

THE DARK CORE OF MIMESIS

ART, BODY, AND IMAGE IN THE THOUGHT OF JEAN-LUC NANCY

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Abstract

The thesis we argue in the text through three separate planes of discussion is that *mimesis* (μίμησις) cannot for Nancy be reduced to mere imitation of an already always existing reality. Instead, what is at issue is a creative principle of the openness of the world as meaning starting from the possibility of imitating something that can only be presented-represented in the equation between the *logos*, the figure, and the image. *Mimesis* thus presents-represents an existential event of novelty in the world. We cannot

rely on the language of the openness of the meaning of the world without previously elucidating on the mediality of the media in Nancy's thought. This means that the *logos* and the image are connected neither via language nor via the representation of something as something (being as the singular plurality). An event occurs authentically precisely in this "elevation of the body" (*levée du corps*). In Nancy's narrative, it becomes abundantly clear that the body (*corpus*) assumes the position of the unthinkable in traditional philosophical thought. The *logos* of the body is, thus, in its representation as a figure-image in what is open and therefore beyond the opposition between the "self" and the "outside." In order to think this "crack" between philosophy and art (*logos* and *mimesis*) it is necessary to make a decisive break with the "oblivion of the body" symptomatic of the entire history of Western philosophy.

Keywords: Nancy, mimesis, art, body, image, event, ontology.

Temno jedro mimesis. Umetnost, telo in podoba v misli Jeana-Luca Nancyja

Povzetek

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Teza, ki jo v besedilu avtorja zagovarjata na treh različnih ravneh obravnave, je, da *mimesis* (μίμησις) za Nancyja ne more biti zvedena na golo imitacijo vselej že obstoječe realnosti. Namesto tega je osrednji problem ustvarjalni princip odprtosti sveta kot pomena, ki ga sproža možnost imitiranja nečesa, kar je mogoče prezentirati-reprezentirati samo v enačenju logosa, figure in podobe. *Mimesis* potemtakem prezentira-reprezentira eksistencialni dogodek novosti v svetu. Ne moremo se zanašati na govorico odprtosti pomena sveta, ne da bi predtem razmislili o medialnosti medija v Nancyjevi misli. To pomeni, da logos in podoba nista povezana niti s pomočjo govorice niti s pomočjo reprezentacije nečesa kot nečesa (biti kot singularne pluralnosti). Dogodek se avtentično dogodi natanko s takšnim »dvigom telesa« (*levée du corps*). Znotraj Nancyjevega narativa se popolnoma razločno izkaže, da telo (*corpus*) zavzema pozicijo nemisljivega v tradicionalni filozofski misli. Logos telesa potemtakem leži v njegovem reprezentiranju kot figuri-podobi znotraj tistega, kar je odprto in zato onkraj opozicije med »sebstvom« in »zunanostjo«. Da bi lahko mislili to »razpoko« med filozofijo in umetnostjo (med *logosom* in *mimesis*), je odločno potrebno prekiniti s »pozabo telesa«, kakršna je simptomatična za celotno zgodovino zahodne filozofije.

Ključne besede: Nancy, mimesis, umetnost, telo, podoba, dogodek, ontologija.

“La mimesis n'est pas la copie, ni l'imitation reproductrice. Elle re-produit au sens où elle produit à nouveau, c'est-à-dire à neuf, la forme, c'est-à-dire l'idée ou la vérité de la chose.”

Jean-Luc Nancy: *Le Plaisir au dessin*

Introduction

Speaking about the “meaning” of what renders us speechless in the close encounter between philosophy and art already presupposes an important differentiation. This is not, however, a differentiation according to rank originating in the primal uncanny (*arché*) from which the historicity of existence, being, and essence of man is interpreted. Differentiation produces difference like thinking produces meaning. But only when a language has established the equation that Jean-Luc Nancy, already on the opening pages of *Noli me tangere: On the Raising of the Body* terms a “parabolic truth.” Drawing attention to portrayals of Jesus Christ in art history and the symbolic course of Western history something suddenly occurs as an unforeseen event. In Christ’s body, the difference between the “*logos*, the figure, and the image” is cancelled out (cf. Nancy 2008c, 4). If philosophy and art produce meaning in the narration and depiction of the world as a horizon of meaning, then this identification, which Nancy holds to be a problem of ontological determination without rank and hierarchy between the “*logos*, the figure, and the image,” can be viewed as a non-identification. Therefore, the statement itself is further problematized. How can we see as the same and identical that which according to the original determination is different and therefore points towards the primacy of philosophy over art? *Logos* cannot become a figure or an image unless its “essence” is previously deconstructed. However, even when we see in the figure as the image that which is “logically” perfectly performed like in a piece of conceptual art, for example by Joseph Kosuth, it remains unclear how and under what circumstances thinking can become a figure-image. This act must indubitably have in it something beyond logic in the formal sense of the word. Moreover, there must be a medium, mediating experience of merging thinking and feeling so we can truly attest to differences dissolving before and almost mystical similitude.

That medium is the body. It enables the equation of what seems metaphysically different. *Logos* and figure as the image can only in relation to the body become a feasible relation. It can even be demonstrated that this mediation, this mediality in the touch between philosophy and art without the former ruling over the latter as has been the case throughout the history of metaphysics until Heidegger, is the focal point of the crystallization of thinking in the openness of meaning. In the touch of what is separate different thinking takes place. Thinking the body outside Western metaphysics is to touch the untouchable. Is not untouchability, however, what denies the possibility of touch even when it seems that sensuality is, like the immateriality of the virtual world, beyond any imaginable tactility? The question of touch directly affects us with the surplus of synesthetic sensuality. Touch cannot be understood from the spatiality of matter, things, and objects in motion as necessary merging, colliding, intertwining, pervading, synthesis of action between matter and energy. Only beings touch. In their desire for intimacy and confidentiality, they compensate for the inherent lack of independent existence. What moves them, surpasses the experience of corporeality in the sense of physical mobility (flesh and nerves). The question of the “exalted body” which no longer possesses the signifiers of bare corporeality for Nancy in his essay *Noli me tangere* as well as in his book *Corpus* refers to the mystery of the double helix of existence. On the one hand, it is about disembodiment after the death of a being, and on the other, about approaching what is a “relict” of metaphysics in the theological understanding of transcendence as a path towards suprasensuality. Whoever thinks “of” the body in the existential openness of the meaning of the world must pass into a state of freedom from thinking “about” the body. In the aesthetic experience of the sublime, we come to the threshold of Plato’s form (*eidos*), Kant’s schematism and Lyotard’s presentable un-presentability of the thing itself.

Nancy’s essay on the “exaltation of the body” should furthermore not be considered a mere variation on the problem Christianity has according to the relationship between man and the divine, life and death, crucifixion and resurrection. Besides, it is known that the entire hierarchy of the de-fundamentalization of “meaning” in the history of Western metaphysics since Derrida carries the seal of deconstruction work. Starting from a primal notion/word such as the *logos* Heraclitus’ being is named. Up until Hegel’s

absolute spirit, *logos* signifies the original word/concept for the meaning of Being. Regardless of how it is understood and what expressions are used to compensate for the original self-referentiality. What follows next from Nancy's work, furthermore, is a "deconstruction of meaning." The reason lies in the fact that it is impossible to step out of the realm of metaphysics into the openness of a new historical world unless one first de-fundamentalizes being (*Being, Sein*). Language still reveals the heritage of the differentiation between the worldly and the otherworldly (transcendence and immanence). Besides, it is difficult for the notion of the singular plurality of events to see the light of day (cf. Nancy 2008b). Philosophy and art overlappingly intertwine when encountering what enables this relationship in the first place. If we reduce it to the omnipresent notion of "event" which has been used since Derrida, Deleuze, and Lyotard to think what is irreducible to any intentionality of consciousness, to anything objective and fixed, then this is an event that can boast a truly special authenticity. What approach can one take to the open the thinking towards a de-fundamentalizing of Western metaphysics in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy? Perhaps it is precisely the question of authenticity of a text that indicates its overall veracity. In the case of the author of the unique interpretational essay *Noli me tangere*, simultaneously a hermeneutic of the Christian representation of the mystery of resurrection and a philosophically nuanced analysis of the relationship between art and the world from the horizon of living corporeality, it is possible to say that what is untouchable and invisible to the eye signifies the "dark core of mimesis." This is how Nancy himself expresses it in his book *Muses* (cf. Nancy 1996). What does this mysterious expression signify in a volume dedicated to the issue of the meaning of art? As arts cannot be reduced to their common denominator, diverging multifariously, we must discard any self-sufficiency of reducing and suspending the artistic character of Being to a primordial form acting a-historically. When art presents and represents Being then this is not an esthetic impression of the world as it has always already existed since the times of yore. Quite the opposite, any presentation as the representation of the uncanny open is the beginning of a new event. With it begins the adventure of lending meaning to the world.

