

ON THE DECONSTRUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY:

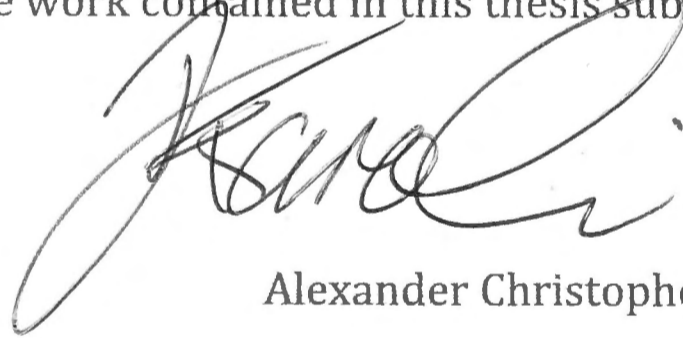
TECHNĒ AND TOUCHING—ABANDONED BODIES IN THE PHILOSOPHY
OF JEAN-LUC NANCY

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The work contained in this thesis submission is wholly my own

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alexander Karolis', written in a cursive style.

Alexander Christopher Karolis

In memory of my father

Christopher Karolis

Born Nicosia Cyprus 20th April 1947

Died Sydney Australia 31st August 2001

dedicated to my mother and father

Trinity College, Hartford, Conn.
being in the philosophy of ...
especially Fiona Irwin, Desmond Ma.
Charles Harbour.

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ABSTRACT

The question posed by this dissertation is what role, if any, does religion continue to play in understanding the material world? The direction taken by human thought in the Western world since the enlightenment has shaped, and continues to shape, a multifarious habitat of interconnected materiality. There are two intertwined and seemingly competing aspects to this, the secular and the religious. As the capacity of religious political power to direct thought declined, and the counter-balance of secularism increased, human endeavor directed its energy toward the path of "reasoned" thinking. This had, roughly speaking, two consequences: an ever intensifying influence of technology in shaping the "world", and the envelopment of economies of exchange over the globe. What relation is there between, on the one hand, the spread of economic-rationalism and technology, and on the other hand, the continued pervasive influence of religion in the world?

I approach these questions through the work of Jean-Luc Nancy in his project, the deconstruction of Christianity. In so doing, I engage Nancy's project through the ontological question of the meaning of being, and draw out the intersection that Nancy's ruminations on Christianity have with the broader ethical, ontological and political, aspects of his thought. Six themes form the basis of the chapters: the secular, globalization, community, abandonment, the body, and touch. Nancy's thought reveals a continuous interplay and synergy between secularization, the impact of secularization in technology and economic rationalization, and the "decline" of Christianity. In following Nancy's thought, I consider how his philosophy intersects with a number of key influences, and I draw heavily on aspects of the work of Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida. I also discuss the interplay between Nancy's thought and interlocutors, obvious and otherwise, such as Charles Taylor and Catherine Malabou. What I demonstrate in this dissertation is the ever-present role Christianity plays in shaping the world; and, by citing the deconstruction of Christianity as an intrinsic facet of his broader ontological project, I claim that Nancy provides a novel and convincing understanding of existence that draws upon how being shares the world with others.

In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the haughtiest and most mendacious minute of "world history," yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die. . . . There is nothing in nature so despicable or insignificant that it cannot be blown up like a bag by the slightest breath of this power of [human] knowledge; and just as every porter wants an admirer, the proudest human being, the philosopher, thinks that he sees the eyes of the universe telescopically focused from all sides on his actions and thoughts.

Friedrich Nietzsche
On Truth and Lie in an Extra Moral Sense
1873

Why does deconstruction have the reputation, justified or not, of treating things obliquely, indirectly, in indirect style, with so many "quotation marks," and while always asking whether things arrive at the indicated address? Is this reputation deserved? And, deserved or not, how does one explain it?

Jacques Derrida
Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"
1989

Love in its singularity, when it is grasped absolutely, is itself perhaps nothing but the indefinite abundance of all possible loves, and an abandonment to their dissemination, indeed to the disorder of these explosions. The thinking of love should learn to yield to this abandon: to receive the prodigality, the collisions, and the contradictions of love, without submitting them to an order that they essentially defy.

Jean-Luc Nancy
Shattered Love
1986

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INTRODUCTION

A moment arrives when one can no longer feel anything but anger, an absolute anger, against so many discourses, so many texts that have no other care than to make a little more sense, to redo or perfect delicate works of signification. That is why, if I speak here of birth, I will not try to make it into one more accretion of sense. I will rather leave it, if this is possible, as the lack of "sense" that it "is." I will leave it exposed, abandoned.

Jean-Luc Nancy *The Birth to Presence*

This thesis is a meditation on what Nancy means when he describes a relation to the infinite that dwells in the midst of life; a relation, I claim, that dwells in the heart of being. This relation has repeatedly asserted itself in philosophy, the most obvious tropes of which have established themselves in various forms of Idealism and metaphysics. It has also explicitly manifested itself through religion, and implicitly through various forms of politics and social practice. Less obviously, or perhaps in a more complex manner, it can also be attested to in "science." The manifold variations on the relation of the human to what transcends it form the guiding threads in the chapters that follow. As Nancy weaves through these apparently fixed significations, rupturing and exhausting their various iterations, I will attempt to shed light on how Nancy's understands meaning itself as anchored to a transcendent, Ideal, or metaphysical premise. Paradigms may shift and academically pigeonholed disciplines may become more or less relevant, however, Nancy's thought takes him wherever he deems necessary to reveal how what Heidegger called *ontotheology* still functions today.

A singular rupture in thought: despite the variously "completed" iterations of a transcendent or metaphysical premise, they all nonetheless fail at a critical

juncture—they fail to provide “any assurance [*assurance*] concerning the foundation of existence.”¹ However this failure has been addressed, it is a failure that confronted the world of Ancient Greece and Rome, and that has continued to confront modernity. Christianity became the guiding premise, the principle paradigm, in a structural lacuna (that had, for example, expressed itself in ancient Greek civilization through the metamorphosis of *tragedy* into Platonic Idealism); a lacuna that Nancy claims had formed within the Greek relationality of “law, city, reason (we can also include art).”² By providing an exemplar, in the figure of Christ, capable of translating the relation between the human and their own existence; and a space and a time outside of space and time, a world outside of the world; Christianity itself became “life in the world outside the world.”³ With the event of Christianity, existence itself was split into two parts—as Augustine described, the city of God and the city of the human—and with this split an ontological distance opened up between what was now outside the world of human earthly existence and what remained inside.

Christianity, throughout its history, has addressed the human failure to provide a foundation for existence within this *inside*, and our recourse to foundation through a now separated *outside*, by aggravating and intensifying our relation to that failure. Indeed, Christianity provides meaning through that failure itself, and opens onto a *logos* that can no longer have any resonance with our immanent existence (despite the centuries of lamentations over *doxa* that culminated in the reformation). While the increasing intensity of that “aggravation of the *incommensurable*” culminated in what Nietzsche called “the death of God.” Perhaps the echoes of that coming “death” can be heard in Pascal’s remonstrations of Descartes, Kant’s destruction of metaphysics, Jacobi’s critique of Fichte, or indeed Max Stirner’s anarchical affirmation of egoism—certainly Hegel might lay claim to first philosophical pronouncement of God’s “death.” In any case, Nietzsche provides the most polemic argument, and it was toward Christianity that he turned his scathing criticism.

¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Adoration: The Deconstruction of Christianity 2*, p.23. What Nietzsche describes in *The Gay Science* as the pathological human drive to give life a “purpose”.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

Nietzsche argues that Christianity provided its own undoing, by bringing together the will-to-truth and the pursuit of moral-cleanliness in the form of the ascetic ideal. Nancy elaborates on this claim by describing Christianity as that which constitutively self-deconstructs. Put simply, Christianity, in claiming the meaning of the world through an opening in the world to another world, has formed, since the death of God, the experience of a gaping void in the place of that opening. Returning to my initial remark, the infinite that opens in the midst of life with which Nancy is concerned, is an opening that comes as a rejoinder to the response of the Enlightenment to this gaping void. That is to say, in the Enlightenment, it became necessary for "reason" to efface the rupture formed by the "death of God," and, as such, become closed to all forms of an "outside" of the world. This "enclosure" is what Nancy turns his attention to in his deconstruction of Christianity, as this enclosure is constitutively part of Christianity, and the manner in which it is self-surpassing. Hence this enclosure can only be "dis-enclosed" through a deconstruction of what encloses – *"only an understanding and an accentuation of Christianity's becoming-atheist...can give us access to a thought I am indicating as a dis-enclosure of reason."*⁴

It is important to play close attention to why Nancy describes reason as enclosed, as it explains the trajectory of Nancy's project. Reason since the Enlightenment, and the atheism that accompanied it to various degrees, *is* in its relation to God—*Reason* was substituted for God in the movement of atheism and secularization of the "West." However, as Nancy argues, "reason...came to deploy itself *and* encountered its own uncertainty, trembled on its own foundation."⁵ Thus, despite its enclosure, reason remained necessarily a metaphysics; whether of presence, the subject, *logos*, or some other iteration. Thus Nancy will continually labor the point at which he can describe an opening of the world, and more exactly an opening of reason. He does so, in order to break with the notion that found its pinnacle in the philosophy of *both* Kant and Fichte, in which reason (and hence, freedom) is given as *the* foundational aspect of philosophy. Each opening, or "birth" (recalling the opening epigraph), is a space in which "we"

⁴ Ibid p.29.

⁵ Ibid p.32.

dwell within the opening that opens up in the midst of life, abandoned, residing *in* existence as shared, resisting the urge to add another accretion to the endless signification of the world. In what follows I will expand on this notion through five chapters, in each adding another fragment of this concept, and in each explicitly and implicitly drawing upon the play of this transcendent immanence as it unfolds in Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity.

§

A testimony to the disseminated and fragmentary but nonetheless important influence of Nancy on contemporary philosophy can be illustrated by the variety of ways in which he is singularly encountered by some of the leading figures in philosophy. For example, Derrida, Badiou, and Agamben, all attempt to make contact or touch Nancy's *œuvre*, and by this I mean quite literally they attempt to "put one's finger" on Nancy (where this act of fingering Nancy, pointing him out, touching him in one place at one time, is almost as if in that moment they felt that it was too dangerous to embrace with or address Nancy, and they could only risk that one finger). However, they all come away with a different "words" for describing that sensation. Alain Badiou writes, in *The Caesura of Nihilism*, that "Offering, exposition, these are two fundamental words for Jean-Luc Nancy: exposing oneself to something like a response to offering."⁶ In *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, Jacques Derrida points out, "one of Nancy's master words, which we'll come back to frequently: *exactitude* is this thinker's thing, his big deal – he thinks *exactly* something other than what one thinks in general or ponders too easily under the word "exactitude," and yet..."⁷ Likewise Giorgio Agamben, touches upon Nancy in *Homo Sacer*, where "abandon" becomes a key term of both exactitude and generality; immanently personal and constitutively general at the same time.

We should read these moments of singular engagements as indicative of the affective encounter one has with Nancy. The way in which he "labors the

⁶ Alain Badiou, "Caesura of Nihilism" *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, p.58.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.15.

concept” to paraphrase Christopher Fynsk,⁸ suggests an ongoing attempt to disrupt the metaphysical entanglement of language. At the same time, Nancy is ever aware of the powerful (metaphysical) *modus operandi* in philosophical interpretation of putting one’s finger on what someone is trying to say. For Nancy, philosophy *is* only as much as it remains fragmented, and notwithstanding the insight of Derrida *et al* in reading Nancy, it is only *through* the singular (plural) act of reading Nancy himself that the sense of words like *exposition* or *touché* begin to open.

Indeed, fragmentation is the basis upon which Ian James begins his own engagement with Nancy (working from Nancy’s fraternity with Maurice Blanchot).⁹ Benjamin Hutchens also spends some time working through the implications of what James describes as Nancy’s “fragmentary demand.”¹⁰ Hutchens describes the efficacy of this demand in the following terms, “if all fragments have an internal creative volatility expressed through the work of an individual self, then fragmented composition can be put to the systematic task of reconstructing the ruination of systems without merely offering another form of systematic discourse.”¹¹ These singular fragmentary moments of encounter with the thought of Nancy are precisely indicative of the affect of thinking with him, and furthermore, of how Nancy disrupts the “work” of writing philosophy itself. As Nancy argues,

...la fragmentation de l’écriture, depuis qu’elle a lieu et la où elle a lieu...répond à une instance répétée des corps dans – contre – l’écriture. Une intersection, une interruption, *cette effraction de tout langage où le langage touche au sens*.¹²

⁸ Christopher Fynsk, “Experiences of Finitude” *The Inoperative Community*, p.ix.

⁹ “...the fragment often seems a means for complacently abandoning oneself to the self rather than an attempt to elaborate a more rigorous mode of writing. Then to write fragmentarily is simply to welcome one’s own disorder, to close up upon one’s own self in a contented isolation, and thus to refuse the opening that the fragmentary exigency represents; an exigency that does not exclude totality but goes beyond it.” Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, p.359.

¹⁰ Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p.3.

¹¹ Benjamin Hutchens, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy*, p.13.

¹² Nancy, *Corpus*, p.20.

Why do bodies interrupt writing? How do bodies fragment writing and break into it? And why is this moment of fragmentation the point at which language touches sense? I cannot claim to have precise answers for these general questions, however, what I hope I have done in what follows is address the importance of Nancy's repeated and insistent encounters with the moments at which language touches upon sense. A further question is raised, why does it become necessary to disrupt language, and how is this more than a question of epistemology—indeed, how does this become a question of ontology, and, furthermore, is this another metaphysics or perhaps worse, another nihilism? Finally, how do all these questions find their resonance with Nancy's ongoing project—the deconstruction of Christianity? To begin, I would say that the deconstruction of Christianity is from the outset indicative of Nancy's far reaching motivation, as Alison Ross provisionally puts it, to articulate “an ontology that is not beholden to an originary meaning.”¹³ Hutchens summarizes this position neatly when he writes that; “Along with another stellar contemporary thinker who will have no truck with the theological excrescence of “alterities,” Alain Badiou, he [Nancy] insists that the world attests to itself and requires no external foundations.”¹⁴

Nancy approaches this task by moving through Heidegger's fundamental ontology, and his relentless attempts at the *Destruktion* of onto-theo-ology. At the same time, continuously critiquing what Nancy identifies as a “dualist structure of metaphysics” in Heidegger's referral to “authenticity.”¹⁵ As such, this dissertation approaches many of the key topics in Nancy's philosophy through his critique and appropriation of Heideggerian themes. Thus, by interpreting and questioning what Heidegger writes about *Mitsein*, *Eigentlichkeit*, *Seinsverlassenheit*, and *Gestell*, I open a path to Nancy's thoughts on finitude, being-singular-plural, abandonment, and an inauthentic being-with as the immanent-materiality of our being-*in*-common. This allows me to engage with what is perhaps Nancy's

¹³ Alison Ross, *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy: Presentation in Kant, Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Nancy*, p.134.

¹⁴ Hutchens, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy*, p.5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

most difficult concept, *sense*. As Ross describes, “sense emerges from the active involvement of the sense in the world.”¹⁶ Critchley is right to assert that *sense* is Nancy’s master word¹⁷; it certainly seems to me that by working through the way in which *sense* is formulated by Nancy provides an insight into Nancy’s philosophy in general, and provides an important facet of Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity.

I have also found it useful to contrast Nancy’s position on religion, atheism, and community, with Charles Taylor’s recent book *A Secular Age*. Taylor’s central concerns match well with Nancy, as both are critical of the nihilism implicit in the capitalist system upheld by scientific and economic rationalism, and suspicious of repeated calls for a return to religion. Where Nancy and Taylor part ways provides an understanding of their respective positions that is more informative than reading them alone. While they both seek to “open sense” to something other than a pure (meta-)physical rationality, or the competing binary of negativity that binds to fundamentalism, mysticism, and negative theology; there is, however, a clear point of contrast in Nancy’s account of the secular as compared to the way Taylor frames his account.

Taylor relies on a familiar narrative of dis-enchantment and secularization; however, within this account, he characterizes both Nietzsche and post-Nietzschean philosophy as evoking a “lack” which suggests nothing more than a stoic commitment to the abyss of nihilism. According to Taylor, a religious reinvigoration of the dis-enchanted secular world can endure alongside the rationalized account of the world by providing a release from the existential crisis of meaning that would otherwise become nihilism. I argue that Taylor’s account of Nietzsche and post-Nietzschean philosophy omits the potential for re-reading this “lack” of transcendent meaning in ways other than as a nihilism—in particular, I focus on Nancy’s use of the term “abandonment,” to provide an account of the relation of this “lack” to law.

Throughout this dissertation I examine the nexus between Nancy and some of the most formative philosophers in the history of “Western” philosophy.

¹⁶ Ross, *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy*, p.135.

¹⁷ Simon Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*, p.241.

Nancy writes as if in a continual conversation with the tradition of Ancient Greece, Medieval Scholasticism, German Idealism, Jena Romantics, Neo-Kantians, French Positivists, Anglo-American pragmatists, Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Post-Structuralism; up to and including his many contemporaries in French philosophy, from the 60s in France to the present day. Nancy is a philosopher, who, like Derrida, was ever-aware of the “debt” that can never be repaid, but for which thanks must be given, to all those who came before, exist alongside, and will come in the future. It would be presumptuous and fool-hardy to claim to have even scratched the surface of this “debt” in my treatment of Nancy; however, I have attempted to shed some light, in a small way, on the relation he holds with Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Husserl; as well as bringing his somewhat enigmatic philosophical relation with Derrida into the picture. There is also what I consider an interesting synergy with the contemporary philosophy of Catherine Malabou and Simon Critchley that informs my account of Nancy’s relation to Hegel and Heidegger, as well as a necessary but somewhat brief encounter with the analysis of biopolitics in Agamben and Esposito.

I have, for the most part, read Nancy in translation—while reading him in French where possible, and where I thought it would be necessary—however, I am confident that my readings are sound as I maintained a close and grateful relationship with the ever expanding secondary literature on Nancy. Of these Marie-Eve Morin, Christopher Fynsk, François Raffoul and Ian James have played a particularly informative role in shaping my opinions, as have conversations with my supervisor Fiona Jenkins. Other notable influences are referred to throughout the text and in my bibliography.

§

The bud disappears in the bursting-forth of the blossom, and one might say that the former is refuted by the latter; similarly, when the fruit appears, the blossom is shown up in its turn as a false manifestation of the plant, and the fruit now emerges as the truth of it instead. These forms are not just distinguished from one another, they also supplant one another as mutually in-

compatible. Yet at the same time their fluid nature makes them moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole.¹⁸

When Hegel wrote these words in the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he must have been aware of their profundity. If we read this passage carefully there are clues to interpreting Hegel's dialectic, and at the same time, I want to use them to guide how I approach the "fragmentary demand"¹⁹ made by Nancy. Each singular moment in the bud's development is a whole, it is absolute, and yet there remains an inherent contingency to each singularity, as one moment supplants the next. Each singularity must be thought as a self-overcoming, as each moment succeeds the following, and the bud negates its own universality and passes contingently into the next moment of singularity. The manner in which the movement of the bud to fruit is the continuous supplanting of one form by another, forms a plurality through the necessity that each stage has on the next; they are contingent in their singular universality, but nonetheless necessary in their plural particularity. This marrying of contingency and necessity is indicative of how Nancy approaches his reading of Hegel, and it produces a lasting impression on his own approach to philosophy. As Judith Butler points out, Nancy "releases Hegel from the trope of totality," and his notion of the subject remains fundamentally dispersed and fragmented,

...the subject is not recoiled into itself, but is defined fundamentally as an act by which the self overcomes itself in its passage toward and into the world. The subject disperses itself into its world, and this self-surpassing is precisely the operation of its negativity.²⁰

I want to hold onto this notion of the subject, as dispersed and fragmented, as plural in its singularity, throughout the rest of this dissertation. It forms the core

¹⁸ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p.2.

¹⁹ Cf. Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand*.

²⁰ Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, p.xviii.

of Nancy's ontology of being-singular-plural, and leads to the final chapter of this dissertation where I discuss the *technē* of the body. It also forms the basis for Nancy's notion of abandonment, and how he works through the deconstruction of Christianity as the experience of abandoned-being. The subject is the subject of Nancy's thought, how to think from the subject and think beyond the subject, how to overcome the subjection of the subject to thought. As Ross puts it, "Instead of the subject being the site or source of meaning, meaning is exteriorised; its 'origin' is being-in-common, between bodies." The deconstruction of Christianity is a treatise on the body of human subjects, human subjection of the body, and the subjection of the bodies that make up the world. I hope that in this work, I have shed some light on Nancy, and perhaps sparked a new approach to the thought of this difficult but necessary philosophy that holds a mirror to our present age.

§

In chapter one, using the recent work by Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* as my point of departure, I will argue that Jean-Luc Nancy develops an ontology that surpasses the competing binary of atheistic and religious experience, and allows us to surpass the present narratives of secularism.²¹ In *A Secular Age*, Taylor himself seeks a middle ground between atheism and religion, arguing that it is possible to open ourselves to the *cross-pressures* of modern existence that find us caught between scientific atheism and a need for spiritual and religious guidance. Here, Taylor finds a way of picturing ourselves within a secular age, remaining faithful to scientific rationalism, but still open to religion and a sense of a higher good. I read Taylor's project along similar lines to those Critchley uses in characterizing Pascal's critique of Descartes, "where nihilism is the accusation leveled

²¹ C.f. Alexandrova, et al. "Re-opening the Question of Religion: Dis-Enclosure of Religion and Modernity in the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy" *Re-treating Religion: Deconstructing Christianity with Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.22; in which they argue that, "Nancy attempts to conceive monotheistic religion and secularization not as opposite worldviews that succeed each other in time but rather views that spring from the same origin and that are intertwined to the point of synonymy".

by a Christian world-view at a secularizing rationalism.”²² However, as I shall demonstrate, in his thesis Taylor misrepresents the Continental philosophical tradition (particularly Nietzsche and post-structuralism) that has itself sought to understand these *cross-pressures* of existence. Taking this misrepresentation—and specifically his reductive and colloquial analysis of Nietzsche, Camus, and Derrida, as my point of departure—I provide an alternate manner of thinking through the work of these writers, a way of thinking that leads to an introductory analysis of Jean-Luc Nancy and his project *the deconstruction of Christianity*. In this analysis I argue that Nancy provides a manner of thinking that remains open and allows an experience of freedom, without seeking to close that sense of openness with explanation, nor maintaining that sense of openness with a conception of the divine.

Beginning with an outline of the key arguments in Taylor’s conception of the secularization of the “western” world, I examine how our “sense of self” has become embedded within an “exclusive humanism”—exclusive in the sense that the immanent flourishing of the human subject has become the primary motivation for our engagement with the world. I then describe how the world has become trapped, according to Taylor, within an “immanent frame,” in which the world has lost any sense of a divine reference. Taylor seeks to invest this “closed world system” (CWS) with a sense of wonder that would thus allow an opening for transcendent reference in the form of a Christian God. What I find most interesting about this account is the manner in which Taylor dismisses the “continental” tradition of philosophy as inexorably bound to nihilism. Instead, I demonstrate how the nihilism confronted by Nietzsche and Heidegger is one they read in the metaphysical closure of the “western” world, a closure that is in fact brought about through Christianity.

By framing my opening chapter in this way, I set up the question of Christianity as it is posed by Jean-Luc Nancy in his deconstruction; and provide, in this chapter, a brief analysis of some of the key motifs in Nancy’s project. Nancy provides a narrative of Christianity that engages with and expands upon the Nietzschean gesture “God is dead”; and I raise a critical detail that forms a key thesis

²² Simon Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing*, p.4.

in Nancy's project—that Christianity is essentially self-deconstructing, and indeed, that deconstruction itself is Christian. A number of other motifs are also advanced at the end of this chapter, explicitly and implicitly, that will form the core interpretative gestures of this dissertation: sense and the manner in which for Nancy sense is that which is shared, the loss of meaning (abandonment) that has accompanied the withdrawal of transcendent presence from the world, the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ and the syncope of the body, the other thought of all thought as the opening of a world within the world, and, the necessity or otherwise of giving meaning to community.

In what follows, my thesis will engage with these motifs and the questions that they imply. In chapter two and three I provide a deliberate couple through which I engage with two crucial aspects of Nancy's philosophy that will allow a clearer understanding of his deconstruction of Christianity. The critical part of chapter two is an examination of how Nancy deconstructs and questions the meta-narrative of globalization. For Nancy, the world conceived in terms of "westernized globalization" must be critiqued and opened to the possibility of alternative narratives. This chapter reflects Nancy's concept of a world that constitutively lacks sense, and provides a first step into Nancy's radical materialism. A concept of materialism that is radical in the sense that Nancy is not held to a purely immanent ontology, but finds the possibility of an "opening" within immanence that is without "production" or transcendent reference. Nancy postulates the term *transimmanence* to describe this gesture, and I return to this term many times throughout this dissertation to build a clearer picture of this critical part of Nancy's broader philosophical thesis.

Thus, in chapter two, I begin with an elaboration of Nancy's theory of monotheism, and the manner in which monotheism has remained the guiding force of globalization from its inception. By focusing upon globalization and Christianity as mutually inclusive motifs, Nancy deconstructs the typical notions of value and exchange inherent in an exploration of capitalism, through the notion of monotheism and its metamorphosis into the monovalence of all value through a general equivalency. In this analysis Nancy draws upon *The German Ideology* in order to elaborate how the power of the monovalence of value is enforced by the notion of general equivalency. Nancy then removes himself from

the Marxist paradigm, critiquing the absolutism within Marx's argument and the strong connection Marx holds toward the creation of the human. Nancy instead deconstructs the notion of value, and relies upon the sense of an opening and distinction that occurs *within* the world, utilising the motif of *transimmanence* to describe the possibility of a revaluation of value as it is framed by global capitalism. The second half of chapter two also provides an initial examination of Nancy's theme of abandonment, as it relates to *transimmanence* and the notion of value in Marx's critique of capitalism from *The German Ideology*. I argue that in "classical metaphysics" a picture of the "world" has been constructed which remains unequivocally bound to questions of meaning and truth. These questions are formed on the basis of the world as something that is brought into view by the "gaze" of a "subject." This allows for an expansion of this question through the deconstruction of metaphysics, as undertaken by Heidegger in his *destruktion* and expanded by Nancy in his project to deconstruct Christianity. I expand upon these themes in chapter three, when I focus on the question of community, and I also set up the question of abandonment as a pivotal term in Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity, thus providing the backdrop to a more thorough analysis of abandonment in chapter four.

Hence, in chapter three, I describe in detail the manner in which Nancy outlines his notion of community, and in particular draw upon his important essay *The Inoperative Community*. By providing an initially exegetical approach, I demonstrate the way Nancy understands the term *inoperative* as it relates to the possibility of *community*. In this chapter I argue that according to Nancy—in contrast to the notions by which thinkers such as Charles Taylor broadly conceive of community in terms of some *operative* whole—it is precisely in the way the *operative* functions that community is pushed onto the path toward the possibility of a *being-in-common*, and a loss of any *value* beyond the purely *economic*. In contrast, Nancy argues that community must be conceived as fragmented, and *inoperative*, to prevent what he calls a *work* or *production* of community that becomes a *work* of its own death—responding to a reading of community in the shadow cast by the *totalitarian* "community" of Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union. In order to consider this notion of the *inoperative*, Nancy draws upon both Heidegger and Bataille, demonstrating in the thought of both the pos-

sibility for describing a shared finitude, but also the inherent weaknesses in their approach to shared finitude. On the one hand, according to Nancy, Heidegger presents the possibility of thinking the *finitude* of being, which is an important first step toward understanding *finitude* as it relates to being-*with*. However, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, according to Nancy Heidegger was unable to make that step. Drawing upon Bataille, Nancy can configure a *shared* notion of *finitude*, which enables him to pose the ontological notion of being-*with* precisely as *shared finitude*. In this chapter I also engage with Critchley's critique of Nancy's notion of being-*with* and community in both *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity* and *The Political Subject of Violence*, this critique provides an important analysis of the political possibilities of justice in Nancy that I expand upon in the conclusion.

In chapter four, I bring together the notion of *shared finitude*—as the ontological premise of being-*with*—and the notion of *transimmanence*, into a deeper understanding of Nancy's ontology. I bring these notions together by describing in detail the way Nancy elucidates the notion of *abandonment*, and how the notion of *abandonment* forms a critical step in the deconstruction of Christianity. In order to explain *abandonment* in some detail, I work through Nancy's conception of *abandoned being* and how this ties together with the thought of *creation ex nihilo*, that is, creation without a divine or transcendent author. Through this explanation it is possible to note the importance of what Derrida describes as *l'avenir*, which is the future as "to-come,"—a future that remains open to the possibility of what Nancy describes as *trans-immanence*. In order to describe in more detail how this posture toward the future resonates with what Nancy describes as *abandonment*, I work through how Nancy reads both Nietzsche and Heidegger as interlocutors with his sense of *abandonment*. There is also a schematic analysis of Agamben's brief but important engagement with Nancy, and how Agamben's use of the term *abandonment* differs in a nuanced but nonetheless significant manner from how Nancy refers to *abandonment*. I then describe how Nancy departs from and extends Heidegger's notion of *abandonment* that we find in his later work on philosophy *Contributions*. To finish the chapter I return to Nancy, and the manner in which he brings together our *shared finitude* and *abandonment*, as opening the possibility of an address toward the infinite that he calls *adoration*. This address of *adoration*, is another way of conceptualiz-

ing the notion of *trans-immanence*, and forms part of his later work on the deconstruction of Christianity. Before moving to the following chapter, I draw upon Malabou's reading of Hegel through the notion of *plasticity*, in a brief interlude that opens some scope to Nancy's reading of Hegel. Paying close attention to the manner in which her reading intersects with both Heidegger and Nancy, I argue that how Malabou poses the question of future in Hegel as "to see (what is) coming" informs how abandoned-being is linked to Derrida's *l'avenir*.

In the fifth chapter, I explain how the body forms an integral part of the ontological picture that Nancy allows with his notion of being-*with* and *shared finitude*—thus, explicitly opening the fundamental role played by Nancy's reading of the body in his deconstruction of Christianity. By following the narrative of *The Stranger* in Camus' novel, I argue that the figure of *Meursault* can be read as a site of *abandoned being*, and furthermore, suggest that *Meursault's* performative encounter with the law indicates the intersection of this *abandonment* with the sensual/sense-able body. In order to expand on intersection, I then explore how Nancy disrupts and deconstructs Descartes' figure of the subject, and the Cartesian split between thinking-thing and extended-thing. Nancy argues that it is in the *enunciation* "I am" that something like a thinking-material body can come into the world. This nontransitive and syncopated notion of the "I" forms the core of Nancy's attempt to rethink the body while complicating the formation of the "subject" as "I" in this Cartesian split. According to Nancy, in order to understand the body and thinking, we must first understand the manner in which the body and the soul, in modern Western philosophy, are conceptions added onto the "I" to construct the *Ideal* of subjectivity—found in the metaphysics of the subject. These questions segue into the final section of this chapter, in which I discuss the intersection of Nancy's thought with Derrida's work on *differance*, and introduce the manner in which Nancy works through a re-reading of the Christian *incarnation*. Here we find the ontological premise of the *body*, and by working through various texts by Nancy, I build a picture of how this ontology of the body fits with Nancy's notion of abandonment in his deconstruction of Christianity. In this section I reveal the importance of reading the body according to Nancy's sense of exposure, the critical concept that must be taken into account in this reading is Nancy's sense of the word touch—which thus forms the basis of my final chapter.

In chapter six I confront possible challenges that might limit Nancy's extension of the concept of touch and the body; in particular, the possibility that Nancy remains thoroughly Christian in his approach, and that he has not thought through the possibilities opened by a reading of the *flesh*. Drawing upon Esposito's reading of Nancy, I work through these challenges and present an alternate reading of Nancy that demonstrates how the body brings together Nancy's notion of Being-with (as, *shared finitude*), into a re-conception of *sense*, through the notion of *touch*. A central question that I grapple with in the following two sections is how Nancy can nonetheless posit a sense of "origin," whilst maintaining a fidelity to his ontology of being-singular-plural. This question centers on how one reads Nancy's notion of abandonment in relation to the sense of this "origin." I argue that Nancy is driving toward an understanding of existence in terms of a *technē* of bodies, or an *ecotechnical* sense of the world, in which the "originality" of meaning springs-forth in the manner that this technicity manifests itself as a world. Hence, I finish the chapter with an exploration of what Nancy means by the *technē* of the body, and how his sense of the body that remains exposed and without signification can nonetheless be thought in terms of the justice of a shared finitude.

The central question of how it might be possible to consider the creation of meaning through the deconstruction of Christianity is resolved, in my conclusion, through the pivotal and central issue of love. I argue that the crux of the question of the meaning of being is centered upon the decentering role of love in the philosophical parlance of Nancy. The weight of existence, and the possibility of intelligibility that this weight implies, maintains a sense of justice by remaining beyond the calculable of law if the force of this sense of the incalculable is felt through our embodied existence. This affect, which remains critical for how it is possible to read Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity, is a touching that cuts through the very sense of existence—a sense of touch, as empathy, that contradicts the critical dichotomies of inside/outside, immanent/transcendent, or material/immaterial and touches the heart of existence. What Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity opens, are the very possibilities that love reveals, when it is considered as the primordial question of the meaning of being.

CHAPTER 1

The Secular

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I seek to problematize the meaning of the sense of *the secular*. I begin by providing an account of Charles Taylor's notion secularization that appears to ground how one might understand the secular in contemporary existence. I then argue that in his explanation Taylor fails to consider the complexity and nuance within Nietzsche's account of "the death of God", and the manifold manner that Nietzsche's thought has been received in existentialist and post-structuralist considerations of what it might mean to say we now live in a secular age. I focus on Taylor's description of Albert Camus, and open a path toward an alternate reading of "the death of God" in Camus through the work of Jean-Philippe Deranty. I then broaden the scope of this reading by considering in more detail what Nietzsche meant by his prophetic statement through an analysis of Nietzsche on his own terms, and the way Nietzsche was received by Heidegger. By drawing upon Heidegger's rehearsal of "the death of God" I provide a segue into Jean-Luc Nancy's project "the deconstruction of Christianity." As will become clear as this dissertation develops, Heidegger is a pivotal influence and touchstone for Nancy, and this early account of Heidegger begins my exploration of the harmonic dissonance and critique of Heidegger that is implicit in Nancy's project. I end the chapter with a critical theme from Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity "the other thought of all thought," that beats a path into the analysis of Nancy in the chapters that follow. By beginning this dissertation with an account of *the secular* I demonstrate two important facets of Nancy's thought and the motivation for this analysis herein; firstly, Nancy opens a unique and competing sense of *the secular* that is explicitly critical of the hegemonic accounts of secularization for which Taylor forms an exemplar; secondly, Nancy's

deconstruction of Christianity is placed firmly within the world as an imminent and critical response to the modern “western” trajectory of ‘globalization’ and the seemingly endless and intensifying injustice that is left in its wake.

The secularization of the Western world is understood by way of a rather simple historical narrative, through the Middle Ages and into the Enlightenment humans became progressively advanced in scientific theory and method, eventually reaching a time when it was no longer possible to naively believe in God, and instead belief became a choice. Despite some variation in its account this typically frames how *the secular* is understood. Whether we consider this deliberately oversimplified narrative in political, ethical, economic, or social terms—and, by taking into account the increasing intensity with which humans have translated and transcribed information and themselves throughout earth—it is no real stretch to imagine the efficacy and explanatory power of this narrative in any of its myriad of forms.

What makes Taylor’s account both interesting on its own terms, and a useful juxtaposition to Nancy, is how he complicates this narrative by re-instituting the place of the transcendent. Simultaneously, however, he solidifies and entrenches facets of this account in ways that enforce the hegemony of Anglophone philosophy that continue to dominate the English-speaking academic world. What Taylor does, quite neatly, is wrap an ethical and spiritual account of Christianity around the dominant epistemic force of ‘common-sense’, one that typically has no use for pithy pontifications on the aesthetics of wonder. Taylor’s account thus functions as an important counter-balance to the economic and scientific rationalization of academia today. For Taylor, God becomes a release valve for the calculative effects of this rationalization; a manifold of effects that has eroded the importance of what necessarily eludes it, the incalculable (or what I will call later, the incommensurable). It is at this point that I depart from Taylor’s account for the reasons below and put in more detail in what follows. However, Taylor does provide an important crack in the epistemic hegemony, a crack that I argue is best understood through the ontological thought of Jean-Luc Nancy. In order to reach the point at which the importance of Nancy becomes apparent, it is necessary to work through Taylor’s critical and dismissive account of Nietzschean thought.

Taylor begins by describing the modern paradigm as "*A Secular Age*," in which the milieu of our existence is defined in terms of what he calls an *immanent frame*. It is this characterization that allows him to posit a higher authority outside this frame, viz. the Christian God. As part of Taylor's narrative, and in order to strengthen "our" capacity to stay in touch with what is outside the *immanent frame* (to stay in touch, that is, with what provides spiritual guidance to the pervasive force of rationalization), Taylor takes aim squarely at the "continental" tradition. Taylor essentially argues that what marks the "continental" tradition is an approach to the "death of God" (inspired by Nietzsche) in which there is a propensity to picture the *immanent frame* as surrounded by an abyss. While he does provide brief accounts of how Nietzsche *et al.* relate to the abyss, it is through Camus that he gives the most sustained and detailed account. I thus work through Taylor's account of Camus, and demonstrate an alternate reading of Camus that does not correlate with Taylor's, and which provides an important window to the nuance of post-Nietzschean thought.

It is the wager of this dissertation that Nancy gives an important, novel, and insightful account of post-Nietzschean thought that remains balanced on the point between three (broadly speaking) competing narratives – rationalization, theology, and nihilism – without itself becoming a narrative. Taylor's account of post-Nietzschean thought as essentially nihilistic does no justice to the complexity involved in the work of a myriad of philosophers who have positioned themselves in relation to Nietzsche (Heidegger, Arendt, Beauvoir, Derrida, and Foucault, to name a few). What Nancy adds to these accounts is a novel approach to understanding secularization (inspired by Nietzsche), in which the seeds of Christianity's undoing were planted at its inception.

In the fourth section, *Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Making Sense of the Death of God*, I work through the context of what Nancy describes as an aggravation of the incommensurable. Understanding what Nancy means by "aggravation" and "incommensurable" provides the entry point into understanding the uniqueness of Nancy's philosophical approach to Christianity, and more generally what it "means" to make sense (*sens*). What I argue in this section is that with the "death of God" the distinction between what was commensurable (worldly, human, intelligible) and what was incommensurable and beyond the human (heavenly, di-

vine, unintelligible) became indistinct. This lack of distinction establishes both metaphysics *and* its closure, and manifests itself through the human as the arbiter of knowledge; a process that takes place precisely through Christianity. In working through the Nietzschean account of the “death of God,” and Heidegger’s interpretation thereof, I suggest that there are two essential points. Firstly, I seek to discredit Taylor’s characterization of Nietzsche and post-Nietzschean accounts of the “death of God.” Secondly, I set up the relationship between Christianity and metaphysics in order to show how Christianity and metaphysics are inexorably linked such that Christianity itself was the driving force behind the blurring of the *distinction* between the commensurable and incommensurable. What this second point reveals is the *transference of the power to distinguish* (that is, the power to make this distinction between commensurability and incommensurability in their various iterations), *to the human*.

The crack that opens within Taylor’s immanent frame is not something to be directed toward spiritual guidance; nor is it something that reveals flaws in the capacity of present forms of epistemology that might be either continually improved (viz. Popper), ignored as irrelevant to philosophy (viz. Rorty), or registered as flaws in human capacity for reason (viz. Dawkins). What I want to suggest is that what this crack reveals is a fundamental ontological gesture of nothingness that must be taken into any account of the human. Rather than picture the world in terms of the *immanent frame*, which allows this “nothingness” to be set up as an incommensurable that is dealt with—and aggravated—by competing accounts of intelligibility and/or theology; Nancy proposes that thinking (and reason) must begin from this gesture of nothingness as infinite, and as constitutive of both reason and finitude. It is this notion of finitude that provides the opening, or “dis-enclosure,” from which thinking can begin *sans* metaphysics. What makes Nancy’s account so compelling, is that it is Christianity itself that provides this opening. It is thus through a deconstruction of Christianity that Nancy traces the possibility of opening reason, and thinking, to the incommensurability, re-inscribed as the infinite, that constitutes the truth of its finitude.

In the final section of this chapter I introduce and set up how Nancy thinks through the deconstruction of Christianity. To begin there are three essential gestures to Nancy’s deconstruction. Firstly, the manner in which Christi-

anity is in a continuous state of self-surpassing, such that it is relentlessly overcoming itself. Secondly, that Christianity has lost the capacity to give sense to the world, despite the performative gestures of “sense-making” that are part of the Christian tradition. And, thirdly, by combining the two points above Nancy argues that Christianity works towards its own end, undercutting its own *ground* whilst simultaneously ceaselessly pushing toward its own re-enactment.

Thus, through these gestures, Nancy explains that Christianity is the accompaniment of the West toward its own dissolution (nihilism). It is here that the force of Nancy’s deconstruction comes into play; only by accompanying Christianity to its own end and abandonment, can the world open to the other of thought. Precisely through this opening it becomes possible to *dis-enclose* reason. This sense of opening, and the accompanying abandonment are pivotal gestures in Nancy, and gestures explored in more detail in the chapters that follow. To end this chapter I make some preliminary remarks on how this opening plays out through the other of thought, as described by Nancy in *The Experience of Freedom*, and it is this sense of an opening to the other of thought that provides a segue into the next two chapters.

I. THE CROSS-PRESSURES OF EXISTENCE

According to Taylor, today’s *secular age* is marked by a decisive shift, from the naïve condition of belief where a transcendent God was simply assumed to play a role in our immanent existence; to the reflexive condition of belief we live in today, where belief in a transcendent God is now one choice among many others.²³ Taylor calls into question the historical correlation made between an abandonment of faith and the rise of science by examining the close link between scientific epistemology and the ethical premise of humanism. He argues that our modern experience is dominated by a sense of “exclusive” humanism, such that there

²³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p.21. Subsequent references are made in the text.

is no longer any goal or condition beyond an immanent and purely human flourishing. That is to say, nothing is needed outside of a purely human sense of existence to justify human flourishing, nor is anything required that provides any sense or meaning beyond this purely human flourishing (18). In Taylor's critique, the changed conditions of belief, and the move to exclusive humanism, are aligned and reinforced with a shift in human self-understanding or self-reflexivity from the "porous self" to the "buffered individual" (541). Taylor's motif of the buffered individual captures the modern sense of self and identity, in which a person's thoughts and feelings, their values and goals, are contained within the mind and are separated from the outside world (of course, that is not to say that the mind is not affected by the outside world).²⁴ The buffered sense of selfhood correlates with a firmer sense of intimacy and individualism. Taylor then aligns this sense of evolving individualism with the prominence in Reformation teaching on the believer's personal relationship with God, (which is to say, a relationship with God unmediated by the church); and the modern sense of privacy and discipline (social, spatio-temporal, and theological) that accompanied this transformation. The changing nature of the human sense of self-hood, one that no longer required any "outside" to provide it with a sense of self,²⁵ when aligned with the trajectory of exclusive humanism and the ability prescribed by science to explain the world in material terms, allows Taylor to build a picture of modern self-reflexive identity caught within what he calls the "immanent frame": immanent in contrast to transcendent, in other words, a natural and

²⁴ For example, when a person is beset by erratic and abnormal thoughts we understand this in terms of mental illness rather than as possession by some evil spirit (540).

²⁵ One manner of conceiving this changed sense of self-identity is through the changing manner of relating to oneself through discursive practice that evolved from an intensification of the confession through Church history to the sphere of psychiatric medicine, as described by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality: Volume One*. In this genealogical picture set out by Foucault we can see an increasingly individualizing set of disciplines and bio-power that worked upon the subject to create a "truth of the subject" p.70. For example, Foucault writes, "For a long time, the individual was vouched for by the reference of others and the demonstration of his ties to the commonweal (family, allegiance, protection); then he was authenticated by the discourse of truth he was able or obliged to pronounce concerning himself. The truthful confession was inscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualization by power" p.59. I suggest this manner of picturing the change Taylor outlines in order to place this discourse within an alternative frame of reference, and I am not necessarily suggesting a correlation between the two notions of individualization.

material order in contrast to a supernatural and immaterial order (542).

The immanent frame is Taylor's way of picturing what Max Weber described as the dis-enchantment of the world, where we no longer rely upon another "transcendent" world to give meaning to this one. Thus, the modern condition of human experience²⁶ is broadly construed in terms of an immanent framing of existence; however, despite the fact that it allows an explanation of the world in completely immanent terms it does so "without demanding it" (544). According to Taylor, this lack of demand allows the immanent frame to remain open to sense from "outside", what he calls a "neo-Durkheimian" understanding,²⁷ in which there is something morally higher than our immanent *natural* world. In these terms, it is possible to maintain a sense of the world beholden to a "higher good", a sense that remains *distinct* from the world encompassed by the immanent frame; and as such, a sense of the world "somehow ineradicably linked to God" (544). It is important to recognise that in Taylor's explanation of remaining open to an "outside", sense arrives in the world through this opening, and it is this notion of a passage of sense from the "outside" that captures the essence of the divine. Taylor presents an account of our experience of the Western-world, a world caught within the "immanent frame", as one that we may regard as remaining open (in contrast to the predominant explanation of this "immanent frame" in terms of a "closed-spin", a point to which I will turn shortly). This is an opening that permits the passage of sense between the "immanent frame" and what remains beyond this frame. This account of an opening is best explained, according to Taylor, with reference to a transcendent Being viz. God.

In contrast to the conception of openness, Taylor describes the "subtraction thesis" in which the immanent frame is understood in such a way that it seems obvious that there is no longer any necessity for a God to explain the natural world. This second posture towards the immanent frame, what he describes

²⁶ In which what we believe is governed by choice, while the pursuit of human flourishing is largely unquestioned, and we come to understand ourselves as essentially "buffered" individuals.

²⁷ While this short 'snap-shot' of Taylor's notion of the "immanent frame" provides a somewhat useful touchstone in the context of this thesis, it is by no means provides a complete picture of Taylor's considerably well thought through and articulated thesis of the "immanent frame". I have provided it here in the context of this thesis in order to introduce one manner in which we might follow Taylor's thought.

as the “closed-spin”, is the perspective or notion that we have, through the progression of science and rationalism, subtracted the spiritual and mythical explanations for our world, and reached a true and natural understanding of the material world. Taylor uses the term spin to indicate the manner in which the dominance of the epistemological closure of our sense of the world has become the “picture” or “background to our thinking” (549).²⁸ The subtraction thesis has an explicitly moral inscription, our belief in God is childish fantasy and we must ethically grow-up and see the world for what it is—a world that is largely “indifferent to us” (561). Rather than cloak ourselves in the reassuring narrative of an omnipotent God, we must confront the ethical challenges of our existence alone. Thus any sense of openness—remembering that the manner in which Taylor uses this term is purely religious—must first reject the epistemologically closed background to our thinking; and hence, religious or spiritual experience always takes place within, and despite of, the immanent frame.

In order to critique the scientific epistemology and moral narrative involved in the closed immanent frame Taylor introduces two important concepts into his argument that allow him to demonstrate an alternative way of understanding our existence beyond this closure; these he describes as the “death of God” and “deconstruction”. Taylor refers to the “death of God” motif, to further his conception of the “subtraction” thesis outlined above, in essence describing the subtraction of divine openness as premised upon the death of God. By referencing his correlation with Nietzsche’s sense of this motif, while completely disregarding and disparaging Nietzsche’s work as a whole, Taylor demonstrates what is symptomatic in colloquial and reductive references to Nietzsche.²⁹

²⁸ Taylor makes reference here and in other places to Wittgenstein’s picture theory, for example he writes that; “we have here what Wittgenstein calls a “picture”, a background to our thinking, within whose terms it is carried on, but which is often largely unformulated, and to which we can frequently, just for this reason, imagine no alternative. As he famously put it, “a picture held us captive” (549).

²⁹ When Taylor first introduces the “death of God” into his analysis of the immanent frame, he explicitly makes reference to Nietzsche without naming him in the text, but referring to Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science* in a footnote. He writes of his own version, that it will not “be simply following the originator of the phrase (though I think my version is not too far from his)” (560). He later argues that Nietzsche’s philosophy culminates in the doctrine of the will-to-power, in which “The main virtue stressed here is the imaginative courage to face the void, and to be energized by it to the creation of meaning...But how coherent is this view of the creation of meaning and value in face of the void” (589).

Taylor uses the notion of “deconstruction” in the sense of a “deconstruction of epistemology,” the conception of which he describes by summarising Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in a few sentences.³⁰ Once again, Taylor makes use of a philosophical tradition with colloquial and reductive references to terms that have a significant and expansive tradition behind them; he uses the term deconstruction without any mention of Derrida, and hence I assume that he is referring to what Heidegger called “destruction”. Taylor uses this notion to demonstrate how the seeming obviousness of the closed world system is premised upon a world that is in-itself constructed in support of what it proves. The “death of God” or subtraction thesis combines the scientific world-view with an ethical or moral attitude; according to Taylor, the proponents of this “package of epistemic and moral views”, present “the scientific-epistemic part of it [as] completely self-supporting,” without recognising the pivotal role played by the moral views surrounding this scientific epistemology (562). What the proponents of this package of epistemic and moral views overstate (Taylor here refers to Richard Dawkins specifically), is the notion that the scientific-epistemic paradigm does not rely upon “faith” but rather is based upon evidence, overlooking the sense in which science itself must contain non-evidence based assumptions (835 fn27). Taylor concludes that the moral outlook, closely aligned with the science driven “closed-spin”, is simply one moral outlook that “gave way to another” (563). His argument rests on his alignment with the proponents of the deconstruction of epistemology—his claim is that “some move is being passed off as a simple discovery,

³⁰ Taylor engages in a dramatic reduction of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger’s philosophy in order to explain how one might engage in a “deconstruction of epistemology” (c.f. 558-9). Taylor then argues that, “Once you shift to the deconstructing point of view, the CWS [Closed World System, in other words, a closed spin on the immanent frame] can no longer operate as such. It seemed to offer a neutral point of view from which we could problematize certain values – e.g., “transcendent” ones – more than others. But now it appears that it is driven by its own set of values. Its “neutrality” appears bogus” (560). I agree, in a broad sense, with the cut and thrust of Taylor’s argument. The issue is that Taylor does not refer to the philosophical tradition that is part of the methodology he is using here, a methodology that quickly morphs when he begins referring to his task as one of deconstructing the death of God view (c.f. 567). One might refer to this as Heidegger’s ‘destruction’, Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the flesh, and furthermore, Derrida’s notion of deconstruction – in any case, the reason why Taylor seems compelled to conflate these various philosophical traditions deserves further analysis, of which I hope this thesis may form a part.

which in fact is much more like a new construction" (565).³¹

What Taylor hopes to add to his conception of the immanent frame by showing the problems associated with the "closed-spin" is an experience of the "cross-pressure" of existence, where one is caught between two ways of conceiving a lived experience. These cross-pressures provide the experience of flux, in which we can interpret our experience in terms of either an open or closed perspective (555). That is, despite the dominant paradigm or "intellectual hegemony" of secularism creating what Taylor describes as a "closed world system", at times we experience the world in terms of a "stance of openness" in which we feel a sense of wonder at the world and our place in the world. Taylor is thus contrasting an interpretation that may be explained in rational and scientific terms (thus preventing this "stance of openness"),³² or, alternatively, more clearly grounded in faith and a sense of religious experience (551). Moreover, rather than dismissing this openness as illusory and necessarily ignored or scientifically explained away, Taylor argues that this openness provides an important and alternate reading of the modern human condition. What these pressures illustrate is the necessity of maintaining faith in a transcendent and religious sense, and allowing spiritual hope and belief to continue to play a role in modern exist-

³¹ As Taylor states, he is here referring to the manner in which the "master narrative" (a "closed-spin" to the "immanent frame") provides these "constructions" with the sense of a "coming of age". Which is to say we are, in the present milieu of the Western-world, ethically growing up (836 fn32). This relates directly to the argument made regarding "exclusive humanism" which forms an important part of how Taylor understands the "immanent frame". For Taylor these "new constructions" are not "unarbitrable by reason. . . their arbitration is much more complicated, like that between Kuhnian paradigms, and also involves issues of hermeneutical adequacy" (565).

³² Taylor is here arguing that the closed world system creates the conditions for explaining and hence ignoring our sense of wonder at the world, and hence disavowing the 'open stance' that Taylor is advocating here. As he writes, "one's thinking is clouded or cramped by a powerful picture which prevents one seeing important aspects of reality. I want to argue that those who think the closed reading of immanence is "natural" and obvious are suffering from this kind of disability" (551). Importantly, and in a manner that strengthens his argument, Taylor also points out that this works in the same way for those who think that the "open reading is obvious and inescapable", however, as he puts it, "such people...cannot approach the intellectual hegemony their opponents enjoy" (551). It should be noted that this 'intellectual hegemony' refers to 'Western secularism'.

ence.³³ By maintaining these cross-pressures, Taylor believes he has found an alternate narrative to the one dominated by exclusive humanism, opening the possibility for a sense of the world that moves beyond purely human flourishing through a religious faith that is in harmony with the modern conditions of experience. By maintaining 'an openness' to the cross-pressures of our experience of the world, we can have a rational and scientific understanding to some degree, while also allowing a sense of our place in the world to enter through religious experience. In this paradigm, we are cognisant of the advances of science, the importance of rational decision-making, the medical picture of our psychological make-up; however, we still allow ourselves to be open to a sense of our existence that transcends these immanent explanations, thus allowing us to maintain a stance toward morality that encompasses a higher good, and higher purpose, beyond purely human flourishing.

II. DECONSTRUCTION AND THE DEATH OF GOD: FACING THE NORMATIVE ABYSS

Taylor's argument is well-conceived and warrants close attention. Taylor's concept of the "immanent-frame" and competing "cross-pressures" provide a convincing account of the fundamental issues that confront our existence within the present milieu of the Western-world, leaving aside the religious overtones of his solution (which form the conclusion to his argument), which I do not seek to discredit here. However, by joining the "death of God" motif with the hegemonic "account of the rise of modern secularity", he conflates one philosophical motif with the other, claiming that "death of God atheism" is driven by science.³⁴ What Taylor does is put himself on the side of the "deconstructors of epistemology" whilst using his particular sense of that mode of thinking to discredit the "proponents

³³ Charles Taylor, "Foreword" in Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, p.4.

³⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp.564-5. Subsequent references are made in the text.

of the death of God" (565). Yet Nietzsche was the catalyst for the very deconstruction that Taylor proposes he himself is undertaking. It was surely Nietzsche who first revealed the symbiotic and multi-valenced manifold of relationality between "morality" on the one hand, and "metaphysics" on the other.

In other words, what I propose is that the "death of God" motif that Taylor discredits with his "deconstruction of epistemology", already points to the very notion he is seeking to undo; that the "moral order" is closely aligned to the hegemonic episteme that has accompanied science-based secularism. However, this may be considered a nominal argument over the use of the phrase "death of God", and viewed in this way does not detract from the weight of Taylor's thesis. It is necessary to decide the role Taylor assigns to Nietzsche and Derrida in the broader picture he has built of the secular age, and to do that we must start with his analysis of Camus, as this analysis plays a vital role in his description of these thinkers. The crux of my issue with Taylor's analysis is that he does not consider that there are other ways of thinking about the openness of the world that do not involve the religious call that Taylor assumes.³⁵ Taylor claims that Camus, and others that similarly question the death of God, contribute to a closed sense of the immanent frame. Yet, as I will demonstrate when I come to an alternate reading of Camus, Taylor confuses and conflates the complexity involved in a tradition of thought that questions the sense of the world after the death of God, one that finds a unique voice in Camus. In this section of the chapter, I will trace the manner in which Taylor interprets Camus, and where that interpretation takes him with respect to Nietzsche and Derrida.

§

Taylor quite comprehensively surveys Camus' literature, revealing what he claims is a sense of stoic courage and moral order in a struggle for meaning that has no hope of finding stable ground. In contrast to the scientific-episteme, the perspective Taylor is tracing here is one that accepts the lack of transcendent reference and stands "before a normative abyss", coming to the conclusion "that this

³⁵ C.f. Taylor's discussion of Nussbaum's "warning against attempts to "transcend humanity"" (625-34).

blind, deaf, silent universe offers *no* guidance whatever" (581). What is pivotal for Taylor in this narrative is Camus' notion of "the absurd"—premised on the sense that despite the "unreasonable silence of the world" (583) we are still called to enjoy our life in the world, that we still desire *jouissance*.³⁶ As Camus writes, "what is absurd is the confrontation between this irrational reality and the wild longing for clarity whose call resonates in the depths of the human heart" (584).³⁷ What we find in Camus is a struggle, and a call, to find *jouissance* in the world without thought of a higher authority. Taylor argues that this stoic courage, despite facing a completely "ungrounded self-authorization", still displays something of the highest form of "human morality" (586); Taylor then goes on to describe Derrida as occupying the same ethical position. Yet the ethical position that Taylor attributes to Camus and Derrida remains one-dimensional, a sense of loneliness in the figure of a human that has no higher purpose or meaning, an "indifferent universe" that leaves us without any "transcendent hope" (586). This position of the human, the binary positioning of our human-ness—in the way that we seek *jouissance* despite the seeming pointlessness—and the indifferent universe, is precisely what enables Taylor to create a sense that Camus can be slotted into another reading of the closed world system. The "closed" part of this "world system", is, in Taylor's assessment of Camus, in the human itself; closed off from meaning, buffered from myth and higher purpose, completely individualised and alone. This sense of closure is what leads to Taylor's reading of Nietzsche alongside Camus and Derrida, in which they are all protagonists in the same story; that the "power" of this "closure" is in the way in which "meaning" itself comes under the purview of this individualised human. This is, furthermore, why Taylor comes to categorise Nietzsche, Camus, Derrida, Foucault, (and with them an entire philosophical tradition) as part of a narrative of self-authorization, where crucially, the self is ungrounded, and hence the authorization is presented as unbounded.

Taylor here separates what he calls the "narratives" of ungrounded self-authorization into two halves, maybe we could think of them rather simplistically

³⁶ I come back to this sense of *jouissance*, and Nancy's use of this term, in the chapters that follow.

³⁷ Taylor's modified translation from Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p.26.

as bad nihilism and good nihilism, both of which contribute to the closed world system. On the good side, "Camus, Derrida, and others" represent an ethical calling that sounds very much like stoicism, despite the contingency of life and the lack of a higher meaning or ground to our existence; it is "an ethic which has deep roots in our civilization, a humanism which takes up some variant of the modern moral order, that our actions and structures should conduce to the benefit of all" (586). On the bad side, "Nietzsche", of course, "conceived of a kind of self-authorization which deliberately rejected universal benefit, egalitarianism, democracy, as so many obstacles on the road to self-overcoming" (586).

