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**Jean-Luc Nancy: The Question of Otherness**

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For the Degree of Ph.D. in Philosophy

**All the work presented within this dissertation is my own.**

NOTE:

Citations are footnoted in Chicago style.

## **ABSTRACT**

While the present work analyzes three distinct motifs – body, world, with – in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, the dissertation intends to investigate Nancy’s reading of Heidegger, with particular focus on the question of Being-with. Given the nature of the reflection – opening the question of otherness from within Heidegger – the research will also articulate a dialogue between Nancy and Levinas. Through the examination of Nancy’s reading of Heidegger, the dissertation will then endeavor to establish the original gesture of Nancy’s contribution to philosophy, which will be identified in the concept of powers of existence. Under the light of the analysis of the three concepts which structure the work, the conclusions will define powers of existence as singular resistances of existence to the mastering decision of philosophical work. This being the case philosophy will in turn continuously loosen its categories and key words in the attempt to decide its course according to what happens between us. The opening of a series of incommensurable measures responds to the demand existence casts on philosophical work. The problem of otherness is thus resolved as the work of powers of existence.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The aim of the present work is neither that of tracing Nancy's career, nor of introducing Nancy's thought. Instead the analysis endeavors to follow Nancy's reading of Heidegger in order to investigate to what extent the Heideggerian project motivates Nancy's writing. The conditions for describing the originality of Nancy's thought will emerge from the creative frictions between the two.

This plan will be tracked in particular with regard to the notion of Being-with, which has been identified in the present work as the moment where Nancy's appropriation of Heidegger becomes at once most distant and most productive.

This same question that guides the research motivates the presence of a third interlocutor: Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas has been one of the most attentive readers of Heidegger, engaging specifically the question of sociality. Finally dismissing the Heideggerian solution – because rooted in a philosophy of the world, where the Other is confronted simply as a moment in an otherwise individual and solitary trajectory – Levinas formulated the original command of otherness as epiphany of the face of the other human being. Jean-Luc Nancy never explicitly engages with the thought of Levinas, while at the same time one has the impression that his 'return' to Heidegger with regard to the theme of sociality and otherness works as a response and critique to the radically anti-Heideggerian position of Levinas.

The dialogue between the Levinas and Nancy runs perhaps the risk of remaining sterile due to their conflicting readings of *Being and Time*. Nonetheless Nancy's 'interpretation' of Heidegger lets us envisage a possible reopening of the Levinasian question from within Heidegger himself. If Levinas shifts the interest from Being to the Other, Nancy's reading of Heidegger situates the two on the same level. Instead of posing

an absolute otherness, Nancy's conception of the co-essentiality of Being and Being-with opens the question of otherness at the heart of Being. Nancy seems to start at the point where Levinas finishes his work.

Overall this research will thus attempt to read Nancy's effort as directed to a disarticulation of Heidegger's thinking of sociality (normally considered to be the weakest part of his thinking; Sartre, Levinas, Arendt all agree on this).

Nancy's reading though is almost never an historical or literal one; it is rather a reading that Heidegger himself suggests, one that aims at appropriating the underlying ground of existential analysis. Nancy explicitly states his engagement with Heidegger's notion of finite being in his reworking of the idea of finite thinking, by trying to deliver finitude to its own openness, liberating it from a certain Heideggerian rhetoric. In a footnote to 'A finite thinking' Nancy writes 'We don't know finitude 'in itself' [...] It is with this that we need to concern ourselves, and not the rhetoric of the modesty of thinking within which Heidegger remains trapped'<sup>1</sup>.

Nancy starts precisely from a question that Heidegger has left unanswered, that of the body, to articulate finite existence at the crossing of materiality and thought. The question 'What a body can do?', posed by Spinoza, allows Nancy to force Heideggerian thought to a territory of incommensurable measures. In Spinoza Nancy finds a model where the body is consigned neither to pure materiality nor to the simple extension of the mind, but precisely inhabits a space that is incommensurable to one or the other, opening both from within and making a clear distinction problematic. It is from this consideration of the

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Luc Nancy, 'A finite thinking' in *A finite thinking*, Simon Sparks ed., trans. Edward Bullard, Jonathan Derbyshire and Simon Sparks (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), footnote 4, p.321

body that ensues the questioning of finite worldhood, which Nancy approaches in many works, but which is dealt with in a decisive manner in his volume on film. For Nancy cinema offers the possibility of reopening within the finitude of sense the infinity of its destination, namely the impossibility of grasping the sense of sense once and for all. By addressing the evidence of sense, cinema insists on the blind spot that the inscription of sense itself is. The world of finite sense opens in itself an infinite measure of sense.

This touch of infinity on which finite sense rests, allows one to read the encounter between Nancy and Levinas at the moment where the latter invokes the notion of justice. Levinas advocates the intervention of the divine in the concept of justice. Levinas' idea of justice springs from the breaking apart imposed by God on the face to face. In so doing Levinas seems to introduce a leap of faith, an impasse where the face to face is outclassed by the encounter with God. A number of commentators have argued that this moment impinges Levinas inasmuch as the distinction between the neutrality of the *il y a* and the intervention of the divine to guarantee justice remains uncertain. Nancy overcomes this difficulty by obliterating, in particular in the two volumes of the *Deconstruction of Christianity*, the clear distinction between secular and religious as well as that between finite and infinite. It is from this argument that a reconsideration of Heidegger becomes possible. Within the Heideggerian framework – existence considered as the disclosure of possibilities through the referentiality of sense in the world – the question of otherness becomes the question of the infinite reopening of the possibilities of finite existence. Finite existence in its three moments – body, world, with – is caught in the infinite as the continuous exposure of its significations to incommensurable appropriations.

The point therefore will be to see from which concepts Nancy starts and how – namely thanks to what kind of ‘writing’ – he manages to articulate Heideggerian questions *otherwise than Heidegger*. This opens also the space to identify Nancy’s specific gesture. The research will then attempt to name Nancy’s original contribution to philosophy, that which allows his writings – whose format is mainly that of the short essay – to move from a complication of Heidegger to a more affirmative position.

One has to retrace this decision in the space devoted to each single concept. This decision is not summoned at the end, but contained in the traces that punctuate the shattered movement of Nancy’s writing.

Although one can identify a continuity of concerns and strategies, Nancy’s fragmentary style makes it difficult to systematize his thinking or to isolate one single concept. Each concept works on an incessant movement of presentation and withdrawal. What becomes apparent through these negotiations is the struggle by which argumentation seems always to lead thinking to moments of incommensurability which revitalize discourse without being resolved. Each concept therefore is articulated as intensification or an adjustment of the others.

One should thus pay attention to the fact that Nancy’s writing responds to the same structure of plural sense and incommensurability that his work attempts to advance as its very conceptual agenda.

For Nancy the problem of writing, the strategy of inscription, becomes co-essential with the demand of the creation of concepts. A distinction between philosophy as literature and philosophy as the naked re-appropriation of the question of Being is highly

problematic; one always has to do with the ‘essential indecision of the two’<sup>2</sup>. As Blanchot says then every philosopher is the ‘man of duplicitous word: there is what he says and what is important, interesting, original and able to prolong the interminability of discourse, but behind this, there is something that revokes his words’<sup>3</sup>.

For the sake of the analysis and of coherent presentation this work will nevertheless be structured around three motives. However it is not only what the concepts do, but also how the concepts are orchestrated that characterizes Nancy’s gesture. Although the fragment is one of the preferred forms of Nancy’s writing, the fragment doesn’t simply dissect an original identity. The shattering precedes the unity; therefore each fragment collaborates with the other not in order to reconstitute a lost coherence.

The risk of turning philosophy into literature is one Nancy is willing to take in the name of a possibility to save the argument from presenting concepts as the absolute. Fragments therefore do not only mark an insufficiency or establish a derivation of philosophy from literature, instead they respond to ‘the movement of meaning in the suspension of signification, which withdraws meaning in giving it, in order to give it as its gift’<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 152

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Blanchot, ‘Le Discourse Philosophique’ in *Maurice Blanchot: Récits critiques*, eds. Cristophe Bident and Pierre Vilar (Tours: Éditions Farrago, 2003), 49 (translation mine).

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 151

The following concepts will be analyzed:

- the body as the exposure of Dasein's existence and what of Dasein's existence is exposed;
- the world as the opening of the question of sense understood in terms of what happens between us;
- the with as the opening of the problem of otherness as incommensurable distance in the circulation of sense;

Following Nancy one could move then from the characterization of the body to the definition of an ethical world, but also the opposite way: a world whose ethical stance lies in the impossibility of reducing the contact of bodies in separation (*with*) to a category.

If the body is that which consistently keeps moving 'towards the world', the world being the very place where this transcendence becomes factual, the *with* is the hyphen that separates and maintains this transcendence. Such a manner of thinking permits to see the place of ethics in a perpetual form of displacement where the world is both what it is and also what is called by to separate itself from mere presence and givenness. The *with* is not then a simple device, but this very logic of unsettlement, a logic that prevents the becoming absolute of the ethical in a principle beyond the sense of the world.

The work is organized in three chapters each devoted to one concept.

The first chapter focuses on the question of the body in Nancy's work *Corpus*<sup>5</sup>. The text doesn't present a systematic treatment of the question of the body. Instead Nancy's

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<sup>5</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008)

attempt to expose the intertwining of materiality and thought is elaborated according to a strategy of displacements achieved through a series of resolutions. Concepts like body, flesh, incarnation, are adopted momentarily and only strategically. The fragments are often organized or culminate with long lists, which occasionally lead to what Derrida has called *aposiopesis*<sup>6</sup>.

Nancy's discussion of the body is framed as an attempt to open Heidegger's silence on the question of the body, taking this silence to be a *praeteritio*: the body receives its emphasis through silence. Nancy's work will be read in the light of Spinoza's *Ethics*, in particular there where the latter seems to offer a model to liberate the body. The work of Emmanuel Levinas is introduced towards the end of the chapter, since the notion of *position* developed in his early writings seems to provide a point of contact with Nancy's attempt to link the question of the body with that of existence.

The second chapter attempts a reading of the question of the world, mainly from Nancy's volume *The Creation of the World or Globalization*<sup>7</sup>. Here Nancy embarks in a deconstruction of the onto-theological tradition that has presented the world in terms of a principle lying beyond itself. As the principle is often a divine one this deconstructive gesture cannot be completely separated from a deconstruction of Christianity. Following a reading of Heidegger's notion of Being-in-the-world Nancy's analysis understands the world as the site for the opening of sense as that which responds to the question 'what happens between us'. 'Us' can be pronounced only insofar as it is pronounced within the

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christiène Irizarry (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 71

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007)

limits of this world 'here'. The sense of the world is always given, but only insofar as it is given to 'us'. Given to be given again.

Heidegger's attempt to extricate the question of the world from the subject – object relation and Heidegger's own project of *destruction* are subject in Nancy's text to a creative re-appropriation. This becomes more apparent when the question of a world without principle is read in the light of Heidegger's examination of Leibniz' *principle of reason*.

In order to expose the logic of a world without principle, the chapter will investigate the relation cinematographic image and reality, as explored in Nancy's *The evidence of film*<sup>8</sup>. In particular the work of American director John Cassavetes will be presented as an attempt to figure out a strategy of sociality based on distance.

The third chapter will take its cue from Levinas' notion of metaphysical desire and intends to question the notion of originary otherness. Levinas' refusal of Heidegger's Being-in-the-world constitutes the point of departure to develop the dialogue between Levinas, Heidegger and Nancy. The phenomenology of desire that occupies the central part of *Totality and Infinity* will be re-opened in a debate with Heidegger. The question of an originary otherness and Levinas' relationship with the work of Martin Buber will be confronted with Nancy's work on the incommensurable.

Heidegger's notion of Being-with, refused by Levinas because organized around an indifferent crowd or because grounded in individualism, provides Nancy with the possibility of understanding a co-essential plurality at the heart of singular existence.

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<sup>8</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, trans. Christine Irizarry and Verena Conley (Brussels: Yves Gevaert Éditeur, 2001)

In this light therefore the *with* remains inappropriable, its logic is that of separation. Without being a thing, the *with* is that which commands a logic of relation based on the distinction of the terms that engage in the relation. The separation of the terms imposed by the *with* is that which allows the two terms to keep relating to each other.

*With* therefore designates relation in terms of that which happens and withdraws between us. *With* is nothing, meaning that it is not some thing, but that which happens between things. As Jean-Luc Nancy puts it the law of the *with* is that of ‘the distinct that distinguishes itself in entering the relation [...] coming to the other and separating itself from it’<sup>9</sup>.

The fact that the *with* remains incommensurable guarantees the opening towards the other that Levinas was seeking to address.

The problem of otherness will therefore be understood in terms of decision over singular existence. Existence is the work of otherness inasmuch as it always has to decide itself. This decision is always co-appearing along the *with*.

The work of otherness at the heart of existence will be explored finally in the conclusive remarks where the attempt will be to understand Nancy’s incommensurabilities as the work of *powers of existence*. Those name on one side the primacy for Nancy of philosophy as demand towards the open and on the other the necessity of plunging philosophy into limit-thoughts and incommensurable distances.

With regard to the first point for Nancy philosophy is mainly a problem of keeping open the exercise of questioning; the stress is therefore always on the possibility of

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<sup>9</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *L’ “il y a” du rapport sexuel*, (Paris: Galilée, 2001), 22 (translation mine)

retaining in philosophy the primacy of the question. The work of philosophy is that of questioning acquired significations in the name of a reopening of sense, whose consequences cannot be completely calculated. Finite thinking must retain a completion in incompleteness.

On the second point the incommensurable is thought by Nancy in order to avoid binary structures and the reification of philosophical concepts. Nancy acknowledges that the work of philosophy is always an attempt to recover the 'advance of existence'. In this act of recovering philosophy doesn't represent existence, rather it interrupts it and works in and as this interruption. What this means is that philosophy must inhabit a space where reconciliation is impossible, but where the evidence of the real is exposed as that which philosophy has to decide upon without though extinguishing neither the real nor its own (in)decision. The opening of any question to the incommensurable is what prompts the most decisive transgression and allows philosophical discourse to proceed.

The return to Heidegger in the conclusive section then explores another silence, this time on the question of love. In 'Shattered Love' Nancy reopens the possibility for a discourse of love from within the Heideggerian ontological constitution of Dasein, proposing that a logic of the broken heart would allow one to envisage a new opening of the notion of otherness in Heidegger's thinking. The movement of love, which disrupts and at the same time widens the discourse, rather than determining the closure of the argument, should explode the enquiry towards a reconsideration of what still remains unthought.

## **EXPOSURES**

*'You said soul...can you really still think about the soul's reality when the torture has shown you that your body is everything? Your body has resisted, not your soul; and your mind, which is body, has resisted. And very soon, body and mind...'Mas tu y ello juntamente en tierra en humo en polvo en sombra en nada'*

Leonardo Sciascia<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leonardo Sciascia, *The Council of Egypt*, trans. Adrienne Foulke (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1966), 183

## **Introduction**

Considerable attention has been devoted to the body in current reassessments of phenomenology, metaphysics, film and literature. And yet the body resists discourse by almost bouncing it back. To present it in a schematic fashion, one could say that the discussion has mainly polarized around on one side discursive bodies, bodies that are mostly constructed through socio-cultural practices and, on the other, mere material bodies, bodies whose matter is all that matters. The body resists. It resists as excess.

How is it possible, given these premises, to (re)open the question concerning the body? In other words: how can one reopen the question of the body sewing together the empirical reality of bodies and the relation they entertain with the ideality of sense?

The present work proceeds by retaining the opening itself as original gesture, in order to let the body appear in its excesses, to let it appear – as it were - as that which exceeds all secure borders. Opening a space, an extension – a kind of plastic language will be at work throughout the discussion and forms part of its strategy – whose suture is unknown, or, better said, is a closure that falls outside of the realm of knowledge.

The abovementioned opening simultaneously exceeds a symbolic, hysteric reduction and its opposite, the purely materialist account, where the body is the irreducible crust. This excess would place the body not in between the two, since such an inscription would probably mean nothing more than translating the two

reductions into a third one, but beyond and elsewhere. Beyond means here that the opening remains at work throughout, it means that one does not open it in view of a closure, but that the gesture of opening is retained as the foundational movement. Beyond is here taken to indicate the fact that the question of the body is always a question of adjusting the limit of the excess the body is. What is at stake here is a questioning of the body that has in view the Heideggerian analysis, although Heidegger apparently does not have much to say on the body.

## 1.1 - Heidegger: a review.

It has been said everywhere that Heidegger does not speak about the body: ‘one does not find ten lines concerning the problem of the body’<sup>2</sup>.

In *Being and Time* there is no reference to corporeality. Better said, the only reference one finds is a dismissive statement. ‘‘Bodily nature’ hides a whole problematic of its own, though we shall not treat it here’<sup>3</sup>. Heidegger is not going to talk about Dasein’s bodily nature. Nevertheless one should perhaps be suspicious given that this passage appears in *Section 23*, at the point where Heidegger takes up the question of de-severance (Ent-fernung) and directionality (Ausrichtung), Dasein’s way of orienting itself in the world. How could he avoid talking about the body? Perhaps this hasty dismissal should then be read as a *praeteritio*, a figure that allows one to achieve emphasis by passing something by. Perhaps Heidegger simply wasn’t interested in trying to liberate the question of the body from the metaphysics of substance into which tradition had plunged it. And yet, this very operation seems to be nevertheless performed. The passage from §23 gives the impression, as Levin says, to produce an interruption<sup>4</sup> and also to leave a blank there where the ek-statical opening of the world promises a phenomenological investigation of the body.

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<sup>2</sup> Alphonse de Waelhens ‘‘The Philosophy of the Ambiguous’’, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. Alden L. Fischer (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), xix

<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 124

<sup>4</sup> David Michael Levin, ‘The ontological dimension of embodiment’ in *The Body*, Donn Welton eds. (London: Blackwell, 1999), 124

De-severance is ‘a kind of Being which Dasein has with regard to its Being-in-the-world’<sup>5</sup>. It is a constitutive state of Dasein’s Being, a state whose factual modes go from the ‘extremely close’ to ‘absolute remoteness’. The only mention of the body therefore appears when Heidegger sets off to explain what it means for Dasein to spatialize. Dasein opens space, makes space for itself. Dasein’s spatiality is linked with its Being-in-the-world; it is one of the ways through which Heidegger specifies the nature of ‘in’ and the concept of world. Dasein’s spatiality is not that of an object inside the world, Dasein is not in the world as present-at-hand; rather its happening in a space has an ontological connection to the world. Dasein’s spatiality ‘cannot signify anything like occurrence at a position in a ‘world-space’, nor it can signify Being-ready-to-hand at some place’<sup>6</sup>. Dasein’s way of being in space is of a different nature: Dasein relates to things present at hand by becoming familiar with them, by concerning itself with them. Through this concerned dealing it gives things space and renders them accessible. Dasein brings what it encounters within-the-world into its sphere of concern, namely it brings things at a distance.

As Heidegger reminds us this is an existential characteristic of Dasein. Bringing close accounts as well for what is cognitively discovered and not simply for objects drawn near for immediate use. This does not mean taking a subjectivist stance. Dasein does not change the nature of the entities it encounters; it rather reveals them as that which always already matters. This ‘primordial spatiality’ precedes every measuring (whether scientific or everyday) because it is intended as a way of relating, rather than serving as a device for quantitative calculations. This

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 139

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 138

is what Heidegger means with the example of the street, whose touch one feels at every step, 'it slides itself as it were along certain portions of one's body'<sup>7</sup>, and at the same time it is more remote than what one can encounter at a distance on that street. Dis-stancing as bringing close does not mean drawing something nearer to my body, encumbered by my body as it were; it means that one is bringing something existentially at a distance, becoming concerned with it. The corporeal involvement of Dasein appears here as existential: it discloses a world without necessarily bringing this world here.

In the expression 'existential character of one's body', one should hear the fact that my body is involved in the world. This involvement entails the activity of reaching as that of disclosing a region without performing any particular action. Furthermore it involves the almost passive situation of being always stretched between here and there. Perhaps one could say that in these passages Heidegger is pointing to a structure that sees the body as never in one place, but always at each time constituting a somewhere. This – it will be seen – is the starting point where Jean-Luc Nancy takes up the Heideggerian silence over the body (one first appearance of the unthought) and develops it into the relation between the body and existence. This relation – that one could call 'exposure' – is structured around the fact that Dasein moves between a 'here' in which it finds itself (without ever simply being/resting there) and a 'there', which it 'makes' each time. The fact that Dasein ex-ists and that its nature is ek-statical – always already played out in the outside where it has transcended all beings, including itself – constitutes the central question of the body. As François Raffoul puts it: 'transcendence is the taking

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 142

place of any place'<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, despite the fact that in *Being and Time* Heidegger does not articulate any explicit argument with regard to the body, it is possible to reopen the aforementioned question from a Heideggerian perspective, regardless or even because of Heidegger's silence.

The existential character of the body is disclosed moving from this section of *Being and Time*. It is at this point that Heidegger attempts to liberate the body from its metaphysical 'history': the body is not a substance, but a particular way of existing in the world. The body is perhaps – this is precisely what Nancy seems to say – a fundamental way of being of Dasein, exposing the thrownness of Dasein and also its involvement with the world (Being-in) and with others. As Heidegger puts it: 'Dasein is proximally never here but yonder; from this 'yonder' it comes back to its 'here'; and it comes back to its 'here' only in the way in which it interprets its concerned Being-towards'<sup>9</sup>.

In Heidegger's work the question of the body becomes the question of Dasein's leaping over and of its concerned being-in-the-world as dealing with and working. Because Dasein is neither *vorhanden* nor *zuhanden*, neither present-at-hand nor ready-at-hand<sup>10</sup>, one could say that it is not only factually that the body occupies a crucial juncture in Heidegger's thinking. The body is not only what is present-at-hand for other Daseine. Existentially it is the ek- that displaces any place. The taking place of any place happens existentially with the body. It is as a body that I assume a distance and inhabit the world as the outside to which I've transcended.

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<sup>8</sup> François Raffoul, *Heidegger and the Subject*, trans. David Pettigrew, Gregory Recco (New York: Humanities Books, 1999), 152

<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 142

<sup>10</sup> Derrida reminds us of the problem of foundation between the two: 'Is or is not *Vorhandenheit* founded on *Zuhandenheit*?'. Jacques Derrida, "Heidegger's Hand (*Geschlecht II*)" in *Psyche. Inventions of the Other, Volume II*, trans. John Leavey and Elizabeth Rottenbergh (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 44

The body is in charge of possibilities as the horizon of ek-sistence. This could also be put in the following way: something about the body is already explained by its bare being-there, but this something comes to be articulated only once the body exists as dis-stance from the world.

It has been said that Jean-Luc Nancy tries to reopen the question of the body from a Heideggerian perspective, but it shouldn't be surprising that one finds no explicit reference to Heidegger in Nancy's *Corpus*. The book in fact tries to make its own space. Thus it often takes on trajectories that, while respectful of the dictates of philosophical praxis, do not follow a specific model of philosophical presentation. The risk of this discourse betraying completely the laws of philosophical writing is always open, in particular when one stumbles upon propositions that 'can neither be derived nor refuted' that therefore prompt and never abandon the 'syncopation' of philosophical discourse. *Corpus* inhabits this syncope by relying constantly on undecidable series<sup>11</sup>.

As it is frequently the case with Nancy, the way Heidegger is read allows for an indirect appropriation where the proper name *Martin Heidegger* seldom appears, while at the same time one can feel the German philosopher watching over the curve of the argument. This kind of appropriation does not repeat Heidegger's discourse; rather, it attempts to open Heidegger to his own possibilities.

Despite the fact that the question of the body is again not addressed frontally, the *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* takes up the question of Dasein's neutrality. Heidegger makes clear that his choice of 'Dasein' over 'man' was made

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<sup>11</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Logodaedalus: The Discourse of the Syncope*, trans. Saul Anton (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 10

in the name of neutrality. Dasein's neutrality allows investigating 'the being for which its own proper mode of being in a definite sense is not indifferent' prior to factual determinations; existence prior to its concretions. This peculiar neutrality, however, should be taken not as indifference but as potency. Neutrality here stands for openness to possibilities disclosed by Dasein in view of the realization of factual humanity. As Heidegger puts it, 'neutral Dasein is indeed the primal source of intrinsic possibility that springs up in every existence and makes it possible'<sup>12</sup>.

This allows Heidegger to separate his existential analysis from worldviews and philosophies of life. As neutral Dasein gets immediately dispersed. Its dispersion is what *exists*. Dasein exists as its own dispersion. Seen in this light neutrality translates an original situation: Dasein is originally neutral, its neutrality stands for 'the not yet of factual dispersion'<sup>13</sup>. It is at this point, in the ontical order, that Heidegger inscribes bodiliness: 'as factual Dasein is in each case dispersed in a body'<sup>14</sup>. One should immediately caution that Heidegger does not introduce dispersion as a negative term, and that the lexicon deployed – splitting, dissociation, disaccord, division – cannot be heard only in its negative resonances. As for other concepts belonging to Dasein's facticity – falling, thrownness, They and destruction, among others – the register suggested by the terminology cannot be taken too literally. Dispersion, further defined as *bestrewal* [Streuung] and *dissemination* [Zertreuung], is first of all a descriptive term. It describes Dasein's relation with the 'multiplication' of possibilities, its standing against and disclosing them. This multiplication is already present in Dasein's neutrality and is realized in its essence: existence. Heidegger says that embodiment is an organizing factor of

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 137

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 137

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 137

this dispersion. Dispersed in a body, Dasein then assumes its proper multiplication, it occurs in the world as extension [Erstreckung]. As Derrida says: ‘Erstreckung names a spacing that, ‘prior to’ the determination of space as *extensio*, comes to extend or stretch out being-there, the *there* of being, *between* birth and death’<sup>15</sup>. The extension Dasein assumes as factually dispersed in a body belongs to its ontological character, to its existential structure, and decides of both Dasein’s temporality and its spatiality. As dispersed Dasein is *in between*: both in a temporal sense (extended between birth and death) and in a spatial one (‘here’, ‘there’ and every other spatial meaning belong to this dispersion). The body as we said is at this point ‘an organizing factor’ of this original dispersion. Heidegger again stops here. Nothing further is mentioned with regard to how embodiment organizes the aforementioned dispersion. For the sake of this argument and for the analysis to come, what one could retain from these passages of *The Metaphysical Foundations* is a ‘lexical swarm’, the scattering of *dis-*, ‘the series of “dissociation”, “distraction”, “dissemination”, “division”, “dispersion”’<sup>16</sup>.

In the *Zollikon Seminars* hosted between 1959 and 1969 by Medard Boss in Zurich, Heidegger will take up the question of the body explicitly. The first emergence of the term is to be found within a discussion of the phenomenon of making-present. Heidegger tries to clarify to an audience of non-philosophers the philosophical presuppositions sciences take for granted when explaining physiological-psychological processes.

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<sup>15</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Geschlecht I: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference” in *Psyche, Inventions of the Other. Volume II*, trans. Ruben Bevedzdivin and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 20

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 17

The phenomenon of making-present, Heidegger says, cannot be considered as self-evident and known. Heidegger criticizes the sciences for such a blind attitude: ‘Science becomes blind to what it must presuppose and to what it wants to explain’<sup>17</sup>. There is then something unsatisfactory in the way sciences approach perception. Heidegger shows the impossibility of distinguishing between body and mind, saying that a simple principle cannot be found; instead, one moves in a circle. Contrary to what Nietzsche thought, the phenomenon of the body is not the more distinct and comprehensible and this is why, Heidegger says, its treatment has been passed by in *Being and Time*. This is also why Heidegger always seems too sceptical with regard to providing a solution – his intention is more that of opening a field of questions.

Phenomenologically the body is the most resistant of concepts<sup>18</sup>. If one works by trying to reduce phenomena like sadness, blushing, grief, to simple somatic manifestations, one ends up in the circle again, for measuring is not enough, and still some kind of reduction, in the form of a set of references to other phenomena at least, must be attempted. At this point Heidegger moves back to the question of spatiality: how does the body relate to space? In a manner not different from *Being and Time*, Heidegger says that ‘Dasein is not spatial because it is embodied. But its bodiliness is possible only because Dasein is spatial in the sense of making room’<sup>19</sup>. As a consequence of this, the body is not identical to any ‘being-here’ of Dasein’s being in a particular place. The body is the most distant to us in space. These passages serve Heidegger to say that although the body is a relation with my

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<sup>17</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 75

<sup>18</sup> For an analysis of the relation between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty’s thought see: Kevin Aho, *Heidegger’s Neglect of the Body*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 81

here, this relation is not that of presence-at-hand or readiness-to-hand; Dasein's mode of presence is other. The human body is not a chair, therefore one cannot properly say that the body is here in some place, 'in each case the *here* is this one'<sup>20</sup>. Rather the body always leaps forward and in so doing takes up space. The fact that the body takes up space, rather than occupying a point in it, means that the 'here' of the body is never specified, because it is simply a 'somewhere': the body discloses a somewhere, without ever identifying with a specific place. At each time the body discloses a somewhere, this somewhere is opened, made by the body at each time and impervious to being reduced to specific coordinates.

What one could conclude from these remarks is that Heidegger intends the human body differently from a simply corporeal entity.

*The body has to be linked more intimately with the question of Dasein, with existence.*

The limits of the body are not the limits of the body as a corporeal thing. They extend beyond, and in this beyond one should understand existence. Thus the question of the mineness of my body has nothing to do with the limit of my skin. My body is not limited by or within my skin. Heidegger says that 'the bodying forth of the body is determined by the way of my being [...] The limit of bodying forth (the body is only as it is bodying forth: 'body') is the horizon of being within which I sojourn'<sup>21</sup>.

Further on, Heidegger attempts to explain the body as organizing factor in the following terms: 'within philosophy we must characterize all comportment of the human being as being-in-the-world, determined by bodying forth of the body'. The

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<sup>20</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay trans. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 86

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 87

body is an organizing factor in that it *expresses* Being-in-the-world. This expression, which manifests itself as gesture – ‘one’s gathered bearing and comportment’<sup>22</sup>, says Heidegger – shouldn’t be taken as an expression of something interior – the body pushing outside what exerts a pressure from the inside. The body is an *interpretation* of Being-in-the-world in the way of an existential disclosure. As Levin says, this gesture could be heard perhaps in terms of ‘a deep sense of inherence, belonging, rootedness, and grounding that normally and for the most part remains deeply, darkly implicit, pre-reflective, unthematized, unquestioned’<sup>23</sup>.

These few passages – from the almost total silence of *Being and Time* to the explicit argumentation as a response to natural and medical sciences in the *Zollikon Seminars* – do not exhaust the list. What emerges though is that there is a possibility of reading the body in relation to Dasein’s existential disclosure of the world. The path, however, remains in Heidegger’s work nothing more than a prospect, whose articulation is always precarious. Nevertheless those references provide a possibility to understand how Jean-Luc Nancy’s work tries to address the question of the body within a Heideggerian perspective, while remaining silent with regard to Heidegger’s silence.

Nancy endeavours to re-open the question of the body from within Heidegger, which in a few words means to *link the body most explicitly with the question of an existence without essence*.

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<sup>22</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, Franz Mayr and Richard Askay trans. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 90

<sup>23</sup> David Michael Levin, ‘The ontological dimension of embodiment’ in *The Body*, Donn Wellton eds. (London, Blackwell, 1999), 132

If it's true that *Being and Time* 'strives to understand meaning as a question that precedes itself hermeneutically'<sup>24</sup>, then the work of Nancy on the body recalls that of the subject in the hermeneutic circle: the sense of the body cannot be separated from the body of sense.

Nancy will not treat Heidegger. He will not openly address the criticism that Heidegger never talks about the body, but nevertheless his question, which finds references elsewhere, namely in Spinoza, springs from a recess of Heideggerian silence. Nancy takes up Heidegger's *praeteritio* to re-mark what has been said only by being passed by.

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<sup>24</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Sharing Voices', in *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: from Nietzsche to Nancy*, Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift eds., trans. Gayle L. Ormiston (New York: SUNY Press, 1990), 225

## 1.2 - Situating the body

In the light of the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, it will be argued that the body is an extension, but – one needs to make it clear in order not to fall into the discourse of the body as pure extension or as tool - an extension of a particular kind, given its relations with sense and existence. In considering the body as mere extension, one ends up performing a discourse that minimizes the complexity of the relationship that the body harbours with sense, the latter defined as that which, dis-identical to itself, is irreducible to the assignment of significations. As Nancy puts it: ‘sense isn’t a matter of something having or making sense. It is rather the fact that sense grasps itself as sense’<sup>25</sup>. Regarding the second point, the body as tool, one could largely agree with Michel Henry when he says that it is ‘just a fantasy of reflective thought’<sup>26</sup>. Once the body’s relation with sense and existence is clarified the use of the term extension will hopefully have escaped both aforesaid conceptions.

The angle at play within this research is then an existential one, which means that it will posit the questions regarding the body mainly as emerging from and concerning existential analysis. Following the path traced by Jean Luc Nancy, I will then attempt to look at what the French philosopher calls an ontology of bodies. The endeavour undertaken here with regard to the question of existence will be to map out within the thinking of Jean-Luc Nancy the presence of Baruch Spinoza.

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<sup>25</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Elliptical Sense’ in *A finite thinking*, Simon Sparks ed., trans. Jonathan Derbyshire (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 92

<sup>26</sup> Michel Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, trans. Girard Etzkorn, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Press, 1975), 61

One should be fully aware that such an enterprise is fraught with difficulties; nonetheless a close reading of the work of the two thinkers will show that such a trajectory is perhaps not impossible.

The first point is thus the acknowledgement that existence is disclosed at the threshold of the relationship between sense and the body.

*The difficulty about thinking the body is that 'body' can never be before me. I am always already involved in the body I am thinking of.* This is the prelude to put in front of this first stage of the research. It amounts at saying that the body does not refer to a beyond itself; if it has ever referred to such a thing, it does not do it anymore. The body is that which makes sense, but at the same time, residing in the passage sense-matter, it is resistant to signification, resistant to the play of signifiers/signified.

As already anticipated, the present chapter will be largely occupied with a reading of the body of work of Jean-Luc Nancy. It is in particular motivated by one sentence: 'The body is neither a 'signifier' nor a 'signified'. It is exposing/exposed, ausgedehnt, an extension of the breakthrough that existence is'<sup>27</sup>.

Following Nancy, I will argue that an analysis of the body in its relation to existence, sense, and creation allows the body to emerge as excess resisting the system of references. In this light the body weaves and disrupts the ground on which this system of references is based.

It is not then a matter of translating the materiality of the body into a discursive factor or of saying that materiality is itself a process<sup>28</sup>. The problem is to situate

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<sup>27</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 25

<sup>28</sup> Judith Butler proposes 'a return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produced the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter'. Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 9

bodies beyond pure materiality. Bodies inhabit the passage, or ‘fracture’ as Nancy wants it, that distances materiality and sense, that movement exceeding both in circulating from one to the other. Although this program – a body that refuses the dualism sense-matter in order to take position beyond the two and that plays a pivotal role in the disclosure of existence and the world – might resonate with that of phenomenology, there are nevertheless important differences between the two. Michel Henry for example has posed the body as an ontological problem<sup>29</sup>, but his investigations are still largely articulated within a Husserlian perspective (see for instance the analysis of movement and the study of Maine de Biran). Working within the framework laid down by Jean-Luc Nancy means to find oneself sometimes even at odds with a phenomenological account. Furthermore, differently from Merleau-Ponty and the approach linked with his work, the term *flesh (chaire)* will never be used. While Henry in his latest works carefully lays down the difference between flesh – ‘(that) which experiences itself and at the same time senses what surrounds it’ – and body – ‘senseless to the universe’<sup>30</sup>, here the word flesh will not impose itself. Instead of reducing the body to a mere outer layer or a pure materiality, ‘a stone on the way’ as Henry says, one should think it as the site that allows the spacing out of *what is* by inhabiting the passage sense-matter. Adding the word flesh would mean to craft a notion that attempts to surpass the body by claiming its insufficiency. In fact Henry says not just that ‘flesh and body are as opposed as to feel and not to feel’, but that ‘just our flesh allows us to know [...] something as «body»’<sup>31</sup>. In an interview with Roberto

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<sup>29</sup> ‘The body now seen from the ontological point of view, as absolute body, refers to no particular intentionality [...] it designates nothing other than the common being of all these intentionalities’ Michel Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, trans. Girard Etzkorn (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Press, 1975), 207

<sup>30</sup> Michel Henry, *Incarnation. Une philosophie de la chair*, (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 8 (translation mine)

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

Esposito, which opens the Italian translation of *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy claims to avoid the word flesh for it is too inscribed within the Christian and phenomenological register. On the contrary, the word body retains some kind of lightness. In addition: '(flesh) is a word of the in-itself and not of the outside of itself'<sup>32</sup>. While Merleau-Ponty uses a register of intertwining ('things [...] are incrustated into its flesh'<sup>33</sup>) that develops in his later writing into the notion of chiasm<sup>34</sup>, here the register on which to insist is one of discontinuity: not an inscription, but a writing out, a relation as limit that exceeds what it inscribes.

Finally there is in Nancy's work a reflection on the lexicon of incarnation, which breaks with the approach traced by Merleau-Ponty, since the Christian and Christological foundation of the problem is taken into account as such<sup>35</sup>. Incarnation is traced back to a broader questioning at the hearth of Christianity. This project differs from that of Merleau-Ponty and also from that of Henry, who conducts a similar analysis but focuses on the abovementioned distinction flesh/body. Incarnation, according to Henry, would pertain to flesh and would not at all entail the body:

it is a matter of flesh not of body and, if the difference between flesh and body has appeared to us essential since the beginning, it is the flesh and not the body that will lead to an understanding of Incarnation in the Christian sense.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Roberto Esposito, Interview with Jean-Luc Nancy, in *Essere Singolare Plurale*, (Torino: Einaudi, 2001), xxviii (translation mine)

<sup>33</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind' in *The Primacy of Perception*, James M. Edie ed., trans. Carleton Dallery (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 163

<sup>34</sup> See in particular the working notes in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968)

<sup>35</sup> See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure. The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant and Michael Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> Michel Henry, *Incarnation. Une philosophie de la chair* (Paris : Seuil, 2000), 26 (translation mine)

What both the constructive/social theory of the body and the phenomenological approach seem to rely on is the presence of the *body of God*, that is to say an external, eminent Cause or Discourse, a *beyond*, which is called to confer sense on the body. On the contrary the attempt to understand the body in the absence of Gods or as the place that the withdrawal of Gods has left open is usually set aside. If there is no beyond, no body of God, then the question of the body can be put alongside the obsession, peculiar to Western thought, for *what is*.

Questions will then be structured around the fact that the body is that which exposes existence itself. These questions can be posited as demands concerning the very fact that the body *is* and that it is always what is *there* (in thinking as in the actuality of experience). What is left is the body as an obsession with the real.

Approaching the body in the light of an obsession with the real, without falling into defining it as either discourse or matter, amounts to questioning the body's relation with an existence that cuts across its own essence.

The question is to address the body as body, out of the apparent tautology, in excess of signification, as that which constantly exposes and is exposed to existence. Nancy suggests thinking the body not as referring to clear and distinct signifiers or fixed moments of meaning, but to existence's coming to presence. To put it differently, Nancy advocates a thinking of the body in terms of existence as the sharing that creates the world as *world*. The body writes out this fact: the world is its own existence. In reading Nancy and tracing his thought back to Spinoza, the present discussion will try to avoid any teleological discourse on the body. What

the research stresses is rather the fact that the body should be read in its crucial relation with the ‘happening’ of existence.

Spinoza will be brought into play not just because he is – as Deleuze so eloquently envisaged – the liberator of the body, but because his thought on the body – the body as extension participating in God; the mind as idea of the body – is the site where one can trace Nancy’s reopening of Heidegger’s *praeteritio*. Moving from the definition of the ‘body as a mode which expresses [...] God [...] as the thing extended’<sup>37</sup> and the mind as idea of the body, one can draw a trajectory that culminates in Nancy’s thinking of the body as a place of existence.

Spinoza’s claim that ‘no-one has hitherto determined what a body can do’<sup>38</sup> echoes the idea of the body as resilient to signification, of the body as excess, as that which resides in the passage sense-matter. Furthermore, given the nature of the Spinozian God, Nancy considered him to be the first thinker of the world. The famous formulation ‘Deus sive natura’ bears a relation with the ways through which Nancy addresses existence and the question of the world. Under this light a look will be taken at the ways in which Nancy rereads the question of the creation ex-nihilo and how this rereading finds in Spinoza an almost exact reference.

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<sup>37</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 79

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 131

### 1.3 - Banality of bodies

*If as its name suggests, the Occident is a fall, then the body is the ultimate weight, the extremity of the weight sinking from this fall. The body is weight.*

Jean-Luc Nancy<sup>39</sup>

To speak of the banality of the body would mean here that the word “body” itself does not touch the ground anymore. It means that it is a floating concept, a *generalogy* (a logos of the general, posited as generally as possible).

As Nancy puts it:

Capital, no doubt, also produces a banalizing generalization of the body and of the neighbour. Photographic obsessions with crowds attest to this fact, with their misery, their panics, with number as such, or with erotic obsessions filtering in throughout...(this, too, is why the body has also become the most insipid, the flattest, finally the most disconnected of themes and terms – in an irreversible coma)<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 7

<sup>40</sup> The name of the company itself is rather emblematic: *The body holiday*

<sup>41</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 197

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 197

<sup>43</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 91

Nancy goes on to indicate two versions of this banality, two shades of the same phenomenon: ‘that of the model (the magazine register, a canon of streamlined, velvety bodies) and that of the *indiscriminate* (no matter what body, ruined, wrecked, deformed)’<sup>44</sup>.

This distinction sketches out the circumstances into which the question of the body has fallen. On one side, the body matters when it can be subjected to a process of beautification (*cosmesis*), what Stendhal once defined as *la promesse de bonheur*, “the promise of happiness”<sup>45</sup>. On the other, a body is always called upon to signify or stand in for something else. Any other body, which does not belong or subscribe to a body of signs, which does not inscribe itself within a system of signification, falls into the category of the *whatever* (*n’importe que corps*).

Along this same path the theme of proximity, the space of the one next to me, loses its profundity. One’s relation with the fellow man becomes a question of a simple summa of more than one body. Exposing the theme to its banality requires – I will consistently come back on this – reopening again the Heideggerian horizon, in particular at the juncture where a crossing is produced between the questions of Being-with and the question of the world.

What happens once, as per Nancy, ‘the body is simply there, given, abandoned, without presupposition, simply posited, weighted, weighty’<sup>46</sup> and what if bodies were ‘first masses, masses offered without anything to articulate, without anything to

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 91

<sup>45</sup> I have here avoided making use of the word aestheticization for at least two reasons, a positive and a negative one. By speaking of an aesthetic body, we run the risk of falling into an irreversible tautology, for the body is already aesthetic, the fact of feeling being proper to the body, or better yet it is bodies alone that can access and create an aesthetics, the space of senses. Any body is aesthetic in itself, since the very beginning, because it is the very force expressing and expressed by the verb *aisqanomai*. On the other hand the word beauty bears here a particular connotation, relevant to the discourse we hope to stimulate. Beauty, from the late Latin *bellum* – a milder version of *bonus* – firstly signifies comfortable and suitable, that which follows a certain code of conduct.

<sup>46</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Corpus’ in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Claudette Sartiliot (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 197

discourse about, without anything to add to them'<sup>47</sup>? To the lightness and inconsistency that the concept of the body has come to assume, it will be here opposed a thinking that tries to give weight to this notion in an attempt to acknowledge the nature of our bodies in terms of *situations*: local extensions exposing existence and exposed to existence. It is worth adding at this point a brief remark on Sartre's use of the word *situation*. Sartre defines situation as

the contingency of freedom in the plenum of being of the world inasmuch as this datum, which is there only in order not to constrain freedom, is revealed to this freedom only as already illuminated by the end which freedom chooses<sup>48</sup>.

The attempt here will not be to attach the notion of situation to that of freedom, situation as that which allows for freedom. The aim is that of defining situation as existence's coming to presence and what of existence is present, playing on the ambivalence of the Latin *situ*. In relation to the body this means questioning the *pure contingency of my place*.

The urgency for an enquiry into what bodies are can be located on two limits, which themselves form the edges of a polarized structure. This polarization is determined on the one side by 'starving bodies' and on the other by bodies excessively sated or nourished. It is here between these two poles that one should situate the sense of the body, there where the sense of the word "body" has become too light and too cruel, incommensurable. The former is the place where sense

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 197

<sup>48</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 1993), 487

disappears from the body, the sign is in withdrawal, no longer present; it has left space for a mere thinness, which presents itself like a shortage of existence. The latter establishes a pole on which too much signification is concentrated. Sense disappears in the wake of a body that dazzles.

It is in this cleft that the two banalities arise, in their spacing out which sees this cruelty inflicted upon them: a cadaverous and gaunt body and a pleonastic one, each incommensurable to the other in the lightness they have become.

What they have grown to be recalls precisely the Socrates of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, the philosopher caught in pointless speculations, walking upon air and desecrating the sun: Socrates has become Σωκρατιδιον, sweet little Socrates.

One should then ask, as with Strepsiades, for a *katabasi*, for this body to come down. It must be repeated here that the body is a matter of weight and thickness. Even the body of the tightrope walker weighs, even a skeletal body has a volume; even the lightness of bones left to vultures lets itself be weighed.

#### 1.4 – **Impenetrable outline**

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of October 1921, Franz Kafka wrote in his diary: ‘the impenetrable outline of human bodies is horrible’<sup>49</sup>. This sentence provides a useful starting point to separate the body from the two regimes of banality just mentioned. The passage outlines the effort to give the body its dimension, a dimension that does not rest upon a system of significations, but rather one into which signification has not yet entered.

The Kafkian outline sets the limit, that limit one has to question in order to let the body expose sense and disclose the world. Rather than occupying a place, the body occupies a limit. This is precisely what is horrible about it: the body, its outline, is always the limit that discloses sense; it is always as limit that it makes sense. As Nancy says: ‘a thought of limit is always a thought of excess’<sup>50</sup>. The outline then is horrible because as limit it is always in excess. In excess of itself, always open and about to reject itself – the limit where existence comes to presence. Finally it is also in excess of signification and the symbolic order, since the outline of the body is the limit where sense is articulated, and articulated as the confine of signification, irreducible to it.

Nancy says that the general logic of the limit is such that ‘the limit unlimits the passage to the limit’<sup>51</sup>. According to the excesses just mentioned, the body unlimits itself, existence and sense. It unlimits itself as open; it unlimits existence’s coming to presence; it unlimits sense as the denial of identity, as a resistance to signification.

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<sup>49</sup> Franz Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka*, Max Brod ed., trans. Joseph Kresh, (London: Penguin, 1974), 396

<sup>50</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 40

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 40

As bodily event, as passage disclosed by the body, sense makes the world available, makes the world *world*: an entity with no principle, no end, no existence other than a sense in excess of all sense. The sense the body exposes is ‘beyond the appropriation of signifieds and the presentation of signifiers, in the very opening of the abandonment of sense, as the opening of the world’<sup>52</sup>. This body itself, which is always a *situation* of excess and a passage of excess (sense), goes beyond the play of the symbolic-cultural order, it resists this reduction. It resists it as matter (the thickness of its outline, almost a crust) and it resists it as the opening of sense (as the horrifying power of its outline, the silhouette of excess). There is something about the body that signification never grasps and this resides mainly in the fact that the body, rather than signifying or being signified, is the element without which signification couldn’t be opened. Meaning confronts the body always as its most riotous *nescio quid*, horrible outline.

This is the first premise the present research understands as its area of investigation: to think the body moving from this horrible outline. ‘The body is neither’, Nancy says, ‘a ‘signifier’ nor ‘signified’. It’s rather exposing/exposed’<sup>53</sup>.

The nature of such an enquiry will subsequently lead to an analysis of the relation between existence and the body. Here again a lexicon of projections and ridges will be employed, revolving around notions of exposure and extension. The intention of this first part is to arrive at a definition of the body as a *situation*. In order to do so the research will work on the following statement: the body is *existence as exposed and the exposing of existence*.

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<sup>52</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 40

<sup>53</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 25

The two analyses, of the body and of existence, will be shown from the beginning to be intimately related to the point of their being almost inseparable. The trajectory the research aims to draw moves from the works of Jean-Luc Nancy to the first two books – with excursions into the third and the fifth - of the *Ethics* by Baruch Spinoza. Although this trajectory might seem unfounded, the attempt will be to underline the fact that, given consistent differences and chronological gaps, the two thinkers produce a similar approach to the relation between existence and the body. Moreover the question of language must be taken in consideration: both seem to put forward the question of the body as a question of extension. Nancy often draws on Spinoza when giving his own reading of the question of the creation *ex-nihilo* understood not as the Christian cosmology wanted it – with a creator creating from nothing – but instead as a *growing*:

if creation is *ex-nihilo*, this does not signify that a creator operates «starting from nothing»...this instead signifies two things: on the one hand, it signifies that the ‘creator’ itself is the nihil; on the other hand, it signifies that this nihil is not...«something from which» what is created would come, but the very origin...of some thing in general and of everything<sup>54</sup>.

The enquiry into existence will then create the space for an analysis of the question concerning the open nature of the body. At the end of the first part, the conclusion would be that the body is the place of existence and therefore that ‘bodies aren’t some kind of fullness or filled space (space is filled everywhere): they are open space’<sup>55</sup>. The open nature of the body will be pursued along three lines: the body rejecting

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<sup>54</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O’Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 16

<sup>55</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 15

itself, its density; the body open as the exposing of existence, as existence's presence; the body exposed to other bodies, the world of bodies. Particular emphasis, in view of further stages of the analysis to come, will be placed on the idea of the body open to the contact of other bodies.

Through the analysis of the concept of *position*, as outlined by Emmanuel Levinas in *Existence and Existents*, the research will attempt to sound out the space that a body-open could make available. Attention will be devoted to the shift from the notion of body-situation to that of position, which presents itself as the event from which the subject arises. As Levinas says in the preface to the volume, *Existence and Existents* is a preparatory work, which sets the ground for any further study Levinas will undertake. While trying to evade the Heideggerian analysis of Being and in particular the ecstatic character of Dasein, Levinas develops the notion of position as a basis from which the subject posits itself. This interpretation of the body does not treat the latter as substantive, but rather as an event arising in the rumbling of impersonal Being, the *there is*. Position is never already within Being; instead it is a rage, a movement, where the act of taking position opens up a space that wasn't there beforehand. The concept of position assumes a particular importance for the development of the Levinasian system, since, on its basis, the philosopher will then develop the idea of separation as that which is accomplished by the body in the *living from...* both dependence upon and independence from the world. It is still within the framework laid out by the notion of separation, which stage by stage (from need to enjoyment) progresses towards the human condition, that it will be possible to speak of the opening of the inner life, of the encounter and shock with what is other and with the Other, an encounter always ruled by the equivocation of the body as

dependent or independent. The examination of the two notions of position and *living from...* in Levinas' work will prove to be crucial for the development of the current enquiry, in particular at the moment when this will depart from the question of one's own body in order to move towards the space of bodies, or, as Nancy puts it, the world of bodies.

The open nature of the body will be the primary concept by which this movement may be elucidated: from the analysis of one body to the analysis of the space created by bodies in proximity. The study will open onto a second juncture, where – introducing the aperture as expressed by Emmanuel Levinas and recalling the same idea in Nancy's thinking – it will turn towards questions that have to do with being with Others and/or being for the Other.

## 2 - Spinoza: the liberator of the body

At the very beginning of his remarkable *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, Gilles Deleuze comments that Spinoza's thought has been of groundbreaking consequence, insofar as it has provided philosophy with a new model: the body.

'One seeks to acquire a knowledge of the powers of the body in order to discover, *in a parallel fashion*, the powers of the mind'<sup>56</sup>. In EIII, p2, Spinoza writes that: 'the body cannot determine the mind to thought neither can the mind determine the body to motion nor rest, nor to anything else, if there be anything else'<sup>57</sup>. He goes on to reveal the motivation of his proposition: the mind is determined by the attribute of thought, while the body's determination is subjected to motion and rest only by another body, that is to say, by God understood as an extended thing. Whatever then arises in the body cannot come from the mind, but from God in the mode of extension.

A first stop, followed by a diversion, is needed here to clarify the boundaries of the expression 'to come from'. It is true that Spinoza adopts the terms *sequire* and *effluere*, but this shouldn't induce readers to understand Spinoza as a Neo-Platonist. As Deleuze emphasizes, the differences between an emanatist neoplatonic understanding and the essentially immanentist theory of Spinoza are incommensurable. However it is true that in Spinoza's writings the abovementioned terms result at times problematic. In the EP43 to Osten, for example, Spinoza goes as

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<sup>56</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley trans. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 17-18

<sup>57</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 130

far as to say: ‘omnia necessario a Deo *emanare*’. Nevertheless there are consistent clues that permit one to resist assimilating him to an emanationist logic. In particular the line has to be drawn between him and Plotinus, who, with a view to providing an anti-Christian tool, forged the theory of the emanation *ex-deo*. Spinoza situates himself on precisely the opposite side, for his cause is an immanent one. As Deleuze argues, if it is true that both an immanent and emanative cause can be said to produce without leaving themselves, the emanative cause does not retain its effect. It is precisely on this latter element that Plotinus developed the theory of degradation. To this Spinoza replies with a cause that, instead of being remote, is everywhere equally close. Spinoza’s God ‘produces things as he formally exists, or as he objectively understands himself’<sup>58</sup>. I will come back to the notion of expression later on, but for the time being it is important to note that in Spinoza expression is ‘freed from all traces of emanation [...] Far from emanating from an eminent Unity, the really distinct attributes constitute the essence of absolutely single substance’<sup>59</sup>. One should thus take seriously the remark by Jean-Luc Nancy that Spinoza is the first thinker of the world.

According to the theory of parallelism, body and mind have to be considered as one and the same thing precisely for this reason: neither of the two can limit the other. The theoretical thesis known as parallelism<sup>60</sup> assumes no primacy of the mind over the body and vice versa. It is clear how this explicitly undermines the Cartesian idea, which wanted the mind to act upon the body and the latter to act upon the mind. Such a conception is entirely absent in Spinoza’s philosophical system. The work of mind

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<sup>58</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin, (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 180

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 182

<sup>60</sup> This is not a Spinozian concept, it will be applied to his philosophical system by commentators.

and body is one and just one, but at the same time, since they depend on two different attributes, they have to be understood as autonomous. Their relation – and this is what it is addressed as parallelism – is established by the fact that the order of ideas corresponds to the order of things. As in Spinoza there is no primacy of any attribute over any other, mind and body share the same (im)perfection.

Spinoza adds a supplementary claim that allows us to understand why for Deleuze he may be considered the liberator of the body. In the *Note* to the second proposition of EIII, he argues: “For what the body can do, none has hitherto determined”<sup>61</sup>. The body surpasses the knowledge that one has of it. Bodies are somehow free from the understanding we have of them. Spinoza liberates the body not just from the legacy of medieval philosophy, where after Plato the body was detachable from the elevation of the mind and couldn’t achieve any perfection whatsoever (*viventes scilicet in corpore mortali, quod est quasi quidam carcer animae*<sup>62</sup>, Thomas Aquinas says) – but also from Cartesian dualism. Deleuze will return to this point some years later in *Cinema 2*, silently quoting Spinoza and referring to this position as the philosophical reversal. In the section of the study devoted to the cinema of bodies, a cinema that through the body would build its alliance with thought, Deleuze still seems to be thinking with Spinoza when he says that:

the body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life

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<sup>61</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 131

<sup>62</sup> ‘to those (spirits) that were in prison’--that is, living in the mortal body, which is, as it were, the soul’s prison-house’, St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province), Christian Classics, London, 1981, III<sup>a</sup> q. 52 a. 1 ad 2

[...] The categories of life are precisely the attitudes of the body, its postures

[...] To think is to learn what a non-thinking body is capable of<sup>63</sup>.

The mind cannot and should not act in order to dominate the body, for passions arise in both and, most importantly, *for what a body can do, none has hitherto determined*. One should thus not consider the mind to be the master of the body, insofar as a significant number of bodily states – drunkenness and insomnia for instance, but also effort and resistance – are unavailable to the mind.