Our thesis, which we will strive to argument through three planes of discussion is that *mimesis* (μίμησις) can for Nancy never be reduced to

mere imitation of an always already existing reality. Instead, here we have at work the creative principle of the openness of the world as meaning starting from the possibility of imitating of something that can only be presented-represented in the identification between the *logos*, the figure, and the image. *Mimesis*, therefore, presents-represents the existential event of novelty in the world. If an event cannot be questioned in traditionally metaphysical terms as to what it is (*quidditas*), but instead how it occurs (*quodditas*), we cannot depend on the language of the openness of the meaning of the world without the previous clarification of the mediality of the media in Nancy's thought. This simultaneously means that *logos* and image are connected neither by language nor by a depiction of something as something (Being as singular multiplicity). It is precisely in this "elevation of the body" (*levée du corps*) that the event occurs authentically. And it is neither the truth of "resurrection" nor the mystery of "transcendence." In Nancy's narrative it is perfectly clear how the body (*corpus*) assumes the position of the unthinkable in traditional philosophical thought. If the *logos* of the body is in its depiction as the figure image in what is open and thus beyond the dichotomy between philosophy and art (*logos* and *mimesis*) then the entire legacy of the "oblivion of the body" in the history of Western philosophy until Maurice Merleau-Ponty needs to be decisively contended with.

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Why is this necessary? Let us remember that the problem of the body hardly has a role to play in Heidegger's masterwork *Being and Time*. This is the fundamental reason for the current redirection of phenomenology towards the relationship between the body and the world following the insight into the technical transformation of Being. A critique of Heidegger does not simultaneously mean that the path towards liberating the body from the outcome of metaphysics is unambiguously open. What determines the meaning of existence (*Dasein*), is nothing other than existential openness in the suggestion of the possibility of Being as the meaningful worldliness of the world. For Heidegger, the body cannot appear as problematic in the environment of the destruction of traditional ontology simply because existence (*Dasein*) is neither the *animal rationale* nor the *homo faber*. And as it cannot be exhausted thematically by biology, psychology, and anthropology, it is obvious that human existence supersedes the metaphysical differentiation between

the spirit/soul and the body (cf. Heidegger 1977). Like in Derrida, also in Nancy regarding the contention with the contemplative shadow of Heidegger the problem of the allocation of the language of metaphysics appears. What was first achieved by Merleau-Ponty in the stepping outside of Heidegger's "dogma of existence" appears to be continued here in even more radical terms using different means. While Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception* understood existence as a spatial category of the first order in contrast with Heidegger's temporal perspective, Nancy provides a full array of his movements in the direction of the spatial-corporeal configuration of man without the metaphysics of the subject-object. Regarding this topic, Nancy, in his work *Corpus*, specifically says:

Bodies aren't some kind of fullness or filed space (space is filled everywhere): they are *open* space, implying, in some sense, space more properly *spacious*, and nothing exists without a place, a *there*, a "here," a "here is," for a *this*. [...] More precisely, it makes room for the fact that the essence of existence is to be without any essence. That's why *ontology of the body* is ontology itself: being's in no way prior or subjacent to the phenomenon here. The body *is* the being of existence. [...] The ontological body has yet to be thought. (Nancy 2008a, 15)

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These Heideggerian-intoned conceptions of "open space," of "the essence of existence without any essence" culminating in the assertion that the "ontological body has yet to be thought" should for now remain without comment. The assertions are almost programmatic. It is possible to assemble into a set Nancy's assertions from various books, essays, lectures dedicated to art. And all will circle around the fundamental idea of the "openness of the meaning" in existence as a singular plurality. Following Derrida, he will plan his steps towards going beyond the deconstruction of logocentrism in the attempt to de-fundamentalize the matrix of Western metaphysics. However, if the existential structure of man in the modern times of technocracy as planetary technology is affected by the absence of "essence," it does not necessarily follow that one ontology is to be replaced by another. That the one with the key term of existence is to be superseded by the body in a synesthetic meaning beyond

mere sensuality. Moreover, it is not clear at all why the “openness of meaning” should have its safeguard in the presence (of existence) by way of articulating something that does not have essence and refers instead to the form or schema of thinking as such but could become the autonomous idea of inscribing art as an event of synchronicity. In this perspective, the *logos*, the figure, and the image present-represent the world without the illusion of pretense and its luster in the hour of celebratory agony and endless end. Nancy thinks the openness of the world from the openness of space. This by no means refers to space as a mathematical-physical problem of movements of matter. The openness of space is thought, quite the opposite, from the primary dimension of placement and habitability of the place where, in Hölderlin’s words, “poetically Man dwells on this Earth” (“Voll verdienst, doch dichterisch wohnet der Mensch auf dieser Erde”). The body, therefore, has an existential freedom of possibility to be something else and different from the factuality of existence without “essence.” How are we, however, to understand that the body as the mediality of the relationship between philosophy and art (*logos* and *mimesis*) is yet to be ontologically thought if the commencement of its new adventure is determined by the drama of de-incarnation and de-cosmogonization? If, finally, what connects thinking and sensuality in presenting-representing artistic work must be derived from the impossibility of narrating and seeing what the Greeks termed the mysterious word of origin, source, beginning, inception, a foundation of all existence—the *arché*?

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1. What is art?

At the beginning of the book entitled *The Muses* Nancy reflects upon the question: “Why are there more arts, not just one?” What is art as such? This is a question of a formal ontological nature. It seems as if one would be asking about what requires an opinion regarding “one sphere of Being.” It is well known that art refers to the area of sensuality. In this regard, Nancy himself does not deny that Hegel’s claim of beauty as “the sensible shining of the idea” is the highest climax of metaphysics regarding the definition of the “essence” of art. But the articulation of art is not just a matter of modern aesthetics. From Kant onwards, its intent is to find an appropriate language for what art

raises above nature by creating two closely related emotions in observational reflection—beauty and sublime. From Plato onwards, art has been defined as the conjunction of *poiesis* and *téchne*. But for the Greeks art is nothing self-sufficient. It is only from the service of the gods in the city (*polis*) that art takes place and time of the envisioning of Being. In the abundance of indefiniteness, it is somewhat disturbing and at the same time calming. Art is, by definition, a mimic (*mimesis*) imitation of Being. When we imitate someone or something, we are faced with two possible explanations of the reason for imitation. It can be a mere or blind repetition of existence in another form of expression or image; or it can be, on the contrary, a creative act of change from an existing source. In Aristotle's *Poetics*, therefore, the mimetic act in the tragedy as a dramatic form of artistic performance shows and represents the destiny of man in the midst of divine powers. The catharsis, which ultimately frames the work of rendering-presenting elevates man into the spheres of spiritual cleansing and spiritual tranquility. Whatever the case, the beginning of art corresponds to the imitation of Being in another form of its true factuality. To imagine the unimaginable and to think the non-thinkable means to go through the enchanted chambers of logos and mimesis.