As with Taylor's assessment of the ethical premise of exclusive humanism at work in the science/moral-order package, Taylor argues that Camus, Derrida, Nietzsche "and others" are guilty of the same subtraction thesis, that this is simply a "twist to the story of modernity as adulthood" (588). The "twist" is that, instead of replacing a childish need for myth with the adulthood of science and reason, with Nietzsche *et al.* the emphasis is on "the imaginative courage to face the void, and to be energized by it to the creation of meaning" (589). Taylor argues that these "narratives of self-authorization, when examined more closely, are far from self-evident; and yet their assuming axiomatic status in the thinking of many people, is one facet of a powerful and widespread CWS" (589). The problem here is not simply the manner in which Taylor assesses how these "narrative of self-authorization" fit into a more general assessment of how and why we arrive at moral principles, but also the manner in which Taylor places Nietzsche within this assessment. Taylor concludes that these narratives of self-authorization he has been examining are simply another facet of the closed world system, that they simply represent one more "closed spin" on the "immanent frame".

This broad categorisation of "closure", which Taylor applies to a scientific-episteme founded upon scientific empiricism and rational epistemology, precludes an ontological foundation. However, it does not fit with the picture that Taylor himself paints of the Nietzschean view of existence in which we are faced with a "normative abyss". The crucial question in this picture is the manner that existence comports itself as it faces this normative abyss, and one could hardly conclude that such an "abyss" is closed. Indeed, what makes the Nietzschean per-

spective so definitively different is the manner in which it overturns the modern propensity for scientific epistemology to ground our conception of morality and ontology. Indeed, we might conclude that the Nietzschean perspective is the catalyst for the deconstruction of epistemology that Taylor himself relies upon in his own account. Thus I would speculate that it is rather difficult to associate the Nietzschean perspective, and one of its major protagonists in Derrida, with the closure of the immanent frame; and, furthermore, it is difficult to imagine the Nietzschean perspective in any sort of *binary relationship* with a transcendental religious ontology.

Taylor categorises the modes of ungrounded self-authorization he associates with Nietzsche, Camus, and Derrida, as another part in the closure of the immanent frame. Taylor describes Nietzsche's doctrine of will-to-power, or the "search for the Dionysian", as one in which the modern moral order, constructed by and through Western modernity, is to be shed in favour of "a new ethic" (599). However, this critique of the Western moral order, by Nietzsche and those who have followed Nietzsche's critique, creates another version of the cross-pressures of existence. This is ostensibly between those who wish to retain some form of the natural order and the fundamentals of human morality, and those who seek to overturn or criticise the structural inequalities and hidden relations of power.

In what is perhaps indicative of Taylor's misreading of Nietzsche and his misrepresentation of the post-structuralism of Foucault and Derrida, is Taylor's assessment of the role of the Dionysian. Taylor describes the manner in which the category of the "Dionysian" forms an apex of recovery, in the sense of a "Romantic" attempt at the re-appropriation of the connection between desire (and the manner in which it inhabits the body) and the natural order; a connection reversed in the steady appropriation of the body through the religious conversion of the reformation in which the body became inhabited by God. Foucault is listed as a protagonist in this recovery, which Taylor describes as "not just a call for release of desire, sexual as well as violent and destructive, but also the attempt to recover a profound resonance of these desires, the way they can offer us escape from our disciplinary prison in ecstasy" (613). This is one way of reading Foucault's *History of Sexuality*; another, and one towards which I am more sympathetic, is to see Foucault as overturning the very notion that repression and

desire might be somehow attached to human "agency" or human "nature" in the first place. Indeed, Foucault might be read as showing how this binary forms an instrument of relationality in the manifold of power relations that create the world. Taylor plays on the relation of the Reformed church to the repressing "bodily desires, of sex and violence" as indicative of the transcendent or "higher" form of expression; and charges the "Romantic" expressive tendency as taking an opposing view. Rather than placing Foucault with this expressive tendency, it seems to me more faithful to Foucault's work to see Foucault as breaking down this binary opposition and revealing the movement of power and resistance within the interplay of these two positions. This point illustrates what is symptomatic in the way Taylor has misread Nietzsche, Camus, Derrida, and Foucault, "among others", in order to create a holistic trajectory of thought that does not take into account the nuanced way in which each of these thinkers has engaged with the question of a "higher authority", religious, Christian, or otherwise.

III. CAMUS AND A TENDER INDIFFERENCE TO TAYLOR'S SENSE OF THE ABYSS

What my brief synopsis of *A Secular Age* I hope makes clear is that Taylor is undertaking to define the relationship between spiritual thought (a sense in which a higher moral order or excellence in ethical thought may be attributed to God), and the philosophy that has been inspired by Nietzsche and undertaken by many in the "continental" tradition, including Derrida. Specifically, Taylor argues that this tradition follows a lineage of thought that was founded by Nietzsche, in which this *philosophy* is ontologically premised upon an attitude of "stoic courage" in the face of a world marked by a "normative abyss" (703). I take Taylor's argument to rest in part upon an assessment in which "deconstruction" provides an empty basis for "value" and "meaning", in a world premised, first and foremost, upon the nothingness found in the *ex nihilo* devoid of a divine creator; in a world premised upon a "view of the creation of meaning and value in face of the

void" (589). Hence this manner of philosophical thought leaves little in the way of guidance to those confronted by the wonder and contingency of existence other than their own agency. This sense of self-authority in one's own agency, devoid of any ground, is what leads Taylor to conclude that the "stoic courage of a Camus or a Derrida" is simply another "spin" upon the "immanent frame" in which we find ourselves in the modern Western milieu.

Jean-Phillipe Deranty offers a completely different reading of Camus than the one undertaken by Taylor. I will sketch the picture built by Deranty briefly here to illustrate an example of the nuance involved in a more detailed analysis of the "stoic courage" or apparent nihilism shown by Camus. Firstly, Deranty rejects the Hellenistic interpretation of Camus' work, arguing that Camus engages in an attempt to think through the sensualism at work in our experience of the world, rather than any attempt to construct a moral order or ethical understanding of our existence.³⁸ Thus, instead of interpreting Camus on the basis of self-authorization, which implies a presence of being that stands in contrast to the world, Camus is engaged in a *theory of the flesh* that mirrors Merleau-Ponty's ontological foundation.³⁹ By this reckoning, when Camus writes of the "absurd", he is pointing in fact to a sense of letting oneself touch and be touched by the world, a sensual contact with the world that draws us into a relationality with the "indifference" of the world. Now, as Taylor has argued, this indifference can be thought of in terms of a stoic courage, an indifference to which we must face up to, confront and struggle for happiness within, despite the contingency and fleeting nature of these encounters with the world. But in contrast with Taylor, Deranty notes that Camus' sensual encounter with the world allows for a "moment of truth", which "is linked to an experience of opening or 'openness', an opening to

³⁸ As Jean-Philippe Deranty writes in his paper, "The Tender Indifference of the World: Camus' Theory of the Flesh" *Sophia* (2011), 50:513-525; "Camus' position could be mistaken as being akin to the classical ethical positions of the Greek philosophers, one he might have learnt to appreciate during his work for his dissertation on "Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism". In fact, the acceptance and recognition of the world's inhuman beauty occur through sensuous experience, not through moral reasoning." p.518.

³⁹ Deranty presents a succinct and lucid introduction to this difficult and enigmatic notion of the "flesh" in Merleau-Ponty in the aforementioned article; he writes that the flesh is indicative of, "Merleau-Ponty's 'chiasmatic' scheme, that is, the idea that we can see and touch the world only because the world, as it were, sees and touches us." p.515.

the world"; and, that it is Camus' notion of the *flesh* that forms the site of "mediation" between the "self and world" and allows this openness.⁴⁰ Thus, in order to reconcile the bleak picture of stoic courage discussed by Taylor with the mediation illustrated by Deranty, there must be a different picture of the "world" in Deranty's assessment of Camus' work. Indeed, the difference is the way in which the indifference of the world may be thought of when the engagement is 'mediated'.⁴¹ That is to say, the mediation of the flesh, the chiasmus of subject and object in that mediation, leaves the world in a completely different posture than the one supposed by Taylor through a stoic courage. This second picture of the world, "is no longer human", it "is the reciprocal (chiasmatic) indifference of the world itself...The indifference of the world here is not rebuking, or challenging; it is the exact opposite: it is a tender indifference."⁴² This notion of "tender indifference" only becomes possible through the sense of mediation allowed by Camus' ontology of the flesh, letting oneself become immersed in the world, and hence losing that sense of self, losing any sense of a narrative of "self-authorization" that would then have to be "grounded" in some-thing, a "thing" which is not there. This very different reading of Camus opens out the possibility of re-reading the notion of deconstruction and the paradigm of ungrounded self-authorization that Taylor sets up in his reading of Derrida.

This alternate reading of Camus illustrates a way of thinking the openness of the world without seeking to understand or make-sense of this opening. Indeed, what is at stake in this openness is the possibility of sense *ex nihilo*; the possibility, that is, of sense that lacks the element of production, and hence lacks a producer. What I would like to consider now, in contrast to Taylor, is the manner in which this openness can be thought without reference to religious experience, and without God—that is, a thought that makes-sense without the closure provided by the element of production, and without reference to a transcendent

⁴⁰ Deranty, "The Tender Indifference of the World," p.517. As will be apparent to those familiar with Jean-Luc Nancy, and recent discussion of his work by Roberto Esposito, Nancy resists engaging in discussions of the "flesh", preferring to use the mediation of a "limit" to reconcile not simply self and world, but self and self, or indeed, self and the other. I will come back to this point in chapter six.

⁴¹ I return to this notion of mediation in chapter six.

⁴² Deranty, "The Tender Indifference of the World," p.517.

call. In order to do so, as indicated in my introduction, I explore the project undertaken by Jean-Luc Nancy in his deconstruction of Christianity. To contextualise the thesis within which Nancy is working I begin by tracing the source of this thesis in Nietzsche and Heidegger.

IV. HEIDEGGER, NIETZSCHE, AND MAKING SENSE OF THE DEATH OF GOD

Nancy begins his investigation of the trajectory of Christianity and Western secularism with the premise of a closure, however, in contrast to Taylor, Nancy understands the genealogy of Christianity as sowed with the seeds of atheism from its inception. Derrida helpfully describes the manner in which Nancy's thinking on Christianity and atheism took shape, alongside a detailed phenomenological account of Nancy's motif of *toucher* (touching).⁴³

Just as it is neither enough to present oneself as a Christian nor to "believe" or "believe oneself to be a Christian" in order to hold forth in a language that is "authentically" Christian, likewise it is not enough *not* to "believe" or believe oneself and declare oneself *non-Christian* in order to utter a discourse, speak a language, and even inhabit one's body while remaining safely sheltered from all Christianity.⁴⁴

This leads Nancy on a radically different path of thinking the relationship between openness and closure to sense in our modern experience of the Western world, a closure that differs significantly from the closure interrogated at length in *A Secular Age*. Taylor describes the closure of an immanent frame that aligns neatly with the broad thesis of a dis-enchantment of the world; in contrast, Nancy, as I will demonstrate in this and the following chapter, understands this clo-

⁴³ I will address this book during chapter five, in order to provide some access to Nancy's motif of *touch*.

⁴⁴ Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.220.

sure as an inherent part of Christianity. Perhaps what marks the approach taken up by Nancy is the manner in which he understands the transformation of the world as an intensification or "aggravation" of this closure, rather than the more simple narrative of a subtraction of the world's transcendent reference. In this section I seek to elaborate on this closure. Firstly, I begin by setting out the terms engaged by Nancy in which this closure, aggravated by Christianity, is part of a broader account of the closure of metaphysics. Secondly, I show how Nietzsche provides the basis for Nancy's engagement with both the closure of metaphysics, and how this closure began with Christianity. Thirdly, through Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, which puts "aggravation" into its metaphysical context, I demonstrate how both metaphysics and Christianity provide the seeds of their own closure. Thus, in this section, I describe how Nietzsche and Heidegger inform what Nancy describes as the "aggravation of the incommensurable", a concept I cover in more detail in the following chapter.

For Nancy, metaphysics is in itself already closed, and rather than exiting from Plato's cave, we have simply functioned as if we had always already left, while carrying around the secret of our enclosure. In fact, *logos* is defined by the relationship it holds with the unknown and the incommensurable. Closure must thus be thought of as essential for metaphysics to function. By giving reason its limits I define reason, and give reason the power to explain; and yet, through that same closure, reason pushes against what eludes its grasp. By continually attempting to convert the incalculable into the calculable, *logos* is also increasing the marginalization of what remain incommensurable. According to Nancy, the West has taken shape through its ability to increasingly marginalize what remained incommensurable, and in the process provide more emphasis on what could be claimed by knowledge. As I will describe in the next chapter on globalization, Nancy calls this process of producing knowledge an "agglomeration". For the moment, however, I want to focus upon how and why the unknown is "aggravated". The answer is in how Western metaphysical thought has been necessarily haunted by what continues to elude it.

The West was born not from the liquidation of a dark world of beliefs, dissolved by the light of a new sun...It took shape in a metamorphosis of the

overall relation to the world, such that the “inaccessible” in effect took shape and functioned, as it were, *precisely as such* in thought, in knowledge, and in behavior. There was no reduction of the unknown, but rather an aggravation of the incommensurable...⁴⁵

According to Nancy, philosophy has interrogated the incommensurable since its inception. Indeed, what marks philosophy is the need to posit reason without any condition or “prior given”, but instead to begin from the “unconditional”.⁴⁶ Thus, reason cannot function without what necessarily exceeds it, the *logos* depends upon the *a-logon*.⁴⁷ By disrupting the metaphor of light, Nancy is arguing that reason is necessarily linked to the incalculable and incommensurable other of “reason”. That the West took shape through this metaphysics precisely in the sense that it came to understand itself as overcoming and mastering the incommensurable. Significantly, Nancy is also claiming that this first began with Christianity; Christianity shaped the West by turning away from the necessity of the incommensurable, while instituting its perpetual aggravation. Nietzsche, an important touchstone for Nancy, continually engaged with and elaborated the stakes of this “metamorphosis”, and he thus provides a useful point at which to begin an account of this “aggravation”. As Nietzsche describes, the moment the human became the author of its “world” it became the arbiter of meaning, and lost touch with the incommensurable.

The total character of the world, however, is in all eternity chaos—in the

⁴⁵ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.8.

⁴⁶ Nancy writes in the *Philosophical Chronicles*; that “philosophy, in whatever manner we envisage it, aspires to be removed from specialization as well as from subjectivity. From the beginning and in principle, it demands the universal and the objective. That is to say, it asks how the universal can be an object of thought and how any object, whatever it may be, can be thought according to the universal. Thus, even if thought adopts the principle of multiplicity, heterogeneity, and the incommensurability of being, it still thus posits a form of universal object. Kant had a word for this: “the unconditional”. Reason demands the unconditional. That is its passion. It demands that which does not depend on anything prior, on any condition already posited. If I admit a condition, a prior given, I cannot begin to philosophize.” pp.1-2.

⁴⁷ This leads Alexandrova et al. *Re-treating Religion* to conclude that; “By means of his deconstructive analyses, Nancy insists that reason is not only the key notion to go against the grain of the religious, as secularism generally has it, but that reason keeps at its heart, and even depends upon, an element that exceeds it – the *a-logon*, the *allos*.” p.25.

sense not of a lack of necessity but of a lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms...Let us beware of attributing to it heartlessness and unreason or their opposites: it is neither perfect nor noble, nor does it wish to become any of these things; it does not by any means strive to imitate man.⁴⁸

The importance of Nietzsche's reading of this intrusion of anthropomorphisms for Nancy's account of the deconstruction of Christianity is pivotal. By reading Nietzsche closely one is struck by how the human attribution of "unreason or their opposites" took place precisely through the event of Christianity, and how the investment of the human with the power to "attribute", separated reason from the incommensurable and necessitated its aggravation. I want to unpack in some detail how this process of "attribution" functions in Nietzsche, and Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, in what follows below.

Nietzsche wrote in the last line of the *Genealogy of Morals* that "man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will."⁴⁹ Many have taken up the propensity of 'man' to will, or the 'will to will' as the defining moment in Nietzsche's confrontation with the nihilism of the modern age.⁵⁰ This emphasis misses the disease by focusing on the symptom, it is the pathology of our relation to 'nothingness' that defines the modern age; and this is not a nothingness that Nietzsche imposes upon the world, as many, including Taylor, insist. This nothingness is what drives us to will, indeed, nothingness is what enables us to will. Nothingness (or not-being) is constitutive of our 'presence'. Nothingness is operative throughout Nietzsche's work, for instance in *The Gay Science*, where it is the powerful inclination that drives us to a "will-to-truth"; and it is this nothingness that allows the formation of consciousness, the "need to "know" himself what distressed him...how he felt...what he thought."⁵¹ A number of fundamental questions become apparent at this point. Is it not possible that this need to know comes from

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, s.109.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, "Genealogy of Morals", in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, p.599.

⁵⁰ As Aristotle wrote in the *Metaphysics*, anticipating the desire to sense that would become indicative of the notion of the *will to will*; "All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves." 980a22.

⁵¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, s354.

the fact that we are for the most part thinking without knowing, and what we become conscious of, what we “know”, is only a fraction of what we are, a fraction which allows us to communicate and survive? Furthermore, that constitutively what we are and how we appear to ourselves, and, indeed, how our world appears, is nonetheless a thin veneer of corrupt, superficial, and generalized representation? Such that knowledge becomes, as Nietzsche claims, simply the reduction of the unfamiliar to the familiar, and “what we are used to...our everyday.”⁵² The will-to-truth is thus a drive to reduce everything into knowledge, where this “everything” is that which one is dealing with everyday. The incommensurable itself changes, as the unknown and incalculable begins to shift according to how our knowledge takes shape in its focus upon calculability.

By engaging with ‘nothingness’ and its constitutive role in metaphysics, Heidegger credits Nietzsche with overturning (*Umkehrung*) metaphysics.⁵³ Nietzsche overturns the philosophical assumption of beginning an epistemological investigation with what we assume is most familiar to us, our “inner world” or “facts of consciousness”, in order to bring us to a greater understanding of the world as a whole. He argues that what is most familiar to us, what we are closest to, is in fact the most difficult to understand, because it is the most difficult “to see as a problem.”⁵⁴

In this dynamic of Western metaphysics—where the visible is contrasted with the invisible, where presence is founded upon and held above absence,⁵⁵ and where we are constantly exploring the deep recesses of knowledge to bring

⁵² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, s355.

⁵³ C.f. Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and other essays*, p.53. “Through the overturning of metaphysics accomplished by Nietzsche, there remains for metaphysics nothing but a turning aside into its own inessentiality and disarray.” Heidegger argues that Nietzsche is caught within the paradigm he sought to overturn, naming Nietzsche as the “last metaphysician,” and opening the path for Heidegger to promote his own fundamental ontology. In this chapter I put to one side this important departure Heidegger makes from Nietzsche.

⁵⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, s355. We are here reminded of the ontic-ontological divide first portrayed by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, and discussed in detail by Derrida in the ‘The Ends of Man’ *Margins of Philosophy*. I elaborate on this further in chapter three.

⁵⁵ Cf. The preference of speech over writing, and the logocentrism outlined by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*.

the truth to light⁵⁶—these hidden foundations of knowledge are all based upon a principle paradigm or premise,⁵⁷ the suprasensory, whether in the form of Platonic Idealism or the monotheistic God. Nietzsche's work engages with this principle, and overturns its assumptions; revealing, in Heidegger's words, that the,

...suprasensory is transformed into an unstable product of the sensory...the sensory denies its own essence. The deposing of the suprasensory does away with the merely sensory *and thus with the difference between the two* [aggravation of the incommensurable]. The deposing of the suprasensory culminates in a "neither-nor" in relation to the distinction between the sensory (*aesthēton*) and the non-sensory (*noēton*). It culminates in meaninglessness. It remains, nevertheless, the unthought and invincible presupposition of its own blind attempts to extricate itself from the meaninglessness through a mere assigning of sense and meaning.⁵⁸

In essence, Heidegger argues, like Nietzsche, that the human lays claim to the arbitration of the suprasensory, and in the same act the human is separated from the constitutive force of the suprasensory. The paradox that both Nietzsche and Heidegger play upon is the manner in which the sensory, our sensation of the world, is reliant upon the suprasensory for its own essence. One cannot remove the suprasensory and leave the sensory unscathed, metaphysics *is* the very structure of suprasensory and sensory, removal (or subtraction, as Taylor describes) of one implies an upheaval of what one might mean by the sensory itself. The sensory is only what it is in relation to, in distinction to, what it is not. This relationship between sense and a suprasensory is necessary to release sense from a chiasmus within which sense is caught constitutively, the fact that sense senses

⁵⁶ Cf. The "secret" at work in "the incitement to discourse" described by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality Vol 1* pp.22-35.

⁵⁷ Nancy discusses the manner in which the *paradigme principiel* replaced the myth of polytheism in the simultaneous creation of atheism with monotheism, cf. 'Atheism and Monotheism' in *Dis-Enclosure*, pp.14-28. I return to this principle paradigm of the "mono-" in the following chapter.

⁵⁸ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, p.54. Emphasis added.

itself sensing.⁵⁹ This is why Heidegger argues that removing the suprasensory removes the “difference” or distinction between the sensory and the non-sensory (I refer back to this important concept of distinction in this and the next chapter). There is no longer a distinction between the sensory and what cannot provide sense, and thus there is no longer a distinction between sense and meaninglessness. In order to make sense, the human produces the distinctions necessary for knowledge by building upon what is familiar (“agglomeration”⁶⁰) and dismissing what does not fit into the principle paradigm (“aggravate the incommensurable”). This is nihilism. It is not a ‘making sense’ in the face of meaninglessness. It is the *lack of distinction*, and that lack of distinction makes us blind to the manner in which the will continues to distribute sense and meaning.⁶¹

Without distinction we are left with the ‘will to will’; in other words, to read Nietzsche through Heidegger, the human would rather will a meaning that *lacks any distinction from meaninglessness*, rather than not will at all. What are the ramifications of the will to nothingness? In the words, “God is dead”, as uttered by Nietzsche, there is not merely a “formula of unbelief” as interpreted by Taylor—rather, as Heidegger argues, Nietzsche is concerned with the relationship between “the truth of the suprasensory world” and “man’s essence.”⁶² According to Heidegger, what concerns Nietzsche is the creeping shadow of nihilism and our “inextricable entanglement in metaphysics...cut off from its own essence.”⁶³ Heidegger argues that a fundamental shift has taken place in the manner in which we conceive of *creation* and the relationship of that creation to human essence.

Creativity, previously the unique property of the biblical God, becomes the

⁵⁹ Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy *A Finite Thinking*, p.6. Here Nancy describes this chiasmus in the following terms, “what senses in sense is the fact that it includes what it senses, and what produces sense in sense is the fact that it senses itself producing sense.” I return to this remark in a later chapter.

⁶⁰ I come back to this term in chapter two, I flag it here in anticipation of that later discussion.

⁶¹ Cf. Nancy’s engagement with Nietzsche in “An Experience at Heart” in *Dis-Enclosure*, where Nancy considers this lack of distinction as precisely what overturns the tradition of a metaphysics of presence such that presence itself becomes the opening. I return to this in a later chapter.

⁶² Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, p.63.

⁶³ *Ibid* p.61.

distinctive mark of human activity. Human creativity finally passes over into business enterprise.⁶⁴

The will to will nothingness rather than not will, is precisely what leads to the transformation of creativity into what Heidegger calls a business enterprise. The lack of distinction between *aesthēton* and *noēton* that occurs in the process of removing the suprasensory, results in the complete and utter loss of any “creative” will, which remains distinct from the “business” of “human activity” as a concern with the average everyday. Hence any sense of the world, beyond what is purely given by the human, becomes unthinkable. To inscribe creativity with the distinctively ‘human’ average-everyday creative activity, and the purely human sense of the world, is precisely what marks our present age with nihilism. Nihilism is the outcome of metaphysics. The overturning of metaphysics is not the end of metaphysics; it remains hidden within metaphysics as its ownmost possibility, such that metaphysics is in a continuous process of overcoming itself. Metaphysics constituted the conditions for the degradation of the suprasensory, and, indeed, it is “Christendom”—in Heidegger’s terms “the historical, world-political phenomenon of the Church and its claim to power within the shaping of Western humanity and its modern culture”⁶⁵—that stands behind the trajectory of metaphysics. It is Christendom that seals the closure of human creativity.

The prophecy uttered by Nietzsche’s madman—“God is dead”—should not be read as the end of God. The death of God is implied in the rise of metaphysics and Latin Christendom itself, these create the very conditions for the end to which they now appear to have reached. The symbiotic relationship between the death of God, and ‘His’ replacement with the scientific, rational mind of human production is far from a simple subtraction of myth. Moreover, the nihilism explicitly formulated in Nietzsche’s narrative can hardly be represented as a comportment of existence, a stance of stoic courage in the face of the removal of any transcendent reference to our existence. As Heidegger describes, “nihilism,

⁶⁴ Ibid p.64.

⁶⁵ Ibid p.63.

thought in its essence, is, rather, the fundamental movement of the history of the West", it is the "inner logic of Western history."⁶⁶

How does this "inner logic" relate to Christianity, and the manner in which Christianity surpasses itself through its own logic? If the advantage of polytheism is in its "*plurality of norms*,"⁶⁷ then what Platonic idealism and Christianity (or, monotheism more broadly) provided was the will-to-truth. With his account of the death of God and the will-to-truth, Nietzsche uncovered the hidden face of metaphysics, its inherent nihilism. As Nietzsche puts it, "you see what it was that really triumphed over the Christian God: Christian morality itself, the concept of truthfulness that was understood ever more rigorously."⁶⁸ Christianity is from its inception its own self-surpassing. In other words, the scientific-moral package described in detail by Taylor cannot be simply wrenched apart in the sense that one has not simply *accompanied* the other; instead one should think of them as two sides of the same coin. We have, on the one hand, *the sensory*: contingent, chaotic, and grounded in the truth of the suprasensory as faith in God. And, on the other hand, we have *the suprasensory*: our faith in the metaphysical ground of truth founded in the premise of God, which becomes our will-to-truth and enables the human to overcome God. Rather than a plurality of norms, we were left with *one norm*, the truth, which was itself grounded in Christianity and more precisely "Christian morality" (which was to become, according to Nietzsche, "scientific conscience").⁶⁹ Hence the trajectory of metaphysics, and the most successful of all metaphysical paradigms, Christianity, is its own undoing, its own overturning. The point, or rather the question, is how can one think the 'to come' and the 'self-undoing' that is the trajectory of Christianity. According to Nancy it is through 'deconstruction' that we can most adequately describe these philosophical issues.

Like Taylor, Nancy claims that the world is 'closed'; however, in seeking to open "mere reason up to the limitlessness that constitutes its truth"⁷⁰, Nancy

⁶⁶ Ibid pp.62, 67.

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, s143.

⁶⁸ Ibid s357.

⁶⁹ Ibid s357.

⁷⁰ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.1.

seeks an opening to this limitlessness from 'within' the world. Nancy is not attempting to 'make sense' of 'an opening'; instead, he brings into focus a tension at the heart of the relation of reason to what is outside and what is inside. Typically the *logos* of "material reality" is either purely immanent and without an outside (immanent frame), or, "material reality" is constituted by its relation to a transcendent meaning (religion) or lack thereof (nihilism). Put another way, if there is more to reason than "material reality"—the opening leads to an outside—then we negate material reality by arguing that there is simply *more than material reality*, that is, there is an unfathomable nothingness or transcendence that is constitutive of our existence. By introducing an ambiguity in this competing binary, it is "reality", or as Žižek describes in *The Monstrosity of Christ* the "ontological fuzziness of reality", that creates this tension. As Žižek puts it, "the form of "material reality is *non-all*" ...this merely asserts the non-all of reality *without implying any exception*", and it is this fuzziness or "ontological incompleteness" of reason itself that must be revealed.⁷¹ Nancy wants to reveal this ontological incompleteness, and re-inscribe the necessity of the incommensurable, through a deconstruction of Christianity that does not collapse into a pure immanence nor re-iterate a pure transcendence. As he puts it,

It is not a question of overcoming some deficiency in reason, but of liberating reason without reserve: once everything is accounted for, it is up to us to show what remains beyond these accounts.⁷²

Liberating reason means allowing for the ontological incompleteness of reason, and in contrast to Taylor's approach, assuming a posture of passivity to reason and its inherent incompleteness. As Nancy writes, it is a matter of letting "the obscure to emit its own clarity" (6). In the following section I begin the task of out-

⁷¹ Slavoj Žižek & John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ*, p.95. Emphasis Added. While sympathetic to Žižek's reading of Hegel through Lacan and more broadly his ontological thesis as described here, and a number of other places in what follows, his proximity to Lacan makes it tricky to use his philosophy in any great detail in this dissertation. It would require a separate reading of Lacan viz. Nancy, for which I lack the space, and which would distract from the overall thesis of this dissertation. It remains thus a momentarily suspended project.

⁷² Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.1. Subsequent references are made in the text.

lining how Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity brings the ambiguity of the distinction between transcendence and immanence into focus, which opens my foray into the question of globalization and community in the chapters that follow.

IV. JEAN-LUC NANCY AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF SENSE

The deconstruction of Christianity is accompanied by a central line of questioning, "How and to what degree do *we hold* to Christianity? How, exactly, are we, in our whole tradition, held by it?" (139). The self-reflexivity in Nancy's question specifies his project as essentially an act of opening oneself to a kind of self-reflexive assessment or introspection. In essence Nancy is addressing himself, in the sense of being not simply a philosopher, but a philosopher from the west, and part of the philosophical tradition that comes from the west. Nancy is addressing his world as it is ceaselessly unfolding around him, a world punctuated for Nancy by the fact that "Christianity is inseparable from the West" (142). This question is driven by Christianity itself, by what Marcel Gauchet, a pivotal influence on Jean-Luc Nancy, describes as the "unusual dynamic potentialities of the spirit of Christianity", potentialities that from its inception (or incarnation) made Christianity, "*a religion for departing from religion.*"⁷³ Upon loosening this central tenet, we can chart three essential ways in which Christianity can be thought of in this manner. Firstly, as Nancy writes,

Christianity as such, is surpassed, because it is itself, and by itself, in a state of being surpassed. That state of self-surpassing may be very profoundly proper to it; it is perhaps its deepest tradition...It is this transcendence, this going-beyond-itself that must therefore be examined.⁷⁴

⁷³ Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World*, p.4.

⁷⁴ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.141.

This is the sense of Christianity that has accompanied the west through to the enlightenment, and it encompasses the overcoming of Christianity and the reinstatement of Christian belief that has been occurring ever since: indeed, this state of self-surpassing has accompanied Christianity since its inception. For Nancy the west is *bound* to Christianity in such a way that “to deconstruct Christianity is to accompany the West to that limit, to that *pass at which* the West cannot do otherwise than let go of itself in order to continue being the West, or still be something of itself beyond itself.”⁷⁵ Bringing us to the second point, Nancy forms a link between this bind, and the notion that Christianity, despite being alive as such, has stopped giving life in any collective or common way⁷⁶; in other words Christianity “has ceased giving life in the order of *sense*.”⁷⁷ According to Nancy this is symptomatic of a more general pathos, that indeed “Christianity’s fate is perhaps the fate of sense in general” (142). The notion of sense being at an end, or in a state of decomposition, is a theme that will reappear over and over again throughout his project, and it forms the core of the lacuna Nancy traces within the trajectory of the west. If the west is *bound* to Christianity, such that, as Nancy states “the West is the nervation of Christianity itself” (142), then in the way Christianity is *overcome* by “the secular” it must be considered the religion for the departure from religion. Hence, Christianity has *always* been in a state of being overcome, and what marks the “West” or “the secular” is this continual flux of Christian overcoming or self-surpassing.

Nancy traces the manner in which “the unfolding of Christianity” through the incarnation of Christ, has been accompanied by an “internal denial of its Christian reference” (144). This denial places a conflict at the core of Christianity in which its *repression* and *re-enactment* work to push Christianity to its end, without ever reaching an end as such. The simultaneously operating modes of repression and re-enactment (as a conflict that is internal to Christianity, in contrast with a conflict between Christianity and Islam for instance), is a conflict Nancy argues that is at the core of Christianity as a “conflict between an *integral-*

⁷⁵ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.143.

⁷⁶ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.xxxviii. At this point in his essay Nancy argues that the only worth to be found in *logos* is in and through a shared exposure.

⁷⁷ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.142. Subsequent references are made in the text.

ity and its disintegration" (144). This is the argument that Christianity is, within itself, a movement of expansion and tension toward an ending and dissolution of its own possibility. However, at the same time, this movement has no end, it is caught within itself in much the same way that Heidegger argued that the overturning of metaphysics is still caught within metaphysics. This process of opening towards an end without reaching an end, is a chiasmus of possibility and impossibility. It is a distention of the enclosure of Christianity. As Nancy puts it: "My inquiry is guided by this motif of the essence of Christianity as opening: an opening of self, and of self as opening" (145).

The three points I have covered above are essential to Nancy's project; they are what make it possible and necessary for deconstruction to take place, and what reveal the inherent nihilism within which the "world" appears caught. Hence, there is an underlying notion at work: Christianity and the modern world have accompanied humanity to a new formulation of self-hood in terms of the individual—all we have left of sense is a "fragmented individual experience" (142). We must keep this in mind as we follow Nancy through the central motif of Christianity as opening in the sense of "opening as Christian ipseity" (145). This movement of expansion and tension, of ending without an *end*, draws Nancy toward what he calls the *real* question.

What of – and this is at bottom the real question – an *absolute transcendental of opening* such that it does not cease pushing back or dissolving horizons?...From all directions horizons are asserted in the modern world, but how...can we grasp the character of horizon while we are on a ground that is not a ground of horizon(s), a ground without ground of indefinite opening? That is the question to which Christianity at bottom, seems to me to lead.
(145)

There is a two-fold picture of Christianity at work in the idea of an *absolute transcendental of opening*. Firstly, there is what Nancy describes as the "Christmas projection" or the "*absolute happening*" of Christianity where the world reflectively conceives of itself as suddenly born into Christianity, and at the same time, a "dialectical *Aufhebung*" or "*integration*" of the preceding heritage into itself

(145). Nancy describes this as a self-transcendence, which is a useful way of conceiving the notion of Christianity as self-surpassing, or as the religion that provides the departure from religion. This self-transcendence begins with the incarnation of Christ, and continues through the Pauline Epistles, and Augustine's *City of God*... "Christian identity is therefore from the start a constitution by self-transcendence: the Old Law in the New Law, the *logos* in the Word, the *civitas* in the *civitas Dei*, and so on" (146). Nancy claims there is something unique in this *self-transcendence*, something peculiar to Christianity and the West as the westernization of the globe. This is the relationship at work in the *dialectical Aufhebung*, between a singularly human faith and human history. This is not the renewal of religion through the disassociation and rejection of what it is not, whether that stands before it or not, although this certainly occurs in Christianity. It involves a new conception of time, time as an experience of the world as transformative, and transformative without end, simply as a progression and fashioning of the world as such. Time changed in Christianity from a circulation of seasons, rituals, events governed by an eternal law, to time in the sense of a linear progression, an absolute passage toward...revelation, "the absolute of parousia"—a "passage to presence" (147). According to Nancy, it is this *passage to presence*, that manifests itself as nihilism at work as and within Christianity as a completeness and thus an end of sense.

...the question is less that of the sense of Christianity than that of Christianity as a dimension of sense, a dimension of sense that—and this is the point to be analysed—is at once the opening of sense and sense as opening...Christianity is accomplished in nihilism and as nihilism, which means that nihilism is none other than the final incandescence of sense, that it is sense taken to its point of excess...It is sense that no longer orders or activates anything, or nothing but itself; it is sense absolutely in its own right, pure sense, that is the end revealed for itself, indefinitely and definitively.

(147)

Christianity is the trajectory or movement of an opening of sense. This is not in terms of the sense of *something*, that is, the end toward which this opening is moving; rather, it is simply sense for itself. (I explore this trajectory in the follow-

ing chapter, in the terms laid out by Nancy, as an “agglomeration”.) It is sense as what is revealed, the sense of which is simply that it can be revealed. This discussion revolves around Nancy’s particular notion of sense (*sens*), which we might contrast with the notion of sense as signification. Most notably, this distinction is thought through by Jean-Luc Nancy in his work *The Sense of the World*, or indeed in ‘Responding to Existence’ from *A Finite Thinking*, in which Nancy discusses the chiasmus of responsibility and sense in remaining open to futurity as the “to come” or *l’avenir*. “Sense is only guaranteed by its own movement of expansion or flight – or, if you prefer, its own imminent contagion or its own transcendent excess”⁷⁸ In order to bring this critical trajectory of Christianity back into play, that is, to open up the modern world to the unfolding of the infinite as modernity’s ownmost possibility, it is necessary to open modernity from within through a deconstruction of Christianity. The end of ideologies is the exhaustion of the infinite, in the inexhaustible distraction of its multiplicity, what Derrida described as a “globalization that is running out of breath.”⁷⁹ The ceaselessly moving nature of the infinite is completely empty of sense in terms of any content; it is simply sense as a ‘going toward’, without resolution—passage toward “sense as pure, absolute, and infinite.”⁸⁰ Our history as structuring, as unfolded, as assembled, is what hides the legacy of Christianity, and what hides the trajectory of modernity as an end of sense, or nihilism. In the following chapter I cover in more detail this trajectory of modernity.

CONCLUSION

Taylor frames both Nietzsche and post-Nietzschean philosophy as essentially nihilism, and in the process relegates a unique line of philosophical critique and questioning that has contributed to so much of what has come to be described as

⁷⁸ Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p.295.

⁷⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge” *Acts of Religion*, p.67.

⁸⁰ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.148.

“continental” philosophy to a particular process of engaging with the “abyss”. In contrast, Nancy claims that Christianity itself, its unfolding, has led us to this “crisis of meaning” that is framed by the narrative of the secular. According to Nancy, what must guide the task of thinking today, is a thinking that is and remains open; in a sense we might say open to the cross-pressures of existence. However, where Nancy departs from Taylor is precisely at this point. For Nancy the demand is to a thinking of existence that is open, without guidance, without re-inscription, and without re-presentation; that is to say, an openness that *does not*, in turn, “sink into its own openness”, and that “would not be a figurative capturing of sense (that would not be God).”⁸¹ Instead, it is the suspension that maintains an openness to what cannot be thought as a necessary accompaniment for what can be thought.

The Deconstruction of Christianity should be understood as a posture of thought in which there is an openness to what is beyond thought, a recognition of the limit to every enclosure, and, a recognition that an inside can only be in relation to an outside. The “demand” that Nancy places upon thinking can be posed in the following manner. *On the one hand*, the demand to recognize with Anselm the “*Majus quam cogitari posit* (Greater than what can be thought)”; without, *on the other hand*, acquiescing to “ideals”, myth, or nihilism.⁸² Without, that is, submitting to this demand as indicative of a higher sense or logos, and without an aggravation of the incommensurable. Nancy’s philosophy is a posture toward the opening of the infinite that resists or suspends the desire to prescribe an explanation, and that dwells instead in the opening as the freedom that it is. This is the recognition that “in every thought there is *an other* thought,”⁸³ where thinking itself in this context becomes the experience of freedom.

For that, there remains for us neither cult nor prayer, but the exercise – strict and severe, sober and yet joyous – of what is called thought.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Ibid p.157.

⁸² Ibid p.12.

⁸³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, p.59.

⁸⁴ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 157.

It is precisely this other of thought (in contrast to Taylor's manner of thinking through the "cross-pressure" of existence, negotiated through a transcendent reference), without attribution to an Other of thought (divine reference), without submission to an other of thought (obligation of reason), that allows what Nancy calls the surprise or "burst" of freedom itself, within and as a being in the world. For Nancy, the point is to remain within this sense of thought, without acquiescing to the inhabitation of the divine.

The *other* thought of all thought – which is not the Other of thought, nor the thought of the Other, but that by which thought thinks – is the burst of freedom.⁸⁵

In the *Experience of Freedom*, Nancy writes of the opening to the other of thought that was not the divine, but simply that which allows thought to think. This is the thought of sense that surpasses the stifling enclosure of all binaries, secular and religious, theism and atheism, and seeks thought purely for-itself. In the next chapter I explore the possibilities for an opening of the world that takes place within the world itself. Opening as a suspension of the narratives of value and creation, a dissenting point of view, and "the *other* thought of all thought" capable of disrupting the standard narratives of globalization. The following chapter thus follows Nancy's characterization of globalization, the alignment between that globalization and monotheism, and the possibilities for opening through their disruption and suspension.

⁸⁵ Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, p.59.

Globalization

INTRODUCTION

According to Nancy, Christianity can be understood as an event through which the world became invested with a primary (*principial*¹) paradigm or premise:

We must therefore suppose that the invention of "atheism" is contemporaneous and correlative with the invention of "theism." Both terms, in effect, have their unity in the principial paradigm or premise.² [Nous devons donc considérer que l'invention de l' « athéisme » est contemporaine et corrélative de l'invention du « théisme ». Les deux termes, en effet, ont leur unité dans le paradigme principiel.]³

God denotes the premise or principle of a presupposed totality, founded in unity and in necessity.⁴ [Dieu nomme le principe d'une totalité présupposée fondée en unité et en nécessité.]⁵

This "*paradigme principiel*" or "principle of a presupposed totality" or even "premise...of the One"⁶, is the capacity to give a *totalized* account of the world

¹ Primary, Initial.

² Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.15.

³ Nancy, *La Déclosion*, p.29.

⁴ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.21.

⁵ Nancy, *La Déclosion*, p.35.

⁶ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.23.

through a primary principle. This orientation could be explained by Taylor's narrative of the immanent frame, and yet the style in which Nancy reads this principle reveals a key difference. According to Nancy, the *paradigme principiel* unfolded through the event of Christianity itself, eventually transforming the world into a state dominated by the global economic exchange of capital. I work through this "principle" in order to bring Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity into the context of modern discussions of globalization.

To explain this transformation of the global dimensions of human existence, I begin by setting out the stakes involved in the *paradigme principiel*, and how it shapes our sense of the world. In order to explain the crucial dimensions of this powerful paradigm, I provide a schematic outline of the figure of Christ and Christianity, which introduces a number of key thematic gestures (loss, abandonment, *l'avenir*, touch) that take shape throughout this dissertation. These gestures are pivotal for understanding how Christianity continues to play a decisive role in onto-theology, and why the deconstruction of Christianity is critical for making-sense of the world, precisely in how Nancy articulates that modality of sense through these gestures. Building on this initial picture I refer again to Gauchet's thesis on Christianity, introduced briefly in section IV of the previous chapter, in which he describes Christianity as the religion that allows the departure from religion.

In the second section, I begin by outlining the formative role played by the *paradigme principiel* of Christianity in what the Western milieu today calls globalization, and how Nancy links the transformation of Christianity to the phenomenon of globalization. For Nancy, globalization symbolizes the situation in which "value" has become flattened by the effects of calculation and circulation within an economy of general equivalency, what he calls a "monovalence de la valeur"⁷ (monovalence of value). Accordingly, for Nancy the stakes are high, globalization is pushing the world into the state of becoming an *immonde* (un-world), in which there is a lack of sense, and an increasing pervasiveness of nihilism.

In the third section of this chapter I build upon Nancy's critique of globalization and how it both aligns and diverges from Marx's critique of capital. Spe-

⁷ Nancy, *La Déclosion*, p.29.

cifically, I build upon the notion of value, and show how value itself calls into question the totalizing effect of metaphysics (as Absolute) intrinsic to the *paradigme principiel*. The “monovalence de la valeur” belies a tear in the fabric of the absolute, a tear Nancy finds centered upon the sense of human *jouissance*. How we read the human, and a “secret desire”⁸ within the way the human relates to the Absolute, reveals an excess of value in the play of *jouissance*; an excess that I read as the exposure of value to what Derrida calls *l’avenir*. Nancy’s account of the deconstruction of Christianity informs how we read this excess of value, and reveals the potential for “world-forming” (*mondialisation*) through a shift from the temporal structure of the absolute in the *paradigme principiel*, to the temporal openness of *l’avenir*. Through this shift, Nancy wants to reinvest value with significance beyond the totalized *paradigme principiel*, and open *sens* (sense) to the play of the infinite in what I referred to in chapter one as the incommensurable. This shift, as an “overturning” of “value”, ruptures the empirical subject as it becomes self-reflexively unknowable, and suspends the self-immanence of the human.⁹ This overturning is premised on both Marx’s dialectic and Nietzsche’s *Umwertung*, and by coming together in Nancy’s re-reading of Heideggerian *Seinsverlassenheit*,¹⁰ allows an opening of the world within the world.

In the fourth and final section of this chapter, I build upon this concept of a shift toward the possibilities of *mondialisation*, by introducing Nancy’s ontological notion of abandoned-being. The notion of abandoned-being comes from Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity, and allows Nancy to describe an ontology that remains immanent and held to a material sense of “world,” while also allowing an opening *within* the world to the infinite “passage”¹¹ (*passage*) of sense. The terms of abandonment open an alternate reading of the “death of God”, which allow Nancy to think through the potential for creating the world, while

⁸ Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, p.46.

⁹ I will explain in greater detail the notion of self-immanence in chapter two by referring to Nancy’s concept of the “immanence of man to man”. I also expand on this sense of rupture in chapter five when I refer to Nancy’s critique of Descartes.

¹⁰ Abandonment

¹¹ “Meaning is the passage back and forth [*passage*] and sharing of the origin at the origin, singular plural.” Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p.86.

also avoiding any recourse to an overlying "reason" or archetype in the form of a *principliel paradigme*.

In his deconstruction of Christianity Nancy brings a new reading to these narratives by appropriating the Christian motif of creation *ex nihilo*. By opening the world to the infinite of making-sense *ex nihilo*, an opening that is devoid of any "producer", Nancy posits an opening that touches the infinite of transcendence while remaining wholly immanent and within the world. An opening to the infinite of meaning, which is "without reason", gives a sense of "world" that is without a subject of the world. In order to expand upon this point, in section IV I explain what Nancy calls a *transimmanence*,¹² which is the nothing growing as something, and the dis-enclosure of the world such that a world opens up *within* the world. There is a necessary ambiguity to the sense of *within* in this thought, which emphasizes why Nancy insists that sense is always a *passage* "between",¹³ where the sense of being *is* in this *passage* of sense. It is the importance of this sense of the "between", and how this directly plays into a re-reading of Heidegger's description of Dasein, that segues into the themes of chapter three.

I. THE *PARADIGME PRINCIPIEL* IN THE FIGURE OF CHRIST

In the previous chapter, I set out how Nancy frames Christianity in terms of both an *aggravation of the incommensurable*, and *the transfer of the power* to distinguish between commensurability and incommensurability *to the human*. I want to flag here the sense in which Christianity, as the religion that allows the surpassing of religion, implies what Nancy describes as the *paradigme principliel* or premise of "the One".

If, as Nancy claims, Christianity remains the driving *paradigme principliel* behind the transformation of the world, then the catastrophe of this transfor-

¹² Nancy, *Lu Sens du Monde*, p.91

¹³ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p.27.

mation manifests itself in the de-valuation of value, which allows value to circulate within an economy of general equivalency. This sense of equivalency plays a vital role in fostering and intensifying the influence of economic modes of exchange. The effect of this calculative rationale on the notion of value has spread itself into every aspect of existence, and, for Nancy, is intrinsically linked to the guiding premise of “the One” that provides its structural tension.¹⁴ The continuously intensifying cannibalism of the economy of equivalency that drives capitalism feeds on “value”, transforming the world into a waste land of “un-world” that lacks the sense inherent to a “value” that resists equivalency.¹⁵ The spreading *monovalence*, a short hand for signalling the conflation of the premise of “the One” with the notion of value, is accompanied by the dilution and dissolution of sense, which in turn drives the increasingly obdurate prevalence of calculative rationalization. The resulting outcome of the ongoing circularity in the event of One-ness, is nothing less than the exhaustion of signification—there is no longer any sense of the world.¹⁶

The *paradigme principiel* comes from the notion of a singular God, and is shaped by the way in which the human relates to that God. Where does this propensity for singular divinity come from, and why does it become the pervasive norm or background to thinking in the Western world? If not the motivation, then, at the very least, the *principle* that stood behind monotheism, perhaps the organising principle, was the need and propensity to create a unifying and foundational instantiation of law. In the event of Christianity, the *paradigme principiel* continually manifests itself through the figure and life of Christ.

As a point of entry, there are two aspects in the event of Christ and Christianity I want to set up here: Firstly, in Christianity power is no longer derived from a mythic past, but instead becomes an investment in the mythic *future* of a second coming of Christ (*parousia*).¹⁷ Secondly, in the figure of Christ, there is the

¹⁴ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, pp.31-32.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Cf. Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p.8. Here he argues that, “the world no longer has a sense, but it is sense.” As such, to make sense we must transform the world. This takes place through *transimmanence*, which I come to at the end of this chapter.

¹⁷ There are obvious parallels with the sense of the Jewish Messianic that orientate the temporal structure of this futurity.

subjection of the *world* to a transcendent principle that is *not of this world*, and therefore not a principle (archetype) founded in the (enchanted) world. Rather, the crucifixion of Christ on the cross marks the "death of God", and the point at which the human is left to rule in His *absence*.

The first aspect provides a clear spatial separation and temporal division of the kingdom of heaven from the kingdom of earth. In general terms, the fallibility of the human is framed in terms of something the human lacks, but which is nonetheless attainable by projecting the human into the future. In the previous chapter I discussed Nietzsche's interrogation of nothingness, and how this invigorates the will-to-truth. In the following chapter I will explain how this lack manifests itself in a *loss of meaning* or *nostalgia* that plays a role in forming the conditions for totalitarianism, and which Nancy expands upon in his reading of Bataille. This constitutive lacuna also opens the possibility for re-thinking temporality without the mythic element of this as a loss. Framed in Derridean terms as *l'avenir*, I claim that re-thinking temporality forms a crucial aspect of Nancy's deconstruction, and I will set out this claim in more detail throughout this dissertation.

In the second aspect, which is linked to the first, there is an enigmatic transcription of the law (*logos*) into the human body (as flesh).¹⁸ Christ walked the earth as the Son of God, not as God's representation on earth, but rather, and this is the crucial point, as God's *figuration* of 'Man' on earth. It is through the play of these gestures that humankind became the guiding authority for an earth that was now separated from the divinity of heaven. However, the enigmatic relation humankind has with Christ (His abandonment to the world and resurrection), has put in place an untouchable limit between humankind and the apparent investment of the law (*logos*) in the human. In this gesture, humankind is abandoned to a law that remains constitutively projected into the future and out of touch. The way Nancy frames these themes of loss, *l'avenir*, abandonment and touch, form a key part in how I approach his deconstruction of Christianity in this dissertation.

At this point I would like to draw again upon Marcel Gauchet's reading of

¹⁸ I return to this notion of flesh in chapter five.

Christianity. Gauchet describes the move I have just described (from a primeval religious principle affirmed through the foundation of an archetypal past, to the transcended and incarnated principle of Christianity), in the following way,

In a universe presented as *united*, thought corresponds to a logic of the *many*; in a universe divided between presence and absence, there suddenly appears a way of thinking the "One"...Even if the foundation and what it founds end up being ultimately reunited, the difference between them allowed the possibility of *thinking totality as such*, of generally attributing what was either an intrinsic or extrinsic single principle.¹⁹

In order to unpack the manner in which Gauchet frames "thinking the one", we should focus for a moment on how the division between presence and absence functioned to allow this way of thinking. In a pre-monotheistic context, human culture had come to rely upon a foundational presence in the form of an archetypal mythic *past*. We can understand this in terms of places and events that involved a synergistic relationship with a world that still included the transcendent, such that the transference of transcendent power involved reinvigorating the mythic *past* of the Gods by their *presence* in the world in the form of iconography and ritual. Christianity changed that modality by providing a foundational incarnated and resurrected *absent-future*, a singular God that had abandoned His own Son to the world, a disenfranchisement of the transcendent itself through absence. The symbols of polytheistic or mythological foundational order (whether through pagan rites, rituals, symbols, or iconography) constitute a present moment of the past. With the increasing power of the event of Christianity, these gestures of transcendence in the enchanted world became denuded of their power through the division of absence and presence, in the sense that God had become absent from the world—the *absent-future* of Christianity.

As I noted in chapter one, the symbolic gestures of sense-making in Christianity became increasingly emptied of their capacity to give meaning to the world.

¹⁹ Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World*, p.48. Pausing for a moment, it is worth considering how Christianity provides a "solution" to the enigmatic dialectic in Plato's *Parmenides*. I set aside the questions raised in Plato's *Parmenides* for another time.

As Gauchet puts it,

The will to establish the City of God, and to place the secular arm in the service of the world community of believers and its spiritual head, was destined to stumble over the competing claims of a human City and to allege the respectable sacredness of its own natural order, which brings with it the absorption of the Church as a social entity...Both claims were anchored in the basic articulation of the new faith, the one announced by the Redeemer's humanity, whose contradictory and interdependent potentialities it expresses.²⁰

Gauchet describes this as the "contradictory potential of Christ's revelation"²¹, in which the *presence* of worldly transcendence collides with the *absence* of humankind's foundational power. Put another way, the foundational power of the transcendent came from the inability of the human to question and distinguish its incommensurability or intelligibility, relying upon the unquestionable *presence* of myth to give meaning to the world. Christianity transferred the power to make "sense of the world" to the human by removing transcendence from the world, and in this gesture placed the heavy burden of distinguishing precisely what was meaningful upon humankind. Indeed, removing transcendence from the world and setting up a demarcation between immanence and transcendence is only possible through the *paradigme principiel*. Without thinking the "One", as Gauchet argues, we cannot think totality, and only through thinking totality can we think of an immanent world devoid of the infiniteness of transcendence. This capacity to think "totality" brings the problem of human finitude and the limit of intelligibility into the scope of human knowledge. It is up to the human to distinguish this limit, and decide on what falls outside the limit, that is to say, to distinguish the commensurable from the incommensurable and declare the "sacredness of its own natural order". As I claimed in the previous chapter, when the human distinguishes what is commensurable it also must distance itself from what remains incommensurable, aggravating this distinction, and hence, in the

²⁰ Ibid p.154.

²¹ Ibid p.153.

terms set out above, declare it *absent*. According to Nancy, the *paradigm principiel* morphed into the present state of the world, which became denuded of sense by the hegemony of global capitalism according to modality of this *absence*. It is this transformation that I now explore in the following section.

II. THE MONO-VALENCE OF VALUE

In *The Creation of the World*, Nancy traces the dissolution of the Christian church as an organising principle of the West, and the establishment of an economy of general equivalency (mono-valence) premised upon the continuity of the *paradigme principiel* that spans this metamorphosis. Having sketched the stakes of this transformation, the question I first engage with is Nancy's claim that there is no sense of the world. Nancy frames this claim in the following terms:

The civilization that has represented the universal and reason—also known as the West—cannot even encounter and recognize any longer the relativity of its norms and the doubt on its own certainty...the domination of an empire made up of technological power and pure economic reason.²²

The West, by way of its incapacity to “encounter” or self-reflexively engage with its own “certainty”, imparts a hegemonic epistemological framework that lacks sense. This capacity to “encounter” is crucial to understanding what Nancy refers to as “sense”. Critical to Nancy's claim is the manner in which reason itself has become an exchangeable commodity, necessarily caught up in the economy of equivalency. The structural concerns of the economic system have themselves become the hegemonic paradigm. Technological power, enslaved by its own increasing capacity to calculate and repeat, feeds back into this structure an obligation; that reason must remain an exchangeable commodity. *Logos* has, as such,

²² Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, p.34. [Emphasis added.]

reached a point at which it lacks reference to anything other than its own reflection. The capacity to recognise a "doubt on its own certainty", as what enables thinking, has become lost to this play of self-reflection within the hegemony of the *paradigme principiel*. Put another way, thinking is what takes place within the limit of thought itself, a limit that opens onto an other of thought that suspends the very notion of certainty. "Thinking", resolutely proscribed by the limits of an immanent and totalized human existence, remains incapable of moving beyond what can be calculated according to the premise of this totality. Thus, what cannot be "thought", either remains to be measured, or, if beyond the capacity for measurement, must be ignored.

The hegemonic paradigm of an economy exchange as the true source of power, and hence injustice in the world, was empowered by the foundation of Christianity. The transcendent sense of meaning that once stood within the world, with the resurrection of Christ became separated from the human world. In this new paradigm, thinking can no longer touch upon "the other of thought" within the world. Thinking became configured according to its relation to the *absence* of the transcendent, such that meaning could no longer rely explicitly upon divine authority. We should resist the obvious counter-claim, that Nancy is seeking some pre-monotheistic return. This misses the point of Nancy's critique; the loss of meaning and nostalgic desire it inspires, is precisely what drives the necessity of exchangeability. The Nietzschean *will-to-truth* I discussed in chapter one, functions according to the *absence* of transcendent meaning necessitated by the totalized world-picture empowered by Christ's departure.

There is of course a parallel with Taylor's thought at this point; Taylor specifically wants to reinvigorate our relation to the absence of transcendence. In Taylor's terms, this absence is structurally constitutive of the human, and necessary for fostering an ethics beyond exclusive humanism. *Mutatis mutandis*, Taylor continues to work within a framework in which transcendence gives meaning to the world only through its own absence, and as such, simply perpetuates what Nancy terms the mono-valence of value. This framework, in which Taylor is wedged, is a framework in which knowledge, as a confrontation with its own limit, continually collapses into the world of the human.

Nancy terms what I have been describing above as an "agglomeration" of

the globe; the accumulation of wealth and power alongside the accumulation of poverty and misery. The framework of circularity and equivalency, necessary for the exchange of (de)value,²³ produce increasingly larger quantities of exchangeable (de)value—what Nancy calls “the exponential growth of the globality of the market”²⁴—forming an “un-world”. As Nancy puts it, the “world has lost its capacity to “form a world” [*faire monde*]: it seems only to have gained that capacity of proliferating, to the extent of its means, the “un-world” [*immonde*].”²⁵ Importantly, the deconstruction of Christianity reveals how this “agglomeration” that has accompanied globalization into an *immonde*, and that sets it apart from *mondialisation* as world-forming (more on this distinction below), has its roots in, or rather, is constituted by, the historical trajectory of Christianity.

How does Nancy configure the mono-valence of value as a way of explaining this transformation? What the contradictory potentiality of Christianity (city of God and city of “man”) unleashed, according to Nancy, are the very conditions for globalization. Globalization is precisely a globalization of monotheism, or, in other words, a globalization of the *paradigme principiel*. Nancy argues that “monotheism...is the provenance of the West qua globalization over which something entirely different than a divine providence seems to hover, namely, the somber wing of nihilism.”²⁶ Nancy’s account of this nihilism suggests that Christianity, as the religion that allowed for the departure for religion, is *bound to a meta-logical premise* of indeterminate growth and accumulation without reason. The withdrawal of God from the world transformed the topology of human existence. What this indicates, Nancy writes, is that “the “worldly” world of Christianity, the world as created and fallen, removed from salvation and called to self-transfiguration, had to become the site of being and/or beings as a whole, reducing the other world therein.”²⁷ This experience of monotheism in the world today, is exemplified by global finance: the increasing deregulation of a globally expanding free-market capitalism, that appears at the same time to be based in

²³ The term (de)value implies an inherent lack of value beyond a capacity for exchange, viz. exchange-value.

²⁴ Ibid p.37.

²⁵ Ibid p.34.

²⁶ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.32.

