relativity does not mean any abandonment of the sense, since the self weighs itself and others and thinking has a gravity of its own: thought always *depends* from or on “weighing”. Sense is what exceeds or is beyond any signification. To Nancy, this view is given support from the etymology of these two French words meaning “thought” (*pensée*) and “weight” (*pesée*).\(^{652}\) In Nancy, *thinking* amounts to *weighing* things: the world which is without measure has to be given the dignity of things, and here the weight has a certain gravity as regards thought. The act of thinking means weighing of the real, that is, of the world and of things, as sense. In weighing, the self relentlessly measures the incommensurable, co-appropriating the sense and the real, thus deciding what has sense and what does not. Or more exactly, what in the relation between “someone” and another puts them together, is their common incommensurability. In common between them is nothing but their distinction.\(^{653}\) Experience of the weight of thought affects us with a pressure or inclination – still, it remains at a limit, unable to appropriate what it represents: as Nancy writes, there is no access to the weight of thought, nor to the thought of weight.\(^{654}\)

Alongside bringing forth the specific nature of each singular of existence, Nancy wishes to introduce the notion that existence means the coming into presence of existence, or presence to presence and not to self. This is because presence is, in each case, presence “in common”.\(^{655}\) Coming-into-presence is thus characterized by a sense of plurality as much as of singularity, in a way that it is both “in each case ours” and “in each case mine” in an interdependent manner, and not principally the latter, as proposed by Heidegger. The existence of beings is necessarily plural, and thus community is the “ontological condition

---

\(^{651}\) Apart from the temporal modes of the future and the past (the having-been), the historicality of *Dasein* is singularized by the horizon of death and each situation. Added to these are repetition and destiny of being; they constitute what is most proper to *Dasein* in what Heidegger terms its “connectedness” in the unity with which experiences are linked together between birth and death. This points at how *Dasein* temporalizes itself and is its own “self” and is irreversibly bound up in its acts and choices. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 75, esp. p. 442. According to Susanna Lindberg’s explication, the proper space of *Dasein* is, however, only between its own being and its being-such (*être-tel*), See Lindberg, *Filosofien ystävyys*, p. 107.


\(^{653}\) Nancy, “Un sujet?”, p. 103.

\(^{654}\) Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, p. 76 (*Le poids d’une pensée*, p. 2). In question here is the decision of existence. Or, conscience measures the immeasurable by measuring the distance and difference between things.

\(^{655}\) Nancy, “Introduction”, in *Who Comes after the Subject?*, p. 8.
of existence as presence-to”. The scope of plurality in Nancy’s philosophy will now be investigated, however inseparable this concept is from the sense of singularity. Here again, reference will be made to Heidegger and his term *Mitsein*, which is one of the principal sources from which Nancy’s notion of being-with arises. To be explored are some of the implications of *Mitsein* in order to shed some light upon what is meant by “we”—plurality and community—in Nancy’s thinking. Briefly presented in my dissertation will be what is hinted at by “us”, which is related to such concepts as community and politics in Nancy. In the background of Nancy’s discussion of community can be found, in the first place, Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot, for whom community is only born in death.

As being is being-with, being-together or being-in-common, one is always more than one, which means that one’s being is copresent with itself. However, the *co* is not something which could be presented as such, because it “is” only in the distancing of being. The “co” or the “with” is thus unpresentable—or more precisely, it remains outside the logic of presentation. The “with” only denounces the condition for the exposition of singularities: since they are many, they must incline or decline, in other words, they must be in relation to others. With respect to community and being-with, which are both central notions in Nancy’s ontology, where do these reflections lead? As I see it, they suggest that Nancy raises the concept of “we” to an equally ontological position. Namely, he states that “we are” the sense, which is not to say that we would have any signification, nor would it signify any community. Rather, “we” means the common belonging to sense that enunciates itself, since sense “can only be common, and that which is common takes place only in the element of sense.”

“We” consists in the subject of enunciation, which is not yet a statement but the general communication or the general performativity that is inherent in the element of sense as such. “We” is thus the sense of sense, the very opening of sense, and sense as opening. The opening “in us” or “between us” would be

---

the possibility of saying *we*, and what is even more important, of saying *I*.\textsuperscript{661} For Nancy, it is possible to say that “we are sense” just because our existence presents itself as sense (or equally well as non-sense). Simultaneously, we present ourselves to ourselves: “We co-appear [comparaisons], and this appearing [parution] is sense”.\textsuperscript{662} Being exposed or presented is thus sense itself: exposure as our sharing makes us a community of sense, a community which has no signification. We are the community of sense – the community itself has no signification and respectively, our exposure to sense constitutes our being-in-common, and not the communication of significations.\textsuperscript{663}

However, in considering the notion of the commonality of sense, Simon Critchley is probably right in saying that Nancy is unable to describe the relation of the ontical and the ontological because the particular being is always already understood within the pre-comprehension of being. Yet, Critchley remarks, Nancy’s “first philosophy” of being-with and *comparution* rejoins the philosophical tradition of ontology, which suppresses ontical plurality. Thus, Nancy seems to modify ontically a fundamental ontological structure, with no fundamentally ontological dimension to the encounter with the other. Heidegger, for his part, subordinates the relation to the other to the relation to being, and while *Dasein* is *Mitsein*, “this question is only a moment of an existential analytic whose ambition is the elaboration of the question of the meaning of Being”.\textsuperscript{664}

\textsuperscript{661} Ibid. What is more, Nancy sees a similar idea in Descartes’ *ego*: “One could in fact show that, at the point of where the Cartesian *ego* is still suspended just before all signification, before *sum* (if this is a signification), and before *cogito*, the *ego* is caught in the element of *we*; Descartes himself is not far from saying this when he ascribes the evidence of his proposition to the fact – which is, here again, inextricably empirical and transcendental – that we all experience our existence, and that it is this certainty alone, which we all already share, that can impart to us the evidence of its philosopheme”. Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, p. 61-62 (L’oubli de la philosophie, p. 94).

\textsuperscript{662} Ibid., p. 62 (L’oubli de la philosophie, p. 94).

\textsuperscript{663} Ibid., p. 66 (L’oubli de la philosophie, p. 101).

\textsuperscript{664} Critchley, *Ethics – Politics – Subjectivity*, p. 248, 250-251. Critchley considers Nancy both in the context of Heideggerian ontology and Lévinas’s ethics. Critchley sees Nancy’s ontological condition of “being-with” as based on “a neutralizing of ethical transcendence or a flattening of the structure of ethical experience”, reducible to “a relation of reciprocity, equality and symmetry”. Thus, what Critchley claims is that Nancy’s thought would be missing the sense of Lévinasian ethics: the other who “stands to me in an asymmetrical relation of height”. Critchley accuses Nancy’s “other” for becoming “my colleague, my comrade, my semblable, perhaps also my lover” whom I still do not face. Instead, Nancy’s thought would incorporate “the dialectic of intersubjectivity that defines the Subject through its appropriation of absolute otherness”. Ibid., p. 251. However, as one is able to read from, for example, *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy’s being-with is grounded in co-existence and togetherness, the origin of which is irreducible alterity. The other remains other and as such, inappropriable; shared in a community is the fact that nothing is to be shared. Cf. *Being Singular Plural*, e.g. p. 19 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 38).

With respect to the question whether Nancy misses the point of ethics in his ontology, what he holds himself is that being should be considered as praxis: as an active relation, as man’s reality in its opening toward the facticity of being, which is the relation of existence to itself as the action of sense. See esp. “Originary Ethics”, in *A Finite Thinking* (“L’ethique originaire”), in *La penseé dérobée*. Furthermore, in the essay “The Free Voice of Man” Nancy wants to ask the origin of ethics, his conclusion being that there is finally no access outside of ethics. With this Nancy hopes to show that philosophical discourse,
To have sense, or to make sense or to be sensed means, according to Nancy, being to oneself as far as the other affects this selfhood (ipséité) in such a way that this affection neither lets itself be reduced to nor retained in the self (ipse) itself. On the contrary, if the affection of the sense is reabsorbed, sense also disappears.\textsuperscript{665} Keeping to the idea that the sense is the opening of a relation \textit{to self} (à soi), Nancy suggests that “we are sense” (nous sommes sens). But in which way are we sense? The structure inherent in the relation of “to itself” calls for a difference involved in this relation. Sense is related \textit{to} itself – it is the exposition to itself – and what initiates it, engages it and maintains sense \textit{to} itself is the distance and the spacing of an opening of the \textit{to}.\textsuperscript{666} Inasmuch as the exposure presents us to sense and presents sense to us, sense turns out to be inappropriable: it is offered at the limit of signification, from whose presence we are spared being caught. According to Nancy, “The sense offered at the limit of signification takes us into the movement of a presentation \textit{to}… which is a rupture of presence itself …, a rupture of signification itself and its order. This is why this presentation at the limit is an exposure”.\textsuperscript{667}

From what has been said above it follows that there is a discontinuity in the birth of sense, for sense is shown to be \textit{us} as exposed. “Ourselves” (nous-mêmes) finally comes to mean “we others” (nous autres): the self is the other in that it is exposed-to-self, which results in the fact that “the self” is nothing but exposition. As a consequence, being-to-self is being-to-other, for the reason that the self is always declined.\textsuperscript{668} Or, in other words: sense depends on relating itself to another or to some other.\textsuperscript{669} That we are \textit{we others}, refers to the notion that the self is always only toward itself – this is, according to Nancy, synonymous with what is meant by existence. Hence, the self is always the other; similarly, community is nothing but the community of others, for its members may participate only in their own otherness. Namely, in community no common

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{665} Nancy, \textit{A Finite Thinking}, p. 6-7 (Une pensée finie, p. 16).
\item\textsuperscript{666} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{667} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{668} Nancy, \textit{The Gravity of Thought}, p. 63 (L’oubli de la philosophie, p. 97); cf. Nancy, \textit{Being Singular Plural}, p. 4-5 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 22-23).
\item\textsuperscript{669} Nancy, \textit{La communauté désœuvrée}, p. 207-208. Pointing to the problematic of “the They” (das Man), Heidegger writes: “Daein itself is not; its Being has been taken away by the Others; one belongs to the Others oneself”. \textit{Being and Time}, § 27, p. 164; cf. Nancy, \textit{The Birth to Presence}, p. 185-186 (Une pensée finie, p. 220-221). According to Nancy, “[i]t is common to all things to be, and in this way, being is their “whatever”. But it is common to each one to be some thing, this particular thing here. There is no “common” thing that is not singular”. This would be to say that to be in-common is to remain in the between of “the continuous-discontinuity”.\textsuperscript{669}
\end{itemize}
identity exists which would precede the differences. For this reason, singularity means one’s being with the other: we share what shares us as singularities, with no sense of a fusional community. Otherness is, at every instant, “mineness” (*Jemeinigkeit* in Heidegger), which corresponds to the otherness of every selfhood. Thus, the relation to the other is without relation.

“We” are “we others” because spacing is the “absolute condition” of sense. From this it follows that each individual’s otherness is not some substance it shares with other selves; rather, the self is in relation to other selves through the strangeness implied by sharing. In its circulating movement, sense infinitely exceeds signification, and this is why sense for Nancy neither comes to be finally fulfilled, nor does it have a point of origin, but rather a plurality of origins. Or, one might say that sense reflects itself as it circulates, and this kind of self-reflexivity allows that the opening of sense is at once an opening-to-self.

Sense is “us” as exposed, to a space and to ourselves as a space, to a time and to ourselves as a time – it is “[t]hrough this exposure, which presents us to sense and which presents sense to us” that we are “spared being caught in the presence that results from signification”. In this way, the birth of sense implies that the “self” finds itself other than itself, as originally altered. That is, instead of a subject described as an (undivided) individual, Nancy speaks of a “singular being” which is always already altered. Singular beings as such are “constituted by… sharing that makes them others: other for one another… ‘communicating’ by not ‘communing’”. For Nancy, it is the very experience of the limits of communication that allows each being to discover a certain singularity in common.

### 3.4 Community – the Shared Exposition of Being

Is there anything for Nancy that would be more common than to be or being? He gives an answer: we are. What we share is being or existence, and

---

673 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 77 (*Être singulier pluriel*, p. 100-101). This kind of (dis)identification of the self has its roots in Hegel, as Nancy points out.
674 Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 25 (*La communauté désœuvrée*, p. 64).
the question about being must from now on be turned to the community of being. “Community” appears in his philosophy as a term organically associated with the notion of being-in-common, but in Nancy’s community the sense of communality does not lie in any communion. In place of communion, there is communication, which, however, is not a bond. The concept of community is thus an object of deconstruction in Nancy’s philosophy; as I see it, he aims at the deconstruction of the traditional notion of community by pointing to the withdrawal or retreat of its identity. Identity and immanence are the components of the metaphysical discussion on the constitution of community. Nancy points out that the immanence of community is essentially given form by its “loss” – yet, and most importantly, he doubts whether any such community ever existed. Thus, his deconstruction aims at bringing forth “a community without community” or “without communion”.

In fact, what Nancy has in mind is Georges Bataille’s formulation of the “negative community”, “the community of those who have no community”, or the community of worklessness (désœuvrement). Bataille introduced the notion of the community of absence or the absence of community: the community which consists in its own withdrawal of communion, or community caught up in its own impossibility. For Bataille, communication calls for touching the limit where the whole sense turns over outside of itself through the word “sense”. Shared by Bataille and Blanchot, as well as by Nancy, is the idea that what the community lacks is any notion of infinite common substance. On the contrary, the source of community must be searched for in what Nancy

675 Ibid., p. 28 (La communauté désœuvrée, p. 72). Cf. Derrida, Writing and Difference, p. 98–99 (L’écriture et la différence, p. 118–119). Here Derrida refers to “a community of the question” – of philosophy, of decision, of initiality. See also Bernasconi, Robert (1993). “On Deconstructing Nostalgia within the West: The Debate between Nancy and Blanchot”, Research in Phenomenology, vol. 23, p. 18, note 28 (p. 3–21), where Bernasconi puts deconstruction into question as “a community of remembering”. What Bernasconi claims is that Nancy ignores this problem as such; hence, he asks whether Nancy is really speaking of the loss of community or of the nostalgia for it – whether deconstruction is, finally, “threatened by nostalgia for so-called Western metaphysics, securing Western philosophy’s identity at the very moment that it questions it?”


677 See Blanchot, The Unavowable Community, p. 24 (La communauté inavouable, p. 45).


679 Nancy, Une pensée finie, p. 53–64, cf. Blanchot, The Unavowable Community, cf. p. 3, 15 (La communauté inavouable, p. 12, 30). In Nancy’s view, this is the point at which the fragile and repeated sense is suspended, the point where language starts to communicate with itself and where writing turns out to be its own source. Nancy took up the discussion on the matters of sharing and community in the book Le partage des voix (Paris: Galilée, 1982) and in more length in the article “La communauté désœuvrée” (Allée 1983: 4, p. 11–49). It was soon followed by Maurice Blanchot’s response to Nancy, titled La communauté inavouable, in 1983, the English version being The Unavowable Community. Nancy’s book La communauté désœuvrée came out in 1986 (of which an expanded edition was published in 1990). It was translated into English as The Inoperative Community (1991).
terms partage. For him, partage is both sharing and division, as it introduces the possibility of sharing and commonality, even if they are momentary, in “compearance” (com-parution): in the common appearance of finitude, or of finite singular beings in an extension.680

What Nancy terms the “inoperative community” refers to something which cannot, however, be identified with the being of community.681 Nancy’s (as well as Bataille’s and Blanchot’s) deconstructive theorization of community resists any desire for presence, as it strives at giving expression to the insufficiency and incompleteness of community. The desire for presence is what Nancy describes as “an absolute immanence of man to man”.682 Such immanence proves impossible in Nancy’s hands: it rises from the nostalgia for “a more achaic community” and its alleged constituents, that is, familiarity, fraternity and conviviality, which are now lost.683 As each singularity is extended, this means that it exists – ek-sists in the Heideggerian sense – by being exposed to an outside in communication. The common appearance can thus be called the exposition of finitude, which, Nancy contends, is the essence of community.684 This is to say that while stressing the aspect of the eventual sharing of sense, Nancy also maintains an (impossible) openness of community to the other: such openness involves the recognition of irreducible difference and radical alterity. One may thus state that the being-in-common is based on a difference or on a shared lack of identity. In question for Nancy is the community of communication, which is momentarily able to reach the sense of community. However, the community itself does not imply a common substance. A finite being only exists by co-appearing or “compearing”, which is to say that it presents itself only in-common.685 In fact, it is not that

680 The French comparution is a legal term which refers to the act of having been summoned to appear in court. The court to which we compear is the Day of Judgment – but in the sense of a day which is constantly in suspense, or a differed judgment that cannot be appealed against. It is not subject to any superior law (droit), for it proceeds from that which precedes law. In fact, we “have never ceased to compear before this law without law”. Nancy, “La comparution / The Compearance”, p. 371-373 (“La comparution”, p. 47-53). This means that we are exposed to a criterion before all criteria: community is the law to come (à venir). What follows is that we are under the necessity to judge ourselves in front of other people by our common existence – one could also say that we are obliged to make the decision of our own being. This is what judges us. Here Nancy makes the point that comparution is not only an ontology but it is, and must be, also an ethos and a praxis. What withdraws from the notion of community is any notion of infinite common substance.
681 Nancy, La communauté désœuvrée, p. 201-202.
682 Ibid., p. 2 (La communauté désœuvrée, p. 14).
684 Nancy, The Inoperative Community, p. 29 (La communauté désœuvrée, p. 73).
685 For Nancy, being is free from all generality, from all categories that would give a phenomenon an essence or a substance. Nancy notes that, as a consequence, being is to be conceived as “abandoned being”, meaning that being has been abandoned by all categories and transcendentals. Being’s position is empty: it mediates the becoming of being in an irremediable scattering in its inexhaustible advent. Being is the “spoken-in-multiple-ways”, with no other identity than its default of identity. Nancy, The
finite beings would be singularized against any ground offered by the “origin of being” or that one could identify with the origin or essence, nor is there any access to such thing through singular identities. Rather, Nancy seems to be saying that singularities are determined by the spacing between them and between all beings: only this “with” or togetherness, which is neither a substance nor a bond, may be able to grant a state in which the plurality of identities and the singularity of every identity are mutually determined. This also means that sense is in common and together, although all the selves are related through their otherness, that is, through the fact that there is nothing substantial to be shared with other selves. A similar idea of interdependency and of the relationality of senses is central to Nancy’s account of art.

Read as an interpretation of Heidegger’s *Dasein and Mitsein*, it would not be too difficult to draw the conclusion here that *Mitsein* basically comes down to pointing out that being is always that of singular beings in Nancy’s thought. Furthermore, the sharing which is founded on division corresponds with the notion of “relation without relation”, introduced by Lévinas, as Simon Critchley remarks. Another characteristic of Nancy’s community is its worklessness or unworking. A workless community is one which refuses to create itself as a work (*œuvre*): an idle and unoccupied community lacking anything that might unify it, a community of absence. Like Nancy, Blanchot finds unworking to be the condition of the existence of a community. They share the idea that a community occupies a singular place in that it takes upon itself the impossibility of a communitarian being as subject. This is, for Critchley, the fact which opens the way to thinking of Nancy’s community as a community founded on transcendence, irreducible to immanence (or, as Critchley terms it, immanentism), and thus resisting a fusion into communion or the recognition of the self and the other.

---

689  One example of an immanentist community is, Critchley notes, the desire to produce the community as a living artwork. This is a project that Heidegger outlines in his essay “The Origin of the Work of Art” (p. 75-81). The same project is termed by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe as Heidegger’s “national aestheticism”. Cf. Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, p. 218; cf. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 15 (*La communauté désœuvrée*, p. 42). See also Bernasconi, “On Deconstructing Nostalgia within the West: The Debate between Nancy and Blanchot”, p. 4. From the standpoint of Lévinasian ethics, Bernasconi considers that Nancy’s ontological account of the “inoperative community” is tied to the philosophy of immanence that Nancy himself tries to avoid. This would be on the grounds that Bernasconi sees Nancy as effacing alterity by stating that being is itself “in common”, whereby Nancy would render the Lévinasian face to face secondary. Bernasconi, “On
community is, in Nancy’s opinion, constitutive of “community” itself; yet community has not “lost” anything, for immanence would only suppress community or communication.

Drawing on Bataille, Nancy affirms that communities are communities of death or the dead. This is the case, according to B. C. Hutchens’s formulation, “if only because immanental community would require the complete realisation of a potential of each individual”, such a realisation being possible in death. However, Nancy holds that even death does not give community any sense of communion, for death is nothing but the singular death, and inversely, the sense of death cannot be retraced to community. Death is not sublated, and no dialectic leads it “to any other immanence than that of… death”. At this point, Nancy’s idea seems to be consistent with Blanchot’s observation, according to which the singularity of death cannot be taken over by a concept. Here Blanchot points to Hegel’s notion of dialectics, in which the concept and the singularity of its object are reconciled into unity, in a way that death, or negation, also comes to be destroyed. Community is something that is constantly to come (à-venir); communion never forms a future, since the future is formed by the individual death.

What, then, is it that is common or shared in a community of being or existence? Here lies Nancy’s seemingly paradoxical statement: being is in common, without ever being common or having common substance. In community the lack of identity is shared, so that community is made of what retreats from it, that is, the common and its work, “work” being Nancy’s term for the fulfilled infinite identity for community. Finitude, defined by Nancy as “the infinite lack of infinite identity”, thus constitutes community. As Blanchot sees it, with his notion of community Nancy thus seeks, in the words of Georges Bataille, “the community of those who do not have a community”.

Deconstructing Nostalgia within the West”, p. 12.
690 Nancy, The Inoperative Community, p. 12 (La communauté désœuvrée, p. 35).
693 Cf. Blanchot, The Gaze of Orpheus, e.g. p. 46-48. Thus, in Hegel, speech would become the life of death. Blanchot’s view is, at many points, aimed at opposing Hegel. If Hegel tried to bring being, in its singularity and materiality, into the sphere of language in order to approach the Idea or the universal truth, Blanchot wishes to speak of language in terms of its materiality, which would communicate its own strangeness and singularity.
694 Nancy, La communauté désœuvrée, p. 225.
696 Blanchot, The Unavowable Community, p. 1 (La communauté inavouable, p. 9).
Being *in common*, like being-with, are for Nancy a relation without relation, or a simultaneous exposition to relation and to the absence of relation. In this case, what is exposed? It is “*our* communication”, or our exposition as finite exposition, which itself is exposed to the “without common” or the “without common measure”.

Being in common is a mode of being or existence, when existence *is* nothing else but shared being and only the exposition of being and the declaration of the self – ourselves – is shared. Any thought of community as shared sense is suspended in the situation where philosophy has come to its limit. This is when sense does not coincide with being, and community has nothing, or is nothing, to be shared – nothing but the decision of community itself “in one sense or another”, as Nancy puts it.

As it seems to me, it is primarily within the thought of community that Nancy radicalizes Heidegger’s notion of *Mitsein*. With *Mitsein* Heidegger gives Nancy an opening which allows him to think of existence as a plural spacing of singularities or a nonidentitarian thinking of community. This is to say that *Mitsein* opens up a possibility as the fundamental being-with of those singularities, and not as a collection of individual subjects who bind themselves together on the basis of a shared identity. In proposing community as a mode of being-with Nancy shows what the ultimate sense of this term is: *Mitsein* is what allows one to think of the groundlessness of being. The relation between beings is community, in which the “ground” of existence is not to be searched for in an individual or a subject but in the relation.

Community is made of multiple singular articulations, and thus it ceaselessly differs from itself; according to Christopher Fynsk, this difference presents itself as unsublatable with Nancy. In this regard, the account of death is decisive to the extent that the Heideggerian notion of being-toward-death is that which places the singular existence of *Dasein* outside the grounding of any metaphysics of the subject. *Dasein* as “being-toward-death” probably exceeds the discourses of subjectivity and substance. But according to Nancy, Heidegger’s existential analysis is still bound up with the same discourses in its invocation of the historical destination of a people (*Volk*).

---

699 Ibid., p. 218, 223.
700 Cf. James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p. 177.
Being and Time turns out to have no impact on, or relation to, the collective existence of community.\(^{703}\)

What gives motivation to Nancy’s will to radicalize Heidegger’s thought of Mitsein, as well as to move from the thinking of being in terms of space rather than in terms of time, is the attempt to point out that the sense of a collective existence of community escapes Heidegger. Heidegger in fact states is that I alone am projected to death and that Dasein is thus singularized by death – only when a singular Dasein is first projected to its own death is it also a “being-with” others.\(^{704}\) A sense of collective exposition to finitude is thus lacking in Being and Time, and this is what Nancy aims at: to think of the relation to death as “radically implicated” in the experience of community.\(^{705}\) The consequences of such a communitary exposition to finitude makes way for Nancy’s idea of sharing of death.

Yet, in Nancy, too, community consists of the lack of communion of any kind between singulars, and only of their common exposition to the sense. We are exposed, but exposition is always singular: being exposed is always being at a limit, simultaneous being outside and inside, and being neither of these.\(^{706}\) Existence is thus always understood as ek-static being in Nancy’s community: it can be defined from outside of it only in relation to other beings.

Just as “ourselves” proves to be “we others”, Nancy’s notion of community is constituted on Is (and not on immortal egos, that is, on subjects or substances), who “are always others [autrui] (or else they are nothing)”.\(^{707}\) This, Nancy remarks, is explained by the fact that community takes place through others and for others, being revealed in the death of the Other and thus always to others. Community is essentially the “community of Others [autrui]” for

\(^{703}\) James, The Fragmentary Demand, p. 178.

\(^{704}\) According to Heidegger death is what constitutes Dasein and gives it an existence genuinely its own: one can only die one’s own death, for the death of anyone else cannot be appropriated. Being-toward-death (sein zum Tode) singularizes each Dasein; mortality brings existence to the sphere of certainty as the truth which is always only coming. In this way, death reveals the sense of being as temporality – as soon as one is born, one is able to die. However, even one’s own death cannot be represented because it belongs to Dasein’s absolute future. It is for this reason that Dasein may not have experience of its own death: its existence can only be towards death as the ultimate possibility of the impossibility of being-there.

\(^{705}\) James, The Fragmentary Demand, p. 178; Heidegger, Being and Time, § 9, p. 68; Nancy, The Inoperative Community, p. 14 (La communauté désœuvrée, p. 41).

\(^{706}\) Nancy, La communauté désœuvrée, p. 224.

\(^{707}\) Nancy, The Inoperative Community, p. 15 (La communauté désœuvrée, p. 42). Let us just note here that Robert Bernasconi reminds us at this point that, in the perspective of the ethics of Lévinas, who speaks of the symmetry of ego and the other, irreducible to my ego, Nancy’s view on the “community of others”, or that “the I’s are always others [autrui] (or else they are nothing)” becomes difficult to understand. See Bernasconi, “On Deconstructing Nostalgia within the West: The Debate between Nancy and Blanchot”, p. 10; Nancy, The Inoperative Community, p. 15 (La communauté désœuvrée, p. 42), cf. Derrida, Writing and Difference, p. 156-157 (L’écriture et la différence, p. 184-185).
Nancy. In this matter, as I have tried to bring forth above, Nancy’s reasoning of the “communitary” nature of death correlates with his passage from the Heideggerian understanding of time and death as absolutely “mine” to the thinking of the experience of the sharing of death, which brings the members of a community together.

Robert Bernasconi has provided an interesting discussion of this matter. Bernasconi offers an insight into Nancy’s and Blanchot’s ideas of community at the points they differ from each other. In fact, in Blanchot death is itself the true community of mortal beings: their impossible communion. The community is born in and from someone else’s death – it is grounded in the sharing of another’s death “as the only death that concerns me” at the moment of another’s dying. Yet, of course, I cannot participate in another person’s death, but this death places me outside myself. What is peculiar to Nancy’s notion of community is its relation to the Heideggerian concept of death: that death represents a limit to community, is not interpreted by Nancy as existentialist isolation or individualization, as Heidegger does, along with numerous philosophers in the French tradition. By contrast, death as a limit to community is another concept of community for Nancy in that he tries to integrate Heidegger’s analysis of being-toward-death with that of Mitsein in a way Heidegger did not. If Heidegger’s view on death as what is most proper to I and most inalienably its own is to demonstrate that I is something other than a subject, Nancy claims, this fact does not apply to Heidegger’s idea of community – people and its destiny – which he conceives of “at least in part as a subject”. For Nancy community occurs in order to acknowledge the impossibility of making a work out of death, which is the sense of the inoperative nature of community. This is why,
Nancy writes, “[t]he true community of mortal beings, or death as community, is their impossible communion”.\footnote{Nancy, \textit{The Inoperative Community}, p. 15 (\textit{La communauté désœuvrée}, p. 42). Nancy’s statement is more or less in opposition to that of Blanchot’s: for the latter the death of the other is what founds community and opens oneself to the Open of the community, allowing oneself to die in the place of the other. In death there is thus an element of sharing, Blanchot, \textit{The Unavowable Community}, p. 9-11 (\textit{La communauté inavouable}, p. 21-25). As regards the question of alterity, Blanchot comes close to Lévinas, whereas there is a disagreement between these two thinkers and Nancy, as Bernasconi suggests. He also points out that, in his relation to Levinas, Nancy cannot avoid resting on the philosophy of immanence. Bernasconi, “On Deconstructing Nostalgia within the West”, p. 12.} According to Bernasconi’s interpretation, as, in the sense suggested by Heidegger, being-toward-death disrupts one’s sense of oneself as a subject or an ego with projects, so also for Nancy “the death of others disrupts community as ‘a project of fusion’ or ‘a project at all’”.\footnote{Nancy, \textit{The Inoperative Community}, p. 15 (\textit{La communauté désœuvrée}, p. 42); cf. Blanchot, \textit{The Unavowable Community}, p. 9 (\textit{La communauté inavouable}, p. 21-22); also Bernasconi, “On Deconstructing Nostalgia within the West”, p. 9-10. Bernasconi aims here at showing that Blanchot has, in fact, interpreted Nancy’s original essay for purposes that best fit Blanchot’s own scheme. For Blanchot the death of the Other renders community as communion impossible. Therefore he identifies community without communion as substitution, since “mortal substitution is what replaces communion”. Blanchot, \textit{The Unavowable Community}, p. 11 (\textit{La communauté inavouable}, p. 24). Bernasconi points out that death does represent a limit to community in Nancy, which however is another concept of community, and not like existentialist isolation. In Nancy’s view, “the other is in an originary relation to death and in a relation to originary death”, because the structure of existence is “going into exile”. This, he says, means that the intimate, the absolutely proper, consists in the absolutely other, which alters the origin in itself, or as Nancy puts it: “[o]pen to the other and occurring as other, the self has its originarity in the loss of self”. Nancy, \textit{Being Singular Plural}, p. 78 (\textit{Être singulier pluriel}, p. 102). Or, one could also state that in their being something that cannot be substituted, the self and the other substitute for one another. As a consequence, Bernasconi notes, there opens up a large difference as far as Nancy’s and Blanchot’s notions of the political and the ethical are concerned (p. 11f).} A community does not form any ties between the death of its “members”, for it does not exceed them or elevate their being to any superiority or immortality, but, as Nancy maintains, community is calibrated or articulated on death.

Hence, a community as presented above would not be possible for metaphysical subjects, which are founded on infinite self-appropriation. This is because Nancy’s notion of community relies on “the presentation of the finitude and the irredeemable excess that make up a finite being”.\footnote{Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, e.g. § 53, p. 307. In Nancy death becomes the condition of community (and thereby of the “radicalized Mitsein”) in its inoperativeness. This was something Nancy writes, “[t]he true community of mortal beings, or death as community, is their impossible communion”. Nancy’s statement is more or less in opposition to that of Blanchot’s: for the latter the death of the other is what founds community and opens oneself to the Open of the community, allowing oneself to die in the place of the other. In death there is thus an element of sharing, Blanchot, \textit{The Unavowable Community}, p. 9-11 (\textit{La communauté inavouable}, p. 21-25). As regards the question of alterity, Blanchot comes close to Lévinas, whereas there is a disagreement between these two thinkers and Nancy, as Bernasconi suggests. He also points out that, in his relation to Levinas, Nancy cannot avoid resting on the philosophy of immanence. Bernasconi, “On Deconstructing Nostalgia within the West”, p. 12.} Being-together of a community thus always transcends its members, presenting them with the “mortal truth”. As I see it, it is in the thinking of death that community as a radicalized \textit{Mitsein} – “Being which itself is communal”\footnote{Cf. Nancy, \textit{Of Being-in-Common}, p. 1. Cit. Bernasconi, p. 12.} – encounters its culmination. What I suggest is that in Nancy, death becomes the condition of community – and thus, of \textit{Mitsein} in its radicalized form – in its unwrking, in the idea that it refuses to create itself as a work. This could be something that Heidegger probably did not consider thoroughly, as for him death only singularizes \textit{Dasein} as \textit{Dasein} and as its “ownmost possibility”.\footnote{Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, e.g. § 53, p. 307. In Nancy death becomes the condition of community (and thereby of the “radicalized Mitsein”) in its inoperativeness. This was something Nancy writes, “[t]he true community of mortal beings, or death as community, is their impossible communion”. Nancy’s statement is more or less in opposition to that of Blanchot’s: for the latter the death of the other is what founds community and opens oneself to the Open of the community, allowing oneself to die in the place of the other. In death there is thus an element of sharing, Blanchot, \textit{The Unavowable Community}, p. 9-11 (\textit{La communauté inavouable}, p. 21-25). As regards the question of alterity, Blanchot comes close to Lévinas, whereas there is a disagreement between these two thinkers and Nancy, as Bernasconi suggests. He also points out that, in his relation to Levinas, Nancy cannot avoid resting on the philosophy of immanence. Bernasconi, “On Deconstructing Nostalgia within the West”, p. 12.}
philosophy death, again, expresses the view that there cannot be anything shared in a community.

With this notion one might perhaps state that the Heideggerian *Mitsein* refers to nothing but the being of beings. In this way, the being of each being singularizes the community, as diverse communities are constantly in the state of coming or being born. For Nancy, the notion of *Mitsein* ultimately proves to be dependent on *Dasein*: since existence is existence of existents, there cannot be but the being of singular beings – there is always something or someone that comes into being. This would be to say that Heidegger’s differentiation between the ontical and the ontological does not find its counterpart quite in the same sense in Nancy’s philosophy. In fact, Christopher Fynsk has interpreted Nancy’s “community” as the term which marks the difference between the ontical and the ontological and leads one to think of their underlying ground. It is clear that Nancy starts from the relation of singular beings, relation which is without relation and which is not a bond between the members of any community, which only allows a being to come into its existence. I strongly agree with Fynsk’s articulation, which announces that this communitary ground or condition of existence is an unsublatable differential relation that “is” only in and by its multiple singular articulations (though it is always irreducible to these) and thus differs constantly from itself.\(^{718}\) This existential principle is not without consequences as regards the multiplicity of art and of the arts, either, and the same applies to the difference between presence and what is present.

These are probably some of the reasons why Nancy is willing to speak of an *inoperative community*, a community whose identity – or what is proper to

---

Heidegger had not thought, for in his account, death only singularizes *Dasein* as *Dasein*. Nancy, however, sees death to display the fact that there is nothing shared in community (except the fact that there is nothing to be shared).

\(^{718}\) Fynsk, “Foreword”, in Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. x. According to Fynsk, Nancy’s “community” comes to mark the same as the difference between the ontic and the ontological to Heidegger. But community essentially names a relation, and not a ground for being-in-common: in the thought of community, Nancy starts from the relation itself, not from the subject or individual. The community without community is, thus, always-only-coming: in compearance, it comes to its own limit. Hence, the community “ground” or condition of existence turns out to be “an unsublatable differential relation that ‘is’ only in and by its multiple singular articulations (though it is always irreducible to these) and thus differs constantly from itself”. What Fynsk stresses is the fact that for Nancy community is communication itself. As such, community exceeds the horizon of signification and representation. Hence it escapes representation and any theoretical grasp. Yet community as communication is unworking in character. However, Fynsk wants to point out that something like a politics of community seems to be possible for Nancy: a politics which would proceed from the imperative to which the work itself answers. *Ibid.*, p. xxiii, xxv-xxvii. At stake is “a community ordering itself to the unworking of its communication”, or “destined to this unworking”. See Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 40-41, cf. Fynsk, “Foreword”, in Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. x.
its existence — can only be accessed by expropriation. Its inoperative nature is due to the fact that it is bound to remain without substance and without communism and communality; in Fred Dallmayr’s opinion, Nancy’s article “The Inoperative Community” reasserts the pre-eminence of a public place seen as an arena of democratic interactions. The relatedness of the plurality of existence and the irreducibility of materiality are, among others, themes that now lead one to the consideration of what is ontologically at stake in art and the arts.

Ibid., p. xxxvii.

Dallmayr, Fred (1997). “An ‘inoperative’ global community?”, in On Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 177 (p. 174-196). What is more, Nancy’s notion of “people” [le peuple] more or less exemplifies what he means by community. A people comes to mean, not a nation, an ethnic group, or any troops guided by a leader, but something polymorphous: a population, a multitude or a crowd which institutes itself. However, a people may only institute itself as a “so-called people”, that is, a people which declares itself as a people [soi-disant peuple], who cannot be called people as a product of this declaration, but rather through the very act of declaring. Indeed, the people does not constitute itself otherwise than as the subject of its self-declaration. The people is its own tension, inasmuch as this tension makes its own being, which cannot be found as presence or as beings [étant]. For Nancy’s account of the notion of “people”, see Nancy (2004). S. T. (“Le chant du départ”), in La démocratie à venir. Autour de Jacques Derrida, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet. Paris: Galilée, p. 350 (p. 341-359).
From Ontology to Art: Aesthetic Presentation in Jean-Luc Nancy’s Philosophy
At the present point of this study, after having inquired into some of the constituents of Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy in its general outlines, let me turn to the notion of art. Here, my interest is in the ontology of art as proposed by Nancy: how, and on which grounds, does the work of art and the aesthetic occur in his philosophy? This is a question that Nancy approaches, in the first place, by addressing the origin of art. I find his starting point is similar to Heidegger's, whose criticism of metaphysical or Platonic accounts of art is directed at the idea that the work presents an existing signification in a material form. According to what one might regard as traditional aesthetic theories, art would be a material object which gives expression to a supersensible meaning. Art would thus be understood in terms of “allegory”, or “metaphor”, or “symbol” – as opposed to symbols, for Nancy art is what interrupts symbolization, or it is the symbolic itself in the place and instant of its interruption.\footnote{Cf. Nancy, \textit{The Sense of the World}, p. 137 (\textit{Le sens du monde}, p. 210).}

For Nancy, it seems clear from the start that art does not embody any of these: instead, he gives an account of art as something which cannot be its own end and the origin of which is divided from the start. How does one approach the question of art, then? Why is there art at all, and what is the specific ontological position – provided there is one – that Nancy allows to art? These are some of the questions to be posed in this part of my treatise, in which the focus will be on the exploration of the particular way of art’s coming into presence, that is, its presentation.

Nancy’s theory of art is closely linked with his general views on ontology, be it its being, the thought of its coming-into-presence, its singularity and plurality, or its sensibility. Is the ontology of the work of forms a radically separate section in Nancy’s thinking, or should it rather be seen as an integral part of it – how is it that Nancy puts forward the view that art is singular by character? As I see it, there are reasons to think that art does emerge as a sphere of specific importance in Nancy’s philosophy in that art undeniably has a status of its own as regards the questions of presentation and of sensibility. In the context of these notions, I shall consider, and reconsider, a number of points discussed earlier in my work: the most fundamental of them is difference – spacing and distance, along with the concept of trace or vestige, by virtue of which any sense is born in Nancy’s thought. In fact, for Nancy “art has always begun in the distance”.\footnote{Nancy (2003). \textit{Au fond des images}. Paris: Galilée, p. 12.} Overall,
the problem of the origin of art is dealt with in most detail in Nancy’s first collection of articles on art, *The Muses.*

Especially in the past few years Nancy has published several brief texts in which he analyses visual works of art. In these books he focuses on the particular nature of, for example, a certain Christian tradition of paintings, like the ones represented by the type of “Touch me not” pictures (as in the book *Noli me tangere*), portraits (*Le Regard du portrait*), or nudes (*Nus sommes*). These sorts of pictorial interpretations are able to give an approach to Nancy’s accounts of art from a more practical angle and thus further elucidate his ontology of art by analysing actual works of art.

However, it seems evident that his interpretations of single works in most cases turn out to be philosophical reflection on art and tend to illuminate his central notions, yet contribute to them by giving them sensuous justification. I consider it plausible to say that his philosophical views even come so close to the way he explains an artwork that they finally prove indissociable. The preliminary view I attempt to test here is how to define this relatedness of art and thought – in which way should we define Nancy’s thinking of art and its relation to his general ontology? But it is even more important, however, to examine the strategies he uses in breaking with the general ontological structure – that is, how thinking on art provides an alternative scheme to philosophy.

In Chapter 4, *The Work of Art*, I shall take up the notion of the work of art. This requires accounting for the meaning of art and its position in Nancy’s thinking. I first discuss the origin of art, in which the separation of the senses and the plurality of different arts is at stake, and conversely, thinking about one art in its dissolution. In attempting to explicate this, I shall examine Nancy’s ontological idea of art and how it is related to the thought of being as difference, as brought up in the previous part of my study. For Nancy the origin of art is not single but is originally heterogeneous, that is, divided or zoned. On the other hand, he also claims that the division of arts and that of senses cannot be identified, for art *dislocates* the sensuous difference. Nancy seeks, moreover, the source of the particularization of art zoned quality in the Hegelian position,

---

referring here, roughly speaking, to the Idea and its incarnation in sensuous presentation (*sinnliche Darstellung der Idee*). I have already discussed the points of departure for Nancy’s idea of presentation in Chapter 2, and I shall not therefore directly return to this question as such, but shall here reconsider it in the context of the aesthetic.

The presentation or coming into presence in the very context of art will be introduced in the chapter *The Presentation of Art*. Is there a *particular* way of the coming into presence of art, which is most proper to it? In other words, we need to ask how art exposes itself. Seeking to answer why, and in which conditions, there is something like art, is crucial to Nancy’s understanding of the ontology of art. Furthermore, my analysis goes on to inquire why he states that in art there is no question of representation, but only of presentation. Nancy detaches the thought of being from the thought of representation, as well as from the thinking of a meaning of being. Instead, being is to be approached beginning from the existence of singular existents. In his exploration of art, Nancy remains faithful to the central outlines of his own philosophy, recurrently taking a stand in regard to Heidegger’s thinking; however, my initial claim is that, as far as the ontology of art is concerned, Nancy tends to go beyond Heidegger. This can be seen in that Nancy brings forth problems such as sensibility and, associated with that, the distinctive ontological characteristics of art, its multiplicity and the differences between the arts. To some extent, Nancy also pays attention to artistic production.

What unites Nancy and Heidegger is the fact that the experience of art as such does not arise as a question. Instead, Heidegger turns to art as something which may reveal the truth of being by preserving it, whereas Nancy takes, above all, an interest not in the truth which might take place in art, but in sense which presents itself in art, sense which is always exterior to or in excess of itself in the work of art.

Heidegger’s influence is even more visible when Nancy puts art into the context of technique, which is what he does in various writings on art, “Why Are There Several Arts and Not Just One?” included.\(^7\) I shall discuss the notion of *techne* in the chapter entitled *Art and Techne*, the central problem being Nancy’s relation to Heidegger’s notion of technique: while Heidegger speaks of a singular notion of technique, various *techniques* are in Nancy’s idea of art. In

---

the essay “The Origin of the Work of Art” Heidegger states that *techne* denotes a mode of knowing (*Wissen*), whose sense has not been thoroughly thought so far. In principle, technique as such does not have a negative connotation for Heidegger, nor does it for Nancy.

Their interpretations of technique do not end up in similar results, however. While Heidegger speaks of technique as a singular notion, in Nancy, what he calls *la technique* and what is translated as “technique”, exists in plural form, as techniques.\(^{726}\) For Nancy technique is something that instantly multiplies itself in art, since technique is a question of the production of every detail of the work of art. Rather, in the case of art, technique partly provides an answer to the question of its ontological foundation, for technique accounts for the production of the ground that does not produce itself. Though it is not comparable as such with Heidegger’s corresponding notion, we need to examine in what terms Nancy refers to the ontology of art and its allegedly technological foundation. Technicity puts art outside itself, making art touch its end, which is the premise for presentation or exposition to occur.\(^{727}\) Nor is technique foreign to the notion of the body: for Nancy the body is technical from the beginning.\(^{728}\)

One answer to the question how does art present itself can be sought in the aforementioned notion of touch, which I discuss in Chapter 5, *Presentation, Touch and Finitude: Touching the Limit of Sense*. The prerequisite of thinking the touch of art is the notion of difference – difference which is born in touch, while touch is born by virtue of a difference. Touch, a term which is not to be understood as a metaphor, is for Nancy the paradigm of the five senses in that touch is the presentation of sensibility. Where does touch take place, and what is it that is touched? And how to describe the way in which art touches? These are some of the questions to be posed. Fundamental to touch is the fact that it takes place on a limit, to the extent that it is a limit-term – it takes place at the limit of being touched, at the limit of exposition or coming-into-presence.

---

726 The translator of *The Muses* points out that in this book *la technique* is rendered as “technics” when Nancy intends the whole order of *techne*; in the case of technical skills, the translation is “technique”. See *The Muses*, p. 104, n. 4.
727 Nancy, *The Muses*, p. 26, 37 (*Les Muses*, p. 50-51, 66-67). As Nancy claims, insofar as the “nexus” of technologies (that is, existing itself) is not, but is the opening of its finitude, existing is technological through and through. Technique is no more immanence than it is transcendence, but it is “the putting into play of the exteriority of nature as existence”. Because technology is neither immanence nor transcendence, or because technology is the spacing in the middle of contact and hence deferring of the origin, there is nothing like technology “as such”, but the multiplicity of technologies. Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p. 24-25 (*Une pensée finie*, p. 43-46).
I find this approach to touch the most rewarding aspect of Nancy's philosophy, for by taking this path the consequences of his notion of presentation will perhaps also become clearer. What is central to presentation as proposed by Nancy is a distance, a difference: the fact that presentation touches itself and thus remains suspended in its passage, “in its coming and going.” How is touch structured? Suffice it to note here that touch touches itself, and this is the sense of self-affection, which, at the same time, is touching the other in oneself, in general. Of particular importance in the thought of art and its limit is Nancy’s interpretation of the Kantian sublime.

On the whole, what constitutes Nancy’s understanding of art and the aesthetic is considered in the final chapter, *The Finite and the Infinite in the Aesthetic Experience*, where I attempt to draw together the basic lines which have been discussed in various parts of my dissertation. My aim is to bring them together in Nancy’s notions of the finite and the infinite, concepts which, as I see it, crystallize his thinking on presentation and limit. What is implicated by the idea that art presents itself singularly at its own limit? In considering this, I go to the Heideggerian theme of finitude in order to understand its importance to Nancy’s conception of art. Thinking of the finite and the infinite – how finitude opens itself to the infinite – is at issue in Nancy’s dealing with subjectivity and presentation. It is a question of appropriating the inappropriable: the touch by which any sense of the world comes into presence is finite, whereas its sense is infinite, that is, limited in its scope. Finitude is the sensing-itself of the infinite in action. In particular, I try to find out what is the framework which a finite work of art gives to the infinite sense.

---

729 Nancy, *The Muses*, p. 34 (*Les Muses*, p. 62). A similar structure is at stake in the relation which Heidegger sees between thinking and being: “[t]hinking is related to being as what arrives (l’avenant). Thinking as such is bound to the advent of being, to being as advent.” See Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, p. 275.


4. The Work of Art

In the following, I wish to shed light on the problem of art as such by looking at what constitutes a work of art and its experience in Nancy’s thinking. I aim at elucidating the way in which Nancy examines the ontology of art, considering art’s specific position both in respect to its origin and its mode of coming-into-presence. This will be done by exploring the existence of art and of arts: that is, in question is a tension between one general notion of art and individual arts – *the singular plural* of art and of the arts.