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Mimesis establishes a twofold relationship between art and Being as a “form of life:” *technically* and *poetically*. The language of art is not just something like the artistic style but belongs to the indefinite field of what from romanticism becomes the aspiration for a complete piece of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) by the transformation of the “form of life.” Nancy in his attempt to “deconstruct the sense” of all Western metaphysics discusses Hegel's aesthetics and the thinking of art in Heidegger's work. In this context, the question of art does not presuppose just the dissolution of the notion of art that tradition has conveyed to contemporaneity. This is also the way of thinking about “art” as a philosophical understanding of the condition of its survival in the world. Barnett Newman does not say in vain that the artist needs a theory like birds require ornithology. The linkage between the subject matter and the philosophical questioning of art with the reflexive powers of reflection on the things that are being revealed here begins with Nancy's “ontology of meaning” of Being as a singular plurality. It is already apparent that the question “about” art suggests something paradoxical and aporetic. We do not further ask for

“singularity.” The latter is thought as “One” (*unum*) that is comprehensively and initially assembled as a multitude. Assembling is an act of meaningful scattering (*logos*). If there is no common ground (*archê*) for all art, including architecture, what remains of the opinion after Adorno’s aesthetics of modern art that states that “truth is not a whole?”

196 The sequence of Nancy’s accomplishment of the notion and “essence” in the works such as *Muses*, *Corpus*, and *The Ground of the Image*, and in the short lecture “Art Today,” held in 2006 in Italy, corresponds to the structure of historical-philosophical “deconstruction.” However, it is necessary to add that this method of thought development of the very subject discussed extends in the sense that Nancy, unlike Derrida on Heidegger’s trail, introduces the overlapping places of the inconceivable to the circulation. How is this supposed to be understood? Unthinkable is not netted in the records of tradition, just as there is no mistake in thinking. The reason for the unenforceability of a problem stems from the fact that thinking emerges as an event. In the attempt to open the problem, as Heidegger has pointed out in his papers and lectures, there must be an original situation that requires a solution or at least a problem-solving question. Therefore, asking about the “essence” of art in the age of technical secularism of the world does not seem instructive. Instead, the question refers “to” art in its origin and event. As Being happens in the singularity of a multitude of events, so the art puzzle does not diminish the problem of why art, for example, today no longer needs aesthetics for its last metaphysical reason of justification. This, of course, does not mean that the aesthetics is exhausted in its range. New aesthetical approaches really flourish everywhere. Everything is happening today in the aesthetic character of artificial worlds (cf. Mersch 2015). As *Corpus* states that ontologically the body should be thought differently as during the entire tradition of philosophy, the same, by analogy, is true of art. However, how does this programmatic setting come from Nancy’s own understanding of the “future of philosophy” (cf. Hutchens 2005)? The answer must be sought in the immanent interpretation of the problem referred to in the above-mentioned texts. As has already been said, in *The Muses*, Nancy resolutely removes the existence of some general “essence” of art. Starting from the so-called singular plurality or plural singularity, that have already been discussed by the French poststructuralists like Levinas, Derrida,

Deleuze, Lyotard, Lacan, and Badiou, Being is in the category of suspensions. What is not “One,” but has the features of “Multitude,” does not mean that the quantum leap of Being has disappeared in the metaphysical, but remained in the mathematical sense. It is only in this “postmodern nominalism” that lies the qualitative turn of the “essence” of ontology.

It is not, therefore, art that has become irrelevant and destructive in its self-sufficiency in the modern era of planetary technology. It cannot simply be derived from the common ground. This would rather mean a reduction in the extraterrestrial reality and the principle of performing arts as different activities starting from something external. The problem is that regarding art Nancy retains the process of the “essence” what Plato had called the idea or form, and Kant the schematics of the mind. Of course, “retention” does not take place in some form of the transcendental principle of the realization of reality. However, that is precisely what comes from the “dark core of mimesis.” In all his aesthetic writings Nancy talks about the “forming or shaping meaning.” Art as a singular event of a multitude of forms as the only one possesses the fatal feature to enter new in the world. It also renders it reasonable. This is true even when it overrides the tyranny of meaning in the hyperproduction of aesthetically worthless artworks. Marcel Duchamp introduced into contemporary art the concept of an aesthetic object (*objet trouvé* or *readymade*). With it, everything becomes an aesthetic banality of the “world” as the industrial realization of reality. What seems paradoxical and aporetic in the growth of the idea of art as an *arché*, is that its “essence” is only perceived in the existential abyss of the possibility of creating new worlds. If art does not have its “essence,” then art as the self-centered event of a mimetic relationship towards the world is not self-evident from the point of view of the event (*Ereignis*), as the late Heidegger explained. After all, the differences between work and event in the contemplation of contemporary art adequately testify to the problem of separation in the era of *technosphere* (cf. Paić 2006).

Nancy’s critique of Heidegger derives from the fact that instead of the synthesis of *poiesis* and *téchne* he insists on their differences. This is not a mere difference as such. Its origin is beyond the metaphysics of ground and foundations (*arché*) (cf. Hörl 2013, 11–24). It is, therefore, possible to think art without “essence” by establishing a place of difference in the very use of

traditional ontological categories. Instead of the quasi-transcendentalism of categories and the concepts of metaphysics, we encounter the production of meaning. The traces of singular plurality of events point to the dialogue of thought and artistic practice. Art does not belong to the event, as is the case in Heidegger's work. It is a contingent event without "essence" in the project of the creation of existence. To design means to open what is not there. And this also means bringing forth the presence of being in the form of *logos*, figures, and images. Creating the world in a multitude of articulation of Being (*mondialisation*) does not lead to the primacy of subject to the object's objectivity (cf. Nancy 2007). In this respect, Nancy, unlike Heidegger, does not consider art starting from the understanding of the workings of the work, in which the beauty and the sublime of Being are combined. Art without "essence" not only does no longer have any work in the aesthetic sense of the word. Moreover, it remains without its cult-mystery event or celebration, of which most remarkably was written (besides Heidegger) by Walter Benjamin (cf. 1963). The problem of the unthinkable in the language of metaphysics, although in Nancy it seems to be quite different compared to Heidegger, comes to the fore in the guise of artificial, monstrous self-sufficiency, formally of Greek origin, but which has from the new era to the modern era of information-communication technology turned into a thing that thinks. Moreover, this is in the way of full compensation as Nancy therefore says:

Thus, the arts are first of all *technical*. They are not technical "first of all" in the sense that they comprise an initial part, procedure, which is capped by a final part, "artistic" accomplishment. The Muses do not happen upon a craft like operation: they install it [...] (Nancy 1996, 25–26)

We should not be fooled that Nancy does not talk here about "essence" of technique as Heidegger in the essay "Die Frage nach der Technik" (cf. Heidegger 2000). If art does not have an "essence" or a common foundation associated with all singularly specific arts (literature, drama, music, painting, sculpture), then no technique has the foundation, upon which all other technical disciplines would exist since the time of Rome and the separation of craftsmanship as

technical arts and art as the art of creating something new. This difference is present in the disciplinary arrangement of the so-called natural-technical sciences and socio-humanities to the present. After all, Nancy continues to consider this problem in *The Muses*:

Technique extends a withdrawal of the “ground,” and the most visible part of our history consists in this extension. The technique as such, in the common sense of the word, at the same time extends and recovers this *Grundlosigkeit* or *Abgründigkeit*. This is why there is no “technique” but “techniques” and why the plural here bears the “essence” itself. It might be that art, the arts, is nothing other than the second-degree exposition of the technique itself, or perhaps the technique *of the ground* itself. How to produce the ground that does not produce itself: that would be the question of art, and that would be its plurality of origin. (Nancy 1996, 26)