²⁷ Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, p.44.

some notion of a principle or principles that exist outside of the world of economic exchange. It is in this “capitalist and technological economy” that Nancy pictures a “structure of monovalence”; such that, from whatever view-point one may hold on the market economy that currently grips the world, the “general form of value or sense today”²⁸ is based upon an infinite²⁹ and open *ability*³⁰ to trade, an ability that is rooted in a general order of “equivalency”, and through the law of this “equivalency”, is marked by a strict closure—the world is enclosed through the totalizing power of the premise of “the One”, and hence not essentially a “world”, but rather a globe.

To this one might add another account of how the historical unfolding of Christianity began a transformation in our mode of existence, in which the human found itself overwhelmingly compelled to be concerned with the administration and governance of the self. Hannah Arendt, in her book *The Human Condition*, describes the manner in which Descartes traced this shift in human concern. A concern once solely focused upon the human soul, shifted, ultimately, into a gaze of concern resting upon the individual self. This shift was an attempt, as Arendt writes, to “reduce all experiences, with the world as well as with other human beings, to experiences between man and himself.”³¹ As Arendt argues, this inward gaze of context and perspective, enabled human existence to not only put up with, but also to thrive upon, the mundane activities that are constitutive of the industrial expansion required for the law of capital. Following the discovery of the roots of capitalism in the Protestant work-ethic by Weber, Arendt traces the manner in which human labour remained detached from any experience of joy or care in an everyday *worldly* existence. In these mundane activities of la-

²⁸ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.31.

²⁹ We can think here of this notion of infinite in terms of what Clive Hamilton describes as a “growth fetish”.

³⁰ In the example we are discussing, the infinite and open ability for growth is driven by the fear that trade is a potentiality and not an actuality, in this case trade as something that has the potentiality to not-be must be continuously driven to be, and hence continually expanded, accelerated, and accumulated. Hannah Arendt writes about this principle in her work *The Human Condition*, “Under modern conditions, not destruction but conservation spells ruin because the very durability of conserved objects is the greatest impediment to the turnover process, whose constant gain in speed is the only constancy left wherever it has taken hold” p.253.

³¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.254.

bour that constitute the every day, Arendt outlines her notion of “world alienation”—instead of a concern for the *world*, the activity of labour was motivated by “worry and care about the self.”³²

Bringing these two thoughts together—the framework of general equivalency and care of the self—we can see a union between Christianity and capitalism in guiding the trajectory of modernity toward what could literally be described as an explosion of economy as the administration of equivalence. Christianity enabled the *paradigme principiel* to inhabit our daily existence, while, simultaneously, creating a lacuna within our experience of that “One” that allowed human existence to withdraw into the self. Nancy describes this experience of the economic expansion of mono(theism or value) in the following terms,

Ultimately, if the capitalist and technological economy constitutes the general form of value or sense today, that is by way of the worldwide reign of a monetary law of exchange (or general equivalency) or the indefinite production of surplus value within the order of this equivalency—a value whose evaluation remains impossible except in terms of equivalency and indeterminate growth. Yet this monovalence of value, or this one-way [*sens unique*] circulation of sense hardly behaves otherwise than as the apparently nonreligious transcription of the monoculture whose monotheistic conception it carried...The mystery of this history is tied to nothing other than the character—simultaneously absolute and invisible, incalculable, indeterminable, and universal – of the value or unidirectionality [*sens unique*] that is placed now in “God”, now in “man”, and now in the tautology of “value” itself.³³

The true crisis of modernity according to Nancy rests upon the interpretation and subjugation of value; value has become something other than value as transformative, “world-forming”, or sense-making. Value in its most simple terminological usage is usually denoted in terms of the worth (wealth) of the thing; the value of a commodity, or value as commodity; as Marx wrote, the “*commodity* is primarily an external object, a thing...”³⁴ Denoting a place, a product, a person, an

³² Ibid.

³³ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.31.

³⁴ Karl Marx, “Capital” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p.303.

act—and with the necessity inherent in the potentiality of trading—value is that which allows a general equivalency between things, all things, every-thing.³⁵ A general economy of things, each with a determinable-value (de)value, and each (de)value in a relation to every other (de)value in a state of general equivalency—this is the present day ‘sense’ of the world, a sense dulled by the ever present force of determinable-value, and hence a world overcome by the mono-valence of value.

The affective topology and displacement of the mono-valence, the manner in which all value is invested with the necessarily determinable effects of the law of general equivalency, is best understood alongside what we may understand by the word “community”. The community of our contemporary Western milieu is marked by, “the socially imploded characteristic of capitalist community [where] capital negates community because it places above it the identity and the generality of production and products: the operative communion and general communication of works...it is a work of death.”³⁶ With the lack of any notable form of value beyond that marked by general equivalency, we may speculate that the “West” is the domination of production at the expense of community.³⁷

This is what it means to say that the world is abandoned, abandoned by the divine incitement of value that once created a wealth without value in exchange, but was simply valued for the sake of value; instead we live and die on a globe that is “dark, hard, and lost in space.”³⁸ Our world is marked by its transformation into an agglomeration, a hyperbolic accumulation of value piled upon value through the one-way circulation of sense. For example, Nancy describes the current network of the city in terms of a “hyperbolic accumulation of construction projects (with their concomitant) spread, and the inequality and apartheid concerning the access to the urban milieu (assuming that it is a dwelling, comfort, and culture), or these exclusions from the city that for a long time has pro-

³⁵ We can try to imagine what cannot become part of the circulation, love perhaps? And thus perhaps love is the only thing that does not have a determinate value, and hence is not a *thing* - furthermore, perhaps it is our potentiality for love that makes us resist being a thing.

³⁶ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.75.

³⁷ I return to this thought of an “operative communion” in the following chapter.

³⁸ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.1.

duced its own rejections and outcasts, accumulate proportionally. The result can only be understood in terms of what is called *agglomeration*, with its senses of conglomeration..."³⁹ Hence, in an age of mono-valence we have ceased forming a world, and instead reside within the "un-world", bound to a "work" that does nothing but destroy the world.

The event of Christianity, and the pervasive effects of mono-valence it empowered, is linked to an *absence*. According to Nancy, this *absence* takes the form of an "unnamable beyond"⁴⁰ that explains why value must include its own capacity to be calculated and exchanged. The "unnamable beyond" is what defies the human capacity for calculation, and is the opening of the human to the possibility of its own end. The *will-to-truth* is the continual drive to keep the "unnamable beyond" separate from human existence, as such, value that cannot be subsumed into the economy of equivalency must remain *absent*. What Nancy distinguishes as the "monotheistic disposition," is "the fact that divine unicity is the correlate of a presence that can no longer be given in this world, but rather must be sought beyond it."⁴¹ This absence of "presence", is the absence of creation within the world, crudely put, it is the dis-enchantment of the world—it is however, far more than a lack of enchantment, it is the incapacity to tolerate "sense" unless it carries with it some presupposed assumption. Unicity—the oneness or uniqueness—of the divine, is the fact that the divine can no longer be represented; the "unicity displaces or converts divinity...it changes divinity into a principle, a basis, and/or a law, always by definition absent or withdrawn in the depths of being. *Deus absconditum*."⁴² The unity of God becomes "absorbed" into the unity of the premise, in the unfolding of theism into atheism, and indeed, into "absentism" (in medieval religion one did not ask "what do you believe?" the true notion of their existence was found in the question, "what do you practice?"), such that "Christianity became, by itself, a humanism, an atheism, and a

³⁹ Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, p.33.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid p.32.

⁴² Ibid p.22.

nihilism."⁴³ Our world is indelibly marked by this divine unicity, and hence a lack of creation. The capacity to form a world has been replaced with the endless "agglomeration", and the relentless drive toward self-destruction.

Today our understanding is shaped, Nancy writes, by the fact that we begin our thinking of the world from the knowledge that "the world is destroying itself."⁴⁴ A knowledge marked by the fact that this destruction is actually "taking place", that it is "really happening"; and furthermore, it is as if this knowledge, more than an "event" or a "history", has met us with surprise. Put another way, we are in truth "surprised" by the fact of the world that we now face, and *know* we face, such that what surprises us is the "ambivalence of the unnamable"⁴⁵—the ambivalence of the future as an *immonde*. Nancy is making an appeal for us to "own up to the present", and indeed, own up to the fact that this present withholds this "event" of the world destroying itself.⁴⁶ Here Nancy is rehearsing the guiding gesture for his deconstruction of Christianity, highlighting his concern that the sense of the world has reached the point where there is a genuine lack of sense in any statement concerning the "sense of the world". The notion that we are destroying the world is marked by a lack of sense on what exactly we are destroying, that we in effect do not really know what the world is that we are destroying.⁴⁷ The "ambivalence of the unnamable", is the ambivalence felt by a world without creation, thus simply a world that is caught in an accelerating "agglomeration" of equivalency.

What Nancy signals here is a way of thinking that *begins* from this end of sense. That it is, "in the very opening of the abandonment of sense", that we find "the opening of the world."⁴⁸ As Christopher Watkin argues, Nancy is marking a paradigmatic shift in the *cosmic* articulation of "world", such that "the West, as it comes to an end, requires neither that we resuscitate significations, nor that we

⁴³ Ibid p.23. Religious fundamentalism is nihilism, in the sense that in lacking the transcendent guarantee the fundamentalist over-compensates for his or her own insecurity. It is less a belief that a drive to prove that they do indeed believe through radical (violent) practice.

⁴⁴ Ibid p.35.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ I will expand on this point in chapter four when I explore Heidegger's notion of *Seinsverlassenheit*.

⁴⁸ Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p.3.

resign ourselves to their annulment, but that we understand that the demand of sense now comes via the exhaustion of significations.”⁴⁹ Thus, precisely where Taylor is blind to the potentiality of the *other of thought* that Nietzsche and post-Nietzschean philosophy invigorates, is the point at which Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity finds its point of departure from traditional narratives of secularization, and disrupts the normative frame of the secular.

III. A “SECRET-DESIRE” *L’AVENIR*: THE *JOUISSANCE* OF VALUE IN POVERTY

I argued in the previous section that “globalization,” as Nancy understands it, is the transformation of the world through the *paradigme principiel* in the form of both monotheism and mono-valence; and, that “globalization” is at its very core built upon the event of Christianity. Hence, I am also describing the mode in which this transformation of the present age is not a reduction in the influence of Christianity, but rather a metamorphosis and transfiguration of Christianity. In the deconstruction of Christianity, Nancy lays bare the “here and now” (*hic et nunc*) of globalization; thus opening the possibility of rethinking ontology by dwelling within the “here and now”, and hence thinking *within* the pervasive effect of a monotheism that has transformed itself into the mono-valence of all value. As will become clear, it is the transcendent itself that Nancy seeks to rethink, in order to dis-enclose the potential to think the world anew. In this section I want to unpack how Nancy’s critique of capitalism focuses upon the re-establishment of an ontology of “value” that disrupts the economy of equivalency. It is by thinking an inherent excess of “value” in ontological terms, which take into account the incalculable affect of *jouissance*, that Nancy can critique the flat-

⁴⁹ Christopher Watkin, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction? The Question of Ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricœur and Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.139. In order to think *through* the present condition of the world, as one that has inherited a genuine lack of sense, so that what typifies our experience of the world is this lack of sense, we must not search for a new sense of the world in either our past or future. Instead, we must inhabit the “here and now” of a lack of sense, as the point at which thinking must begin anew.

tening effect of capitalist economies of equivalency. As part of Nancy's critique he provides a reading of Marx, and demonstrates how a deconstruction of Christianity can build upon Marx's conception of the human.

In order to critique the nihilistic effect of equivalency, inherent to globalization, Nancy takes as his point of departure a lengthy remark from Marx's *The German Ideology*, in which Marx discusses the enslavement of individuals to "a power alien to them...the world market."⁵⁰ According to Marx, this stage of development, in which the activity of the individual has become "world-historical activity", forms the necessary pre-cursor for the "communist revolution" and the abolition of "private property"—such that, "the liberation of each single individual will be accomplished in the measure in which history becomes transformed into world history."⁵¹ This liberation is to be accompanied by a transformation of the relation between the individual and their connection to the world: where the wealth of the individual will be measured by their connection to the intellectual and material wealth of the world. Nancy describes this transformation as "the passage to consciousness and enjoyment of human creation in its entirety by all human beings."⁵² This is a fundamental shift from the enjoyment of wealth in terms of individual production, to the enjoyment of wealth—as, "the material and intellectual production of the whole world"⁵³—in its entirety, by and for each individual.

Crucially, as Nancy notes, the liberation of an individual's relation to the world, as described by Marx, is essentially a reversal of globalization in its current trajectory. Here the difference between "globalization" as an "*immonde*", and the creation of the world as "world-forming" [signified by Nancy as *mondialisation*] is made distinct through this reversal. The twin pillars of "globalization and the domination of capital," indicate the point of convergence of two necessary ingredients that for Marx make possible, "a revolution that inverts the direction [*sens*] of domination."⁵⁴ That is, this convergence creates the very condition for

⁵⁰ Marx, "The German Ideology" *The Marx and Engels Reader*, pp.163-164.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, p.36.

⁵³ Marx, "The German Ideology" *The Marx and Engels Reader*, pp.163-164.

⁵⁴ Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, p.36. Subsequent references made in the text.

the liberation of individual inter-connectedness. In Marx's terms the communist revolution; or, in Nancy's terms, "the creation of the world" through *mondialisation*. For Nancy these conditions of convergence are premised upon the very conditions of the "*immonde*" as laid out at the end of the last section. It is through the interconnectedness required for the global exchange of value, in terms of a general equivalency, that "the interconnection of everyone in the production of humanity as such comes into view" (37). The same "work" of globalization provides the means for a *global* consciousness required for *mondialisation*.

Here Nancy draws our attention to the explicit circularity of this interconnection, and where he begins to depart from Marx: "World-forming" is for Marx essentially "the creation of humanity," completely enclosed "in "this" world, or as "this" world" (37). That is, the human implicitly remains for Marx "a teleological or eschatological term" (37) in which, through a world-history, the human produces itself. Nancy is quick to point out that in Marx's "teleo-eschatological logic," it is not clear that there is any strict "determination" of a "final value" attributable to human being. The problem, according to Nancy, lies in the ambiguity implicit in any argument that seeks an "absolute value"; whether through the human, as has been attributed to Marx, where "the human being, as source and accomplishment of value in itself, comes at the end of history when it produces itself" (38); or indeed in the current global climate, in which the clash of absolute value is played out between the United States "and Islamic fanaticism...two figures of monotheism" (39). The ambiguity of "absolute value," is marked by Nancy in the question of what exactly we mean by the term "humanity", and where we might distinguish the human, and human value, in relation to the production or establishment of an absolute value—where "absolute value" is what ameliorates the overall totalizing effect of the *paradigme principiel*. In other words, "absolute value" establishes what counts as one. In essence, as I described above, through the demarcation of transcendence and immanence in the premise of "the One" that provides the force of monotheism, the human has become the final arbiter of knowledge. The question of the relation of the human to value then pivots on the insight provided by Marx, in which the world is the production, or product, "of human beings" (39). There is a synergy between the increasing interconnection created by globalization and its accompanying economic forces, and the explicit

formative role of human relation in the production of the human itself. This second point is well illustrated by Marx when he argues that,

All-round dependence, this natural form of the world-historical co-operation of individuals, will be transformed by this communist revolution into the control and conscious mastery of these powers, which, born of the action of men on one another, have till now overawed and governed men as powers completely alien to them. Now this view can be expressed again in speculative-idealistic, i.e. fantastic, terms as "self-generation of the species" ("society as the subject"), and thereby the consecutive series of interrelated individuals connected with each other can be conceived as a single individual, which accomplishes the mystery of generating itself. It is clear here that individuals certainly make one another, physically and mentally, but do not make themselves.⁵⁵

The individual, alienated from production, is a formative and constitutive alienation of the self. The communist revolution brings about a connection of the individual and the relation of the individual with the "world", such that it is a world constituted by the human. Marx is arguing for an interconnection between the individual as productive force, and the consequence of that productive force as world-forming. As Nancy writes, while on the one hand, "commerce engenders communication, which requires community, communism", on the other hand, "human beings create the world, which produces the human, which creates itself as absolute value and enjoyment [*jouissance*] of that value" (37). If the human creates itself as "absolute value," while encased in a globe of infinite reciprocity, the very notion of human value is marked by an absolute. The absolute, it would seem, is unavoidable—monotheism, and its trajectory or metamorphosis into atheism, are both marked by "the same One taken as God" (39). How is it possible for Marx to break from this bind of the absolute?

According to Nancy, emancipation from the absolute resides in an interpretation, and an invigorated displacement, of the meaning behind the word val-

⁵⁵ Marx, "The German Ideology" *The Marx and Engels Reader*, p.164.

ue. "Absolute value," in any guise, is reliant upon power. Under the sway of the absolute, value is "instrumentalized,"

...it serves the reproduction of its own power, indefinitely, through spiritual or monetary capitalization. Value has value through this endless autistic process, and this infinite has no other *act* than the reproduction of its *potentiality* (thus in both senses of the word, power and potentiality). (39)

For Marx, value is intrinsically linked to enjoyment; without *actuality* (that is, if value remains an infinite *potentiality*), there is no "enjoyment" of value—there is a *jouissance*, but an inauthentic *jouissance*, one without value. This begs the question of what is meant by the term *actuality*? According to Nancy it is nothing less than the "finite inscription of its infinity" (39).

We should recognise this as the finitude (or limit) of a "here and now" that opens onto the infinite that is sense, a gesture of *l'avenir* that will become clearer as I explain and expand Nancy's concept of *transimmanence*. The concept of *transimmanence* is used by Nancy to discuss the notion of an opening of sense that occurs wholly within an immanent sense of the world. In order to flesh out the implications of an infinite *potentiality* that lacks an *actualised* enjoyment, so that we may reveal the finite inscription of this infinite potentiality—or, in other words, what Nancy elaborates elsewhere as a "finite thinking"—Nancy once again turns to Marx, to find the "revolution" that Marx calls for in the reversal of "the infinite into another, and potentiality into act" (40). According to Nancy, Marx marks the point at which the world seemed suspended, "between a new and a former world," and has "fallen short of what it should be" (40). Why? Perhaps, according to Nancy, the problem is a focus, not on the "world", but rather, on a world "view", a picture of the world. That is to say, the question of the "world" remains caught in the circular bind of the relation of the human to the "world"; a question that interrogates the capacity of the human to understand the world, and hinges on the way the human gives meaning to the world.

Nancy is interested specifically in the way Kant appears to hinge his philosophical system on the ostension of freedom, and the manner in which freedom "in itself" steps outside the internal logic of Kant's own system of knowledge in

order to become its grounding principle. As Nancy points out, in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* he remarks that freedom "is the only one of all the Ideas of pure Reason, whose object is a thing of fact."⁵⁶ The problem then comes from the very apodictic sense of freedom itself, the fact of freedom is linked to the fact of existence, placing incommensurability at the core of the subject. As Nancy puts it, "One could say that with Kant begins the self-legitimation of existence, *and* existence as the *abyss* of this self-legitimation."⁵⁷ The ambiguity of self-legitimation arises because of the necessity of freedom in Kant's concept of the subject—the "*fact* of freedom" cannot be established through causal logic as a fact. Its self-determination is its own ground, and hence its own lack of ground. Freedom, as concept, appears to cross the demarcation of sensibility and intelligibility.⁵⁸ As Nancy points out, Heidegger picks up on this ambiguity in Kantian freedom, and elevates freedom to a problem of ontology rather than discursive logic in Kant's system.⁵⁹ I return to this problem in my treatment of Heidegger in chapters three and four. However, anticipating the importance of Kant and Heidegger for Nancy's philosophical project in the deconstruction of Christianity, the *abyss* that Nancy refers to above becomes an opening to what I described in the previous chapter as the other of thought.

Returning to the problem of this *abyss* of self-legitimation; that in order to bring the world into focus through the "thought" or "gaze" of a subject (that is, as something to be "viewed"), the world must be viewed by a "subject". The world, captured in its essence, becomes "dependent" upon the gaze and is totalized by this gaze; furthermore, because the world itself as totalized is dependent upon this gaze, the gaze must stand outside of this world. However, and it is here that we reach the true aporia of the gaze, for a world to be "my" world "I" must in some way inhabit that world, "I" must, in essence, "share" that world and be a part of the world. It is this aporia of the gaze that leads to what Nancy, following Derrida, describes as the self-deconstructive gesture of the world (for Nancy, an aporia of the incarnation and resurrection of Christ), in which the world becomes

⁵⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §91.

⁵⁷ Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, p.22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid* p.25.

⁵⁹ *Ibid* p.26.

its very own self-standing subject as a globe. The world “view” was the world itself—and indeed, “the stance of the world is the experience it makes of itself” (43). Nancy elaborates in more detail the self-deconstructive gesture of Christianity, and demonstrates the cogency of this deconstruction to the current problem of globalization, and how deconstruction builds upon Marx’s critique.

The God of onto-theology has produced itself (or deconstructed itself) as subject of the world, that is, as world-subject. In so doing, it suppressed itself as God-Supreme-Being and transformed itself, losing itself herein, in the experience for-itself of the world without an outside...The speculative *Weltgeist* mocked by Marx becomes—and becomes with Marx himself—*Welt-Geist* or *Geist-Welt*: no longer “spirit of world” but rather world-spirit or spirit-world. (44)

The removal of God from the world, such that the world was no longer represented to or from itself, changed completely the manner in which we can conceive of the “world” in terms such as necessity and contingency, or complete and incomplete. These terms lose meaning in that they are no longer meaningful in any related way to the world; there is no outside of the world, and hence there is nothing that provides any means of correlating these terms to anything other than the *within* of the world. The “world”, as such, is a “fact without reason or end, and it is our fact” (45). For Marx, the world may be viewed as an end in itself, the production of humanity and human-value alongside the displacement and reversal of “onto-theology”. This occurs in such a way, that taking up again the notion of Marx’s “communist revolution” cited earlier, the “immanent cause” of this world as our fact, is “the production of humanity itself represented as the final and total accomplishment of self-production” (45). However, if, as according to Marx, this self-production is to be the production of freedom (viz. the “enjoyment” to be found in the shared intellectual and material wealth of the world), then there can be no “end” attached to this production. Thus the “world” itself cannot be thought of in terms of the “self-production” of the human, or humanism; instead it is intrinsically marked “by a beyond of production itself, here named “enjoyment” (*jouissance*)” (45). For Nancy, the excess of value in produc-

tion cannot be totalized, not because it is outside the structural framework of capital, but rather because it is part of a future “to-come” (*l’avenir*). The excess of production in *jouissance* challenges the totalizing effect of the *paradigme principal* (and importantly, the capacity to count as one) because it cannot be subsumed into the temporal frame of the *paradigme principal*, rather it is necessarily outside and excessive.

It is clear that the creation of the world, the overcoming of the agglomeration inherent in today’s global-capitalism, is premised for Nancy on how we understand and relate to the notion of *jouissance*. Hence, the manner in which Nancy unpacks this notion of *jouissance* is of course crucial for understanding the emancipatory role *jouissance* plays in avoiding the trajectory of a one-sided globalization and the coming *immonde*. As Nancy argues, *jouissance*

...maintains itself beyond either having or being in the same way that it unfolds beyond or before activity and passivity. By identifying this enjoyment of the global production of humanity, Marx indicates an excess with respects to production as well as with respect of possession (and this is perhaps that very thing which he tried to call later “individual property,” once again neither private nor collective⁶⁰). (45)

Here we have the absolutely decisive point of engagement between Nancy and Marx, the point of intersection between *mondialisation* and *immonde*, and a point of intersection between two somewhat competing methods for the conception of *jouissance*. On the one hand, the “law of capital,” through interspersed—and yet connected—deeply furrowed lines of power relations, extorts profit from the excess of enjoyment, converting the surplus-value of the necessary “excess of enjoyment” into profit. This profit is added to the “agglomeration” of general equivalency. Temporality itself is caught in this totalized framework, time is itself part of the count—the future is contingent while the temporal structure of that future

⁶⁰ Note here the distinction made by Nancy regarding individual property – this to my mind indicates a synergy between Nancy’s ontology of being-singular-plural and Marx’s notion of the emancipated individual’s relation to a property that is neither private nor collective.

remains secure.⁶¹ On the other hand, for Nancy, *jouissance* is always and necessarily excessive, beyond having or being, and beyond activity and passivity (46). This is why he argues that there is the ever-present “secret desire” to allow enjoyment to provide meaning for-itself, without ground and without reason, to accede to the infinite value that is enjoyment without equivalency

This “secret desire” is premised upon how we provide an account of truth and existence, which registers the openness involved in the temporality revealed by deconstruction as to-come. In essence, giving an account in any totalized way is rendered impossible through the necessary inclusion of the always to-come [*l'avenir*]. The impossibility of reconciling what is to-come within the moment of truth is registered thus as the human capacity for *jouissance* in spite of the totalizing capacity of the *paradigme principiel*. Nietzsche plays upon this allusive character of truth, and Nancy draws upon this Nietzschean gesture in describing this sense of a “secret desire”. The paradoxical nature of truth in Nietzsche’s thought is transcribed by Nancy into power of the “secret desire” to avoid the asinine envelopment of this desire within the hegemonic force of global capitalism. Truth is understood in these terms as remaining allusive, never fully revealing itself and always holding something over in the temporal axis of what is to-come. By remaining held by the temporal sense of to-come, the “secret desire” not only avoids becoming subsumed within the economy of general equivalency, it also remains hidden from the being within which it would otherwise seem to reside. Thus the “secret desire” also stands for the impossibility of aseity, and hence of a singular sense of being. It is in this way that the “secret desire” betrays a restlessness in human existence, a restlessness that underpins the “without-reason” or “absence of ground” of the world. Nancy elaborates the without-reason that motivates the “restlessness of existence” in many places throughout his work,⁶² in *Creation* he finds the question linked to Angelus Silesius – that “the rose grows without reason”.

If the world, essentially, is not the representation of a universe (*cosmos*) nor that of a here below (a humiliated world, if not condemned by Christianity),

⁶¹ One could argue that Enron collapsed because it was able to exploit this paradigm so completely.

⁶² I return to this through Nancy’s reading of Hegel in my interlude.

but the excess—beyond any representation of an *ethos* or of a *habitus*—of a stance 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... “the rose grows without reason”. (47)

This marks a key point of divergence from the sense of secularization detailed by Taylor in *A Secular Age*, and reveals the unique picture of the world portrayed by Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity. In contrast to an elaboration of secularism, in which the world is freed from the shackles of a constitutive God, Nancy argues that what we understand by secularism and atheism, is an intensification of our relation to an already abandoned world. The sense of a world abandoned by God, that finds itself searching for an end—through theism in the “sacred,” and through atheism in the “cumulative”—must be embraced in a wholly new and “absentheistic” way. This is what it might mean to accede to the infinite value that is enjoyment without equivalency. The “without reason” is not a problem to be solved or rejected, it is the tear in the fabric of metaphysics that gives the opening for *mondialisation*. If we read the quote above carefully, we recognise that Nancy finds that the “principle of the absence of principle” is always and already part of the world. Where might it be possible then to find this “principle”, and what is the link between this principle and enjoyment? As enjoyment is always in excess, and hence, there is always a value that exceeds the capacity of capital to accumulate value. It is thus possible to seek the “principle of the absence of principle” in the Marxist commodity itself, or rather, the excessive dimension of the commodity.

What does it mean to think about a value in the “world” beyond equivalency? In other words, to consider a thinking that exceeds the ability of the law of capital to transform value and leaves behind a trace of value. A “surplus-value” that is no longer part of the law of accumulation, and also exceeds the capacity of the religious to subsume it under the simplistic moniker of the sacred. Nancy explains this notion by considering the pre-capitalistic form of wealth;⁶³ as he puts

⁶³ If there are, as Nancy claims, three modes of wealth that coincide with three modes of the body – “glitter, capital, dissemination” (50) – then at work in Nancy is more than simply a deconstruction of Christianity,

it, what preceded capital was “wealth as glitter...which produces its own splendor and its own opulence as the glow of a meaning in which the world is wrapped” (48). This is a picture of wealth that does not empower the accumulation of more wealth, but instead, a thought of wealth that creates sense from itself alone. Wealth, in the terms Nancy elaborates, loses meaning as it is transformed through the law of capital into an accumulation—and hence, we must hold onto a sense of wealth that continues to be attributed to the “so-called grandeur of the soul...its glory and exaltation” (48).

It is no accident, Nancy claims, that the meaning and designation of spiritual wealth shifted as the West was transformed by capitalism. This shift in the sense of wealth—from giving meaning to the world, to giving wealth to the human—reveals the stimulus behind a resistance to this shift in “Christian or philosophical poverty” (48). Precisely what this shift reveals is that there remains in wealth a value that cannot be appropriated by accumulation, but which is transferred into the domain of “spiritual poverty”. Put another way, there is an incessant excess, which continues to haunt the appropriation of value by the “machinations”⁶⁴ of general equivalency; this indeterminate but unequivocal excess is that part of value which cannot be exchanged. This is the “valorous” sense of value spoken by the language of “dignity.”⁶⁵ In this “valorous” sense of the word value, Nancy traces a “remainder and excess of capital,” a dignity and human value for its own sake which inhabits a secret core within the exchange of value for profit. This secret inhabitant in the “machinations” of general equivalency is

here is a line of thought that is disrupting and displacing any sense of the body. The three ways in which Nancy distributes the body, match with three traces of value that may inhabit the world. The first “glitter” is a sense of meaning that comes from the glory of God(s); the second, capital, is the sense of meaning in the endless exchange of value, through work, through history, through a world-spirit; the third, dissemination, is our contiguity and touch, the way we rub up against others, our unavoidable contact with the world. Abandonment must be thought through all three modes of wealth, all three distributions of the body, if we are to truly understand the sense of abandonment Nancy calls for here.

⁶⁴ An allusion to the term “machinations” in Heidegger’s *Contributions*, to which I turn in chapter four.

⁶⁵ It may be worthwhile at this point to examine the necessity Kant felt in providing a link between the human “world-forming” subject, irreducible to an “empirical subject”, and the notion of human dignity. More importantly, the fact that this link came to be associated with the notion of the “sublime” in Kant, where “*the sublime is that, the mere ability to think which, shows a faculty of mind surpassing every standard of Sense.*” *Critique of Judgment*, p.110.

strictly what Nancy understands as erupting “anew in Marx’s work” (48). This fecundity of the “law of capital”, cannot escape the inclusion of human dignity, which, as Nancy argues, is the “production of humanity itself” (48). Hence, a trace of value that will not succumb to the law of capital; and, for Nancy, a “sense of the world that would become rich from itself, without any reason either sacred or cumulative” (49). It is, in essence, a call to find a richness and dignity of existence in the world, without any precursor of significance beyond the fact of existence itself.

It is in the attempt to invert the significance of value, such that the “production of value becomes the creation of meaning”—an attempt to invert the meaning of value itself—that Nancy finds an unlikely synergy between Nietzsche and Marx in the re-evaluation of all value: “*Umwertung*” (49). However, the *Umwertung* must remain out of reach; in a sense, it must always be held within Derrida’s paradigm of *l’avenir*—a future “to-come”—with the incessant aim of making this incalculable future an *actuality*. Indeed, it would seem that what Nancy is working toward, is an *actuality* that remains aware of its own incalculable futurity; that is, the future of an understanding of value that remains aware of the fact that it is outside the cumulative effect of capital, and must maintain in its essence that fact of being outside. The necessity of the incalculable (contingent) within value *l’avenir* must remain its “transcendental” condition.⁶⁶ Perhaps one might think the Kantian ideal is being pushed too far; however, as Nancy argues, it is precisely this ideal that enables the possibility of the impossible trace of value beyond equivalency to become an actuality (49).

By suspending the equivalency of value, Nancy is also abandoning the sense of a “world” that is totalized by the *paradigme principiel*, and through this abandonment the significance of value becomes its own sense. In the process of this suspension Nancy brings the incommensurable and incalculable back into the play of sense, as what allows value to become more than its equivalence. In a gesture that resonates with my discussion of St Anselm in chapter one, it is this incommensurable that becomes *the other of thought*, as something always greater than what can be thought. An intrinsic and unavoidable contingency, which is

⁶⁶ Thus for Nancy, as I argue in chapter four, this becomes the sole remaining transcendental.

what renders the empirical subject impossible, while in the same gesture making the impossible of value, as the creation of a world, possible. We must hold this gesture in mind whenever we encounter Nancy's notion of abandonment. Abandonment, which remains configured by Nancy according to the abandonment of Christ, is an openness toward the infinite of transcendence that remains a completely immanent and material actuality. For Nancy, the thought of the "other of thought" is only possible by re-casting the Christian paradigm of abandonment; thus accompanying Christianity to its own self-surpassing deconstruction, but nevertheless seeking the transcendent wholly within the immanence of the world. A sense of transcendence that is nothing less than the opening of the possibility of sense, a *transimmanence*—the details of which I turn to below.

IV. (A FORAY INTO) THE POVERTY OF ABANDONMENT: CREATION *EX NIHILO*

...the transcendental is also, always, that which constitutes conditions of possibility of experience, while at the same time *rendering impossible the subject* as itself an empirical subject. Willing the world but not willing a subject of the world (neither substance nor author nor master), is the only way to escape the un-world. (49)

We have reached the impasse of understanding, and the reason why Nancy is so stringent in his loyalty to the method of deconstruction. What is this "willing the world" if not the "secret desire" that displaces and suspends the very "subject" that should hold the key to questions of truth and existence? Is the question transferred to one in which we provide some meaningful account of this "willing the world", in the sense that it could be explained in terms of a some-where, in some-time, and from some-thing? The first question moves too quickly and risks giving sense to a law of the subject, and the second question belies the manner in which Nancy frames the terms of "creation" in willing the world. That is, within this "will" there is no "subject of the world", there is only a will that wills the

world for otherwise this "will" becomes subsumed by the totalized *paradigme principiel*. The link with "world" is maintained as the condition for the very possibility of experiencing "a world" rather than the *immonde*. To reveal "a world" is to open sense to the possibility of "world" without subject, which is made possible by tracing how wealth has been transformed from meaning to equivalence, and finding within that transformation a trace of the "poverty" of meaning (what was referred to earlier as "spiritual poverty"). This "poverty" of meaning, as the cinders of value that remain without equivalence, are what make possible "a world" as experienced whilst suspending the inclusion of "subject."

For Nancy this sense of poverty designates an "*ethos...the value of which does not derive from ownership (of something or of oneself) but in abandonment*" (50). That is, the value of poverty is in the abandonment of subjectivity, and in the abandonment of value that is attached to some-thing or some-one, or indeed, the abandonment of any sense of belonging some-where. It is instead a being-here and being-there, in the Heideggerian sense of *Dasein*, where the "here" and the "there" are abandoned—a sense of abandonment that Nancy captures in his re-iteration of Heidegger's term *Ereignis*.⁶⁷ Neither ownership of an other, nor an ownership of the self; and certainly an abstraction from any sense of ownership of, or subservience to, a sovereign. We might further consider this sense of poverty and abandonment, with reference to "Being", in terms of Hegel's notion of "simple immediacy". As Hegel argues, "pure knowing" begins without any "reference" or "mediation"; and hence we must register pure knowing as "distinctionless", in which this "simple immediacy, therefore, in its true expression is *pure being*."⁶⁸ We must read carefully the ontological premise at work in this sense of abandonment, as it maintains an ontological link to both *being* and *world* as a giving without premise and without precedence.

Poverty, or the being-abandoned—in all the complex ambivalence of these two senses: abandoned *by* and abandoned *to*. (50)

⁶⁷ I return to Heidegger in some detail in the following chapter and in chapter four, where I also include a reading of Hegel.

⁶⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.69.

For Nancy, “poverty” is the point at which thought must depart from globalization and the manner in which globalization has suppressed “all world-forming of the world” (50). This sense of “poverty” is not simply an exercise in thought; it is an attempt to think through a fundamental incapacity to form a world in lieu of the intensifying injustice of violence. This is violence that comes in many forms both hidden and unhidden, whether it is registered as domestic, institutional, corporate, inter-State, contra-State, and intra-State; as war, disease, poverty, addiction, or disaster (whether “natural” or “human”, it is increasingly difficult to know whether there is a difference). Thus “poverty” is that which attempts to re-think and re-vive what threatens the hegemony of capitalism, and defies attempts to subsume thinking into the circulation of equivalency. In this way, “poverty” is the “other of thought” which allows Nancy to even pose the question of thinking a “world”; such that, “Poverty, or the being-abandoned” is to gesture toward the lacuna of “without-reason” that remains at the core of all violence.

It is not, however, a matter of re-“calculating” reason, which would be to slip back toward the prevailing paradigm. The re-evaluation of all value is for Nancy an ontological project that begins *ex nihilo*, where this “from nothing” will have to encompass the full weight of being-abandoned: “abandoned *by* and abandoned *to*.” The “without reason” is what provides the ontological openness and tear in the fabric of metaphysics, and allows ontological incompleteness to overcome the calculative effects of the *paradigme principiel*, in order to become the potential for *mondialisation*. Furthermore, an ontological project that encompasses abandonment, begins from a “world” fully exposed by the deconstruction of its onto-theological foundations in the self-deconstruction of Christianity—abandonment exposes us to a decision; either the continuation of an “un-world,” or the point of departure for thinking the world from the “motif of creation.”

This point of departure from the hithertofore globalized-world is the outcome of *the deconstruction of Christianity*, which Nancy sums up through the dual displacement of value; the Christian displacement as world-becoming, and, the Capitalist displacement as world-forming. Firstly, value was displaced by “world-becoming”; value was made “immanent” and material, and it became embodied and of this world through the incarnation of Christ. Secondly, the “production of value” was displaced by a notion of “world-forming”; shaped by the power of the

law of capital, the necessity of a general equivalency, and the ability of value to be exchanged or traded (51). This dual displacement of value yields the conditions for an “un-world” or *immonde*, and yet, according to Nancy, this is also the point from which we may depart these conditions through the (Nietzschean) *Umwertung*.

And this displacement is not a transposition, a “secularization” of the onto-theological or metaphysical-Christian scheme: it is, rather, its deconstruction and emptying out, and it opens onto another space—of place and of risk—which we have just begun to enter. (51)

This “space” that “we have just begun to enter”, is a “space” revealed by the (self-) deconstruction of Christianity in which the “without-reason” of being-abandoned becomes the potential for “world-forming” and the condition for experiencing “a world”. What this deconstruction indicates is the necessity of thinking without “recourse to representations”—and here Nancy turns to the Derridean notion of the future as *l'avenir*, as the precise notion of that which “exceeds representation” (50). Essentially, Nancy is attempting to understand the world, or understand the meaning (or *sens*) of the world, without recourse to representations. Purely because representation requires a subject as author of the world, and it is the necessity of this subjectivity that created the conditions of the “un-world”. In order to think a sense of the world without recourse to representation, Nancy intends to appropriate the “motif of creation” from its theological roots, and instead think creation from the standpoint of an *ex nihilo* that eschews divinity. This is, however, a very particular thought of the “from nothing”, and indeed, a thought of *ex nihilo* that one might interpret as unique to the ontological paradigm that Nancy has worked to elaborate in his writing. Nancy begins his clarification of creation in terms of *ex nihilo* in a familiar fashion;

If “creation” means anything, it is the exact opposite of any form of production in the sense of fabrication that supposes a given, a project, and a producer. (51)

This unorthodox reading of creation-from-nothing contradicts not only the three monotheisms of the “Book” of Abraham; it also contradicts Marx for whom “value is precisely created” (51). Through this reading we move to what one may think of as Nancy’s “cosmography”, the elliptical notion of creation from nothing—that is, “*nothing* growing as *something*”, where the “world”, in terms of a creation of the world, is “the world” as “the growth of/from nothing” (51). It would seem that the pivotal gesture that Nancy makes is through the term “growth,” which is for Nancy put in terms of “the sense of *cresco*—to be born, to grow” (51). And this explains the engagement Nancy has with the notion of a “birth to presence”, and why Nancy insists on thinking this birth to presence in terms of the abandonment of being. Being, can only be born “from nothing”, if it is understood first and foremost as abandoned *by* and abandoned *to* the world. What sense of abandonment do we then reach from this notion of “Being born from nothing”, and “nothing growing as something”? It would seem to me that the sense of abandonment Nancy is asking us to read, is a sense of abandonment that is *of* that which is abandoned; and as I argue above, this is the potential for *mondialisation*, that Nancy finds in the “without reason”. Consider the implications for this reading of creation in the following example.

If we think of an abandoned child, then the spectacle that ensues remains focused on that which abandoned the child, the cruelty involved, the story, the narrative—many times it would seem that the voyeurism involved betrays a certain sense of self-righteousness on the part of those who judge, by way of the spectacle, those guilty of abandoning. This focus, and indeed, the notion of “judgment” itself associated with abandonment, clouds the issue. The sense of abandonment Nancy traces here, is the sense of abandonment felt by the child, helpless, alone, thrown into the world, without a sense of past, or indeed a sense of future—and yet, full of the hope and possibility that their very existence “gives”. A moment of pure nothingness that is still, it must be understood, a nothing growing as something. This sense of abandonment is, I would argue, the sense of abandonment Nancy seeks to explore as he unpacks the point from which we traverse the *immonde* of our present world.

A world thought in terms of abandoned-being must, through *mondialisation* (the “nothing growing as something”), come to have sense. Where then does

this sense come from? It comes from the world, but from the world in a very special way. It comes from the world in the sense of a transcendent-immanence, or an immanent-transcendence, or indeed, as a *transimmanence*. I quote here in both the English translation and the original French,

As soon as the appearance of a beyond of the world has been dissipated, the out-of-place instance of sense opens itself up within the world (to the extent that it would still make sense to speak of a "within"). Sense belongs to the structure of the world, hollows out therein what it would be necessary to name better than by calling it the "transcendence" of its "immanence" – its *transimmanence*, or more simply and strongly its existence and exposition.⁶⁹ [Dès que l'apparence d'un dehors du monde est dissipée, le hors-lieu du sens s'ouvre *dans* le monde —pour autant qu'il y ait encore du sens à parler d'un « dedans »—, il appartient à sa structure, il y creuse ce qu'il faudra savoir nommer mieux que la « transcendance » de son « immanence » — sa *transimmanence*, ou plus simplement et plus fortement, son existence et son exposition.]⁷⁰

In order to expand upon this notion, Nancy turns to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Through his reading of Wittgenstein, Nancy brings our attention to how the logic of totality and immanence not only become discordant according to, but also configured by, the possibility of creation *ex nihilo*. As Nancy argues, in his remark that "the sense of the world must lie outside the world,"⁷¹

...Wittgenstein simultaneously stated two things: that the world itself does not constitute an immanence of meaning, but that since there is no other world, the "outside" of the world must be open "within it"—but open in a way that no other world could be posited there. This is also why Wittgenstein writes further: "It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists" (TLP 6.44, 88). (52)

⁶⁹ Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p.55. See also Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, p.35.

⁷⁰ Nancy, *Lu Sens du Monde*, p.91.

⁷¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.48, p.86.

By drawing our attention to the concept of “the outside of a world opening within the world,”⁷² Nancy signals the importance of language; as it is precisely the notion of language—in the terms that Derrida elaborated—that provide an opening and place, unique and fleeting, for the transmission of sense. This opening is also a consequence of the self-deconstruction of Christianity, as the exposure of the “without-reason” of the “world”, and the opening of sense itself as *déclousion* (dis-enclosure). Indeed, it might be possible to say that what Nancy means when he writes the neologism *déclousion* is precisely this somewhat enigmatic concept of opening—there is no other sense of the world, other than that sense which opens within the world, as an outside that is inside. However, what is most remarkable about this opening is the manner in which Nancy insists that sense makes itself distinct only as the “possibility of transmission from one place to another” (52). The outside of a world opening within the world, an opening that allows for the sense of the world, is in the very “possibility of transmission”. This is the same ontological premise that Nancy pictures in *Being Singular Plural*, that “Being is put into play among us; it does not have any other meaning except the disposition of this “between”.”⁷³

In this gesture Nancy is creating what Henk Oosterling calls a “shift,” where the ontological emphasis moves “from being-in-common (*être-en-commun*) via being-with (*être-avec*) to the between (*entre*).”⁷⁴ Sense *qua* sense, is in the *passage*; the transmission of sense from one to another, through the *passage* as the opening within the world as outside the world, is the creation “without-reason” of sense—its “content” and “direction”. *Passage* is the vital component of sense in much the same way that “space” is the vital component of things.

⁷² This is also, importantly, a way of thinking through the predicament of existence since the ‘death of God.’ As Eric Santner puts it, in terms that in a way mirror Nancy’s own concerns, “What both Freud and Rosenzweig help us to grasp is that with the “death of God” the entire problematic of transcendence actually exerts its force in a far more powerful way in the very fabric of everyday life. What is *more* than life turns out to be, from the post-Nietzschean perspective, immanent to and constitutive of life itself. Freud and Rosenzweig are, as I hope to show, among our most important thinkers of this immanent transcendence.” *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig*, p.10.

⁷³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p.27.

⁷⁴ Henk Oosterling “From Interests to “Inter-esse:” Jean-Luc Nancy on Deglobalization and Sovereignty” *SubStance*, 34(1) (2005), p.82.

As a point of comparison, consider the way Nancy expresses space, as “that outside of things thanks to which their distinctness is granted them.”⁷⁵ For Nancy, *déclousion* operates through “distinction”, so if we think that “space” operates to make things distinct from one-another, *passage* functions to make sense distinct from the “agglomeration” of the global—distinction is hence the opening *within* that is outside, it is what *gives a world*. Anticipating my elaboration of this concept in what follows, the ontology of being-singular-plural also functions through the “distinction” provided by the outside of things, even to the point at which the sense of touch becomes the hinge between Nancy’s reading of the body and his broader critique of political onto-theology. In being-singular-plural, the *with* in *mitsein*, (“co-appearing”, or “co-existence”) is that outside of *being* thanks to which their distinctness is granted them. I return to the *passage* of sense, in the following chapters.

There is, of course, the appropriation of this “distinction” in the present day machinations of globalization and the law of capital. This “capitalist version of the without-reason,” as Nancy describes, is the notion that “anything makes sense in just any way” (52). The power of pure economic reason is its capacity to disrupt and remove “distinction,” to vitiate “value” in order to establish the “general equivalence of all forms of meaning in an infinite uniformity” (52). In contrast consider Nancy’s account of the without-reason, where the *jouissance* that facilitates the creation of meaning must also create the *form* that this *jouissance* of sense takes place. I read this paradigm as indicative of how Nancy’s concept of a sense of the world given without-reason, carries with it the context of that sense. Put somewhat enigmatically, sense creates the world in which that sense is taking place. I will flesh this statement out as this dissertation unfolds.

Certainly these aspects of sense indicate the role “distinction” plays in the creation of the world-hood of the world. Returning then to Nancy’s critique of Marx, we might read Nancy as expanding on a point made by Althusser, in which he cites the unique notion of “knowledge as a production.”⁷⁶ As Althusser’s com-

⁷⁵ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.158.

⁷⁶ Louis Althusser & Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, p.25.

ments make clear, in Marx's formulation of political economy in *Capital*, production creates an excess of sense.

What political economy does not see is not a pre-existing object which it could have seen but did not see—but an object which it produced itself in its operation of knowledge and which did not pre-exist it: precisely the production itself, which is identical with the object. What political economy does not see is what it does: its production of a new answer without a question, and simultaneously the production of a new latent question contained by default in this new answer.⁷⁷

This excess of sense—an answer forms which *retrospectively* poses the formative question—is characteristic of Derrida's *l'avenir*. In this reading, "production" is always-already ahead of itself, and cannot maintain the structural necessity of its *paradigme principiel* without subsuming this excess into itself. The excessive dimension of production remains within the remnants of this subsumption; as production takes place through the metaphysics of the subject, these remnants form the excessive *jouissance* that rupture a subject opened by its "secret desire"—hence, Nancy's ontological emphasis on the poverty and abandonment of the subject suggests that only through "poverty" do we encounter these remnants. Thus, while maintaining Marx's insight into "production", Nancy is attempting to move beyond the notion of "political economy"—or what Nancy terms the "capitalist version of the without-reason"—and discover the power of "creation" in transforming and configuring the "world". Abandonment, as the poverty to let being be and become a world, is a possibility enigmatically encountered in the impossibility of being a subject.

This sense of *letting* the conditions for the possibility of experiencing a world *be* is a fragile thought, but a nonetheless powerful ontological account that allows Nancy to suspend the operation of communion in our social-being and give an ontology of being-with. To maintain a sense of "distinction", and thus not allow the appropriation and degradation of "distinction" under the law of capital, is more than simply a reversal; it is the moment at which we "come to expose

⁷⁷ Ibid p.25.

capital to the absence of reason, for which capital provides the fullest development" (53). Thus, by maintaining "distinction" one opens the place and space of conduct, that is, at the level of being, "the letting-be through which something is"⁷⁸—maintaining "distinction" is "a matter of exposing ourselves to the absence of concept and affect...as making-sense."⁷⁹ Put another way, this manner of conceiving "distinction" carries with it the sense of *ethos* that the conduct of being implies, a conduct that creates a "circulation of meaning," and hence creates the "world". According to Nancy, at stake in preventing this appropriation of "distinction" in globalization, are the means of providing an originary ethical⁸⁰ stance to the world—and a "practical struggle" toward an "actual justice" (53).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have followed Nancy's account of Marx. Yet Nancy also departs from Marx in ways that inform my reading of his gesture of deconstruction. Marx is far from "obsolete," as he is often characterized in modern liberal discourse, however, Nancy also argues that the explicit reversal of the relation of humanity to the modes of production, necessary for Marx's communist revolution, do not go far enough. According to Nancy, "what we have begun to learn is that it is also a matter of creating the meaning or the value of the reversal itself" (54). This is a revision of the parameters of Marx's communist revolution to include the notion of abandonment. This abandonment must take place at the intersection of the production of value, where the relation of the human to production creates a possibility for the human to be abandoned as world-historical. The notion of humanity, as becoming part of the "enjoyment" of the world, must maintain the

⁷⁸ Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p.185.

⁷⁹ Ibid p.191.

⁸⁰ I return to this originary ethics in chapter four, where it describes the unique ethical-ontology that Nancy takes from Heidegger.

sense of distinction premised upon abandonment that allows humanity as “enjoyment” without representation; and hence, without the appropriation of the work of human production into the equivalence. The humanism of the human must resist the signification in becoming a given sense. Enjoyment as the transmission of meaning and the sharing of sense is what marks the point beyond any notion of a production of representation, and thus marks the point at which value moves beyond any attempt at equivalence and becomes completely for-itself. It is this sense of creation, a creation that creates the reversal of production *ex nihilo* (maintaining the sense of *ex nihilo* outlined above), that Nancy provides through the resistance of abandonment.

To create the world means: immediately, without delay, reopening each possible struggle for a world, that is, for what must form the contrary of a global injustice against the background of equivalence. But this means to conduct this struggle precisely in the name of the fact that this world is coming out of nothing, that there is nothing before it and that it is without models, without principle and without given end, and that it is precisely *what* forms the justice and the meaning of the world. (54-5)

The struggle of this revolution must be one that seeks power, but “does not seek the exercise of power” (55). The sense of creation that Nancy wants to give is one that lacks a fundamental structural premise—production without author, substance or master—and this lack provides the segue into the next chapter. Essentially, Nancy is thinking creation through a sense of plurality that ruptures the *paradigme principiel*, and at the same time, he is committed to thinking being in terms of “letting being be”, which is a singularity of value that lacks equivalency. There is a tension in Nancy’s ontological commitment to both plurality and singularity. In the following chapter I follow this tension through what I see as two pivotal and related notions in Nancy’s ontological project to deconstruct Christianity—the *inoperative* in community, and *being-singular-plural*.

CONSTITUTION

The Constitution of the United States of America is the supreme law of the land. It is the framework for the government and the rights of the citizens. The Constitution is a living document that has been amended many times since its original signing in 1787. It sets out the structure of the federal government, the powers of each branch, and the rights of individuals. The Constitution is the foundation upon which our country is built.

The Constitution is divided into seven articles. The first three articles establish the three branches of government: the legislative branch (Congress), the executive branch (the President), and the judicial branch (the Supreme Court). The remaining four articles deal with the states, the territories, and the federal government's powers and responsibilities. The Constitution is a document that has shaped the history of our country and continues to shape it today.

Community

INTRODUCTION

Nancy's critical engagement with community as characterized by *The Inoperative Community*, and his encounter with Heideggerian ontology in *Being Singular Plural*, both demonstrate why the deconstruction of Christianity must be considered within the context of his critique of the metaphysics of subjectivity. The deconstruction of Christianity enables Nancy to describe the poverty of existence, as covered in the previous chapter, and lead Nancy to invoke a sense of abandoned-being that enables a thinking of the human that remains without ground whilst also defying aseity. By bringing Nancy's ontological commitment to being-singular-plural into focus alongside his deconstruction of Christianity, the interplay and mutual reinforcement of Christian subjectivity with the economy of equivalency becomes evident. Furthermore, through Nancy's early critical analysis of themes of community, the religious artifacts of totalitarianism and subjection tacitly resonate with the powerful paradigm of "the One", in which community is bent to a singular will and becomes a work of death.

As I described in the previous chapter, the deconstruction of Christianity reveals ways of resisting the hegemonic influence of capital; by building upon those themes of resistance, in this chapter I explore how the affect of the "inoperative" and the ontological oscillation in being-singular-plural likewise provide openings of thought within the immanence of a world that defies subjection to a transcendence. In other words, I build upon and extend the motif with which I

ended the first chapter, “the *other* thought of all thought” that eschews a metaphysical premise and enables “the burst of freedom”.

Nancy’s analysis of community reveals the politico-theological stakes of metaphysics that are continually engaged within an operative conception of community. Operative here refers to a sense of community framed in terms of a loss, which implies the drive toward some reconstitution of this lost essence. For Nancy, this drive manifests itself as a work, in which the lost essence becomes a point of communion between the human and a “common-being”. This operative version of community perpetually works to restore the essence of a “common-being” and in the process creates the logic of exclusion and inclusion, which finds its fulfillment in the “work of death”. For Nancy “the political” stakes of community are no longer engaged with this operative version of community, and any sense of “the political” has retreated into the calculative framework of “politics.” In contrast, by suspending the operative function of community, Nancy argues that “the political” can re-engage with community in creation of “being-in-common,” where this space of the common is a “between” of being, and remains a *passage* of sense, rather than a site of signification.

A tension emerges within this space of the *in* common. It is a spacing of being without signification or identity and hence singular. Alongside this ontological claim, this disposition of the “between” is a *passage* of sense as shared, and hence becomes an ontological gesture of plurality. Nancy mediates this tension through the finitude of philosophical practice, and the failure of language to ever fully reveal truth. The finitude of existence is an exposure to the limit of sense, where this limit is precisely the conduit of *passage*. This finitude also modulates the operative effect of a politics that seeks a common essence for community. Through finitude, community itself becomes suspended as *inoperative* and incapable of being presupposed in some fashion, it is instead a continuous exposure to its own finitude, as the failure to become its own signification and meaning. The *inoperative* community provides the space for being-in-common, as a finite existence.

In the second section, I introduce a reading of Heidegger’s account of Dasein and being-toward-death. This will allow me to elaborate how Nancy relies upon Heidegger’s account of finitude in order to establish his own sense of

finitude, and also where Nancy departs from the way Heidegger frames the ontological parameters of death and Heidegger's sense of community. By exploring Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of Heidegger's anathematic ethical lapse in his sympathetic view of the Nazi Party, and how Heidegger's sense of community relies upon a characterization of the German *volk* that appears predicated on an essence of community, I demonstrate why Nancy's reading of Bataille's notion of "nostalgia" and "being-in-ecstasis" are essential for understanding this departure from Heidegger.

In the third and fourth sections, I claim that the stakes of Nancy's engagement with community open the possibility of thinking without producing an end to thinking itself. By working through Nancy's reading the absolute in *The Inoperative Community* I reveal a possibility for thought that remains within the world, without being premised on some lost or transcendent meaning, while nonetheless being outside the immanent structure of the absolute. I then describe Nancy's ontology of *being singular plural*, referring again to the *déclension* of the totalizing absolute I discussed in chapter two, in order to illustrate how Nancy seeks to bring justice to thinking the being-with (*Mitsein*) of being. I strengthen these claims by reviewing Critchley's critique of Nancy, and Critchley's style of reading Heideggerian authenticity as it relates to community and death. In particular, I suggest that Critchley's characterization of the 'riddle of existence' clarifies how Nancy re-thinks Heidegger's ontology to include the "inauthentic" sense of *Mitsein*.

This chapter establishes that only according to an ontological commitment of shared existence—neither singular nor plural, but one along with the other—can Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity be shown to overcome Christianity itself. It does this precisely insofar as the ontological flux of singular-plural is what opens the transcendent possibility of sense wholly within the world.

I. A QUESTION OF COMMUNITY

For Nancy, when we speak of “community” we typically describe what we mean by referring to a loss, where this loss refers to an ideal that gives “community” its meaning, and which our contemporary situation lacks. At the same time, “community” derives its truth precisely *from* that loss of meaning, in the sense that community “works” toward fulfilling an essence of “the common”, or “*common being*,” through the driving power of that loss. In order to overcome this propensity Nancy frames the question of community in terms of “the political,”¹ rather than in political terms, while at the same time recognizing that his thought originates “*from the left*.”² Nancy, from the outset, appears to give his reading of community the mark of an ontological rather than a purely political project. By marking his thought as “*from the left*,” Nancy suggests a reading of “the political” that responds to the question of community, in other words, community is at issue for a left leaning reinvigoration of “the political.” Nancy contrasts his thought with a “politics” that come from the “right,” that frames community in terms of “legal” and “administrative” tasks to be fulfilled through political ends, and in which “the political” itself is devoid of sense. By distinguishing his project from the myriad of partisan political positions that seek to control the question of community, while remaining sensitive to the fact that simply to approach the question of community is to have already taken up a political position³; Nancy is, from the outset, indicating the contradictory bind that frames the very question of “community”. Modeling the question of community in this way, Nancy can sequester the possibility of invigorating “the political” according to the question of community; if “the political is the place where community as such is brought into

¹ “The political” in Nancy’s terms has its roots in an earlier work, *Retreating the Political* with Lacoue-Labarthe; I come back to this briefly in what follows. Suffice to say that for Nancy, “the political” is marked by a withdrawal that resonates with the loss of the question of community.

² Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. xxxvi.

³ Nancy makes this apparent from the beginning, by framing his project to address the question of community as necessarily marked by an association with “communism” despite the obscurity of this term, he clearly understands the stakes involved in his project.

play,"⁴ it is also possible to bring "the political" into play according to the question of community.

Nancy contrasts his thought with what has been described variously as the "end of history" or the "end of ideology," which—by denuding the political of meaning—form the "conditions" for a politics known as totalitarianism.⁵ On this point Critchley delivers the following scholium; the "truth of the present is that 'everything is political', that is, the political condition of contemporary societies is one where all areas of social life are politicized...the political form of contemporary societies is *totalitarian*."⁶ Indeed, as I sketched in the previous chapter, Nancy discloses this catastrophe in terms of an "equivalency," which cuts across this vitiation of community and politics within the commanding parameters of "globalization." Accordingly, Nancy is wary of the growing political submission to the ideal of liberalism that is cloaked in the guise of "democracy," where the institution of "democracy" has begun to serve nothing more than "a play of economic and technical forces that no politics today subjects to any end other than that of its own expansion."⁷ Nancy is thus attempting to revive something of community from the suffocating effects of technocratic economics.

