

# *In media res: Interceptions of the Work of Art and the Political in Jean-Luc Nancy*

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We must be able to think a world, and therein lies the question that is not artistic at all, in the sense of not at all decorative, which is our question. Our question, or rather our categorical imperative, or again our necessity in the sense of our poverty and our way of being needy because we have no world, but we must be able to imagine a world. To imagine the total impossibility of thinking a world immediately leads to madness, to death. We must be able to think a world, thus there is a necessity for this possibility and the possibility of its necessity. It is possible that this world may be necessary, that every world may be—that of all people and that of each person—even though none of them shows either its reasons or its ends, but perhaps that's what a world is—that which shows neither a reason nor an end. Anything that can show—or about which one can show—reasons or ends, is perhaps in a world, but it is not a world, it does not make a world. Thus, based on this possibility and necessity of a world—that is, of a totality of meaning, I am attempting to read these paintings. (Nancy, *Transcription*, 20)

Anyone closely following the philosophical and political reflections of Jean-Luc Nancy, especially his analysis of the disjointed articulation of the *cum* in community<sup>1</sup> (community without communitarianism, exposed, shared, held in common) and his critique of the concept of sovereignty and its ontotheology,<sup>2</sup> or again the huge project that traverses his writings concerning the deconstruction of Christianity, will still have only a partial view of the breadth and extent of this thought if he fails to grasp the important role Nancy confers to art. The question of art is pregnant in many guises in all of Nancy's recent essays, whether about dance,<sup>3</sup> cinema (see Nancy and Kiarostami, *L'Evidence du film*, 2001), painting and photo,<sup>4</sup> music (see his *À l'écoute*, 2002), sculpture (see Nancy and Parmigianni, *Coeur ardent*, 2003), ceramics (see his *Miquel Barceló—Mapamundi*, 2002), and even about urban architecture or the landscape.<sup>5</sup> Nancy questions the so-called specificity of each "art" devolved or dedicated to one particular "sense" (painting to sight, music to hearing,

etc.). He strives to underline the divisibility of each sense, or of each medium, in all senses. It is in *Dehors la danse* that he lays out most clearly his views on this question of the “difference among the arts/difference among the senses as a constitutive difference (not secondary or accidental),” stressing the fragility of this representation of art when one attempts

to distribute, if not to differentiate the arts (not just painting and music, etc. but also, for example, painting and drawing, musical composition and execution, cinema and video, installation and sculpture, etc.), nor less to divide up the “senses” (for example, the sense of distance and the sense of order, sense of color and of texture, of dampness and dryness, etc., in their relationships to the canonical “five senses”), not to mention the well-known difficulty in qualifying the former by the latter (is music an art of time, painting an art of sign? Are they only that? etc.). (*Dehors la danse*)

If Nancy still acknowledges some usage in this current, “ordinary” representation of the relationships (not always equal) of the different arts within the heart of “art,” if he acknowledges their intermedial capacity to establish correspondences among the different senses, or, for each art or medium, to cultivate an internal heterogeneity, he stresses the fact that there is no true isolation (of sight in painting, of hearing in music), but that “all of art is at play every time in an art, and all the senses in a sensation;” “each sense/art play[ing] in its fashion the difference (and the contact)” (*ibid.*). In “*Séparation de la danse*” he adds, “and perhaps it is even necessary to say that each art, in each work, creates its own regime of the senses, without forgetting to add that in each instance this regime also owes several of its characteristics to a context, an era, a place and to the singularity of values, of style and tone that is called a ‘people’” (*ibid.*).

### **Reciprocity between World and Art**

Stressing the differentiation and heterogeneity that transcends and traverses all the classifications designed to distinguish among the arts, Nancy is less interested in art as a “simple” technique (as though it were ever simply a matter of technique)<sup>6</sup> or even as an aesthetic question (in the limited sense inherited from the “*beaux-arts*”), than in the enigmatic experience which, in the thing designated as “art,”<sup>7</sup> puts “thought to work in a world of forms and matter, of rhythms, or images, of sounds or of colors” (*Y a-t-il encore un monde?*, 55). In short, it’s a question of grasping in this thought of art, in this “art of art,” the creation of a world—and of

the world, no less—which surges and withdraws. Thus art is not a subsidiary of thought; it is absolutely indissociable from it, in order to think the concept of world, if one takes seriously this proposition of *La création du monde ou la mondialisation*:

It is not impossible to note provisionally that it's perhaps not by chance that art furnishes the most speaking examples [of the world]: a world is perhaps always—at least potentially—of the order of unity particular to the work of art. Unless it is the opposite, or rather unless the reciprocity between “world” and “art” are constitutive of both of them. (35)

In an interview with Claire Margat, Nancy spoke even more clearly, more affirmatively concerning what he suggested “provisionally” in this note, opening up a vein rich for development and ramifications in his work. He declared that this reciprocity between world and art is due to their common absence of finality, and that it is not by chance that the work of art has been assimilated with the world, for both of them exist only in and for themselves:

A world, or the world, what is it made for? In order to make world, that's all. No world is made for anything but itself. [...] The world finds itself today in the position of art: it serves no design, it produces nothing, neither does it come from any *outré-monde*. [...] It is what responds to the meaning of a world that knows that henceforth it cannot count on anything but itself—and not on God or on an historical eschatology—to be and to do what it has to be and do: a world [...]. (*Y a-t-il encore un monde?*, 55)

### Art and the Senses

This position, whose implications are at once ontological, political and aesthetic, finds itself put to the test by the senses (the senses rather than sense, and even ab-sense or beyond sense [*l'outré-sens*], beyond or at the heart of any perception by the senses) in several of Nancy's recent texts on art, no matter the diversity of the “objects.”<sup>8</sup> For at this level also, the philosopher's reflection never fails to challenge such a “conception” of the world or of an art assumed to define these objects as a given formality, an accomplished synthesis, whereas on the contrary it is a question of grasping how, in art as in other “worlds,” there is never anything except passages, possible or potential trajectories, sketches or glimpses: “figures waiting to make a world” (*Transcription*, 11), bodies with no other object than to spring forth, “to come into the world” as well as “to make a world arrive” (*ibid.*, 12) in a beginning that is always opening, rather than open.<sup>9</sup> *In statu nascendi*, or *in media res*, this would be

the movement—*élan*, plunge, uprooting—philosophy's *impetus* for Jean-Luc Nancy. Not virtues or values or meaning, but an upheaval, an insurrection, an impetuosity or an *untimeliness*:

Philosophizing doesn't happen without *élan*, not without a violent *élan* that hurls you forward and also uproots you [note that this is already the dance-step]: that uproots you from deposited, sedimented meaning, partly decomposed, and which hurls you toward possible meaning, especially meaning that is not given, not available... ("Pièce jointe," 13)

In "Pièce jointe," he recounts having kept on his desk for several years this saying from Seneca: "You will not show me anyone who knows how he began to want what he wants: he was not led to it by reflection, but pushed by an *élan* [*sed impetu impactus est*]" (12).