Abyssal, groundless and primordial non-possibility of the original as the common platform for the emergence of everything else: this is what it comes to trying to think of art based on its real plurality. But what is multitude as opposed to the singularity? Is it just a denial of One or Being as such? Or is it perhaps a different thought of the world of the abyss and without foundation as something “new” that is produced precisely thanks to the technical character of art? Nancy is inclined, as we have shown, to go for a solution that assumes the openness of the meaning of the Being in its plurality. What is different from One is no opposite or negation. It is a differently articulated way of performing art in the act of creating imitation (*mimesis*). If there is no technique, then a number of techniques are the evidence of becoming different in the history of technical arts and their creations (objects and apparatuses). However, art cannot be reduced to technique. Its puzzle is that it belongs to the poetic part of the *mimesis*, and not to the technical one. It is important to point out that in one of the more interesting interpretations of Nancy’s philosophy concerning his notion of the relationship between technique and art, it is stated that he introduced a new understanding of “existential phenomenology” (cf. James 2006, 203). When there is no more possibility to access art in a traditional

metaphysical manner, what is left? Nancy leaves in his conceptual horizon all that is typical in phenomenology and deconstruction, but redirects their ways of reflection into the singular plurality of the “openness of the world.” Art opens up world only because it is an immanent purpose in the “transcendence” of the existing “world” whose features are in the technical construction and shaping of Being.

200 Why art for Nancy appears under the signs of “openness,” “meaning,” and “the world”? While for Heidegger in the 1930s, finding two keywords for a new way of thinking, such as “art” (*Kunst*) and “event” (*Ereignis*), denoted a search for a real alternative metaphysical course of Western history in the nihilism with the latest fortress of modern technology in cyberspace, Nancy’s task of thinking according to the question of art is set “modestly.” No one can no longer claim the right to refer to the “other beginning” of philosophy at its return to the coming time unless the invisible in the historical-epochal framework of nihilism is seen as the emergence of a different era of Being in general. The problem for Nancy is, therefore, ontological and aesthetic. In the books, *The*
Muses, *Corpus*, and *The Ground of the Image*, art is no longer determined in its era of technical construction of its Being. The focus lies on art as question of the possibilities of the “openness” and “sense” of the world. Why, then, art alone has the privilege of becoming a philosophical question rather than a response? Derrida at one point in discussion in 1994 on Capri, devoted to the issue of identity and difference in Europe after the return of religion to contemporary Western societies, says that religion, unlike philosophy itself, never puts itself into question. Religion is, therefore, always a positive answer for the simple reason that it is the source of its events in the revealed faith in God (cf. Derrida 2001, 46). Unlike philosophy, however, both art and religion derive from the living wounds of sensitivity. The sense of beauty and sublime, and the experience of faith in the supremacy of the highest being determined the metaphysical structure of thought up until Hegel. Nancy does not attribute to art, however, the messianic-apocalyptic place of man’s salvation in the age of planetary technology as the Moloch, which devours the remnants of some primal humanity. However, one must not deny that the art is bound by *téchne* and *poiesis* and that its non-historical ontological provision from Plato is equally biased. Art is the shaping of world according to the notion of beauty

and sublime, and simultaneously also the imitation of the world. On the one hand, it is about producing something new (*poiesis*), and, on the other, about repeating Being in the form of language and image. In addition, music as the most extravagant and most abstract of all arts goes beyond the limits of the worlds of overstatement and of the other. Raising itself above the sensory limits of observation and experience of the world, music is now reaching the point where the body goes beyond its corporeality. The problem with which Nancy wants to cope when it comes to the assignment of art in the technically constructed world of contemporaneity once again places art and technique at the same level:

Technics “as such” is nothing other than the “technique” of compensating for the non-immanence of existence in the given. Its operation is the existing of that which is not pure immanence. It begins with the first tool, for it would not be as easy as one imagines to demarcate it clearly and distinctly from all animal, if not indeed a vegetable, “techniques.” The “nexus” of technics is existing itself. Insofar as its being is not, but is the opening of its finitude, existing is technical through and through. Existence is not itself the technics of anything else, nor is technics “as such” the technics of existence: it is the “essential” technicity of existence insofar as technics has no essence and stands in for being. (Nancy 2003, 24)

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The question of the “essence” of art is no longer sustainable. We’ve seen the reason for that. Instead, we are faced with a turn in the idea that art still survives its historical-epochal obsolescence. In certain places, Nancy in *The Muses* mentions Hegel and his remarkable thesis that the age of art has passed since the character of truth does not appear in the sensible mantle. We can agree with Nancy when he calls Hegel’s concept of art a Western Idea. But what does that really mean? Nothing else but that art in the time of the “loss of art” (*Kunstlosigkeit*), as Heidegger stated in his comments on the *Diary* of Paul Klee, is condemned to a state that has nothing to do with the historical epochs where it played the fateful role of a mediator between divine and human, heaven and earth. Its task no longer consists in being the form in which the

truth, righteousness, the good dwell. What is left of the glorious mission of art in the modern times is the existence of the existential sign of freedom. The gestures of eccentric resistance have become more important than the work itself, and the events of intervention in social relations from the institutional drive of art. If there is no longer a universal idea with which art has been identified in the shaping of worlds (for example, Gothic art, Renaissance, Baroque, Romanticism), what still remains?

At the limit, ultimately, there remains nothing more than the Idea of art itself, like a pure gesture of presentation folded back on itself. But this residue still functions as Idea, and even as pure Idea of pure sense, or like an ideal visibility without any other content than light itself: like the pure kernel of darkness in an absolute self-imitation. (Nancy 1996, 90)

202 In his lecture “Art Today,” held in Italy in 2006, Nancy in a concise way summarizes the basic problems of contemporary art. Since the criterion of “contemporariness” cannot be performed without a critical understanding of time in the difference between the metaphysical and historical view of Being as an event, it is quite clear that this term/word causes a great deal of misunderstanding. Firstly, it is something new to the current in terms of “news.” But this does not amount to a mere acceleration of time in the technical meaning of innovation. So, Nancy is pointing out that the “pragmatic” meaning of modern art is that it must, whether or not it is, be considered within the discipline of art history. For the simple reason that it encompasses avant-garde moves such as cubism and *arte povera* up to the latest trends in digital or cyber-art. The problem of “contemporary art” is even more evident in its intentions that, like Duchamp’s *Bottle Rack*, it integrates everything, starting with the aesthetic modality of figuration and abstraction, hyperrealism and body art. The way of thinking in Nancy’s view “on” art appears to be unusual. He does not question the category of time as the vulgar transience of “now” and does not, as other authors, for instance, Heidegger and Simondon, explicate the emergence of the technical arrangement of “essence” art evolving from the movement of the historical avant-garde to the present. The problem that we

are constantly pointing to is the same as in other papers that we have been analyzing in a broad way. And this is the status or place of art in the “designing” of human existence at the outcome of the metaphysical history of the West:

Where does art stand today? What is happening with art today? Firstly, this category of “contemporary art” has been created and is being used, and this category immediately raises a whole series of problems, for art, has always been contemporary with its time. Michelangelo was contemporary, Praxiteles was contemporary, the painter of Lascaux was contemporary with his contemporaries, how could an artist not be contemporary? He or she cannot be so probably only if he or she works in some style of art, that is, if today someone executes a painting in the style of Poussin or Renoir, he or she will not be contemporary, he or she will not even be contemporary with Renoir or Delacroix, he or she will be contemporary with no one, he or she will be somewhere in a repetition of forms. So, we understand that art is always contemporary because it always belongs to a creation of forms in the space of the contemporary, in the space of an actuality, and that in this actuality art makes us feel, see first of all if we are talking about the plastic arts. (Nancy 2010, 92)