By establishing "the political" as the opening through which community is questioned, it becomes apparent that the question of "being" is also at stake in this opening. "The political," as the opening of community itself, is where the existence of a "being *in common*" becomes possible. This forms the core of what one could describe as Nancy's ontology, and it is only through community as such, that something like this ontology might be thought. As Nancy argues, "we are brought into the world, each and every one of us, according to a dimension of the "in-common" that is in no way "added onto" the dimension of "being-self", but that is rather co-originary and coextensive with it."⁸ I will return to a sustained account of Nancy's ontology of being-singular-plural below, however, be-

⁴ Ibid p.xxxvii.

⁵ Cf. Lacoue-Labarthe & Nancy, "The Nazi Myth" *Critical Inquiry* (1990), 16(2), p.293.

⁶ Simon Critchley, "Re-tracing the political: politics and community in the work of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy" *The Political Subject of Violence*, p.75.

⁷ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.xxxvii.

⁸ Ibid.

fore doing so I want to give an account of the role of finitude, and how Nancy understands the role of the “inoperative” in community.

According to Nancy, following the manner in which the communist ideal became an all-encompassing totalitarian regime, and with the onset of an “end” to political ideology that had become the mark of a program of what might be described as the democratic ideal in the western social milieu, community has reached an impasse. What this “end” signals is the very real possibility of an end to any possibility of thinking beyond what has become a new background to our thought, “the consensus of a single program that we call “democracy””⁹ that limits the possibilities that continue to exist within such a “program.” To succumb to an end of thinking the possibilities of “the political” there is the very real possibility that we may no longer think the community as such, as it is precisely within “the political” that the exposition of community as being-*in-common* transpires. Furthermore, Nancy argues that our political tradition has already “folded and closed the thinking of being-*in-common* within the thinking of an essence of community.”¹⁰ Nancy examines the manner in which this folding and closure reveals the finitude inherent within being itself, and the possibility of thinking this finitude as a demand for thinking beyond the closure thus described.

I start from the idea that such a thinking—the thinking of community as essence—is in effect the closure of the political. Such a thinking constitutes closure because it assigns to community a *common being*, whereas community is a matter of something quite different, namely, of existence inasmuch as it is *in common*, but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance. Being *in common* has nothing to do with communion, with fusion into a body, into a unique and ultimate identity that would no longer be exposed. Being *in common* means, to the contrary, *no longer having, in any form, in any empirical or ideal place, such a substantial identity, and sharing this (narcissistic) “lack of identity.”* This is what philosophy calls “finitude.”¹¹

⁹ Ibid p.xxxviii.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

There are two important themes in this remark that illustrate why *The Inoperative Community* must be thought alongside Nancy's project in *The Deconstruction of Christianity*. Firstly, "being *in* common" mirrors the "poverty" involved in retrieving the remnants of value from the calculative effects of general equivalency—such that, if "poverty," as a lack of identity, is to be abandoned, it becomes necessary to suspend subjectivity and rupture the very notion of the subject through abandonment. Secondly, "being *in* common" is always-already an exposure of "being" as being-abandoned to the necessarily inoperative component of community—and, as such, the "common" is nothing more than the share of the "*in*" as a "between" and *passage* of sense.

Accordingly, a tension exists between, on the one hand, "finitude" as finite existence, which is the facticity of existence as the conditions of experience; and, on the other hand, the manner in which this facticity functions within what may be called the socio-political bond of a particular milieu as a social ontology. This tension, in finitude, between the singular and the plural, reveals the ontological stakes in Nancy's study of community. The "sense" of community that Nancy seeks to explicate is precisely one that must continue to lack a completed sense of the singular, and also lack a completed account of the collective. For Nancy a community is defined as that which is continually faced with the withdrawal or lack of any "infinite identity."¹² Nancy draws our attention to the process of "politics," and its engagement with this infinite identity, as "either as the product of the working community, or the community itself as work."¹³ The former is a "community" that becomes a programmatic and bureaucratic instrumental articulation of political power. The latter involves succumbing completely to some transcendent authority. In both cases we reach a state of totalitarianism.

In contrast, Nancy claims community must remain, both necessarily and constitutively, "inoperative." That is, what defines community is not the completion of some substantive work towards an overarching essence, but rather the denial of a "work" driven toward a singular essence.¹⁴ The fragmentation that is

¹² Ibid p.xxxix.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Todd May, "The Community's Absence in Lyotard, Nancy, and Lacoue-Labarthe" *Philosophy Today* (1993), 37(3), p.278.

“finite existence” within community, and the retreat from any sort of “agglomeration” of this existence, is what “continues to keep open, this strange being-the-one-with-the-other to which we are exposed.”¹⁵ Thus, for Nancy, community must remain without presuppositions, and open to the continuous exposure of beings in their shared finitude. Any sense of a higher authority that transcends community must remain completely immanent to the community, such that justice and equality are a continuous happening within the fragmented and incomplete articulation of community. The lack of any founding logic or transcendent governance, and the incomplete lacuna of the work of community, comes back to the sense of a finite existence and the necessity of exposure that Nancy holds as the mainstay of what must be called an *inoperative community*—“community cannot be presupposed. It is only exposed.”¹⁶

In contrast to a narrative of self-interpretation through social bonds, which would allow the formative structure of selfhood alongside this narrative, for Nancy it is essential that these bonds remain fragmented and incomplete. Community, for Nancy, is what brings us together “through the infinite exposure of an irreducible finitude.”¹⁷ In this paradigm, communication must not become engaged in a competition for some consensus; it must instead remain a continuous “*exposition*”¹⁸ where our finitude is brought to the limit of sense, rather than made sense of in some determined way. The constitutive force of finitude in the ontological picture Nancy is wrestling with has its basis in Heidegger’s fundamental ontology. Indeed, the catalyst of Nancy’s work on “the political” comes from a colloquium organized in Paris in 1980 as a response to Derrida’s *The Ends of Man*,¹⁹ and we can clearly read the influence of Heidegger on the publication *Retreating the Political* that was produced after this colloquium. As Christopher Fynsk argues, within the intersection of this thought,

...philosophical practice would be this work of reading or of writing which

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid p.xl.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Critchley, *Re-tracing the political*, pp.73-78; Cf. Derrida, *The Margins of Philosophy*.

brings to light that point where every representing production—and that is to say, every practice which implies language—fails. Every practice, then, including its own. Philosophical practice would work to define... the 'practical finitude' of all human production.²⁰

“Philosophical practice” can maintain a sense of finitude in the activity of revealing, by way of the failure of language to ever complete that revealing. This implies that there is no definitive point at which meaning is “revealed,” rather sense itself is a revealing. The insistence Nancy places on maintaining “community” as the exposure to a shared finite existence is premised upon the inability of the human to make sense of the world in some determinate way. Certainly, the propensity to call forth a transcendent force in articulating a completed sense of community, and inspire the work of community in such a direction, is to ignore this exposure. The outcome of this, he argues, is the abandonment of community “to political and technological economies...[which] will be the end of our communities...deprived of our finite existence.”²¹ Hence, to ignore the inability of the human to ground community with a stable meaning is precisely what founds the path toward some overriding metaphysical premise.

One could charge the deconstructive program as thus having *nothing to say* about the political forces at work within community. And yet, as Ian James argues, this would be to miss the important emancipatory point at which deconstruction presents a challenge to metaphysics. As James puts it,

In this sense philosophy’s affirmation of failure, the affirmation of the impossibility of mastering a ground or foundation, is less a nihilistic staring into an abyss and more an encounter with an instance of freedom and decision (that is, the recognition that our being is not predetermined by an essence or ground), a decision in which the existence of others and a *shared relation* to being is at stake.²²

²⁰ Christopher Fynsk, *Retreating the Political*, p.91.

²¹ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.xli.

²² James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, pp.156-7.

We should be attentive here to the possibilities that Nancy's affirmation of finitude provides, and in particular recall the manner in which his theory of *transimmanence* I discussed in chapter two, provides for an opening within the world without recourse to a metaphysical premise. This provides a clearly contrasting locus within Nancy's ontology to Taylor's reduction of this affirmation of failure I discussed in chapter one, in which the lack of foundation is framed as, at best, a stoic comportment in the face of the abyss. Thus I approach Nancy's articulation of the *Inoperative Community* in what follows with precisely this gesture in mind.

II. HEIDEGGERIAN FINITUDE AND BATAILLE'S REJECTION OF NOSTALGIA

In this section I focus upon Nancy's reading of Heidegger and Georges Bataille, bringing together the thought of these two figures on both the notion of community, and on the subject. Nancy's analysis reveals the strengths and weaknesses in their respective accounts. By bringing these accounts together, Nancy demonstrates how their (at times conflicting and at times synergistic) reading of community might provide an insight into how it is possible to rethink community through the notion of finite existence, precisely in the sense that finitude is what resists slipping back into a metaphysical account of the subject. While Nancy recognizes the possibilities of this reading in both Bataille and Heidegger, he also reveals the blind spots of their accounts.

This section is in three parts: I begin by explaining the role "being-toward-death" plays in Heidegger's philosophy, and why the ontological conclusions reached by Heidegger remain a problem for Nancy while also becoming Nancy's point of departure in suspending a metaphysics of the subject. I then elaborate on how Heidegger's thoughts on community, particularly in the context of his encounter with the Nazi party, lead to a problematic essence of community. In the final part of this section, I follow Nancy's reading of Bataille, and

how Bataille's concepts of "ecstasy" and "suffering from a lack" inform Nancy's engagement with Heidegger.

Heidegger on death

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's account of Dasein's being-toward-death provides the existential basis of Dasein's finitude. According to Heidegger, death remains Dasein's ownmost possibility, and Dasein remains alone in its projection toward death. In the same projection, Dasein is thrown into existence, always-already caught in its singular projection as being-toward-death. As thrown, death remains an ungraspable horizon for Dasein; it is inconceivable for Dasein to make sense of death despite the impossibility of eschewing the claim that death has upon Dasein. As such the modality in which Dasein is exposed towards its singular projection of being-toward-death precludes Dasein from giving a metaphysical account of its subjectivity. Nancy claims that for Heidegger, "Death irremediably exceeds the resources of a metaphysics of the subject."²³ Accordingly, Heidegger's *Being and Time* marks the point at which "a metaphysics of the subject" could no longer be thought. This failure to fully account for the subject, the finitude of being and the abandonment of "identity", is a crucial part of the manner in which Nancy seeks to re-think community through the gestures of the deconstruction of Christianity.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger responds to the demand to "raise anew" the fundamental ontological question, "the question of the meaning of Being."²⁴ Primarily this is a question of what it means for something to exist, rather than not exist. In order to respond to this demand Heidegger must first of all ground his inquiry in some way; he does this by defining the human as the entity for which its very own being—the question—is an issue for it, and he names this being Dasein (Being here/there). It is impossible to give a comprehensive account of the existential analytic in the space afforded here, however, we can begin with the fact that "to be," as such, is to have an unavoidable and meaningful

²³ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.14.

²⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.1.

relationship with the “world.” This is the “horizon” of Being. When Heidegger describes Dasein as Being-in-the-world, this points to the fact that it is impossible to relate to the world in a non-contextual way. Even in the act of self-relating, the world and Dasein’s place in the world always already *is* in a certain way.²⁵ Heidegger claims that the most important aspect of our horizon is time, and the aim of his ontological inquiry is to interpret time as the horizon for understanding what we mean by being.²⁶

It is important to say something about “thrownness” and “falling,” so I can elaborate on how Dasein can be both “authentic” and “inauthentic” in how it relates to its “horizon.”²⁷ These are primary concerns for Heidegger, as it is only by way of authenticity that Dasein can take hold of its Being. To begin, Dasein “always-already” finds itself in the world in some way, Heidegger describes this way of being as its *Stimmung* (“mood”). This mood represents the way Dasein is *always* conducting (comporting) itself in some way, for which Heidegger uses the term *Befindlichkeit* which roughly translates as “attunement.” Accordingly, “thrownness” is how our *Befindlichkeit* reveals Dasein’s way of being always-already thinking, acting, and encountering the world in some way (the list is not meant to be exhaustive, just indicative). To put it simply, Dasein cannot step out of its current context or horizon and examine itself, it is always-already in the world; and, at the same time, it is that being for which Being is an issue or a question. Hence, in order to question being as Being, it is necessary to ask questions of being as an existent being (Dasein) that is always-already thrown. It is this hermeneutic circularity that Heidegger transposes into the question of the meaning of being, as it is precisely by ignoring the thrownness of Dasein that leads philosophy toward a false ontological picture of existence—the metaphysics of presence or ontotheology. Heidegger claims that traditional ontology (ontotheology) focuses on what it means “to be” by framing this ontological

²⁵ Heidegger naturally engages with Descartes on this point which I will not elaborate on here, however, I will give an account of Nancy’s engagement with Descartes in the fifth chapter.

²⁶ Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.19.

²⁷ In this and the following paragraph I draw upon the following sources: Marie-Eve Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*; Richard Port, *Heidegger: An Introduction*; Stephen Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*; Magda King, *A Guide to Heidegger’s Being and Time*.

question in terms of that which is present in the world; whether as substantial and measurable things, as the subject of self-conscious thought, and even eternal substance like God.²⁸ To question the meaning of these beings is necessarily posed by that under interrogation, humans, or more precisely Dasein, the being for which these questions are an issue. Accordingly, this approach misses the manner in which “to be” as Being is to be “always-already” in the world; and in particular, that our own Being, as Dasein, cannot be abstracted from the “attunement” of its “thrownness,” as such, in order to question (or be questioned). Thus, the hermeneutical circle, within which one finds oneself when one poses the question of what it means “to be,” is, Heidegger claims, ignored by traditional approaches to ontology.

Heidegger makes an important distinction in *Being and Time* between our “inauthentic” average everyday attunement to our being thrown, and the possibility of an “authentic” experience of the question of Being. In order to exist in the world in a general fashion, Dasein is inauthentic, characterised by a state of thrownness Heidegger calls *Verfallen* (“fallen”). Despite the perjorative tone it is necessary for Dasein to exist as fallen to get about its everyday tasks involved in living. As fallen, Dasein relates to the world as existing with *das Man* (“the they”), literally Dasein ‘does what one does’ in being-with “them”—being-with the world of others as *zuhanden* (“at hand” or “ready-to-hand”) and *vorhanden* (“objectively present” or “present-at-hand”). In order to relate to one’s existence in an *eigenlicht* (“authentic”) manner, Dasein must make its own the facts of existence. This happens when Dasein experiences the *Angst* (“dread” or “anxiety”) of *Verfallen*; where *Angst* is not of *zuhanden* and *vorhanden* (which would be “fear”), but rather, as Heidegger puts it, “*That in the face of which one has anxiety [das Wovor der Angst] is Being-in-the-world as such.*”²⁹ *Angst*, transcribed in the terms set out above as “the affirmation of failure”, is to face the fact of our existence; not that we are in such and such a place and time in a particular way, but rather *that we are at all*. Thus, *Angst* is that which “individualizes Dasein for its ownmost Being-in-the-world.”³⁰

²⁸ Port, *Heidegger*, pp.4-5.

²⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.230.

³⁰ *Ibid* p.232.

Anxiety brings Dasein face to face with its *being-free for* (*propensio in...*) the authenticity of its Being, and for this authenticity as a possibility which it always is. [Die Angst bringt Dasein vor sein *Friesen für...*(*propensio in...*) die Eigentlichkeit seines Seins als Möglichkeit, die es immer schon ist.]³¹

It is in *Angst* that Dasein comes upon the fact that it is not the ground of its own existence, that it does not ground the contextual conditions of experiencing the world, that it cannot overcome its own death. Nevertheless, while *Angst* might be the way in which Dasein's relation to the fact that she is something and somewhere rather than nothing, it is *Sorge* ("care") that brings together this *Angst* into an ontological picture of Dasein. Care³² is the ontological fact of Dasein's being-in-the-world, the hermeneutic circle at the heart of the question of Being; that Dasein is always already ahead of itself as thrown into the world, and cannot step back behind this "always already ahead" to some sort of original concept of Being.³³ Nancy describes the "to be" of existence as "the letting-be through which something is,"³⁴ which is to be "exposed to limits that are not at my disposal: birth, death, world."³⁵ Exposure to these limits is the essence of Heidegger's notion of finitude, and points to the lack of ontological totality that Being is as such.³⁶

Nancy's engagement with Heidegger begins at the level of Dasein's engagement with the world, as a world of Others; and the manner in which, according to Heidegger, this engagement is premised upon its authenticity (ownness) or inauthenticity. Importantly, Heidegger argues that the "world of Dasein is a with-world [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is Being-with Others."³⁷ Heidegger is

³¹ Ibid p.232.

³² *Sorgen* is perhaps the most elusive Heideggerian term in *Being and Time*, what I propose here is schematic at best.

³³ King, *A Guide to Heidegger's Being and Time*, p.99.

³⁴ Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p.185. I elaborate on this gesture in the following chapter. As Heidegger puts it, letting a being be the being that it is could perhaps be "the most difficult of tasks." "The Origin of the Work of Art" *Poetry Language Thought*, p.31.

³⁵ Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.25.

³⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.280.

³⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.155.

very clear on this point, there is no Being prior to Being-with, Being requires Dasein to be as such, and therefore is premised by being-with. The vicissitudes of the predicament of Being, as explained by Heidegger in relation to the encountering of Others, make clear the manner in which Heidegger himself attempts to rupture any notion of the absolute in his description of fundamental ontology.

...in characterizing the encountering of Others, one is again still oriented by that Dasein which is in each case one's own. But even in this characterization does one not start by marking out and isolating the 'I' so that one must then seek some way of getting over to the Others from this isolated subject? To avoid misunderstanding we must notice in what sense we are talking about 'the Others'. By 'Others' we do not mean everyone else but me—those over against whom the "I" stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself—those among whom one is too...This 'with' is something of the character of Dasein; the 'too' means a sameness of Being as circumspectively concerned Being-in-the-world...the world is always one that I share with Others.³⁸

So, far from articulating an isolated singular being, an individual that would constitute itself as a "subject" or as "human", or even as a differentiated discrete notion of "One"—Dasein is always with, alongside, amongst, the world of others as an other. That is to say, for Heidegger, Dasein as being-in-the-world, as thrown, is fundamentally co-originary.

One might thus understand Nancy as simply invigorating this inauthentic notion of being-with. This is, however, not only an over-simplification of Nancy's ontology, it is to misunderstand the role of authenticity and inauthenticity in Heidegger's existential analytic. As Marie-Eve Morin points out, "in the way the argument of Being and Time unfolds, the essential being-with is subordinated to an analysis of its improper face (inauthentic they) [or *das Man*] and its proper one (authentic people)."³⁹ Thus for Nancy, in order to think Being as more than

³⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp.154-5.

³⁹ Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.26.

“being-there” as existing in an authentic or inauthentic mode of relating to Others, but as fundamentally, from the very premise of thinking existence, as being-singular-plural, requires more than “a simple ‘readjustment’ of the Heideggerian discourse.”⁴⁰ For Nancy, being-with must be that with which we begin to even speak of existence.

For Heidegger, in our average everyday existence, our being-with is caught or fallen into an impersonal with one another. The “we” of this inauthentic being-with is on the one hand outside the possibility of authentic Dasein, that is to say, this “we” is separated from our authentic ontological mode of existence. On the other hand, this “we” has no relationality as such, it is simply a collection or multitude of entities. Through the mood of *Angst*, which comes about by resolutely facing the ownmost possibility of being-toward-death, Dasein is temporarily removed from this average everyday relating to the world. In this mode of “anticipatory resoluteness” Dasein comes into the authentic mode of Being, however, the anxiety of being-toward-death cannot be shared. As Heidegger remarks, “The dying of Others is not something which we experience in a genuine sense; at most we are always just ‘there alongside’.”⁴¹ Further along, Heidegger continues his analysis arguing that;

Death is Dasein’s ownmost possibility. Being toward this possibility discloses to Dasein its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, in which its very Being is the issue. Here it can become manifest to Dasein that in this distinctive possibility of its own self, it has been wrenched away from the “they”...The ownmost possibility is non-relational. Anticipation allows Dasein to understand that the potentiality-for-being in which its ownmost Being is an issue, must be taken over by Dasein alone. Death does not just ‘belong’ to one’s own Dasein in an undifferentiated way; death lays claim to it as an individual Dasein. The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualizes.⁴²

⁴⁰ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p.27.

⁴¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.282.

⁴² *Ibid* p.308.

Heidegger makes a concession to the importance of being-with in the constitution of Dasein, however, this being-with is always a relationality that stands against the individual Dasein of authentic “anticipatory resoluteness.” For Heidegger, the resoluteness of authentic Dasein, does not “detach” Dasein from the world, nor does it pose Dasein as “a free-floating ‘I,’”⁴³ nonetheless as we have noted from the passages above, Dasein is an individual in the world. Even if following his engagement with Schelling in 1936, and his lectures on *Ereignis* in 1937, Heidegger “shifts the focus from the freedom that engages the human Dasein in the “accomplishment of Being” to the freedom (the Open, the “free” region) to which the human Dasein accedes in answering to the event of Being’s advent”⁴⁴; nonetheless, the being-with that Heidegger is concerned about, is one in which the individual Dasein, sacrifices itself to the common cause of the community.⁴⁵ For Nancy, this mode of relating is one that “comes to a dead end” precisely because, as laid out by Heidegger, it is a pure instrumentalization of being-together that relates not to itself, but to “something other than itself.”⁴⁶

Heidegger on Community

Nancy’s engagement with Heidegger extends to a concern with the manner in which Heidegger succumbs to a parochial vision of the German people. Thus, despite the fact that, as Nancy writes, “[a]ll of Heidegger’s research into “being-for (or toward)-death” was nothing other than an attempt to state this: *I* is not – *am* not – a subject.”⁴⁷ It is nonetheless at the point where Heidegger comes upon the question of the community that he is unable to remain faithful to his own project. As Nancy argues;

when it came to the question of community as such, the same Heidegger went astray with his vision of a people and a destiny conceived at least in

⁴³ Ibid p.344.

⁴⁴ Fynsk, *The Inoperative Community*, p.xii.

⁴⁵ Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.27.

⁴⁶ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p.59.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

part as a subject, which proves no doubt that Dasein's "being-toward-death" was never radically implicated in its being-with—in *Mitsein*—and that it is this implication that remains to be thought.⁴⁸

In order to elaborate on why Nancy argues that Heidegger "went astray," it is useful to review one of Nancy's contemporary influences Lacoue-Labarthe, and how he approaches Heidegger in *Typography*, where he poses the question of "what was it that authorized, what did not forbid, in Heidegger's thought, the political commitment of 1933?"⁴⁹ That is to say, what was it in Heidegger's philosophy that allowed for the Rectoral address given by Heidegger in 1933, in which he pledged his allegiance to the Nazi regime? Lacoue-Labarthe begins by tracing the way Heidegger poses Dasein as caught within an inauthentic every-day relation to others as *das Man* (the they).⁵⁰ How might Dasein take hold of authentic existence and its own most possibility in light of this inauthentic community of others? As Lacoue-Labarthe puts it, according to Heidegger it remains possible for Dasein "to come as oneself into one's power-to-be", which "is each time to open up the possibility of a community, of a being-together...a community of language."⁵¹ However, Lacoue-Labarthe argues that the language of this "authentic" Dasein is perpetually laced with a sense of 'destiny' that will come to have parochial and racial overtones by his address in 1933, despite its pivotal importance as a concept for describing the temporal horizon of being, both in 1927 and in Heidegger's later work. As Heidegger declares in *Being and Time*,

But if fateful Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, exists essentially in Being-with-others, its historizing is a co-historizing [*ein Mitgeschehen*], and is determinative for it as *destiny* [*Geschick*]. This is how we designate the historizing of the community, of a people...Our fates have already been guided in advance, in our Being with one another in the same world and in our resoluteness for definite possibilities. Only in communicating and in struggling does the

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, p.271.

⁵⁰ The Macquarie & Robinson translation of *Being and Time*, which I have relied upon here, provides us with "the they" as the translation of the German *das Man* while warning not to take this "too literally" (Cf. p.149).

⁵¹ Ibid pp.284-5.

power of destiny become free.⁵²

The sticking point for Lacoue-Labarthe, as it is for Nancy, is the manner in which this destiny becomes attached to a people, and an ontology of the world, that is premised on the racial privilege of the German people. If, as Lacoue-Labarthe neatly summarizes, "The world...is the condition of the possibility of politics; and the essence of the political, that is to say, the fundamental political agency, is the community as people"⁵³; then, according to Heidegger, philosophy remains the organizing principle for how one might make sense of the political.⁵⁴ The question that consequently haunts this Heideggerian formula is why "should this privilege be accorded to the *German* people?...Why is the access of science [knowledge] to "power" made to depend on the access of the German people itself to "power," and inversely?"⁵⁵ It is precisely this privilege, given in his account of the German *Volk*, which relegates Heidegger's ontological commitment of community to the metaphysical paradigm. Heidegger's attempt to describe a fundamental ontology and closure of metaphysics fails at this crucial juncture where politics becomes the decisive intrusion into his own thinking on community, and, accordingly, "Heidegger's political commitment is undeniably "metaphysical," in the strictest and most powerful sense of the term."⁵⁶

In what follows I elaborate on how Nancy moves beyond Heidegger's metaphysical account of politics. In his essay *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy gives an account of what remains to be thought in Heidegger by engaging with Bataille's reading of community and death. I question the implications of this reading, and discuss how Nancy re-thinks the Heideggerian existential analytic as a *co*-existential analytic. Nancy begins this process by arguing that humankind experiences finitude through the opening of a being-*in*-common, which provides the experience of being through a fundamental sharing of existence. Nancy expands on this thought in his essay *Being Singular Plural*, where he seeks to re-

⁵² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, s74. Cited in Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, p.285.

⁵³ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*, p.285.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid p.296.

orientate the ontological significance of Heidegger's *Mitsein* (being-with). Thus, for the remainder of this section I outline how Bataille informs the ontology of being-singular-plural, and in the following two sections I explain how Nancy sets up this ontological shift in the significance of being-with.

Bataille on community and death

The possibility of rethinking community through the finitude of being-toward-death must be reworked in such a way as to bring together the radical finitude provided by Heidegger *into an experience of this finitude as community*. Indeed, it is only through such a conception of community that Nancy might give an account of community as inoperative. According to Nancy, it was ultimately Bataille who went furthest "into the crucial experience of the modern destiny of community."⁵⁷ We should bear in mind that Bataille (1897—1962) was writing through what was a transformative phase in how philosophy contemplated both politics and community, particularly in relation to how an experience of death was transformed in this period of history. Whereas, for Heidegger, the experience of the death of another can never be understood as an authentic existential experience of death, but is rather caught in our inauthentic relation to others as *das Man* (the they), Bataille conceived our experience in witnessing death in an inverse fashion. Indeed, it was in our experience of the death of another that was for Bataille a window into our own sense of mortality.⁵⁸ Thus, in a complete about-face of Heidegger's existential analytic, for Bataille, it is only through our access to the mortality of others that community itself comes into existence.⁵⁹ Describing Bataille's thought, Nancy remarks that death "is indissociable from community, for it is through death that the community reveals itself—and reciprocally."⁶⁰ However, while this access is a necessary premise for community as such, it is not to say that the death of another brings some ground or horizon to our own existence within community. Instead, it is the sense in which, "Death irremediably ex-

⁵⁷ Nancy, *Inoperative Community*, p.16. Cited in James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p.178.

⁵⁸ James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p.180.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.14.

ceeds the resources of philosophy.”⁶¹ Thus by thinking the existence of community through the irremediable excess of death, Nancy makes his case for the inoperative or ungrounded community.

Nancy thus turns to Bataille in order to evoke why the mortality of others provides an affirmation of community, one that must remain a shared space of exposure to our finite existence. While maintaining the Heideggerian formula of finitude, Nancy argues, Bataille provides an account of community as the “presentation to its members of their mortal truth.”⁶² Furthermore, Bataille’s use of the term “ecstasy” to express how subjectivity itself is called into question by the experience of “mortal truth,” allows Nancy to provide an account of the refusal of “totality” I discussed in chapter two; in the sense of both “individuality” and “pure collective totality.”⁶³ “Ecstasy” is what is always outside or in excess of itself, the question for Nancy becomes how to give justice to the “*being-ecstatic of Being itself?*”⁶⁴ As Nancy puts it,

...one could not properly say that the singular being is the subject of ecstasy, for ecstasy has no “subject”—but one must say that ecstasy (community) happens *to* the singular being.⁶⁵

This is a crucial point for Nancy, as it allows him to posit an ontological account of being-with, while at the same time maintaining a critical break from the metaphysics implied in an *essence* of community. Nancy begins his account of Bataille by quoting the gesture of being-outside-itself, where community is put in terms of an exposure to finitude. In Bataille’s account, witnessing the death of its “fellow-being” brings being to the point of being “*outside itself,*” and it is community that allows being-ecstatic to exist in this way; furthermore, the “intensity of death” is what *gives* community, without giving community an essence.⁶⁶ Community is the disposition of being, existing outside itself, as a “between” that is

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid p.15.

⁶³ Ibid p.6.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid p.7.

⁶⁶ Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol.7 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970) pp.245-46. Cited in Ibid pp.15-6.

shared; a sharing that relates directly to finitude of being.

Nancy also calls upon Bataille in order to remain vigilant against the continual call for the restoration of the "loss of meaning," which he expresses as "nostalgia" that would turn the inoperative sense of being-toward-death into a *work* of death. Bataille recognized this notion of "nostalgia" as a restoration that created the conditions of totalitarianism in Nazi Germany, conditions that would lead to the two-fold "work of death" in the atrocities of the *Shoah* and the sacrifice of Germany to the cause of the Third Reich. It was because of these conditions that Bataille rejected his once held obsession with sacrifice (*communion*), which he sought for its exemplary purity as a form of communal mortality. In his reaction to the barbarisms of Nazi Germany, Bataille rejected the *sense of loss* of community, and "came to understand the ridiculous nature of all nostalgia for communion."⁶⁷ As I indicated above, this "sense of loss" is a powerful force in the institution of metaphysics, the call for restoration or the lamentation of 'what once was' or 'could come again' are motifs that continually seek to repair or produce the work of community, and take the (no) place of the *inoperative*.

It is in Bataille's rejection of nostalgia that we come again to the crucial motif of abandonment that Nancy will turn to throughout his deconstruction of Christianity, and to which I will return in the following chapter. There is likewise a connection between the being-ecstatic and suffering of a lack, in that lack disrupts totality. Furthermore, the rejection of nostalgia should be read as a rejection of Heidegger's call to the German *Volk*.⁶⁸ Bataille describes the "inner experience" that the "sense of loss" might inspire, if we abandon the nostalgia of a return, in the following terms.

The truth is that we can suffer from something we lack...if it is true that something essential is missing from the world in which it collapsed, then we can only go further ahead, without imagining even for a moment the possi-

⁶⁷ Ibid p.17.

⁶⁸ We should not be afraid to draw the obvious conclusion here, Bataille is rejecting Heideggerian authenticity, particularly the authentic being-toward-death. To show this in any detail is far beyond the scope of this dissertation.

bility of turning back.⁶⁹

This “lack from which we suffer” is the reversal, or inversion, of the “nostalgia for lost community” into the experience of a lack or lacuna around which this “suffering” revolves. Nancy translates this “inner experience” of Bataille into the paradoxical formulation of what might otherwise be signified by the death of God—that “Sovereignty is NOTHING”⁷⁰—in which being, suffering from a constitutive lack of ground, becomes the experience of a powerful affirmation of abandonment. As Nancy has commented, the notion of abandon is “more than a topic: it is the way and the task of thinking.”⁷¹ Nancy responds to Bataille’s “suffering” with the task of thinking abandonment (more properly it would be to “think with abandon”), to experience being as the lacuna of absence in the place of sovereignty, as an excess to be embraced with abandon.

Which is to say that sovereignty is the sovereign exposure to an excess (to a transcendence) that does not present itself and does not let itself be appropriated (or simulated), that does not even *give* itself – but rather to which being is abandoned.⁷²

This is an opening of a world within the world, a being-*in*-common, being exposed to the excessive dimension of finitude as the unfolding experience of community. The exposure, in community, to one’s mortality; is the exposure of being to a finitude that cannot be reconciled with being. Community remains irrevocably beyond being, while remaining the necessary exposure to being of its finitude, as the un-workable (*infinite*) limit of being-*in*-common in which we experience the *passage* of sense. This un-workable limit is what provides the “between”, or *partes extra partes*, which is what precisely enables a *passage* of sense; a concept I will cover in more detail in chapter five on the body. We experience our existence as being-ecstatic (being outside itself), existing at the in-

⁶⁹ Bataille *O.C.* 8:275; Cited in *Ibid* p.18.

⁷⁰ *Ibid* p.18.

⁷¹ Nancy, Correspondence via email, 23 November 2012.

⁷² Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.18.

commensurable and excessive limit that is an exposure to finitude. It is the fact of being-ecstatic that describes the *inoperative* dimension of our Being-*in*-common, both of which are governed by the incommensurable excess that is our death. Being outside one-self is a spacing and a disposition of being, an opening of a world within the world, a *transimmanence* of sense.

The impossibility of an “essence” or “communion” of community is, for Bataille, what reveals the role of community in the finitude of being. This will guide Nancy’s rethinking of Heidegger’s fundamental ontology in terms of an opening and spacing or disposition of being. As Nancy argues, for Bataille, community is “neither a work to be produced, nor a lost communion, but rather as space itself, and the spacing of the experience of the outside, of the outside-of-self.”⁷³ For Nancy, “to be” is to neither be an individual in the atomistic sense of selfhood relating to the world that remains outside-the-self, nor is being a being-common, shaped and articulated through a synergistic or communal relation to the world.

However, according to Nancy a problem exists in the way Bataille has framed the excess of the subject through terms of communication that “leads Bataille back to the core of a constant thematic in speculative idealism.”⁷⁴ As James explains, Nancy remains concerned with “Bataille’s thinking of a residual and unthought legacy of the subject.”⁷⁵ On the one hand, Nancy agrees with Bataille’s call to reject a community of being in which death remains an ontological dimension of solitary being. Thought in this way, being does not allow the thought of openness provided by excessive dimension of a shared relation to finitude, and it is this excessive dimension of being as *outside itself* that opens the space for community.⁷⁶ On the other hand, Bataille remains caught by the “(Hegelian/Kojevan) language of subject-object relation,” such that in thinking past the “logic of subjectivity” he remains within the language and thought of the subject.⁷⁷ According to Nancy, the way Bataille thinks of alterity and the other, is al-

⁷³ Ibid p.19.

⁷⁴ Ibid p.23. I rely heavily on Ian James’ account in this paragraph.

⁷⁵ James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p.183.

⁷⁶ Ibid p.184.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

ways within the communicative framework of subject-object language, and hence at an ontological level, the other remains a representation of the subject.⁷⁸ As Nancy puts it, "a thinking of the subject thwarts a thinking of community."⁷⁹

As such, Heidegger remains the pivotal point of reference for Nancy's ontological project, a project that seeks to extend Heidegger's fundamental ontology beyond the ontic relation Dasein maintains with *das Man*. Bataille provides a useful supplement to Heidegger by indicating the excessive dimension of shared finitude and the possibility of re-thinking being from the ontological premise of being-with. Notwithstanding Bataille's shortcomings, Nancy will seek to extend the Heideggerian motif of *Mitsein* beyond its ontic roots by reworking Heidegger's fundamental ontology through a difficult and complex ontology of being-singular-plural. In what follows I will focus on one manner in which we might read how Nancy undertakes this project through an engagement with Heidegger on the theme of *Mitsein*.

III. L'UN-AVEC-L'AUTRE

There are a thousand paths that have never yet been walked; a thousand healths and hidden islands of life. Human being and human earth are still unexhausted and undiscovered.⁸⁰

In light of this Nietzschean epigraph, consider Heidegger's assertion: "Every humanism is either grounded in a metaphysics or is itself made to be the ground of one. Every determination of the essence of man that already presupposes an interpretation of being without asking about the truth of Being, whether knowingly or not, is metaphysical."⁸¹ Heidegger rejects humanism because it is a

⁷⁸ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.24.

⁷⁹ Ibid p.23.

⁸⁰ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p.58.

⁸¹ Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, p.202.

thinking of the human in which the “-ism” provides the explicit thought of relating being to some higher *presupposition* that governs how we might understand the “human.” Humanism relates to something beyond the material and unique sense of a human, where this something beyond captures the essence of humanism.

In this section I want to show how Nancy understands the stakes in Heidegger’s critical stance on humanism through this Nietzschean gesture. By extending the ontological language of Dasein’s exposure to the world to include the inauthentic mode of *Mitsein*—with the caveat that this be read according to Nancy’s sense of the Being-*in-common*—the “truth of Being” can only be asked within the opening of a community without essence. In light of this gesture, I propose to read Nancy as rewording Heidegger in the following way: Every determination of the essence of community that already presupposes an interpretation of common-being without asking about the truth of *Mitsein*, whether knowingly or not, is a metaphysics of the human. More than a question of the truth of *Mitsein*, this is also a suspension of that determination in which the truth of *Mitsein* remains always *l’avenir*. Without this suspension *Mitsein* becomes part of a totality of immanence, caught by the conflation of individuality and the pure collective, which is a key gesture in the transition to totalitarianism. If this formula is to have any meaning, however, this cannot be a purely temporal gesture. As I will show below, the purely linear temporal suspension of meaning is precisely how totality functions. Instead, I focus on how totality itself provides its own incompleteness, its own undoing, in the sense that the structure of the absolute is self-deconstructing. The space that opens within the absolute is what allows for an outside, and provides the other of thought which makes sense possible. This opening mirrors the “thousand paths” through which the human remains to be discovered.

The stakes for Nancy are clear, where the fundamental indictment with which he charges the modern age is, “the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community.”⁸² The catastrophe implicit in the metaphysics of the subject, implied as Heidegger claims in any sense of humanism, must be

⁸² Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.1.

rejected for the sake of community.

As I set out in chapter two, it is impossible to consider the increasing intensity of violence (both implicit and explicit) within our global existence without surmising that this “earth is anything but a sharing of humanity.”⁸³ According to Nancy, globalization—as the “agglomeration” of meaning and equivalency of value—has produced conditions in which the sense of the human has no sense beyond a totality of equivalency. It is in this concept of complete equivalency across all aspects of “sense,” in other words the capacity to translate “value” in every sense and hence a “mono-valence of value,” that for Nancy is indicative of the complete lack of “sense” in the particular way that he conceives it. The “totality of equivalency” indicates a closure or limit boundary around value that allows it to function within an economy of equivalency. Furthermore, this closure is symptomatic of a more general epistemological closure concerning the human; the sense of the human as something to be “signified” has become a “saturation”⁸⁴ of that signification. This saturation points to the necessity of enclosing value in order for it to function within the economy of equivalency, which is evidence of an enclosure of human significance beyond the systemic facets of this “economy”.

If the *human* remains to be discovered beyond the limits of this enclosure, then the very project of humanism itself is called into question by the stakes of Nancy’s reading of the three orientating themes within this dissertation—the secular, globalization, and community. All of which forms a touchstone for the key gestures in Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity that have guided my dissertation to this point—loss, abandonment, *l’avenir*. As Nancy argues in *Dis-Enclosure*, “the so-called civilization of humanism...is bankrupt or in its death-throes.”⁸⁵ In *Adoration* he again argues that we must return all that we have thought of *l’homme* to the workshop for re-questioning.⁸⁶ The basis of my argument for approaching these questions is the assessment that what has been covered thus far, and in particular the motif of abandonment, forms a continuous

⁸³ Ibid p.xi.

⁸⁴ Ibid p.xiii. These two motifs—“agglomeration” and “saturation” function together in Nancy’s trope.

⁸⁵ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.2.

⁸⁶ Nancy, *L’Adoration*, p.14.

intersection that cuts across the thought of Nancy—extended and reworked extensively to be sure throughout his *œuvre* but without any significant break or turn. The ontology of being-singular-plural is not a separate concern for Nancy from these questions, more importantly, however, this ontology is a key gesture in Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity as a way of re-thinking the human. Furthermore, the manner in which Nancy invokes creation *ex nihilo* in terms of a *passage* of sense forms a critical part of Nancy's deconstruction. The ontology of being-singular-plural brings the concept of the "between" that opens for this *passage* of sense into clearer focus. As I will elaborate in the final chapter, the notion of *touch* will bring this ontology into an engagement with the figure of Christ and Christianity, and adds a further dimension to how Nancy expresses the concept of "between." Put another way, the deconstruction of Christianity is the exposure of thinking to this ontology, as precisely that which allows thinking in its shared finitude.

By considering the closure that marks the project of metaphysics through the lens of deconstruction, the circularity that enables this closure to function is brought into focus. Certainly this closure is precisely what makes "possible" the *production* of an end in how one approaches the meaning of the human. At the same time, it is "thought" itself that drives this production through its relentless search for the truth of the human—the production of thought, and thought as production. Derrida calls this the "thinking of the end of man," which, as he writes, "is always already prescribed in metaphysics, in the thinking of the truth of man."⁸⁷ Nancy describes this closure as the "immanence of man to man,"⁸⁸ an immanence of the human in which the meaning and signification of the human has collapsed into its own signification. A state (State) or situation in which the community of the human becomes its own work and fashioning, and community as such becomes the product or work of this "immanence of man to man." As Critchley argues, by "immanentism" Nancy is describing a totalitarianism in which "power has no outside, it is the total immanence of the social in the political."⁸⁹ A key claim of this dissertation unfolds here, primarily that this

⁸⁷ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, p.121.

⁸⁸ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.3.

⁸⁹ Critchley, *Re-tracing the political*, p.78.

“immanentism”—in the retreat of “the political” and drive toward an essence of community—forms an integral part of the deconstruction of Christianity. Furthermore, there is a link between “immanentism” and the gesture of self-deconstruction in Christianity that I elaborated in the first chapter.

The “immanence of man to man” is not the “exclusive” humanism described by Taylor, in which our understanding of the human is wholly framed within the immanent sphere of scientific epistemology. Rather, through the body of the *arisen* Christ, humanity is orientated toward its closure by that separation of Christ from the world.⁹⁰ Bataille describes this modality of the human as *the lack from which we suffer*, and Nancy, tracing Bataille’s thought describes this as the “humanist Christian consciousness of the loss of community.”⁹¹ This *absent-presence*, for which Christ provides the strongest symbolic event in the Western milieu, is the guiding gesture at the heart of “the end of man.”⁹² The “absence—” of an organising transcendent force in “the world” provides its closure and transfers the power to signify to the human; the “—presence” is the ongoing “*lack from which we suffer*” which feeds the restlessness at the heart of the human, and drives the will to make truth. Indeed, the very separation of this gesture imparts to it a certain stability, which belies its restlessness (the inherent instability and perpetual play at its heart). How Christianity continues to function in this way does not form a continuous narrative, instead we might consider it a gesture that continues to echo within the closure of metaphysics as an orientating paradigm. Furthermore, “Christ” has continued to function throughout modernity and into the present, because the role “He” plays is one in which “He” remains absent, and in this absence “permits” a metaphysics of subjectivity.

I want to take another approach to how this *absent-presence* functions: As I covered in chapter one, according to Nietzsche the will-to-truth drives the human to seek truth at the expense of Christianity itself. In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche gives a detailed account of how Christianity formed the conditions in which truth became a moral necessity through the ascetic ideal.⁹³

⁹⁰ I explore this in more detail in chapter five.

⁹¹ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.11.

⁹² Recalling my discussion of Gauchet in chapter two.

⁹³ Cf. Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow*.

In Book V of *The Gay Science*, written in the same period, Nietzsche describes this necessity as the “unconditional will to truth”, which is the “conviction” that “truth is more important than anything else.”⁹⁴ Nietzsche goes on to describe a hidden “will to death” that functions within the will to truth, because the will to truth affirms a language of meaning at the expense of the inherent deception and meaninglessness of life. The will to truth affirms another world while denying the restlessness of the world in which the human dwells.⁹⁵ This “will to death” cannot be understood in terms of a binary of two worlds, which would be to miss the nuance of Nietzsche’s thought. Rather there are two competing paradigms which work together to create the totalizing paradigm of the absolute, and the space opened up by their contradiction is the opening within which sense dwells. The loss of meaning perpetually represented by Christianity, forces the human to search for this loss in what appears before it; however, appearance only functions to reflect this loss back upon the human as its own inherent flaw.

The human is then presented with a decision in confronting this flaw. The human may consider appearance, and hence “the world”, as inherently flawed; in which case, “the world” is a fallen space, cut off from the transcendent purity of meaning. Or, alternatively, the flaw resides in human understanding, which lacks some aspect of truth which would give us a complete picture; in which case, “the world” must have some organising totality or completeness (understood in the ethico-political sphere as law, or in the scientific-rational sphere as rule) that remains to be discovered, but which the human must nonetheless continue to strive toward. In both cases, we have a totality within which our will-to-truth is orientated by a loss, and to which it is driven to complete without ever achieving satisfaction.

In everyday existence one becomes caught in some aspect of this totality, such that the decision I describe above deceives one into attributing freedom where there is none. While the human functions within this totality it remains an “immanentism”, unable to think ‘the other of thought’, and hence cut off from the experience of freedom. Furthermore, lacking an outside, the sense of the

⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, s344.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

individual and the collective loses its distinction, as the meaning of the human conflates around the drive to produce what Derrida calls the “ends of the man.” At issue here is not *if* the subject is orientated around the paradigm of totality, the point is whether one is capable of thinking within this metaphysics of the subject in such a way that its self-deconstructive gestures provide an opening of a world within which “we” can dwell. Where are the potential sites of emancipation from the ongoing threat of “immanentism”? How can we overcome the way a metaphysics of subjectivity continues to orientate a political-onto-theology, which provides community with an essence and common-being? And, indeed, how can it be possible to rethink the human in such a way that it remains to be discovered?

I begin to answer these questions through Nancy’s engagement with Heideggerian fundamental ontology in which he calls for an ontology of being-singular-plural, an ontology in which “every presupposition of Being must consist in its nonpresupposition.”⁹⁶ This ontology begins with a thinking that is no longer orientated by what it lacks, but instead occurs within the opening provided by the deconstruction of metaphysics of the subject, what Nancy terms a “finite thinking.” Thinking itself that remains in touch with the limit of its own singular-plural or shared finitude, and the possibility put into play by thinking at the “limit” this finitude implies.⁹⁷ In *A Finite Thinking*, Nancy provides the coordinates for this thinking by engaging with *sense* as a concept. His argument hinges on the way sense is always an affection, a relating that is “to itself as to another or to some other,”⁹⁸ such that this relating is a “between.” Collapsing this between is precisely what happens with “immanentism,” which Nancy is contrasting here to the openness of sense that is not an openness to some opening outside the world, but rather an openness within the world that is the difference of its relating.

Sense is the openness of a relation to itself: what initiates it, what engages it, what maintains it *to* itself, in and by the difference of its relation...The *to* of

⁹⁶ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p.56.

⁹⁷ Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p.5.

⁹⁸ *Ibid* p.6.

the to itself, along with all the values that we can give it...is first and foremost the fissure, the gap, the spacing of an opening.⁹⁹

This gap is the restlessness of thought itself, sense suspended by the limits of the decision, in which the competing perspectives of totality become the conditions of this limit. Sense is never a totality, it is the crack that opens within the difference of its relation to the limits of totality. This opening only occurs when sense is abandoned to the act of relating, rather than drawn back into itself. A sense of sense that occurs through being only when being is abandoned, "only once this being—to itself no longer belongs to itself, no longer comes back to itself."¹⁰⁰ This guiding gesture, that I wager began with his concerns in *Le Retrait Du Politique* from 1983, becomes Nancy's attempt to rethink Heideggerian fundamental ontology through *Being Singular Plural*, in which this "between" as opening becomes the minimal ontological premise of the "with."

Being is put into play as the "with" that is absolutely indisputable. From now on, this is the minimal ontological premise. Being is put into play among us; it does not have any other meaning except the dis-position of this "between."¹⁰¹

Being, understood as the between, *l'entre-étant* (the "among-being"¹⁰²) and *l'un-avec-l'autre* ("the one, each one, with another"¹⁰³), is the ontological premise of being in the middle-voice. The sense of being in the *passage* "between" that is the "with" of existence. Here, Nancy abjures the paradigm of totality in both "individuality" and the "pure collective," both of which are premised upon an *absent-presence* that enables this totality. This is precisely why Nancy begins his ontological treatise of being-singular-plural with a critique of false memory, a critique of that which laments the loss of meaning that might be rekindled through some reinscribed anamnesis, which would allow one to access a past

⁹⁹ Ibid pp.6-7.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid p.8.

¹⁰¹ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p.27.

¹⁰² Ibid p.16.

¹⁰³ Ibid p.26.

position of knowing. I have already covered this loss of meaning in my discussion above, however, I want to pause for a moment to consider what Derrida is picturing in *The Ends of Man* when he argues:

What is difficult to think today is an end of man which would not be organized by a dialectics of truth and negativity, an end of man which would not be a teleology in the first person plural. The we, which articulates natural and philosophical consciousness with each other in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, assures the proximity to itself of the fixed and central being for which this circular reappropriation is produced. The we is the unity of absolute knowledge and anthropology, of God and man, of onto-theo-teleology and humanism. "Being" and language—the group of languages—that the we governs or opens: such is the name of that which assures the transition between metaphysics and humanism via the we.¹⁰⁴

The ability to say "we" characterises a certain position of plurality, a discursive mark that implies authority and a weight of numbers, which allows one to speak from a place within "community." At the same time, to say "we" is to claim a space of signification within the world, it is to open up the world and be open to the world as an origin of sense. Here the "I" is presented with the force of a desire to be (or, become) an origin of sense. The "I," if it is to step into the world in order to become part of the "we," is presented with the challenge of becoming *intelligible* in some fashion to the "we." This notion of *intelligibility* is thus caught within the circular logic of a "saturation" of signification described above. This is the anxiety of becoming *intelligible*, of making sense of one's self as part of the "we" where there is no clear origin or Law upon which one might attach oneself. To simply be an origin, that is allowed to present itself within the world, comes from the necessity of saying "we"; a "we" that functions even in the absence of any meaning to this "we," where the absence of any meaning to the "we" might signal something more significant, an absence that functions specifically as denial.

In *Being Singular Plural* Nancy engages with this denial of absence by

¹⁰⁴ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, p.121.

considering the implications for dwelling *within* this absence. To claim that “we have lost meaning” is to frame meaning, however, as I have already noted, this is to frame meaning in such a way that it functions through both its absence and the promise of a return. The very notion that we have lost meaning gives meaning a sense of truth, and indeed privileges precisely those who make this claim. It places them in a position of “mastery” as the one who can recognise meaning in its absence; one who could recognise meaning if it were there, and can speak in its absence. The *absent-presence* of meaning, and the enunciation of this absence, gives this absent meaning both its power and structural stability.

What the paradigm of “loss” reveals is the relation of the *absent-presence* of meaning with a *place* of meaning that also lacks presence. By beginning his ontological exploration in this way, Nancy immediately juxtaposes the absence of meaning to the gap that forms a lacuna in the split subject between the enunciated and enunciation of signification itself. Nancy describes this split in two texts: Firstly, in *Ego Sum*,¹⁰⁵ Nancy interrogates what Derrida in his essay *Cogito and the History of Madness*¹⁰⁶ reveals as the space that opens up between the “foundational event or instant of the Cogito and its representation in language or discourse.”¹⁰⁷ This expresses how the Cogito is separated from the very *logos* in which the Cogito must be inscribed if it is to make sense. Secondly, in *Logodaedalus*,¹⁰⁸ Nancy argues that Kant grounds the philosophy of his *Critique* in a “philosophical discourse” which can only be as such in contrast to what it is not, literature.¹⁰⁹ According to Nancy, within Kant’s *Critique* the foundation of philosophical discourse is premised upon a split that it itself is founding; the text must already be speaking from a position of authority in order to ground its authority to do so. If, “we ourselves are meaning,” then we must recall the dynamic Nancy posits between the call for meaning, and, the position of the subject of meaning—in other words, “the immanence of man to man,” where “man” is the enunciator of the meaning of “man.” This split at the heart of

¹⁰⁵ C.f. Nancy, *Ego Sum*. I come back to this point in chapter five.

¹⁰⁶ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, pp.36-76.

¹⁰⁷ James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p.55.

¹⁰⁸ Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope: Logodaedalus*.

¹⁰⁹ I rely here on the account of James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p.42.

the subject, what one might call the ungraspable nature of subjectivity, is the opening between the enunciation of a ground and the enunciator which must already stand upon that ground in order to make such an enunciation. Thus, Nancy will posit meaning as that which always and only is negotiated "between us"—in other words, meaning is not what takes place through signification or representation. As Nancy puts it, "this 'between us' would not be exhausted by the codes of 'significance'."¹¹⁰

What Nancy signals in this gesture is not the notion of the split subject in Lacanian terms, in fact he accords Lacan with "an effectuation of a metaphysics of the Subject" which at the same time forgets the "metaphysics (or onto-theology) which it perpetuates."¹¹¹ Meaning is not something that exceeds signification in the sense that meaning cannot be wholly contained within signification, nor can we describe some minimal order of signification which defies our modality of thinking, or some archaic chain of signification that we cannot decode. Rather meaning is that which is in play between us (The sense of play is important here, and we might speculate relates directly to Derrida's notion of "The Hinge" or *La Brisure*,¹¹² where Derrida puts into play the motif of "the trace," as that which "does not let itself be summed up in the simplicity of a present."¹¹³), a between us that is our being *in* common, or being-together, in meaning. The "we" of being-*in*-common is that which opens the space for meaning, and at the same time the common itself only occurs "in the element of meaning."¹¹⁴ Meaning is that which comes prior to signification and any sense of signification we might imagine, such that meaning is to be understood wholly as "presentation," "coming to presence," or "birth to presence," without any

¹¹⁰ Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, p.57.

¹¹¹ Translation of Nancy, *Ego Sum*, p.13. in James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p.50. James argues that according to Nancy, "Lacan is engaged in a discourse of theoretical mastery: the splitting of the subject comes to it from the big Other, from the law of the symbolic which constitutes it, by dividing it and thus reinscribing it within an economy of lack. In this way the true subject of subjectivity is identified as Other and at the same time the discourse of psychoanalysis which masters and theorizes this negative identity is authenticated and given its authority. Thus, according to *Le Titre de la lettre*, the alterity which constitutes and alienates subjectivity is subordinated to and mastered by the discourse of psychoanalytic theory." p.49.

¹¹² Cf. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp.65-73.

¹¹³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p.66.

¹¹⁴ Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, p.61.

rejoinder.

The closure of metaphysics, the “absolute immanence of man to man” leaves us with nothing but the individual, the metaphysics of the subject—“metaphysics of the absolute for-itself.”¹¹⁵ The absolute closed off from all relation, standing resolutely alone, is the premise of all atomism and any notion of the individual which continues to function within the premise of metaphysics. What the metaphysics of the Subject (absolute for-itself) reveals in the closure of metaphysics brought about by the dissolution of community, is the self-undoing structure of the absolute. The absolute *qua* absolute produces an impossible logic which demonstrates an incompleteness that is constitutive of being and makes it possible to consider an ontology of being-singular-plural. It is worth quoting Nancy’s thought in *The Inoperative Community* in full here, as this reveals a fundamental premise of the ontological position upon which he will expand his notion of being-singular-plural.

A simple and redoubtable logic will always imply that within its very separation the absolutely separate encloses, if we can say this, more than what is simply separated. Which is to say that the separation itself must be enclosed, that the closure must not only close around a territory (while still remaining exposed, at its outer edge, to another territory, with which it thereby communicates), but also, in order to complete the absoluteness of its separation, around the enclosure itself. The absolute must be the absolute of its own absoluteness, or not be at all. In other words: to be absolutely alone, it is not enough that I be so; I must also be alone being alone—and this of course is contradictory. The logic of the absolute violates the absolute. It implicates it in a relation that it refuses and precludes by its essence. This relation tears and forces open, from within and from without at the same time, and from an outside that is nothing other than the rejection of an impossible interiority, the ‘without relation’ from which the absolute would constitute itself.¹¹⁶

Nancy’s conclusion that the logic of the absolute *violates* the absolute, brings a measure of contingency into the “oneness” of being; in the sense that the

¹¹⁵ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.4.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

absolute relies upon transcendent forms that provide an Ideal from which we might understand the world and the place of the human form within the world (whilst ever standing apart and unable *to be* part of that world), at the same time it disrupts the possibility of positing a one-ness to the particular place of the human, as a being in the world that stands apart in its particularity within the world. The notion of an absolute, as a guiding authority for human ontology, or a guiding authority for the world as such, disrupts itself in its own gesture. What Nancy thus puts into play is the authority of Heidegger's fundamental ontology, and the important figure of Dasein in its finitude, while at the same time, reiterating the importance of thinking finitude through a notion of shared existence.

The Absolute, in any formulation, thus provides the point of departure for Nancy's notion of *transimmanence*, that is, the exposure to transcendence, as a fundamental point of natality, is completely immanent and opens within the immanent frame of the world itself. Again, it is useful to recall the manner in which this departs from Taylor's formulation of the immanent frame. For Nancy, while it is manifestly the case that we are caught within an immanent frame, to provide an opening of this frame it is not necessary to recall some (even weak) transcendent opening. Instead what Nancy provides is an ontology that allows the "birth to presence" of an opening that comes from within the immanence of the world itself. In his gesture of *transimmanence* Nancy provides a manner of thinking contingency as that fundamental opening within the world to the to-come (*l'avenir*). There is a contingency to the world, but one that remains completely necessary and immanent to the world itself through the shared space of finitude.

The full implication of this reading of the absolute becomes clear when we consider the relationship between the rupture of the absolute and the Heideggerian notion of *Eigentlichkeit* (authenticity, propriety, or ownness). As we know, *eigen* in German means "own" or "separate" or even "distinct"—thus one translation of Heideggerian authenticity might be "what is one's own." The question that Nancy confronts is precisely "What can we say about the 'ownness' of Dasein in light of the rupture of the absolute?" Hence, how might we think through the implications raised by Nancy in what I have covered thus far in

relation to the *Eigentlichkeit* of Dasein, and in particular, how it relates to Heidegger's authentic reading of being-toward-death?

By reinscribing the event of being (*Ereignis*) into the existential analytic of *Being and Time*, Nancy wants to emphasise "the singular nature of the event wherein Dasein opens to Being,"¹¹⁷ in order show how this singularity is possible at all only through an exposure to its plurality. Through this emphasis, being-singular-plural is what provides the possibility of a *transimmanence* of existence by rethinking the notion of temporality in *le futur* as *l'avenir*, which is the possibility of thinking both the historical and the future alongside one-another and always "to-come." Nancy's thought breaks down the inauthentic and authentic modes of Dasein's relating to being-in-the-world according to his reading of Bataille's notion of *ecstasy*, imposing the self-rupturing logic of the absolute on Dasein's singularity and opening that singularity to its own impossibility. *On the one hand*, as an all-encompassing totality that governs Heidegger's being-in-the-world; and, *on the other hand*, as the totality, in which Dasein itself is governed in absolute terms. While I am not claiming that this would satisfy Heidegger's fundamental ontology, it nonetheless presents a logic into which he may be caught if the full possibility of *Ereignis* is not thought in terms of a shared finitude rather than the finitude of Dasein.