It could be argued here that one is failing to take into account the 5<sup>th</sup> book of the *Ethics*, the one devoted to ‘the method or way which leads to liberty’<sup>64</sup>. This volume presents additional problems to parallelism. In EV, Spinoza argues that ‘we possess the power of arranging and connecting the modifications of the body according to the order of the intellect’.<sup>65</sup> Many have taken this proposition as undermining parallelism and in fact, when read in isolation, it does indeed seem to confirm this position. However upon reading further one finds clues that seem to convey the opposite: a persistence in determining the body as being parallel to the mind. The body is still an irreplaceable intermediary on the way towards knowledge. If EV P10, the proposition just quoted, could be read as saying that the mind acts upon the body in order to subdue the body’s passions, one should nevertheless not forget that the liberation from passions springs from a clear and distinct knowledge of oneself. This awareness must necessarily include knowledge of the body allowing the latter to act. Furthermore, if one stresses propositions 30 and 39, it is possible to find confirmation

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<sup>63</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta, (London: Continuum, 2005), 182

<sup>64</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 252

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 260

of such a reading, which aims at asserting that parallelism never fades out in the *Ethics*. In EV 30, Spinoza says that ‘our mind in so far as it knows itself and the body under the form of eternity, necessarily has a knowledge of God’<sup>66</sup>. One sees here that the body is not excluded from the knowledge of God and of one’s being in God (the subject matter of the third kind of knowledge, the one we must acquire in order to set ourselves free from passions). In EV 39 Spinoza seems to dare even more. Therein he pursues an old philosophical question, first debated by Aristotle and then by Maimonides among others: whether or not the body can bring anything to the perfection of the mind. Spinoza’s reply is affirmative. The body helps our mind to experience during lifetime the liberation from passions, for ‘He who possesses a body fit for many things possesses a mind of which the greater part is eternal’<sup>67</sup>.

Yet Spinoza is the liberator of the body in a further sense. He performs a liberation of a quite different kind. Spinoza conceives of the body, as Deleuze puts it, as

composed of an infinite numbers of particles; it is the relation of motion and rest, of speed and slowness between the particles that define a body.

Secondly a body affects other bodies<sup>68</sup>.

The body is here described as a set of relations; it is no longer depicted in terms of form and function, or as substance.

As Deleuze says: ‘one never commences; one never has a *tabula rasa*, one slips in, enters in the middle; one takes up or lays down rhythms. Also Spinoza provides the body with a great deal of power, for its affective power is core to its definition’<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 272

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 277

<sup>68</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 123

There is an additional idea here: ‘one never commences, one never has a tabula rasa, one slips in, enters in the middle’. It is important to underline this point in order to lay down a central premise: *one never starts with the body, nor with it one ever ends; one always finds oneself caught in its coming.*

There is then a last element according to which Spinoza removes the body from its traditional position: the body is a mode of God; God is also body, extended thing.

In EII D1, Spinoza says: ‘by body I understand a mode which expresses in a certain and determinate manner the essence of God in so far as He is considered as the thing extended’<sup>70</sup>. To the definition of God as thought, which was taken almost as common sense at the time Spinoza was writing, he adds God as extension. From this it follows that the body shares the same ontological status as the mind. It takes part in God, it is in God.

From these introductory lines it is already apparent the degree of novelty Spinoza brings to the understanding of the body. As Deleuze says: ‘Every reader of Spinoza knows that for him the bodies [...] are not substances or subjects, but modes’<sup>71</sup>. Therefore Spinoza allows for a definition of the human being that already opens a path beyond subjectivity: ‘you will define a human being not as a subject, but by the affects of which it is capable’<sup>72</sup>.

With Spinoza therefore one comes across a body that shares in the essence of God. The body is an expression of God as extended thing; its powers are not fully graspable

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<sup>69</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 123

<sup>70</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 79

<sup>71</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 124

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 124

by the mind and its definition relies on relational properties: motion, rest and its capacity to affect other bodies and to be in turn affected by them.

It is not by chance that the path of the elder man in Isaac Singer's short story leads to where it does. Dr. Nahum Fischelson, a Spinozian scholar, finds a sort of redemption through his body while in the last stage of his life. His body comes to liberate him from a state of abandonment; an abandonment that he pays, at an intellectual level, in finding shut each and every door that would open onto a true understanding of the Ethics. The revolution in his life is triggered through the encounter with a woman 'tall and lean and as black as a baker's shovel'<sup>73</sup>. Dr. Fischelson, old, sick, and almost entirely devoid of strength, is all of a sudden and quite unexpectedly led back before his physicality, his corporeality – indeed he very nearly retrieves it – when the woman he has just married (with a wedding that, involving as it does such a man, feeble and tired, is wonderfully described by Singer as being without joy), Miss Dobbe, enters his room 'wearing a silk nightgown, slippers with pompoms, and with her hair hanging down over her shoulders'. Dr. Fischelson's first reaction is to start trembling, while Spinoza's masterpiece plunges from his hands. When she kisses him murmuring '*Mazel Tov*', something miraculous happens. 'Powers long dormant awakened in him'<sup>74</sup>. Suddenly all the pain, the pressures, the ailments and aches stopped, *he was again a man in his youth*<sup>75</sup>. After this awakening of the body he seems for a single second to be able to grasp the Spinozian system, he finally accepts the truth with which he is confronted. While he watches the night sky in which a shower of meteors is shedding light, the narrating voice comments:

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<sup>73</sup> Isaac Bashevis Singer, *The Spinoza of Market Street*, trans. Elaine Gottlieb (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), 14

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 23

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 23

Yes, the divine substance was extended and had neither beginning, nor end; it was absolute, indivisible, eternal, without duration, infinite in its attributes. Its waves and bubbles danced in the universal cauldron, seething with chance, following the unbroken chain of causes and effects, and he...with his unavoidable faith was part of this<sup>76</sup>.

No one knows what a body can do.

Similar is the case of Anthime Armand Dubois, 'unbeliever and freemason', who decides to visit Rome in order to consult a specialist for rheumatic complaints. This sudden decision instigates the fury of his brother in law – Julius de Baraglioul - who exclaims: 'Is it your body you are going to treat in Rome? Pray heaven you may realize when you get there that your soul is in far worse case'. Once in Rome the freethinker is abruptly struck by a dream, following which he not only converts to Catholicism - one of the orators during the ceremony of his conversion inevitably recalls Paul of Tarsus - but finds himself cured of the sciatica from which he had suffered for so long. This event, so unexpected given Anthime's stubborn atheism, surprises and gladdens Julius, compelling him to fight for Anthime in order to retain all the mundane privileges once granted by the Lodge. However, when the novel is about to arrive at its closing stage, the readers find Julius and Anthime engaged in a final conversation. Julius has just informed Anthime that the pope he attempted to visit was in fact a false pope. At this point Anthime stops the carriage in which they are traveling and shouts: 'I shall write to the Grand Master of the Order this very

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<sup>76</sup> Isaac Bashevis Singer, *The Spinoza of Market Street*, trans. Elaine Gottlieb (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), 24

evening, and tomorrow I shall take up my scientific reviewing for the Depeché'. Julius, surprised to see him limping again says: 'What! You are lame?' 'Yes, my rheumatism came back a few days ago'<sup>77</sup>.

No one knows what a body can do.

Following the pathway marked by the nature of the Spinozian body, the investigation in this first part will attempt to understand the body in light of the question of its creation.

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<sup>77</sup> André Gide, *The Vatican Cellars*, trans. Dorothy Bussy, (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 7 & 227

### 3 - Touching the word

*What is it that binds you more intimately to these impenetrable, talking, eye blinking bodies than to any other thing? Because you belong to the same species? The impenetrable outline of human bodies is horrible.*

Franz Kafka<sup>78</sup>

To claim that one does not know what a body can do might also mean that it will not be possible to find its 'truth' in the realm of signification, in the symbolic order. The intention here, then, is to pursue the opposite direction. Moving from EII, D1 and the Note to EIII, P2, the intention will be to focus on the body as extension and on the relational qualities that are yielded at its very origin. In conceiving of the body in terms of its relation to the One Substance and in terms of the mutual affection it performs on and receives from other bodies, the aim is to bring forward a discourse that explores the truth of the body elsewhere than in the dialectic signifier/signified. Following Spinoza, one can say that a body is in the world as relational extension, well before it is in the world as subject of... The attempt to resist subscribing to the idea of the body as signifier leads the analysis to further comments on the ways bodies present themselves to us in language. I am here arguing that a body is untranslatable, that one would necessarily fail in tracing its truth (that is, the moment in which a body starts talking) in language(s). I will proceed by analyzing the words we use to define the body, concluding that none of them actually let the body speak.

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<sup>78</sup> Franz Kafka, *The Diaries of Franz Kafka*, Max Brod ed., trans. Joseph Kresh (London: Penguin, 1974), 396

The primary concern resides in the following circumstance: *that a word for the body is missing or that the word "body" fails to touch upon that to which it refers*. A word, in order to account for the body, should designate a physical extension or structure, whose power relies on the ability to enter a complex set of relations; it should, as it were, *exist the body*.

One understands that here it is all a question of "properness", the same question Jacques Derrida investigates in reading Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. The question could be formulated in this way: when is a noun proper? Is the noun *body* proper? Derrida argues that a noun is proper first of all when 'it has but a single sense. Better it is only in this case that it is properly a noun. Univocity is the essence'<sup>79</sup>.

Derrida suggests posing the question of properness along with the one of polysemia. Derrida writes:

language is what it is, language, only insofar as it can then master and analyze polysemia [...] A nonmasterable dissemination is not even a polysemia, it belongs to what is outside language [...] Each time that polysemia is irreducible, when no unity of meaning is even promised to it, one is outside language<sup>80</sup>.

Another question arises at this point: is it possible that the word 'body' resides exactly there, at the limit or even beyond the limit of language? The question would then be that of a polysemia only partially reducible to meaning, a polysemia that resists being reduced completely, but that nevertheless makes itself be understood. Polysemia would have here entered one single word, the word *body*, obliging it to

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<sup>79</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'White Mythology' in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Harvester Press, 1982), 247

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 248

always engage a dynamic game in and out, within and beyond univocity, thus at the limit of meaning.

The Ancient Greek dictionary expresses the idea of a body with more than ten words; it is a *polisomatic* dictionary. I presently recall the Ancient Greek dictionary because it employs a different strategy to name the body than the one adopted by modern languages and at the same time it directs a number of the ways we address the body nowadays. What the Greek dictionary does not do is designate the body with a single term; it does not provide a word for an organic unity, which would support the individual in the multiplicity of his vital and mental functions. Univocity is excluded, though one is not exactly outside meaning, never too far from it.

For the Greeks what exists is instead a corpus, a list, a catalogue without an index, without a unity, precisely orphan of its object. A catalogue without an object is that which creates its object through a continuous process of naming. It is a catalogue without a table of contents, a catalogue comprised not of the totality of its terms taken together, but of the declination of each one of them. It is a catalogue one would find difficult to use as a reference, as one would make use of a dictionary.

The word that has survived in the philosophical tradition to designate one's body is  $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ . Modern languages still employ it in reference to a whole range of expressions such as somatic, to somaticize, somatology, psychosomatic; even cells are designated by the word soma (the soma of neurons for instance). In the Greek dictionary the word  $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$  originally indicates a corpse. It seems to designate the very opposite of a body, an antibody as it were.  $\Sigma\omega\mu\alpha$  is what remains of an individual after his incarnated life and physical vitality has left him. It is the body of bereavement and waiting.  $\Sigma\omega\mu\alpha$  is an inert figure, it is immobility, stillness, absence of life, lack of movement, lack of bodily functions; a symbol, an effigy, an imitation, an image

(μιμεομαι means to imitate, but also shadow, ghost). It is what remains of me, or better still what remains of me after *me* has departed. It is then an exposition, an object on display. The object of display and lamentation, cries, tears and screams. It is the shadow of the beloved for the ones who are left celebrating him/her. It is the minute before dust, before all disappears in the burial, ashes. Σωμα, rather than indicating or standing for the word “body”, invokes the instant before invisibility, and as such it thus accomplishes this invisibility’s initiation. It reminds us of Socrates’ statement in the *Cratylus* ‘there is a lot to say, it seems to me – and if one distorted the name a little, there would be even more. Thus some say that the body is the grave of the soul’<sup>81</sup>, which seems to have come directly from his ear: in *soma* (body) resonates the word *sema* (grave).

Δεμοσ indicates an individual’s stature, the whole individual as various pieces in assemblage. It is employed in combination with ειδος and φυη. The three of them together account for the image of someone standing in front of us, the idea that one gives when offering his body to another. Similarly Χρωσ (from which the English *crust*, the French *croûte* and the Italian *crosta* are descended) stands for the outside of the individual, the hard outer layer, what is most likely to touch and be touched, the place of contact, the place that links one’s body to the surface of another. These four terms all indicate bodily properties or parts; they do so, however, without entailing any idea of life. A body that lives, moves, escapes stillness, is immersed in the stream of life is expressed with still different terms. Γυια and Μελεα both communicate an idea of movement, of a being possessing the quality of life, activity, strength and ability to hold tools and make use of them. Suppleness, agility, flexibility, elasticity, plasticity, even smoothness, grace, style. Γυια and Μελεα are the two terms that

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<sup>81</sup> Plato, *Cratylus*, trans. C.D.C Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 30

more than any other articulate a wholeness, a physical entity that holds itself, that is self-contained, that can bring itself from one place to another as a whole.

*Σομα, δεμασ, ειδος, πηυε, χηροσ, γυια, μελεα, कारा, προσοπον, ετορ,  
καρδια, πηρεν, πραπιδεσ, τηυμοσ, μενοσ, νουσ.*

What keeps revealing and hiding itself under these many curtains is a human body. The positive aspect of this dissemination resides in the fact that the Greeks were reaching a productive compromise with regard to the idea of the body as in constant change, immersed in a set of relations that it is not possible to simplify.

All the words the Greek dictionary employs account for a part of the body, or for the body's being in a particular state (thus somehow confirming the Deleuzian account that by thinking the body with Spinoza one is driven to think it as a complex set of relations). The variety of the Greek dictionary is still largely utilized, for instance, in medicine (in every kind of medicine, also in psychiatry, the science devoted to the body of the soul). Surprisingly, this seems to be the one branch of contemporary thought still to acknowledge that when we utter the word body we don't know what we are referring to (there is, for example, a body of cardiology, which is not the same as the body of dermatology; the body of knowledge of immunology then looks at the inside, while that of genetics looks at the invisible). Surgery does not even treat the body as a whole, for the body of surgery is made in turn of bodies: bodies of kidneys, hearts, legs – and these are removable, the whole is never taken into consideration, purely *partes extra partes*. The Latin word *corpus*, which then gives birth to the French *corps*, the Italian *corpo* and the Spanish *cuerpo*, means simply “that which has a form”, leaving the question of the body in an indisputable indeterminacy, for that which has a form does not tell us anything about the changes this form may undergo and the relations in which this form can engage.

The English word body (from the German root *bodig*) is itself a metonymy, originally standing for chest. Looking at modern languages, it seems possible to draw the following conclusion: while the Greek dictionary proceeded through dissemination, always drawn into detours, and thus setting aside the possibility of having one word which would without remainder account for the body, the strategy of modern languages on the contrary seems to privilege a single component (the idea of form or a part of this form), which then comes to account for the physical structure as a whole. There is a sort of exuberance when one attempts to trace bodies in language, a sort of enthusiasm of and for language, an enthusiasm that expresses itself in a love for synopsis. Language persists in saying with a single word, keeps unravelling its own imperfection in addressing the question of the body (or maybe here one is asking of language too much, because this is exactly what language does, it continually expresses and unravels a lack). The part goes beyond itself and names the whole. In this case language, rather than allowing for an intervention to be made onto the body, instead of opening up a series of paths, lifts up a curtain manifesting the intranslatability of the body, maybe even the impossibility of talking about it. This is the reason why a discussion concerned with the body should avoid starting from the body in the midst of significance or from the body overwhelmed with signification. In doing so, it seems one will eventually find oneself within that other body of signification, translation, meaning, therapy, interpretation, giving up any attempt to understand the body as that thick rim which makes sense *in se*, that which constitutes the solution of sense by articulating it. If one wants to put it in a formula: ‘the body is the solution of sense’. If *absolution* indicates the state of being free from..., depending on nothing, solution would then be its opposite: that which opens up the opportunity for a bondage, for *to solve* is always – even in its chemical meaning – to call for a

fastening. This is the nature of the relation between body and sense. In order for sense to make sense, a body must expose it, must solve it coming together with it.

An absolute sense (or sense absolutely, that is, a sense *free from...*) does not properly exist, for it is not exposed to anything, it keeps coming back to itself; absolute sense would be the identity of sense. Sense has to be solved. If sense has to be exposed to become that which it is, it stops in front of the body, it stops because – as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it – it is the body that exposes sense. When it comes to the body one has to do with a ‘certain interruption of sense, and this interruption of sense is body’<sup>82</sup>. If one looks at this relation from the other side one could also add that the truth of bodies resides somewhere other than in absolute sense (that which would make of the body a pure signifier). To treat the body as such would mean touching merely upon the words we use for it and not on its thickness and volume. For the word “body” is the word without word and without body, unable to utter itself, the unutterable. ‘Perhaps body is the word without employment par excellence. Perhaps, in any language, it’s the word in excess. At the same time however this ‘in excess’ is nothing’<sup>83</sup>.

The aim here is, then, precisely this: to touch upon the body itself, for to think it in terms of the legacy signifier/signified would mean to run after its shadow all the while neglecting the actual body by which this shadow is cast. It belongs to the innermost of sense to be a fracture; it is always the crack and the body, which expose us to this truth of sense.

At first glance the program outlined above may appear to simply register the fact that sense, as the Incorporeal, needs flesh, needs an incarnation. What one should try to say here is something different: not that sense requires embodiment, but the very

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<sup>82</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 125

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 21

fact that it needs a body *is its end* (in both senses of the word, as ending and as aim).

Jean-Luc Nancy puts it this way:

in no way is the body of sense the incarnation of the ideality of 'sense': on the contrary, it is the end of such an ideality – and thus the end of sense as well, since it no longer returns to itself or refers to itself (to an ideality making sense of it) – suspending itself at a limit that makes its own most proper 'sense' and exposes it as such.<sup>84</sup>

The body is the end of sense in two ways: as *ending*, because sense ceases to direct itself towards the purely Incorporeal, and *aim* because the body is that by and through which sense begins. One must reach that point where signification comes to a stop, where the body resists; we must always bear in mind that solid outline by which Kafka was so terrified and disgusted, and bear in mind that sense comes with it, that sense is exposed as this limit/outline.

A further misreading is also possible here: that of temporality. That sense begins with the body shouldn't be taken as an attempt to establish any kind of anteriority of bodies with regard to the order of signification. The point that needs to be stressed is instead their co-appearance. This is not at all to say the body may come at any time, that it comes already loaded with signification, but rather that sense cannot come if not at the limit of the body, on its border, with its border.

*In principium erat verbum*; but then *verbo caro factum est*, otherwise *verbum* wouldn't be able to express itself. It would remain caught up in the principium<sup>85</sup>.

Recalling the Christian logos at this point seems to lead the discussion back into the

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<sup>84</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 23

<sup>85</sup> In Latin the word principium (and its Greek equivalent αρχη, of the εν αρχη τον ο λογοσ) stands for both beginning and principle of something.

discourse of incarnation. In fact it is not a matter of incarnation at all, but of positing a body with both *verbum* and *principium*, ‘not a body produced by the production and reproduction of the spirit, but a body given, always already given, abandoned, and withdrawn from all the plays of signs’<sup>86</sup>. If one repeats the action of turning this relation upside down, one could then say: not a sense made available by its incarnation in a body, but a sense given over, given over just to bodies; sense as a bodily event, a passage that can’t be thought in abstraction from the body. Sense becomes then the very possibility of bodies. There is no supposition here; the body does not presuppose sense and vice-versa, the nature of this relation cuts short all presupposition in favour of a co-appearance. As Nancy puts it:

this doesn’t mean that the body comes before sense, as its obscure prehistory or preontological attestation. No, it gives it its place, absolutely. Neither before nor after, the body’s place is the taking-place of sense, absolutely. The absolute is the detached, the set-apart, the extended, the imparted. (We can say the finite sense).<sup>87</sup>

If sense therefore needs a body it is in order not to be the sense of itself, in order to escape a return to itself. Speaking of the joy of the body Jean-Luc Nancy suggests: ‘this joy is its birth, its coming into presence, outside of sense, in the place of sense, taking the place of sense, and making a place for sense’<sup>88</sup>. Thus, instead of incarnation one should speak here of a making-place.

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<sup>86</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Corpus’ in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Claudette Sartillot, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 197

<sup>87</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 119

<sup>88</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Corpus’ in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Claudette Sartillot, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 197

Instead of a fragile version of a body floating in significations and language, one must be able to set out a different program, one that will enable us to touch upon that fear the body seems to provoke, the undetermined of the *none has hitherto determined*. It is this solidity, this delimitation and this fear that one should address, for these terms constitute the triad of a body extended, dense and open. This will in turn require a program. “We always have to speak about the body *ex-corpore*”<sup>89</sup>.

Further on Nancy adds:

A discourse of the body or on the body is both touched by and touches upon something that is not discourse at all. Which means quite simply that the body’s discourse cannot produce a sense of the body, can’t give sense to the body.<sup>90</sup>

What is thus demanded is to pursue the body through nails and hairs rather than by questions of genders and identities, not because these are lacking in relevance, but because bodies indicate their limit, that is their starting point. A limit is the place where several opportunities remain open, and what is of interest here is the condition of emergence of these possibilities. To say it better: that which allows for their coming, that which makes consistent and dense their availability.

First of all one should go straight to the body. One should go there where bodies make place for sense, contemplating at the same time what the body expels (its outwards, or the body itself as outward and onset). To touch on the density, solidity, terrible outline and open traits of the body, this is the program.

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<sup>89</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 124

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 125

*What bodies do is precisely photography.* By saying that the body is a photographer - bodies perform a writing (γραφειν) of the light (φως) that sense is - I mean that the body, prior to any assumption of subjectivity or inscription into signification, articulates sense as disclosure of the world, as opening up of a set of shared and meaningful relations. In *Words of light* Eduardo Cadava employs a similar terminology, offering a reading of photography and history, which relies mainly on Benjamin's essay *Theses on the philosophy of history*. Cadava's work associates the act of writing the light with terms like mortification, reduction, disappearance, ruin, decay; the entire work revolves around the conception that writing the light is a matter of death and withdrawal. In the first pages of the book Cadava lays down an association between the corpse and the image and one reads that 'photography [...] speaks to us of mortification' and that 'the conjunction of death and the photographed is in fact the very principle of photographic certitude'<sup>91</sup>. Although there is no space here to do justice to Cadava's work, nevertheless it is necessary to say that the kind of photography the body performs situates itself at the opposite of Cadava's discourse. What is at stake here is that this writing of the light the body performs works in the direction of an opening up, a disclosure. By saying that the body writes the light that sense is I am here, following Nancy, defining sense as a bodily event, a bodily passage. For Nancy sense is a movement, which never returns to itself, never goes back to ideality. The body writes sense in this way, in disclosing sense as this openness, as a dis-identity, which cuts off and exceeds ideality and signification. What the body expresses is a writing of this limit, this *closure into openness* that sense is. As Nancy puts it: 'sense, as that which the world is, is only insofar as it

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<sup>91</sup> Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 10

never constitutes a ground [...], rather exists as passage, as movement to or as creation or birth'<sup>92</sup>.

The body writes the light by rendering sense as the limit - by weeding out any possible ground where sense could be reduced to its identity - while at the same time disclosing it as the 'stuff' of existence. In this constellation where sense is always the sense of a limit – a passage, a being-to – bodies write light. Prior to being *subjective* or to being inscribed into language and signification, the body opens up the world as the writing of the limit from which sense can't come back to ideality.

Thus one can see how distant this idea is from Cadava's definition, for there is no fixation here, no reduction to ashes. According to what has just been said, the body would be the only photographer who never printed an image, who never developed the film, for this writing of the light is the writing of a movement, a movement of disclosure, which never rests upon itself. There is no withdrawal here. There is not even mimesis, for there is no ground or identity on which mimesis can be achieved. The outcome of this photographic act is never an image, but the dispersal of writing itself.

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<sup>92</sup> Jean Luc Nancy, 'A finite thinking' in *A finite thinking*, Simon Sparks ed., trans. Edward Bullard, Jonathan Derbyshire and Simon Sparks (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 8

#### 4 - Body's origin: esse in se

What is at stake here is to look for the body making sense prior to any inscription into signification. The questions of the body's origin and of its existential status therefore become more and more crucial.

It has already been underlined that in no way can one interpret Spinoza as being a Neo-Platonist. In EI, P16 one reads: 'From the necessity of the divine nature, infinite numbers of things in infinite ways must follow'<sup>93</sup>. The relation between things and God is derivative in kind, and the modality of this relation is one of necessity. Further on, in EI, P17, Note, Spinoza says that the singularities one finds in the world 'flow' from God: 'a summa Dei potentia sive infinita natura infinita infinitis modis hoc est omnia necessario effluxisse'<sup>94</sup>. This relation of necessity – in which things follow on [...*ex natura... attributi Dei sequuntur...*] from God in a constant flowing – contains an idea of movement as well as one of dislocation. The latter is implied with the notion of the divine extension: for EII, P2, individual things, this and that thing, are modes which express the nature of God in a certain and determinate manner. God therefore possesses an attribute, in this case extension, the conception of which is involved in all individual things<sup>95</sup>. God then would have many places and would be equally close to all of them. Is this not confirmed at the very beginning of the *Ethics*, when Spinoza lays down the foundational principles of his system, and also in his most evocative formula, which has somehow come to define Spinozism itself, *Deus sive Natura*?

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<sup>93</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 51

<sup>94</sup> 'From the supreme power of God, or from His infinite nature, infinite things in infinite ways, that is to say, all things, have necessarily flowed, or continually follow by the same necessity', Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 52

<sup>95</sup> The demonstration to EII, P2 is not given, but, Spinoza says, it has the same character as that of P1. I am here reconstructing the demonstration following P1.

In EI P15 one reads that ‘whatever is, is in God, and nothing can either be or be conceived without God’<sup>96</sup> [*quicquid est, in Deo est*], a proposition that develops out of D3 and D5, so that modes can only be in the divine nature and only through it they can be conceived. God would thus be the movement of dislocation, although this dislocation, the outcome of the movement according to which things flow from God, would not be separated from God himself. Again an echo of Nancy’s statement: ‘in saying this [*Deus sive Natura*] Spinoza becomes the first thinker of the world’<sup>97</sup>. The One Substance is the always-existing movement that – by flowing towards its own outside – results in extension. This flowing does not make its way towards an Other, as if the world would already be there, a *tabula rasa* upon which God forces his powers, as if singularities would be a degradation of the One (this would be essentially the doctrine of Plotinus). The outside towards which the One Substance moves is an outside-to-itself; an outside that is comprised within. Acknowledging that in Spinoza there is no separation between God and the world means articulating the fact that the world expresses God while God expresses itself in the world.

God is immanent in the world, the creation is *ex-nihilo*, in the connotation Jean-Luc Nancy gives it, as a *creation where the nothing grows out of itself*. According to Nancy, the expression *ex-nihilo*, the world as coming from nothing ‘does not mean fabricated with nothing by a particularly ingenious producer. It means instead that [...] the nothing itself or rather nothing growing as something’<sup>98</sup>.

The creation *ex-nihilo* here is not understood as Christian onto-theology would have it. *Ex-nihilo* for Nancy means ‘that it is the nihil that opens and that disposes

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<sup>96</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 52

<sup>97</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 54

<sup>98</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 51

itself as the space of all presence (or even as one will see, of all the presences)<sup>99</sup>. This is why Nancy defines Spinoza as the first thinker of the world: ‘*Deus sive natura* does not simply say two names for one thing, rather that this very thing has its outside on the inside’<sup>100</sup>. With Spinoza we move from ‘a creation as the result of an accomplished divine action, to creation as activity and incessant actuality of this world in its singularity’<sup>101</sup>.

In the world God feels himself eternal, that is to say, necessary. It is in this relation of God with the world that the concept of expression may be developed furthest. It should be remarked that the term *expression* is in Spinoza a technical one, a term he inherited from a long philosophical tradition. Although this is not the site for an extended analysis of the term, it is necessary at least to introduce it, in the light of the work undertaken by Deleuze. As Deleuze says in *Expressionism in Philosophy*:

Expression is on the one hand an explication, an unfolding of what expresses itself, the One manifesting himself in the Many (substance manifesting himself in its attributes, and these attributes manifesting themselves in their modes). Its multiple expression, on the other hand, involves Unity. The One remains involved in what expresses it, imprinted in what unfolds it, immanent in whatever manifests it<sup>102</sup>.

Deleuze proceeds to say that the notion of expression relies upon four concepts, which also are derived from a long and lasting tradition. The four concepts respond to

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<sup>99</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 62

<sup>100</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 54

<sup>101</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 64

<sup>102</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin, (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 16

different steps of expression and are organized in a binomial structure: involution and evolution, implication and explication. The idea of expression would then be the synthesis of these four concepts. This synthesis takes the name of *complicatio*. To put it succinctly: *complicatio* indicates that the attributes are points of view on the Substance – not external but contained in the Substance itself, the latter then comprising the infinity of its points of view within itself. As Deleuze says: ‘It is no longer a matter of finite understanding, deducing properties separately...it is now the object that expresses itself, the thing itself that explicates itself’<sup>103</sup>. A very important point has been anticipated in view of the fact that the idea of expression serves as the point from which one can begin to draw a line connecting the philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy to that of Spinoza. One could almost describe a trajectory here (if not a line of descent), though in Nancy’s thinking the idea of an immanent God or Intellect is radicalized and transforms into a world without principle. The idea of the Substance having in itself all that is external to it comes back in Nancy’s idea of the coming to presence of existence and of existence’s ‘sharing out’. In *Corpus* Nancy articulates a precise reference to Spinoza’s atheism<sup>104</sup> and in various works the Dutch philosopher is brought into play as the paradigmatic figure exposing creation ex-nihilo.

One of the latest works by Nancy – *The creation of the world* - seems to be devoted precisely to this idea: the thinking of the world on the basis of a transcendental principle (a principle from which it would attain its sense) has come to an end. This ‘exhaustion’ started manifesting itself in particular with Spinoza.

A close reading would reveal that a great part of Nancy’s reflection is devoted to this analysis and that these themes are constantly present in his philosophy. The idea

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<sup>103</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin, (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 22

<sup>104</sup> ‘Spinoza has been more than abundantly treated as an atheist, and, I think, rightly so’, Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 129

is that according to a tension present in our tradition, the world shows itself as that which is ‘without a model, without reference, without a first step, without origin, without even the possibility to say «without»’<sup>105</sup>. The world has come to coincide with itself; this is what lies in the word *mondialization*. What in Spinoza was immanence becomes with Nancy a *coincidence*, the coincidence of immanence. What the term coincidence expresses is precisely the ‘becoming-world of the whole that was formerly articulated and divided and expressed as the nature – world – God triad’<sup>106</sup>. That is what allows Nancy to claim that ‘the world resolutely and absolutely distances itself from any status as object in order to tend towards being itself the subject of its own ‘worldhood’ – or ‘world-forming’ [mondialization]’<sup>107</sup>. The world has stopped to be represented, to be the object of a representation, to become itself the subject of sense. The possibility for a vision of the world has been extinguished; the world has escaped a world of representations: in its wholeness and with all its weight it has now entered this vision, it has become this vision, it has swollen it. It is with Spinoza and from him that we can start tracing that auto-deconstructive drive in which Nancy sees the inflowing of the world in thinking. The sense of the world, Nancy warns, is not anywhere else than in the world itself, there is no outside to which we can refer to in order to find the sense of the world. This sense resides precisely in the possibility of this world, in the actuality of its taking place, the inescapable thinking that *there is* this world. What is left is the experience of the world, its internal revolution and the domestic movement from one end to another. We will come back to this point, offering a closer reading of the ex-nihilo question as in *Being Singular Plural*.

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<sup>105</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Pensée Derobée*, (Paris: Editions Galilée, 2001), 187 (translation mine)

<sup>106</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the world or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 41

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 20

In Spinoza the passing away of a transcendental entity providing the sense of the world (in terms of ground) is announced in the idea of God itself. In EI, P28 one reads:

An individual thing, or a thing which is finite and which has a determinate existence, cannot exist nor be determined to action unless it be determined to existence and action by another cause which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause cannot exist nor be determined to action unless by another cause which is also finite and determined to existence and action, and so on ad infinitum<sup>108</sup>.

As one can see, the Spinozian God unambiguously negates the religious God. Since the early stages of his philosophy, Spinoza, following the method of the Collegiants<sup>109</sup>, challenged the idea of God as persona, a God able to lavish miracles, an object of an unreasonable cult. In so doing Spinoza, a Jewish man of the XVII century, was undermining the power of the Holy Texts and the idea of the Jewish people as the ones selected by God.

In fact God in Spinoza is equated to nature; in the demonstration of P15 for instance one can read:

there are those who imagine God to be like a man, composed of body and soul and subject to passions; but it is clear enough from what has already

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<sup>108</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 64

<sup>109</sup> Christian sect operating mainly in Holland, animated by a refusal of the clerical hierarchy in favor of a free reading of the texts and questioning of God

been demonstrated how far off men who believe this are from the true knowledge of God<sup>110</sup>.

As previously sketched out, unlike the God of religions, the Spinozian divinity is not a God that responds to a principle of creation, for - in order to assume a principle of creation - one should also imply a principle of exhaustion, since any creation has an end in exhaustion. The God of the *Ethics* keeps auto-producing itself; it shares itself out. This is how the world comes to presence – that is, it exists – in sharing out its essence and therefore crossing this over before the latter can be posited as a ground. Thus it derives that the Substance is never alien to the world since the world is its expression, it is its outside without being unrelated to its inside. The truth of this God is that it shares itself out. With the theory of modes Spinoza seems to claim that the world is the ways of being of God, the attitudes and the postures of God, if one can dare to use such terms. The world does not refer to a unity, a single wholeness; rather world stands for a multiplicity of singularities (*natura naturante*), since the attributes of God are infinite. Similarly in Nancy's text: 'a world is a multiplicity of worlds and its unity is the mutual sharing and exposition of all its worlds – within this world'<sup>111</sup>.

The fact that Spinoza employs two verbs such as *sequire* and *effluire* and the idea of movement that they imply allows us to read Spinoza's Substance alongside Nancy's idea of coming to presence. The One Substance, according to the characteristics mentioned before and the principle of expression, recalls the idea of existence as that which is always-engaged in coming, which informs much of Nancy's ontology. Such a thinking is crucial for our understanding of the origin of the body,

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<sup>110</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 52

<sup>111</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 185

for if one wants to answer the question: *in which way is the body an extension*, it is necessary to ground any claim into body's relation with existence as announced in the introduction.

The kind of auto-production Spinoza talks about and the fact that everything follows and flows<sup>112</sup> from the One Substance allows us to read the Spinozian creation in terms of an auto-production *ex-nihilo*. We have already mentioned that the term *ex-nihilo* should not be intended here as referring to a Creator or Idea delivering the world starting from nothing. In Nancy's reading the question of the creation *ex-nihilo* assumes different connotations from the ones established according to a Judeo-Christian philosophical tradition. As he reads it *ex-nihilo* means that there is not a *nothing* to start with, neither is there – as a cosmological mythology used to say<sup>113</sup> – rough material, uneven matter the Architect will work on, crafting the world out of it. The *nihilo* is God himself and the *ex* is what is left in the sharing out of God.

if creation is *ex-nihilo*, this does not signify that a creator operates «starting from nothing»...this instead signifies two things: on the one hand, it signifies that the 'creator' itself is the nihil; on the other hand, it signifies that this nihil is not...«something from which» what is created would come, but the very origin...of some thing in general and of everything<sup>114</sup>.

As in Spinoza, here one has existence as, at the same time, some thing in general and every thing (where every stands for each singularity). The nature of this coming to presence - which is necessarily continuous - contained in the *ex-nihilo* is such that

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<sup>112</sup> The two verbs used by Spinoza and already mentioned - *sequi* and *effluere* – contain an idea of necessity and of movement.

<sup>113</sup> 'Verily at the first Chaos came to be' but Hesiod's *Theogony*, whose title says already everything – the genus of gods - could be one of many examples

<sup>114</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 16

with it, Being shares out; that which exists is precisely the outcome of this sharing out, or better said, the sharing out itself. Nancy says:

Creation takes place everywhere and always – but it is this unique event, or advent, only on the condition of being each time what it is, or being what it is only «at each time», each time appearing singularly...If ‘creation’ is indeed this singular exposition of being, then its real name is *existence*<sup>115</sup>.

God then is all in the *ex*, in this movement, in this dislocation. The One Substance – *causa sui* and *per se concipi* – ex-produces itself, and in this continuous production it constitutes the immanent cause of the world.

What has been just mentioned can be put in still another way: if God is the immanent cause of the world, which follows from him as its own dislocation, then God never withdraws from the world, because this would mean that God can withdraw from Himself. For Spinoza God is eternal (EI, P19), which means to say that God is the *there* (without temporal affections), which has *always* and *already* been there. Creation, if one can still call it by this name, is always occurring: ‘it is the being-already-there of the already there that is of concern’<sup>116</sup>. Origin is thus every time. Moving one step forward, one could then think Origin as the lack of a thing called by this name, or better said as the multiplication, the unextinguishing echo of this name. *Origin is ongoing*, it is contained in that «effluxisse», it is a movement. In Nancy’s words: ‘Origin does not signify that from which the world come, but rather the coming of each presence of the world, each time singular’<sup>117</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O’Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 16-17

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 26

Having worked out this parallel, one can now move back to the question of the origin of the body and observe what room the notion of God as an extended thing has made for it. In EII, D1 one reads: ‘by body I understand a mode which expresses in a certain and determinate manner the existence of God in so far as He is considered as the thing extended’<sup>118</sup>. The problem of origin and creation of the body asks to be thought in terms of extension, that is to say in terms of that which makes room for existence. In the second place it then demands a thought on the matter of access to the origin. Making room for existence here means that the body is that which exposes the coming to presence of existence. It is that which manifests the singular being as shared out, for my body makes me here and you there. The expression indicates the impossibility for me to speak at the same time and from the same place you are speaking from [we would here need a detour on the question of making love for it is in making love that the problem of the here and there manifests itself in all its vividness, for the more I try to penetrate into one’s innermost being, both in its physical and psychological connotations, the more that person remains there - keeps occupying a space which I cannot fully access - without me being able to fill this gap. For the time being we must set this discourse aside].

Making room for existence means that the body as extension or place – the body thought here both with Nancy and Spinoza and with their lexicon – exposes the very fact that existence is always in a coming of some sort and must be decided in the open. Body is the dislocation of this coming, dislocation of existence’s coming. In order for the coming to presence to persist in its name and to preserve the meaningfulness of this name (without this name becoming just an echo, caught in a meaningless bouncing back), it can’t be identical to itself, it has to be – always –

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<sup>118</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 79

encumbered in coming, for its very essence is in this movement. To exist means exposing existence precisely to its *to*. (It is at this point that one could recall Heidegger's analysis of the 'here' and 'yonder', the impossibility of grasping the body as 'this particular place').

The mode of the coming to presence thus can't be identity; quite the opposite, it has to be a movement against identity. If coming to presence has to keep coming – otherwise it would be just presence, but presence of itself to itself, saturation - it needs in each coming to move from itself, it needs to come at a distance from itself.

When Nancy makes use of the expression 'world of bodies' it is this constant refusal of existence to come to itself that he has in mind. Existence performs in its appearance a rejection of its own face, the refusal of its identity, a room with no mirrors.

Dislocation is the dis-identity of the coming, the lack of evenness and saturation. Coming comes always elsewhere; it is in this way that one can make sense of the multiplicity of singularities. The world does not happen in one moment, it does not suddenly burst out, but it is present every time this refusal comes to presence, thus every time existence appears as dislocated. This is what bodies expose; the body exposes this dis-identity. The body is the extension of this not-having identity (or the necessary and eternal refusing identity) of the coming. But nowhere is the body simply a figure, an illustration of existence's dis-location – it is instead its very limit.

If existence is that which 'pre-vents supposition itself, or that which overcomes it by surprise [...] the same thing completely different'<sup>119</sup>, then it is in this light that one

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<sup>119</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p.69-70

can read Nancy's words: 'the body is the being of existence [...] registering the fact that existence has no essence, but only ex-ists'<sup>120</sup>.

This last thought connects the present discourse to the one that has been previously anticipated: bodies are the limit where sense quits referring to that ideal it is and starts *making* sense. Bodies do photography, but this photography is a mechanical writing, something of the skills proper to the medieval amanuenses, who copy a manuscript, crafting one letter after the other, while they are at the same time already caught in the exegetical effort.

The body makes room for existence: along with each body, the whole is exposed, but never recuperated as a system or determined as a closed totality. The body then makes room for existence by exposing the logic of exposition: not identical and not appropriable. One could attempt to summarize all this in three points:

- the body is that which makes room for existence, that is the body is existence in action; not created, not produced, without supposition, simply placing itself continuously outside, in the 'other'.
- The body as the being present of existence. There is no anteriority of the body to existence here because the coming of existence is also the coming into existence<sup>121</sup>. It has been mentioned earlier on that bodies could also be conceived in terms of access. This claim is grounded in the analysis worked out in the previous paragraph: it has to be conceived in relation to the ongoing characteristic of origin<sup>122</sup>. Given that the extension of the body, or better the body as extended, is that which exposes existence – constant coming to

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<sup>120</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 15

<sup>121</sup> In a similar way as 'the coming to the world is also the coming of the world'. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997), 159

<sup>122</sup> Ongoing origin: the definition the dictionary gives of ongoing is: continuing to exist or develop, or happening at the present moment. In apparent contrast with the definition of origin: the beginning or start of something. It is the oxymoron which results by associating the two terms that explain how I am posing the question of origin here.

presence and dis-identity - bodies allow us to touch on the origin and to have access to it. The body is that by which I can gain access to the «*at each time*», to the singular origin and to the plurality of origins. Body is my plastic *locality* exposed to other *localities*; hence the access to the origin is realized in the fact that I can conceive of myself as exposed to the multiplicity of existence and its ongoing origin just through my body. My body is what spaces me from other beings, thus allowing me to touch on that plurality constituting the continuous arising of origins. Body is access in these terms: it is the extension of God – the *there* of existence – and the existing presence of the ongoing origin.

- The presence of existence and existence presencing. To conclude: according to what has been said thus far - that the body is extension of existence, extension of the essence of existence as dislocation of its coming to presence - then one can think the body as the *ex*, the presence of that outside which follows («sequitur») from existing.

#### 4.2 - 'Bear in mind Dear Friend...'

At the very end of EP4 - a letter Spinoza addressed to Henry Oldenburg – one can read the following: 'bear in mind, Dear Friend, that men are not created, but born and that their bodies already exist before birth, though under different forms'<sup>123</sup>.

In this passage Spinoza tried to reply to his friend's objection to EI, P1 and EI, P3. What is anticipated here is something that Spinoza will develop more extensively in EII, Lemma VII, Note<sup>124</sup>, namely the continuity, indivisibility and indestructibility of God as extended thing. Such a statement leads one to notice that, as to the mind we can attribute a 'certain eternity', so one must do with the body. Bodies exist independently from the individual subject; they are born and not created, which means that with the singular body one is in the midst of the *ex*, which constitutes the difference of God to himself. In its constant sharing out, the Substance dislocates itself. This dislocation differentiates the Substance from itself. What Spinoza seems to address is that the body is always already there in the substance and that birth is the appearance of this dislocation.

The argument of the eternity of the body, this 'certain eternity' satisfied through body's eternal presence in the One, follows logically from two points:

- 1) the expressive implication of modes and substance; according to EI, P19: 'God is eternal or in other words, all His attributes are eternal [...] eternity pertains

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<sup>123</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Letters to friend and foe*, trans. Dagobert Runes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1969), 17

<sup>124</sup> 'The individual thus composed will, moreover, retain its nature whether it moves or be at rest, or whether it move in this or that direction, provided that each part retain its own motion and communicate it as before to the rest' Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 94

to the nature of the substance. Therefore, each of the attributes must involve eternity'<sup>125</sup>;

2) the idea of bodies and minds as having the same ontological status.

In addition if the body were to be thought as dying and being created anew each time, this would mean that God as an extended thing would perish or be divided, which is not possible. The body is then eternal, although it exists within the substance in forms that might be different from the human body.

Oddly enough if one turns to Christian logic, it is possible to trace a similar proposal; that is to say, there's nothing before the body. Although this might appear in sharp contrast with the *εν αρχη ην ο λογος*, it is exactly this incipit that allows for such a statement. What demands to be asked here is: what is before the body? The answer should be something of this kind: it is the angelic revelation that stands before it, the angelic logic of Christian creation, that which has and is no-body. The coming to presence of the Angel happens, however, under the features of a body, because any presence is the presence of a body, even this presence of God. Body makes space for the verbum. 'In principium erat verbum', *εν αρχη ην ο λογος* what takes place before the body actually claims body's eternity as necessity. In this *principium* is already contained the idea that *verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis*, they co-appear, their coming is simultaneous. The word has to *caro se facere*. This body that the verbum becomes is nothing else than the sharing out of logos itself, what makes the logos come to presence. Everything that comes without a body is just principium, not even verbum, for verbum needs a body to become that which it is. *In principium erat verbum, verbum caro factum est* = the verbum, in order to become what it is, to

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<sup>125</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 59

make sense, has to come on the edge of a body, otherwise it remains principium, that is to say the beginning of sense and its ideal principle (Goethe's Faust, struggling with the logocentric diktat and the mediation of signs to which he saw himself subordinated, retranslated the question as: 'in the beginning was the deed'<sup>126</sup>).

What this biblical detour attempted to express is that once one poses the verbum one is at the same time posing the body, and necessarily so. *Principium* – as Jean-Luc Nancy points out – indicates that which has always already been there (it is the religious equivalent of the metaphysical *nihilo*) the incipit that already also implies an excipit. Verbum = corpus = incipit. They all come together, at the same time in the same place, or they don't come at all, or there's no way out of the inertia of the principium. Either there is just an incipit without the body of the text or there is an incipit with an excipit. It is not by chance that Christianity starts with a body. It starts with it and from it twice and in two ways:

- a) there is no Christianity, there is no verbum of Christianity, without the body of Christ, without God becoming flesh; this body of Christ makes room for the existence of the Christian God;
- b) moreover there is no Christianity without this body of Christ being extended until the end of every possible extension; until he starts rising and engages in an *anabasi*, becoming untouchable, becoming again the body of logos, the body of God, God as extended; *quo tangere non vis*.

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<sup>126</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Bayard Taylor (London: Euphorion Books, 1949), 59.

## 5 - Idea of the body

*Yet the expression of her face is one of sad contrition and her wilting body conveys nothing other than her sorrowing soul, which we cannot ignore even if it is concealed by tempting flesh, for this woman could be completely naked, had the artist so chosen to portray her, and she would still be deserving of our respect and veneration*

Jose Saramago<sup>127</sup>

In EII, P13 one reads: ‘The mind is the idea of the body’<sup>128</sup>. The mind is the idea of an extended thing actually existing. The suggestion is here to read this statement next to a posthumous fragment by Freud on which Jean-Luc Nancy has extensively commented: “Psyche is shared out, she knows nothing about it”. The proposal can be justified looking at how both Spinoza’s proposition and Freud’s fragment draw a trajectory of incommensurability. They both point at a thinking of the mind as extended. One is here facing incommensurability. In a text on Descartes, Nancy says ‘there is no measure one can attend to here. It is the incommensurable that makes possible the *quasi permixtio* of the union and that makes of this an incommensurable thought’<sup>129</sup>. How to think this incommensurable community in extension of thought and body?

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<sup>127</sup> Jose Saramago, *The gospel according to Jesus Christ*, trans. Giovanni Pontiero (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 2

<sup>128</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 89

<sup>129</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Ego Sum* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979) 161 (translation mine)

Nancy thinks this incommensurability in terms of holes. He employs a metonymy, ‘the incommensurable extension of thought, is the opening of the mouth. The mouth that opens itself and forms ‘ego’, this mouth is the locus of the union as far as the union opens itself up and stretches itself’<sup>130</sup>.

Nancy thinks the mouth for everything else, as accounting for the whole body. He suggests that what is to be thought, in order to make sense of Psyche’s extension, is the mouth, ‘psyche’s body, the being-extended and outside-itself of presence-to-the world’<sup>131</sup>. One should then think the mouth, but starting from it one must also pay attention to other entrances, ways in and ways out. In order to think this extension of Psyche, it is necessary to think a mouth before orality, doing things other than speaking, spacing out thought, thus reconciling the incommensurability. The mouth assumes this importance because it is the place where the ‘I’ is thrown. The mouth creates space, making available the condition of extension, including that of thought. Psyche’s extension is an idea tenaciously resisting perception and common sense. It is easy to conceive body as extended, it is a different question, a harder and more demanding one, to think the extension of psyche or the mind as the idea of the body. How to think this being outside and stretched out of Psyche? How to make it bearable?

Spinoza wrote that the mind is not an Other to the body, it is not that which is in opposition to the body, for the very reason that mind and body are united (EII, P13, Note). While thinking the body one then shouldn’t presume that there is a soul on the other side, which is overdetermined or which overdetermines. What ‘Psyche ist ausgedehnt...’ and EII, P13 point to is the outside of the body, the idea of the mind as the body outside itself.

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<sup>130</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Ego Sum* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 161 (translation mine)

<sup>131</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (Fordham University Press, New York, 2008), 21

Nancy suggests that once one proffers a discourse on the body one is in fact already implicated in a discourse about the mind. One should then reason keeping in mind the parallelism introduced at the beginning of this discussion. On one hand, what is demanded is not to think body and mind as exactly the same thing, while on the other, one should resist giving in to a dualistic vision. What is at stake is to think with Spinoza, at the very heart of his P13, at the very heart of parallelism: the mind as the idea of the body or Psyche being stretched out. In other terms: one is here asked to conceive the mind as the difference of the body to itself; that which accompanies the journey of the body from itself to itself. One should notice a similar thinking in the Stoics and in the Christian philosopher Tertullian, for whom the soul is a corporeal substance [*consitus spiritus corpus est*]. This idea has at different times agitated Western thinking and has performed with Descartes' second meditation (certainty as the verbalization of the 'Ego Sum' – 'Ego sum, ego existo; quoties a me profertur, vel mente concipitur – necessario esse verum') a deconstructive interruption. As Nancy says: 'the setting up and inauguration of the Subject have provoked the collapse of its substance [...] the collapse of the substance belongs to the setting up of the Subject'<sup>132</sup>.

Nancy suggests thinking the *unity of the articulation*, which means to understand the extension of the mind and its relation to the body in terms of movement, of a common *e-motion*.

What Spinoza says in the propositions following P13 is fundamentally that the mind is the experience of the body. That is how I would make sense of EII, P39, P22, P19. If one reads these propositions in this light they will resonate with the last words of Freud's fragment '...weiss nichts davon'. In addressing the question of

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<sup>132</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Ego Sum* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 33, (translation mine)

experience, it should be made clear that the word – from the latin *experiri* - always holds to an idea of movement towards the outside.

As long as sense is all that is available to us, then bodies *make* sense – in the double and ambivalent sense of the expression. This is why to talk about bodies is a matter of touching on that which is not discourse at all. If one argues – with Nancy – that the world is the exposed of human being and that human being is that which exposes the world, then sense requires a body in order to gain such a name. As Nancy points out, if we are to rebuild ontology the only one available would be one concerning the body. Bodies do photography, they write the light in making space for sense, but sense needs to stop on the edge of this writing, it has to squeeze itself into this writing the body is<sup>133</sup>.

Sense finds in the body a second skin, while at the same time the body invests itself in sense. It is not the skin of an incarnation, but the skin as the surface that makes space, that exposes sense, that takes the place of sense.

In EII P13 we read that the mind does not know anything else but the body, ‘the object of the idea constituting the human mind is a body [...] and nothing else’<sup>134</sup>. If the body is the extended thing informing the very and only idea of the human mind, then the mind makes sense of itself by ways of the affections of the body. Body is the extension of the mind on which the mind bases its knowledge of itself. What a mind is capable of is what a body is capable of. This last discussion inscribes the present

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<sup>133</sup> One could here use the metaphor Michelangelo employs in a sonnet to his lover Tommaso Cavalieri: *Così volesse al mie signor mie fato/ Vestir suo viva di mie morta spoglia/ Che come serpe al sasso si discoglia/ Pur per morte potria cangiar mie stato/ O fussi sol la mia l'irsuta pelle/ Che del suo pel contesta, fa tal gonnal/ Che con ventura stringe si bel seno,/ Ch'i' l'are' pure il giorno; o le pianelle/ Che fanno a quel di lor basa e colonna,/ ch'i' pur ne porterei duo nevi almeno*. ‘Would that my destiny wished the same for me as regards my lord: that I might clothe his living skin with my dead skin, so that, as a serpent sloughs on a stone, I might through death change my condition. Oh might my skin alone be the hairy skin that, woven from its own skin, makes the gown whose good fortune it is to bind so lovely a breast, so that I should have it at least in daytime; or might I be the slippers which make themselves a base and support for him, that I might at the very last carry him for two winters’.

Michelangelo Bonarroti, *The Poems*, trans. Christopher Ryan, (London: J.M.Dent, 1996), 90

<sup>134</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 89

argument once more there where the body escapes the dialectic signifier/signified. The body does not stand for anything else. Instead the body is sense in itself, as such, as extension, as dense, solid and open. Nancy says that the body is there where sense comes to presence, sense in se and per se.

## 5.2 - Body and the wound

In 1601 Caravaggio started painting *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas (Doubting Thomas)* showing Christ as he forces the apostle to penetrate his rib, wounded after the crucifixion, with a finger. The body is that fracture of existence one needs to test in all its cruelty. Always open, always already wounded: this is the condition of the body<sup>135</sup>.

Following the path traced by Jean-Luc Nancy, the question of the open nature of the body can be thought of in three ways. When Nancy writes that the body is ‘what is neither shit nor soul’<sup>136</sup>, he is not just provoking. Rather, he is advancing a consistent argument. One could summarize it as follows: the body constitutes its form in an inception where it is what it expels. Soul and faeces are what the body is and what the body is not; they constitute the difference of the body to itself, ‘in and of itself a body is also its consumption, its degradation’<sup>137</sup>. In this way the body is always open, always ready to think its form and its manner in terms of its own rejection and expulsion. As Nancy remarks, the open body or the body-as-open is never a void, a blank page; it is an open calling for a double action or double movement: going inside to recover that which then, through its entrances, will be forced outside.

The openness of the body, its breach, revolves around this double movement. In order to configure itself as appropriation, the first movement demands the second.

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<sup>135</sup> Mentioning the question of the wound inevitably brings fore the question on the surroundings of the wound. If there is a wound there should be a totality, originally intact and then injured. Although this is a theme we don’t intend to approach here, due to the space the question would need, we are lured to attempt a first answer: there is no totality, for the wound itself, as it is, opened, a displacement, is the place of the coming to presence, the only way we can conceive of this kind of wound, of Being as wound, is if we take the wound itself as the totality, but the totality always opened to be wounded. The wound as totality is a wound without a surrounding body, but body itself, a body of a particular nature, always opened.

<sup>136</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 127

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 105

This appropriation will then make possible the ex-scription, the being in the world, dislocation of the coming to presence. Similarly to the wound of Christ, which overwhelms Thomas, the body, as the dis-identity of the coming to presence, cannot withdraw from its openness. ‘A world of bodies in which bodies, identically, decompose the world. Identically: dis-location, dis-localization’<sup>138</sup>, the body has to keep extending and dislocating itself. The dislocation, which is its creation, its mode, its art, keeps opening the body, and new origins keep arising. The body is also ignorance, for it is incapable of closing itself. This ignorance is not a lack, though. As Nancy points out ‘the body does not belong to the domain in which ‘knowledge’ or ‘non-knowledge’ are at stake’<sup>139</sup>. The ignorance of the body lies somewhere else; it stands alone, as Artaud would say. The body cannot contain – it is not in its knowledge – its origins, its ends and its beginnings, as it cannot contain its immersion and emotion towards other bodies. Soul and excrement constitute the difference of the body to itself and show how this constant movement is needed for the body to maintain its density.

The body is open in at least two other ways. It has been mentioned already that for Nancy bodies are not a full space, they are rather open space, the opening of space. One can take this to mean that bodies are what make room for existence, thus they constitute the taking place, the *taking the place of*. Here one finds the second way in which the body is open: in that it creates the conditions for space and then, maintaining itself as this dislocation, persists (without its persistence ever perduring in the same) in making room for existence. It does so continuously and not once and

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<sup>138</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 105

<sup>139</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Corpus’ in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Claudette Sartiliot (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 200

for all. It is always the dislocation of the coming to presence, it is always open for presence to come. When the body turns back it sees no origin or creator, no Idea or Archon; this possibility is no longer given to it. What the body finds is its own being open and its coming as the always open, the extended open, the wound without cure, without tissues to close it. Open would thus mean the presence of the always and forever there, terms that in turn indicate an open as permanent access to the origin, for this origin is ongoing, always possible, always arising.

This second way for the body to be open is a being open as access, as that which creates the possibility for access, what continuously makes access available. A body is the continuous being outside of existence, it is that which never stops coming to presence and always makes space for an outside. So the ontology of the body would be in this fracture or spacing<sup>140</sup>. Extension = fracture, wound that keeps bleeding existence. This second manner of the body open is the body as condition. One would then say: the opening of existence and existence as the open.