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What is striking here is the “confusion” that Nancy attaches to the idea of contemporary art. According to him, everything and nothing can become a piece of art. Furthermore, art is not necessarily current and modern. Therefore, the fact that even great masters of the classical age, including anonymous participants in the occult depictions in the caves of humanity’s prehistory, are, in the same way, “contemporary” with their age sounds too self-explanatory to the common reason. In order to avoid its principles when it comes to art, it is enough to speak of manifestations of avant-garde movements. Dadaism is surely the most reliable witness in the prophetic statements of Hugo Ball. Isn’t the current in contemporary art something truly uncanny in the definition of its suspended and neutralized “essence” which makes it possible and what is seemingly impossible: to pervade the classical and the modern in contemporaneity only then if it is the event that they live the presence of the body in the “logic of the event” of the world itself? The

criteria for distinguishing contemporary art from modern art, which Nancy wants to establish ontologically, cannot really be strictly separated as in the concept of Heidegger's "ontological difference" between Being and beings in his work *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*). It is not our intention here to enter into a critical discussion of Nancy's notion of the problematic of the concept of "contemporary art" with regard to its further "advancement" and "development." It is enough to say that in the aesthetic sense of the word the difference between modern and contemporary art shows that the latter rests on the threefold concepts of performance-concept-enframing of the event as a work, and not vice versa. This means that the "contemporariness" in the idea of art cannot be separated from its life practice. This reflects the radicality of the desire to objectify, transform the body into an aesthetic object that thinks and exists in the world shaped by the demands of *technosphere* (cf. Paic 2016, 121–143).

204 There is no doubt that contemporary art is a historically developed category. The crucial thing in its action is that it goes beyond all the metaphysical boundaries so far. This is true for the elimination of rank, the democratization of taste, the overlapping of the technical and the poetic dimensions of *mimesis*. Although almost all relevant interpretations of the idea of contemporary art would consider the ancient Greek term to be too outdated to explain the complexity of the artistic event as an aesthetic object in a ruptured state and, accordingly, to the notion of representation that Michel Foucault puts forth in the *credo* of modern epistemology, as emphasized in his most significant work *The Order of Things* in 1966 (cf. 2001), in Nancy's work, we cannot find this "epistemological cut" in such a radical way. That's the reason why the notion of contemporaneity and contemporariness can be used with ultimate fluidity. Even better: it can navigate to its edges and nodes of the network without fear of falling into the hassle of technical banality. By affirming the old notion of new meaning, we do not elevate it from nothingness only in an attempt to restore the history of the deceptive foundations. Much more important in all this is something "irrational." The language as opposed to the image sounds as if it were abandoning its inexcusable fate of desolation.

Why Nancy avoids talking about contemporary art as a state and a part of a variety of techno-poetical practices and approaches simply the

phenomenological description of what is happening “today?” It is likely that the answer lies in his attempt to get the idea of the edge of “the meaning of the world” from the idea of art itself to the process of embodying new meanings (*mondialisation*). That is why art in every aspect of today’s movement is two-fold. It is both contemporary and non-contemporary. The reason for this is that the idea is an auto-reflection of one’s own position in the “form of life” without any direct relationship to the reference frame of society, ideology, politics, culture, etc. In other words, the “Big Other” is lacking in the contemporary art and differentiates it from its antecedents. Myth and religion have disappeared a long time ago from the world of art. What remains, are the modern substitutes for the re-politicization and re-aestheticization of the event. Heidegger calls this the political and aesthetic kitsch of modernism (cf. Heidegger 1997, 39). The question is what art ultimately needs to open up a different perspective at a time when *logos*, body, and image are no longer separated entities. Instead of differentiating and differentiating, we witness the production of a multitude of identities. This goes from immersion into virtual space to the ability of body transformation into the aesthetic object of clear visibility. The problem with (contemporary) art as a set of “forms of life” consists in that Nancy must assume that behind its essential autonomy versus science and *technosphere* lies a deep void. We are immersed in the aesthetic code of the world. It seems that we are so confident about how everything works that it serves the “purposefulness without purpose.” But that is not Kant’s definition of beauty without which art does not make sense. It is now something more complex and uncannier. About the concept of the image Nancy in *The Muses* states as follows:

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In a world without the image in this sense, profusion, a whirlwind of imageries unfolds in which one gets utterly fast, no longer finds *oneself* again, in which art no longer finds itself again. It is a proliferation of *views* [vues], the visible or the sensible itself in multiple brilliant slivers [éclats], which refer to nothing. Views that give nothing to be seen or that see nothing: views without *vision*. (Think of the effacement of the romantic figure in which the artist was *visionary*.) (Nancy 1996, 94)

2. Disembodiment and rising of the body

Can we ask what the body *is* if the question of what art is is self-evidently moving into a meaningless circle? Everyone today feels obligated to criticize Descartes' dualism of mind and body (*res cogitans* and *res extensa*). As if it would be a professional duty of contemporary philosophy and as if likewise art would try to show the integral structure in which there is no longer the transcendental primate of consciousness about empirical reality of the physical world. Instead, it seems to be necessary for an opinion to persist in a new monism. However, the body is not in the ontological sense superior to the mind, as one could presume at first glance. But it has a different path of articulating what remains of the metaphysical treasury of the notion of founding and the rule of reality at all. In the case of Nancy's contemplation regarding the status of art "today" we have seen how the relationship between *logos* and *mimesis* altered at the pervading level and so-called mutual relationship. It's no longer like Hegel's speculative dialectics. We are now facing the turn
206 towards understanding the relationship of existential freedom of creation of the new world and the "ontology of the body." If *logos* is taken as the creator of meaning, as the signifier of Being, then it is self-evident that *mimesis* can only be marked in an orderly manner. Art, however, does not appear for Nancy alone with the medium of aesthetic experience that the subject constructs his imaginary worlds to reign over them with beauty and sublime. This is the event of the envisioning of a new world. And at the same time, it means that *mimesis* requires "its authentic" *logos*. Nancy is not close to any aesthetics of new rationality, which, with the concept of reflexes, finds a new key for deciphering the techno-poetic code of contemporary art. His fundamental problem is in the effort to phenomenologically open up the space of existential freedom to create "sense." For this, it is necessary to think how the mediality of media, which art "today" itself realizes as the idea without "essence," as the pure body comes to its autopoietic "extensiveness." For art, neither psychoanalysis nor theology (neither desire nor God) cannot be anything else than a metaphysically faded fiction. The body in its sovereignty of the event gives existence to "flesh" and "nerves." That is how a figure-image of lives self-defeating Being emerges in moments of endangerment of its meaning. As much as the body is free from

the “sins” of lust in the mechanical space of movement as imagined by the rationalism of the 18th century, so much the very space in which the physicality of existence occurs essentially changes under the pressure of a new situation of thought and expression.