The logic of the absolute is self-rupturing, and we should precisely read this rupture as a rupture of the authentic mode of Dasein formulated in the Heideggerian individual. By reading Nancy's "logic of the absolute" against the notion of an individual that precedes the "with," I want to pose the following scenario. The individual, if it is to be an individual, must identify itself absolutely as separated and self-reflexively discrete in some way from its surroundings, which is to say, the individual must have a limit. However, if the individual is to be absolute, if it is to be thought of as an individual, and, even only in a minimal way, as a sovereign autonomous subject, then the enclosure of the individual must include more than what is simply separated—the *enclosure* of the individual must thus include an excessive dimension. This excess opens the very notion of the subject, such that the excessive dimension of the individual is the

¹¹⁷ Fynsk, *The Inoperative Community*, p.xiii.

exposure to its limit as finite existence. An exposure that is like-wise the point of co-appearance and communication with others. As such, this exposure must be included and closed within individual in order for the individual to be considered as singular. However, this enclosed outer limit must also be *exposed* in order for the individual to have a boundary and be capable of communication and co-appearance. The individual thereby contains both more than what it is and less than what it should be, the singularity of the individual is always *touching and touched* by the plurality of its being-in-the-world. It is the being-with that is its exposure to the world, which implicates its being as not a closed autonomous individual, but as co-originarily radically exposed—as being-ecstatic, or being beside itself.

This is why Nancy will argue that “The logic of the absolute violates the absolute.”¹¹⁸ The logic of the individual, which is the principle logic of subjectivity at work in the metaphysics of the subject, is split by the fundamental and originary relation of being to the world. Even if the emerging subject is to be thought simply as a body in its singularity and distinctness, this presence in the world is, and must be, as Nancy puts it, “impossible except as copresence.”¹¹⁹ “I” am always already posed and exposed to—touching—the world.

IV. ...AND JUSTICE FOR MITSEIN

This reading of being-ecstatic explains why Nancy is critical of Heidegger’s iteration of *Mitsein* in the existential analytic of *Being and Time*, arguing that despite the fact that Heidegger moves past this analytic, and that the analytic is far from complete, it nonetheless continues to be the touch-stone for all of Heidegger’s and Heideggerian thinking.¹²⁰ In the analytic of *Mitsein*, Heidegger

¹¹⁸ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.4.

¹¹⁹ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p.62.

¹²⁰ *Ibid* p.93.

describes two scenarios; in the first we have the undifferentiated being-alongside-others as *das Man* ("the They") in which Dasein becomes lost in mediocrity and noise, in the other we have Dasein authentically understanding others.¹²¹ In neither case, Nancy claims, does Heidegger do "justice" to the analytic of *Mitsein*.

These gestures clearly motivate both Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's initial engagement with the question of the political in *Le retrait du politique* where *retrait* indicates both the retreat, and, as Critchley describes, a re-tracing of the political.¹²² I have already indicated the particular sense of community for Heidegger to which Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy take exception, and I read Nancy's *Being Singular Plural* as an attempt to do justice to the thought of *Mitsein*. However, should we agree with Critchley's assessment that for Nancy the political *must* be abandoned and become dominated by politics before we can then re-trace (re-think) what is at stake in the political?¹²³ In Critchley's assessment, with the withdrawal of the theologico-political, Nancy claims we must also eschew "every possible figure for community,"¹²⁴ where to do otherwise is to perpetuate our fall into totalitarianism. Critchley brings to our attention the way in which *le politique* (the political) may become reinvested with the practice of *la politique* (politics) through what Nancy calls "*L'éclat dur de l'injustice absolue*."¹²⁵ "And yet," Critchley remarks, "the question now becomes: how might the recognition of injustice become effective in our communal lives?"¹²⁶ For Critchley, the only way in which "we" can recognise the glare of *l'injustice absolue* is through a fundamentally ethical mediation of politics. Drawing upon Nancy's essay *La Comparution*, Critchley points out that Nancy would seem to be claiming that "not only is the reality of the social revealed by symbolicity, or the symbolic order, but that the latter also constitutes the

¹²¹ Ibid p.82.

¹²² Critchley, *Re-tracing the political*, p.78.

¹²³ Ibid p.83.

¹²⁴ Simon Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*, p.242.

¹²⁵ Critchley, *Re-tracing the political*, p.90. (Emphasis from the original text.) "The glare of absolute injustice."

¹²⁶ Ibid.

former.”¹²⁷ In what follows I want to address Critchley’s concerns and provide a reading of Nancy’s engagement with Heidegger. Indeed, Critchley’s own reading of Heidegger’s authentic finitude provides a useful way of opening Heidegger to critique, and I use it to deepen my account of Nancy.

Critchley is critical of Nancy’s claim that the symbolic order constitutes the reality of the social. In Critchley’s terms, the *ethical* can reveal itself only by way of *the real* (in the Lacanian sense).¹²⁸ Applying the Levinasian critique of ontology in which first philosophy must be ethical not ontological, Critchley argues that despite Nancy’s attempt to define an “originary ethics” alongside his ontology,¹²⁹ “being-with” is still premised upon a symmetrical relation to the other.¹³⁰ Philip Armstrong contradicts Critchley’s reading of Nancy, arguing that Nancy’s ontological commitment to *exposition* reveals a way of addressing the political in which the very possibility of relation, of one to an other, is always posed as a question. As Armstrong puts it, “it is only in and through the...retreat of the political that the question can be posed as to what makes the social relation possible *as such*—not only what constitutes the relation *as* (a) relation but that *there is* relation.”¹³¹ Armstrong’s argument hinges on how we understand Nancy’s reading of being-*in*-common, and the link between this reading and how one frames the reinvention of the political in terms of the symbolic and the real. In other words, how one might read the ethico-ontological implications of “signification.”

In response to Critchley, I would argue that Nancy’s philosophical position is one of pure assymetry, in which Nancy suspends the relation of the real to the symbolic in the modality of abandonment. Anticipating the manner in which I conclude this chapter, “we” relate to shared existence through an ontological incompleteness. Sense comes into the world as the between of our shared existence, sense *is* only as *passage*—sense is nothing if it is not shared.

¹²⁷ Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*, p.245. This claim is based upon a reading of Nancy, (translated from the original by Critchley as) “the laying bare of social reality – of the *real* itself of social being – in, through and as the symbolicity that constitutes it.” *La Comparution* with Jean-Christophe Bailly, p.79.

¹²⁸ Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*, p.246.

¹²⁹ A point to which I return in chapter four.

¹³⁰ *Ibid* p.251.

¹³¹ Philip Armstrong, *Reticulations*, p.3.

Rather than an “ontological drive for mediation without a mediator,”¹³² I would argue that for Nancy mediation is always mediated through a *passage* of *l’un avec l’autre*. Notwithstanding Critchley’s extraordinary insight into Nancy’s “co-existential analytic,” in this and the following chapters, I seek to bolster my claim.

In order to bring justice to the analytic of *Mitsein*, in *Being Singular Plural* Nancy works through the Heideggerian critique of the philosophical obsession in the “West” with the subject as presence. I want to build now on the description of “Heidegger on death” I gave above, before turning to how it might be possible to give an alternate reading of this authentic mode of Being. According to Heidegger, the insistence on reading our existence as presence, is inculcated through our preoccupation with discursively identifying—and defining—existence through measurement and value, and hence a relationality of equivalence. This attempt to overcome, subjugate, and master existence as such, is nothing more than the “violence” of metaphysics itself. Through the project of mastery by measurement, we transform humanity and the world into things or commodities that are capable of exploitation; while at the same time alienating ourselves “from the richness and multiplicity of our pretheoretical, prescientific experience.”¹³³ By maintaining this obsession with measurement and mastery over beings, the capacity to wonder on the fact of existence—the ‘question of the meaning of being’ itself—remains irredeemable. Signification of any kind projects a ground that acts as the subject of that signification, a knowing subject and a known object, an enunciation and an enunciated. The subject of the world is that which provides the point of intersection between presence in the world, and the thought that constitutes the ground ground of this presence. “Man” since the “death of God” is precisely this point of intersection—“man” is the knowing subject which brings the world to presence.¹³⁴ This intersection of mastery, the crux of the issue in the metaphysics of presence, is for Heidegger *Seinsvergessenheit*—forgetting of being.

Why does Heidegger describe the obvious connection between subject and object as a forgetting? As Critchley impresses upon us, for Heidegger

¹³² Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity*, p.249.

¹³³ James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p.52.

¹³⁴ I am deliberately gendering this point.

“philosophy begins with the riddle of the completely obvious,”¹³⁵ the riddle that there is something rather than nothing. In Critchley’s analysis, this *Rättsel* (riddle or enigma) remains a necessarily unresolvable and “*a priori* enigma.”¹³⁶ In our average everyday understanding of being, the *Rättsel* of existence is constitutive of being. Critchley thus provides some nuance in how we might read the significance and movement behind Heidegger’s often quoted remark;

That which is ontically closest and well known [our average everyday being in the world with others as *das Man*—the obvious], is ontologically the farthest and not known at all [remains a *Rättsel*]; and its ontological significance is constantly overlooked [which is *Seinsvergessenheit*].¹³⁷

Our existence is continually challenged by the affective role of an “obvious” riddle that nevertheless remains hidden. However, the problem becomes more tortuous because, as Critchley points out, even when I am “authentic” in how I comport myself, “the everyday is not extinguished, it is rather rendered enigmatic or uncanny.”¹³⁸ The enigmatic character that suspends our capacity to describe the ontological fact of existence is not something that can be surpassed, it is the constitutive fact of existence. As Derrida claims, we cannot rid ourselves of the metaphysical. According to Critchley, this is decisive for how we should read Heidegger;

...the enigmatic *a priori*...is not only descriptive, but also normative, functioning like an imperative in the philosophical analysis of being-in-the-world. Philosophy must attempt to be equal to the enigma of our being-in-the-world, while knowing all the time that it cannot.¹³⁹

Heidegger is thus not attempting to overcome the riddle of our “sheer facticity”

¹³⁵ Reiner Schürmann & Simon Critchley, *On Heidegger’s Being and Time*, p.138.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.23.

¹³⁸ Schürmann & Critchley, *On Heidegger’s Being and Time*, p.138.

¹³⁹ Ibid. This is precisely why Critchley chooses Samuel Beckett as the hero of his book *Very Little...Almost Nothing*, p.27.

the everyday banality of our existence—the “that we are.” Rather, for Heidegger, the enigmatic character of this facticity, and the seemingly pure contingency of our existence, becomes the orientating force of philosophical enquiry. Philosophy is not a project of “overcoming,” it is a project of dwelling in the fact of our existence, and becoming attuned to the weight of this facticity and thrownness. Importantly, Heidegger is also clearly opposed to the contingency and banality that accompanies our ontic everyday experience becoming an explanatory narrative. An explanatory narrative of the self would be a dumbing down and forgetting of being, and a shield from the uncanniness that presents itself in the *a priori* enigmatic character of being. This is exactly what Nancy refers to in *The Inoperative Community*, when he argues that the “subject cannot be outside itself: this is even what ultimately defines it—that its outside and all its ‘alienations’ or ‘extraneousness’ should in the end be suppressed by and sublated in it.”¹⁴⁰ We are always caught up in the attempt to understand our own existence, that is, we are always caught up in our “state-of-mind” in our attempt at “understanding.” The enigma that accompanies our thrownness is the manner in which the “being-there” of our existence is always already a “being-there” in a certain “state-of-mind,” and this enigma opens the possibility for a “knowing subject” to, from the outset, avoid the implications of its *seinsvergessenheit* and wrap itself within this “state-of-mind” as a narrative or discourse. Authenticity is Heidegger’s way of confronting this propensity of forgetting, however, as we have seen, his attitude toward the death of others would appear to ignore the fundamental role played by the death of others in the ontological constitution of our being-with. Critchley emphasises precisely this problem with Heideggerian authenticity, when he points out that,

...if finitude is fundamentally relational, that is, if it is by definition a relation to the Faktum of another who exceeds my powers of projection, then the only authentic death is inauthentic. That is, on my account, an authentic relation to death is not constituted through mineness, but rather through otherness.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p.24.

¹⁴¹ Critchley, *On Heidegger’s Being and Time*, pp.144-5.

This reversal allows Critchley to discredit and reverse Heidegger's elaboration of an authentic conscience. As I describe above, Heidegger argues that the authentic call of conscience is one in which we exist as individuated and resolute authentic Dasein. According to Critchley, this standing alongside others in an authentic communal relation would seem to eschew an ethics of "face-to-face relation"¹⁴² such that, "if death is non-relational for Heidegger, then also, *a fortiori*, conscience is non-relational."¹⁴³ However, if we accept that the ontological claim of individuation in death is fundamentally flawed, we can also follow Critchley's thesis that conscience is likewise the ontic attestation of "a certain splitting or undoing of the self in relation to a *Faktum* that it cannot assimilate."¹⁴⁴ Critchley's analysis is guided by Levinasian philosophy in which ethics is first philosophy, and a Freudian account of mourning in which conscience is necessarily relational.¹⁴⁵ While I am not arguing that Critchley's psycho-analytic account of conscience that provide the methodological tools for undoing Heidegger's individuated account of conscience are unsound (in fact, quite the opposite),¹⁴⁶ I nonetheless claim that Nancy provides an important reading of how this splitting or undoing of the self provides an ontological account of *Mitsein*.

Indeed, *mutatis mutandis* I claim, the unresolvable *Rätsel* of existence in Heidegger's terms can be reorientated through Nancy's ontology of being-singular-plural. In order "to be" one is caught within the constitutive necessity of self-signification required to enter the world of discursive intelligibility, that nonetheless remains—also constitutively—incomplete. There is, in each birth to presence or awakening, an affective relationality to existence, that *feels* the manner in which the calculations and measurements with which we give this

¹⁴² Ibid p.146.

¹⁴³ Ibid p.145.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid p.146.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. Indeed, the convergence on this reading of Heidegger would seem to me to be a point at which both Nancy and Critchley can find some common ground. The complexity of Nancy's relation to psychoanalysis, and in particular the contemporary readings by Critchley and Butler, are fertile ground for analysis. I have also avoided elaborating on Critchley's temporal analysis of *Being and Time*, as this would require more space than what is provided here.

account of ourselves are missing some-*thing*. That there is, “something beyond the calculable, which cannot be reduced to any commensuration, comprehension, or convention whatsoever”¹⁴⁷; something beyond even the singularity of this coming into the discursive realm, which defies the language we use to describe or signify this sense of an elsewhere that troubles us. Put another way, there is a sense of something that defies expectation and eludes signification, and as such cannot even be attributed to a “you,” or an “I,” or a “we”; as soon as “to be” enters the realm of language and the discursive play of signification, it enters that homogenous play of equivalency through what remains outside, and it “crosses over” into signification while being caught by the incapacity for signification to satisfy a “secret desire.”¹⁴⁸ In the process of awakening and sleeping, birth and death, existence comes into and out of the play of equivalencies required for signification and the incommensurable that is completely beyond this play but makes this play possible. To exist is to know that in speaking language has already pulled this sense of incalculability into what Nancy describes as the “outside of homogenous communication and signification.”¹⁴⁹ Language is this and this alone, the play of homogenous equivalencies that is continually calling out to that which remains incalculable and “unnameable”—which is to say, language speaks to the unsayable

The notion of speaking to the unsayable leads us back to Nancy’s treatment of community in *The Inoperative Community*, in which he emphasizes the necessity for community to remain inoperative. By remaining incapable of satisfying its desire for completion, language itself maintains the openness of the to-come that Nancy seeks to explain through his notion of *transimmanence*. In order to complete our reading of this dynamic facet of Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity I turn to abandonment in the following chapter.

¹⁴⁷ Nancy, *Adoration*, p.2.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. chapter two.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

Before drawing the conclusion that Nancy is referring to some ineffable negativity that provides the precursor for being—this is not a negative theology, and it is not the “thing-in-itself,” nor is it the “Real.” The manner in which Nancy describes it is remarkable in its unremarkableness itself. A method of thinking finitude to which I will return and explore more fully in the following chapter, in which it is not “the signification of what is” that opens the possibility of an ontology of shared existence, but rather the simple fact “that there is.”

It does not exist: all existence opens itself starting from it and toward it. “Him,” “that [ca],” or “nothing”: the thing itself that is nothing in particular but that there should be some things, and a world, or worlds, and us, all of us, all existents.¹⁵⁰

Nancy calls this an adoration, which is an address to that which remains inaccessible to signification. Adoration is the “that there is,” “that you are,” “that we are,” that opens itself to us in a way that we cannot but signify, while slipping elusively from our grasp. As I have argued, Nancy departs from Heidegger in a radical manner, but nevertheless in a manner that maintains a certain fidelity to the Heideggerian project and the enigma that remains at the core of the question of Being; however, for Nancy the Faktum of existence, the “fact that we are,” is the “*in common*.” Hence, commonality is the minimal ontological premise of existence, where sense is a *passage* through the opening of this being-*in-common* such that sense is nothing if it is not shared. This “fact that we are,” which Nancy describes as our *comparution*, should be read as our appearing in common and attesting to this appearance.

The sense of the world, if there is to be a sense of the world, can only be that which is maintained as a play between us, as existents, as the “that there is” of the world. This fact of our being-in-the-world *in common*, is for Nancy an

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

“echoing and referring,” where the sense of the world *is* the sharing commonality of this echoing and referring. Hence, “sense” is not tied to significations; constrained, as Nancy indicates, to “references, axioms, or semiologies outside of the world.”¹⁵¹ Rather, it is “sense” in the sense of *passage*, and thus the sharing and the play between existents in the world. As such, Nancy argues, “we are meaning in the sense that we are the element in which significations can be produced and circulate...even where this communication takes place only between ‘me’ and ‘myself’.”¹⁵²

Drawing on a strange-bed-fellow for this engagement—but one that nonetheless makes an important point—Žižek, in *Less Than Nothing*, argues that “what is properly meta-physical is the very presupposition of a substantial Being beyond the process of (self-)differentiation.”¹⁵³ Put another way, if thought was premised on the notion that there was some sort of “substantial Being” that *grounded* the circulation of meaning, this would simply reiterate the metaphysical gesture inherent within both “communicative rationalism” *and* the “consciousness of a loss.” Hence, the inability to provide an adequate signification of the sense of adoration (in Critchley’s Heideggerian terms, the uncanniness we feel at the enigma of the everyday fact of our existence), is not a failure of signification, and as such not an epistemological failure. It is instead an incompleteness within the ontological premise of existence in itself, a gap opened up within Being, or in the terminology I have also used here, a rupture inherent to the Absolute. If, as Heidegger remarks, “language is the house of being,” we must simultaneously recognise that language is itself incomplete. Indeed, if Dasein is finite, then we must understand this finitude, not as indicative of a limit that defers to some authority that would allow its completion and hence signification in the fullness of sense, but rather as symptomatic of the “non-fixing” of this signification—not as a lack of power to “fix” this signification, but rather as the “power to leave it open.”¹⁵⁴ The ontology that I have laid out here relies heavily on the capacity to leave signification open to a constitutive

¹⁵¹ Ibid p.4.

¹⁵² Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, pp.1-2.

¹⁵³ Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, p.16.

¹⁵⁴ Nancy, “Originary Ethics” *A Finite Thinking*, p.178.

incompleteness, and think being without presupposition. In the following chapter I want to unpack how this power that comes from leaving open is made possible through Nancy's notion of abandoned-being.

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Abandonment

INTRODUCTION

The term abandonment cuts across key gestures that orientate what is at stake in Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity. Clearly the notion of *transimmanence* forms an integral modality within Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity; however, in order to address the very notion of *transimmanence*, it is necessary to think this alongside Nancy's notion of shared finitude.¹ Approaching the notion of finitude in both theological and a-theological terms reveals for Nancy the manner in which both of these, despite their apparent opposition, impose upon finite existence a metaphysics of subjectivity. Nancy contrasts this imposition with a sense of exposure (as opening *within*), to both a world and community, that does not make sense in and of itself, but rather remains open to the possibility of making sense through the predicament of shared finitude. Abandonment is precisely the possibility of making sense that eschews the imposition of law, beyond that which opens within the world as the passage enabled by shared finitude. It is within this gesture of an exposure to shared finitude that the possibility of *transimmanence* itself becomes open, and what links these two motifs together is what Nancy describes as being-abandoned.

In what follows, I will focus upon Nancy's notion of abandonment. This notion, I argue, provides the key ontological motif for Nancy's notion of *transimma-*

¹ Morin, in her chapter on Christianity in the aforementioned book, describes this in terms of an ontology of finitude. While I do not disagree with her characterization, in this work I am working toward a theory of Nancy's work in which his notion of 'abandonment' provides the touchstone of his thought.

nence, and its alignment with the sense of shared finitude in the ontology of being-singular-plural. However, more than simply bringing these notions together, I will argue that it is the concept of abandonment itself, which provides Nancy with an opening of a world—a *déclousion*—that motivates his deconstruction of Christianity. As the following remark makes clear, according to Nancy the notion of sense is implicitly linked to both the systemic structure of the Judeo-Christian world-view, and the implications of the “death of God” that continue to haunt the juxtaposition of the human within that structure, in spite of the concomitant move toward “a secular age” in lieu of “His” departure.

Man, no longer the “son of God,” the “purpose of nature,” or the “subject of history”—no longer, in other words, a being that is or that has sense—is the being through which being ex-poses itself as making-sense.²

Ergo, I begin from the thought that orientates this remark. The ontological import of this thought is extended through two central motifs, that “being ex-poses itself,” and that this is a “making-sense.” This chapter focuses upon that first motif, while carrying the second along with it as the ontological rather than epistemological efficacy of the first. The question then becomes, how does this exposure manifest itself, and perhaps more precisely, why is this an ontological gesture that resists becoming a metaphysics of exposure as presence? This leads to the weight of the second motif, how does this “making-sense” itself avoid becoming a metaphysics? Certainly, I must indicate how ex-posure remains apart from the vestiges of metaphysics. However, more than that, and as I have already argued, making-sense is a *passage* that occurs *in* the common of being. The crux of the problem is showing how this *passage* does not become attached to some law of signification. That is why, in the first instance, exposure must be an exposure that dwells within the tension of abandonment, a dwelling that resides within abandonment, and that resists the ex-tremities to which abandonment pushes being. The play of this tension produces a transcendent explanatory force, which would provide redemption from the state of abandonment. Alternatively,

² Nancy, “Originary Ethics” *A Finite Thinking*, p.183.

this tension can be thought of in terms of a tacit force that continuously reproduces the drive to make sense from within an enclosure of the world through the circulation of sense as signification. In contrast, Nancy wants to dwell within the thought of being-abandoned, not as an attempt to overcome abandonment, but rather thinking in the midst of abandonment, as the possibility of making-sense without becoming the subject of signification.

In the first section, I discuss Nancy's proposition that abandonment is the sole remaining transcendental—viz. *the* condition for experiencing being. As *the* transcendental, abandonment becomes “the reason” for being, and therefore also the mode by which one might picture how being can experience freedom. In this gesture, we are confronted with the necessity of law, a law to which we are abandoned, and a law that must remain an imperative. At the same time, if abandonment is *the* transcendental, then the imperative of law comes to us in the midst of an opening that is without ground or signification—a law *beyond* law. Thus, it remains to be explained how the imperative of this law *beyond* law, can nonetheless allow the thought of freedom. My claim is that by removing the necessity of the Kantian subject as the site of subjection to the law, the enigmatic character of the *beyond* law of law is focused upon the act of freedom in the experience of being, where this act of freedom is precisely received as the *obligation* to make sense.

In the second section, I consider abandoned-being in Nancy's terms, as the condition in which being is exhausted by the many ways of saying being. By invoking the exhaustion of saying being, Nancy argues that being must forgo the possible abundance of signification in the many ways of saying being, and dwell instead within the excess that these possibilities evoke. This is an “excess” that displaces the notion of subjectivity, in the sense that abandoned-being dwells according to an ungrounded law. I then turn to Agamben's characterization of abandonment, and argue that despite their similar concerns with maintaining a sense of community without signification, Nancy differs in his understanding of the possibilities of dwelling within abandonment.

My encounter with Agamben segues into the following section on Heidegger's *Seinsverlassenheit* (abandoned-being³). Building upon the concept of the 'forgetting' of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*) that was reviewed in the previous chapter, I consider how Heidegger shapes this hypothesis through his posthumously published book *Contributions to Philosophy*, in which he describes abandonment as the condition in which being "can no longer see what is really happening."⁴ In *Contributions*, abandonment is used to frame the pejorative iteration of forgetting that occurs in Dasein's affray with the machinations and economy of technological existence. As abandoned, Dasein cannot attest to itself without succumbing to the metaphysics required in representing itself through 'intelligible' means that have become occupied by the machinations of modernity. As I have illustrated in the previous two chapters, Nancy is consistent in his analysis and critique of these conditions of abandonment. However, where Heidegger employs his emancipatory thesis of authenticity, Nancy instead anticipates the gesture of "adoration", in which "we" make-sense and open a world, while "being" in the midst of abandonment.

Explaining Nancy's critique of Heideggerian authenticity, and how Nancy juxtaposes authenticity with an unfolding sense of love in thinking, is vital for understanding how Nancy's embodied sense of abandonment differs from Heidegger's use of the term. The gesture of love provides a means of interpreting the "obligation" to make-sense, which would otherwise be characterized as a burden upon the poverty of dwelling as abandoned-being. I follow this exploration of Nancy's use of the term love with a study of Christ as abandoned. I argue that Nancy's reading of the crucifixion of Christ forms an integral part of understanding how his sense of *transimmanence* functions alongside abandonment. By invoking the notion of *transimmanence* Nancy raises the possibility of a *dis-*

³ *Seinsverlassenheit* is Heidegger's term for the ever-worsening nihilism he envisages in the world due to the abandonment of Being by beings in the world. I have drawn a correlation here between Nancy's use of the term *l'être abandonné* (cf. Nancy, *L'impératif catégorique*, Paris: Flammarion, 1983) and Heidegger's term *Seinsverlassenheit*, and here translated this for my own purposes to abandoned-being. I develop this notion of *l'être abandonné* (in French *abandonné* is an adjective that can be translated as abandoned, hence the reversal of the words being and abandoned in my translation here) and the relation of *l'être abandonné* to existence throughout this thesis.

⁴ Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy: Of The Event*, [122-123]

enclosure of the 'world', not as an attempt to move beyond the incommensurability of abandonment, but rather to dwell within the *obligation* of abandonment that I discussed in the first section—an opening that allows the *passage* of meaning between being in their shared finitude. In my conclusion, I parse the implications in this sense of dwelling as it applies to Nancy's notion of *adoration*. The leitmotif of *adoration* forms the basis of arbitrating the *obligation* of abandonment in the experience of freedom, in the sense that *adoration* is an address to the opening of a world within the world.

I. ABANDONED-BEING AS OBLIGATION: READING KANT'S IMPERATIVE

Mankind *is* the abandonment of God: the trace upon him, the trace that he is, constitutes him as a sign of this abandonment.⁵

The key ontological gesture in this remark contains an explicit *obligation* intrinsic to the constitution of humankind. To be human, is to carry the burden of being that which God did abandon. As Nancy describes in *Abandoned Being*, written in 1981, abandonment is the "predicament of being" and its sole "transcendental," such that this abandonment forms the very coordinates from which thinking within the world occurs.⁶ By considering this "predicament" from the perspective of creation *ex nihilo*⁷ Nancy displaces how abandonment is understood, such that, with this parallax shift in perspective, abandonment becomes an obligation that ties our embodied being to the concept of creation.

⁵ Nancy, *Adoration*, p.30.

⁶ Nancy, *Birth to Presence*, p.36.

⁷ "'Creation' is a motif, or a concept, that we must grasp outside of its theological context...The world is created from nothing: this does not mean fabricated with nothing by a particularly ingenious producer. It means instead that it is not fabricated, produced by no producer, and not even coming out of nothing (like a miraculous apparition), but in a quite strict manner and more challenging for thought: the nothing itself, if one can speak in this way, or rather nothing growing as something...The *ex nihilo* is the genuine formulation of a radical materialism, that is to say, precisely, without roots." Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, pp.50-1.

The *ex nihilo* is manifested in the obligation of “abandoned-being” to the “radical materialism” of a creation that is “the nothing itself”; however, paradoxically, this obligation itself lacks any grounding in Law. To put it another way, the abandonment of the human by God can be read as an *obligation* to respond to the institution of a command; a command issued from the loss of transcendence that it is “to be” human. The command remains an imperative to which one must respond, despite what Nancy describes as the “destitution of the Supreme Being.”⁸ The command of the imperative is law, however, this is law *without* grounding in Law that transcends the immanent issue of an obligation. To be human is to be always and already faced with the imperative to stand within the void of the law *without* Law—to occupy the “place that has just been emptied”⁹ of its transcendent significance.

It is a matter of standing in this void and remaining within it—that is to say, to re-engage anew what “*ex nihilo*” means. That *nothing* opens a world and opens in the world; that the sense of the world excludes any given truth and undoes any associated signification. That I receive, that we receive, the command of standing in that opening. It is, indeed, imperative.¹⁰

Being abandoned is to be abandoned to the imperative of law, but importantly, an *imperative* that in the “each-time” of becoming does not issue-forth from a “place,” “time,” or “thing.” The enunciation of the imperative finds its consistency in the being in which there is a response to that command. To be human is to “respond” to the *obligation* of law that actually issues from that “response.” For Nancy, as I consider in chapter two, the crucifixion of Christ, His abandonment by God, and the spectral figure of His resurrection, are key gestures in the withdrawal of transcendence and God’s abandonment. Christianity is this withdrawal, however, it is a withdrawal that is always-already happening. Like an object moving quickly through the air creating a vacuum in its wake, Christianity is the void that opens in the wake of the “destitution of the Supreme Being.” The de-

⁸ Nancy, “From Imperative to Law” *Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice Legality and World*, p. 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

construction of Christianity forms a sustained meditation on that abandonment, and the relation between existence and what it faces in the form of a void—between being and nothing.

There is no predicate of the law, no-thing *from* which the law comes; instead, the law must spring-forth in its reception as law. The imperative is the command to occupy the void that is issued from the void. The “subject” *is* according to the subjection of being to the imperative; furthermore, as the law issues-forth from no-thing, the “subject” that comes to occupy the site of enunciation occupies a “place that has just been emptied.” The imperative to stand in this opening, is not simply an imperative in the immanent sense of the term, it is an ontological premise that determines being as always being obligated to the demand of this imperative. As Nancy argues, “what obligates us, what makes us obligated beings: a law beyond the law, which is given to us, and to which we are abandoned.”¹¹ The ontological premise of *obligation* comes from Nancy’s designation of abandonment through a re-articulation of law as “a law beyond the law.” The question of abandonment for Nancy would thus seem to hinge on this concept of law, and how Nancy interrogates what is at stake in the “destitution of the Supreme Being.” Nancy provides a new perspective precisely inasmuch as he reads the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, and the legacy of Christianity, as fully invested within these questions.

By recalling Kant’s notion of the Categorical Imperative, and how this intersects with “freedom,” Nancy can elaborate on how abandonment intersects with Kant. According to Nancy, the Categorical Imperative is a command in which “what is commanded and the fact of the command are the same thing.”¹² Nancy is playing upon the sense in which the law as an “imperative” *is* in its taking place, such that it “takes place *only* as the imperative.”¹³ Kant’s Moral Law brings law together with its enactment in such a way that it becomes impossible to separate the sense in which law is founded and hence transcends its imma-

¹¹ Nancy, *L’Imperatif categorique* in Francois Raffoul, “Abandonment and the Categorical Imperative of Being” *Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice Legality and World*, p.65.

¹² Nancy, “From Imperative to Law” *Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice Legality and World*, p.12.

¹³ Nancy, “The Kategorein of Excess” *A Finite Thinking*, p.138.

ment enunciation, from the sense in which law is followed in some way and hence explicitly immanent. As Nancy writes,

...the imperative does not prescribe that we act *in accordance with* the law, since "the law," in this sense, is given neither by the imperative nor prior to it. Rather...it prescribes that the maxim of action be the founding act of a law, of the law.¹⁴

The law is *legislated*, in the *each-time* and *each-place* of an enacting. Thus, according to Nancy, the categorical imperative demands that "a world must be"¹⁵; which is to say that the *what* and the *fact of* the command institutes the necessity of the world through the imperative of that command. Kant captures this necessity in his notion of *reason*, which is realized through the instantiation of the Categorical Imperative. The instantiation of an imperative can only be considered as such if there is the possibility of freedom, which is to say, if there is the possibility of doing-otherwise, for if there were not such a possibility the law would lose its moral efficacy as an imperative. Kant must therefore insist that freedom be considered as the adjunct to the necessity of *reason* as it is manifested through the autonomous instantiation of the Categorical Imperative *within* the world. According to Nancy, "reason" for Kant, must thus command "itself to be what it ought to be, a freedom creating world."¹⁶ The necessity of reason is the obligation of abandonment (to stand in the void left by the withdrawal of God), in which case freedom is bound to the limits of reason. As Kant remarks, tying the knot that binds freedom to these limits, "freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally refer to each other."¹⁷ As Nancy puts it, reason "obligates itself to its freedom and frees itself for this obligation."¹⁸ The free manifestation of rea-

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Nancy, "From Imperative to Law" *Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice Legality and World*, p.13.

¹⁶ Nancy, "From Imperative to Law" *Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice Legality and World*, p.14.

¹⁷ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 5:29f

¹⁸ Nancy, "From Imperative to Law" *Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice Legality and World*, p.14.

son is the enactment of law, as an imperative; or, in other words, to open the space for freedom is to act in accordance with reason.¹⁹

The pivotal point for Nancy is to re-articulate freedom in such a way that it could be thought otherwise than as a "property of man."²⁰ If freedom is not to be thought of as a property of "man," then, as Heidegger writes, can we describe freedom as that which "possesses man"?²¹ Nancy is critical of how Sartre reads the Heideggerian sense of freedom in terms of a condemnation. As Nancy argues, if the human is "condemned"²² to be free, then the experience of freedom is the experience of a *determined* causality into which the human has become plunged. In this case, the efficacy of the Sartrean narrative is in the projection of the human beyond this "condemnation," and thus, to defy the passivity of this projection and will oneself to overcome this passive ipseity through the "heroism of despair."²³ For Nancy, the Sartrean articulation of freedom "remains caught in the space of causality."²⁴

In order to maintain a difference or space between obligation and freedom, and thus eschew the framework of *determined* causality, Nancy actually intensifies the Sartrean narrative of "condemnation" such that the subject is *less than* the manifestation of its intangibility in its being condemned to freedom.²⁵ If the human subject, in Sartrean terms, is devoid of the capacity to ground itself

¹⁹ The necessity of reason is a fundamentally influential part of Kant's philosophy, as Robert Pippin describes, this 'necessity' orientated Hegel's critique of consciousness in *Phenomenology*. Pippin gives a neat summary of how this 'necessity of reason' functions in Kant's transcendental deduction to unify experience of representations through a unifying subject (subject to law); "...in one of Kant's most influential claims, being *in* a subjective state, even a merely momentary subjective state, does not count as having an experience *of* and so being aware of that state unless I apply a certain determinate concept (a "this-state," not "that-state" concept, say) and judge that I am in such a state, something I must *do* and be able to know that I am doing." *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness*, p.19.

²⁰ Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, p.96.

²¹ Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth" *Basic Writings*, p.129.

²² Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, p.99.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Thinking back to Taylor's categorization of this engagement as "stoicism" in spite of "the abyss", what he misses are the conflicting "ontological" claims between existentialism and Heidegger, and the way these are approached by Derrida. Nancy adds to Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysics of subjectivity by approaching these ontological claims through a reading of Christianity in which its plays an explicit role.

through an essence, then it lacks any sense of causality altogether. The “heroism” that marks the Sartrean narrative “is the will to be the cause of that for which causes are lacking or contrary in given reality.”²⁶ Nancy takes Sartre’s exposition of Heidegger a step further, as Peter Fenves describes, to undercut the very notion of subjectivity itself. Nancy not only negates the incommensurability of the Sartrean subject, but also ruptures the Kantian subject within which the necessity of reason resides. In doing so, there is only “*finite* freedom,” which is, as Fenves defines, “a freedom that does not amount to a limited space of action but is, rather, the opening—in thought, in experience—onto the limit, onto groundlessness.”²⁷ Rather than allow the subject to use reason to follow Law, freedom is what bars the subject at the point of its self-constitution. Put simply, within the void of abandonment, freedom cannot be a property of the subject as it exceeds the very sense of subjectivity. The freedom inherent to abandoned-being is always more than the subject, precisely because the subject is not God.

The question I want to respond to at this stage is how one might understand the explicit ethical premise of obligation that remains despite, the disorientation of any sense of a “subject” in coming to grips with “a law beyond the law.” The answer is in Nancy’s ontology, however, in order to maintain the opening that obligates being-singular-plural Nancy draws upon the motif of abandonment in his deconstruction of Christianity. Indeed, as Christopher Watkin points out, on the one hand, the ontology of being-singular-plural is “an ethos and a praxis”; and, on the other hand, “the province of *ethos* is not one of possession but of abandonment, of poverty.”²⁸ This explanation validates how both ontology and ethics remain intertwined within Nancy’s philosophy, and, furthermore, why his thought remains closely aligned to Heidegger.²⁹ By considering poverty within the ontological context of abandonment not only provides the principle that something is lacking or missing, it also allows Nancy to premise his ontology on

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Peter Fenves, “Foreword” *The Experience of Freedom*, p.xxiii.

²⁸ Watkin, “Ontology and Incommensurability in Nancy’s Notion of Justice” *Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice Legality and world*, pp.21-2.

²⁹ Nancy argues that, “Only those who have read Heidegger blindly, or not at all, could think him a stranger to ethical preoccupations” “Originary Ethics” *A Finite Thinking*, p.173.

dwelling within that lack. Poverty, in these terms, is existence that dwells within the *absence* of transcendence, and does not seek its fulfilment.

Nancy uncovers a “fundamental ethics”³⁰ in Heidegger’s thought that must be considered alongside his fundamental ontology. The crux of Nancy’s displacement of Heidegger centres on a re-articulation of the relation of Law and obligation in the Categorical Imperative. Kant argues that the Moral Law governs such actions as could become universal maxims for a subject in accordance with the free use of reason—one is “subjected” to the imperative of such an action, in the sense that this is an obligation *to* the Moral Law. According to Nancy, Law is itself without ground in the sense that it “is simply the law of legislating in this absence of law”³¹—as such, the autonomous “rational subject” can only be thought after one has reconciled the notion of obligation. Put another way, to be obligated to “a law beyond the law” correlates with the exposure of being-abandoned to shared finitude, before any conception of the singular or indeed the plural. Sense, and thus any notion of “reason” that might be allocated to a “subject,” is only in the *passage* between being as abandoned. Hence, as Nancy argues, “only a subject which is entirely responsible for sense and for its own existence as *making-sense*, without prior subjection to any fixed sense, can be a fully-fledged ethical subject.”³²

In order to reconcile the sense of an autonomous ethical subject with being abandoned to “a law beyond the law,” Nancy argues that “obligation” has in itself become the ontological premise of “law abandoned—to itself.”³³ As Francois Raffoul remarks, in “Nancy’s work, the question of obligation finds itself radicalized, from the (regional) sphere of morality per se to the entirety of the sphere of being itself.”³⁴ If, as Kant would hold, one can only perform an act governed by the Moral Law as an autonomous subject; in contrast for Nancy, ethical action is only possible when one acts in accordance with the ontological *obliga-*

³⁰ Nancy, “Originary Ethics” *A Finite Thinking*, p.174.

³¹ Nancy, “The Kategorein of Excess” *A Finite Thinking*, p.149.

³² Ibid p.182. [Emphasis added.]

³³ Nancy, “The Kategorein of Excess” *A Finite Thinking*, p.149.

³⁴ Raffoul, “Abandonment and the Categorical Imperative of Being” *Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice Legality and world*, p.65.

tion of *making-sense*, in which one's desire does not coincide with an established sense, but are rather fully abandoned to the groundlessness of conduct. By seizing upon Kant's conflation of reason and freedom in the notion of the imperative, Nancy opens the sense of the subject to the "between" of shared finitude as described in his ontology of being-singular-plural.

Obligation is the ethical flip-side of the ontological premise *making-sense*: The key term in Nancy's description of existence as *making-sense* is not the "subject," but "respect," and how respect is the opening of the possibility of freedom itself. Nancy undoes the notion of a subject standing before a law, in which obedience or respect for the law is a property that can be thought as attached to a being present as a subject. Instead, Nancy is recalling and extending the Heideggerian critique of Kant, specifically as outlined in Heidegger's *Kant and The Problem of Metaphysics*. According to Nancy, "respect" is the possibility of a desire that manifests itself through *obligation*, and it is this alone that opens the possibility of being, which is to say "to be" within language. In order to describe the gesture I am picturing here, it is necessary to quote in some detail the argument put forward by Heidegger in §30 of the aforementioned work.³⁵

Respect as such is respect for the moral law. It does not serve [as a basis] for the judgment of actions, and it does not first appear after the ethical fact to be something like the manner in which we take a position with respect to the consummated act. On the contrary, respect for the law first constitutes the possibility for action. The respect for... is the way in which the law first becomes accessible to us. At the same time we find therein: this feeling of respect for the law does not also serve, as Kant puts it, for the "grounding" of the law. The law is not what it is because we have respect for it, but rather the reverse: this respecting having-a-feeling for the law, and with it this determinate manner of making the law manifest, is the way in which the law, as such a respecting having-a-feeling for in general, can be encountered by us.³⁶

³⁵ Nancy indicates the importance of this section in *The Experience of Freedom*.

³⁶ Heidegger, *Kant and The Problem of Metaphysics*, p.111. [§30: 158-159]

The reversal indicated by Heidegger in the remark above, in which the law is “encountered” as a “respecting having-a-feeling,” is the manner in which desire itself, becomes the opening of being to a *making-sense* that is *felt* (having-a-feeling) as obligation. This reading of Kant’s Moral Law, in which “respect for...” shapes our encounter with the “*a priori* enigma”³⁷—the question of the meaning of being—opens the possibility of understanding how this question is in-itself an opening between being. This opening, as a question, cannot be directed toward, or directed from—the question of the meaning of being issues to no-thing, and from no-thing. This is marked in the Heideggerian turn (*kehre*), in which being comes under erasure, and will be written in his later work as *seyn* (beyng).³⁸ Nancy argues that Dasein must be understood without being premised upon a spatio-temporal manifestation of being-*there*. “The *there* is the open in which, right at an existence *hic et nunc*, making-sense is at issue.”³⁹ Dasein is as “clearing” without being a “clearing” of its own *there*, but rather as “clearing” which is the opening of an *obligation* (to the law) of *making-sense*. I return to this sense of clearing later in the chapter when I discuss Heidegger’s use of the term *Ereignis*.

The opening in which making-sense is at issue is understood both ethically and ontologically in the term *obligation*. It is within this notion of *obligation* that both desire and action are intertwined. As Nancy explains; “This way of being is immediately a conduct: the conduct of being-open to making-sense, a being-open that is itself opened by (or whose opening consists in) the desire/ability of sense.”⁴⁰ Why does Nancy bring together action and desire in this fashion? Nancy does this in order to surpass a fundamental problem with the Kantian premise of Moral Law. In Kant’s philosophy, morality is understood in terms of an autonomous subject’s conformation to the categorical imperative. Kant’s Moral Law stipulates that to act in accordance with the Moral Law is at the same time to act through the free use of one’s rational will. Thus to act in accordance with the Moral Law is in fact to become the originator of the Law to which

³⁷ Recalling my discussion of Critchley in the previous chapter.

³⁸ The precise meaning of this term for Heidegger is outlined below.

³⁹ Nancy, “Originary Ethics” *A Finite Thinking*, p.181.

⁴⁰ *Ibid* p.180.

one is subjected. As Raffoul points out, for Nancy the question is “[n]ot simply a “moral” obligation, but rather the question of an “ontological” being-obligated.”⁴¹

Nancy thus brings together the ontological language of *making-sense*, with the ethical language of *respect for...*, in order to describe the onto-ontico-ethical being through *obligation*. *Obligation* captures the sense in which Nancy is describing being as abandoned to law; there “the other” is “essential” to “opening”, “sense”, and “action.”⁴² *Obligation* thus functions both as singular and plural, surpassing the either/or of singularity and plurality by bringing together both of these terms into an ontology of being-singular-plural that is first and foremost a fundamental ethics. By surpassing the either/or of singularity and plurality, Nancy rethinks the mode of abandonment that Heidegger refers to in *Contributions* by describing a mode of being in its comportment to the abandonment of being in which “being is the letting-be through which something is.”⁴³ This “letting-be” is an ethos, such that the mode of being as singular-plural encounters the destitution of law according to the ethos of abandonment. Ethos is the conduct of being as it unfolds through the groundlessness of abandoned-being. Ethos is not a response to abandonment; it is the springing-forth of singular-plural being made possible by abandonment as an experience of freedom. Nancy recalls Heidegger’s use of Heraclitus in *Letter on Humanism* in order to portray how being can be thought in relation to obligation and conduct.

This is how original ethical conduct encounters its law, its proper *nomos*: the *nomos* of the “abode,” of “upholding” according to ek-sistence. It is a matter of upholding ourselves and “bearing” or “carrying” ourselves in a way that befits the injunction of being—the injunction to be—ek-sistent. Conduct, dignity, is a matter of bearing. We have to bear ourselves, bear up before the responsibility for making-sense that has unfolded unreservedly. Man has to understand himself according to this responsibility.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Raffoul, “Abandonment and the Categorical Imperative of Being” *Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice Legality and World*, p.65.

⁴² Ibid p.181.

⁴³ Ibid p.185.

⁴⁴ Nancy, “Originary Ethics” *A Finite Thinking*, p.193.

Nancy re-articulates fundamental ontology in terms of an *originary ethics*; an encounter with law, in which law is nothing more than the *obligation* to make-sense without drawing upon an already conceived sense. Nancy draws upon the Heideggerian gesture of ek-sistence to underscore here how this obligation coincides with the ontological picture of Dasein as the “being for which being is an issue.” As Heidegger argues: “As ek-sisting, man sustains Da-sein in that he takes the *Da* [*there*], the clearing of Being, into “care.””⁴⁵ Thus, rather than impose a reading upon Heidegger, Nancy is allowing the implicit notion of “ethical conduct” to unfold in how Heidegger approaches the question of the meaning of being “which was raised of old and is raised now and always, and is always the subject of doubt, viz. what being is...”⁴⁶ *Obligation* can be thought as a response by Nancy to the manner in which Heidegger juxtaposes *ethos* and “care” with the fundamental question of Dasein. Conduct, bearing, and responsibility, as it applies to an “ethical encounter” is always an encounter with the question of being as primordially *with*. Hence, Nancy suggests an encounter in which the “conduct” of being-with becomes “the proper transcendence of the immanence that is.”⁴⁷

As Raffoul argues, abandonment is what it means to be at the closure of metaphysics and the end of all metaphysical premises that might give meaning to being⁴⁸; whilst, at the same time, not marking abandonment as the withdrawal of being from meaning itself, as if abandonment “would safe-guard the being of being, withdrawn in its pure, remote presence.”⁴⁹ Abandonment is thus to remain obligated as being; an obligation that is itself without boundary and without law, and is simply “to be” at the limit of being as the shared-finitude in the “here and now” of existence. This is a limit that is not founded in law, or obligation to that law; but rather a limit that *is* being. A limit that, on the one hand, marks a thought of radical materialism found in the shared finitude of being, which is the possibility of “making sense” within our shared finite existence; and, on the other hand,

⁴⁵ Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism” *Basic Writings*, p.231.

⁴⁶ Heidegger, *Kant and The Problem of Metaphysics*, p.232fn.

⁴⁷ Nancy, “Originary Ethics” *A Finite Thinking*, p.181.

⁴⁸ Raffoul, “Abandonment and the Categorical Imperative of Being” *Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice Legality and world*, p.67.

⁴⁹ *Ibid* p.68.

describes the possibility opened at the limit of that finitude through the thought of *transimmanence*.

The thought of abandonment cuts across Nancy's oeuvre from the essay *Abandoned Being*, to the extension of his deconstruction of Christianity in *The Adoration*. In all I have been describing above, the term obligation has come under scrutiny, and it is important in what follows that this term is not considered as that which binds being to the law. Obligation must be thought in terms of *adoration*, as I have already described in chapter three. As Raffoul argues, "obligation frees being for itself, opens it to a relationality, so that being can then be as the event and the openness that it is."⁵⁰ We have already covered this briefly in how Nancy responds to Heidegger's notion of "letting-be," however, I will return to this notion, and Nancy's departure from Heidegger, in what follows.

II. ΠΟΛΛΑΚΟΣ ABANDONED

We do not know it, we cannot really know it, but abandoned being has already begun to constitute an inevitable condition for our thought, perhaps its only condition.⁵¹

The manner in which Nancy opens his essay *Abandoned Being* is reminiscent of Nietzsche's figure of the madman who runs into the square proclaiming "God is dead."⁵² As the sole transcendental, abandonment has become not only *the* condition of possibility of experience, but also that which renders the "empirical" subject impossible.⁵³ For Heidegger, as I will explain in the following section, the madman has come too soon, "man" cannot see the obviousness of his predica-

⁵⁰ Ibid p.66.

⁵¹ Nancy, *Birth to Presence*, p.36.

⁵² A passage I examined in chapter one in which I argued that this motif indicates the way metaphysics has closed in upon itself through the effect of Christianity. "The death of God" is not only what allowed this closure, but was brought about by the Christianity itself as the religion that enabled the end of religion.

⁵³ See chapter two, section IV.

ment, and remains oblivious to “what is really happening.” Likewise for Nancy, abandonment cannot be thought, whilst remaining necessarily constitutive of the conditions of thought. And yet, within these aporetic conditions that reveal the poverty of thought; Nancy acknowledges the excessive dimension of being—a *jouissance*—that suggests power of abandonment in the creation of a world.

Fully aware of the implications of this notion, Nancy draws upon Aristotle to explain how this poverty of thought manifests itself through the “exhaustion” of being, as abandoned to its own destiny. Despite the manifold manner in which ontology has been thought and expressed, these expressions have nonetheless collapsed upon themselves in their exhaustion of the possibility of “speaking” being. Nancy refers to the Aristotelian expression of *pollakos legetai*, the assertion that “being may be expressed in many ways”. For example (one of many), in his *Metaphysics* Aristotle writes that, “There are many senses in which a thing may be said to ‘be’.”⁵⁴ As Nancy writes:

If being has not ceased to speak itself in multiple ways—*pollakos legetai*—abandonment adds nothing to the proliferation of this *pollakos*. It sums up the proliferation, assembles it, but by exhausting it, carrying it to the extreme poverty of abandonment. Being speaks itself as abandoned by all categories, all transcendentals.⁵⁵

Being speaks, and is thus not forgotten or withdrawn from itself as being; however, in speaking being in many ways, it is being itself that speaks itself as abandoned. Nancy thus argues that “being abandoned” is to be no longer held to the transcendental possibilities of *unum, verum, bonum*—the one, the truth, the good. In so doing, Nancy extends his thought of the figure of the abandoned Christ, to an exhaustion of transcendentals that cut through Western philosophy from Plato and Aristotle, to the neo-Platonic roots of medieval philosophy, and even, and perhaps most importantly to Kant. Nancy is also drawing upon and surpassing the Heideggerian notion of abandonment that is outlined in *Contributions*, by re-

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book IV, 1003a30. Which points to Aristotle’s critique of Parmenides to which Nancy turns, as will be noted shortly.

⁵⁵ Nancy, “Abandoned Being” *Birth to Presence*, p.36.

ferring to the opening or *déclousion* [*dis-enclosure*] that a deconstruction of Christianity reveals in abandoned-being.

It is at the point of an exhaustion of transcendentals that Nancy reveals the possibility of *déclousion* in and through the cessation of these transcendentals. Abandonment is an opening to thought itself in the very possibility of abandonment. “*Unum, verum, bonum*—all this is abandoned. Which amounts to saying, saying to us, that being *has* ceased to speak itself in multiple ways, although this cessation does not constitute an end or decide a destiny. *The cessation pursues a destiny.*”⁵⁶ The exhaustion of speaking being, and extreme poverty of abandonment, is in itself for Nancy actually the openness to an excess. An excess, he adds, that was already to be found in the fragment of Parmenides, *esti gar einai*—it is indeed being—that Nancy reads in the following manner.

It requires nothing that being has not already, always, arranged in its silent being...

It is indeed being.

It is indeed being.

*It is indeed being.*⁵⁷

It is in the tripartite of being in-itself, being for-itself, and the necessity of being, that these terms collapse into one another as the possibility of being that *is* nothing other than the “speaking of being” which has become “the exhaustion of transcendentals”⁵⁸—*it is indeed being*. Abandonment is to be found at the point of exhaustion where *it* “requires nothing,” an exhaustion that nonetheless provides an “openness” to being, the opening of a world within the world itself. According to Raffoul, in Nancy’s reading of Parmenides: “We are summoned to an ontology deprived and stripped of all metaphysical principles, deprived of ground and the ruling of the so-called “transcendentals””; and furthermore, this exhaustion of transcendentals “corresponds to a suspension, and interruption and a ceasing of

⁵⁶ Ibid. [Emphasis added to the last sentence.]

⁵⁷ Ibid p.38.

⁵⁸ Ibid p.37.

the various discourses of onto-theology and its categories.”⁵⁹ The abundance of saying being becomes for Nancy an exhaustion of speaking being, which is in itself an opening to pursue a “destiny” from which this abundance is sprung. The importance of this opening to a “destiny” in the exhaustion that becomes a “cessation” of transcendentals—a “cessation” that itself must be recognized when Nietzsche declares that “God is dead”—will become apparent as I explore a reading of *l’avenir*.

III. AGAM BEN ON THE SOVEREIGN BAN

Some remarks on Agamben’s reference to Nancy’s essay *Abandoned Being* may be useful here to bring more nuance to my interpretation of abandonment in Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity. Without the space here to do justice to the considerable oeuvre of Agamben, it will suffice to outline Agamben’s use of the term “abandonment” within the context of his political project, and to demonstrate how Agamben’s ontological picture differs from Nancy’s. When Nancy refers to abandonment he is not simply recalling the onto-theological critique (*Destruktion*) that is explicit in Heidegger’s theory of being-abandoned (*Seinsverlassenheit*) as laid out in *Contributions*. Nancy is also attempting to think beyond the closure that Heidegger explicitly attributes to abandonment, and instead use abandonment as a point of departure in his reading of the loss of meaning that I refer to in chapter three on community. Agamben, in contrast, refers to abandonment in order to relate his theory of “exception” and sovereignty to an ontological framework of life and law; a framework that he will critique and continually call into question. It is in *Homo Sacer*, that Giorgio Agamben takes up the

⁵⁹ Raffoul, “Abandonment and the Categorical Imperative of Being” *Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice Legality and World*, p.67.

theme of abandonment in reference to the manner in which Nancy describes the High German sense of prohibition.⁶⁰

If the exception is the structure of sovereignty, then sovereignty...is the original structure in which law refers to life and includes it in itself by suspending it. Taking up Jean-Luc Nancy's suggestion, we shall give the name *ban* (from the old Germanic term that designates both exclusion from the community and the command and insignia of the sovereign) to this potentiality...of the law to maintain itself in its own privation, to apply in no longer applying...⁶¹

For Agamben, abandonment is thought in relation to his theory of the "state of exception," in which the "force of law" is provided by the "capacity of law to maintain itself in relation to an exteriority."⁶² That is to say, the law constitutes itself through its own suspension, by not being held to the inner "space" of its own rule of law. The law is outside of itself, or, put another way, the law itself remains lawless, and it is this lawlessness that provides the very "force" of law. As Eric Santner explains, the power of the sovereign has been interpolated into the body of the state, which are the bodies that inhabit that state as "a corporeal locus and shape."⁶³ Agamben argues that the "state of exception" has become

⁶⁰ Agamben also refers to Nancy in *Means Without Ends*, in which he writes: "The concepts of *sovereignty* and of *constituent power*, which are at the core of our political tradition, have to be abandoned or, at least, to be thought all over again. They mark, in fact, the point of indifference between right and violence, nature and *logos*, proper and improper, and as such they do not designate an attribute or an organ of the juridical system or of the state; they designate, rather, their own original structure. Sovereignty is the idea of an undecidable nexus between violence and right, between the living and language—a nexus that necessarily takes the paradoxical form of a decision regarding the state of exception (Schmitt) or *ban* (Nancy) in which the law (language) relates to the living by withdrawing from it, by abandoning it to its own violence and its own unrelatedness. Sacred life the life that is presupposed and abandoned by the law in the state of exception—is the mute carrier of sovereignty, the real *sovereign subject*." pp.112-3.

⁶¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, p.28.

⁶² Ibid p.18.

⁶³ "...the body of the citizen that is invested with the principle of sovereignty is no longer an instance of *zoe*, no longer bare life in the sense of animal existence, but rather life insofar as it is posited as *bearer of flesh*, as giving — always precarious — corporeal locus and shape to the element that holds the place of the jointure of life and law." Eric Santner, *The Royal Remains*, p.61. I should note that Santner is engaging in a specific cri-

more often the norm in modern democratic political constituencies; the legal attributes of citizens are increasingly suspended and placed *outside* the law such that citizens are reduced to merely “bare life.”⁶⁴ The “potentiality” (perhaps the crucial ontological term for Agamben) of law resides in its capacity to abandon being to this “bare life,” and, in particular, the politico-ontological blur between being outside and being inside law.

He who has been banned is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather *abandoned* by it, that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable...The matchless potentiality of the *nomos*, its originary “force of law,” is that it holds life in its ban by abandoning it.⁶⁵

Through the second half of *Abandoned Being*, Nancy catalogues the ways in which a singularity is constituted in its “abandonment to law.” As I have already described, it is clear that Nancy is referring to an ontology in which the command of law comes “to be” only through the issue of that command from out of an opening. In the same gesture it should be remembered that Nancy is gesturing within the project of deconstructing Christianity, in which this opening remains itself without ground, and must be thought as a withdrawal of “presence.” Agamben picks up on the manner in which Nancy relates the voice to law, and voice itself relates to a singularity, an issuing-forth from..., which remains without the sense of transaction such that the “law gives nothing.”⁶⁶ Specifically, Nancy argues, “One abandons to a law, which is to say, always a voice. *Bannan, bannen*, in ancient and middle High German (to order or prohibit, under threat of penalty), are grafted onto a “root” (*bha) of speech, of declaration...Ontology is thus a

tique of biopolitics in that it remains incapable of addressing these vicissitudes of flesh and the “*surplus of immanence*” (61) that coincides with the translation of law into the sovereign body of ‘the people’.

⁶⁴ I should also note here that the efficacy of Agamben’s thesis is brought into its stark and violent conclusion when he describes the manner in which the concentration camps of Nazi Germany represent “the materialization of the state of exception”. *Homo Sacer* p.174.

⁶⁵ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp.28-9.

⁶⁶ Nancy, “Abandoned Being” *Birth To Presence*, p.45.

phonology.”⁶⁷ Thus, while the voice may constitute law, the voice cannot be thought of as issuing a command, rather it might simply say “*ecce homo*.”⁶⁸ This marks an important distinction, as it goes to the heart of how Nancy relates abandonment and law to the “question of being.”