This position—that in matters of art one is not dealing with objects or forms—engages an idea of creation as a placing outside of oneself, exposition to the open, whose consequences impact philosophy and the political as well as art ("To create concepts, rough up languages, sharpen styles, find the thought—that's the work" [*ibid.*, 14]). For philosophy lacks an object of its own ("All possible objects are themes and motives upon which to work [...]. That means that each time philosophy comes into play in new terms. It starts over each time. It is nothing other than this beginning—starting to think" (*Y a-t-il encore un monde?*, 55). It hardly matters what the object is (if we even still use this concept and the old limits it assumes: subject-object, activity-passivity, animate-inanimate, inside-outside, interiority-exteriority, etc.). It could be a work of art, a knowledge or an event. In politics as in art, "Everything becomes once again not only worthy of thought, but in need of thought,"<sup>10</sup> and it is this reciprocity between world and art—their mutual loss of any ontological, theological or anthropological alibi—that sparks this thought of creation—creation *ex nihilo*, in Nancy's frequent phrase. With nothing already set in place either before or behind us as assumption or meaning, it is a question of moving beyond these "conceptions" (in both senses of the word) of *world* and *art* where they are both still defined by their "nature" or their "ends," their "identity," an Idea, or a regulating ideal. It's no longer simply a question of the so-called autonomy of art (qualified by Nancy as "abstract *jouissance* and closed upon itself,"<sup>11</sup> but of that which in art opens "infinitely an access to the truth," because it is precisely "without an end—that is, without a stop and without satisfaction, without limit and without meaning" (*ibid.*, 57). It is in this that art and the political—especially the "democracy to come," to use

Derrida's phrase—communicate with each other (precisely because they are incommensurable):<sup>12</sup>

Basically, this whole affair [of art] is identical to that of democracy. The latter is not a given either, and likewise is not something to aim for or hope for at some later date like an ideal (for example, a "republican" one). But it can only come into being as a non-given, perhaps even as the sharing out of the non-given itself (which in a sense is nothing—neither a thing nor a form nor an Idea.)<sup>13</sup>

I would like to focus on some of Nancy's texts on art in order to investigate how the political plays out in them, in a body of work that leaves no sovereignty intact or unscathed—not even the sovereignty of the body of work itself. Whereas sovereignty has been defined as indivisible in its very principle, the division, the opening, the exposition of and in the work of art would no longer be simply the effects of a contained mediation—for example in a representation—but would already effectively engage a deconstruction of ontotheological sovereignty. Further, a question should be raised concerning precisely this sovereignty of the work: is it a matter of the same sovereignty as the one that in the political realm nourishes ethnic and nationalist sovereignty? Or is it a matter of imagining, in the work of art, a different sovereignty, one beyond the most absolute sovereignty—not because it exceeds it in power or superiority, but because it would be, as Derrida says, unconditional?<sup>14</sup> This question, coming from the work of art, would be the question par excellence of the political today, and of a "democracy to come." Thus, it is no longer art that would be in the image of the world—a world imitated, represented, copied in an image—but, rather, it would be the work of art that henceforth would "image" the world, and not just in the weaker acceptation that the imaginary grants to the image.

Thus no matter what the object is—nudity in painting, the portrait of the writer, the forbidden representation of the death camps, the sonorous body or the body thrown out of the dance, the malleability of this "primary material" that will be named—Nancy asserts that "that hardly makes a difference" (*Miquel Barceló*, 26)—whether it's painting, ceramics, sculpture or drawing, the question would always be the following, a question always new and ground-breaking in its beginning, for Nancy claims that

You can't get further upstream than the elementary. You begin with it and in it, and you no longer get beyond the beginning. You do not scrutinize the principles or the reasons that would give the laws of a composition and the plan of a work. But you are at work, already, elementarily. (*ibid.*, 21)

This is a question that touches “the *thingness* that petrifies and molds all things,” this thingness, “the concept, the thought of the being-as-thing” (*ibid.*, 26) and which art, by its tension, its extension and its attention (without intention) to things will cause or allow to come to the surface:

How can we speak without speaking about any object? How can we pass over to the side of the thing—there where it is always ahead of us, already there, carried forward—how can we pass over to its side, alongside of it, in order to espouse its movement, the exact mode of its presence, and not its representation? In consequence, how can we go from language right to the thing, how can we touch it, hold it, work with it, weigh it and preserve it in order to give it to itself, in order finally to leave the thing itself naked—but with a nakedness that would be identically its voice [*dire*]? (*La Naissance des seins*, 11)

From language right to the thing [*avec la langue à même la chose*]: if I cite somewhat at length (when one reads Nancy’s texts the temptation is great to not interrupt his already fractured syntax), it is because one hears in this the primordial strain that traverses all his texts on art (though this “one” does not begin to render the position of the spectator who penetrates the work of art as much as he is penetrated by it).<sup>15</sup> It is a matter of passing from the object to the thing, just as in the political realm it would be a matter of slipping between two understandings of *cum* in community (*with* or *together*, *connexio* or *compositio*—the crux of the matter is perhaps there)<sup>16</sup> and of measuring a space—a distant or divergent proximity where one can say of both art and community that they are “that which one cannot touch (or only through a touching without contact)” (*Au fond des images*, 12). The whole question of art (what opens up and operates in the work of art) is lodged each time in the way of finding a “passage toward a different world, an access—access itself, the pure notion of access” (*La Naissance des seins*, 44); art would have no other aim or end than to be within this passage, and to make it happen. Art is a way of “sojourning in the coming,” for “it is necessary to remain in the passage, and not to pass it, for fear of nullifying it” (*ibid.*, 41).

Numerous recent readings of paintings or photos echo this proposition, as can be seen in the analysis of “Joana’s Back in the Doorway,” a photograph by Nan Goldin, where “the infinite transit of sexual identities” is put to work in the image of a passage “where one can’t quite see what is happening, where the passage remains indefinite, suspended.”<sup>17</sup> Now it is clear that this *ekphrasis* is at work throughout, “from language right to the thing,” to show that what’s at stake here is much more than a disruption of the sense of sight (“it’s a disruption of the senses, of all the senses and in all directions [*dans tous les sens*]”) (*Nus*

*sommes*, 117). This traversing of sexual identities passes beyond henceforth familiar “trans-gender” questions in order to bring out something entirely different—an extension of the political itself into the unobjectionable encounter discerned in this passage. The encounter is not “in relation to subjection to a subject” (*La Naissance* 46); the transfer that occurs in the place of passage is “not a process of identification with the other or of projection onto the other—which would assume two already defined subjects—but the experience of an exposure to otherness that constitutes the subject; an exposure to the extension that constitutes the psyche; the sometimes painful, sometimes joyous sharing of the sense of an encounter in a place of passage” (*Nus sommes*, 119). I use the word *interception* in my title, as opposed to *conception*, and perhaps by now the inflection that I seek to attribute to the former is becoming apparent. For Nancy, the very way of situating the relations among the senses contains from the outset a political dimension. Thus, in *Dehors la danse*, Nancy questions the specific sense of dance, that art with the “common” property of being “practiced by almost everyone” either by dancing or by watching a dance. (For him, movement is not enough to trace a separation, a dividing line between dancers and those who form a body with them via the eyes or the restrained body.) Nancy describes the body of the dance—hurled, extended, multiplied, lifted up, tangent with the ground but unattached—in terms that are both those of a cosmogony<sup>18</sup> and those of a community: “of one with the other, of the air with the earth and of the body with the body;” in each case it’s always a question of the same “shattering of separation”; one must “secede and withdraw in order to leap ahead better” (*ibid.*) Not only are these three levels set in motion in a stressed triple separation “between soil and sense, between body and body, between the same and the fray [*entre le même et la mêlée*],” but the dance is the figure par excellence of a separation that opens all these bodies, all these senses and all the arts to one another:

[...] sense above all the senses, and which closes them, then re-opens them one by one, slipping between all, jumping to the bottom of each one and from one to another, from the space in time and from the figure in speed, plunging into each and from one to the other, from space into time and from figure into speed, touching each, setting each among themselves in a dance or dancing relation—sight against hearing, the speck of skin in the step of color, the timbre folded by the sense of taste, distance by scent, orientation by assonance, finally a body by the other and by the same, an open body, cleft, hung on its own crotch, ten bodies mixed and unmixed, 100 bodies hurled by a stochastic ballistics, a sense regulating the geared-down choresthesia of all the senses, of which each, one by one, in every way, is originally a stressed separation from all the others and simultaneously a leap above all at the extremity of each one... (*ibid.*)

Likewise, but otherwise (since this time it is a question of music) one can immediately hear the double political-aesthetic implication that resonates in the following declaration of principle:

[...] each sense is a case and a divergence from such a “(self-)vibrating,” and all the senses vibrate among themselves, one against another, and some to another, including the felt sense. [...] (Nevertheless, it’s a whole other question to ask how many senses there are, or if they are actually beyond counting.) But we still must simultaneously discern how each sense regime is differently a model and resonance for all of them... (À l’écoute, 22-23)

This position that emphasizes the co-presence of the senses and the vibration that takes place among them like a *renvoi* and an encounter, extends to considering the subject as a diapason: “(The subject, a diapason? Each subject, a differently regulated diapason? Regulated to itself, but without a known frequency?)” (*ibid.*, 37). We suddenly discern in this position—in its resonance, precisely—how this seemingly aesthetic question in fact at its core (in its core like a chorus?) [*en son coeur comme chœur?*]<sup>19</sup> carries the question of the political—in this instance the image of the people, of their discord and clamor, of their *being-with* that is not *being-together*, if one understands by that a “harmony” that blends mixed voices, the sealing of a “homohegemonic” consensus, as Derrida would say, linking all the *dissensus*.

It’s clear that in such an aesthetic undertaking that questions the sensory qualities of the arts, the conditions of their mutual intrication and of their difference, the stake is again to find a way to reconfigure the political *being-with*,<sup>20</sup> to remodel it based on the work of art—that is, based on that which remains “without-image, [...] without-model, [...] without-principle-nor-end” (*Y a-t-il encore un monde*, 54). In a passage from *À l’écoute*, where Nancy evokes “the *becoming-music* of sensibility and the *becoming-of-the-world* of musicality, whose historicalness remains to be pondered” (*ibid.*, 29), he suddenly is not speaking of the domain of sound, but of the creation of the political space that sound makes heard—that *becoming-world* of music “whose extraordinarily mixed nature—popular and refined, religious and profane, old and recent, emanating from all continents at once” is already, with its “internal transformations,” its “growing importations of exterior references,” its hybridization, its “remodeling of sonorous schema—timbres, rhythms, writings”—an exemplary demonstration of the political community to come.

One could also wonder in which directions, which goings and comings, the transfers pass between music and the political, as is the case in this text, but also between the political and music, as in “Le



people souverain," where the concept of the people—equivocal and out of tune in its essence—is reconfigured precisely on the basis of music.<sup>21</sup> As the "echo chamber" of the political, "the people" is in effect placed as a sonorous body (where the political resonates, when it does not actually beat out its rhythm upon it, in a more vulgar sense, like a stretched skin upon which are beaten timbres and different dissonant rhythms—a body in common, divided, never in unison, nor tuned to the same tdiapason, nor even to a single one.<sup>22</sup> A demonstration that is always pushing further ahead the *methexis* (participation, sharing, contagion) beyond representation and mimesis. There are infinite variations of such conversions or echoes in Nancy's work, where the political and the aesthetic open onto each other. One reflection on timbre as "communication of the incommunicable" is an echo (less clearly articulated) of the "inoperative," "confronted" community:

I would willingly say that timbre is communication of the incommunicable: on condition of understanding that the incommunicable is, quite logically, none other than communication itself—that by which a subject is an echo—of itself, of the other, it's all the same—it's all a plural one. Communication is not transmission but the sharing that makes the subject; sharing as the subject of all the "subjects." Unfolding, dance and resonance. (*À l'écoute*, 78-79)

It is significant here that sharing puts in contact—but contact of separation, of what juxtaposes within composing, without articulation—three words that designate three senses (sight, touch, hearing) and three arts (painting, dance, music) that exchange their reverberating properties. This kind of transfer among the arts, which goes well beyond the traditional "correspondence," takes place in several of Nancy's essays, particularly at the moment of precipitating their "end." In *À l'écoute*, a "Coda" dedicated to an *ekphrasis* of Titian's *Venus*<sup>23</sup> listening to an organ player seizes this interception of music in painting—the proximity and distancing of what happens in the painting between the one and the other, between the eye and the ear<sup>24</sup>—in an opening of the senses/arts listening to themselves among themselves, touching but in an intangible way, in a forbidden, suspended contact of the *in-between*.<sup>25</sup> When Nancy speaks of painting elsewhere—this time about Miquel Barceló—it is music that gives him the resources to render sensible the malleability of matter, its transformation and mutation, as well as its mutism:

[...] one hears that monotonous chant droning on the edge of the brushstrokes, just as the voice and the sense come to bend their phrasing according to the basecoat applied, to soak in the tempera and murmur while

fainting in the pasty matter, in its flows and against its projections. This painting mutters, it howls, it blows through its nostrils the vapor of a thick sense... (*Miquel Barceló—Mapamundi*, 19)

It is no longer a matter of an *ekphrasis* in the current sense of the word—that is, of a figure operating a transfer from one sense into another, the passage from one order to another, its transposition and its transformation (via metaphoric paths)—but something entirely different. It's the effectivity of an energy that no longer owes anything to mastery or to autonomy or to the form already given as framework or content, the meaning of this experience. For if the sonorous, the visual, and the tactile are completely traversed here, they are also set down and mixed—tints, liquid, colors, humming and muttering—to which sense do they relate? Once again we have here an example of the thought of creation that exceeds limits, exceeds the lines of division meant to distinguish the senses from the canonical arts, in a mixture, a commingling that forces one to rethink everything habitually understood by mediation, medium, middle, etc., and all the value-concepts associated with these (receptivity, plasticity, ductility, malleability of materials, etc). Far from seeing Barceló's painting as a proper visual body, Nancy listens to the music that floats around this painting; he is attentive to "a coming and a passing, a spreading and a penetrating" (*À l'écoute*, 31), where, from one sense to another, it is not the presence of the one and the other, the stable and consistent *being-present* that matters, but the internal diffraction where, for the one and the other of sense/art, for the one and the other that create themselves against one other, the "division of an inside/outside, division and participation, disconnection and contagion"<sup>26</sup> is produced. The axiom of a correspondence between the senses and art is itself surpassed because there are no more given conditions, "nothing pure, nothing identical to oneself, except that which only *is* in exiting oneself—from nothing—by ex-citation or by the e-motion that lifts it..." (*Miquel Barceló*). The question of art thus finds itself as the very place of passage for thought, if, as Nancy affirms:

Philosophy consists precisely of becoming engaged in a space where there is no configuration of meaning available, nor a felt immediacy—nor, in consequence, the possibility of mediating the one by the other. [...] Between religion and the lived—in a space, take note, where one also finds politics, science and art—philosophy is in charge, if you will, of spacing itself. Neither form nor life nor concept nor intuition, but from one to the other, or else of the one in the other, through the other, but the one against the other, a tension without resolution....(*Chroniques philosophiques*, 21)

Thus neither modeling nor happy medium, but “the power to hold fast before the necessity that its meaning will never be given to it” (*ibid.*, 22)—this would be the truth, always in action, both in thinking and in the work of art.