Of a certain illustrative value is his thought of the singular multiplicity of being as being-with, which largely resonates with the being of a work of art in that its being is originally shared. Existence is singular: it always happens as a singular event, while the existence of the existent occurs an indefinite number of times “in” its individuality, this being its singularity. Yet being and the being of art cannot be identified in any straightforward manner. Above all, Nancy takes an interest in the traditional assumptions concerning the correspondence of the different arts and the five senses, and goes on to question this alleged distribution in relation to the birth of sense. The arts and the senses both involve discontinuity. The thresholds which are at stake here are the limits of coming-into-presentation, on the verge of being touched by each other. The mutual touch is the moment of the opening of sense – sense is what gives rise to signification, as we have learned elsewhere in Nancy’s philosophy. Sense cannot be approached as anything present, for it is always only coming. Hence art is always postponed, only coming, and in this way it is for Nancy presentation, in other words, setting itself to the work of exposition. By the same token art cannot be a question of representation. The notions of touch and exposition, which occupy a central place in Nancy’s discussion of art, are given further attention in Chapter 5.

---

733 Nancy, *Le Regard du portrait*, p. 34.
**4.1 The Uniqueness of Art(s): The Interval and the Withdrawal of the Ground**

Nancy’s thought on the ontology of art departs from the idea that art and the arts exist singularly in their multiplicity. His view thus includes the thought of the uniqueness of arts. This notion, unlike most theories of art in the history of aesthetics, is not built on the self-constituted, self-pronounced classical subject, on thinking of art as representation, and on searching for an origin of art in general. Why is it that Nancy focuses on the ontology of singular arts in their multiplicity? I shall suggest that this problem cannot be differentiated from the ontology of art. Parallel to the thought according to which there is no being in general but only the singular existence of an existent, there is no art “in general”: arts exist singularly. Still, generality or universality does not grant a uniqueness or a unity of origin. It should now be asked why Nancy claims that the question of the multiplicity of art has so far not been recognized in theories of art, or has resulted in various difficulties. In examining the problem of the origin of arts, he encounters the question of finding the ontological foundation of art. The reason why this leads him to analyse art beginning from its material facticity – how it involves the problem of difference is examined in what follows.

In the essay “Why Are There Several Arts and Not Just One?” Nancy gives his most sustained discussion of the ontology of art. As his point of departure, he takes the Muses of antiquity who, he says, have always been several, whatever their attributes and number. This fact offers him the point of departure for thinking about the multiple origin of art – why there are several arts instead of just one. It is not a question of finding a principle of plurality, but of regarding plurality itself as a principle and in relation to the essence of art. In the following I shall try to interrogate the role of notions such as difference or interval, as well as those of limit and threshold, and thereby elucidate the nature of the break or interruption around which Nancy’s notion of art is articulated. In his philosophy, a distance can be found, first of all, in and as the tension between the concept of “art” and that of “the arts” in their diversity. While the

---

traditional notion of art, Nancy claims, is based on the distinction between the alleged *one* art and its division, he himself understands art as a singular notion which is grounded in diffraction. In fact, this diffraction extends to the untouchable end of “art” in its diversity.

**ONE ART – SEVERAL ARTS**

Why does Nancy insist on shifting the focus from a general notion of “art” to its diffraction, and places its origin in heterogeneity? I shall first try to draw together, in a schematic and perhaps still immanent way, some lines which Nancy takes up in order to build an ontology of art. To be discussed is what motivates his thought of art, starting from its supposedly divided origin: how such an account should contribute to theories of art more than to a single concept of art, and what it is able to make visible as regards the field of the aesthetic. Another question to be reflected on is the position and novelty of this thinking about theories of art, as well as Nancy’s success in offering an ontology which does not rest on an idea of aesthetic subjectivity.⁷³⁸ In considering the legitimacy of the problem of the multiplicity of art, or why it so far has been impugned or why theories of art have failed to recognize it as a question, Nancy addresses two possible answers. In the first the givenness of plurality comes to be affirmed through mere observation. But the classification or hierarchy of arts is not without problems, or, as Nancy suggests, at least there have been many historical variations, as is shown by the internal distribution concerning the order of the recognized arts, and the extension of the jurisdiction or what must be recognized as art, in their changes.⁷³⁹

Making an appeal to the attributes of the arts would lead to a task which would be uncontrollable in its extension, Nancy remarks, as music may be thought of in terms of sounds, time, or space, whereas painting appears as the art of vision, of light and of colour, among other things. These ways of asking about the plurality of art ignores his “ontological” question, that is, the one that

⁷³⁸ Let us remark, once more, that at the most general level, the foundations of Nancy’s account of the ontology of art lie in the critique of metaphysics. A view shared by Nancy and Heidegger is that it implies a thinking of the destitution of the essence of being and the groundlessness of subjectivity. Thus, they find the foundation of existence abysmal, which leads them to replace the metaphysical notion of being as presence by the thought of presence in its state of coming into presence, as presencing. See e.g. Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought.*

concerns the plurality of the origin of art: by following the lines of argument given above art rather would only come to be thought of as “art” in general or plurality without referring to “its own order, the singular plural of art, of the arts”. Also, the tendency to avoid the ontological question of arts might point to the fact that we are not in the register of ontology, but of technology – the relation between technology and ontology, or whether technology can make an ontology, is yet to be interrogated.\(^\text{740}\) As for now, let us state that the scope of technique is not the same in Nancy’s philosophy as it is in Heidegger, for whom \textit{techne} stands for a way of revealing things. Nancy’s understanding of technique is based on the existence of techniques in the plural. I shall come back to this later in this chapter.

The second way to approach the supposed singular plurality of arts would be that which there is one art or an essence of art. This is what Nancy calls the “philosophical” response, which, according to him, many artists share. In his opinion, these views fail in attempting to place the notion of art above its own diversity, even above art itself, if “art” does not reside in art itself no more than it does in artistic practices.\(^\text{741}\) In such theories, plurality is conceived of in terms of manifestations or the moments of a unique reality, be that Idea, substance or subject, so that “art” may finally exceed its own distinction.

From another point of view, this is to say that the being which is characteristic of art is, for Nancy, to show the world as though it were cut off from itself. Thus, art assumes a figure on its cutaway section: it is “form without ground, abyss and shore of apparition”.\(^\text{742}\) The objective which Nancy now sets himself is to make explicit how philosophy has established “art” in the singular form, since he understands the determination of art in terms of singularity, in the first place, as a philosophical determination. At the same time, philosophy has left unanswered the question concerning the plurality of arts, which must be seen against the background of the connection between art and technique.

Historically the thought of the plurality of arts is by no means unprecedented. Yet in his account Nancy seems to rely on an assumption that previous theories of art have more or less failed in attempting to produce an ontology which


\(^{741}\) One example is offered by Heidegger, for whom the reflection on art is determined by the question of being. According to him, art “belongs to the \textit{disclosure of appropriation} by way of which the ‘meaning of being’ can alone be defined”; art is thus not a cultural achievement nor an appearance of spirit. Cf. Heidegger, \textit{Poetry, Language, Thought}, p. 86; Nancy, \textit{The Muses}, p. 4, cf. n. 3 (\textit{Les Muses}, p. 15-16, n. 1).

\(^{742}\) Nancy, \textit{The Muses}, p. 75 (\textit{Les Muses}, p. 128-129).
would be based on an original heterogeneity. To further clarify the nature of the problem, Nancy takes up views presented by Kant, Schelling and Hegel.\footnote{Ibid., p. 7-9 (Les Muses, p. 21-24).} For Kant the division of arts is simply given, consisting of the tripartition comprising the arts of speech, the formative or figurative arts, and the art of the play of sensations.\footnote{See Kant, The Critique of Judgement, § 51. The arts of speech include rhetoric and poetry; the formative arts are the arts of “sensuous truth” (plastic art, i.e. sculpture and architecture) or of “sensuous semblance” (painting); and finally, the art of the beautiful play of sensations, refers to music and the art of colour. See also Escoubas, Imago mundi, p. 68-79. Here she refers to Kant’s double or reverse mimesis between the appearance (Aussehen) of nature and of art: nature may prove beautiful when it wears the appearance of art, and “art can also be termed beautiful, where we are conscious of its being art, while yet it has the appearance of nature”. Kant, The Critique of Judgement, § 45, p. 167.} In the sublime Nancy sees a potential for going beyond art: the sublime escapes from the plurality of arts, for in Kant’s theory there is just one sublime for all the arts. In Schelling’s philosophy, art effects the “representation of the absolute with absolute indifference of the universal and the particular”.\footnote{Schelling, F. W. J. (1989). The Philosophy of Art, trans. Douglas W. Scott. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, p. 45.} This is the definition of the symbol, whose supreme form is language. Diversity is thus subsumed into unity. Lastly, with Hegel the unity of art and the differentiation of its historical forms demand their external reality, that of the particular arts; namely, that “art” only comes into existence by means of particular arts.\footnote{Hegel (1998). Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, 2, trans. T. M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 613ff.} Underlying all this is the supposed “irreducible material difference” of the arts, which blocks art from sublation, that is, from its self-overcoming.

Why does Nancy tend to promote a view that does not allow space for a general notion of art, and which, however, still appears to remain inevitably related to it? How should one characterize the position of art, if it can be located only in its own multiplicity? Does “art” not risk becoming another very general statement of Art, instead of being deconstructed by the idea of many arts? Or does art after all remain an illustration of philosophy? In other words, is Nancy’s approach capable of addressing the works in their very singularity and locality? Whether there is an ambiguity in Nancy himself, is the thing to be interrogated now. As I see it, the possible reasons for this double nature of Nancy’s account, if one may say so – of formulating a theory founded in an idea of the original multiplicity of art and of the arts – are to be sought from outside his immediate reflections on the sphere of the aesthetic.
In reflecting on the motivation of his ontology of art, Nancy’s key terms are heterogeneity and differentiation. The alternatives presented above, which are designated to put into question any notion of the unity of art, now lead him to conclude that art would be in default or in excess of its own concept. This is to say that art would never appear “except in a tension between two concepts of art, one technical and the other sublime”, so that the tension itself would remain without concept.\textsuperscript{747} His point of departure is the assumption that art and the arts inter-belong to each other (s’entr’appartiennent) in an extended mode of interiority, and for this reason a tension exists between them – the tension between art and the different arts. Art, in this way, would be a matter of \textit{res extensa} and \textit{partes extra partes}. How Nancy wishes to thematize the tension, and what its bringing to the fore entails as regards the ontology of art, is what I shall focus on in what follows.

The statement that there is not presentation of art “in general”, but only the plural presentation of the singular plural of presentation proves to be valid for Nancy because, he says, art takes place singularly: it comes into presence, but only as plural and in terms of discontinuity. Nancy attempts to clarify these as matters of time and space – namely, in their interlacement, which is to say as spacing. The dis-location of the world into plural worlds, that is, into what he terms as “the irreducible plurality of the unity ‘world’”, takes place producing the \textit{a priori} and the transcendental of art.\textsuperscript{748} Here, the discreteness of the different zones and distance in itself is what constitutes the world. Constituting the world, in turn, is the sense of spacing – or what might as well be called being – that is, the absolute difference of appearance or of being-in-the-world as such.\textsuperscript{749}

The way Nancy comments on the distribution of the arts can be compared with the separation which he makes between the metaphysical “signification” and the rediscovered, genuinely philosophical “sense”. According to him, art has the ability to release the senses from signification – or rather, art disengages the world from signification. Such disengagement is the moment of the opening of sense, which is always only coming. This is the sense of the (sensuous) senses in that they are external to signification and, finally, they come to mean the

\textsuperscript{747} Nancy, \textit{The Muses}, p. 4-6 (\textit{Les Muses}, p. 16-18). The tension of simultaneous belonging and ek-sisting is also the structure of Nancy’s idea of transimmanence.
\textsuperscript{748} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 19 (\textit{Les Muses}, p. 38).
\textsuperscript{749} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 20 (\textit{Les Muses}, p. 40). This is the reason why aesthetics for Nancy becomes “transcendental aesthetics”. See section 4.2.
“sense of the world”. The sense of the world stands here for suspension of signification.750

Hence it may be said that art is always postponed, in the state of being born, and in this way it means presentation or, in other words, setting itself to work of exposition.751 As I see it, art is external to signification twice over. First, it dislocates the senses from signification; secondly, it distracts the alleged synesthesia between the sensuous senses, if we suppose that sensibility is understood as external to signification. In both stages of dislocation, sense does not coincide with signification when the five senses are multiplied when touching each other at innumerable points in art.752 By the same token – that art is outside of the sphere of signification – art cannot be a question of representation: art shows the beginning of a beginning.753 It discloses what and how the work of art is: it shows what the depicted thing is “in truth”. Truth is here understood in the sense of unconcealedness or aletheia.754

In Heidegger’s philosophy, being-in-the-world (In-der-Welt-sein), like any being-in (In-sein), is restricted to Dasein’s state of being.755 Only Dasein is in the world; as for its ontological characteristic or modality of being, Dasein is an existentiale.756 Heidegger calls Dasein’s characters of being existentialia. They are to be distinguished from “categories”, which are characteristics of being for

750 By saying that the suspension of signification is that of touch, Nancy states that “being-in-the-world touches on its sense, is touched by it, touches itself as sense”. Ibid., p. 22 (Les Muses, p. 44).
751 Nancy, Le Regard du portrait, p. 34. The “setting itself to work of exposition” recalls, in Heideggerian terms, the “setting itself to work of truth” as in Heidegger’s “Origin of the Work of Art”. See Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, e.g. p. 39.
752 A later nomination which Nancy has given to the original heterogeneity of the sensuous domains is oscillation. Oscillation is what happens in the exchangeability called into question between a text and an image, between sonority and visuality, in the event in which they interpret – incarnate and animate – each other. The horizon of interpretation between image and text is at each other’s limit, referring to one another, in a way that they vacillate between the presence of form and of spirit, without that they would fix any presence. Cf. Nancy, Au fond des images, p. 122, 131, 136; The Muses, p. 22 (Les Muses, p. 44).
754 One of the famous examples that Heidegger uses in “The Origin of the Work of Art” is van Gogh’s painting of peasant shoes. The shoes stand for what Heidegger calls “equipment”, the quality of which is in usefulness and reliability. Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, p. 33-36. I return to this example in section 4.3.
755 Heidegger, Being and Time, § 12, esp. p. 78-80; § 41, p. 235f. The fundamental ontological characteristics of being-in-the-world are existentiality, facticity, and fallenness. Heidegger explains that “being-in” usually comes to be understood as “being in something”: this is “the kind of Being which an entity has when it is ‘in’ another one”. Their being is that of being-present-at-hand. In his later writings Heidegger expands the notion of being-in: in Die Kunst und der Raum – as in the much earlier “Origin of the Work of Art” – he notes that “things themselves are the places, and do not merely belong in a place”. This statement has several consequences as regards Nancy’s ontology of art. See Heidegger, Die Kunst und der Raum, p. 11; cf. Nancy, The Muses, p. 19 (Les Muses, p. 39).
756 Dasein understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of a possibility of itself: to be itself or not itself. Thus, the task of Dasein is to decide of its own existence. The understanding of oneself is what Heidegger calls existentiell, and the question of existence is one of Dasein’s ontical affairs. Again, the context of such structures, or the thematic explication of Dasein’s ontological structure, belongs to the sphere of existential analysis. Heidegger, Being and Time, § 4. Cf. also Chapters 1 and 3 of this study.
entities whose character is not that of Dasein. Together, existentialia and categories are “the two basic possibilities for characteristics of Being”\(^{757}\). Respectively, the entities whose kind of being is not of the character of Dasein, but which have “a definite location-relationship with something else which has the same kind of Being”, are “categorial”. The things of the latter sort are merely present-at-hand within the world; they are worldless in themselves.\(^{758}\) For Nancy, being in the world does not seem to be reserved uniquely for man, but instead all beings are more or less in the world. The grounds of this extended notion of being-in-the-world lie, as I see it, in his notion that being is nothing but the existence of singular beings. Being is thus plural and heterogeneous from the start – all beings exist, from which it follows that their being-in-the-world is nothing that could separate man from other kinds of beings.

In exploring the operation of the plurality of the arts as sketched above, Nancy brings forth four general points.\(^{759}\) In the first one he writes that this plurality breaks down the living unity of perception or action, which, however, is not a breakdown into sensations. Instead, art forces a sense to touch itself and in this way it forces the sense to be the sense that it is or gives it an identity as a particular sense. Beyond what Nancy calls the “lived” unity of sense, art presents a “pictorial” or a “sonorous” unity, for instance; that is, it makes up another world, which is not one of signification or representation.

Where does such a “pictorial” or “sonorous” unity spring from, then? In general terms, Nancy’s notion of art is characterized by heterogeneous touching. By such touching, art dislocates the lived unity of sense or of the sensuous – as a result, sensorial registers become endlessly differentiated. The “lived unity” is for a great part constituted, and it belongs to one’s life-world. Out of the life-world, art cuts off a moment of the world: such a moment means to be in the world, and yet it means exteriority with respect to the world. In other words, it is to be outside in the world; in this sense, Nancy’s thought of art has some affinity with the Heideggerian “being-in-the-world”.\(^{760}\) In Nancy, the differentiation of sensibility amounts to the plurality of different worlds. Thus, there is a tension

---

\(^{757}\) Heidegger, Being and Time, § 9, p. 70-71. Heidegger’s existential analytic shows that categorial ontology is founded in fundamental ontology. See Franck, Heidegger et le problème de l’espace, p. 115.

\(^{758}\) Heidegger, Being and Time, § 12, p. 81.


\(^{760}\) In Heidegger, being-in-the-world means that Dasein’s exists as its “there”, as spatiality which occupies a place. This occupying, however, cannot be reduced to the position at which a corporeal thing is ontically present-at-hand. Instead, Dasein’s being in the world is grounded in the openness and disclosedness of the “there” – the awareness and seeing of one’s possibilities. Cf. Heidegger, Being and Time, e.g. § 23, 69.
between plurality and singularity: as art posits a world, singularity comes to be posited in a plural manner. This is to say that singularity is not posited as different forms, but is outside of singularity from the beginning. Hence singularity exists singularly, for every work of art is an opening of some world – a form which is thus born, is not different from the ground. Rather, form turns out to be the ground itself.

The second issue, as regards plurality, is that by touching itself as sense art dis-locates “common sense” or “ordinary synesthesia”: namely, art causes synesthesia “to touch itself in an infinity of points or zones”. Thirdly, the differences in zones work in a way that they increase across all of the sensorial registers, producing new touches infinitely. This is the “dis-located synesthesia”, which brings about a reference or a response from one touch to another. The fourth point is that to Nancy the arts are first of all technical: they seem inseparable from what he calls “the essence of technics”, technique meaning knowing how to go about producing what does not produce itself by itself. But what counts in this scheme are just the differences: the unity of the senses is, after all, the singular “unity” of a “between” the sensuous domains, so that their communication takes place “in the element of the outside-itself”. This is an ex-position of existence. Difference is the “ground” of appearing: a groundless ground, which makes each presence a ground for others.

THE DIFFERENCES OF ART – THE DIFFERENCES OF SENSES?

In interrogating the difference between the arts and the difference of the senses, Nancy’s first concern is to ask if it is possible to transform the first into the second. The most common version used in defending their identity would be, according to Nancy, to say that the division between the senses constrains and limits artistic expression, while art remains “unique and beyond the senses”.

761 For Heidegger, existence is an existential rather than an existentiell, an a priori condition that is not a condition of an object but of being-in-the-world. See Nancy, The Muses, p. 22-23 (Les Muses, p. 44-46).

Another alternative, contrary to the previous one, is to conceive of art as being “for the senses”, in a way that its activity would be in the senses. Thinking of the difference is all the more important, Nancy stresses, as at stake in this questioning is “the sense and/or the senses” of “art”; still another alternative would be to claim that the distribution of the sense(s) is the product of art itself. This results in an aisthetic circle, largely analogous to the hermeneutic one. In this circle art is to be defined by an intrinsic diversity, called “sense”.

The “aisthetic” or “hyletic” circle is linked with the thought of art’s ability to displace the unity of the senses. Art isolates a sense and puts it outside the sensuous integration, thus forcing it to touch upon itself. As a result, the singular sense finds itself to be heterogeneous, from which follows the original plurality of the arts: one touch provokes another. This makes the differences multiply indefinitely. With regard to the unity and disunity of art and the heterogeneity of the aesthetic, what shows itself to be important here to Hutchens, is Nancy’s interest in the way art exemplifies the dislocation of a world into a plurality of worlds, of revelations of a world, “each phenomenon of which is the production of a potential phenomenal world”. The dislocation into multiple worlds is given, respectively, in the plural dislocation of the five irreducible zones of the senses. Thus, art itself would make the world phenomenally apparent “in as much as sentience consists in nothing but the singular difference of touching and its zones”, showing experience what it is in so far as irreducible zones of sensing delimit one another.

A more precise way to put this is that art demonstrates that, “[i]f the zones of sensing were not discrete, then there would be merely a disconnected bundle of sensations severed from complex sensed phenomena, not any possible synthesis of phenomena”. In other words, Hutchens wants to express the same thing as what is said Nancy, namely that the division of the zones of the senses is the condition of their unity in the experience of art. Hutchens is probably right in stating that the discreteness of the zones is necessary so that the zones may touch each other or sense-themselves-sensing to produce any sense experience in which complex associations of sensations are involved. Altogether, Nancy takes away the privilege of the continuity of the five senses by positing a contact

765  Ibid.
between contact and non-contact, or the lack of contact. Thus, he wants to point out that there is a fracture in the heart of contact.

However, such a scheme results in problems if one attempts to derive the arts from the senses: first, the heterogeneity of the senses does not correspond to that of the arts, as Hegel earlier pointed out. What Nancy remarks in particular is that touch as a sense is not proper to any of the arts. Secondly, the diversity of the senses cannot be decided, for physiology gives various kinds of criteria as to what counts as sense (pain, pressure and the like). 766 Thirdly, the partition of senses can be countered by what is called “sensorial integration”, “synesthetic unity” or “correspondences” between senses in perception. Yet there is the possibility of a “sixth sense”, “a metaphysical sense of the ‘physical’ which remains ‘physical’, therefore sensuous and singularly plural”. This problem is central to the singular plural of art. 767 Nancy’s fourth and last point is that the heterogeneity of the senses may be insisted on, either in their singularity or in their differentiation on the material basis. Other sensuous scales are evoked in the presentation; however, at this point Nancy does not speak of synesthesia but argues that the different sensuous registers are originally involved in all arts.

Another observation is to be noted when considering Nancy’s understanding of art and senses in their “zonal” being. In speaking of “colours” and “sounds”, among other things, one cannot name a colour “in general”, or even red “in general”. 768 The empirical colour cannot be categorized under “colour”. Rather, according to Nancy, any colour or sound is local by nature: the question has to be conceived in a way that the empirical is at once transcendental and empirical. This is just one example of the general idea which he wishes to raise: namely, that the empirical is the technics of the local, or the presentation of a place. The

766  Nancy, The Muses, p. 12-14 (Les Muses, p. 28-30); cf. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1995). Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith. London: Routledge, p. 229. Here Merleau-Ponty suggests that “[s]ynaesthetic perception is the rule”: the sensations both of a sound and a colour appeal to other senses as well, e.g. the subject of aesthetic experience sees the sound itself where colours are formed. The synesthetic view is not, however, Nancy’s point.

767  In this respect, Nancy’s point of departure is to be found in a kind of sensus communis. Kant’s “common sense”, or sense shared by all, implies an integrative purpose in that it organizes the five senses. But at the same time, common sense also dislocates the division of the senses in Kantian aesthetics. – In its basic meaning, “common sense” refers to the fundamental ground in the universal validity of judgements of taste, as well as judgement in general and of all cognition. See Kant, The Critique of Judgement, § 20-22, 39-40.

768  Here Nancy points to Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1978). Remarks on Colour, trans. Linda L. McAlister and Margarete Schätte. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 50e-51e. Cit. Nancy, The Muses, p. 20 (Les Muses, p. 41, n. 1). This view seems to correspond with the one presented by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In order to argue for the idea that the world is nothing but “world-as-meaning” (and that the phenomenological reduction is idealistic), he states that one’s sensation of a colour is perceived as the manifestation of a certain colour experienced in a certain thing. Thus, in question is the apprehension of a certain hylè. Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, p. xi.
same locality holds for art, which results in Nancy’s central argument: that art is technique of the detail, technique of difference and discreteness. The zones of art are themselves zoned, which means that art as technique “multiplies itself into an infinity of points, in an infinitely divisible locality”, so that “in each local value it combines heterogeneous values without homogenising them”.769 This is to say that, unlike Heidegger, Nancy does not conceive of technique as a singular notion. A visible property of a thing does not extend only to the sphere of visibility, but it also has tactile values and movement, Nancy claims. This is to say that the ontology of art should be thought of on the basis of phenomenality, and in the experience of art a person’s look (regard) would respond to the way art “looks” back at one, as well as inversely.

The singularity and locality of art are Nancy’s main concern here.770 The notion of the groundlessness of being, or its abysmal ground, offers the background for his thinking of art: the thinking of the eventness of being and of being as a singular relation and exposition. From this point of view, Nancy’s idea of the locality of art comes close to Heidegger’s notions of Stimmung and Befindlichkeit. In Being and Time, the notion of Stimmung, which can be translated as “mood”, “attunement”, or “state-of-mind”, is one of Dasein’s existentials. Being attuned discloses Dasein in its thrownness: it attunes Dasein to being affected by things and affected in certain ways.771 Yet attunement is not to be understood as a subjective state – in fact, it can be found neither in the subject nor in the object. It does not belong to the “inside” or to the “outside”, but pervades man and takes him outside himself. Attunement expresses the way in which we find ourselves (Sichbefinden) in the midst of beings as a whole. Being attuned, in which we “are” one way or another and which determines us, not only unveils beings as a whole, but is also “the fundamental occurrence of our Da-sein”.772 In speaking of art, Stimmung concerns the way in which the truth of being is opened and disclosed as it happens in the work773 – the way in which truth is put to work and in which the work unveils something in a new way.

Could it thus be possible to see an affinity between Heidegger’s “attunement” and the way arts show themselves in their diffraction, that is, according to the

770 Cf. e.g. Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 186 (La pensée dérobée, p. 101).
771 Heidegger, Being and Time, § 29, p. 176.
772 Heidegger, Pathmarks, p. 87.
773 Cf. e.g. Luoto, Miika (2002). Heidegger ja taitteen arvoitus, Helsinki: Turkijaliitto, p. 80.
way they are each singularly “attuned” in Nancy? Such reasoning might be at stake in the latter’s question whether the arts ever existed as such. It leads one to consider the thinking of difference and interval, which here serves as my guideline. The examination of arts starting from their ontological uniqueness derives from the fact that they cannot, finally, be reduced to one another. There is no “being” as such, there is never any “touching” as such, and, following a similar logic, there is not an “art” as such – nor is there an “interval” or a “spacing” as such. Instead, for Nancy the existence of art is similar to what is implied by being-toward (être à): existence as a singular taking place, as exposed and inclined, as a relation.

In my opinion, it would not be impossible to compare the notion of art as the technique of difference and art as locality to the principles of Nancy’s term “a-reality”. Being a-real means the practical reality of distance in relation to the self. This is not to say that a-reality would be reduced to empiricity; the singular existence is characterized by areality when it is exposed to exteriority. The exterior is nothing else but the exposition of the other to which one is exposed. The distance of ek-sistence is real and areal, which is to say that the facticity of transcendence is real and produced by the spacing and difference between the areal horizon of the infinity of existence and the finite absolute. However, this is not all: art is also a matter of the senses. Art deals with the way it dislodges them or dislocates their division, a notion which now deserves further attention.

**SENSE, DIFFERENCE, AND THE MATERIAL FACTICITY OF THE ARTS**

The necessary plurality of the arts leads one to think of the origin of art in terms of a foundation without foundation. Difference is the “ground” of appearing: a groundless ground, which makes each presence a ground for others. As a consequence, probably the most central question of art in Nancy asks how to produce the ground that does not produce itself. This is also the definition

---

774 See e.g. Nancy, *Corpus*.
775 See *ibid.*, p. 39-40. In *Corpus*, Nancy takes up areality in the context of the body. The “reunion” of the finite and the infinite is the fact of the body. However, the body means that there is neither mediation or coincidence nor a dialectical relation between the finite and the infinite in existence. The body can mean a real sense of the body only in its real horizon, in a way that the “body must make sense straight in its own extension”.
he gives of the notion of technique. Here, the break or interval which allows
the sense of being to come into presence, is, it seems to me, the foremost point
to think of when drawing a parallel between Nancy’s philosophy and that of
Heidegger and Derrida. Nancy’s thinking on art is articulated by the notions
of a threshold and a blackout or a syncope, which show themselves as a limit as
well as in a distance or a space opened by art.

In Nancy’s notion of “art” it would thus be a question of creation ex nihilo: art
emerges as something autonomous. It is the technique of what has no image, no
model, no principle or end. Could it thus be said that the singularity and the
plurality of art and of several arts, as well as of presentation and representation,
are organized around a thought of limits and breaks?

For Nancy the transcendental condition of the arts is what he calls “the
material fact”. The materiality is that of a particular sense which takes place in
the different arts. This is to say that none of the arts represents anything—instead,
each of them is the coming into presence of some presence, and the particular
presence provides model for itself, which occurs each time in a singular manner.
The materiality resides in the fact that there are several senses (or presences)
and not one common sense (or presence), nor is there a community of sense
between the senses and language, since the singularity in each coming-into-
presence of art is that of the senses and of language.

The question concerning the distribution of the arts and of the senses harks
back to the sharing of being together: the sharing of communication and the
communication of such sharing, and the community that is a priori diffracted779
— therefore, as Nancy remarks elsewhere, to be shared is only the consciousness
that there is nothing to be communicated but the sharing itself. Art would,
then, have an origin which is similar to that of community, as regards their
singular coming into presence. Each of the arts is the coming into presence of
some presence, and not of presence in general, which thereby models itself. This
presence “itself” only takes place in the difference of presences. Based on this,
it may be possible to see a correspondence between art and the idea of Nancy’s
community and of shared being, “the sharing of voices” in it, to the point that

54-59).
778 Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 389 (Une pensée finie, p. 321). Behind Nancy’s “material facticity”
there is the notion of the materiality of sense: sense is matter which gives form to itself. Matter is
difference, through which something as something is possible. Cf. e.g. The Sense of the World, p. 57, 63
(Le sens du monde, p. 94-95, 104).
the origin of art is itself differentiated, if it is the difference that occurs in a singular way in each work of art. Community exists by virtue of the interval, which multiplies in each of its happenings, to infinity. As I see it, this is one of the structures – although in need of further consideration – which link Nancy’s thinking on community to art.

The interval and discontinuity now appears to be inherent in the coming into presence of the arts. The presence of the work of art comes from no other presence; or “the ‘modelling’ of art is itself the ‘becoming-model’ of the model” – like being, it presents itself as a surprise. The thinking of art beginning from the groundlessness of being, and, consequently, the way in which existence is the existence of something that exists, comprises the thought of a blind spot or a blackout. First, speaking of an interval as a point of departure leads Nancy to deny that in art the logic of the representable and the unrepresentable, or of an invisible form which would be effectuated into a visible one, would be in question. It is not the modelling which rests on another model – in Hegelian terms, at stake is neither a figure nor an Idea. This is to say that nothing absent is not exposed as presence in art. The ground on which Nancy’s art arises is instead absence itself: it is absence that is modelled. The model does not pre-exist this event, but “model” means its own becoming-model, which makes it present as such.

Still, the model is not pure self-formation. The presence of art is presence which comes in disappearance and as disappearance, or as the appearance of disappearance. The ground of a work of art has neither not been there before – likewise, the desire to paint has not been there, according to Nancy’s example – nor has it been absent. In this way, the singular work of art comes into being in its passing. Art born in the space between presence and absence is “art without art”, which is only there in its bursting (éclat) and explosion into presence. The blind spot is thus needed in order to allow things to come into presence: as it seems to me, only by being in relation with the appearance of the figure, and figuring itself as the figure of art, does anything arise as an art by disappearing in its coming – thus, art models itself without another model, and without itself being a model. In Nancy’s view, however, the point of interest lies in the fact that everything cited above loses its significance: the differences or relations

780 Ibid., p. 387 (Une pensée finie, p. 318).
781 In this respect art may be compared with laughter, Nancy suggests. See Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 368-392 (Une pensée finie, p. 297-324).
782 Cf. ibid., p. 388 (Une pensée finie, p. 319).
between senses cannot provide any ground for art. Neither the senses as such nor their integration can work as conditions or models of the arts.

In seeking the original difference in the origin of art, Nancy’s point of departure does not seem to be very different from what is designated by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s notion of mimesis. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, what he calls “fundamental mimetology” already echoes the alleged opposition between nature and art, in the same way that techne and physis have a common origin in their congeniality. The grounds of the notion of “fundamental mimetology” are found in Aristotle’s philosophy. What is produced is the origin itself, which is to be sought in a difference. This is to say that the origin is localized or instituted in terms of fictioning or fashioning: namely, mimesis itself has the sense of “making present” in that the origin of things itself must be “fictioned”.\(^{783}\) In Lacoue-Labarthe’s terms, one of the principles in thinking of the groundlessness of being is called “ontotypology”. Ontotypology is a notion associated with the deconstruction of ontology. It means the mimetic deconstruction of truth, if “truth” is understood in the Heideggerian sense of aletheia, the essence of which is mimesis.\(^{784}\) To be more precise, with ontotypology Lacoue-Labarthe seeks a non-figural way of thinking about the already fictioned identity of things.

In other words, ontotypology stops rather than reveals the “originary mimesis”; thus it has a critical function. Ontotypology captures the idea that the truth is the installation of the world in its own truth and the opening (déclosion) of being as such, independently of the installing subject.\(^{785}\) In question in ontotypology is a paradigm or a model which would unify history under the schema of a formation (paideia, Bildung) by calling into play a mimesis. However, such mimesis is not to be understood as an imitation, but as the configuration or installation of a type. An ontotypological figure is, thus, a

---

783 The French terms are fictionnement and façonnement. Lacoue-Labarthe’s notion of originary mimesis comes close to Nancy’s idea of the origin of art. By “originary mimesis” Lacoue-Labarthe points to the research of the ground as a “secondary origin”, initially divided and differentiated. Mimesis is the logic of the production of sense or of productive force in Lacoue-Labarthe’s philosophy. Originary mimesis does not reproduce anything and thus it is not imitiation in the sense Aristotle has proposed, but compensates for the defects of nature (physis) as its productive force (poiesis). This is why for Lacoue-Labarthe mimesis stands for the “original supplementarity”, in the structure of which he finds the relation between techne and physis. Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe (1985). L’imitation des modernes. Paris: Gallilée, p. 24; Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe (1987). La Fiction du politique. Paris: Bourgois, p. 127-128.

784 Lacoue-Labarthe, L’imitation des modernes, p. 194. Lacoue-Labarthe points out, however, that at stake in Heidegger’s thinking of the work of art is not mimesis in the sense of simulation, but a being’s resemblance of itself in the play of disclosure and concealment, that is, in their strife (polemos).

785 This is the sense of making present. It resonates with the Platonic notion of poiesis: “making [poiesis] is something manifold; for surely the cause of passing from not being into being for anything whatever is all a making”. See Plato (1991). “The Symposium”, 205b, in The Dialogues of Plato, vol. 2. Trans. with Comment R. E. Allen. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
figure that is utilized to lay down the functioning of philosophical, literary, and also political wholes.\textsuperscript{786} Whether the same principle offers a point of departure for Nancy too, is one of my central questions. It entails asking on what terms does nothingness become a ground, and consequently, how to approach the thought that art gives a model to itself, or makes itself present.

As for Derrida, \textit{différance} implies the thinking of identity without return to the logic of the same; as Nancy formulates it, \textit{différance} points at thinking of sameness itself, as being the same as nothing.\textsuperscript{787} An interpretation of this notion may be found, as I see it, in the core of Nancy’s thinking of the same without returning to itself, and thus identifying with itself. It is question of what is rendered in Greek as the \textit{en diapheron heauto} (ἡν διαφέρον ἑαυτοῦ), the initially divided and differentiated One, thinking of the same without submitting it to the logic of identity.\textsuperscript{788} How is it that “nothing” or difference differing within itself becomes the ground? How are models modelled, how does “modelization” come into being?

The viewpoints presented above open up various approaches concerning the groundlessness of art in Nancy. In the Aristotelian philosophy of nature there is the differentiation between matter and form. In it he distinguishes between three principles: matter, form, and privation.\textsuperscript{789} Later, Hegel introduces the self-determination of the modes of being, which means that form gives form to itself. He uses the term \textit{außersichsein} to describe the elemental level of ecstatic being. At the same time, Nancy follows for example Blanchot’s criticism addressed to Hegel in the sense that there cannot be any universal concept of “art” which might appropriate the multiplicity of art and of the arts, their singular and material nature. For Heidegger being “is” exterior to itself: \textit{Dasein} is in space and time, but outside of them, for \textit{Dasein} gives itself its own time and space – this is what is meant by “spacing”.\textsuperscript{790} Again, Derrida’s \textit{différance} implies the idea that things are encountered in the form of a trace; in another register, Lacoue-Labarthe speaks of the originary mimesis. Regarding these matters, in what Nancy writes about the origin of art without origin, or its unfoundedness, I see his ontology to be based on the thought of trace and difference.\textsuperscript{791}

\textsuperscript{786} Cf. Lacoue-Labarthe, \textit{Typography}, p. 52-53.
\textsuperscript{787} Nancy, \textit{Being Singular Plural}, p. 162 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 188).
\textsuperscript{789} Aristotle, \textit{Physics}, I.
\textsuperscript{790} Cf. e.g. Heidegger, \textit{Contributions to Philosophy}, p. 264ff.
\textsuperscript{791} At this point, one could say that for Nancy, art exists when it appears in its own “community”, that is, as the birth of difference. Art has sense only at its own limit, when it is distinguished from
PRODUCING THE DISTANCE: SPACE AND TIME

If, between the arts and the senses there are thresholds, for Nancy they represent limits of coming-into-presentation, on the verge of being touched. How are, then, these “thresholds” to be understood – what is it that is on the threshold, and what is the nature of the threshold or limit? A metaphor used by Nancy is “the intactness and touching of light and shadow”: with it he tries to describe the liminal nature of sense in art. The threshold is that of sense in its infinite opening, art offering access to the limit of sense, to an access that infinitely accedes.792 One way to deal with the threshold is to take ourselves as spectators as the limit of presentation: when being exposed to a work of art, we are the access to that which is absolutely inaccessible.793 The paradigmatic case of the “absolutely inaccessible” is death.794

Nancy thus suggests that the painting offers an opening, an access to all that is. The presence of the scene is an access: it is an expanse, a zone, a plane, and not a form or a consistency of being.795 As I see it, this note could be read in a way that the painting spaces, as Nancy has remarked elsewhere, referring to the Heideggerian notion in *Die Kunst und der Raum*. The attempt to make access to the scene of the painting is something that Nancy deems indiscreet – tactless, one might also say, as the limit is that of touch. In question is touch as limit.796 Could one possibly suggest that at stake here would be a structure which resembles *Dasein*’s? If *Dasein* is temporal and gives time, but is nevertheless ecstatic – that is, outside of time – it is on these grounds that the ontological difference between beings and being can be born. Existence is *ek-static*, both in spatial and temporal terms.797

---

794 This is exemplified by Nancy’s interpretation of a painting by Caravaggio, *The Death of the Virgin* (1605–1606), which I shall take up below.
796 Cf. ibid., p. 57 (*Les Muses*, p. 103).
797 For Heidegger, “space” stands for “clearing space” (*Räumung*). Time is what spatializes; it provides space. Time and space belong to each other, and making-room (*Einräumung*) means “making space space by filling it up”. Cf. *Contributions to Philosophy*, p. 134, 183f.
At the time of *Being and Time*, Heidegger still understands space as an ontological concept. Space and time are connected for him, but although they are unified, they are not co-ordinate. According to Heidegger, *Dasein*’s “constitution and its ways to be are possible ontologically on the basis of temporality, regardless of whether this entity occurs ‘in time’ or not”.

Thus time appears to be before space: *Dasein*’s spatiality is grounded in temporality. *Dasein* is spatial in a way that no other extended thing is. It clears a space around it to give itself “leeway” or elbowroom; other things may occupy or “take up” space, but *Dasein* takes (nimmt) space in (ein). This is to say that *Dasein* is never present-at-hand in space, but makes room for itself. It directs itself in space and time.

*Dasein* is able to break into space only on the basis of its ecstatico-horizontal temporality and, as a consequence, space is independent of time. However, after *Being and Time* Heidegger envisages a unified “time-space” (*Zeit-Raum*). He starts to think of time-space, not as a coupling of time and space, but as what is more originary in their belonging together: as “onehold”, which is also the origin of time and space, that is, their unitary origin or common root.

*Dasein* exists as care. As care, it has been disclosed as a “there”.

As being-in-the-world, *Dasein* addresses itself to the object of its concern. *Dasein* articulates this concern temporally, in terms of the “now”, the “then”, and the “on that former occasion”. Thereby *Dasein* does not temporalize, if temporalization is understood from the angle of theoretical objectivity, but by contrast, it expresses itself as being-in-the-world. *Dasein* takes its time or gives itself time required for some task. Heidegger calls the relational structure of the “now”, the “then”, and the “on that former occasion” *datability* (*Datierbarkeit*). It reflects the ecstatic constitution of temporality. Time is constituted ecstatically because it happens by way of making present which “awaits and retains, lays ‘out’ a ‘during’ with a span”: this is to say that the making-present discloses itself as the way in which its historical temporality is stretched. Time is ex-tended (étendu) and spread

---

799 Ibid., p. 419-420.
800 Ibid., p. 421.
801 Cf. ibid., p. 263-264. Furthermore, the “originary onefold” of time and space, which “lets them go apart into their separatedness”, is what Heidegger terms as “ab-ground” or “abyss” (*Ab-grund*). This is the groundless ground on which truth is opened, the ground which “hesitantly refuses itself” and opens itself as emptiness and as undecidability. Ibid., p. 264ff. These notions in the context of Nancy’s understanding of finitude are to be considered in more detail in Chapter 5 of this study.
802 Ibid., § 79.
803 Ibid., p. 457; cf. § 65, in which Heidegger calls the future, the character of having been, and the present the “ectases” of temporality.
out (écarté), as Didier Franck puts it: there is an interval which gives access to the continuity of time, and it is for this reason that time is founded in finite ecstatic temporality. This is what Heidegger calls the spanned character of time (Gespanntheit).\textsuperscript{806}

The discreteness of the zones and distance in itself is what constitutes the world: this is the sense of spacing – or what might equally well be called being, Nancy remarks – “the absolute difference of appearance”.\textsuperscript{807} The “space” inherent in “spacing” is not, to be sure, a spatial notion here, but ontological. The creation of the world is itself spacing and differentiation between the zones. If we suppose that one may at this point hear undertones from Heidegger’s philosophy – this is what Nancy states himself – how does one make them more explicit in the connection of Nancy’s approach to art?\textsuperscript{808} As it seems to me, the link is to be sought between Nancy’s notion of spacing and the analytic of Dasein. In Heidegger’s view, thinking time in its “ecstasis” brings it, “in its relatedness to the t/here (Da) of Da-sein, into an essential relationship with the spatiality of Da-sein and hence with space”.\textsuperscript{809} In the short essay \textit{Die Kunst und der Raum} Heidegger proposes an interpretation of spatiality.\textsuperscript{810} As a point of reference to this text he names section 70 of \textit{Being and Time}, where he explores temporality and spatiality on the basis of Dasein’s belonging to a place. It is this conception which now comes under substantial revision.

In \textit{Being and Time} Heidegger contends that Dasein’s spatiality must be grounded in temporality, without, however, deducing space from time.\textsuperscript{811} Instead, Dasein’s spatiality is existentially founded upon temporality in the connectedness of space and time, and Dasein makes room for itself by directing itself in space. “The space which it [Dasein] has exstastically taken in”, Heidegger writes, “the ‘here’ of its current factical situation never signifies a position in space”, but instead signifies a “leeway” opened up for Dasein in directionality and de-severance.\textsuperscript{812} Dasein’s spatiality is such that it is never present-at-hand in space, but it takes space in by determining its own location.\textsuperscript{813}

In the essay “Building Dwelling Thinking” Heidegger analyses buildings in somewhat similar terms. Buildings are things which, as locations, allow a site.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[808] \textit{Ibid.}, p. 20-23 (\textit{Les Muses}, p. 41-44).
\item[809] Heidegger, \textit{Contributions to Philosophy}, p. 132.
\item[811] Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, § 70, p. 418.
\item[812] \textit{Ibid.}, § 70, p. 420.
\item[813] \textit{Ibid.}, p. 418.
\end{footnotes}
Schematically expressed, locations only come into existence by virtue of a thing, Heidegger using a bridge as an example.\textsuperscript{814} A site is something that provides for a space, Raum. How, then, to describe the role of man in the birth of space? This is what Heidegger calls man's “dwelling”. Dwelling means “existing in a human manner”: it is man's persisting through spaces and staying among things and locations. Building produces locations that allow spaces – as such, building is a founding and joining of spaces. In other words, building puts up locations that make space. A space is something that has been made room for and which is “cleared and free”, in other words, which is within a boundary, from which something begins its presencing. Spaces in turn receive their being from locations, and not from “space” as an abstract mathematical construction.\textsuperscript{815}

By contrast, in the spaces provided for by locations there is always space as interval, and in this interval there is space as pure extension. Heidegger's notion of building and its relation to space is, as I see it, aimed to bring out the idea that space has a presence, not as such, if one may say so, but only when it is related to other things and to other spaces. A space comes into existence from inside of the analytic space – space as a mathematical qualifier does not have space in itself. Only then does location have the sense of “space”.

It is in \textit{Die Kunst und der Raum} that Heidegger acknowledges his idea that to derive the spatiality of \textit{Dasein} from temporality is untenable. Space in this text is considered not as a spatial but as an ontological term, for Heidegger's aim is now to rethink the notion of space in terms of \textit{spacing}, starting from the idea that things themselves are the places, and do not merely belong to a place.\textsuperscript{816} At stake is thus the taking place of and opening up a space, on the ground that every locality (Ortschaft) means the taking place of what gives space. For Heidegger, a place opens up a region, in which it gathers the things in their belonging-together and frees them into the open.\textsuperscript{817} What is proper to space must present itself from the space itself, and not inside any given space. In this way art, and sculpture in particular, would neither be thought of in terms of a seizure of space nor a confrontation with it – instead, plastic art should rather be regarded as incorporation and setting-into-work of places.\textsuperscript{818} A notion of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{814} Heidegger, \textit{Poetry, Language, Thought}, p. 151-154. A thing, such as a bridge, allows a site for the fourfold: earth and sky, divinities and mortals in their “primal oneness”. \textit{See ibid.}, p. 149.
\item \textsuperscript{815} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 154-155. \textit{Techné}, which is at play in architecture (that is, in the erecting of buildings) as a letting-appear, is what “brings something made” within what is present.
\item \textsuperscript{816} Heidegger, \textit{Die Kunst und der Raum}, p. 11.
\item \textsuperscript{817} \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{818} A similar idea appears in “The Origin of the Work of Art”, see \textit{Poetry, Language, Thought}, e.g. p. 41ff.
\end{itemize}
spacing comparable to the one introduced by Heidegger in *Die Kunst und die Raum* appears in Nancy’s interpretation of a landscape, in which he contrasts it to a garden. A landscape (paysage) is, according to Nancy, a cutting out of an indistinct expanse of a region (pays). A garden, in turn, belongs to a presupposed and pre-existent space, which is a space for dwelling. In the landscape spacing spaces a part for itself; by closing itself at the same time it opens itself, thus producing its own limits. In this sense, Nancy’s paysage has attributes that correspond to Heidegger’s Dasein: both are being-there or being-in-the-world and give space to themselves.

Emptiness of space, in turn, is nothing: it does not mean a deficiency for Heidegger, but the double of space, and as such is a “bringing forth” (Hervorbringen). What is shared by Heidegger in his rejection of the notion of space as a homogeneous expanse and Nancy’s thinking on the origin of art, would thus be diversity and plurality as a rule. With Nancy, this would be to say that art exposes the unity and the uniqueness of the being-in-the-world in the singular distance of a touch in the interruption which it produces. Spacing is at stake in that every touch is heterogeneous and zoned in itself.