There is then also a third way – which still has to do with the relation between body and coming to presence – inducing us to treat the body as openness. Body is an extension, it is what exposes being, but my individual body is also local, it is the local extension that makes me-here and you-there. It is worth recalling that Spinoza focused his attention on the relational value of the body. As Deleuze points out, in Spinoza the body is not defined as a subject but on the basis of kinetic and dynamic properties. When Spinoza says ‘we do not know what a body can do’ and ‘the human mind does not know the human body itself...except through ideas of modifications by

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<sup>140</sup> ‘In fact the body is *partes extra partes*, it is discrete, for it is spacing of being, that is to say spacing from itself. Self spacing’. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O’Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 84

which the body is affected'<sup>141</sup> [EII, P19], he proves to be investing a great deal of attention in the presence of the body to other bodies. It seems as if he is here concentrating the powers of bodies on some kind of being-with. Nancy as well often makes use of the list, to the point of risking apoïoïesis as Derrida says<sup>142</sup>. Mentioning one body leads one to mention not only its *partes*, but a great number of other bodies; one comes to place oneself in the midst of the system of relations and exposures the body is made of, relations which extend toward a beyond. The word itself opens up – like the Aleph that in its three centimetres contains the ‘populous sea, dawn and dusk, the multitudes of the Americas and London as a broken labyrinth’<sup>143</sup> – and all the possibilities of a universe are pulled out:

Hoc est enim: this world-here, stretched out here, with its chlorophyll, its solar galaxy, its metamorphic rocks, its protons, its deoxyribonucleic helix, its Avogadro number, its continental drift [...] Cleopatra’s nose, the number of petals on a daisy<sup>144</sup>.

One can’t employ the word body without necessarily letting the space free for this burst, since every time we use it everything the body is exposed to comes about as an eruption. Nancy puts it in an almost poetic way:

a body is an image offered to other bodies, a whole corpus of images stretched from body to body, local colors and shadows, fragments, grains, areolas, lunules, nails, hairs, tendons, skulls, ribs, pelvises, stomachs,

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<sup>141</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press, 1949), 99

<sup>142</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 71

<sup>143</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), 283

<sup>144</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 33

meatuses, foams, tears, teeth, droolings, slits, blocks, tongues, sweat, liquors,  
veins, pains, and joys, and me, and you<sup>145</sup>.

The body is always exposed to and always exposes an *alium* as well as an *aliud*. The definition Nancy proposes of our world as the World of Bodies seems to indicate this: that our body is always offered –thus open – to the other. To those other bodies which it shares the coming to presence with. If Nancy says that body has to be intended as bodies, otherwise it does not make sense, this means that there is an opening of the body towards the other. However this other is not more foreign than my body. ‘There’s not, on one side, an original singularity and on the other, a simple being there of things, more or less given for our use’<sup>146</sup>. Or again: ‘they [bodies] are not isolated nor mixed together. They are among themselves, as origins’. My body, is always my outside, an outside I offer to the other. I will never perceive my body as such, as mine; what I will perceive are others as bodies.

Body is open to other bodies, and this word *other* should include both *alium* and *aliud*, both other human bodies and all the other bodies of whatever nature. Because all the *aliud* have the same access to the ongoing origin, I will always already be there with them. If my body is an opening, it is then all a question of access, of acknowledging that my local density is always handed over to the other, for, every time a body rises up, this inception immediately brings fore all the other inceptions. My relation to these others is not such that I can stop sharing with them; on the contrary, it is such that having access to them also assures me access to myself.

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<sup>145</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 121

<sup>146</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O’Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 17-18

Three ways of the body-open:

- open as rejecting itself; as incontinence of its own density, of itself as origin;
- open as the taking place of existence; constantly moving with the coming to presence of existence; constantly placing itself in existing;
- open as body=bodies; open in the sharing of an ongoing origin, open for its being local extends to all the other localities

## 6.1 - An interesting situation. *Welcoming Levinas*

Calling for the body as an aperture<sup>147</sup>, for openness as the necessary truth of the body, draws the trajectory for the second part of our analysis. I have so far dealt with the body in terms of extension, locality. It is now time to introduce the notion of position as outlined by Emmanuel Levinas in *Existence and Existents*<sup>148</sup>. In this volume, in which Levinas starts deploying the elements which will later on come to constitute the core of his philosophy, the task undertaken revolves around the attempt to describe the relation between the *there is*, the impersonal being, and existents. In Levinas' words 'the distinction between that which exists and its existence itself'<sup>149</sup>. What Levinas is looking for is the way in which 'a being, a subject, an existent, arises in impersonal Being'<sup>150</sup>. The notion Levinas develops to introduce the aforementioned question is that of *position*. This idea contains *in nuce* most of Levinas' mature philosophical concerns and will retain its whole strength up to *Totality and Infinity*. Under the light of this research, the notion of position proves to be useful when linked with the notion of situation I have attempted to describe thus far. The body is a *situation*: it is both a *situ* – a taking place, existence taking place - but it also finds itself *in situ* - it is then existence as situated. The body is the situation of existence, existence in the act of situating itself, it is the happening or the event of existence finding a *situ* and the condition existence bears as place. In this way the body is the arising of existence and the fact that existence will always arise and situate itself. If one wants to put this double meaning of situation with Nancy's words, one should

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<sup>147</sup> The term aperture recalls a technical terminology used in photography, aperture would be a narrow opening that allows light into a camera. According to what we say before – that bodies do photography – this term sounds particularly proper.

<sup>148</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003)

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 1

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

quote him saying: 'being takes place, but its place spaces it out. In every instance of its occurrence, being is an area, and its reality gives itself in *areality*. It is thus that being is a body'<sup>151</sup>.

When expanding the question of Being to a different scale, Nancy tries to reply to the questions *what is a world?* What does 'world' mean? Nancy's argument is that 'a world is the common place of a totality of places: of presences and dispositions for possible events'<sup>152</sup>. Here one sees how the lexicon that was earlier on structured around terms like *exscription* and *extension* is lending itself more and more to a spatial connotation, so as to allow us to introduce the duality *situation - position*. This is because henceforth the aim is to open up the enquiry into the realm of the possible space released by the aperture of the body to the *space of bodies*, the world of bodies. From now on, this will be the central question: what the world of bodies is and what the characteristic of such a shared space is. Space here would take up the local tone of something spacious rather than spatial, a roomy space, whose coordinates haven't been posited as yet.

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<sup>151</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 35.

<sup>152</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 42

## 6.2 - Levinas' Position

The question of position is called on to respond to the definition of the body as *situation*, in the double meaning of actuality of a space and happening of that space.

It is necessary now to clarify what role the notion of position plays here and what is crucial about it. In reading *Existence and Existents* one should always keep in mind that Levinas has been trained mainly in phenomenology – having been a pupil of Husserl – and that in this volume, written while the author was a prisoner of war (which means that it does not take into account almost any volume published between 1940 and 1945), is an attempt to overcome the Heideggerian analysis of the existents, while still remaining attached to the conclusions of *Being and Time*.

Levinas introduces the notion of position to express how a subject can arise from the ‘rumbling of the *there is*’. He is here trying to answer the question ‘what does the advent of a subject consist in?’<sup>153</sup> His argument moves from an analysis of states such as fatigue, insomnia, sleeping and the detachment that sleeping produces from the *there is*. The position in which the subject arises is a position before any understanding, even before any world; it is the very essence of any existent to have a position, to hold himself: ‘the here we are starting with [...] is the very fact that consciousness is an origin, that it starts from itself’<sup>154</sup>. The body, in order to become a subject, to develop the awareness of being a *situation* and an open one, needs this notion of position. Moreover one needs to conceive of position as a base, as a localization that allows the existent to put itself together. The event of this position is

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<sup>153</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 64

<sup>154</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 68

the very opportunity a body possesses to become a subject, to realize its position and the opportunity of opening spaces.

One further clarification is required. From the aforementioned remarks it seems I am incurring a plain contradiction: according to what I have been saying, it looks as if the body would be entered into an already existing space, but this would contradict the notion of the body as situation, bearing the connotations of existence taking place and existence as place. This claim would undermine all that has been said before, in addition to rendering the notion of situation completely useless. If the body would just enter a space that is already there and from which it would then arise as subject, it wouldn't make sense to talk about the body as 'existence situated' and 'the evidence of existence as something looking for situation'.

The body is itself that which makes the situating of existence possible: by creating the condition of space, it is the body that creates the *spaciousity* of existence.

To make this point clear one could show how this happens in cinema, employing the analysis Gilles Deleuze undertakes in his *Cinema 2*. As in the concept of position the conditions for space are created by the body, so in what Deleuze calls the cinema of bodies do bodies create the space for the camera. If in classical cinema the body was an obstacle on the road to thought, in modern cinema (at least for some directors; the work of John Cassavetes will serve here and in the following remarks as guideline) the body acts as a tool, 'it is through the body that cinema can reveal what remains of past experience'<sup>155</sup>. What is important for us to consider is the possibility for bodies to construct the plot. In some cases the plot is even undone in favour of the attitudes and the gestures of the body. The characters themselves are reduced to their movements, gesture by gesture.

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<sup>155</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 197

Those directors who employ this procedures inevitably let bodies arrange the spatial coordinates, articulate camera movements and lights; the space is composed according to the presence of bodies, so is the camera framing, ‘all the components of the image come together on the body’<sup>156</sup>. Each body will be accorded the faculty of giving space, of shading light and of orienting the camera. The image is calibrated through the presence of the body. One could say that for this kind of cinema the body unravels the film, bodies begin to play the image, they articulate every part of it, they bang into the camera, forcing the camera to move according to their movements. As position designs the spatial coordinates in which the subject arises, so bodies in cinema decide what will be inside or outside of the picture and at which tempo the film will flow.

The presence of existence is the body, but the body is also that which existence – in its always dis-identical coming – presents of itself, what has here been called *situation*. Position then cannot be conceived simply as a location, a point in space, because before any body no spatial possibilities are given. As already said, the body makes place for existence, it is God (the Spinozian God) as the extended thing.

Levinas is well aware of this when he assumes that the

body is nowise a thing...because its being belongs to the order of the events...it is not posited; it is a position. It is not situated in a space given beforehand; it is the irruption in anonymous being of localization itself.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 198

<sup>157</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 69

To reinforce once more the idea that the taking position is the foundational idea of an analysis of the body in the world, one should follow Levinas in saying that

a subject does not exist before the event of its position. The act of taking position does not unfold in some dimension from which it could take its origin; it arises at the very point at which it acts. Its action does not consist in willing, but in being<sup>158</sup>.

*Position is then an awakening of the body-as-situation*, the moment where situation starts becoming preoccupied with itself. If the body as situation is all/entirely in its relation with Being, then the movement towards position concerns a relation of the body with itself.

The idea of position will come back in later writings of Levinas, again to support the same thinking. In *Totality and Infinity* – within the chapter devoted to Enjoyment and Nourishment - readers are told that ‘the body is the elevation, but also the whole weight of position’<sup>159</sup>. The question of the taking position as the very advent of consciousness is restated few lines later when Levinas says that the essence of a body is to ‘accomplish my position on the earth [...] to give me a vision’<sup>160</sup>. The position is for Levinas the very moment where the subject can state its beginning, a beginning that is intrinsically linked with the positioning itself:

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<sup>158</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 81

<sup>159</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 127

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 128

to posit oneself corporeally is to touch an earth, but to do so in such a way that the touching finds itself already conditioned by the position, the foot settles into a real which this very action outlines or constitutes<sup>161</sup>.

With this analysis I have introduced Levinas into the discourse led so far by Nancy and Spinoza<sup>162</sup>. Although at first Nancy and Levinas seem to move from similar points of view (at least they both devote attention to a close reading of Heidegger, whose thinking Levinas introduced for the first time to the French speaking world), the more this enquiry will engage with the space of the bodies the more one will see that there is an incommensurability between the two ways of thinking this space. I will let these differences emerge and feed our questioning, since it will be from this incommensurability that I will attempt to develop further investigations.

Nevertheless most of the conclusions Levinas draws in *Existence and Existents* provide a useful framework, which is not at all contradictory with what I have been developing so far in reconstructing a collection of traces from Kafka, Nancy and Spinoza. In the preceding lines I have tried to sketch out a possible movement from the body as exposing existence to the body as subject, and we've found in the notions of situation and position the way to articulate this progression. Our trajectory has led us from the origin of the body to the event of a subject, or in Levinas' words: 'the advent of consciousness'<sup>163</sup>. It was necessary to emphasize this movement, for the idea of openness, the body as open, as an open position, is that which makes available a discussion on the space of bodies.

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<sup>161</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 128

<sup>162</sup> One should always be aware that Spinoza is the philosopher of immanence, while Levinas is, among contemporary thinkers, surely the one who puts more emphasis on transcendence. We bring them close in this analysis keeping always in mind this consistent difference.

<sup>163</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 69

As I mentioned earlier Nancy highlights three ways in which a body is open. The one I will take most into consideration here is the third way, where he states that body is always *bodies*, because I will always perceive it as present with others, as sharing their same origin. It is the question of this sharing out that is decisive, because this sharing out between bodies constitutes the very condition of a shared space; it sets down the coordinates for a world of bodies. What Levinas wanted to state in introducing the question of position is that it is possible to begin a thinking on sense and consciousness only if one acknowledges the crucial role played by the taking position of a body in the coming of Being, in the rumbling of the *there is*. The body stands up, something emerges out of its ignorance. But Levinas sets another program for the body. In *Totality and Infinity* he further develops the question of Being and beings, assuming a radical perspective, unknown to *Existence and Existents*. We here encounter the question of the body framed by the broader aim Levinas has set for his research: the possibility for Beings to overcome totality, the same, the ontological enclosure. The core question of *Totality and Infinity* was already announced in ‘Is Ontology fundamental?’ – an essay Levinas published well before he started his first major work – as: ‘How is this simultaneity of a position in totality and a reserve or separation with regard to it achieved?’<sup>164</sup>. Levinas introduces the concept of separation, for his interest is to show the wrench operated by western ontological tradition. Levinas’ program aims to revise this way of thinking by opposing to Totality the idea of Infinity. Infinity in Levinasian terms is realized in the opportunity for *ipseity* to contain in itself what is not of itself, the welcoming of the other and the Other, gentleness and the face<sup>165</sup>. The point of arrival of this philosophy, at least of

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<sup>164</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre nous. Thinking-of-the-other*, trans. Michael Smith and Barbara Harshav (London : Continuum, 2006), 13

<sup>165</sup> Levinas uses the term Autrui for the other human being, *you* – while Autre indicates the non-human other; the English translation by Alphonso Lingis employs the capital letter for the French Autrui. See

*Totality and Infinity* – as the discourse will become even more radical in ‘Otherwise than Being’ – is that ‘to think the infinite, the transcendent, the stranger is not to think an object’<sup>166</sup>, it is to do more or better than that. The idea of the body plays in this philosophical system a crucial role.

For Levinas it is crucial to resolve the question of Infinity in terms of resistance to totality, of overcoming of it, the very possibility of thinking a way out of the Same [same and totality are correlative terms for ‘totality’ and ‘infinity’, and we’ll see how in Levinas’ work many terms actually perform the same philosophical action: face, for instance, while playing a role in itself, is also a synonym for infinity, when it is defined as the way the other presents himself exceeding the idea of the other in me]. Infinity then comes to be defined as ‘the desirable, that which arouses desire, that which is approachable by a thought that at each instant thinks more than it thinks... the measure through the very impossibility of measure’<sup>167</sup>. For the idea of Infinity to be possible one has to understand what separation is, for the latter agitates the former. Levinas establishes in the creation ex-nihilo the first time that the possibility for separation arises. This notion has been discussed already with regard to Nancy and Spinoza, but Levinas’ interest in this idea lies elsewhere. On one hand Nancy stresses the fact that the body is the created par excellence and created always refer to a creation ex-nihilo – ‘if the world is the growth of/from nothing – an expression of formidable ambiguity – it is because it only depends on itself, while this ‘self’ is given from nowhere but from itself’<sup>168</sup>. On the other, Levinas sees in this movement where the *nihil* comes to presence and where what is important is the *cresco*, the

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footnote: Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 24

<sup>166</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 50

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 63

<sup>168</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 51

possibility for the first detachment from Totality. The ex-nihilo is also the moment where Levinas introduces for the first time that *equivocation*<sup>169</sup> which delivers us to the question of the body:

the creation ex-nihilo expresses a multiplicity not united into a totality; the creature is an existence which indeed does depend on an other, but not as part that is separated from it. Creation leaves to the creature a trace of dependence on an other, but not as a part separated from it. Creation ex nihilo breaks with system, posits a being outside of every system...Creation leaves to the creature a trace of dependence, but it is an unparalleled dependence: the dependent being draws from this exceptional dependence, from this relationship, its very independence, its exteriority to the system<sup>170</sup>.

In the ex-nihilo Levinas sees the flash where the novelty of the 'I' is introduced, the first instant where the light of separation is foreseen. The foregoing quotation also sets the ground for the dependence - independence equivocation that constitutes for Levinas the very secret of the plurality of existence. It is in fact in the possibility of separation, of every existent disposing of its own time, that Levinas makes sense of plurality. Here there is inevitably an echo of what Nancy affirms: 'The unique God, whose unicity is the correlate of the creating act, cannot precede its creation any more than it can subsist above it or apart from it in some way. It merges with it'<sup>171</sup>. Although the two thinkers reach different conclusions, for both of them what is at stake is nevertheless the autonomy of existents/singularities. Levinas places the creation ex-

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<sup>169</sup> Levinas makes use of this term when referring to the body throughout *Totality and Infinity*

<sup>170</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 104

<sup>171</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 70

nihilo at the beginning of his analysis on separation because: ‘the idea of creation ex-nihilo expresses a multiplicity not united into a totality’<sup>172</sup>.

Separation, warns Levinas, cannot and should not be regarded just in terms of negativity. It has to be the outcome of a positive movement, a movement where the ‘I’ and the ‘I can’ grow (*crescunt*)<sup>173</sup>.

The movement Levinas has in mind is a movement towards the inside, for separation can only happen as *ipseity*. Separation is a movement whose finishing line is inner life, for ‘inner life is the unique way for the real to exist as a plurality’<sup>174</sup>. This separation however cannot rest on an opposition; to say this would betray the entire construction of this philosophy. If the intention is to breach the *there is* up to the point where a violation might occur, then separation has to come not from an opposition, but from a positive movement of reconciliation. *Resisting Totality*, the heading or slogan under which one could thematize Levinas’ work, cannot be resolved in an opposing to the totality of the same, of another kind of totality, that of the I completely shut, isolated into its own inner life, an island. The way in which one should conceive of separation is rather as the possibility for the I to identify itself. Separation is made necessary by Infinity in the process of overcoming its own idea; hence a mere correlation is not enough. Separation is instead the way in which we come to be freed from that site in which we are. Here one sees the crucial role the question of position assumes and how it has developed from the earlier stages of *Existence and Existent*. Separation, then, is produced when the ‘I’ starts loving life, starts that process by which it begins to love what it lives from, to become

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<sup>172</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 105

<sup>173</sup> We shall recall here Micipsa’s famous sentence: ‘concordia parvae res crescunt, discordia maximae dilabuntur’ which says something of the quality of the creation ex-nihilo and of this dependence Levinas is talking about.

<sup>174</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 50

preoccupied with itself. Levinas alerts that this existent preoccupied with itself is not the same as Dasein's care for Being. There is something more dear than my own being, 'thinking, eating...distinct from my substance but constituting it, these contents make up the worth of my life'<sup>175</sup>. It is not as in Heidegger's thinking, where Dasein always cares for its existence, for it *is* always there to comprehend Being, because for Levinas the 'love of life does not love Being but loves the happiness of being'<sup>176</sup>.

Separation thus constitutes itself first in creation *ex-nihilo*, as pure trace of the intertwining dependence – independence; secondly in the closure of *egoism*, and finally in the living from... The notion of living from... is crucial for the way in which Levinas frames the question of the body.

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<sup>175</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 112

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 145

### 6.3 - Living from...

The notion of *living from...* articulates another step towards separation, psychism and the inner life. Through the living from... 'each existent comes to have its own time'<sup>177</sup>, separation appears to be resolved in a deep-seated way. When an existent has come to recognize itself in ipseity, it then turns towards life, towards its dependence on the other. Living from... is the basis of enjoyment: there we recognize that our dependence on the other, on the world, characterizes also the contents of our lives. In Vittorio De Sica's movie 'Miracolo a Milano' the paupers leaving in huts happily praise their poverty by singing 'Ci basta una capanna per vivere e dormir, ci basta un po' di terra per vivere e dormir'<sup>178</sup> [*all we need is a shack to live and sleep in, all we need is a bit of ground to live and sleep in*].

Living from... bears this dual meaning; it is poverty and dependence, πενια, but also the very exercise of existence, the fact that there is a life to live from, ενθουσιασμος, dwelling with God. To this effect Levinas writes: 'what I do and what I am is at the same time that from which I live'<sup>179</sup>. Need is the need of enjoyment, it is that which makes enjoyment possible.

In this construction the body plays a central role, for it is the body that bears more than any other the weight of this ambiguity, it is the body that concentrates in itself πενια and ενθουσιασμος. The body is the very articulation of this equivocation, of this game between dependence and independence, which in the end life is made of. The chance for the human being to leave the realm of nature is all in the body, body

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<sup>177</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 57

<sup>178</sup> *Miracolo a Milano*, prod. and dir. by Vittorio De Sica, 100 min., 1951

<sup>179</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 113

as the mode making possible the movement from need to enjoyment, from life as self-sufficiency and nutrition to life as happiness, love of life. “My body is not only a way for the subject to be reduced to slavery, to depend on what is not of itself, but is also a way of possessing and of working...of overcoming the alterity of what I have to live from”<sup>180</sup>. Without the body I wouldn’t be able to realize this distance from the world, which assures my movement from need to enjoyment of the content of life. The here of the body, situation that becomes a position (*situation upwards*), exercises itself in this double performance between dependence and independence, need and happiness. Separation is thus possible just to the body, the possibility of evading totality is given to it and in particular to the body as position, ‘raised upwards’. Through the body a separation towards Desire is realized. I grasp, I labour, I allow myself to exercise life, I gain time – ‘to be a body is to have time in the midst of the facts’<sup>181</sup>. My inner life is possible just as body, since the body closes the way to totality while it remains open to the other. Here again one has to come back to the question of position, as presented in *Existence and Existents*. In that first study Levinas worked out the notion of position moving from the body as an event and not a substantive. Position was not a site in being – not already posited in a pre-existent space, but making space– but the arising of human being as subject in the rumbling of the *there is*. In *Totality and Infinity* the argumentation becomes even more radical, for the body becomes almost irreducible to thought; it even appears as the very contestation of consciousness. Similarly to Nancy, where sense starts making sense by coming at the edge of the body, in Levinas’ text the body is ‘a permanent contestation of the prerogative attributed to consciousness of ‘giving meaning’ to each thing’<sup>182</sup>. Levinas also

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<sup>180</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 116

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 117

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 129

approaches the problem of consciousness in a way recalling the Freudian ‘psyche ist ausgedehnt’, in particular when he says that ‘consciousness...is a disincarnation, a postponement of the body’<sup>183</sup>. The very question of the body – its truth as it were – must be traced in the taking position and in the equivocation this taking position implies.

The taking position is being in the earth in a way that it is conditioned by this very being. The action of positing, although it creates its conditions – its space – is at the same time settled by the position one assumes. The body is this taking position that makes available the future, a future that nevertheless has already been announced. Bodies inhabit the element but are the only accessible mean in order to raise upwards, to forget this inhabitation.

Thus the question of position here turns out to be more problematic, because if the body is what makes it possible for me to be here and to exercise being, to make present Being, it is also at the same time what bounds me to this here. ‘To be a body is to be master of oneself and on the other hand to be encumbered by one’s body’<sup>184</sup>. The body is this participation of health and sickness, and in this way it comes to be the how of separation, ‘the ‘somewhere’ of the separated being as separate. I will come back to this ambivalence in the next paragraph, although shortly, for this argument will be covered more extensively in the second part of the analysis.

At this point all of a lexicon has been reviewed, a lexicon and a register which – given the differences and the different aims – draws Nancy and Levinas nigh. It has been shown that for both the question of the ex-nihilo is relevant, but that what is

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<sup>183</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 165

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 164

most important is that they have in common a particular lexicon. On one hand, a lexicon of places: *position, somewhere, standing, dwelling, inhabitation, immanence, localization*... On the other side there is a lexicon of weight: the body for both of them is the *foot that weights on land*, the trace of the weight, the very heaviness of Being here and there. If Nancy says that the body is a weight, Levinas answers that the body endures “the whole weight of position”<sup>185</sup>.

In a short while, however, my aim will be reversed, I will need to make them far from one another and to seek questions and answers in this distance.

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<sup>185</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 127

## 7 - In between bodies

Having established a group of notions on the body, it is necessary to move to the opening that the body allows for. I have mentioned the three ways in which the openness of the body is articulated by Nancy, and I will now examine how this opening is structured in Levinas' thinking. It is by means of this opening that it is possible to proceed in the analysis and make sense of a world of bodies. The attempt is to move the focus from the body as standing alone to a body exposed to any other body. The spaces where bodies keep each other company.

In order to introduce the topic that will be central in the second part of this analysis, it seems crucial to first move a step backward. I previously talked about the opening as the true nature of the body, as that which makes the body what it is. I have even listed a series of possible directions this notion can take. Now it is time to go back to that idea and develop the direction that will prove to be the most fertile. In reading *Corpus*, I summarized that the body could be open, an aperture, as rejecting itself, as that which can't contain its own density, what Kafka calls the 'horrible outline'. The body can't contain its own creation, which is, as I have already insisted a creation without creator. The apertures as rejection that Nancy enumerates – playing on the sounds of the French words *cent*, *sense* and *sang*<sup>186</sup> – all highlight this necessity for bodies to pull out something of themselves. This same discourse informs the idea of the mind as difference of the body to itself.

The body is then open in a second fashion: as the exposure of existence, constantly open to the coming to presence of existence, thus open as constituting the space for

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<sup>186</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 107

existence. Recalling Nancy once more: ‘the world of bodies is the nonimpenetrable world, a world that is not initially subject to the compactness of space; rather, it is a world where bodies initially articulate space’<sup>187</sup>. This quotation introduces us to the third way in which a body can be open, the one that will lead us to the second argument of this research. Bodies do not just articulate space, making available the conditions for space, arising in a position which wasn’t posited before; as Levinas makes clear, bodies also articulate a space for contact. Bodies are open to the contact of all other bodies. It is not just a matter of a body articulating its own space and extending to the space of other bodies. The point here is to show how the aperture that a body articulates a space for contact, communion, sharing and otherness. How the singular bodies necessarily make available the proximity to other bodies and how this space of company becomes the declension of their locality and the necessity of their presence. There wouldn’t be any discourse on the space of the body if this space wasn’t a space where there is always spare room, an open space that declines itself and slopes down every time towards spaces which come to him from the outside. It is essential to see how the body creating an outside of itself, being itself an outside, necessarily opens the conditions for a more general outside. This space of extended existence is not configured as a possibility the body can avoid, a responsibility it can decline; quite the contrary, it is the space without which it would not exist. What it is indispensable to think here is that the two steps just delineated, the body as making available itself through the conditions for its own space and the body as articulating the space of contact, company, the space of bodies, do not occur as consequential - first a body that constitutes itself as a closed locality and *then* one that opens up to share this inner place. On the contrary, what is a stake here and what I propose to shed

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<sup>187</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 27

light on is the co-presence of these two possibilities at the very point where a body exposes existence. When a body exposes its own existence it is already exposing to the whole of existence. One can't take the coming to presence of the body as a point of closure, after which existence arrests its coming just to move to another singular creation. Quite the contrary, one must think that the arising of a body as extension of existence is also the way existence articulates itself as space of contact, as a world of bodies. The body contains both its space and the space for contact, its presence is always a co-presence. It is present to itself as much and as long as it is present to other bodies. In this way, after having said that the body is a situation arising in a position, one could say that the body is a *separation*, for in the body there are, already at the moment of its onset, two dimensions of space.

*The body is existence extended but also extends itself towards the plurality of existence.* Separation indicates that the body is that space which contradicts itself by also exposing to any other possible space, and in so doing making them possible. To say that – to say that the body is a separation – additionally leads one to allege that this is what the expression *to be in the world* – to be alive, present, born, here and there – means: *to be able to express through one's own locality the eternal (necessary) possibility for a space of other localities.* There's no choice: being in the world means being offered to a space of co-presence. As Nancy says:

The opening is neither the foundation nor the origin. Nor is the opening any longer a sort of receptacle or an extension prior to things of the world. The opening of the world is what opens along such things and among them, that

which separates them in their profuse singularity and which relates them to each other in their coexistence<sup>188</sup>.

One must therefore acknowledge that it is from the body that one can question the idea of the space of the other(s). The following steps will revolve around the question on how to make sense:

how to do justice, not only to the whole of existence, but to all existences, taken together but distinctly and in a discontinuous way, not as the totality of their differences, and differends – precisely not that – but as these differences together, coexisting or co-appearing, held together as multiple [...] and held by a *co-* that is not a principle, or that is a principle or archi-principle of spacing in the principle itself<sup>189</sup>.

From this space of the single body, from its trait of separation – where in the opening of one's locality this body is also thrown<sup>190</sup> towards constituting the space which is not its own, but its outside - derives the possibility of an analysis beyond the single body, or the single situation/position.

A discourse on the space of the other needs to arise from this analysis of the body as a place for existence, a place that makes possible not only its own expression of existence, but existence's expression. A body is never alone with itself, it is never known as a single body,

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<sup>188</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 70

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 61

<sup>190</sup> It is interesting to note how the latin verbs *jectare* [to throw] is a derivation of the verb *jacere* [to lie]. The same root expresses the movement towards a position and the act of assuming a certain position. [also in Italian, *gettare* and *giacere* and in French *jeter* and *gésir*].

Bodies are first and always other – just as others are first and always bodies. I will never know myself as a body right there where ‘corpus ego’ is an unqualified certainty. By contrast, I’ll always know others as bodies<sup>191</sup>.

In Levinas’ thinking, where the ideas of separation and constitution of the inner life, psychism, play a central role in the arising of the subject out of totality and the same – action that is delivered to the body, in the taking position of the living from... - the idea of an opening is equally relevant. Although the first step towards separation is played in the realm of closeness, for the separated being arises in egoism, ignorant of the Other, in coming to be preoccupied with itself, this closeness reveals itself as ambiguous. It is in this ambiguity that the separated being, the body that has taken position, which lives in the dependence/independence from the world, can produce an encounter with heteronomy. Levinas says that ‘in the separated being the door to the outside must hence be at the same time open and closed’<sup>192</sup>. Closed because the inner life necessary to infinity must remain real in order to keep itself out of the dialectic of the same, but simultaneously open, for within this interiority ‘there must be produced a heteronomy that incites to another destiny than this animal complacency in oneself’<sup>193</sup>.

Thus, once the separated has come to love life, it has to open itself in order to rise from the animal condition, it has to let itself be shocked by heteronomy, his body trembling due to the proximity of another body. This shock, Levinas warns – and this will be a ruling concern for the development of our discussion – is not the shock of

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<sup>191</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 31

<sup>192</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 148

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 149

the Other negating me, of the 'non-I' negating the 'I', it is *the Other who comes directly from gentleness*.

On this former structure Levinas will then configure another opening, even more decisive, that resides in the possibility of a movement whose target is the beyond essence. The questioning of openness Levinas approaches at the end of his second major work takes this shape:

How can the openness upon the other than being be conceived without the openness as such forthwith signifying an assembling into a conjuncture, into a unity of essence? Can openness have another sense than that of the accessibility of entities through open doors or windows? Can openness have another signification than that of disclosure?<sup>194</sup>.

Attempting here, where I have not even introduced the argument of this dense volume, where we have barely skimmed over, glanced through the complex philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, to unravel these questions would be to proceed without knowing the direction. I will come back to this key idea, and consistently so, later on in the research.

It is on this basis that the second stage of this research, which will be devoted to questions of proximity, proximities of bodies, will be approached. The next question will be: how to shed light on the space of bodies? How to shed light on the question of the body always expressing the world of bodies, always having this possibility as its inner nature, for this means being in the world and also the existence of the world?

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<sup>194</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 178-179

What is the place of the other, what kind of space is allocated to the other in the world?

It seems the matter will move to an ethical dimension, but what for the time being one needs to keep in mind is that we must approach the abovementioned questions from what this analysis has been able to underline: any possibility for a sharing, must be – to put it in the words of Jean-Luc Nancy:

The with understood in terms of existence, must therefore be elaborated as a quite particular space – the word space being understood here both in the literal sense, since the existents are also bodies, extended beings, and in a figurative sense, which would answer the question: ‘What takes place between us?’<sup>195</sup> .

*What is the space opened between eight billion bodies?*

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<sup>195</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘The Being-with of the Being-there’, in *Rethinking Facticity*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2008), 119

## Conclusions

The task of this first chapter has been to determine the angle of the present discussion. This takes its cue from Heidegger's silence on the body. By way of the work of Jean-Luc Nancy this silence is intended as a *praeteritio*, a passing by that emphasizes its object without touching upon it. From within Heidegger's *praeteritio* Nancy reopens the question of the body.

It has been said that one should look at weighing the body, working in that incommensurability between a skeletal and a pleonastic body; thus thinking its thickness and the horrible outline Kafka was terrified by.

The idea that the body is what *existence exposes* and the *exposure of existence* has been expressed through the work of Nancy and Spinoza. Spinoza's idea of the body as God as an extended thing has been read under the light of Nancy's writing on the question of coming to presence, the ongoing origin and the role that the body plays in this structure. The conclusion I reached has been that the body exposes existence and marks the rim of sense. In doing so it remains constantly open. This openness has been seen as the very truth of the body. It is in fact this opening that makes space for existence and also makes available the space of other bodies.

One could say that the existence of the body is therefore the body of existence. The crossing of the praxis of existing happens through the materiality of our world. In the reading Nancy offers of it, materiality is not a property of matter, but the resistance of sense to Ideality, to a non-actual referent. The praxis of existing is already the distance and circulation of materiality. Existence transcends this materiality not towards pure spirit or pure soul. This means that materiality itself is always already

sensible, predisposed to and predisposing sense, and that sense is cut across by its own actuality.

At the same time the existence of the body is nothing but a force of appearance between a here and a there, a 'here' and a 'there' of sense, a 'here' constituted by body's evidence and a 'there' constituted by the fact that this evidence is nothing if not stretched, filtered through, suspended, abandoned to a 'there'. The evidence of a body is nothing if not the movement of sense in space and time. It is therefore a force of sense inasmuch as it is a force of spacing. The body spaces itself out and spaces sense out. Sense circulates through bodies and on bodies: this is Nancy's 'absolute realism'<sup>196</sup>. The existence of a body is therefore preserved as long as the work of existence is preserved. One could say that as body existence is already decided, already in action, cutting across the substratum of its essences.

The existence of a body is a free force which does not disappear even when the body is destroyed and which does not disappear as such except when the relation of this existence to an other and destructive existence is itself destroyed as a relation of existences, becoming a relation of essences<sup>197</sup>.

Existence of the body indicates also that the body itself is not a whole, it is not self-same but always already crossed by existence, and unable to recover itself as a property. The property of the body is not to be found in some determination of matter, but in its implication in the praxis of existing. This praxis sends the body to the open, remits it to the open and brings the open into the body. And again the open does not

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<sup>196</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, Christine Irizarry trans. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 46

<sup>197</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 102

become itself a substance, but precisely the fact that the body negotiates its existence against substance. The body guarantees that existence comes to have no essence, no interiority into which it can withdraw. This means that at the same time the body itself has no guarantee, it remains completely delivered over.

*The body is what existence exposes (of itself):* existence exposes through the body the logic of a putting at stake of interiority; from this existence receives its name. This does not mean that existence recalls or gathers its interiority and puts it outside, but rather that existence decides only and always in favour of the outside and is only decided when it is left outside. Through the body existence exposes the fact of subsisting only in the restlessness of a going *to* that, despite its obviousness, cannot be made into a property. That the body is what existence exposes means that existence offers its evidence precisely by remaining outside the field of vision that it creates.

*The body is the exposure of existence:* existence touches on its sense only in detaching from itself 'the sense of existence'. In spacing sense, therefore, bodies place it at a distance, there where a final completion would have to always be negotiated again. Sense is thus never the ideality of recurring significations or the ultimate sense, but an entangled circulation that bodies expose precisely in excess of conceptual formulations. The exposure of existence means the remaining *in circulation* of existence, despite the closure brought upon it by discourse. Bodies name the actuality of existence, bringing the fact of existing to its bareness, to an exuberant and mute absence of mediation that conceptual formulations can write out without making less bare and resistant.

What appears from this double signification is that the body pronounces about existence the latter's being nothing: everything that is not a thing.

The body therefore lets itself be articulated only in a multiplicity of figures. A body is a corpus. This corpus though is not one that can be completely dismembered; rather, its parts keep articulating themselves in proximity with one another.

As Emmanuel Levinas says, articulating about the body means talking about an advent. The notion of *position* – which in a way determines a body preoccupied with itself – determines still the space for a growth, a space not yet saturated, but constantly in the making, offered to others.

The next stage of the research will try to develop the questions: what happens between eight billion bodies?

## **BETWEEN US**

*It depends on us, so it is said*

Martin Heidegger<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 128

## Introduction

The question: ‘what happens between eight billion bodies?’ can also be formulated in a different way: ‘what happens between us?’

The distance between the two expressions is apparently minimal, but by looking at them more closely, one finds that in fact the second makes visible something that the first leaves out of sight.

It is not the same thing to ask what happens between eight billion bodies – without having defined any attribute with regard to the way those bodies share a *between* – and to ask what happens between *us*. It is precisely the ‘us’ that draws the line here, as it is not established, by any means, that the ‘us’ follows naturally, organically as it were, from the mere juxtaposition of a number of bodies. The pronoun ‘us’ contains something that goes well beyond any space filled with bodies. It contains that which lies beyond any simple proximity, even the closest one. The ‘us’ is a leap, a movement forward with respect to the simple exposition of bodies. At the same time it pronounces what is most proper to them: that bodies are ‘us’, in this odd grammatical fashion, or that we are as bodies. As a matter of fact the two aforementioned propositions do not articulate any valuable statement on ‘us’; the latter rests, therefore, on an unresolved inertia. ‘Us’ is never a given, it is never posed in something, it is never presupposed, unless one situates oneself within a perfectly immanent community, a community by definition destined to constantly restate its natural intimacy.

What is to be articulated here is the way in which bodies find themselves in between one another, or – to put it differently – what is found between them. ‘Us’ lays *in between* bodies; not just as the space between one body and another, but most properly as that between, the articulation of one body with regard to all others. The task will then consist of looking not solely for the space opened by my locality, as it was the case in the previous stage of this analysis, but in the exposition of one locality to ‘the other’. The ‘between’ is intended here precisely as this space bodies articulate, but whose determination goes beyond their pure juxtaposition. It is this indetermination that allows ‘us’ to speak.

There is one more point that requires clarification. The questions ask: *what happens between eight billion bodies* or *what happens between us*. That which ‘happens’, rather than addressing the firm and clear visibility of an actuality, holds the quality of a coming to, of an open possibility, of an ongoing movement towards presence. If one pushes the reading to the limit of the word it is not incorrect to list, along with other connotations, those of ‘spontaneity’ and ‘accident’, of an unexpected emergence. To put it in other terms, what happens between us could possibly not happen at all. Everything that can happen, that has this possibility as its very essence, always embeds also its very opposite. It is then worth questioning what ‘to happen’ means, investigating the nature of this *happening* when related to the space between us.

Before moving on to analyze the philosophical traditions that have to do, in one way or another and under different headings, with *us*, or with the way in which something happens between us, the task will be to investigate the conditions of this space.

The main thesis this second stage of the research moves from, is that the conditions of this space do not just provide a background for the emergence of the question ‘what happens between us’, but draw the path of a possible investigation. In other words, the *where* of this happening is also its *how* and suggests the order of the exposition. The analysis here presented, for reasons that will become clear as the reading of the two main questions proceeds, intends the space of the ‘us’ as bearing also a physical dimension. This space is identified as the *world*. The analysis of this concept, through Jean-Luc Nancy’s work and its references to the Heidegger’s idea of ‘Being-in-the-world’, and the closure of the onto-theological horizon, will occupy most of the following discourse.

Nancy’s argument that the world rests on a lack of principle or essence – the world of bodies – will constitute the point of departure on which to situate the happening of ‘us’. With regard to the impossibility for the world to represent its own premise, Nancy speaks at times of the *end of the world*. However this end

cannot mean that we are confronted merely with the end of a certain ‘conception’ of the world, and that we would have to go off in search of another one or to restore another one. It means that there is no longer any assignable signification of world or that the world is subtracting itself from the entire regime of signification available to us<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997), 5

A world without reason, a world that has escaped any ground, is a world where what remains are bodies and their exposure to one another, as in Deleuze's cinema of bodies. What remains, once characters and plots have been stripped away, are forces supported only by the belief in this world *here*, a world whose sense corresponds to its confines. Among the filmmakers whose gesture can be exposed according to such logic Deleuze mentions American director John Cassavetes.

Cinema here will work as our model. The method will follow one rule: that the philosophical approach to a filmmaker cannot be taken simply as the possibility to unravel a convergence between concept and image. The task cannot only be that of treating a film as a philosophical example or that of using a concept as a comprehensive approach to a particular cinematographic work. It is a matter of investigating how both philosophy and cinema creatively confront a problem, in this case the problem of our being-together in its relation with the question of the sense of the world. It is therefore not a matter of providing an entrance into Nancy's philosophy or of describing Cassavetes' cinema but of how cinema reopens the sense of what happens between us. Moving between philosophy and cinema one is always asked to look for their internal alliance and their creative possibilities. It will be thus a matter of exposing the cinematographic idea as it happens in the image and not to impose ideas from the outside.

Along with Deleuze's argument, one can read modern cinema as reestablishing our belief in this actual world, the articulation of the world's *here* with regard to all its *there*. Understood thusly, cinema establishes the very modern fact that we do not believe in another world anymore. As Deleuze puts it: 'what is certain is that believing

is no longer believing in another world, or in a transformed world<sup>3</sup>. In the account provided by Revault D'Allones – who elaborates on Deleuze's work – 'starting with World War II [...] a number of directors have decided to turn their cameras to the world itself, "as it is", "raw"<sup>4</sup>.

As the world happens and happens between us, so cinema essentially 'contributes to free a motion, which is that of a presence in the process of making itself present'<sup>5</sup>. There is here the same relation the 'us' entertains with the world, for cinema, to quote Nancy once more, 'shares the intensity of a look upon a world of which it is itself part and parcel'<sup>6</sup>. Cinema does not represent the world, it does not mirror it, reality is not simply registered in its immediacy. In cinema experience is not reduced and incorporated. Instead the impossibility of capturing it under the regime of truth liberates once more the sharing of experience's evidence as undecidability. Cinema allows Nancy to express the intrinsic differential structure that the world is. This structure is not a category of the world - neither disposition nor organizing principle – it is the world itself. It is the constant creation of finite sense, infinitely relating to an out of itself, which makes for the evidence of the world. The 'real' at stake in cinema, what Nancy calls the 'evidence of film', exposes this logic: sense isn't the set of significations sent and received, sealed on themselves, but the sending and receiving as they infringe acquired significations and release a tension that opens the immanence of the world. In this in this view that Jean-Luc Nancy's engagement with film

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<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 167

<sup>4</sup> Fabrice Revault d'Allones, *Pour le cinéma "moderne": Du lien de l'art au monde*, (Liege: Yellow Now, , 1994), 9 (translation mine).

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, trans. Christine Irizarry and Verena Conley (Brussels: Yves Gevaert Éditeur, 2001), 16

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

responds also to a wider reconsideration of the question of the image where the concepts of absence and presence are played in a sort of reversal: what comes to presence is the force liberated by an absence and presenting is nothing other than the drawing out of absence, which constantly occupies what is presented. The discussion of cinema therefore attempts at responding to a double demand: the status of the cinematographic image – what cinema is, cinema’s ontology – and how cinema exposes finite worldhood by making the world evident. Cinema allows entrance into an ontological moment, where the world – delivered to us – is separated from its character of mere given and its sense now requires our attention. Cinema’s relevance for Nancy’s ontology resides in the possibility of presenting the unseen, not as the extraordinary, rather as defeat of ultimate significations, sense’s constant withdrawing from its own horizon, deferral of its arrival. The notion of evidence should thus be understood within this ontology of finite sense, where the world is always presented as the absolute novelty of sense, in absence of an ultimate disclosure. Cinema does not mimic the world, it gives presence to it, but this giving presence again should be understood under the mode of absence: ‘the image gives a presence that it lacks—since it has no other presence than the unreal one of its thin, filmlike surface—and it gives it to something that, being absent, cannot receive it’<sup>7</sup>. The something that cannot receive this presence is precisely sense, which is only in the existence of the image, ‘sense exists, or rather it is the movement and flight of existing’<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005)

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 68

The philosophical mirror, as it were, of the world of bodies would then be the cinema of bodies, a cinema that undoes the character and the plot in order to follow and reduce both to bodily attitudes. In the cinema of bodies, as Deleuze conceives of it, the space is also reduced to bodies' articulations, 'in order to get to attitudes as to categories which put time into the body, as well as thought into life'<sup>9</sup>.

After having outlined Deleuze's discussion of Cassavetes and his cinema of bodies, this argument will move towards a more detailed analysis of Cassavetes. The endeavor will be to establish the reason of this strategy – why it lies at the heart of Cassavetes' construal of the moving image. The present analysis will revolve around the thesis that Cassavetes' way of making films rests on the attempt to get to 'us', to drag people behind the camera.

Cassavetes was intimately interested in making films about people, and Deleuze himself seems to be fully aware of this when he says:

This is what Cassavetes was already saying in *Shadows* and then *Faces*; what constitutes part of the film is interesting oneself in people rather than in the film, in the human problems more than in the problems of the mise en scene; so that people do not pass over to the side of the camera without the camera having passed to the side of the people<sup>10</sup>.

Although Deleuze's analysis of the work of Cassavetes is detailed and generous, I will attempt to highlight one more strategy Cassavetes developed and move from this

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<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 185

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 149

towards a philosophical discussion of his work. The second strategy relates to Cassavetes' use of close-ups. The question asked will be how, in particular in a film like *Faces*, close-ups take on a contrapuntal structure. By way of the contrapuntal use of the close-up, Cassavetes is able to elaborate a model of distance, as opposed to a panoramic one.

## 1 - What happens between us

*What is the space opened between eight billion bodies?*

*What happens between us?*

As mentioned in the introduction, the second question exposes a set of quandaries on the nature of this happening, but in particular on the status of 'us' and on its measure.

If the first chapter has been almost entirely devoted to the analysis of the body and its radical openness, here the gesture will extend beyond the local position of the body to reach bodies in relation with one another. It is here a matter of relation, because one is moving from an analysis of the status (from *stare* - to lay, to rest) towards a dynamic investigation, the investigation of a passage.

As I have already mentioned it is from the space opened by eight billion bodies that I will move, starting from the thickness of this opening to investigate *what happens between us*, retaining entirely the previous analysis so that the space of the one next to me will not lose its meaningfulness and become a simple summa of more than one body. The aim here is to be able to say something about 'us', about the space where 'us' takes place, the space where we are essentially with 'us'. It is by way of the connotation of being-with that one is impelled to consider so carefully the question of the space where the 'us' takes place.

Following Nancy the problem of understanding the space of the 'us' reveals itself in all its urgency:

The with understood in terms of existence, must therefore be elaborated as a quite particular space – the word space being understood here both in the literal sense, since the existents are also bodies, extended beings, and in a figurative sense, which would answer the question: ‘What takes place between us?’<sup>11</sup>.

A discourse on the space of this relation (if one wants also the space of the other) needs to arise from the analysis of the body as a place for existence, in the double connotation already described for the notion of *situation*. A body is never alone with itself, it is never known as a single body, ‘bodies are first and always others, just as others are first and always bodies. I’ll never know my body, never know myself as a body [...] *An other is a body because only a body is an other*’<sup>12</sup>.

Already in the first chapter the question of space as intimately linked to that of the body was of crucial importance. This space, opened to a plastic lexicon, a register of plasticity, was needed in order for the excesses of the body to appear, so that the latter would not fall either into the symbolic, hysteric reduction or into its opposite, the purely materialist one, where the body forms just an irreducible crust. This last definition is what Heidegger in the *Zollikon Seminars* refers to as the mere corporeality of a thing.

The kind of space thus described, the space of this language, was announced as one whose suture is unknown, or, better said, as an opening that is not anymore in the realm of knowledge. However this openness should not be dismissed as vagueness. As

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<sup>11</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘The Being-with of the Being-there’, in *Rethinking Facticity*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew, (New York: SUNY Press, 2008), 119

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 31

Nancy says, ‘tightly woven and narrowly articulated, it constitutes the structure of sense qua sense of the world’<sup>13</sup>.

Further than opening the space for a new lexicon, one finds a more substantial attention to the question of space. One of the main issues the previous reading of the work of Jean-Luc Nancy was concerned with was the fact that bodies are open-space. The open nature of the body was pursued along three lines: the body rejecting itself; the body open as the exposure of existence; the body exposed to other bodies, the world of bodies.

One could even say that the first chapter in its entirety had an implicit centre constituted by the question of space. Even when the discourse turned to the work of Emmanuel Levinas and its notion of position, the focus was on bodies’ way to articulate space. There it was said that position is never already within Being; instead it is a rage, a movement, the opening up of a space that wasn’t there beforehand. The lengthy analysis devoted to this concept was in fact pointing to the same direction as the reading of Jean-Luc Nancy: bodies spacing each other out do articulate space.

Levinas assumes that the ‘body is nowise a thing [...] because its being belongs to the order of the events [...] it is not posited; it is a position. It is not situated in a space given beforehand; it is the irruption in anonymous being of localization itself’.<sup>14</sup> Levinas attempts to refute what he calls the concreteness and usability of Heidegger’s world through the question of the body. In other words, he tries to formulate a concept

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<sup>13</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997), 3

<sup>14</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 69

that would precede the instrumentality of Heidegger's Being-in-the-world. From this search for an 'otherwise than the world' will spring the third part of this analysis.

The problem of the body also returns in Levinas' following analyses. In *Totality and Infinity* – 'the body is the elevation, but also the whole weight of position'<sup>15</sup> – Levinas claims that the essence of a body is to accomplish my position. Subjectivity begins with this taking position beyond mere living as making use of, beyond as it were the 'rumbling of the *there is*'. The notion of position also allows Levinas to distance his thinking from the geographical-political connotation of Heidegger's thought. In later writing Levinas will express all of his concern towards Heidegger's reasoning on the place of Germany and on the primacy of certain topography.

In *Otherwise than Being* the body becomes a necessary element in the construction of the ethical relation: 'the body is not only an image or figure here; it is the distinctive in oneself of the non-contraction of ipseity and its break-up'<sup>16</sup>. It is a decisive recurrence to oneself in name of the other.

Levinas is clear in saying that:

in contradistinction to the philosophers of existence we will not find the relation with the existent respected in its being [...] on being in the world, the care and doing [...] Doing, labor, already implies the relation with the transcendent<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and infinity*, trans Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 127

<sup>16</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006), 109

<sup>17</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 109

From this conception of the world, as fundamentally linked to the relation with the transcendent, follows a series of consequences, which will lead the research to its third and last part and will make possible the emergence of a path or even a whole philosophical tradition.

Two notions will be retained here from the analysis that has occupied the first stage of the research:

- the body as what spaces me from other beings; thus the question of access and origins from which the question of relations *between us* will also spring;
- the world of bodies – that is to say, ‘a world that is not initially subject to the compactness of space [...] rather, it is a world, where bodies initially articulate space’<sup>18</sup>.

## 2 - The world of bodies

The world of bodies bears no relation to a beyond or an outside of itself, for it is that which has escaped every representation. It is not surprising, given that the question of *what happens between us* is formulated in a text devoted to the analysis of Heideggerian ethics and the question of Being-with, that the conclusions Nancy reaches echo the Heideggerian argument of the world.

In order to get to what the world is, or to the apparently simple fact that the world is, Nancy draws largely on Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Despite the fact that this

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<sup>18</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 27.

volume is never mentioned, it constitutes an inevitable background throughout Nancy's *The creation of the world and Globalization*.

Nancy moves from the same point already envisaged by Heidegger when the German philosopher says that 'the concept of the world or the phenomenon thus designated, is what has hitherto not yet been recognized in philosophy'<sup>19</sup>. Nancy is then looking to investigate philosophically the question that there is a world. Within this concern, what one needs to be attentive to is 'the diction of word *world*'<sup>20</sup>. Nancy is looking to establish the notion of the world as a relational totality from which one cannot escape. By saying that one can't escape from this world, I am not proposing to give to the world some kind of Pascalian connotation, as if the world were a sort of *cachot*. Rather, what the expression hints at is the fact that what is at stake is at stake *in* the world and nowhere else (not beyond it). The preliminary gesture required in order to pose the question of the world beyond the tradition that wants its principle somewhere beyond it is to elude the subject - object model. As long as one places the thinking of the world on such a model, one necessarily understands the world as an ob-jectum, illuminated by the gaze of a subject.

The world, Nancy says, is a fact, our fact. Namely, any reference to a principle conferring sense has now left space for the immanent experience of the world. As one

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<sup>19</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 165.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 47.

The French original uses the word *diction*, which the word *determination* I believe does not do justice to. *Diction* refers both to the choice of words and to the way words are pronounced.

can see, what resonates here is the idea of being-in-the-world as a particular kind of absorption, absorption in a set of references, from which there is no way out.

What one should look into is therefore:

the very movement of the occidental history of *sense* as the movement of an ontotheology in principle involved with its own deconstruction, the *end* of which, in all senses is precisely “this world *here*”, this world that is to such an extent “*here*” that it is definitively beyond all gods and all signifying or signified instances of sense<sup>21</sup>.

The very attempt Nancy engages in revolves entirely around the possibility to reach an (open) conclusion on what the sense of the world is. That the sense of the world is to be found in the world itself and absolutely in what is immanent about it (although for this immanence Nancy uses the expression *transimmanence*, to mean that sense belongs to the structure of the world, but precisely as the ex-position of this structure<sup>22</sup>) could be said to rely on Heidegger’s discussion of significance as ‘that on the basis of which the world is disclosed as such’<sup>23</sup>. According to Dreyfus’ commentary this suggests that ‘the world and Dasein are ultimately so intertwined that one cannot separate the world from Daseining’<sup>24</sup>. Understood in this way, the world is subtracted from the subject - object structure.

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<sup>21</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett, (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997), 25

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 55

<sup>23</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O’Byrne, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 28.

<sup>24</sup> Hubert Dreyfus, *Being in the world. A commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time. Division I*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990), 98.

Nancy seems keen to retain most of the Heideggerian argument, despite the fact that he does not explore the modes of our everyday dealings with the world. In this way he avoids entering the discussion of how we encounter things in the world, ultimately limiting himself to define this relation in terms of exposition. ‘Man is the exposing of the world’ – he says – ‘and the world is the exposed of man’<sup>25</sup>.

Moreover Nancy finds in Heidegger’s work – in his critique of Descartes’ use of the concept of *substantia* for example, whereby the substantia is not defined and thus makes it impossible for philosophy to pronounce any statement with regard to what the world is and to the being of this world – an understanding of the world as being ‘world’ only for the ones inhabiting it.

Since the structure of the world, its worldliness and significance, are thoroughly connected with Dasein’s being-in-the-world, by way of a double transcendental movement of disclosure and discovery, the world cannot be read in reference to a substratum that does not participate in it. Heidegger writes that ‘the world is therefore something ‘wherein’ Dasein as an entity already was, and if in any manner it explicitly comes away from anything, it can never do more than come back to the world’<sup>26</sup>. This seems to contain one of the main points Nancy wants to advance: there is no way out of the world; the only way out still resides within the world.

The possibility to represent the world’s premise is replaced by the facticity of the world, by the fact that the world is here as ‘our fact’. Such a proposition calls for a

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<sup>25</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O’Byrne, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 28

<sup>26</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (London: Blackwell, 2006), 106-107

double reading. If it's true that the world is *our* fact, it is also true that the world is our fact and nobody else's – this 'negative' connotation should not be overlooked or passed by. For this reason, in *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that because of its structure the world could not be understood by a rational entity, who does not inhabit our world. Nancy, following Heidegger, articulates on this point a wider argument, emphasizing the idea of dwelling as the moment where a definition of the world becomes possible. As it has been pointed out earlier, Nancy conceives of the world as something into which one is absorbed, otherwise the world is not such anymore. If one can give a detailed description of the world, if the latter offers itself as an object of representation, one is already looking at something else. The only way to access the world is to access it as the 'wherein' one inhabits; 'the world is such just for those who inhabit it'.