Likewise but differently, in *Visitation (de la peinture chrétienne)*, the final “Coda” will open up painting, with its implicit “Do not Touch”<sup>27</sup> but which “we touch with our eyes,” thus making a passage from the visual to touching, but also and especially from the visual to the invisible, to the intangible. It is always a matter of the image: “In conclusion, I will venture one step further, elsewhere in painting towards another womb, another place of its conception” (*ibid.*, 36). He speaks of what painting “does not render visible but [...] places invisible in the light, that it carries or carries away invisible in the pigments and in the folds of its illumination” (*ibid.*, 43). Pictorial art, and through it all the arts of the image (“not limited to painting, [but] pass[ing] into music, into dance as well as into film, photo, video, etc.” [*ibid.*, 51]) is valued most as having the capacity “to advance the opening up of the place that gives rise to what has no place: presence as essentially itself exceeds and exceeds itself” (*ibid.*, 52). Thus, once again, this aesthetic experience is at heart the ordeal or even the purging of the political, if “from the heart of that operation we call ‘art’ [...] we designate nothing other than the shared access to our common presence.”<sup>28</sup>

### The Heart of the Matter

Let’s look at things from a different perspective: let’s try changing material or medium in order to get to the bottom of things—to the heart of things, as we say when we seek to assure ourselves that we have truly addressed a question. This question of “first matter” [*matière première*] (to borrow the title of an important text dedicated to this fundamental aspect) is for Nancy always the first question—the question of “base” [*fond*] is his first and last question:<sup>29</sup> “How can a passivity come first, and in such a way that it passively informs the whole first form itself, before any form even brushes up against it—this is the enigma that fashions this work, that raises it up and shakes it.”<sup>30</sup> Especially since *Corpus* and *L’Intrus*, it seems that the primordial gesture consists of going straight to the heart of things, and first to the heart of the heart, where its beating opens and divides it. Thus, on the subject of Claudio Parmiggiani’s heart-sculpture, Nancy writes that when “the heart abandons itself, it is a heart anew, it is inflamed, it becomes blurred, or it constricts, and always it is a different heart in the heart of itself, a different tone, a different accent, a different beat, a different *élan* or a different syncope” (*Coeur*

*ardent*, 7). For this philosopher (who knows better than most what is meant by “grafts” or an “extruded heart” when they concern a particular body), the heart is never objectifiable in the order of a representation; it is open, pulled aside, even torn apart, beaten rather than beating—the place and experience of a breaking and entering, of an exposition that makes any integrity, any immunity, any wholeness or holiness unthinkable. Far from being consistent and full, it is an empty and hard heart that we are talking about here, a heart that must be “toughly dug into the breast of its toughness” (*ibid.*, 15) before being able to claim any tenderness. One cannot tell which heart Nancy is describing—his own or the sculpted one—when he calls it “a pebble thrown against the fingers that seek to palpate it,” or “a gushing, a throwing, a blow that is always struck anew with this bit of quartz, of ebony or of iron” (*ibid.*, 10). This heart already participates in two senses—sight and hearing: “It alone has the necessary ear for hearing the voice of a different heart, or even its own voice. It alone has the necessary ear for seeing the images that a heart forms, itself or else another” (*ibid.*, 5). From this heart that takes in and pumps out the blood, that fills and empties, that dilates and contracts, from this heart that in principle is the form of a concentration and a consistency of the being in itself, of its constitutive hardness, Nancy faced with Parmiggiani’s sculpture extrapolates a very different image—defeated, abandoned, on the edge of rupture, a heart that has been struck and thrown away:

[...] good for enduring the blows of pounding, of hammering, of modeling and fashioning, the heart that has been thrust out, spit out of the chest into the uncertain and disorienting opening called the world or the earth or existence, the works and days, the ages and the colors, the mechanical arts and the liberal arts, war and commerce. (*ibid.*, 13)

Even if one says that the heart beats, in reality “it is the one that is beaten,” according to Nancy, beaten from the outside, soundly thrashed, “all its pulsation and its restrained presence, held beneath a chest that is offered up, are nothing but a way of being exposed and of being nothing but that” (*ibid.*, 13). The heart does not understand, and submits to every blow: “It remains exposed and alone: its absolute solitude, its absolution from any communication and from any community” (*ibid.*, 14). In this figure of the propulsing heart, “with neither goal nor direction,” expulsed from itself, exposed to everything that “comes from elsewhere, from the other, from outside” (*ibid.*, 15) Nancy is thinking in metaphorical terms of the community (since the community is perhaps first of all that “*affaire du Coeur*,” cadence, tempo, rupture between two measures, interval); he thinks “with” Parmiggiani’s work rather than “about” or on the “subject”

of it: “the truth of its matter is unknown, the matter of its truth is not known”:

This is why the heart’s thing is not a thing, but a disposition: it is disposed to being exposed. It feeds anxiety born of susceptibility—from a capacity for receiving blows. In colliding with itself, in itself, its agitation exposes itself to being struck all over, in every way, without being able to distinguish from the start what is striking from outside from what is striking from inside. There is no outside and inside of the heart—it is in itself the febrile placed outside of itself. (*ibid.*, 18)

In this sculpture-heart—a hammered mass, a carbonized stone, a metallicized meteor, a cold anvil, a glowing ember, a burning metal—metaphor and metonymy are so mixed that it is impossible to tell from what body the image is formed. Nancy wonders whether it is a question of “muscle” or “sentiment,” of organ or of culture, or of an unnamable “thing” that is disheartening [*é-coeurant*].<sup>31</sup> Or, rather, is it about their “intimate metastasis”—a gliding from “body to body” that “directly touches our veritable heart”: “I see the image of a heart (a mass placed on its stem, heavy elevation of the twisted vessels, fleshy volume and pure idea of love), and that touches my heart” (*ibid.*, 23).

### Fragility in Art and Life

In “Attention: Fragile!” Nancy turns his attention away from the hardness of the heart, and toward a different material—glass, whose fragility, he argues, is not an attribute, not a substance or a property, but a constitutive and originary fault arising from existence: “Life is malleable, existence is not, and this is why it is fragile. It is deprived of plasticity, and only experiences tension” (“Fragile”). In this brief text, written in the form of shattering or shattered bursts, Nancy reflects on this tension by taking care not to simply see through the glass, not using it as a useful mediation (its transparency that allows for connections, for example), but seeing it in its very fragility, in what is “frangible, fragmentable and fragile,” in what strains it, always ready to break—that resonance on its surface of an internal texture that strains the whole toward its outside, that tendentially exhausts it in its outside” (*ibid.*). This tension of glass that draws attention to its fragility (attention that eventually slackens and can then make it burst) is likened by Nancy to the skin or nudity of existence:

Love is fragile, like glass, like the skin of men, of numerous animals and plants, like democracy. [...] The world and existence [*l'exister*] are not shattered, but they shatter. Glass, skin, love and democracy, the subject, the genotype and the ozone layer, matter in quarks and quantas, everything

shatters. [...] We know it, we become attentive/careful again, we need a different attention. (*ibid.*)

Unlike the qualities of being (solidity, robustness, consistency, resistance), fragility belongs to existence, it is a fault built into being, a “virtual de-attachment, the fine line of a possible decapitation,” arising directly from the real [*à même le réel*], thus already set apart, according to the syntagm “à même” in which Nancy stresses the de-attachment, the upheaval: “‘*même*’ resides in the self, but *à* already makes it fragile” (*ibid.*). In glass, as in other primary materials, Nancy stresses the ex-traction of existence: “It is to extract oneself and present oneself to the outside, to expose the possibility of a separation between self and the outside, between *même* and other” (*ibid.*).