Art, in the sense introduced by Heidegger, is, on the one hand, to be taken both as more than a traditional object of aesthetic studies in the way it allows the sense to appear as Lichtung, “clearing”: opening or revelation. On the other hand, for Heidegger art certainly falls short of being “art” in a traditional sense: it is more than questionable whether he has any theory of art in its own right, nor does he seek to answer what art qua art is. Nancy, for his part, provides a view of the ontology of art, which is inseparable from his philosophy on a larger scale. An example might be taken from the singular plurality in the origin of art and its relation to his thinking on community.

**ART AND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THINKING AND SENSIBILITY**

From what was said above it follows, according to Nancy, that the sensuous and technical plurality of the arts is bound up with intelligible sense. What he probably wants to say with this is that it is the technical dimension of art, such

---

819 Heidegger, *Die Kunst und der Raum*, p. 11-12.
820 Thus the latter would, it seems to me, belong to the order of space as it is brought forth in § 70 of *Being and Time*. Cf. Nancy, *Au fond des images*, p. 102-103.
as colours, tools, different materials, or words for the writer, which makes of art a sensible form that engages the intelligible materiality of sense such as Nancy understands it.\textsuperscript{821} Thus, one might state that he conceives of art – or the arts – more or less as a matter of language, or poetry (\textit{Dichtung}) in the Heideggerian sense.\textsuperscript{822} Arts “take place” beneath the unity of a pure production of sense and the sensuous dis-location of sense.\textsuperscript{823} The technical dimension of the work of art is, thus, inseparable from its sensible dimension: art (or poetry) is the name for the dissolution or dissenion brought about by technical production, \textit{and}, paradoxically, it is the name of the same dissenion as essence that is the sensuous essence of production. Here the production is that of sense, and the truth of the sense – that is, the originary dispersal of sense, which is opposed to the Heideggerian account of truth as origin, or of “putting truth to work” – is the interruption of the sensing itself. The sensuous and the intelligible sense thus form a chiasm, which is to say that they intersect each other: (sensuous) sense makes (intelligible) sense. Sensation and intelligibility do not exist “as such”, but they must, and can only, be approached through each other, Nancy seems to suggest.\textsuperscript{824}

The plurality of art produces for him, finally, “a fundamental double law”. This happens, on the one hand, in that by touching on presentation one touches on nothing, on obviousness only, and this obviousness multiplies itself in its immanence. Results include colour, nuance, line and echo. On the other hand, “art” disappears as soon as it takes place. What comes into being is an
art, which, in turn, is a work, effectuated in a style, a manner, and so forth, to a still more definite detail. Art is then “nonapparent and/or disappearing”; the unity of art syncopates itself in material plurality, which makes that art, in fact, vanish twice.825

How to speak of the chiasm between the sensuous and the intelligible? What is the way to describe the sense of sense, and what can it be in art? As Nancy puts it, aisthesis is a matter of the relations between art and sense. In thinking of what characterizes aisthesis or sensibility, Nancy’s definition is in line with Hegel: the sensible is “synonymous with what is self-external”.826 For Hegel the arts are constituted by their exteriority to one another, in other words, their mutual dispersion. According to Nancy’s interpretation, this means that the exteriority of sensible things is all there is of sensible interiority. In the case of the arts, their exteriority is the only interiority of their order, and the internal affinities of this order – each art is at the threshold of the others. The arts, thus, touch upon each other, constantly passing into one another’s space. What is more, a work of art can present some sense just because it does this in passing, by opening a certain presence: not by exposing a fixed and permanent signification, but as a relation to some other thing. Such is what Nancy calls the “fractality of (the) sense(s)”, exposed in the very place of the truth of sense, if the “truth of sense” is understood as a synthesizing movement toward an ideal sense. This fractality is what art is all about.827

Yet aisthesis, understood as the sense of sense, is rather the “absence” of sense, or the sense of being “insofar as it is in play as the existence that is its own sense”.828 That is, if sense is the nudity of existing, without any other signification, in what way can this nudity be or become the subject of art? And further, Nancy

825 Nancy, The Muses, p. 36 (Les Muses, p. 65). When aesthetics presents or anticipates itself in philosophy, it is suppressed twice: first, in the end of art, and secondly, in the enjoyment of imaginative reason. In fact, these two are the same to Nancy. Art meets its end because art comprises this enjoyment. As a consequence, Nancy sees art as a question of presentation in the thinking of both Kant and Hegel, for in both, presentation is what is at stake in the aesthetic. In Nancy’s view, “The presentation of truth rests on the truth of presentation, which is the enjoyment of pre-figured unity”. Namely, “the Hegelian spirit is itself the final self-appropriating enjoyment of the Kantian imagination”. Nancy (1993). “The Sublime Offering”, in Of the Sublime: Presence in Question, ed. Jean-François Courtine and Jean-Luc Nancy, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett. Albany: State University of New York Press, p. 32 (“L’offrande sublime”, in Du Sublime, ed. Michel Deguy and Jean-Luc Nancy, Paris: Belin, 1988, p. 47). Furthermore, the Aufhebung of art in philosophy has the structure of enjoyment, where art in turn enjoys itself, for it may become, as philosophic art, the self-enjoyment of Spirit itself.


827 Nancy, The Sense of the World, p. 130 (Le sens du monde, p. 198). The fractality of the arts will be discussed in section 4.4.

asks, is art necessary to the articulation of sense in its “absence”, in its “surprise”? The sense of sense as aisthesis is what he defines as “the heterogeneous entelechy of the sensing/sensed”. 829 What is thus at stake in Nancy’s idea of such entelechy of the sensing, which is at once the sensed? One answer is to be found in the notion of *spacing*: the unity of the contact implies relationship, which in art takes on the forms of either being-affected-by, being-affectable-by, or being-liaible-to.

Art, thus, is something that touches oneself. Intellection and intelligible sense are only modulations or modalizations of such contact, even affections of affect itself. In this context spacing means that in art the unity of the five senses gets disunified at the limits of the senses, which makes touch and other senses touch each other: the senses “burst into” one another, whereby their disintegration occurs. 830 Accordingly, there is no touch in general, but someone touches some other, in some manner. This makes contact heterogeneous in itself. Here, what touches itself is the local presentation of the senses; touch as a sense is a threshold by nature. It follows that tensions exist between the five senses. As such, there is no sense “in general”, but only local difference and differing division: what is sensible is in-sensible différance. In Nancy’s words, this is to say that affect presupposes itself: affect involves the actuality of a being-subject-to. 831 This originary act of passibility takes place as the cutting and opening of an access, the access through which it is possible for a sensing thing to sense something sensed, for a sensed thing to be sensed. What results is the singular sense of the aesthetic: that exteriority as intimacy of the aisthetic entelechy gives us the cut of a place – sensation is necessarily local.

In this scheme, the intellectual sense is produced by the fact that it is immediately sensed: it is sensed as a sense. Sense has sense or value only if it is sensed. This is something that requires sensuous sensing. This I see expressed by Nancy’s notion that affectability constitutes “the pres-ence of sensible presence”, not as a pure virtuality, but as a being-in-itself-always-already-touched, touched by the possibility of being touched. In this way, “it is necessary to have already offered some part of itself – but here, the part counts for the whole – to something outside of itself (or to some part of itself set apart from itself)”. 832 Affectability, or the way in which the sensuous senses touch each other, thus

---

829 Ibid.
implies the thought that sense wants to be felt, it wants to sense itself: “it wants to sense itself and to be sensed; for to sense oneself making up sense would be properly to make sense”.833

In such a notion of sensibility, Nancy explains that what sense longs for is to sense oneself as the engenderment of sense: “desire [of sense] is thus the desire to abolish aesthetic exteriority, to enclose within oneself the double entelechy of the sensing/sensed, to confer on it a unity that would not be simply numerical, and finally to force the touch to be more than a touch: to make itself into an invasive inherence of the self unto infinity”.834 The same endeavours constitute “the ultimate stake of philosophy”, for Nancy’s claim is that philosophy has wanted to appropriate the generativity of sense. As I understand it, by this Nancy wants to express the notion that sense, which is both sensuous and intelligible – on the grounds of the idea that sensuous sense has only value inasmuch as it is intellectually grasped – should be considered as something that remains outside the sphere of metaphysical significations.

In his account B. C. Hutchens repeats an idea that is in fact similar to Nancy’s. In Hutchens’s view, since the concept of sense, as Nancy understands it, has no fixed provenance, but “is suggested in the very grasping at it, then sense is grasped wherever there is grasping at sense”.835 According to Hutchens’s formulation, this is to say both that senses sense themselves sensing (se sentent sentir), and that sensing senses that there is something that senses itself sensing, and this sensing too has a sense. And, “[t]o sense that there is sensing is to sense ‘sense’ in its materiality, and to sense oneself as if one were producing sense” – from which follows a “double aporia”. However, what appears to be Hutchens’s point, is that in question in this “double aporia” would be something which at its basis resembles “a revamped metaphysical distinction between the sensible and the intelligible” and hence a form of empiricism.836 If Nancy’s decisive question is the self-engenderment of sense – how to avoid getting caught in an interminable autophagy of discourse – Hutchens does not see that he is able to elude this problem altogether.837

833  Ibid., p. 162 (Le sens du monde, p. 244).
834  Ibid.
835  Hutchens, Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy, p. 56.
837  Cf. Hutchens, Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy, p. 163. In this “double aporia” Hutchens sees to be in question something which at its basis would be “a revamped metaphysical distinction between the sensible and the intelligible” and a form of empiricism.
4.2 The Presentation of Art

In Chapter 3, I have sketched some philosophical outlines for Nancy's understanding of the notions of Vorstellung and Darstellung within the scope offered by Hegel, as well as that of Anwesen and Heidegger’s critique of it, followed by Derrida’s interpretations of “presentation”. What has guided my exploration is the deconstruction of the notion of “permanent presence” (ousia, parousia) and its relatedness to the thinking of “representation”. In the following shall I attempt to put this discussion into the context of the ontology of art, thus seeking to illuminate the specific way which he allows to art in the light of the notions of presentation and representation.

Taken more extensively, at stake is an interrogation of the nature of art’s coming into presence and what allegedly makes it different from any other presentation. In this way it may be stated that, apart from the ontology of art, aesthetics bears for Nancy the meaning of a “transcendental aesthetics”, the aesthetics of the birth into presence and the infinite coming into presence of a finite sense.838 Such aesthetics is transcendental because it is not a question of an established sense or the institution or foundation of sense, but of the comings of sense. Or, one might also say, the other is encountered by us as existing, that is, in its finitude: as opening to us out of its own relation to alterity.839

For Nancy, the event of coming-into-presence means presence before signification.840 What is at stake in art is the limit of the coming-into-presence of sense: what comes to be presented in art is the fact that there is presentation. The presencing occurs each time singularly, whereas the possibilities of coming into presence are innumerable. In question is not the fact that art would represent something to a subject, but that its presentation is related to itself: there is presentation because the obviousness of the factuality of presentation is in relation to itself. Art manifests that presentation is something evident; this is to say that presentation in art is not in relation to a subject. Hence, as I see it, the limit of each sense, which comes to be embodied in a work of art, is where presentation touches itself.841 Here the limit is between arts, the distribution of

838 Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p. 27 (*Une pensée finie*, p. 49). Speaking of “transcendental aesthetics” does not mean, however, that Nancy would have simply taken up the Kantian project under the same name. With Kant transcendental aesthetics refers to the forms of the sense perception. Cf. Chapter 1.
which Nancy discusses on the basis that art is the exposition of differences. Art presents singularly the detail and the local in their multiplicity. This would be to say that the occurrences of presence are for Nancy always multiple, but in a singular way, since they are, from the beginning, infinitely differentiated according to the heterogeneity of the happening of the world, whereby the world is revealed as something. The way art is differentiated would thus be comparable to the Heideggerian *Stimmung*. *Stimmung* opens up a world to *Dasein*. Thus, he suggests that art would isolate a moment of the world “as exteriority and exposition of the being-in-the-world”, presented as such. Art is similar to “world” inasmuch as a world is no longer attached to a signification but is itself its own signification, or has no signification – it is sense absenting itself, an *ab-sense*. What opens in art is its own lack of end – we have to invent the universal of art.

To begin with, to characterize the sense of presentation in Nancy, means, in a word, *exposition of existence*. According to his own definition, existence is “he spacing of a present that *takes place*, as present, when a ‘substance’ or a ‘subject’ is coming along or going away”. For this reason, “[t]he present as present is *praesens*”, for it both precedes (itself) and succeeds (itself), thus separating itself and keeping at a distance the presence it carries. Art means acceding to access to the sense itself, without one acceding anywhere. Rather, access implies the opening up of time, its spacing and the here-and-now, Nancy says: this is what is designed by his notion of finitude. As a consequence, it is a question of the coming of sense, and not of the institution of sense; there are nothing but finite senses. The same phenomenon is manifested by the trace in the work of an

---

844 See e.g. Margat, “Jean-Luc Nancy: y a-t-il encore un monde?”, p. 57, 59.
846 *Ibid.*, p. 66 (*Le sens du monde*, p. 107). For Nancy the *Bildung* calls for a blind spot or the vanishing of unity of *Einbildung* so that an image may present itself. Such a blind spot appears in a specific sense in the case of the death mask. The gaze of the dead presents an inimaginable imaging (*le bilden inimaginable*), it is the model of an image or of a sight, because it looks without seeing or sees without looking. Thus, the mask works as the model of the pre-vision of the unity which anticipates itself in the precession of its own succession. Yet, it is a model, since it “*bildet* and *ein-bildet* a *Bildung* in general”. In other words, “*vor-bildet* the unity of the image”. The blind spot of the empty look, the blackout of the oneness of the image, is the focus in which the view or the representation, the shining of being, breaks out. This is to say that the imaging of unity is possible only out of death, that is, from the disruption of unity: from the non-presence of unity, in which unity “pres-ents” itself (*se prés-ente*), or comes both before and after itself. Nancy thus comments on Heidegger’s critique to the Kantian idea of the schema, produced by imagination. See Nancy, *Au fond des images*, p. 172-174; Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, § 20.
artist: as he draws a line in a painting, in the contour he draws not a presence but a vestige of its birth.\textsuperscript{849}

In this way, by distinguishing from itself, an image dislocates itself: the distance is born between the sense understood from the basis of the material presence (of a text, for example) and an imaged (\textit{imagée}) absence, revealed by the sense in the ground of the image. The existence as a form of presence is, then, drawn out of absence; imagination is a force capable of doing this.\textsuperscript{850} The manifestation itself is “the coming of a stranger” and “the birth into the world of what has no place in the world”\textsuperscript{851} – this strangeness, the very thing that is of interest to Nancy in art, is what I have tried to elucidate in the previous chapter, in which the groundlessness of art is discussed.

As my point of interest I take Nancy’s idea of art as the appearing of appearing or the presentation of presentation: the fact that there is such a thing as presentation.\textsuperscript{852} Namely, an image – like any thing – presents itself inasmuch as it resembles itself, and thus affirms its being that thing.\textsuperscript{853} It is apparent that art is, in Nancy’s philosophy, a matter of distinction and of the opening and withdrawal of sense. It is according to this kind of a dual gesture that it comes into presence by opening itself to its own groundlessness.\textsuperscript{854} As elsewhere in Nancy’s discussion of sense, the sense of art is not identical with itself. Or, sense exists but as the movement and the escape from presence: this is to say that it exists or exceeds itself. An image presents an absence. An image itself is a place: the singular place of what has no place, being the place of displacement.\textsuperscript{855} The difference of art is, thus, to be found in a gathering of sense without signification. Before going to Nancy’s interpretation of the questions of presentation and representation, let us take a brief look at Hegel’s notion of art.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{849} Nancy, \textit{The Muses}, p. 75-76 (\textit{Les Muses}, p. 128-129), cf. \textit{Au fond des images}, p. 162.
\item \textsuperscript{850} Cf. Nancy, \textit{Au fond des images}, p. 48.
\item \textsuperscript{851} Nancy, \textit{The Muses}, p. 76 (\textit{Les Muses}, p. 129).
\item \textsuperscript{852} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 34 (\textit{Les Muses}, p. 62-63).
\item \textsuperscript{853} Nancy, \textit{Au fond des images}, p. 24, 162-163; cf. the idea of Kantian schematism.
\item \textsuperscript{854} Cf. \textit{ibid.}, p. 54.
\item \textsuperscript{855} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 128-129. Because the place of the image is empty, the number of its modes of presentation is indefinite – sense exists by virtue of its ex-it-ing and exceeding itself, its departing from itself and unidentifying with itself, for it is the movement and escape from existing. By comparing an image, or art in general, to absence, Nancy adopts a terminology which is very close to that of Maurice Blanchot.
\end{itemize}
HEGEL: ART AND TRUTH

If the speculative theory of art, or the Jena romantics, put art on the same level as philosophy, and even grant art superiority over philosophy, it can be said that for Hegel the speculative function of philosophical rationality is more powerful than that of art.\[^{856}\] Here I can only deal with the central facts which constitute the framework of Hegel’s understanding of presentation. This question is equally of importance to his account of art.

Hegel’s understanding of the provenance of art is based on a view that art has to be seen as an autonomous concept which does not serve any external finality, except the dialectical end in itself, as brought forth in *Aesthetics*.\[^{857}\] How, then, does the dialectical movement appear in Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics, and what is the interest of dialectics in them? Nancy’s answer is that art is maintained by the dialectical movement “even where art should disappear” or, eventually, “where it disappears”.\[^{858}\] However, he does not intend to refer to the end of art with this: rather, he argues that in art an immemorial past is constantly reborn.\[^{859}\] This introduces us to the idea of a repeated moment of an incessant coming into presence.\[^{860}\] And, according to Nancy, such a birth into presence cannot be sufficiently accounted for by the word “art”.\[^{861}\]

Artistic presentation is for Hegel, first of all, a question of the sensible presentation of an Idea, or the sensuous display of the mind’s relationship with external reality (*sinnliche Darstellung der Idee*). This is to say that aesthetics is between the sensuous and the ideal: it is a matter of a sensuous conformity between the idea and the reality in which it is expressed. In this constellation the work of art means the sensuous display of the mind’s relationship with external reality, since it is material substance that has been imbued with the mind; as such, the work of art can be described as “the sensuous presentation of the

\[^{856}\] Cf. e.g. Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*, p. 135.
\[^{857}\] Here, Nancy remarks, Kant’s conception of art is still in the service of morals and finality, despite its “disinterestedness”, whereas Hegel gives art an absolute position. Nancy, *Le poids d’une pensée*, p. 34.
\[^{858}\] See e.g. *ibid*.
\[^{861}\] *Ibid.*, p. 42. In Hegel, the Absolute is absolute only insofar as its presence to itself is accomplished. At this moment, its self-consciousness becomes absolutized – Nancy’s question is how can such self-consciousness come into being as art, as art that is subordinated to nothing? The end of the religion of art is self-consciousness’s return to itself which was exteriorized and mediated in the works. For the Self, all presentations of the Self are inessential except one’s self-presentation through an infinite distance, empty of works and of presence. If art exists “in between” the revealing dialectics, never is it either revealing or revealed itself: the appearing or presentation of art is not revelation. The “in between” or the interval is what Nancy is interested in: that is, art as syncopated existence. *Ibid.*, p. 46-48.
Absolute itself”. According to Hegel, it can be shown how the particular parts of the subject emerge from the conception of artistic beauty as the presentation of the Absolute. Here the “content of art is the Idea, while its form is the configuration of sensuous material”.  

For Hegel there is a concordance between beauty and truth – that is, the way the Spirit gradually unfolds in history and finally becomes conscious of itself as Spirit – when ideality is presented according to its presence. Yet the Idea as the beauty of art is not the Idea as such, but “the Idea as shaped forward into reality and as having advanced to immediate unity and correspondence with this unity.” The Idea as such is the absolute truth itself, and in order to become an object of consciousness as a particularization through the unfolding of the Idea it has to be given a concrete form. Forms, for their part, are different relations of meaning and shape, and proceed from the Idea itself. As far as art is concerned, as Hegel explains, there are three relations of the Idea to its configuration: first, the symbolic form, represented by architecture; second, the classical form, represented by sculpture depicting the human form; finally, the third and highest category, romantic form, seeking to free itself from the burden of particularity. The importance of art resides in its being the substantial expression of ideas: matter presents a recalcitrance which makes thought tangible to consciousness.

At stake now is the notion of the “end” or “death of art” as brought up by Hegel, and its relatedness with the concept of truth as accounted for in Nancy’s deconstructive interpretation. This issue of the death of art has been discussed by Nancy mainly in his texts relating to presentation in art. As the Spirit of the world develops toward self-realization through self-knowledge, art is one of its stages in this dialectical development. What Hegel claims about art is that art comes to an end: as he puts it, there will not be, or even is no longer, a need for art as something which brings home spiritual truths to consciousness. As a

864 Hegel, Introduction to Aesthetics, p. 73.
865 Ibid., p. 75-76.
866 Ibid., p. 76-80.
868 See e.g. Le poids d’une pensée, p. 33-63; The Muses, esp. p. 41-55 (Les Muses, p. 75-97); The Sense of the World, p. 123-139 (Le sens du monde, 189-212). See also Taminiaux, Poetics, Speculation, and Judgment, esp. p. 127-152.
consequence, “Art is and remains for us, on the side of its highest possibilities, a thing of the past”. At this highest stage, art now transcends itself, in that it forsakes the element of reconciled embodiment of the spirit in sensuous form and passes over from the poetry of imagination to the prose of thought. As Spirit reaches its full self-realization, the need for images and symbols withers away, and with it goes the need for any art that uses physical means to express itself. Hegel does not mean by this that art would stop altogether, but rather that the need for it, and its role in the development of spirit would be fulfilled. That is, in speaking of the end of art Hegel does not refer to the end of the production of art, but the end of the necessity of its presentation.

For Nancy, Hegel’s declaration of the end of art is nothing but the end of what is Hegel calls “aesthetic religion”: what is surpassed is, in fact, religion, and here he is speaking of the religion of the Greeks. In Nancy’s interpretation the end of the religion of art means “the return to itself of the conscience of oneself, which was exteriorised and mediated in its works”; this is to say that works of art now lack the power of the Spirit. Again, as Nancy maintains, art is properly art only when it is withdrawn from the service of divine presentation and “when it presents itself as such”. In other words, “art is not ‘simply’ dead”; instead, “[i]ts divine content is dead, but art for the first time presents itself as such, in the works which have been detached from their roots and from their spirituality”. As regards Hegel’s concept of “truth” in the unfolding of the Spirit, it is probably better to refer to the corresponding notion in Heidegger’s philosophy of art in order to relate it to the destruction of metaphysics.

One could say that there is a certain, albeit an inevitable tautology at work in the way Heidegger presents the origin of the work of art, that is, in the assumption that the origin of art lies in art itself. What unites Hegel’s and Heidegger’s propositions concerning art, one deemed metaphysical and the other aimed at overcoming it, is that both reject empiricism and intellectualism alike: in Taminiaux’s view, they strive at demonstrating that neither lived experience

870 Nancy, Le poids d’une pensée, p. 46.
872 Nancy, The Muses, p. 43 (Les Muses, p. 79).
873 Nancy, Le poids d’une pensée, p. 49-50.
874 Questioning, as I have tried to do above, the conditions of the death of art from the point of view of “the true” takes Nancy to paths which are marked by an apparently Heideggerian approach, although based on Hegel’s thinking as articulated in his Logic. Cf. section 2.1 of this study.
875 Cf. Luoto, Heidegger ja taiteen arvoitus, p. 20-21, 26-29.
(Erlebnis) nor beauty as such equals the essence of art. Moreover, the reason for rejecting these views is the same for both philosophers, that is, their failure to recognize the aforementioned circularity. This is because for Hegel art has an essence but empiricism does not manage to account for it, since it either leads to negative results or to too abstract and negative definitions.

As for Heidegger, there is, of course, no essence in art, for it could be roughly said that the core of his thinking on art is in its taking place as unconcealedness or alētheia. The Heideggerian setting-into-work of truth itself is an event, and as such the origin of art. Alētheia must be thought of as “freed from the perspective of the metaphysical representation of ‘truth’ in the sense of correctness, freed also from the determination of ‘being’ as actuality”. This said, one may see clearly that although there is a circularity visible in the thinking of the notion of art with Hegel and Heidegger, the circle proves very different as far as its points of departure are concerned: in Hegel’s thinking, it has been structured on entirely metaphysical grounds, relying on the Spirit as a production of subjectivity.

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe has explored the relationship between philosophy and literature in German romanticism, more exactly as a question that was “never asked by Hegel” in his pushing the logic of literature to its limit. In this text, Lacoue-Labarthe takes up the question of the limit of representation from a deconstructive angle. He asks whether there is, according to Hegel, a necessity of manifestation in Greek art; is it possible that what must “present” itself does not present itself; but must differentiate itself and alienate itself, so that the necessity of manifestation or appearance entails the necessity of loss? As interpreted by Lacoue-Labarthe, this problem concerns the form of Darstellung. “Without manifestation,” he writes, “there is nothing – to think”, and consequently, there is no presentation except of thought: pure self-equality in the identified self-difference of thought.

For Lacoue-Labarthe, the status of Vorstellung is the poetic form between manifestation and the speculative: poetic fictioning is what “makes the external object produced by the other arts into an internal one which the spirit itself externalizes for representation”. Fiction dissociates truth, at least up to a certain

876 Taminiaux, Poetics, Speculation, and Judgment, p. 136.
877 Heidegger, Pathmarks, p. 335.
878 Cf. e.g. ibid., p. 327.
880 Ibid., p. 143 (“L’impréparable”, p. 75).
881 Ibid., p. 144 (“L’impréparable”, p. 76).
point, from the problematic of veiling/unveiling. But philosophy still has the right to be art: an emphasis on the necessity of veiling truth begins slowly to pervert the “logic of truth”, that is, the logic of (un)veiling, dissociating (at least in part) the figural from “aletheic” play, displacing the play itself and so preparing the paradoxical locus where truth could be revealed as undiscoverable (indévoilable), unpresentable: un-(re)presentable, undarstellbar. This is, as Lacoue-Labarthe interprets it, what Hegel would have wanted to avoid: Hegel verifies the verification of fiction. The ethical scandal had always been the scandal of the aesthetic – which, like every scandal in the eyes of Knowledge and the Spirit, consists in having revealed that there is nothing to unveil.

**REPRESENTATION**

To be able to delve into Nancy’s view on the nature of the presentation of art, I shall first take up very briefly some remarks concerning his notion of representation in order to shed some light on the difference between these concepts. Earlier I referred to Heidegger’s critique of the metaphysics of presence, designed by terms such as Anwesen, Anwesenheit or ousia, and the connected terms of presentation (Darstellung) and representation (Vorstellung). He contends that the metaphysical understanding of being has led to the consideration of being as presence, or thinking of the being of beings as the presencing of what presents itself.

As a consequence, the levels of being, or presence, and particular beings, or present things respectively, have been identified with each other. The failure to distinguish them results from the way of thinking that what is present emerges from the presencing of what is present. The distinction between presencing and present things is forgotten, since the essence of presencing (das Wesen des Anwesens) has been forgotten. Heidegger deems the metaphysical tendency an objectifying way of thinking, for what is at stake in taking being as constant presence is that the subject brings something before itself. In other words, being presents itself as an object for awareness. The present comes to be understood

---

883 Ibid., p. 154-156 (“L’imprésentable”, p. 84-86).
884 See Heidegger, Early Greek Thinking, p. 48-50.
as Vorhandenheit, “presence-at-hand” or “availability”, when the present is represented (Vorstellen) as given presence by the subject.\textsuperscript{886} Beingness is now thought of as presence for this mode of representation.\textsuperscript{887} Starting from presence beings may manifest themselves as present, and the antecedence of the horizon of being in reference to beings can be understood.\textsuperscript{888}

As I have stated before, Nancy takes Heidegger’s view on the metaphysics of presence as the basis of his interrogation of and distinguishing between presentation and representation. However, it should be noted that what separates (to some extent) Nancy’s interrogation from that of Heidegger’s, is that Nancy does not proceed from the differentiation of being (Sein) and beings (das Seiende), or presence and present things, respectively. The grounds of Nancy’s shift of emphasis in this matter can be considered in the context of Heidegger’s stating, cited earlier, that “[t]he essence of Dasein lies in its existence”.\textsuperscript{889} Fundamentally, Nancy accepts the same principle, but here he gives priority to the thought of existence, in which the “essence” of being lies.

For Nancy the “essence” of the existent is in its possibility to exist, in what is each time possible for it. The existent has nothing, for it is everything that it “has” – its “characteristics”: “The relation to ‘the possible’”, Nancy writes, “is nothing other than the relation of existence to itself”.\textsuperscript{890} Here he follows Heidegger’s view, according to which the “essence” (Wesen) of Dasein lies in its “having-to-be” (Zu-sein). In this way, the relation to the possible constitutes the relation to the “self” (à “soi”), in which the “self” is the “possible”. The relation to the possible is that of (in)decision.\textsuperscript{891} In Nancy’s philosophy, the Heideggerian Zu-sein is designed by “having-to-be”, avoir-à-être, which carries a sense of obligation. It is precisely existence which is being-toward: existence is the opening of the possibility to be. Existence – the self – is thus transcendent in relation to being. For this reason the (in)decision of being is most proper to the being of the existent, when being is abandoned or “offered”. Being is thus transitive by nature; it is inclined of exposed toward the other. Here resides the


\textsuperscript{887} Ibid., p. 54-55.

\textsuperscript{888} Heidegger, \textit{Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics}, p. 92-93. See also Derrida, \textit{Margins of Philosophy}, p. 66 (\textit{Marge de la philosophie}, p. 76-77).

\textsuperscript{889} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, § 9, p. 67. As it has become evident, “existence” (Existenz) is, according to Heidegger, “allotted solely to Dasein”, for the traditional term existentia is the equivalent of “Being-present-at-hand”, which is “inappropriate to entities of Dasein’s character”.

\textsuperscript{890} Nancy, \textit{The Birth to Presence}, p. 85-86 (\textit{Une pensée finie}, p. 114).

\textsuperscript{891} Ibid., p. 86 (\textit{Une pensée finie}, p. 114).
insubjectifiable mode of being of a singular “subject”. This is why in existence there is a tension and a difference, which is the difference in the way the existent is ahead of itself or of its presence. The tension is what is under exploration here: coming into presence.

To examine the coming into presentation of art more closely, I shall first take a look at what it is not in Nancy’s philosophy, namely, how it differs from representation. Representation, as Nancy defines it, is presented, exposed or exhibited presence. Thus, representation is not “pure and simple presence”, immediacy of being-posed-there (être-posé-là), but it takes presence out of this immediacy and gives it the value of (la fait valoir) some particular presence. Representation always exposes the value or the sense of a thing, the value of being posited before the subject, if nothing else, Nancy says. This results in representation not only presenting something absent, it also presents what is absent from pure and simple presence, what is absent from the being of presence as such, or from its sense or truth. Representation belongs to the order of Vorhanden, presence-at-hand.

This means that an image is not simply present and homogeneous with the world. Rather, the being-there of an image is characterized by its distance, which, however, is not the same as absence – or it may be the case if absence is understood as “intense presence”. According to Nancy, representation has traditionally been understood as the presentation of an absence which remains open in the (sensuous) given of the so-called work of “art”. Representation is not a simulacrum, nor is it the substitution of any original thing in its presence: rather, at stake here is the presentation of what cannot be described in terms of given and completed presence. Representation is the setting into presence (mise en présence) of an intelligible reality or form by the formal means of a sensible reality.

When questioning representation in painting, Nancy appeals to the notion that painting is not the reproduction of a model. The model “has fled”, and this fact provides the model itself. Representation implies the sense of repetition, but in the presentation of art no re-presenting can be at issue: art is not imitation
of a model, but imitation of the inimitable.\textsuperscript{898} Nancy examines this theme by setting side by side laughter and presentation in art. What he sees is the burst of laughter – as it is described in Charles Baudelaire’s poem “The Desire to Paint” – as comparable to the truth of truth itself (that is, sense in its plurality and dispersal), and as such, comparable to the truth of art.\textsuperscript{899} This truth is truth beyond any realization or representation – that is, it is nothing like the truth of being which would be put to work in Heidegger’s meaning: the poem does not paint an image, but the painting is the poem, which presents the truth of itself. In this way, the poem would present the \textit{impossible} itself, or the possibility of penetrating the impossibility of coming into its presence and of making it come into presence. Presented, according to Nancy, is just the truth concerning the lack of the object – that is, the artist’s desire to paint and to die, juxtaposed with the burst of the woman’s laughter. In other words, the subject of the poem is the truth of its vanishing into its own presentation, thereby “plunging into its obscurity the one who presents it”.\textsuperscript{900}

The desire does not wish to make something present – to re-present, that is – but it longs to desire. Longing to desire thus turns out to be the un(re)presentable truth. For what the artist does is that he “paints the desire to paint inasmuch as this desire is the subject of to be painted par excellence, the inimitable subject of painting, absolutely”.\textsuperscript{901} The artist paints the representation as desire, not the desire to represent, but the pictured image itself as desire. In art there is no question about an achieved representation, but of a desire “going endlessly toward pleasure, of \textit{coming} to pleasure”.\textsuperscript{902} By such an account Nancy is offering a reading which points to a view of art (and fundamentally, of the artist’s desire) as something which is without model, or which is in a mimetic relation to its own flight and disappearance only, when its explosion into presence resembles the way it gives a model to itself, singularly.

\textsuperscript{898} Cf. Nancy, \textit{Au fond des images}, p. 95; see also Nancy, \textit{The Gravity of Thought}, p. 7-71 (\textit{L’oubli de la philosophie}).  
\textsuperscript{899} Nancy, \textit{The Birth to Presence}, p. 377 (\textit{Une pensée finie}, p. 306-307).  
\textsuperscript{900} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 372, 374 (\textit{Une pensée finie}, p. 301, 303).  
\textsuperscript{901} Nancy, \textit{The Birth to Presence}, p. 380 (\textit{Une pensée finie}, p. 310). Nancy suggests here that in this desire something like the Freudian fore-pleasure is in question. In Freud, fore-pleasure or “incentive bonus” offers an answer to the questions how sexual excitement possesses the character of tension and how an experience of pleasure in sexual excitation can give rise to a need of greater pleasure. As the excitation spreads from one erotogenic zone to another, what is true of one of them is true of all. Fore-pleasure is offered to us so as to make possible the release of still greater pleasure arising from deep psychical sources. (1995). \textit{The Freud Reader}, ed. Peter Gay. London: Vintage, p. 280-282. As regards the work of “creative writers” (\textit{Dichter}), Freud remarks: “In my opinion, all the aesthetic pleasure which a creative writer affords us has the character of a fore-pleasure of this kind, and our actual enjoyment of an imaginative work proceeds a liberation of tensions in our minds.” \textit{Ibid.}, p. 443. See also \textit{The Muses}.  
\textsuperscript{902} Nancy, \textit{The Birth to Presence}, p. 380 (\textit{Une pensée finie}, p. 310).
Aesthetic presentation is not unlike any other presentation in Nancy's philosophy, for it, too, is always-only-coming: being is perpetually postponed in that being is exposed at the limit of the birth into presentation and the withdrawal of presentation. The touching of presence means the singular touch of its untouchable limit. This principle distinguishes it from the thought inherent in representation, when it comes to be understood as availability and as a correlate of the thinking of the subject. The way in which art comes into presence is a movement of withdrawal as soon as the image presents itself or appears. In this respect, I see the structure of Nancy’s presentation as a singular taking place of existence corresponding to the “leap” (Sprung) or “surprise” of being in its eventness (Ereignis), as viewed by Heidegger. For Nancy, the emergence of the visible as visible has to be spoken of as the desire to become the apparition, by which the form of an image is born, or “fictioned”. The apparition at issue is not a phenomenon for Nancy, but phenomenalization or the phainesthai of the apparition.

The desire to become the “surprise” means for him the “coming from the depths of the visible”, out of which it comes to “bloom” “into the miracle of its own apparition”. According to Nancy’s interpretation of the Heideggerian notion of the arrival of being, the surprise is in a disagreement between being and the being, between the founding essentiality of being and the present, given beingness (étantité) of the being. The event is constituted by disagreement, or “the nonpresence of the coming to presence, and its absolute surprise”. However, Nancy remarks that it is precisely the distinction between being and beings which makes the disagreement exist: “The disagreement is a disagreement with that which, by according being to the being, would have eased the tension of ek-sisting”. The surprise, understood as the event of being, or the spacing of time, does not, then, belong to the order of representation; it represents “neither ‘itself’ nor its surprise”, but the leap surprises itself in the absence of being-

---

903 Ibid., p. 381 (Une pensée finie, p. 311). As clarified above, “fictioning” (fictionnement) and “fashioning” (façonnement) are terms linked with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s interpretations of “original mimesis”. For Nancy’s accounts of this, see e.g. Being Singular Plural, p. 174 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 200). In Kant, schematism is the condition of all visibility; for the notion of “leap”, see Heidegger, Contributions to Philosophy, 161-203.

904 Ibid. “Phenomenalization” means for Nancy the fact that being happens, or the event-ness of the event, as the truth of the thing. The truth, then, is not phenomenon, but “the nonphenomenal truth of the phenomenal itself as such”, that is, as event or Geschehen. In this matter, Nancy’s source of inspiration is Hegel’s Science of Logic. Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 161 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 187); also The Birth to Presence, p. 381 (Une pensée finie, p. 311).


906 Ibid.
present. So, the leap coincides with the surprise, without, however, the surprise “belonging” to the leap. It is “the present of Being insofar as it happens, and therefore insofar as it is not”. In Nancy’s view, being is “simply existing”; “to exist” takes place in the passage or the coming and departure and the rhythm of the “syncopated blackout” of being. The passage is the taking place of sense and its whole presence. One might say, too, that all sense is in the fact “there is” (il y a) – in the fact which provokes being to arrive.

Here the question of the singular plurality of art and of the arts is also important. In the coming into presence of art the limits between different arts are crossed, for the arts ceaselessly pass into each other when the arts burst in appearance and disappearance. None of the arts represents anything, for each of the arts is “merely the coming into presence of some presence, which thereby models itself”. This is because there is no presence in general, nor is there any essence of presence. Nancy explains: “Presence ‘itself’ only takes place in the difference of its presences – and each of them only stems from a singular coming into presence, a passage through which presence disappears in offering itself.”

The transcendental condition of art is what Nancy calls its “material fact”: there are several sensuous domains, but not one common sense. Consequently, the singularities are those of the senses.

**PRESENTATION**

Above I have attempted to outline what, according to Nancy, could be said to constitute presentation when confronted with representation. Singularity in the core of art’s existence and the eventness of being come to the fore insofar as Nancy’s understanding of coming into presence is concerned. The point which he repeatedly brings forth in the discussion of representation and its difference from presentation is the thought of presence in its completion. Here, his criticism addresses the metaphysical infinite and self-appropriative subject, for which or in which representation would take place. The idea of representation

---

does not thus comprise the idea of distance and difference which is productive in itself, whereas this is crucial in thinking of being in terms of coming into presence. Presentation, the sense as exposed, is constituted by its being born from absence and its disappearance into it. This is one of the ideas which sets Nancy apart from the traditional notion of aesthetics and the will to take works of art as objects of aesthetic experience.

What, above all, characterizes art in Nancy’s philosophy, is that art presents the fact that there is presentation. Art exposes what is patent but not apparent, when “apparent” is understood in the sense of givenness: if art is the presentation of presentation, it presents the fact that there is art and that there are several arts. Art thus cannot be reduced to philosophy: art presents the weakness of presentation, a view which will be further elucidated in the context of the sublime.914 In a very similar way, Heidegger points that what emerges from the work of art is the daβ, “that it is”: “that such a work is at all rather than is not”.915 The “that” expresses the “factum est”, that is, the “createdness” of the work. The work shows that the unconcealedness of what is has happened here, and that as this happening it happens here for the first time.

In other words, in Nancy art articulates the fact that it is exhibited, which, however, does not imply that it would be explicated.916 There is no patency of the world “in general”, but “only the plural presentation of the singular plural of presentation”.917 Yet the presentation of presentation is not representation, for it does not relate presentation to a subject, but to itself. The moment when there is presentation takes place when presentation touches itself according to the different places, spaces or instants in the singular plural of occurrences of existence, presence or passage. Presentation remains suspended in its passage, in its coming and going. Art exposes thus the “transcendence of immanence”, ek-sistant immanence or “transimmanence”. Transimmanence is the patency of the world, which takes place as art, that is, as works of art, in which presentation touches itself, which is also to say that we are touched.918

914 Cf. section 5.2 of this study.
918 Ibid., p. 35 (Les Muses, p. 63). In this context, Nancy quotes Adorno, who affirms that the work of art is not a monadic constitution, but points beyond it; the work is not a particular, understood as a closure, in relation to universality.
The model of art comes before all models, and it goes beyond them. This is why painting is not representation of a model, “but rather as the presentation of the unpresentable [irreprésentable] flight the of model”, and thus – using Blanchot’s terms – “as the presentation of the exemplary, and more than exemplary, night from which the model comes, because it disappears there”. Modelization, like being, happens in its coming and going. Painting is “modelization” in the sense of the “becoming-model” of the model, which models art itself as model and presents it as such. This takes place in the inaccessibility of its flight and its surprise.919 Here, Nancy’s seemingly paradoxical statement is that the model is neither based on another model, nor is it without model – it is no more a figure than an Idea in the Hegelian sense. Furthermore, the model is nothing visible, nothing which would have an invisible form, or the form of the invisible. Rather, Nancy searches for a presence which does not come from any other primitive presence any more than from pure absence. This would be a presence coming from disappearance and as disappearance, or as the appearance of disappearance.920 The “substance” and the “subject” of art are to be found in the presenting of their disappearing in its coming. In my view, this would thus be to say that instead of thinking of a ground of representation – departing from, say, its essence or substance – he seeks its form. However, here he refers to the origin of art neither as heterogeneous nor autogeneous. The modelling has neither a model nor is itself a model.921 The question is, how does the modellization

920 Ibid., p. 388 (*Une pensée finie*, p. 319). How to produce the form, then? Nancy elucidates this question by referring to Kantian schematism and Heidegger’s interpretation of it in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (§ 22 and § 35). In Nancy’s view, Heidegger understands schematism as “the visibility of nothing as the condition for the possibility of any visibility of something”. Schematism is the production of a “pure vision”, anterior to every figure and to the ex-position of time as “pure auto-affection”. This is why “in pure auto-affection vision sees itself seeing and, in this way, sees – (the) nothing”. As a consequence, schematism, as well as all transcendental imagination, would be nothing else but what “birth” and “death” dissect, namely, the being of a being, or its event. The schema is what brings the concept into an image. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 174 (*Être singulier pluriel*, p. 200). Elsewhere, Nancy challenges Kantian schematism as the principle of “making-sensible” of the concept, of providing an image for a concept, in the context of the idea of the death mask, discussed by Nancy on the basis of § 20 of Heidegger’s *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. In question is the *intuitus originarius*, or phenomenality in general. The core question is concerned with the aspect under which the image of the deceased is grasped by the one who looks at it: which is the appearance (*eidos*, idea) that a photograph of a death mask gives? See Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 65-68. From this perspective, Nancy problematises Heidegger’s thought of being-toward-death – is it possible to gain access to the other’s death, to gain access to what is inaccessible? As Nancy holds, the empty look of the mask as such is unable to provide the unity of the image: the unity shows itself (*se montre*) only out of its own disappearing or withdrawal – in more Heideggerian terms, *eidos* has its place in the core of *aletheia*. Likewise, Nancy states, death has to have a face; so, death is the movement of presenting oneself. Yet the gaze of the dead is the model for imagining (*Bildung*) in general. Nancy’s conclusion is that the “secret of schematism” turns out to be the fact that there is no imagination “as such” to be appropriated and recognized, but that imagination stays inimaginable: “one” derives from the “other”, from the inimaginable which imagines, “if this imagining originates from death as a non-seeing gaze against that of my own”. Nancy, *Au fond des images*, esp. p. 171-179.
happen? Nancy seems to suggest that things are given through their form; forms, in turn, are produced by means of technique.

Thus, as he writes himself, Nancy’s notion of presentation of art can neither be sought in the logic of representability, nor can it be traced back to unrepresentability. As I see it, in the coming into presence of art there is no question of a dialectical relation between appearance and disappearance: what appears has not existed before in any form, but all art gives itself form without a readily available figure or significance. In fact, art itself is without art; there is no model of “art”. Arts, Nancy states, are not representable by one another; yet they do not cease to pass into one another and to present themselves for one another. Hence every art is “nothing but the coming into presence of some presence, which takes shape in it". This is because there is neither general presence, nor has presence any essence. Art happens only singularly, so that its presence is singular in its coming, which means that it is at once multiple – the comings are multiple, as there cannot be just one being for Nancy. Rather, “the’ presence only takes place in the difference of presences”, and each of the presences comes singularly. This is a passage in which presence disappears as soon as it presents itself.

The ways in which art comes into presence may be approached from two directions, space and time, which, however, are inseparable in their intertwining. The intertwining is designed by “spacing”, which Nancy describes as “the absolute difference of appearance or of being-in-the-world as such”. Art retains the present which presents itself; thus, art has a particular relation to the present in time. Art retains the impulse (élan) of a presentation by holding it, which is to say, by letting it go. There is thus a dual moment in art which

---

922 Ibid., p. 387-389 (Une pensée finie, p. 318-321). Art, like laughter, only “bursts” or “explodes”: this is how art and laughter alike present themselves, and in the bursting or explosion they are consumed and disappear. The essence of art is nothing more than this. This is also to say that art has only singular existence. The painting comot to model the pleasure of a laughing mouth – this is how laughter is comparable to the presentation of art, for neither of these follows any pre-existing model, nor does it work as a model for any other laughter or work of art.

923 Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 386 (Une pensée finie, p. 320).

924 Ibid., p. 389 (Une pensée finie, p. 321). Behind the multiple singularity of art there is at work, it seems to me, a continuous difference in the sense Derrida has given to the term. In general, the spacing or fracturing is the movement of meaning whereby it does not come back to itself, but unfolds an absence of origin as its origin. It is only in starting from the origin, which in itself is already shared, that sense may be articulated. What Derrida attempts to show is a constant shifting and reconfiguration of concepts and meanings. Cf. Derrida, Of Grammatology, p. 66-70. The birth of sense happens where meaning reveals its own différance in regard to itself, thus creating a caesura and a space for the exposition of sense. The structure of sense is ecstatic: sense has its “origin” outside of every consciousness, unreachable by consciousness. See also Nancy, Corpus, 37; The Birth to Presence, p. 103-104 (Une pensée finie, p. 137-138, n. 1); Lindberg, Filosofien ystävyys, p. 90-91.

925 Nancy, Corpus, p. 20.

gives the beholder the chance to present himself to himself by virtue of the fact that art’s present is \textit{praes}ens, being-before-itself: art anticipates itself. Art itself is preceded by the line or the \textit{tractus}, which simultaneously precedes itself while commanding itself.\footnote{Ibid., p. 184.}

In Derrida, the “trace” never coincides with anything present, for trace is its own erasure.\footnote{This is how trace belongs to the very movement of signification, which is a priori written, in a “sensible” and “spatial” element that is called “exterior”. Derrida, \textit{Of Grammatology}, p. 70.} Coming-into-presence thus occurs in the distance of the presentation itself: in how presentation presents itself in the event of touching its own limit. This is the core question of my study. As such, the trace has the structure of the origin of art itself in that it is composed of an infinity of infinitely multiplicable points, being thus a dimension of being which only exists by ek-sisting, being outside of itself, by preceding and succeeding itself. One could, as a consequence, say that it is a question of drawing the presence, not beyond absence, but to the point of absence which brings absence before itself and exposes it in its relation to itself by exposing it to “us”.