The body exposes a breakthrough of sense, constituted absolutely and simply by existence. [...] and finally, we will not call it “the body of sense,” as if “sense” at this limit could still be the support or subject of anything at all: instead, and absolutely so, we will call it the body, as the absolute of sense itself, properly exposed. // The body is neither a “signifier” nor a “signified.” It’s exposing/exposed: ausgedehnt, an extension of the breakthrough that existence is. An extension of the there, the site of a breakthrough through which it can come in from the world. A mobile extension, spacings, geological and cosmological displacements, drifts, sutures and fractures in arch-continents of sense, in immemorial tectonic plates shifting under our feet, under our history. The body is the architectonics of sense. (Nancy 2008a, 25)

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For Nancy, the next turn is decisive: *the body is the Being of existence!* This seems to be a counter-direction to Heidegger of *Being and Time*. Instead of *being-towards-death* (*Sein-zum-Tode*), which is the fundamental determination of man (*Dasein*), here there is the existence of an existential production of events. It is not accidental that in *Corpus* Nancy quotes the posthumous fragment of Sigmund Freud from 1938: “*Psyche ist ausgedehnt; weiss nichts davon. (The psyche has extended; knows nothing about it)*” (cf. Derrida 2005). The phrase reminds us of Spinoza who was delightfully quoted by Gilles Deleuze: we do not yet know what the body can do. Derrida finds the reason for the deconstruction of body and body lines in Western metaphysics by criticizing the phenomenological approach of intuitionism as opposed to rationalism. In any case, Nancy starts from the “concretizing” of the existential event. The body becomes “sensually architectural” only when it is at the intersection of two equally insurmountable states: between the threat of disappearance or death, and the way towards the resurrection. Disembodiment and elevation are not negations of the living body in its authentic Being. It is better to say

that this is the ultimate possibility of the body in its existential freedom of self-determination of life. In the afore-mentioned text from *Corpus*, we encounter Kant's transcendental idealism. It cannot, therefore, be concluded that instead of consciousness now the body has become the subject. Quite the contrary, its "enlargement" testifies to the necessity of a different approach to the liberty of existential freedom in the world. In the attempt to open such a fluid and mobile body as a problem of philosophical thinking, it seems that some condition is needed, without which the entire effort of thinking the body is in vain. After all, such a surprisingly thoughtful idea of "the future of philosophy" cannot ignore the achievements of the "tactile-corporeal" turn. This condition of body re-emergence as "flesh" and "nerve" of existence presupposes the criticism of structuralism and the redirection of phenomenology into the articulation of the "meaning of the world." It is obvious that the body cannot be fixed as a signifier or signified. It is still less reasonable to consider it a mere aesthetic object. In a technically established world, the body increasingly loses its eccentricity. By becoming the prosthesis or organ-without-body, the process of its rupture is taking place. It should not be forgotten that the rise of the "A-intelligence" simultaneously means the loss of the significance of existential contact between beings.

Discussing the body within existential phenomenology was already attempted by Merleau-Ponty as scandal or exaggeration. First of all, this is something unimaginable from the point of view of the metaphysical relationship between *logos* and *mimesis*. The "logic" of the body does not hide in the "imitation" of an already established Being in its factuality. Why? For the simple reason that this would mean that both philosophy and art would be the result of some overwhelming power (perhaps God?). The elimination of this is directed at the exceptional possibilities of Being as the singular-plural. It is further known that for Merleau-Ponty the world was not thought beyond the body. It can only be encompassed by opening in multiple pathways of self-perceiving through the body (cf. Merleau-Ponty 2013). In this sense, the notion of "embodied existence" means a break with the metaphysics of the spirit of the German speculative tradition from Kant and Fichte to Schelling and Hegel. A further step in the exploration of the ways of thinking of bodies beyond Descartes' tradition meant also to re-examine why phenomenology

in Husserl did not positively address the question of the body as flesh (*Leib*) and corporeal body (*Körper*). The touching problem that Nancy put in such an exaggerated philosophical way in the reflection of the resurrection in *Noli me tangere* cannot be considered his last thoughts of the body. As in *Corpus*, and in this text, he emphasizes the necessity of passing beyond the reduction of phenomenology to intersubjectivity. The body is in contact more than it is an existentially fragile and fluid “object.” Therefore, the “architectural sense” should be analyzed much deeper than it has been attempted within metaphysical tradition of “rationalism” and “intuitionism.” In the proximity of the body as a substance that has no “essence” in the world, everything happens so that in the foreground comes what we call the object from the tradition of the new age and its metaphysics. This does not mean in any way that the body is lying in the process of “designing the world,” although it is increasingly impossible to avoid the latter. The body, of course, cannot even be “subjected,” become a solipsistic “I” in the tradition of the reign of the conscious Being as the guarantee or foundation of the mindset order of the world. What the body can do, and what the psyche does not know, is hiding in its aspiration for fervor as ascension. That is why Christianity in the ontological sense is truly the greatest possible scandal and excess in world history. The problem is that the figurative image of Jesus Christ is not only a synthesis of *logos* and *mimesis*, thought and sensitivity, but is a universal drama of the conflict between the proposition of Being and the nihilism of what Heidegger first noticed and what Nancy on Derrida’s trail made the setting of how Christianity or monotheism is in “essence” a kind of nihilism of history. The paradoxical “destiny” of the body crucified on the cross and the ascension act of ascending Earth bear witness to the mystery of the Being as an event of sacrifice. It is true that sacrifice is nothing but an aesthetic-ethical vow of existential freedom in dealing with the negligence of abyssal Nothingness.

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In Nancy’s view, however, the distinction between the “outside” (world) and “the self” goes through the transformation of the body. What for Levinas is absolutely the Other in the unconditional love of existence as a justification of my “life” from the ethical perspective, for Nancy is the aesthetically transformed place of the Other. Instead of the face as a sign of the identity of the Other, now the at stake lies the touching of the body in all

the conceivable meanings. What is the Other if its being is now trying to get closer to the aesthetic dimension of a body contact? In the last chapter from *Corpus*, and at the same time the most intriguing, “L’intrus” (“The Intruder”), inspired by the experience of Nancy’s fighting with the suffering of the body caused by cancer and the necessity of heart transplantation, the body is shown as an alien or absolutely Other (cf. Nancy 2008a, 161–170). And not only because of the need to continue life processes, including thinking, there exists a necessity for a technical denture as the guarantee of the extension of a different sense of a “healthy man.” What is left of “man” at the end of his natural body? Nancy at the end of *Corpus* says:

We are, along with the rest of my more and more numerous fellow-creatures, the beginnings, in effect, of a mutation: a man begins again by passing infinitely beyond man. [...] Man becomes what he is: the most terrifying and the most troubling technician, as Sophocles called him twenty-five centuries ago, who denatures and remakes the nature, who recreates creation, who brings it out of nothing and, perhaps, leads it back to nothing. One capable of origin and end. // The intruder is nothing but myself and man himself. None other than the same, never done with being altered, at once sharpened and exhausted, denuded and overequipped, an intruder in the world as well as in himself, a disturbing thrust of the strange, the *conatus* of an on-growing infinity. (Nancy 2008a, 170)

What is—body? In the meaningful performance of all the possibilities of words matched by the Latin language (*corpus*), Nancy emphasizes that the language itself is already a proof of the materiality and meaningfulness of the entering of body into discourse. Language through speech speaks of the “expansion” of the psychological structure of the unconscious. In addition, the body is spread in the sensory network. Contrary to “container” for empty two-dimensional objects is the space in the five dimensions of cosmic-biological-cognitive evolution. The rise of the body within the humanities of the 20th century comes at the same time with the degradation of metaphysics in linguistics and semiology, as well as in progressive studies of technically

created visualities in cybernetics and informatics. The body in the strict sense of the word, ontologically, is “not” simply because it cannot be reduced to Being in the sense of mere *extension*. Physical presence does not differentiate the human body from any other object. Is there, though, something “more,” a corporeal difference between man and animal? From the point of view of classical metaphysics, man is the embodiment of the spiritual ability of thought and feeling like God. We read in the *Bible* that man is made up of the image of God. This resemblance or similarity leads directly to the body of the image (*eikon*). The body cannot be thought of as mimicry for a figure in terms of the contours of its abyss with the addition of the symbolic dimension of beauty and sublime. The matter, however, is substantially changed by the displaying-presenting of (Christ’s) body in the history of art. This should always draw attention to the fact that there is no apparition. We cannot, with certainty, have an account of the historical character of the Savior. The reason lies in the fact that such existence is just unambiguously impossible. At the same time, this concerns the fractured body as a sacrifice on the Crucifixion and the ascension by ascending the body into the celestial sphere of pure spirit. The body, therefore, is defined as an existential sacrifice (cf. Nancy 1991, 20–38). This should be understood at the beginning of each “ontology of the body” which was not possible in the metaphysical language and image so far. And this could not have been so because the understanding of the mimetic nature of Jesus Christ needs to be denied since he is not a “man,” but God in the image of human being as a representation—a representation of what is visible in the ultimate invisibility.