### The Nude in Art

“Whoever sees glass—and not through glass—knows that he must be careful. Likewise for whoever sees a skin.” From glass to nudity, the same fragility, the same carefulness. Clearly it is not by chance that Nancy is interested in the question of the nude in art. In his essays on other aspects of art, such as the self-portrait in *Le Regard du portrait*, or the “portrait of the writer” in *Iconographie de l’auteur*,<sup>32</sup> even when the genre is not explicitly the nude,<sup>33</sup> it is always a question of the nude, of the problem of the base [*fond*] (founding and foundation), or of an unveiling [*mise à nu*] of an absence of base.<sup>34</sup> In the West, the nude was a privileged category in art. In *Nus sommes*, Nancy and Federico Ferrari propose to set the nude apart from the images so often associated with it: modesty/obscenity, intimacy, unveiling/revelation, eroticism/pornography, etc. They postulate that although the Western nude was displayed for curiosity or desire, its goal was “nothing except to be nude” (5), and that it presents, on the contrary, this particularity: the nude “exposes itself for itself and offers *per se* an interest in that it is not linked to ends of knowledge nor to ends of pleasure” (*ibid.*). They claim that for them the nude is “neither erotic nor anatomical nor authentic” (6), thus reopening the enigmatic question of the nude, inasmuch as the body, in a violent denegation of the evidence created by art, has never ceased being the object of extreme attention, which extends to cruelty in certain contemporary practices that incarnate a desperate desire “to make bodies into their own icons” (9). (On this subject, Nancy cites David Nebreda’s *Autoportraits* and Orlan’s performances, where the line between extreme images and sacrificial mutilation is always thinner [*Au fond des images*, 53].)

For the question of the nude in art necessarily touches the thinking of art—what Nancy calls “the art of art”—a material and sensible thought that ponders directly the work that takes shape within it, not in a “belle forme” but in that “originary opening” “yawning and bottomless,” that “wide open mouth,” an “erotics of matter and form” where one will touch, will “sense the sense of the nude” (*Nus sommes*, 73-75). This ambiguous proximity of denuding and destitution [*dénudement et dénuement*] that is reopened in each nude subject calls thought into question, “whether for it [thought] it is above all a question of standing denuded of received significations and drawn figures” (9). Thus in several of Nancy’s fragments, outside of any Treatise or Theory, a reciprocity is introduced between art and the nude, between nudity and thought.<sup>35</sup> Like art, and in its base (a base without foundation), the nude serves no design (moral, political, historical, religious); it doesn’t answer to any project or intention or alibi (theological, ontological, anthropological); “It rests on itself, in that ‘self’ that is the skin, the thinness of the skin and its tint” (8). There is nothing behind or beyond these “smooth surfaces of our images, of our skins” (8). “This is why the image is its element, and its skin always the skin of an image. Whoever denudes himself makes himself into an image: pure exposition” (7). No base, no depth, no background or other-world: the nude harbors no meaning or truth to be revealed or exhibited. It is the place of the emergence of that paradoxical presence that Nancy, borrowing from Blanchot, delineates by the notion of “absens,” a presence restrained and withdrawn within the self, a force of inoperativeness (*désœuvrement*) that is also that of the community when it shares “a secret without divulging it”—communication that is not of the order of the communicable, but which is not ineffable, “but opens up every word” (*La Communauté affrontée*, 48, 50).

As Nancy describes in “L’Image—le distinct,” the nude can be said to be an “image [that] thrusts in my face an intimacy that comes to me in full intimacy” (*Au fond des images*, 16). We discern that the figure of the nude (but is it as much a figure as something else, come to delimit itself in excess?) is here no longer an area subordinate to art, a minor genre or motif in the history of painting, but the very thing of art. As Nancy notes, the nude “does not constitute the theme but rather the limit of pictorial thought. Now, ultimately a thought always becomes troubled and uneasy” (*Nus sommes*, 50). In the nude, “what touches is something of an intimacy that is carried to the surface” (*Au fond des images*, 16); “its ‘within’ is no different from its ‘in front of’” (*ibid.*, 25). This is another way of saying that the spectator is not so much “in front of” such a subject,

but drawn to it. The nude comes to us in the image, an image which, contrary to popular belief, is not wise, but carries and overflows the representation by its force, its impetus, its energy and intensity. In "L'Image—le distinct," Nancy speaks again of a mimesis that "contains a *methexis*, a participation or a contagion by which the image seizes us" (25): we find ourselves on the wavering line that both separates and joins pornography and the "erotic" nude.

For if there really is a difference between pornography and the nude, it continually vacillates, and these two versions of the image continually touch, even as they separate from one another in a diverging proximity. Avoiding a simple opposition, Nancy displaces the limit between these two in speaking of Daniel Julien's photograph, *Peep Show*:

Everything takes place on the surface [*à fleur de peau*]: that of the nude is based on gaze, touch, and penetration, it in turn denudes it; that [the skin] of the porno excites the eye to operate as viewer [...]. The one is the nude of truth, of its infinity coming as a presence; the other is the nude of a defined access, and definitive to the truth [...], which is caught in the trap of a representation of the *imprésentable*.

"But who can really measure this separation?" he asks (*Nus sommes*, 122-24). Modesty cannot exist without obscenity, the one taking up what the other releases: "One desires to access and to turn away at the same time, in the same proximity. The nude always contains, more or less exposed, this contradiction and this contraction [...]. Forbidden access, but a forbidding that allows access—the time to be dazzled and to remain speechless" (94). It is in this sense, a suspended sense, and not in terms of transgression or interdiction, that one must analyze the forbidden representation in the nude image. Further, if any image, especially the image of the nude, "is indeed held in check," it is "also the tension of an *élan*. It is first offered and given for taking" (*Au fond des images*, 26). As Nancy writes in "L'Image—le distinct":

The seduction of images, their eroticism, is nothing more than their availability for being taken, touched with the eyes, with the hands, with the chest or with the reason, and penetrated. If flesh has played an exemplary role in painting, it is because it is its spirit, far beyond the figuration of nudes. But to penetrate the image, as well as an ardent flesh, means to be penetrated by it. (*ibid.*, 26)

It is this intimate force that is at work in the nude, and it is this, much more than censorship or scandal, that troubles and surprises us. "Neither imitation, nor reproduction, nor copy" (*Nus sommes*, 134), "the image does not 'represent' [this intimate force], but is it, it activates it, it draws and withdraws it, and extracts it while still retaining it, and it is



with it that [the image] touches us" (*Au fond des images*, 18). A double movement of attraction and retreat by which "One must see the nude and denude sight" ["Il faut voir le nu et dénuder le voir"] (*Nus sommes*, 94).

Thus the nude "is not buried in interiority, but on the contrary is carried in total exposition to a light, to a gaze, which come from outside" (98), it is "a being-always-outside-of-itself" (35), a thing (often seen from the back, or without a face) that is not "facing" something, that "never exchanges gazes, for the nude does not gaze, it is gazed upon, and by itself as well (*ibid.*, 35). This would be precisely that "disappearance of any interiority" (*ibid.*, 99), that evanescence that comes to the presence in order to escape from it, that exiting from oneself where the strange, sometimes overwhelming experience of a "becoming subject, but a subject without a face" takes place (98).

This experience holds Nancy and Ferrari's attention; many of the works they comment upon are strongly impregnated with the idea of a rough draft, a beginning, by their very material (red chalk [*sanguine*], etching, unfinished canvas, burin), and thus marked with the idea of infinity: both the "end of the infinite, and the infinity of finitude" (*ibid.*, 107).