The problem now is, as I see it, how to make sense of coming to presence, so far as art is concerned. I shall first consider the question in terms of its temporality. Nancy’s analysis of the general matter of presentation is based on the view according to which being or existence takes place as an event. It exists by arriving unexpectedly.\footnote{Nancy, \textit{Le Regard du portrait}, p. 51. By thinking of the image, not as representative, but as presentative – or as presentation “in general”, as expressed by Heidegger’s term \textit{Aussehen} (this is for Nancy also the stake of the Kantian imagination and the schema, “the pre-seeing rule” or “the \textit{Bilden} which is not confined to a present being”), Nancy refers to the notion of finitude. Finitude has a similar structure to “trace” in that it always precedes and succeeds itself like the contour of a drawing. Nancy, \textit{Au fond des images}, p. 161-162, cf. Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, § 21.} The event is “empty time” or negativity as time: the presence of the present as negativity, “insofar as it happens and is, as a result, nonpresent …”, for nothing precedes or succeeds it.\footnote{Nancy, \textit{Being Singular Plural}, p. 170 (\textit{Être singulier pluriel}, p. 196).} This is time in its appearing. Nancy defines the event as empty time as the happening or coming of something in general. It is nonsuccessive time, which is permanence without substance, or the present without presence. “Time” or “the event” is the position of existence as such, and this is the event of being as the being of being (\textit{l’être de l’être}).\footnote{Ibid., p. 168 (\textit{Être singulier pluriel}, p. 194).} As such – that is, as taking place, as appearing or disappearing – “the event is not ‘presentable’”, in Nancy’s view.\footnote{Ibid., p. 169 (\textit{Être singulier pluriel}, p. 195).} Yet, he explains, it is not
“unpresentable” either, like some hidden presence, “for it is the unpresentable or, rather, the unpresentifiable of the present that is right at the present itself”. In this way, the unpresentifiable proves to be the difference that structures the present, and it makes itself “the surprise of/in its ‘object’”.934

With the “as such” mentioned above Nancy thus means that the event of being does not exist “as such”, but “as it comes about (é-vient), as it happens”. This is how the “as such” is both the mode of the event and the time of the unexpected arrival.935 The unexpected arrival is organized spatio-temporally when “the nothing” or “the void” of time is stretched “to the point of rupture and to the leaping-off point of the arrival, where presence is presented [presente]”. In Nancy’s analysis, the void of time becomes tension and extension: its “nontemporal and nonlocal extension” is that “of the taking-place as such, the spacing through which time appears”.936

The spacing through which time appears, or the tension of nothing which opens time, corresponds, according to Nancy, to what is implied by Heidegger’s term Spanne.937 By Spanne Heidegger means the spanned and stretched nature of time, which is opposite to any notion of time as punctual presents in succession. This is the condition for temporality understood as a taking place, and it gives Spanne the meaning of separation and space.938 Spanne is the condition for the passage – the coming and going of Being – to exist; it is the leap in which being crosses over itself. Here Nancy follows, in general, Heidegger’s discussion of the leap: for Heidegger, the leap opens up the play of originary time-space.939 The leap can be described as the abysmal grounding of Dasein. It posits being-

from Hegel’s Science of Logic.
934 Ibid.
936 Ibid., p. 170 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 196). Let us note that this negativity or “nothing” is what is designated in French by le rien, and not by le néant, “nothingness”. The nothing in question in Nancy’s thought is that of unexpected arrival and of tension and spacing, it is “negativity for itself” and as such, the position of being or existence. Heidegger’s “that there is being and not nothing” means for Nancy that there must be nothing in the place of something, and not nothing which exists. As a result, such negativity is positivity, as Nancy formulates it. Ibid., p. 170-171 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 196-197).
937 Ibid. A “stroke” and a “shock” are Nancy’s names for this stretch of time, which results in “an irreparable damage made to the simple presence, the irreversible start of Being-there”. In The Sense of the World Nancy thematizes the spacing also figured by “surprise” and “leap” of being in Heideggerian terms, as Spanne – separation, space, or extension. Spanne is defined in temporal terms; to cite Heidegger’s statement, “Time is intrinsically spanned and stretched”, and not punctualized as proposed by the ordinary notion of time. Spanne stands for the spacing of the present that takes place; it allows for the existence to expose itself, being the altered sameness of time. Heidegger, The Basic Problems of Phenomenology, p. 264; Nancy, The Sense of the World, p. 64 (Le sens du monde, p. 105); cf. Derrida, Of Grammatology, p. 70.
938 Nancy, The Sense of the World, p. 64 (Le sens du monde, p. 105). Other names for space are “extension”, “traction”, “attraction”, “agitation”, “spasm”, “expansion”. Thus, to Nancy Spanne has the senses of inclination and tension.
939 Heidegger, Contributions to Philosophy, p. 270.
there, and thus the essence of *Dasein* is the leap.\textsuperscript{940} When speaking of the leap, it seems as if Nancy has rather adopted Heidegger’s interpretation of being in the form which it took after his turn (*Kehre*), that is, after he shifted the focus from the meaning of being (as presented in *Being and Time*) to the notion of the event of being, *Ereignis* (of *Contributions to Philosophy*, for example). In both of the stages in Heidegger’s thinking, there is at stake the unfolding of being. However, in the thought of *Ereignis* he puts the emphasis on the disruptive nature of being, a jointure or a transitional “between”. This is to say that in *Ereignis* there is in question a moment between two beginnings, in which one can only enter through a leap.\textsuperscript{941}

Nancy describes *Spanne* as what he calls the negativity of time, namely the “empty place” or the “tomb”, without which nothing new (like “a new substance” or “a new subject”) would appear and disappear; *Spanne* is the “no not” (*pas de pas*).\textsuperscript{942} This tension is organized temporally, it is spatial, for it is “the spacing of the present that takes place, as present, when a ‘substance’ or a ‘subject’ is coming along or going away”.\textsuperscript{943} The present as present is *prae-sens*, which means that it both precedes (itself) and succeeds (itself). In this way, the presence that the present carries is kept at a distance by it, so that the present separates itself. *Spanne* is “the altered sameness of time”. It allows a self to take place, and the being-self is coextensive with the extension wherein it is made into a present.

In his interpretation of the Heideggerian “leap” (*Sprung*), Walter A. Brogan, for example, brings to the fore its unicity and singularity and thus non-relationality when the leap grounds the possibility of all relationality and belongingness.\textsuperscript{944} I would hence propose that Nancy has adopted elements for his ontology from both Heidegger’s philosophy which precedes the turn from the meaning to the event of being, and that which follows it. In fact, Nancy attempts to think of the sense of being in general by turning to its singularity and event-like character and, thus, by questioning Heidegger’s being as one. Nancy stresses the way in which the decision of existence singularizes *Dasein* – and not only the human *Dasein*, but every existent.\textsuperscript{945}


\textsuperscript{944} Brogan, “Da-sein and the Leap of Being”, p. 177-178.

\textsuperscript{945} Yet, in Nancy’s opinion, by thinking of the altered constitution of being in its singularity,
Expanding the scope from *Dasein* to outside of the human, to other beings, is also one of the constituents of Heidegger’s turn.\(^{946}\) What is more, existence is infinitely finite; to exist means to appropriate the inappropriable.\(^{947}\) At this point enters the thought of coming into existence as fractured and discontinuous from the start, which also lays the basis for Nancy’s understanding of art. His idea of presence as “pure manifestation” suggests that the *apparition* of art is what must be reproduced – the gesture of *mimesis* brings about strangeness and monstrosity, which, I think, comes close to Heidegger’s notion of *Unheimlichkeit*. In producing art, the artist sees “coming toward him a monster who holds out to him the unsuspected reverse side of presence, its displacement, its detachment, or its folding into pure manifestation, and the manifestation itself as the coming of the stranger, as the birth into the world which has no place in the world, as the birth of the origin itself, or as the appearance of appearing”.\(^{948}\) In effect, the monstrosity of art comes to the fore in the article “The Sublime Offering”, too, in which Nancy describes the event of artistic production in somewhat similar terms.\(^{949}\) This is visible in the thought of the abysmal ground, or the *mise en abîme* structure inherent in the multiplicity of the arts.

In his treatise on art, as I see it, Nancy attempts to develop an aesthetics based on an original break, provided that the way art presents itself is on close terms with being’s coming-into-presence. Thus it remains to be asked what the position of art is, in the ontological sense, and how it could be possible to define art’s specificity with regard to any other forms of existence. One way to take up the problem is to think of the presentation of art as composed around a blackout, or as a death on the verge of coming into presence – or that *we* are the threshold of the presentation.\(^{950}\) In the process of painting “the unpresentable Beauty is presented as unpresentable, which is to say that its impossibility comes into

\(^{946}\) Heidegger determined the essence of *Dasein* outside of subjectivity in a being-exposed or in a being-offered to others, of which philosophy “has always been” the denial (this is the meaning that Nancy gives to *Fürsorge*). Still, Heidegger keeps the assignation of *Dasein* in the form of a distinct individuality, which is as much opposed as exposed to other individualities and “thus irremediably kept in a sphere of autonomic, if not subjective, allure”. See Nancy, *Une pensée finie* (A Finite Thinking, p. 269). What Nancy states is that Heidegger has still not considered the meaning of *Mitsein* thoroughly – such a view can also be challenged, as for example Françoise Dastur has done in her *Heidegger et la question du temps*, Paris: PUF, 1990, esp. p. 39-92. Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, e.g. § 26, 65.

\(^{947}\) Cf. also *Being and Time* and *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* – the turn is already visible in “The Origin of the Work of Art” and in *Contributions to Philosophy*.

\(^{948}\) Cf. e.g. Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 103 (*Une pensée finie*, p. 136).


presence”. What follows is that the escaped presence of a painting “becomes the ‘cave’ and the ‘blackness’ where that which makes it appear disappears: it fades away (s’évanouit) in its own presentation, plunging in its own darkness the thing that makes it present”. This is how art makes a passage and leaves a vestige or a trace of itself in the “… strange place where art only passes”.

In all, since the logic of the visible and the invisible – of representation as revelation – is not valid as regards Nancy’s understanding of the presentation of art, one must consider another notion. The logic employed by Nancy, as I see it, derives from thinking of the birth of the origin of art in terms of spacing. The fact that art presents its own figure or form is the event of the coming of the world, something which does not have a place in the world. The event of the coming into being of the world is “the fact that there is world”. The sense is given in absence, so that the origin itself is absence and lack, or to say the least, strange and absolute distancing, having no foundation in presence.

Presence thus fails; instead, it exposes everything, and the exposed failing is “its own proper touch”. This is because there is no other ground for presence except the birth to presence or the coming about of the forms of presence. These are its “nascent vestiges”, which only exist as the form or figure arises, and this is the precise meaning of what Nancy describes as “spacing”. In it, there is always a tension in existence, in other words, in singular being which “is” transitively as it is tended toward its limit and its outside. Existence is exposed to its limit. Hence, existence is singular, and being comes as a surprise.

In all, since the logic of the visible and the invisible – of representation as revelation – is not valid as regards Nancy’s understanding of the presentation of art, one must consider another notion. The logic employed by Nancy, as I see it, derives from thinking of the birth of the origin of art in terms of spacing. The fact that art presents its own figure or form is the event of the coming of the world, something which does not have a place in the world. The event of the coming into being of the world is “the fact that there is world”. The sense is given in absence, so that the origin itself is absence and lack, or to say the least, strange and absolute distancing, having no foundation in presence.

Presence thus fails; instead, it exposes everything, and the exposed failing is “its own proper touch”. This is because there is no other ground for presence except the birth to presence or the coming about of the forms of presence. These are its “nascent vestiges”, which only exist as the form or figure arises, and this is the precise meaning of what Nancy describes as “spacing”. In it, there is always a tension in existence, in other words, in singular being which “is” transitively as it is tended toward its limit and its outside. Existence is exposed to its limit. Hence, existence is singular, and being comes as a surprise.

---

951 Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 371ff. (Une pensée finie, p. 300ff.).
953 Although the logic of the visible and the invisible does not apply as such to Nancy’s idea of art’s presentation, his view may still have some similarity with Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of the relation between the visible and the invisible. The first vision or the first vision of the world is the the invisible of the world, “that which inhabits this world, sustains it or renders it visible, its own and interior possibility, the Being of this being”. To Merleau-Ponty, perception qua wild perception is of itself ignorance of itself, imperception, and as such, it tends to see itself as an act and to forget itself as latent intentionality, as being toward. According to Françoise Dastur, this constitutive ignorance, expressed by the “of itself”, points to the blind spot which makes seeing possible. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1964). Le visible et l’invisible. Paris: Gallimard, p. 198, 266-267 (The Visible and the Invisible, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968, p. 151, 213); Dastur, Françoise (1988). “Monde, chair, vision”, in Merleau-Ponty. Le psychique et le corporel, ed. Anna-Teresa Tyminiecka. Paris: Aubier, p. 125.
4.3 Art and Techne

If Nancy’s central argument concerns art’s ability to make something come into presence, how should one speak of the grounds for the thought of coming-into-presence in his philosophy? This problem in mind, the foremost notion to come up is groundlessness, which can be approached by thinking of an original break or a syncope. The break is structured both in terms of time and space: it happens, not in terms of punctuality, but as an instant, which is at once spacing out. In this respect, it reminds us of Heidegger’s notion of leap (Spanne), which gives birth to the tension of being when it takes place as exposition, that is to say, when it ek-sists by being stretched out. Here Nancy accentuates the singularity of the event of coming into presence, an event which can only be articulated as a passage. The passage takes place in a moment of emergence and withdrawal. Such an idea of coming into presence does not entail the giving of things through their content but through their form.

In thinking of the manner in which art presents itself – that is, the form of art – technique comes to be considered from two different points of view. First, in order to juxtapose Nancy and Heidegger on the idea of coming into presence in art, I refer to the question of artistic modellization cited above: this is to clarify the way in which artistic models come into existence. In this task, I shall discuss Nancy’s view, according to which technique creates forms. Secondly, another sense in which Nancy points to the linkage between art and technique is that art means to him the technique of the detail, technique of difference and discreteness: art is “the technics of the local, the presentation of a place”. His understanding of art as technique underlines the uniqueness of each of the arts in its singularity, which arises essentially from the material basis. To gain a picture of what the position of technique is here, I first turn to Heidegger’s concept of techne and its implications, as proposed in his “Origin of the Work of Art”.


Interrogating “aesthetics” in Heidegger’s philosophy means, above all, to acknowledge that he recognizes the inadequacy of traditional aesthetics, which takes works of art to be objects of an aesthetic experience. Basically, Nancy builds on a similar idea, but distinctions do exist between the accounts of art in these two philosophers. For one thing, Nancy finds the significance of language to be less important with respect to the inquiry about the ontology of art. For Nancy art presents neither world nor language, but the “real presence” beyond them, or the “sacred intimacy” offered by a material fragment.959

What is more, the work of art, or the image, is not a thing – what it presents is sense without signification, although such sense is “senseless”, and appears “right in the fact the image makes one feel (the image itself)”.960 The image is neither the thing nor its imitation, but the resemblance with the thing. On the basis of resemblance, the image is detached from itself: the image refers beyond itself, and thus it presents the absence of any signification. The thing presents itself only inasmuch as it resembles itself and shows itself to be the thing. The image is at once distanced from itself and the resemblance of the thing: it shows the visibility of the world.961 Thus it presents the absence of any signification. In this, it is just the distance and difference between the image and its spectator, involved in such intimacy, that allows for communication. In this respect, Nancy’s thinking of the thing in the image comes close to Heidegger’s idea, according to which the work of art is not a thing in the sense of Vorhanden, simple presence: being-image is distinguished from being-there – the image remains at a distance.

Yet the signified sense, such as that expressed by language, is not what gives sense. The communicated sense is what comes into presence between signified things, for the symbolic is exposed in the dispersion of its symbolization. By this he wants to say that the communicated sense in art is not simply grounded on symbolic enchainments and on substantial continuities: what he argues, is that art communicates at the point when the symbolic order is suspended or interrupted.962 The shared thing, in this way, proves to be not the signified symbol, but what exceeds it: what precedes and comes after it. This exceeding

959 Nancy, Au fond des images, p. 27.
960 “… à même ce qu’elle fait sentir (elle-même)”. Ibid.
Nancy calls “the sharing out [partage] of the secret of communicability itself”: for example, that we share “the secret of language” as something more remote than language itself.

This “something” is exposed right on the “flowering surface” of language itself. In question is presentation without presentness (présentité), or pres-ence, sense as it comes and goes, its singular event. According to Nancy, art has no other truth than access to sense, sense being in excess of the figural presentation of the work of art. This, I think, is what is suggested by his notion that “‘art’ is merely that which takes as its theme and place the opening [frayage] of sense as such along sensuous surfaces, a ‘presentation of presentation’, the motion and emotion of a coming”. Art, as a sensible form, engages the intelligible materiality of sense. In other words, sense arrives when signification, or intellectual sense, comes to a breakage. The absence of sense – its fullness or overfullness – and thus its impossibility is the “truth” of sense.

As was indicated earlier in this discussion, for Nancy the sensuous and technical plurality of the arts is bound up with intelligible sense. For this reason, art and the arts appear to be a matter of language or poetry. Heidegger, however, gives language itself a more fundamental importance than Nancy with respect to asking what art is. In “The Origin of the Work of Art” he states that “All art, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is, as such, essentially poetry”. As he explains, poetry is the saying of truth and the saying of the unconcealedness of beings, in other words, the production of a revelation. The fact that poetry unfolds from unconcealedness as the Open, when it lets the Open happen, could, however refer to a notion that is comparable to Nancy’s point as regards the symbolization of language: to the idea that the truth of the symbolic is, in fact, beyond it. We create our world through and in language, since for Heidegger it is “[i]n the word, in language, things first come to be and are”. However, through the special language of poetry, we are able to articulate the relationship between internal and external worlds, for poetry allows humans to dwell harmoniously with the earth, “dwelling” being human

963 Ibid., p. 136 (Le sens du monde, p. 209).
964 Ibid., p. 134 (Le sens du monde, p. 206). As breaking and reunion are the principles of Nancy’s understanding of the constitution of the symbolic (as they are the rule of the singulis), there cannot be one symbolon alone, but many symbola. See ibid., p. 136.
965 Nancy, The Muses, p. 27 (Les Muses, p. 52); cf. James, The Fragmentary Demand, p. 221.
967 Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, p. 72.
existence itself. In poetry, nature is not simply represented; rather, nature is revealed, made present.

More important is, however, art's relation to the question of technique: what Nancy proposes, is that the notion of technique exists in a fundamentally multiple form: art is a question of a variety of techniques, whereas for Heidegger in art a single technique is at play. Heidegger's argument was that art, as techne, brought about poiesis (ποίησις) for man, parallel to the poiesis that occurs in nature. For Heidegger, poiesis is the event of truth or aletheia (ἀλήθεια) within which correspondence then occurs. The act of expressing the truth of one's being in an art form is referred to by Heidegger as “poiesis”. This act “makes present”, a “presencing” that comprises both disclosure and concealment.

Instead, Heidegger adopts a view according to which the essence of art is to be the bearer of the happening of truth: art is the place for the setting itself to work of truth (Sich-ins-Werk-Setzen der Wahrheit). However, Heidegger opposes a notion of the truth of the work of art which would be understood as imitation or representation. The work can pictorially represent something that is. This is shown by Heidegger's example of van Gogh's painting of peasant shoes: what the work reveals is how the represented object is. Departing from the fact that there is a pair of shoes represented in the painting, the work reveals their character of equipment.

Hence, Heidegger tries to interpret the truth of the work as disclosedness, which precedes the notion of truth as correspondence.

---

969 In Heidegger's "Origin of the Work of Art" Jacques Taminiaux finds a certain ambiguity as regards the notion of truth: on the other hand, truth may be taken in the sense of aletheia or unfolding of being, and truth in the sense of certainty of oneself; or respectively, to think of truth, as Hegel does, as history in the sense of the development of the absoluteness of Spirit and in the sense of the history of being. According to Taminiaux there is a circularity at work with both Hegel and Heidegger when art is involved, but the circularity is not of the same kind. In Hegel the circle is a speculative one, and it is to be found between the universal – consciousness – and the singular – the work of art. In the present circle the Spirit is the third element, transgressing the work in the variety of its self-becoming. At the same time, it is inseparable from its setting-into-work. The Heideggerian circle, in turn, is a hermeneutical one, and it can be found in the reciprocity of the artist and the work of art, which are each of them by virtue of art. Art, however, precedes both, and thus corresponds to the position of the Absolute in Hegel's philosophy. Taminiaux, *Poetics, Speculation, and Judgment*, p. 17-129, 136; cf. *Being and Time*, esp. § 32, p. 188-189. In the latter Heidegger defines "understanding" as "Being-towards-possibilities", possibilities upon which Dasein projects its being. These possibilities are thus disclosed, whereas "interpretation" means development of the understanding. What happens in interpretation is that "understanding ... becomes itself".


971 Ibid., p. 25-28. The idea of art as reproduction and likeness is grounded in the distinction between matter (μαρμάρον) and form (μορφή) in Plato's philosophy. The distinction of form and matter is, to Heidegger, "the conceptual schema which is used, in the greatest variety of ways, quite generally for all art theory and aesthetics". Ibid., p. 27.

972 Ibid., p. 33. In effect, the peasant shoes do not present anything, but they are rather a visual realization of an equipment which opens a sphere of life by showing the equipmental quality of equipment, its truth as reliability. What the painting's particular means are in doing this is something that Heidegger does not explain in any direct way.

207
This is necessary in order to disengage with the Platonic view of art as imitation of an idea.

What makes truth take place in the work of art and brings truth into disclosedness is something which Heidegger calls *techne* (τέχνη). *Techne* “is a bringing forth of beings in that it *brings forth* present beings as such, beings *out of* concealedness and specifically *into* the unconcealedness of their apparence”.

The original meaning of *techne* is a bringing forth (Hervorbringen) or uncovering of beings out of concealedness. As such, the sense of *techne* cannot be returned to any practical action of making, nor can it be equated with theoretical knowledge. Rather, *techne* denotes a mode of knowing (Wissen): “to apprehend what is present, as such”. This is why Heidegger calls the artist a *technites*: “both the setting forth of works and the setting forth of equipment occur in a bringing forth and presenting that causes beings in the first place to come forward and be present in assuming an appearance”. *Techne* is man’s relation to what is. *Techne* posits being as availability. The taking place of *techne* is the event of truth, designated by the Greek term *aletheia*, “unconcealedness”.

In this way, for Heidegger the meaning of *techne* is not limited to what its ordinary translations, “know-how” and “production” or “practical performance”, suggest. Neither does it signify art or craft nor anything technical in the modern sense. In contrast, for Heidegger the thought of *techne* bears a far deeper sense with regard to the sphere of ontology: he considers *techne* to be an original opening of being in the sense of the happening of truth. As for the work of art, the significance of *techne* is that it is able to reveal “nature” as something. This is to say that physis (φύσις) is only disclosed in *techne*.

However, to examine the scope of *techne*, it has to be thought of in its difference from its ground. The ground is what Heidegger terms *physis*, the Greek name for “nature”. It is only through *physis* that *techne* may appear as something. In turn, *physis* is accomplished in *techne* – in fact, these two presuppose each other. For Heidegger, the word *physis* has a dual sense, both

---

973 See Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, p. 59; cf. Heidegger, Pathmarks, p. 259. Heidegger thus separates his use of *techne* from its Greek meaning of “art”, a practical means or a craft needed in order to produce, for example, tools or works of art.

974 Also *poiesis* is translated by Heidegger as Hervorbringen. The more traditional meanings of *poiesis* are “making” and “producing”.


977 There is yet another, more negative interpretation which Heidegger gives to *techne*, as can be seen for example in “The Letter on ‘Humanism’”. Here *techne* is, among other things, what becomes of philosophy in its exhaustion, namely, a technique of explanation. Heidegger, Pathmarks, p. 242; also, “The Question Concerning Technology”. 

208
senses having their origin in Aristotle’s philosophy. The first meaning of *physis* is “that which prevails [walten] in its prevailing”, and thus “manifests itself in its undecidedness”. It lets everything that prevails be as that which it is. So, *physis* comes to mean beings as a whole: that which may be experienced everywhere. *Physis* “is always already at hand, continually forming and passing away of its own accord”.

*Techne* is, then, a means of knowing and of revealing *physis*, which brings something forth as being.

Thus interpreted, *physis* is opposed to *techne*, which arises from the basis of a preparation and production; when man produces something new by means of *techne*, he allows being to grow as *physis*. One of the examples of works of art which Heidegger discusses in this context is the Greek temple. In its standing on rocky ground, the temple makes manifest an “emerging and rising in itself and in all things”; the emerging is what the Greeks called *physis*. It is the ground on which and in which man bases his dwelling. Heidegger’s name for this ground is “earth”. Beings as a whole reveal themselves as *physis*, “nature”, which Heidegger takes in the sense of “upsurgent presencing” (*aufgehenden Anwesen*). Also, this revelation, in which nature comes to present itself to *Dasein*, may be interpreted the other way round: *Dasein*’s “ex-istence” is its disclosedness to beings as such. Then, disclosure is the openness of *Da*, the “there”, the open region of being-there. This unconcealment of beings as a whole is the beginning of history. *Physis* can be understood, then, as the ground on which *techne* may operate.

979 See Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, e.g. p. 121 (“On the Essence of Ground”). Heidegger characterizes the relation between *techne* and *physis* as strife. Strife clears an open space by opening up the being of a being in the existence of *Dasein*. This is to say that *Dasein* is transcendent in relation to being, and only by virtue of transcendence can it encounter something as being. Transcendence is the taking place of being-in-the-world. In this way, *techne* is the grounding form of existence, in which being is opened.
981 Ibid., p. 42: “Earth is that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises without violation. In the things that arise, earth is present [west] as the sheltering agent.” As regards the relation between the world and the earth, it is on the earth’s material basis that the work sets up a world. Unlike an equipment, the work does not disappear in its usefulness, but by contrast, it causes it to come forth and to come into the Open of the work’s world. The material properties of the work only come forth in their power – for the very first time. The earth is that which in the work comes forth and shelters in an effortless manner, while the earth is also self-secluding: it is by nature undisclosable. An essential strangeness, is, then, proper to the earth. With respect to the work-being of a world, two essential features are the setting up of a world and the setting forth of earth. The world is “the self-disclosing openness”, and the earth “the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and concealing”. The earth and the world are different yet inseparable from each other. Their opposition is a strife (*Streit*). The role of the work is not to put an end to the striving and to lead it to an agreement, but to make it remain a conflict. Indeed, “the unity of the work comes about in the fighting of the battle”, and here, in the strife between the earth and the world, truth happens. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 46-50.
983 Ibid.
But presented above is not yet the whole scope of *physis*, for it also has a second meaning: it may designate the nature of beings, or nature taken in the sense of the innermost essence of things. In this way, *physis* is the *prevailing* as such of what prevails. This is to say that *physis* as the essentiaity of beings as such has the meaning of *ousia*, that is, presence (*Anwesen*). The second meaning of *physis* is, then, the being of beings.

To elucidate the way in which things may arise from the earth, Heidegger introduces the notion of the *world* as the counterpart of the earth. Namely, the work in its work-being sets up a world: “[t]owering up within itself, the work opens up a world and keeps it abidingly in force”. In the work, the *world worlds*. This means that the work holds open the Open of the world: “[t]he work as work, in its presencing, is a setting forth [*Herstellung*], a making”. The specific importance of art is, thus, that it makes being appear in its truth: as *Lichtung*, “clearing” or “lighting”. In art, *physis* is revealed by *techne*, and only on the ground of *physis* does *techne* come into being. It is possible to state that being is characterized by a lack: because of this lack being does not appear by itself, but needs art to appear. In this respect as well, art may be an essential and necessary way in which truth happens, a happening which is “decisive” for our historical existence – provided art has not lost this power yet. Art opens up the historical *Dasein* of a people, which does not pre-exist the work of art, but only takes place when the work sets up a world.

The role of *techne* is not, however, to be understood in relation to its ground, to *physis* alone. For Heidegger *techne* is also what guides *poiesis*. The possibilities for the translation of the Greek term *poiesis* are “making”, “fabrication” and “production”, as well as “poetry” and “poem”. According to Aristotle, whose interpretation of *poiesis* is mainly behind Heidegger’s use of the word, there is an inner deficiency embodied in the production, *poiesis*, of art. The end (*telos*) of the artistic production – when production is regulated by *techne* – is not in the producer, but is exterior to him. As a result, there is a work which stands as an independent being with respect to the producer. At this stage, for Aristotle the opening of truth has come to an end; for Heidegger the opening of truth

---

987 Ibid., p. 45.
only begins with the work.\textsuperscript{991} As poetry or \textit{poiesis} can be distinguished from \textit{techne}, this results in a tension – in Nancy, there is a tension in technique itself: technique produces forms on the ground of the withdrawal of ground.\textsuperscript{992} The difference between \textit{techne} and \textit{poiesis} in Heidegger’s thinking, however, reflects the distinction already made by Plato. With \textit{techne} Plato refers to the production of things, whereas \textit{poiesis} means readily available products. Heidegger associates \textit{techne}, the fabrication of products, with the coming into presence of being, while \textit{poiesis} gets the meaning of the presence of things. Thus, for him, since the early Greeks this distinction echoes the thinking of being as constant presence instead of directing the attention to the phenomenon of being’s \textit{coming} into presence, that is, the eventness of being.

\section*{Art and Disclosedness}

It is thus possible to contend that in Heidegger’s philosophy being and art complement each other. According to Daniel Payot’s interpretation, Heidegger has thus renounced the notion of art as representation of an idea. A similar thought is implied in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s “originary mimesis”, a notion concerned with figuration, which, however, bears no sense of reproduction, but points to the common origin of \textit{techne} and \textit{physis}: to being as imitation with no ground other than its own taking place. Instead, for Heidegger art would be a question of nothing but pure appearing or free opening of being. Yet, it is possible to produce being in art, since being can be given a figure or a form. The production takes place when being appears and is instituted in a being.\textsuperscript{993} With regard to Nancy’s account of art, a difference exists at this point: his thinking of the birth of form and of formlessness – of what may present itself – does not entail that art would be presentation of being, or that it would be related to truth or a closed circle of signification in the sense that philosophy does.\textsuperscript{994}

In Heidegger, the figure cannot be discovered, but it must be created and accomplished, in other words, formless must be given a form. The strife between the earth and the world, when truth is fixed in place, is figure or shape (\textit{Gestalt}); the figure is placed in a particular framework (\textit{Ge-stell}) in which the work

\textsuperscript{991} See Luoto, \textit{Heidegger ja taiteen arvoitus}, p. 116.
occurs. The opening up of the world, whereby “permanence” is given to being in it, takes place when the power of physis is fixed in place by techne. The fixing happens in the work (Werk, ergon). This is how it means being fixed to certain “limits” or enframing in its own figure (Gestalt). The limit limits each being in what it is: it gives it its particular being. This is the power to effectuate, for man has to make work of what is imposed on him. Techne opens up the ontological difference, the one between being and beings, although “the Being of entities ‘is’ not itself an entity”.

Again, for Heidegger, unconcealment or the clearing of being is not a simple movement between any phases or areas of clearing and concealedness. In his view, clearing guarantees us “a passage to those beings that we ourselves are not, and access to the being that we ourselves are”. Clearing makes things disclose themselves – still, disclosedness is only possible thanks to the concealing nature of being: a being can be concealed only within the sphere of what is lighted. As a result, concealment can be “a refusal or merely a dissembling [Verstellen]”, for concealment conceals and dissembles itself. At stake in the opening of being is not a thought of truth as a permanent state, but a double concealment, when being, as it appears, presents itself other than it is. The opening of being is thus, first of all, the happening of the clearing. For this reason, unconcealedness or truth is neither an attribute of factual things in the sense of beings, nor an attribute of propositions. Hence, at the foundation of Heidegger’s understanding of art can be found a notion of Unheimlichkeit, “uncanniness” or “homelessness”; it is possible to speculate whether a similar notion gives rise to Nancy’s idea of art as modellization on the ground of the groundlessness of being. What unites these views could be a mise en abîme structure, inherent in Nancy’s idea of the ontology of art and, consequently, the form of art.

Thus, there can never be certainty whether concealment is a refusal or merely a dissembling. This conclusion leads to definite consequences as regards

995 Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, p. 64.
996 Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics, p. 63-64.
997 Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, p. 44.
999 Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, p. 53.
1000 Ibid., p. 54.
Heidegger’s attempt to locate the origin of the opening of being: it becomes clear that the origin cannot be found in what is believed to be familiar in the circle of beings which surrounds us. Concealment is not just a limit of knowledge, but it marks the beginning of the clearing of what is lighted.\textsuperscript{1002} Also, the chain of dissemblances may prove to be endless, with no other “ground” than another disguised being; still, any cognition presupposes that the being to which one is exposed is unconcealed to some degree.\textsuperscript{1003} The movement between concealment and unconcealment of being is thus not a matter of simple dialectics. As disclosedness remains partial and changing in the realm of beings, the ordinary shows itself not to be ordinary, but extra-ordinary, uncanny (un-geheuer). The nature of truth is dominated by a denial as a double concealment.\textsuperscript{1004} This is why Heidegger states that the being of beings itself is uncanny; what is unusual about the work lies in the fact that the work is at all rather than is not.\textsuperscript{1005} In Heidegger, art has particular significance in that it is original revelation of being, although art may only disclose the strangeness of beings and their tendency to dissemble.\textsuperscript{1006} Using violence thus means giving form to each being in its singularity; techne is this creative force.

NANCY: TECHNE AND THE FORM OF ART

For Heidegger techne exposes being as a being. In this way it gives figure to being, when being is unconcealed as a particular thing. What is uncanny or strange – the totality of what is or what precedes man – is, though, without ground. Techne is the power to create forms out of groundlessness. This is to say that

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1002} Heidegger, \textit{Poetry, Language, Thought}, p. 53-54.
  \item \textsuperscript{1003} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 52.
  \item \textsuperscript{1004} \textit{Ibid.}
  \item \textsuperscript{1005} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 65. In this respect, the work of art maintains the ontico-ontological difference: being cannot be returned to beings. “[I]n the work, createdness is expressly created into the created being, so that it stands out from it, from the being thus brought forth, in an expressly particular way”. Also, \textit{Dasein’s} anxiety (e.g. \textit{Being and Time}, § 40) in front of being which cannot be returned to any being, brings about a feeling of homelessness – in fact, for Heidegger being is “nothing”.
  \item \textsuperscript{1006} \textit{Technic} opens \textit{physis} as being when \textit{physis} is exposed to it; however, \textit{physis} is not “nature” in the sense of availability, \textit{Vorhandenheit}, but in that of “pervading them in their sway” (durchwalteten). Cf. Heidegger, \textit{Introduction to Metaphysics}, p. 166. Referring to Heidegger’s \textit{Introduction to Metaphysics}, Daniel Payot interprets techne, in its relation to dike, as an articulation or a distinction. By means of techne each being is internally differentiated out of “a fundamental and unique dimension”. This dimension is force (das Walten) or violence (die Gewalt). In this process, strangeness (in the sense of Sophocles’ deinon) means not only the use of violence, but also, the totality of beings, which dominates all particular beings, while they are beings only “to the extent that they are placed, inscribed, subjugated” in and through the precedence of the totality of beings. Payot, \textit{La statue de Heidegger}, p. 15-16; see Heidegger, \textit{Introduction to Metaphysics}, p. 159ff.
\end{itemize}
forms emerge from a formlessness and a strangeness, which are fundamentally without ground. In Heidegger’s view of art, "Unheimlichkeit" is the name for what is, that is, for art as something uncanny. "Techne" is the self-differentiating power of being: it brings about ontological difference.

Nancy, for his part, sees in this opening of being a possibility of the thought of art’s ontological stake. However, for him the structure inherent in the Heideggerian notion of "techne" is not limited to referring only to the ontology of "art", but of "arts". The rule for the origin is to be searched for in multiple singularity. Let us say categorically that the central difference between Nancy and Heidegger is that while for Heidegger the notion of art does not bring on technical questions, but there exists only the singular "technique", in Nancy technical questions – a multiplicity of them – on art do exist in art. For Nancy art is originally technical and, as such, bears a sense of plurality, a fact which is essentially connected with the idea of the sensible plurality of art. As I have indicated in the earlier discussion on sensibility, the technical scope makes of art a sensible form that engages the intelligible materiality of sense.1007 Thus, Nancy’s thought of originary technicity is aimed at dislodging the thinking of the origin of the artwork as it appears in Heidegger. In Nancy’s view, art opens a world, but the thought of a sensible and technical plurality disperses the notion of an origin. As Ian James formulates it, this plurality unties the possibility of “putting the truth to work”.1008 In Heidegger, technology has a dimension which is entirely different from Nancy’s account, even opposite to it, as the Heideggerian technology stands for an “enframing” or a framework (Ge-stell), which allegedly sends the question of being into oblivion.

For Nancy, in their division different "arts" each remain outside one another in a state of oscillation between the repulsion and attraction of the attributes of each other, yet breaking their contact and thus keeping their limits and separation.1009 The division of art is composed of the singularity of “art” and the indefinitely multiplied plurality of what he terms "technics".1010 This division separates the name of the product, "poiesis", from the name of the process or the mode of production, "techne". There thus proves to be a tension at work between the product and the production, or the finite operation and

1007 Nancy, The Muses, p. 27 (Les Muses, p. 52).
1008 James, The Fragmentary Demand, p. 222.
1009 The tension of simultaneous belonging and ek-sisting would also be the structure in Nancy’s idea of transimmanence. Transimmanence is the chiasm of transcendence and immanence. See The Muses, p. 18-19 (Les Muses, p. 36-38).
1010 Nancy, The Muses, p. 5-6 (Les Muses, p. 16-18).
the infinite operation – a tension in *techne* itself. In between the poles is the diversity of the works and of the modes of work, which, according to Nancy, has so far been ignored in the philosophy of art. This is also the tension of art and technics. In other words, in question is the division of the artificial and the artistic, or “engineering and genius”.1011 Furthermore, a tension exists in the sublime; together with the tension of *techne*, these two kinds of tension make art ontologically plural. In the sublime, presentation itself is in question. Because the thing presents itself only insofar as it resembles itself, one might say that the sublime takes art above artistic practices.1012

As regards giving grounds for the plurality of arts, Nancy regards the arts as technical in the first place.1013 Arts are indissociable from the essence of technics. Here Nancy points to technique as knowing how to produce what does not produce itself by itself, so that technique designs a space and a delay between the producer and the produced – thus between the producer and him- or herself.1014 Technique is exterior to self in its operations and objects. When the artist makes his technical decisions in his working, he does not end up with a work which already belongs to some pre-existing category of art. Instead, he necessarily results in multiplication in putting into unique use the artistic means of production; the number of alternatives among which to choose is endless.1015

What is important for his understanding of art and technique, however, is that technique means that the presentation of the work of art, its end, its essence or subject, are always postponed, always only coming. This is because art as technique is endlessly linked to other techniques, so that the end of the work appears to itself as a perpetual “means”. Technique is, then, groundlessness, and art appears to be “nothing other than the second-degree exposition of technique itself, or perhaps the technique of the ground itself”. The problematic issue is now the one concerning the ground: one has to proceed from a ground of heterogenesis, which in Nancy’s thinking is “existence as the ‘infinite multiplicity of the world’”, when existence is the ground and the obviousness

1015 The representation of “nature” (*physis*) refers to the representation of self as sublimated or as compensatory; with respect to “nature”, art lacks origin and end, and this is why the idea of creation fills an abyss between “art” (or “technics”) and “nature” by borrowing from both and also by refusing both.
or manifestness of being.\textsuperscript{1016} Moreover, the multiplicity is not that of a world, but of a heterogeneity of worlds which, in turn, give the world its unity.

Technique, as “technique of the world”, is Nancy’s interpretation of creation. “Creation” is nothing mystical here, but it is what Nancy understands by poiesis: techniques are always in a plural form, having no origin and no sense as their end. Thus technique opens the singular plural of art, from which fact results, first, that the end of art is infinite or always-already finite and repeats itself. Secondly, in the mediation of the sense the dialectic is resisted by “poetry”, which brings with itself an irreducible plurality of the arts. This is to say that poetic subsumption is in itself heterogeneous.\textsuperscript{1017} Hence, what is central in this statement is that the artistic sense is “multiply unique and uniquely multiple”: multiplicity exposes unity in multiple ways, which, however, does not mean that multiplicity would come in the place of the One. Instead, unity expressed by plurality takes place every time each one of the arts exposes in its way the unity of the art. Its unity, in turn, has neither place nor consistency outside this “each one”. The fact that the world has to be a plurality of worlds is the condition under which each work of art is in its way a synesthesia and the opening of the world.

Thus, each work is to be understood as a cutting out (découpe) of appearing. This is for Nancy the point at which phenomenology comes to its limit: here it is a question of the appearing of appearing, or of appearing as a coming into presence, namely, a coming of the world rather than “into” the world.\textsuperscript{1018} This “coming of the world is not even a coming”, but is the fact that the world discloses itself in its patency. This conception no doubt has some affinity with Heidegger’s idea of art as the setting itself to work of truth, the difference being, however, that at stake in Nancy is nothing like a revelation of originary truth of being, set forth by Heidegger’s notion of the artwork. In the present connection Nancy mentions truth, which is a name for the “sense of sense”, or the patency of the world which makes art, or that truth is its own art. The figure that Nancy uses here is that the phenomenon is a light that illuminates, without which the light would appear in itself (“lux without fiat”).\textsuperscript{1019}

Technique is what dislocates art from anything that might make it just “aesthetic”: “The technicity of art dislodges art from its ‘poetic’ assurance, if

\textsuperscript{1016} Nancy, The Muses, p. 26-27 (Les Muses, p. 50-51).
\textsuperscript{1017} Ibid., p. 30 (Les Muses, p. 56).
\textsuperscript{1018} Ibid., p. 31 (Les Muses, p. 58).
\textsuperscript{1019} Ibid., p. 32-33 (Les Muses, p. 59-60).
one understands by that the production of a revelation, or art conceived as a *physis* unveiled in its truth".  

This is because the role of technique is, finally and seemingly paradoxically, to put the work out of work (désœuvrement): not to make work out of the work, but to put it outside itself, touching the infinite. This is why art is always coming to its end. The end is the beginning of plurality, technique being “a rule for an end”.  

Art’s sense of existence is to be found in what infinitely touches its end; this is finitude and “another sense of technique”. The technique — *techne* — of existence is the relation to the endless ends, and it is the relation to singular plurality, which is the duty of technique. This is the duty imposed on art. I might suggest that by linking his interpretation of Heideggerian *techne* with art, Nancy gives technique the position by which he attempts to justify his view of the endlessly multiplying origin of art. Technique is characterized by the fact that, as different means of production, it leads to another means. Thus, technique does not lead the artist to a conclusion concerning the category of the work which he is making — on the contrary, it takes him to an end which is always only coming and postponed in the beginning. Here, I think, is the grounds for Nancy’s saying that “presentation remains suspended in its passage”. What he calls “the singular plural occurrences of existence, or presence, or passage” would, expressed in more Heideggerian terms, point to the idea that, while unconcealing being, art does not reveal *physis* in its truth. In Nancy’s thinking, the revelation takes the singular work of art to the limit of touch. Touching is touching the limit of touch, which in art means that each time the limit of technique comes to be touched, it does not “give” the work of art as a representative of an art, but leads art outside itself in order to consider another technique. This would be how the zoned being of art appears in its division. *Techne* means that the end of art is, however, the beginning of plurality, and thus a beginning for technique. As I see it, for Nancy the technique of art is infinitely finite. It works so that a singular art touches infinitely its own limit; in this way, the arts can be divided into still new categories and take still new forms.  

In Heidegger’s philosophy, *techne* gives being a particular form, making being appear as a being. *Techne* opens up the ontological difference, the one  

---  

between being and beings, although “the Being of entities ‘is’ not itself an entity”.\textsuperscript{1023} In art the concealing nature of being is endless: being cannot be revealed “as such”. In a similar manner, “technique” as understood by Nancy is something which gives forms by defining the limits in which a work is done – by defining its details. However, it gives infinitely one form after another or one within the other. What comes is yet not “Art”, but the \textit{techne} of existence, for “this is not \textit{physis}”, but relation to endless ends.\textsuperscript{1024} In conclusion, Nancy’s position is based on a notion that in art nothing but presentation comes to present itself, if “presentation” is synonymous with the obviousness of art. Art takes place by vanishing, for the unity of “art” syncopates itself in material plurality. Art is articulated as a definite form by a particular technique. The ontology of art proves to be, then, not one but plural, and a process in a state of multiplication.

\section*{4.4 At the Heart of Images: Nancy on the Arts}

After having taken up the relatedness of art and philosophy in Nancy’s thought in the previous chapters, I shall lastly consider this question from a more specific angle. Here, the main focus will be on the work of art – what \textit{is} a work of art in the sense Nancy addresses it? Or does he altogether seek to destroy the idea of a work art in view of the intrinsic differences, heterogeneity and plurality of art and of the arts? Before, I have attempted to bring to light some aspects of the way in which art is an object and a source of philosophical reflection to Nancy. However, to be inquired is \textit{how} he approaches the work of art. Such a question results in considering what the character and the role of the “work” is when individual works of art are interrogated. Is it possible to say that the object of Nancy’s research in the examination of particular works is to seek support for the ontological thematizations that appear in his philosophy? This question will be one of my focuses in what follows. At the same time, philosophical notions combine with a precise view of the art historical elements of the works at issue.

A description of the concept of the “work of art” does not appear in Nancy’s \textit{œuvre} in any systematic or comprehensive way, at least not in the way that has

\textsuperscript{1023} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, § 2, p. 26. Cf. also Luoto, \textit{Heidegger ja taiteen arvoitus}, p. 120.

become familiar in the sphere of analytic aesthetics. To put it roughly, the point of interest in Nancy’s account of art is not in its analysis based on empirical linguistic practices of the use of the concept of “work” as we understand it, or in its determining the criteria that we apply when calling something “art”. Such is hardly the objective of Nancy’s discourse on art: his fundamental question is not “what is art?”. By contrast, he can be counted among philosophers whose interest lies in what it means that “art” is indefinable as such. In a large sense, one might say that he works within the more speculative framework which strives at a philosophical legitimation of the ontological function of art. This tradition reached its culmination point in Hegel’s dialectical theory of art: for Hegel, the work of art has the meaning of philosophical thought expressed through sensuous means.  

Yet, in historical terms, Nancy’s thinking on art shares a remarkable point of contact with the philosophy of art in the years which immediately precede Hegel’s theory. Early German Romanticism was a movement which formulated a literary theory, or better, a literary ideal, around 1800. The Romantics, also known as the Jena group, are represented by philosophers such as F. J. W. Schelling, Novalis, August Schlegel and Friedrich Schlegel.  

For the Romantics, particular works of art are characterized by incompletion, for they are structurally linked with a whole of which they would have been a part. Such a fragment, or a piece, has a truth status in that it is related to a larger unity: Art. Nancy’s notion of the particularization and multiplicity of the arts has, no doubt, some analogy with the genre of the fragment if one considers his emphasis on the diffraction of (the) art(s) and the romantic idea that art is divided within itself: what is being synthesized is split within itself. However, differences between Nancy’s ontology of art and the Romantic fragment become visible as soon as one starts thinking of a whole of which individual works

1025 For Hegel, the artwork is the presentation (Darstellung) of the truth interpreted as the self-consciousness of the Spirit. Art thus presents the philosophical content – that is, the content of art is the concrete and articulated idea: as we cannot have access to Absolute Knowledge or Truth, Art will have a compensatory function in this respect. Art thus comes to mean the revelation of the ultimate truths which are inaccessible to man’s cognitive activities. For the same reason, art is comparable to religion in its ability to reveal universal truths. See Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit (1807); Aesthetics (1820); cf. Schaeffer, Art of the Modern Age, p. 6.  


1027 This notion was articulated by Friedrich Schlegel in the “Athenaeum Fragments”, published in 1798. See e.g. Schlegel, Philosophical Fragments, p. 18-93.
would be parts. Nancy’s version of the thought of the fragment, which draws on the *foundational* nature of fragmentation and hence on the original difference of the arts, is what I shall discuss in further detail in the last part of this chapter.

It is especially during the past decade that Nancy has taken an interest in the arts and the analysis of particular works of art. In outlining what constitutes his understanding of art and the arts in a perhaps more concrete sense than what their ontological reflection insinuates, my aim is not to say, in the first place, that his analyses of artworks would form any distinct sphere with respect to his purely philosophical renderings of art. Rather, one might state that his treatment of individual works contributes to the ontology of “art” and of “the arts”, and vice versa.