Nancy then proceeds by specifying what inhabiting means and how any form of inhabiting must be the taking place of the possibility of a world to be. In my inhabiting I hold myself to the world, I take place in the world, where the 'in' does not address just 'insiderness' as 'being contained' or 'resting inside'. 'In' addresses in fact something quite different: the 'in' of 'this taking place in' sustains my most proper happening.

For Nancy the taking place as happening provides the world with a structure, or better with an ex-perience, while at the same time what takes place, takes place by way of that world. This taking place then not only recalls the double structure whereby Dasein is always already in the world – at the same time as it reveals the world's

significance by a double ‘attitude’ of disclosing and discovering – but seems to follow a number of passages that can be found in Heidegger. For instance when he says:

the world as already unveiled in advance is such that we do not in fact specifically occupy ourselves with it, or apprehend it, but instead it is so self-evident, so much a matter of course, that we are completely oblivious to it<sup>27</sup>.

Heidegger specifies the nature of the *in* of the Being-in-the-world by saying that we should not think the in as the insiderness of an object into a container. The ‘in’ is thus not a spatial representation whose expression renders Dasein as contained into the world; rather, it stands for Dasein’s concern towards the world, a concern Dasein is invested with, prior to its disclosure of the world:

Being-in [...] designates the kind of Being which an entity has when it is ‘in’ another one, as the water is ‘in’ the glass, or the garment is ‘in’ the cupboard [...] Being-in, on the other hand, is a state of Dasein’s Being; it is an existentiale [...] So one cannot think of it as the Being-present-at-hand of some corporeal Thing (such as a human body) ‘in’ an entity which is present-at-hand<sup>28</sup>.

Heidegger draws his analysis of Being-in from the etymology of ‘in’, which he finds in the Latin terms *habitare*, *diligere*, *colere*: to dwell, chose and cultivate. These terms, rather than specifying a container and a contained, bear a direct relation with

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<sup>27</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 165

<sup>28</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (London: Blackwell, 2006), 79

being-familiar-with and being-connected-with. Heidegger explicitly links the expression ‘having a world’ with the connotation of *habitare* that Being-in refers to: ‘In its very possibility this ‘having’ is founded upon the existential state of Being-in.’<sup>29</sup>

In a similar fashion, Nancy links ‘taking place’ with the Greek terms *êthos* and *ethos*, echoed by the Latin *habitus* and *habitare*, both related to *habere*, a ‘having – Nancy says – with a sense of being: it is a manner of being there and of standing in it’<sup>30</sup>. It is by way of Heidegger then that Nancy seems to reach the conclusion, based on the abovementioned etymological resonances, that the world ‘is an ethos, a *habitus* and an inhabiting’<sup>31</sup>, our fact.

This is what allows Nancy in the end to attribute to the world its own proper mode, its way of standing and occupying a place. ‘A world is an ethos, a habitus and an inhabiting: it is what holds to itself and in itself, following to its proper mode. It is a network of the self-reference of this stance. In this way it resembles a subject’<sup>32</sup>.

This last sentence creates a problem (a problem that confirms the kinship between Nancy’s thought and Heidegger’s, for the German philosopher asked himself the very same question)<sup>33</sup>. If the world resembles a subject then one would need to make sense of it through the model of subjectivity. As a consequence of this one would need to presuppose something, to look for something prior to the subject itself and to seek therefore the substance of this subjectivity. Here, as one can see all too easily, one

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<sup>29</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (London: Blackwell, 2006), 84

<sup>30</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 42

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 42

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 43

<sup>33</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 167

runs the risk of falling again into some kind of Cartesianism, at least the one Heidegger moves against, whereby an undefined substance comes to define the world. Against this argument Heidegger will say that ‘the world comes not afterwards, but beforehand, in the strict sense of the word’<sup>34</sup>. Also one should keep in mind that the analysis Nancy devotes to the world aims at defining it beyond a subject - object relation and beyond any presupposition according to which the sense of the world would have to be found beyond the world itself. If the world can be called subjective, this is not because it can be placed somewhere within the subject - object relation, but because the world presupposes itself outside any premise. The only possibility left open to the world-as-subject is its own revolution, the fact of turning on itself, from one end to the other. Nancy says: ‘the world does not presuppose itself: it is only coextensive to its extension as world, to the spacing of its places between which its resonances reverberates’<sup>35</sup>. Thus, following a Heideggerian path, Nancy manages to resolve the question of the world in terms of experience, a particular kind of experience taking place as the revolution of the world on itself.

The word experience has again to be understood according to the logic just exposed:

there is no experience of sense if ‘experience’ is supposed to imply the appropriation of a signification – but that there is nothing other than experience

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<sup>34</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 165

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 43

of sense if 'experience' says that sense precedes all appropriation or succeeds on and exceeds it<sup>36</sup>.

The sense of the world lies on the immanent experience the world makes of itself. As Nancy puts it, experience then consists in the circulation of sense infinitely reopening the available significations. Experience here is the given of sense delivering itself back to exposure. Hence the experience of the world would be in this case the apprehending of the world as an inhabiting, a self-standing that never presupposes itself. The world grinds on itself and this grinding is its experience. The world is thus this *habitus*, this taking place as dwelling that grinds on itself.

The points one needs to retain are mainly two:

- the world is such just for the ones who inhabit it;
- the world does not depend; rather it ex-ists itself.

How does the world appear for the first time as escaping the subject- object relationship? How does the world appear as that which is available just to those who inhabit it without depending on any substance?

Nancy is here exposing once more the argument of the end of metaphysics – the closure of the onto-theological and onto-teleological horizon. More specifically his gesture attempts a re-reading of the Heideggerian compound expression being-in-the-world.

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<sup>36</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997), 11

Nancy shares with Heidegger a point of departure: both attempt to think the world as that which has never been thought before in its *being as such*. The philosophical urgency Nancy moves from revolves around the need to think the world not as an object, but as a habitus, ‘what holds to itself and in itself’. The question to which one tries to respond, the very question the philosophical tradition has left open, is formulated as follows:

What has remained unresolved is the grasping of a concrete world that would be the world of the proper freedom and singularity of each and of all without claim to a world beyond-the-world<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 38

### 3 - The World is without a why. Deconstruction of the World.

*Let the world be without name for a time. Let things listen to what they are. In silence, in their own time and their own way.*

Jean-Luc Godard<sup>38</sup>

One needs here to take a step backwards and reread the passage that has led us this far. The present discussion started out from this:

The with understood in terms of existence, must therefore be elaborated as a quite particular space – the word space being understood here both in the literal sense, since the existents are also bodies, extended beings, and in a figurative sense, which would answer the question” ‘What takes place between us?’<sup>39</sup>.

Nancy is here using a vocabulary that draws on Heidegger’s *Being-with*. At times it seems as if the entirety of Nancy’s effort were devoted to reopening the problem of Being-with as in sections 26-27 of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Given the question investigated here, a passage resonates with particular relevance: ‘the world is always the one that I share with others’<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> *Nouvelle Vague*, prod. by Alain Sarde, dir. by Jean-Luc Godard, 90 min.,Mercury Film Group, 1990

<sup>39</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘The Being-with of the Being-there’, in *Rethinking Facticity*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2008), 119

<sup>40</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 155

Most of the questions this second part of the research sets at its horizon derive from and are triggered by an attempt advanced by a group of philosophers after Heidegger's work. The debate formed around this question has tried to reconsider – according to different trajectories and taking in some cases opposite paths – *Being-with* as the possibility to open the question of subjectivity outside individuality.

What is important at this point is to analyze the space from which *Being-with* emerges and begins to work. The first challenge so far has been to connote this space as the world. The second is to recognize what the diction of world is able to tell us, this diction that a long tradition has hidden away.

The *with* of Being-with discloses the question of the world in all its urgency. If the *with* in its existential determination articulates itself as a space – both the physical space of a coming-to-presence and the space as relational set – then such a space, that has been here denoted as the world, collaborates to define the *with* itself. This is to say that the *with* and the world are intimate, so intimately bound up that the first emergence of the *with* can be read from within the question of the world. If the world is our fact, then it is a fact that has first of all to do with 'us'.

The investigation of the notion of the world, of the world as a space, is nevertheless invested with the character of necessity. At this stage *with* indicates first of all a common space. It is thus necessary to question the nature of such a space.

For Jean-Luc Nancy the question of the with moves, or better revolves around, the question of a space, a space that – one will have to wait for this to come into sight – sometimes is also structured as a thin line running between Heidegger's destination, the destining of a people, and a pure juxtaposition of impersonal bodies.

The deconstructive gesture Nancy performs – in order to understand how the world appears as our fact – lets emerge the conditions for the abovementioned determination of the world. In other terms Nancy seems to take up Heidegger's question 'How does the deity enter into philosophy?'

Nancy formulates a similar demand, but according to an almost reverse articulation: 'How does God abandon the world?' What happens to the world once God's presence stops signaling the sense of the world from its rearguard beyond the world itself? The nature of that place that was once divine and grounded in the highest cause assumes different traits: 'if the god no longer offers himself, if he no longer even conceals his presence in his divine being, he leaves only bare places, where no presence withdraws or comes'<sup>41</sup>.

Both Nancy and Heidegger elaborate on the development of the Western tradition as the search for a ground. This engagement with the idea of a foundation draws the trajectory for the institution of divine places, of the world itself as a divine place, intending with this expression that the world becomes a place caused by a Supreme Being. The argument cannot be completely separated from a deconstruction of Christianity and of monotheism, at least insofar as a discussion of the God of philosophy makes evident that monotheism is not simply the reduction of the Greek-Roman pantheon to one single divinity, but the positing of the divine as an existent being holding real qualities. The question therefore is not just that of a singularity

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<sup>41</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 111

replacing plurality, but that of the place of the divine in the real. One could say that monotheism accounts for Being itself.

With the question ‘How does the deity enter into philosophy’ – asked in the context of a debate with Hegel – Heidegger aims at penetrating the nature of the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics, which is to say the posing of grounds that – within the Western tradition – has allowed and dominated the thinking of the Being of beings. Drawing in particular on his *What is Metaphysics* Heidegger inquires on the nature of the God of philosophy, the metaphysical concept of God as *causa sui*. ‘How does the deity enter into philosophy?’

Heidegger’s task is to deal with the nature of the question itself. What is in question in the onto-theological? What are the terms of the belonging together of ontology and theology?

Heidegger makes clear in this context that ontology and theology cannot be thought of as two distinct disciplines coming together in a second stage. What must be considered is indeed the nature of the unity according to which they belong together, which means looking for ‘beings as such in the universal and primal at one with beings as such in the highest and ultimate’<sup>42</sup>.

The aforementioned unity has established itself as our way of thinking the difference between Being and beings. Philosophy has represented this difference to itself in onto-theological terms. The difference just mentioned, however, is what one encounters at any time – therefore it cannot be said to be simply a contribution of

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<sup>42</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 62

representational thinking. This means that on one side Being can only be thought of as the Being of beings and on the other that beings can only be reached according to the ways in which they account for Being. Being constitutes itself as that which transits the arrival of beings, the difference becoming as a result ‘the perdurance of overwhelming and arrival’<sup>43</sup>. It is in this way that Being is posed as ground. In turn, and still by virtue of the difference, beings as such – as a totality, a whole – account for the ground. The difference is then thought in terms of Being as that which grounds because it allows beings’ presence and in terms of beings as that which account for Being because they present Being’s active nature. Being as grounding becomes something that is, something that appears as presence and therefore needs ‘accounting for through a being, that is causation, and indeed causation by the highest cause’<sup>44</sup>. This configuration is clearly expressed by Leibniz in *The 24 Theses of Metaphysics*, a text Heidegger recalls both in *Identity and Difference* and *The end of philosophy*.

According to Leibniz: ‘ratio est in natura’; ‘ratio debet esse in aliquo Ente Reali’; ‘Est scilicet Ens illud ultima ratio Rerum, et uno vocabulo solet appellari DEUS’<sup>45</sup>. The totality of Beings must be thought in terms of a ground that justifies its existence. This ground must be identified in the realm of ‘reality’. It must be conceived as a real cause that grounds the actuality of existing things. This real cause must in turn be necessary, which means not grounded in anything else. This necessary being that grounds the existent goes under the name of God.

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<sup>43</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 65

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 72

<sup>45</sup> ‘There is a ground in nature’ – ‘This ground ought to be in some real being or cause’ – ‘That being is the ultimate ground of things and is usually designated by the one word GOD’. Martin Heidegger, *The end of philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 49-50.

These passages from Leibniz highlight the specific movement prompted by onto-theology: once the transformation of Being into real ground has occurred, then the ground is identified with God, a real being providing the first cause. Therefore we think onto-theologically because we always think beings both as belonging to a common ground and as a whole granted by the highest being, whose existence is necessary (*per se concipi* is the formula used by Spinoza). Beings belong to a common ground that makes their presence possible, while this common ground at the same time belongs to beings according to the existence of a supremely original matter that exists necessarily.

Heidegger therefore concludes that the ‘deity enters into philosophy through the perdurance of which we think at first as the approach to the active nature of the difference between Being and beings’<sup>46</sup>.

This is the framework on which Nancy too starts his work. Nancy’s attempts seem to respond to this urgency opened by Heidegger across a number of texts in terms of ‘destruction of ontology’, what John Stambaugh in the introduction to *The end of Philosophy* defines as ‘the unbuilding (*de-struere*) of the layers covering up the original nature of Being, the layers which metaphysical thinking has con-structed’<sup>47</sup>.

Although Nancy’s argument does not refer explicitly to the Heideggerian notion of ‘appropriation’, it nevertheless finds its point of departure in the breach operated by

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<sup>46</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 71

<sup>47</sup> Joan Stambaugh ‘Introduction’, in Martin Heidegger, *The End of philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), ix

Heidegger at the heart of our tradition. The following remarks attempt to take this ‘provenance’ into account.

To grasp how the deconstruction announced by Nancy in fact participates in the construction of the world of the onto-theological tradition, one should start by reading the very beginning of a text named *Urbi et Orbi*:

‘it is no longer possible to identify either a city that would be ‘The City’ – as Rome was for so long – or an orb that would provide the contour of a world extended around this city [...] it is no longer possible to identify either the city or the orb of the world in general’<sup>48</sup>.

‘Urbi et orbi’ is the expression used in papal addresses to Rome and the world, or to Rome as the world. To name the world ‘Rome’ meant to imagine the world as inscribed within a particular topography, in that case that of the city of Rome and the walls – *Murus Servii Tullii*, *Murus Aureliani*, the walls protecting the *Civitas Leonina* – that were separating the city from the surrounding countryside.

‘Urbi et orbi’ makes the world the subject - object of a metaphor, of a representation. The world has today escaped this possibility, the possibility of a being represented or subjected. The possibility of this break away from its representations – from the ones held true by the tradition – is already at play within the tradition itself. This is precisely the juncture Nancy tries to bring about by attempting a

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<sup>48</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 33

deconstruction of the world. The deconstruction of the onto-theological tradition – *our* tradition, the tradition of the Western world that comes to make the entire world – can once again not be completely separated from a deconstruction of Christianity:

The opening of the world in the world is the result of a destitution or a deconstruction of Christianity, which goes back or which advances in it all the way to the extremity at which nihilism breaks up the presence and the value of God, breaks up the sense of salvation as an escape from the world<sup>49</sup>.

The more one progresses with the imaging of the world – the more one forges pictures of it from satellites – the less the world resembles a *topos*. When the Pope was pronouncing his blessing it was clear to everyone that he was thinking the world as a particular image of God: the order God had wanted for his creatures. The Pope could say ‘urbi et orbi’ just because his audience would have immediately understood the world as the subject of.... This formula was made available moving from the consideration that the world was the subject of the making of God and of the making of God itself, God’s praxis.

The same use of the word *orbe* allows one to imagine that the Pope had in mind a particular shape for the world: not just an image as idea, but also an image as shape. The rim surrounding the world and providing it with a sense, theological or historical-teleological, filling the word with the consistency of a world, does not include the world anymore.

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<sup>49</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure. The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant and Michael Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 78

### **Nouvelle Vague postscript**

In the intimacy of his flat, his figure softly lightened, a man is typing passages of a novel on his typewriter. We recognize the noise of fingers tinkering with the keys. A voice-over narrates the events of a life that is becoming literary creation. The following frame introduces a woman wearing a green skirt and stiletto high heels shoes. The camera follows her steps, while she is seemingly walking towards no specific destination. Her legs are the only thing we see, while the voice of the man comments: *Les jambes des femmes sont des compas qui arpentent le globe terrestre en tous sens, lui donnant son équilibre et son harmonie*<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> 'Women's legs are like compass points, circling the globe and giving it its balance and harmony'. *The Man who loved Women*, prod. and dir. by François Truffaut, 120 min., Film du Carrosse, 1977

How could one therefore address the world nowadays<sup>51</sup>, provided that the metonymy – Rome – has ceased to work? It has ceased to work not just because there is no city around which the world is wrapped, but also because the meaning of the word *world* should be readdressed today in a fashion that excludes any appropriation and also any illustration (as the world as a sphere or orbe, would suggest). One would rather have to address the world as a matter of fact. To say that one is left with the world means that the world ‘is such only for those who inhabit it’<sup>52</sup>, a world without principle.

That the world is ‘without principle’ should be read as inhabiting two poles of any reasoning on the world. This double meaning articulates the opening and the open end of a possible deconstruction of the world. One could say that ‘the world is without principle’ presents itself also in another form, it can be spoken out under another fashion that says: ‘the world is without reason’. Once translated in such a way, this new formation posits the following: that there is no reason to engage in a discussion that holds the world as its centre, for – the world being an *ens creatum*, the very here below, placed at the bottom of the hierarchical vertical structure—its very reason, the point of departure as it were for reasoning, would necessarily (and thus eternally) lie beyond the world itself.

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<sup>51</sup> Among the many interpretations not contemplated because of lack of space and time, it’s worth recalling here two main traits or directions that will remain out of the frame, although it would be definitely worth considering them elsewhere. One has to do with Heidegger’s statement that ‘*the world is always spiritual*’ and the analysis Derrida devotes to this in ‘Of Spirit’ and the other with Wittgenstein claim that ‘*the sense of the world must lie outside the world*’.

<sup>52</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 42

This reason thus rests on the specification provided by an *ens perfectissimum*, which itself requires no specification in order to be what it is. Hence, every time one sets oneself out to speak about the world, one needs to define the subject – or creator – of the world.

On the other hand ‘the world is without reason’ means something that might sound just like the exact opposite. It means that the world is in itself in no need, it is determined in a self-standing, which requires no further specification and no further representation. According to this articulation the world would finally be able to confront its own freedom: revolution. This is the world-subject (although one should, it has been mentioned already, always be careful when it comes to the term subject).

What needs to be highlighted is how the world, from being that which needs to be rescued from the abyss, becomes itself the [ $\alpha$ -byss], that which is without a ground.

The abovementioned movement is such that one might find in the end that the figure of the subject of the world has been replaced by the world-subject. As Nancy says, after Heidegger, a long and lasting tradition has covered up the question of the world by replacing it with something *better*, its creator or with a substance accounting for the phenomenon world. In this scenario the world can’t account for itself, because its sense is deposited beyond its ‘thereness’.

The world, augmented by an ideal world, which lays above ( $\upsilon\pi\epsilon\rho$ ), or via a  $\pi\rho\omicron\tau\omicron\nu\ \kappa\iota\nu\omicron\nu\nu\ \alpha\kappa\iota\nu\epsilon\tau\omicron\nu$  that moves it, has never been enough. Nevertheless one can see how even the most radically transcendent, the most vertical tradition, assigning the creation, order and destination of the world to a distant God beyond the world, does not fail to bring fore the question of the existence of the world.

It should not surprise anyone to find within this same tradition a constant questioning of the world and of our being-in-the-world. One could say, as Nancy outlines, that the metaphysical tradition has in fact brought fore the question of the world and of its immanence with such insistence that the question never really deserted philosophical thinking. In a formula one could say that the more one attempts to explain the world as the outcome of God's praxis – God's very productivity - the closer one draws God to the world. This being the case the only possibility for God to remain a Supreme Being would be for God to be completely alien to the world, so Supreme that no account of the world can, even accidentally, even by an odd trajectory, touch on him. God could be saved and thus save his divinity only as that which is farthest from the world. As long as God is at a distance, but still within concern, as Heidegger would say, still within the worldly horizon, then it is somehow fated to follow the destiny of the world until its own withdrawal within the world itself. The Supreme Being, which used to be the distance of the 'from a distance', privileged point of view on the world<sup>53</sup>, has departed that position, closing the gap from the world, until no distance is left, not even a diaphragm, and the world and God become so bound up that one does not need to reference any supremacy or any beyond. Nancy puts it like this:

The God of onto-theology was progressively stripped of the divine attributes of an independent existence and only retained those of the existence of the world

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<sup>53</sup> Among others, one particular figure in Christian mysticism provide very vivid images of the ones getting close to God and thus grasping the world. St Teresa of Avila wrote about S.Pedro de Alcantara that by means of an insuperable devotion he had put the world at his feet. A large iconography was to develop from this, showing the Saint with the globe at his feet.

considered in its immanence, that is to say, also in the undecidable amphibology of an existence as necessary as it is contingent<sup>54</sup>.

The places of the divine are now empty and have left space for what in Nancy's terms can be called the spacing out of sense. In commenting Heidegger's famous statement that 'Only a God can save us now' (even more remarkable considering those were Heidegger's last words), Nancy reminds us that 'every god is the 'last one', which is to say that every god dissipates and dissolves the very essence of the divine'<sup>55</sup>. The necessity of God leaves in this way space for the necessity of the re-affirmation of the sense of the world against (in front of) any given sense.

A world where God has left its place vacant is a world that stretches itself out:

divine places, without gods, with no god, are spread around everywhere around us, open and offered to our coming, to our going or to our presence [...] ourselves, alone, out to meet that which we are not, and which the gods for their part have never been<sup>56</sup>.

Thus it is within this tradition that one should seek the crumbling away of the otherness of God and the becoming apparent of a world without principle/reason. If it's true, as Levinas also underlines, that 'the God of philosophers, from Aristotle to

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<sup>54</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 44

<sup>55</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure. The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, Michael Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 27

<sup>56</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor et al (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 50

Leibniz, by way of the God of the scholastics, is a God adequate to reason, a comprehended god who could not trouble the autonomy of consciousness'<sup>57</sup>, then this deconstruction participates in the very construction of onto-theology itself.

The deconstructive gesture emerges as the search for a movement within that which rids itself of any principle and could be formalized, with Nancy, as follows: 'If it [the world] is necessary without being the effect of a superior reason (or will) what is that necessity?'<sup>58</sup>

The trajectory Spinoza follows in treating the question of the world and his notion of Divinity have already been examined in the first chapter. Spinoza's notion of divinity consistently departs from the Christian onto-theological tradition. Spinoza solves the problem of the relation between the immaterial God and the material world by abolishing the immateriality of God. What is more, Spinoza places at the centre of his system the denial of final causes and the necessitarianism, which drastically excludes the possibility of the creation of the world as an act of pure will. Spinoza says, in the appendix to the first volume of the *Ethics* that God 'acts from the necessity alone of his nature [...]' adding that 'things have been predetermined by Him, not indeed from freedom of will, or from absolute good pleasure, but from His absolute nature'<sup>59</sup>. What has just been said stands in overt contrast with Aquinas' conclusions that God works not by necessity, but by His intellect and will. Spinoza goes as far as

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<sup>57</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', in *Deconstruction in context*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 346

<sup>58</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 45

<sup>59</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press 1949), 72

to say that ‘Nature has no end set before it, and [...] all final causes are nothing but human fictions’<sup>60</sup>.

Even before Spinoza, another philosopher working within the onto-theological tradition had already reached similar positions. He was, similarly to Spinoza, to be heavily attacked because of his ideas and finally burned alive by the Inquisition. Giordano Bruno’s philosophy seems to have significantly influenced the metaphysical thinkers that followed him, although he had claimed to be interested purely in natural philosophy – physics – leaving further speculations to theologians. In fact Bruno’s philosophy extends well beyond a mere cosmological interest. Moving from Nicholas of Cusa’s ideas, Bruno argues for the immanency of God in ways that will echo both in Spinoza’s *Deus sive Natura* and in Leibniz’ idea of an intellect organizing the world as the ‘best of all possible worlds’. Establishing a link between the material and the immaterial infinity of the universe, Bruno claims that God would be in need of the world as much as the world is in need of Divinity. Furthermore the relation between multiplicity and unity is worked out in a way that allows Bruno to say that the unity of the universe lies within it and not beyond or above the universe itself, thus denying the existence of two distinct worlds. Divinity is then all in all and everywhere, not localizable beyond the world and not in a particular place. What is interesting for the current research is the conclusion Bruno reaches with regard to the fact that God cannot be placed in an ‘elsewhere’, given the coincidence in God of spirituality and matter. The possibility for naming an elsewhere is thus foreclosed. Bruno defined his thinking as a new beginning, both for the cosmological and for the ethical implications

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<sup>60</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner Press 1949), 74

that this could have, starting for instance with the question of the Christology as mediation between the *ens perfectissimum* and the *ens creatum*. Dialogue Fifth of *Cause, principle and Unity*, starts with one of the interlocutors, Teofilo, saying:

The universe is, therefore, one, infinite and immobile. I say that the absolute possibility is one, that the act is one; the form, or soul, is one, the matter or body is one, the thing is one, being is one [...] it possesses no outside to which it might be subject and by which it might be affected<sup>61</sup>.

A few lines further down, the same character concludes that: ‘the universe comprises all being in a totality; for nothing that exists is outside or beyond infinite being, as the latter has no outside or beyond’<sup>62</sup>, something that will profoundly resonate in the philosophies of Spinoza, Malebranche and Leibniz.

The latter, in particular commenting on God as Supreme Wisdom, will define God as existing everywhere as a centre, having everything present to itself immediately.

Leibniz’ God works as the Reason of the universe. Although this Sufficient Reason is immanently present in the organization of the universe, it is not however to be found within things themselves. Even if Leibniz thus retains the supremacy of God and claims that things, lacking any perfection, do receive a sort of perfection from Him – through the idea of each monad as ‘a perpetual living mirror of the universe’<sup>63</sup> – the thought of a God less and less divine reaches with him an articulated stage. God

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<sup>61</sup> Giordano Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity*, trans. Robert de Lucca, Richard J. Blackwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 87

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 89

<sup>63</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *On the ultimate origination of the Universe*, in ‘Monadology and other philosophical essays’, trans. Paul Schrecker and Ane Martin Schrecker (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1977), 248

calculates and the world comes to be ('Cum Deus calculat fit mundus'), but calculation may have nothing to do with creation.

In particular when he says: 'there is a certain urgency towards existence in possible things [...]'<sup>64</sup>, he seems to imply that the world might just as well happen out of its own necessity, without any principle prompting it to change from possibility to actuality. It is perhaps with Leibniz that the idea of a world without principle emerges most clearly.

In the language employed by Nancy this would also mean that the world has no ground beyond its own taking place, our way of *in-habiting* it. The absence of principle is the absence of the world's premise. As Nancy puts it:

If the world essentially is not the representation of a universe, nor that of a here below, but the excess – beyond any representation of an ethos or of a habitus – of a stance by which the world stands by itself, configures itself, and exposes itself in itself, relates to itself without referring to any given principle or to any determined end, then one must address the principle of such an absence of principle directly<sup>65</sup>.

It is crucial here to make sense of this 'without principle' that Nancy talks about, because it is this lack of principle that makes possible the world as a taking place of the *us*.

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<sup>64</sup> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, trans. Leroy Loemker (London: Springer, 1975), 487

<sup>65</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew, (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 47

It is not a new idea to say that the world is without reason [...] We know quite well that it is found within Angelus Silesius (“the rose grows without reason”), but one does not always notice how it works within all the great formulations of the most classical rationalism<sup>66</sup>.

By quoting Silesius, Nancy is here just partially disguising a reference to Heidegger’s *The Principle of Reason*. Lending an ear to the lack of reason(s) with regard to the world means approaching once more, from a different angle, the question of the sense of the world. This operation also lets the various Heideggerian filiations of a thought on the world emerge more clearly.

More than three hundred years ago Leibniz wrote: *nihil est sine ratione*, speaking out for the first time in the history of Western thinking the principle of reason, which had, Heidegger says, slept within the inner structure of philosophical thought. This is, Leibniz repeats in the *Principles of Nature and Grace*, the most important issue, the very question of philosophy.

Within modernity, Heidegger says, one finds the unconditional demand for sufficient reasons, perfect cognition as the stretching out of complete rationality.

Heidegger opens the series of lectures on Leibniz by saying: ‘what the principle says is illuminating. When something is illuminating we understand it without further ado’<sup>67</sup>.

And yet the principle can be read according to two tonalities. The first one reads the principle as ‘*nothing is without reason*’ and addresses exactly the demand for the

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<sup>66</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew, (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 47

<sup>67</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 3

completeness of a foundation. The principle of reason becomes in the rationalist tradition that which decrees the existence of a being, of what may or may not count as an object of cognition. Therefore, if heard in this way, the principle is a statement about cognition as that which transforms the world into an object. The principle expresses the essence of being human as an 'I that relates to the world such that it renders this world to itself in the form of connections correctly established between its representations'<sup>68</sup>.

Heidegger tries though to also lend an ear to a second tonality, where the principle is read as 'nothing *is* without *reason*'. Here it is the word 'is' that becomes decisive.

The principle of reason can in this way be read as a statement on beings and in particular on the Being of beings. However it is thanks to this second tonality that names Being that the first one becomes true in the first place. As Heidegger points out: 'as the fundamental principle of rendering sufficient reasons, the principle of reason is thereby true only because a word of being speaks in it that says: being and ground/reason: the same'<sup>69</sup>.

If understood in this way, then the principle of reason speaks of the belonging-together of being and reason/ground. Being and ground/reason: the same.

The word *ratio*, though, does not explicitly speak of Being. The belonging together of Being and grounding must therefore be read within the tradition of Western thinking (the *Geschick* of Being, Being's destining) there where *ratio* translates the Greek *logos*.

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<sup>68</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 119

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 125

Thought from within the *Geschick* of Being, the belonging together must then be heard in its Greek formulation: το αυτο (ειναι) τε και λογος<sup>70</sup>.

It is in the word *logos* that the belonging-together emerges more clearly. *Logos* names being because it names what lies present as the ground for everything that lies-present.

In Heidegger's words:

Logos names this belonging-together of being and ground. It names them insofar as it, in one breath, says: 'allowing to lie present as allowing to arise', 'emerging-on-its-own' [...] and 'allowing to lie present as presenting', laying a bed of soil, "grounds"<sup>71</sup>.

Logos names being in terms of an allowing to arise. Named this way, according to the word *logos*, being is the ground from which everything arises. This also means though that Being – as that which grounds – remains itself groundless; every foundation would degrade being to a being. Being is then that which cannot be appropriately founded and thus remains immeasurable. Heidegger calls it the abyss. Being is abyss insofar as being is ground. The leap into which, Heidegger claims, our thinking has stepped with the principle of reason consists in this reconfiguration of the un-needy nature of Being. Being as the a-byss is then the limit of our thinking; that from whence something commences emerging as what it is. The principle of reason

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<sup>70</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 106

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 107

thus stakes on us a demand: to consider the lack of any principle as the only possible principle.

Therefore the second tonality establishes for the first time the possibility to think Being not according to beings (in particular to an ultimate being, *causa sui*), but qua Being: Being as that which cannot be accounted for by another being, not even the highest ultimate cause.

It is at this point that Heidegger introduces a leap: if Being is ground, then it means that Being is not grounded, it is an abyss. Being as abyss therefore does not repose on something present; instead, what Being reposes on is the 'play'. This play is what cannot be properly thought, since our manner of thinking does not allow us to think it. The play cannot be thought thoroughly because our way of thinking provokes us to think it again in terms of ground. If we try we end up reducing it to something present, 'we take the play as something that is'<sup>72</sup>.

The play is instead determined as the dynamic of freedom and necessity and is not to be understood in terms of an object for cognition or representation. This play is without a why. It is the active nature of the play itself – its playing – that shrivels away the 'because'. This play is 'the world that worlds and temporalizes, in that, as *κοσμος*, it brings the jointure of being to a glowing sparkle'<sup>73</sup>. The play is *αωv*, according to Heraclitus' Fragment 52, ever-being (*αει – οv*), non-appropriable and non-finishable. The mystery 'in which humans are engaged throughout their life, that play in which their essence is at stake'<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 112

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 113

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 113

This play is the world without principle. It is *κοσμος* not as the fulfillment of complete rationality, but as the singular circulation of sparkles. The juncture of the world without principle is the rendering of the abyss onto us, the continuous rendering of essence by the singular crossing of existence. ‘Us’ in a world without principle indicates precisely this: the tuning in with the crossing of essences opened onto an abyss. A world that plays is a world that constantly puts the essence of the human at stake – thus bringing the sense of the human forward always in sparkles of sense, before or in excess of an ultimate meaning. This is the world as the field of existence.

Within the formulation of the Principle of Reason by Leibniz – *Nihil est sine ratione* – found at the heart of the rationalist tradition of metaphysics as the claim for an all-encompassing Rational Ground, Heidegger reads the belonging-together of ground and being, and the abyssal character of Being itself, which is now not accounted for by an ultimate cause (God). Being reposes instead on a play as the engagement of essence in the work of undecided existence: the world not as a rendered reason, but as the venture of existence. Being as abyss unconceals being as play, where essence is continuously put at stake. This play is the work of the world, its becoming *κοσμος* beyond any pre-established order. It depends on us, ‘whether and how we, hearing the movements of this play, play along and accommodate ourselves to the play’<sup>75</sup>. This play is excess, the world is in excess of itself; its essence is continuously submitted to existence.

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<sup>75</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 113

What is a world that worlds then? It is a world that has itself as world, which means here that it has itself as the space of its own principle, or better that its space is constituted as the lack of any principle, as the consistent space where any reference to a beyond falls inside the a-byss, falls inside itself. This is precisely the mystery which Nancy too evokes: ‘the absolute mystery of spacing itself, according to which there is a “world,” from that dis-enclosure that is preceded by no enclosure of Being’<sup>76</sup>. The world has no principle outside its space.

What seems to change, in a decisive manner from Leibniz to Heidegger and Nancy is the *eminent* character of the world. In Leibniz, beyond the principle of reason lies a God that *at least* is calculating. In *On the ultimate origination of the universe*, for instance, Leibniz writes: ‘the reasons for the world are concealed in some entity outside the world, which is different from the chain or series of things, the aggregate of which constitutes the world’<sup>77</sup>.

In Heidegger’s text one finds another decisive leap, triggered by the definition of the principle of reason as that which shows the play of ‘the world that worlds’ (the world as the rendition of the abyss onto ‘us’). In Leibniz the world is still placed within a chain of causality. Leibniz still employs the scholastic term *eminenter*, which stands for a movement through which a cause is more perfect than the effect it produces. When instead cause and effect are of the same nature, we would say that the effect is contained *formaliter* (formally) in the cause. The world, as cause of itself, as

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<sup>76</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure. The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, Michael Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 161

<sup>77</sup> Gottfried Leibniz, *On the ultimate origination of the Universe* in ‘Monadology and other philosophical essays’, trans. Paul Schrecker and Ane Martin Schrecker (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1977), 86

its own revolution, is the cause that contains – *formaliter* – its effect. To put it in a different language: ‘the world [...] is a fact without reason or end, and it is our fact’<sup>78</sup>. [That the world plays could also mean that it produces a sound, but this sound is the product of its revolution, of the two ends of this same world extending one toward the other and touching each other. One has here lost the *harmonia celestis*, the music of the stars – we can’t hear it anymore, but what we can lend an ear to is the music of the revolution of the world on itself (revolution = return to the point from where a movement has started)].

A world that springs from the principle of reason, without a why, growing in excess of the demand of foundations, this is the world of bodies. A world that is configured differently from the world as cosmos – the world the God creator and cause had delivered – but also differently from the world as earth explored and mastered by a conqueror. The latter would in fact be the world of a complete rationality or at least of the possibility of a completion operated by reason, by representations permeated by reason. The world is not the property – ‘re-presented and presented to the faculty of representation’<sup>79</sup> – that finds its unity in the mastering subject.

The world without principle therefore also requires a disengagement from a “‘conquest of space’ conceived if not in terms of kosmotheoria, at least in terms of kosmopoiesis, mastery and possession of the universe and thus mastery and possession of its reproduction by and for the subject ‘man’”<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>78</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 45

<sup>79</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The end of philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 61

<sup>80</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 40

This world is the world of the density, of the space between bodies; its truth, its very articulation being that of the spacing out of bodies, of their incommensurable distance. This density releases the question of the world as a question of singular sharing: ‘sharing singularity means to configure a world, a quantity of possible worlds in the world. This configuration allows the singularities to expose themselves’<sup>81</sup>.

The world as the exposition of singularities, necessity of their being-with.

The *with* or the question springing from the Heideggerian *Mitsein* has to be analyzed as moving from a space, a space articulated by bodies, by extended beings. The world is the space just described as that which can no longer be addressed, that which no longer has an address. It is in this fashion that the world can be the space that belongs to the ones who inhabit it. One must pay attention to the fact that no other space would be able to resist this formulation. The only space where one can articulate a discussion on ‘us’, on me *with* you, rather than simply me *and* you, is this world that allows no discussion on its principle. As Nancy says, “the world is not a unity of the objective or external order; a world is never in front of me or else is not my world. But if it is absolutely other, I would not even know, or barely, that it is a world”<sup>82</sup>.

Singular existence is played out at the level of the taking place of the world, but only inasmuch as the taking place of the world is all a matter of my existence.

The extension of the world, which has overcome any possible shape and epitomical city, is the distension towards all the sharing out that our existences are. To put it in

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<sup>81</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 46

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 45

other words, the existence of the world is nothing else than the *distance* – the play of the distances – we take from one another. The configuration in which something happens between ‘us’ finds its articulation in this touch in distance, it is the very *touch of distance*.

To say that the world is worldly amounts to saying that a world makes sense, while at the same time the sense of this world circulates, never leaving our borders but also never resting on them, circulating around and among us.

The sense of the world is a sending (‘le sens est toujours le sens d'un chemin’, says Derrida in a text devoted to Heidegger<sup>83</sup>) from one side of the world to the other, a sense that, although it never stops traversing the world, lacerating its texture, never falls outside it. This sense is the play of the world that worlds, the truth of the without principle. The principle of reason as read by Heidegger says that one can apprehend the world as that whose sense has no principium, no appropriable beginning and no absolute rendered reason. Instead the sense of the world continuously crosses out the possibilities for its own completion.

We experience the world and our experience is (and not represents or gives) the sense of the world, in that the world is a suppression of any sending out, of any sense residing somewhere else than in the world itself, but it is also a suppression of any resting of sense on a grasped and granted ground. What is worldly about the world is

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<sup>83</sup> Jacques Derrida, *De l'esprit. Heidegger et la question* (Paris : Éditions Galilée, 1987), 142  
Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit. Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 90

that it is our taking place, not as an otherwise than the world, but rather as that which makes the world what it is, the promise of sense<sup>84</sup>.

The trajectory of this reflection leads us to the core of the question, to a triad, to three quotations, one building upon the other and producing a sort of climax, that one is now ready to understand: ‘the world is such for those who inhabit it’, ‘sharing singularity means to configure a world’ and ‘the world is our fact’.

Outside this configuration, the world is not a world anymore; rather it becomes what Nancy defines as a *glomus*, that is exactly its opposite, the dispersed juxtaposition of beings, a confused solidity. Glomus would here be the exact opposite of the word *mundus*, which originally stood for the pure (‘*Omnia munda mundis*’, says St.Paul). That the world is an ordered system is a definition that dates back to Pythagoras and his school. For our purpose the word ‘world’ resonates with a much subtler tone, as it means, simply, the age of man, but also this world as opposed to the afterlife.

This very long analysis of the world – touching mainly on Nancy’s reformulation of Heideggerian motifs – brings back *our* initial question, the question that concern ‘us’.

Two points should have emerged:

- the world happens as the taking place of a *us*;
- we take place as a being-in-the-world or as a being-world ;

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<sup>84</sup> In *Dis-Enclosure* Nancy writes: ‘After all modern signifies a world always awaiting its truth of, and as, world, a world whose proper sense is not given, is not available, is, rather, in project or in promise’ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure. The Deconstruction of Christianity*, Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, Michael Smith trans. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 34-35

### **Double postscript**

The film opens with a peasant wearing a traditional straw hat walking in front of the camera until he comes to occupy the entire frame. Far behind him a smaller-than-real-life version of the Tour Eiffel cracks the horizon filled with skyscrapers.

In the following shot a woman on a train answers her mobile phone: 'I am going to India, has Fenzghuo bought food?'

The camera then follows the little train as it passes in front of the Arch de Triumph and indulges for few seconds on the Pyramids, while a voice-over says: 'See the world without ever leaving Beijing'.

Guards in uniform stroll around, sometimes riding a horse, moving quickly from London to Rome and from Notre-Dame to Manhattan ('haven't the Twin Towers been destroyed?' says someone, astonished, at some point). The weather never changes.

The shot of the Tour Eiffel, aligned next to contemporary skyscrapers overlooking a lake in a foggy and sultry morning, recurs for the whole duration of the film, up to the point of becoming its trademark. The titles appearing at some point read: 'Paris in Beijing suburbs', 'Tokyo in Beijing suburbs' and so on.

This is the only manner in which one can represent a world without principle (the title of the movie is in fact 'The World'<sup>85</sup>). The only way this world lets itself be represented is by repetition, by a duplication, by an infinitely extending pleonasm, which can collapse, all of a sudden, whenever a passage appears as being too brusque (as it's the case with the Twin Towers). Once cut from references to the real, this duplication loses completely and absolutely its sense.

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<sup>85</sup> *The World*, prod. by Hengameh Panahi, Takio Yoshida, Chow Keung, dir. by Jia Zhangke, 105 min., Celluloid Dreams, 2004.

#### 4 - Cinema as philosophical model

In his extensive analysis of cinema Gilles Deleuze identifies a cinematographic mode he calls the ‘cinema of bodies’.

It has already been said in the introduction that cinema will be treated as a mirror to the philosophical discourse here attempted. The link between the two is the question of the world. In the introduction it was said that the world of bodies recalls and demands the same kind of philosophical exploration as the cinema of bodies. This is so not only on the level of the forces constituting it, but also with regard to its coming to presence. As the world essentially happens and happens between us, so cinema ‘contributes to free a motion, which is that of a presence in the process of making itself present’<sup>86</sup>.

Cinema takes place at the crossing of this double demand: the world as being without reason – delivered to the exposition of singularities – and always caught in a process of happening by letting free.

According to Deleuze modern cinema re-establishes our belief in the world. This is configured as the belief not in another world, but in this world here, the one in which we live. According to Deleuze ‘the cinematographic image showed us the link between the man and the world’<sup>87</sup>. This belief, this speaking with terms that belong to (or appear to strictly emerge from) the realm of faith, might seem in apparent contrast

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<sup>86</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, trans. Christine Irizarry and Verena Conley (Brussels: Yves Gevaert Éditeur, 2001), 16

<sup>87</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 166

with what has been said earlier on drawing on Nancy and Heidegger. However this belief points to the world as the lack of any principle, the world of the without reason, or what one would have to call the world of bodies. Deleuze adds: 'belief is no longer addressed to a different world or a transformed world. Man is in the world as if in a pure optical and sound situation'<sup>88</sup>. Belief can replace knowledge only if it becomes a belief in this world and in this world as it is, since the link between us and the world, or between us and the sense of the world, as a sense that calls forth something beyond this world, has broken. The belief of believers would instead be a belief in a world that precedes or jumps beyond itself, a belief that navigates the rim of the world without really touching on this world. Where believers, when asked about the world of today, claim the need for recovering a lost enchantment, the world's detachment from an ultimate sense, the belief of the non-believers demands that they think of a world 'moving of its own motion, without a heaven or a wrapping, without fixed moorings or suspensions'<sup>89</sup>.

This is the belief that modern cinema gives us: a belief not falling from the sky - cinema speaks also of the silence of God<sup>90</sup> - but arising from the bottom of our bodies, from our feet as it were. This belief, outside any restoration, must be discovered in the spelling of the word 'world' itself. Cinema gives us the world so that we can give it back, so that we can enter its existence and reopen the simultaneous presence / absence of its significations.

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<sup>88</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 166

<sup>89</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, trans. Christine Irizarry and Verena Conley (Brussels: Yves Gevaert Éditeur, 2001), 44

<sup>90</sup> See in particular the pages devoted to Rossellini and Bresson in Fabrice Revault d'Allonnes, *Pour le cinéma "moderne": Du lien de l'art au monde*, (Liege: Yellow Now, 1994)

Modern cinema presents us with this truth, the collapse of the other world: ‘what is certain – Deleuze says – is that believing is no longer believing in another world, or in a transformed world’<sup>91</sup>. It is through the mode of evidence that cinema affirms belief as possible solely in this world or, to be less ambiguous, belief as possible only if addressed to this world that belief itself takes part in. In this way modern cinema opens inside itself the world whose sense is withdrawn and must be recreated, as opposed to a world where sense is always projected.

Deleuze analyzes the shift between classical cinema and modern cinema. On one side one has an organic regime of sensory motor images, and on the other, a crystalline regime of time images. To put it in other words: kinetic as opposed to chronic.

Here it is important to dwell for a while on the power of the false definition that so prominently dominates the crystalline regime. Deleuze starts by tackling three categories: description, narration and story. A crystalline description detaches itself from an organic one by the relation it initiates with its object. In fact, in crystalline descriptions the object is both created and erased in order to generate series of other descriptions ‘which contradict, displace or modify preceding ones’<sup>92</sup>. The kind of cinema these descriptions lead to is a ‘cinema of the seer’, a cinema that the agent is no longer able to dominate; rather, the agent, who necessarily does not possess enough qualities to be called an agent anymore, is plunged in pure optical and sound situations. The abovementioned redefinition of descriptions in the new context of a crystalline regime leads to a number of consequences. Where the organic description

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<sup>91</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 167

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 146

kept the real recognizable by mean of what Deleuze calls *consistency* and *continuity*, thus functioning by triggering the localization of relations and the actuality of links between imaginary and reality, the crystalline [cuts off]/severs any actual motor linkage. What one finds in crystalline description is a play between imaginary and real leading to a confusion of roles, to indiscernibility of the two positions. Real connections and localizable relations cease to boast their own domain; instead they propel, are triggered and merge with eminently virtual situations.

The cinematographic image is delivered to both realms, the virtual and the real, and this results in a loss of control over them, their crossing and passing over having been uncertain since the beginning. What one thus ends up with is exactly a constant crossing, a blending, which constitutes the image itself. If one was to analyze modern cinema by trying to trace the moment in which these crossings happen, one would inevitably fail, for the imaginary and the real, the real and the virtual, are in constant opening<sup>93</sup>. As Nancy puts it ‘neither a ‘realist’ nor a ‘fictional’ phantasm, but life presented or offered in its evidence’<sup>94</sup>.

This new status brings fore some necessary remarks on a second element constitutive of the two regimes: narration. Organic narration is to Deleuze true and truthful, because time remains necessarily chronological time. What Deleuze means by truthful narration is that ‘it claims to be true even in fiction’<sup>95</sup>. Narrations proper to the different kinds of organic image developed out of sensory motor schemata to

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<sup>93</sup> In *The World Viewed* Stanley Cavell speaks of cinema as making manifest the impossibility of distinguishing reality and fantasy, for the former is already drawn by fantasy. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001)

<sup>94</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, trans. Christine Irizarry and Verena Conley (Brussels: Yves Gevaert Éditeur, 2001), 58

<sup>95</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 123

which the agent reacted in order to unfold a particular situation. For instance, the two schemas of the action-image Deleuze had traced in *Cinema I*, the small form SAS and its correspondent large form ASA, were both depending on the domain of qualities and powers actualized in a concrete and specific space-time. Both structures are delivered over to the reaction to real situations, and that reaction takes the shape of real actions. The structure itself, with its circular shape, implying a movement backwards to its initial point of emergence, already invites a reading on the basis of discrete actions.

In crystalline narration, on the other hand, sensory motor schemata tend to collapse, leaving no reaction to characters, because characters face pure optical and sound situations. Structures like the ones one finds in the action image can't possibly take place in the crystalline regime, where the anomalies of movement become essential, substantial and constitutive of the image. While the organic image tended to push the anomalies to the realm of the accidental, binding them to its essential continuity, the crystalline regime revolves around spaces that lack 'a proper spatial definition'. In a similar fashion the world as described by the title 'world of bodies' is the place of a taking place, thus a solely spatial definition will not apply to it.

Spaces defined in this way lead to non-localizable relations, which assume the form of direct presentations of time. Hence anomalies, the ab-normal, become the necessary element in the presentation of time, and movements are therefore necessarily false movements. It is interesting to see here what happens to montage as, Deleuze says, 'it becomes a mean to decompose relations in a direct time-image in a way that all the

possible movements emerge from it'<sup>96</sup>. Within such a new configuration, narrations do not try to absorb the imaginary and virtual into the real by reducing it to actuality and localization. In fact, quite the opposite happens: while in the organic image fiction was true even when pushed as far as possible from real – fiction was as it were fiercely true – here it becomes essentially false, the false being its dominant creative power.

To be more precise, the prevailing quality of narrations now turns out to be their power to establish themselves as essentially false, without losing, as it were, their credibility. Saying that does not amount to saying, Deleuze warns, 'to each fact its own truth', as if it were a matter of establishing a kind of relative system in which any act/fact finds its innermost truth and coherence. This is by far a more radical movement, which finds its principle in the play between two poles of the false: 'simultaneous impossible presents' and 'not-necessarily true pasts'<sup>97</sup>. Cinema detaches itself from the problem of truth. At this point, then, cinema carries itself beyond the problem of truth and untruth, imposing what one could call an existence, a discontinuity of these two poles. As Nancy says: 'this existence identifies itself as thought and that means that this existence relates to a world: set down, felt, received as a singular point of passage in the circulation of meaning'<sup>98</sup>.

Between cinema and the world does not subsist a relation of analogy. Cinema does not represent the world, that is it does not mirror it; in cinema experience is not reduced and incorporated. Instead the impossibility of capturing it under the regime of truth liberates once more experience's evidence as undecidability.

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<sup>96</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 126

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 127

<sup>98</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, trans. Christine Irizarry and Verena Conley (Brussels: Yves Gevaert Éditeur, 2001), 44

However, one is not confronting a system of variable content; rather, what is at stake is to determine the false as cinema's productive power. Deleuze says: 'The truthful man dies, every model of truth collapses, in favor of the new narration'<sup>99</sup>. There is one deep-seated consequence of this new regime of narrations, which retains its value in the present discussion and has to do with the relational model established by falsified narrations. What is of particular importance here is to stress the fact that the model of freedom touches on the model of identification.

Deleuze says: 'Contrary to the form of the true, which is unifying and tends to the identification of a character [...] the power of the false cannot be separated from an irreducible multiplicity. 'I is another' has replaced Ego = Ego'<sup>100</sup>. This point skims over the whole question: *what happens between us*. In particular it offers a model to think the 'us'. The false exists only in a set of relations, where mastery over the situation keeps circulating.

Once cinema has entered the mode of existence as opposed to the mode of the truth, then the question is posed to our gaze. Cinema starts pressing against it and demanding that a respect is enacted in our gaze. It impels us to give back the sense of the world that has been opened inside the image. It is then a matter not of receiving the world and its senses but of deciding over the real as given to us by cinema. This decision passes through our way of looking as a way of articulating the evidence of the world. The image under the regime of existence cannot simply be accepted; it must be done again, recreated. Revault d'Allonnes speaks of insignificance and non-evidence

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<sup>99</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 127

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 129

of reality as the lack of guaranteed significations: 'modern cinema is seized here by the possible and sudden evidence of sense [...] at the opposite in classic cinema we face a world of assured, established and permanent sense'<sup>101</sup>.

Therefore metaphors are avoided, unless those come from within the world itself and only when they express the play, the absence of an ultimate sense.

This evidences set in front of us by cinema correspond to a disclosure of the world. The world is delivered and therefore separated its character of mere given. Evidence would stand for the fact that the indeterminate totality of the world is presented to us as a sparkle that extinguishes itself. That the world is given and given as a whole wouldn't make sense if it weren't for the continuous singular evidence that on one side exposes it and on the other discharges both the world's wholeness (the world's grip on itself) and its givenness (the world's eternal resemblance to itself, or what one could call representation). The absolute referentiality of the world is interrupted so that referentiality keeps happening. Understood in these terms, the being of the world is thus the 'discontinuity of what keeps happening'<sup>102</sup>, wholeness gathered only in indefinite evidences.

According to Deleuze what one now has is this: falsifying narrations free themselves from the system of actual, localized and chronological relations; the elements are constantly changing according to the relations of time into which they enter and the terms of their connections. Narration is constantly being completely

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<sup>101</sup> Fabrice Revault d'Allonnes, *Pour le cinéma "moderne": Du lien de l'art au monde*, (Liege: Yellow Now, 1994), 18 (translation mine)

<sup>102</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, trans. Christine Irizarry and Verena Conley (Brussels: Yves Gevaert Éditeur, 2001), 44

modified. We witness the emergence of purely cinematographic powers. The agent dissolves into an 'I as another' structure. My gaze becomes the agent, not only what sees but what participates.

There is something of a doing in my looking, a mobilizing of the world, an agitating and an organizing. In a truly Heideggerian way, Nancy remarks that 'presence is not a mere matter of vision: it offers itself in encounters, worries, concerns'<sup>103</sup>. Presence is always coming to presence, passage: the technique of exposing (bringing forwards) reality.

It is because of the active role of my look – which engages with the real, with the image as what carries the real – that Nancy can play on the words regard and égard, on the coming together of look and regard: 'looking is regarding and consequently respecting'. Nancy notes that 'the word respect also comes from regard (respicere): it is regard towards...guided by attention, by observance or consideration'<sup>104</sup>. Our gazes disclose the real without trying to master it. 'Looking just amounts to thinking the real, to test oneself with regard to a meaning one is not mastering'<sup>105</sup>, this is what a respect for the real means in a cinema that works under the mode of existence. Inevitably this implies engaging other gazes, becoming intimate with otherness at a distance.

'A common task, that is to say not at all collective, but a task imposed on *us* all *together* [...] to say *us* exactly there where this possibility seems to vanish sometimes into a 'one', sometimes into an 'I''<sup>106</sup>. Relationship is precisely across this distance.

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<sup>103</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, trans. Christine Irizarry and Verena Conley (Brussels: Yves Gevaert Éditeur, 2001), 30

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 38 (translation modified)

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 38

<sup>106</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Pensée Dérobée*, (Paris: Galilée, 2001), 116 (translation mine)

What remains, Deleuze says, are bodies, forces without any linkage with/to a centre, forces confronting each other. For Nancy it is a matter of a cinematic metaphysics: ‘cinema as the place of meditation, as its body and its area, as the taking-place of a relation’<sup>107</sup>.

Under the mode of existence – differently from the mode of the truth where the character could be judged according to external criteria – every being, and the world itself, has to be judged with regard to the life which it involves, and only with regard to this: a world without principle / reason; sense as a rebound from one end of the world to the other.

The power of the false reestablishes then the belief in the life this world ‘here’ involves, the life as the taking place of this world.

One finds cinema in a completely new situation, responding to a radically different definition. If previously the fitting definition was ‘art of looking made possible and required by a world that refers only to itself and to what is real in it’<sup>108</sup>, now cinema becomes ‘a matter of life as it happens and passes’. The relation between cinema and the world becomes the sharing of an intimacy crossed by a distance and therefore never absorbed: ‘the evidence of cinema is that of the existence of a look through which a world can give back to itself its own real and the truth of its enigma’<sup>109</sup>.

Deleuze too describes this proximity in distance: ‘there is a point of view which belongs so much to the thing that the thing is constantly being transformed in a

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<sup>107</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, trans. Christine Irizarry and Verena Conley (Brussels: Yves Gevaert Éditeur, 2001), 44 (translation modified)

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 18

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 18

becoming identical to point of view'<sup>110</sup>. The point of view – in Deleuze's lexicon – or the look / gaze – in that of Nancy – are always working in this proximate distance, whose measure is the passing of an existence. This distance, as it will be articulated more clearly in the following pages, is exactly what allows not just the relation between cinema and the world to rest entirely on the real (which is therefore not alienated but confirmed and reopened in images), but also the relations within the cinematographic image – almost inside, in the silver nitrate – to take the real into account as his ultimate horizon: 'the reality of images is the access to the real itself, with the consistence and resistance of death, life,...'<sup>111</sup>. This does not amount to attributing to cinema a constructive relation to the world, as if what is real is real just because the camera poses its gaze on it or makes it a particular point of view in a series; quite the opposite, this indicates that the existences variously produced in and by cinema identify themselves always in relation to the world taken as a point traversed by sense. Right distance: cinema engaging itself with a world whose evidences never surmount those of cinema.

The power of the false, as traced by Deleuze is exactly this: it is not a matter of truth anymore, but of existence. It is not just about images and the laws of their accordance.