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In the essay *Noli me tangere*, Nancy passes virtuously through all the mysterious places of the interpretation of Christ’s resurrection. Consequently, his concept of touch is derived from the phenomenology of corporeality as the inestimable presence of meaning. Nothing is just to the tune of that substance. Sartre has already in *Being and Nothingness* and in the *Nausea* completely expressed the abstinence (abjection) towards primordial magma of Being. What is touched, is not meat (*flesh*, *Leib*) as a complex of proteins, something biologically or objectively structured. It is the design of the world in something that goes beyond the metaphysical distinction between spirit/soul and body. That is why this is the existential drama of the encounter with the Other. When

Christ forbids Magdalene, who saw him first after the resurrection, any physical touch of his “new” body, the disruption in the act of prohibition is expressed in what is *in-between*. Nancy in detail exegetically and hermeneutically questions the nature of the statement: “Do not touch me” (“*Noli me tangere*”), because it is clear to him that there is no longer any conflict between divergence with a metaphysical understanding of difference. God and man are not merely two different beings in the tradition of ontology. They are primarily a place to reconcile the difference between *logos* and *mimesis*, thought and sensitivity. And this place should be understood as the beginning of a new space, to which the body as the medium mediates a deeper meaning. Between God and man, between disembodiment and rising of the body, there lies the so far unimaginable in-between. The space between is so unmistakable that cannot be a religious taboo for the possibility of a credible sacrifice of the body as the gifted “object.” If in Nancy’s understanding of the possibility of *mimesis* is being derived from the technical and poetic vision of creating the world by artwork, then the difference between the gift of the “object” and its creation is precisely that nature is subjected to mimicry by sacrificing the body, and the technical construction of “artificial life” shows that non-sacrificed at all.

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Why, then a body? Because only a body can be cut down or raised up, because only a body can touch or not touch. A spirit can do nothing of the sort. A “pure spirit” gives only a formal and empty index of a presence completely closed in on itself. A body opens this presence; it presents it; it puts presence outside of itself; it moves presence away from itself, and, by that very fact, it brings others along with it: Mary Magdalene thus becomes the true body of the departed. (Nancy 2008c, 48)

Why, then the body? Nancy’s answer, referring to the place between what is already on the road to the fallacy and what is waiting for the rising in the sky, is extremely “realistic.” Only the body allows the spirit its invisible action. In the “dark core of mimesis” there is something which illuminates the passage towards the place of absolute untouchability. This is *logos* as a figure-image of a rising body whose representation in Western painting only rare attempts

like Rembrandt's and Tizian's achieve. But why painting alone? Why not other media like poetry and film? Does not this hide a simple dimension of the originality of the image over the language? Nancy makes it impossible for any other art in its singular nature to show and present this event of visible invisibility. The reason lies in the sight of mediation. Seeing does not mean to perceive the mere meaning of an external subject. It is a vision that meets the time dimension of the presence of the body "here" and "now" with what is absent in the sense of the upcoming future. The secret of the body is thus the question of the time of an existential event with according to which historical events take on meaning. Only "in" the body can we leave signs of decay and "on" the body can we see the signs of rising. It is as if the agitated body agitates the spirit into the inevitable line of noble suffering. Only painting can do that because it is rooted in the "dark core of mimesis." The gap between the body's rift and its ascension remains a work in the serenity of life-in-eternity. Unlike poetry that gives supremacy to language and unlike film that reduces the image to a number of moving "now"-s, only in painting unpredictability and abstraction occur as the synthesis and the incarnation of *logos*, figures, and images. From Giotto to Francis Bacon, painting disintegrates the body as the spirit and the flesh, the idea and the reality of the universal performance of humanity left to the grace and inevitability of art. As the painting develops from Renaissance to cubism, the body grows more and more with regard to tint, point, line. Abstraction as a method of de-substantialization of the image of art leaves the body only as a prosthesis and supplement. In this respect, the technical and poetic dimensions of *mimesis* must be re-considered again. Why, in fact, painting after the movement of the historical avant-garde, during which the figure of Jesus Christ literally evaporated to the demands of aestheticization and politicization of art, no longer concerns the body image, but only the transition of the body to the performance of the performative-conceptual turn (cf. Paić 2014, 63–105)? The acceptable answer to this question comes from the violence perpetrated to the body, its disintegration, in Picasso's *Guernica* as its best testimony. But what is behind all of that visible "deconstruction" of the world in which the painting gave the glow and the shine of decency? Nancy says in *The Muses*:

The image withdraws as phantom or phantasm of the Idea, destined to vanish in ideal presence itself. It withdraws therefore as image of, image of something or someone that, itself or himself or herself, would not be an image. It effaces itself as simulacrum or as face of being, as shroud or as glory of God, as imprint of a matrix or as expression of something unimaginable. (Nancy 1996, 93)

Yes, the picture no longer corresponds to any universal idea as it does not fit any historical sense that no longer emerges in the future. So, how, then, is it possible that art in the rift between disembodiment and rising of the body still leaves traces of some hope in the salvation of the technology-devastated world?

3. An image without foundation

214 Nancy's "ontology of the image" cannot be understood without his "ontology of the body." If the body of Western metaphysics would be scandalous and excessive then the long-term reflection regarding the image would not fit the body, and would encounter a similar fate. The body could not think of its autonomy as the association of *logos*, figures, and images as the image could not really be understood without regard to art as the representation of things. The notion of *mimesis* is certainly the one that allows this bond/relationship. But the question is, under what conditions can an image as the material trace or the imprint of a technical skill of creating a new one be distinguished from its original "transcendence?" The problem of the "ontology of the image" is that its material structure does not reach the "essence" of what an image "is." And originally it "is" primarily something that belongs to the "holy" area. Nancy in his deconstruction of religion and monotheism in the book *The Ground of the Image* endeavors a methodical and hermeneutical separation of the sacred and religion. The reason lies in the fact that the sacred can be understood only from the untouchable. We have seen that its sense of touch is directed to release the body from every bond with two heavy balls:

(1) the super-sensible field, in which God or its secular substitute enters the body as a symbolic trace of deity and so the spirit/soul becomes in all its aspects its metaphysical "essence;"

(2) the sensitivity as a mechanical affection that in Descartes assigns the body with a space of infinite extension (*extensio*).

From this, it might be obvious that Nancy assumes a phenomenological understanding of the image. Repentance, therefore, appears as the key concept of syn-aesthetics with which the dual contradictions of *Ur*-image and copy, spirit and body, object and subject lose the meaning of fixed determinants. Only now can we find out why the picture is no longer performed in “pure form.” Instead of that Platonic concept, Nancy uses material substrates such as “energy” and “intensity.” If “form” (*eidōs*) is no longer the basis of the image in the metaphysical understanding of *archē* and the conditions of the possibilities of everything that the image signifies, which comes to the empty place of form: the schematic of the mind and the expressible inexpressibility?