How should one describe the points of departure for Nancy’s handling of particular works? With respect to the spectrum of visual artworks that he inquires into, a special interest seems to be on traditional figurative paintings. On the one hand, he explores problems associated with the depiction of human figures within a definite tradition, such as portraits and nudes, about which he has written two studies, *Le Regard du portrait* and *Nus sommes*, respectively.\(^\text{1028}\)

On the other hand, Nancy writes about picture types with a literary source, like the particular nature of, for example, a certain Christian tradition of paintings. They are represented by “touch me not” pictures in the book *Noli me tangere*,\(^\text{1029}\) or in *Visitation (de la peinture chrétienne)*,\(^\text{1030}\) in which the focus is on the painting of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin by Pontormo. In examining works of arts, Nancy in no way simply restricts himself to mere pictorial analyses. More than this, his interpretations of single works seem to be designed to provide specific aspects to his ontological accounts of art. Although his analyses often aim at the illumination of philosophical notions, I would say that they also work in a reverse manner: that is, excursions into works of art are often reflected in the development of Nancy’s philosophical questioning, as very similar problems come into view in his interpretations of pictures and in his discourse on art in a larger context.

---

\(^\text{1028}\) Nancy, *Le Regard du portrait*; Nancy and Ferrari, *Nus sommes*. Even before the publication of *Le Regard du portrait*, Nancy wrote about the genre of portraiture in the shorter essay (1999), *Le portrait (dans le décor)*, Villeurbanne: Institut d’art contemporain, which comprises an analysis which is partly similar to that in the book that was to follow. One may add also to the discourse on portraiture the photographic essay “Georges”, in *Le poids d’une pensée*, p. 113-123.

\(^\text{1029}\) Nancy, *Noli me tangere*.

\(^\text{1030}\) Nancy, *Visitation (de la peinture chrétienne)*.
Apart from the books mentioned above, Nancy has written extensively on art in shorter articles. Their range varies from landscape painting, pictures which incorporate written texts, conceptual art, to name just a few subjects. Yet Nancy’s thinking on art is not restricted to the visual arts: he has also published on cinema, literature (especially literary theory), and music. But what probably comprises Nancy’s largest contribution to discussions on art, are his texts which do not interpret any particular works, but elaborate his theoretical views on art, that is, its ontological stakes.

Most of Nancy’s analyses of artworks handle single works within a definite tradition, or are linked together by way of a looser theme or association. As I see it, the picture examples taken up in the aforementioned books work essentially as series: artists, the ages of the works, their provenance, their uses and purposes, techniques and compositions all differ from one another, but their subject matters are more or less linked. His choice of picture motives in books like *Le Regard du portrait*, *Nus sommes*, or *Noli me tangere*, consists of examining a theme and its variations. Yet this is not to say that Nancy merely compares them on a representative level, rather he concentrates on the philosophical themes that arise. By contrast, purely abstract visual art appears less frequently in Nancy’s accounts, although what is conventionally called “conceptual art”, like that of On Kawara’s, does.

One could hardly say that aspects of representation are unimportant in Nancy’s essays on art. In the current and superficial sense of the word of “representation” this is, I think, the case, but this does not mean that he studies...
representation “as such”, if “representation” is understood in the art historical perspective: as exhibiting a likeness or as imitation, as analogy or as substitution of an absent thing with a present one (see sections 2.2 and 4.2). What I shall attempt in the following pages is to discuss if, and how, the practical investigations of the works may open up access to Nancy’s fundamental questions on art and their philosophical explorations. With only few exceptions, his examples are aimed at leading him to consider his ontological key notions, which include being, existence, access to sense, coming into presence, exposition, representation, difference and interval, spacing, singularity and plurality, touch, the finite and the infinite, and technique.

Can this mean that art could be identified with or reduced to philosophy? Nancy does not thematize this problematic at length. In my view, his profound sense of art is in the notion that art is not identifiable, nor can it be totalized under any single notion of truth, or any opposition between the categories of the absence and presence of sense, since in art such oppositions come to be dislocated. The notion of presentation offers us one viewpoint to this question. According to one of Nancy’s basic ideas, art is “the presentation of presentation”: it presents the fact that there is art and that there are several arts. What is characteristic to art is that it exceeds presentation: art is a matter of coming to presence and at the limit. This notion is fundamental to the theme of image, toward which Nancy’s interest has grown in the past years. What basically guides his inquiry about image is the fact that an image gives presence: it is the manner and matter of presence – presence, however, is not simply “there”, for the image lacks it, and it gives presence to what is absent and what could not receive presence. To be distinct is to withdraw from everything that is not in the concrete image. Such a distinctive trait sets image apart from a thing and from the world, when the world is understood in the sense of availability, as present-at-hand. To show itself by virtue of a distinctive feature, means that

---

1041 This fact is the focus of Nancy’s reading of the Kantian sublime: the inadequacy of the imagination to present. As a consequence, presentation arrives as a contradictory feeling; in the sublime experience, our faculties of sense, first, fail to complete their task of presentation. Second, this very failure constitutes a “negative exhibition” of the ideas of reason, which could not otherwise be presented. Cf. Kant, The Critique of Judgement, p. 117-123. Nancy, “The Sublime Offering” (“L’offrande sublime”), Cf. also section 5.2 of this study.
1042 Nancy, Au fond des images, p. 126.
1043 Cf. ibid., p. 18.
the image shows itself through force and intensity. A reference will be made to these questions in this chapter, and again in Chapter 5.

THE WORK OF ART

As I have brought out above, Nancy’s fundamental claim concerning the ontology of art is that there is no such thing as “art” as such, but that art is heterogeneous from the start. If art has its origin in distance and difference, then what is called art always exists in its multiplicity, that is, in singular arts and in singular genres and, finally, even in singular works and their traits. What does singularity in art mean for Nancy, and where does it reside? Let it suffice for now to say that it is something that takes place in the presence of the work. Such presence is the spacing, or the intersection of space and time: it opens each time, singularly, as an opening of a “local colour”, which is born, not as a property of a thing, but as a result of different relations.

What opens up, according to Nancy, is not a quality of a thing, but its presence is the act through which the thing is set before its nature of a thing or thingness. For Heidegger, all works of art have a “thingly character”.

Yet there is something at work that does not belong to the character of a thing in the meaning of equipment: a work is able to “open up the Open” and disclose the being of beings, “the truth that has set itself to work”. Up to this point I see Nancy’s and Heidegger’s views as convergent. The central difference, however, arises in thinking of what it is that art is able to unfold. In Heidegger “to be a work means to set up a world” for a historical people (Volk) to dwell in. In other words, the work as the “putting-to-work of truth” reveals the “site” (Da) and destiny of a community as the historical being of a people. This idea has been criticized especially by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, but also by Nancy. The target of their criticism is the political undertones that Heidegger’s conception of installing a world for a historical people imply. More

---

1045 Nancy, Technique du présent, p. 15.
1048 Ibid., p. 44.
exactly, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy see a risk of fascism in Heidegger’s notion of people.\(^{1050}\)

It is for this very reason that Nancy seeks for another mode of thinking of “being-with” or “togetherness”. Heidegger’s “people” is judged by Nancy to be a betrayal of the key insights of fundamental ontology. Nancy fully admits that Dasein as “being-toward-death” may exceed any topology of substance and subjectivity; yet, “when it came to the question of community as such, the same Heidegger also went astray with his vision of a people and a destiny conceived at least as a subject”.\(^{1051}\) On the same grounds, Nancy’s notion of being-with cannot gather around a work of art, if the function of the work is to determine the destiny of a community, as is suggested by Heidegger. Art can, according to Nancy, only present the singular senses of multiple sites for existence. Thus, just as Nancy attempts to open the way to thinking of a nonidentitarian community (and at the same time show Heidegger’s deficiencies in the same task), he aims at a nonidentitarian concept of art. Its alleged singular plurality has, then, political motivations as well.

For Heidegger there is a parallel between the work and the world, both of which appear as one. In Nancy’s thinking a parallel also exists, but in a different way. First of all, there is not one universal or totalizable concept of the “world” “which would come back to itself as its end”.\(^{1052}\) Rather, the idea of the world is discontinuous and finite, and thus plural: as discussed earlier, the touch by which any sense of the world comes into presence is finite, whereas its sense is infinite, that is, limited in its scope. Nancy takes the world to be discontinuous and dislocated into plural worlds, that is, into what he terms as “the irreducible plurality of the unity ‘world’”.\(^{1053}\) The result is that such a world takes place producing the a priori and the transcendental of art, for the alleged reason that there is not just one art.

At the same time, if we suppose that the world is irreducibly dislocated into heterogeneous worlds without common measure, one can see an analogy between Nancy’s use of the notions of the world and community. The fundamental characteristic of his idea of community is its worklessness or

---

unworking (*désœuvrement*). A workless community is one which refuses to create itself as a work (*œuvre*): an idle and unoccupied community lacking anything that might unify it, a community of absence. For Heidegger the work is only what it is in the world which it opens. What can a *work of art* mean to Nancy, then? The “ground” – if a groundless one – of its existence is in singularity, which is to say that nothing like medium, technique, style, age, or the like will give an art a unity or an essence. Is it therefore possible to speak of “the work of art” at all? Could there be a way to approach it in terms of a “workless work”, and what is or how to define such a work, which is, fundamentally, nothing but the here-and-now of its birth into presence? Thus, my intention is to find out if there is any inconsistency between the singular and local nature of art, or the unworking of a “work”, and the reference to individual works. In what follows I shall do this by exploring a few singular artworks analysed by Nancy.

**AT THE LIMITS OF TECHNIQUE AND PRESENCE**

One way to approach the existence of the work art is to see it as technique arriving at its limit. This is Nancy’s objective in the essay “Technique du présent: essai sur On Kawara”, in which he studies On Kawara’s (b. 1933) date paintings.1054 These works mainly consist of presenting dates and locations painted on a monochromatic foundation. As I have stated above, Nancy is not willing to consider On Kawara a “conceptual artist”, although he admits that On Kawara keeps on examining the concept of art, which traditionally is the definition of conceptualism.1055 Again, Nancy notifies, *all* art is conceptual in the sense that it reflects on itself as art.

Nancy’s viewpoint on On Kawara’s paintings is that technique is a means of reproducing presence. His interest is on what he calls *techne poiëtikê*, or productive technique.1056 Namely, “poetry, before being the name of a particular art, is the generic name for art”; and “art” stands for calculated operation, procedure or artifice, which produces something “not with a view to another thing or a use, but with a view to its very production”. What is

this production, then? It is the exposition of this thing – “the pro-duction of
the thing puts the thing forward, presents and exposes it”. Furthermore, to
expose is to depart from a simple position, which is always also a deposition (for
etymologically the word poiesis is derived from a word family that designates
ordering, arrangement, or disposition), abandonment to the contingency of a
passing moment, of a situation and of a point of view. What is exposed is placed
in “the order of absolute, immutable, and necessary presence”. Art disposes
the thing according to the order of presence: art is “the productive technique
of presence”.

Such a notion concerning the connection of presence and its productive
technique is, first of all, based on the idea that presence is not a quality or a
property of a thing, but the act by which the thing is put forward: prae-est. That
is to say that the thing belongs to praxis, and through this praxis a thing is put
forward or in front of its nature of a thing. The nature of the thing is in its birth
into presence – it can subsist only in this movement, and its permanence is in the
passing. In other words, Nancy holds, presence must be seen as what immerses
the nature of the thing in the world of its connections – “origins, relations,
process, finalities, and becomings”. This is the way the present advances: as
pure time withdrawn from temporality, as the pure presence of time, which in
itself is nothing. Thus the present is inexposable, and it only deposes all things.
On the other hand, the present of presence is not in time, but before it; as pure
time, it is the space where pure time opens itself. Space opens time in order
to open the present “which does not pass”. Space, Nancy concludes, is the origin
of time, and On Kawara’s art is the “productive technique of this spacing”. Art
which does not produce itself is not of nature, for it takes place outside nature –
that is, in a technique, in art. Those who open space-time, those who move
away from nature, are for Nancy the “technicians of presence”, which one

The dates depicted in On Kawara’s paintings are elements which deploy
time and space. His work July 21, 1969 (Moon Landing) (1969) signals the date
of man’s first landing on the moon. According to Nancy’s interpretation, the

1057 Ibid.
1058 Ibid.
1059 Ibid., p. 6.
1060 Ibid.
1061 Nancy, ibid., p. 7; cf. Aristotle’s differentiation between nature (physis) and art (techne) in
Physics.
1062 Nancy, Technique du présent, p. 9.
moon works as a point from where the space of time “opens out simultaneously in all directions in the universe, one of the innumerable points stochastically disposed everywhere where there is someplace”. 1063 This notion supposedly applies to art in a more general sense, for Nancy continues: “There is no art that is not cosmological, because the productive technique of spacing produces the world each time, an ordering of the world, the world in whole or in part, but always the whole in each part each time”. 1064

Technique is what gathers the parts together into a whole. In this way, there turns out to be a parallel between the world and the work of art. The world indefinitely refers to all its points, and so does the work of art, in that it is “a singular, monadic and nomadic solidification of the cosmos”. 1065 If the notions of the “world” and the “work of art” cannot but be in a necessary relation to what they consist of, this fact attests to what Nancy designs as worklessness – neither the world nor the work of art can be made into a work on the grounds of anything essential, but instead technique is what assembles them. Technique is, thus, what gathers the original heterogeneity of art and the arts.

What is in question in painting and in the “re-productive technique of the world” is the sacred. The sacred means setting apart or putting at a distance, and as such it is for Nancy the condition of all relations and of communication. The sacred comes to be thought of as a crossing or a transgression: the sacred means “doing what cannot be done” or “what can only come from elsewhere, on the foundation of withdrawal”. Yet the transgression, required by communication or the relation to the other, does not suppress any distinction, but retains it while making contact. 1066 An example is On Kawara’s triptych Title (1965), a painting which is composed of three independent canvases. The background in all of them is painted deep red, 1067 while the inscriptions are white. In the first painting is the text “ONE THING”, in the middle painting “1965”, and in the third “VIET-NAM”. For Nancy the three-partite painting serves as an

1063 Ibid., p. 12.
1064 Ibid.
1065 Ibid.
1066 Nancy, Au fond des images, p. 14. The “sacred” of course refers to Bataille’s philosophy. Again, an associated question – how to think of the irreducibility of the other to the same – is, of course, central to Derrida.
1067 In Technique du présent Nancy is speaking explicitly of “red magenta”, and the foundation of the Title triptych is unquestionably magenta in the reproduction (p. 14). However, the other reprints I have seen of this work are rather dark red, and some writers have even referred to it as blood red. To my knowledge no other versions of this painting exist. Therefore, there may be the possibility that Nancy has seen a printing with incorrect colour.
articulation of spacing, which exposes “the fold and the unfolding of space”. Starting from the painting, Nancy interprets different techniques of the present and what makes it singular. The obvious one is the writing “one thing”, which links “one” and “thing” intrinsically, so that “each thing … has its own place, puts its place in place, and puts equal places in equal relations”. And similarly, “Viet-Nam opens the present, 1965, of a partitioning of spaces which put a relation in place”. Such relation is singular, and each time it produces its local colour – a colour of a place “insofar as this place is an origin of the world”. Like the time of each presence, the place is, on the one hand, “independent of all places, and every locality is absolute: it instantly colours the totality of a world”. On the other hand, the place is merely localized by its relation to and distance from all places.

What is devoted to presenting the present in the paintings is the aforementioned poietic technique: “re-presenting”, not in the sense of recopying, but in that of putting in front and putting forward. Yet at stake is not the second-order presentation or a copy, for there is nothing to be copied. “Poietic technique” is therefore involved with putting into the world that which is outside-the-world. This fact, as Nancy sees it, is embodied by On Kawara’s paintings with dates, like those of the Today Series (from 1966 onwards), which all indicate the date of their execution. In their analysis Nancy’s point is to show that each date, in foregrounding the spacing of time, exposes what is not there as such. The nature of the dates is tautological, for it does not say anything but itself – yet in not saying anything but itself, the date does not say anything of itself. The only information the date is able to tell is that it is painted of the very day, or on the very day (du jour même). As such, it remains separated from any event it may refer to. This is what Nancy points to as the “properly pictorial gesture” of the Date Paintings. By effacing the date, the painting reinscribes it outside of its donation and dating. This means that it makes the date eternal and multiplies it indefinitely, since it is always that particular day that the painted date is effaced. The erasure happens the very day and at the specific moment.

1069 Ibid., p. 15.
1070 Ibid.
1071 Ibid., p. 21.
1072 Ibid.
1073 Ibid.
1074 Ibid., p. 22.
that the painting is re-exposed and the spectator encounters it. This particular instant is unstable; it is the spacing in which the present unfolds.  

Technique, or poetry, is thus what produces the end of what the presence of the work of art gives to the spectator on the grounds of its opaque depth. The thing cut out by the present puts the presence at a distance; in other words, what is cut out of the work is the level (plan) which gives it colour and exhibits it. As this putting-at-a-distance takes place time after time means for Nancy, as he explains in *The Muses*, that techniques exist in the plural; in fact, in question are techniques which multiply themselves indefinitely. They are the means by which we expose ourselves to the work, and by which the work is exposed to us each time and in a different manner. Technique thus accounts for how every work of art is produced: not on the grounds of its “original” nature, but on the grounds of groundlessness itself, or on a ground that does not give rise to itself. To me, this would be to state that the origin of art is not nature, but the origin is always another work of art, which is outside of the world, and in this way technical. In Nancy’s view, technicity puts into play the exteriority of nature as existence.

Technique puts art outside of itself. In the paintings one’s gaze encounters the precise date of the intentions; poetry is the productive technique of this end. Each time one feels this end in the excess of the present in whatever is present behind the “immense and perpetual” flowing of presence.

**THE ART OF PORTRAIT**

The centrality of the notion of distance, and the distinction linked with it, is not without consequences. This is attested by the position which Nancy gives to the idea of the *portrait*. For him a “portrait” does not refer uniquely to the art of portraiture, but it brings about a number of more general questions around the ontology of image. One way to trace these questions is through the etymology of the word “portrait”: it draws out (*tirer*) or extracts (*extraire*) an intimacy or a force. To extract an intimacy from a picture, or what is innermost to it, is

---

1077 Nancy, *The Muses*, p. 26, 37 (*Les Muses*, p. 51, 66-67). In this respect, Nancy’s notion of technique is different from that of Heidegger’s. For Heidegger, there is one “technique”, and similarly, there is one concept of the “world”. See Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art.”
1079 Nancy, *Au fond des images*, p. 16. The root word for *tirer* and its derivatives is the Latin *trahere*.
to take the picture away from homogeneity and to set it apart and to throw it before us. Such a projection gives “its trace, its outline, its style, its incision, its scar, its signature, and all this simultaneously”. A projection thus also proves to be “pro-duction”, as it means putting into light the subject by detaching it.

If we suppose that “portrait” equals any image in the sense that an image is composed of the way in which things come to be drawn out and extracted in it, how does this exactly happen? For Nancy, the special nature of the portrait lies in the fact it is “the image of the image in general”. Or to put it otherwise: “the portrait paints exposition” – the portrait puts something outside of itself (mettre hors de soi), it ex-poses the thing. The picture does not represent anything, but it is an “inner force”, and the picture extracts the force while simultaneously retaining it. The force is what touches us in the picture. This is because the picture does not give any signification or intention, nor for that matter an object or “subject”. The picture is nothing but “an imprint of the intimate and its passion (of its movement, agitation, tension, passivity)”. Moreover, “the imprint is at the same time the receptivity of a shapeless support and the activity of a form: its force is the union (mêlée) of the two”.

As a result, the portrait does not portray anything, since it attains the possible resemblance with the world otherwise. In this respect, the portrait is analogous with the example of a Greek temple which Heidegger introduces in “The Origin of the Work of Art”. In Heidegger’s description, the temple “portrays nothing”, but “simply stands there”. Heidegger does not analyse the qualities of the temple from the viewpoint of architecture. Instead, he is interested in the way the temple-work “first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of the destiny for human being”. The significance of the temple is that it does not come to be thought as an object of aesthetic reflection, but makes visible the things that are related to and surround it: “Standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so first makes

1080 Cf. ibid.
1081 Ibid.
1083 Nancy, Au fond des images, p. 18.
1084 Ibid., p. 21.
1087 Ibid., p. 42.
the storm manifest in its violence.” The temple, like the artwork in general, belongs to the realm which it opens up, in a way that truth may happen in it. Is this not to say that the work, when it “opens up a world” and “gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves”, only does this by revealing things that are not present in itself? The sense – like Derrida’s “trace” – is never given as available, but one must make it available for oneself. In other words, that nothing comes to be recognized by means of representation or portraying – nothing is recognized in the work as such – except that meaningful associations are recognized on the basis of what remains outside of the work. This happens in singular encounters with the work.

According to Nancy, the things one sees in the work of art exceed the system of possible significations. They establish a space, in which the singular generality of an existence appears as well as the sense which it brings with itself. In other words, an image is able to make a sense come out of absence: it makes “absens a presens”, without removing absence from its impalpable nature. Instead, what image images, is this immateriality. It is probably for this reason that Nancy claims that an image is an empty place, a singular place without place – a place of displacement. Any mode of existence can take this placeless and absent place. However, what exists is not presence (which is there), but sense. At stake is not a reproduction, but an access to ever new senses of the picture. As Nancy puts it, the sense “is movement and the escape of existing: of ex-ire, of exiting from the self, of exceeding, of exile”. The conclusion is that sense “essentially unidentifies [se désidentifie] with itself”. When looking at an image, things are discerned: every thing distinguishes itself in another thing. As I see it, what Nancy wants to bring out, is that the sense of the work is practical, an act, which takes place here and now. If “to be present in the picture” is to open up some thing before our eyes, it follows that presence is something distinctive: image has “always begun, not in religion, but apart, at a distance [à l’écart]”. Distance is the condition of being in a relation, or of communication: it is “the condition of the infinity of a relation”.

1088 Ibid.
1089 Cf. ibid., p. 42-43.
1090 E.g. Nancy, Nus sommes, p. 19.
1091 Nancy, Au fond des images, p. 127.
1092 Ibid., p. 128.
1093 Ibid., p. 129.
1094 Cf. ibid., p. 132.
1095 Ibid., p. 122, 12.
To show how these thoughts work in the context of concrete works of art, I shall discuss an example of Nancy’s account of portraiture. He starts from the traditional definition of a portrait, which is “the representation of a person considered for its own sake”,\textsuperscript{1097} in other words, as an absolute subject, detached from all exteriority.\textsuperscript{1098} However, Nancy finds such a definition insufficient; it is typical of what he calls the category of the “autonomous portrait”. As he holds, the subject of the portrait is the portrait itself, a fact which becomes manifest in two ways. First, the portrait is the subject (the object or the motive) of such a painting. Secondly, this painting is the place where such a subject (a person, a soul) comes to light.\textsuperscript{1099}

Yet what interests him in portraits is the question of the ex-position of their subject: its presence and reality – that is, how the identity of the picture is formed – as well as the gaze of the painted subject and the way the painting refers to itself.\textsuperscript{1100} Various problems arise in thinking of the reference in portraits. The painting refers to itself, not only by reference to the real person who is represented, but by reference to the general form of a relation to the self.\textsuperscript{1101} Basically, for a picture to be identified with another thing, it has to have a model. But how is it possible that the portrait can relate with itself, with its own “subject”? According to Nancy, this may happen only if the portrait is related with itself as the other, or if it differs from itself: the condition for this is that the portrait is a portrait of “the ‘soul’ or of interiority”, instead of and in the place of the exterior appearance which is visible on the canvas.\textsuperscript{1102} At stake in the picture is what is immaterial or ideal in it – and which nevertheless comes into existence on the basis of the material, sensuous presence of the picture.\textsuperscript{1103} Everything is in the picture.\textsuperscript{1104} And yet nothing is in the depicted thing in the sense of simple

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1097} Nancy, \textit{Le Regard du portrait}, p. 11.
  \item \textsuperscript{1098} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 12.
  \item \textsuperscript{1099} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 27-28.
  \item \textsuperscript{1100} See \textit{ibid.}, p. 11-35.
  \item \textsuperscript{1101} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 22.
  \item \textsuperscript{1102} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 25.
  \item \textsuperscript{1103} This view comes very close to Maurice Blanchot’s description of the literary work. The work is not a thing, nor does it refer to anything which exists. Instead, the work is the presentation and withdrawal of the imaginary space it creates. The work opens up a time of its own, and this time is a space. See Blanchot, Maurice (1982). \textit{The Space of Literature}, trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. Nancy himself cites Blanchot, who argues that resemblance starts and exists only in the portrait: the portrait “expresses the fact that the face is not there, that it is absent, that it appears only out of absence, which is precisely resemblance”. Blanchot, Maurice (1971). \textit{Lamitié}, Paris: Gallimard, p. 43, cit. Nancy, \textit{Le Regard du portrait}, p. 37. In another discourse, a similar idea is expressed in Heidegger’s “Origin of the Work of Art”: the work “holds open the Open of the world”. Heidegger, \textit{Poetry, Language, Thought}, p. 45.
  \item \textsuperscript{1104} Nancy, \textit{Au fond des images}, p. 26, 127.
\end{itemize}
presence (Vorhanden): the being-image (l’être-image) of the thing is absent and only comes from afar.\textsuperscript{1105}

“Exposition” thus comes to mean “this putting into place or this taking place, which is neither ‘interior’ nor ‘exterior’, but which is on the border [en abord] or in relation”.\textsuperscript{1106} As I see it, it is this distance and distinction that Nancy seeks when trying to give an account of how the portrait may bear a resemblance to things. Furthermore, the way Nancy presents the taking place of exposition happens neither exactly in the work nor outside of it; this notion comes close to Derrida’s problematic of the parergon. The atopics of the parergon is “neither work (ergon) nor outside the work (hors d’œuvre), neither inside nor outside, neither above or below”.\textsuperscript{1107} Such a place without place illustrates the missing frame or context in the work of art. The parergon means the marginal or the extrinsic; in discussing this concept Derrida attempts to question what is part of the work and what remains foreign and supplementary to it, when “the edges of any contexts are open out wide”.\textsuperscript{1108} Common to both Nancy and Derrida is thus the deconstruction of any thought of the self-identical presence of a work. In place of this, they bring out the work as something which does not represent, but presents a thing on the condition of presenting the absence of its sense. As a result, the variation of the singular senses proves infinite.

Resemblance arises as the central question in Nancy’s reflection on the portrait. He starts from the assumption that resemblance seems to be the whole issue of the portrait, which may thus be considered as the paradigm of representative or figurative art.\textsuperscript{1109} What is characteristic of the genre of portraits is that they pay tribute and express the truth of the painted subject; the desired resemblance and individual singularity are the two contrasting motives of the portrait. But what constitutes Nancy’s understanding of the art of portrait is

\textsuperscript{1105} Ibid., p. 23-25.
\textsuperscript{1106} In French, “… exposition: cette mise en place et cet avoir lieu ni ‘intérieur’, ni ‘extérieur’, mais en abord ou en rapport”. Nancy, Le Regard du portrait, p. 32. In his Truth in Painting, Derrida plays with the senses of the French word bord, which are impossible to translate as such: what comes in addition to the work of art, is “on the border, on board ([au bord, à bord]) and “first of all in (the) bor(a)rd(er)” (Il est d’abord l’à-bord). It is evident that Nancy is referring to Derrida here. See Derrida (1987). Truth in Painting, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{1107} Derrida, Truth in Painting, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{1108} Ibid., p. 1. Derrida illustrates the problem of situating the frame of the artwork by invoking Kant’s distinction between the Greek terms ergon and parergon. Derrida translates parergon as “accessory, foreign or secondary object”, “supplement”, “aside”, “remainder”: “It is what the principal subject must not become”. Ibid., p. 54. Therefore, the integrity of the ergon depends on the essential secondariness of the parergon, on its supplementarity. In this chapter, Derrida discusses the problematic nature of Kant’s theory of the aesthetic judgment. He questions the criteria which Kant identifies in the third Critique as belonging to the category of the beautiful: that the beautiful represents an ideality, and that this ideality excludes the parergon, or extrinsic.
\textsuperscript{1109} Nancy, Le Regard du portrait, p. 37.
that “resemblance has nothing to do with recognition”.\footnote{1110} How does he give grounds to this view? One obvious reason is that we rarely have the chance to meet the person who is represented. The pictorial example of this is provided by the Self-Portrait of Johannes Gumpp (ca. 1646).\footnote{1111} In it, the artist is shown painting his own portrait. He is represented in the middle, his back turned towards the spectator, who thus cannot see the face of the artist. Yet the spectator sees his face twice in the painting: reflected in a mirror on the left of the painter, and on the right in the unfinished painting. In Nancy’s view, the act and process of representation is what Gumpp’s work is all about: it is supposed to be the painting itself which paints, and not so much the painter himself. Thus, the act of painting seems to be the very subject of the work.\footnote{1112}

What is particular to Gumpp’s Self-Portrait is that in the two representations – one in the mirror, the other in the unfinished painting – it offers two distinct views of resemblance. In fact, the pictures in the mirror and in the painting are identical; the difference between their ways of resembling the model is in the \textit{gaze} of the painter. That the mirror image looks at the painter, standing in the foreground, who thus is shown looking at himself, while the gaze of the portrait looks away from itself: it looks at the spectator of the canvas, that is, at the painter at work. This is to say, Nancy concludes, that the “same” becomes the “other”.\footnote{1113}

Nancy’s central argument is that in the portrait, or in painting in general, there is no \textit{object}: nothing is “ob-jected”, “thrown against” or before us, but is rather \textit{in front} of us (\textit{en avant}). The viewer is behind the painting or inside it, in its presence. Yet it is not the model in front of the painter (like an image in the mirror or a model in the studio) which makes one’s presence intimate: no resemblance is granted or defined in any other way than as “the Idea” of the painting itself. The method of the portrait, if one may say so, is to show “the life of the Spirit”, but only by showing itself as the art of painting, that is, as “\textit{(re)presentation of art as such}”.\footnote{1114} The Idea does not pre-exist the work; only the work executes it. “The Idea of art is always art itself, and the Idea is always different”, as it seems to Nancy.\footnote{1115} The condition of resemblance thus proves to be absence: by virtue of the absence of the depicted subject, the portrait may

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{1110} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 38.
\item \footnote{1111} This painting is deposited at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.
\item \footnote{1112} Nancy, \textit{Le Regard du portrait}, p. 41.
\item \footnote{1113} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 42.
\item \footnote{1114} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 42-43.
\item \footnote{1115} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 44.
\end{itemize}
relate to itself, when the sameness (of the portrait and its subject) recognizes itself in and as the painting and identifies itself with it. The picture is able to resemble anything only insofar as it differs from itself and, on the grounds of distinction from the thing, it withdraws from its outside and it gathers itself (se rassemble), forming a totality that is suited to itself. In this way, “looking alike” ("se ressembler") is grounded in the fact that the portrait resembles itself, and it is able to do this by drawing its own presence to absence, “which brings the presence in front of ‘itself’ and exposes it in the relation to itself by exposing it to ‘us’”.¹¹¹⁶ In other words, one could say that resemblance, according to Nancy, finds its force of presenting in a place without place, which is neither precisely inside nor outside the picture, or is in both at the same time. There, the insensible or intelligible sense as such comes to be “sensed right in the picture”.¹¹¹⁷

ACCEDING TO ACCESS: BETWEEN THE INSIDE AND THE OUTSIDE OF DEATH

How does Nancy question the thought of an access to the picture space, and how should one inquire about the singular opening of the work of art, in other words, its indefinite coming into presence? To explore this problematic, I shall briefly reflect on what I see as an alleged correspondence which Nancy makes between death and the work of art. Death and its impenetrable nature is Nancy’s object in several analyses. In the following, I take up three different contexts in which he handles the representations of death, above all as presented in the essay “On the Threshold”, which examines Caravaggio’s painting The Death of the Virgin (1605–1606).¹¹¹⁸ Together with this painting, I refer to Nancy’s account of a photograph by Mario Giacomelli, entitled Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi¹¹¹⁹, as well as his book Noli me tangere.

In “On the Threshold” Nancy suggests that the viewer of the painting is exposed to death, to that which is absolutely inaccessible. In Caravaggio’s

¹¹¹⁶  Ibid., p. 51.
¹¹¹⁷  In Au fond des images, Nancy takes an interest in a painting by Hans von Aachen (1552–1615), called Joking Couple (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum), which is similar to Johannes Gumpp’s self-portrait in that the painted subject – a woman’s face – is reflected in a mirror. Because of the mirror reflection, in Joking Couple the foundation of the portrait disappears and becomes part of the picture surface, much in the same way as in Gumpp’s work. According to Nancy’s interpretation, the painting presents an impalpable non-place, from where the painting gets its power. Such a place is not simply the “support” but the reverse of the picture. Nancy, Au fond des images, p. 23.
¹¹¹⁹  Nancy and Ferrari, Nus sommes, p. 101-104.
(1573–1610) *Death of the Virgin*, under a red canopy hanging from a barely visible ceiling, the eleven disciples are grouped round the Virgin Mary’s corpse, most standing to the left. Light coming from a window high on the left picks out their foreheads and bald skulls, before falling on the upper part of the Virgin’s body lying on a bed. Above the Virgin stands the young, mourning John the Apostle who had been given special charge of her; in front, the seated Mary Magdalene leans forward and almost buries her head in her lap. The scene is dramatic and the colours are strong, the contrasts of light and shade being predominant in the composition.

Although the death of the Virgin is what the painting is “about”, the core of Nancy’s interpretation is that there is not access to death itself, for there is no death itself: one is always on this side of death and beyond it. His argument is that there is no death “as such” that could be presented by pictorial means, or in any other way. Rather, death arrives as a singular event. He writes, “There are only a dead man, a dead woman, numerous dead who are firm, whole, present among us, woven with us into life”. Clearly, Nancy’s explication comes close to Heidegger’s idea of mortality, according to which *Dasein* postpones its own death and thus makes its time its own: we are never and always in death, both inside and outside of it, but never in a way that there would be mediation. Thus, at the core of this notion of death is especially the aspect of space.

According to Nancy, not only does death make a threshold, so does the painting, and even we are one: the painting puts ourselves, as spectators, in the position of being a threshold. As we enter the scene, we are neither inside nor outside of the work – we “compear”, or co-appear, with the presences of the apostles, the Virgin and Mary Magdalene. What lies between the Virgin and Mary Magdalene is not, however, death. By so saying Nancy wants to emphasize the nature of the visibility of the painting. That is, in between the two women there is only the immobile material stuff of the painting – the canvas, the oil, the pigment and the texture, and the most important thing created by these, the use of light. The demand to see the invisible either beyond the picture, or inside or outside of it, loses its meaning: *everything* is there in the painting, “right at it, on the threshold”. The Virgin appears dead for the reason that Mary

---

1122 Ibid. Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 49-50. As for Heidegger, let us remind that death is the paradigmatic case in thinking of *Dasein*’s finitude.
Magdalene appears to be alive – their presences are alternate, and one brings the other to brightness by virtue of the light that falls on them. In a somewhat poetic way, Nancy states that one answers the other; “across the two shores of death, there is nothing but light and the thin line of shadow that runs along the edges of the bodies, the folds of the linen and the clothes”.\textsuperscript{1124} Similarly, I would like to add that life and death themselves exist as a difference or relation, if one wishes to take Nancy’s interpretation further.

Perhaps, Nancy thinks, if there is not death itself, neither is there before or beyond: we are never in death, and we are always there.\textsuperscript{1125} Between these two sides, he finds no mediation or communication. His explication of Caravaggio’s painting seems thus to suggest that we, as spectators, are in a position which is parallel to our existence as mortals: there is no access to the “mystery” or the hidden invisible inside behind the surface of a work of art, since we cannot penetrate into the obvious facts of the painting, that is, into its materiality. Instead, as well as we remain on the threshold of its inappropriability, we also ourselves exist as the living threshold of death: we either are on this side of death, or beyond it, but we have no experience of death; this is what I see as the point of Nancy’s explication. This is made manifest by the painting, and an analogous structure appears to be inscribed in the nature of the work of art itself. The access is not a trespassing of a limit of an invisibility.\textsuperscript{1126} If the painting is “our access to the fact that we do not accede – either to the inside or the outside of ourselves”, in Nancy’s view this is also how we exist.\textsuperscript{1127} In this way, the painting paints the threshold of existence. It cannot reach what lies beyond existence, but it can just show the dead in this world. This would be to say that life and death remain separated; there are no living dead, one is either on this side of it, or on the other side.

This is why The Death of the Virgin cannot be thought of as a painting of the vanitas genre, nor can Mario Giacomelli’s photograph Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi (Death will come and it will have your eyes, 1954).\textsuperscript{1128} In Nancy’s

\textsuperscript{1124} Ibid., p. 60 (Les Muses, p. 107).
\textsuperscript{1125} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1126} Cf. ibid., p. 59 (Les Muses, p. 105).
\textsuperscript{1127} Nancy, \textit{The Muses}, p. 61, 67 (Les Muses, p. 108, 115-116).
\textsuperscript{1128} Vanitas paintings, which evolved in the Dutch city of Leiden in the 17th century, serve as reminders that the power, the pleasures, even the beauty of the earthly life are transient compared to that which we encounter after death. The transience of the human life was represented by emblematic objects such as skulls, snuffed candles, or watches, to remind the viewer of mortality and the passage of time. See e.g. Langmuir and Lynton, \textit{The Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists}, p. 667. – The title of Giacomelli’s photograph derives from a poem by Cesare Pavese. See Nancy and Ferrari, \textit{Nus sommes}, p. 103.
interpretation, within the *vanitas* tradition, the figure of the skeleton is used to strip the skin off and to devitalize the living and thus to examine what is beyond the “secret” of skin. In this way, the objective of showing the skeleton would be to “see with the eyes of the dead”. The painting would like to banish its own end by invoking death to the scene. What Nancy says is that Giacomelli’s photograph presents its subject in a way that is opposite to the *vanitas* paintings. The black and white picture presents a very old naked woman sitting. She is either putting on a shirt or taking it off. Her face is turned downwards, but one can see the upper part of her thin body and one of her hands with their wrinkled skin, in a way that the marks of her advanced age are clearly visible. Even if the viewer’s connotation in the presence of the picture were death, Nancy perceives that the eyes of the photographer do not *give* death – they just show its inevitable character and its always possible coming. The eyes have to stop at the surface of the skin, but they cannot go beyond. As suggested by the title of the photograph, if there is any allusion to death in the picture, it is in the eyes of the spectator. The picture is able to produce only a “caesura of life”, which is carved in the skin. It offers an “endless transport at a point of suspension”, life on the border of death, but yet on this side of it.

Like in *The Death of the Virgin*, Nancy brings to the fore the role of the viewer: death is not in the picture, for it manifests the living body. This amounts to his stating that the viewer himself turns out to be the border of death.

If in the interpretations of *The Death of the Virgin* and *Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi* Nancy’s interest is on the singularity of death and one’s existence at the limit of death, in *Noli me tangere* he arrives at a similar argument, although by means of a different pictorial approach. In this book Nancy focuses on the Christian picture type called “touch me not”, based on a scene which is told in the Gospel of John.

According to Nancy, in Jesus’ presence as shown in the touch-me-not tradition, it is not a question of “death”, but of indefinite dying and of a

1131 The “touch me not” representations show the resurrected Jesus with Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene had found Jesus’ tomb empty on the third day after his crucifixion. At the tomb, Jesus suddenly appeared to her, but she did not immediately recognize him. It was then that Jesus told her not to touch him, giving as the reason for this the fact that he had not yet “ascended” to his Father. Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, the first witness of his Resurrection, “Touch me not”. *The Holy Bible*, John 20:17. New revised standard edition (1989), New York: Oxford University Press. To exemplify this scene, Nancy has chosen a number of classical works from the 16th and 17th centuries by artists such as Rembrandt, Dürer, Titian, Pontormo, Cano Alonso, Bronzino, and Correggio.
prolonged departure.\textsuperscript{1132} Jesus is a figure of constant absenting: he appears present by the tomb which he has already has departed from.\textsuperscript{1133} It follows that life and death neither prove identical to nor contemporaneous with one another: the resurrected Jesus is no more dead than living – he is only present.\textsuperscript{1134} The focus of the “touch me not” pictures can thus be found in Mary Magdalene’s attempt to see the invisible (that is, resurrection), or to touch the untouchable (the resurrected). Yet, like death, resurrection is outside of representation, because “no presence can present the distancing of truth from presence itself”.\textsuperscript{1135} In \textit{The Death of the Virgin} Nancy saw the position of the spectator to be the access to the fact that we do not accede: an access to the painting, as well as to death itself; in the context of the “touch me not” theme, he understands death as an endless departure to departure. The departure to departure is, in this way, the departure to the untouchable singular difference of life and death – and “thus we exist”.\textsuperscript{1136} This is also the structure which Nancy gives to his notion of sense, which is nowhere but in its coming and going.

In my view, what organizes Nancy’s interpretation of the theme of death in art is the Heideggerian thought of being-toward-death.\textsuperscript{1137} Mortality brings \textit{Dasein} to the sphere of certainty as the truth which is always only coming. Even one’s own death cannot be represented because it belongs to \textit{Dasein}’s absolute future. It is for this reason that \textit{Dasein} may not have experience of its own death: its existence can only be towards death as the ultimate possibility of the impossibility of being-there. Being-toward-death gives the principle of our status between life and death, and at once it singularizes each existence – be it that of the spectator or of the represented figures, or of the way the work of art is born into presence in front of us. As I understand it, the painting only offers an access to the untouchable limit, parallel to our intermediate state between life and death: the one between presence and absence.

On the basis of such an account, our position as threshold would thus give a singular presence to the work of art. The presence is what distinguishes every picture: what therefore comes to be articulated is the thought that in question is difference and \textit{différance} which give the ground for the birth into presence for each depicted thing. If the rule for resemblance was the presence of absence,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1132} Nancy, \textit{Noli me tangere}, p. 31.
  \item \textsuperscript{1133} Cf. \textit{ibid.}, p. 49.
  \item \textsuperscript{1134} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 36.
  \item \textsuperscript{1135} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 42.
  \item \textsuperscript{1136} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 74, 77.
  \item \textsuperscript{1137} Cf. Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, § 51-53.
\end{itemize}
this means that the painting is no more “here” than it is “out there”: it does not imitate the thing, but can only resemble the thing, thus being distinct from itself. For Nancy the image is the power to resemble.\textsuperscript{1138}

\textbf{THE SCATTERED ART: THE FRAGMENT}

Lastly, I would like to sum up some problems concerning the relation of art and philosophy, and to attempt to provide a partial answer to the question of the nature of the “work of art” in Nancy’s thinking. At stake are matters such as why it is not possible, in principle, to speak of “art” as one single term – how in fact does one characterize the relation of art and the arts? What is it that gives art and the arts their original plural singularity and their origin in diffraction? And why does Nancy claim that the arts are not totalizable under a single concept? In these matters, I touch upon the idea of art as \textit{fragment} and \textit{fractality}. This will be done by a brief reference to the notion of art as it appears in the literary theory of the Jena Romantics, especially as presented by Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829). The roots of German Romanticism are in the classical metaphysics of German idealism. That is to say, according to the idealists, behind the real, there is a transcendental substance – be it God, the infinite, the Absolute, or the Spirit of the world – out of which the finite identity differentiates itself. As a consequence, the Romantic theory of art aimed at finding the interdependence between the subject and the object, or the connection between presentation and spirit – of the real and the ideal, or of nature and spirit, in order to find out how the infinite presents itself in the particular.\textsuperscript{1139} This is not to say that Nancy’s notion of art as we know it would be a simple re-reading of the early Romantic account of art, but perhaps more than that, Nancy’s treatise provides a reaction to it.

As I see it, Nancy’s interest in the thought of the fragment is twofold. First, it is linked with the notion of art as presentation, which originates from Kant’s notion of \textit{Darstellung}, “presentation”, a central point of departure for the Romantic theory of art. For Kant, \textit{Darstellung} designates the rendering of a concept in terms of sense, or a sensibilization (\textit{Versinnlichung}).\textsuperscript{1140} In \textit{Critique

\textsuperscript{1138} Nancy, \textit{Au fond des images}, p. 23.
of Pure Reason Kant elaborates in his transcendental schema a “third term” that could reconcile the categories of understanding with sensibility, or the intelligible with the sensible. Yet the schematism that attempts to link sensibility and reason, or the schematism that Kant calls “symbolic”, is necessarily only an approximation. In other words, a more adequate or perfect presentation of ideas is impossible for Kant. According to Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester, in the romantic theory of art, “what is perceived as both the dead end and the most formidable challenge of the Kantian model presentation is transformed into a model of arts as the aesthetic activity of production and formation in which the absolute might be experienced and realized in an unmediated, immediate fashion”. The task of the Romantics is now to accomplish a presentation of what in Kant remained unpresentable – that is, the sublime. For the Romantics, art realizes an adequate presentation of the Idea; it accomplishes a sensible actualization of the Idea in the realm of the aesthetic.

The Romantic theory of art has its roots in what one may term a crisis of philosophical discourse. In question was both a philosophical and theological crisis that, after Kant, deprived the world of its unity. It was Kant's critical philosophy that was held responsible for the dismantling of philosophical ontology and rational theology, which were henceforth subject to a speculative prohibition. This fact amounted to the thesis of the Romantics which asserted that philosophical discursivity can have no access to the Absolute; that is, the Absolute cannot be figured as a whole. A solution was found in what is known as the speculative theory of Art: the failure of philosophical discourse was replaced by poetry, and more generally, by Art. From now on, Art would have a compensatory function in regard to philosophy. Not only was Art endowed with an ontological function, but for Romanticism, it was the only possible presentation of ontology or of speculative metaphysics; that is, Art provided

---

(vii-xx). See Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 209-219 (the “Transcendental Analytic, Book 2, Chapter 1).
1141 Kant, The Critique of Judgment, § 59. Kant’s notion of schematism is in the background of Schelling’s (1775–1854) philosophy of art. In § 39 of The Philosophy of Art, Schelling notifies that “Representation of the absolute with absolute indifference of the universal and the particular within the particular is possible only symbolically”. Italics and bold in original. To elucidate this, he writes: “That representation in which the universal means the particular or in which the particular is intuited through the universal is schematism. – That representation, however, in which the particular means the universal or in which the universal is intuited through the particular is allegory. – The synthesis of the two, where neither the universal means the particular nor the particular the universal, but rather where both are absolutely one, is the symbolic”. Schelling, The Philosophy of Art, p. 45-46.
1143 Ibid.
1144 Schaeffer, Art of the Modern Age, p. 9.
an ontological revelation, the revelation of being.\textsuperscript{1145} According to Jean-Marie Schaeffer, Romanticism thus short-circuits Kant’s \textit{The Critique of Judgment} by reducing the Beautiful to the True in that the domain of the arts becomes the manifestation of \textit{Art}.\textsuperscript{1146} In this manner, Art reveals being, as well as works of art reveal Art and are to be interpreted as empirical realizations of the same ideal essence. Therefore, for the reason that the works and the particular arts are reducible to Art, Art can be an ontological revelation.