It is about images 'as opening onto what is real and insofar as they alone open onto it'<sup>112</sup> and this opening goes all the way into the givenness of the world.

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<sup>110</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 142

<sup>111</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, trans. Christine Irizarry and Verena Conley (Brussels: Yves Gevaert Éditeur, 2001), 16

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

There is still a last point in this reconstruction of the Deleuzian argument in which one inevitably is to find the world: the story.

The story concerns the subject-object relationship and the development of this relationship. The new kind of story no longer refers to an ideal of the true, which constitutes its veracity, but becomes a story that simulates, or rather a simulation of the story: objective and subjective images lose their distinction, but also any possibility of identification is abandoned, substituted by a new circuit where they contaminate each other.

The shift is not as much between fiction and reality as in the story itself, because the story affects both: ‘what cinema must grasp is not the identity of a character, but his objective and subjective aspects. The real character when starts making fiction’<sup>113</sup>.

This is the ground on which cinema poses questions to thought, or better where cinema starts enacting questions that have thought, thinking, as their primary references.

The question of thought, Deleuze says, concerns cinema as long as the image no longer follows the rule of the sensory motor schemata. When the sensory-motor break appears, cinema is then able to reveal a link between man and the world. This is the moment where the belief in the world- that particular kind of belief I have mentioned few pages earlier – draws the limit. Cinema, as seen in crystalline narrations, gives up metaphors and metonymies, ‘because the necessity which belongs to relations of thought in the image has replaced the contiguity of relations of images’<sup>114</sup>. The reconfiguration from organic images to crystalline ones, then, is such that cinema not

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<sup>113</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 145

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 146

only ceases to be true, but leads to a limit, that which, by mean of a traversing, marks a surfacing. This limit is structured on two main points, on two ends, and imposes a thinking that moves from leftovers. As Nancy puts it:

Cinema stretches and hangs between a world in which representation was in charge of the signs of truth or of the warrant of a presence to come and another world that opens onto its own presence through a voiding where its thoughtful evidence realizes itself<sup>115</sup>.

What remains is: on one side, a belief in the world, a belief nevertheless entirely immersed in this world, as a point of view on itself, an imminent belief; on the other side this belief is articulated by bodies, forces, whose most proper quality is their being relational.

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<sup>115</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, trans. Christine Irizarry and Verena Conley (Brussels: Yves Gevaert Éditeur, 2001), 56

## 5 - Contrapuntal close-ups

*A person in our picture is judged more as a person than as a performer – from the point of view that they have to add something as people*

*The mistakes that you make in your own life, in your own personality, are assets on the film.*

John Cassavetes<sup>116</sup>

Deleuze defines the cinema of bodies as that cinema where characters are fundamentally reduced to their bodily attitudes and the plot, too, is undone in favor of those attitudes. Deleuze identifies in John Cassavetes the author that more than any other draws the limit, which means the emergence, of such a cinema. Deleuze says:

The greatness of Cassavetes' work is to have undone the story, plot, or action, but also space, in order to get to attitudes as to categories which put time into the body, as well as thought into life<sup>117</sup>.

In fact the cinema of Cassavetes responded to a precise concern. By no means was it accidental that he was to develop a cinema of bodies.

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<sup>116</sup> Ray Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), 166

<sup>117</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 185

Speaking about *Faces* Jean Comolli develops the definition of ‘alcoholic form’

Characters define themselves gesture by gesture and word by word as the film proceeds. They are self-creating, the shooting is the means whereby they are revealed, each step forward in the film allowing them a new development in their behavior, their time span coinciding exactly with that of the film<sup>118</sup>.

When Cassavetes says: ‘when you cease to know the way home, things go wrong. And then you get detoured. And when you can’t find your way home, that’s when I consider it’s worth it to make a film,’<sup>119</sup> he is putting forward the entire program underlining most of his mature works. This is something that Deleuze had not failed to understand, as when he says that Cassavetes’ originality lies in having addressed the question of film as

interesting oneself in people rather than in the film, in the human problems more than in the problems of the mise en scene; so that people do not pass over to the side of the camera without the camera having passed to the side of the people<sup>120</sup>.

Deleuze understood that Cassavetes was one of those directors walking within the distance that brings the cinematographic image to the point where what is at stake is not fiction or reality, but rather their continuous crossing (a sort of double-crossing).

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<sup>118</sup> Silvie Pierre, Jean-Louis Comolli, *The two faces of Faces*, in ‘Cahiers du Cinema. The 1960s. New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood’, ed. Jim Hillier, trans. Annwyl Williams, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 327

<sup>119</sup> Ray Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), 161

<sup>120</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 149

Deleuze seems to pay a debt to the long-sighted analysis published by Comolli in *Cahiers du cinema* just after the first European screenings of *Faces* in Cannes: ‘Cassavetes does not use cinema as a way of reproducing actions, faces or ideas, but as a way of *producing* them [...] We start from scratch, the cinema is the motor and the film is what causes event to happen<sup>121</sup>.

What Cassavetes strove for was a cinema that could tackle the ‘right distance’, taking the risk to approach the image not as a given, but as the outcome of the interruption of lives and contacts. Deleuze realized that Cassavetes’ imagination as a filmmaker pointed at creating an ‘indirect discourse operating in reality’, pushing further the powers of the false. The philosopher saw that the director was concerned with getting to people, to others (or even, in a formula, probably not far from Deleuze’s lexicon: getting to people as the other of cinema, although this other is not, in any way, beyond cinema, but rather its very evidence).

There are two ways in which Cassavetes – whose directorial style was forged around a feeble presence behind the camera, balanced by a strong presence on the stage – accomplished his plan to make movies on people who cease to know their way home. The first one rests on the analysis that Deleuze devoted to him and to the cinema of bodies. The second might be interpreted as an exacerbation of the set of gestures identified by Deleuze in relation to the cinematographic device of the close-up.

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<sup>121</sup> Silvie Pierre, Jean-Louis Comolli, *The two faces of Faces*, in ‘Cahiers du Cinema. The 1960s. New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood’, trans. Annwyl Williams, Jim Hillier eds. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 326

With Deleuze one could say that Cassavetes maintained his promises by interpreting cinema mainly as a cinema of body. Cassavetes would approach the cinematic by undoing the plot and exposing characters to the experience of the camera. This means that characters do not present themselves through the internal consistency implicit in or delivered by the plot; quite the opposite, they come to the screen by opposing themselves to that coherence. Characters are constraints, barriers placed in front of the camera, turning the camera movements upside down, or even moving the camera in an uneven way (most of Cassavetes movies were shot with handheld cameras).

The confusion a movie like *Faces* might create depends exactly on this. The character must struggle with the story and with the presence of the camera to get there, to see his birth on the screen. Once dialogues and situations migrate from the script to the screen, what takes place is an operation of undoing, as if the script were banging into bodies, literally failing to flow. The script lets bodies coil it.

Among other examples, one could mention Gus' love night in *Husbands*, where the two bodies engage in repeated sequences of twists and position-taking, as a consequence of which the hotel room they are occupying seems to enlarge. In *A woman under the influence* the scene where Mabel's confronts the doctor and her husband Nick, shows the erratic and frantic movements of the woman turning a familiar setting – the living room of the house – into an uncharted space.

As Comolli says, with Cassavetes one always starts with nothing, that is to say that one starts with a complex set of exposures, but with no time and no spaces, with

characters with no inner experience; one has bodies exposing one another: ‘cinema of bodies: the character is reduced to his own bodily attitudes’<sup>122</sup>.

With regard to the second strategy the point to be made here relates to how the presences on the cinematic screen trigger a particular kind of relation.

Once more one needs to restate that initial remark: Cassavetes’ aim was to make movies on people, on people who cease to find their way home (it would take another kind of reflection to show how this happens). Cinema of bodies then, but also a cinema that should engage ‘us’.

Although Deleuze spends a considerable amount of pages on Cassavetes, there’s no mention of the American director in the study of the close-up. For the sake of clarity, here one needs to quickly revisit this analysis. Deleuze, quoting Eisentein, defines the close-up as ‘the face’. The face acts on two poles, as reflecting surface/quality and intensive series/power; although the two poles do not occur by closing one another out, preventing the other from appearing, they always realize themselves by letting open a possibility. The criterion of distinction revolves around the following point: ‘we find ourselves before an intensive face each time that the traits break free from the outline, begin to work on their own account and form an autonomous series which tends toward a limit’, on the contrary ‘we are before a reflexive or reflecting surface as long as the features remain grouped under the domination of a though which is fixed or terrible, but immutable and without becoming, in a way eternal’<sup>123</sup>.

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<sup>122</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 185

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-92

Deleuze's concept of 'the face' does not apply solely to the human visage, but to any image that could be said to occupy these two poles: 'each time we discover these two poles in something [...] we can say that this thing has been treated as a face'<sup>124</sup>. Opposing the idea of the close-up as the upsurge of the partial object, Deleuze turns to Balász to say that the close-up 'abstracts it [an object] from all its spatial-temporal coordinates. That is to say, it raises it to the state of an Entity'<sup>125</sup>. What is more, the close-up allows us to abandon the three ordinary roles of the face: individuating, socializing, and communicating. 'The close-up has merely pushed the face to those areas where the principle of identification ceases to hold sway [...] The close-up suspends individuation'<sup>126</sup>.

In Deleuze's opinion it is Bergman that has pushed this suspension, this nihilism, of the face to a limit.

Cassavetes operates a very different gesture with regard to the close up; he does erase the face (or objects standing for it) but not just to prevent identification, rather to add a condition, a co-essential condition to it, the face is posited always as co-belonging.

*Faces* in particular is a film where the close-up is used to the point of violence, that is to say to the point where it somehow acts violently towards the smooth flowing of the film. In fact there is nothing smooth about *Faces*; rather, the apparent simplicity of the plot is continuously interrupted and then proceeds not from but in the interruptions

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<sup>124</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Rober Galeta (London: Continuum, 2005), 90

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 98

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 102

themselves. Exactly by interrupting the plot, the close-ups establish almost a register that precedes the story. While the film depicts a rather stiff social situation, characterized by individualism, the social constraints of marriage and a rather well-known collection of middle-class repressive norms and betrayals (on the line of: middle age people just want to have fun), what is liberated in the series of successive close-ups is a distance that sends for a different model of being-with.

A first set of succinct remarks is needed to open the way for the discussion:

- like Bergman, Cassavetes operates an erasure of the face. He does so in that, surpassing the face as entity, surpassing the poles of quality/powers, he places the face there where it shouldn't be: there where everything else is expected, where all the others should be, all that which takes place off the frame. Saying that amounts not to affirming the face as a bearer, an icon, as if it were a sort of visual synopsis, a herald or promise, but exactly to taking it as that which testifies for the dispersion of the evidence, that which goes as far as saying: there's no movie here, this is not fiction but rather the dispersed presence of a reality which a look agitates. *Faces* is a film of dispersed (and agitated) presences, which, perversely, find their peak of dispersion in the play of close-ups. The close-up is constantly trapped in this leap towards an outside of itself as if it were there to declare its impossibility, the impossibility of recollecting in itself any meaningful statement.
- The faces in *Faces* do not just suspend individuation. This suspension triggers the circulation of sense within the film: the sense of the film as situations rendered by a sending toward, rather than by a meaningful closure; the sense of the film as

materiality on and through which looks encounter one another. In other words, *Faces* is a film where no one is allowed to stay alone; conditions, locations and positions open into absences and at the same time these absences make the happening of relations most evident. Close-ups link one presence to another; they do not lead anywhere as they are there to underline the importance of what the spectators cannot see, the distance required by relation. Close-ups show what is beyond their reach; they carry this beyond in and carry away what falls inside the frame.

- Cassavetes managed to put in the close-up the openness of a long shot by accumulating one close-up after the other. Once the face appears, it appears as the excluded and the intruder at the same time. Close-ups serve to allow the characters to stay together and to prevent one character from standing out, from being singled out. Therefore what is at stake in Cassavetes' use of close-ups is the impossibility of affirming the face, as this always come as the presence of what lies outside the frame.
- Cassavetes' close-ups work towards establishing a mode of relation without relation, a model where what is at stake is a coming of the relation without this having to be announced. The relationship here is realized in the action and is not then the substratum that channels, motivates and directs the action. In this also resides the great vulnerability of the faces of the film. The measure of this relation is itself incommensurable.

## 6 - Pan-orama and dis-stance

At the very beginning of *The evidence of film* Jean-Luc Nancy says: ‘capturing images is clearly an ethos, a disposition and a conduct with regard to the world’<sup>127</sup>.

It is interesting to see here how the relation ethos/world comes back. What is Nancy expressing here? The capturing of images exposes the world’s standing on itself and opens our standing in it. Capturing images is a way of exposing the world and a way in which the world exposes itself.

The way Cassavetes uses the close-up is an ethos. The close-up is not just a particular device among others, thanks to which a director arranges the internal structure of his work; rather, it becomes an offering oneself to the world, a particular way of happening in the world and of the world going *through* the image. Here the close-up becomes the way to capture and make remarkable the world in its evidence.

Cassavetes’ *habitus* revolves around an attempt to wind up the ‘us’, winding the ‘us’ up, exposing the actors to our looks, as if to say that one not only needs to ‘go to the movies’, but that one is then called to do so in a precise way. What the director demands on our part is to abandon both an all-encompassing gaze (objects of the film are signified regardless to their singularity) and an absorbed one (the objects of the film replace reality by providing a vision of it). Not a *panoramic* perspective, but our distance to the film and the distances within the film.

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<sup>127</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, trans. Christine Irizarry and Verena Conley (Brussels: Yves Gevaert Éditeur, 2001), 16

As the word indicates, panorama, from the Greek παν-οραο, means to see everything, or better said, to strive in order for everything to become visible, apparent, for everything to surface and occupy a place in front of us.

The concept of pan-orama should here work on two levels. On one side the panorama is what allows us to gain an overview, a general gathering in front of our eyes, a gathering where presence presence melts into a plurality that forecloses any singularity appearing and anything appearing as singularity. This is the panorama as whole. On the other side the panorama also gives to the eye the opportunity of seeing not the whole, but each and every thing, every tiny detail. In this scenario things come from an infinite distance, and we descend into them apprehending their porosity, grasping their granular, corpuscular texture; things become permeated by our sight.

It is interesting to note how in *Faces* no character is devoted enough space so as to be *alone*, to transform into *the* character. The shot-reverse shot composition, which would wrench the individual out of the context, is almost never employed. At the same time one never has the impression of receiving a general overview, or a visual synopsis of any kind, although the film remains an extremely choral one. Bonitzer is right when he notes that the camera in Cassavetes accompanies a system of crises<sup>128</sup>.

Cassavetes aims to play in between the uprising of the main character, a detail that one is forced to take as everything, while he at the same time escapes the whole, the idea of presenting everything inside the frame. He is not a director who believes solely in the image, nor a director who tries to document reality. Rather, his gesture is something like a play with distances.

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<sup>128</sup> Pascal Bonitzer, *Decadrages. Peinture et Cinema* (Paris: L'Éditions de l'Etoile, 1985), 8 (translation mine).

As Raymond Carney says: ‘Cassavetes works to resist the individual effort to isolate himself’<sup>129</sup> and also, one could add, to prevent the individual performer from elevating himself above the in-common into which he is plunged. So much of the personal point of view is privileged that we almost forget that there are *others*. This means that the individual is not allocated enough room and time to control the visual space, to wrap the frame around himself. Rather, as Carney notes again, the character ‘is everywhere put back into a series of relationships’. If one were to fix all this in a formula, one could say: *Faces* starts with us. The being-in-common, our being *us*, is never given; rather, it is something that takes place beyond any construction and takes place in this world here as that set whose holding together is the constant reframing of its given senses. Characters do not put themselves to work to reach as it were a kind of communality; quite the opposite, the picture is almost always about desegregation, it is not an oeuvre or a composition; it holds nothing of a per-forming.

The way Cassavetes starts with ‘us’ is by orchestrating the close-ups mainly in a contrapuntal way. As cinema lacks a similar concept, one has to borrow it from music — this simply means that close-ups are independent but harmonically related. They are independent in that they appear not as intimately chained to the series they — at least because of a temporal succession — belong to, but as always interdependent in that they are not there to identify anything or to underline one’s role, gesture, words, *face*, but to introduce another close-up that will revolve around something different.

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<sup>129</sup> Ray Carney, *American Dreaming. The films of John Cassavetes and the American Experience* (London: University of California Press, 1985), 98

Cassavetes seems to try to reply to the demand to “say ‘us’ otherwise than as ‘one’ and otherwise than as ‘I’”<sup>130</sup>.

Carney notes this as well: ‘Cassavetes intercuts and edits together close-ups of over forty interrelated glances, responses and adjustments of position’<sup>131</sup> and this works as a constant reminder of simultaneous presences. In this way Cassavetes starts with ‘us’, ‘us’ becoming almost a white noise, which never falls into complete silence.

By means of contrapuntal close-ups, Cassavetes is able to oppose to the double signification of the pan-orama, a play of distance, or more properly a dis-stance. He never allows us to see the whole, nor every detail of a given situation. He plays in between these two categories of the panorama. Distance written as dis-stance (in which also resonates this-stance) should be thought here as that standing, posture, taking place, which is also a habitus, an ethos towards something or someone, which by means of the prefix *dis* indicates a movement outside, a difference that is constitutive of one’s own place. Dis-stance works here as the impossibility of closing oneself from others, by pushing them to an irreducible distance. Every distance is always a happening outside, towards, an occupying a place by trembling. Distance as self-standing passes and traverses every other self-standing, since the beginning, even before the film starts, but in particular in the span of time in which the film, rather than separate us from reality – constantly delivers us back to the world. Distance is impossible if not as an approach, not out of an intentional humanitarianism, but as that gesture which I can’t, by any means, completely limit.

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<sup>130</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Pensée Dérobée* (Paris: Galilée, 2001), 116 (translation mine)

<sup>131</sup> Ray Carney, *American Dreaming. The films of John Cassavetes and the American Experience* (London: University of California Press, 1985), 99

To conclude, Cassavetes' contrapuntal close-ups and all the faces of *Faces*, bring fore this evidence of distance as a dis-stancing, a bringing towards, a going out, the irreducibility of a being-with. Distance is here the opening of my stance to the other; my stance is always already a standing out, something I cannot fully appropriate nor withdraw within. I am always already delivered to this opening, which is also the taking place of the sense of the world, the sense of the world as the singular difference of a passage, or as Nancy puts it in his discussion of the multiplicity of the arts:

the sense of the world is only given by dis-locating at the origin its unique and unitary sense of "sense" in the general zoning that is sought in each of the many differential distributions of the senses [...] There would be no world if there were no discreteness<sup>132</sup>.

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<sup>132</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 18-19

## Conclusions

Cinema says something about *what happens between us* because the world and cinema don't stand in an analogical or mimetic relation. The world on the screen is still the world. Although things are not available for use, nonetheless their evidence sizes the circulation of sense. Nothing is manifested on the screen if not the sheer existence of the world, its being 'remarkable'.

Cinema shows a discontinuity in the world and this discontinuity opens up a place for 'us': we are at the crossing between the indistinct world and the evidence delivered by cinema.

The world in cinema becomes remarkable: it becomes the 'disclosure of a look in the middle of ordinary turbulence'<sup>133</sup> (this turbulence is the movement of the everyday, the Heideggerian *Bewegtheit*). On one side the world on the screen holds on us the same obvious grasp as in the everyday; on the other the fact of it being placed at a distance – made evident – submits it to the unseen, as that which needs to be marked once more. Its sheer existence is once again weighted down by sense.

Cinema does not support the signification of the world, it shows the obvious fact of the world, that is also the *not-yet-signified*. Within this obviousness the abyssal sense of the world becomes evidence. Obviousness and abyss indicate the fact that the world is common, sharing itself in constantly creating itself as world.

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<sup>133</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, trans. Christine Irizarry and Verena Conley (Brussels: Yves Gevaert Éditeur, 2001), 22

That a model of truth is replaced by one of existences shows a world whose sense constantly reopens its references (its 'sense') and is sustained on possibilities to be realized, meanings to be taken up, discontinuities not yet sublimated.

On the screen the reality of a world without principle is mobilized, which also means that it necessarily calls us to engage in what is there delivered. Cinema does not seal the sense of the world by drawing world-pictures, nor does it replace the world with pure appearances, the play of fantasies. The world exposed by cinema is one in which the absolute accountability of sense is continuously handed over to 'us' to be readdressed. It is in this way that cinema precisely constitutes the crossing of the question of the world and the question of 'us'. Cinema makes evident a constellation where the world is a set of relations in constant disclosure; this disclosure is operated in the distance 'us' as being-with takes from its inscription in a closed horizon of sense. As Nancy puts it:

the common, having-in-common or being-in-common, excludes interior unity, subsistence, and presence in and for itself. Being with, being together [...] are precisely not a matter of being 'one'<sup>134</sup>.

The opposite of this is what a world-view would entail or promise: sociality finally assured once and for all, grounded around a tension that makes sense unavailable to it. The reference in this case would not be to our happening together, but to the transformation of the togetherness in the essence of what has always happened. This

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<sup>134</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne: (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 154

means that 'us', instead of existing on the register of deliverance across otherness (this has been here called its 'happening'), is returned to the register of an autonomic charisma, where everything is immanent and within which everything is already resolved. This scenario founds itself on the same structure and proceeds in the same way as the juxtaposition of the crowd, where the dispersion is not a singular exposure of sense, but the collapse of sense by disengagement.

'Sense is the singularity of all the singular ones, in all senses simultaneously [...] the sense of the world is thus in each one as totality and unicity at once'<sup>135</sup>.

The world remains the task and the responsibility of 'us', as long as 'us' always opens its own presence and makes it remarkable. 'Us' happens only in the world as long as it does not close the world within a natural intimacy. Cinema unlocks this intimacy by showing and ex-scribing the uncertainty of what we have always already seen, between us.

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<sup>135</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 68

## **SEPARATIONS**

*“Would we accept being alone?” – “Alone, but not each one for his own sake; alone in order to be together.” – “Are we together? We aren't completely, are we? We're only together if we could be separated”*

Maurice Blanchot<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, trans. John Gregg (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 19

## Introduction

At the end of the last chapter the question ‘*What happens between us?*’ found articulation in the discussion of the concept of the world, once this becomes free from an external substance.

It has been argued that a deconstruction of a certain metaphysics positing the world as a substantiated term, directly depending on a substance or essence external to it, would allow for the first time the appearance of the world as *that which exists*. Also the process described made it possible to trace the emergence of the world as that which is always already there, though hidden under the determinations of a substance. A related movement highlighted the idea that a certain conception of God was to identify God itself with the notion of the world. This could happen by way of a shift that became increasingly evident (though it is not simply a matter of chronology here) at the beginning of the rationalist tradition, in particular with those thinkers – Bruno, Spinoza and Leibniz for example – who had God as an intelligent principle rather than as a creator, demiurges or architect. The account of this deconstructing process reopened the question of the *creatio ex-nihilo*, by way of which what is has come to be as a growing out of nothing.

The analysis of the world has been considered to be a step in view of a more consistent look on the question ‘what happens between us’ and its various declinations. If it has been argued that ‘we are the world’ it is now time to engage with the measure of this world, namely with the ‘we’ or with the between us or simply with the ‘with’.

In analyzing the thoughts of Jean-Luc Nancy and Emmanuel Levinas one will have to focus not as much on the traits constituting their difference as on the difference itself: on what the difference says and on what precisely this difference is, what it resides on and what it pushes for, rather than on the forms it assumes. For the sake of clarity, the proximity that has been the object of the first part of this discussion will be revisited. It has been argued that Nancy and Levinas do not occupy completely distinct poles with regards to the argument on the body, if only because they both attribute great importance to it while coming to discuss ideas of otherness.

The three elements that will be considered here as separating Nancy and Levinas are:

- the idea of the world,
- the syntax used to identify the relationship with the other,
- the notion of an element beyond the terms of this relationship.

The pattern encompassing the following line of reasoning relies on one constituent motif: both breaches that Nancy and Levinas engage with are possible within a Heideggerian perspective. It is within Heidegger, which also means in his absence, that one can meaningfully join the two sides and follow them. The absence of Heidegger allows Nancy and Levinas to pursue their reflection and uncover new implications and problems; for this very reason they can also find an

original angle from which to address conceptual questions<sup>2</sup>. One should obviously not forget that this same rule is, in the end, a Heideggerian formulation:

What is unthought in a thinker's thought is not a lack inherent in his thought.

What is un-thought is there in each case only as the un-thought. The more original the thinking, the richer will be what is unthought in it. The unthought is the greatest gift that thinking can bestow<sup>3</sup>.

Accordingly, the following discussion, inasmuch as it proves to be a productive reading, should not just determine something on Nancy and Levinas' thinking but also provide insights as to the originality of Heideggerian thought. The dynamic of thinking in this case could well be grounded on an absence and the methodology must be that of clarity for 'one thing is necessary for a face-to-face converse with the thinkers: clarity about the manner in which we encounter them'.

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<sup>2</sup> Heidegger himself warns about the peril of such a venture: 'What a thinker has thought can be mastered only if we refer every thing in his thought that is still unthought back to its originary truth. Of course, the thoughtful dialogue with the thinker does not become any more comfortable that way, on the contrary it turns into a disputation of rising acrimony'. Martin Heidegger, *What is called thinking*, trans. Glenn Gray (London: Harper and Row Publishers, 1968), 54

<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What is called thinking*, trans. Glenn Gray (London: Harper and Row Publishers, 1968), 77

## 1 - We are the world

It has been said that Nancy follows Heidegger rather faithfully in understanding the disclosure of the world and its mundane character as the very springing of the question *what happens between us*. This question does not hold onto anything but the world as world, as a system of relations or references, into which we are always and already plunged. It has been underlined more than once that this ‘always already’ should not trigger the idea of the world as a Pascalian *cachot*; quite the opposite, it composes the very plane where sense, including the sense of the world itself, can be and can remain open.

The opening towards others is then an event taking place not as much ‘in’ the world as that inside which would then be in correlation to an outside, but *as* the world. The fact that singularities are open towards each other is the fact of the world and is our fact. I have already argued the dependence of this conception on the structure of the Heideggerian being-in-the-world and in particular on the care Heidegger takes in defining the ‘in’ not on strictly spatial grounds. The world is not a container, but rather the place of transcendence: the set of relations one engages in order to reopen existence. The world – as it has emerged from a deconstruction of metaphysics, or, to give the term a more precise connotation, the deconstruction of western onto-theology – lies there, stripped bare of any principle that would not in the end somehow return to the world itself, to the transcendence of the world towards itself. Sense, as long as one shows it to be that which does not rest on determined significations<sup>4</sup>, takes place as world. Following Heidegger,

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<sup>4</sup> ‘What is essential to this sense is that it neither grasps nor presents its unity or its oneness’. Jean Luc Nancy, ‘A finite thinking’ in *A finite thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Edward Bullard, Jonathan Derbyshire and Simon Sparks (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 8

Nancy states that ‘we have already come into sense because we are already in the world; we are in the world because we are in sense. One opens the other’<sup>5</sup>.

In Nancy’s view the idea of an outside of the world is conceivable only if one again refers this outside to the world, the outside as the differential character immanent to the world. It is not that the world so conceived holds a secret that one can disclose or reveal or for which one can create occasions that would unravel its very secrecy. The outside is always already this differential trait, wherein the world can’t conceive of itself as identical, dignified or vilified by the acquisition of a meaning. As long as the world is the plane of this disclosure, then it is that which lacks a principle; it neither refers to a beyond nor signals or points towards it, ‘the whole of being is its own reason; it has no other reason, which does not mean that it itself is its own principle and end, exactly because it is not ‘itself’<sup>6</sup>.

The world is neither the ‘creatum’ nor the evidence of ‘a ens perfectissimus’ but that which holds itself as its own difference. To say that the world is a difference, to say that its structure does not respond to formal logic or metaphysics but embraces a dynamic, implies also that one is at times able to envisage this difference; one could call this moment when one is able to picture the difference – which means that the difference has already moved the world somewhere else anyways – the irreparable. The irreparable in this case also indicates that the world is never simply ready-at-hand or a given: it always is that which is constantly

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<sup>5</sup> Jean Luc Nancy, ‘A finite thinking’ in *A finite thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Edward Bullard, Jonathan Derbyshire and Simon Sparks (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 11. Nancy’s point of departure here is mainly Heidegger’s *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O’Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 86

different from itself. Giorgio Agamben says that: ‘at the point where you perceive the irreparability of the world, at that point it is transcendent’<sup>7</sup>.

It was shown in the second part of this analysis that one can hear the sound of the question *what happens between us*, only if one has previously lent an ear to the question of the world. This is so because the world is never something that simply *contains* the references that constitute it; rather these references constitute an outside that is nonetheless never beyond the world itself. The world is then that relational totality from which one starts all the relational work. Every decision thus takes place as an opening of the world; every sense makes sense as a migration from the world back to the world. If the notion of a multiplicity of worlds wouldn’t be already overloaded, one could say that sense is that which goes from one world to another, though this is not an otherworld.

At this point one is called to register and stress the relational aspect of the *worlding* of the world. Heidegger again is quite clear on this. The analysis of the ready-at-hand, which marks the first steps of *Being and Time*, emphasizes that the relational characteristic of the world is what is – at each and any time – at stake. Saying that amounts to expressing the fact that the world is not the outside of an inside, the outside of God or the outside of subjectivity, the externalization of an intimacy. It might still be right to say that the world is an expression, provided that one pays attention to term *expression*. Expression means seeking the *ex*, seeking the movement towards an outside. The world is the expression in its most productive meaning: an *ex* that is at any time gambling with itself. It would be a mistake then to reduce it to a pure juxtaposition of beings, which find themselves

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<sup>7</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 105

chained to one another. Relation must mean something else because being-in-the-world defines not a bare proximity, but the event of disclosing this proximity, of opening up the sense of this proximity and sense as proximity. This is what makes the question of the world so important for the discussion on *what happens between us*. Heidegger always thinks of the world in terms of involvement (the discussion of the ready-to-hand as opposed to the metaphysical present-at-hand could already bear witness to this). Heidegger's concept of world does not merely give priority to subjective projections; it constitutes the ontological underpinning of every mode of engagement with things, including theoretical encounters. The world is then defined by significance and involvement, something that is both implicit and explicit in Heidegger's text:

The context of assignments or references, which, as significance, is constitutive for worldhood, can be taken formally in the sense of a system of Relations [...] the phenomenal content of these 'Relations' and 'Relata' is such that they resist any sort of mathematical functionalization; nor are they merely something thought, first posited in an 'act of thinking'<sup>8</sup>.

Before moving forward with the discussion it is necessary to pay attention to the first point announced in the introduction. What can come from within Heidegger's notion of Being-in-the-world? This question somehow demands to return Levinas to Heidegger, to read as it were Levinas from within Heidegger's thinking. This does not amount to reducing Levinas to a plain reformulation of Heidegger. Levinas himself remarked more than once of his debt to Heidegger, although this

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (London: Blackwell, 2006), 121

was always counterbalanced by an 'irreversible abomination'. In a lecture delivered in 1987 Levinas stated once more his 'admiration inspired by a philosophical intelligence among the greatest and the irreversible abomination attached to National Socialism, in which that brilliant man was somehow able to take part'<sup>9</sup>. A number of commentators have been reassessing the extent of this debt. As Peter Gordon says: 'to argue for an enduring continuity between Heidegger and Levinas is not to condemn Levinas. It is, quite simply, to challenge the notion that Levinas is capable of effecting this separation without recourse to the very philosophy he opposed'<sup>10</sup>. Though explicit disputes with Heidegger are more evident in Levinas' preparatory texts (mainly in *On Escape* and *Existence and Existents*) than in his mature works, nevertheless Heidegger's influence never really ceases to play a role in Levinas' thinking. As Manning puts it, 'Levinas' own philosophy is both a heavy borrowing from Heidegger's philosophy and also a constant argument against it'<sup>11</sup>. Jacques Rolland, in his introduction to *On Escape*, is even more explicit in pointing out that 'what is taken over from Heidegger without contestation is a certain comprehension of philosophy, by virtue of which one problem will be considered as philosophical par excellence in as much as it confronts us with the ancient problem of being qua being'<sup>12</sup>.

It is time to confront that which has just been outlined with regard to the Heideggerian questioning of the world in *Being and Time* with Levinas' idea that

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<sup>9</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Dying for..." in *Entre nous. Thinking-of-the-other*, trans. Michael Smith and Barbara Harshav (London : Continuum, 2006), 179

<sup>10</sup> Peter Eli Gordon, "Fidelity as Heresy" in *Heidegger's Jewish followers*, ed. Samuel Fleischacker (Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 2008), 203

<sup>11</sup> Robert Manning, *Interpreting Otherwise Than Heidegger: Emanuel Levinas's Ethics As First Philosophy*, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1993), 29

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Rolland, "Getting out of Being by a New Path" in Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 6

‘in contradistinction to the philosophers of existence we will not find the relation with the existent respected in its being [...] on being in the world, the care and doing [...] Doing, labor, already implies the relation with the transcendent’<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 109

The original French text says: ‘Nous n’allons fonder la relation avec l’étant respecté dans son être sur l’être au monde, sous le souci et le faire du Dasein heideggerien. Le faire suppose déjà la relation avec le transcendant’. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et Infini*, (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1990), 111

## 2- A matter of hyphens

*The compound expression 'Being-in-the-world indicates that it stands for a unitary phenomenon.*

Martin Heidegger<sup>14</sup>

Levinas omits the hyphens, but here he is explicitly arguing with Heidegger. A few lines earlier though, Levinas had also pointed to Husserl in order to criticize the latter's use of terms such as intentionality and consciousness of..., for these terms underline a thematic understanding of the Other, one that forecloses the access to Infinity; the thematization always seems to bring with itself a reconciliation that occurs to detriment of the Other.

Levinas thus proposes an approach, named metaphysical relation, which 'does not link up a subject with an object'. It seems then pretty obvious that here Husserl and Heidegger are coupled in the charge of having mistaken the relationship to the Other in the world as that of an object facing a subject. Being-in-the-world would then be a natural evolution of Husserlian thematization of the Other, for, Levinas argues, the world is already a way of confining the Other within the Same. It is then a matter of seeing how this confinement takes place and what kind of reading allows Levinas to impeach Heidegger with the above-mentioned accusation.

Levinas writes in *Existence and Existents* that 'existence is not synonymous with the relationship with a world; it is antecedent to the world'<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (London: Blackwell, 2006), 78

<sup>15</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 8

What Levinas is concerned about, almost weary of, is the fact that to be in the world is to be attached to things. The problem here lies in the kind of attachment. Levinas seems to always take the attachment as the mastering or cognitive recognition (one could call it thematization or substantiation), the panoramic apprehension of every fold of the world. This preoccupation is disseminated in a number of Levinasian texts. Whether he addresses it as the attachment of the other to things ('in the world the other is [...] never separated from things') or as its becoming object ('in the world the other is an object already') or affirms that 'it is one thing to ask what the place of the world in the ontological adventure, and another thing to look for that adventure within the world itself'<sup>16</sup>, the concern implicit in these remarks is the same: in the world, as in the Heideggerian formulation of the concept, the Other is absorbed within the Same. It should then come as no surprise that in this early study Levinas at some point turns to Husserl in order to challenge Heidegger. The notion of epochè allows him to say that 'it is not by being in the world that we can say what the world is'<sup>17</sup>. As one can see, Levinas often cuts off the hyphens and this gesture seems to convey important consequences. By lifting the hyphen and translating being-in-the-world for *being in the world*, Levinas loosens that which is most dear to Heidegger, namely the definition of being-in-the-world as an existential. By way of this erasure, which at times could be said to take the form of an upsurge, Levinas dispels the existential dimension and reduces the Heideggerian motif to its constitutive pieces. One should be careful in undertaking such an operation as it seems that the consistency and novelty of the Sein-in is lost as soon as the tightness between its constitutive

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<sup>16</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 33

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 35

terms is loosened. Without the hyphens one is left more or less with the denotations of 'in' and 'world' that Heidegger sets out to refuse. Once the terms of the expression are made independent, the tone changes: they no longer collaborate but instead tend to withdraw, moving back towards the accepted meaning of 'in', a container, and 'world', a given that contains. Some splendid pages are devoted to food, enjoyment and dwelling, but they all take their cues from the removal of the hyphens, so that the reflection on the 'in' as an *having that has the character of a being*, the in as *ethos*, fades out. The expression 'being in the world' does not do justice to the Heideggerian effort. It is true that Heidegger as well starts with separated terms, for the analyses of 'in', as derived from *innan*, *habitare*, *diligere*, and of the 'world' as existential must first be set free from their traditional (in the literal sense of the term, as referring to a thinking tradition) meaning. Nevertheless, as the analysis advances to the point where one can feel comfortable using the two terms, they can't be pronounced separately any longer, for this would mean plunging them again in the tradition, thus stripping them bare of their fecundity. It would then be necessary for Levinas to reformulate the two terms 'in' and 'world'.

Separating the terms in the compound expression being-in-the-world, thereby returning them to their substantial position after they have been carefully composed, does not suffice to silence their articulation, as if by tearing them apart one were triggering an elastic movement which then binds them together with more strength. In his discussion of Husserl and Heidegger's concept of world, Alweiss says that 'the hyphens between the words being-in-the-world are crucial for they emphasize Dasein's dis-location: this essential interdependency between

Dasein and the world'<sup>18</sup>.

Levinas, in short, seems to rely on a definition of the world that Heidegger is explicit in refusing. A great deal of the claims Levinas advances relies on the definition of the world as the totality of entities that can be present-at-hand within the world. This is pretty much the idea of the world that has prevented, in Heideggerian terms, the world from being accounted for in any meaningful way. The notion of the world as a totality present-at-hand, or if one wants to put it in a different way, as the given, prevents us from unveiling the world. But if the phenomenon world has never seen the light of the day, covered as it is by the corrective definition of totality, then Levinas' critique cannot really be addressed at Heidegger; rather, it sounds more proper when addressed to the same 'enemies' with whom Heidegger engaged. With regard to the question of the world at least Levinas might be therefore much closer to Heidegger than he seems. At times it appears as if Levinas, in his attempt to overcome Heidegger, is just placing himself at a distance, which means he is already concerned with and maybe even inspired by, Heidegger. Levinas breathes in the novelty of Heidegger's breeze.

It is nonetheless necessary to investigate the Levinasian strategy, the route he covers in order to reach a beyond the world, in view of transcendence, as that which is already implied in the relation with the existent. Step by step, to the top of the world.

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<sup>18</sup> Lilian Alweiss, *The world unclaimed: a challenge to Heidegger's critique of Husserl* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 79

### 3 - Desire-in-the-world

*I see life as a struggle and the real romance is  
not walking away from it*

John Cassavetes<sup>19</sup>

It is now worth summarizing the structure Levinas formulates in order to explain why he will not find ‘the existent respected in its being in being in the world’ and the transcendental relation that, according to him, every doing already implicitly assumes.

The argument develops from the intention to explain interiority and the section, right in the middle of *Totality and Infinity*, is largely devoted to explain this idea.

Although Levinas’ style precludes the possibility to draw a schema of its development, the skeleton of the analysis nevertheless appears quite clearly. Man’s relation to the world, an exteriority not alien to man himself, takes its first step as enjoyment. Our apprehension of things in the world is envisaged under the heading of enjoyment, which means that it is oriented towards the satisfaction, in happiness, of necessary needs. The notion of enjoyment is worked out, as already mentioned in the first chapter, thanks to the concept of living from... Enjoyment, ‘the very pulsation of the I’, ‘a quenching’, is the very fact of living; men move into it by the simple fact of living. It is, Levinas says, different from the Heideggerian disposition towards Being, for it always exceeds Being. It is both an accomplishment and an opening, as its order is disclosed in the incomplete nature of a being. As the very pulsation of the I, enjoyment, or better the independence and sovereignty this produces, is also the place where subjectivity originates. It

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<sup>19</sup> Ray Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, (London: Faber&Faber, 2001), 359

does not go unnoticed here that there is an implicit critique of Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world; as Thomas, among others, remarks 'for Levinas, to live from something is neither to act on it in an everyday immersion in the world, nor to act by means of it, utilizing the world as tool or implement'<sup>20</sup>.

The instantaneous enjoyment, by which man recollects himself and becomes familiar with things in the world, is then completed by the concepts springing from dwelling: habitation and possession. These concepts elevate the independence already achieved in enjoyment to a more mature level. Habitation and possession again should not be intended the Heideggerian way but as the separation of a being, which recognizes itself as both needy and happy, able as it is to overcome indigence, the nudity, and find in itself the encounter with the Other. Levinas calls this progression *separation*, that which is necessary for the constitution of the idea of the Infinite and, later on, for that of justice. As Levinas says: 'enjoyment separates by engaging in the contents from which it lives. Separation comes to pass as the positive work of this engagement [...] To be separated is to be at home with oneself'<sup>21</sup>.

As I said earlier on, one can find within Levinas' works a series of statements that lead in the same direction, albeit moving from different angles. Having sketched out the structure of Levinas' enjoyment, I will proceed by analyzing a series of quotations, in order to expand on the effects this structure has on Levinas' understanding of the world.

When Levinas writes that 'it is one thing to ask what the place of the world is in

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<sup>20</sup> Elisabeth Thomas, *Emmanuel Levinas. Ethics, Justice and the Human beyond Being*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 57

<sup>21</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 147

the ontological adventure, and another thing to look for that adventure within the world itself'<sup>22</sup>, he seems to be taking this to mean that it is not by investigating our attitude towards the world that we can understand something of that world. One could translate the statement by saying that by being in the world, by being immersed in things, we can't account for it, as our experiences of things prevents us from understanding the relationships enacted therein. This reproach, however, seems hardly imputable to Heidegger. One can't have a picture of the world as one finds itself in it; every possibility is laid down *as* world, the latter being not just the taking place of possibilities, but the very possibility of these possibilities. Thus in saying what the world is, which would then be the starting point of the ontological adventure, one should not look for an account of for the totality of existents, but for the conditions of possibility of such a totality.

The ontological adventure starts exactly by questioning what ontological status can one ascribe to the world. The two questions then are not at all different, as Heidegger says in *On the Essence of Ground*: 'Dasein is not Being-in-the-world because and only because it exists factically; on the contrary, it can only be as existing because its essential constitution lies in Being-in-the-world'<sup>23</sup>. If one questions the existence of the world, its place as it were, one finds that the world is not a place, that means it is not something 'within' which, as a site, the ontological adventure takes its first steps; rather, it is the access into or plane of disclosure for Dasein's possibilities, there where 'Dasein always faces the question of which possible mode of existence it should enact'<sup>24</sup>. As Dreyfuss says in his volume devoted to the first section of *Being and Time*, Dasein's submission to the world

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<sup>22</sup> See note 13

<sup>23</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'On the Essence of Ground' in *Pathmarks*, trans. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 111

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Heidegger and Being and Time* (London: Routledge, 1996), 53

belongs essentially to its Being, therefore 'being-in-the world is ontologically prior as the ontological condition of the possibility of specific activities'<sup>25</sup>. This indicates that even if Heidegger stresses practical activity, he does so in order to describe a more fundamental involvement with the world, a concerned absorption with the world that could not emerge from a subject-object understanding of intentionality.

If the world is primarily 'the structure of all possibilities'<sup>26</sup>, then ontology cannot start within it, as the world neither has a within nor contains the ontological adventure; rather, it exists *as* the ontological adventure, that means as an existential ontological concept for which no substance (no *what*) or set of qualities could successfully account.

In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, while discussing the schemata of ecstatic temporality, Heidegger explains that 'self and world belong together in the single entity, the Dasein. Self and world are not two beings, like subject and object [...] but are the basic determination of the Dasein itself in the unity of the structure of being-in-the-world'<sup>27</sup>.

The misreading seems then to rest on the question of the within or better of the with-in. If one were to write them separately one would see that *with* in this case would address a relation, while *in* again would address the way in which one exists (in the transitive) this relation. Thus the question would now be translated as: *it is one thing to look for the ontological adventure within the world and another thing to look for that adventure as the with-in the world is*. The world is the set of relations that traverses it and the way one traverses these relations. The

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<sup>25</sup> Hubert Dreyfuss, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 107

<sup>26</sup> Lilian Alweiss, *The World unclaimed: a challenge to Heidegger's critique of Husserl* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 78

<sup>27</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic problems of phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 297

consequence of this is that ‘as being-in-the-world Dasein must take a stand on itself and must be understood in what it does, uses, expects, avoids’<sup>28</sup>.

The question of the world is asked ‘in ignorance, by one who does not even know what led him to ask’<sup>29</sup>.

Levinas, however, is also looking for a way to be in the world that would break with the imperative of existing, referred to as *ontologism*. This theme, imbued with the implicit understanding of being as overwhelming plenitude, was developed for the first time in *On Escape*, where Levinas’ main concern is ‘getting out of being by a new path, at the risk of overturning certain notions that to common sense and the wisdom of the nations seemed the most evident’<sup>30</sup>. The analysis of pleasure, need and nausea will find a more thorough development in *Existence and Existents*, where Levinas writes that ‘to be in the world is this hesitation, this interval in existing; to be in the world is precisely to be freed from the last implications of the instinct to exist’<sup>31</sup>.

The question that could arise here is: in what way does this differ from what Heidegger says? Isn’t Heidegger perhaps saying exactly this by pointing out that the world is open before our thematization of it, that it is preliminarily open?

*Totality and Infinity* indicates that the possibility to return the world to the singular life freed from the ‘instinct to exist’ is achieved through enjoyment, the great missed chance of phenomenology and in particular of existential analysis.

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<sup>28</sup> Hubert Dreyfuss, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1990, 147

<sup>29</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edna H. Hong and Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 9

<sup>30</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 73

<sup>31</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 21

For Levinas the concept of ‘enjoyment – ultimate relation with the substantial plenitude of being, with its materiality – embraces all relations with things’<sup>32</sup>. Levinas operates a shift in emphasis by redefining, as Harman describes, ‘the ‘ontic’ realm as the zone where ontology stakes its genuine claim’<sup>33</sup>.

Enjoyment is the positive event through which Levinas tries to break with being-in-the-world as concerned absorption, ‘attempting to describe a subjectivity in relation to a world that does not fit into the ontological categories of Dasein’s being-in-the-world’<sup>34</sup>. The moment of separation triggered by enjoyment allows for an identity disengaged from immersion, departing from the world of work, as Heidegger describes it. According to Levinas things are grasped primarily in the love of life, ‘the primordial relation of man with the material world is not negativity, but enjoyment and agreeableness of life’<sup>35</sup>.

Three further questions arise at this point:

- Levinas sees in enjoyment both a ‘primordial relation’ and the ultimate moment of the utilization of tools<sup>36</sup>, but before apprehending things in enjoyment, shouldn’t there be something akin to a disclosure that allows us to envisage the fact that we will enjoy those things, or at least that one can intend those things as the ones leading to enjoyment? How can enjoyment render things accessible? It seems that Levinas at least has to acknowledge the fact that things are disclosed – they come to be pres-ent, they rejoin themselves –

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<sup>32</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 133

<sup>33</sup> Graham Harman, *Tool-Being. Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 241

<sup>34</sup> Elisabeth Thomas, *Emmanuel Levinas. Ethics, Justice and the Human beyond Being*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 64

<sup>35</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 149

<sup>36</sup> ‘The handling and utilization of tools [...] concludes in enjoyment’, Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 133.

and then enjoyed. The world presents itself to us as the relational encounter of singularities; in the multitude of entities, each entity is defined each time as being what it is. This disclosure of singularities, the fact that Dasein works out its conduct as being-in-the-world, does not rule out enjoyment or sincerity.

- Isn't the enjoyment Levinas refers to still an *in view of*... ? Namely, isn't the kind of beyond-utility, grasping and themes Levinas seeks to attain still a way of unleashing things for Dasein's own sake? Although one never finds in *Being and Time* the word enjoyment, or words like pleasure or happiness, as Harman points out in commenting on Levinas' sincerity, 'Heidegger obviously realized that the invisible system of reference only tells half of the story'<sup>37</sup>. In particular one should retain that the analyses of *Zeughaftigkeit* might in fact lead there, albeit in an implicit way. Does the pleasure that one derives from food not always imply feeding oneself? The same goes for building a house and for labour in general. Surely building a house does not stop at finding a shelter, but at the same time a house is not simply decoration, carpets and wallpapers. Although one cannot negate the aspirational side of things, nevertheless one should assume the fact that they introduce themselves not firstly and only as aspirations. It might be true that 'enjoyment embraces all relations with things', but at the same time it is not true that all relations with things lead to enjoyment, not even in the sense Levinas attributes to the term enjoyment. One cannot expose oneself to enjoyment unless one has already entered, exposed oneself to the referentiality that allow us to stick to things, by letting them be, without ever exhausting them. One should then start thinking of enjoyment as the non-exhaustion of the referentiality proper to the

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<sup>37</sup> Graham Harman, *Tool-Being. Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 241

world, for the referentiality is always prior to enjoyment, although enjoyment can ultimately come to pervade it.

- By saying that doing and labor already imply a relation with transcendence Levinas wants to suggest a movement beyond the simple possibility of using things, towards what he names 'desire' (defined as that which does not exhaust itself in apprehension, but operates a movement surpassing itself<sup>38</sup>). One should pay attention to the fact that in Heidegger's text the dimension of *usability* is often linked to the description of moods. In particular in §18 and then in §28 onwards Heidegger refers to a more poignant comprehension of the wordly nature of the world. Does not this *more* refer to a letting be that also assumes on itself the possibility for Dasein to be affected by intraworldly beings? Heidegger says it explicitly: 'to be affected [...] becomes ontologically possible only in so far as Being-in as such has been determined existentially beforehand in such a manner that what it encounters within-the-world can 'matter' to it in this way'<sup>39</sup>. If Levinas' critique can be translated to mean that things experienced in the world are present and then clothed with a meaning, so as to be enclosed in themes, Heidegger replies by bringing fore the notion of 'involvements'. This designates a grasping of things different from thematization, at least not in the mode according to which Levinas seems to understand thematization. It is important to pin this down at this moment, for the discussion ultimately leads to the question of sense as that which allows something to be comprehended, namely something that refers to something. As Heidegger says 'the context of assignments or references,

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<sup>38</sup> 'Metaphysical desire [...] desires beyond everything that can simply complete it', Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 34

<sup>39</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (London: Blackwell, 2006), 176

which, as significance, is constitutive for worldhood, can be taken formally in the sense of a system of relations'<sup>40</sup>. This last quote puts forth the idea that the sense of things has to be grasped beyond their pure presence, or even their pure readiness, or even their bare consumption. Rather it must be disclosed in terms of relations, as a referring within the original density of referrability, where things are always somehow delayed and do never offer themselves as bare as they are.

As Heidegger writes:

In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, [...] The ready-to-hand is always understood in terms of a totality of involvement. This totality need not be grasped explicitly by a thematic interpretation<sup>41</sup>.

Levinas might then be wrong in thinking that Heidegger is simply trying to privilege the practical; in fact, he rather seems to attempt a description of involvement that escapes the traditional model subject-object.

It is not only in the phenomenology of enjoyment though that Levinas points

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<sup>40</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (London: Blackwell, 2006, 121-122

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-191

his finger against the Heidegger's presupposed understanding of the world as the world of work. In the discussion of possession Levinas once more makes explicit that his intention is that of providing a different horizon from which to understand the world. When he says that 'the doctrine that interprets the world as a horizon from which things are presented as implements, the equipment of an existence concerned for its being, fails to recognize the being established at the threshold of an interiority the dwelling makes possible' he is again reducing Heidegger's propositions to the primacy of readiness-to-hand, concluding that 'it is not the world that makes things possible'<sup>42</sup>.

As already pointed out Heidegger does not stop at arguing that the primacy of theoretical cognition should instead be accorded to practical activity. As Dreyfus puts it, Heidegger is rather attempting to drift away from 'the traditional relation between self-referential mental content and objects outside the mind'<sup>43</sup>.

*Being and Time* does not establish a priority of readiness-to-hand to presence-at-hand. Rather, what Heidegger says is that theoretical contemplation does not allow one to take hold of aspects of the practical mode of activity, which is particularly relevant for Dasein's worldliness. As Mulhall points out:

overlooking our worldliness, we overlook something ontologically central to any form of human activity, theoretical or otherwise; and if this notion of world grounds the possibility of theoretically cognizing present-at-hand objects, it cannot conceivably be explained as a construct from an array of

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<sup>42</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 163

<sup>43</sup> Hubert Dreyfuss, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 62

purely present-at-hand properties and a sequence of value-projections'<sup>44</sup>.

Heidegger reads in Being-in-the-world the overcoming of intentionality when this is understood according to the subject-object articulation. Given that Being-in points to the structure of transcendence, his aim is to work out that what remains unresolved in the relation between a subject and an object is precisely the relation itself. The subject-object relation is for Heidegger 'less original than the self-transcendence of Being-in-the-world'<sup>45</sup>.

Heidegger is quite explicit on this: 'one of the main preparatory tasks of *Being and Time* is to bring this 'relation' radically to light in its primordial essence and to do so with full intent'<sup>46</sup>. Dasein is always already open to the world. The kind of opening at stake in Being-in-the-world is a mode of Being before any knowledge and subjectivity. This means that Dasein is already open to entities in the world, without making them the objective correlative of intentionality or appropriating subjectivity. Thus for Heidegger the problem is not which intentionality gives us the best account; instead, the attempt is that of getting beyond traditional intentionality.

It seems then that Levinas is here drawing near Husserl and Heidegger right there where the Heidegger's effort to differentiate himself is greatest. Dasein can have a world; in fact, the very possibility of being open to the world, prior to knowing it, means that Dasein is not purely an intraworldly being. If it were so, Dasein could not properly be-in-the-world, but only be contained/present in it.

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<sup>44</sup> Stephen Mulhall, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Heidegger and Being and Time*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 42

<sup>45</sup> Giorgio Agamben, 'The Passion of Facticity' in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 187

<sup>46</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 130

Heidegger says that ‘an entity ‘within-the-world’ has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its ‘destiny’ with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world’<sup>47</sup>. Having a world does not mean overcoming it by encompassing it: it is a mode of Being, by which Dasein is open to Being prior to knowledge; it is an existential, a ways ‘in which Da-sein is, whereas the corresponding categories show themselves as properties and attributes whereby the being of things can be determined’<sup>48</sup>. As existential Being-in-the-world is thus an a priori character of the Being of Dasein and as such it has an ‘active’ form.

The distinction between existentials and categories proves here to be particularly important. Heidegger – who seems to derive it from Dilthey – puts it like this:

all *explicata* to which the analytic of *Dasein* gives rise are obtained by considering *Dasein*’s existence-structure. Because the being-characteristics of *Dasein* are defined in terms of existentiality, we call them ‘*existentialia*’. These are to be sharply distinguished from what we call ‘categories’ – determinations of Being for entities whose character is not that of *Dasein* [...] *Existentialia* and categories are the two basic possibilities for characters of Being<sup>49</sup>.

Existentials always refer to Dasein, they always respond to the question of *whom*, while categories respond to the question of *what*. Somehow Heidegger here

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<sup>47</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 2000, 81

<sup>48</sup> Magda King, *A guide to Heidegger’s Being and Time* (New York: SUNY Press, 2001), 43

<sup>49</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 44

seems to invoke the notion of necessity, for something has to exist in a particular way if it has to be Dasein.

Oddly enough at times Levinas seems to be turning to Heidegger, although not explicitly, in order to criticize Husserl, as he had already done at the beginning of his philosophical adventure. As Derrida notices<sup>50</sup>, in *Theory of Intuition* Levinas turns his back to Husserl and grounds his analysis on a reading of *Being and Time*. Not by chance, the critique revolves mainly around the concept of the world and in particular around the notion of the world, not as a totality of perceived objects, but rather a ‘centre of action’. Levinas says that Heidegger goes further in that he thinks the world is not given over to the glance, but ‘in its very Being as a center of action, as a field of activity or of *care*’<sup>51</sup>. Although, as Derrida says, one cannot be sure whether Heidegger would have retained the definition of the world as a ‘center’ and in particular as a ‘field of activity’, nevertheless one should notice that Levinas seems here to fully understand the referential trait of the Heideggerian world. This gesture, to read Heidegger in opposition to Husserl, also resurfaces at times in *Totality and Infinity*, leading to a sort of confusion with regard to the point Levinas wants to make. Some remarks – a series of moves of rehabilitation by which Heidegger, kicked out from the door, gets into the discourse through the window – appear to be contradictory. After all that has been said so far, one still finds in *Totality and Infinity* a peculiar accent, which seems to lead once more back to Heidegger. After having detached himself from the idea of being-in-the-world, Levinas expresses himself in these terms: ‘the world I live in is not simply

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<sup>50</sup> Jacques Derrida ‘Violence and Metaphysics’ in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2002), 108 onwards

<sup>51</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. Andre Orianne (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 119

the counterpart or the contemporary of thought and its constitutive freedom, but a conditioning and an antecedence'<sup>52</sup>. One is not too far from Heidegger here; what suddenly resounds is that the world is prior to any acknowledgment (and possession). The idea that the world is disclosed beforehand, primarily, anticipating its thematization, or the fact that 'if the world can, in a way, be lit up, it must assuredly be disclosed'<sup>53</sup>, is a motif that Levinas had already used in the 30s. Even when his discourse moves overtly against Heidegger, it still draws lines that intersect from within the Heideggerian horizon.