Ecce homo, “behold the man,” is attributed in the bible to Pontius Pilate’s gesture toward the figure of Jesus Christ prior to his crucifixion. In the same gesture, Nancy refers to the “dereliction” of Christ by God, abandoned in his crucifixion. Thus, while one abandons to a law, the voice that is law is without “medium” or “discourse”, it simply issues the human to a “being-there, or to be there—that is, *here*.”⁶⁹ Where the “here” of being, remains to be constituted, categorised, catalogued—the “here” instead is only that which “opens a spacing, clears an area upon which being is thrown, abandoned.”⁷⁰ Critically, this relates directly to what Gauchet reads as the gesture of *absent-presence* I outlined in chapter two—in the figure of Christ, God abandoned humankind. The New Testament provides a re-reading of the creation *ex nihilo* that was first given structure in the book of *Genesis*, the figure of the human body of Christ suffering on the cross opened the *ex nihilo* into which the human was abandoned. For Nancy, abandonment is an ontological gesture of the body, where the body is what has come to occupy the void opened by the “destitution” of the premise *qua* God.⁷¹ Nancy regards and addresses the necessity of thinking this gesture of abandonment alongside the withdrawal of presence and the ruptured topography dis-enclosed by this withdrawal. In other words, whereas in Nancy abandonment *is* law—in the sense that law cannot be thought otherwise than the space opened by the withdrawal of presence and occupied by the body, understood as the continual play of this withdrawal and springing-forth of sense within the opening—for Agamben

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid p.46.

⁶⁹ Ibid p.47. As Alenka Zupančič argues, the death of God in Nietzsche is the death of the generative power of the Law (in Lacanian terms, the master-signifier); however, the linguistic structure of law (university-discourse), the ‘voice’, remains in force (without-affect). In other words, as Nancy would also argue, we conduct religious rites like actors on a stage – they have become emptied of their divine force. See, *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two*, p.37.

⁷⁰ Nancy, “Abandoned Being” *Birth to Presence*, p.47.

⁷¹ I address this gesture of the body in detail in chapter five.

abandonment is the *potentiality* for law to reduce life to “bare life”. This difference once again reiterates the importance of Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity in understanding how he uses the term “abandonment”.

In his conceptualization of abandonment, Agamben argues that it refers to Law’s potential to be in force without application. With this in mind, we should note briefly the key ontological motif in Agamben, *potentiality*—an engagement with the uneasy relationship between potentiality and actuality in Aristotle’s philosophy. Agamben seizes upon what he reads as a misunderstanding of Aristotle’s theory of potentiality, arguing that what Aristotle is describing through the term potentiality is the ongoing accompaniment of an impotentiality (“the potentiality to not-be”).⁷² “To be potential means: to be one’s own lack, to be in relation to one’s own incapacity.”⁷³ Thus, Agamben argues, Aristotle’s insight is not, as typically understood, that “what is not impossible is possible”⁷⁴ which would be to say that impotentiality is erased in the coming to be (actuality). Rather, Agamben argues that impotentiality (“the potentiality to not-be”) is exhausted but still preserved in actuality. Thus impotentiality does not disappear “in actuality; on the contrary, it preserves itself as such in actuality. What is truly potential is thus what has exhausted all its impotentiality in bringing it wholly into the act as such.”⁷⁵ This, as Catherine Mills argues, serves to relate the ontological term *potentiality* directly to Agamben’s theory of biopolitics and his use of the term abandonment.

In this way then, the relation of potentiality to actuality described by Aristotle accords perfectly with the logic of the ban that Agamben argues is characteristic of sovereign power, thereby revealing the fundamental integration of metaphysics and politics.⁷⁶

⁷² Aristotle writes that “And a thing is capable of doing something if there is nothing impossible in its having the actuality of that of which it is said to have the capacity.” *Metaphysics*, 1047a24-5. Translated by Agamben as “A thing is said to be potential if, when the act of which it is said to be potential is realized, there will be nothing impotential.” ‘On Potentiality’ *Potentialities*, p.183.

⁷³ Agamben, *Potentialities*, p.182.

⁷⁴ Catherine Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, p.31.

⁷⁵ Agamben, *Potentialities*, p.183.

⁷⁶ Mills, “Agamben” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

Abandonment is the leitmotif used by Agamben to infer the nihilism that has accompanied the indistinction of law and life in modern sovereignty. This mode of indistinction is correlative to both the state of exception and abandonment that allows Agamben to maintain a definition of the force of law, in which law remains in force while being *without* "significance."⁷⁷ As Mills argues, by bringing together both exception and abandonment, Agamben is describing the modern nihilistic condition of contemporary politics in which it is no longer possible "to say clearly whether that which has been banned is inside or outside the juridical order."⁷⁸ Abandonment is a theme of critique, and opening to the possibility of thinking beyond nihilism—which finds its potentiality, for Agamben, in Benjamin's *Messianic* politics of pure means as a "divine violence."⁷⁹

The key distinction between Agamben and Nancy is the manner in which they approach the question of law. Nancy's ontological theme of abandonment seeks to form a synergy between being-with and law, such that being responds to the *obligation of making-sense* in shared existence that comes from being abandoned to the law, "creating" a sense that is born into the shared finitude of being-with. Abandonment allows Nancy to maintain the sense in which "creation" is devoid of a producer and is not a "work." Themes such as "community" and "globalization" remain inoperative, which is to say, sense is *in* common but not attached to the production of a commonality or communion. In contrast to Nancy's approach Agamben seeks, as Mills describes, to "illuminate the "originary" relation of law to life."⁸⁰ This would seem to suggest that Agamben wants to recapture the sovereignty of being through the iteration of Benjamin's *divine violence*. Agamben gives a clue as to how this would manifest itself in *Homo Sacer*, when he argues "one must think...the existence of potentiality even without any relation to being in the form of the gift of the self and of letting be."⁸¹ According

⁷⁷ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p.51.

⁷⁸ Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, p.63.

⁷⁹ "If mythic violence is lawmaking, divine violence is law-destroying" Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" *Selected Writings Volume 1, 1913-1926*, p.249. This is obviously a difficult and complicated topic, related to but nonetheless far beyond the scope of this study.

⁸⁰ Mills, *The Philosophy of Agamben*, p.60.

⁸¹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p.47.

to Agamben, this is only possible if we surpass the relation of being to abandonment, which “implies nothing less than thinking ontology and politics beyond every figure of relation, beyond even the limit relation that is the sovereign ban.”⁸² Agamben clearly differentiates his philosophical project from Nancy’s by projecting the theme of abandonment into a political-ontology, in the sense that Agamben is prescribing a political emancipation from abandonment.

It nonetheless appears that Agamben’s motivation for this “thinking beyond” resonates in some fashion with the concerns Nancy raises in *The Inoperative Community*. In *The Coming Community*, Agamben points to the necessity of maintaining human *potentiality* in describing the very possibility of ethics. As Agamben puts it: “There is in effect something that humans are and have to be, but this something is not an essence nor properly a thing: *It is the simple fact of one’s own existence as possibility or potentiality.*”⁸³ It is only by remaining apart from subjection to some essence or destiny through potentiality, that humankind remains open to the possibility of ethics. “This is the only reason why something like an ethics can exist, because it is clear that if humans were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would be possible—there would be only tasks to be done.”⁸⁴

This suggests that a distinction can be found in the emphasis Nancy places on “shared-finitude” in his ontology of being-singular-plural as a specific means of overcoming the Heideggerian insistence on authenticity.⁸⁵ Agamben maintains a connection to Heidegger’s theme of *Seinsverlassenheit*, while at the same time seeks a political-ontology that might overcome the nihilism inherent within this concept of abandonment. In contrast, Nancy suggests the possibility of political emancipation from *within*, a possibility revealed by *deconstructing* Heideggerian abandonment; such that, Nancy’s ontological commitment relies specifically upon his project in the deconstruction of Christianity. Indeed, in my analysis of Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity, I am suggesting that he is working *within*

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p.42-3.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ I explore the emphasis Nancy places on shared-finitude in relation to Heidegger’s fundamental ontology in more detail below.

Heideggerian abandonment as part of the project of deconstruction itself. Rather than attempt to think *beyond* abandonment to a more originary formulation of the relation of life to law, one that reaches back and beyond the nihilism of contemporary politics,⁸⁶ Nancy works *within* the theme of abandonment. By demonstrating how Heideggerian abandonment deconstructs itself in much the same fashion as Christianity, Nancy opens the possibility of departing from the nihilism of Heideggerian abandonment from *within* the notion of "Abandoned Being."

IV. HEIDEGGER SEINSVERLASSENHEIT

Nancy is facing up to the predicament of abandonment described by Heidegger in *Contributions to Philosophy: From Ereignis*, in which Heidegger argues that the "lived-experience" of existence must be understood as the "abandonment of beings by being."⁸⁷ As Nancy's reading of Parmenides explains, the ontological attestation of being fails through the exhaustion of transcendentals, it is at this point of failure that Nancy and Heidegger converge on the term "abandonment." In chapter two I referred to the *paradigme principiel* that provides an absolute or totalized way of conceptualizing the world. Within the *paradigme principiel*, the "distinction" in the ontic-ontological difference remains opaque. For Heidegger, abandonment is the predicament of Being that attempts to make sense, while forgetting the impossibility of a non-metaphysical understanding of being. It thus relates directly to how Nancy describes globalization as an "agglomeration" of meaning that functions according to a general equivalency, and the "immanence of man to man" in the "production" of an essence in community. Heidegger turns to the notion of *Ereignis* to describe an authentic way of thinking being, a term I detail below, before describing where Nancy diverges from Heidegger's use of

⁸⁶ I am not suggesting that we can attribute this to Agamben, my schematic overview of Agamben's thought lacks the considerable rigor involved in making such a claim.

⁸⁷ Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy: Of The Event*, p.88. [110-112].

this term. Prior to detailing what Heidegger means by *Ereignis*, I want to first elaborate on how Heidegger refers to abandonment in *Contributions*.

I have argued that Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity traces the manner in which the Christianity has shown itself to be the religion that enabled religion to be surpassed. Through the term abandonment Nancy is reinforcing Heidegger's notion that Christian dogma worked to hide the distress of the abandonment of being,⁸⁸ while simultaneously going further than Heidegger by undoing Christianity itself by playing upon the fact that it was grounding being in a creator that had itself been abandoned. Furthermore, Nancy is deconstructing the structural gestures that function through the figure of the crucifixion of the body of Christ, and the trauma of His abandonment by God.

In *Noli me tangere*, Nancy describes the encounter between Mary Magdalene and the arisen Jesus—Jesus being not of this world and not yet with the Father. When Jesus commands Mary “do not touch me,” how are we to understand this prohibition? In one sense it may be understood as indicative of the manner in which the presentation of truth through Christ (*logos made flesh*) is its own revelation, “the truth and the interpretation being made identical to each other and by each other.”⁸⁹ What we find in this chiasmus of truth and interpretation is the exhaustion of “speaking of being” to which I referred above when I discussed Parmenides. Mary cannot touch Christ because He no longer occupies this world, He is absent, and yet His spectral absence is still present, inviting and prohibiting the out-stretched hand of Mary to touch Him, while concurrently withdrawing from “the world.” For Nancy, abandonment can only be understood through this withdrawal by resisting the invitation and prohibition of this withdrawal—the invitation and prohibition of which both coalesce into the *paradigme principiel*, such that this paradigm totalizes the world and gives nothing but its own closure.⁹⁰ How does Nancy's use of the term abandonment build upon what Heidegger refers to in *Contributions* as *Seinsverlassenheit*? And where does he find the possibility of this dual resistance?

⁸⁸ Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy: Of The Event*, p.88. [110-112].

⁸⁹ Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, p.5.

⁹⁰ See chapter two.

Heidegger writes *Contributions* as a response to the sense in which his destruction of metaphysics is paradoxically still reliant upon a language of metaphysics⁹¹; and it is from this critique that he takes up the question of the truth of Being in a wholly new way. In her remarkable exegesis of *Contributions*, Daniela Vallega-Neu⁹² argues that Heidegger was fully aware that his approach had remained in a certain way caught within the paradigm of metaphysics; in particular his “transcendental approach to the question of being” in which Heidegger included notions such as “transcendence...horizon...condition of possibility...and his thinking in terms of the ontological difference.”⁹³

In *Being and Time* Heidegger attempts to formulate “time” as the essential transcendental for understanding the question of the meaning of being. In order to explicate this transcendental Heidegger refers to an “ontological difference” in his fundamental ontology, in which he forms a distinction between the ontological and the ontic modes of Dasein. What this distinction recognises is that in creating an understanding of what it means “to-be,” being also *reveals* the manner in which it comes into the world and into a relation to others within the world. In working through his fundamental ontology Heidegger argues that, on the one hand, Dasein is revealed in its ontic sense as *in* the world, as part of the world; and, on the other hand, through the ontological distinction that his fundamental ontology makes apparent, Dasein is also understood as what it means to reveal itself ontologically *as* a world. As Heidegger acknowledges, this ontological distinction, or difference, creates a gap between our ontic and ontological mode of thinking through the concept of Dasein. Thus, in understanding and conceptualising his fundamental ontology, Heidegger becomes aware of the necessity of moving between these two conceptions of Dasein. In *Contributions* he approaches and confronts this necessity. As Heidegger explains:

⁹¹ As Richard Polt argues, “Heidegger...is trying as hard as he can to respond to Being with appropriate language, but he holds that it is simply impossible to say “the truth of being” directly: nothing we can say will make Being unconceal itself with perfect clarity.” *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p.141.

⁹² Throughout this section I rely heavily upon both Daniela Vallega-Neu’s book *Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction*, and her recent translation of *Contributions* published in collaboration with Richard Rojcewicz.

⁹³ Daniela Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy: An Introduction*, p.9.

We grasp the 'ontological', even when grasped as a condition of the 'ontic', indeed only as something supplementary to the ontic, and we repeat the 'ontological' (the projection of beings onto beingness) once again as a self-application to itself: the projection beingness (as a projection of being) onto its truth. There is at first no other way that could come out of the horizon of metaphysics and make the question of being graspable at all as a task.

Through this procedure, beyng (*seyn*)⁹⁴ itself is apparently still made into an object, and what is reached is the most decisive opposite of what the first approach to the question of beyng had already opened up for itself. Yet the point of *Being and Time* was indeed to expose "time" as the domain of projection for beyng. Of course; but if the matter had rested there, then the question of being would never have developed as a *question* and thus as an inventive thinking of what is most question-worthy.⁹⁵

What this remark demonstrates is that Heidegger had become aware of a problem that he created within his analysis of Dasein in *Being and Time*. In an ontological questioning of Being in its temporal sense we are still faced with the beingness of being as represented ontically. Consequently, as Vallega-Neu points out, in order to question the ontological Being in its temporality we "invite thinking to slip back into a metaphysical perspective that poses itself over against and therefore outside what it questions."⁹⁶ Immediately we should wonder how a

⁹⁴ Heidegger's use of the spelling *seyn* instead of *sein* (being) captures the sense in which Heidegger wants to think being beyond the metaphysical thought of being amongst beings. "For Heidegger, the use of the word "Seyn" (instead of "Sein") indicates that being is not thought of metaphysically, i.e., it is not thought of analogously to beings as a (highest) being but rather as an occurrence (C307; B436). In order to render the non-representational and temporal character of being, "Seyn" is translated as "be-ing." Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy*, p.7fn1. See also, Richard Polt, "In the *Contributions*, Heidegger often spells the word for "Being" as Seyn instead of Sein. Seyn is an old-fashioned, nineteenth-century spelling that gives the word a faint flavor of something archaic and forgotten. He wants to recall a mysterious sense of Being that lies hidden behind the conventional way of conceiving of Being." *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p.143.

⁹⁵ Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy: Of The Event*, [450-451].

⁹⁶ Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy*, p.25. Žižek clearly elaborates this gap in his critique of Heidegger's notion of finitude in *The Parallax View*, claiming that this gap is indicative of the very impossibility, of, ontologically grasping the "real" as such. He writes, "To put it in Kantian terms: it is because of this finitude that "intellectual intuition" is impossible, that a human being can grasp things only within a gap between their mere being-there and the mode "as such", of their appearance; in short, that every under-

question of what it means to exist could be thought within the existence to which the question is addressed.⁹⁷ By addressing the ontological sense of being as distinct from the ontic sense of being, this distinction itself appears as a metaphysical distinction within the question itself. In other words, seen from the ontological perspective, ontic being is understood as an object that might be thought as standing apart from this perspective as thinking. Heidegger is attempting to describe being while aggravating the ontic-ontological difference that allows metaphysics to make its way back into the question of being.

In fact, this difference provides an opening that becomes the point from which Heidegger attempts to overcome the failure of language through the performativity of language. Heidegger does not attempt to think across the ontic-ontological divide, to an original ontological truth of being in its authentic temporality; rather, Heidegger describes the truth of being by instituting a mode of discourse in the language of *Contributions* that, as Vallega-Neu argues, supports “a letting go of any representational mode of thinking, of any supporting structure, value, or belief.”⁹⁸ *Contributions* could thus be read as an attempt to “think” the truth of being from within the impossibility of any direct apprehension of Being. As Vallega-Neu puts it:

In *Contributions*, Heidegger departs from a thinking in terms of the ontological difference which still places the thinking of fundamental ontology in an ambiguous position as it slides back and forth from an authentic mode of being to a representational mode of thinking.⁹⁹

Hence, *Contributions* demonstrates the impossibility of making any ontological attestation of Dasein without sliding back into a metaphysical understanding of

standing is a contingent “projecting” of a link over a gap, not a direct apprehension. The transcendental “condition of possibility” is thus the obverse of the condition of impossibility: the very impossibility for a human being to directly intuit reality, the very failure, falling-short of the goal, is what constitutes the openness of the world, of its horizon.” Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p.273.

⁹⁷ Anticipating Nancy’s re-reading of abandonment, what should catch our attention is how the *revelation* of Christ as *logos made flesh* is precisely such an attempt.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid p.48.

being. What should catch our attention is not the impossibility of revealing Being without recourse to metaphysics, but rather, what this impossibility reveals about ontology itself. In other words, recalling my remarks on Fynsk above, ontology springs forth from the very “failure” of its attestation in non-metaphysical terms.

Heidegger on abandonment

The concept of abandonment is a pejorative term for Heidegger, one that he associates with the “disaster”¹⁰⁰ of the modern human condition. Heidegger designates a two-fold movement of abandonment: Firstly, being is abandoned to the “machinations” of beings, in which everything becomes beholden to the “interpretation of beings as re-presentable and represented.”¹⁰¹ Secondly, being is abandoned to the “cause-effect relationship” of the Christian paradigm of creation, in which creation is naturally preceded by a creator; a relationship which invokes the seemingly obvious sense of the transitive within the play of cause and effect.¹⁰² It is this binary construction of *beings* in the world—where they are configured through representation and predicated in that representation by some effect that provides the substance of representation—that is the defining mark of onto-theology. According to Heidegger, this methodology continues to function despite the withdrawal of the divine¹⁰³; it functions in the modern world as a hegemonic “logical form” that is driven by the notion of humanism that Heidegger rejects in his *Letter on Humanism*.¹⁰⁴ As Heidegger writes,

The abandonment of beings by being: the fact that being¹⁰⁵ has withdrawn from beings, and beings have first of all (through Christianity) become mere things made by another being. The supreme being, as cause of all beings,

¹⁰⁰ Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p.142.

¹⁰¹ Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy: Of The Event*, [108-109].

¹⁰² Ibid [110-112].

¹⁰³ Broadly speaking I am referring here to the “dis-enchantment” of the world that was covered in some detail in chapter one.

¹⁰⁴ C.f. chapter three of this text.

¹⁰⁵ The truth of being.

took over the essence of being. These beings, formerly made by a creator God, then became the *dominion* of humanity, inasmuch as beings are now taken only in their objectivity and come under human domination. The beingness of beings thereby fades into a “logical form”, into what is thinkable by a thinking which is itself ungrounded.¹⁰⁶

Put simply, Heidegger’s claim is that the Christian God instantiated beings in their thingness or presence through the separation of a producer from His production. This structural separation has remained despite the “Platonic reversal”¹⁰⁷ in which the Ideal came under the dominion of the human. Abandonment is this structural separation and reversal; while at the same time this separation and reversal is continually (self-)reinforced by the forgetting (fallen-ness) of being. Forgetting is the lack of questioning, and the blind prescription to the paradigm of representation and creation, in which beings are left to themselves as “objects of machination.”¹⁰⁸ This term “machination” expresses what Heidegger “will later call *Technik* (technology) or *Ge-stell* (enframing),”¹⁰⁹ terms that I turned to in chapter one to describe how Heidegger pictures our modern age as overcome by nihilism. According to Richard Polt, in *Contributions* Heidegger uses the term “machination” in order to describe the nihilism implicit in a metaphysical thinking, in which the immanent world is pictured as an assemblage of beings or “present at hand things with no *intrinsic* meaning or purpose”¹¹⁰—in other words, their meaning is beyond their being. Furthermore, in picturing the world in terms of “machination,” Heidegger is capturing the sense in which we have increasingly *enclosed* beings in terms of a general equivalency.¹¹¹ As Polt explains, “All we can do is calculate and control. We observe and measure everything, we make things go faster and faster, our power and efficiency are ever increasing—

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy: Of The Event*, [110-112].

¹⁰⁷ C.f. Heidegger, *Nietzsche* in particular ‘Volume I: The Will to Power as Art’, pp.200-210. I refer to this reversal in chapter one.

¹⁰⁸ Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy: Of The Event*, [110-112].

¹⁰⁹ Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p.142.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* emphasis added.

¹¹¹ Cf. chapter two.

but questioning and reflection are withering away."¹¹² Thus, Heidegger argues, the truth of being must be revealed by the sense in which the "abandonment by being...has to be experienced as the basic occurrence of our history and brought into the knowledge which configures and leads the way."¹¹³ However, at the same time, we are caught within the paradigm in which the "abandonment of being is the ground and thereby at the same time the more original determination of the essence of that which Nietzsche was the first to recognize as nihilism."¹¹⁴

Essentially, Heidegger is wrestling with the need to avoid metaphysical language as he attempts to describe the increasing intensity of rationalization and mechanization in the modern milieu. In outlining the manner in which this nihilism operates in the "machinations" of the modern age, Heidegger argues that these machinations of the calculability and exchangeability of beings as entities produce the very conditions for "disguising" our lived-experience. The sense of "machinations" culminates in what Heidegger calls the "gigantic," a sense in which beings have become completely encompassed by the manner in which they are as purely calculable entities. In this way abandonment becomes, in a very essential way, "the incapacity to experience what is genuinely happening...All these signs of the abandonment by being point to the inception of the *era of the complete unquestionableness of all things and of all machinations*."¹¹⁵

Two thoughts converge here: on the one hand, the "incapacity to experience," or, the inability to interpret; and, on the other hand, a "genuine happening," which would be analogous to truth. What is absolutely critical to an understanding of how abandonment functions for Heidegger, is how the element of truth is caught within the paradigm of machination—truth is the mark that allows the calculative element, the exchangeability of beings, to function. The abandonment of being for Heidegger is the covering over of the manner in which machination becomes the "lived-experience" of being, and, operates without question. As Heidegger argues,

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy: Of The Event*, [112-113].

¹¹⁴ Ibid [119-121].

¹¹⁵ Ibid [122-123].

...where "truth" has long since ceased to be a question, however, and even the attempt at such a question is dismissed as a disturbance and an inconsequential musing, there the plight of the abandonment by being has no time-space at all.¹¹⁶

This lack of time-space is why Heidegger refers to the *Ereignis* of being; *Ereignis* is the clearing of time-space that makes the event of being possible, which is why *Ereignis* is not simply an event. From the impossibility of crossing the ontic-ontological divide Heidegger restores the question of the truth through spatio-temporal clearing event of *Ereignis*. *Ereignis* must thus be more than simply an event as happening, particularly as it is in happening that *being* is something rather than nothing.

Heidegger: *Ereignis* and performativity

Responding to the "machinations" of modernity, Heidegger plays on the performative appurtenance of *Ereignis* in order to "think" the experience of being without recourse to metaphysics, and thus contest the ever-expanding dominance of technology. As Bernasconi writes, "Heidegger is clear that our access to *Ereignis* is not through proof, but through experience...*Ereignis* is experienced in the essence of modern technology, but as that which brings about the recovery of the world from out of the dominance of technology."¹¹⁷ In using the term *Ereignis*, Heidegger is again drawing upon his notion of authenticity and ownness while attempting not to succumb to a metaphysical discourse, which is why it is sometimes translated as *enowning* and *appropriation*. According to Polt, by using the term *Ereignis* Heidegger "wants us to hear an echo of the adjective *eigen*, "own"."¹¹⁸ In Nancy's account, "we" resist the dominance of "production" through the creation of a world, which occurs in the "between" of our shared finitude. In contrast, for Heidegger, *Ereignis* "is an event that is my own", or in other words, it is an authentic experience of being as my own. The notion of *Ereignis* is critical

¹¹⁶ Ibid [124-126].

¹¹⁷ Bernasconi, *The Question of Language in Heidegger's History of Being*, p.86.

¹¹⁸ Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p.146.

for Heidegger, as it opens the possibility of contemplating our Being, while overcoming the nihilism of being-abandoned to the machinations of technology.

A question arises at this point, how is it possible to consider our own *Ereignis* when it remains groundless? Put another way, what sense can *Ereignis* have if it occupies the *ex nihilo* of abandoned-being? The answer for Heidegger is in the enactment of being, as the clearing-spacing event that is its own making-sense. Heidegger finds a means of overcoming the metaphysics implied in his ontic-ontological distinction, while also addressing the “*a priori* enigma” of existence, by considering how Being *is* in the performative event of *Ereignis*. As Vallega-Neu describes,

...for Heidegger the originary unity of be-ing [*seyn*] and beings can be thought adequately only if it is also *performed*, that is, enacted in thinking-saying. This is a decidedly different approach to thinking from *Being and Time*. Heidegger’s thinking becomes be-ing-historical and ceases to be transcendental in his attempt to respond to the compelling necessity of grounding the truth of be-ing in Da-sein out of the experience of the abandonment of be-ing.¹¹⁹

What Heidegger illuminates in *Contributions* is the importance of thinking being in its performativity, that is, to think through the question of being as a “thinking-saying,” as a happening of interpretation or reading, an inscription that is likewise always an exscription.¹²⁰ *Ereignis* is a continuous abandonment of being into the ungrounded; in which each event of being, as its “own” unfolding of

¹¹⁹ Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy*, p.49. We should note here that Vallega-Neu, in using the term be-ing, is referring to the original translation. In the translation that follows from her work she transcribes this term as beyng, and thus the two terms should be read in the same way despite the change in spelling. Be-ing or beyng is an attempt to capture the necessity of thinking being as *Ereignis*, the performative advent of being as beyng.

¹²⁰ We might pause to reflect here on the words of the biologist Francisco Varela who wrote that what is most striking to him, what he calls the “eternal question” is the manner in which “emergent selves” that appear throughout the biological world at both the cellular level, and the level of consciousness, are essentially based upon what he describes as a “process so shifty, so ungrounded, that we have an apparent paradox between the solidity of what appears to show up and its groundlessness” Varela, *The Third Culture* p.210.

openness into the world, “appropriates” this abandonment. As Port explains, the “world opens up for us only because we are engaged participants in it.”¹²¹ Vallega-Neu likens this unfolding to the difference that always unfolds in the repetition of a performative action, such as the performance of a piece of music. The “each-time and place” of a musical performance is a unique disposition or spacing of the event as its *performance*. In the same way, she argues, Heidegger’s *Contributions* is itself an “each-time and place” in the event of its “performative reading and listening” in which thinking itself unfolds in a unique way.¹²² As Joan Stambaugh puts it, the “word Being is simply too bogged down with metaphysical connotations.”¹²³ In order to “think” Being aside from (not “overcome”¹²⁴) metaphysics, Heidegger chooses the term *Ereignis*, which is not precisely a term, but instead a way of picturing the thinking-saying of the performativity of being in its clearing-event.

Nancy on abandonment

Consequently, if one fails *think* one’s Being in terms of *Ereignis*, then the abandonment of being is not “felt” as a distress; in other words, we do not reckon with the *Rätsel* of existence and become part of the calculable or “agglomeration” of the globe. As Nancy puts it, abandonment signals the distress and necessity of a “finite thinking...that, on each occasion, thinks the fact that it is unable to think what comes to it.”¹²⁵ Abandonment forms a key ontological gesture for both Heidegger and Nancy in the sense that it is constitutive of existence, and clearly Heidegger’s sense of abandonment resonates with Nancy. Nevertheless this gesture forms a point of departure from which Nancy will extend being-abandoned, in a style that appears analogous with his method of critiquing Heideggerian finitude.

¹²¹ Port, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p.147.

¹²² Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy*, p.32.

¹²³ Joan Stambaugh, ‘Introduction’ in Heidegger, *On Time and Being* trans. J. Stambaugh, p.ix.

¹²⁴ Heidegger was forced to defend his use of the term “overcome” from the scathing criticism of Carnap.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

We can spot the key difference between their accounts of abandonment by how they approach the possibility of thinking—the truth of Being in Heidegger's case, and the *obligation* to make-sense in Nancy's case. For Heidegger, *Ereignis* maintains the singularity of belonging to us, it is our own. The clearing-event of Being is always governed by the "care" of Being that is constitutive of an authentic Dasein. In contrast, by focusing on *obligation* Nancy is unencumbered by the necessity of taking *own-ership* of the clearing-event of being, rather it becomes necessary to embrace abandonment as the *obligation* to make sense of our shared finitude. The weight of thinking resides for Nancy in how it touches the world as both singular and plural. Indeed, this *obligation* is what opens in the withdrawal of the divine that his project to deconstruct Christianity reveals; an opening, as *transimmanence*, that obligates the *passage* of sense "between" being in their shared finitude.

In *The Decision of Existence* Nancy turns his attention to reading the possibility of both authenticity and inauthenticity¹²⁶ in "thinking the ownness of a decision in which existence reaches *its* decision."¹²⁷ The terminology of the decision brings to the fore a way of thinking the chiasmus of truth and the revelation of Christ as *logos made flesh*, without the necessity of re-inscribing a "return" to some proper mode of thinking that may have existed before the withdrawal of the divine (*absent-presence*). The decision makes a "world" and "community" possible, while suspending the modality of production that turns these motifs into a "work." Decision, then, has a precise meaning for Nancy in his essay, and in my account relates directly to the notion of *obligation* I have referred to above. Nancy engages directly with the Heideggerian analysis of the question of the meaning of being, and how it might be possible to address this question without recourse to an authentic mode of address. Indeed, as I have argued above, it is not a case of moving beyond abandonment, but dwelling within the abandonment of being. As Catherine Malabou puts it, it is "the experience of an absence

¹²⁶ Nancy writes that the "category of the "authentic" essentially implies the idea of a purity of origin or provenance, of a native excellence, in relation to which one can represent or bring about an "inauthentic" falsification or degradation." "The Decision of Existence" *Birth to Presence*, p.100.

¹²⁷ Nancy, "The Decision of Existence" *Birth to Presence*, p.100.

of an outside."¹²⁸ Nancy recognizes that for Heidegger the decision of existence can only take place in the inauthentic "they." Authentic existence is nothing more than a "modified grasp" of inauthentic existence, "not something which floats above falling everydayness."¹²⁹ Thus, Nancy is interpreting Heidegger and at the same time exaggerating and intensifying the decision to exist within abandonment as an *obligation*. The "decision" of existence involves an *obligation* to make-sense that is fulfilled through our being-with, and indeed, cannot be fulfilled on one's own.

V. THE POWER OF *PHILOS*

Abandonment's only law, like that of love, is to be without return and without recourse.¹³⁰

In his essay *Shattered Love* Nancy recognizes the power in the *philos* of philosophy; the love of wisdom is a call that orientates thinking in light of the *call to make sense*—which is precisely rendered by Nancy through the term *obligation*. Love calls us to engage with the orientation of thinking towards an other. A call that is finite without being completely singular, an engagement with others that lacks a definitive model of plurality, and that opens onto the infinite without becoming transcendent. The orientation of love is an abandonment to "a law beyond the law" of *shared finitude* that allows the ontological premise of being-singular-plural.

Love in its singularity, when it is grasped absolutely, is itself perhaps nothing but the indefinite abundance of all possible loves, and an abandonment to their dissemination, indeed to the disorder of these explosions. The thinking of love should learn to yield to this abandon: to receive the prodigality, the collisions, and the contradictions of love, without submitting them to an order that they essentially defy.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Catherine Malabou, *The Heidegger Change: On the Fantastic in Philosophy*, p.229.

¹²⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.224. cited in Nancy, *Birth to Presence*, p.99.

¹³⁰ Nancy, *Birth to Presence*, pp.36-7,47.

¹³¹ Nancy, 'Shattered Love' *The Inoperative Community*, p.83.

For Nancy, to think love in this way is not to think love beyond or outside of the philosophical. Rather it is the philosophical as a re-treatment of philosophy within the re-configuration of (Heideggerian) abandonment. Indeed, according to Nancy, it is only *through abandonment*¹³² that we can reach the point at which we would restore the love of wisdom—thinking—that is philosophy. Thinking begins from *within* abandonment.

Thus, while Nancy is clearly influenced by the Heideggerian themes of “machinations” and “en-framing,” we should read Nancy as going further than Heidegger was prepared to go in addressing the closure intrinsic to metaphysics. According to Nancy, thinking “does not produce the operators of a knowledge; it undergoes experience, and lets experience inscribe itself.”¹³³ The modality of abandonment that Nancy articulates through his deconstruction of Christianity, positions thinking as that which takes place *within* abandonment, as a *déclousion* [*dis-enclosure*] of thinking. *Within* abandonment, thinking arrives at the limit of intelligibility, and enables thought to happen otherwise than within the Western metaphysical paradigm of “presence.” This “finite thinking” is the realization that indeed “we do exist and we “understand” that this existence (ourselves) is not the senselessness of a reabsorbed and annulled signification.”¹³⁴ But more than that—and this, again, is how Nancy remains within the theme of abandonment while still providing a path for thinking that surpasses nihilism—thinking announces a sense that is constitutively shared.

The themes of belonging (*eigen*), appropriation (*Ereignis*), and authenticity (*eigentlich*) that guide Heidegger are *trans-located into ‘sense’ in-itself* (this is perhaps the decisive gesture); “we” are obligated to sense as shared. As Nancy puts it, “In the distress and necessity we “understand” that this “we”, here, now, is still and once more responsible for a singular sense.”¹³⁵

¹³² “It is probably even through the process of discerning the themes and structures of the “closed upon itself” that one may begin to make oneself available to the “open,” to what comes” Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, p.11.

¹³³ Nancy, “Shattered Love” *The Inoperative Community*, p.84.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p.15.

Nancy pushes Heidegger's notion of abandonment in *Contributions* to its very limit, and seizes upon the possibility that abandonment provides. According to Nancy, the openness that "we" are as abandoned provides the very possibility and sense of freedom itself. Abandonment, as the limit of intelligibility, is the limit that "we" face in an understanding or conceptualization as what remains beyond comprehension. Freedom is the fact of this limit, and the intelligibility that remains to-come. Indeed, this is the precise point made at the end of chapter one, when Nancy draws upon the argument of St Anselm.¹³⁶ As Nancy argues in *The Experience of Freedom*, freedom does not oppose comprehension, however, "it makes itself understood, at the limit of comprehension, as what does not originate in comprehension."¹³⁷ Nancy's extension of Heideggerian abandonment is the freedom of *transimmanence*, the potential for an outside of a world to open within the world.

In order to think beyond the implications of abandonment that represent the threat of nihilism in the contemporary world, "we" must think beyond the manner in which we lack any sense of the world (touched upon here in its three forms outlined in the previous three chapters as secularization, globalization, and community). For Nancy, the task at hand is to reveal a thinking that might retrieve *the love that thinking is*. Thinking occurs at the limit or boundary of an enclosure, and we should read Nancy as tirelessly seeking to open the world again in some fashion, to open "mere reason up to the limitlessness that constitutes its truth."¹³⁸ This limitlessness or opening is not the sense of something *more than* or beyond this enclosure, which would be another form of onto-theology; but how then can Nancy provide a sense in which there is an opening without falling prey to onto-theology?

As I outlined in chapter two, Nancy describes the sense in which Christianity provided the "one" God as the "closure" of metaphysics, which occurs in the *paradigme principiel* of mono-theism. This is not the "end" of the metaphysics, rather, it is the "inability to experience what is genuinely happening" in the metaphysical premise of calculability and equivalency—where "production" forms

¹³⁶ "'Majus quam cogitari possit' [Greater Than What Can Be Thought]" Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.11.

¹³⁷ Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, p.49.

¹³⁸ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.1.

the response to abandoned-being. Importantly, as I describe in both chapter one and two, according to Nancy it was Christianity itself that inscribed this "closure" as our "nervation" of sense. Put another way, the Western-world remains ostensibly bound to the paradigm of "Christianity," despite the prevalence of "secularism" and "atheism." The love of thinking that emancipates our being-abandoned, and opens an *ethos* within Nancy's ontology, must overcome the vitiation of value that marks our contemporary global system of capital. Hence, to answer this question of making-sense without succumbing to an onto-theology, Nancy turns to the deconstruction of the guiding figure within *paradigme principiel* of the West, the figure of Christ.

VI. CHRIST ABANDONED

Noli me tangere, Nancy's exegesis of the artistic interpretations of Christ's resurrection, exemplifies how being-abandoned can embrace the fragile thought of allowing, "the obscure emit its own clarity."¹³⁹ In this work Nancy begins with an analysis of Christ's parables or teachings, an analysis that will allow me to illustrate the theoretical coordinates for an ontology premised on what Heidegger called "inauthentic" *Mitsein*. This section will also introduce Nancy's treatment of the body in his deconstruction of Christianity that I cover in the final two chapters.

The parables of Christ in *The New Testament* teach one to follow the life of Christ as a guiding exemplar. As Nancy points out in the *Noli me tangere*, the reason why the parable is the proper method of instruction is linked to the manner in which Christ embodied "the word" of God. As Nancy writes in *Corpus*, "In truth, the body of God was the body of man himself: man's flesh was the body God gave himself."¹⁴⁰ Christ is the presentation of the *truth* of His life: His exemplarity, and

¹³⁹ Ibid p.6.

¹⁴⁰ Nancy, *Corpus*, p.61.

the “Word made flesh” in His embodiment as the Son of God. Christ is a *revelation* in the sense that, as Nancy puts it, “the entire life of Jesus is a representation of the truth that he claims to be,” and, as such, it is through the life of Christ that “this life is precisely the truth that appears in being represented.”¹⁴¹ Thus, in this section, I elaborate on how Nancy reads the figure of Jesus in the Christian faith as a truth exemplified in the *life* of Jesus, and as *logos* presented through His life in its singularity.¹⁴² By configuring truth in this way, Nancy is drawing upon his broader thesis that I have relied upon throughout this dissertation; Christianity itself provided the process by which this truth could cut across “Christian” monotheism *and* its evolving atheistic metamorphosis that culminates in the economy of equivalency—“monotheism is an atheism.”¹⁴³ This thesis is critical for showing why the deconstruction is so important for Nancy as it suspends the closure of metaphysics and reveals a love of thinking (adoration) that gives sense to the “world.”

Nancy claims that the Christian figure of Jesus produces the sense in which truth as *logos* “becomes parabolic”¹⁴⁴—as I described above, truth is situated within the Christian parable as its own “revelation.” Consequently, *logos* can only be thought in terms of the truth that is enunciated in the figure of Jesus, who embodies truth whilst remaining apart from the world in which such a truth might be enunciated. As Nancy puts it in *Adoration*, ““Christianity” is life in the world outside of the world,”¹⁴⁵ such that the content that could re-present *logos*, and thus invigorate the symbolic with meaning, is the “revelation” of the body of Christ which remains enclosed within the circular logic of the Christian parable. Christ announces Himself as the Son of God, the singular embodied figure of God on earth, but abandons the world of humankind to its own truth of that abandonment. Christ is the figure of truth as *logos*, but an image that points toward a

¹⁴¹ Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, p.4.

¹⁴² I return again in the next two chapters to the crucifixion of Christ in order to elaborate how this motif of *logos* is read in terms of the body and flesh.

¹⁴³ Schelling, cited in Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.14.

¹⁴⁴ Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, p.4.

¹⁴⁵ Nancy, *Adoration*, p.23.

divinity that has withdrawn from the world. Nancy quotes from John 14:9 (King James Version), in order to demonstrate the movement of this withdrawal.

He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou *then*, Show us the Father?

Christianity institutes *logos* in this parabolic movement of a withdrawal, in which the divine premise of “revelation”—what invests the world with meaning—abandons that world. As Nancy puts it, with the death of Jesus, “[t]here is nothing and no one to unveil or reveal.”¹⁴⁶ The Christian thought of “revelation” is precisely what institutes the kenosis of truth in *logos*; truth abandoned to the world whilst remaining opaque to all but Christ who abandons the world. Nancy uses the deconstruction of Christianity to argue that this is not a religious idiom that is overcome through atheism; it is rather precisely this religious idiom that puts atheism into play. The withdrawal of the *paradigme principiel* constitutes being as abandoned, whilst instituting the hegemonic status of this paradigm *in its withdrawal*. Ignoring the *obligation* of our being as abandoned, allows the totalizing effect of politics to orientate itself around this *obligation* as a loss that functions at the expense of community. In contrast, thinking that occurs through *obligation*, as a love of thinking in the address of adoration, allows *transimmanence* to open the world to the possibility of creation. Nancy reiterates his reference to Wittgenstein in *Adoration*, in order to explain this gesture of *transimmanence*.

“Life in the world outside of the world” is so far from being an exclusively “Christian” formula that it finds an echo [*repondant*] in the statement by Wittgenstein that “the sense of the world must lie outside the world.” Of course, Wittgenstein is not calling on any representation or conception of “another world”: he is asking that the outside be thought and grasped in the midst of the world.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, p.4.

¹⁴⁷ Nancy, *Adoration*, p.24.

If sense is to be grasped in “the midst of the world,” and is not to be deterministic, then there must be some way of imagining how thought brings something *other* into play. “Finite thinking” is thought that thinks at the limit without broaching the limit, and love provides the motif for this necessity of dwelling within the midst of the world without penetrating its limit. As Raffoul and Recco describe, “finite thinking” is thinking in which, “everything happens or takes place on the limit, because the limit *is* the place for the event of meaning, the event of transcendence itself, that is, existence.”¹⁴⁸ The limit remains the limit, in the sense that it can never be reached, only dwelled within (love) or penetrated (equivallency).

In the figure of Christ, the internal logic of “*logos* made flesh” can produce truth only by penetrating the circularity of “revelation.” As Heidegger describes, within the circular logic of “revelation,” the true, “whether it be a matter or a proposition, is what accords, the accordant.”¹⁴⁹ A “bringing to light”¹⁵⁰ governed by this circular logic can only occur when meaning takes hold within this circularity. Once a fixed point is established—a presence—from which truth can be judged, meaning can be built upon—agglomerated—this established presence. In other words, to make sense within a circular logic of truth, it is necessary to fix sense in some predetermined way. This “fixed-sense” is precisely what allows for the separation of the intelligible (what accords with the established presence) from the unintelligible (what does not), while remaining fully invested in the paradigm of “revelation.” Why must we remain within this paradigm? It is “revelation” that gives judgments their epistemological efficacy; “revelation” allows the determinations of a “fixed-sense” to function as truths in the world, and they remain intelligible as far as they remain within the circular logic of “revelation.” This is precisely how Heidegger pictures abandonment as the “disaster” of the world, described in *Contributions* in terms of “machinations.”

There would seem to be a sense in which we are slipping into a social paradigm of contingency in the establishment of this fixed-sense. If law is “without foundation” but nonetheless functions, through pre-determined judgments,

¹⁴⁸ Raffoul & Recco, “Translator’s Preface” *The Gravity of Thought*, p.xv.

¹⁴⁹ Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth” *Basic Writings*, p.67.

¹⁵⁰ Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, p.4.

to bring powerful epistemological narratives into play; then perhaps intelligibility itself, or the necessity of making oneself intelligible, is contingent on how "revelation" comes to have a "fixed-sense." Heidegger wants to distance himself from the social aspect of this contingency, which is why the ontic sense of the "they" [*das Man*] remains apart from the ontological question of being. Yet, far from attempting to bring this contingency back into play through the "they," Nancy is actually making the problem even more radical by pointing out the manner in which this "contingency" is actually constitutive of the *obligation* to *make-sense*. Indeed, to dwell within the midst of life is to embrace contingency, rather than cling to a pre-establishment effacement of this necessary and constitutive aspect of contingency in ontology.

...one must already have in order to receive: precisely, one must have the receptive disposition, and this disposition itself can only have already been received. This is not a religious mystery; it is the condition of receptivity itself, of sensibility and of sense in general.¹⁵¹

Nancy traces how the fecundity of Christian revelation, the orthodoxy in which the "word was made flesh," culminates in "the truth and the interpretation being made identical to each other and by each other."¹⁵² As I have argued, one way of understanding this is through the figure of Jesus. On earth, truth resides in the image and figure of Jesus himself, in his life and the manner in which he conducted his life. According to Nancy, contrary to the sense in which the parables of Christ might reveal truth to those who do not yet understand, the parabolic logic of Christ exemplifies the paradoxical proclamation from Mathew 13:14.

By hearing, ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.

¹⁵¹ Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, p.6.

¹⁵² *Ibid* p.5.

In contrast to considering the parables as a pedagogy, they are instead a “refusal or a denial of pedagogy.”¹⁵³ The parables are a “revelation” of the truth; however, in the sense in which truth and interpretation coincide, the “revelation” of truth will come only to those who can already see the truth as it is revealed. One must already have the ears that hear the truth, in order to hear the truth as it is spoken; and one must already have eyes that see truth, in order to see truth as it is revealed.

There is no “message” without there first being—or, more subtly, without there also being in the message itself—an address to a capacity or an aptitude for listening...It is, in fact, a matter of hearing: of hearing our own ear listening, of seeing our eye looking, even at that which opens it and that which is eclipsed in this opening.¹⁵⁴

Nancy is collapsing one of the primary distinctions in philosophy, the difference between sensibility and intelligibility. The medium of the message, its sensibility, and the meaning of the message, its intelligibility, become one in the same. Synonymously—or in the same breath of enunciation¹⁵⁵—both the medium and meaning conflate into the riddle that resides, hidden, within the possibility of answering the question of the meaning of being. It should be clear that Nancy is in fact appropriating what Heidegger explains in *Contributions* as the nihilism that has reached its zenith in the “machinations” of modern Western civilization. Essentially, Nancy is claiming that meaning exhausts itself, that “the entire order of significations...has come to an end because it encloses itself in the subjective movement that has come full circle in its realization.”¹⁵⁶ However, the point for Nancy is not to move past this exhaustion of signification, quite the contrary, the point is to radicalize this exhaustion as precisely the limit at which “thinking” is possible. “Sense makes sense only in the space of philosophy as it ends by open-

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid pp.9-10.

¹⁵⁵ This notion of enunciation is covered in detail in chapter five, and it refers to Nancy’s deconstruction of Descartes’ thesis on mind body dualism.

¹⁵⁶ Raffoul and Recco, “Translator’s Preface” *The Gravity of Thought*, p.xv.

ing up the world."¹⁵⁷ The exhaustion of signification, *Seinsverlassenheit*, is what provides the very possibility of "thinking" for Nancy. This is why Nancy is not trying to move beyond or think past abandonment, but rather dwell in abandonment. This dwelling or being in the "midst of the world" can now be put in the following terms: existence is the *obligation to make-sense* in the *shared groundlessness (finitude)* of that which is.

Obligation remains the only necessity; the necessity of freedom found when one dwells in the midst of the world at the limit of intelligibility. Where this limit is the exposure of existence to its own groundlessness, and exposure to "the anxiety and the joy of being without ground."¹⁵⁸ To dwell in abandonment is radical in the sense that the *obligation* we find in our shared finitude is what finds its expression in thinking as love. Thinking as love, or the love of thinking, is what shatters singularity and allows plurality to find its singular expression in being.

CONCLUSION

To conclude I want to once again touch upon Nancy's notion of adoration in order to bring the theme of abandonment into focus on the ontological affect of opening; a notion that provides a guiding light, without source, for thinking within the finitude of abandonment. Adoration is no mere platitude; it represents the limit of thought for Nancy. On the one hand, adoration cannot be affirmed through meaning given to objects of adoration, whether *of this world* or *of a world beyond*. On the other hand, the affirmation of adoration, must not form the configuration of another necessity, immanent or transcendent, to once again bring meaning to the world in some way. Adoration affirms the failure of being to establish a ground and meaning in its singularity, and calls being to the necessity

¹⁵⁷ Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p.50.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid* p.109.

of *obligation* in a plurality of being, nothing more or less than an adoration for the very state of abandonment in which the contemporary world must be thought. When Nancy describes the *passage* of sense that occurs “between” being we must consider how this opening refers to the adoration of the opening as such. Adoration signals the disruption of our singular subjective stance in the world as we are pulled into the world of others, however, more than that, adoration also invokes a certain mode of conduct toward this disruption. To “let being be” refers not simply to other beings, which would make no sense in the light of our own disruption—to consider letting other beings be I have already set up my own being as a subject, and re-established a singularity—in “letting being be” Nancy is referring to the openness implied by Heidegger’s reinterpretation of Kantian moral law as “the respect for...” The openness within this attitude toward the law is an openness that is not inhabited by the singular subject, rather it is an address from the groundlessness of being-abandoned. Obligation fulfils this leitmotif, by regarding the conduct of “letting being be” as what takes place in the being-*in-common*. Furthermore, the love of thinking, is a love that does not refer to my love of thinking, or your love of thinking, again it refers to the sense of “letting being be” without ego or ownership, a dwelling within groundlessness that creates the possibility of freedom and *ergo* sense. By building upon Nancy’s reading of Kant through the fragile sense of Nancy’s *obligation*, I opened the possibility of embracing the shattering affect of love as it is imagined by Nancy. Philosophy, as the love of wisdom—a love that becomes possible through the exhaustion of transcendentals in the many ways of speaking being—occurs within this opening, without reference to *ego tu et haec*.

Nevertheless, at the end of this chapter, as I continued the task of unpacking Nancy’s sense of Christ, I reached the troublesome notion of contingency. It seems to me that contingency is precisely necessary, insofar as this sense of opening as a *declosion*—pictured by Nancy as the fundamental ontological gesture in his co-existential analytic—can only be thought otherwise than the *paradigme principiel* through the opening provided by contingency as such. Reading how Nancy considers the necessity of contingency below, we should consider how “poverty” remains the touchstone for approaching this opening in lieu of how *jouissance* has become entrapped by the machinations of global capital.

What is to be thought is nothing but this: how the contingent side of existence opens onto an adoration...an adoration of what is not set up on any altar or throne, does not drape itself with glory, and whose setting up, if it takes place at all, is at most a prostration, a deposition [déposition], an abandonment.¹⁵⁹

The question of the *contingent* side of existence remains a difficult thought, and one that demands explanation if we are to engage with thinking in the direction that Nancy likewise demands we follow. The opening of existence as *transimmanence* is contingent by necessity, and yet for Nancy it remains the premise for the adoration of abandoned-being in its experience of the ethical necessity in *obligation*. The contingent side of existence is the necessity of being-with that exposes being to finitude, the necessity of the other of thought that makes thinking possible, and indeed, makes-sense. Without this premise of contingency, being becomes bound to the flattening effect of the *paradigme principiel*, and the monovalence of value. However, pure contingency would simply become a nihilism, and as such, it becomes necessary to show how the contingent side of existence that Nancy presents remains at the limit of thinking.

In the short interlude that follows this chapter, I will discuss how Malabou rethinks Hegel's conceptualisation of the 'future' according to what she calls *voir venir*—to see (what is) coming. In her orientation of Hegelian futurity, necessity and contingency are regarded in a similar manner to Nancy's reading of these terms in Christian "revelation" I encountered above. Necessity and contingency are neither treated as singular and reductive instantiations in the constitution of being, nor are they considered as ontological absolutes. Malabou reads Hegel as doubling these terms in a re-orientation of futurity, such that the only necessity is contingency itself. What will come will always have been, however in each contingent moment it is an infinite opening to freedom. For Hegel, there is not simply the necessity of contingency in opening the world and providing some sense to the word freedom; there is the contingency of necessity itself, the fluidity that must reside within the absolute.

¹⁵⁹ Nancy, *Adoration*, p.11.

In Nancy's use of the term *adoration*, as an address to this opening of the infinite, Nancy is concerned with addressing how thought finds itself inexorably caught at the limit of sense, its finitude, when addressing the infinite. This is necessarily the case, without this finitude thought would be carried away into the infinite, and futurity would lack sense.

To address the incommensurable as "adoration," is to recognise and reawaken the fact that the world itself is reliant upon this address; that the world *is*, as a world, the fact that it touches upon the limit of intelligibility.¹⁶⁰ *Adoration* is to think with abandon, in which the predicament of being is the *contingency of existence* as a *necessity of thinking* an opening to an outside of the world within the world. As Heidegger argues, we must become attuned to what is really happening. However, for Nancy this can only occur by turning toward abandonment, and being *obligated to making-sense* as part of a shared existence.

If *adoration* is an address or turn toward the incommensurable, a call to thinking in its finitude, then according to Nancy, thinking must "not be conflated with intellectual activity," rather, "[t]hinking is a movement of bodies: it begins in the folded-over nerves [*ce pli nerveux*] of the body and is exposed to the infinite of a *sense*, which is to say, of affection coming from other bodies."¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Ibid p.3.

¹⁶¹ Ibid p.13.

INTERLUDE

What “the God of love” means is that love alone abandons.

...

Hegel understood that history is necessity. But we, Hegel and ourselves, have not understood what necessity is. Nietzsche understood: *amor fati*. But we have not understood, nor perhaps did Nietzsche understand, what *amor* is.¹

ABANDONMENT *L'AVENIR* – READING HEGEL THROUGH MALABOU

Perhaps one way of thinking through the implications of abandonment in Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity can be found in Catherine Malabou's conception of plasticity in the Hegelian dialectic. This interlude will allow me to bring Nancy's engagement with Hegel into a brief encounter with the themes of this dissertation, while recognising the limited scope with which I have covered Hegel in this body of work. Nancy has written two books explicitly on the work of Hegel, *The Restlessness of the Negative* and *The Speculative Remark*, and has tirelessly engaged with Hegel throughout his *oeuvre*. Rather than interpret Nancy's reading of Hegel, which would require far more space than is allowed here, I will indicate a broad theme of Hegel that Nancy takes interest in before I elaborate on how Malabou's theme of plasticity might relate to the gestures of *l'avenir* and abandonment in Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity. I will then comment on Malabou's reading of Nancy's *La Declosion*, and where she finds the possibility of exceeding the deconstruction of Christianity in terms of plasticity.

¹ Nancy, *Birth to Presence*, p.41.

Nancy takes great interest in what Hegel describes as the restlessness of the negative in "Spirit." In contrast to a metaphysical interpretation of Hegel in which he is the totalizing thinker—his dialectical *Aufhebung* understood as working toward the satisfaction of "Spirit"²—Nancy provides a perspective on Hegel in which he is "utterly contrary to the "totalitarian" delirium that would show here and now the given face, form, and empire of the unconditional."³ What is critical for Nancy is how Hegel transforms the negativity involved in the abandonment of given-sense, and the groundlessness this implies to all aspects of "Spirit." (A view shared by, among others,⁴ two notable and distinctly divergent Hegelian scholars Robert Pippin⁵ and Slavoj Žižek⁶). For Nancy, the Hegelian subject defies the singular "ideological notion" whether "individualist...and liberal," or "communitarian" in the form of nationalism or imperialism.⁷ "The [Hegelian] *subject* is what it *does*, it is its act" and this conduct is always an experience of abandonment as the "negativity" or lack involved in "the loss of references and of the ordering of a "world" in general (*cosmos, mundus*), but also, and thereby, its becoming-world in a new sense."⁸ It is how Hegel conceives of the "concept" in becoming-world without ground that provides Nancy with the term "restless-

² C.f. Simon Lumsden, "Reason and the Restlessness of the Speculative: Jean-Luc Nancy's Reading of Hegel" *Critical Horizons* 6:1 (2005), pp.205-6.

³ Nancy, *Hegel: the Restlessness of the Negative*, p.3.

⁴ We could with some justification add Judith Butler and Paul Redding to this list.

⁵ As Pippin argues, "contrary to many popular interpretations of Hegel (the ones with world spirit behind the scenes, pulling the historical strings), it appears that the major point of this section [First Section of Book II, *Science of Logic*] is to argue that there is literally *nothing* "beyond" or "behind" or responsible for the human experience of the world of appearances, and certainly not an Absolute Spirit. There must be some way of understanding the totality of appearances themselves as "absolute," without reliance on the familiar representations from traditional metaphysics or theology, if this unusual identity claim is to be properly understood." *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness*, p.206.

⁶ Žižek writes that in Hegel's "account [of] the radical *retroactivity* of the dialectical process: the process of becoming is not in itself necessary, but is the *becoming* (the gradual contingent emergence) *of necessity itself*. This is also (among other things) what "to conceive substance as subject" means: the subject as the Void, the Nothingness of self-relating negativity, is the very *nihil* out of which every new figure emerges; in other words, every dialectical passage or reversal is a passage in which the new figure emerges *ex nihilo* and retroactively posits or creates its necessity." *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and The Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, p.231.

⁷ Nancy, *Hegel: the Restlessness of the Negative*, p.5.

⁸ *Ibid.*

ness." He begins by quoting a passage from *Philosophy of Mind* in which Hegel writes:

Spirit is not an inert being, but on the contrary, absolutely restless [*unruhig*: "troubled," "agitated," "restless"] being, pure activity, the negating or ideality of every fixed category of the abstractive intellect...an essence which is truly actual only through the determinate forms of its necessary self-manifestation.⁹

Nancy describes the Hegelian spirit in terms of world, and we should be careful here to remember how "world" for Nancy is not made up of things or beings, but rather the shared sense of existence as it unfolds. World has no purpose or "end" other than this sharing, which is not to say that it is the "brute fact"¹⁰ of contingent outcomes, rather, as Nancy puts it,

It is the world that itself results *in* its own movement, and the thought of this its own truth is itself, in turn, a movement and a restlessness—the very same, in fact, to the extent that it is restlessness of self, for itself, and uneasy about itself; and because it reveals itself as other, infinitely in the other.¹¹

The question is how does this "restlessness" that is linked to the lack of ground in self-consciousness relate to abandonment? In Malabou's reading of Hegel, the term plasticity provides a powerful motif for understanding this "restlessness" and provides another perspective of Nancy's sense on abandonment. For Malabou, there is nothing outside of life, nothing that is more than life itself, there is only life itself. And yet, there is a freedom to life, there is a manner in which life overcomes and moves beyond the mechanistic and deterministic sense of existence. The accidental and the essential are here considered as coextensive and correlated. According to Malabou, we find the essence of this movement in Hegel's dialectical sublation; however, for Malabou, it is necessary to form a new

⁹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind: Part Three of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), §378, p.3. cited in Nancy, *The Restlessness of the Negative*, p.6.

¹⁰ Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, p.6.

¹¹ *Ibid* p.5.

concept for the reading of Hegel today, in order to overcome the sense in which his system has been conceptualised as lacking futurity. In her study *The Future of Hegel* she unearths a way of retrieving the concept of Hegelian futurity in the concept of plasticity.