The texts of the Jena Romantics, especially those of Friedrich Schlegel, pose the question of literature as the question of the presentation of philosophy, in other words, as the question of the aesthetic presentation of the idea along lines determined by philosophy.\textsuperscript{1147} At stake is, however, not only a crisis of presentation, but also a crisis of the model of the Romantic subject’s auto-production in the (literary) work of art, the “subject-work”.\textsuperscript{1148} The “crisis” after Kant’s critical enterprise thus involved the presentation of philosophy and the subject of philosophy (the “system-subject”), which were opened up by Kant.\textsuperscript{1149} In Barnard and Lester’s opinion, Kant bequeaths this crisis of presentation to his successors by depriving the subject of its being-subject, that is, of its adequate presentation of itself to itself, reducing the subject to little more than the logically necessary, purely regulatory idea of the unity of its representations. This provided an initial context for the development of idealism and Romanticism alike.\textsuperscript{1150} One could thus say that in question is a \textit{poetic} model according to which the subject confounds itself with its own production, and a model of literature – or art, in general – as the production of its own theory and its own engendering, Romanticism. This is the moment which Nancy, together with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, calls the moment of the \textit{literary absolute}.\textsuperscript{1151}

Literature must, then, be seen as productivity and, at the same time, as reflection. In other words, the task of the particular work is twofold, for art is always related to something that exceeds it: the Romantics understood the work, or \textit{organon} (the literary work, in the first place), as a \textit{fragment}. To put it

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1145} Ibid., p. 10.
\item \textsuperscript{1146} Ibid., p. 13.
\item \textsuperscript{1147} Barnard and Lester, “Translators’ Introduction”, p. x.
\item \textsuperscript{1148} Ibid., p. xii.
\item \textsuperscript{1149} Ibid., p. xiv.
\item \textsuperscript{1150} Barnard and Lester, “Translators’ Introduction”, p. xvi.
\item \textsuperscript{1151} According to Barnard and Lester, in \textit{The Literary Absolute}, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy “will reinvest the concept of presentation in such a way as to transform it into the kind of adequate and ever more perfect operation they perceive to be lacking in Kant”. Barnard and Lester, “Translators’ Introduction”, p. ix.
\end{itemize}
schematically, in its fragmentary work, literature is determined as the productive capacity of *poiesis*, and manifests the synthetic totality that lies behind or before each of its particular manifestations. As a result, it was demanded that art operate in view of its essential totality and completion. Art now came to be determined as a reflective moment, as criticism became a constitutive part of art. In fact, literature’s infinite demand for completion (*achèvement*) and perfection (*parachèvement*) lay beyond any finite instance of literature – hence literature’s necessarily fragmentary presentation of totality. But the central idea of the fragment involved the notion that the fragment was essentially *incomplete* and lacked unity, and as such, nothing but a project. In this sense, the fragment was understood as “the immediate projection of what it nonetheless incompletes”. A famous formulation of the nature of the fragment was given by Friedrich Schlegel in the fragment 206 of the *Athenaeum Fragments* (1798): “A fragment, like a miniature work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a porcupine”. In Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe’s view, the existential obligation of the fragment, if not its existence, is “indeed formed by the integrity and the wholeness of the organic individual”.

For the Jena Romantics, the fragment stands for the “genre” of theoretical Romanticism. If the fragment is simultaneously in the whole and in each part, what does this mean? In Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s account, this is to say that in its detachment or isolation fragmentation is understood to correspond exactly to completion and totality. In the fragment 116 of the *Athenaeum* Friedrich Schlegel writes that the “real essence” of Romantic poetry is “that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected”. The totality of “Romantic poetry” presents itself as a fragment. The fragment, then, comes

1158 Ibid., p. 39 (*L’absolu littéraire*, p. 57).
1159 Ibid., p. 43 (*L’absolu littéraire*, p. 63). For “fragmentation” Nancy gives the synonyms “spacing”, “exposition”, “piecework” and “exhaustion”; “fracturing”, “fraying”, “wounding”, and “shattering”, among others. The thinking of fragmented art is based on the idea that “our art, thought, and text are in ruin” – in question is “a flight from the event and its truth”.
1160 Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 31-32.
to be defined as “a small work of art”: one that is neither directly nor absolutely the Work, but its individuality must be grasped with respect to its relation to the work, in a way that the totality should be present as such in each part. In other words, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe see the fragment as essentially characterized by its inherent multiplicity. According to them, “to write the fragment is to write fragments”, since each fragment stands for itself and for that which it is detached, the totality being present as such in each part.

The individuality of the fragment is, at the same time, the plural whole of the fragments, for each fragment has the ability to replicate the totality. The presence of each of the parts is, therefore, the co-presence of the parts, and the fragment has to have the characteristics of the work, and of the work of art. Further, the “fragmentary exigency” is the exigency of auto-production, that is, the demand that the literary work organize and produce itself as organon, that it should operate in view of its essential totality and completion. Literature is the adequate presentation of the fragmentary model of the subject-work creating itself, and it becomes what Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy call a “metaphysics of art”, a religious art in the sense that it represents the remainderless presentation of the truth, the joining of difference into the Same.

What is said above, in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s own explication of the Romantic fragment, resonates with what they say about the plural origin of being. If “to write the fragment is to write fragments”, does this not amount to saying that the fragment, in its singularity, has the structure of being always more than one (plus d’un)? Simultaneously, the foundation for fragmentation is composed of the fragmentary totality in its organicity, from which follows that “the fragment thus constitutes the most ‘mimological’ writing of individual organicity”. As I understand it, this would mean that the very origin of the fragment is mimetic, or itself imitated: the fragment modellizes itself into a work. Following Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, this is because the ideal is as numerous as the fragment – that is, already originally multiplied. However,
there is no direct identity between the fragment and the Absolute or the truth, but Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy describe their relation as “the step to the dialectical”, which “covers the thinking of identity through the mediation of nonidentity – this is what precisely forms the basis of fragmentary totality”. As a result, the Work (the ideal) is absent from singular works, and “fragmentation is also always the sign of this absence”. Moreover, in the Romantic fragment the infinite is presented only through the finite, through the actuality of the work, work in progress becoming the infinite truth of the work.

Later, in the early 1990’s, Nancy explicitly took up the theme of the Romantic notion of art as fragment. The focus of this reaction is on the sense of art, which Nancy sees to be fractal: not that the arts, or works of art, or the five senses would be fragments of one art, but rather that the origin of art is fragmented and that “Art” – which would be the origin of any sense – is absent from particular arts and works. In my view, the points of emphasis in Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe’s explication already drew on this interpretation: on the nonidentity, the incompleteness and the plurality of the Idea whereof the Romantic fragment is a microcosmic reflection. In the essay “Art, a Fragment”, Nancy brings to the fore the idea that “our art, thought, and text are in ruin”. To elucidate this argument, he places the thinking of ontology within the context of fragmentation: that the foundation of art lies in an original diffraction and dislocation, which implies that “art” is not part of a greater unity, which would give it sense. This fact signals a flight from the event and its truth.

In my view, such an interpretation allows Nancy to think of what constitutes his fundamental understanding of art: its workless nature; its infinitely finite coming into presence; the singularity and the locality of the aesthetic; in a word, difference.

In my view, these themes are not to be read directly as a comment on the fragment. Rather, the thought of the fragment in Romanticism offers one, albeit central, aspect to what grounds Nancy’s thinking of the singularity of art and the arts. If Romantic fragmentation consists in a state of the detachment and isolation of the fragments and if their end is where the fragment gathers itself into itself, Nancy’s aim is to disengage from the thought of art as an art of

1168 Ibid., p. 46 (L’absolu littéraire, p. 66).
1169 Cf. ibid., p. 48 (L’absolu littéraire, p. 69); Schlegel, Philosophical Fragments, p. 27, 31-32 (“Athenaeum Fragments”, 77 and 116).
1171 Ibid., p. 123 (Le sens du monde, p. 189).
fragment. Instead, he sees art itself as fragmentary and fractal. Fragmentation would thus be that of the presentation of being or of existence, in which the tracing of (or in) its totality is at stake.\textsuperscript{1172} From the relativity of the fragment he turns one’s attention to something that might be called \textit{absolute relativization} – that is, to a notion of the fragment which would finally convert itself to a finish, absolving itself from its fractal character.\textsuperscript{1173} As a result, what arises is the very action of the fraying of the edges of the trace of the fragment: the \textit{aesthetic} itself comes to be fragmented.\textsuperscript{1174}

In general, what I see as Nancy’s aim in emphasizing the fractal character of art, is to dissociate things from the “world” and “sense” as a given, accomplished or finished presence.\textsuperscript{1175} The most important point in this respect is the following: the reverse of fundamental fractality is the idea of totalization, or art’s “worldliness”, \textit{cosmetics}, in tiny pieces.\textsuperscript{1176} From the microcosm of the fragment of Romanticism Nancy directs himself to a thought of fractality which is not in a necessary relation to a greater whole or any end that would give its sense – at stake is an interpretation which makes one think of art in terms of its “worklessness” (\textit{désœuvrement}).

What Nancy is after is rather the “spacing and fraying [\textit{frayage}] to all space disposed in the present of a presentation”.\textsuperscript{1177} Implied by the present is the local nature of art: existence conceived of as sense, when one sense touches upon another. Here, according to Nancy, is where the aesthetic can be localized: in a contact and a relationship of being affected and being affectable by something.\textsuperscript{1178} It turns out to be impossible to produce the reality of a “sensible Totality”, for his notion of the sensible is based on the assumption that the five senses are \textit{external} to each other: the senses, which as such are insensible, are able to touch only when they affect each other.\textsuperscript{1179} This is to say that only when sensing and the sensed communicate with one another or in mutual contact, does any sense come into presence. In other words, the aesthetic, if it is understood as sensible

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1172} Ibid., p. 125, 128 (\textit{Le sens du monde}, p. 191, 195).
\item \textsuperscript{1174} Nancy, \textit{The Sense of the World}, p. 126 (\textit{Le sens du monde}, p. 193).
\item \textsuperscript{1175} Cf. ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{1176} Ibid., p. 123-124 (\textit{Le sens du monde}, p. 189-190).
\item \textsuperscript{1177} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{1178} Ibid., p. 128 (\textit{Le sens du monde}, p. 196).
\end{itemize}
presence, takes place only at its own limit: senses border on one another, and only then they become sensed. Finally, it is absence of sense that is the existence of sense, which, one might say, is the singular and local access to sense. And if there is nothing but local difference and differing division between senses, as Nancy’s argument goes, this also shows that it could not be totalizable into one sense “in general” or into a transcendent sense. If “the exteriority of sensible things is all there is of sensible interiority”, this also means that each of the different arts remains at the threshold of the others.

By working in this direction, Nancy endeavours to give space to a thinking that the fragmented presentation, which art is all about for him, is in the last analysis able to give grounds to the separation between art and intelligibility. This is because “the fractality of (the) sense(s)” takes the place of any thought of the truth of sense. The whole of the sensible exists only in its division. This thought appears, according to Nancy, between the Romantic theory of art and Hegel. With the “end of art” Hegel announced the end of, not the production, but of the necessity of the presentation of art. That is, art no longer responds to man’s need to recognize his own self – the sensuous (re)presentation of the intelligible Sense has come to an end, as art has lost its “highest vocation”.

Nancy relies on this view in saying that a work art, in its groundless and shattered existence, cannot be a symbol or presentation of being, and thus is not related to truth “in the sense philosophy would have liked”. Instead of this, as I have shown before, Nancy’s account of art is related to sense, which remains outside of the work of art itself, as it is exposed to an irreducible exteriority. Nancy explains this by stating that art presents its movement of being-\textit{toward}, and not of being-\textit{such}, which is what is presented by the traditional notion of truth. Art’s presence is thus not accomplished presentness (\textit{présentité}), but \textit{techne}, production which gives its own grounds.

---

1181 \textit{Ibid.}, p. 130 (\textit{Le sens du monde}, p. 198).
1182 \textit{Ibid.}
1183 One formulation of this thesis is as follows: “Art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past. Thereby it has lost for us genuine truth and life, and has rather been transferred into our \textit{ideas} instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality and occupying its highest place.” Hegel, \textit{Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts}, p. 10.
In my view, such fragmentation implies, thus, both an idea of not being self-enclosed, as it is infinite coming into presence, a matter of the “frayed access” (l’accès frayé) to a presentation. At the same time, the fractal nature of the aesthetic proves to be absolute self-sufficiency, for it does not repeat any signification which would be situated beyond it. In this situation, which perhaps could be termed a double bind as regards the idea of the fragment, Nancy finds the thinking of the absence of sense: existence that is its own sense, which is to say, the sense of existence as it comes to its own limit – sense as it is interrupted.\textsuperscript{1187}

To sum up Nancy’s position, what he seems to be saying is that no longer can there be a totality as regards the five senses than there can be a totality of art or the arts, since they are no more fragments of the “one”. Rather, their origin is scattered and absent from the start, and thus begins over and over again.\textsuperscript{1188} One cannot produce the reality of the sensible Totality, but the sensible is only in differences and contacts – from this follows that the totality (“art”) is only in its fragments. In this way, art would be difference – Nancy already points to such a notion in \textit{The Literary Absolute}. The work of art, like sense, is always in excess and in default of itself. Consequently, presentation and its action itself takes the place of the truth of art, and instead introduces a notion of sense; sense, one may conclude, would reside in its very being in relations and contacts, in a heterogeneous, discontinued, multiple way.


5. Presentation, Touch and Finitude: Touching the Limit of Sense

If “being”, as well as “art”, are for Nancy something which is never the foundation of its own existence, and the origin of which is to be traced in the withdrawal of origin, how should one articulate the most proper possibility of their existing? How to trace the possibility of the impossibility of existing, that is, the impossible fact of its existence? One answer which Nancy offers to these problems lies in the philosophical figure of touch – other names for which are “tact” and “contact”. For Nancy, what touches is the sense of things: sense emerges as the multiple and fragmented real of the world to which thought is exposed as its limit. Sense is thus offered at the limit of signification, which is also the rupturing of presence.\(^{1189}\) It could thus be said that, in attempting to think sense, Nancy is looking for the the limit – and the limits – of the phenomenological account of the disclosure of the world.\(^{1190}\)

What this chapter will investigate are the limits of sense and, as a consequence, the limit of touch and its connection with the limit of presentation. More exactly, what I try to discern here is whether, and on what grounds, Nancy sees a possible interrelation between the thinking of art and that of touch and the body. To be clarified is how art touches “sense” – in other words, how art may present or make manifest a sensuous figure or form which makes sense, precisely as the being-in-the-world which we encounter with our bodies makes sense.\(^{1191}\)

Let us now take a brief look at the scope of “touch”. Unlike one might expect, Nancy’s thinking on touch does not understand touch as continuity and immediacy. Rather, his conception of touch implies a thinking of separation, dislocation, or “effraction” as he calls it.\(^{1192}\) His thought of touch calls for, first of all, a logic of contact in distance or in absolute separation. Touching means for Nancy primarily touching the limit of touch: touching the border of the untouchable and approaching the inaccessible or the inappropriable, in other words, its alterity.\(^{1193}\) In question is the possibility of touch starting from a

---

1192  James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p. 150; see also Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 12-13.
1193  Experience is always experience of the limit, and hence there is an asymmetry in that the “you” is inaccessible in its transcendency. Cf. Derrida (1993). “*Le toucher. Touch/to touch him*”, trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Paragraph* 16: 2, p. 142-143. This article presents in compact form the basic arguments of Derrida’s future book *Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy.
relentless coming to a limit, or the impossibility of touch; on the limit things are exposed to themselves.

According to Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy is “the greatest thinker of touch of all times”.\textsuperscript{1194} What Derrida might mean by this statement, and what might make Nancy worthy of such a nomination, is what I shall take up in the following. What is it that makes Nancy a thinker of touch, and what is the scope of touch and its relation to the thinking of limit and of finitude, and hence, to the way things come into presence, which only takes place at a limit? “Touch” is a concept which appears throughout Nancy’s philosophy, and it can be considered in the context of many of his key philosophical notions and in the different strata of his thought. I shall take up these points in section 5.1, “Touching the Untouchable: Touch and the Body”.

Nancy’s “haptology” is grounded on the thinking of intimacy \textit{and} an absence of contact.\textsuperscript{1195} With respect to presentation, the structures of touch and presentation, when understood as the auto-presentation of presence, show similarity with each other in their heterogeneity and intervals – art is divided from its origin. In the previous chapter it appeared that art not only is the “presentation of presentation”, but also that the sensuous form of artistic presentation is expressed in terms of the singular plurality of the senses sustained in the simultaneous proximity and distance of touch: in a contact which occurs at a distance. These notions come under focus now. How art touches its limit in presenting itself is the key question here.

In section 5.2, “The Limit and Figuration”, I shall take a look at Nancy’s interpretation of the Kantian sublime in the context of touch. My point of departure lies in the assumption that Nancy’s thinking on touch and its connection to the presentation of being, especially from the point of view of art, may be in great part reduced to Kant. However, Nancy’s accent is on the birth of form, as well as of formlessness – on what may present itself. This does not mean that art would be presentation of being, or that it would be related to truth or any closed circle of signification in the sense that philosophy seeks it.\textsuperscript{1196} Nancy’s argument is grounded in the notion that the truth of art is put outside the work of art. The truth exists in no other way than as act, as truth’s sense in action, and not as presentness.

\textsuperscript{1194} Derrida, \textit{Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy}, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{1195} See \textit{ibid.}, p. 129.
Thus art is fragment: it suspends all signified sense. Similarly, it interrupts the symbolization of the symbolic – thereby it delivers the “(n)evermore-of-sense, the infinitely-(n)evermore-of-sense by means of which existence is related and exposed to itself”. Nor does art present physis, “nature”, if one understands it in terms of the power which gives rise to its essence or which is, or produces of itself, its own manifestation. Nancy’s “art” proves to be techne or ars, which is still without any essence to be reproduced or imitated. In question is “the metaphysics of the act that precedes (itself) in presence.” Instead, art presents the arrival into presence, or being before or beyond its truth, being which “enjoys and suffers under existence”.

What Nancy holds is that presentation takes place at the limit of its becoming, and hence, in art presentation presents itself always at its own limit. In this chapter I am interested in the way in which Nancy integrates Kant’s thinking of the sublime into his own thought of presentation. One aspect of this is the idea of presentation as a matter of interval and of difference – that is, how is it that Nancy gives reasons to his statement that touching a thing demands interrupting the contact. Or more exactly, touch is neither pure continuity nor pure discontinuity. At the same time, presentation could be a question of something that can be referred to as an ellipsis – a notion which recurs in Derrida, which involves the thought of an absent centre of thinking and of presentation which is always postponed. Would it be possible, thus, to speak of hapticity as a limit at which, or from which there is presentation?

In section 5.3, “The Finite and the Infinite in the Aesthetic Experience”, the attention will be on the notion of finitude, mainly from the point of view of the Heideggerian existential analytic. I shall ask why “there is” art: why there is art as a finite event, and what is existence as the opening disclosure of being, and how to characterize its relatedness with Nancy’s idea of the coming into presence of art – the singularly plural existence of art.

As the last point, I shall go into the relatedness of touch and art. For Nancy, art exposes what is obvious, but not in the sense that art would present anything “given”: he proceeds from the idea that art is the presentation of presentation, or

---

1198 Such an act “completes itself of itself, but that, in so doing, completes nothing other than itself, closing neither the circle of a proper self nor the circle of a proper sense, but, rather, ceaselessly opening the toward-itself as if onto the world”. Ibid., p. 139 (Le sens du monde, p. 212).
1200 Ibid., p. 58 (Le sens du monde, p. 96).
that it presents its own figure or form, to put it another way, the fact that there is art and that there are several arts. As Nancy’s argument goes, there cannot be obviousness of the world “in general”, but only the plural presentation of the singular plural of presentation. Yet the presentation of presentation is not representation, Nancy says, for it does not relate presentation to a subject (for which or in which it would take place), but to itself, in a way that it is obvious. In other words, art does not reproduce but produces. This is what he describes as the moment when there is presentation, that is, when presentation touches itself in the context of different places, spaces or instants in the singular plural of occurrences of existence, presence or passage. Touch is for Nancy the paradigm of senses in that it is the presentation of sensibility. In “The Sublime Offering” the thought of the Kantian sublime as the presentation of presentation is proposed. I shall discuss whether this interpretation means that Nancy transfers a similar conclusion to the sphere of the ontology of art.

5.1 Touching the Untouchable: Touch and the Body

In the present section, the attention will be directed to how the concept of touch is constituted in Nancy’s thinking. The starting point when trying to approach this complex notion can be found in the fundamental impossibility as the basis of his view of touch: to touch is to touch the untouchable, or to touch is to touch the limit. These are some of the issues which he has raised, in the first place, in his book Corpus and the article “The Sublime Offering”. Corpus could be called an “ultimate” example of Nancy’s writing. It is at once literary in style, in some passages even poetical and aphoristic, yet very dense in its philosophical references. Some of these points of interest are encountered in the whole of Nancy’s œuvre, though too many to be cited here. Speaking generally, what could be named as foremost common starting points are the critique of subjectivism and the metaphysics of presence.

1203 This thought appears also in The Muses, Nus sommes, Noli me tangere, as well as in “The Sublime Offering”, in which Nancy brings out the idea of the sublime from the standpoint of the presentation of presentation, a “definition” which also applies to his notion of art.
In *On the Soul*, Aristotle presents the *sensus communis*, “common sense” or “general sense”, as the primary faculty of sense perception. The notion of common sense is used to account for our capacities of perceiving objects of perception through more than one sense, of distinguishing and relating the proper objects of the different senses. What Nancy finds interesting in Aristotle, however, are not so much these traits of common sense than its capacity of being reflexively aware of our perception. Common sense is related to the thought that there are objects of perception that are common to more than one sense, according to Aristotle’s principle that potentialities are to be distinguished by their objects. The “common” objects of perception are perceived as the proper objects of any of the five senses. As a result, common sense is to be described as a distinct perceptual capacity though it is exercised through the proper senses.

From this perspective, perception proves to be almost parallel to the intellect. According to Nancy’s argument, the notions of the difference – or integration – of the five senses does not contribute to the thought of art, but rather, that at stake are tensions and spacings between the sensuous and the intellectual sense. If we suppose this, one can hold that reflexivity is the idea that counts in Nancy: the thought that the senses reflect each other at their proper limits. Such a notion partly explains the way in which the continuous dislocation of the sensuous takes place in the arts, according to Nancy.

In lieu of making a thoroughgoing analysis of touch from the point of view of its historical background, I would instead like to examine the connections that touch may have with art and presentation, and thus explore the specific role of touch in Nancy’s philosophy. I shall consider this role in the light of contact without contact, of the limit of touch, of spacing and difference as well as the exposition of sense. Here I shall turn first to *Corpus*. The leitmotiv of this book is, as I see it, the alleged incompatibility between the body – the singular existence of man – and thinking: how can thinking touch the weight of the body, or how can the body touch thinking?

---

1205 Aristotle (1968). *On the Soul (De anima)*, Books II and III, trans. D. W. Hamlyn. Oxford: Clarendon Press. II, 6, 418a17-20. Namely, sight has colour, hearing sound, and taste flavour; touch, however, differs from the other senses in that it has many varieties of object. *Ibid.*, II, 6, 418a. In cognition, a sense organ is affected in some way, and changes are caused in it by things around us. In sense perception the sense organ receives the form of the object without its matter: the object actualizes a potentiality, which the organ has for receiving forms of objects, so that the sense organ becomes what the object is. The common sense is something by which the cognition of objects – their magnitude, motion, and time – is affected. This is to say that the presentation involved in such cognition is an affection of common sense.


1207 Cf. Nancy, *Corpus*, e.g. p. 50-54. A similar question, formulated somewhat differently, can be
Nancy’s notion of the body holds a somewhat ambiguous position between the empirical materiality of a body and philosophy understood as a corpus. “Body”, in Nancy’s use of the word, stands for something which might be called the body of thought. Gary Shapiro examines the relatedness of Nancy’s notion of corpus (which Shapiro defines as a “body of work”) and his understanding of philosophy. More exactly, according to Shapiro in question is “philosophy’s secular or imaginary conception of itself, that self-conception in which philosophy views itself as having transcendened or absorbed the body without remainder”. What will happen if philosophy cannot speak of the imagined and mastered “body”, and if philosophy instead faces itself as having a corpus, “the body that works on philosophy”? On the basis of what is argued by Nancy, should we make (con)tact with the disembodied thought, Shapiro asks, or should contact rather be avoided? In the context of the body, “touch” appears as a way of communication between the body and the mind, Psyche.

It appears that Nancy wants to introduce a world of bodies in the place of a world of ideas: he wishes to create a language which would not speak of the bodies as separate entities. He speaks of the body of the mind, the place and being of the body of the mind – the way we are a body, the body as a “here and now”. In fact, what I see as Nancy’s crucial problem comes up explicitly in Corpus where he asks: “How to touch at the body instead of signifying it or making it signify?” From the formulations such as “the body of the mind” or “the body of sense” one should not, however, draw the conclusion that the body would be primarily the intersection of the sensible and the intelligible, or of matter and spirit. Still less is it a question of an incarnation of the ideality of sense, as Nancy brings out explicitly. I would instead like to suggest that Nancy’s corpus reveals existence in different kinds of interrelation between discourse and matter. With the “ideality of sense” he points at a self-present and

---

1209 Ibid., p. 53.
1210 In Nancy, in “tact” a sense of avoiding too close a contact or of touching too much is involved. By using the word “(con)tact” Shapiro probably wishes to express contact in which the sense of tactfulness is retained.
1211 Nancy, Corpus, p. 12.
1212 Ibid., p. 24.
self-identical meaning, which, in articulating itself as meaning, always returns sense to itself, that is, to the ideal concept or essence which gives meaning.\textsuperscript{1213}

One might thus propose that Nancy’s “body of sense” is suspended on the very limit which gives it its most proper “sense”, and which exposes it as such. As a consequence, the body of sense, by exposing this suspension of sense, exposes \textit{existence}.\textsuperscript{1214} “Suspension” here is another name for what Nancy calls “effraction” or fragmentation – that is, the suspension is that of sense itself. As Ian James points out, the motives of “effraction” and “exposure” are probably aimed at implicating a notion that finite bodily sense makes sense, discloses a world, and thus constitutes existence.\textsuperscript{1215}

Still, one should not understand existence in a return to itself, in a gathering of its own identity and self-identity, but in a movement of dispersal. Sense, in this dispersal, fragmentation, or passage, articulates an experience of the limit: it articulates an experience both \textit{at} the limit and \textit{as} limit – as the limit of sense itself, as it is exposed without returning to reveal a world.\textsuperscript{1216} As I see it, this is to say that through our bodily existence we have access to a world in its plurality – fragmentation and dislocation – when a singular world opens up.

What Nancy wants to argue by this is that each work, synaesthetic in itself, would stand for the opening up of a world. This happens, however, only on the grounds of an irreducible plurality: to quote Nancy, it happens “insofar as ‘the world’ as such, in its being-world … is plurality of worlds”.\textsuperscript{1217} More exactly, what one may thus conclude is that the body’s analogy with art could be found in the singular plurality of the arts: in art, a singular figure or form presents itself among a multiplicity of possible figures.\textsuperscript{1218} In both world and art a spacing of space is at stake. Spacing, thus, is the notion which links the singular plural of art to Nancy’s discourse of the body. I therefore find it necessary to consider the body in the present context.

\textsuperscript{1213} See also James, \textit{The Fragmentary Demand}, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{1214} Nancy, \textit{Corpus}, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{1215} James, \textit{The Fragmentary Demand}, p. 132, 148.
\textsuperscript{1216} Cf. \textit{ibid.}, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{1217} Nancy, \textit{The Muses}, p. 31 (\textit{Les Muses}, p. 58-59).
\textsuperscript{1218} Cf. James, \textit{The Fragmentary Demand}, p. 218.
Nancy’s *Corpus* proceeds in a spiral-like and fragmentary manner, and it is structured by making the central ideas appear and reappear in new contexts. Perhaps more than in the rest of his writings, Nancy’s method is to *show* things in *Corpus* and to ask, not what is probable, but what is *obvious* in thinking of beings. In *Corpus* this means, more than anything else, that he affirms the alleged power of the dichotomy and opposition of body and mind in the Western metaphysical tradition. As an introduction, Nancy outlines the scene for what he believes to be the traditional thinking of the body and the world, and the “obsession” for making the absent body a present one. This thought is epitomized by the opening words of the book, with which the Christian Communion is given: *hoc est enim corpus meum* – “(Take, eat;) this is my body. (Do this as a commemoration of me)”.

In this phrase Nancy recognizes the Christian conception of incarnation where spirit is made flesh in the body of Christ.

By these words, Nancy makes reference to the body understood as an incarnation, of which we *have* to be convinced. With “us” he refers to the heirs of the metaphysical tradition; what Nancy’s question concerns, is what happens if metaphysics does not avoid touching the body. Namely, Nancy begins from the theological presumption that the body must be pronounced and confirmed in order to be realized. For Nancy the notion of the incarnate body is a figure inherited from the metaphysics of presence, and it is this very thought that he aims at breaking from in his *Corpus* by tearing apart the notion of the Communion. In another words, Nancy attempts to deconstruct the metaphysical tradition of haptology, or “haptocentric metaphysics”, as Derrida calls it. This tradition privileges immediacy, continuity, and indivisibility, whereas Nancy prefers to think of touch, which is also a separation, or a contact which occurs at a distance.

As such, the *hoc est enim corpus meum* is destined to be a prohibition to touch. It is a sign of idealization in that it hides the body from touch (soustrait le corps au toucher) by making it insensible and inaccessible to touch. The body has to be addressed; at the same time, its being “here” does not seem to

permit any kind of touching. The *here* has to be pronounced so as to confirm
the certainty of the incarnate body and to make its absence (or rather, Nancy
says, “the Absent” itself) appear. If, however, the “here” does not prove to be
as certain as it should be, if the sense certainty is touched or disturbed, it will
break down into chaos and all the senses are lost (*tous les sens se dérèglent*). According to Derrida’s interpretation, Nancy now maintains that the body of
Christ, which is exposed in communion, is tangible but untouchable. To
escape the duality of a body that both is and is not “here”, Nancy develops a
thinking of a body which is not just one and “here”. Or, it is “here”, but in an
endlessly multiple and at once unique way, as mortal and mundane bodies. The
body suggested by Nancy is singular and the place of each existence.

The finitude of one’s factual existence signifies, first of all, that the
appropriation and the property of every thing, or the being-thing-in-itself of
every thing, takes place as “there is”, and takes place only in this way. The “there
is” is not being, nor is it essence. The “there is” takes place as a “here and now”:
in a community, in a place defined by history. Whoever speaks here, they are
already speaking in another, incomparable, and unmistakably other *here*, in
which the *here* and whoever says it is lost, according to Werner Hamacher.
In fact, Nancy attempts to understand the body as a scene in which philosophy
takes place and from which any thought is expressed. The body is “here, now”,
it is an event: it arises and opens up the place in which being occurs.

Yet the unrenouncable gesture in these operations is that of a *here*: a *here
and now*; the place is not pre-given, but it is opened up through the reference
to it in the quotation. The now is not a point in time. Or, “the here has no
place: at every moment it is here and there, here and now, for here *is* now. *Hic
et nunc.*” The here is abandoned in its movement, it is given up and can only

1223 Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 9.
1224 Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, p. 79.
1225 What Gary Shapiro points out is that there are two kinds of bodies that Nancy speaks of:
odies as they become present in (for example) philosophy, and *corpus* in its finitude, as what comes,
what emerges, yet what cannot be fully here. Such a corpus is an event, “here and now” — to Shapiro;
only if the corpus is catalogued, does it meet its fulfilment. Shapiro, “Jean-Luc Nancy and the Corpus
of Philosophy”, p. 61, cf. *ibid.*, p. 52-53. As Derrida sees it, the body has to be pronounced aloud
to become real; if the certainty of the senses is touched, it turns into chaos, something breaks down,
senses tremble, directions fall into obscurity, significations run wild — “Sitôt touchée, la certitude
sensible vire au chaos, à la tempête, tous les sens s’y dérèglent”. Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.
76f.; Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 9.
38-39.
1227 Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 79; cf. Shapiro, “Nancy and the Corpus of Philosophy”, p. 61.
be repeated *here* as a *here*, given up in that way – *here* is thus exposed to an alteration. This is the law of its cessation, its ex-position or its abandonment. According to Gary Shapiro’s interpretation, “the *corps perdu* and the emerging corpus” are to be understood as two foci of an ellipse.\(^{1230}\)

In the previous example, the body appears as the paradigm of the untouchable. However, Nancy wishes to consider the question otherwise: neither as a spiritualized body or a word, nor as matter, but in terms of the body of sense. By the body of sense he means the one “*in which* a sense is given and *out of which* sense emerges”.\(^{1231}\) For Nancy the body is evident – yet its evidence is not that of a present thing, but of an inappropriable or unownable body which keeps at a distance, even when it is there (là) and exposed to another body – that is, to the world. How should this happen?

Nancy’s “touch” is, regardless of its various senses and uses, not to be understood as a metaphor.\(^{1232}\) By contrast, he tries to show the connotations and different forms of touch in their *concrete* being; Derrida even calls this enterprise an “absolute realism”. According to Derrida, it is in the name of touch that Nancy resists all kinds of idealism or subjectivism, be it transcendental or psychoanalytical.\(^{1233}\) Nancy’s “absolute realism” denies any idea of pure space or time, but suggests that “[t]here are only places, which are simultaneously locations and extensions of bodies”.\(^{1234}\) In Derrida’s view, the non-metaphoricity of Nancy’s touch is true even if “touch” cannot be taken as anything else but a figure. This is because “to touch” only means touching the limit, the edge, or the contour, the thing itself remaining untouched.\(^{1235}\) A similar reasoning concerns Nancy’s idea of the relation – one of dependency, as he wants to show – between the immateriality of thinking and the materiality of weighing. However, no more can the immateriality of thinking or the materiality of weighing thinking weigh up the weight than inversely: weight cannot touch thinking.\(^{1236}\) Yet they are intimately co-appropriated with one another, as their contact is what Nancy calls a limit-experience: sense is *toward* itself – here the *différance*, in accordance with which sense opens, is inscribed *along the edge* of the “in itself”, so that

---

\(^{1230}\) Shapiro, “Jean-Luc Nancy and the Corpus of Philosophy”, p. 62.

\(^{1231}\) Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 61 (*The Birth to Presence*, p. 192).

\(^{1232}\) Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 190.

\(^{1233}\) Derrida, *Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 60.

\(^{1234}\) Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, p. 77 (*Le poids d’une pensée*, p. 4). It is not, of course, difficult to see the connections between this thinking and the way the Heideggerian *Dasein* gives time and space to itself.


the weight is to be found in the contacts between things. The weight of a thought is what is called finitude.

For Nancy the body is local. Yet, as I see it, it is local without having any given place, localities exist by virtue of the body. But how should one characterize the body which is touched by sense but remains untouchable? What kind of sense does this body belong to? In Nancy’s explanation, the body is aphallic and acephalous, “without head and tail” (sans queue ni tête). This is not to judge the body as “non-sense”, but without a (figured or closed) sense: the body with neither head and tail, nor substance. Instead, the body gives place to local existence, since it is a place “for what is left here, without place”. The placeless place, Nancy suggests, is in contiguities and tangential contacts between the senses of things, that is, in an absolute difference and an absolute différance. This is what he calls the areality of the body. This thought can be taken still further: Catherine Malabou interprets Nancy’s notion of body, not as flesh and blood, but as something which becomes areal (s’aréalise).

In Derrida’s philosophy, the offering of such a place is the task of what he calls “writing”; according to Nancy, it is the place of “ontology”. The body is the place of ontology; inversely, ontology, “which has not been thought so far”, is that of the body, and of nothing else. To be more exact, it is the existence of the body that is ontology itself: ontology means “the mortal spacing” of the body, which only “ex-ists”, or extends outside of itself. For further clarification of the significance the body has, Nancy says, “Dead or alive, neither dead nor alive, I am the opening, the tomb or the mouth, one in another”. The idea that the body is aphallic and acephalous makes it “spread out [étal], equal with others, multiple, zoned, and touched”. The body is a thing, a res extensa, an ecstatic and exposed thing. I shall come back to this.

What is more, a human body is for Nancy technical or denatured from the start. The thought of the techne of bodies implies, first of all, the thought of a prosthetic supplement. Ecotechnics also points to the world of bodies

---

1237 Nancy, The Sense of the World, p. 61-62 (Le sens du monde, p. 101-102); cf. also Heidegger’s article “The Thing”.
1240 Nancy, Corpus, p. 39-40.
1242 Nancy, Corpus, p. 16-18.
1243 Ibid., p. 17.
1244 Ibid., p. 35.
1245 Cf. Derrida, Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 113. According to Derrida, it is the thinking of the techne of bodies which, most of all, makes a difference between Nancy’s ideas of the “proper body” and
which has neither a transcendent nor an immanent sense: ecotechnics tells of the dislocation of touch. Contrary to Cartesian immediacy, which would fuse the senses and “the” sense, Nancy brings to the fore the “local, modal, fractal” nature of touch, by which he underlines the fact that touching always includes the notion of spacing, it is touching at a distance.\textsuperscript{1246} Ecotechnics, in Derrida’s view, points to the decentralization which “deconstructs the system of ends”: it is the connection between the interrupting spacing of \textit{con-tact} and the question of technique. The term of ecotechnics points to the paradoxical place of the interval and to the irreducibility of the other and of the untouchable.\textsuperscript{1247}

Nancy builds his philosophy of the body of sense on a circularity of touching oneself (\textit{se toucher}). This is why he calls the body “the black hole”: the body is a double formula, and thus, it is “the sign of the self, and the being-self of the sign”. Here, sense makes the body, by virtue of which the body may make sense; this is a body of sense in the sense of the body.\textsuperscript{1248} The sense would be in the “black holes” of the body, that is, as I see it, in its indivisible being: it seems that the body exists in a place where the without-essence of the body and gravity of “flesh”.\textsuperscript{1246} Nancy, \textit{Corpus}, p. 76; cf. Derrida, \textit{Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy}, p. 146. According to Derrida, the question of ecotechnics returns to the problem of the immediacy of the body: this is the world of bodies with neither a transcendent nor an immanent sense, in which the dislocation of touch and hence the thought of difference, of spacing and departure (the departure of existence from itself) comes to the fore.

\textsuperscript{1247} Derrida, \textit{Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy}, p. 251-252. “Ecotechnics” implies the idea that things are originally mimetic and groundless – correspondingly, art would imitate only the production of its own forms. The body is not just a place for the sense to expose or open itself. Yet Nancy does not think of the question simply conversely: that the body would be the \textit{signifying body}, or the body signified. This is how the way the tradition of metaphysics would understand the question of the body and mind, but Nancy tries to go beyond this. For him, it is “an absolute contradiction” not to be a body without being a spirit, which, for its part, “disincorporates” (\textit{désincorpore}) the body, makes it incorporeal. At the same time as the body is an empty place without essence and substance, sense is the body; there is no sense without a place for it. In fact, the only thinkable body is the signifying body. Thus Nancy claims that the signifying body would be either the “inside” or the “outside”, or the inside and the outside of the body. This is because it remains on a threshold, which, as we have seen, is comparable to the way art exists; the painting makes up the threshold between “the intactness and touching of light and shadow”. In metaphysical thought, the “inside” is the place in which the representation – feeling, perception, image, memory, idea or consciousness – is formed. In this case, “the ‘outside’ appears (to itself) as strange and as a ‘spirit’, while at other times, the body is the signifying ‘outside’: the “zero degree’ of orientation and of the aim, origin, receiver of relations, the unconscious”. In the case of the unconscious, the “outside” appears as a thick interiority, a cave filled with intentionality. See Nancy, \textit{Corpus}, p. 60-62; \textit{The Sense of the World}, p. 82 (\textit{Le sens du monde}, p. 131); Derrida, \textit{Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy}, p. 68.

\textsuperscript{1248} Derrida, \textit{Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy}, p. 64-65. It is especially here that Derrida sees “undeniable implicit affinities” between Nancy and Merleau-Ponty. In \textit{Corpus}, p. 66, Nancy cites Merleau-Ponty’s idea of “proper body” (\textit{corps propre}): “what we call flesh, this internally worked mass, does not have a name in any philosophy”. Derrida examines Nancy’s connection to Merleau-Ponty on the basis of the latter’s interpretations of Edmund Husserl’s \textit{Ideen II}. Merleau-Ponty’s analysis proceeds from the thought of sensuous reflexivity: the body is both touching and touched, subject and object. Still, in Husserl’s theory, no access to the body (\textit{Leib}) of the other is possible except indirectly, through appresentation or introjection. The appresentation of the body of the other can never be one’s own, and in this sense, it stays inappropriopriate. This abyss is what makes possible the experience of the body of the other; for Derrida, this perhaps corresponds to Nancy’s idea of the singular plural of being. See Derrida, \textit{Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy}, p. 209-243, esp. p. 218; cf. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1960). \textit{Signes}. Paris: Gallimard, p. 209-212.
– the weight of sense – coincide, or touch one another. The “gravity” of a body – the one that weighs – gives the body its sense. \(^{1249}\) Thus, gravity itself is the fact of the body’s existence: it is the untouchable heart of the body, the body which is without essence.

To complete the circularity, Nancy has to answer the question how is it that the body may have sense. Besides proposing that the body is the body of sense, Nancy’s “absolute realism” goes in the opposite direction: it consists of a “co-appropriation of thinking and weighing”, at the same time confessing the incommensurability of thinking and weighing. The idea of the weight of thought is incorporated in a body which both touches and is touched. Touching between these two happens, according to Derrida, when “the touch offers the untranslatable to be touched” (le toucher donne à toucher l’intraduisible). \(^{1250}\)

Thinking weighs exactly the weight of sense (pensée pèse exactement le poids d’un sens). \(^{1251}\) The body is the weight; it weighs in itself. \(^{1252}\) The act of thinking “is an actual weighing; it is the very weighing of the world, of things, of the real as sense”. \(^{1253}\) Each sense, in turn, is to be thought of in its singularity: “Bodies are heavy”. \(^{1254}\)

Singularity derives from the oscillation from oneself to oneself (de soi à soi), and here “[t]hought weighs at the point where reason, being (present) to itself [étant à soi], distances itself from itself and does so with the whole distance of this to”. \(^{1255}\) Sense falls to the body, making it weigh, and this is probably one factor which saves Nancy’s thinking on sense from the idea of traditional relativism.

As has been shown above, the formulation of “the body of sense” does not refer to anything like the signifying or the intelligible body. This is also why, in Nancy’s view, the body cannot be “saved” or expressed with geometric formulas, for this kind of “fleeting” of formulas is “suspended in the air”. Instead, he sees it

---

\(^{1249}\) Cf. Nancy, Corpus, esp. p. 84-85.

\(^{1250}\) Derrida, Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 69.

\(^{1251}\) See Nancy, The Gravity of Thought, p. 77 (Le poids d’une pensée, p. 5).

\(^{1252}\) Nancy, Corpus, p. 10.

\(^{1253}\) Nancy, The Gravity of Thought, p. 76 (Le poids d’une pensée, p. 3). In the English translation the French sens has here been rendered as “meaning”, which (like elsewhere) I prefer to replace by “sense”.

\(^{1254}\) Ibid., p. 77 (Le poids d’une pensée, p. 4: “Les corps sont pesants.”).

\(^{1255}\) Ibid., (Le poids d’une pensée, p. 4-5). The sense of a thing is always inclined or towards another thing; sense may exist only because it is in relation to something. This means that Nancy’s thinking of sense is built on an idea of relations between senses. Yet, this does not imply that senses, although they are incommensurable, would be without measure: they are measured against each other. It is for this reason that one could think of a kind of “absolute relativism” or “infinite finitude” in speaking of Nancy’s notion of sense. Cf. Librett, Jeffrey (1997). “Translator’s Foreword”, in Nancy, The Sense of the World, p. vii-xxvi.
necessary to address the impenetrable materiality of the body, saying that the body “has to touch the ground”. One may well wonder what this ambiguity means. In this matter, Gayatri C. Spivak refers to the analogy between Nancy’s saying that “all misunderstanding is still understanding”, and that corpus, which is neither substance nor subject, is a catalogue without a logos, which is “logos” itself”, as Nancy notes in Corpus. That the “cata-logon” is still the “logos”, in Spivak’s view, would be thus the reason why she argues that Nancy gives in to catalogues and makes lists. Gary Shapiro thinks much in the same vein: he holds that there exists an ambiguity between the body which is not integral to thought or the logos, and the body, which Nancy nevertheless sees as being subordinated to the logos: this would be shown, for example, by Nancy’s very attempt to create sets of entries or catalogues of the anatomy of the body, of its parts and locations.

For this reason I find it doubtful whether Nancy’s interest in “cataloguing” the body’s dimensions really points to subordinating it to thought or to linguistic signification. When considering the connection of the body and the logos, or the signified body, Spivak and Shapiro make their conclusions despite the fact stressed by Nancy that the body is not a locus of writing, not where one writes, nor is it what one writes. The body excises outside of language what it at the same time inscribes with language. In other words, the body is what writing excises – rather than something that could be transformed into writing, the body is for Nancy the tracing and the trace, “more deconstructed than all ‘literality’, a ‘lettericity’ that is no longer legible”. And consequently, “a body is what cannot be read in a writing”. This notion can be further clarified on the basis of what Nancy proposes in Corpus. Namely, according to his own explanation, he does not aim to show how the body could be signified or how it could be made to signify, but at expressing how the body may be touched, whereby it may have sense. As has been indicated above, sense takes place nowhere else than on the limit of the body, and the same goes for

1256 Cf. Nancy, Corpus, p. 11.
1257 Spivak, “Response to Jean-Luc Nancy”, p. 34.
1258 Such catalogues are numerous throughout Corpus: they consist, for example, of “[s]ibs, skulls, pelvises, irritations, shells, diamonds, drops, foams, masses, excavations, fingernail moons, minerals, acids, feelers, thoughts, claws, slates, pollens, sweat, shoulders, domes, suns, anus, eyelashes, dribbles, liqueurs, slits, blocks, slicing, squeezing, removing, bellowing, smashing, burrowing, spoiling, piling up, sliding, exhaling, leaving, flowing – ”. Nancy, Corpus, p. 105 (The Birth to Presence, p. 207); cf. also Corpus, p. 74-75, 87, 92-93 (The Birth to Presence, e.g. p. 200).
1260 Nancy, Corpus, p. 76.
touching. How to touch the body – which is always some singular body – with the incorporeal “sense” is now the question.\textsuperscript{1261}

In exscription writing situates itself outside of the sense it inscribes in and as writing.\textsuperscript{1262} “Writing” here is not an exponent of linguistic signification, if this is to mean representation or mimesis. Rather, writing stands for exscription which describes the relation to exteriority, or separation which is maintained between impenetrable matter and bodily sense, and between bodily sense and linguistic signification.\textsuperscript{1263} Thus, I think it would be most accurate to suggest that Nancy’s ontology of the body never gathers being up into the word or logos, but always points to it as the excess of signification or of any relation of the signifier to signified.

But what is finally the role of the catalogues of the body in \textit{Corpus}? In Nancy’s own words, they are there to indicate what is opposite to Spivak’s and Shapiro’s interpretations: that “it is the after all the body that requests, demands this anatomical and catalogical writing, the kind of writing that would enable it \textit{not to signify}.”\textsuperscript{1264} More than entering the sphere of signification, the lists would thus point to a body that no spirit has become – not incarnation, but on the contrary, “a body given, always already given, abandoned, and withdrawn from all the plays of signs”. It is not difficult, then, to notice the affinity which Nancy’s “body” has with the Heideggerian \textit{Dasein}: both \textit{Dasein} and the body are names for “being” and “sense” in that they have no pre-existing signification, but are always in excess of signification. Rather, they have sense only because of their situatedness, or better yet, sense takes place in them at a specific time and place. With his notion of body, however, Nancy wants to replace \textit{Dasein} by giving it more “bodily” aspects or by showing its embodied and material existence – in a word, its gravity.

Still, apart from Nancy’s own explication of the need for catalogues of the parts and functions of the body, one may bring into question Spivak’s and Shapiro’s tendency to read these as attempts to totalize the body. What I would like to ask is whether the citing of the dimensions of the body really point to the fact that the body would be subjected to the logos or to conceptualization. Could it be that the lists are, rather, indications of the inappropriable nature of the body – that one could not speak of the body without referring to its details,\textsuperscript{1261} \textsuperscript{1262} \textsuperscript{1263} \textsuperscript{1264}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1261} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 13.
\item \textsuperscript{1262} See James, \textit{The Fragmentary Demand}, p. 150.
\item \textsuperscript{1263} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 149; cf. Nancy, \textit{Corpus}, p. 76.
\item \textsuperscript{1264} Nancy, \textit{The Birth to Presence}, p. 198; italics are mine (cf. \textit{Corpus}, p. 77).
\end{itemize}
as little as one can refer to one single notion of art? Or that the body would be nowhere else than in its singular articulations, but that it offers, like the work of art, access without access: only, through different registers, to still more definite ones? In other words, this is to say that the multiplicity of the catalogues would manifest the idea that the body is not to be listed in an exhaustive fashion; that is, that the body avoids identification with any singular entries or epithets. The use of such names can mean that there is no such thing as the indivisible body.