There are significant examples that could add consistency to these comments. For instance, before moving on to discuss elements and things, Levinas pins down once more that: 'the world I live from is not simply constituted at a second level after representation would have spread before us a backdrop of a reality simply given, and after 'axiological' intentions would have ascribed to this world a value that renders it apt for habitation'<sup>54</sup>. What is crucial is to show that in understanding the relation with the Other as metaphysics, Levinas needs a world that is not immediately thematized, instead disclosed, and as such open as the always already open. Levinas needs, as it were, the 'same new world'. This, it seems, can be found only in Heidegger's work. The fact that Levinas wants to stress the structures of enjoyment and happiness, labor as living from... does not place his discourse in the apparent antithesis he attempts to reach.

Levinas' understanding of the world cannot do without the Heideggerian critique of Descartes and of presentness-at-hand. Only in this way can it be

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<sup>52</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 129

<sup>53</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 106

<sup>54</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 130

effective and only in this way can Levinas introduce desire in the world. It seems thus as if the author has never really left, at least with regard to the world, as per the perspective he had already adopted in *Theory of Intuition*. In order to overcome the subject-object relation, as it has been constituted up to Husserl and reinforced by him, Levinas necessarily turns to Heidegger. One can surely show that the register of enjoyment is absent from Heidegger's lexicon. Nonetheless one should also ponder that all the 'negative' connotations that Heidegger seems to assume in describing Dasein's relation with the set of relationships the world is must be specified not as negative in the sense of a lack of, or as the dialectical antithesis of a positive movement. At the opposite they should be intended as possibilities. The not indicates a condition of possibility. Heidegger himself takes care to specify this in many passages. Whenever one finds a privative expression, one should always be reminded that those express something positive, as when he says: 'in such privative expressions what we have in view is a positive phenomenal character of the Being of that which is proximally ready-to-hand'<sup>55</sup>. The series of *not*, which seem in the end to concern and even grip Levinas so much, do not necessarily foreclose positivity, desire, permission, aspiration, hope, enjoyment; those are not necessarily forces of anonymity or, even more so, powers of negation. Quite the opposite, this emphasis on 'possibility' suggests perhaps the emergence of *powers of existence*. One should then consider their function as that of opening conditions of possibility. When Heidegger says that 'if it is possible for the ready-to-hand not to emerge from its inconspicuousness, the world must not announce itself'<sup>56</sup>, one should read in these two instances of 'not' the very method to approach the in se of

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<sup>55</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 106

<sup>56</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (London: Blackwell, 2006), 106

the world and of things in the world. Heidegger makes it clear, years after the publication of *Being and Time*, in the *Letter on Humanism*:

The reference to 'being-in-the-world' as the basic trait of the humanitas of homo humanus does not assert that man is merely a 'worldly' creature understood in a Christian sense, thus a creature turned away from God and so cut loose from 'Transcendence' [...] in the name 'being-in-the-world', 'world' does not in any way imply earthly as opposed to heavenly being, not the 'worldly; as opposed to the 'spiritual'. For us 'world' does not at all signify beings or any realm of beings but the openness of Being [...] with the existential determination of the essence of man, therefore, nothing is decided about the 'existence of God'<sup>57</sup>.

The discussion of enjoyment previously undertaken calls for one more question. Levinas writes 'in the ontological adventure the world is an episode which, far from deserving to be called a fall, has its own equilibrium, harmony [...] to call it everyday and condemn it as inauthentic is to fail to recognize the sincerity of hunger and thirst'<sup>58</sup>.

This passage deserves to be analyzed in light of the Heideggerian concept of fallness. Levinas seems to imply that enjoyment and sincere happiness cannot find their place in the Heideggerian treatment of the world because fallness precipitates Dasein into some kind of ruination. Therefore the mode in which enjoyment and sincerity take place, that of the everyday, would be a priori disqualified or, as Levinas says, inauthentic.

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<sup>57</sup> Martin Heidegger 'Letter on Humanism' in *Basic Writings*, trans. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1978), 228

<sup>58</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003, 37.

As King points out though, what Heidegger means by fallness is not the situation of something ‘fallen perhaps from a state of grace into corruption, but the *movement* of falling. This movement, moreover, is not one of the accidents that can befall Da-sein in his factual existence but is one of the basic ways in which Da-sein can-be-in-the-world’<sup>59</sup>. Falling is then an existential structure of Being-in-the-world: Dasein already finds itself falling: an ontological motion, but without nostalgia. Heidegger writes: ‘in falling, nothing other than our potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world is the issue, even if in the mode of inauthenticity [...] On the other hand, authentic existence is not something which floats above falling everydayness; existentially, it is only a modified way in which such everydayness is seized upon’<sup>60</sup>.

Heidegger is explicit in refuting that fallness designates that it is not a matter of the bad side of things and that falling contains no assertion about a possible corruption of what is human.

The concept of fallness then does not necessarily imply a curse, a ‘condemnation’ as Levinas seems to put it. Terms like ‘average understanding’, ‘idle talk’, ‘everyday’ do not address a judgment; rather, they constitute sites where Dasein’s decision towards its essence (that is its existence) takes place. As Nancy puts it, it is precisely in adherence to existence that Dasein’s interest towards itself is disclosed. Rather than being the world of banality, of the general, the everyday is adherence to existence itself, ‘the taking-place, of the each time according to which existence appropriates its singularity’<sup>61</sup>. Therefore it is not simply in deserting the everyday that we ‘attain another, more “authentic” register

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<sup>59</sup> Magda King, *A guide to Heidegger’s Being and Time* (New York: SUNY Press, 2001), 88

<sup>60</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 224

<sup>61</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘The Decision of Existence’ in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 89

of existence'<sup>62</sup>.

The inauthentic should then not be thought of as the 'decline into an inferior form'<sup>63</sup> or the negative reduction of the authentic. As Agamben explains while discussing the concept of love in Heidegger's thought, 'authentic existence has no content other than inauthentic existence; the proper is nothing other than the apprehension of the improper'<sup>64</sup>. From the two works just mentioned, it emerges that when Heidegger talks about the inauthentic, one should be extremely careful in deriving from this any sort of judgment.

Recalling Nancy's elaboration of the question of the world one could say that the world as such comes from the withdrawal of Gods and constitutes itself as the spacing of sense. The world is what matters as what it is, it refers to and networks with itself; 'in short, it has started to comprise a co-existence'<sup>65</sup>. As one can see then Nancy's reading is close to Heidegger in linking the question of the world to that of Being-with and otherness. The reference to co-existence appears every time the question of the world is at stake. What need to be traced are exactly how the two questions unfold together, how one shapes the other and finally how both are intersected by the question of sense. One could attempt one provisional formula, expressed in three modes: the world is the co-existence of sense; co-existence exposes the sense of the world; sense circulates as the co-existence of the world. This co-existence, for this is what will be investigated from now on, is not a simple juxtaposition of things: as Nancy puts it, 'it refers to everyone and to no one, the

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<sup>62</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Decision of Existence' in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 89

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 99

<sup>64</sup> Giorgio Agamben, 'The Passion of Facticity' in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 1999, 197

<sup>65</sup> Jean Luc Nancy, 'Changing of the World' in *A finite thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Steven Miller (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 305

circulation of a sense that nothing either retains or saturates, a circulation found in the movement between places and beings, between all places and all beings, the infinite circulation of a sense that will end up having its entire sense in this with'<sup>66</sup>.

Saying 'you are absolutely strange because the world begins in its turn with you' or that 'the world is the generic name of this ontological curiosity'<sup>67</sup> means inscribing in the world the problem of being-with or, better said, taking the world as the only plane in which those questions become meaningful. It is by way of an access to sense as sense of the world that one can gain an entrance into the sense of the other. 'Co-appearance, then, must signify that "appearing" (coming into the world and being in the world or existence as such) is strictly inseparable, indiscernible from the *cum* or the *with*'<sup>68</sup>. In Nancy's thinking the Heideggerian structure that links Being-in-the-world, sense and Being-with is respected.

What appears at the end of the analysis is that where Levinas understands being-in-the-world mainly as instrumentality, a being-near-things which tend to turn the world into a category, Nancy reads it in terms of the abandonment to possibilities – 'offered and set free: this is what 'in the world means''. Therefore rather than being a constraint, it is the very site where the enactment of sense as the opening beyond a principle becomes possible.

Where for Levinas the world forms part of that system from which one needs to find a way of escape, through nausea or pleasure for instance, Nancy sees the breaking as the world itself. As Nelson writes 'individuation as the break of indifference can take place because Dasein's neutrality is already broken by the

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<sup>66</sup> Jean Luc Nancy, 'Changing of the World' in *A finite thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Steven Miller (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 306

<sup>67</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 6 and 19.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 61

facticity of its existence'<sup>69</sup>. The world is open to the facticity of singular existences in a way that makes it the open par excellence, the very factual breach constantly re-opened.

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<sup>69</sup> Eric Sean Nelson, 'Heidegger and the Ethics of Facticity' in *Rethinking Facticity*, François Raffoul and Eric Sean Nelson eds (New York: SUNY Press, 2008), 133

#### 4 – Two versions of originary otherness

*In truth, it was possible that for some time he had been giving me considerable help. He had put me to my task by creating a void around that task and probably by letting me believe that the task would be able to limit and circumscribe the void.*

Maurice Blanchot<sup>70</sup>

For the sake of clarity, the following argument will proceed by separating what in fact in Levinas' work is not separated. This means that the question of Being-with (or better of the refusal of Heideggerian Being-with), the I-Thou (relation to the Other person) and the question of Illeity (the third term, God, Justice), which form in Levinas' texts one single journey, traversing its entire philosophy with admirable solidity and consistency, will here be treated not as different themes, but, for the sake of analytical clarity, in different moments.

The argument will set off on the discussion of Levinas' rejection of the notion of Being-with as articulated by Heidegger in section §26-§27 of *Being and Time*. It will then move on towards a questioning of the I-Thou relation, as the preferred field where the ethical can emerge; here particular references will be addressed to the thought of Martin Buber, and the symmetry that Levinas contests. Finally the last step will be devoted to the theme of Illeity, the Third term. Appearing as early as in *Existence and Existents*, the term remains at times ambiguous, for it contains

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<sup>70</sup> Maurice Blanchot, 'The one who was standing apart from me' in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader. Fiction and literary essays*, ed. George Quasha, trans. Lydia Davis (New York: Station Hill, 1999), 265

references to God and also explains the resolution of the I-Thou situation in the ethical relation, what Levinas will then name justice.

A number of these considerations will appear again at the end of this work, in relation to the thinking of Jean-Luc Nancy, who proposes a treatment of Being-with, which, seemingly at least, goes in the opposite direction of the one undertaken by Levinas. The endeavor at that stage will be to show how the two, moving as mentioned on radically different paths, attempt in the end to propose the ethical not as a set of norms, but as absolute, as something that compels the human from beginning to end. Levinas proceeds by introducing what he terms metaphysical desire and the links this establishes with a third term that does not take part in desire or in relation while nonetheless judging it and adjusting the measure of one's responsibility to the other human being. On the contrary, Nancy places the ethical problem in a more apparent Heideggerian way: this is not outside ontology, but is rather ontology's central problem. The ethical can follow only from a reformulation of ontology that would take into account a *co-existential* analysis, an ontology that takes the world of bodies as its starting point. One then goes, or at least attempts to, beyond ontology, the other at the very bottom of it, at its core. According to Levinas one reaches ethics by stepping into otherwise than being, while Nancy finds it at the core of Being as the co-essentiality of with and Being.

Perhaps one is not that far from the question Heidegger poses to the thinking of Being in *Letter on Humanism* when he says that "if the name "ethics" in keeping with the basic meaning of the word *ethos*, should now say that "ethics" ponders the

abode of man, then that thinking which thinks the truth of Being as the primordial element of man, as one who exists, is in itself the original ethics'<sup>71</sup>.

Levinas seems to dispel the notion of *Mitsein* entirely, in view in particular of what Heidegger was 'in 1933, even if he was that for only a short period'<sup>72</sup>. One should not be too quick, however, in assessing this opposition. As it has already been argued with regard to the question of the world, a reading of Levinas starting from Heidegger might still prove to be productive. Without pushing this too far one could argue that Being-with still poses a horizon on Levinas' thinking. On several occasions Levinas proves to be fully aware of the debt one is to pay to Heidegger if one is to philosophize these days. As early as in the *Theory of Intuition* (a text from 1930) and as late as in the interview from 1982 quoted above, Levinas attributes to Heidegger an enormous influence. He is as explicit as to say: 'For me Heidegger is the greatest philosopher of the century, perhaps of the millennium'. One should always keep in mind a certain ambiguity, a sort of conscious resistance on Levinas' side to the seduction of Heideggerian thought: great respect and admiration, but also an almost spiky opposition with regard to some crucial philosophical questions. It is within this ambiguity that one could situate the questions here at stake. On one hand it is apparent enough that Levinas rejects a great deal not just of the Heideggerian perspective, but of the tradition, which Heidegger deconstructs and in so doing reinstates, and of his way of rereading the masters; on the other hand, this might be less evident, but it has

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<sup>71</sup> Martin Heidegger 'Letter on Humanism' in *Basic Writings*, trans. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1978), 235

<sup>72</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, 'Philosophy, Justice and Love' in *Entre nous. Thinking-of-the-other*, trans. Michael Smith and Barbara Harshav (London : Continuum, 2006), 98

already emerged in the notes to the question of the world. It is still from within Heidegger, a certain Heidegger at least, that Levinas finds his own solutions.

Levinas poses a number of reasons for not articulating the question of otherness in terms of *Mitsein*. Already in *Time and the Other* he devotes half a page to the refutation:

The other in Heidegger appears in the essential situation of *Miteinandersein*, reciprocally being for on another [...] the preposition *mit* here describes the relationship. It is thus an association of side by side, around something, around a common term and, more precisely, for Heidegger, around the truth. It is not the face-to-face relationship, where each contributes everything, except the private fact of one's existence. I hope to show for my part that it is not the preposition *mit* that should describe the original relationship with the other<sup>73</sup>.

Levinas will restate his concerns in a very similar manner in an interview, almost forty years after *Time and the Other*: 'In Heidegger the ethical relation, *Miteinandersein*, the being-with-another-person, is only one moment of our presence in the world. It does not have the central place. *Mit* is always being next to [...] it is *zusammensein* [being-together], perhaps *zusammen-marschieren* [marching-together]'

The second passage in particular calls for a separation in analysis. What Levinas seems to be refuting here is:

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<sup>73</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 43

- the fact that, according to him, Being-with is just a moment and its centrality is subordinated;
- the 'with' is then not 'ethical enough' (if one could use this expression); it simply states a juxtaposition, a *being next to* that does not involve any sort of responsibility but remains as it were, free of charge.

In addition, a twist occurs at the end of the passage. The question of what Heidegger was in 1933 becomes more poignant. The 'with' does not only fall short of the ethical command, it also constantly runs the risk of embodying a violent movement: a crowd walking side by side escalating to the vicious rustling of a march, men in black boots lifting their arms at unison. One can find here a thinly veiled reference to the question of destiny and to the theme of the people, about which Levinas is rightly more than suspicious. This last remark also establishes a link with what has been said in regard to the world, for Levinas finds always present in Heidegger's thinking a kind of distorted geographic constellation, a prevalence of the people, of some people to say the truth, namely Germany and Central Europe: 'there are texts in Heidegger on the place of man in Central Europe. Europe and the German West are central to him. There is a whole geopolitics in Heidegger'<sup>74</sup>.

Before moving onto questioning some of the statements Levinas makes in his few references to Being-with, and before analyzing them in relation to the way Nancy takes up the Heideggerian theme, it seems proper to describe the trajectory Levinas undertakes. It is all too known that Levinas' 'big idea' lies in having

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<sup>74</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, 'Philosophy, Justice and Love' in *Entre nous. Thinking-of-the-other*, trans. Michael Smith and Barbara Harshav (London: Continuum, 2006), 101

(re)discovered the question of the Other, in having opened a way, at the very limit of Western thought, through which the Other might come to be questioned as that which is always in a position to overcome, overtake, overhaul the possibility for an I to thematize it. Levinas' great formula has the Other as that (non) phenomenon opening the way to Infinity, opening dialogue and language as the question of responsibility, a question going well beyond the confines and the realm of knowledge and understanding. Ethics as first philosophy is in the end nothing else but this welcoming of the Other, an act of welcoming which precedes any approach by the Other, any demand for hospitality. The relation with the Other is a relation with Infinity, with something that cannot be contained, that therefore does not return to Totality (this, as Derrida says, is always a finite totality), a relation where the *I can* finally surrender.

In order to reach these conclusions Levinas not only turns to Heidegger when arguing against Husserl, as it has been seen, but often turns to Martin Buber – someone who lies at the very border of the philosophical tradition – in order to find notions such as 'relation' and 'meeting'. 'In the beginning is relation'<sup>75</sup> says Buber. In this statement one finds a decisive orientation, a way to access Levinas. As Levinas puts it:

the discovery of that order (the ethical relation) in its full originality and the elaboration of its consequences, and, if one may designate them this, its 'categories', remain inseparable from the name Buber, whatever may have been the concordant voices in the midst of which his own made itself heard<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Martin Buber, *I and thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (London: Continuum, 2007), 22

<sup>76</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, 'Apropos of Buber: Some Notes' in *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 41

In associating his name to that of Buber, Levinas is not just referring to a tradition, that of Jewish mysticism and of Jewish thinking in general: he is also delineating a pathway following which one would from time to time find oneself outside the philosophical tradition of the West. Anyone who has read Levinas has perceived, in pages that are among some of his most inspired, the attempt he constantly undertakes to breach the history of Western philosophy, operating an opening that would allow him to find a way out without leaving that tradition completely. Staying within it, without fully living it. Buber seems to offer Levinas this very possibility. In *I and Thou* there are very few references to the ‘tradition’, apart from a couple of winks to Kant and a final ironic rephrasing of Spinoza. Most of the book speaks on a different register, one that recalls certain proceeding of negative theology and mysticism. Surely a particular Jewish tradition plays a great role there, but , through the consideration paid to ‘primitive’ cultures or nature peoples – Zulu, Fuegian, Kaffir, Native Americans all make their appearance there – Buber also seems to advance towards the terrain of cultural anthropology. Mysterious powers and the magical emerge quite frequently in Buber’s major text, much more often than the tradition of the Reason, if one can so name that curve that stretches from the Greek up to contemporary thought. Buber seems to resort to a different background, to traditions of the *otherwise*, in order to resolve something he thinks cannot be found in ‘our’ authors. Even when he turns to Christianity he is most likely to turn to the Christ of Eckhart, then to Augustinian or Aquinian theology. Towards the end of the volume, for instance, while discussing union and duality, nowhere does Buber to the Parmenides; instead he resolves the aporia by turning to the story of Indra and Prajapati from the *Upanishads*. Although Levinas almost never dares pushing his set of references too far from the Western tradition,

this element nevertheless definitely attracts him to Buber. It should be noted that the calling fore of primitive cultures and of Eastern philosophy is not only a formal adventure; rather, it constitutes a core aspect of Buber's proceeding.

Having said that, it is not simply this leap outside philosophy, or at least philosophy as the established corpus of Western thinking, that draws the two close: there is something more seductive in Buber that catches Levinas' attention. This could be said to be already evident in the title of Buber's work: *I and Thou*. Without attempting to degrade Levinas' originality, the present argument will try to uncover Levinas' refusal of the notion of *Mitsein* by underlining the influence of Buber's conception of relation, the primary importance of relation as meeting, in the form of an *I* uttering a *Thou*.

The privilege Levinas accords to the one-to-one encounter will emerge better if read in light of Buber's thinking. This privilege is not without consequences and can be seen at work in every Levinasian reformulation of his 'big idea'. Whether he tries to express the encounter with the Other, to formulate the concept of *Illeity*, to express the surfacing of Justice, or to argue with regard to the State, Levinas seems to always bear in mind, or start from, a one-to-one situation. The same fact that he uses the Face as the concept that unleashes the 'power' of avoiding the return to the same could be intended as a telling sign of the fact that facing, whether one takes it as a shock, a breach, the exposure of gentleness, or the condition of responsibility prior to decisions, constitutes the situation *par excellence*, excluding all others, or including, which is to say submitting, all others to it.

Levinas finds in Buber a model that allows him to both reformulate the Husserlian subject-object relation without having to, as in *Theory of Intuition*, turn to Heidegger and to start freeing the Other from the Same, Totality. Very much like Buber, Levinas will structure his thesis around the bursting forth of a meeting, the encounter with the Other as ungraspable. Moreover, as in Buber, one finds in Levinas' thinking the motif of language as holding primarily onto a dialogical nature, thus always being readable in the form of the address, a sending to the other human being.

In particular with regard to the first point – the subject/object relation – Buber distinguishes himself since he posits the I-It relation in a different realm from the dialogical relation I-Thou. While for Heidegger Dasein is always caught in the understanding of the Being that is at stake for it, whether it encounters things ready-at-hand or it is solicited to and by other human beings, for Buber the two spheres, the world of things and other human beings, other 'Thous' in his lexicon, do not cross. Analytically they have an independent life.

Buber opens his work with these words:

To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude. The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks [...] The one primary word is the combination *I-Thou*. The other primary word is the combination *I-It* [...] Hence the *I* of man is also twofold<sup>77</sup>

Therefore he can immediately distinguish the appraisal of things from dialogue, the meeting with a partner or a friend, the turning towards the unknown neighbor.

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<sup>77</sup> Martin Buber, *I and thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (London: Continuum, 2007), 11

One shouldn't however be too quick in saying the 'appraisal of things', for Buber maintains that even when one addresses things, the *It*, one is still addressing an interlocutor, one is nonetheless in the midst of dialogue. The response one gets from the *It* is surely different from the one received when the *Thou* is uttered, but it still has to be conceived as a response. Buber places this realm at the threshold of mutuality and describes the intercourse one has with it in this way:

It is part of our concept of a plant that it cannot react to our action towards it: it cannot 'respond'. Yet this does not mean that here we are given simply no reciprocity at all [...] In the sphere we are talking of, we have to do justice, in complete candour, to the reality which discloses itself to us<sup>78</sup>

It is important then to underline what Buber makes clear in the very first pages of his text, that even the *It* is primarily the calling forth of a relation: rather than simply facing objects, an *I* calls them forth, insisting not on their presence, but on the relation that can be established with them. It is from within this relation and as this relation that a world of *It*, a world of things, exists. Its existence springs from dialogue, from an interrogation. Objects would not just be inexistent without this call being put through: in addition there wouldn't be an *I* without the relation *I-It*. The constitution of the *I* is always bound to the uttering of a composite mode, it is always then to be found in the midst of a relation. The existence of subjectivity as such, the *I* alone, is considered to be impossible. Prior to dialogue the subject has, as it were, nothing to say.

This conception – speech as dialogue and dialogue as the opening up of relations constituting a meaningful plane – is displayed in a more radical way

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<sup>78</sup> Martin Buber, *I and thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (London: Continuum, 2007), 95

when Buber comes to describe the relation with other human beings. This point is the one that Levinas finds dearest and also the point where he finds an entire register with which to address the question of otherness. Buber says: ‘if I face a human being as my Thou, and say the primary word I-Thou to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things’<sup>79</sup>. To say that the other human being escapes the direct grasp of things amounts at saying that I am not in relation with a set of quality, but primarily with a response that comes directly to me and to no one else, a response that follows my addressing one and a single man. Every utterance of the Thou singles out an other Thou, who is immediately also an I readdressing me in the same way. It is therefore impossible to encounter another human being without addressing him as a whole, as part of a dialogue in which I will never stop having to respond, having to also question myself as a Thou, for his speech will always already have addressed me as this Thou. I can try, Buber goes on, to exclude some quality of the human being I am facing, but in doing this/so I am already losing him, not losing control over him, which I don’t hold anyway, but losing the relation, losing the only possibility I have of approaching. As such, every time I attempt to draw something particular, a quality, out of a Thou, I am already stepping outside, Thou flies out of my reach. Therefore – now one starts to see the relevance this could have for Levinas – there is no experience of a Thou: experience is a mode that is not given in my relation with the other man. This relation will always be commanded by his light, nothing else exists if not through the light cast forth by our dialogue, by our unending calling and responding, at every time reversed, since when he responds to me I cease being an *I* and become a *Thou*. In Buber’s words: ‘I do not experience the man to whom I say Thou. But I

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<sup>79</sup> Martin Buber, *I and thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (London: Continuum, 2007), 15

take my stand in relation to him, in the sanctity of the primary word. Only when I step out of it do I experience him once more. In the act of experience Thou is far away<sup>80</sup>.

The same concern is expressed few lines afterwards in a dialogical fashion:

- What, then, do we experience of Thou?
- Just nothing. For we do not experience it.
- What then do we know of Thou?
- Just everything. For we know nothing isolated about it any more<sup>81</sup>.

Not just experience is ruled out of the encounter with the other human being, but also seeking, looking for, any intentionality that aims to draw the *Thou* close, that would bring him within my sphere, subject to manipulation. It is certainly through an act that I address the *Thou*, but this act is not an act of my will, one actions among others: rather it has something of the unknown, an unconditioned reflex, an impulse I follow with my whole being; my very being is completely engaged in a leap towards the Other. This is what gives to Buber's notion of the meeting its force; it holds the traits of a drive, urgent, compelling, undeniable.

While reading Buber one sometimes has the impression that his understanding of the meeting follows the logic of the passion, the swinging between excess and passivity, that which, as Kierkegaard has it, 'opposes itself to learning'. In fact, if one lends an ear to Kierkegaard for one more minute one can heed this echoing in both Buber and Levinas: 'To this end passion is necessary. Every movement of

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<sup>80</sup> Martin Buber, *I and thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (London: Continuum, 2007), 15

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

infinity comes about by passion, and no reflection can bring a movement about'<sup>82</sup>.

No agency, no subjectivity, meet the requirements. No idea of I, no self-consciousness or extrapolation suffices to account for the encounter with another human being: the vanishing point of this relation terminates right at the feet of infinity. 'Only when every means has collapsed does the meeting come about'<sup>83</sup> says Buber.

Buber translates passion in the fashion of a refusal of any sort of objectivity or abstraction; his philosophy is very much bent towards life, the living man. 'You and me', 'real living', 'actual man', 'our life' are recurrent formulas, stock phrases that Buber employs to inscribe at least the first section of his volume in a sort of concreteness, which rids itself of the world of ideas, postulates and possibly tries to detach itself from a more general attitude of philosophy, that of neglecting the 'province of the lived'.

While this is the lexicon employed, one shouldn't be misled and consider Buber a thinker of accidents; the *I-Thou* relation should be thought, as Derrida puts it, prior to its eventual modifications.

What is relevant here is that Buber adopts a language that aims at real life, very much as Levinas will do later on in his descriptions of enjoyment, need, happiness and the elements. In doing so Buber refuses, or at least attempts to, what he names objective speech, that register that 'snatches only at a fringe of real life'<sup>84</sup>. Objective speech aptly expresses only 'shadowy solicitude for faceless numbers', without thus taking the meeting into account and foreclosing the way to God and the infinite.

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<sup>82</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 20

<sup>83</sup> Martin Buber, *I and thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (London: Continuum, 2007), 17

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 21

This brief detour on Martin Buber's philosophy was intended to provide an entrance into Levinas' reformulation of some unending questions within continental thought. If one were to draw a Levinasian genealogy, one would find Buber on the opposite side of Heidegger and Husserl, the other two crucial influences. He provides Levinas with a mean with which to hold the tradition in reserve, without having to dismiss it completely. Buber's reflection is tangential to, but does not properly confront the masters of, Western thought; one should therefore not be surprised by the fact that Buber does not set himself to contest or argue against that tradition, that this kind of analytical effort is completely absent from *I and Thou*. Nevertheless, or properly because of this, Buber addresses questions in a way that Levinas finds inspiring in his attempt to redefine some of the structural questions of continental thought.

At the analytical level the proximity between the two thinkers could be said to revolve around two core points, from which many others spring:

- the subject-object relation: Buber understands it in terms of a bursting forth – his preferred expression is *meeting* – in which a degree of reciprocity is always possible. Although Levinas will then distance himself from Buber by the adding the crucial concept of asymmetry to the meeting, in this he is still closer to Buber than to Husserl or Heidegger;
- language: the primary dimension of language is not the naming of things or the expression of Being, but the triggering of relations; the relational tone of language, therefore the primacy of the dialogical mode, structured around few primal words (*Grundwort*) allows man to meet the world and the Thou, as an I that utters the relation. Although here one should keep in mind that the

Levinas of *Otherwise than Being* introduces the distinction Saying/Said<sup>85</sup>, which finds no place in Buber.

From this two points one could draw a series of secondary ones: in order to express a different subject-object relation, Buber adopts a different lexicon, a lived lexicon if one could dare using this formula, one that relies much more on 'concrete situations' than on references to the authors and masters of the tradition of reason. In such a relational system, the notion of meeting becomes crucial. The way Buber structures it will flow into Levinas' formulation of the encounter with Other as a step towards Infinity.

While Levinas says that Infinity is that which overwhelms what tries to contain it, Buber elaborates the meeting as:

- that which happens outside the sphere of experience: 'Only when every means has collapsed does the meeting come about';
- that which – in relation to the Thou – belongs to no space and no time, but will unleash itself as the uncontained: 'The world of Thou is not set in the context of either of these (space and time)';
- that which sets forth the world as destiny and man as free man, free in that he is in need (and awaiting) of this destiny: 'he intervenes no more, but at the same time he does not let things merely happen. He listens to the course of being in the world [...] in order to be brought [...] I said he believes, but that really means he meets'.

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<sup>85</sup> While the Said concerns identical entities, the Saying 'antecedent to the verbal signs it conjugates, to the linguistic systems and the semantic glimmerings, a foreword preceding languages' triggers the logic of the one for the other. See in particular Chapter I, Section III and Chapter II, Section III, c of *Otherwise than Being*.

What is most important for the present argument though is to understand the meeting as a device that liberates the I-Thou relation, what John Llewelyn puts in terms of Levinas endorsement of ‘Buber’s insistence that it is an evasion of responsibility to turn the I-Thou relation into a conscious experience of sociality [...] that relation is dialogue, where dialogue is not to be conceived metaphorically’<sup>86</sup>.

Although Levinas will argue against Buber that his characterization of the I-Thou as mutual, reciprocal and symmetrical does not allow him to enter the properly ethical field, the mode of relation ‘discovered’ by Buber allows Levinas to move, to an extent at least, beyond Being-with.

Between Buber and Levinas there are nonetheless consistent differences. For Levinas what triggers the relation with the Other is not as much my uttering a Thou, although this dialogical irruption constitutes an important moment, as my responsibility for him, which does not need to be triggered by any particular event; rather, it lies always there, before any encounter, before experience and before any actual, concrete, eventual call. As such I am responsible anyway, no matter what my position with regard to the Other is and regardless of the way in which the Other depicts me. Levinas often refers to Dostoyevsky in order to elucidate this more clearly: “We are all guilty of everything and everyone, towards everyone, and I more so than all the others. The superlative degree of guilt does not refer to any personal history”<sup>87</sup>. Thus from this one can already envision that the relation to the other cannot reside in reciprocity and symmetry. Quite the opposite, it rests on the original difference ‘neither mediate nor immediate’ that proceeds by a-

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<sup>86</sup>John Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 188

<sup>87</sup>Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Apropos of Buber: Some Notes’ in *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 44

symmetrical confrontations. This might sound surprising given that the privileged mode of this relationship is the face-to-face (one-to-one), but it is exactly because the face-to-face is played out within a situation that never manages to include itself – I can never really see the face I am confronting – that Levinas can name this relation as the ethical itself. While in Buber a *Thou* called is always an *I* calling another *Thou*, thus establishing an intimate reciprocity, Levinas founds his thought exactly on the overcoming of reciprocity, what he terms ‘the dissymmetry of inter-subjective space’<sup>88</sup>.

The main difference then lies in the stress Levinas puts on the ethical, as a term and as the primal term. In particular the word *responsibility* is to me what draws a line between the two. In Levinas’ words: ‘In my own analyses, the approach to others is not originally in my speaking out to the other, but in my responsibility for him or her. That is the original ethical relation’<sup>89</sup>

Buber does not exactly have this, his meeting does not speak of responsibility for the other man in the same way Levinas does. It seems like Buber stops a moment before, and instead he turns his eyes towards God and the relationship with the world. In Buber the same term *ethics* is almost absent: his philosophy is more inclined toward opening a breach to reach the other, before the question of responsibility and decision might come in.

Despite the abovementioned differences, Levinas’ face to face is still very close to the I-Thou relation at least in the contempt he feels towards neutrality. The face to face is still structured as an intimate relationship, for Levinas seems to use it in

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<sup>88</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Apropos of Buber: Some Notes’ in *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 45

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 44

order not to have to turn to Being-with. Although Levinas, it will be discussed later on, at some point introduces the third term, he nevertheless remains rather faithful to the one-to-one relationship as the primal mode of every access to the other. Levinas never really rids himself of a privilege for intimacy, although it is an intimacy that tends not to exclude the third one, the other Other, but to bring him in.

While arguing against Buber Levinas is much closer to him than he would like to consider himself to be: in his attempt not to give into Being-with, he goes back to the pair, the couple, though this time to an open couple. The couple is Buber's domain, it has been Buber who established it, as Levinas is ready to admit.

Now, having seen the privilege Levinas, though somehow reluctantly, has to accord to the couple – then to Buber – one can turn to see where the contempt for the proposition 'with', this tiny crucial word, comes from.

It is largely a reversing of terms one has to operate here. It is a reversal that motivates Levinas since the beginning: 'Being before the existent [...] is freedom before justice [...] The terms must be reversed'<sup>90</sup>.

Contrary to what one might think one does not find in Levinas' texts many references to the Heideggerian 'with', nor to Being-with or Being-with-each-other (Miteinandersein) and in general very few explicit mentions of sections 26 and 27 of *Being and Time*.

It seems as if Levinas' intention is then that of reversing the terms of the question: the face to face would be more original than the with, for the with would still be referable to an understanding of sociality where the former could be in the

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<sup>90</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 41

end communicated as a unity. In this view individuals would be aggregates undertaking an always latent process of fusion. As Michael Lewis writes, 'Levinas' criticism is first of all stirred precisely by its subordination of the relation between self and other to a relation that is named 'being-with' and which by invoking 'being' neutralizes the asymmetry of a relation that can be accessed only from within that relation itself. Any view from the outside betrays the relation'<sup>91</sup>.

Levinas' concern for the exclusivity of the face to face, his privilege for intimacy, pushes him to reduce the Mit to the cornerstone of a logic devoted to master the crowds, directing their trajectories to a single-minded destiny and to Truth. The reference to marching, the translation of being-with as marching-together, is also present in more elaborate works. Levinas fears that by placing the with as the primary mode of relation one would be then obliged to surrender to the Same; being-with would then be being-within-the-same, an holistic ending Levinas cannot accept.

Miteinandersein too remains the collectivity of the with, and is revealed in its authentic form around the truth. It is a collectivity around something common. Just as in all the philosophies of communion, sociality in Heidegger is found in the subject alone; and it is in terms of solitude that the analysis of Dasein in its authentic form is pursued<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Michael Lewis, *Heidegger and the place of ethics; being-with in the crossing of Heidegger's thought* (London: Continuum, 2005), 8

<sup>92</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 93

There is one fundamental misreading that appears to motivate Levinas' refusal, although this misreading contains elements that are possibly truly at stake, as Being-with appears more and more as the unfulfilled promise of Heideggerian analysis.

In *Time and the Other* Levinas writes:

It is the collectivity which says 'us', and which, turned toward the intelligible sun, toward the truth, experience, the other at his side and not face to face with him...Miteinandersein also remains the collectivity of the with, and its authentic form is revealed around the truth [...] we hope to show, for our part, that it is not the preposition mit which must describe the original relation with the other<sup>93</sup>.

As Derrida points out, Levinas is taking Being-with as a 'derivative and modified form of the originary relation with the other'<sup>94</sup>. While Heidegger explicitly says that 'this 'with' is something of the character of Dasein', Levinas appears to evoke what is an existential possibility under the traits of a category<sup>95</sup>.

This has a number of consequences:

- It means to interpret Being-with as instrumental intersubjectivity, the plural readiness-at-hand of actual individuals. As Heidegger says: 'the kind of Being which belongs to the Dasein of Others, as we encounter it within-

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<sup>93</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 43

<sup>94</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Violence and metaphysics', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2002), 112

<sup>95</sup> The distinction has been sketched in the section entitled 'Desire in the world'

the-world, differs from readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand<sup>96</sup>. In this way the Mit is reduced to an incident of solitary Da, and – as Lewis puts it – ‘being-with is taken to be little more than a placatory appendix to a description of what is ultimately a solipsistic ego’<sup>97</sup>.

- Levinas seems to underline an undifferentiated equality at the heart of Being-with, overlooking the fact that the equality that makes co-existence (Mit-dasein) possible rests on the being-open of entities to one-another. This openness prevents the constitution of a pure subject (therefore also of a pure sociality, which Levinas names philosophy of communion), to which world and others would be added<sup>98</sup>. This is confirmed not just by Heidegger’s statements throughout sections 26-27 that he does not intend to start from an isolated ‘I’ or that the being-there-too (Auch-da-sein) is not a simple Being-present-at-hand-along-with, but also by the fact that the with constitutes a relational difference, where every and each Dasein discloses the world as a with-world. While Levinas seems to highlight a kind of constraining empathy, Heidegger explicitly refutes this. As King suggests, ‘another way to explain the non-categorical characteristic of Da-sein is to compare Husserl’s view with Heidegger’s. Heidegger avoids founding his solution on empathy (Einfühlung), because it assumes that the other is a ‘double’ of oneself<sup>99</sup>, while the access to the world others provide can be understood just as *absolute curiosity*.

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<sup>96</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (London: Blackwell, 2006), 154

<sup>97</sup> Michael Lewis, *Heidegger and the Place of Ethics; Being-with in the crossing of Heidegger's thought* (London: Continuum, 2005), 18

<sup>98</sup> Walter Biemel in talking of ‘others’ puts it like this: ‘Je peux les découvrir comme co-existants parce que je suis moi-même *être-avec*, c’est-à-dire ouvert aux autres en partageant avec eux mon ouverture sur les étants’. *Le concept de Monde chez Heidegger* (Paris : Librairie Philosophique J.Vrin, 1987), 93

<sup>99</sup> Magda King, *A guide to Heidegger's Being and Time* (New York: SUNY Press, 2001), 75

- Levinas stresses Being-with as simply the realm of the They and thus takes the They as the purely the negative moment of banality. As already explained in the discussion devoted to being-in-the-world, the They, although it constitutes the moment of indifference (Dasein does not recognize its absorption), must also mean, in Nancy's words, 'the site of disclosedness'<sup>100</sup>.

Although one can, as Nancy does, advance the critique that Heidegger's question of the with as co-existential to the Da basically leaves open just two possibilities – a crowd with no proper names or a People forged around the destiny of its Proper Name – nevertheless one should be careful not to step into the mistake of taking Being-with for a category or draw conclusions from some exemplary modes. What one would rather reproach Heidegger for – Jean-Luc Nancy does this effectively – is that, although the German philosopher stresses the cruciality of the question of the co-essentiality of Being-there and Being-with, all the same he never really dwells on it. Being-with floats on the surface of the analysis of Dasein while it never becomes as fundamental as, according to Heidegger's announcement, it should be.

Nancy points this out by saying:

In his analytic of *Mitsein*, Heidegger does not do this measure justice. On the one hand, he deals with the indifference of an 'uncircumspective tarrying alongside' and, on the other, an 'authentic understanding of others' [...]

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<sup>100</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Decision of Existence' in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 89

Between this indifference and this understanding, the theme of existential  
distantiality immediately reverts back to competition and domination<sup>101</sup>

This is the legacy one is left with, something that Heidegger does not attempt to resolve even in his later writings. It seems like Levinas duplicates this Heideggerian gesture: he claims to be attentive (and he proves to be in many regards) to the Heideggerian reworking of the problem of existence, but when approaching the big question – the Other – he quickly glances at the Heideggerian articulation of the problem (Fürsorge is mentioned just a couple of times in *Totality and Infinity*), but never really attempts to discuss it at length.

What the few occurrences just underlined seem to show is that in general, by taking Being-with as a category (not an existential possibility necessary to Dasein, but an occasion of its world) Levinas can criticize the fact that by calling into question Being in the compound expression Being-with Heidegger describes a relation that refers constantly to an element outside of itself.

Brought into play in these terms Being would thus overshadow the asymmetry necessary for the relation to be ethical (which means at this stage for a concern for the Other to really emerge). The relation to the Other would then be reduced or mediated by a relation to an overarching totality, which assumes the Other as part of itself. If Being-with though is taken as an existential possibility (necessary if one is to identify something as Dasein), then the Being in the Heideggerian formula should be understood as a singularity not reducible to the anonymous totality. From this it follows that the other that Being-with

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<sup>101</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O’Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 82

invokes is precisely the other whose otherness remains intact (as it remains intact his possibility to disclose a meaningful world). As Lewis puts it 'Being is the uniqueness of a Being, the singularity of an entity before and beyond any wider horizon of meaning which might subsume it and render it comprehensible'<sup>102</sup>, which could be rephrased as the fact that the shared world, the world-with as Heidegger has it, is always made available as the sense open from a singular perspective. Therefore, even when Dasein is alone, even in solitude, Being-with does not cease being its existential possibility; as King puts it, 'even when Da-sein thinks he does not need the others, when he withdraws from them and has nothing to do with them, this is still only possible as a privative mode of being-with'<sup>103</sup>; Dasein's access to the world is always guaranteed by an access with-others.

Also, once Levinas has turned Being-with into a category, his work 'against' ontology begins. One could read it already in the following passage:

From the start I repudiate the Heideggerian conception that views solitude in the midst of a prior relationship with the other. [...] the conception seems to me ontologically obscure. The relationship with the Other is indeed posed by Heidegger as an ontological structure of Dasein, but practically it plays no role in the drama of being.<sup>104</sup>

Here Levinas is pointing out that Being-with remains nothing more than a missed chance, since 'it plays no role'. He is not going as far as to say that the

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<sup>102</sup> Michael Lewis, *Heidegger and the Place of Ethics; Being-with in the crossing of Heidegger's thought*, (London: Continuum, 2005), 8

<sup>103</sup> Magda King, *A guide to Heidegger's Being and Time* (New York: SUNY Press, 2001), 75

<sup>104</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 44

notion forecloses access to alterity, but at this point it already seems to him ‘ontologically obscure’. From here on though Levinas’ formulation will become sharper, meant to highlight not just an obscurity, but a real darkness at the heart of Mitsein, a darkness that makes it impossible to retain the alterity of the Other:

Beginning with Plato the social ideal will be sought as an ideal of fusion. It will be thought that, in its relationship with the other, the subject tends to be identified with the other, by being swallowed up in a collective representation, a common ideal. It is the collectivity that says we, that, turned toward the intelligible sun, toward the truth, feels the other at its side and not in front of itself<sup>105</sup>.

If one takes Being-with as a categorical, then one naturally finds oneself to argue on something Heidegger never says, namely Being-with defines purely the human being as a social animal. Being-with should instead be taken as that which exposes a logic of separation rather than companionship, differentiation rather than fusion.

Nancy shows this dynamics, completely opposite to the one Levinas seems to detect: ‘we do not have to identify ourselves as “we” [...] we have to disidentify ourselves from every sort of “we” that would be the subject of its own representation’<sup>106</sup>. If one formalizes Being-with in the way Levinas seems to do (zusammen-marschieren), one entangles Being-with in significations that are, if not foreign, at least posterior and eventual and that tend to reduce Being-with to the truism ‘man is social’.

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<sup>105</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 45

<sup>106</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O’Byrne, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 71

It is easier to read Being-with as applying to Dasein in a second stage. Understood in this way, there would be no need at all for Being-with, but maybe there wouldn't be any need at all for Dasein either. Heidegger probably wouldn't be 'the greatest philosopher of the century' if he had just restated some kind of dialectic that philosophy had been aware of for quite a while.

Levinas himself explains this when, simplifying for the sake of an introductory work, he says that Heidegger's effort is diametrically opposed to that of dialectical philosophy, which far from seeking the ontological foundation of knowledge is concerned with the logical principles of Being. Therefore there must be something other than the simple discussion of the with proceeding from an I and a world and following those two constitutive terms. All attempts to thematize the 'with' in 'Being-with' simply take one of its occasions – 'being-next-to', 'marching together' – and make of that the exact definition. In the word 'exact' one should hear the force of the *ex*, before it assumes the idea of method, of a thoroughly examining. *Ex-agere*, the pulling out of something: the action of isolating and bringing something out. This is what exact means in this case: the interpretation isolates one aspect of Being-with and uses it to cover the word itself.

The question then that should be reopened at this stage is: what does it mean to say that Being-with is an existential and not a categorical and what does it thus mean to co-exist?

One can try first advancing two negative arguments, namely by indicating what co-existing is not. On the one hand, co-existing cannot simply be the co-appearance of a series of entities alongside each other. A chain of human beings, slaves chained and sold at the market, does not make co-existence (and not even co-appearance). On the other hand being-with cannot be a universal destination,

the common ground on which to build the People. This second connotation would in fact lead to the violence Levinas warns us against.

What one has to try and revert to is something different: it is the logic of the *with* thought immediately alongside Being, something that would go beyond ontology if ontology stops at the thinking of Being (thus excluding the co-extensive *with*) or that would change ontology (by pushing it to a place it has not yet been able to occupy, namely taking the *with* acutely, as Being's most intimate problem).

What needs to be thought if one still wants to try taking Being-with seriously is an originary with, knowing though that one cannot get back to this origin, for 'the with is strictly contemporaneous with all existence, as it is with all thinking'<sup>107</sup>.

What the *Mit* in *Mitsein* invites one to think of is the exposure of our being-many; that is to say plurality as such, which does not mean plurality disentangled from the one. The two terms have now to take a new undertone. In the word plurality one should now hear the plurality of existence, and in the word one, the one-to-every-other, simultaneously many and each one. Alterity, in its inner structure, is made possible by the way the many confronts the singular always as an each-one, never simply as crowd; each one even when alongside and not in front of each other. There is though nothing fortuitous here: this register of positions, simultaneity and being-alongside, does not fall back into the crowd and so it is employed to address the configuration of Being-with as that which establishes a being-together founded on separation. Being-with makes separation possible: 'together only if separated', as Blanchot puts it<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>107</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 41

<sup>108</sup> 'When he touched her and drew her toward himself in a movement to which she immediately consented, he knew, however, that their two images remained at a certain distance from each other, a

The concept of distance used to describe Cassavetes's work becomes particularly relevant here. Being-with exposes this contrapuntal logic whereby the singular is called an 'each-one' each time it exposes itself to the many. In this process the 'each-one' is not constructed (then destructed by society), rather it is exposed to its own being-social, it finds itself as the singular as long as plural. Again, this is not the old fashioned constructivist formula, by way of which the individual understands how to behave in society; quite the opposite, the singular apprehends nothing and loses nothing, it simply happens to be among others, and this happening is the very essence of its existence. In discussing the work of Cassavetes, Deleuze for example points out that: 'linkages, connections, or liaisons are deliberately weak [...] sometimes the event delays and is lost in idles periods, sometimes it is there too quickly but it does not belong to the one to whom it happens'. A bit further Deleuze also says that: 'the characters can act, perceive, experience, but they cannot testify to the relations which determine them'<sup>109</sup>.

The close-up identifies in order to let the identified singular play with the plurality that its identification exposes. Identifying the singular in this case would be also and at the same time opening up, gaining access to the plurality. Cassavetes makes clear that the regime of identification is inseparable from a regime of distancing, of even minimal spacing, sharing and circulation. The movement in the close-up is not directed from one to many, but passes both types and *rests* in this

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slight distance that he did not lose the hope of reducing a little further'. The long dialogue of this short book, *Awaiting Oblivion*, would probably deserve a separate analysis, for what it says about Being-with, being-with-one-another, and for the way in which it says it. Maurice Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, trans. John Gregg (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 20

<sup>109</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1, The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 2005), 205; 211

passing and therefore never really rests on anything. It takes place between us, between the each-one and the many.

The attention paid in every close-up to the singular and the repetition of this gesture for other singulars, without ever letting one be the only One, are not just cinematic gestures responding to an attempt to achieve a choral composition. They don't simply aim at establishing a common ground. They rather are an attempt to reach the eventual trait of our being-together. Being-together: explosion of singularities exposing each in its own way an access to the plurality they also are.

By using the close-up in a contrapuntal way, by cutting several close-ups one next to the other, Cassavetes (dis)organizes the composition: the close-up makes sure that the sociality, the being-there-together, is purely happening and is sustained only by the fact that it is happening (the communality of the social situation is sustained not by the choral fellowship of the many, but by the displaced appearances of each one). Sociality is not reduced but exploded in these situations, exploded because what makes it solid, what prevents it from dissolving all of a sudden, is that everyone poses a distance which can't be reduced if not in view of a betrayal of sociality itself. Many authors have identified a sense of 'destruction' at work in Cassavetes' images. Kouvaros speaks of 'a tension between composition and annihilation at work in the very construction of the image' and of a filming technique that tends to 'to eat away the characters, showering them in too much light or losing them in a deliberate underexposure'<sup>110</sup>. Jousse puts it in terms of elusiveness when he says that 'the aim of Cassavetes's cinema is to show the streams which surround a person, a constantly moving rhythm between beings and

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<sup>110</sup> George Kouvaros, *Where does it happen? John Cassavetes and cinema at the breaking point* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 149

things which is beyond the self, elusive'<sup>111</sup>. As already noted, Deleuze often insists on this point. With particular reference to *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* and *Gloria* he argues that locations can abruptly change coordinates as empty spaces can be filled all of a sudden, creating the effect of an 'event which exceeds its actualization in all ways'<sup>112</sup>.

Sociality in Cassavetes – and all his films are in this way utterly 'social' – never rests on an obligation, a principle: it always takes an adverbial form. Contrapuntal means exactly this: that the simultaneity is not simply an appearing of subjects, but the appearing of distinct subjects, whose appearing together is for them neither the reception of an extrinsic property – an accident – nor the giving of intimacy – the unleashing of an a priori. Contrapuntal is the distance of one from the other when those ones are together. This is barely presentable, if not *as* the time it takes from one cut to the next, from one close-up to the next, the non-consequential appearance of one face after another.

Not presentable because it cannot be reduced to one single vision, this is what makes the *with* appear and withdraw at the same time. To some extent one could say that those are not images, or barely so, if the image is what detaches itself completely and lies in a temporary isolation; those images never completely disentangle themselves from the multiplicity of other images. The process of extraction that the image necessarily propels is not completely accomplished. This is why someone can speak of Cassavetes' films as having an alcoholic form<sup>113</sup>: filming is never simply the attempt to render a narrative or a silent act of

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<sup>111</sup> Thierry Jousse 'John Cassavetes', quoted in George Kouvaros *Where does it happen? John Cassavetes and cinema at the breaking point* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 117

<sup>112</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1, The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 2005), 125

<sup>113</sup> Silvie Pierre, Jean-Louis Comolli, *The two faces of Faces*, in 'Cahiers du Cinema. The 1960s. New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood', ed. Jim Hillier, trans. Annwyl Williams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 325

witnessing, rather the camera flings the mundanities of day-to-day life towards a constant crisis whereby we are no longer sure how things come together or what the proper order of things is; the everyday is taken as a portion of eternity. Characters appear, become solid, as long as they always have the possibility to revert their presence into an absence, into circulation. The fact that those films tend to be long and almost exhausting for the viewer, the fact that the action is followed always almost in real time, spanning across a short period of time, a matter of days or even hours, depends on the fact that there's no need for any reference external to the film itself. The realism of Cassavetes' films lies in the fact that they avoid resemblance, they resist it; likeness can't affirm itself because the film does not institute a relation with something beyond itself. Rather than delivering the film to the real, the film sucks the real in. Things are left without 'the time to corrupt themselves nor the origin to find themselves'<sup>114</sup>. Realism is here not an attempt to reproduce a status quo or to draw the image close to it; the real should be taken as Blanchot does: 'that with which our relationship is always alive and which always leaves us the initiative, addressing that power we have to begin, that free communication with the beginning that is ourselves'<sup>115</sup>. The birth of the film has no other resource than what is happening in front of our eyes, and what is happening is the impossibility of a presence that is not also making itself present and is therefore always on the verge of becoming the instinctual flow of time. Cassavetes seems to say: we are always there, but this is given not as a condition or agreement, but as the affirmation of something that lives just as this affirmation. In

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<sup>114</sup> Maurice Blanchot 'When the time comes' in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader. Fiction and literary essays*, ed. George Quasha, trans. Lydia Davis (New York: Station Hill, 1999), 258

<sup>115</sup> Maurice Blanchot 'Two versions of the imaginary' in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader. Fiction and literary essays*, ed. George Quasha, trans. Lydia Davis (New York: Station Hill, 1999), 418

a paradoxical formula what those films say is: there's no reason for being-here-together, therefore we are-here-together.

If plurality is then not a mere multiplicity and the one is not the only one – subject, Man – then what in fact needs to be thought is a different exposition of Being, a reversal of the philosophical priority. Not Being and then its correlations, but Being as correlation, exposing a logic that in one stroke names both 'together' and 'singularly'.

One immediately hears at this point the objection of all Levinasian scholars, for whom Being would already mean the finite totality, which forecloses access to the Other.

This position can nevertheless be challenged. To the Levinasian objection that the unity of ontology addresses a finite totality precluding access to the Other, grasping the Other in order to betray him, Nancy replies that in fact the unity of ontology must be taken as the distancing, the in-between of its singular-plural articulations. The apparent encompassing totality of Being is here dispossessed of its powers, since Being becomes simultaneity, simultaneously singular and plural, which means also *with* itself, without ever recovering itself: 'Being does not coincide *with* itself unless this coincidence immediately and essentially marks itself out according to the *co*structure of its occurrence'<sup>116</sup>.

Where Levinas affirms that the recurrence to Being is a threat posed to alterity, Nancy affirms that alterity lies at the heart of Being. In a footnote to *Being Singular Plural* Nancy in fact writes that: 'in a sense Levinas testifies to this

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<sup>116</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 38

problematic in an exemplary manner, but what he understands as ‘otherwise than Being’, is a matter of understanding as the ‘most proper of Being’<sup>117</sup>.

It is hazardous to simply translate the lexicon from one thinker to the other. This operation is the one that Blanchot attempts in the *Unavowable Community*, where he criticizes Nancy’s reworking of the concept of community by rephrasing Nancy’s line of reason in Levinas’ terms, so that ‘Nancy’s skepticism towards Levinas is discreetly rebuffed by Blanchot’s infinite skepticism towards Nancy’<sup>118</sup>. This kind of translation always runs the risk of betraying as it were the letter of the texts, by plunging the text into a context the text is not necessarily ready to respond to. An alternative strategy, the one attempted here, could be of letting the two arguments run somehow separately, paying attention to the differences – and even in some case to the incommensurability – of the two registers.

Nancy’s argument can be reconstructed in this way: if one is to reread the Heideggerian Being-with, the problem of otherness cannot be posed simply with regard to the Other as the Other concrete human being, the problem must be posed at the heart of Being itself, concluding that Being is Other, by being with itself. This configuration presents itself as even more originary than the ontological difference, or better the ontological difference at this point becomes the question of the with: difference between Being and Being.

If the critique Levinas moves to philosophy – to always and only conceive the Same, perennially returning to itself – is grounded on the understanding of Being as the One, that whose horizon is its own unity, then it seems that any mention of Being would return philosophy to a standstill. The languishing position in which

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<sup>117</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O’Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 199

<sup>118</sup> Leslie Hill, *Blanchot. Extreme contemporary* (London: Routledge, 1997), 201

philosophy rests is an inaptness to detach its sight from the splendor of the system, questioning Being as solid. Being as an indeterminate and abstract predicate, ‘seeking to cover the totality of existents in its extreme universality’<sup>119</sup>. Thinking Being would then always mean to think the Other as a category of Being itself. Levinas addresses this comment to philosophy in general, but he has Heidegger in particular in mind. It is though from within Heidegger that perhaps the criticism could be probed. If the critique rests on the fact that Being reduces the Other, then learning to think Being as the other (and not the Other than Being) could reverse the terms: not the Other in being, but being-as-other. Being-as-other means understanding the plurality at the heart of Being itself, the impossibility on Being’s side to recover itself, or opening the possibility to understand the solidity of being (being-one) starting from being-with-one-another. If Being is not solid, neither a state nor a quality, but graspable only in the action of being with, then the Levinasian critique loses much of its force. As Nancy points out in a text on love – one of the few explicit debates with Levinas’ thought – ‘There is the ‘each time’ of an existing, singular occurrence. There is no existing without existents, and there is no ‘existing’ by itself’<sup>120</sup>. What Nancy is pointing out once more is Levinas’ misunderstanding of the Heideggerian emphasis on Being as the thinking of a generality. The Being at stake is rather a Being that is both multiplied and singular, ‘hard and cut across’. Being-with – co-essential and constitutive of Being – takes place as the cutting across of a singular occurrence.