The place of an "originary partition," of a "division of the subject that precedes any identity" (46), the nude thus has little to do with the narcissism of the subject, but with what opens it, often in "the impossibility of a precise identification of the sexuality of the nude" (115), as in the indecision of sex itself, evident in several of the works chosen, "that traverse and work the sexual like its own difference and its opening" (80). This hesitation has become commonplace in contemporary transgender iconography, but dates from the Renaissance, as seen for example in the nude back of Cornelisz van Haarlem, who exposes in all its power "what plays about the buttocks and at the center of the back," in that "place of trembling and waiting, the place where the close look and identification remain always to come," in that opening, slit or hole at the base of all nudity "that doesn't open onto anything, but which opens nudity in itself (*Nus sommes*, 79-80.) The nude is in this sense always an extension of the question of identity: it is always singular, even if each time it asks again the universal question: "what is man, in his generality?" and the answer is somewhere in non-ideality, in absolute singularity, in the "unrepeatability" (*ibid.*, 21) of a body with neither precedent nor replication.

The nude's importance is primarily as a relationship. In Jacques-Louis David's unfinished painting, *Apelle painting the portrait of Campase*, a canvas that evokes the equivocations and duplicity of desire, nudity "is not a being, not even a quality: it is always a relationship, it is several simultaneous relationships—to others, to oneself, to the image, to the absence of an image" (41). Apelle's canvas, at the heart of David's painting, remains "empty and naked: it is painting face to face with itself—like a great desire restrained. What is taut here is the canvas" (41).

Far from being a digression or an aside, *Nus sommes* brings together several areas of Nancy's thought, notably in its developments about the image (which for him is not simply visual, but also tactile, sonorous, cinematic, choreographic, poetic, etc.) and about its violence. "We must also admit not only its violence, but the extreme violence of cruelty that lurks at the edges of the image, of any image [...] Any image, perhaps, is on the edge of cruelty," he writes in *Au fond des images* (26), a work in which he pursues these questions further.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, certain segments of *Nus sommes* touch upon "the deconstruction of Christianity," a vast area that passes crucially through the image and thus through art in general (notably because of the rapports the image maintains with the sacred and with sacrifice, according to this key distinction):

[A]rt has always begun, not in religion (whether or not it was associated with it), but apart. [...] [T]he image is necessarily non-religious, for it does not link earth to heaven, but draws the latter from the former. This is true of any image, including those on religious subjects. (*Au fond des images*, 20)

The analysis of biblical and mythological figures is carried on in *Le Regard du portrait* and *Visitation (de la peinture chrétienne)*, as well as in *Noli me tangere/ Ne me touche pas*, on the relationship arising from the untouchable between two bodies, divine and human. But in *Nus sommes* we can also see, under the guise of reflections on the work of art, a testing of Nancy's political thinking on the impossible, separated community, irrevocably set apart from any intimacy with itself.

*Nus sommes*, *Au fond des images*, *Noli me tangere* (and before it, *Visitation [de la peinture chrétienne]* and *Transcription*) and *Iconographie de l'auteur* form a cluster of essays that touch each other in precisely the same manner as the "object" they treat—in a "tangency without contact, [an] adjoining without mixture, [a] proximity without intimacy" (*Noli me tangere*). All of these works share a common thinking that nevertheless keeps them at a distance from one another, circling around the question of the image in art, a truly bottomless question [*sans fond*], a withdrawn point of tangency

around which all of these texts of Nancy's rotate, but at variable speeds, intensities and rhythms. Here questions that seem unrelated—about identity or the political—touch, in distinguishing the image, which transcends the aspects of representation in which a certain aesthetic thinking attempts to circumscribe it.

Now, this question of the distinction of the image is political—having to do with “wresting the word from its dilution,” from the stereotyped forms that de-politicize it—for the image, like the word, deals with separation, with distinction, with distance, with the incommensurable. Thus both art and the political share the following question:

Further, this is indeed why the philosophical scene today is so preoccupied with works attempting to redefine, to redelineate the field and meaning of “political” in order to wrest the word from its dilution in what must be termed the social immanence.

What haunts the unthinking totalitarianism of the abusive use of the term is in fact an obsession with suppression of separation. Everything must be political because politics as a separate sphere must be suppressed. (*Chroniques philosophiques*, 33-34)

The problem of the “base” [*fond*] of the political is linked to that of the image, its delineation, its detachment from any base: “It is detached from a base and it is delineated in a base. It is unglued and turned around [...] in this double operation, the base disappears. It disappears in its essence as base, which is to not appear. [...] Disappearing as base, it passes integrally in the image” (*Au fond des images*, 21-23). The intensity of this retreat or of this excess, the unimaginable base of images—how can this retreat, this retracing of art not have to do with the separation of the political, especially with its distinction from the religious? In this sense, and in more than one sense, the work of art is not a reflection [*à l'image de*] of the political, but is the very image of the political. It is not about entertainment or becoming-cultural, but about the fact that art—in front of us and within us<sup>37</sup>—opens up and works on the question of the world, and that this other concept of the political that requires examination and rigorous analysis transcends any science of government or of public law. To think *ex nihilo*, with no preconceptions, with no model, is what art has always done: it is the reason—surpassing reason itself—that should commit us to passing through it in order to ponder the coexistence and the conflict of “a world of bodies, a world of senses, a world of the being-in-the world” (*La création du monde ou la mondialisation*, 53).

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## Notes

1. Since *Le Mythe nazi* (with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 1991), the question of the political traverses Nancy's philosophical work, especially in *Être singulier pluriel* (1996), *La Communauté désœuvrée* (1986) and *La Comparution* (with Jean-Christophe Bailly, 1991), not to mention the more recent essays, *La création du monde ou la mondialisation* (2002) and *La Communauté affrontée* (2002).
2. See especially "Ex nihilo sumum (De la souveraineté)," in *La création du monde ou la mondialisation* (145-172), and "Le peuple souverain," in *La démocratie à venir. Autour de Jacques Derrida*, 340-359.
3. See "Séparation de la danse" in *Dehors la danse*, with Mathilde Monnier. Following this exchange, not only did Nancy comment "from outside" of dance performances; in June 2002 at Beaubourg and on other occasions, he participated in a performances with Mathilde Monnier's dancers.
4. Among others: with Martin, François, *Nium*. Valence, ERBA, 1994; *La Naissance des seins*, 1997; *Le Regard du portrait*, 2000; with Hantaï, Simon, and J. Derrida, *La Connaissance des textes*, 2001; *Visitation (de la peinture chrétienne)*, 2001; *Transcription*, 2001; with Ferrari, F., *Nus sommes*, 2002; *Au fond des images*, 2003; *Noli me tangere/Ne me touche pas*, 2003; *Wir*, with Anne Immelé, 2003.
5. *La Ville au loin*. S.I., Mille et Une Nuits, "La Ville entière," 1999. On the question of landscape, the representation of a "neck of the woods" and disorientation, see "Paysage avec dépaysement," (*Au fond des images*, 101-119).
6. In opposition to the view that technique is the goal of art, Nancy reactivates *techné* in its ancient sense of *savoir-faire*, which gives it its dignity and nobility. Thus the artist is defined as "the *artifex*, the doer of joining and of affect in joining, the body thinking how it is touched, penetrated, molded" ("Matière première," *Miquel Barceló—Mapamundi*, 23).
7. Regarding art's self-reflexivity (and self-referentiality) which means that "there is no Art that does not open simultaneously to itself, to its work, to its production or its object," Nancy clarifies that this prevalent conception of contemporary art forgets and remains silent upon "the fact that Art has spoken about itself for a long time, perhaps forever;" since Rembrandt and even since the first cave drawings—these are the two "immemorial" milestones that he cites—art is "inevitably a thought and a monstration of self. [...] In a certain way, the minimal definition of Art is perhaps nothing but that—that which shows itself and for itself" (*Transcription*, 9).
8. Not an object (especially not a partial one or a fetish), but the thing—this is how one can contain in a few words a whole reflection on the *impensable*: "...Thought: always to speak about an *impensable* object, of the *impensable* thing at the base of the object, of the subject, at the bottom of the base. Always to weigh the *impensable*. [...] Imagine: the being as being. Simply not imaginable. Not representable. Condition of any presentation, of any coming, of any upheaval. One must imagine the unimaginable." And also: "Always remember to think an object, an *impensable* subject, force yourself to speak of an unnamable thing. Always be ready to touch that which eludes contact. [...] An *impensable* object: not an object, precisely, but a thing: the thing itself, and even not the thing, but the heart of the thing" (*La Naissance des seins*, 26-27).
9. One thinks here of what Nancy writes about the bodies in painting: "all virgin bodies, in the sense that to be penetrated does not tear them, but restores them to their integrity. In this virginity that is always replayed in desire, in the desire of the painting, in that which makes painting the place where everything opens and closes, while that which closes only gives form to opening (or again: the open gives form to the closed, and vice-versa). What is happening here? It is the infinite that sketches the finite, in the place where the finite butts up against infinite and collapses into it" (*Transcription*, 26). We can transpose this artistic gesture of the work of art into the