The singularity of a thing, or the unicity of existence, takes always place in its material there is. Matter is the difference through which something, and several things, are possible. Nancy calls matter “the reality of difference” that is “necessary in order for there to be something and some things”, and the ideality of difference cannot be separated from its materiality.\textsuperscript{1265} The materiality of the there is is a question of the touch by which any sense of the world which comes into presence is finite, whereas the sense is infinite, that is, limited in its scope. Finitude is the sensing-itself of the infinite in action.\textsuperscript{1266} Now, when considering finitude from the aesthetic point of view, I shall try to find out what the framework is like which a finite work of art gives to the infinite sense.\textsuperscript{1267}

What Nancy describes as the gravity of thought is that of a localized body, or the materiality of reason. A sense cannot exist as anything but local and singular, as a being-there: he names a local taking place of a sense “\textit{corpus}”. The world of corpuses is exposed or presented, which happens only when the world is touched by the sense. The weight of thought is the weight of the thing insofar as that thing weighs outside of thought, insofar as it punctures and overflows that thought.\textsuperscript{1268} For proportions to develop between the disproportionate, a common measurement has to be found in the incommensurable: the world means measuring the immeasurable.

Finitude, the impossibility of experience to appropriate what it represents – its (in)ability to measure the immeasurable – are some of themes which Nancy focuses on in his article “The Weight of a Thought”. In this text he explores what is “proper to thinking \textit{and} to weighing, to thinking \textit{as much as} weighing, thus being properly neither”.\textsuperscript{1269} He takes an approach to these topics by bringing together opposing philosophical concepts, such as thinking and weighing or

\begin{thebibliography}{1269}
\bibitem{1265} Nancy, \textit{The Sense of the World}, p. 57-58 (\textit{Le sens du monde}, p. 96-98).
\bibitem{1266} Nancy, \textit{The Muses}, p. 33 (\textit{Les Muses}, p. 61).
\bibitem{1267} Cf. Nancy, \textit{Au fond des images}, p. 30, 94.
\bibitem{1268} Nancy, \textit{The Gravity of Thought}, p. 79 (\textit{Le poids d’une pensée}, p. 7).
\bibitem{1269} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 75 (\textit{Le poids d’une pensée}, p. 1).
\end{thebibliography}
materiality and immateriality. At stake, thus, is the notion of limit: experience as touching its proper limit. According to Nancy, there cannot be pure space or time, but only places, in other words, locations and extensions of bodies. This is what he calls “a transcendental aesthetics of gravity [pesanteur]”.

Thought weights at the point where reason, being (present) to itself [étant à soi], distances itself from itself and does so with the whole distance of this to itself.

To summarize, thought thus proves to be inappropriable: this distance of a presence-to-itself of an existence whose existing means precisely this presence-to, and “this distance is nothing other than sense, absolutely”. For this reason, an existence exists only in the disjunction of the presence-to, so that sense is an event, and not an end, for there is no appropriation of a sense. In other words, sense is endless ending (finition infinie), the noncompleted and the nonfinished, the “not-yet” and the “yet-to-come”.

The weight of thought is then the weight of the thing insofar as that thing weighs outside of thought, insofar as it overflows the thought that it is. The weight of a thought can only be open to the thing, and to its heaviness. Being-open is nothing but being-finite, and the “open” is nothing other than the to. Sense needs a density, a thickness, a mass and an opacity by means of which it leaves itself open and lets itself be touched as sense right there where it becomes absent as discourse. Finitude designs nothing other than the sense of existence insofar as this sense itself actually exists, insofar as it is given at the very level of the singular existent, at the very level of the “open” of that existent, and insofar as this sense does not subsume existence under an essence. Existence does not have a sense, in the sense of a property or a signification, but sense exists, or existence itself is sense. Existence is the appropriation of

---

1270 Ibid., p. 77 (Le poids d’une pensée, p. 4).
1271 Ibid.
1272 Ibid., p. 78 (Le poids d’une pensée, p. 5-6). To clarify, one might say that a sense, as a relation-to-itself, if it is understood as the coming of the other as “self” and to the “self”. The finite itself is absolute; for Nancy, finitude is not the privation of the infinite, for we are not deprived of anything. Finitude, as a singular, fractal and uncompleted totality, is the exposure of being-exposed, which is also called “existence”. In finitude, that is, in the weight of a thought, because a thought does not complete the sense (of what) it thinks, and thus lets the “object”, or the thing itself, have the weight that carries it away from completed, presentified, or signified meaning.
1273 Nancy, The Gravity of Thought, p. 79-82 (Le poids d’une pensée, p. 7-12). Here, Nancy aims at showing that the weight of a thought, or the materiality of a thing, are the inappropriability of the proper. Weight is something that exposes a thing, which makes a sense present in it obviousness – senses weigh on one another. A figure would be an exposition (or the sketching of an art) of the inappropriable gravity of sense. In a figure, in turn, at stake is letting the weight of a thought weigh, just as it comes, just as it passes away. 83: Figures are the shattering of the exposed identity of sense, and the dispersion of its “sense”. In this context, Nancy comments on Hegel’s idea of the figure-moments: these are not successive figurations of the same identical sense, but the shattering of the exposed identity of sense, and the dispersion of its “sense”. Ibid., p. 82-83 (Le poids d’une pensée, p. 12-14).
the inappropriable – the weight of a thought is “exactly the inappropriability of appropriation, or the impropriety of the proper (proper to the proper itself, absolutely)”. Inappropriate sense presents itself in as many figures as there are existences. The inappropriable is not presented, but it presents itself, it presents the absentification that happens in the coming of presence.

THE INTERVAL OF TOUCH

In *Corpus*, Nancy summarizes the relation of body and mind by quoting a note by Sigmund Freud, a note which he supposes to be Freud’s “great saying”: “Psyche is spread out: she knows nothing about it”.1274 Derrida draws extensive conclusions from this statement and from Nancy’s interpretations of it.1275 That Psyche is extended or spread out (*ausgedehnt; étendue*) implies, according to Nancy, that Psyche – thought, spirit – is corporeal, while it is also “untouchable”. Yet this does not mean that a body would be an incarnated body, in the sense that spirit would have become flesh. Instead of a thought of incarnation, Nancy wants to trace “a body that no spirit *has become*”. This is a body not “produced by the self-production or reproduction of the spirit, but a body given, always already given, abandoned, and withdrawn from all the plays of signs”.1276 He is now speaking of a touched and touching body. In my view, Nancy thus seeks to create a language for a body which cannot be turned into any discourse. The reason for this is that Nancy’s notion of the body is a singular one: it is the body of a sense (*le corps du sens*), but only *touched* by the sense.1277 As a consequence of the singular nature of the body, thinking and touch cannot be returned to one another.1278

Now, if for Nancy, “Psyche is extended”, how should one speak of the corporeal extension of mind? Although, as I have proposed above, in question in the “body of sense” or “bodily sense” is not so much a crossing point of the sensible and the intellectual than the fragmentation of sense and matter, as well as their originary separation. Nancy thus wants to speak of sense’s relation to

---

1274 “Psyche ist ausgedehnt: weiß nichts davon.” This is a posthumous note by Freud, which in many respects guides Nancy’s inquiries into the problems of the body and the mind. Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 22; cf. *The Gravity of Thought*, p. 83 (*Le poids d’une pensée*, p. 13-14); see also Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 199.
other senses, and it is for this reason that the basis of a singular sense turns out to be irreducibly plural for him. When thinking and its weight meet, this is the encounter of the incommensurate entities. The incommensurability of mind and body comes to be shared. What is thus shared is a spacing: an opening or an interval. The body and the psyche (or thinking) both have their own extension, and the conceptual passage between these is what exceeds the common measure. As a result, according to Derrida’s interpretation, the common incommensurability goes through a thinking of a place (lieu), a place which cannot be reduced either to an objective extension or to an objective space. This spacing precedes any actual space; it is no more sensible than it is intelligible.

In considering the scope of Nancy’s word “touch” (le toucher) and “to touch” (toucher), the first point of reference to it are the five senses, among which touch occupies a primary position. Tactility encompasses all the other senses, thus being a paradigm for all sensibility. Nancy has undertaken to “deconstruct” the traditional dualism between sensibility and intelligibility in his Corpus. There, he departs from the questioning of the metaphysical discourse, which has, according to him, not been able to bring the body to the conceptual sphere, despite its urge to do this. Therefore, he focuses his critique on the totalizing framework in which philosophy has spoken of the body. To speak of the body as something that becomes present in philosophy is to speak of the body as an event, as what comes and emerges but yet cannot be fully here. As I see it, this discussion is essentially linked with Nancy’s notion of finitude; this will be clarified later in my text.

How the body and the mind touch each other and how to speak of their relation, in other words, how to express the relation between the sensible and

---

1279 Cf. James, The Fragmentary Demand, p. 216.
1281 See Derrida, Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 37.
1282 In his commentary, Derrida brings forth some of the most important thinkers behind Nancy’s notion of touch. First, there is Aristotle’s On the Soul (Peri Psykhês or De anima). Of modern philosophers, Kant has probably the greatest influence on Nancy. In Kantian terms, Nancy’s “touch” is what lies between understanding and sensibility; this is also the place of schematism and Dichtung, the sensuous faculty or sensuous figuration. For Kant, immediate, outer perception is the most certain kind of sensibility. Among the senses, touch is the one which underlies sight and hearing. Husserl continues with the “tactilist” or “haptocentric” tradition, whereas Merleau-Ponty develops a notion of symmetry between the touched and the touching, a symmetry which Husserl denies. Nancy, in turn, attempts to think of touching what does not touch itself: that is to say, the touching of a limit, or touching with the “point”. Cf. Derrida, ibid., p. 55-56.
1283 Cf. Shapiro, “Jean-Luc Nancy and the Corpus of Philosophy”, p. 61.
the intellectual, are Nancy’s questions. Therefore, he discusses their “shared incommensurability”, or the thought of the body of a sense in *Corpus*. In exploring this, my focus will be on the manner in which the extension of the mind may be expressed. How do we approach corpus by means of philosophy? These questions lead us to consider the difference of presentation, which, in the case of Nancy’s “touch”, at least as Derrida sees it, makes us to consider that the contact between body and mind must be found in the lack of contact. That is, the contact must be found in touching without touching, in an abstinence from touch.

Touch demands that there should be a difference in which the touch may take place. What thus opens is an interval: it exists between “us”, between our contours. This is possible, Nancy explains, only because bodies are *partes extra partes*; all that is shared, is the difference. This, of course, reminds us of Nancy’s notion of community, the members of which share the fact that there is nothing to be shared. Senses open to each other in a community of communication. That a singular sense is born requires a difference from other senses – hence, its opening to other senses must take place in common with other senses. That something as sense may be exposed or presented to each other requires a thinking of distance and difference. In other words, being takes place only when beings are touched by each other or when they are exposed to other beings. The idea that sense is shared by a community does not, however, mean that sense would exist *between* the members of a community.

First of all, the bodies articulate the space: “Because the bodies are not in space, but space is in the bodies, the space is a spacing, a tension of place”. *Partes extra partes* means that bodies “do not become undone, nor do they dissolve into other bodies, nor do they fuse with a spirit”; bodies are outside each other; and what is impenetrable is not the thickness of the *pars*, but the distance of the *extra*. The bodies *are* in the open, yet they do not open anything themselves. The “open” is not, however, a noun. *Partes extra partes* could be called “intrinsic exteriority”, as Derrida does. Furthermore, Derrida interprets the “extra” not as another “part” between “parts”, but only the sharing (*partage*)

1285 *Ibid.*, e.g. p. 81.
1286 Nancy, *Corpus*, e.g. p. 80.
1288 Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 73 (*The Birth to Presence*, p. 203).
1289 Derrida, *Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 28. Yet, Derrida points out, it is often thought that not all extension is structured according to the principle of *partes extra partes*: the living body is organized *partes extra partes*, but it also has a relation to itself – Nancy, however, shows something else.
of parts. In question would thus be “[s]haring, partition, departure”. The shared spacing is, then, the condition of all extension, without which there would be no touch.

What is meant by touch in Nancy’s philosophy is the relation to the world. The body is the place in which touch takes place: a place “which spaces the phallus and the cephalus, giving them space to take place”. Touching is not comprehension, but it points to addressing someone or something showing tact – this is why Nancy also compares ontology with writing (écriture). In writing, as introduced by Derrida, signs always refer to yet more signs ad infinitum, since there is no ultimate referent or foundation of linguistic signs; in other words, there are no ideal meanings in language. In this way, writing is a process of infinite referral, or it is a process of never arriving at a meaning itself: any text consists of comings into presence in an endless sequence, the openings of presence having no foundation in themselves. As for Nancy, he describes Derridean “writing” as “altered sense” or “the infinite re-petition of sense”, the access of sense to sense in its own demand, an access that does not accede. By this, Nancy points to a notion of presence as withdrawal, while the withdrawing is exposed as a trace. Nancy’s use of the term “writing” includes the idea that language is alone: writing remains of language when it has unburdened itself of sense.

The analogy between body and writing is, according to Nancy, in the fact that writing is thought which is addressed and sent to the body, when bodies are the ones which make thought distant and strange. This is to say that “from my body I address my body” (c’est depuis mon corps que je suis adressé à mon corps): the distance permits the bodies to be singular. Touching by addressing is to send oneself towards the touch of something which is “outside, hidden, apart or distanced”. In this way, touch is the “strange contact” which comes outside, and stays strange in the contact, and furthermore stays stranger to the contact. Thus, they are neither transcendent, immanent, nor do they mean transsubstantiation, that is, “generalised incarnation”. Writing addresses – or addresses us – “from here to there, just here”. This process is for

---

1291 Ibid., p. 18.
1292 See Derrida, Of Grammatology.
1293 Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 94-95 (Une pensée finie, p. 274-275).
1294 Ibid., p. 28, 98 (Une pensée finie, p. 50, 279).
1295 Nancy, Corpus, p. 19.
1296 Ibid.
Nancy the exscription of the body: the body is sent to being, or being sends itself. The body is ex-scribed (ex-crit), “written out”, in the process when ego is forced out. In his interpretation, Derrida states that in question in speaking about the world of the bodies, in which a difference or an interval is constitutive, is Heidegger’s “dechristianization”. This is to say that there is no longer anything which might be called the globalization of the world: for Heidegger, “the world worlds” (die Welt weltet), or produces itself as a singular world without a sense of globalization. Nancy, for his part, states that the question of the necessity and of the sense of the world will have formed the self-deconstruction, which is internally at work in onto-theology. This is to say that the world is moving away from any status of object, and instead tends to become itself the “subject” of its own “worldliness” (“mondialité”) or even “globalization” (mondialisation). The same thought is further illuminated in The Sense of the World. In it Nancy proposes that “[t]he word world has no unity of sense other than this one: a world … is always a differential articulation of singularities that make sense in articulating themselves, along the edges of articulation”. Thus, the world dissolves any sense of the world in its own becoming-worldly, which happens “as the nudity in the process of being born that sense itself is”. Here, the dehiscence of the act of sensing corresponds to ek-sisting in general.

1297 In Nancy’s idea of exscription Derrida finds an echo of all the thinking which points outside of subjectivity: some related terms are “ex-pulsion”, “ex-pression”, “ex-cretion”, as well as the thought of “excess” which pushes ‘inexorably outside’, to the point of throwing (to eject, to deject [déjeter], to object, to abject) the subjectivity of ego in exteriority. Also, Derrida suggests, the scheme of Nancy’s discourse is, among other things, connected with Heidegger’s notion of Geworfenheit, thrownness, of an opening in and through which the I is, in fact, properly thrown. As a result, what is born is the original spatiality and a trace (trace), in which only ego can emerge, open up (se tracer), and think of itself. See Nancy, Ego sum, p. 162-163; also Nancy, The Gravity of Thought, p. 79 (Le poids d’une pensée, p. 7); Derrida, Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 39-40.

1298 As soon as a body spaces itself, it is expelled – this is the world of bodies that Nancy calls immondice, “refuse”, “the filth of the world”. Spacing is also the principle according to which Nancy’s “world of bodies” is organized. Here, as I see it, spacing is to be understood as the suspense of sense. Namely, “as soon as the world is world, it also produces itself (expels itself) as filth”. The world is being without either principle or end, and this is what “the spacing of bodies” means to Nancy: “the in-finite impossibility to homogenize the world with itself, and sense [sens] with blood [sang]”. He adds: “the openings of blood are identically those of sense, and this identity is made of nothing else but the absolute rejection of oneself which is the world of the bodies”. The articulation of sense, and of the body, is its disarticulation: while the sense is rejected, it is exscribed. When touching itself, the world rejects itself. Nancy, Corpus, p. 90-95.


1301 Ibid., p. 79 (Le sens du monde, p. 126-127). In the opening pages of Corpus he claims that there is no longer “the sense of the world” (Corpus, p. 13) – according to Derrida, this is Nancy’s interpretation of the Heideggerian deconstruction of Christianity. It corresponds with Nancy’s “globalization” (mondialisation), which takes place when “the world worlds”. See Derrida, Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 68f.
In Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, space is a necessary a priori representation (*Vorstellung*) that underlies all outer intuitions or sense perceptions.\(^{1302}\) This notion is linked with Kant’s “transcendental aesthetics”. By this, Kant means the conditions of sensual knowledge, or the “science of all principles of a priori sensibility”. The matter of sensibility, or the appearance which corresponds to sensation, is capable of being “ordered in certain relations” which constitute the form of sensibility. These are the pure, a priori intuitions of space and time, which are pure and a priori by virtue of their priority to appearances, and they are intuitions by virtue of co-ordinating but not subsuming sensations in the manner of concepts.\(^{1303}\)

There is still more complexity to Nancy’s notion of touch. “Touch” points at sensibility which does not touch anything, pure sensibility without empirical contact, self-touching (*un se-toucher*) without touch.\(^{1304}\) There is a spacing or a syncope at work in touch at the moment the other is addressed: touch is *at once* autoaffection and heteroaffection. Touch touches itself, which makes it self-affection. At the same time, it is *your* touching – or touching the other in oneself, in general. As well as “I” touches itself (*je se touche*), it touches its own limits in touching “you”. According to Derrida’s interpretation, what is thus born is a distance even where *I* touches itself – in the heart of “I” there proves to be a difference and a break or a syncope, as if one were addressing the other in oneself. The difference here is the difference of being to itself.\(^{1305}\) It can thus be said that touch posits the difference between the touching and the touched, and this interval is exposition itself.\(^{1306}\)

When “I touches itself”, Nancy is speaking of self-affection and its tactile figure. “I” addresses itself in a soliloquy, which is interrupted from the beginning. Here, self-affection is addressed to you (*se toucher toi*). Touch touches only the limit of one touching itself. This is why touching takes place between the touchable and its untouchable limit.\(^{1307}\) The body is addressed by

---

\(^{1302}\) Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 24 (Transcendental Aesthetics, § 2; Pluhar’s translation, p. 78).

\(^{1303}\) Ibid., A 19-22.

\(^{1304}\) Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, p. 59. With Kant, when the matter coming from understanding and from feeling have been detached in the representation of the body, something is still left from empirical intuition: extension (*Ausdehnung*) and figure (*Gestalt*).

\(^{1305}\) Cf. ibid., p. 42, 47.

\(^{1306}\) See also Nancy, *Des lieux divins*, p. 67. Nancy’s saying “cela se touche” can be translated either as “it touches itself” or “one touches it, it lets itself be touched”. For translations, cf. Derrida, “Le toucher. Touch/to touch him”, p. 125; also, for “là où ça se touche, un je”, see Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, p. 47.

exscribing, “writing it out”. The ontology of the body is, according to Nancy, equal to the exscription of being, in other words, existence, which is directed (adressée) outside of it.\footnote{1308 \textit{Nancy, Corpus}, p. 20. This is one of the main themes in Nancy’s book \textit{Corpus}, which is concerned with the Cartesian separation of body and mind. In \textit{Corpus} Nancy wants to investigate their unity, stating that body is the non-discursive place of thought, in which sense is given and out of which sense emerges. \textit{Nancy, Corpus}, cf. 19-25.} This would be to say that it is not possible to write (to exscribe being) “to” the body, or to write “the” body without discontinuities and interruptions in the discourse itself.\footnote{1309 \textit{Ibid.}, p. 21.} To Derrida, the core of Nancy’s thought of the difference in touch is that undecidability makes the decision time and again when the syncope is decided.\footnote{1310 See \textit{Derrida, Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy}, p. 37, 51. To Nancy’s mind, Kant would have “nothing to say” of the connection of the body and mind; Derrida objects to this thought. See \textit{ibid.}, p. 51.} As I see it, syncope or spacing allows him to think of touch as something which takes place singularly and makes one think of subjectivity as \textit{unum quid}, as something which opens itself as \textit{I}. This is consistent with what is termed the subject of enunciation by several French contemporary thinkers.

To draw together what has been said above, one of the characteristics of Nancy’s touch is that it touches without touch. Derrida defines it as spacing \textit{a priori}. Nancy’s idea of touch is founded on self-touching in the event of spacing: one touches and is touched at the very moment when there is a difference and a syncope in the core of touch. In touch there cannot thus be a question of appropriation – or if there is, it takes place only as expropriation. To touch means cutting contact, which is possible in the loss itself in the first place. Derrida names this the abstinence from touch: according to him, there is an articulation which is unable to be articulated by the \textit{ego}, which is capable of touching its heart when addressing (\textit{en touchant à}) it.\footnote{1311 \textit{Derrida, Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy}, p. 47.} Nancy’s so-called haptology is thus, to quote Derrida, a matter of \textit{tact}: touch manages to interrupt itself – it “succeeds in making a contact, in making itself \textit{as} contact, thus in \textit{self-touching} by interrupting itself”.\footnote{1312 Cf. \textit{ibid.}, p. 51.} To touch is touching without touching \textit{too much}: it is tactility, in which the crucial moment is tact. Tact, in turn, presupposes a thought of limit.
TOUCH AND EXPOSITION

What is the common incommensurability that Nancy speaks of? How is it possible that the incommensurable body and sense may “touch” each other? The answers – or, what makes it possible that there are something like answers, in the first place – must be sought in the way that the two incommensurates are exposed to one another. Above I have referred to the notions of exposition and exscription, and, as their common condition, to the being of corpuses as partes extra partes. The structure partes extra partes, the fact that bodies are each outside one another, is the grounds for thinking that they touch without touching. This thought leads one to consider the limit of touch, and with it, the limit of touching what does not touch itself. That is to say, the touching of a limit, or touching with a “point”, that is, with an edge.

As for the notion of exposition, I have taken it up elsewhere in my dissertation, and for this reason it will not be discussed at great length in the present context. For Nancy, exposition is the event when the world opens as something. However, there are some points worth specific examination as far as touch is concerned in relation to exposition. One thing is Freud’s note, often cited by Nancy, according to which “Psyche is spread out: she knows nothing about it”. In Nancy’s view, “psyche” thus is the body, a fact which goes unnoticed by psyche itself. Psyche, or mind, is extended as soon as it is born; to be born is the same thing as spacing, it is an exit from punctuality, in a similar way that time is constituted in Heidegger. That psyche is extended does not mean that spirit would be incarnated, but rather that psyche takes on a “local colour”: complexion or skin colour (carnation), an existence and some sense. In On the Soul, Aristotle describes the union of the soul and the living body as an impression in wax. The union, then, presents itself in what Nancy calls “ectopias”, that is, displacements. Body means spacing: it is a space as well as it makes space by dislocating itself. The body is in a place, but also, it is of a place.

In the case of the body, like elsewhere, “exposition” necessarily points to the modes of presentation: it presupposes inclination and being-towards. The ideas of inclination and being-towards, in turn, gather the whole vocabulary which in
Nancy’s philosophy is related to the problems of subjectivity. Namely, the body is articulated according to a distance: the body is always in a state of dislocation and departure. The selfness (aseity) of the subject does not exist anywhere but in the distance and the departure; here is its place and moment of its presence and sense. The body is, for Nancy, “the departure of the self, to the self”.1316 The body is the being-exposed of being, not that of a surface (of the body), but its extension exposes other extensions; Derrida describes this kind of unfolding in exposition with the notion dépli.1317 The body as a sensing body resides in the differences which thus arise. The aesthetics of the body – Nancy calls “the aesthetic body” a tautology – exposes a still new aesthetics, and the body is its assemblage.

The spacing is decided every time that it takes place. This is to say that the obviousness or patency of the world is given outer figure or form in it. This thinking, of course, has its parallel in Nancy’s idea of art as technique: a means of giving form to the formless. On a more general scale, the decision is made out of abandoned being. Being happens through abandon: being is always already given, as is the body.1318 Abandon is the condition of being.1319 Being abandoned means endless access to being, that is, a permanent state of birth. Being is to be abandoned; that there is being (il y a l’être), however, demands that the “there” (il) is “I” (je): that someone pronounces being. “I”, in turn, requires a mouth in order to be pronounced. The “here” of the body is abandoned in its movement, it is given up and can only be repeated here as a here, given up in that way – here is thus exposed to an alteration. This is the law of its cessation, its ex-position or its abandonment. In contrast, neither discourse nor any plays of signs are needed when being speaks itself in singularly multiple ways.1320

Being abandoned is also what Nancy calls being delivered to its freedom “as to that which comes-up to it and surprises it”.1321 What comes and surprises

1316 Nancy, Corpus, p. 32-33. As for the relation of body and spirit, it is a union of the heterogeneous: the flesh (chair) of the philosopher does not become an object of knowledge, that is, it is not represented. Derrida, Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 52.
1317 As Nancy understands it, “there is nothing beyond being (and its fold) … but the expansion of nothing into nothing, if being itself is nothing. Such is the infinity proper to finitude.” Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 101-102 (Une pensée finie, p. 283). Italics in original.
1318 Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 198.
1319 See ibid., p. 36-47 (L’impératif catégorique, p. 141-153). The thought of abandon reminds us of Heidegger’s terms Geworfenheit, “thrownness” (to being) and Gelassenheit (releasement), to which I have referred elsewhere in my study.
1320 Ibid., p. 37 (L’impératif catégorique, p. 142).
1321 The thought of “freedom” is for Nancy not the property of the subjective constitution of being, nor the property of an individual “subject”. Nor is freedom an option offered to our free will – it is freedom that precedes every concept of freedom, prior to every philosophy of freedom. It is the decision for philosophy (not of), the decision that delivers and will deliver philosophy to its destiny.
in every decision is exscription: it appears when being is “written out”. Starting with the presumption that language is exscribed or shared out in a community, Nancy states that language is the incorporeal. Saying (le dire) is corporeal as an audible voice or a visible trace, but the thing which is said is incorporeal. The expressed thing is not in the world or inside the world like the body: it is inside the world, but the outside of the world. Language is not the apparition of an Other, which would remove the world or sublimate it, for language is the exposition of the world of the bodies as such. The incorporeal exposes bodies according to their being-with-one-another. They are neither isolated nor mixed together, but amongst themselves, as each other’s origin. Exposition, then, is not just being exposed in speaking of bodies: it is exposition, “exposition of the skin”. In this way, being exposed is to be finitely singular. This is because the body is born at its weighing: in fact, it is nothing but its weighing. Weighing is what exposes a thing and makes its sense present itself as something. This means that the sense is nothing which would float freely, but something makes it incline towards some other sense.

Could it be said, thus, that “the untouchable” is in Nancy’s philosophy one articulation of the assumption that being is without essence? If the body weighs the weight of a thought and inversely, is it not that the difference and the distance between them is what makes a singular sense, and make senses expose and open to each other? This, as I understand it, would be what Nancy means by freedom, namely, the freedom to exist. Touch presupposes a spacing and a distance – spacing is difference, which creates the space for any coming-into-presence, a zoned and internally unlimited, multiplying limit, a state or phase of perpetual beginning, which I have taken up in the context of the
ontology of art in the previous chapters. The difference of touch is what I shall be considering in the following sections.

5.2 The Limit and Figuration

The question of figuration in Nancy’s philosophy is the object of examination in this section. The key notion here is presentation, when it is understood as the birth of form out of formlessness. This idea is essentially connected with Nancy’s thinking on art. A work of art presents a world: the birth of form, or the modelization which takes place in each work, points to the opening of the world in its obviousness. In its opening as something, being is thus escribed out of its abandonment. I shall take as my point of reference the concepts of excription and exposition, which point to the problem of the presentation of being. One clue to the examination of these questions can be found in Nancy’s view on the singularity of touch. For him, “[T]here is never any ‘touching’ as such [il n’y a pas ‘le’ toucher], nor is there any ‘limit’ as such, but this is why there is something, all things, as absolute, separated and shared out [partagés] bodies”. Instead of a general and “essential” notion of touching, Nancy thinks of touch in terms of a singular decision.

Like in Nancy’s early book *Le discours de la syncope*, it is undecidability which makes the decision. This notion will be discussed in more length in section 5.3. For Nancy, identity can be found only in its vanishing, and this is what the syncope tells us. This is how Nancy understands the condition of the possibility of the origin of sense – it is the experience of what cannot be experienced. Sense is its own origin, and it makes the origin itself. In the retirement of sense, or in the retirement of being, sense comes into being: it articulates itself upon joining and dividing, upon a system of a syncope. Thus, one might suggest that Nancy follows the outlines set by Heidegger’s ontological difference, but nevertheless emphasizing its taking place in being’s coming into existence, which it does in a multiply singular way. Nancy interrogates the withdrawal of sense as the essence and as the sense of being. His idea of language is built on an interval – the space between us – which makes possible both “together” and “apart”.

1326 Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 315-317. Cf. Derrida’s comment, in which he states that
One point of departure in the question of touch may again be traced back to Heidegger’s philosophy. He underlines that being is left to be its being: thus being comes to be defined as Gelassenheit, “releasement”. Nancy, for his part, underlines the being of being in its singularity, stating that being is its existence. Similarly, the eventness of being has its origin in releasement. In comparison with Heidegger, Nancy thus moves a step further, as for him there is no purely ontological being. In other words, he emphasizes the interdependency of the ontic and the ontological levels, which, in his view, are both reduced to the singularly multiple occurrences of being, being which takes place as existence.

At issue here are questions on how figuration takes place, how it is linked with the notion of touch and, perhaps most importantly, how the question of limit is articulated. One expression of these matters is offered by Kant in his philosophy of the sublime. In examining it, Nancy directs his attention to the Kantian birth of form. Regarding the notion of form, the beautiful proves to be a paradigmatic case: form is born out of the free play between the faculties of mind, that is, between understanding and imagination. In the sublime, there is a momentary interruption in the functioning of the faculties: figuration is syncopated, as imagination cannot work according to the demands of reason.

The background is essentially in the Kantian thought of the sublime, to which Nancy gives his interpretation in “The Sublime Offering”. At the same time, he departs from Hegel’s idea of the end of art. Nancy sees the thoughts of art coming to its end and of sublation (Aufhebung) as the exact reverse of the sublime. In the sublime, art is suspended, and hence the sublime gives as a task something else than art. This task is the thinking of truth or the experience of thinking. While Hegel’s view on sublation begins from thinking of the end of art, the thought of the sublime instead considers art in its destination. What Nancy aims at is to approach art as the presentation of the true (le vrai): here, art is “properly sublated and maintained as pure presentation”. With Kant, Nancy states, aesthetics arises as the first philosophy for the first time. In Nancy, art should thus not be understood as representation, but as original coming-into-presence of sense, to which the work of art opens itself.

Undecidability is what makes the decision – the syncope is each time decided again. Derrida, Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 51.

1329 Ibid. Bringing the notion of truth in art to the fore gives Nancy’s questioning some Heideggerian undertones – with respect to art as disclosedness of the truth of being – to which I referred earlier.
each time in a singular manner. To put it another way, the sense presented by art remains dispersed and never fully reaches itself, but remains exposed to its outside (being). According to Nancy, art has the ability to release the senses from signification, or it releases the world from signification. Here is the moment of the opening of sense, which is always only coming. Hence it may be said that art is always postponed, in the state of being born, and in this way it means presentation.  

By the same token art cannot be a question of representation, for art shows the beginning of a beginning. When “shaking” at the limit of philosophy, art causes an interruption within it.

This is where the question of presentation arises in a particular way: Nancy’s attention is directed to the play of presentation, in which no represented object is involved. More exactly, this is a notion of presentation not subordinated to representation, which would take place through the subject and to the subject. It is in The Critique of Judgement, in the section on “The Analytic of the Sublime”, that Kant elucidates his theory of the sublime. At the core of Nancy’s interpretation is the relation which the sublime has with the concept of limit. In question is “the singular way of presenting the limit, in which the limit comes to be touched: one has to change one’s sense [sens] and to pass from sight to touch”. This remark is worth noting as regards the examination of the themes involved in Nancy’s interpretation of the Kantian sublime and its connections to the notions of touch and limit. The passing from sight to touch marks the “abstract, insensible, invisible, intangible” limit. Between sight and touch, there is an “infinite gulf”.

1330  Nancy, Le Regard du portrait, p. 34. This kind of view on “presentation” comes close to Heidegger’s expression of the “setting itself to work of truth”: a work of art is able to show or open up a world that is beyond the work itself, like in the case of van Gogh’s painting of peasant shoes. See Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, p. 39ff.
1333  “[Mais le mode singulier de la présentation d’une limite, c’est que cette limite vienne à être touchée] il faut changer de sens, passer de la vue au tact.” Nancy, Une pensée finie, p. 179. The latter part of the sentence was only added to the later version of “L’offrande sublime” which was published in Une pensée finie. Cf. Nancy, “L’offrande sublime”, in Du Sublime, p. 62; “The Sublime Offering”, p. 44. In Derrida’s view, Nancy’s thought of freedom is associated with this “passing from sight to touch”: the thought of what cannot be mastered or examined, what goes beyond the limit – freedom as it surprises itself. The excess is the untouchable. Derrida, Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 114, 122-123; Nancy, The Experience of Freedom, p. 114-115 (L’expérience de la liberté, p. 148).
1334  Derrida, Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 115.
For Kant, the sublime means what is incomparably great in the sense of absolute magnitude or absolute greatness. According to Kant’s definition, the sublime is that “in comparison with which everything else is small”. In the experience of the sublime, imagination meets the impossible: imagination attempts to reach its proper limit, to which it can proceed only by not proceeding to it. The sublime occurs when the imagination fails to present an object which might, if only in principle, come to match a concept. This is the relation between the Kantian aesthetics of the sublime and the unpresentable.

In judging the beautiful, understanding and imagination are the faculties of mind which take part in a harmonious free play, where these faculties animate each other. What results from the play is the feeling of pleasure, which is connected neither with emotions, nor with concepts. Imagination is the faculty of presentation in the beautiful. In the beautiful at stake is disinterested and free satisfaction – the beautiful is what pleases without concepts of utility or morality, for no subjective purpose can lie as the basis of the judgement of taste. The sublime posits the sensuous at its limit: in so doing, it causes both repugnance and attraction. The sublime, in turn, is unpurposeful by nature: it cannot be an object of nature, and thus it cannot be a sensible phenomenon. The sublime is an idea of reason, with which nothing empirical corresponds. Still, in the feeling of the sublime the incompatibility of imagination and understanding comes to be presented in a sensuous form. When the idea of reason demands a totality to be presented in the encounter with the object, imagination proves to

1336  Cf. Derrida, Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 124.
1337  Kant, The Critique of Judgement, § 11. The sublime has to be examined in the context of the beautiful, first of all because in Kant’s thinking the sublime is the reverse of the beautiful. For him the beautiful is the object of the judgement of taste. The judgement of taste consists of the form of purposiveness, which, however, remains without purpose. That the judgement of taste is “purposiveness without purpose” signifies that there is no concept of understanding involved in these judgements. As a consequence, the beautiful cannot be proved by evidence or by any rule, in other words, by any objective criteria. The beautiful is in no way a cognition – thus aesthetics is not an empirical science for Kant. Still, the judgement of taste is founded upon a concept, but not on an empirical one, that is, not on a concept of understanding. In question is a concept of reason, which does not correspond to any sensuous phenomenon, since the concept comes from outside of experience. The judgement of taste is thus not a cognitive experience; yet simultaneously it claims generality. This is what gives the judgement of taste heterogeneity in Kant’s thinking. Kant transfers the question of the aesthetic judgement to the sphere of subjectivity, while yet retaining its generality: when someone makes a judgement of taste, everyone else is supposed to agree with it. This is what is called Kant’s antinomy of taste – on the one hand, the judgement of taste does not rest on concepts, for otherwise it could be disputed, and by affording proof consensus could be reached. On the other hand, the judgement of taste is based on concepts, because otherwise it could not even be disputed. See Kant, The Critique of Judgement, § 32-33.
be inadequate for this when trying to respond to the challenge of reason. In the pressure imposed by reason, the imagination attains its maximum in struggling to exceed this challenge. In the sublime the imagination is overwhelmed by the immensity of what is to be presented (darzustellen). In its fruitless efforts to extend this limit, imagination recoils on itself, but in so doing succumbs to an emotional delight.1338

In the sublime imagination meets with its limits and finds itself to be blocked. There is a special kind of synthesis involved here, when the subject tries to figure a maximum of magnitude at one time. The synthesis of imagination fails in its attempt to break with the conventions of seeing. This is the consequence when the subject approaches the absolute or the impossible. Imagination tries to produce a comprehension of the object in one sensuous intuition (Anschauung) – that is to say, imagination strives at making a single intuition holding the manifold of the object as great as possible. However, what it encounters is too great, and at this point imagination collides with its own limit when attempting to produce a presentation (Darstellung).1339 Hence, the sublime is a subjective state of mind: it is born from a contradiction, when feeling does not find an object. Even in its failure, imagination is in harmony with reason. The contradiction arises from a demand to produce the object “here and now” in its presence or actuality; the feeling of the sublime emerges from this idea, the realization of which is impossible.

NANCY AND THE SUBLIME LIMIT

In reading Kant’s theory of the beautiful and the sublime, Nancy’s focus is on the thought of presentation: what unites the thought of the beautiful and that of the sublime in Kant’s philosophy is presentation, and nothing else.1340 Among the points thematized by Nancy, I shall concentrate on the limit of presentation – the limit between form and formlessness, the relation of representation and presentation, and the role of break or syncopation with respect to the limit of presentation. At stake is the play of presentation without a represented object;

1339 Ibid., § 26. For Kant, Darstellung stands for the presentation of a concept in a sensible form. Cf. § 27, in which Kant explains that imagination experiences reason as a law, and therefore falls short in fulfilling the obligations set by the ideas of reason.
thus Nancy seeks a concept of presentation which would not be subordinated to representation, if we suppose that representation happens through the subject and to the subject. In the following, I shall ask how the limit of presentation is constructed by Nancy and how it is related to his notice of presentation and art.

Nancy’s task in “The Sublime Offering” is twofold, linked with what he calls “a double suspense” of art: namely, he explores how art is interrogated or provoked in view of something other than art.1341 First, he traces a sublime thought in art, in which aesthetics is refused and seized by the sublime in the same way as aesthetics is suppressed as a domain of philosophy. This is what Kant does, thus leading to the thinking of the experience of truth and of the experience of thought – truth as unconcealment, that is. Secondly, art suspends itself on the border of art, by which art gives itself as a task something other than art, something which is “sublime”.1342

In Le Toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy Jacques Derrida wants to point out the fact that Nancy’s thinking on the sublime and on touch is essentially connected with thinking on freedom. According to Derrida, Nancy applies the figure of touch to “a thing which is not a thing”. In The Experience of Freedom, Nancy describes the touching of the limit as the initial decision of philosophy itself: the touch of the limit delivers philosophy to its destiny. Moreover, this decision of philosophy is, perhaps most of all, the decision for philosophy, for as such, it is the decision of freedom. If we now pass to a realm where freedom is no longer merely the freedom of the subject, but also of other beings (of a stone, for example), it becomes a question of the freedom of existence, which gives rise to the groundlessness of being. Thus, the problem of the sublime is also linked with the philosophy of subjectivity and its coming to an end, in that freedom is not merely limited to the subject. Freedom takes place in thinking, which is free for freedom: thinking, or philosophy, is abandoned to freedom, which always-already exceeds, precedes and overwhelms thinking.1343 “If philosophy has reached the limit of the ontology of subjectivity”, Nancy says, “this is because it has been led to this limit”.1344 Philosophy can no longer represent its own beginning as the originary unity of a subject-of-philosophy appearing to itself

1341 Ibid., p. 27 (“L’offrande sublime”, p. 40).
1342 Ibid., p. 27 (“L’offrande sublime”, p. 40).
1343 Derrida, Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 122.
in its freedom, or appearing to itself as philosophy. As Derrida understands it, freedom means thinking of what lies outside of control and of examination.\(^{1345}\)

In fact, for Nancy there is nothing else to be touched than the limit. This thought also forms the basis for his view of the sublime. The limit is both touchable and untouchable, for touch touches only the untouchable, while the object or the thing remains untouchable. According to Derrida, Nancy imposes a duty on the sublime in that he does not merely content himself with suggesting a change of direction or of mind: that this change cannot not arrive (\textit{cela ne peut pas ne pas arriver}), is the sublime point.\(^{1346}\) In Kant’s philosophy, the sublime imagination touches its own limit. In this encounter touch makes imagination feel its incapacity of presentation when meeting with the impossible.\(^{1347}\) As for the sublime, the limit is reached as the sublime imagination touches its own incapacity. In the beautiful, the faculties of mind work in an accord, and this is why the incapacity of imagination does not appear.\(^{1348}\) The sublime reaches a limit which it may only catch by not reaching it – what comes as a result is a state of suspense. Hence, as Derrida sees it, touching the limit means to Derrida both heteroaffection \textit{and} self-affection. It is self-affection in the movement of withdrawal and double fold (\textit{re-pli}) in the sense of touching the untouchable. Here, the limit limits without self-limiting itself (\textit{[la limite] confine sans se...})

---

\(^{1345}\) Nancy, \textit{The Experience of Freedom}, p. 7 (\textit{L’expérience de la liberté}, p. 48); Derrida, \textit{Le toucher}, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 122-123.

\(^{1346}\) Derrida, \textit{Le toucher}, Jean-Luc Nancy, p. 123-124; see Nancy, \textit{The Sense of the World}, p. 59-63. In question is passing to a field in which freedom is no longer the freedom of the subject, but also that of a stone, for example (cf. Heidegger). At stake in such freedom is the freedom of existence, which brings about the groundlessness of being.

\(^{1347}\) The imagination, which schematizes without a concept, schematizes itself in aesthetic judgement: it presents itself as unity and it presents its unity to itself; it presents the faculty of presentation in its free play. In both the beautiful and the sublime, the unity of spirit or spirit as unity, as well as the accord of the faculties, operate in the imagination. Or rather, one might say, they operate \textit{as} imagination presents itself to itself. Nancy, “The Sublime Offering”, p. 31 (“L’offrande sublime”, p. 45). In the Kantian view, the judgement of beauty is disinterested by nature, that is, it is not dependent on the actual existence of the object. The agreeable is attached to an interest, whereas the beautiful is not. Nancy, however, sees the question somewhat differently. For him, interestedness is profoundly involved in beauty in that the judgement takes an interest in the being-anticipated of unity in order to avoid chaos. The beautiful thus originates from the subject’s enjoyment (\textit{jouissance}) – it constitutes the unity and the free legality of the subject. Nancy, “The Sublime Offering”, p. 31-32 (“L’offrande sublime”, p. 46).

\(^{1348}\) If the beautiful is concerned with the formation of the form of the object in the free play of understanding and imagination, the sublime means the opposite in that it is engaged with formlessness or absence of limitation. The judgement of the beautiful is a reflective judgement, whereas understanding is the faculty of concepts, even if indeterminate ones, in judging the beautiful. There is yet another faculty of concepts, which is reason. This is the faculty of the sublime. In the sublime, the feeling of pleasure is momentarily blocked. Unlike in the case of the beautiful, in the sublime no finality of the object’s form underlies our estimate of it. In the mere estimation of magnitude, the subjective finality is pushed to the point at which our faculty of imagination breaks down in presenting the concept of a magnitude, and proves unequal to its task. When the block in imagination breaks, the pleasure rushes outward more strongly. In question is thus a negative or an indirect pleasure, or pleasure attained through displeasure. See Kant, \textit{The Critique of Judgement}, p. § 26, p. 101.
In all, the touching of the sublime signifies the same as touching imagination, when imagination comes to mean a sensible presentation or a transcendental schema. Considering feeling as touch (sentir comme toucher) can also point to “feeling oneself”, and thus, to “self-touching”.\textsuperscript{1350}

Nancy’s notion of freedom no longer belongs to the sphere of subjectivity: for Kant, in Nancy’s view, the sublime destiny of reason is freedom. In the beautiful and the sublime alike, it is imagination, the faculty of presentation, that plays in order to find a form in accord with its free play. Imagination presents (to itself) the notion that there is a free accord between the sensible intuition in its multiplicity and a unity; the latter is not the intuition of a concept, but free indeterminate unity, a form in free formation, that is, feeling. What imagination presents is that there is an image (Bild), which is neither a representative figure nor an object, but form forming itself without object. Thus, imagination means an image, which images itself as a form forming itself in the sensible manifoldness – it is a free, non-figurative image. In \textit{Critique of Pure Reason} Kant calls a schema Bild, which “precedes all images, all representations, and all figurations”.\textsuperscript{1351}

With our central problem it is important to keep in mind that for Nancy the world forming itself is only a schema or an image, which itself gives form to a world in its formation. Form, then, does not have a ground: the formation of form presents that there is presentation. It is a figure that makes the world, and not the other way round; form takes form when it gives itself a figure and creates a free unity. This is characteristic to imagination (Einbildung), which schematizes without concepts: when the world that forms itself “is not a universe of objects but merely a schema . . . , merely a Bild that makes a `world’ on its own, because it forms itself, because it designs itself”.\textsuperscript{1352}

\textsuperscript{1349} The limit touches itself, or feels itself touching (se sent toucher) – or feels itself to be touched or touching (cela se touche, cela se touche lui-même), or something is being touched. Cf. Derrida, \textit{Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy}, p. 124.

\textsuperscript{1350} This thought involves the idea of syncopation. According to Derrida, the syncopated imagination, inasmuch as it opens the experience of the sublime, is an experience of the limit and of going beyond the limit: by touching upon the limit, imagination both exceeds it and stays at it. The experience of the sublime takes place at the limits of art; what Derrida asks is if the limit is understood as a border, is its origin thus tactile, or does it come into being starting from the tangible? At this point, the notion of figure enters the play: “the inevitable figurality is perhaps due to this internal multiplicity which disperses the so-called literal signification of touching or the property of the tangible”. This is because, for Nancy, the tension “makes itself felt at the moment when the limit is touched, in the suspension of the impulse, the broken tension, the fainting or fading of a syncopation”. Derrida, \textit{Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy}, p. 126-127; Nancy, “The Sublime Offering”, p. 44 (“L’offrande sublime”, p. 63).


\textsuperscript{1352} Nancy, “The Sublime Offering”, p. 29 (“L’offrande sublime”, p. 43).
signifies a form or a figure. As I understand it, this reasoning comes close to Nancy's basic conceptual structure of "technique" as something which creates forms in art: it is as though he would be asking if Kant's idea of schematism as the technique of the soul, which presents the pure form of a schematism, could be understood expressly as aesthetic schematism. Hence, the technique of the schema would be an art, the creative and self-creative technique – and aesthetics comes to mean philosophy as well as art and technique. Similarly, in The Muses Nancy describes technique as a means of creating artistic forms. The notion that art shows that there is presentation is a vantage point in considering the groundlessness of form.

But, Nancy writes, there are other alternatives if art does not come to an end. Beauty is an unstable category, and "not as autonomous as it appears" as the pure presentation of presentation. Beauty tends to preserve the enjoyment of its proper image (Bild) and imagination (Ein-bildung); this even gives art its constitutive lability. At this point, Nancy begins to think of the beautiful as "only an intermediate, ungraspable formation, impossible to fix except as a limit, a border, a place of equivocation between the agreeable and the sublime". Here, the sublime comes to be the condition of the beautiful: the sublime is in question when the beautiful is suppressed without its coming to an end. The sublime represents that without which the beautiful could be nothing but the beautiful, or would be merely beautiful. What is characteristic to the sublime, according to Nancy, is that it transforms the entire motif of presentation. The beautiful is the figure that figures itself in accord with itself, and, for this reason, the beautiful comes to signify the same as subjectivity itself: that is, "a presentation that is successful and without remainder in accord with itself". Beauty alone is "form in its pure self-adequation, in its pure accord with the imagination, the faculty of presentation (or formation)."