Plasticity provides a means of following Nancy's motif of *transimmanence* into what exceeds the deconstructive gesture of Christianity whilst surpassing Christianity as it is tied to the West. Malabou provides a way of conceptualising the infinite opening in Nancy's ontological project, without (despite her own misgivings on precisely this point) becoming trapped by the endless gesture of self-deconstruction that would tie this project to "the West." As Malabou argues in a recent paper, Nancy's *déclension* comes to a crossroads in its conceptualisation of the temporality involved in the deconstruction of Christianity. On the one hand, "the deconstruction of Christianity...as messianic deconstruction...never comes to an end so long as the West continues."¹² Whilst, on the other hand, the phenomenon of plasticity "exceeds the specific deconstruction of Christianity."¹³ At this crossroad, Malabou reveals the possibility of maintaining our fidelity to Nancy's proclamation that "the contingent side of existence opens onto adoration," and the ethical implications of that opening in how being-abandoned makes-sense according to an *obligation*, without slipping into the infinite movement of Christian self-overcoming that promises and that "never arrives."¹⁴ In this later path of thinking, as Malabou puts it,

Déclension is an absolute opening because it is the "spacing of space itself." *Déclension* thought in terms of absolute hatching and absolute spacing can be read differently than a simple messianic temporality...a plastic understanding of time that...brings nothing to an end.¹⁵

However, where Malabou finds Nancy unable to consider this modality of time, arguing that his project "is symptomatic of a desperate effort to "save" the

¹² Malabou, "Plasticity and the Future of Philosophy and Theology" *Political Theology*, 11.1 (2010), p.30.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

West"¹⁶ and hence remains tied to the messianic version of time,¹⁷ I claim that this "plastic understanding" is precisely where Nancy's thought of adoration implicitly leads. In fact, Nancy's project reveals the efficacy of plasticity in grappling with the elusive concept of sense as *passage*. Furthermore, I claim, the way Nancy pictures this opening as a "between" of being-*in*-common in the ontology of being-singular-plural is not only constitutive of plasticity, but also provides plasticity with the ethical touchstone necessary to avoid this gesture slipping into the machinations of general equivalency. Derrida argues, in his introduction to *The Future of Hegel*, that Malabou provides a manner of addressing the future in which the "sudden appearance of what is un-awaited" might provide us with a manner of rethinking the closure in the withdrawal of the divine. Indeed, by addressing the emancipatory gesture contingency provides to being-abandoned in the terms laid out by the temporal modality of *voir venir*, we overcome the infinite movement of what "never arrives." Furthermore, if we consider Derrida's sense of the future as *l'avenir*, then *transimmanence* makes sense within this futurity without recourse to an outside—to embrace the unexpected as an infinite opening, whilst anticipating that opening in terms of an *obligation*.

'To see (what is) coming' is to anticipate, to foresee, to presage, to project; it is to expect what is coming; but it is also to let what is coming come or to let oneself be surprised by the unexpected, by the sudden appearance of what is un-awaited. 'To see (what is) coming' means *at the same time* to anticipate and to let oneself be surprised, to bear *and, at the same time*, I mean precisely *at the same time, not to* bear the unexpected. In other words, the surprise *in* what is coming, the event *of* what is coming: the future.¹⁸

The sense in which we do not "bear the unexpected," means we do not hold to a pre-conceived sense of futurity. Surprise is not a lack in our ability to determine meaning, and thus predict the future. It is precisely the openness to what is "to-

¹⁶ Ibid, p.19.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.21.

¹⁸ Derrida, "A time for farewells: Heidegger (read by) Hegel (read by) Malabou" *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, p.ix.

come” by understanding the ontological lack in sense itself. Derrida’s emphasis on the notion of “*at the same time*,” found repeatedly in his introduction to Malabou’s text, should be read as a reiteration of Malabou’s commitment to an immanent and materialist reading of Hegelian futurity. A gesture that aligns with the thought of Nancy’s radical-materialism I discussed above. Within this immanence there remains a posture towards the future that rejects both determinism and transcendent providence, a manner of thinking the “to-come” of immanence that remains open to the possibilities of the unexpected.

In order to rethink Hegel today in these terms, Malabou relies on the term plasticity. Considering plasticity first in its ordinary meaning, we should understand that we are giving form to a concept that is defined as the very concept that both gives form and *at the same time* receives form. Plasticity means suppleness, flexibility, the ability to be moulded and morphed; while also the possibility of sedimentation and fixation, the possibility of crystallization and the preservation of form. Plasticity also means to give form, to shape and mould, to adjust, to sculpt, in the sense of plastic art, plastic surgery, and even the capacity to destroy and annihilate all form as plastic explosive.¹⁹ In order to illustrate the manner in which plasticity functions in Hegel’s philosophy we can turn to a passage from Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, considered by Malabou to exemplify the way in which Hegel brings to light the necessity of plasticity for philosophical thinking,

A plastic discourse (*ein plastischer Vortrag*) demands, too, a plastic sense of receptivity and understanding on the part of the listener (*einen plastischen Sinn des Aufnehmens und Verstehens*)...²⁰

Hegel contrasts the doubling of plasticity—as discourse and receptivity—with what he characterises as “the restlessness and the distraction characteristic of our modern consciousness.”²¹ The plastic discourse requires a philosophical

¹⁹ See for a complete etymology Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, pp.8-9.

²⁰ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.40 (translation modified to reflect the French); Suhrkamp 5, p.31. in Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, p.10. [original English translation is from A.V.Miller, and is to be found with 21.18 of the German *Geammelte Werke*, where possible I will make reference to this pagination.]

²¹ Hegel, *Science of Logic* (trans. Giovanni), 21.18.

thinking that allows itself to take the form of the concept being discussed, and to accept the universality of the concept; and yet, to give form to the universal is to “inform” and “interpret” the concept through a particularity, and hence to embody the coming to be—the becoming of the “being-there” of universal spirit in its particularity. Hence, the universal becomes embodied in its particularity and enforces a contingency to necessity itself.

In terms of Hegel’s negation of negation, plasticity allows us to reflect upon how this negation functions as a giving and receiving of form, a conjunction of essence and accident (or, necessity and contingency). The receptivity of the reader involves negation, an emptying out of his or her “own” content in order to become purely receptive. At the same time, there is another negation involved, a negation of the content that is being read, which is the negation of the arbitrary and personal within the concept itself. Hence the plastic philosopher is “both universal and individual”²²; accepting the form of the universal, while “incarnating” it in their own particular individuality. The speculative is a constitutive component of necessity and vice versa.

By paying close attention to the role plasticity plays in Hegel’s thought Malabou reveals a common misconception of *Aufhebung* as the “bad infinite progression,”²³ where the *Aufhebung* functions within an enclosed circle of growth such that every activity or progression is cancelled out as it occurs.²⁴ Here the dual meaning of the German word *Aufhebung*—to suppress and to preserve—serves the Hegelian notion of a plastic logic. In bringing this plastic logic to the forefront of her study, Malabou considers how we can apply “to the terms *aufheben* and *Aufhebung* the very meanings for which they stand?”²⁵ By framing

²² Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, p.10.

²³ Ibid p.144.

²⁴ As Nancy remarks in *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, The true infinite is the infinite of relation, that is, what is shared, that allows the infinite of immanence. This is another way of conceptualizing what Nancy terms *transimmanence*. “An infinite process does not go on “to infinity,” as if to the always postponed term of a progression (Hegel calls this “bad infinity”): it is the instability of every finite determination, the bearing away of presence and of the given in the moment of presentation and the gift. Such is the first and fundamental signification of absolute negativity: the negative is the prefix of the *in*-finite, as the affirmation that all finitude (and every being is finite) is, in itself, in excess of its determinacy. It is in infinite relation.” p.12.

²⁵ Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, p.144.

Aufhebung in this way, the very notion of "*Aufhebung* evolves, as a term, within the same process which it regulates and measures."²⁶ In this gesture Malabou invokes the notion of plasticity and futurity within Hegel's notion of the *Aufhebung* and *Aufheben*, claiming that Hegel invokes an "essential dialectical performativity"²⁷ into these notions that retrieves them from the claim that they operate as a fixed logical determination. Malabou provides a matrix, in which the dual meaning suppression and preservation act upon themselves creating a double suppression and double preservation.²⁸ This dual suppression-preservation—the negation of negation—brings together both "habit" and "*kenosis*" in which the movement and futurity of the *Aufhebung* is restored through the capacity to suppress and shelter. "At once the result of habit and the act of *kenosis*, the *Aufhebung* suppresses, but what it suppresses it saves and shelters."²⁹ The question Malabou addresses here is what remains in the movement of *Aufhebung*; how we can rescue Hegel from the claim that he brings philosophy (history) to an end? The plasticity of Hegelian spirit is precisely what enables dialectical sublation to function in the aforementioned manner. The *Aufhebung* does not entail a complete emptying out of the universal in its essentiality, and the particular in its singularity, rather there is, Malabou claims, an "ontological residue"³⁰ that operates within the dialectic.

At the same moment, the determination thus simplified exists as a type, an exemplar—mourning its individuality—and a particular essence—mourning its individuality. To produce this ontological residue involves a *double suppression* and a *double preservation*.³¹

If we regard this "ontological residue" as an acknowledgement of the groundlessness of being-abandoned, recalling that the withdrawal of God I discussed above as an *absent-presence*, then we can, I claim, read this "ontological residue"

²⁶ Ibid p.145.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Malabou elaborates this concept far beyond what I can cover here.

²⁹ Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, p.153.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

alongside the opening Nancy unfolds in terms of *transimmanence*. Within the movement of dual suppression and preservation, a gap that opens up in the *Aufhebung*, and this “ontological residue” is precisely what occupies this gap. In each sublation of the absolute there is an indivisible remainder, a limit point that is carried along with the movement of the dialectic and enables it “to see (what is) coming.” It is the withdrawal of presence, which Malabou frames here as a mourning, that provides the precise point at which the dialectical *Aufhebung* must acknowledge the distress of abandonment. The withdrawal of the absolute as presence, within the Hegelian dialectic, opens the possibility of reading the “to-come” *within* Nancy’s materialism; it is the limit at which an *obligation* to make-sense is anticipated whilst surprisingly, opening up a world within the world. This functions within Malabou’s account of her motif “to see (what is) coming” in the way she invokes the Hegelian dialectic whilst giving an account of the distress of abandonment.

Suppression occurs through the work of habit, with its blunting and flattening effects, and through sacrifice or alienation. Preservation has involved two forms of permanence: the virtuality created by reactualizing, and the singularity which, in its disappearance, has left itself behind as an interiorized trace...Maintenance always demands distress: without that, how can there be a threat of loss to counteract?³²

What Malabou demonstrates is not simply the manner in which the Hegelian dialectic might be freed from its interpretation as a totalizing form of absolute idealism. Another question suggests itself at this point, why does Malabou claim that Hegel sublation is more than simply operative or methodological? That is to say, there is also the question of how dialectical sublation responds to its own process, to its own “law.”³³ For Malabou the process of an “abandonment of self”³⁴ is crucial to the notion of plasticity at work within her conception of the dialectical

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid p.155.

³⁴ Ibid p.158.

sublation, and indeed, coextensive with the manner in which the dialectical sublation provides its own law.

In order to understand how this works, Malabou traces the Hegelian motif of what she calls *dessaisissement*—abrogation, letting-go, renunciation, or dis-possession—and the manner in which this abrogation is “completely interdependent” with the notion of sublation. We find an invocation of this thought of a *letting-go*, which I interpret here as the abandonment of being, in the preface of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

Thoughts become fluid when pure thinking, this inner immediacy, recognizes itself as a moment, or when pure certainty of self abstracts from itself – not by leaving itself out, or setting itself aside, but by giving up the fixity of its self-positing, by giving up not only the fixity of the pure concrete, which the ‘I’ itself is, in contrast with its differentiated content, but also the fixity of the differentiated moments which, posited in the element of pure thinking, share the unconditioned nature of the ‘I’.³⁵

Hegel is describing a process in which “pure thinking” becomes completely fluid in a two-fold sense. On the one hand, in its relation, as a concrete thought, to the dynamic content of the context in which that thought can and must appear; and, on the other hand, how the context of that thought, in its fluidity, is precisely what makes the “inner immediacy” of thought possible. Rather than raising thought above the level of sense itself, Hegel is describing a thought in which thinking itself is embedded within its own process. Nancy addresses precisely this process in *A Finite Thinking*, in which he begins by affirming the necessity of Heideggerian finitude, such that thinking is always a running up against its own finitude, “the working out of the innermost essence of finitude must itself always be fundamentally finite.”³⁶ Nancy puts into play the notion of sense in thinking through this finitude, sense is the limit of thinking, or to put it another way, it is the limit of sense itself that puts thinking into play. What confronts Nancy, in thinking through the fluidity of thought, is perhaps the fundamental aporia of

³⁵ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p.20.

³⁶ Heidegger, cited in Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p.5.

philosophy. As Nancy explains, in an explanation that itself reaches the limit of intelligibility,

...what senses in sense is the fact that it includes what it senses, and what produces sense in sense is the fact that it senses itself producing sense. Of course, we can always object that in this way we have merely pushed back ad infinitum the question of the sense of sense, or that, in this oxymoronic game, where nothing tells us what it might mean “to sense sense” or “to understand sensing,” we have lost any possibility of posing it.³⁷

This is, Nancy claims, an iteration of “the most powerful distinction philosophy has to offer: that between the sensible and intelligible,”³⁸ a distinction that has remained a problem to be solved, and re-solved over and over again throughout the history of Western philosophy. However, for Nancy, the task is to *not think* a solution to the “double aporia” that the fluidity of thinking poses, but instead to engage thinking *within* the abandonment of a solution—“the thought of the absence of solution as the very site of sense.”³⁹

Within what Hegel describes in the *Phenomenology* as the *giving up of fixity*, Malabou discerns a “speculative abrogation.”⁴⁰ This is an essential component to the fluidity and suppleness of thought, which is in turn necessary for engaging in a plastic discourse. In the process of “*letting go*” the “I” loses its contrast with the differentiated content and differentiated moments of thinking. This enables fluid thinking to no longer be bound by the subject-object distinction, however—and here the genius of Malabou’s interpretation becomes apparent—knowledge does not come from the creation of a new “subject-object gap,” instead, as she points out, knowledge “arrives in the suspension of that gap.”⁴¹ And so, where Malabou reads the necessity of suspending the subject-object gap through the interdependency of sublation and abrogation, *mutatis mutandis* I claim, Nancy is invoking precisely the same necessity of suspension into his radically material

³⁷ Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p.6.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, p.157.

⁴¹ Ibid p.157.

reading of the manner in which truth and interpretation function in Christian parables. Indeed, to further support this claim, we need only turn to Nancy's own reading of Hegel, *The restlessness of the negative*, where as he writes in a chapter entitled "Trembling";

Thought must take the self out of itself; it must extract it from its simple being-in-itself: thought is itself such an extraction, along with the speech in which thinking takes itself out of itself and exposes itself.⁴²

The call Nancy makes to thought in which it is extracted *from*, in this case speech, is a double movement of exposure. Thinking is re-iterated and re-orientated. Or indeed as Malabou writes,

...the plasticity of meaning is inseparable from a plasticity of reading, a reading which gives form to the utterance it receives.⁴³

Again there is a double movement, which is precisely why Malabou relies upon the term plasticity in order to read through this doubling effect, reading, in this case, as a giving and receiving of form. In order to maintain the plasticity of giving and receiving form within discourse, it is not enough to simply abandon oneself; abandonment must maintain its exposure—an exposure to the suspension of the subject-object gap—and it must be aware of the distress of the abandonment. It is precisely this lack of exposure—a lack of questioning and subsequent covering over of distress—that Heidegger critiques in *Contributions* when he argues that abandoned being, "shelters and conceals itself in the manifestness of beings."⁴⁴ The importance of the gap in a double movement, for Malabou, relates directly to the manner in which this gap or exposure works with a sense of temporality and allows one "to see (what is) coming." That is to say, reading Malabou back into Heidegger, by refusing to conceal and shelter itself, being maintains an attunement to temporality as *l'avenir*.

⁴² Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, p.40.

⁴³ Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, p.168.

⁴⁴ Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy: Of the Event*, p.78.

In *Abandoned Being*, Nancy describes the vicissitudes of abandonment in the figure of Christ, abandoned to the earth, abandoned in love, abandoned in the resurrection as the untouchable arisen. In a number of places I have already discussed the competing potentialities that the birth and resurrection of Christ instilled within the Western-World. For Malabou, the figure of the abandoned Christ exemplifies the manner of conceptualising plasticity, that is to say, the giving and receiving of form. As she writes, the “new modality of the donation and reception of form discovers its fundamental concept in alienation.”⁴⁵ This alienation, for Malabou, is premised upon the incarnation of Christ as happening just the once, shifting temporality from the teleological sense to a linear sense. This alienation, I claim, in contrast to Malabou’s argument in her recent paper, makes even more apparent the necessity of deconstructing the event of Christianity, precisely in the sense that Christianity provides this event with the power of a *paradigme principiel*. The radical departure from teleology allows “history to turn.”⁴⁶ Linear time translates into the ontological understanding of “subjectivity,” an infinite relationality—what Hegel describes as “a *world* of interdependence and of an infinite connectedness.”⁴⁷ Malabou’s reading of plasticity within the Hegelian dialectic intervenes and appropriates the linearity of time with an “ontological residue,” a residue that maintains *connectedness* whilst allowing the future to open up to what is “to-come.”

As Nancy argues, “sense—if it is still or finally necessary to do justice to the obstinate request of this word—can only proceed from a deconstruction of Christianity.”⁴⁸ The abandoned figure of Christ can be neither “suppressed” nor “preserved.” Instead, being must dwell within that abandonment, suspended within dual possibility of transcending presence (subject) and being present as pure immanence (object). However, the deconstruction of Christianity does not re-engage a transcendent conception of the world in terms of a Messianic time, but rather grapples with the full implications of its abandonment. Being aban-

⁴⁵ Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, p.116.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, s123; cited in Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, p.123.

⁴⁸ Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p.55.

doned to its finitude in the withdrawal of transcendent reference, while, at the same time, being abandoned to the infinite of sense at the limit of that finitude. The linearity of the endless time of Christianity's self-overcoming is disrupted in the "each time" of its abandonment, an opening of finite being-with to infinite that constitutes its sense.

Body

INTRODUCTION

Several critical facets of Nancy's philosophy come into focus when we consider the role of the body in his ontology. To experience freedom is to experience an exposure to the world, an exposure that finds its expression in the body. As James puts it,

Sense and bodies are co-articulated in a fundamental way which discloses the world to us as existing.¹

The crucial question that will guide this chapter, is how are "sense" and the "body" co-articulated, or perhaps more precisely, co-thought? Ontology is not simply an ontology of the body, it is an ontology of spacing and spacing-out, a disposition of bodies as an *exposure*. As Malabou argues, the way we consider this spacing out provides the interpretive keys to understanding the temporality of being, and how this temporality provides being with a sense of futurity within the contingency of existence. The human lacks a given-ness, a void that shatters the very premise of subjectivity, and I have considered how we reconcile the contingency of this lack in the interlude. Nevertheless, existence, as being-singular-plural, remains exposed to the *obligation* to make-sense; the spacing of bodies, their exposure, is continuously forming a world through their conduct. In

¹ James, *The New French Philosophy*, p.42.

what follows, I consider this exposure, in terms of existence, as a spacing both of and for sense; where sense comes from how existence touches upon the un-touchable embrace of the corporeal and incorporeal. As Nancy argues in *Corpus*;

Ontology has yet to be thought out, to the extent that it's basically an ontology where the body = the place of existence, or *local existence*.²

Thus, in this chapter, I give an account of Nancy's ontology of the body; and why, following my account of abandonment,³ the body is necessarily that which is without foundation. What this reveals, I claim, is that for Nancy ontology is fundamentally an ontology of *exposure*; an exposure that allows sense to flourish at the very limit of that exposure. The opening of the limit at the plurality of being that creates a world, and that likewise remains vulnerable to the equivalency of the *paradigme principiel*. Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity reveals the fragility of this exposure, and the necessity of its thought for making-sense.

Nancy's ontology of *exposure*—in which sense passes “between”—begins from the plurality of *Mitsein* that disrupts any experience of singular subjectivity. On the one hand, thinking remains finite and wholly within the world such that thinking is an immanent part of the world. On the other hand, Nancy's notion of the infinite and *transimmanence* relies upon an immanence that allows an authentic experience of freedom. And yet, as I argued in the previous chapter, a model of agency cannot frame freedom through subjectivity. Hence, freedom opens in the “between” of being, and as such, materially must be articulated through the spacing and disposition of the body.

In order to answer the question of how sense and the body form an ontology, we must engage with how Nancy understands the relation between thinking and the body. I begin by revisiting the thought of Camus' by discussing his novel *L'Etranger*, and provide another layer of complexity to the questions raised by his philosophy of the “absurd”. In the following section, I outline the Cartesian

² Nancy, *Corpus*, p.15.

³ In chapter one, *The Secular*, I considered “the other thought of all thought.” In chapter two, *Globalization*, I considered the possibility of *transimmanence* in place of the *paradigme principiel*. In chapter three, I considered the *inoperative* as opening the very possibility of community.

subject and the key gestures in Nancy's reading of Descartes. Descartes' argues that he overcomes doubt through the expression "I am, I exist"; in contrast, Nancy claims that the body announces itself—each time a singular enunciation—that exposes the body to the world through that enunciation. By relating this act of enunciation to Derrida's use of the term *différance*, I bring the key gestures of Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity to his critique of Descartes in *Ego Sum*. Hence, in the third section, I expand on my reading of Derrida's notion of *différance* by discussing in more detail how Nancy deconstructs the figure of Christ in the Christian motif of *incarnation*. I argue that Nancy overcomes the Christology of incarnation that allows the mind-body split to be thought as an ontological premise. Nancy does so without collapsing the mind-body into a chiasmus of flesh, which would allow the body to be invested with a transcendent vitalism.

As ontology, the body is a spacing out, and bodies form a dis-position, a limit that touches the world of bodies and evokes the *passage* of sense. Sense takes place through the spacing of the body, not as internal viz. subject-thought or external viz. object-bodies, but rather in how the body is exscribed as a sense of the world. As I will argue, Nancy's ontology begins from the body's lack of a founding presence, its bodily-abandon. This entails that exscription cannot be formed in a singular expression; exscription must take place in the plurality of space, which manifests itself at the limit of the body through the gesture of touch. Exscription captures the sense in which the *exposure* of the body touches and is touched upon by the plurality of being that forms a world. In chapter six, I take up this gesture of touch in more detail, and explore how this forms a critical motif in Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity.

I. THE EXPOSED BODY OF THE NAKED STRANGER

Taylor frames Camus' notion of the "absurd" as a closure, and hence emptiness, of "meaning". All that remains for the human subject is to embrace a narrative of

“self-authorization” in order to display a stoic courage in the face of this normative abyss. I contrast Taylor’s assertions with Deranty’s reading of Camus’ sensual encounter with the “absurd”, in which Camus demonstrates a “tender indifference” to these narratives of “self-authorization”. In this section I give an alternate reading of Camus that builds upon my account of Nancy’s notion of abandonment. I explore how Camus stages the impossibility of experiencing an empirical sense of subjectivity, through the opening of an *abyss* at the heart of the subject. This narrative reveals a rupture in the metaphysics of subjectivity, which allows Nancy to pose the body—abandoned to the necessity of addressing the *absence* of principle—as the opening of a “between” that creates a *passage* for sense.

In Camus’ *L’Etranger*⁴ the protagonist Meursault portrays an indifferent attitude towards what I would like to describe as his exposure to “the world,” while allowing himself to be at times directed by this exposure.⁵ Meursault behaves in this way throughout the first part of the narrative, and the relationship that Meursault has with the world around him highlights the manner in which the protagonist is ‘pulled along’ by this exposure. The complete lack of reflective judgment to the circumstances or context of his life draws the reader, along with the character, into the sense that the final act of this first half of the narrative, the death of the other, is simply one more experience to which the character is seemingly inexorably exposed. The final act of shooting the dead corpse several times, as he focuses upon the bright light from the sun, when combined with his complete lack of emotion at the beginning of the narrative while attending his mother’s funeral, bookend this first part of the narrative with the seeds of apathy and ambivalence that will play such a vital role in the assessment of Meursault’s character that is to come.

In the second half of the book, the protagonist is nothing if not reflective and reflected upon. Meursault is tried for the murder of the man he kills on the

⁴ To my mind, to translate this as *The Outsider* imposes a one-sided relation to Meursault, *The Stranger* allows the original meaning of the French to invest this title with the strangeness of self, as well as the strangeness of the protagonist.

⁵ A thought that links this apparently indifferent attitude to the manner in which Nancy reiterates the Freudian fragment, “psyche is extended knows nothing about it” from the epigraph of this section. A link that I come to in more detail in what follows.

beach. In contrast to the beginning of the book, the narrative of the trial is focused inward, into the mind of Meursault, from the position of the outside—particularly on the apathy displayed at his mother’s funeral. The people that made up Meursault’s daily encounters and the seemingly trivial relationship he shared with them—through the clever orchestration of the prosecution—provide an account of Meursault that delves into the inner workings of Meursault’s mind through the assessment of those most removed from its inner workings. Two narratives unfold: the first, from the privileged position of inside the mind, lacks any clear picture of that mind, Meursault seems unable (from the reader’s perspective) to focus on his unfolding downfall; while the second, the court of law, far removed from Meursault’s mind’s-eye, takes up the privileged position of the disinterested spectator⁶ that can comment ‘objectively’ on the inner workings of Meursault. As Camus’ novel unfolds, the split between these narratives becomes increasingly stark, and an *abyss* opens up between them—this split constitutes the subject at the same time as disenfranchising Meursault’s thought from “what is really happening.”⁷

In traditional philosophy, the conscious mind is the nexus of these two competing narratives. On the one hand, it is our lived exposure to the world as an unfolding experience of sensations; and on the other, it is the use of reason as our reflexive capacity to assess what has happened, and how it relates to what is happening, in a manner that determines our relation and posture toward the future as what will happen. Reason, as the oft quoted determining characteristic of our humanity, is what allows the conscious mind to be, precisely that, *conscious*—to be an awareness of and determining factor in our lived experience. In fact, in “Western” philosophical parlance, the attribute of reason provides the capacity to think in a manner that ameliorates and governs our exposure. Put another way, reason buffers and filters our exposure to the world, such that we can think within that “sensible” exposure without succumbing to distractions

⁶ I take this notion from Arendt’s *Lecture on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, for example, as she puts it, “The spectator, because he is not involved, can perceive this design of providence or nature, which is hidden from the actor. So we have the spectacle and the spectator on one side, the actors and all the single events and contingent, haphazard happenings of the other.” p.52.

⁷ Recalling this gesture from Heidegger’s *Contributions* that I elaborate on in chapter four.

that would be detrimental to the “intelligibility” of that thought. Reason provides the distinction between sensibility and intelligibility, while also setting the parameters of intelligibility. Thinking, put in these terms, is infinite in the sense that it transcends the thinking subjects immediate context of exposure, and is part of the absolute in the sense of the conceptual tools associated with the positive or negative value that may be assigned to certain reflexive judgments.

It is only through the reflexive moment of the legal trial that the protagonist in *L'Étranger* becomes a “self.” This moment of self-hood is a staging of the fundamental question that brings meaning, reason, and self-hood together—“How do we answer for existence—and to existence?”⁸ Camus’ narrative stages this moment of self-hood as a fundamental split in human subjectivity. Meursault is *guilty* for an account of existence as subjected to *law*, both of which remain beyond his sense of existence. Rather than exploring Camus’ reading of this split, I want to address this split through the gestures I referred to in chapter three; in particular, what Nancy terms *comparution*, a theory of the common in which two sides of the common, the inside-out, and outside-in, come together as “the common human condition...The common condition is at the same time the common reduction to a common denomination *and* the condition of being absolutely *in* common.”⁹ The guilt attributed to the protagonist, is the guilt of these two senses of the common, “intermixed and in opposition to each other.”¹⁰ It is a guilt that is formed through the premise of a law, but of a law abandoned, a law without law.¹¹ “Before this law without law we have never ceased to compear. *In the end* we compear there naked.”¹² Thus, as abandoned being, Meursault stands naked to the principle of the common; which is to say not naked in his singularity, as a singular body, but rather naked as being-*in*-common, as being-singular-plural. Nancy’s materialism, I claim, is premised on the manner in which it is possible to think the body as the “being-*in*-common.” The body *is* the opening of a “between”

⁸ Nancy, “La Comparution /The Comparution: From the Existence of ‘Communism’ to the Community of ‘Existence’” trans. T. Strong, *Political Theory*, p.373.

⁹ Ibid p.371.

¹⁰ Ibid p.372.

¹¹ As described in chapter 4.

¹² Nancy, “La Comparution /The Comparution: From the Existence of ‘Communism’ to the Community of ‘Existence’” trans. T. Strong, *Political Theory*, p.372.

that creates the *passage* of sense. Concurrently, sense is not inscribed *into* the body, nor does it manifest itself *as* the body, but is always that which passes “between” bodies. Accordingly, Nancy refers to the gesture of touch as the exemplary way of thinking this “between.” Touch provides a way of bringing together the dual premise of the body as it relates to sense, as touching the body is the opening for sense; however, touching occurs along the limit of the body without ever penetrating, and hence explains how sense passes between bodies.

As O’Byrne argues, Nancy’s materialism finds its radical premise in the material non-All of the world as experience by a singular embodied existence. According to Nancy, materiality is premised on the shared sense of material singularity that is found through the side by side, or *with*, of bodies as touching. To be *a* body is not enough, one can only be as a body through the shared sense of bodies alongside and with one another within a world. This gives some indication of how Nancy thinks of “world.” To give meaning to the body as purely material, is to configure the body as something recognized; however, as O’Byrne points out, this notion of recognition is premised on a third person point of view that must stand apart from the body. As such, “a body is only approached or seen or touched by other bodies. There is no way to talk about being and being-with in the third person, no way to say that “it is” or “there is...” or indeed “I am”. Instead, the only term for the being of bodies together in the world is “we are.”¹³ As “we are” already touched and touching the world of bodies, “we are” already within the ontological premise of being a body among bodies. Materiality is extended, alongside, and touching the limit of the body amongst other bodies. Existence is exposed in the sense of both imposing upon the *with* of the other as a body, and posing as the limit of a body that extends to the touch of others. The body is never singular as it is infinitely exposed to the *with* of its own singularity, nor is it infinitely extending as plural as it is finitely limited in touching the world. Taylor’s narrative of “self-authorization” and “stoic courage” fails to encounter the manner in which Camus gestures toward an embodied shared sense of existence.

¹³ Anne O’Byrne, “Nancy’s Materialist Ontology” *Jean-Luc Nancy and Plural Thinking*, p.83.

II. "I AM...I EXIST!"

Nancy's critique of Cartesian dualism provides an important example of the place of the body within Nancy's ontological project in the deconstruction of Christianity. Nancy explores the point of enunciation in Descartes' model of certainty, and indeed, deconstructs and opposes Descartes' dualism at the precise conceptual point that Descartes' will frame the mind-body split. According to Nancy, enunciation—"I am, I exist"—is the moment at which the body becomes the opening that allows the *passage* of sense, not by what is said, but in its very exposure to the world. Furthermore, by reading Descartes in this way, Nancy suggests a nuanced concept of materiality, where it becomes no longer possible to reduce thinking to a singular process associated with the body; in the same way that the body is always premised on being-with, so too is thinking. Thinking thinks only alongside and *with* thought, it would never, as Derrida puts it, "think *by itself*."¹⁴ It makes no sense then to pose the problem of the relation of the mind to the body; the problem is the sense of body to the body, or mind to the mind. Nancy's deconstruction of this pivotal Cartesian gesture reveals another way of contemplating how the human subject is configured by the motif of Christ's abandonment. By focusing on the way Derrida's notion of *différance* allows a different way of posing the problem of *absence*,¹⁵ I argue that the human *subject* has become accoutered with the *absent* body of Christ. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes' describes the process of discovering the indubitable sense of existence in spite of his inability to find certainty in his embodied existence.

Thus, having weighed up everything adequately, it must be stated that this proposition 'I am, I exist' is necessarily true whenever it is stated by me or

¹⁴ "In spite of thought: thought thinks only in spite of itself, or, I would say, *a son corps défendant* [i.e., reluctantly, notwithstanding itself]; it thinks only there where the counterweight of the other weighs enough so that it begins to think, that is, *in spite of* itself, when it touches or lets itself be touched *against its will*. That is why it will never think, it will never have begun to think *by itself*." Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.299.

¹⁵ See my discussion of Gauchet in chapter two, section I.

conceived in my mind.¹⁶

This quote demonstrates the importance of the action of enunciating 'I am' in Descartes' process of overcoming his skepticism. As Morin argues, the traditional interpretation of Descartes' *I think, therefore I am*, is described by Heidegger as "the inaugural moment of modern metaphysics, where the "I" becomes the *subjectum*, the underlying subject of representation, which is absolutely certain of itself."¹⁷ In doing so, Heidegger argues, "Descartes not only evades the ontological question of substantiality altogether; he also emphasizes explicitly that substance as such—that is to say, substantiality—is in and for itself inaccessible from the outset."¹⁸ It is from this point forth, philosophically speaking, that the "meta-physics of the subject" is reinforced as the measure of truth, which is to say, truth itself is measured in terms of how things as objects are represented and understood by the subject—further reinforcing the metabolic paradigm that Derrida terms a metaphysics of *presence*. Nancy's reading of this pivotal moment in Western philosophy scrutinizes the point at which Descartes grasps the thinking "I" in order to produce a certainty about the world that can be thought through the *ego*. In response, as Morin argues, Nancy demonstrates that "the "ego" cannot to be taken as the underlying subject in its self-certainty, the thinking substance, but rather must be understood as the gaping mouth that unfounds the subject in the very moment of its foundation."¹⁹ Put another way, the "gaping mouth" becomes the moment in which being finds itself abandoned to a body that exists without foundation. As Nancy argues, the facticity of existence *is* as the exposure of the body—"The body exposes a breakthrough of sense, constituted absolutely and simply by existence."²⁰

Nancy claims that to premise ones' existence upon "*the Cogito*" is to deduce existence from a third person point of view. One cannot begin thought from the point of view of "the" thinking, thought is only ever thinking—that is to say, it

¹⁶ Descartes, (1641) *Meditations and other Metaphysical Writings*, Second Meditation.

¹⁷ Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.126.

¹⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.126.

¹⁹ Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.126.

²⁰ Nancy, *Corpus*, p.25.

is caught up in its own thinking. As Morin explains, the “evidence that “I exist” is not based on a logical proof or a deduction, a proof that would be conducted by a (preexisting) ego. Rather, the evidence lies in, and is one *with*, the utterance.”²¹ In other words, in enunciating “I am,” Descartes is not stating a fact that refers to something else—for instance, *that* “I am,” which comes to rely on Descartes’ assumption/proof²² regarding the existence of God—rather, in enunciating “I am,” the “I” is caught in the throat of enunciating. Enunciation does not refer forward or backward in a linear temporality, nor does it refer to a predefined spatiality.

As I described in the previous chapter, Nancy draws upon Hegel in *The Restlessness of the Negative*, to describe the manner in which turning toward the infinite can be thought without collapsing into a thought of the infinite. Perhaps, with this in mind, it is not overly presumptuous to read this move against Descartes as a manner of thinking Hegel’s engagement with the same notion in his *Science of Logic*.

The indispensable foundation, the concept, the universal which is thought itself (provided that with the word “thought” one can abstract from figurative representation), cannot be regarded as just an indifferent form that attaches to a content.²³

Hegel’s claim here resonates with Nancy, thought cannot be simply attached in some way to the movement of thinking, thought itself *is* the movement of thinking—that is to say, thought *is* in the enunciating action. There is no ‘I’ hiding behind the enunciation of the ‘I think’, instead, the ‘I’ is precisely what occurs in the enunciation of the ‘I think’. As Morin puts it, “There is no underlying, preexisting enunciator that would precede the utterance. Before the subject of the *énoncé* (the I that is spoken of) and the subject of the *énonciation* (the I that speaks), there is the verb *énoncer*, enunciating, an action without subject, the opening of a gaping mouth that articulates “ego.”²⁴ If we return to the quote from Descartes’

²¹ Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.126. Emphasis added.

²² The debate over the “Cartesian Circle” becomes irrelevant in Nancy’s reading.

²³ Hegel, *Science of Logic* (Trans. Giovanni), p.17.

²⁴ Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.126-7.

Meditations—"it must be stated that this proposition 'I am, I exist' is necessarily true whenever it is stated by me or conceived in my mind"—then it is possible to understand how Nancy informs this reading of Descartes—in each enunciation of "I am," whether stated or thought, that the "I" comes into play. There is no "I" that remains constant throughout the spacing of enunciation, there is no generality of the "I," there is instead the "I" that *is* in each enunciation.²⁵ As Nancy argues in *Corpus*, the "I" of each enunciation can be read as the enunciation of a *place*. What he calls the *corpus ego*, which is the taking place of thought and extension as the body.

In the Cartesian *ego's* articulation, therefore, mouth and mind are the same: it's always the body. Not the body *of* the ego, but *corpus ego*, "ego" being "ego" only when articulated, articulating itself as spacing or flexion, even in the inflection of a *site*. The enunciation of "ego" doesn't just *take* place. To the contrary, it *is place*.²⁶

Through Nancy's reading of the Descartes' notion of the ego, Nancy puts into play the spacing and temporality of the "each time" of the subject. In order for the subject to "assure itself of itself,"²⁷ the "I am" must attach itself in some way to its abandoned sense of being, covering over the "each time," through a forgetting of its spacing and temporality; which is to say, the subject *is* only by attaching itself to a self-conception of presence, again a manner of describing what for Derrida is a metaphysics of presence. It is precisely this attachment to a presence of the subject that Derrida seeks to uncover in his notion of *différance*. If we turn here to Derrida's essay *Différance*, we can read in his "problematic of the sign and writing"—a "problematic," in Nancy's terms, of the subject itself as abandoned each time to its *corpus ego*—an exposure of the body as abandoned to the world.

Différance as temporization, *différance* as spacing. How are they to be joined?

²⁵ Ibid p.127.

²⁶ Nancy, *Corpus*, p.25.

²⁷ Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.127.

Let us start, since we are already there, from the problematic of the sign and writing. The sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, "thing" here standing equally for meaning or referent. The sign represents the present in absence. It takes the place of the present.²⁸

The Cartesian subject should be read here as precisely the sign that represents the present in absence. The *subject* is what takes the place of the withdrawal of presence from the world, as abandoned. Derrida continues,

When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign. We take or give signs. We signal. The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence...the circulation of signs defers the moment in which we can encounter the thing itself, make it ours, consume or expend it, touch it, see it, intuit its presence.²⁹

In traditional philosophy, the body that stands in the place of the deferred presence, as the place of being, and the point from which thinking can be radiated. The body is the signal for what can never be completely revealed, the body as thinking remains forever out of reach. Consequently, bodies cannot "think" their sense of *exposure* and simply circulate as signs, enunciating a presence as *ego*, which is forever deferred to the thing-itself as thought.

Nancy retrieves thinking from its privileged position, asserting that ontology is, "'Ontology of the body" = exscription of being. Existence addressed to an out-side."³⁰ As Derrida describes, this address is an address to something missing; this opening is an address to the absence of completion in the immanent itself—what Nancy terms adoration. Eschewing transcendent reference, the immanent is nonetheless non-All, and *différance* is Derrida's means of expressing this fact of existence as what opens the body to an experience of freedom. Furthermore, we should take note here of the manner in which Derrida describes

²⁸ Derrida, "Différance" *Margins of Philosophy*, p.9.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Nancy, *Corpus*, p.19.

the process of deferral in terms of a future that remains *l'avenir*. If one agrees that Derrida eschewed pure transcendence in this deferral, the infinite that opens in this *l'avenir* must be an opening within the world. Hence, I claim, we find in this Derridean gesture below, Nancy's motivation for deconstructing Christianity while maintaining that opening *with-in* a world.

...this structure presupposes that the sign, which defers presence, is conceivable only on the *basis* of the presence that it defers and *moving toward* the deferred presence that it aims to reappropriate. According to this classical semiology, the substitution of the sign for the thing itself is both *secondary* and *provisional*: secondary due to an original and lost presence from which the sign thus derives; provisional as concerns this final and missing presence toward which the sign in this sense is a movement of mediation.³¹

In this act of substitution we can read the classical concept of divine presence on earth in the body of Jesus Christ. Christianity, as a Christology, relies upon this dual substitution. This is elucidated most obviously in the prayer that continually repeats the call for the Christ's second coming alongside His abandonment—"Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." The style of this secondary and provisional substitution, as understood within the pedagogy of Christianity, can be thought through a reading of *incarnation* and the role of the *Eucharist*. Nancy engages precisely this in his essay *Verbum caro factum* (from John 1:14 "And the word was made flesh")—though we can read these motifs throughout his work on Christianity. *Différance* suspends the completion of signification, and renders this completion meaningless as meaning comes only through this suspension—sense is always *l'avenir*. Accordingly, for Nancy, the body as subject must be encountered in the same way, incomplete in the sense of being necessarily suspended by a constitutive contingency. The body is as *exposed* to bodies, articulated and dis-posed in the world, always touching and touched. The sense of the body remains *l'avenir*.

³¹ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, p.9.

III. READING (IN)CARNATION WITHOUT SACRIFICE

In the Christian milieu, the body provides a (sacred) link between “existing” and the Ideal through the mantra of *hoc est enim* (this is My body), by confronting “our doubts about appearance, conferring on the real, the true touch of its pure Idea: its reality, its existence.”³² Through the narrative of crucifixion and incarnation, the “Body” becomes the site of an ontological vitalism in the flesh and blood of Christ; a sign of the *hypokeimenon* (underlying thing) for *ousia* (substance), and a touchstone for the reality of our existence, giving us a sense that we “really exist.” This sense conflates the biological everyday sense of the body, with the subjection of that body to the body politic.³³

For Nancy, the body must be thought otherwise than its Christian incarnation with the blood and flesh of Christ through the continuous ritual of Communion—the body is abandoned not *sacrificed*. The question of the body remains caught within the Christian notion of sacrifice, as I indicated in chapter three, and the necessity of abandonment is found within the abandonment of the body of Christ. This is a model, which is repeated over and again, through the provision in Christian thought of the *Eucharist*.

The anxiety, the desire to see, touch, and eat the body of God, to *be* that body and *be nothing but that*, forms the principle of Western (un)reason. That’s why the body, bodily, *never happens, least of all when it’s named and convoked*. For us, the body is always sacrificed: eucharist.

If *hoc est enim corpus meum* says anything, it’s beyond speech. It isn’t spoken, it’s exscribed—with bodily abandon.³⁴

The question that Nancy asks is how are we to write the body, how is the body *exscribed*? What is *exscription*? In fact, what is writing when it takes place at the

³² Nancy, *Corpus*, p.5.

³³ I explore this link in the following chapter when I discuss Esposito’s critique of Nancy.

³⁴ Nancy, *Corpus*, pp.5,7.

limit or boundary of the body—to “touch upon the body”—without penetrating the body? How can we describe or give meaning without giving the body a meaning, or forcing the body to provide meaning—how do we make sense of the body while not incarnating the body with this meaning-giving operation? The bodily abandon of exscription is a manner of rethinking *incarnation*, without the decisive “in” of carnality. Thus, it remains to be shown how we can encounter incarnation without the overlying figure of production, the producer—whether as God or some other mode of production, which as we explored in the second chapter may simply come down to an economy of “value”—must not be thought as part of the narrative of creation. The “body as exscription” is the thinking of a “coming-into-presence”³⁵ of being without foundation, where the body “makes room” and forms a “place of existence.”

Bodies aren't some kind of fullness or filled space (space is filled everywhere): they are *open* space, implying, in some sense, a space more properly *spacious* than spatial, what could also be called a *place*. Bodies are places of existence, and nothing exists without a place, a *there*, a “here,” a “here is,” for a *this*. The body-place isn't full or empty, since it doesn't have an outside or an inside, any more than it has parts, a totality, functions, or finality...the body *makes room* for existence...More precisely, it makes room for the fact that the essence of existence is to be without any essence. That's why the *ontology of the body* is ontology itself.³⁶

As Morin argues, the manner in which Nancy configures the body as that which “*makes room* for existence,” is a description of the body as always “an outside, something turned inside out”;³⁷ however, this is not a re-inscription of the self-touching in the phenomenological sense. Thus, while it is certainly true that Nan-

³⁵ As Nancy describes in *The Experience of Freedom*, “The existence of being is improbable for the existent – and is what frees thought in it: “*Why is there something rather than nothing?*” In this way there is a coming-into-presence: in the *coming* to presence of that whose presence in itself has no reason or foundation for coming to presence. (This is exactly what the entire ontotheological tradition has relentlessly sought to present, even resolve, as the problem of freedom or of the necessity of a “creator” and its “creation.”)” pp.93-4.

³⁶ Nancy, *Corpus*, p.15.

³⁷ Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.128.

cy draws upon the phenomenological analysis of self-touching in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty; according to Morin, Nancy rejects the manner in which "phenomenologists "always return to a primary interiority"."³⁸ This is why Nancy develops the notion of exscription in order to reject any sense in which his philosophy is an attempt to bring together the body with the mind into some chiasmus. The very premise of a split between the material and the ephemeral as soul or thought (or even the, "what it is like to experience something") is rejected from the outset as a "Christian" (monotheistic) gesture, and hence what must be the focus of Nancy's deconstruction.

Nancy is also rejecting any notion in which we might understand, as Morin puts it, a "dichotomy between mute matter and conceptual or linguistic meaning."³⁹ Thus, it is important to recognize that Nancy is not bringing the body into the ontological picture of his deconstruction of Christianity by re-inscribing the body in a purely phenomenological sense. That is to say, the body is neither organized nor dis-organized by thought, rather the body and thought co-incide as a spacing and dis-position, which provides the *passage* of sense.

Derrida's remarks cited above suggest that the "body," as the sign that defers the *absent* presence of Christ, "is conceivable only on the *basis* of the presence that it defers and *moving toward* the deferred presence that it aims to reappropriate."⁴⁰ Put another way, the body is understood by the deferred presence of incorporeal investment, which has its *basis* in *incarnation*, and is continuously *moving toward parousia* (Christ's second coming). As Nancy explains, the incarnation of Jesus, as the "human" figure of the divine, provides the indelible mark of "humanism" in the Western world.⁴¹

The term *incarnation* is usually understood in the sense of the entry into a body of some incorporeal entity (spirit, God, idea)...It is a change of place, the occupation of the body by a space initially not connatural to the given

³⁸ Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.128.

³⁹ *Ibid* p.130.

⁴⁰ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, p.9.

⁴¹ Nancy, "Verbum caro factum" *Dis-Enclosure*, p.81.

reality...incarnation is a mode of transposition and representation.⁴²

It is this mode of thinking that allows dualists to conceptualize the body as exterior or outside thought itself, and thus allows thought to posit representation in terms of an exteriority or "sensible manifestation."⁴³ In order to position representation as an outside or exteriority, it is necessary to construct a tangential point from which it is possible to *re-present* this exteriority, it is the thinking position which is interior and tangential that allows representation to be thought in its "sensible manifestation." This is precisely what Descartes does through his articulation of the mind-body dichotomy; Cartesian doubt, or skepticism, allows for a tangential position—the soul transcends the body. However, this interpretation, as Nancy argues, does not necessarily follow from the figuration of incarnation as it was originally manifested in the Nicene Creed; "If the verb *was made* flesh, or if (in Greek) it *became* flesh, or if it *was engendered* or *engendered itself* as flesh, it is surely the case that it had no need to penetrate the inside of that flesh that was initially given outside it: it became flesh itself."⁴⁴ Indeed, as Nancy argues, it is "theology" itself, that "has made superhuman efforts...to think this *becoming*." A becoming in which in the figure of Jesus Christ was split into "two heterogeneous natures,"⁴⁵ that of the Holy Spirit and that of the earthly human as purely material. Theology itself undoes the thinking that reifies the body through a metaphysics of presence.

In *Verbum caro factum*, Nancy confronts "one of the founding oppositions of philosophy, between the sensible and intelligible,"⁴⁶ through a reading of Christology as *différance*, or as the withdrawal of presence. As Derrida argues, "*Différance* is not only irreducible to any ontological or theological—ontotheological—reappropriation, but as the very opening of the space in which ontotheology—philosophy—produces its system and its history, it includes on-

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid p.81-2.

⁴⁵ Ibid p.82.

⁴⁶ Derrida, "Différance" *Margins of Philosophy*, p.5.

totheology, inscribing it and exceeding it without return."⁴⁷ It should be possible, thus, to read Nancy as inscribing a reading of the Christian body and exceeding it without return. How does Nancy do this?

To begin with, picking up on the manner in which the *logos becomes flesh* in the Christian body, the exemplar of which is Jesus, Nancy argues that "the Christian body is completely different from a body serving as an envelope (or prison, or tomb) of the soul."⁴⁸ Rather, it is in the *logos becomes flesh*, that the *logos* forms a body, and in becoming flesh, it is the "exiting of the spirit from itself", which is to say that the two forms of *logos*, as spirit and as flesh, are mutually exclusive.⁴⁹ Another way of reading this movement is in the notion of "creation," in creating the world, God "puts himself outside himself by and in a "creation"."⁵⁰ Thus God (Christian or monotheistic, the lines blur here) is precisely the God "who *atheologizes himself*" in the creation of *logos as flesh*.⁵¹ In this concept Nancy draws upon a reading of the Pauline notion of *kenosis* to describe the body as precisely that which is not-of-God, or in other words, as the withdrawal of presence. "The "body" becomes the name of the *a-theos* in the sense of "not-of-God." But "not-of-God" means not the immediate self-sufficiency of man or the world but this: no founding presence."⁵² It is from this sense of being as abandoned, and without founding presence, that Nancy begins his deconstruction of Christianity, and opens the path of thinking that I have explored in the previous chapters. The next step is to discuss precisely how the body, as abandoned, opens the *passage* to meaning—for this reason I describe Nancy's notion of touch in the following chapter.

⁴⁷ Ibid p.6.

⁴⁸ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.82.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid p.83.

CONCLUSION

Despite the disorientation involved in the notion that the body is without a founding presence, by reflecting on Derrida's gesture of *différance* the body can be conceived as a continuous deferral and spacing of presence. The body would thus be its own "origin," however, an origin that cannot be thought as singular, but as always differing in and of itself from other singularities through which it is dis-posed in the world. In order to think through the notion of "origin," it is necessary to understand how the body as this "origin" at the place of existence is never simply there, but always exscribing itself at the limit through which it touches the world of other bodies in their plurality. To think the body as a spacing that opens a *passage* for meaning, without investing the *flesh* of the body with meaning, Nancy uses this gesture of touch. As *exposed*, the body is the spacing of the world through the perpetual gesture of touch. Touch is the limit at which sense takes place, through the disposition of bodies.

Deconstructing the fundamental gesture of incarnation, Nancy claims that the body is *exposure*, and that sense is what takes place at the limits of that exposure. The dichotomy of the mind-body is false; thought, like the body, only makes sense at that embodied limit. To think otherwise invites a transcendent opening in the world, which allows the *paradigme principiel* to function as the hegemonic background to all "meaning." In contrast, Nancy describes the exposure of the body to a plurality of bodies that create a world. This takes place through the exscription of the body, which is to describe the body and thought itself, as taking place at the limit. Hence, to give meaning to this limit, Nancy uses the gesture of touch, to which I now turn.

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Touch

INTRODUCTION

...therefore flesh is the medium of touch.¹

Nancy wants to approach philosophy through the notion of a fundamental contact between the material and corporeal on the one hand, and the incorporeal sense of language (meaning) on the other. *Touch* is Nancy's way of describing this gesture of $\epsilon\alpha\eta\tau\alpha\kappa\tau\alpha$ (which is to run up against the limit without penetration), and incorporates a rethinking of the body as its own "origin" rather than produced, particularly in terms of the Christian motif of incarnation. The way in which Nancy rethinks incarnation forms an important aspect of his project of the deconstruction of Christianity. It also fundamentally addresses the manner in which the "flesh" might come to be thought as the point of "origin," and why Nancy wants to surpass such a reading. As James describes, Michel Henry gives an account of a phenomenology of the flesh by incorporating the Christian incarnation into phenomenological thought. The "flesh" in Henry's account—a revision of both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty—comes to stand for the "'stuff' of appearance itself."² This rethinking of the "flesh" is in and of itself an ontological vitalism of the corporeal, and one that Nancy implicitly rejects. Instead, as Derri-

¹ Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 423b26.

² James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p.116.

da argues, Nancy will incorporate the notions of *plasticity* and *technicity*, or more broadly a *technē* of bodies, into rethinking an ontology of body.³ *Technē* allows Nancy to discuss the disposition of bodies alongside the materiality of the body in and of itself without giving either aspect precedence in understanding the ontology of the body. The concept of *technē* also opens thinking to the gesture of touch in its articulation *with* bodies as a world, while eschewing the violence involved in the penetration of bodies.

Thus, for Nancy, the critical gesture in his deconstruction of Christianity becomes how he reconciles the Christian conception of incarnation with his own sense of the body and how this sense manifests itself through the *technē* of bodies. In the first section of this chapter, a reading of Esposito's critique of Nancy will bring out the important role played by the gesture of touch in making-sense of the body. On the one hand, incarnation invests the body with its own originality in the form of flesh; one might use this originality to disrupt the immanentism inherent in totalitarianism, which redirects that originality in the body politic. On the other hand, incarnation allows a certain vitalism to adhere to the concept of the flesh, which would allow that origin to be invested with meaning from outside the world; hence transcendence overcomes immanence. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, it is through Christianity that we become bound to a choice of preeminence in either pure immanence or pure transcendence. Hence, by deconstructing the critical gesture of incarnation, Nancy reveals the tension in these two ontologies, and hence the ambiguity in setting up these two competing binaries.⁴ In contrast, for Nancy touch is the ontological gesture that reveals this tension and allows one to consider the body as an origin; however, an origin that occurs at the limit, which is precisely how the gesture of touch is involved—at that limit. Touch brings thought to that limit in a number of ways; in how we make-sense of the junction of the body and thought, which I discuss in the first section; in the suspension of the demarcation between sensibility and intelligibility through the notion of the body as origin that I explore in the second section;

³ "...it is the thinking of a *technē* of bodies as thinking of the prosthetic supplement that will mark the greatest difference, it seems to me, between Nancy's discourse and other more or less contemporary discourses about the "body proper" or "flesh"." Derrida, *On Touching Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.96-7.

⁴ See Chapter One, Section IV.

and, in the opening provided by the limit of touching that allows a passage of sense, as I describe in section three. In the fourth section, I bring these impressions of thinking the gesture of touch at the limit together through Nancy's notion of *technē* and the ecotechnical. The ecotechnical expresses Nancy's ontology of the body through the gesture of touch that takes place at the limit of the body, singularly and, as part of a world of touching in which the sense of this touch gives meaning through the *passage* that opens in touching, as plurality. As I will explain, Nancy's materiality finds its articulation in the ecotechnical, as a *passage* of meaning, which is always an origin without production.

I. WHEN LOGOS BECOMES FLESH: NANCY CONTRA ESPOSITO

One way of describing *touch* is by way of a question, namely, what is the relation "between body and language?"⁵ Nancy has drawn upon a reading of the body through the Christian motif of incarnation, in which the *logos becomes flesh*, however, this is not to suggest that Nancy is a thinker of the flesh such that the body becomes an arrangement or *logos* of the flesh. On the contrary, as Esposito points out, Nancy "clearly distances himself from all philosophy of the flesh by opposing to it the urgency of a *new* thought of the body."⁶ Arguing that this position is clearly enunciated by Nancy throughout his work, Esposito cites an example from *The Sense of the World*.

In this sense, the 'passion' of the 'flesh,' is finished—and this is why the word *body* ought to succeed on the word *flesh*, which is always overabundant, nourished by sense, and egological.⁷

⁵ Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.130.

⁶ Esposito, "Flesh and Body in the Deconstruction of Christianity" *Minnesota Review*, p.89; Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, p.162.

⁷ Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p.149.

However, if *flesh* is finished, Christianity is not. Indeed, the very notion of the deconstruction of Christianity, which is characterized for Nancy by the decisive formula of self-deconstruction (or, auto-deconstruction), configures Christianity in such a way that the secular becomes its own-most possibility. The possibility of surpassing Christianity is imbedded within Christianity itself; self-overcoming is its own necessity, however, the logic of this self-overcoming reveals Christianity as un-surpassable. Its movement is infinite, and indeed, it is toward this notion of "the very infinite of its continual self-surpassing" to which we must direct what Nancy describes as *adoration* (an address to the opening of the world within the world). Thus the infinite to which Nancy turns in *adoration*, is, and must remain, thoroughly Christian, even if it is at the same time thoroughly *atheologized*.⁸ Nancy recognizes precisely this ongoingness in Christianity as the infinite that must be reconciled through abandonment, "finitude is the truth of which the infinite is the sense,"⁹ and the question of Nancy as a reader of Hegel can again be raised at this point. It should be readily recognized the manner in which Nancy reconciles the infinite in Hegel through his reading of *incarnation*.

It was Christianity, by its doctrine of the Incarnation and of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the community of believers, that first gave to human consciousness a perfectly free relationship of the infinite and thereby made possible the comprehensive knowledge of mind in its absolute finitude.¹⁰

Here we read again the Hegelian good infinite that Malabou so incisively describes. Hegel clearly recognizes the movement of the withdrawal of a transcendent reference in Christianity; and, how this allows consciousness to freely relate to the infinite whilst remaining immanently finite. The question of flesh and the body becomes, how do these relate to the infinite of sense in abandonment within Nancy's project of the deconstruction of Christianity? As Derrida notes, the infinite movement of Christianity takes part in its own deconstruction, and it continues to do just that through the narrative of incarnation. "For a cer-

⁸ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.82.

⁹ Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p.29.

¹⁰ G.W.F. Hegel *Philosophy of the Mind* §376 Zusatz

tain Christianity will always take charge of the most exacting, the most *exact*, and the most eschatological hyperbole of deconstruction, the overbid of "Hoc est enim corpus meum." It will still make the sacrifice of its own self-deconstruction."¹¹ As I explained at the end of the previous chapter, Nancy revokes the sacrificial aspect of incarnation, emptying the body of this divine aspect and leaving the body as *a-theos*. The body, the human body, is to be without foundation, and the decisive gesture is how to think from the body in this way without succumbing to the Christian motif of the *logos made flesh*—how to reconcile the possibility of opening in abandoned-being with the continual reinvestment of divinity through *logos*. In other words, how successful is Nancy's re-configuration of the body and sense through the notion of *touch*, if the deconstruction of Christianity remains a task without an end?

As Esposito has argued, for Derrida, the notion of the *flesh* is *the* fundamental gesture in the continually self-overcoming—and thus returning—modality of Christianity in modern western philosophy. "In its most intimate essence, [Derrida recognizes that], the notion of flesh is the directional vector through which Christianity penetrates modern philosophy and is contemporaneously the linguistic symptom through which phenomenology reveals an unwavering Christian ascendance." And furthermore:

One could say that it begins to make sense that Derrida accords extraordinary importance to Nancy's work, at the summit but also beyond the phenomenologically derived haptic traditional, precisely because he places it at a distance from the carnal or "carnist" semantics...¹²

However, there remains a sticking point, according to Esposito, in Nancy's deconstruction of *incarnation*. For if it is the case that the conceptual link between the Christian notion of *flesh* and the body is cut so as to allow the body to become, *on the one hand* materially consistent with the world, and, *on the other hand* released from the ideality of a thinking substance.¹³ Then there remains the prob-

¹¹ Derrida, *On Touching Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.60.