The thing *as* image is thus distinct from its being-there in the sense of the *Vorhanden*, its simple presence in the homogeneity of the world and in the linking of natural or technological operations. Its distinction is the dissimilarity that inhabits the resemblance that agitates it and troubles it with a pressure of spacing and of passion. What is distinct in being-there is being-image: it is not here but there, in the distance, in a distance that is called “absence” (by which one often wants to characterize the image) only in a very hasty manner. The absence of the imaged subject is nothing other than an intense presence, receding into itself, gathering itself together in its intensity. Resemblance gathers together in force and gathers itself as a force of the *same*—hence the enjoyment [*jouissance*] we take in it. We touch on the same and on this power that affirms this: I am indeed what I am, and I am this well beyond or well on this side of what I am for you, for your goals and your manipulations. We touch on the intensity of this withdrawal or this excess. Thus *mimesis* encompasses *methexis*, a participation or a contagion through which the image seizes us. (Nancy 2005, 9)

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As Nancy points out, *mimesis* includes *methexis*. The meaning of this ancient Greek word (μέθεξις) is derived from a common sharing, the participation in the picture. The ritual connects people in a communion that expresses

the attachment to the sacred. Without that, the community remains vacant and abandoned. It is now obvious, however, that the image can be nothing but the “sacred” in the meaning entirely different from the “religious” of the individual. To make the image as a *mimesis*, more than copying or imitating Being, something extraordinary must happen. The image must show the present absence of a hidden foundation beyond mere materiality and character. In other words, the image as *methexis* is the event of the sacred and secular encounter even when it seems that the entire era of defiance of the Being seemed to occur. It is worth asking whether Nancy’s phenomenology of the image is possible without understanding the “sense of Being?” What he calls the “fundament of the image” does not refer to the hidden form of Platonic ideas. However, it is difficult to show at least a bit of a skepticism about the way in which the image of the image we are talking about is kept in mind when the image takes on the features of performance and gesture. Modernity was marked by the emergence of an image as an indefinite referentiality. Therefore, the crisis of representation does not exist until the perfecting of technical
216 appliances is at the break with “imitation” and “introduces” a new complex reality. Distinction and distancing, upon which Nancy bases his observations on the theory of images, primarily relate to the status of the object in the eyes of the observer. His role has changed significantly. He is no longer neither the Kantian passive subject of the reflection of beautiful, nor the Nietzschean active producer who disturbs indifferent senses. The observer does not look at what’s happening in a picture like an idle screen. Violence caused by the rise of the chaotic reality of the 20th century, wars, and revolutions, by the technical acceleration of the cinematic energy of one’s life, becomes the “energy” and “intensity” of the image. The image is always an image of something. It is therefore mimetic in its aspiration to turn life into the objectivity of reality. However, the representation of something does not mean that it is only an empty intentional act of observing objects.

Mimesis primarily indicates the possibility of reorganizing objects in creating a new situation and context. Bodies that present and represent possible events of change in observation are not frozen in time. Their “essence” is a creative projection of the possibilities of radical change. What changes is nothing external or internal. It is an imminent change of perspective from

which a work gains the status of an exceptional event at its own time, such as Malevich's unpredictable images or an out-of-print figure in the conceptual art of the neo-avantgarde, which ends with all the remnants of referentiality, and raises the question of the meaning of art in their place. Let's go back briefly to the suspending and neutralizing of the idea of foundation. The title of Nancy's book in which he explicitly discusses the "ontology of the image" is, at first glance, problematic. What is the "foundation" worth talking about, through which image could be invoked and would rest upon it unless this is a metaphysical source of distinction between spirit and matter, form and content, mind and sensitivity? Of course, it is the one that derives from the heritage of Western philosophy. Still, for Nancy, art is never a servant of religion. Though the myth is the beginning of the mimic activity of the narration, and the story and the logic of the very thing are permeated with it, we have seen that the distinction between the sacred and the secular is conditioned by the difference of image as an event of the meaning of Being and image as a material sign. The deconstruction of the idea of a picture's foundation can only be that what is hidden behind the idea or form (*idea* or *eidolon*) is not God's *logos* of the thing itself. The secret of the *mimesis* is in *methexis*. What now does not seem quasi-transcendental as in Derrida, appears in a touch of power in the whole spectrum of energy and intensity. The basis of the image in its original groundlessness is precisely that fluid touch in its unmistakability, which Nancy perfectly reads in the hermeneutics of the Christian understanding of the body as the medium of existential freedom between disembodiment and rising (*Noli me tangere*). The image is unmistakable, just seemingly touchable. That is why visibility is here only a way of its presence. Others exist in music, poetry, kinesthetic experiences, etc. Without the image as a rendering-presenting event, the body could not be something that disturbs psyche because it cannot be retrieved by *logos*. Touch always vanishes in the desire for the absolute possession of the Other as an object. What is the basis of the image if the spirit has lost ground under its feet?

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There is nothing in the spirit that is not in the senses: nothing in the idea that is not in the image. I become the ground and depth of the painter's eye that looks at me, as well as the reflection in the mirror (in

Aachen's painting). I become the dissonance of a harmony, the leap of a dance step. "I": but it is no longer a question of "I." *Cogito* becomes *imago*. (Nancy 2005, 10)

218 How does *cogito* become *imago*? The process of painting is more important than its attachment to sacred and secular content. Anyway, the image will remain an image and the spirit will remain a spirit as long as there is something like the untouchable Being. In other words, permeating one another is possible without an ontological rupture assuming the survival of a universal reality structure. Since Nancy thinks on the trails of Heidegger and Derrida, with the phenomenological trace of Merleau-Ponty's opinion, it does not appear advisable that this assumption is inexcusable. Namely, Being and its meaning are not predetermined in terms of time and spatial meaning. Therefore, it is possible that the process of creating a new relationship or producing a new form that art enters into the world happens simultaneously with the deconstruction of the foundation idea. The mind is not superior to the senses; rationalism has no superiority over empiricism. However, the differences are necessary for the attempt to confirm the identity with a different path of thinking. This is a post-phenomenological approach to the world's designing from the demands for the openness of existence. Its place is the mediation between the spirit and the image in the bodily constitution of the "form of life" belonging to the man. What happens when instead of the ground in the metaphysical sense we have the touch and the fluid meanings of "sense of Being?" Probably nothing spectacular, except that we can figure out that touch cannot be anything sensible. In the technical way of articulating the Being, touch is already becoming a self-fulfilling condition of the digital world of visual communication. Returning dignity to touch is impossible without the return of the "image" that links *mimesis* with *methexis*. But if it is no longer possible to have any reference frame or universal idea for the art to function spontaneously in this "world," there is still a search for what the image gives more than aesthetic appeal in the irrelevant age of technical destruction. Where all can be salvaged for Nancy except in the immediate community of the world as a place and a time of true world reification of Being (*mondialisation*)?

Conclusion

In the thought of Jean-Luc Nancy, the question of “the sense of Being,” as opposed to Heidegger, does not merely concern the possibilities of philosophy and art at the end of a metaphysically determined Western history. Instead, we are faced with three deconstructions:

(1) of the ideas of “the sense of Being” starting from the understanding of Being as the singular plurality;

(2) of “the oblivion of the body” in the effort to think the body in its openness as a remnant of existential freedom in a space whose temporal perspectives do not diminish actuality and duration;

(3) the idea of art as a form, in which the world has the characteristic of a synthesis of *logos*, figures, and images.

Thus, Nancy’s approach to thinking of what was unimaginable in the history of philosophy is also evidence of an attempt at a new understanding of the fundamental word for the Western concept of art—*mimesis*. At a time when arts are seemingly perceived as the unique globalized influence on the aesthetic shaping of life-worlds, the question of the possibility of thinking as the connection between language and image in the creation of new worlds marks a step towards something directly affecting human sensitivity in general. It is, of course, the touch with which the world opens up in a shared sense of closeness to the Other. Nancy’s aesthetic-corporeal turn of the “essence” of metaphysics ultimately shows a unique way of thinking on the path of post-phenomenology. At the end the already thought, the one, such as Being, the foundation, the reason, becomes a challenge for a different path of thinking. What is art in the age of its growth and rancor, if it is not the event of a common touch of the untouchable that no longer belongs to the “sacred” area, but neither to the banality of this dazzling, accelerated technical adventure of life with which we vanish without a visible trace, such as spots, lines in nothingness? The question of art, however, remains the last crucial question about the meaning of human existence.

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Translated by Tonči Valentić

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