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<sup>119</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Violence and Metaphysics’ in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2002), 175

<sup>120</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Shattered Love’ in *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Lisa Garbus and Simona Sawhney (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 270

Saying not just that being is an unnecessary term, but that, understood in this fashion, existents are again simply juxtaposed, could allow for one further reproach. The critique would repeat the one brought by Levinas against Heidegger: side by side instead of face to face; alongside and not in front of. Nancy replies that 'our being-with, as a being-many, is not at all accidental, and it is in no way the secondary and random dispersion of a primordial essence. It forms the proper and necessary status and consistency of originary alterity as such'<sup>121</sup>. The proximity or togetherness offered by Being-with is thus one that always takes itself as a problem. In Nancy's intention co-existence should be not as much the side-by-side or the taking others into account as the fact that we constantly, on an everyday basis, do not accept juxtaposition and that we open the sense of our being-together, reopening in this way sense at large.

From what has been said one could easily already envisage a critique to the capitalization of the word Other. If otherness is understood as an originary situation, attached to the question of the world, made patent primarily in the unleashing and circulation of sense (without otherness there wouldn't be sense), neither missable nor appropriable, then a 'great Other' would here be misleading. The mode of Being-with requires an access to the originary other that considers no appropriation and no loss; it has nothing to do with these two terms. It is composed in a logic that accepts only the exposition of others as always already coming. On the other side/hand the great Other demands a making, a welcoming that is in the end still a construction, which is the sight turned towards an eternity. The Other

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<sup>121</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 38

becomes a fixed eternity, ‘the exalted and overexalted mode of the propriety of what is proper’<sup>122</sup>.

Having analyzed these differences one might be surprised to find Levinas – in the end of his notes on Buber - saying that ‘the Da of Dasein is already an ethical problem’<sup>123</sup>.

From here, from this brief statement, almost an abandoned note, one seems to see a ‘poros’, a way out of the aporia. If the Da of Dasein is ethical, this is because the Da of Dasein is always already a Mit-da, a there-with.

Although in fact Levinas is here pointing out the fact the fact that by occupying a ‘there’ I am already necessarily depriving someone else of his place, one could try and read this as something different: the Da of Dasein is an ethical problem because my being there always already implies the opening of and towards an *other there*. The consequence of this opening, this necessary displacement from my own Da – displacement which is also access to my there, to the possibility itself of occupying – is something we, regardless of the position we occupy, all have in common. The fact of being there is that which we have in common: the ethical stature of this statement is what Heidegger has left un-thought and what Levinas himself has tried to overcome without really stepping into it, apart maybe by way of this claim, almost a leftover.

On one side the neglected message, left on the page of a text called ‘Notes on Martin Buber’, appears then in a dialogue where Heidegger should find no place.

Buber never properly engages with Heidegger, despite the fact that one could find

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<sup>122</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O’Byrne, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 13

<sup>123</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Apropos of Buber: Some Notes’ in *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 48

disseminated here and there various assaults to the instrumental apprehension of things ready-at-hand. Even so, Levinas concludes his notes with this reference, as if after having walked all the distance hand in hand with Buber, he still has Heidegger, or an overcoming of him, a beyond Heidegger, in mind. As if the call for the meaning of Being were, despite great efforts, still there, still calling, still demanding to be heard.

That the 'Da of Dasein is an ethical problem' might suggest that the 'having to be' Heidegger indicates as the task of Dasein should be understood as a 'having-to-be-with-others'. *Having to be* then might mean not only understanding the meaning of Being, rather to justify one's own being-with, understanding this being with, not starting with one's own position, but moving from the fact that this position is a dis-position with regard to another Da. Therefore the ethical dimension of Da, and also its understanding, any form of understanding, even one beyond knowledge and theory, would start from the with, not as companionship this time, the light of solidarity shining on the darkness of the thrown subject, but as the irreducibility of being-there-with to the simple being-there. Mit/with/cum here are not thus just little mysterious words, they instruct us on what has to be justified, they draw the trajectory and sustain the momentum of this justification. The ethical standing of Da as mit-da could be prepared in this way: on the one hand one receives the impossibility to jump back (though this back shouldn't suggest the idea of a return, rather of a defense) into one's own Da, without finding this Da already displaced. On the other, the access to other Das is an *always, but not yet*, a reinvention of positions one can never take for granted.

What mit/with/cum impose to justify – a word that here bears the connotation of *understanding*, as when one says: to justify an argument – is this logic of an

irresolvable togetherness whose ethical dimension rests on inaccessibility. Irresolvable because, as already said, one can't possibly imagine a way out, into absolute properness (even a limit concept as that of solitude would in fact invoke the very heart of the *with* and its logic; Heidegger: 'Only can be lonesome, he who is not alone'), and inaccessible because accessible only as the eventual form of a displacement.

This is only an anticipation of the conclusions; nonetheless, this discourse seems to be what allows Nancy to say that the 'ontological disposes what the ethical exposes'<sup>124</sup>.

The Heideggerian invitation expressed in the *Letter on Humanism*, 'think about the essence of action'<sup>125</sup>, very much lays down the guidelines here.

Challenging the well-known criticism that Heidegger does not have a position with regard to ethics, Nancy attempts to read Heidegger's thinking itself as a 'fundamental ethics'<sup>126</sup>. The work titled *Originary Ethics* is devoted to this task. Many of the motifs presented in this work are in fact recurrent themes in Nancy's reformulation of concepts such as *world*, *sense* and *with*.

*Fundamental ethics* will not lay down a body of principles, nor specify a particular conduct-- it is an ethics without archetypes and without even the possibility of man to identify completely in his polis. An originary ethics instead responds to the demand of philosophy to think of the essence of action as action of sense. Therefore the ethical interest here will not be merely theoretical or speculative. The question of an ethics should then be posed starting from the

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<sup>124</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 99

<sup>125</sup> Martin Heidegger 'Letter on Humanism' in *Basic Writings*, trans. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1978), 213

<sup>126</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Originary Ethics' in *A finite thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Duncan Large (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 174

particular engagement with existence that is Dasein's stake and responsibility. Dasein's comportment is that of being essentially preoccupied with existence, therefore with an opening of sense. The accomplishment of this opening has to be necessarily deferred, an ultimate opening meaning also an immediate closure. This is, Nancy says, what the finitude of Dasein, on which a fundamental ethics must rest, calls us to think: 'unaccomplishment as the condition for the accomplishment of action as sense'<sup>127</sup>.

This means that such an ethics does not rest on or produce values or ideals, does not as it were refer to an above or a beyond: it announces rather the making sense of existence, the taking up – *hic et nunc* – of existence as the rigorous call to explore possibilities for making sense. Existence, conduct of sense, is both the moment of inscription of this ethics and its putting back into question. One could try a provisional conclusion: to position the possibility of such an ethics, one should pay attention to the fact that Dasein is at any time that which engages with its own existence, this engagement signaling already an absolute responsibility towards making sense. Given that the *making* in making sense is always a matter of primarily opening the circulation of sense (meaning a co-existence that does not rest or present an already given evaluation of sense), this leads us to the problem of being-with and of responsibility towards others. In this way the being-with gives the measure of the measureless opening of sense. If it is true that no ethics can exist without measure, the measure of fundamental ethics is this absolute responsibility to the everyday experience of being-with. Contrary to Levinas, there's no altruism here, unless altruism is taken to mean an an-archic intrusion of the other in everything that has to do with the opening of sense. As Nancy puts it

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<sup>127</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Originary Ethics' in *A finite thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Duncan Large (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 178

‘the other is going to be essential to opening, which is essential to sense, which is what is essential in the action that makes up the essence of being’<sup>128</sup>. The approach then to the humanity of the other human being (this expression inevitably recalls Levinas’ work on the humanism of the other’) will be directed always against and towards the excess that any definition of *man* produces. To put it differently: what needs to be answered about the humanity of the other man lies in the impossibility to respond *exactly* to the question. As Lewis puts it there is almost an equation in Heidegger’s work between thinking and ethics, and Nancy himself seems to respect this: ‘what counts as ‘thinking’ is anything which does not remain oblivious to the void or simply, as Levinas might say, to the excess of the totality, ‘infinity’. Questioning is precisely to institute a ‘ontological difference’ in the totality’<sup>129</sup>. When Nancy argues that ‘saying ‘man’ will always mean letting ourselves be conducted by the experience of a question that is already experienced as being beyond any question to which a signification could respond’<sup>130</sup>, he expresses the logic of a questioning that acts sense out, for it does not let itself be absorbed by any determination. This acting out of sense always has in view the singular, the singular event of being, ‘an element within a field which cannot be encompassed within one’s own view of that field, but which rather has a gaze of its own and thus stares back at the viewer’<sup>131</sup>, as Lewis perhaps sketchily puts it.

Therefore the question is ‘that of making-sense-in-common, something quite different from making common sense’<sup>132</sup>. Provisionally one could then argue that

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<sup>128</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Originary Ethics’ in *A finite thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Duncan Large (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 181

<sup>129</sup> Michael Lewis, *Heidegger and the Place of Ethics; Being-with in the crossing of Heidegger's thought*, (London: Continuum, 2005), 100

<sup>130</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Originary Ethics’ in *A finite thinking*, trans. Duncan Large, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 194

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 192

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 195

ethically reaching to the other means then:

- to act sense out, as opposed to acting on a reserve of available senses
- that this acting of sense is a sharing of finite existence; it means to enter the sharing that sense is, a sharing that exposes a plural singularity to its own existential finitude.

Maurice Blanchot has lent his attentive ear to this many times; in his words one might put it this way: ‘I recognize that you are as unknown to me as you are familiar. It is a wonderful impression’<sup>133</sup>. But he also asks, going straight to the problematic heart of this logic: ‘Are we together? Not quite, are we? Only if we could be separated’. In another text one finds this: ‘Every meeting was already a meeting again for us [...] it’s always too late for us to meet’ - ‘Too late, it’s true, because there is no right moment’<sup>134</sup>. To finally conclude, beyond every conclusion, with astonishingly poignant brevity: ‘United: separated’ (with a very subtle voice, just about to be lost, or just about to reemerge, she replies: ‘we cannot be separated, whether I speak or not’<sup>135</sup>).

Maybe one need invoke Blanchot here because one is stepping on the very threshold of a proximity (and also a friendship, we know this quite well), the proximity between Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Blanchot, a proximity that has the traits of a separated union.

How not to lend an ear now to Blanchot’s description of the *third relation*, keeping to his words, and to the man without horizon, affected by this most terrible, but without terror, relation.

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<sup>133</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, trans. John Gregg (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 55

<sup>134</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Step not Beyond*, trans. Lycette Nelson (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 40

<sup>135</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, trans. John Gregg (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 21

Blanchot's third kind of relation is 'not a relation from the perspective of unity or with unity in view, not a relation of unification'<sup>136</sup>. This is then a relation where the presence of the other does not return us 'neither to ourselves nor to the One'. This is a relation of the interval, of interruption, of the impossibility of finding the way home, of distance (the kind of distance that founds the poetic and cinematography of John Cassavetes): a relation that rests on 'the strangeness between us'. Blanchot is also very cautious in using the term *Autrui* (the other person, in Levinas' lexicon), 'Autrui is not the word one would want to hold onto'<sup>137</sup>. In the same way as Derrida he has the courage to question it; similarly to Derrida, who wants to 'examine patiently what emerges in language when the Greek conception of heteron seems to run out of breath when faced by the alter-huic'<sup>138</sup>, he sets off to discuss the linguistic adventure of *Autrui*. Without much introduction, in the midst of the discussion, moved by a slight terror, confessing without hesitation a 'feeling of fear', right there where one has to come to terms with the unknown, or maybe because it's too late, because one is already trembling, one already feels the pressure of having just passed some threshold, without being attentive enough to it, without being cautious enough not to walk on that spot where 'the alibi of our relations were about to be exposed', Blanchot openly solicits everyone to think: 'Who is *Autrui*?'. He does so by clinging onto the provenance of the word and its proximity to the third term, *lui*, him or even He. *Autrui* is not a word one can use without much caution. He concludes that by asking 'Who is *Autrui*?' one already distorts what one means to call into question, for *Autrui* 'cannot designate a nature [...] is not a certain type of man'.

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<sup>136</sup> Maurice Blanchot, 'The Relation of the Third Kind (man without horizon)' in *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 71

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 70

<sup>138</sup> Jacques Derrida 'Violence and Metaphysics' in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2002), 159

In a relation of this kind one is also not too sure who is the other ('which of the two of us would be the other?'), a presence in missing, a 'presence of man, insofar as he is always missing from his place'. In conclusion: 'we have to do with a non personal punctuality oscillating between no one and someone'.

## 5 - Ambiguity of the Third

What will be proposed here is that the Third, developing in a philosophy of Illeity, is on one side a necessary term for the ethical relation, since it allows the very idea of the face-to-face to be developed, although it won't cease at times to take the form of a return to neutrality, to an order that evades the relationship.

The ambiguity between what Critchley calls 'the alterity of the il y a and the alterity of Illeity'<sup>139</sup> prompts the question whether Levinas is ever able to overcome the bad experience of neutrality.

That Levinas develops a need for neutrality can be seen in various ways. The more he engages in getting rid of it, the more the third term seems to affirm the neutral. It is not a coincidence that when Levinas reaches the breaking point of his philosophy, the peak perhaps of his attempts, Illeity has become the very concept from which a surfacing of Justice can be discussed. If one can see in this 'philosophy of the He', as Derrida has termed it, the resolution of the Face of the Other 'that resembles God', at the same time the Third seems to undermine the face-to-face relationship with the Other, by reintroducing a density beyond the relationship itself.

The third term keeps swinging between two poles: God and the Third Man, absolution and companionship (intended as the constitution of a common ground). It is a necessary development, but at the same time it pushes back the radicalism that should emerge from the face-to-face. Saying that the face is not an allegory,

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<sup>139</sup> Simon Critchley, 'Il y a', in *Maurice Blanchot. The Demand of writing*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (London: Routledge, 1996), 112

not a symbol or metaphor, but what exceeds and breaks visibility, what stubbornly resists phenomenology, and then claiming that the face of the other resembles God, or even comes from Him, poses a few challenges.

Levinas is careful in explaining that the resemblance just mentioned does not fall within *mimesis*: ‘the God who passed is not the model of which the face would be an image’<sup>140</sup> – rather it is a resemblance that comes as respect for the Infinite: man resembles God because man is in the trace of God, not because he is the icon of God. Resemblance between the Other and God means that God can and must be heard in the voice and in the face of the Other, ‘He at the root of the You’<sup>141</sup>. As Levinas repeats, it is not God who makes the revelation – He does not cast it – but the one who receives it (and receives it without having demanded it, by inhabiting the trace of God). ‘His (God’s) absolute remoteness turns into my responsibility’<sup>142</sup>.

Nevertheless if the face resists phenomenology, shouldn’t it also be prevented from referring to a higher order, an order that sheds light on it? Marion formulates the question in this way: ‘if the face does not properly give itself to be seen in the same sense as does an object or a being, how does it come to me, or reach me at all?’<sup>143</sup>

The answers to such questions might come only from the analysis of the third term itself. More specifically it might come from the way in which the Third orders the relationship and inscribes in it an externality, the very outside that the

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<sup>140</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, ‘The Trace of the Other’, in *Deconstruction in context*, ed. Mark Taylor, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 359

<sup>141</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Of god who comes to mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 69

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 69

<sup>143</sup> Jean-Luc Marion ‘The Voice without Name: Homage to Levinas’, in *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God. Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl, trans. Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 225

hypostasis of the Face seemed to have foreclosed from the very start. One can see the contradictory traits of the third term in Levinas' writing by undertaking an analysis of the different connotations it undergoes within his thinking.

In *Existence and Existents* the third term oscillates between the neutrality of Being, *there is*, and the third man, who makes possible my relation to the Other. As neutrality of Being, the third term is simply the space of horror, space in which Macbeth and Phaedra wonder.

The attempt in this case is to shed light on the Heideggerian anxiety, the fear for being, the horror for the rumbling of neutrality, 'the impersonal, nonsubstantive event of the night [...] like a density of the void, like a murmur of silence [...] like a field of forces'<sup>144</sup>. What Levinas wants to underline here is that Being, as conceived by Heidegger, can turn out to be that which makes us all feel the burden of existence, that impersonal field from which one sometimes feel swallowed. With the expression *there is* Levinas expresses an anonymity, that which 'like the third person pronoun in the impersonal form of a verb, designates not the uncertainly known author of the action, but the characteristic of this action itself which somehow has no author'<sup>145</sup>. The place from which there is no escape, suspension is closed off, where 'negation, annihilation and nothingness are events like affirmation, creation and subsistence, but impersonal events'. The *there is*, neutrality over everything neutral, third term as embracing erasure of contradictions, is the locus where inevitably our existence strolls without aim. Levinas will employ this theme again and again, up through his very last texts. In

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<sup>144</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 59

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 52

the concluding pages of *Otherwise than Being* for instance he says: ‘essence stretching on indefinitely without any possible halt or interruption, the equality of essence not justifying, in all equity, any instant’s halt, without respite, without any possible suspension, is the horrifying *there is* behind all finality proper to the thematizing ego, which cannot sink into the essence it thematizes’<sup>146</sup>.

This is, though, only the negative side of Thirdness. Thirdness acquires also a positive meaning, one that allows not just absolution, namely what’s other in the Other, but also access to Justice.

The question one would want to pose is whether, despite Levinas’ struggle against neutrality, the Third term does not still lead to the appearance of an externality with respect to the face to face that seems to impeach the immediacy of the ethical appeal.

The motif of the third is intimately bound to the notion of the trace. It is in fact as trace that the positive meaning of the thirds is inaugurated. It is important here to fix some points, in the way of a preliminary commentary.

Levinas introduces the notion of Thirdness, in the two directions I will show later on, to overcome a certain intimacy implied in the Face-to-Face relation, the kind of intimacy for which he reproached Buber.

What is other in the Other cannot simply rely on proximity, the radicalism of the Face can be pushed even further by relating it to a term external to the relation itself.

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<sup>146</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006), 163

In order to further bury alterity into an ungraspable otherness Levinas associates it with the passing of Infinity. This passing holds the character of something that will never come to an end, it is a passing that will never come to reside on a substance. Understood in this way, as the passage of Infinity, the third renders available a process by which the presence of the Other becomes absolute, for it absolves itself from the kind of presence an object would have, immediately put under siege by sight, grasping hands, thematic understanding. The purpose is immediately clear: bringing the Other outside the Same, making its return to the Same impossible, drawing Ithaca too far from Ulysses. Once the Other is taken as absolute, the Same cannot advance enough to reach it.

The configuration now is that of an Other that can only be caught in a passage, and it will be precisely this passing that makes it Other; alterity resides now on the imperative of a passing, its mode being the opposite of representation, its order being that of a disorienting of intentionality.

A first consequence of what has been said so far is that when one comes to Illeity one can no longer discern Levinas' program on man from that on God.

The intervention of Illeity, its passage transporting the Other to an order impossible to consciousness and intentionality, inevitably calls for an explanation of the concept of God. Levinas intentionally inserts God at this point, and from now on the discourse on God (which is not at all the discourse on the divine, as God is here an 'overwhelming semantic event') will be inextricable from a discourse on the other human being. 'There can be no 'knowledge' of God separated from the relationship with men'<sup>147</sup> Levinas says.

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<sup>147</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingins (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 78

In *The Trace of the Other* then Levinas writes:

From its infancy philosophy has been struck with a horror of the other that remains other – with an insurmountable allergy. [...] It is for this reason that it becomes philosophy of immanence and of autonomy, or atheism. The God of philosophers, from Aristotle to Leibniz, by way of the God of the scholastics, is a god adequate to reason, a comprehended god who could not trouble the autonomy of consciousness, which finds itself again in all its adventures<sup>148</sup>.

Here Levinas seems to associate the refusal of the Other that remains Other, the great refusal of philosophy, philosophy's primal gesture, with the disappearance of God.

It becomes clear, here more than anywhere else, that Levinas binds together a project on the other human being with a project on the radically Other, God. A reversal of the philosophical priorities, from the Same to the Other, goes together with the emergence of God outside of reason. God as Third term – that which allows the reversal of terms – must be understood *in* and *as* an overcoming of reason. This overcoming will be dynamic and result in a trace – sign of infinity – that does not withdraw completely, but does not make itself evident either, being completely foreign to this kind of play.

To name the trace would here mean to name something that does not conclude the transcendence by inscribing itself in what is immanent; rather it is by

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<sup>148</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Trace of the Other', in *Deconstruction in context*, ed. Mark Taylor, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 346

remaining an open transcendence (unmemorable) that it acquires its meaning of trace, a non-graspable relation.

God must then be placed beyond the reach of reason, as this gesture would match and go along with the philosophical twisting of the Other back to the Same. God moved back within reason, is just part of a movement that always means to find itself intact once its momentum has ceased.

By accepting this, Levinas says, philosophy engages in dynamics that in the end rest on a reassuring inertia: the Other, ‘within reasons’; God as well, but only ‘within reasons’.

At the same time though one must be careful not to intend everything under the title of the ‘religious’. It is true that Levinas finds in the relation with the Other the dimension most proper to the religious and that this relation is sometimes divinized – for the Other and God are somehow inseparable – but at the same time he warns that ‘everything that cannot be reduced to inter-human relations represents the primitive forms of religion’. Therefore when he uses the term religious he does so not in order to address the discourse towards the apparatus or the manifestations of various religions – phenomenology or anthropology of religion – but to envisage something beyond these. ‘The sentence in which God comes to be involved in words is not ‘I believe in God’<sup>149</sup>, God is rather pronounced as that which in religions stands back as the ungraspable, the desire for the ‘tenuous ark that ties us to the inaccessible’<sup>150</sup>. Furthermore the God Levinas has in mind does not resemble the one of theology, apprehensible by knowledge (in analogy) or via its modes and attributes. Maybe following the contradictions risen by Derrida’s reading one

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<sup>149</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Of god who comes to mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 62

<sup>150</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure. The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant and Michael Smith, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 8

could in fact say that this God is still very close to the tradition of negative theology, in particular in sentences like: ‘the direct comprehension of God is impossible for a look directed upon him’ or ‘in the impersonal relation that leads to it the invisible but personal God is not approached outside of all human presence’. These formulas strangely echo Angelus Silesius’ ‘What God is one knows not [...] he is what I, or you, or any other creature, before we became what He is, have never come to know’<sup>151</sup>.

It is important to notice that by naming the alterity of the Other as he does – passage, desire, Infinity, trace, the imperative of the Third – Levinas further detaches the relation with the Other from the subject/object relation. The reference is to a past that allows no memory, a past impossible to awaken, an eternity even, but too remote to be inscribed into a present. This time from which the face comes is the time of absolute absence.

In leaping towards the Other it is not enough to follow its trace; or -- what one needs is respect for this trace as that which does not obey to rules, but on the contrary asks me to change my own rules.

That is also the reason why the Other in his non-phenomenal splendor remains enigmatic. Another work that attempts a development of the idea of Illeity is meaningfully titled *Phenomenon and Enigma*. Here Levinas insists on the irreversibility of the temporal dimension, which alterity inhabits and in which it comes to signify: ‘we hear this way to signify – which does not consist in being unveiled nor in being veiled, absolutely foreign to the hide-and-seek characteristic

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<sup>151</sup> Quoted in Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995) 52

of cognition, this way of leaving the alternative of being – under the third person personal pronoun, under the word *He [Il]*<sup>152</sup>.

The reference to a heeding, an intending, a lending an ear to, is not just incidental, for Illeity, the word Illeity is not just a name, but also a voice, a command whose demand I follow even before having accepted it. The voice comes from an unbridgeable gap in time, and it is precisely the gap that allows me to lend an ear to it, to be respectful. As voice Illeity approaches me and turns me towards the Other, without me being able to divert or escape it. It commands me to a desire for the Other that cannot be inscribed in what is contemporaneous, even if the Other is the closest by. This desire divests me of contemporaneity and moves me to a desiring of a completely different nature, desire that does not grow simply by getting close to the other man, but by following the Other in what is most remote about him.

As Levinas says:

desire, or the response to an enigma, or morality, is a plot with three personages: the I approaches the infinite by going generously toward the you, who is still my contemporary, but, in the trace of Illeity presents himself out of a depth of the past, faces, and approaches me [...] I approach the infinite by sacrificing myself.<sup>153</sup>

Following the Other into this depth I'll encounter at the end of the approach his presence as transcendence, not a transcendence that resists presence, but rather a

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<sup>152</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, 'Phenomenon and Enigma' in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martin Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 71

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 73

transcendence cutting across presence. In a formula, maybe too rushed, but still not too far from Levinas': *the presence of the Other rests on his transcendence.*

The presence of the Other, coming from the depth of a time I can't even calculate, signifies without appearing – it signifies by visiting, but this visitation is not an appearance I can inscribe into my light, as if it were clearly incarnate. Coming from the absolutely absent, it visits me in what is disincarnate, interrupting phenomenology and impeding its movement.

From this it follows that together with Illeity is also introduced the motif of distance, of a great distance, the absolute distance, absolute in that it absolves itself from the immediacy of space.

It is important to remark that it is within and because of this distance that the Other comes to touch what is in my innermost intimacy. Namely it comes to subvert and substitute the order of my consciousness. As soon as the Other visits me from this distance I am at stake, for I am indebted to allow his being-without-horizon to appeal to me.

A provisional conclusion at this point could be formulated: the other is Other as Illeity, in the trace of Illeity, what eludes my presence, like a *verbosity infinitely withdrawn in an instant of laconism.*

A few words should be spent more explicitly on the role that the word God (with Levinas one is unambiguously called to avoid using the *divinity* of God or the concept of the *divine*), this word at the very limit of the dictionary, this 'beast' as Blanchot puts it, plays while discussing Illeity. Movement of infinity, indivisible, inmultipliable, each time singular in its voice, retaining all the infinity

of its absence even in the personal order, showing itself through its absence (the trace); those are some of the ways Levinas retains to articulate the word God.

Without aiming to be too schematic, Levinas often gives the impression of overlaying the two terms, Illeity and God. To put it differently: Illeity is God inasmuch as it intervenes as the inner externality of the face-to-face. This also motivates the fact that Levinas seems at times to bind together the approach to the Other as God and the approach to the Other as other human being. God is always already there in the Face-to-Face, the absence of his presence being entangled to the otherness of the Other.

The process of rendering the Other an absolute, absolute because apprehended just in the passage and in the trace of this passage, the Face – his Face being not an allegory but the visitation of a movement belonging not to this world – is what makes transcendence come upon me. Musil seems to have glimpsed this when discussing the difference between common and great ideas: ‘(a great idea) exists in a kind of molten state through which the self enters an infinite expanse and, inversely, the expanse of the universe enters the self, so that it becomes impossible to differentiate between what belongs to the self and what belongs to the infinite’<sup>154</sup>.

Once I am invested by the transcendental absolution of the Other, I am also in the presence, a presence always conserving the character of an absencing, of God. God can and must be heard in the voice and in the face of the Other. Glimpsing the face of the Other, a glimpse that encounters the non-phenomenality of the Face, means that one is also witnessing the passage of God. ‘The other, inasmuch as he lends himself to thematization and becomes a phenomenon said, becomes

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<sup>154</sup> Robert Musil, *The man without qualities*, trans. Sophie Wilkins (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1995), 114

something present and represented – but that by which he is other is precisely the Ille that eludes my presence [...] as an irrecuperable past'<sup>155</sup>.

Following the trace of the Other, welcoming his face as the encounter with that which withdraws in the Absolute, I also withdraw *to* God. *Withdrawing to God* means that I grow less interested in my presence, in my own phenomenology, and become enmeshed with a command falling upon me, without me being able to substitute that command with something else. Withdrawing to God would mean that I engage in a process whereby I substitute my subjectivity for something else. God calls me to this substitution by presenting the Other in his resistance to my grasp. God conveys to us, wrapped in an enigma, a most simple demand, that we realize that 'what we give others comes back to us'. This should not be taken according to the 'do ut des' formula, whereby to every action on my side would correspond a reaction on the side of the Other that would reestablish an equilibrium. In Levinas' understanding the equilibrium is always already broken, asymmetry is what establishes the ethical situation. Saying 'what we give others comes back to us' means that I can acknowledge my subjectivity only in terms of substitution. I am a subject as long as I have substituted my ipseity with a movement (which holds something of a leap) towards the Other. This movement comes back to me in constituting my subjectivity as a 'for-the-other'. The act of giving to others is in the end the only thing that comes back to me; it is not a reaction from the Other, but the same act I started with. This coming back is possible since I am responsible for a responsibility for which I have never asked. I respond to a command coming from a voice so remote that in this absence I can

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<sup>155</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006), xxxiv

hear at the same time God and the Other, illeity ‘slipping into me like a thief’. God performs this command not by setting up a structure in which I would be his interlocutor, as there is no correspondence between God and myself. Every correlation has been already warded off, for correlation in this case would translate a command in terms of constrain or domination. ‘Illeity – Levinas says – lies outside the ‘thou’ and the thematization of objects [...] it indicates a way of concerning me without entering into conjunction with me’<sup>156</sup>. I realize that ‘what we give to others comes back to us’ in lending an ear to Illeity, to God, but I hear this pronounced by me, it is in my own saying that I hear this. It is my subjectivity, once it has entered the play of substitution, that says so and calls me in cause in my own voice, as if I were saying something without being conscious of what I was saying, but nevertheless being already totally included and encompassed in what I am proffering. I offer my own saying to my own consideration. What is at stake is the acquiring of something one has never even been in need of, ‘glory [...] commanding me by my own mouth’<sup>157</sup>.

God thus is glorified when one of the terms in the Face-to-Face paradoxically inscribes itself in an order where the infinitely exterior becomes an inward voice.

A proximity so specified allows Levinas to make a distinction between his kind of commanding theology and both positive theology and the propositions of negative theology (with which it nevertheless retains a link). The triad *proximity*, *substitution* and *responsibility*, which I have summarized in the sentence ‘what we give to others come back to us’, converts negative theology into an assertive form:

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<sup>156</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006), 12

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 147

the absolution of the Other becomes a proximity; in my own saying I am addressed by the passing of Infinity; substitution makes the blurring of identity the very excess in which I can find myself again.

God is therefore the very movement of Illeity, Illeity as dynamics – as opposed to the icon or the sacred – the passage by which the Infinite might be heard and becomes an insight in life, moving in the opposite direction from the bion qhoreticon. To put it differently: the Other and God can be approached in the same passing; what makes their passing what it is being the fact that my approaching never results in a reaching, but remains in the hesitation.

God is the passage<sup>158</sup> where I can see the Other, but I cannot see the Other any better than by accepting the appeal (to me, only to me) as that which does not manifest itself, though I can't avoid responding to it. As Levinas puts it: 'The infinite wipes out its traces not in order to trick him who obeys, but because it transcends the present in which it commands me, and because I cannot deduce it from this command'<sup>159</sup>.

What has been said so far regarding God-Illeity and the approach to the Other, though, gives way to a series of questions. In particular it seems to allow for two ambiguities. Jean-Luc Marion indicates a first possible confusion: 'the face which appeals can be equally assigned to the Other or to God, thus avowing the indecision of its origin as well as the necessity of questioning both identity and

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<sup>158</sup> On a different level, it would be interesting to discuss Nancy's analysis of the *Divine Wink*: 'Man is in connivance with God. Connivance is mute; it is content with the *Wink*, and, in it, it exceeds sense, the look, and, finally, the god himself. That is the divine trait or gesture: God is exceeded in his own passage. In fact he comes there and leaves from there; he is the passing of it'. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure. The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant and Michael Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 119

<sup>159</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006), 12

individuation'<sup>160</sup>. The problem highlighted here questions the overlapping between God and the Other and becomes even more stringent when the theme of justice is introduced. Marion rephrases it by asking: 'does the appeal come from the other person, or it refer me to the Other only from an other than the other person – no doubt God?'<sup>161</sup> It is not clear who's appealing and what's the aim of such an appeal.

A criticism linked with the question posed by Marion emphasizes then a second perplexity. This calls attention to the fact that the absolute distance that Illeity as God takes on poses a challenge to Levinas, since it draws God and a neutral absence (that of the 'there is') extremely close.

As Blanchot discusses in *Our clandestine companion*, Levinas 'gives us a presentiment that the infinite transcendence, the transcendence of the infinite, to which we try to subject God, will always be ready to veer off to the point of possible confusion with the bustle of the there is [...] absolute indetermination'<sup>162</sup>. Llewelyn too points out this possible impasse when he writes 'Anonymous ilyaity recurs in pro-nominal illeity to the point at which the former may be mistaken for the latter. Between the one and the other there is a recurring alternation. Under the weight of responsibility of expiation for the other, elevation is liable to lapse into lassitude'<sup>163</sup>.

In the following discussion of justice this issue will be analyzed in more detail, the attempt being that of showing that the confusion has serious consequences for the Levinasian project. The possibility ascribed to the Third of introducing justice

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<sup>160</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, 'The Voice without Name: Homage to Levinas', in *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God. Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl, trans. Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 227

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 228

<sup>162</sup> Maurice Blanchot, 'Our clandestine companion' in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. Richard Coen, trans. David B. Allison, (New York: SUNY Press, 1986), 49

<sup>163</sup> John Llewelyn, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 204

in the face to face and the ambiguity at work in the Third itself (ambiguity that revolves around the Third Man, God as Illeity and the neutrality of the 'there is') seem to return Levinas to the point he had primarily tried to avoid, namely the return of a neutral term. As Derrida says: 'responsibility for the other human being is *anterior to any question*. But how does responsibility obligate if a third troubles this exteriority of two where my subjection of the subject is subjection to the neighbor?'<sup>164</sup>.

If it is the Third that commands me to justice and if this element cannot disentangle itself from the confusion named by Blanchot, then justice appears as the site where the face to face has to accept some kind of overwhelming totality that concludes its trajectory. As a consequence this would mean that the face to face falls prey to the same accusation Levinas had moved to Heidegger's *Mitsein*, that of being simply a moment in view of something else, the something else in Levinas' case being the reduction of the singular ethical encounter to a neutral justice brought by Illeity behind which one could easily see the shadow of God as *ordo ordinans*. This will become clearer in discussing the concept of justice.

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<sup>164</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 32

## 6 - The sky over Justice. Return of Neutrality

At this point one cannot avoid the question of justice any longer, for it is in the question of justice that something unexpected happens, what Derrida names a perjury, 'if the face to face with the unique engages the infinite ethics of my responsibility for the other in a sort of *oath before the letter*, an unconditional respect or fidelity, then the ineluctable emergence of the third and with it of justice would signal an initial perjury'<sup>165</sup>.

The question of justice calls for the motif of the Third(s) to be addressed once more, this time moving from a different articulation. Where before the focus was on the Illeity of God, now it will be on the Third Man. As the study proceeds it will become clearer that the link already envisaged between the Other and God is also, and inevitably so, at work in the development of the idea of the Third Man. Hence one cannot completely separate God and the Third Man. The way the latter enters the face to face makes him somehow similar to the figure of the angel, if one generously sticks to the word in its Greek meaning: that which announces, but announces something just as long as it announces only itself, its own coming. This is the role played for instance by the young woman haunting Gena Rowlands (Myrtle in the film) in Cassavetes' *Opening Night*. She is not just the very non-phenomenon at the heart of the film, but the evidence of a chronic announcement, always investing the actress from within her own voice. A similar angelic moment can be seen in *Love Streams*, where a naked bearded man suddenly appears on a chair. As Kouvaros says these apparitions 'put representation into question',

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<sup>165</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 33

introducing ‘a violent tearing of performative space’<sup>166</sup>. They not only take us by surprise, they impose on the spectators to bear witness to an unaccountable singularity, exceeding control and comprehension.

All the ambivalence of the Third Man comes from this act of pure announcement revolving only around itself.

The Third man develops in a twofold way: on the one hand the third man is the other of the other which calls me one among others, and thus breaks the intimacy; on the other he obliges me to a concern for everyone and therefore for myself.

Therefore the Third Man finds a sort of contemporaneousness, a common ground. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas had already announced the question of Others, by saying that the response triggered by the Other cannot remain simply ‘between us’, for ‘everything that takes place here ‘between us’ concerns everyone [...] even if I draw back to seek with the interlocutor the complicity of a private relation’<sup>167</sup>. The preferred being, clandestine and in love, is now open to humanity. A universality clinging onto a higher register breaks through. It does so by simply announcing its own arrival, announcing justice as non-postponable.

In Walser’s *The Tanner Siblings* the arrival of Kaspar disposes things from curiosity and chance, the closed fortuity into which Simon and Klara live, to love and concern. This is the situation where happiness is not enough, as Klara says: ‘I am happy, but I can’t bear being happy on my own’<sup>168</sup>. Justice needs the two, but at the condition that these two do not shut themselves up.

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<sup>166</sup> George Kouvaros, *Where does it happen? John Cassavetes and cinema at the breaking point* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 147

<sup>167</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 212

<sup>168</sup> Robert Walser, *Geschwister Tanner*, (Milan: Adelphi, 2002), 83 (translation mine from Italian)

The community of lovers is not just, not because in it injustice would prevail, but because it lacks the means, being played on the possibility of sinking what lies outside it. Tristan and Isolde are beyond the logic demanded by justice, for they can still lose the world and the world can just as easily get rid of them, while their tie remains intact: ‘the world has collapsed’ and they are pulled in ‘the place of the strange’<sup>169</sup>. Lovers are foreign to the logic of justice – though they are not exactly unjust – for the question: ‘why does a man love a woman more than women?’<sup>170</sup> is not yet possible.

Justice is available only to a society where there is no distinction between those close by and those far off. This is made possible by the arrival of the Third Man. Upon his entrance the Third Man always speaks a prophetic word, which means it addresses a universality, though this address never takes universality as a theme (i.e.: human race, biological genus, common functions). As Levinas puts it ‘biological human fraternity, considered with the sober coldness of Cain is not a sufficient reason that I be responsible’<sup>171</sup>.

The analogy with the angel might now appear less whimsical a formulation, for the Third Man’s announcement does not announce an horizon, like humanity united by resemblance; rather, it announces its own coming, the very moment of its movement *into* the face-to-face and across it. The breaking through of the Third Man is straightforwardness: it takes the form of the announcement of its unicity, by way of which my own unicity is also underlined. This means that the Third Man does not come to establish differences within a genus; quite the opposite, by

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<sup>169</sup> Maurice Blanchot, ‘Reflections on Hell’ in *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 191

<sup>170</sup> Robert Lowell, ‘We took our paradise’ in *Day by Day* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978)

<sup>171</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Of god who comes to mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 71

coming foreign to differences, he makes being-for-one-another a more urgent and problematic matter.

The Third Man imposes a problem upon the face-to-face. It has been said that the Third Man could be read in a twofold way. He makes me one among others by announcing himself in his forthright coming, thus he urges us to lower our intimacy, not towards a common cause, but for the sake of a wider command. As Levinas puts it: ‘the entry of a third party is not simply a multiplication of the other; from the first the Third Party is simultaneously other than the other, and makes me one among others’<sup>172</sup>. At the same time the Third Man imposes on me a concern for *everyone*. Given that everyone includes myself, the Third Man also announces in its coming my responsibility towards myself. Apart from removing the face-to-face from clandestinity, it introduces a concern for myself, concern that comes from the substitution of my identity in the for-the-other, ‘my concern for myself is triggered by the third party; not the reversibility of the relationship with alterity, but its multiplication to the second power makes the ethical possible’<sup>173</sup>.

Proximity becomes a problem. Within this new situation I cannot simply address the Other that confronts me in the face-to-face but I also have to address everyone in the face of the Other and myself. Proximity becomes a problem for it no longer concludes my ethical commitment. It is not enough to address this proximity in the face in order to be just – justice is the uneasiness of proximity. Proximity now becomes what simultaneously founds and obstructs the opening of the plane of justice. As Derrida puts it ‘Comparison is superimposed onto my relation with the *unique* and the incomparable and in view of equity and equality, a

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<sup>172</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006), 155

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxv

weighing, a thinking, a calculation, the *comparison of incomparables*, and, consequently, the neutrality - presence or representation - of being, the thematization and the visibility of the face'<sup>174</sup>.

As previously mentioned the closest proximity, of which love is an exemplary situation, achieves the opening of a realm of respect, the relieving of the all-encompassing moment, while at the same time the closer the face-to-face becomes, the more it deepens the intimacy – even when this is played out in asymmetry and absence – the higher the barricade it erects against the entrance of justice.

While the face-to-face binds me to the Other, and immerses me in his trace, it always threatens to leave the Third Man outside the door. This proximity has to acknowledge the angelic element, since the Third Man is 'an incessant correction of the asymmetry of proximity'. There must be a flash of recognition: one must be able to recognize a positive obsession at the very heart of the face-to-face, namely all the others that sit on the opposite side of the face-to-face into which I am engaged.

In the eyes of the one in front of me I must be able to see a plethora of eyes. They are all looking for me and I am commanded to substitute myself for them all. The Third therefore commands me to a concern for everyone, which is not meant to degrade my relationship with the Other in front of me, but imposes on me to see this relationship as problematic, as bound to fail despite the best intentions. The Third, Levinas says, is responsibility extended beyond intention.

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<sup>174</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 32

## 6.1 - *The aporia of Justice*

One is here confronted with a double constraint, because if it's true that the Third introduces justice, at the same time it 'violates in its turn, at least potentially, the purity of the ethical desire devoted to the unique'<sup>175</sup>, as if the solution would dissolve the very thing it tries to preserve. If it is true that the face-to-face is the ethical itself, responsibility without decision, then this should exclude all neutrality. Levinas seemingly carries a battle against neutrality, to the point that one could be led to say that his philosophy is in the end the attempt to push neutrality to its own limit, there where neutrality is neutral even with regard to itself and its forces then collapse under a private inertia.

Levinas' philosophy seems to move from a demand that holds neutrality as its most crucial preoccupation. One might easily say that this is a way of considering *Totality and Infinity* and that the following works purely from the negative and critical point of view, overlooking their propositional vigor and the constellation of positive statements that are there constantly advanced. What I am trying to say here is something different. The thesis here would be that *in the formulation of Justice there happens an inevitable u-turn, one which reintroduces neutrality at the very heart of the ethical.*

It has been said that the other is Other as long as its infinity is respected, which is to say that we do justice to the Other as long as we encounter it in the trace of God. Face to Face means respecting the absolute distance of the Other, his remoteness in the resemblance to God. A series of questions arise: isn't God

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<sup>175</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 33

perhaps the bearer of Justice and not the Other? If this is the case then the movement that would reconcile us to a just relation to the Other would be primarily a look directed to the Other as that which can lead us to God. God is Justice because it is that of the Other which escapes themes. Every time I try to reduce the Other to pure theory, it is God that comes to remind me of the respect for the absolute distance of the Other.

One could try to say this with other words: the resemblance between the Other and God is made possible by the fact that, as Levinas repeats, the revelation is not made by God, but by the one who receives it and receives it without having demanded it, by inhabiting the trace of God. Still, does not the fact that a revelation is possible indicate the need for an agent beyond the relationship, so as to make this relationship meaningful, in this case the meaningfulness becoming the ethical experience?

Marion seems to advance a similar criticism when he asks ‘to evoke ‘the wonder of the I claimed by God in the face of the neighbor’ amounts to suggesting that the claim which refers to the face effectively goes back to God, in the fashion of some strange ethical occasionalism in which the effective cause (God) recovers and would always precede a simply occasional cause (the Other person)’<sup>176</sup>.

By introducing God into the elicitation of Justice, does not the requirement become more important than the terms carrying Justice forth?

God appears sometimes close to a neutral overarching element, the lassitude of the there is. As Leslie Hill says in discussing Blanchot and Levinas, the reference to God in the discussion of justice ‘has the potential of turning Levinas’ account of

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<sup>176</sup> Jean-Luc Marion ‘The Voice without Name: Homage to Levinas’, in *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God. Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Jeffrey Bloechl, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 227

the transcendence of the other into precisely one of those philosophies of the neuter'<sup>177</sup>.

There seem to be two crucial elements: the face-to-face needs Justice, Justice is obtained by the intervention of an Illeity, a distance proper only to God; in turn this distance draws God close to an ordering entity, which can be preserved only if its neutrality is taken into account.

In this double movement one can glimpse the risk that Levinas' project might fail to preserve the non-renounceable, asymmetrical command that makes possible the reopening of the philosophical horizon otherwise than Heidegger.

From these questions it seems possible to conclude that the neutral, against which Levinas makes his first move, is in fact taken as the guarantor of justice, which is – given that Justice makes room for the State and the law – the very achievement of the ethical experience. Exigency for justice seems to always come from above, from that which remains equally distant from me and from the Other. Therefore, in the reaching for justice, Levinas seems to admit to an impersonal reason, chaotic otherness, conceptual totality. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas criticizes 'the obedience that no face commands'<sup>178</sup>, but the question of justice seems to bring this right back, for the obedience to which I am commanded if I am to be just responds exactly to a faceless entity.

It is true that the movement is from the Other to God, an inversion with regard to theology: it is not God that triggers my kindness, but the other that turns my

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<sup>177</sup> Leslie Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 175

<sup>178</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005), 298

sight to the sky. Even so, God comes as the light – visible only as a shadow – that establishes a higher level, promoting the ethical beyond knowledge. The ethical thus confirms itself as God because of this possibility of turning its terms to something that is not ‘just’ the face-to-face.

Wouldn’t this discourse on justice necessarily reintroduce not only the need for thinking about being-with even before substitution, but also about what the *with* of Being is, as that which would prevent being from transforming itself in an all-encompassing movement? Does not Levinas, by way of a series of odd moves, seem to reach a position not at all distant from the one at which Nancy advances his analysis in the first place? The relation between men cannot simply be taken as a discourse on individuality and subjectivity because the relation to the other is itself the position of Being, it is that which commands every other relation, beyond its terms and beyond the possibility to enact the Ethical before the reference to being as being-with.

Could one say that Levinas concludes with that which Nancy starts with?

If justice is what needs in primis to give the face to face its ethical dimension, then how can it do so if the face to face is not the situation of justice? Is this not to impose on the order of the face to face a higher order, that of pure Justice as it were?

This order would remain then the true achievement, the energy of ethics, though still a theory, while the face to face would be a mere, though crucial, step.

Levinas opens *Totality and Infinity* with a chapter entitled ‘Desire for the Invisible’. Rather ironically this casts fore at the very end of *Otherwise than Being*

the following question: in striving for justice, isn't perhaps God the one I desire and not the Other? Desire will then be directed to the Other in the absence of something better. Once the other is called to merely fill a gap, is he still respected in its being?

The reintroduction of neutrality seems thus to take this structure:

On one side Justice is called to wrap up the ethical dimension of the face-to-face by intensifying it as the foundation of State and system; on the other hand, if justice is that which is possible just thanks to the emergence of the *He*, interruption of the face, how can justice be found at work within the face to face without it being a neutrality, a superior gesture that elevates the face to face and in elevating it also consumes the face to the point where this loses every expression?

Justice at this point seems to be the very revenge of Neutrality.

## Conclusions

The reflection undertaken in this chapter has tried to assess to what extent Levinas' philosophy of otherness could challenge a formulation developed from within the work of Martin Heidegger. In different terms: how the measure of the 'with' could resist the immeasurable face of the other.

The distance between Levinas and Nancy has been evaluated against those considered to be key stages in the development of the question of the other: the problem of the world, the I-thou relation and the reference – in Levinas' thinking – to a Third Term.

As to the first concept, the line was drawn between Levinas' need for an escape from Heidegger's world and from Nancy's radicalization of the possibilities of the Heideggerian world (which is also to say the world as the site of the abandonment to possibilities).

The two other stages scrutinized contained a more direct reflection on the question of the 'with' and the reasons Levinas holds to dismiss it. It has been argued that Levinas fails to consider the existential character of the with, reducing it to a category, thereby offering a reading of Being-with as:

- a stage within a solipsistic trajectory;
- an element that expresses the logic of a grouping together, holding onto on one side the indifference of the crowd and on the other the overarching power of the destiny of Being.

It has then been questioned whether Levinas' criticism of the instrumentality of the Heideggerian world does not perhaps rest on a misreading. Levinas' reasons for finding access to the other outside the world would thus be challenged: if the world – as Nancy has it – is in fact not only the place of work, tools and attachment to things, but also the breaking through of possibilities, then Levinas' critique becomes less powerful.

The notion of world has been investigated in detail, as it seems to constitute a crucial moment of distinction between Levinas and Nancy. They both start with the Heideggerian formulation of Being-in-the-world, but where Levinas opens his line of reason by finding a way out from the Heideggerian world, Nancy places the opening of sense right at the heart of Being-in-the-world. This has important consequences as it also sheds light on the question of Being-with and in particular on the Mit of each Da.

Levinas subscribes to a common criticism attributed to Heidegger, which Nelson summarizes in these terms: 'Heidegger's thought is inherently unable to think the social and the ethical'<sup>179</sup>. It has been argued that this is not entirely true. Quite the opposite, Heideggerian ethics – which Nancy calls 'originary' and Nelson 'ethics of facticity' – seems to also allow Levinas to make his claims, once it is understood that this originary ethics rests on impossibility to be reduced to a moral code.

While it is true that Heidegger never puts forward an ethics in terms of moral principles and codes of behaviour it would be nevertheless hazardous to affirm there is no place for the ethical demand in Heidegger's thinking. Even beyond the explicit answers contained in 'Letter on Humanism', the question of Being-with

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<sup>179</sup> Eric Sean Nelson, 'Heidegger and the Ethics of Facticity' in *Rethinking Facticity*, eds. François Raffoul and Eric Sean Nelson (New York: SUNY Press, 2008), 141

already contains a discourse on ethics, if not explicitly then at least by offering a series of possible developments.

Although Dasein is born and dies in apparent isolation, nevertheless *Being and Time* offers passages – in particular in the discussion of being-in-the-world and being-with – in which ideas of openness, sharing, crossing, and circulation of sense play a crucial role.

If it is true that Being-with tends to remain polarized between the indifference of the crowd and the destiny of the people, there are enough elements inviting for a third reading, one that takes the Mit as the exposure of singularities to each other. This of the *Da* of each singularity responds to the question ‘what happens between us’. It offers itself as a reflection on the *between* as the space that makes a ‘we’ possible. When Levinas affirms that the *Da* is already an ethical problem, he seems to glimpse a crucial possibility for the concept of Mitsein. The question here would be how Being-with configures the relation of each Dasein when exposed to other singular Daseins. Being-with or being-together impels the rethinking of the opening of Dasein towards a common *Da*, the crossing of many *theres* that does not end in the constitution of a new, higher Dasein (this is in the end what Levinas is preoccupied by).

The measure of the with, if read in this way, should ‘evaluate’ the distance that singularities constantly cross without giving birth to an higher entity. This makes multiplicity not an external or acquired quality of each singularity, but the very measure of each one of them, an intrinsic measure calling each time for the engagement of one singularity with all others, but only each time and not in a heightened or separate dimension. The each time of the crossing happens in the world, also in the midst of the They, for a relative indistinction is needed for a

constant opening to be possible. The immeasurable face of the other is respected, for the singular existence is what is at each time at stake: not multiplicity as such, but the multiplicity that is always exposed as a singular existence.

This dimension, where the with measures the multiplicity opened by each singularity, would also allow for a relation without mediation, exactly what Levinas tries to assess by a different trajectory. While Levinas' attempt seems to ultimately give in to a Third Term – whose resemblance to an absolute distant God is ambiguous – that appears to act as a mediator in the accomplishment of justice, the measure of the with allows for intersections that respond to nothing else than the originary being-open of a singular existence. The impasse Levinas reaches is well expressed by Leslie Hill: 'if it is the case, as Levinas contends, that the relation with the other is without mediating concept or intermediary of any kind, so it would follow from this that henceforth there is neither God, nor values, nor nature between man and man'<sup>180</sup>.

Levinas' concern though is not only with the crowd, there is one more point of tension: the essentially solipsistic nature of Dasein. One could say that while it is true that Heidegger's system – as Nelson says – rests on *individuation*, this is an achievement that is never fully accomplished. The process is constantly re-opened, resulting in a system of differential relations, rather than promising the constitution of an independent subject.

The fundamental structure of Dasein implies that the work of subjectivity is always 'threatened' by openness. Dasein is in the world as the open. Being-in-the-world means essentially this: that subjectivity is abandoned to its very openness, where my Dasein might never be realized. This struggle for my Dasein is largely

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<sup>180</sup> Leslie Hill, *Blanchot. Extreme contemporary* (London: Routledge, 1997), 173

played on the level of a sharing out (rather than, for instance, in the modes of self-reflection or discoursing with one's own self). The stresses that Heidegger put on practices (on having to do with) can thus appear not only as the attempt to underline our instrumental appraisal of the world, but as the attempt to describe the world as essentially a system of shared references.

Given this framework, Nancy's attempt would be to – starting from Heidegger – dismantle the concept of the subject in order to construe otherwise the question of relation.

This demand seems to be similar in both Nancy and Levinas, but given this common point of departure, a main difference emerges: while for Levinas the ethical is infinity as the interruption of finite existing (break in the world, break in the holding on things, break in proximity), for Nancy it is an infinite demand to take finitude into account by questioning the possibility of an ultimate overcoming of finitude.

Where Levinas places the ethical in the altruism coming from infinity, Nancy sees it as the sharing that traverses finitude, 'the question of the between us – which would be in fact the question of the between, according to which there can be a "we"'<sup>181</sup>.

While Levinas starts from an individuality – withdrawal into ipseity (separation) – opening onto others following the call of responsibility, and then achieving justice with the help of God, Nancy starts from the space of the relation, from the 'with' that distances and unites singularities. It is in the space of the 'with', in the endless circulation of sense and the space that this circulation constitutes, that an

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<sup>181</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Being-with of the Being-there', in *Rethinking Facticity*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2008), 119

investigation on singularities becomes possible. While Levinas starts with the one to one and then indicates a Third, a witness or prophet, to complete the picture, to make the relation a just relation, Nancy starts with the many and the each one, with the space of multiplicity as essential and proper to singularity. By starting there where Levinas ends, it seems that Nancy acquires a position from which he can not just reinterpret the Heideggerian *Mitsein*, adjusting its interpretation beyond the crowd and the people, adjusting it on the ethical importance of each *Da*, but also achieves the relation without mediation that Levinas in the end of its philosophical trajectory seems obliged to abandon.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

## Being with the undecidable

*The us that is imperceptibly and insuperably exscribed*

Jean-Luc Nancy<sup>1</sup>

The following conclusive remarks aim on one side to provide a new opening into the analyses carried out thus far and on the other to enrich the argument with indications regarding what emerges as the specific gesture of Jean-Luc Nancy's contribution to philosophy: pushing thinking to the limit-thought of existence.

The following analysis will be structured around three moments:

- the notion of Being-with will be analyzed once again in light of Levinas' criticism of Heidegger; particular attention will be devoted to the notion of solipsism and its connection with the concept of They;
- the attempt by Nancy to undo a general prejudice present in *Being and Time* – one that tends to highlight the exceptional and the heroic – provides him with the possibility to invest Being-with with a radicalism that Heidegger envisaged but at the same time abandoned. By stressing the *with* as the site of the openness of existence to the work of otherness, Nancy seeks to escape a philosophical performativity that decides over experience by naming it. The result of this is the untying of the with from its destinations and

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Exscription', in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Katherine Lydon (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 320

appropriations, and the possibility to open once more philosophy to existence;

- by exposing thinking – always a finite thinking – to existence Nancy emphasizes the importance of preserving in philosophy the openness of existence. Existence's undecidability, as its very power, therefore also displaces the ontological order. The fact that thinking becomes possible only from the advance of existence with regards to philosophy, understanding, knowledge and interpretation constitutes the very project of Nancy's philosophy. In his constant debate with Heidegger, Nancy relentlessly evokes powers of existence – singular resistances of existence to the mastering decision of philosophical work, so that philosophy in turn will continuously loosen its categories and key words in the attempt to decide its course according to what happens between us.

The problem of *Being-with* has been touched upon throughout the current work. It was said that Levinas contests Heidegger for not having been able to disentangle the *with* from both an original solitude and an overarching generalization.

The originality of otherness, according to Levinas, is foreclosed by a philosophy that commences with Being and with a 'who' trying to address the question of Being for its own sake. Heidegger bars the possibility of receiving the other in two capacities: on one side, Being-with is too general and therefore doesn't provide any indication about sociality, always sinking the Other in the generality of the crowd;

on the other, Levinas insists that the notion of being-with rests on and refers to a long tradition of solipsism.