- political register of the community that does not conform to anything preconceived, but is always of the order of something announced: "That which announces itself in announcing itself makes something arrive—someone, something like someone, someone like something, that is not there, that is not given and that will not be ..." Art and the political community are here precisely that which "exposes itself, that which shows itself at work in its work" (*ibid.*, 30, 9).
10. Significantly, Nancy cites several words "with suspended meaning" (*history, man, community, art*), to which he adds *capital*, and "identity, which seems to become incapable of distancing itself from itself in order to draw closer to itself," and finally, "sovereignty, about which nothing is known any more, except that it comes by detaching itself from a theological-political order to which we are no longer attached."
  11. Jean-Luc Nancy, "Y a-t-il encore un monde? Interview with Claire Margat" in *art press* no. 281, July-Aug. 2002, p. 57. The world of autonomy is finished, saturated, as is the autonomy of "art": "The form of life that has grown old is that of autonomy. Autonomy of principle, autocracy of choice and of decision, autodirection of identity, autoproduction of value, of sign and of image, self-referentiality of discourse—all that is used, worn out..." ("Chroniques philosophiques," 16-17).
  12. "Politics, science, love and art are four structures of impossibility. Likewise, what makes the community of these four is still another dimension—transversal—of interval: the incommensurability among them of the four 'conditions'..." For Nancy, philosophy is the common place of this incommensurability ("La création comme dénaturation: technologie métaphysique," in *La création ou la mondialisation*, 122).
  13. Jean-Luc Nancy, "Y a-t-il encore un monde? Interview with Claire Margat" in *art press* no. 281, July-Aug. 2002, p. 58. In "Chroniques philosophiques," Nancy clarifies: "All that remains, if one can say so, is the gift in its pure state: the world, history, man, as gifts that nothing precedes. [...] there is no first or last condition, there is no unconditional that establishes principle or origin. But this 'there is no' [*il n'y a pas*] is unconditional, and therein, if I dare say so, lies our 'human condition'" (*ibid.*, 12-13).
  14. Unconditionality and sovereignty: these two concepts are difficult to circumscribe, but while they appear similar, they are two heterogeneous representations, according to Derrida. Unconditionality is distinguished from sovereignty (absolute, indivisible, all-powerful) in that it does not aim to surpass sovereignty by even more power, superiority, or excess: if it can question the principle of sovereignty, it is because it is precisely without power, "without power but without weakness. Without power but not without force, albeit a certain force of weakness," which engages a completely different idea of liberty, of decision and of responsibility (Derrida, *Inconditionnalité ou souveraineté. L'Université aux frontières de l'Europe*, 64).
  15. It is the question itself of the body of painting, of painting coming to grips with itself: "Penetration is mixed with the intimacy of the penetrated. It does not enter like a foreign body that separates and distends, nor does it confuse itself with internal immanence, but it makes its foreignness into an organ that feels and looks, that smells and kneads the interior of a dough, of a mass or of a skin, of an envelope in which are disposed some characteristics of a form with some drops of its carnation. The one who penetrates loses himself in his very penetration, he unloads there his exteriority, his position as spectator. The penetrator is kneaded in the penetrated. Thus a penetrating thought takes on the taste and the seed of what it thinks" ("Matière première," 25-26). It is this malleability of matter, itself unidentifiable but which "informs itself, deforms itself or reforms itself straight from matter" (*ibid.*, 19) that Nancy follows in the elementary gesture of the painter and sculptor Miquel Barceló.
  16. In *La naissance des seins*, Nancy contrasts the breast and the heart, remarking that "It is a matter of no less than two values of the *cum*: the 'with' and the 'together.' The

- juxtaposed and the knotted" (40). The word heart [*coeur*] has a powerful and singular trajectory in Nancy's "corpus," from *L'Intrus* to *Coeur ardent* where a different reading of the "*concordia discors*," from the heart of the other with mine, is carried to a point of view that is more metheuxal, more shared than in *La Naissance de seins*.
17. F. Ferrari and J.-L. Nancy, "Trans," in *Nus sommes*, (116). The works of Nan Goldin, Theresa Murphy, Edward Weston and Julien Daniel were already present in *La Naissance des seins*, where the question of nudity of/in the image was also approached, but from a different perspective.
  18. "To make a world, dance also divides within itself continents that move and rub their strong tectonic plates up against each other. [...] In all this dance there move the limbs of these parts of a world and the *chorée* of this agitated geography where the earth once again separates and hurls itself [...]" (*Dehors la danse*).
  19. Nancy himself associates these two words: "(Later, elsewhere, sacrifice is abandoned. *Incipit tragoedia*: the choir [*le chœur*] succeeds the heart [*le cœur*], no less palpitating, no less frightened, but singing instead of exhaling the smoke of warm blood.)" In another fragment, he again makes the link explicit: "Thus the heart insensibly gives way to the choir, to a monotonous chant of mixed voices, threnody and dithyramb become indistinct, like the dark blood and the vermilion blood that will have traversed it with their flows" (*Coeur ardent*).
  20. We must recall the reasons—"disgraces of language"—why Nancy substitutes expressions for the word *community*: "being-together," "being-in-common," and finally "being-with." As opposed to the resonance ("full, if not inflated with substance and interiority") of a community that is spiritual, fraternal, communal; as opposed to a concept that supports so-called "ethnicities" and "communitarian impulses" that are moral, amalgamating and sometimes fascist, Nancy focuses on "with" [*avec*], which is "nearly indistinguishable from the 'co' of community." "'With' is dry and neutral—neither communion nor atomization, simply the sharing of a place, or at most of a contact—a being-together without assemblage. (In this sense, one must carry further an analysis of *Mitdasein*, left hanging in Heidegger.)" (*La Communauté affrontée*, 42-43).
  21. Nancy's contribution to *La démocratie à venir. Autour de Jacques Derrida* originally was entitled "Le peuple souverain," but ultimately he replaced the title with a brief musical passage from "chant du départ." He writes: "In fact, it's all over for us with this pre-romantic and bellicose music, as well as for the three words of this phrase: the 'people,' 'sovereignty,' and the movement of an 'advance,' in formed ranks, toward even better days. This is why I gave my title without a word. First of all, this title is only music. In a certain way, it attempts to ask a question about music—let's say, a question in a singing voice rather than in a signifying voice" ("Le peuple souverain," 341).
  22. We must stress the importance in this text of the voice of the people, of the singing, musical voice, but also enunciation or co-enunciation that should be radicalized, according to Nancy, in terms of co-ontology: "[...] in reality, we must recognize that there is no utterance from a singular subject, explicit or implicit, that does not also include the more or less manifest mark of a collective or common subject, of an "us" that is that of the language of the utterance. [...] That should be radicalized in terms of co-ontology—that is, there is never the *one*, the *other*, then a third that would give the law of their relation. But there is what can be extrapolated from Hegel, as from Lacan: *the one-the other* in the double sense of a mutuality (substitutability) and a *reciprocity* (return to the point of departure—from each one to self through the other. Mutuality and reciprocity create a tension between indistinction and distinction, between the same and the other, or again between distinction and indistinction of the other and the same. [...] One [*On*] expresses this tension by the difference between *one* and *us*: *one*