Nancy now approaches the central notion of his essay: form or contour – the concern of the beautiful – is limitation, but the unlimited is the concern of the infinite. The analysis of the sublime begins, in Kant, with the unlimited, but, what Nancy finds pivotal in Kant's theory of the sublime, is that the sublime does not proceed simply as the analysis of a particular kind of presentation, as

1353 Cf. ibid., p. 29-30 ("L'offrande sublime", p. 44).
1356 Ibid., p. 34 ("L'offrande sublime", p. 50).
the analysis of the presentation of the infinite.\textsuperscript{1357} The sublime is concerned with the movement of the unlimited, or of the unlimitation (\textit{illimitation}; \textit{Unbegrenztetheit}), while it is not a matter of presenting or nonpresenting the infinite. A form belongs to a limitation (\textit{Begrenzung}), whereas the unlimitation or the without-form is the without-limit.\textsuperscript{1358} In the feeling of the sublime, the given is unlimited or quasi-unlimited. This fact prevents \textit{a priori} any concept from applying to the given that provides the sublime feeling in a determining way. However, the formlessness suggests a concept of speculative reason, as Jean-François Lyotard puts it, for the object of such a concept is by definition forbidden presentation and there is no presentation without form.\textsuperscript{1359}

The unlimited takes place on the border of the limit, and thus on the border of presentation. As such, the unlimited sets itself off on the border of the limit and detaches itself and subtracts itself from limitation. Hence, the unlimited withdraws from beauty. It is the feeling of the sublime that allows one to speak of the unlimited as of something that sets itself off somewhere because, Nancy explains, “we are offered a seizure or an apprehension of this unlimitation that comes to raise itself up like a figure against a ground, although … it is always simply the limit that raises a figure up against a nondelimited ground”\textsuperscript{1360}. Understanding cannot conceive of the limit of the object of the experience of the sublime, which is unlimited, for there is no determinable concept of the unlimited. Thus, the sublime limit (like the limited and the unlimited) is not an object for understanding, as is the case in the feeling of the beautiful, but of the ideas of the speculative reason. The limit which is only conceivable with an outside and an inside, immediately implies \textit{both} the limited \textit{and} the unlimited.\textsuperscript{1361} The unlimited begins on the external border of the limit, and it \textit{only} begins, and never finishes. As in Nancy’s general view concerning the structure of presentation, he argues here that the crucial point is the infinity of a beginning, and not so much the absence of figure.

Hence, Nancy defines the sublime as the aesthetics of movement: the sublime invokes an aesthetics of movement as opposed to an aesthetics of the static. The movement in question is the unlimited beginning of the delimitation of a form, and as a result, the beginning of the state of form and the form

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{1357} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 35 (“L’offrande sublime”, p. 51).
\textsuperscript{1358} Kant, \textit{The Critique of Judgement}, § 23, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{1360} Nancy, “The Sublime Offering”, p. 35 (“L’offrande sublime”, p. 51).
\textsuperscript{1361} Lyotard, \textit{Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime}, p. 59.
\end{footnotes}
of state. However, Nancy points out, in the unlimitation involved in the feeling of the sublime it is not a matter of the infinite, for the infinite would be, according to Kant’s terminology, the “numerical concept” of the unlimited, the “presentation” of which is at stake in the sublime. The unlimited is not the number, but the gesture of the infinite. This is the gesture of formation or figuration, of *Ein-bildung* in Kantian terms, but “only insofar as the formless too stands out … along the form that traces itself”; formlessness does not take on any form.

In Nancy’s view, there cannot be presentation of the unlimited because unlimitation is the gesture of the infinite, and not of the number. Kant, in turn, encounters difficulties in attempting to think of the sublime as “negative” or “indirect” presentation, in a way that he still thinks of a presentation *without* presentation. At this point, Nancy takes a stand against Kant: it is not possible to conceive of a presentation *without* presentation. As Nancy understands it, the profound meaning of Kant’s text is the assumption that the sublime is not a matter of figuring the nonfigurable, and hence it is neither a matter of negative presentation, nor of the nonpresentable. In the sublime it is “no longer a matter of (re)presentation in general”, Nancy states. At stake is something which takes place *in* presentation itself and through it but which is not presentation. Yet there is no presentation but its motion, through which the unlimited unlimits itself, lying on the limit that delimits and presents itself.

This movement traces the external border of the limit, which makes it a (re)presentational outline (*tracé*) at the same time as it is an unlimitation. However, the (re)presentational outline is not here an outline as such nor is it homologous to the internal border. The trace causes an “unbordering” or “overbordering” (*débordement*) or an “effusion” (*Ergießung* in Kant), by which takes place what Nancy calls the “offering” (*offrande*) — gift, proposal, sacrifice.

In the sublime, we are, after all, thus speaking of presentation itself: at stake is the fact that it presents itself (que ça se présente) and as it presents itself (comme ça se présente). “It”, in other words, the fact that there is presentation, presents itself in unlimitation, it presents itself always *at the limit*. In Kantian terms,

---

1363 Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, § 27.
1365 *Ibid.*, p. 37 (“L’offrande sublime”, p. 54). In *The Muses* Nancy states that art is the fact that there is presentation – this might serve as an answer to what unites his notion of art, and the arts, to the thought of the sublime and technique (the production of form out of groundlessness). At stake is the becoming of being in the temporal structure of not-yet and always-already, as temporality that is at once spacing. In this scheme, being is shown to be a kind of originary fictioning, whereby presentation
this is the limit of imagination, the absolute maximum of Bild and Bildung.\textsuperscript{1366} With Kant, as is pointed out above, the beautiful is a matter of form and figure, whereas the sublime has to do with the tracing-out, the setting-off and seizure of form.\textsuperscript{1367} The sublime is the fact that there is an image, and hence a limit, along whose edge unlimitation is recognized. From this, Nancy concludes that the beautiful and the sublime take place on the same site, perhaps the one upon the other and even the one through the other. The beautiful is presented in its presentation, whereas the sublime is a presentation in its movement, “which is the absolute re-\textsuperscript{1368}moval of the unlimited along the edge of any limit”. What is removed here is form in entirety; this is the mechanism by virtue of which the sublime is incomparably great, in comparison with which all the rest is small.

The sublime grandeur resides at the limit; it is, for Nancy, “that there is such a thing as measurable, presentable greatness, such a thing as limitation, hence such a thing as form and figure”.\textsuperscript{1368} A limit traces itself, and what comes to be presented as a unity is a multiplicity or a manifold. Unity comes to it from its limit; that there is unity comes from the external border. The sublime concerns the \textit{totality}, that is, the whole of form or presentation: the sublime is “the fact that the totality of presentation or of a form is presented”. For Kant, the sublime takes place in a representation of the unlimited to which is added nonetheless the thought of its totality. Still, according to Nancy, neither is the sublime something other than finite and beautiful forms, nor is it the totality of an infinite that would be the summation of all forms, but it is the totality of the unlimited, insofar as the unlimited is beyond all form and all sum. Thus, the sublime is beyond the greatest possible, beyond the maximum.

To be more exact, the totality of the sublime is beyond \textit{everything}; simultaneously, every form may be the maximum.\textsuperscript{1369} Imagination is not capable of anything more, for it is defined by the Bild or the Bildung. Yet, imagination \textit{can} do more at the point where it can do no more. It is there that the sublime is decided (\textit{se décide}): it can still feel its limit, its powerlessness and its incommensurability with respect to the totality of the unlimited. For Nancy, the totality is \textit{given}, and not exclusively an idea. In this respect, the totality has a connection with the thought of presentation: in presentation, \textit{everything} is

\textsuperscript{1366} The sublime corresponds to \textit{magnitudo} or absolute greatness, whereas the beautiful corresponds to \textit{quantitas}, quantity or amount.
\textsuperscript{1367} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 38 ("L'offrande sublime", p. 55).
\textsuperscript{1369} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 39-40 ("L'offrande sublime", p. 57-58).
This totality corresponds to presentation taking place, and nothing else, for the totality is not an object nor is it anything (re)presented. The formless form, or the form of the formless, arises as the external border of the limit sets off and the limitless is in motion. At issue is not so much the unity of multiplicity than the sublime as “the Idea of a whole”, as Kant calls it, the union of the concept and intuition. The union is what makes possible unity of a whole. Here, it should be noted that the sublime has to do with the union; the beautiful applies to unity. According to Nancy, “In the sublime, imagination no longer has to do with its products but with its operation – and thus with its limit”. The union is the taking-place of all or the whole, which makes it an antithesis of totalization or completion.

In touching its limit, imagination exceeds itself. The excess is the sublime: the sublime is the self-overflowing of the imagination. Namely, there is no Bild beyond Einbildung, nor is there absence of Bild. This is because the faculty of presentation, the imagination, does not present anything beyond the limit, since presentation in itself means delimitation. Yet presentation, within itself, touches upon union, the “Idea” of the union of the unlimited, which borders upon and unborders the limit. At the limit there is no more figure or figuration or form than there is the ground as something to which one could proceed or in which one could exceed oneself. One does not pass on the limit, but it is at the limit that everything comes to pass, the play of the totality of the unlimited included. This play “… throws into mutual relief the two borders, external and internal, of all figures, adjoining and separating them, delimiting and unlimiting the limit thus in a single gesture”. Two borders are one, Nancy says, they are union “itself”: this is what is required by all figures. The union is presentation itself. The limit as limit and as unity divides itself infinitely in its own presentation. For the thought of the sublime, the contour, the frame, and the trace point to nothing but themselves; or rather, they do not point, but present (themselves), and their presentation presents its own interruption, the contour, frame, or trace. At this point, the union from which the presented or figured unity arises, presents itself as the interruption of presentation, as the suspension of imagination (that is, of figuration), in which the limit traces and effaces itself. Sublimity originates from the absence of forms. The tension between the imagination, which is the power

---

1370 And yet nothing is given in the context of art; for this discussion, cf. Nancy, *Au fond des images.*
of presentation, and understanding work so as the concept places itself out of the reach of all presentation. As a result, the imagination founders in attempting to produce forms. The forms of the imagination prove to be insignificant before the absolute, and this beings about the fact that the “object” that causes the feeling of the sublime disappears.\footnote{Kant, \textit{The Critique of Judgement}, § 26, p. 105; see also Lyotard, \textit{Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime}, p. 75-76.} Here, there is nothing to present, except that \textit{it} presents itself (\textit{que ça se présente}).\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 41 (“L’offrande sublime”, p. 59).} In other words, the sublime totality does not correspond with the schema of the “total presentation” even as a negative presentation or the presentation of the impossibility of presentation, but it corresponds with the totality of schematism.

Nancy gives as a practical example the fact that an artist deciding what to do with an empty page or canvas is an experience of the sublime. He states that the two borders – those of form and formlessness – are one, or union “itself”, and this is what is required by all figures. From this it follows that the union is presentation itself.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 42.} Artistic work would thus be an experience which resembles absolute greatness: it is the coming to a limit and the carrying away of unlimitedness. Jean-François Lyotard formulates a similar idea according to which the aesthetics of the beautiful and of the sublime, based on the tension of the imagination and understanding, are always possible and threaten art, periods, genres and schools. One of the two aesthetics is a “figural aesthetics of the ‘much too much’ that defies the concept”, while the other is an “abstract or minimal aesthetic of the ‘almost nothing’ that defies form”.\footnote{Lyotard, \textit{Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime}, p. 76.} As I see it, grounded in the impossibility of the totality of presentation and thus of the absence of figure, the second aesthetic is that of the sublime: in such an aesthetic presentation itself becomes thematized.

That the union of concept and intuition presents itself as the interruption of presentation, implies for Nancy that there is a “tiny, infinite pulsation”: this is a “tiny, infinite rhythmic burst that produces itself continuously in the trace of the least contour and through which the limit itself presents itself, and on the limit, the \textit{magnitudo} … is traced, in which all imagination both imagines and — on the same limit, in the same beating — fails to imagine”.\footnote{Nancy, “The Sublime Offering”, p. 42 (“L’offrande sublime”, p. 60-61).} While, in the case of beauty, the schema is the unity of the presentation, in the sublime the schema is “the pulsation of the unity”, the syncopated rhythm of the trace.
of the accord and “the spasmodic vanishing of the limit all along itself”, into unlimitedness.

In the sublime schematism, the simultaneous reunion and distension of the limit of presentation is at stake: the reunion and distension of simultaneity, and thus of presentation, itself.\textsuperscript{1378} The imagination or the presentation touches on the limit and presents itself, at the same time fainting and vanishing there. Fainting takes place in the foundering of the syncopation “itself”, and this exposes the imagination to its destiny. It becomes evident, Nancy concludes, that the destiny of the subject is the “absolute greatness” of the sublime; the imagination is thus destined for the beyond of the image. The destiny, then, is beyond the image and on the limit, in the Bildung of the Bild itself. It is on the edge of the Bild, the outline of the figure, the tracing, “the separating-uniting incision”, the beating of the schema, while schema is the other name of the syncopation. The imagination or the presentation is dedicated to the presentation of presentation itself; this is the general destiny of aesthetics, or of reason in aesthetics. In the sublime, the presentation of presentation itself takes place in and as syncopation.

Yet presentation does not take place, but is given in “the schematic spacing and throbbing of the trace of figures, and thus only comes to pass in the syncopated time of the passage of the limit to the limit”. This is one of the core points in Nancy’s interpretation of the Kantian sublime. The presentation takes place in the sensuous; since the sublime imagination always belongs to the sphere of presentation, it is hence itself sensuous too.

How the imagination (re)presents the limit, since syncopated imagination is still imagination, is Nancy’s next question. The singular mode of the presentation of a limit is that this limit must be reached, it must come to be touched – sublimitas means what stays just below the limit.\textsuperscript{1379} In the sublime, sensibility is in the imagination’s sentiment of itself when it touches its limit. The sublime is a feeling: the emotion of the subject at the limit – it is the broken tension and the fainting and fading of a syncopation.\textsuperscript{1380} The feeling of the sublime is, according to Nancy, hardly an emotion but rather the mere motion of presentation, at the limit and syncopated. The sublime is pleasure and pain; still, it is sensible, it is the sensibility of the fading of the sensible. In the tension

\textsuperscript{1378} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 43 (“L’offrande sublime”, p. 61-62).
at the limit, “the vital forces” are suspended and cut off, that is, syncopated – the limit, or the contour of the figure, tends toward or in the extreme, to its breaking point. It breaks in fact, dividing itself between two borders, the border of the figure and its unlimited unbordering.

On the border of the syncopation, feeling loses feeling; the feeling is that of the loss of feeling.\textsuperscript{1381} The sublime feeling is what is left from the feeling when there is no longer anything to be felt: in question, then, is not feeling but to be exposed. In touching the limit is the limit proves to be the one between pleasure and displeasure. The common denominator of pleasure and displeasure is nowhere else than in insensibility or apathy, in “a nonsensible sentiment”. However, this is not pleasure or pain, but touching the one through the other, touched by the one in the other.

Unlimitedness cannot become present in and for a subject; in its syncopation, the imagination presents itself as unlimited, beyond (its) figure, but this means that it is affected by (its) nonpresentation.\textsuperscript{1382} Here, presentation takes place but it does not present anything; it presents nothing or the nothing, the nonpresentable; \textit{all is presented – at the limit.} The totality (the union of the unlimited and the unlimitedness of union, of presentation) is offered to the feeling of the sublime or is offered, in the sublime, to feeling. Nothing remains from the present but the gesture of presenting; the offering offers and places before, but it does not install in the present. What is offered remains at a limit; the sacrificed imagination is the imagination offered to its limit. The offer is the sublime presentation. The aesthetic concerns form; the totality always concerns the formless; the sublime is their mutual offering – it is how the limit offers itself to the border of the unlimited, or how the limit makes itself felt: the work of art cuts exactly on the cutting edge of the figure. The sublime is that through which the beautiful touches us and not that through which it pleases us; it is joy and not enjoyment. To be touched is sublime because it is to be exposed and to be offered; the sublime is in the contact of the work, not in its form; the contact is beyond the work, at its limit: but without art, it would not take place. Nothing is lacking in the offering, everything is offered.

\textsuperscript{1381} Ibid., p. 46 (“L’offrande sublime”, p. 66). According to Nancy, “the striving is a striving to reach and touch the limit” (l’effort est pour toucher à la limite), see ibid., p. 46 (“L’offrande sublime”, p. 65). Here, the touching appears as the limit, or as the impossibility of touching, for the touching takes place only when something is being touched, and one touches nothing but the limit.

If the essay “The Sublime Offering” suggests that in the idea of the sublime it is finally a question of presentation of presentation, is it possible to see some parallels between Nancy’s thought of the sublime and of art, which comes to be characterized by the same phenomenon? Art is what touches upon and touches by means of the principal heterogeneity of sensing. Here, “art touches on the sense of touch itself”, for it touches “at once on the ‘self-touching’ inherent in touch and on the ‘interruption’ that is no less inherent in it”.\(^{1383}\) Art touches “on the immanence and the transcendence of touch”, on the transimmanence, as Nancy calls it, of being-in-the-world, and not the world as a simple exteriority but rather as a milieu.

In the chiasm of transcendence and immanence, being-in-the-world is exposed, “isolated and presented as such”. This is how the dis-location of the world into plural worlds, that is, into “the irreducible plurality of the unity ‘world’” takes place, producing the \(a \textit{priori}\) and the transcendental of art. The sense of the world is dis-located from the origin: it must be sought in the zoning “in each of the many differential distributions of the senses”. In question is thus \textit{not} a differentiation in an organic unity, nor a differential as continuous variation, but art is made visible because “the unity and uniqueness of a world are, and are nothing but, the singular difference of a \textit{touch} and of a \textit{zone of touch}”.\(^{1384}\)

As regards Nancy’s discussion of the sublime, it seems more or less to imply all the matters involved in his inquiry about presentation. Some of the most important ones are linked with the problem of the touching of the limit. Like Kant, in his thought Nancy thematizes the limit between presentation and non-presentation, or between form and formlessness. In this, Nancy reads the Kantian analytic of the sublime through viewpoints which are recognizable in his treatment of presentation in other contexts.

Fundamental to Nancy’s thinking of art is the fact that in the presentation of art, there cannot be a question of the logic of representation: art is not a matter of actualization or reproduction of an original image or model. Art produces forms out of formlessness. This thought brings about the notions of the interval or syncopation: the Kantian imagination, which is the faculty of presentation, makes presentation touch its limit. Thus, the imagination presents the interval as the imagination breaks down in its task, or it presents the interval.

\(^{1383}\) Nancy, \textit{The Muses}, p. 18 (\textit{Les Muses}, p. 36).
\(^{1384}\) \textit{Ibid.}
“itself”. At this point, it turns out that this is the finality of the imagination or presentation, when presentation passes beyond the image (Bild): presentation is the presentation of presentation itself.\textsuperscript{1385} From the angle of the ontology of art, with his discussion of the sublime Nancy tries to break with the idealistic concept, inherent in traditional philosophies of art, according to which there is just one “Art” and its division, and “something of the ‘sublime’ escapes from the plurality of the arts, disdains it or dissolves it, even goes beyond art”.\textsuperscript{1386} In Nancy, one might conclude that no general “sublime” exists, but that the sublime is multiplied and diversified with each of the arts.

\section*{5.3 Art and Philosophy: the Finite and the Infinite in the Experience of the Aesthetic}

In the previous sections my interest has been on the presentation of limit: how to present the limit of presentation, in Kantian terms, the limit with which imagination collides when it tries to exceed its imaginative power? How does presentation take place at the limit? According to Nancy’s interpretation, in Kant, imagination is presentation of presentation; when presentation fails, imagination has to face its own limit. In the subsequent failure of figuration, a possibility of sense opens up. The presentation of limit – the limit of touch – is what coming into presence means, and it is here that presentation touches itself. In the presentation of the limit of presentation, \textit{we} are on the limit of touch. In a similar way, touch as sensuous sense forms a threshold. For this reason, the role of touch can more or less be compared with interruption, syncope or spacing in presentation.

As I have tried to clarify earlier in my text, Nancy’s view of the presentation of being is grounded in the notion that being is inappropriable and, thus, finite: in things, there is some thing which resists all appropriation by thought or by concepts. The thing is the fact \textit{that} there are things.\textsuperscript{1387} In his article “The Heart of Things”, Nancy gives “finitude” the following definition: “Finitude does not signify, first of all, mortality (monumentality): it signifies first of all that the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{1385} Cf. Nancy, “The Sublime Offering”, p. 43 (“L’offrande sublime”, p. 61).
\item \textsuperscript{1386} Nancy, The Muses, p. 8 (\textit{Les Muses}, p. 22).
\item \textsuperscript{1387} Cf. Nancy, The Birth to Presence, p. 169 (\textit{Une pensée finie}, p. 199).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
appropriation, and the property, of every thing, or that the being-thing-in-itself of every thing, takes place as ‘there is’, and takes place only in this way (in which ‘there is no longer’ is included, since ‘there is’ is emphatically not a prop for being or for essence). Here is exposed the finite, and the infinite exposure of the finite”. 1388 Yet there is something that stops the appropriation of the self. This is because every act of appropriation is finite: appropriation, or the decision concerning what is ownmost to the self, is expropriation as soon as it takes place. One decides about the abandoned being. 1389 Furthermore, matter – “the reality of difference” – is the difference through which something, and several things, are possible. The ideality of difference is indissociable from its materiality. 1390 Just as position is exposition, Nancy says, so is its identity the difference of the here/lies, and of the thing/itself, and of the coming into presence. 1391

The finitude of one’s factual existence signifies, first of all, that the appropriation and the property of every thing, or the being-thing-in-itself of every thing, takes place as “there is”, and takes place only in this way. The “there is” is not being, nor is it essence. The “there is” takes place as a “here and now”: in a community, in a place defined by history. In Werner Hamacher’s words, whoever speaks here, they are already speaking in another, incomparable, and unmistakably other here, in which the here and whoever says it is lost. 1392 Yet the unrenouncable gesture in these operations is that of a here: a here and now; the place is not pre-given, but it is opened up through the reference to it in the quotation. If existence is a here and now, hic et nunc, of being, it is to be a here and now of being; not being expropriated by the hic et nunc does not mean that we appropriate it for ourselves. 1393 “Hic et nunc” is finite existing “itself”, it is finitude, the inappropriability of sense – nothing and no one can decide what makes a “here and now” possible and what does not “alienate”. Each time, however, a here and now, an existing, must be able to decide to be, and to be open to sense, and each time, being has to be allowed to be, delivered and abandoned to its finitude. This “leaving” or “abandonment” is presented to beings as their very finitude.

---

1389 For further clarification, see Hamacher, “Ou, séance, touche de Nancy, ici”, in *On Jean-Luc Nancy*; also Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 102-103 (*Une pensée finie*, p. 135-137).
Perhaps the most elementary terms which characterize Nancy’s thinking of finitude are weight – the gravity or “black hole” of things, their limit and hence inappropriability, and the discontinuity of being. At stake in the previous definitions is the thought of the accomplishment and withdrawal of sense, the destruction of sense, or “the completion and buckling of the West’s resources of signification and meaning (God, History, Man, Subject, Sense itself...).”\textsuperscript{1394} The sense in question is that of “existence that is or that makes sense, the existence without which sense would not exist”.\textsuperscript{1395} Here, sense is the openness of a relation to itself, what initiates it in and by the difference of its relation. The “to” is the spacing of an opening. The to-being is the appropriation of what cannot be appropriated in its to-being – it is the sense of to-being.\textsuperscript{1396} This thinking leaves us with a new configuration of itself, which is its own undoing of itself at its own limit.\textsuperscript{1397} In his analysis of the Kantian sublime, Nancy strives to interpret the notion of presentation as the presentation of the limit and on the limit, and, “if it is as existence and only as existence that Being comes into play, it designates the without-essence of existence”.\textsuperscript{1398} The untouchable comes to be touched in the constant deferral of this limit. As I have tried to explain in the previous sections of my work, the presentation of the limit cannot be image, for image presupposes a limit. Instead, the way of presenting the limit is touch.

I have argued above that in his thinking on art Nancy challenges a crucial distinction of Heidegger’s ontology: the distinction between the mode of existence of \textit{Dasein} and the mode of existence of other beings. To summarize, in \textit{Being and Time} Heidegger departs from the idea that being is finite (\textit{endlich}) by nature.\textsuperscript{1399} For Nancy, \textit{Dasein} and other beings, namely works of art, share the same way of coming into presence and existing as events of a finite truth, with the difference that in Nancy “truth” could be best termed as their finite “sense”. In both Nancy’s and Heidegger’s work, these instances exist on the ground of their fundamental groundlessness and on their “here-and-now” character, based

\textsuperscript{1394} Ibid., p. 4 (\textit{Une pensée finie}, p. 12-13).
\textsuperscript{1396} Ibid., p. 6-7 (\textit{Une pensée finie}, p. 16).
\textsuperscript{1397} Ibid., p. 4 (\textit{Une pensée finie}, p. 13).
\textsuperscript{1398} See Nancy, “The Sublime Offering”; Nancy, \textit{A Finite Thinking}, p. 9 (\textit{Une pensée finie}, p. 19).
\textsuperscript{1399} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, § 65, p. 372-374; § 65, p. 399. Human experience is anchored in temporality. This is the ontological problem of history which Heidegger aims at interpreting as an existential one. The future, the character of having been and the present are the “ecstases” of temporality. The future, the character of having been and the present are the “ecstases” of temporality. For Heidegger, the essence of temporality is finite.
on a kind of constant decision of existence. This is what gives to both artworks
and Dasein their constitutive finitude.

Regarding this finitude, Nancy’s ontology of art contains an inevitable
ambiguity, however. Is he, after all, speaking of one Art, or are there really many
arts? Nancy insists on deconstructing the notion of “Art”, and his analyses of
particular works illustrate this idea. Works of art are comparable to Dasein in
their singular evenness. What distinguishes Nancy’s treatment of art from
Heidegger’s Dasein is, however, his emphasizing of the “bodily” aspect of works
of art, or better, their gravity. Art gives model and form to itself on the basis
of its materiality. This notion is concordant with Nancy’s ontology of singular
bodies, which he elucidates with his philosophy of art. In this respect, the above-
mentioned ambiguity is reflected in the fact that art does not, in my opinion,
finally deconstruct his general ontology of coming into presence in the full
meaning of the word “deconstruction”. More than this, Nancy seems to suggest
that art is ontologically plural in a more radical and original sense than other
beings, Dasein included. Thus, with his account of art Nancy moves beyond
Heidegger’s ontology. Hence, as I see it, he extends his attempt to radicalize the
Heideggerian Mitsein to the ontology of art and of many arts as well, with the
result that at least on the rhetorical level he cannot avoid being bound to an
ontological claim about “Art”.

In the concept of finitude, as I see it, the fundamental themes of Nancy’s
philosophy culminate: the limits of sense and of thinking. I have discussed some
of the central ideas linked with finitude in my dissertation. As a final point, I
shall try to suggest what the scope of finitude could be in Nancy’s philosophy
and how this term might be described in the context of his thinking on art and
on the aesthetic. Nancy defines “finitude” as “the ‘essential’ multiplicity and the
‘essential’ non-reabsorption of sense or of being”. In his philosophy finitude
relates to infinity as essence to existence or truth to sense, or as instantaneous
presentation to deferral or spacing. What is true for artistic coming-into-
presence is the fact that absolute finitude is all there can be: in the sphere of
finite meanings there can be nothing but birth into an infinite presentation.
It is clear from the outset that “finitude” cannot be simply defined in Nancy’s
philosophy, and considering the scope of this notion means taking into notice,
first of all, the Heideggerian reflection of being. That Nancy uses the term

---

1400  Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 9, 27 (Une pensée finie, p. 19, 49).
transcendental aesthetic is not a matter of simply taking up the Kantian project under the same name.\textsuperscript{1401} Such aesthetics is transcendental because it is not a question of an established sense or the institution or foundation of sense, but of comings of sense. Or, one might also say, we encounter the other as existing, that is, in its finitude: as opening to us out of its own relation to alterity.\textsuperscript{1402}

In the background of this thinking on art— the thinking on being as a singular relation and exposition— Nancy often relies on Martin Heidegger’s ontological notions.\textsuperscript{1403} Nancy sets off from the assumption that there is no such thing as being “in general”, nor is being anything stable and continuous.\textsuperscript{1404} Instead, he thinks of being in terms of coming into presence or presentation and of infinite arrival. That a thing comes into presence means that something is born into presence. “Birth”, which is an event, thus refers to a notion of being as a singular event or a taking place. In question here is a thought of presentation which remains suspended in its passage, in a distance and a difference, “in its coming and going”.\textsuperscript{1405} Therefore, I have in this dissertation tried to consider what I think might be called the impossibility of art. “Art” here is something which is never the foundation of its own existence, and the origin of its existence is to be traced in its withdrawal of origin. Also, art’s most proper possibility of existing will be considered from the viewpoint of the possibility of its impossibility of existing. In speaking of art, Nancy’s thought of common appearance results in his stating that a work of art is the birth of a world. The coming of each presence of the world is each time singular. Hence, each coming into presence is also finite; yet, the world comes into presence innumerable times.\textsuperscript{1406}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1401} Cf. ibid., p. 27 (Une pensée finie, p. 49).
\item \textsuperscript{1402} See Fynsk, “Foreword”, in Nancy, The Inoperative Community, p. xvii.
\item \textsuperscript{1403} Cf. e.g. Nancy, La pensée dérobée, p. 101 (A Finite Thinking, p. 186).
\item \textsuperscript{1404} Nancy, The Sense of the World, p. 35 (Le sens du monde, p. 59).
\item \textsuperscript{1405} Nancy, The Muses, p. 34 (Les Muses, p. 62); cf. Heidegger, Pathmarks, p. 275. A similar structure is at stake in the relation which Heidegger sees between thinking and being: “Thinking is related to being as what arrives (l’avenant). Thinking as such is bound to the advent of being, to being as advent.”
\item \textsuperscript{1406} Nancy, Being Singular Plural, p. 14-15 (Être singulier pluriel, p. 32-33).
\end{itemize}
Conclusion: The Art of Difference – The Infinite Finitude of Art

In this dissertation I have attempted to investigate the significance of art in Jean-Luc Nancy’s philosophy by approaching the question concerning the relation between art and ontology, as well as the problem of presentation or coming into presence of being in this context. Nancy I have argued that the notion of art deconstructs some of Nancy’s central ontological ideas. The point of departure has been to examine Nancy’s idea of art in the perspective of the critique of the metaphysics of presence. I have sought to I have clarified how art differs from philosophy, from the interrogation of being as regards the ontological basis of art, which is plural and grounded in diversity. By this, I want to show that Nancy redevelops his deconstruction of the Heideggerian *Mitsein*, “being-with”, and his own formulation of community. The centre of my inquiry into art is Nancy’s idea of the singularity and finitude of the particular arts. On this basis, I have pointed out that in each of the arts and in every singular work, their form gives the ground for singularization.

As a point of departure in Nancy’s thought, I referred to Heidegger’s ontico-ontological difference, which, as I suggested, is central to Nancy’s understanding of the problematic of being or more exactly, of existence. In the first part of this study, I presented an overview of the way in which Heidegger and Nancy share the viewpoint that being is not to be thought of as beingness or constant presence. Rather, being is to be described as the coming into presence or the presentation of being, whereby being takes place in an infinitely finite way. In interpreting the question, Nancy’s position appears to be slightly ambiguous: fundamentally, he accepts the differentiation between being and beings, but also emphasizes that actually no differentiation exists between these levels. This is also what Heidegger basically claims in *Being and Time*. Yet Nancy takes various aspects of the ontological difference further, stating that in speaking of “being” one has to speak, in fact, of the existence of what exists singularly, or of the existent. There is, then, nothing like being “as such”, but being exists in multiplicity from the start: it exists as sense, and senses are necessarily related with – that is, inclined and towards – one another, because being is nothing “general” to beings.
Apart from this fact, I reflected on Nancy’s idea of sense or being as a matter of *dif\'erance*, defined by Derrida as an unconceptualizable, unperceivable dimension, which cannot be returned to any identity, but only to deferral and difference. Derrida explains that *dif\'erance* is the condition for the opposition of presence and absence, although *dif\'erance* derives from no category of being, whether present or absent. Nancy develops particularly Derrida’s notion of *dif\'erance*, which appears to be closely connected with Nancy’s idea of sense: for Nancy, being or sense occurs on no other ground than an interval or syncopation, in relation to other things. Thus, presentation takes place on its own, which is organized around its constitutive groundlessness. From this it follows that existence comes to know itself in and as an exposure to the other, while the being of the other turns out to be inappropriable, thus retaining its alterity. Both Derrida and Nancy share this thought. Derrida’s notion of *dif\'erance* is linked with what he calls logocentrism, which he describes as a “metaphysics of presence” or the determination of being as presence. *Diff\'erance* announces that there is no referent, that is, foundation or transcendental signified, for it in the metaphysical realm. In Nancy “senses” are outside the sphere of *logos*, or a point of origin: beings do not share any *logos*, which could articulate their common being. Instead, senses are multiplied when their presence divides itself. Senses exist as bodies (*corps*). Nancy thinks of sense as relational, as non-absoluteness and therefore, as community, while “community” stands for the being-ecstatic of being itself. What I have hoped to show is that, as such, community announces the way Nancy deconstructs or at least distances himself from Heidegger’s notion of *Mitsein*.

In the second part of this study, I explicate how, as a consequence of what is said above, Nancy’s ontology proves to be founded in the thought of plurality, which he takes as an ontological notion. Hence, the nomination “social ontology”, as Simon Critchley has put it, is probably justified. I have endeavoured to bring out the way in which Nancy radicalizes and at the same time deconstructs the Heideggerian idea of being-with. What can this mean in art? For Nancy the ontological principle of art is the original plurality, and thus one might think that its ontological unfoundedness stems, at least externally, from that of the multiplicity of existence. Art and the arts are fundamentally

---

1407 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 18-26, 143. This means that *logos* – thought or reason – is the central principle of language and philosophy. Logocentrism is the view that speech, and not writing, is central to language. See *ibid.*, p. 49.
diversified, and therefore do not have an origin with which they could be identified. The relation between art and the ontological plurality of existence is not unambiguous, however. One possibility would be to say that works of art exist as bodies, and therefore not as pure existence, but something which resembles *logos*.

In Nancy, community does not offer a direct parallel to the plurality of the arts. Community stands for “the community of others”, and the death of the others disrupts community as a project or as any kind of fusion, since community is nothing but “the impossible communion of mortal beings”.  In this perspective, the sharing of singularities comes to replace the thought of the origin of identity, death representing the inappropriable nature of existence. As far as art is concerned, Nancy illustrates this idea in his analysis of Caravaggio’s *The Death of the Virgin*. There, he states that, not only do we remain “on the threshold” of the painting’s inappropriability, we also ourselves *exist* as the living threshold of death: we either are on this side of death, or beyond it, but we have no experience of death.

What is crucial to Nancy’s notion of art is that art is a matter of *strangeness*. Art means access to what cannot be anticipated: art comes into presence on its own limit and as this limit, which borders on what is still strange, that is to say, unknown, impossible and negative to it, and even remains so. Singularity and repetition come to play in art’s exposition, which takes place as opening and withdrawing of other expositions, as differentiation – between the different arts, their genres, and details – progresses. The existence of art proves, thus, to be a limit since it does not reach itself, but is in a tension towards itself. This tension is what Nancy means by spacing. Existence, or *ek-sistence*, is, thus, a relation to the self (*être à soi*), and as such it is transcendence in relation to itself. In question is a real and factual relation to itself.

At stake in art and each of the arts is a transitive relation to their existence. This relation is an interval, which proves to be inappropriable, since its “self”

---

1409 Here Nancy’s view of the relation to the other contrasts with Blanchot’s. For Blanchot, the relation to the other is indissociable from the experience of mortality. Community without communion takes place in the other’s death, that is, as substitution, when mortal substitution replaces communion. In Nancy this kind of substitution does not take place, for existence necessarily always shows itself as someone’s being at a definite moment of time and place.
is only a coming of its ownmost possibility: a singular an event and exposition to the other. The self is, however, always otherness; as such, the relation to the self as a possibility appears to be impossibility to Nancy. This is because the relation is differing – it is a local difference and touching. Similarly, art has the structure of the Kantian sublime for Nancy. In the sublime, presentation shows its weakness, and thus presentation itself becomes thematized. Also in art, as Nancy claims, such limits come to be touched upon, and thus art touches us. By the “impossibility” of art I refer to the impossible fact of its existence, or existing which takes place by withdrawing, with no other ground than groundlessness. The said impossibility of art is, as I see it, grounded in the notion of “abandoned being”. Art is abandoned in that its ontology must be sought in the here-and-now of the fact of its existence. This is also what Nancy calls the “material facticity” of art: it is the transcendental condition of the arts in that sense is matter which gives form to itself. Matter, again, is difference, through which something as something – the fact that art presents a figure or a form – becomes possible.\textsuperscript{1410}

“Presentation” means to Nancy, first of all, an exposition, which in every discourse borders the sense of significations, always presented on the limits of sense. Presentation is nothing else but presence before any signification, allowing a thing to present itself “in its own truth”. Representation, in turn, takes a signification to its limit, so that the thought of representation includes its own limit as its closure. This is to say that representation tends to close into itself also what lies outside of its limits: representational thinking strives to give a thing a fixed identity, and at the same time it strives to define the ground it emerges from. As a result, as Nancy concludes, nothing emerges from any ground. This is also to say that representation has a substitutive function as regards the represented object, if the represented thing is understood as a picture or as an idea that is brought before the subject. Correspondingly, the thought of presentation does not imply a subjective reproduction of an “original presence”. On the contrary, it suggests presenting something which is not to be presented, or could not be completed. In Hegelian terms, at stake is “neither Nature nor Idea”, nor is it a figure. This is to say, in question is finitude itself, insofar as it is a coming into presence without presence.

\textsuperscript{1410} Cf. Nancy, \textit{The Birth to Presence}, p. 389 (\textit{Une pensée finie}, p. 321); see also \textit{The Sense of the World}, p. 57, 63 (\textit{Le sens du monde}, p. 94-95, 104).
In seeking the original difference in the origin of art, Nancy’s point of departure does not seem to be too distant from what is designated by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s notion of *mimesis*. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, what he calls “fundamental mimetology” already echoes the alleged opposition between nature and art, in a way that *techne* and *physis* have a common origin in their congeniality. What is produced is the origin itself, which is to be sought in difference. This is to say that the origin is localized or instituted in terms of fictioning or fashioning: namely, mimesis itself has the sense of “making present” in that the origin of things itself must be “fictioned”.

Thus, I argue, the thoughts of interval and discontinuity now appear to be inherent in the coming into presence of the arts. The presence of the work of art comes of no other presence; or the “modelling” of art is itself the “becoming-model” of the model – like being, it presents itself as a surprise. The thinking of art beginning from the groundlessness of being, and, consequently, the way in which existence is the existence of something that exists, comprises the thought of a blind spot or a blackout. Above all, speaking of an interval as a point of departure leads Nancy to deny that in question in art would be the logic of the representable and the unrepresentable, or of an invisible form which would be effectuated into a visible one. It is the modelling which does not rest on another model. This is to say that nothing absent is not exposed as presence in art.

The ground on which Nancy’s art arises is instead absence itself: it is absence that is modelled. The model does not pre-exist this event, but “model” means its own becoming-model, which makes it present as such. The form in art is born in an individual work when it differentiates itself from the other arts, other artistic genres or individual works, to their last detail, by virtue of the technical means. The form does not arise from any pre-given essence which might unify, say, a particular art, but only out of the differences between the arts, genres, and works. This is what gives art its singular existence. With this in mind, I suggest that in reflecting on art in terms of difference and interval, as a thinker of difference Nancy comes closer to Derrida’s idea of *différance* than to the structure of Heidegger’s ontological difference, although I see the ontological difference to lie at the basis of Nancy’s interpretation of being as existence.

Above I have tried to clarify how it is that “nothing”, or difference differing within itself, becomes a ground without ground. What I suggest is that the foundation for Nancy’s notion of art is not *altogether* deconstructed with a
view to his ontology, but as regards art, the thought of presentation proves to be different from presentation in the general ontological sense. Both art and ontology rest on the ungroundedness of existence, with no sense of foundation, substance, subject, or identity.

According to Nancy’s main arguments, characteristic to art is, above all, that it presents the fact that there is presentation. This, in his view, results in stating that art would be the exposition of what is obvious but not apparent, if “apparent” is understood in the sense of givenness. Another way in which Nancy puts it is that art, as the presentation of presentation, presents the fact that there is art, and that there are several arts. One the one hand, as far as the presentation of art is concerned, Nancy thus ends up suggesting that art presents its own figure. On the other hand, art is for him a matter of “singular plurality” and is originally divided. An example of this is offered by his analyses of works of art, where he takes an interest in addressing their unique coming into presence.

Here, one may recognize an ambiguity in his thought. If Nancy proposes that art is the “presentation of presentation”, is it still not possible to see this as an attempt to make an argument of “Art” in general? Namely, in the second argument, concerning the alleged singular plural nature of the arts, Nancy insists on deconstructing the very notion of art in its totality. This is what he claims to do with his statement of many arts. Based on these arguments, the question now arises whether Nancy’s account is really capable of approaching the works in their singularity and locality. At the same time, I find it also right to say that his statement of art, in its power to present the fact of presentation, continues to be an illustration of philosophy. This viewpoint concerning particular works of art which, however, brings forth Nancy’s ontological accounts, was discussed in section 4.4.

As I see it, at this point his reasoning remains somewhat equivocal. It is no doubt true that Nancy’s descriptions of artworks provide accurate insights into the works and show sensitivity in their specific nature and uniqueness – not as representatives of “painting” or “photography”, let alone “art”. But it is also true to say that he cannot avoid referring to a notion of “art”, even of “Art”, when, for example, it comes to explicating the artistic nature of presentation. Nancy’s fundamental claim is that each of the arts is the coming into presence of some presence, and not of presence in general, which thereby models itself, and that this presence “itself” only takes place in the difference of presences.
However, I find it difficult to discern whether his analyses of particular works can, in the last instance, expose a truly singular way of presenting, or do they rather exemplify how a work of art is capable of presenting a figure – perhaps even a figure “in general”? In other words, does an idea of art as presentation of presentation result in doing justice to the alleged “singular plurality” of art?

One could state, then, that the idea of art as the presentation of presentation does not as such lead to the conclusion that Nancy would, in fact, step beyond his ontology of singular bodies. More than this, in speaking of art as the presentation of presentation it could be a question of giving a deconstructive account of “ontology”, if this is understood as one which explains the nature of being. Being is originarily being-with, of which art and the arts are examples in that both are fragmented. Yet art presents some world, a facet of it: if one interprets this in positive terms, it is precisely that plurality and presentation are joined in a special way in art. For this reason, art is allegedly different from thinking.

According to Nancy, what holds true for artistic coming-into-presence is the fact that absolute finitude is all there can be. Thinking of an absolute finitude is followed by the thinking of limit, in reference to which only the reflection of an infinitely finite existence is possible. Since in the sphere of finite meanings, there can be nothing but birth into an infinite presentation, this reflection demands something which Nancy calls “a new transcendental aesthetic”. Finitude comes to signify “the irreducibility a priori of spacing” or “the time-space in the finite here-and-now”. Finitude also refers, however, to transcendental aesthetics as a material aesthetics of the disparity and the dislocation of our five senses, which helps us to understand Nancy’s definition of finitude as “the ‘essential’ multiplicity and the ‘essential’ non-reabsorption of sense or of being”. This explains what he wants to say, namely, that finitude is fundamentally connected with the conception of being as being-toward: being is always inclined or toward something in the exposition of each sense. Taken from the perspective of the “here-and-now”, hic et nunc, art is shown to have an aspect of praxis – like being, each of the arts takes place in an active relation as it opens toward other arts. Being, Nancy states, in every singular existence, is the arrival, the coming and the event of being, and sense can only be thought of in terms of its infinite

---

1411 Nancy, A Finite Thinking, p. 9, 27 (Une pensée finie, p. 19, 49).
For this reason the heterogeneity of the arts also bears a profound relationship with the sense of the world itself, because, in dis-locating “common sense” art makes the world touch itself.

It is because of this dis-location or difference that sensibility consists of nothing but its own division, which Nancy also calls its “dis-sent”. Yet, the fact that art touches us – or is exposed to us – is possible only in what unfolds itself both in the work of art and in the subject of the experience. It is between these polarities that an empty space is born. This space is a distance or the setting apart of polarities, a distance in which a local difference and a differing division are at work. Finally, Nancy goes as far as to say that the in-sensible differance is sensible, because the five senses themselves are the fragmentation or the fractality of the sense that is sense only as fragment. Such emptiness, born in differentiation, is the condition which makes any sense possible. Sense is being that never simply arrives but always returns as an infinite coming, making visible “a thing in itself”, which is a thing touching itself and distanced in itself.

The idea of instituting and of accomplishing sense has, according to Nancy, been a prevalent tendency in aesthetic thinking, in which all thinking of the beautiful, and even of the sublime, has until now insisted on extending to infinity the feature of finitude. Exposure, one might say, is itself finitude in Nancy's thinking, since that which is exposed to such an exposure, thought or philosophy will have to give up its pretensions to a total appropriation of sense.

Yet he does not claim that art would be a second-level presentation, and therefore, one cannot reduce it to thought. The exposition of art is coming before any presence and beyond any presence; rather, it might be described as the “burst” of a presentation. Being exposed to one another is “presence itself”: what is exposed is exposition itself, and what is presented is the coming-into-presence of presence and the differance of its being-present.

In speaking of art, the aforementioned inappropriability of sense can be described as the non-totalizable nature of the singular existence of art and the arts. This is the primary way in which art can be put on a par with the notion of community when considering their ontological plurality. If the point at which

---

1414 Ibid. (Le sens du monde, p. 197).
a community comes to its limit is in the death, thus remaining without the sense of totality, this fact, as I understand it, could give the thought of death as the foundationless foundation of plurality for both art and community in Nancy. How plurality applies to death, which takes place singularly, is of course a question which remains worth further reflection.

Because all presentation proves to be the presentation of a limit within presentation, I argue that Nancy's aesthetic thinking is articulated by an interval and a threshold – that of sense in its infinite opening, art offering access to the limit of sense between “the intactness and touching of light and shadow”.

The ontology of art is to be found in its finitude: not in the differences of the senses, but in their dislocation and diffraction, the way the senses enter each other’s “space”, that is, in the taking place of art, in the infinite opening of the finite sense, which means that art is finite finishing. Thus, I hold that discontinuity and finitude are what gives art and every art its singularity in the first place: each of the arts has to singularly decide of its own existence and justification among all the existing works of art, the different arts, and lastly, among everything that exists.

In the beginning of this study I asked what, finally, is it that makes art different from philosophy and how art can contribute to philosophy. As I have pointed above, one aspect of this is art’s special way of presenting; another thing is that in art distinction is at stake. In other words, what I have tried to bring up in the discussion on Nancy and the work of art is that art is characterized by the facts that it is evident, manifest or patent. Art manifests the fact that presentation is something evident. This is what prevents us from identifying art with thought. With respect to the materiality of art and of the arts, matter is what gives the image its distinctness, that is, makes it different from thought. Distinction means that the image is not the thing itself, nor its imitation. The image is inappropriable in that it has a weight of its own; philosophy is unable to penetrate materiality. In this way, one can think that in Nancy every work of art “decides” of, not only its place among artistic genres and particular arts, but also of the notion of art – although art and the arts are not in a dialectical relation or reducible to one another.

Bibliography

WORKS BY JEAN-LUC NANCY


UNPRINTED SOURCES BY JEAN-LUC NANCY

Nancy, Jean-Luc (s. a.) ”Experiencing Soun-gui”,

“The Technique of the Present”,

OTHER WORKS


Bernasconi, Robert (1993). “On Deconstructing Nostalgia within the West: The Debate between Nancy and Blanchot”, Research in Phenomenology 23 (p. 3-21).


Malabou, Catherine (2004). “Pierre aime les horranges”,


in Dominique Janicaud and Jean-François Mattéi, La métaphysique à la limite. Paris: PUF.