Levinas is not satisfied with Heidegger saying “ad nauseam” that ‘this being qua Dasein is always already with others and with Being not of Dasein nature’<sup>2</sup>. For Levinas it is very clear from the beginning that Heidegger’s philosophy is a thesis on solitude.

Two motifs already mentioned will be discussed:

- *They* as the mode of everyday understanding that inevitably swallows the Other and confounds the work of otherness;
- *Solipsism* as the original mistake of Heidegger’s philosophy, preventing Heidegger from accessing the other.

‘They’ is the site of the ontical experience of being-in-the-world as being-with. While it is true that Heidegger dismisses the ‘they’ as average understanding that understands everything, it is still true that the ‘they’ is the very site of disclosedness. Given the structure of Heidegger’s analysis, moving back and forth between the ontical and the ontological to achieve a thinking of existence, it shouldn’t come as a surprise that They is both the site where everything happens and the place of disengagement: ‘they’ is always already satisfied, because no one is allowed to say anything that would reach beyond it. However it would be hasty to suggest that the everyday is for Heidegger merely deceitful. Heidegger says that

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 190

‘the expression ‘idle talk’ is not to be used here in a ‘disparaging’ signification. Terminologically, it signifies a positive phenomenon’<sup>3</sup>.

The conversations taking place in the everyday don’t necessarily preclude the experience of existence. Instead what Heidegger implies is that one cannot say anything that wouldn’t be immediately recuperated within what the other person (anyone else) is saying. Therefore everything is understood perfectly well. The They is thus not as much condemned as ‘everyday’, as refused as that moment of the everyday where every day is considered as any other day, where the bursting of existence (a bursting that happens every day, every minute) is therefore suspended in the closure of a past of no interest and a future already calculated. The problem – Heidegger says – is that ‘understanding and interpretation already lie in what has thus been expressed’<sup>4</sup>. The surprise that existence is, gets surpassed in the fact that average understanding already knows everything. Existence thus comes to be *comprehended*, but once and for all: things are qualified once and for all. Authority over existence is established, while at the same time existence itself, as a singular decisive event, is passed under silence. It is only because the ‘they’ is there, however, that one can hear the silencing of existence, that one can understand existence as having been decided upon. It is only because I too am the ‘they’ that I can encounter myself there and feel uncomfortable. Existence wouldn’t be in the world without the They, for ‘idle talk’ and the curiosity that springs from it constitute the very first proof that my world is first of all a shared world.

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 211

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 211

As Heidegger makes clear:

This everyday way in which things have been interpreted is one into which Dasein has grown in the first instance [...] In it, out of it, and against it, all genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating, all re-discovering and appropriating anew, are performed<sup>5</sup>.

The attitude just described (an 'I've-seen-it-all' attitude) reveals something about our relation with Others. Heidegger says that in the everyday

The Other is proximally 'there' in terms of what 'they' have heard about him, what 'they' say in their talk about him, and what 'they' know about him. Being-with-one-another according to the mode of the 'they' 'is by no means an indifferent side-by-sidedness in which everything has been settled, but rather an intent, ambiguous watching of one another'<sup>6</sup>.

The other is there already in the 'they', its position is that of being surrounded with a curious surveillance. The 'they' therefore offers the sort of indistinction needed for the Other to spring forth. Particularly because the 'they' doesn't simply negate the other, it reduces both myself and the Other to the same. The 'they' is the negation of singularities in general and their negation in (favor of) the general. It is the everyday before each day. It makes no decision as to what happens between us.

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 213

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 219

The 'they' is necessary to establish at least one façade of an original sociality. The sociality where the other is simply everyone, where everyone is simply an other; another one, upon which to cast a suspicious look. In the 'they' therefore it is not only the Other that disappears, but myself too, and as a consequence the very possibility of a sociality founded on more than an undistinguished inclusion. (Perhaps this is the very kind of sociality that a 'multiculturalism' advocating every difference as equal cannot evade).

'They' is precisely the 'same' into which we, the other and myself, are plunged. When Heidegger says that 'this (the They's) Being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of 'the Others'<sup>7</sup> he is not arguing that Dasein has to overcome the Others so as to retire into a closed interiority, the ivory tower of consciousness. Quite the opposite: Dasein is included in 'the Others'. The dissolution of Dasein into the Others means that both the other and myself dissolve into a generality into which we both become nobody (*ne ipse unum*). This is also why Heidegger says that 'existence as together and with one another is founded on the genuine individuation'<sup>8</sup>. Given that Heidegger painstakingly separates his notion of 'self' and 'individuation' from a substantialist approach, one should not read the passage just quoted from the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* as saying that the self should return to itself so as to elude the pressure of the others. Respectful recognition of the others is respectful only once Dasein has exposed itself to others as a singularity. Dasein's possibility to

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 164

<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 288

recognize others happens together with Dasein's recognition of itself as that which is open to existence and not closed within. As Nancy has it: 'any being that one might like to imagine as not distinguished, not dis-posed, would really be indeterminate and unavailable: an absolute vacancy'<sup>9</sup>. The problem of Being-with as too general plays out at this level, exactly at the point where the discussion of the 'They' crosses that of solipsism.

Critics often identify with solipsism what Heidegger terms *metaphysical egoicity*.

Heidegger created the term in the twenties, at a time when his terminology wasn't completely worked out. With metaphysical egoicity Heidegger describes the possibility for an I-Thou relationship to happen, where the Thou is not simply an ontical replicate of the I. Not an other ego, but a 'you-yourself'.

This very specific kind of existential solipsism is often misunderstood (Levinas is particularly insistent on this) with factual or existential egotism. Dasein's trajectory thus becomes essentially a solitary parade. Dasein would therefore be indifferent to or disinterested in sociality. As François Raffoul remarks though: 'the *solus ipse*, far from signifying the closure of the ego upon itself that occurs with the reduction, in fact opens Dasein to the totality of Beings'<sup>10</sup>. One should be careful not to jump to hasty conclusions and to pay attention to the nature of the solipsism Heidegger invokes with the term *metaphysical egoicity*.

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<sup>9</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 96

<sup>10</sup> François Raffoul, *Heidegger and the Subject*, trans. David Pettigrew and Gregory Recco (New York: Humanities Press, 1998), 215

A reading of Heideggerian solipsism should not only provide an insight into Being-with, but, perhaps paradoxically, it could show how much what Levinas expresses as ‘the other remaining the other’ also motivates – up to a point at least – Heidegger’s thinking. When Levinas speaks about love he seems to rejoin the necessary movement that cuts across the They and solipsism: ‘Coincidence is fusion. For me, on the contrary, sociality is excellence, and one should never think sociality as a missed coincidence [...] I think that when the other is ‘always other’, there is the essence of love’<sup>11</sup>. One could show that the solipsism Heidegger talks about is in the end not at all different from what Levinas terms ‘excellence’.

Heidegger admits that if the determination of Dasein as metaphysically isolated were to mean only that Dasein exists simply to reduce nature and others to its own goals, or that a detachment from the world would allow Dasein to regain some authentic ground, then his philosophical project ‘would indeed be madness’<sup>12</sup>.

Heidegger specifies that the statement relative to the essence of Dasein as interest into one’s own being doesn’t present an ontic ethical egoism. Instead his solipsism is the instantiation of a singularity, it is the moment of emergence of a singularity in a way/fashion opposed to the emergence of a substantial subjectivity. This solipsism makes possible the disclosure of singular/plural existence. It is from this structure that Heidegger says that factually Dasein cannot avoid being-with-others, cannot avoid recognizing others as singularities. If Dasein weren’t a singularity, it wouldn’t be able to express itself with and through other singularities;

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<sup>11</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robbins, trans. Jill Robbins (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 58

<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 186

quite the opposite, it would have them standing in front of it in a simply empathic relation.

The problem arises when one interprets Dasein as subject, which means as a substance that stays identical with itself, regardless and through the course of its modulations. One then needs to look back at the entire project of existential analysis, which is aimed at questioning Being so as to reach the most radical concept of singular existence. As Raffoul puts it: 'The question of the meaning of Being 'in general' becomes inseparable from the question of the specific mineness of a particular being, the generality of Being harboring the most radical individuation'<sup>13</sup>. The self in this case becomes a differentiating principle, and Being is a question of 'who' and not of 'what'. For the concept of an egoistic subject Heidegger substitutes that of a singularly decided possibility always open to Being and to others. Always open also means that its relation with itself is an each-time-open. This implies that singular existence can only be understood on the basis of the singular existent's relation to what it decides upon: the world, other beings, other singular existences. Solipsism is therefore a matter of relation. While subjective theories in the history of philosophy have posed the self as the moment of closure from which to begin, thus to a large extent presupposing its course, or at least considering it as 'an underlying presence of an entity present-at-hand'<sup>14</sup>, Heidegger makes of the singular existent an impossibility: the impossibility of grasping one's own being once and for all. This impossibility produces the constant openness Dasein is, each time open to and for itself. This openness, however, is not

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<sup>13</sup> François Raffoul, *Heidegger and the Subject*, trans. David Pettigrew and Gregory Recco (New York: Humanities Press, 1998), 20

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 27

configured as a dialectic, which is to say that one is not starting with a self, closed in its consciousness, which opens to other consciousnesses only to then come back and recognize itself once more. Quite the opposite, with Heidegger one starts with an openness, which can never be reduced; this ‘distraction’ of Dasein with regard to itself, cannot be reverted back to attention. An absolute subject – abstracted from the world and from others – can at most provide what Heidegger calls a formal indicator, always late with regard to what it tries to indicate: that which doesn’t remain the same.

The problem with the subjectivist tradition – and even Kant according to Heidegger partially falls prey to this criticism<sup>15</sup> – is that it misses out on existence, because it starts with the idea of ‘the selfsameness and steadiness of something that is always present-at-hand’<sup>16</sup>. The idea of individuation as the each-time singular event of selfhood instead allows us to grasp the continual and originary exposure of existence to itself.

As Heidegger puts it, the very first gesture of his analysis demands the opening of this anti-subjectivist horizon: ‘if the Self belongs to the essential attributes of Dasein, while Dasein’s ‘Essence’ lies in existence, then “I”-hood and Selfhood must be conceived existentially’<sup>17</sup>. As a consequence of this, these concepts demand to be considered from the point of view of an each-time-undecided

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<sup>15</sup> This question should in fact be read in particular in light of Heidegger’s re-appropriation of Kant in *Being and Time, The phenomenological interpretation of the Critique of Pure Reason, The Basic problems of Phenomenology*. For the time being this sentence could suffice to render the tone of the discussion: ‘But how does it come about that while the ‘I think’ gives Kant a genuine phenomenal starting-point, he cannot exploit it ontologically, and has to fall back on the subject [...] and does not Kant himself keep on stressing that the ‘I’ remains related to its representations, and would be nothing without them?’ in Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 367.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 367

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 365

existence. Dasein has to decide for its own self, which is not given, or better it is that which at any time is only given, but in this given one hears ‘delivered over’, ‘offered’ and ‘at stake’. The givenness of the self here turns out to have the character of a putting at stake, of gambling. Selfhood is given for articulation, rather than given as that which doesn’t change.

This brings us back to the question of solipsism. Solipsism works along with transcendence. As Heidegger puts it: ‘Dasein transcends every being, itself as well as every being of its own sort (Dasein-with) and every being not of Dasein’s sort’<sup>18</sup>.

Contrary to what the usual criticism supports, solipsism doesn’t indicate a dismissal of altruism: it is this very idea of the singularity/eventual character of existence to commence human community. ‘Metaphysical Egoicity designates the Being-a-self that is the basis for the I and the Thou, in such a way that the Thou is not understood as an alter ego’<sup>19</sup>.

It is only as singular existence that the Other and myself as other avoid being reduced to generality (They), only in this way that these singularities can be exposed to one another.

In solipsism one finds the manifestation of a letting others be. At this point for Heidegger sociality is founded on the exposure of singularities to one another, on the surpassing of the notion of a subject always present-at-hand in favor of an openness, whose appropriation is not possible. The singular, as that which at any

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<sup>18</sup> Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 190. It shouldn’t therefore surprise that in the following paragraph Heidegger calls in cause Kierkegaard’s choosing oneself as ‘absolute choice’ or a ‘primordial choice’, a thinker with whom Levinas often seems to have a profound agreement.

<sup>19</sup> François Raffoul, *Heidegger and the Subject*, trans. David Pettigrew and Gregory Recco (New York: Humanities Press, 1998), 212

time stands against itself as much as against others and the world, is that which can never be reduced to anything, that which is constantly committed to existing, to opening, completely, originally. Only an existent considered as singular (but not as individual) can be this openness, only a singular existent outside participation can live with others in a plurality that 'respects' (this is the term Levinas says is missing in Heidegger's philosophy) them as singulars. The formula Heidegger offers is that of a relationship between an 'I-myself' and a 'you-yourself'. This amounts to saying that the singular is not only delivered to others, but constantly offers itself to others in the singularity that it is. On the other hand, it receives others as unique and irreplaceable accesses to the essence of existence, which means to existence itself. There is therefore no recuperating of the authentic value of existence outside the respect for others, the respect for the existence they are. Solitary individuation individuates itself as open, as exposed, always abandoned to this exposure. Solipsism therefore works to prevent the incorporation of Dasein, it aspires to found society outside fusion.

Isn't this exactly what Levinas aims for? Precisely the detachment of the idea of the other from a solitude where the *I* masters itself and therefore masters everything? Isn't it exactly this that characterizes Levinas' movement in and out of philosophy? When Levinas formulates the question in terms of ethical resistance, resistance towards the return to the Same, he is perhaps saying something not too different from Heidegger when the latter says that the singular finds itself always with-others, but that those others are not same with itself, they are an altogether different exposure of singular existing.

It is perhaps now surprising to read into the fact that on one side Levinas accuses Heidegger of promoting with Being-with a fusional ideal and on the other side he reproaches *Being and Time* because ‘all emotion, all fear is finally emotion for self, fear for self’<sup>20</sup>, solipsism. Perhaps in the interplay between the They as the fusional ideal of common sense and the metaphysical isolation resides a sociality of singular exposures (a contrapuntal sociality to use the terminology employed in the discussion of John Cassavetes).

The gesture of solipsism seems to aim precisely at this: preventing ‘the absorption of singularities into a homogeneous Being-together’<sup>21</sup>. At the same time, it also structures singular existence as constantly open to the other, to that which it is not. Solipsism opens to existence as that which must be decided upon but which cannot be appropriated.

As Fynsk presents it: ‘when Dasein finds and assumes itself in its constancy, it finds that there is always another with it, speaking to it’<sup>22</sup>. Here lies the Heideggerian concept of otherness, which perhaps (Levinas would probably subscribe to this) precedes also sociality as ‘organized otherness’, because it anticipates it or better because it insinuates itself both in the singular of ‘me’ and in the plural of ‘us’. Although the concept as such has not been developed, otherness for Heidegger resides in existence itself as that which we are, but that at the same time stands in front of us, always still to be decided upon. Our own selfhood belongs to the question of otherness. Our existing in the world, the everyday, is a

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<sup>20</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, ‘From the one to the other. Transcendence and time’ in *Entre nous. Thinking-of-the-other*, trans. Michael Smith and Barbara Harshav (London: Continuum, 2006), 117

<sup>21</sup> Francois Raffoul, *Heidegger and the Subject*, trans. David Pettigrew and Gregory Recco (New York: Humanities Press, 1998), 213

<sup>22</sup> Christopher Fynsk, *Heidegger: Thought and Historicity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 42

question of otherness, and from otherness – Heidegger seems to say – there is no retreat. As long as existence is in question, as long as it is the question, otherness never ceases to be the point that cuts across everything. Existence and otherness are the same, but they do not rest on the Same. Attempting a formula: otherness is the essence of existence once existence is its own undecided essence.

Where Jean-Luc Nancy speaks of Being as Being-with, one could perhaps translate: existing is the work of otherness, an always inoperative work. The *us* therefore has to rest on this paradox: I am myself the more I am open to the work of otherness, the more I let the perpetual and ephemeral ambiguity of otherness be exposed to me. The more I exist, the more I become incommensurable to myself as ‘subject’. In existing (which is the same as experience) the existence that is *mine* exceeds my possibilities of seizing it in comprehension, because it resides elsewhere. At any given time *existence is the elsewhere that I inhabit*. But the otherness that existence works on me is not the approach of an identity that cuts across mine and then returns to itself. Existence affirms itself as the work of otherness without Other, which means that one is not in a position to say who (but also what) the other is. Otherness remains essentially (therefore existentially) ambiguous, itself undecided. The other is not a mediator (as it sometimes appears to be in Levinas’ discussion of Justice), because existing is already this combination of given and undecided. The openness of existence, which one could simply call its “with” is itself extension to the extremity of the other without a manifest, necessary mediation. The otherness in question with regard to existence is the ‘not yet’ of

existence itself, the fact that existence still always needs to be existed and existed anew, at every moment other than itself.

Its characterization is at this stage still too general, but perhaps it will turn out that this is also the work philosophy has to attend to, if one pays attention to what Jacques Derrida says about the ‘despair’ of beginnings:

Each text belongs to a completely other history [...] It is really as if I had never before written anything, or even known how to write. Each time I begin a new text there is a dismay in the face of the unknown or the inaccessible, an overwhelming feeling of clumsiness, inexperience, powerlessness. What I have already written is instantly annihilated or rather thrown overboard<sup>23</sup>.

This last consideration anticipates and delivers the discussion over to the second moment of these conclusions: identifying the specific philosophical gesture of Jean-Luc Nancy. The specificity of this gesture, though, cannot be found simply in the re-tracing of an identity, in the identification of a constant signature. What one should look for is not a face-value recognition, the closure brought upon discourse by key words. Nancy’s remarks sink key terms, so as to make of them something less and still more than devices of a meaningful presentation. What they point to is always an excess of value and the value of excess; their withdrawal – in favor of existence – is always as important as their birth to presence.

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<sup>23</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘A Madness must watch over thinking’ in *Points...: interviews, 1974-1994*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 352

Once more one has to return to the question of Being-with, which somehow constitutes the point of arrival of this work and also the crucial moment when Nancy's reflection both joins and distances itself from Heidegger so that the singularity of his voice becomes more powerful. From now on the analysis will follow on one side the working *on* concepts: Nancy's relation to the constellation of models from *Being and Time*; the extent to which Nancy shapes his own philosophical tone by working his way out from Heidegger, thinking the unthought of *Being and Time*. On the other, it will follow the working *of* concepts, that is to say the way in which Nancy phrases his philosophy and how this brings up the problematic of conceptual presentation as such. In order not to make philosophical language, even one that stresses interruption, rupture and openness become simply a justificatory ground, Nancy measures philosophical presentation as such and the *as such* of philosophical presentation. On one side philosophy as a reserve of concepts, on the other philosophy as the struggle of presentation, but never simply the two on opposite ends. The question is therefore the one posed by Lacoue-Labarthe in the following terms:

whether the dream, the desire that philosophy has entertained since its "beginning" for a *pure saying* (a speech, a discourse purely transparent to what it should immediately signify: truth, being, the absolute, etc), has not always been compromised by the necessity of going through a text, through a process of writing, and whether for this reason philosophy has not always been obliged to

use modes of exposition (dialogue or narrative, for example) that are not exclusively its own and that it is most powerless to control or even reflect upon<sup>24</sup>.

The thin line between the purity of philosophical abstraction that rejoins always the heart of concepts available to philosophy and philosophy's complicity with language as a fictional living matter<sup>25</sup>, that which brings philosophy outside of itself and also perhaps closer to existence. Nancy engages with the very question of argumentation as that which leads constantly closer to impasses, so to reveal in the impasse the need for a decisive transgression. It is also always this exhaustion or inability to identify what the right of philosophical discourse is and what is proper to it that Nancy tries to make evident. As he puts it in *Logodaedalus*: 'there is no point in doing philosophy if it isn't to try to accompany this exhaustion of discourse to its limit. Because it is only at the limit that one can try philosophy's luck'<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Subject of Philosophy*, trans. Hugh J. Silverman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 1

<sup>25</sup> Giorgio Agamben writes: 'where language stops is not where the unsayable occurs, but rather where the matter of words begins'. Giorgio Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, trans. Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsitt (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), 37

<sup>26</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope. Logodaedalus*, trans. Saul Anton (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 15

### **The in-common of separation**

Despite the criticism addressing the notions of solipsism and ‘they’, it is not there that Heidegger closes access to otherness. It is instead in the conceptual constellation leading to destiny that Heidegger turns to a closure. As long as Being-with remains undecided it shows the opening of an access, rather than the closure of otherness.

Nancy exposes this logic in two quotations. They appear in the same text, one at the beginning, one at the end, the second perhaps as an answer to the first:

- “Being-with forms an essential condition for the essence of Dasein. How? This is not easy to uncover because of the limits of the analysis presented by the text. Why this point of resistance and relative obscurity?”<sup>27</sup>;
- “The limit, the impasse, or the failure, are thus inscribed quite precisely at the place of and owing to the very opening of the text of *Being and Time*”<sup>28</sup>.

The insufficiency thus belongs to *Being and Time* itself.

Heidegger released the problem of an irreducible otherness at the heart of the singular’s existent with intense force in *Being and Time*. Among many others, one could cite these two passages: ‘Being-with is in every case a characteristic of one’s

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<sup>27</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘The Being-with of the Being-there’, in *Rethinking Facticity*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2008), 113

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 123

own Dasein [...] those entities towards which Dasein as Being-with comports itself are themselves Dasein'<sup>29</sup> – ‘the world of Dasein is a with-world’<sup>30</sup>.

The idea of the constant work of otherness at the core of singular and eventual disclosures of existence, the thought of existing itself as constant opening to that which stands against it as possible (and unknown, insofar as it always has to be assumed); the very conception of something that could work only before and beyond binary constructions (in particular that of subjects and crowds, of singular and plural), that could play the role of un-grounding the latter in the same way that transcendence disengages the subject-object relation, offers extremely rich and compelling material for thinking the question of otherness. Sometimes one has the impression that the co-essentiality and undecidability of Being-with matures/develops almost naturally from the overall structure of the book. In a footnote Nancy comments that: ‘despite this prejudice, there is perhaps no other philosophical text that refers us more forcefully than this one does to the exteriority of the experience it attempts to analyze’<sup>31</sup>.

The fact that the question of Being-with remains unresolved perhaps also belongs to the goals of *Being and Time* itself. To put this differently: this notion should remain the very horizon of Heidegger’s work and should perhaps therefore be thematized as the gesture that re-opens the volume beyond Heidegger’s notorious firmness.

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<sup>29</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 157

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 155

<sup>31</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), footnote 45, 406

And yet at other times, Heidegger, ‘to a certain extent in spite of himself’, retraces the meaning of Being-with towards its very closure. This has to do with the prejudice that Nancy highlights, namely the tendency to grant special relevance to the possibility for the authentically exceptional to appropriate the originary.

While Heidegger insists on Being-with as an existential principle, he seems at the same time to be able to articulate it only as the actualization of a common fate (thus carrying on a gesture similar – as Nancy argues – to a certain German Idealism), whose only alternative is an indifferent perpetual activism devoid of any content.

In particular what seems to bring Being-with to a standstill is the fact that Heidegger sublimates it in – and therefore subjects it to – a destination that incarnates the everyday disclosure of existence. This incarnation is the appropriation by a ‘powerless superior power’ that sacrifices the singular plural play of existence, the fact that at each time what is at stake is a singular decision towards existence as the plural otherness that cannot be appropriated but that nevertheless one must make one’s own. The *with* suddenly transforms into an essence that has always already appropriated and expropriated existence, the latter being relegated to a vanishing point ‘already guided in advance’: fate [*Schicksals*] as the possibility that Dasein ‘has inherited and yet has chosen’ and its crossing with destiny [*Geshick*]. As Fritsche says, the past ‘demands of us that we subjugate ourselves to it and defend or re-realize it’<sup>32</sup>. It is in the past that one ought to seek

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<sup>32</sup> Johannes Fritsche, *Historical Destiny and National Socialism in Heidegger’s Being and Time* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 36

the actualization of the authentic, while the inhauntetic constantly projects itself in the future: ‘with the inconstancy of the they-self Dasein makes present its ‘today’. In awaiting the next new thing, it has already forgotten the old one’<sup>33</sup>.

Heidegger proposes a structure where the processes of mastering and appropriation are always left open, never properly resolved, but tied together in the form of separation. Possibilities are never fully grasped or exhausted, what Dasein understands is never completely understood. This is the case for Dasein’s own individuation – mineness is an each time, Being one’s own is a recurring threshold – but also for its relation to others – the voice of the friend cannot be identified in a specific “who”, fascination and guilt disappropriate without then being recaptured in and by understanding/theory, being-with doesn’t offer the rule of a unity but makes possible a relation across distance. In the end not even resoluteness – factual existence firmly determined in remaining in the open of possibilities, ‘letting itself be encountered’<sup>34</sup> – or decision – where the fact of existence is exposed in all its *immemorial passivity* – does provide a closure to Dasein’s stretching between birth and death. The moment of mastery remains always conceived as a deferral.

On the other end though Heidegger seems to reconfigure an almost opposite constellation around the terms connectedness, fate and destiny, according to which authenticity is realized: ‘Dasein’s fateful destiny in and with its ‘generation’ goes to make up the full authentic historizing of Dasein’<sup>35</sup>. The problem is less that Being-

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<sup>33</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 443

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 374

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 436

with is not developed enough. Instead the stress should be on the fact that in its development it comes to master itself; its existential character is exceeded and it becomes – in spite of itself – a calculated category, understood now simply according to ‘fate’, ‘the ground for destiny, by which we understand Dasein’s historizing as Being-with Others’<sup>36</sup>. In this section of *Being and Time* resoluteness becomes the grasping of one’s fate. The everyday has to be bypassed and experiences have to be connected into a destined future, an already decided destination. The tension between the ahead-of-itself and the having-been is resolved in a common destiny that gathers them together and brings their work to a halt. Future as the moving back towards the fact of already existing, of always already being in the face of existence, now becomes realized only in the possibility given by a destined community that sidesteps singularities. In this connectedness the concept of participation, against which Heidegger had struggled while discussing the notion of the ‘They’, reappears: a connected community identifies its hero surmounting the undetermined *who* of the voice of the friend. Guilt is expiated as response to the call of destiny. Responsibility becomes responsibility not towards all our destinies, but towards the destiny of *All*, a gathering together in the sublimation of singular fates. The only trait that distinguishes the togetherness of destiny from the confused homogeneity of the ‘They’ is that while in the latter, difference was blocked off by a curious dis-interest, here it is foreclosed by a creative catastrophe, where the singular rather quickly turns and locks itself in the

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<sup>36</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 438

order of a plural *unicum* (one could also name this – with Nancy – an *immanentism*<sup>37</sup>).

The everyday, which in the first part of the analysis gave the impression of being the moment, the ‘at stake’ of a decision for existence, is now delimited as the floating ‘coming to pass’. Encountering the everyday means only reabsorbing it into a wider, better rooted, purpose<sup>38</sup>. The dispersal of the ‘between’ stretching from birth to death must be made into unity, what comes to pass has become fate. Every characterization of each day as the moment of a deferred mastering of one’s own possibility proves to simply be a momentary step towards the constitution of a horizon channeled by destiny. The between Dasein is – the fact that ‘existentially birth is not and never is something past and death is just as far from having the kind of Being of something still outstanding’<sup>39</sup> – finds an ultimate, but then also infinite, end.

Heidegger says that Dasein is a stretching along. If the value of this is to be preserved, then it should not result in a destiny whose only freedom is that of giving up. In this way Dasein is destined at every moment to a precise moment, which becomes exactly the moment of an ultimate presence. In Heidegger’s words, in fact, a ‘moment of vision’ is a principle that exceeds every now. Destiny comes

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<sup>37</sup> ‘A community presupposed as having to be one of human beings presupposes that it effect, or that it must effect, as such and integrally, its own essence, which is itself the accomplishment of the essence of humanness’. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 3. This question owes a lot to a reading of Heidegger’s ‘national-esthétisme’ by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, art and politics: the fiction of the political*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>38</sup> Particularly interesting could be here a reading of Blanchot at the moment where he says: ‘The Everyday: what is most difficult to discover’. Maurice Blanchot, ‘Everyday Speech’ in *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 238

<sup>39</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 374

here to represent the 'right now' of existence, where existence concludes its deciding upon possibilities. In destiny everything has been made actual.

According to this configuration, the world is not only the dispersion of *each times*, the eventual spacing and relatedness of singular existences, but the plane where a destiny is played out. Future becomes that which is acted out by being sent, its directionality decided once and for all. The structural connectedness that ends up revealing – in a moment of vision – the flowing of fates into a destiny demands that existence closes its work towards the future: the now of existence has finally occurred. At this point it is only by way of destiny that the community of humanity can subsist<sup>40</sup>. The 'connectedness of life' makes of discrete 'current nows' a final 'Now', where an ultimate 'revolution' becomes possible: Dasein turns towards itself and recognizes its always having been in view of the destiny in which it now participates. This means also that existence is no longer open to the decision of what still lies outside itself, it is no longer that which constitutes itself only by being approached (possibilities). The work of existence as resolutely maintaining itself in the deferral of appropriation, where what is grasped is also re-sent to a further grasping, finds in destiny its right time, where no delay is allowed. Singular existence becomes selfsame and still completely oblivious of itself (solitary) in the plural unicum, the only one that can legitimately express plurality.

The call of fate is a final and last call, where 'the future is all used up', where every *who* calling from the unknown has been individuated and every *we* or *us* has

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<sup>40</sup> One should compare this passage from *Being and Time*: 'Resoluteness implies handing oneself down by anticipation to the 'there' of the moment of vision; and this handing down we call 'fate'. This is also the ground for destiny, by which we understand Dasein's historicizing in Being-with Others' with the one already quoted from *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 190.

ceased to happen as a sending / receiving but is already and infinitely named in the radical individuation of destiny. Silence derives not from listening, but from the infinite – and final – submission of existence to a *single decision*, which has, it goes without saying, nothing to do with a *singular decision*.

In this constellation the very possibility of a repetition both of decision and of resolution, therefore the possibility for the constant work of existence as unfinished opening to otherness, is foreclosed. The finitude of existence, and therefore also its eventual character (the each time), seems to get sucked up in an infinite permanence where existential possibilities are disclosed only as monuments.

The only possibility remaining is that of ‘giving up’, freedom becomes the freedom to ‘give up in accordance with the demands of some possible Situation’<sup>41</sup>. The thrownness of existence is finally ‘accepted’, and ‘incorporated’ in what appears to be an ‘ultimate moment of vision’.

Being-with at this stage has lost its bond with the promises and the powers of existence. Rather, it seems that the notion simply collaborates in sending forward the connection of dispersed experiences in the together, in unity and destiny. Being-with becomes the ground through which Dasein ‘pulls itself together out of its dispersal and thinks up for itself a unity in which that ‘together’ is embraced’<sup>42</sup>.

Heidegger therefore seems to close off and efface the very radicality of his own propositions. If it is true that he displaces any appeal to a sociality that derives simply from the identity of a subject, he seems at the same time to counterbalance

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<sup>41</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 443

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 442

this with a gesture in the opposite direction, that of presupposing the solution of the problem of relation in an incarnated community, the destiny of the *Volk*.

It is at this point that Nancy's reading of Heidegger becomes an appropriation from a distance. Right after the formulation of Being-with as coessential with Dasein, Nancy's reading becomes something more, a decision.

Why with Being-with and not with some other Heideggerian notion? Nancy decides on Being-with because its co-essentiality is both the most explicit attempt at articulating the question of an existence in the world beyond individual subjectivity and also the point at which Heidegger seems to fall outside of itself, outside perhaps of existence as he had defined it. For Nancy it is crucial to expose this co-essentiality: Dasein and Being-with happen each time at the same time. Otherness happens before the self, but not in the connotation Levinas ascribes to it, rather in the sense that exposure to the plurality of existence happens before and cuts across every possibility of firm identification.

*The other comes only once and never leaves, which also means that it never comes back.*

This is possible though only if the *with* is thought as being the measure of an incommensurability. With the notion of destiny, Heidegger imposes on existence a measure. Nancy talks instead of 'measures of the incommensurable'<sup>43</sup>, one that can take place only within a finite thinking, that is within a thinking which renounces itself – justice towards itself – in order to be just to existence. This is a thinking that loses its properness and assumes itself to be signaling and exposing powers of

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<sup>43</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 81

existence. This could also be said in the following, more concise way: thinking exposes itself as the thought of singularities, attempting to think the other without abandoning the other of thinking. One will have to repeat this many more times (repetition is in the nature of what is being said; finitude requires a *pollakos legomenon*, the spoken-in-many-ways<sup>44</sup>), but for now let's use Nancy's words: 'existence the truth of which consists in leaving its sense always beyond or short of any apprehension'<sup>45</sup>.

In this light then the *with* should be thought as that which measures the nothing and everything between us. *With* is the measure of what happens between us – 8 billion bodies – even when nothing happens – in the figure of indifference or of mystic dis-interest<sup>46</sup> – or when –and this is perhaps its crudest modality – the nothing happens<sup>47</sup>, but also and still when everything happens (even for Heidegger the gift of love confronts and works in the openness of the *with*).

One could rephrase these remarks by saying that the *with* is the open into which 'we' maintains itself and sense keeps circulating, from us to us: 'to us: to the upsurge of our existences, together, as the surging up of sense'<sup>48</sup>. The *with* as the

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<sup>44</sup> See Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Abandoned Being' in *The birth to presence*, trans. Brian Holmes (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 36

<sup>45</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Pensée Dérobée*, (Paris: Editions Galilée, 2001) 21 (translation mine).

<sup>46</sup> For a discussion on dis-interest see: Sean Gaston, *Derrida and disinterest*, (London: Continuum, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> "We are told that when Holderlin went 'mad' he constantly repeated, 'Nothing is happening to me, nothing is happening to me'". Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as experience*, trans. Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 21

<sup>48</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel. The Restlessness of the Negative*, trans. Jason Smith and Steven Miller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2002), 78

open thus is the place from which and to which we address, as already addressed, existence: work of an open otherness measured by the *with*<sup>49</sup>.

All this amounts to saying that the *with* itself is nothing, but only because it is what is always 'a question of'. The impossibility of turning the *with* into a political strategy or into an absolute moral principle proves its necessity and its necessarily open character, whose articulation is always both a naked fact and an impossible question. What the *with* measures is a logic of separation, which makes 'we' co-essential with 'I', but only there where in their turn neither I nor we can simply be subjects of a self-presentation or of a presentation of the self. The presentation of the *with* therefore escapes the right measure of presentation, after having escaped demonstration. The *with* is the open itself: it manifests itself, if it does, only there where one touches in us both our inextricable evidence (the fact, for example, of being hopelessly involved in queues and crowds) and the insufficiency of our programs (the *with* produces clefts both in the theme of recognition and in that of seduction). This is not a deficiency, or at least not only a deficit. Quite the opposite, it presents itself as an affirmation (and an ultimately ethical one). The forms that attempt to present the *with* fall always short of its openness and at the same time perform an excess of appropriation: never plural enough, but also too firm in presenting the identity of the plural. The *with* thus remains separated from them, it withdraws and still keeps pushing forward (the fact that in the face of wars one can always still glimpse some moribund piety or 'humanity' – a generous gesture

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<sup>49</sup> This could well be the scheme of the Derridean 'oui, oui'. Jacques Derrida 'Numbers of yes' in *Psyche. Inventions of the Other, Volume II*, trans. John Leavey and Elizabeth Rottenbergh. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

towards the prisoner – doesn't spring from the essentially good nature of humanity but responds to the nakedness of the *with*).

With celebrates also every relation from me to me, the each time of mineness. As Nancy says: “Each time” is the singular-plural structure of the disposition. Therefore, “each time mine” signifies primarily “each time his or hers”, that is, “each time with”: “mineness is itself only a possibility that occurs in the concurrent reality of being-each-time-with”<sup>50</sup>. ‘Mine’ is nowhere else than in the open of the ‘with’. Love too sees itself here. If – as Heidegger has it – it’s true that love is a task and also a nude task (there’s no knowledge and still one has to fight for and through it) than it is there that one can express most vividly the logic of the with, its being nothing. It is breaking every relation with *us*, while constantly setting all possibility of relation, according to this existential logic: *relation with the with is the with out of relations*.

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<sup>50</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O’Byrne, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 97

## Powers of Existence

The with then can only be occasioned to name a phenomenon of the retracing of common sense: with makes possible a retracing by withdrawing at the moment of appropriation, by escaping a properness that will reduce it to the opposite of itself, that is to say a principle of identical presence. Sense in this way shows that with is the logic of every existence that cannot simply afford to say: 'I and the other' but that necessarily has to put up with the fact that the inside of every *I* would still be *with*, because it would still have the structure of an each time mine; the Je in Jemeingkeit must be re-existed each time.

If sense is therefore exposed as with, there is then no common sense, but only the questioning, the putting back into question of this commonality. In a way sense is common only when sense is dead (or death itself). A reflection on sense thus means sense's explosion, the bending and re-bending of sense.

Existence is not the particularization of a universal essence or the degrading of principles, but rather the fact that 'at the point where we would expect "something", a substance or a procedure, a principle or an end, a signification, there is nothing but the manner, the turn of the other access'<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p14

Exposing principles (the Heideggerian existentials) to the each time of the call of existence constitutes the ethical problem at the heart of existence, but also the anticipation of every ethical program, an ‘archi-ethos’ as Nancy calls it.

With a tone faithful to the Heidegger of *Letter on Humanism* one could argue that an ontology can be written only as an ethics and that every ethics is also an ontology, or better that ontology not only is ethical but that it must be so as long as a questioning of existence is necessarily also a question of not betraying this existence by closing its horizon (whether in the name of the I, the Other, or the National Community).

‘Only if the inquiry is itself seized upon in an existential manner as a possibility of the Being of *each existing Dasein*, does it become at all possible to disclose the existentiality of existence and to undertake an adequately founded ontological problematic’<sup>52</sup>. Nancy makes of this Heideggerian thesis the chance to revert Being into the responsibility towards each parcel of sense, thus making of principles a dispersal, perpetual exposure to the otherness of undecided existing.

Here one discovers something like *powers of existence: existence as the force of the each time eludes a thinking of its beginning as it eludes that of its closure*.

The formula *powers of existence* doesn’t mean affirming an ontical priority over the ontological, a paradigm of the banal as it were, nor on the contrary does it aim at establishing the anteriority of the ontological rearguard over the facts of the everyday; rather, it means the utter exposure of both to the otherness of undecided existing,

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<sup>52</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 34

Powers of existence would thus operate in planting the responsibility of mundane existence always as first concern, concern and pre-occupation against a principle or value which teleologically itself imposes on existence (such as the People) or that dissolves existence and its decisions (such as the Crowd).

Powers of existence define philosophy as a responsible decision made in view of the impossible on always factual and urgent possibilities.

The intention here is to find under the articulation of powers of existence the very gesture of Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy. This articulation seems to constitute both the opening and the displacement of ends operated in Nancy's often fragmentary writing (fragmentation itself is perhaps the very enactment of those powers).

In discussing sense, the body, freedom, community, the order of ontology, the rule of philosophical presentations, Nancy constantly evokes powers of existence: moments that keep true to the claim of existence. The latter demands an opening, an always inaugural decision against no horizon (if not the circulation of sense), it demands that this decision be inextinguishable (in front of community, meaning, but also ethics and politics, and every recognition that runs in and out of those, infinitely piercing them to a ground).

Existence demands to be essentially open to the other, to the otherness over which it casts its eventual decision.

The power of existence is moreover a decision always belonging only to 'some factual Dasein at a particular time'<sup>53</sup>. It is this decision that responds by keeping

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<sup>53</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: Blackwell, 2006), 345

existence un-answered – *in the answering* – but constantly in view; in view in the given (that’s the only thing we have) as that which cannot at any time be received as simply given.

Freedom and community, world and sense, body and otherness: these concepts have to be existed, that is they have to be crossed over, sliced open by existence, by the singular touch of existence.

Existence is already the very exposure to the other as deciding for possibility. This ambiguity – decision is only always a decision towards more openness – shouldn’t as someone suggests determine the end of philosophical work<sup>54</sup>; quite the opposite, it delivers philosophy over to existence, over perhaps to a lateness into which philosophy doesn’t recollect itself, but keeps enacting the gesture of opening itself to otherness.

The very idea of a power of existence imposes therefore on philosophy an act ex-scription of experience. Philosophy will neither try to recuperate within its system the exteriority of experience (this comes from Heidegger, although it is what Levinas challenges him for), nor to cap experience with a factual ideal that would pose an asymptotic principle or a ‘better way’. Philosophy rather attempts to expose the singularity of the each time as the founding of existence.

In this way, experience remains both the very site of a philosophical resolution and that which thinking can only grasp without deciding for it once and for all.

Philosophy is not trying to be right. This seems to confirm the formulation

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<sup>54</sup> Paul Ricoeur says: ‘The need to maintain a certain equivocalness of the status of the Other [...] With this aporia of the Other philosophical discourse comes to an end’. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 355

proposed by Adorno: ‘The very wish to be right, down to its subtlest form of logical reflection, is an expression of that spirit of self-preservation which philosophy is precisely concerned to break down’<sup>55</sup>.

By philosophical resolution we mean here that philosophy measures itself against the questions opened within experience – philosophy is not something foreign to experience, therefore it doesn’t have to recuperate it – as the act (or praxis) that brings the questioning of experience back to the point of undecidability: this is experience’s ex-scription.

For this same reason experience always remains in advance of philosophy and maintains open an intrinsic difference through which philosophy cannot (and should not) pass intact (this is also the gesture that Levinas advocates for his own thinking).

It is not a question about the foundations or the logic of existence, but a question about the *resonance* of the singular event of existence, at once able to transform the sense of the world and incommensurable to any other stroke.

The question of the ‘who’ is perpetually the question of existence because it is always a matter of coming up to what happens at the level of the singular sparkle of existence, thus neither what it is before it happens, nor how it repeats itself.

The kind of philosophical reflection that powers of existence need is one that proceeds not by recollecting in the inside, but by bouncing back from existence. What Heidegger refers to as *Widerschein* should here be invoked to name the work of philosophy itself, ‘not shut ourselves off from the phenomena by a framework of

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<sup>55</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1996), 70

concepts'<sup>56</sup>. What one should now read in reflection is the fact that philosophy doesn't withdraw from experience and from the fact that experience is existence (not that experience makes existence), philosophy doesn't retire into its own foundation, into the very place of its own self-preservation; rather, it finds itself – it finds its own saying as well as its very 'philosophy' – in the midst of existence and only there. It doesn't have to turn backward to itself, instead it reaches itself and at the same time attempts not to remain identical with itself 'in those things that daily surround it'<sup>57</sup>. Reflection as the understanding of powers of existence, reflection as the gesture of Nancy's philosophy, is the giving of itself to the inception of existence. This would be a peremptory, unconditional affirmation of philosophy (its passion, its suffering): that of never abandoning existence, everything that is as that which always still has to be existed, a 'going-along-with the givens'<sup>58</sup>. Philosophy, given to existence, receives its action from it.

It also respects what Heidegger says in terms of 'the loyalty the philosophizing individual has to himself'<sup>59</sup> as the only proof of good philosophy. Being loyal to oneself means also having entered the hard thought, the limit-thought of existence as that which doesn't have foundations or essence: having decided to decide. It means precisely to have resolved some kind of freedom to existence, to the

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<sup>56</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 160

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 159

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 161

<sup>59</sup> Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 17

possibilities of existence, to have already entered ‘the remaining uncertainty and gaping discord’<sup>60</sup>.

Nancy seems overall to respond to two claims advanced by Heidegger:

- that philosophy does not in its working produce a world-view and also fights against this tendency almost natural in/to philosophizing itself;
- more importantly that philosophy has to start (and possibly end) right at existence, at current existence, at ‘mine’ ‘yours’ ‘hers’ ‘their’ understood outside properties and only in their existing. As Heidegger says: ‘philosophy remains latent in every human existence and need not be first added to it from somewhere else’<sup>61</sup>.

Reflection is not the act of coming back to itself (therefore of affirming the substantiality of the given), but rather that of exploding (circulating) in the midst of experience.

Every singular each time of existence is a reflection. Philosophy neither casts it on existence, nor names it; it puts it in a space where its necessity is open to a regime of interconnections.

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<sup>60</sup> Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 18

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 18

Given the definition Nancy offers of existence as ‘being-determined according to indetermination’<sup>62</sup>, one could say that, though existence is given, it is given to be existed, therefore not simply. It is given as an offering whose reception is undecidable. That the essence is existence therefore always means having to affirm existence (and not simply something about it, as Levinas also reproaches philosophy for doing). ‘All thought frees the existing of existence because thought proceeds from it’<sup>63</sup>: this is the command that falls upon thinking when thinking aims to be more than a gathering of information or the passion of undoing one particular rhetoric to impose a new one in its place or the regaining of a self-assurance as the right of philosophy to exist always as what it is.

The emergence of incommensurable measures with regard to the body, sense, the world, the opening of an incommensurable space or of a measure of incommensurability doesn’t respond to an awareness as to the end of philosophical action, it rather answers a different call: that of affirming existence. One should therefore see a program here – moments of incommensurability could be another title for it – perhaps the entire program of Nancy’s philosophy. It is in the nature of thinking to open a field of possibilities rather than to close upon them with an ultimate decision.

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<sup>62</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘The Decision of Existence’ in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 104.

<sup>63</sup> Jean Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 18

Nancy is quite clear about this: ‘thought has no decision of practical, ethical, or political action to dictate. If it claims to do so, it forgets the very essence of the decision, and it forgets the essence of its own thinking decision’<sup>64</sup>.

And yet what proceeds from this is not the great refusal of thinking. Thinking does not decline action nor does it remain ‘indifferent’ or ‘disengaged’. Thinking cannot be indifference towards action, there is not such a thing as disengaged thinking. The exposure of moments of incommensurability responds to a gesture of affirmation, rather than to a withdrawal: to expose an immeasurable measure as the practice of thinking.

If this prevents philosophy from enacting the prescription of general rules, at the same time it keeps philosophy as the very affirmation of existence and of existence alone as its own essence.

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<sup>64</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘The Decision of Existence’ in *The birth to presence*, trans. Brian Holmes (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 108

## *Coda*

### *Love: a broken heart and the exposed being*

The Heideggerian thinking of the *with* as a moment of sublimation, where the stripped juxtaposition of our existences grows into destiny, seems then to indicate Being-with as the capping of individual experiences. It is thus the very closure of powers of existence.

On several occasions when confronted with the Heideggerian development of Being-with, Nancy seems to elude the impasse of destiny by turning to love<sup>65</sup>. It is in fact in the few notes on a possibility of love that Heidegger – without ever systematizing his thinking in this direction – seems to put the notion of Being-with back into question.

One should be extremely cautious in trying to formulate a Heideggerian thinking of love simply by reconstructing the sincere, but nonetheless sketchy, remarks one finds in the *Letters to Hannah Arendt*<sup>66</sup>, given some apparent contradictions<sup>67</sup> there enclosed. Although the letters date from the period during which Heidegger was completing *Being and Time*, one cannot be too sure as to how far the equation between the man in love and the philosopher of *Being and Time* can be meaningfully carried out. The aim here, therefore, will only be to problematize

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<sup>65</sup> Not surprisingly perhaps Giorgio Agamben attempts a similar path: 'Love, as passion of facticity, may be what makes it possible to cast light on the concept of the Ereignis'. Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: collected essays in philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 202.

<sup>66</sup> Hannah Arendt's work on St. Augustine and its relation with Heidegger's thought would deserve a separate treatment, which cannot be afforded here. The idea could be to analyze Heidegger's care and St. Augustine's idea of love as craving as treated in Hannah Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, trans. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott & Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>67</sup> Heidegger speaks of love mainly as the affirmation of the Other, although it sometimes also refers to it as unity.

Nancy's turn towards 'Heideggerian love', while always keeping in mind both Being-with and the thinking of existence at large. The letters do contain a few interesting considerations. In a surprisingly blithe fashion Heidegger insists that:

- to pose love 'as such' contradicts the very expression of love;
- in love the otherness of the other bursts forth without ever being reabsorbed (according to St. Augustine's *volo ut sis*);
- love is the most explicit undertaking of existence; the moment where taking existence upon oneself remains beyond and in excess of every possible theme or knowledge.

In the letter from the 9<sup>th</sup> of July 1925, Heidegger says: 'love as such does not exist'. Love is always only 'my' or 'your' or 'our' love, it can be determined solely on the basis of the singular stroke of the ones who share this love. No singular expression of love can be adjusted to fit into the horizon of a thinking of absolute love. As such, outside its singular eventuality, its singular measure of Being-with, love doesn't take place.

Also, Heidegger proceeds to say that 'only such faith – which as faith in the other is love – can really accept the 'other' completely'<sup>68</sup>. The other appears here as the *gift of love*: 'you – just as you are and will remain – that's how I love you'. The possibility to understand the other, as the positive affirmation of an unknown, is the way love sustains itself always beyond mimesis and integration: 'only then love is strong for the future'. Only then is love future itself.

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<sup>68</sup> Hannah Arendt / Martin Heidegger, *Letters 1925 - 1975*, ed. Ursula Ludz, trans. Andrew Shields (Orlando: Hartcourt, 2004), 20

This delivers the argument to a third declaration: ‘to be in one’s love: to be forced into one’s innermost existence’<sup>69</sup>. Love emerges here as the moment of existence that cannot be assimilated: ‘for anything else there are methods, aids, limits, and understanding’<sup>70</sup>. Love is then the fiercest power of existence, it keeps itself open, ‘always beyond or short of any apprehension’. Faith for *co*-existence. To confirm this Heidegger adds: ‘being allowed to wait for the beloved – that is what is most wonderful – for it is in that waiting that the beloved is present’<sup>71</sup>.

The minute space Heidegger makes for love allows one to glimpse for Being-with a different trajectory from the thematization contained in *Being and Time*. It is perhaps not surprising that the possibility of Being-with to offer a logic of separation is maintained right at the point where Heidegger is at the farthest remove from a properly philosophical presentation (and the tone at times seems almost to resonate with Levinas): ‘here (in love) being close is a matter of being at the greatest distance from the other [...] the other’s presence suddenly breaks into our life – no soul can come to terms with that’<sup>72</sup>.

This impossibility of love – ‘we want to thank the beloved, but find nothing that suffices’<sup>73</sup> – perhaps indicates something more. Not being able to think the *with* without transforming it into an essence (fate, generation, community, sacrifice) or

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<sup>69</sup> Hannah Arendt / Martin Heidegger, *Letters 1925 - 1975*, ed. Ursula Ludz, trans. Andrew Shields (Orlando: Hartcourt, 2004), 21

<sup>70</sup> In this same letter one should take into consideration also the final passages where ‘thank you’ is repeated three times, until the final ‘thank you for your love’. Here perhaps one could attempt a triangulation on thinking as gratitude to the impossibility of love.

<sup>71</sup> Hannah Arendt / Martin Heidegger, *Letters 1925 - 1975*, trans. Andrew Shields, ed. Ursula Ludz (Orlando: Hartcourt, 2004), 18

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 5

dispersing it in the apparent apathy of existence as routine (they, indifference, idle-talk, scribbling) – thinking it as what remains in-common in separation, what signals a non continuous contact, the play that always puts at stake both actualized occasions and indefinable possibilities – is ‘a paradox common to all philosophy’ and not only a Heideggerian deficit. Philosophy seems to always fall short of our being-together as that which is stretched across a distance (and always an other distance, a newly born one) rather than united in a point.

In ‘Shattered love’ Nancy attempts to articulate the concept of love beyond metaphysical and dialectical significations aimed at completion. In Nancy’s view love interrupts the law of a subject that always returns identical to itself. Love triggers a transcendence that works as the ‘disimplication of an immanence’<sup>74</sup>. Love breaks into the reflective work of the subject.

To the scheme that wants love as absolute representation running on the fulfillment of the subject (reflecting subject – love – fulfillment), Nancy opposes the logic of the heart (broken heart – love – promise) where love is a singular movement that expresses itself as the arrival of a promise (this arrival, though, doesn’t imply that the promise is kept and therefore concluded). If one understands love according to the first articulation, one hears in it the work of possession. Possession is not of the object possessed – it is not, as it were, simply the grasping of the object – instead it is the subject realizing itself as property. Understood as the law of the broken heart, love instead constitutes the exposed being, that which ‘is not completed by the dialectical process, it incompletes itself to the outside, it is

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<sup>74</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Shattered Love’ in *A finite thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Lisa Garbus and Simona Sawhney (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 249

presented offered to something that is not itself<sup>75</sup>. Here the affirmation and negation proper to dialectic are not eliminated, but posed to the outside of a 'you'. What the heart exposes is finitude, the impossibility of appropriation through love, impossibility of finding one's own property 'either in itself or in a dialectical sublimation of the self'<sup>76</sup>.

Therefore the experience of love is experience of the outside: experience of a subject that cannot maintain itself simply on its self-presence, but has to pro-pose itself to itself in terms of discontinuity. Love rests on this outside that is not the outside of me balanced by the outside of the other. It is not enough to say that the other's identity has traversed me, because it is not the work of another identity that exposes me. The other as well comes always as other, already disjoined, never itself. What the other approaches when he approaches me is not an integrity called 'me', but a movement towards otherness. As Nancy puts it:" (love's) coming is only a departure for the other, its departure only the coming of the other"<sup>77</sup>.

This structure, Nancy says, is nothing else than the ontological determination of Dasein. Love is the law of a subjectivity that starts in singular sharing, not in the mastery of the 'I' nor in its sublimation through the other (in this case one would have to assume again the other as closed immanence). If it's true that this trajectory owes its formulation to Heidegger, it is also true that in *Being and Time* Heidegger remains silent about the possibilities of love. According to Nancy, Fürsorge 'is still

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<sup>75</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Shattered Love' in *A finite thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Lisa Garbus and Simona Sawhney (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 252

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 262

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 262

thought starting from an 'I' or from an 'identity' that goes toward the other'<sup>78</sup> (but even for Levinas love remains nothing more than the moment of a process: love expresses the face, but is then surpassed by the absolute distance and novelty of filiation, the child. Love remains ambiguous, 'does not transcend unequivocally'<sup>79</sup>, to love is also to return to oneself. It is only in going beyond its terms – and so in the child and in paternity – that love can manifest 'a unity that is not opposed to multiplicity, but, in the precise sense of the term, engenders it'<sup>80</sup>).

The space and the logic described by Nancy can be found in Heidegger's thinking only if one pays attention to the letters to Hanna Arendt. There one can glimpse Being-with thematized as faith in the possibility of the other, in otherness itself as the decision for existence. In this series of love letters something is opened that doesn't find space in *Being and Time*: a singular sharing names the absolute singularity of being, 'that which remains 'self' when nothing comes back to the 'self'<sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>78</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Shattered Love' in *A finite thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Lisa Garbus and Simona Sawhney (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 269

<sup>79</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingins (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005) 266

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 273

<sup>81</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Shattered Love' in *A finite thinking*, trans. Lisa Garbus and Simona Sawhney, Simon Sparks ed. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 262

## Beginning to think

*The existential analytic of Being and Time is the project from which all subsequent thinking follows, whether this is Heidegger's own thinking or our various ways of thinking against or beyond Heidegger himself. [...] It does not signify that this analytic is definitive, only that it is responsible for registering the seismic tremor of a more decisive rupture in the constitution or consideration of meaning.*

Jean-Luc Nancy<sup>82</sup>

To conclude, the project of Jean-Luc Nancy is largely that of reading the unthought in Heidegger's work, which means responding not only to the call coming from Heidegger, to Heidegger's legacy as it were, but to that which in Heidegger's thinking resists thinking, resists his presentation: existence, an opening into Heidegger's thought, at the very outset of Heideggerian presentation.

Thinking the unthought thus means something other than thinking according to this rule: 'letting every thinker's thought come to us as something in each case unique, never to be repeated, inexhaustible'<sup>83</sup>. It means thinking with Heidegger, according to a logic of separation, where the distances – although minimal – in the

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<sup>82</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 93

<sup>83</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What is called thinking*, trans. Glenn Gray (London: Harper and Row Publishers, 1968),. 76

Heideggerian praxis of thinking make up resistances. Thinking the unthought in Heidegger's work means thinking that which resists him. The unthought in this sense would be the non-presentable under the strategies of *Being and Time* and the action of thinking. Resistance of philosophy to itself.

That which is un-thought in Heidegger is the beginning of his own thinking.

*The unthought becomes then that which cannot be enclosed by thinking, the threshold of its beginning, that which by exhausting thinking right away makes thinking take its course. Existence and its powers of exposure to the undecidable-having-to-be-decided.*

By thinking the unthought in Heidegger's writing, Nancy thinks the unthought anew: affirmation of existence beyond philosophical presentation and, at the same time, urgency following which we begin philosophy.

Obeying or paying attention to powers of existence thus means unleashing the with-ness from within the subjectivity of the philosopher and therefore the subject of philosophizing; leaving perhaps that place less certain, less individual, less grounded. Unachievability here should not simply indicate a failure to achieve a program, an identity infinitely deferred: it should be the program itself, the power of thinking-with, silently happening and immediately exposed between us.

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