- is mutual, *us* is reciprocal. The third [*tiers*] is this tension, and is not a *yours*. It's the *with* that is an encounter without a relation or a relation without an encounter" ("Le peuple souverain"). On this co-utterance as co-ontology working the *co* of any community, see also the *with* of *La communauté affrontée*, which gives "a clearer indicator of the distancing at the heart of proximity and intimacy" (43).
23. Here Nancy is aware of the exchange between the musician and the woman, whose belly will be the place where his music will echo, the sounding board of his instrument: "The ear opens on the belly, or it even opens it, and the eye resonates here: the image distances it own visibility to the bottom of its perspective, in the distance from which the music returns and resonates, in order, with it, to never cease letting its harmonics echo" (*À l'écoute*, 84).
  24. However, in this *methexis* it is not a matter of erasing the differences among the senses: "When one speaks of plastic, graphic works, there is nothing for it—when one speaks, one speaks, when one gazes, one gazes, and a space remains between the two, luckily" (*Transcription*, 7). At the very heart of the most powerful participation or contagion there always subsists "'divorcité' (separation according to opposite meanings)" as well as diversity and divergence (*À l'écoute*, 40).
  25. This *contact interdit*, in both senses of the word (interdiction and suspension), is the principal theme of *Noli me tanger! Ne me touche pas*, an essay in which, based on the "impossible" relation between the divine body of the risen Christ and the sensual one of Mary Magdalene, Nancy analyzes several pictorial representation of this episode, so rich in semantic paradoxes, and which touches furthermore the Law of painting itself. He stresses the way the painters twist the forbidden expression, in some cases superimposing foreground and background (Pontormo, for example, "dares to make Christ's index finger point against Mary's breast"), leading, by interposed mediation, "almost to touch," leaving the forbidden contact suspended in an undecidable quasi-contiguity. All the "art" of the painter's touch is there, between them, in the in-between, in that intangibility that passes between sight and touch, between the visual and the invisible, between belief and faith.
  26. *À l'écoute*, 33. Perhaps in this essay alone, Nancy privileges hearing over sight: "[...] the visual would tend to be mimetic, and the sonorous would tend to be *methexique* (that is, in the order of participation, of sharing or of contagion)..." (27). Thus for Nancy hearing would carry "in the most ostensive way the sensible or sensitive (*aesthétique*) condition as such," because "to listen is to be at the same time outside and inside, to be open from the outside and from the inside, thus from one to the other and from the one in the other" (*ibid.*, 33).
  27. "It is essential to the painting to not be touched. It is essential to the image in general to not be touched. That is how it differs from sculpture [...]. But what is sight, if not, surely, a deferred touching?" (*Nolo me tangere*).
  28. *Visitation (de la peinture chrétienne)*, 52. This definition of "art" comes close to that of the political community: "It is with that that one must work—with the community confronted by itself, with us confronted by ourselves, the *with* confronted by the *with*. A confrontation no doubt belongs essentially to the community: it's a matter, simultaneously, of a confrontation and an opposition, of a facing-off with oneself in order to defy oneself and prove oneself, to divide oneself in one's being with a distancing that is also the condition of this being" (*La Communauté affrontée*, 51).
  29. "[...] to philosophize is not to draw from a reservoir of meaning. It is not to fill a deficit; it is to completely shake up the truth from top to bottom" ("Pièce jointe," 13).
  30. "Matière première," 20. Nancy returns to this originary affection in *Coeur ardent*: "One never feels by oneself, but always this comes from elsewhere, from the other, from outside. The more deeply one feels, the more intimately, the more in one's heart of hearts, the more that comes from afar. [...] The other makes itself felt, and what makes itself felt is another (as well as when it is my own heart): that is, not only

- because it brings its feeling matter, but also and perhaps first of all because it affects the heart of feeling and thus renders the unfeeling feeling. To feel is not a property that I possess. It is an impropriety that seizes me. Thus it is necessary that before any sentiment or before any sensation, feeling as such must have affected me" (*ibid.*).
31. "The heart is nothing but elastic muscle beating its precise measure. The heart has no emotion. [...] 'Heart' is a disheartening word. 'Breast' is a faltering word. One cannot— one can only say it in a faulty manner." Thus Nancy wrote in 1996 (*La Naissance des seins*, 46). Seven years later, it is not exactly the same heart that beats in *Cœur ardent*.
  32. In this collection of *ekphrasei* dealing with famous or lesser-known portraits of writers, Federico Ferrari and Nancy pursue, in a different register, a baring of/in the image that is not without relation to the line of thought in *Nus sommes*. Here again what is investigated is the intangible passage between two bodies—that of the author and that of the work, the one extracted, drawn from the other (but which one, in which direction/sense?), which arises from it and returns to it. Neither completely detached from the work nor in its center, but stationed on the edge, in tangential contact with it, the portrait belongs to and divides the work. It opens it and splits it, divides it up and detaches it from itself. As Nancy says of Djuna Barnes, "You are not there. You are never there. You are always busy with something else. You disappear precisely in the movement and in the moment when you reveal yourself. You are less a writer than an image of the writer. Which still means a writer" (*Iconographie de l'auteur*, 43). Here again it is the *ab-sens* that comes to the surface, the image withdrawing, "turned toward elsewhere or toward nowhere," toward that "point of an impossible identity, the point where the very one who sought himself with his gaze is abolished" (*ibid.*).
  33. Nudity "as such" is the unrepresentable itself, that which never manifests itself simply to presence, but only ever offers itself as access to that possible coming of "the thing itself, the naked thing, the nudity of the nude" (*Nus sommes*, 134).
  34. It is in these terms that Nancy comments upon the recent use of the word *politique* (substantive, masculine): "The political ['le politique'] has become the name of a problem, and not a minor one! A problem of foundation [*fondement*], of foundation [*fondation*] or, on the contrary, of the revealing of an absence of base" (*Chroniques philosophiques*, 35).
  35. *Nus sommes* is in the form of an ABC book, with each of the 26 titled figures linked to a picture or photograph (famous or not) from the history of art.
  36. This question is treated rigorously in "Image et violence" and in "La représentation interdite," focusing on the most difficult question—that of the representation of the death camps and of the Shoah.
  37. If an "us" is even possible. But as Nancy affirms, "It is up to us to decide for ourselves" ("De la création," in *La création du monde ou la mondialisation*, 101); "we should ask ourselves at new costs what the world wants from us, as much as what we want from it, everywhere, in every direction/sense..." ("Urbi et orbi," *ibid.*, 18).

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