¹² Esposito, "Flesh and Body in the Deconstruction of Christianity" *Minnesota Review*, pp.89-90.

¹³ *Ibid* p.91.

lem of the continually returning thought of Christianity in the secular, an issue covered in the first chapter, in which *incarnation* itself would seem to provide the very necessity of Nancy's deconstruction.¹⁴ The core problem being that Christianity provides the methodological key for opening up the body to thinking, while at the same time remaining the point of departure for this opening.

According to Esposito, "In the body of Christ a nature—a divine nature—comes into contact and cohabits with another radically different nature."¹⁵ This points to a reiteration of the dis-enchantment of the world from the alternate perspective of divinity itself, and so a dis-enchantment of divinity. As such, the body would seem to become the place of a (gnostic) unity, which is precisely what Nancy seeks to overcome.¹⁶ It is at this point that Esposito departs from Nancy's reading; "this is precisely why it is surprising that he [Nancy] positions his concept of the body in direct opposition to the logic of incarnation, which in fact constitutes the archetype most characteristic of this corporeal alteration and dividing up."¹⁷ For Esposito, it is necessary to maintain a link to the Christian doctrine, but at the same time to surpass Christian thought, by thinking on "its flipside."¹⁸ By doing so, Esposito regards *incarnation* as the key to "the renunciation of individual identity, [which is] at its origin the very idea of *communitas* as the dividing up of our singular and plural finitude."¹⁹ In taking up the notion of the body, Esposito is essentially arguing that Nancy is following the path into which Christianity would seem to necessarily lead, in which the "body tends increasingly to refer to the institutional body first of the Church then of the State, from which it inherits its unifying role."²⁰ Esposito here refers to a double movement in the exemplar of *incarnation*. On the one hand, the word made flesh is the opening up of the world to an exposure of the multiple. As he puts it, to

¹⁴ Ibid pp.91-2.

¹⁵ Ibid p.92.

¹⁶ At the same time, however, we can see this attempt to overcome a (gnostic) unity in Christian *doxa*, from its earliest inception, the remnants of which are found in the division between Coptic, Orthodox, and Catholic religious understanding of the Holy Trinity

¹⁷ Ibid p.93.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid p.94.

²⁰ Ibid.

““rise again,” today, cannot be the body inhabited by the spirit, but the flesh as such...”²¹ On the other hand, the body of Christianity, is the reunification of this multiple, its closure. As Esposito claims in *Bios*,

What I want to say is that each time the body is thought in political terms, or politics in terms of the body, an immunitary short-circuit is always produced, one destined to close “the political body” on itself and within itself in opposition to its own outside...when the immunitary demands grow until it overflows the banks of modern mediation, totalitarianism, and in particular Nazism, produced an additional enclosure of the body on itself...²²

Without following the logic of Esposito’s notion of bio-politics here, which is beyond the scope of this exploration of Esposito’s concerns with a deconstruction of Christianity, it suffices to say that Esposito asks the question: “Can we therefore conclude that the flesh is to community what the body is to immunity?” As Esposito argues, this may be the reason for the ever-expanding need of the state to situate the body as the point of departure for ‘the political’ as such (whether in terms of ‘immunization’ as Esposito argues,²³ or some other notion of the biopolitical *a la* Foucault, Butler, Agamben, or Santner). Thus returning to Nancy, Esposito is keen to recognize the potential for overturning this politico-technical elaboration of the body, arguing that in “what Nancy calls “ecotechnics”” there is a “recognition of the body’s originally technical, hence unstable, quality that I see the juncture between his thought and the non-phenomenological but Christian declension of the flesh.”²⁴ The notion of the technical re-orientates the invasive sense of *incarnation*, in the sense that through the technical it becomes possible to penetrate the body in such a way that allows it to continue to function (as we find in Nancy’s *L’Intrus*). It is in this sense of the technical that Esposito seeks to

²¹ Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, p.167.

²² *Ibid* p.158.

²³ As Santner puts it, “Esposito’s rapid summary of the political theological aftermath of the Pauline codification of these transformations makes it abundantly clear that what is fundamentally at issue in the immunitary paradigm is not so much the protection of life from death but of the body from flesh.” *The Royal Remains: The People’s Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty*, p.29.

²⁴ Esposito, “Flesh and Body in the Deconstruction of Christianity” *Minnesota Review*, pp.95-6.

recover something of Nancy's philosophy for a more politically orientated reading of the *flesh*. Esposito provides a reading that forms the alternative discourse to the immunitary logic, "by opening up to a material experience of community."²⁵ In essence, Esposito claims, the opening provided by the material emphasis inherent to flesh allows the reconstitution of the human in its plurality that defies the immunitary logic of individuality and pure collective which constitutes totalitarianism. As he puts it, "...not only does the spatiality of flesh allow us to recuperate a temporal dimension, but it constitutes precisely their tangential point."²⁶

I am sympathetic to Esposito's concluding thoughts, yet his reading of *incarnation* would seem to lack the rigor of Nancy's appropriation of *différance*, particularly with the hindsight afforded by Nancy's latest addition to his project, the concept of the "address" in *Adoration*. It is precisely through this address that the thought of the body, as the body abandoned, exposed, and touching the world, might be properly thought. Nancy's appropriation and deconstruction of *incarnation* provides an account of the body that remains exposed and singular, and at the same time touching and touched by the world. It is this thought that allows the body to be thought with and through a notion of being *in* common, that maintains a sense of community, while remaining inoperative and thus resistant to a thought of the body that has become the site of a political operation. Furthermore, Esposito's claim reveals the unrealized potential of Nancy's emphasis on spacing-out and disposition, and why the gesture of touch is pivotal to this sense of opening; sense is created at the limit, of the body and thought, where it touches the plurality of being. It is this limit, and the gesture of touch that brings being to this limit, that opens space to temporality and temporality to space, which is precisely where the necessity of contingency becomes a fundamental gesture in surpassing the hegemony of logos—and where *transimmanence* functions as what overcomes the agglomeration of meaning. Furthermore, it is, I claim, naïve to suggest that we could subject Nancy's version of "flesh" to a non-phenomenological reading, in the sense that Nancy's use of the gesture of touch

²⁵ Ibid p.96.

²⁶ Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, p.160.

suggests his clear preference for registering his deconstruction of Christianity within the *body* rather than the flesh. In the following two sections, I demonstrate how Nancy maintains a plurality of bodies through a play on the temporal-spatial aspects of both the body and language, which builds on Nancy's reading of the withdrawal of presence, and in particular his critical engagement with Descartes' attempt to split the subject I discussed in the previous chapter.

II. THE PLURALITY OF AN ORIGIN

In order to reconcile my claim regarding Nancy's focus on the body that I have made above, it is necessary to engage once again with the notion of the withdrawal of presence—read through Derrida's play on *différance* into the each time of enunciation in chapter five—this time according to Nancy's gesture toward the discourse of life as a "syncope."

But the syncope that the body *is*—and that it *is* in one uninterrupted block, sustained from the cry of birth to the last breath, a block that is modulated in a singular phrasing, the discourse of "a life"—is not simply a loss: it is, as in music, a beat; it adjoins (syn-) in cutting (-cope). It adjoins the body to itself and bodies among one other. A syncope of appearance and disappearance, a syncope of utterance and of sense, it is also a syncope of desire.²⁷

The syncope of the body is the play between sensibility and intelligibility. The body is *in* the world as a sensibility, never fully articulated in space as a presence, but rather a spacing out in the each time of an enunciation; and, never fully present through time in its linear modality, but temporally registered in the spacing of an enunciation. The syn-cope is the disruption and suspension of intelligibility, that relies upon the each time, and an each space, of an enunciation; the body is

²⁷ Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, p.83.

an exscription into the world, which is a spacing or making room for existence, through which intelligibility is never *there* as such, but functions only through the body in its *différance*. The body is exscription—what Derrida describes in *Différance* as the “middle voice”—a burst of sense into the world that is nontransitive and hence without production. As Nancy writes in his essay *Différance*, “[t]he coming into presence of being takes place precisely as nonarrival of presence.”²⁸

Nancy is reading the auto-deconstruction of Christianity, in which the *divine* alienates itself from itself—atheologizes itself—in the movement and play of the body as the *place* in which sense is always as a *taking place*, but never an end in-itself, and never a restoration of presence. The body is always *secondary*, in its attentiveness to the loss of divine presence (*kenosis*); and, always *provisional*, moving toward and mediated by the presence “to-come.” The each-time of enunciation is an exposure of the body to the world of sense, such that “the act of sensing and the act of the sense are the same...sense does not add itself to being, does not supervene upon being, but is the opening of its very supervenience, of being-toward-the-word.”²⁹ The body is an exposure to sense, and to the sense of the body in the world; nevertheless, always in a between of bodies, as a syn-cope (adjoining-cutting). Hence, supporting Nancy’s notion of being-singular-plural, the body is only singular in its plurality (comparution) to other bodies.

As Morin points out, this leaves us with a question; if sense cannot be attached to the body, but occurs only between, as *différance*, where does this leave the matter of signification—the attachment of thought to a thing? In contrast to the notion of a unified origin of the world, as supplied by the figure of divinity and the concept of *incarnation*, Nancy argues that the “world springs forth” through a “plurality of origins.”³⁰ Each origin lacks production, remains nontransitive, and is abandoned to the world—such that, each is a singular originary moment of being. And yet, each originary being, “share originarity and originality; this sharing *is itself* the origin.”³¹ Here again we return to the notion of being-

²⁸ Nancy, “Différance” *The Sense of the World*, p.35.

²⁹ Nancy, “The Sense of Being” *The Sense of the World*, p.28.

³⁰ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p.83.

³¹ *Ibid.*

singular-plural, as the defining gesture of Nancy's ontology. On the one hand, the origin of each singular being is in itself non-productive, both originary and abandoned in itself to the world as a pure exposition. On the other hand, this origin as a springing-forth is shared by all singular beings, in the sense that the origin without production is precisely this sharing of origin. For Nancy, the springing-forth of originary being is both finite and material.

We have covered the sense of finitude already in the previous chapters; however, the radical nature of Nancy's materialism comes to the fore in this sharing of origin. And it is this sense of Nancy's radical materialism that conveys the unique nature of Nancy's notion of *touch*, and *touching*. Materiality is not something into which being presents itself, even in the sense of springing-forth, we must reject all notions of atomism and determinism. Rather, Nancy describes a sense of sharing that encompasses the very notion of "matter," and calls into question, immediately, the manner in which we conceive of matter.

What is shared is nothing like a unique substance in which each being would participate; what is shared is also what shares, what is structurally constituted by sharing, and what we call "matter." The ontology of being-with can only be "materialist," in the sense that "matter" does not designate a substance or a subject (or an antisubject), but literally designates what is divided of itself, what is only as distinct from itself, *partes extra partes*, originally impenetrable to the combining and sublimating penetration of a "spirit" [or "mind"], understood as a dimensionless, indivisible point beyond the world.³²

When Nancy describes ontology, he is not describing being in the sense of the human, or even the animal. Ontology is an ontology of "body," and an ontology of every body that makes up the world, no matter whether or how we might attach significance to bodies in any political, ethical, scientific, or aesthetic sense. Body in this notion is broad beyond definition, but at the same time a simple thought, almost reductive; body is dis-position and this dis-position is regarded by Nancy through the notion of touch. We make sense of this dis-position, from one body

³² Ibid pp.83-4.

touching the next, and this sense is a sense that is shared across this dis-position. Indeed, sense is only as the sharing of sense—"There is no sense that is not shared [*partagé*]." ³³ The gesture of touch gives materiality as the *passage* of sense, and the ecotechnical, to which I turn in more detail below, explains this *passage* without production or investment of meaning from an "outside."

For Nancy, the question then revolves around thinking through the notion of sense that occurs at the limit of sense, where this limit is precisely what opens to an infinite within the world. In terms of the body the question that remains to be addressed is how Nancy understands the manner in which sense touches this limit through his conceptualization of "body." By answering this question it becomes possible to understand how the motif of *touch* has become a fundamental part of Nancy's philosophical thinking, and indeed why it forms the pivot around which so much of his philosophy functions. This is also why Derrida engages in such a sustained commentary of Nancy's notion on *touch* in *On Touching*. ³⁴ It is through the notion of *touch* that Nancy engages with the incorporeality of the "intelligible" in relation to the materiality of the body as "sensible." Indeed, *touch* is the address of *sense* to the limit imposed by *abandonment* and the enunciation of an experience of existence in the *technē* of bodies.

III. A TOUCH THAT OPENS THE *PASSAGE* OF MEANING

But there remains this difference between what can be touched and what can be seen or can sound; in the latter two cases we perceive because the medium produces a certain effect upon us, whereas in the perception of objects of touch we are affected not *by* but *along with* the medium, it is as if a man were struck through his shield, where the shock is not first given to the shield and passed on to the man, but the concussion of both is simultane-

³³ Nancy, "An Exempting from Sense" *Dis-Enclosure*, p.121.

³⁴ C.f. James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, p.118.

One way of approaching the gesture of *touch* is by considering how the sense of “medium” that Aristotle refers to in the above epigraph might be thought alongside the way meaning is configured by Nancy in terms of a *passage* between bodies. Touch provides a tactic of addressing meaning without succumbing to the totalizing effects of a *paradigme principiel* or mono-valence of value, which produce the “exhaustion of signification” and “immanence of man to man.”³⁶ By using touch to explain how meaning is mediated by the disposition of bodies, Nancy can configure meaning without it becoming appropriated by some configuration—whether theological, political, ethical, biological, technical...even perhaps, anarchical—around which this *passage* of meaning happens. Nancy evades this appropriation by claiming that meaning does not involve a “transmission” of meaning in the transitive sense, but rather an *opening* of meaning that takes place at the *touch* of body to body. Bodies are themselves the origin of a meaning—in other words, bodies are the medium through which meaning originates. Apropos Aristotle’s claim that in the gesture of “touch we are affected not *by* but *along with* the medium”; Nancy describes the way meaning takes shape through the “simultaneity” of saying and resaying.

...meaning does not consist in the transmission from a speaker to a receiver, but in the simultaneity of (at least) two origins of meaning: that of the saying and that of its resaying...Meaning is the passage back and forth [*passage*] and sharing of the origin at the origin, singular plural. Meaning is the exhibition of the foundation without foundation, which is not an abyss but simply the *with* of things that are, insofar as they are.³⁷

In this remark we should play close attention to how “the *with* of things that are” is the medium of touch that opens a *passage* of meaning, an opening without foundation. According to Nancy sense is an *origin* that occurs in the mediation of

³⁵ Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 423b10.

³⁶ As discussed in chapter two and three.

³⁷ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, pp.86-7.

touch as “sharing.” Sense, in Nancy’s terms, is created *ex nihilo*, and the mediation of “shared” embodied existence provides the originary opening of meaning. Touch is thus a gesture of *exposure* in which “the *with*” of bodies opens as *passage*; put another way, the mediation of touch is a *passage* of sense. *Passage* is the opening of meaning at the limit of the body, an *exposure* of the body to the touch of the plurality of bodies. *Passage* is thus, *all that there is*, in the non-pejorative sense, where the *all* is the infinite manifold of touch that happens at each and every moment—the springing-forth of sense, as a world—infinite in the sense that the material is “non-all.”

The central point of Nancy’s claim here, is that *abandonment* must be read alongside the notion of “the *with* of things that are, in so far as they are,” in the sense that abandonment allows the possibility of “shared” existence. Bodily-abandon is neither singular nor plural, but rather is to dwell singularly-plural and plurally-singular within the midst of being. The question arises as to whether “the *with*” makes sense of abandonment? As I have already discussed, the point for Nancy is not to *make sense* of abandonment, it is to dwell as abandoned-being in the address of the infinite as an *adoration*. This would not seem to make the question any less pertinent, nor does it answer the question, so perhaps the question should be posed in another way. We might transpose this question by defining the gesture of touch as that which exposes the “foundation without foundation”; however, if this was the case, it would imply that *touch* exposes this limit precisely through the sense in which it *touches* this limit. What follows from this gesture can be thought as simply a reiteration of the question—what is “the *with*” of meaning?

When Nancy argues that; “*Being, between, and with* say the same thing; they say exactly *what can only be said*,”³⁸ he is describing the process by which he rethinks incarnation as without foundation, such that the address of *adoration* is an “each-time” (syn-cope), in which the body comes to be through the plurality of shared existence in its enunciation. *Touch*, then, is not a touching, it is touching that always withdraws from touch; *touch* is a touching of what is un-touched, remains to be touched, and is untouchable. *Touch* is to touch the ungraspable

³⁸ Ibid p.86.

limit, in which the *passage* of meaning is all that there is in touching. As Nancy puts it, touch is to touch the limit of the other, without penetration, which is to touch without surpassing the finitude of thinking.

What is at stake above all in being-with is the relation to the limit: How can we touch and be touched there without violating it?³⁹

To touch without violation is to open *logos* to the *a-logon*, as I discussed in chapter one, in which *logos* is *dialogue*, which does not rely upon a *consensus* but rather maintains its impenetrability as its constitutive condition. *Touch* is the passage of the logos, from body to body, exposing bodies to sense, but never penetrating bodies—the body remains impenetrable in the sense that meaning occurs in their mediation, rather than their penetration. In this configuration, the *logos* is nothing more or less than this *passage*. Logos is what *touch* touches upon, but which remains un-touchable, intangible, and incorporeal—it is instead “being in affect: being affected and affecting.”⁴⁰

Logos is *dialogue*, but the end [or purpose] of dialogue is not to overcome itself in “consensus”; its reason is to offer, and only to offer (giving it tone and intensity), the *cum-*, the *with* of meaning, the plurality of its springing forth.⁴¹

Dialogue, language, logos, speaking-with, is the continual re-affirmation of being with as material, and as exposed to an “each-time” of meaning. To say, “*logos* is *dialogue*,” is to confirm its impenetrability—what remains as untouchable in the gesture of *touch*. *Logos* is announced in the *passage* of meaning. As Derrida argues, the gesture of touch in Nancy is not a sense; there is no “the” of touch.⁴² Thus, according to Derrida,

³⁹ Nancy, “Church, State, Resistance” *Political Theologies*, p.111.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p.87.

⁴² Nancy, *Corpus*, p.119.

...the haptical is not just a sense among others, and in a way it is not even a sense, *sensu stricto*...because, to every *finite* existence, it recalls what is coming—so as to present it with something, whatever it may be, whatever being it may be, but while marking, with the gift of this presentation, the limit at which or from which the presentation announces itself.⁴³

Touch, is the annunciation and always coming-to-presence of existence. We must consider how touch involves a reconfiguration of the temporal alongside its spatial mediation; touch involves the mediation of time itself. In touching, the temporal aspect of finitude becomes mediated and projected, as such, touch can eschew penetration by remaining what is *l'avenir*. *Logos* is the “each-time” and “each-place” of meaning *l'avenir* as a *passage*—which would thus seem to focus the question upon the notion of *passage*. What is this *passage*, if it is not a tunnel, a tube, or a conduit (which would be to address language as an already given structure through which our ‘mind-speak’ passes), but more precisely the exposition of meaning itself, as the between or the ‘with’ of bodies (always *partes extra partes*)? Certainly, if *touch* is the central gesture that is under examination here, how does *touch* relate to the incorporeality of this passage. The question is, as Derrida puts it,⁴⁴

How to touch upon the untouchable? Distributed among an indefinite number of forms and figures, this question is precisely the obsession haunting a thinking of touch—or thinking as the *haunting* of touch. We can only touch on a surface, which is to say the skin or thin peel of a limit (and the expressions “to touch at the limit,” “to touch the limit” irresistibly come back as leitmotifs in many of Nancy’s texts that we shall have to interpret). But by definition, limit, *limit itself*, seems deprived of a body. Limit is not to be touched and does not touch itself; it does not let itself be touched, and steals

⁴³ Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.53. Implicit within this quote from Derrida is the sense in which he charges Nancy’s gesture of *touch* with an irredentism, a topic I intend to explore in the future.

⁴⁴ “...it was between 1985 and 1991 (approximately – pending a more fine-grained statistical analysis) that the corpus was more than touched upon: it was summoned, almost violated, penetrated, dominated, by the operation that came to inscribe some “touching” at the heart of all writing.” Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.96.

away at a touch, which either never attains it, or trespasses on it forever.⁴⁵

We must be mindful of the role haunting plays in Derrida's philosophy, as there certainly seems to be a recurring spectral figure in Nancy's philosophy—a spectral figure of Christianity that haunts its self-deconstruction. The limit then, of *touch*, in the sense that "it seems deprived of a body," must be the limit at which the body of Christ is withdrawn from the narrative of incarnation. And it is precisely in this withdrawal, that technicity and plasticity as the "ecotechnical" are revealed at the "*limit itself*." In what follows I will address directly the notion of the *technē* of bodies, beginning, again, with how the deconstruction of Christianity itself might play a role in the revealing the "*limit itself*."

IV. TECHNĒ

According to Derrida, the deconstruction of Christianity surpasses Christian thought by reconciling the manifold discourses on *flesh* and *incarnation* with an address toward *plasticity* and *technicity* through the gesture of touch.⁴⁶ Touch finds its theoretical explanatory force in its capacity to cross the sensible-intelligible division in philosophy. As an *aporia*—from its inception in Aristotle to Derrida's modern exegesis of phenomenology—the "phenomena" of *self-touching* has become both the defining motif and the limit of sensibility. In contrast, for Nancy, in the gesture of touch sensibility finds its limit precisely where the notion of "intelligibility" comes into play. When Nancy addresses the problem of a *corpus ego* in Descartes, it is precisely at the limit, where the sensible and the intelligible would seem to be inexorably irreconcilable, that *touch* puts into play the *spacing*, *partes extra partes*, of the body. Through the lens of this philosophical idiom—the partition of sensibility and intelligibility—we should

⁴⁵ Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

read Nancy as expropriating *touch* in the following remark.

...the body is the plastic matter of spacing out without form or Idea. The body is the very plasticity of expansion, of extension, in accordance with which existences take place...⁴⁷

This spacing out lacks any “sense” of form or Idea, which is likewise why the *spacing out* must be *plastic*, a spacing out that is the taking place of being as abandoned. The sense in which the extended body is *plastic* is the body’s *technē*, a body without a given sense, rather a sense that exscribes itself into and as a “world.” Is it possible to address Nancy’s notion of abandonment within this conceptualization of *spacing out*? Indeed, the very possibility of existence must be thought of as abandoned in order to allow *plasticity* to function in the way the body is exscribed. *Plasticity* can only be thought, in terms of giving and receiving form, if it is itself unattached to a *paradigme principiel*. In *Corpus*, in the passage from which the remark above is derived, Nancy anticipates his further exploration of this gesture in *Adoration* eighteen years later. “Glory is the rhythm, or the plastic expression, of this presence—which is local, bound to be local.”⁴⁸ Why does Nancy bind this glory to a locality? He does so as a means of undoing or surpassing the onto-theological expression of “Glory” in its celestial proclamations, thus allowing existence to be thought as an “origin” in its shared metaphysical “poverty” or abandoned-being.

Derrida reads Nancy’s notion of touch, as it relates to an exscription of the body, in terms of what remains untouchable to touch—that there is no “the” sense of touch. By bringing this into focus, Derrida plays upon the *plasticity* and *technicality* of the body in order to think the being-with of the body in these terms as *technē*—“this indissociability of “touch” (of “the” sense of touch that “isn’t”) and technical supplementarity.”⁴⁹ If touch is to manifest itself in terms that no longer remain beholden to a Christian thought, it must form an opening that remains out-of-touch—or, in other words, it must be thought of as an opening onto

⁴⁷ Nancy, *Corpus*; cited in, Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.222.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.224.

the infinite of sense that surpasses any thought of an onto-theology. This takes place, according to Derrida, through “a dissemination of haptics with the body’s technical character,”⁵⁰ a “technical character” that lends itself to the differing and deferring of presence itself, presence (signification) always withdrawn and to-come or *l’avenir*.

The *technē*⁵¹ of bodies is a description of sense that always fails to return to itself and remains fragmented and disseminated. Sense is in the *passage* of discourse or language, sense is writing, but a writing that as a *passage* does not circulate back upon itself. If sense were to circulate in the sense of returning to itself, it would be possible to describe sense as an inscription that remains connected to some meaning outside of itself. In returning to itself, through circulation, meaning can be read from outside its inscription as meaning; here the *passage* itself would be understood from a meta-level, and hence connected in some way by an Ideal. However, this is precisely what Nancy wants to avoid, and he does so by maintaining the thought of sense as an exscription that remains wedded to bodies as that exscription. The *technē* of bodies is the manner in which they remain *partes extra partes*, parts outside parts, exposed to “the *with*” as meaning and a becoming origin of a world. Hutchens argues that despite the “withdrawal of sense” that has accompanied Nancy’s critique of “the sense of the world,” there remains for Nancy “a mode of *technē* in which sharings among singularities offer the potential of civil community.”⁵² As Nancy describes,

I therefore prefer to say that the *technē* is one of a sharing of bodies, or of their comparution...we are exposed together...neither presupposed in some other Subject, nor post-posed in some particular and/or universal end...near in no longer having a common assumption, but having only the between-us of our tracings *partes extra partes*...⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ We should bear in mind the influence of Heidegger in this term *technē* as it manifests itself in the work of Derrida and Nancy. Heidegger writes that, “*Technē* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiesis*; it is something poetic.” *Question Concerning Technology*, p.13.

⁵² Hutchens, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy*, p.142

⁵³ Nancy, *Corpus*, p.91.

“Inscription” can be thought in terms of an enclosure of sense, a sense that is closed by this bringing together; and in this manner of thinking, “reason” would become the meta-language of understanding this enclosure of sense—conferring power to those who wield it. Reason or *logos* thus becomes that which provides a meaning of the world from outside the “sensible.” However, as I have argued, Nancy’s project (the deconstruction of Christianity) is one of *dis*-enclosure, which is an opening and exposure of sense to the infinite within the world. Again, repeating Nancy’s words, “finitude is the truth of which the infinite is sense”; or in other words, our finitude is our shared being-toward-death as a revealing, and this revealing is an opening onto the infinite of “the *with*” as *comparution*.

Plasticity is an important facet of this notion of opening onto “the *with*.” Why? In simple terms plasticity is the manner in which bodies exscribe themselves finitely as with-being, and in the same gesture *touch* the limit that is sense through that exscription. Plasticity is a manner of describing the manifold of dispositions of the body, while maintaining the infinite sense of dispersal of this disposition. As Nancy describes, the body’s disposition is “the plasticity of what we’d have to call states of body, ways of being, bearing, breathings, paces, staggerings, suffering, pleasures, coats, windings, brushings, masses.”⁵⁴ Indeed, the very style of Nancy’s writing itself maintains this sense of fragmentation, through lists such as this that can be found throughout his *oeuvre*. Nancy takes up words such as “sense,” “being,” “thinking,” “body,” and “freedom,” without ever settling on a fixed meaning for these words—they remain gestures, always contextual and never settled, exhausting the concept under analysis by energizing the limit at which it functions, bursting with an excess: *plastic*.

Experience of being always takes place at this limit, where the finitude of experience touches upon the infinite—“there is no ultimate sense, only a finite sense, finite senses, a multiplication of singular bursts of sense resting on no unity or substance.”⁵⁵ We can read this sense of experience in what Nancy describes in *The Experience of Freedom* as “The Free Thinking of Freedom.” The experience of finitude touching the limit of sense as infinite, is thus for Nancy always an ex-

⁵⁴ Ibid p.85.

⁵⁵ Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p.27.

perience of “freedom.” What we experience in this *touching* is the comprehension of the fact that there is “the incomprehensible.”⁵⁶ Or, in other words, that the meaning of existence is always *l’avenir*, such that presence is always a withdrawal. Nancy nevertheless argues that freedom, is “opposed to comprehending: [rather] it makes itself understood, at the limit of comprehension, as what does not originate in comprehension.”⁵⁷ Hence, in order to describe the manner in which freedom “makes itself understood” while avoiding the notion of what we could call a maker or producer of this understanding—in other words, avoiding the Christian narrative of *incarnation*—Nancy describes this process through the notion of *technicity*.

The ecotechnical functions with technical apparatus, to which our every part is connected. But what it *makes* are our bodies, which it brings into the world and links to the system, thereby creating our bodies as more visible, more proliferating, more polymorphic, more compressed, more “amassed” and “zoned” than ever before. Through the creation of bodies the ecotechnical has the *sense* that we vainly seek in the remains of the sky or the spirit.⁵⁸

The ecotechnical is the “creation” of our bodies in the here and now as a springing-forth of being, without recourse to any notion of “production” or intended outcome. The ecotechnical is a relentless becoming of existence, one that replaces the notion of *hypokeimenon* with the infinite restlessness of a coming-to-be in the exscription of bodies as world. The ecotechnical is the *passage* through which meaning is created in the shared sense of existence as a world. If we were to put it simply, *technicity* has replaced Divinity, as the manner of thinking “creation.” In this sense, *technicity* is another way picturing what Heidegger described in terms of “machinations.” Furthermore, we should be quite clear that Nancy is revealing an ontological rather than an emancipatory gesture, the political finds its potential in this revealing, but this is an opening not a revolution of being.

⁵⁶ Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, p.49.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Nancy, *Corpus*, p.89.

It is also important to note that Nancy is not denoting a technical, scientific, or computational meaning of the world through this notion of the ecotechnical. Rather, it is the body, and the manner in which it spaces and exscribes itself as meaning-giving, that Nancy is describing through the notion of the ecotechnical. As James argues, what Nancy is purposefully doing in using the term ecotechnical, is describing a *technē* of bodies as a way of rethinking and deviating from Heidegger's existential analysis of *Zuhandensein* (being-ready-to-hand).⁵⁹ In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes the way we encounter the world of existent things through the modality of "concernful dealings" which he aligns with the Greek word *praxis*. Using the hammer as an example, Heidegger describes a disconnection between the theoretical aspect of an object, and its practical aspect as a tool. When we come to objects in the world, we are caught up in their use-value or instrumentality rather than their being an object.⁶⁰ Nancy extends this way of conceptualizing our being with the world, to include the manner in which we are already with one another as bodies in the world. The body becomes the site of interconnected technicity *with* other beings as bodies. The world itself can only be understood through the technicity of this interconnection, which in turn allows a more complete and nuanced understanding of the role of technology in the human condition.

...the ecotechnical, linking and connecting up bodies in every way, placing them at sites of the intersections, interfaces, and interactions of every technical procedure, far from turning bodies into "technical object"...sheds light on them as such, through this areal connection, which also creates space for the withdrawal of any transcendental or immanent signification. The world of bodies has neither a transcendental nor an immanent sense. If we want to keep these words, we'd have to say that one takes place within the other...⁶¹

The ecotechnical suspends the decision in which we revert to pure immanence (immanent frame) or pure transcendence (religion), and, furthermore, avoids

⁵⁹ James, *The Fragmentary Demand*, pp.144-5.

⁶⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp.96-98.

⁶¹ Nancy, *Corpus*, p.89.

Taylor's explanation of the co-habitation of these frames of reference, in which we allow immanence to function as an incomplete explanatory force, permits religion to function in the gaps that are opened by the incapacity of immanence to encompass an experience of being human. However, according to Nancy, bodies are always parts outside of parts, such that they are always extended and can only be as an outside. Hence, the sense of materiality that Nancy invokes is radical in the sense that there is no inside. Opening the immanent frame to a religious investment, *apropos* Taylor, relies upon the fleshly aspect of the body; however, penetrating bodies cannot create sense—the moment we open a body to look inside (literally or metaphorically) we are exposing another outside. As Nancy puts it in his treatment of the image,⁶² the body is sacred in the sense that it remains distinct and impenetrable, which in turn eschews its capitulation to the resources of sacrificial spatio-temporality in (a)theological narrative. Indeed, in opening and exposing we are invoking precisely the *technicity* and *plasticity* of the body that Nancy is invoking through his sense of radical materialism—sense itself as exposed and exscribed. The exposure of the body, and its ecotechnical articulation, gives the body sense by opening the body to a world—touching that remains suspended by a certain tact in our being-with allows sense to function without collapsing that sense into the hegemony of the *paradigme principiel*. It is in this thought that we find the possibility of re-engaging with the political and perpetually suspending a communal signification of community, hence bringing justice to a sense of community without ever completing that sense.

CONCLUSION

Nancy's ontology is premised on the impenetrability of the body, and the gesture of touch finds its theoretical weight in this sense of impenetrability. The body remains a surface that touches the world, which is another way of saying that be-

⁶² Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, pp.1-12.

ing is finite, and the shared exscription of that touch is what gives meaning to that limit. I began by questioning Nancy's relation to theories of the flesh, and argued that Nancy overcomes the residue of Christianity by eschewing the ontological vitalism of "the flesh" while providing a sense of our being-with through the touch of the body with the plurality of bodies as a world. According to Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity, abandonment, as the continuous investment of the withdrawal of presence, can only become emancipated from its (a)theological roots by allowing the body to be thought as fundamentally without foundation. To avoid this becoming a gesture of nihilism, Nancy argues that sense *comes* in the *passage* of meaning between bodies; bodies that express their finitude through the way they share the capacity to touch this limit with others. Contra Esposito's claim, that if the body is denuded of its fleshly aspect it becomes subject to the institutional premise; Nancy argues that the gesture of *adoration* in which one addresses the infinite opens the body as a spacing of meaning in its shared existence.

I described this opening in terms of Nancy's use of the term syncope, which brings Nancy's conflation of sensibility and intelligibility into focus. The body remains a surface, always touching the limit of its own finitude, however, this touch finds meaning in the contact with a world. This meaning is an exscription of the body in its exposure to the touch of a world, an exscription that is a happening *with* the world, and does not come from some ontological vitality within the body. Thus, syncope is the gesture of the body that gives meaning in its exscription, in its being-affect, as affecting and being affected, within the world. The "material" is found in this division and opening of affect, rather than what inheres otherwise within the "body."

I described the role played by the *passage* of meaning that finds its expression in the articulation of bodies as their *technē*. Thus, given the understanding of the *technē* of bodies, how does this relate to the deconstruction of Christianity? The response leads us back to the first and second chapters, and how Nancy extends Gauchet's claim that Christianity is "the religion of departure from religion." The question of meaning itself is posed in this rather complex idea; from where does meaning arise if not from God and if not from the calculative grip of a rational-scientific thinking? For Nancy, meaning comes from the opening that

Christianity (monotheism more broadly) brought forth in its departure or withdrawal, which is to say, in *abandonment*.

Sense springs-forth in the *technē* of bodies and the articulation of “the *with*,” however, there is no *the* of sense, only the technicity of being. The use of the word *technē* is an attempt to reach back, through Heidegger, to the meaning of this term in the discourse of Ancient Greece. In the modern milieu, technology is perhaps less understood than ever, the use of the term today “obscures the fact that there is no technology that is not technology *of* some determinative operation or other.”⁶³ Or in other words, there is no “general” sense of technology despite the fetishism of technology in modern discourse. Nancy’s use of the term technology is to denote technology not as a thing, but as the multiple singularity of a putting to use of technology without ends. In these terms, there is no *the* of technology; instead there are plural-singular techniques. These techniques are necessary as a compensation for the withdrawal of presence; they make possible the ~~presentation~~ of non-immanence.

...technology compensates for a nonimmanence, that is to say, for an absence of what is represented as a “natural” order of things, in which means are given along with ends, and vice versa...Technology doesn’t reform a Nature or a Being in some Grand Artifice. Rather, it is the “artifice” (and the “art”) of the fact that there is no nature. (Law, for example, is also a technology or technique.) So much so, in fact, that it ultimately designates that there is neither immanence nor transcendence.⁶⁴

Recalling Esposito’s critique from the first section, this is precisely why Nancy’s materialism is *not* a philosophy of flesh, and likewise why Nancy revokes an ontological vitalism, but instead remains committed to an ontology of the body. Bodies are impenetrable in the sense that they are purely outsides. To open up a body to inspection is to expose another surface, another outside, and another part outside parts. Bodies share in the fact of their materiality, but only in the sense of the limit or surface of matter. The *technē* of bodies speaks of the manner

⁶³ Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p.24.

⁶⁴ *Ibid* p.25.

in which bodies are always *touching*, and sense itself is given through the technicity of this touching. This again raises the shared sense of this *touch*, sense is only what is shared through the technicity of this touching. To penetrate beyond the *touch* of bodies is meaningless, there simply is no beyond the *touch* of bodies. Nancy is thus re-articulating Aristotle's description of touch, through a metaphorical re-inscription of Aristotle's concept that the sense of touch is the only sense that if overwhelmed leads to death.⁶⁵ Indeed no matter how far we burrow into the material body, there are only other bodies, other surfaces. As Anne O'Byrne describes, the "world is not itself a body or body as such, but is rather the world *of* bodies; it is both *for* bodies and *made up of* them. Put another way, the material world does not occur as mere matter; we do not experience extension as the unbroken surface of the world."⁶⁶ This is why we must grapple with the way sense is considered by Nancy as always shared: as the articulation and disposition of a body touching the infinite limit at other bodies. A shared disposition and articulation or movement of a body as the *technē* of bodies. By thinking in this way it becomes possible to reconsider the notion of community, not as a project that demands completion, but rather as an opening for the possibility of giving justice to existence, human or otherwise.

⁶⁵ Aristotle, *On The Soul*, 435b5.

⁶⁶ O'Byrne, "Nancy's Materialist Ontology" *Jean-Luc Nancy and Plural Thinking*, p.82.

CONCLUSION

Being unable to give an account, lacking yardsticks or measures, sensing that there is something beyond the calculable, which cannot be reduced to any commensuration, comprehension, or convention whatsoever. Even not recognizing “what” or “who” is at issue, not recognizing at all but sensing that it is so: that the homogeneous is opened by a heterogeneity beyond any equivalence [*homologie*]¹—as when, in the moment of awaking, it is possible, briefly, not to know that one is awaking, or where, or when, or why: we all know what that is, even as we also know perfectly well that it is not. It is an emotion, a nuance, a word, an allure, a resonance; it is a visage, a birth and a death or sooner, much sooner, it is “one” who is born or “one” who dies. It is the newborn and the dead man insofar as we know that they remain and will remain incommensurable, heterogeneous, irreducible, and, as such, neither “born” nor ever “dead.”¹

CREATING A HEART

In my conclusion, I bring this dissertation into focus on a question that remains both a touchstone for Nancy, and the motivation for this present body of work and what lies beyond: the question of giving justice to existence. I want to claim the heart of being, in Nancy’s parlance, reveals the possibility of giving justice; the heart weighs on being whilst remaining constitutively beyond the calculable. Furthermore, I claim, this is precisely the possibility opened to thought by Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity.

¹ Nancy, *Adoration*, p.2.

It would be in no way novel to claim that, for Nancy, the question of justice remains a guiding thread; from his early work, to his project 'the deconstruction of Christianity', and beyond that to his study of aesthetics and sexuality. Recalling the opening epigraph of my introduction, the visceral tone in those remarks are indicative of the "absolute anger" Nancy feels toward the perpetual flow of texts that seek to "perfect" signification—an anger mirrored, but remonstrated in more subtle tones, within the epigraph above. Indeed, the urgency that sparks from the pages of Nancy's writing, seems to continually draw the reader² into the vertiginous affect of grappling with the injustice of "one more signification" while at the same time conflicted by its necessity in simply living a life, notwithstanding the struggle with this heart-felt despair³ in attempting to produce a text that could possibly do justice to the work of Nancy. As I repeatedly asserted in both chapters two and three, this same anger drives Nancy toward revealing how signification itself is responsible for the continuing catastrophe of existence through which injustice thrives. Indeed, once one has grasped this central motif within Nancy's thought it seems impossible to rest one's mind, in the sense that it is less a task of seeking out and extrapolating injustice⁴ than finding a moment's respite from the weight of injustice that seems to intensify with every passing moment. Hence, in what follows, I will extrapolate on the motifs that formed the basis of this dissertation, and rehearse those gestures alongside the question of justice.

In the first three chapters, I sought to explain how Nancy configures the perpetual injustice enacted upon existence in the contemporary world by the metamorphosis of Christianity. I came upon several key gestures, beginning in chapter one with Nietzsche's notion that the human would "rather will nothingness than not will." As Heidegger explains, the will to "will nothingness" has accompanied the evolution of the Western world, and the signification of the "hu-

² This one at the very least.

³ Both Nancy's and my own.

⁴ I am not suggesting that we should not extrapolate and draw attention to injustice, in fact quite the opposite, this is precisely the task that we should set ourselves. Indeed, the weight of thought that resides within the space between Nancy's words drive an ever increasing determination to bring his acute and startling observations into focus on a myriad of issues. This dissertation thus provides the opening volley into these projects to come.

man" both within and outside that world, through an incessantly reiterated metaphysical paradigm that remains constitutively closed (onto-theology). Hence, I began my opening foray by discussing where Nancy finds the potential for dis-enclosing this onto-theological closure (and, the incessant configuration of a human *essence* that maintains this closure), by way of his project "the deconstruction of Christianity."

In the first chapter, I propose that Taylor is perhaps too hasty in his categorisation of "deconstruction", and that a far more nuanced approach, undertaken by Jean-Luc Nancy, to fully think through the implications of Christianity as a self-deconstructive and plastic narrative, creates more ambiguity than Taylor allows in his summation of the "Nietzsche-Camus-Derrida paradigm." And thus, while we can read a great deal of significance into Taylor's understanding of the conditions of human experience apropos Durkheim—as being caught within cross-pressures of existence—it is the writing of Jean-Luc Nancy, *mutatis mutandis* I claim, that allows us to think through the "cross-pressures" of the human condition without recourse to a faith premised upon "Christian" or theistic grounding.

In my account of Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity I consider two leitmotifs of presence, these come together in such a way as to characterise the self-deconstructing process of Christianity as—seemingly—a task without end (recalling here my discussion of Malabou's critique in the interlude). First, that presence is never fulfilled; rather presence, as representation, is indicative of an absence that gives meaning in *absentia*. This should be registered as the "Greek" modality of representation, where meaning is indexed according to a "logical *ideality*"⁵ such that representation is intelligible insofar as it accords with the ideal. Second, that presence is continually withdrawing from the world; indeed, that this insistence on abandoning presence is constitutive of presence as such. Representation, in this model, is perpetually unfulfilled in the sense that it awaits realization in the messianic temporality of a coming to presence, as *parousia*. This should be registered in the "Biblical" modality of representation as a "revelation," whereby in this paradigm truth is catalogued according to "a presence

⁵ Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p.32.

whose sense is an *absense*.”⁶ These two form a third motif—the defining characteristic of Christianity as the religion that allows for the surpassing of religion, and which equally classifies “deconstruction” itself as Christian—and forms the self-deconstructive gesture that divides immanence and transcendence according to what I described, *apropos* Gauchet in chapter two, as an *absent-future*. Representation is entangled within the complexity of these two intertwined modalities: the coming-to-presence “in the world” of a perpetually withdrawing presence; at once indicative of a sense tied to its absence “from the world.” Andrew Benjamin explains how Nancy frames absence and withdrawal in his analysis of Nancy’s essay “Forbidden Representation”, from *The Ground of the Image*, in the following manner;

In the first instance it indicates the possibility of representation is necessarily marked by modes of nonpresence. In the second instance, it shows that what exists—coexists—does so in a way that is traversed by the continual possibility of an attempt to realize and thus enact complete presence.⁷

My task in the second chapter was to explore how Nancy understands the catastrophe of injustice—relentlessly imposed by this intertwined motif of representation “marked by modes of non-presence” and the perpetual withdrawal of presence—by explaining what Nancy terms the *paradigme principiel*. This term plays upon the singular aspect of religious thought that dominates “the West,” in the form of a monotheism that has evolved through a continuous process of metamorphosis into the hegemonic aspect of global capitalism and economic rationalism, tied as they are to this *mono* through a mono-valence of value in the form of “general equivalency.” The “human” is itself part of this hegemony, insofar as it has become the central modality through which signification functions. According to Nancy, by overturning the representation of existence according to “an intelligible form or image,”⁸ inasmuch as existence accords with that

⁶ Ibid. An absence of sense—“absense”.

⁷ Andrew Benjamin, “Forbidding, Knowing, Continuing” *Jean-Luc Nancy and Plural Thinking*, p.215. This essay by Benjamin, and the corresponding essay by Nancy, bring one to the limit of thought.

⁸ Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p.32.

form, the possibility of justice is revealed. The dual motif of absence and withdrawal that fuels the productive power of signification within the *paradigme principiel*, indexes the significance of existence according to a re-presentation of (de)value that cannot but perpetuate injustice. In contrast, as Fiona Jenkin's argues, "Nancy deconstructs the very idea of "value in itself" or "dignity" on the basis of the exchange or sharing it presupposes, so that its "absolute" becomes that of singular-plural existence."⁹ Hence, as I outline in chapter two, Nancy seeks a path toward thinking a "sense of the world" that does not rely upon the modality of representation. By appropriating the motif of creation from its religious investment, Nancy demands that being embrace a sense of creation *ex nihilo*, again, eschewed of the evocation of a transcendent thought. As Jenkin's puts it, Nancy "is saying that equality, the common measure, is not given by the incommensurable value of a human dignity which a being might possess or of which it falls short."¹⁰ Rather, by addressing the demand of thinking existence as *ex nihilo*, Nancy is responding to the possibility of justice, as the conduct of being in its originary singularity; but importantly, an "origin" that is constituted by an exposure to the plurality of a world. To reiterate my claim above, the conclusion I draw from Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity is that the heart of being marks the sight of the incommensurable value. Creation is here to be understood as the singular-plural struggle for justice in giving meaning to being without beginning or end, and without recourse to principle, but purely from nothing. Origin gains its fecundity from both the finite and exclusive occurrence of singularity, and the infinite and contingent opening of plurality. The gesture of making-sense, necessary for allowing existence the possibility of justice, is opened by this ontological premise of singular-plural.

At stake in this modality of creation is the opportunity to "struggle" for a world in contrast to the "global injustice" brought about by the economy of general equivalency. Nancy frames this "struggle" in terms that belie any reduction to a "relationship" between being and an other, but rather remain nothing more than the "touch" of being. Put another way, as an "ontological" project that seeks

⁹ Fiona Jenkins, "Souls at the Limits of the Human" *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, (2011) 16:4, p.165.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

justice, Nancy overcomes both the "authenticity" of ontology, and the "transcendence" of an ethics as first philosophy, both of which are premised upon a polarized relation of being and an other. While certainly in harmony with both Heidegger and the possibilities opened by his Levinasian modification, Nancy cannot think from the singular upon which this philosophy is premised, nor can he lose this singularity to the infinite that comes from a transcendent gaze. Rather, Nancy seeks to understand this relation of being to a world through the limit of this relation, which is what brings singularity in touch with its plurality. Creation *ex nihilo* is a re-engagement, in every sense, with the "struggle for a world"; where "every sense" is neither singular nor infinite, it is purely finite. And yet, the opening at the very "limit" of being that this finitude implies, is precisely what brings being in "touch" with the infinite as making-sense.

We understand the process opened by this "struggle for a world," in Nancy's terms, as *transimmanence*; which is to expose being to the limit of plurality, and to touch upon this limit as the spacing by which immanence opens within to its own transcendence. In chapter two I introduced the notion of abandonment, in order to reveal the proximity of *transimmanence* to Nancy's project of the deconstruction of Christianity. The injustice of general equivalency is suspended by the "conduct" of being in its abandonment, and in this suspension the possibility of *transimmanence* is revealed. Being must dwell in the midst of that abandonment, with the full implications for law that this implies, in order to reveal this possibility. It is "as abandoned" that being can dwell at the limit, and in the conduct of "letting being be" comports itself in such a manner that would permit both meaning to open and the formation of justice in the world.

By the term "conduct" Nancy is not invoking an inner world, quite the opposite, conduct is the opening of a world through the plurality of being. However, conduct also gives being its singularity and incommensurable originality, as its exposure and contingency within the world. Hence, as I cover in chapter three, there is a fundamental tension at the heart of being. A core issue that I address in this chapter relates to how this tension manifests itself through the drive toward an essence of community, a drive that stifles this tension and allows being to become part of an operative communion as "community." In this account of community, as in the *paradigme principiel*, representation hinges upon the capacity

for exchange and calculability of being according to its (de)value. In response, Nancy opens thinking to an inoperative sense of community that allows being “to be” without acceding to the operative force of an essence, whilst still maintaining the ethical premise at work in community. The irreconcilable relation being has with finitude brings being to its own incommensurability, where, *contra* Heidegger, this finitude is experienced in being with others as plurality. The incapacity of being to reconcile its own death comes through an experience¹¹ of the death of others, an experience that is shared, termed a “shared finitude.” This shared finitude is indicative of a broader concern that Nancy has with the Absolute, as I outline in chapter three; Nancy claims that the Absolute is self-deconstructive, making it impossible for the Absolute to constitute itself. Despite this disposition, the Absolute still functions—in the form of the *paradigme principal*—as the modality through which an operative community instills itself with the attribute of a secure essence. The monovalence of value works to prescribe a fixed essence within community, governing existence insofar as it accords with this act of signification, and proscribing that which does not. The injustice of this signification manifests itself in both the denouement of the status of “the political” within the milieu commissioned to develop an essence of community, and as the closure of “metaphysics”—both of which facilitate the global exchange of general equivalency and the consequent de-valuing of the originality of being.

In contrast, the terms of Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity precisely seek to disrupt the manner in which “community” works toward a fixed essence. Drawing upon the capacity for being to process enjoyment according to the “actual infinite,” *jouissance* reveals itself as necessarily excessive in its relation to the state of general equivalency; such that, as Nancy puts it, “finite existence accedes, as finite, to the infinite of a meaning or value that is its most proper meaning and value.”¹² It is here that Nancy reveals the modality of “creation *ex nihilo*,” which confronts being in their exposure to a shared finitude; an exposure that is

¹¹ Is it necessary for me to say here ‘real or imagined’? I am no longer entirely sure what the point of this specification would be, other than to succumb in some fashion to the already predetermined method of signifying ‘experience’—whether as authentic, historical, genetic, cultural, ethnic, traumatic, suppressed, biological, virtual, unconscious, conscious...etc.

¹² Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, p.46.

tied to the excessive sense of *jouissance*, and charged by the aporetic ontological gesture of singular-plural, viz. the necessary contingency of existence. This is a demand—an *obligation*—to engage in an enjoyment of the creation of a world, without succumbing to the vagaries of general equivalency.¹³ In this demand there is an opening for making-sense that is illustrated in the opening provided by our exposure to the contingency of a world. As Jenkin's puts it,

The demand of "making-sense" is not to find a rationalisation of existence "as it is" but calls for the creation of meaning, as the touching of material limits (something Nancy contrasts with the capitalist production of value). "Sense" here is at once responsiveness and agency, the sense by which we touch the world and by which it touches us.¹⁴

What remains to be said, is the manner by which the contingency into which beings are necessarily exposed as existing within a plurality, opens into the possibility of making-sense as justice. I discuss this demand placed upon being to exist as singular-plural within Nancy's reading of the *decision* in Heidegger. Furthermore, this demand, implicit within the *decision*, is an *obligation* to make sense. Thus, in chapter four, I discuss how the term *obligation* is processed by Nancy in response to Heidegger's critique of Kant's Moral Law; and insofar as Nancy opens Heideggerian ontology to the "inauthentic" sense of being-with, *obligation* allows Nancy to pose the notion of making-sense within an ontology of being-singular-plural. The task of overcoming abandonment, as a possibility for how being comports itself within this abandonment, is answered by Heidegger through his notion of "authenticity." In contrast, by abiding within the *decision*, Nancy provides the possibility of opening to transcendence within the midst of the world, precisely in the passivity and non-prescriptive sense in which this abiding is conceived. The only way that thought can maintain this sense of dwelling within abandonment, without some prescriptive movement toward a fixed signification, is by remaining abandoned to the *obligation of shared-finitude*. The incommensurability revealed to being by that shared-finitude, reveals, moreover,

¹³ Ibid p.53.

¹⁴ Jenkins, "Souls at the Limits of the Human" *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 16(4), p.167.

the necessity of abandoning thought to the *decision* of existence. Here we can see how Nancy adjusts what is at stake in the facticity of our abandonment. Justice is served by being,¹⁵ not in its capacity to lift itself out of its abandoned state by the decision to exist as what is present and intelligible within the world of signification; but rather in its concession to the singularity formed in that decision, as what must exceed its capacity to “signify” and which it must abandon.

Thought abandons itself to its own opening and thus reaches its decision, when it does justice to this singularity that exceeds it, exceeding it even in itself, even in its own existence and decision of thought.¹⁶

It is in abandonment that being encounters the limit that is “sense,” however, how do we picture this process of running up against the limit of sense? One manner in which Nancy turns to thinking at the limit of sense is through the notion of language. In speaking one is, according to Nancy, always at the limit of the sensible. Indeed, in speaking we are in fact conflating sensibility and intelligibility; not simply bringing them together, but also bringing them to their own limit in relation to a futurity that surpasses the messianic moment implicit in the “Biblical” rehearsal of signification I discussed above. In speaking we are addressing the incommensurable and infinite that is beyond the limit of sensibility and intelligibility, we address the impossibility of the universal, whilst at the same time, situating ourselves within the fact of our own existence. To speak is to be, at the same time, both inside and outside the limit of sense.

For we know, as soon as we speak, that language addresses itself and addresses us to this outside of homogenous communication and signification. That language in its first and last instance addresses itself and addresses us to this heterogeneity, to this outside. Language is there for this alone, it does

¹⁵ In Nancy's ontology existence is always both to be as a singular entity within a plurality, and to be as a plurality within a singular existential embodied being. As such, “being” should be read as a continuous negotiation between being-singularly-plural and being-plurally-singular. This negotiation emphasises the necessity of exposure to the world, in both its singularity and plurality, and becomes an important ontological movement in the final chapter and conclusion of this thesis.

¹⁶ Nancy, “The Decision of Existence” *Birth to Presence*, p.108.

only this: it addresses, appeals to, calls out to the unnameable...¹⁷

Throughout this dissertation I have explored how Nancy challenges the *précis* of Western philosophical thought that distinguishes between sensibility and intelligibility (whether as body and mind, present and absent, or immanent and transcendent). The way Nancy pictures the address of language to the un-nameable challenges these binaries at the point of enunciation that gives existence its fundamental originality. This is another way of addressing how, in “saying,” language lacks both a transcendent reference, and an immanent yardstick, according to which it may be measured and calculated. Language is “sense,” but sense at the limit of intelligibility, and the task of language is to *make* sense whilst dwelling within the impossibility of this task. In order to resolve the tension within the “false” binary that functions in the “saying,” metaphysics situates existence within the realm of signification, providing an essence that brings being into the realm of intelligibility. This signification occurs according to the temporal regress instilled by the Christian locus of temporality, in which the “saying” becomes the “said.” The “said” maintains a sense of contingency necessary for communication by relying upon the temporality of *parousia*—the Hegelian *bad infinite* in which value is appropriated by the continuous play of general equivalency. By focusing on the term abandonment, as I discuss in chapter four, Nancy eschews this paradigmatic force and calls upon the *obligation* to make-sense within the “midst of the world,” and thus addresses the unnameable without signification by dwelling as being-abandoned within the futurity of *l’avenir*. This notion of being-abandoned seeks the non-resolution of “saying,” however meaning occurs in the originality of being as a *passage*. Two motifs are critical for understanding how this notion being-abandoned allows a creation of the world by making-sense, without falling into the appropriation of signification—I discuss these motifs here in the terms “fortuitousness” and “comparution.”

1) *Fortuitousness*: to experience, or “exist,” as always already within a world, is to predicate sense on the given-ness of a world to experience. Nancy describes this already given-ness of a world as the “fortuitous character of exist-

¹⁷ Nancy, *Adoration*, p.2.

ence.”¹⁸ This fortuitousness is thus symptomatic of how our existence in the world, according to an experience of our existence, “in some way always already *makes sense*, and does so before or prior to conceptual determination, and prior to our giving it a fixed signification, or attributing to it predicates or characteristics.”¹⁹ As Nancy explains, this primordial given-ness of sense is the given-ness of being-abandoned, the comportment of being as dwelling within that abandonment. To be abandoned is not a *contingency* thought in contrast to a necessity, as this would be to already have engaged in a thinking of the world. Rather, it is the necessity of that contingency which puts being into play as the locus of a world in its exposure to the plurality of touch.

The “fortuitous” puts forward a notion less of a nature or a state than of a circumstance, a movement.²⁰

By considering existence as “fortuitous” one addresses the question of the meaning of being in terms that cannot be answered through some programmatic form or calculability, as such an immanent undertaking simply folds the task of sense in upon itself into an “agglomeration.” Furthermore, the *jouissance* involved in the movement of this fortuitous occurrence, renders the capacity to address this question from some position that could stand completely apart from being, as nothing more than a reduction of this fortuitous movement to something wholly static and appropriated by equivalency. We should take note of how a careful consideration of this fortuitous movement opens sense to the possibility of giving justice to the “*being-ecstatic of Being itself*,”²¹ which I discussed in chapter three. To address sense through the notion of *déclension*, is to address the fortuitous movement that opens sense as what opens beyond the limit of being within the world. It is in this gesture of justice that I want to orientate my elaboration of the *passage* of sense, and its relation to touch that I discuss in my final chapter.

¹⁸ Ibid p.11.

¹⁹ James, *The New French Philosophy*, p.41.

²⁰ Nancy, *Adoration*, p.11.

²¹ Ibid.

In contrast, within the *paradigme principiel* we remain caught within the Christian paradigm that prescribes a transcendent reference (*absence*, or “Greek”), whilst simultaneously cutting us off from that transcendent reference (*withdrawal*, or “Biblical”). We thus address sense from this abandonment of being, which has become the only “transcendental,” and thus the remaining condition of our experience of the world since the self-deconstruction of Christianity. However, we surpass Christianity not by attempting to overcome this abandonment, but rather by dwelling within as the *obligation* of the address to the unnameable. *Adoration* is this address, as an address to what opens towards us at the limit of sense, a turning towards the incommensurable itself. “That is what is named “adoration”: a word addressed to what this word knows to be inaccessible [*sans accès*].”²² The address to the unnameable enables being to make-sense whilst dwelling within abandonment. Indeed, the necessity of abandonment is the manner in which it demands a response to the obligation to make-sense *ex nihilo*. The modality of obligation is an opening onto an exposure to the plurality of the world. This ontology of exposure, and the *passage* of sense that opens up at this limit, involves the plurality of being. I discussed the way this plurality and singularity collide in chapter five, and there I drew upon the notion of *comparution*. It is the concept of *comparution* that allows being to make-sense, without enforcing signification, and opens being to a community without essence.

2) *Comparution*: recalling the opening section of chapter four, it is in the way Nancy frames his sense of obligation as the ethical premise of abandonment that necessitates an opening “between” being. It is this opening that allows Nancy to provide, *contra* Heidegger, the ontological premise of being-with. An opening that coincides with the obligation of being to “make-sense” that draws being into an ontological relation to what necessarily surpasses its finitude—the infinite of an exposure to the plurality of a world. Surprisingly, in light of the way Heidegger portrays *Dasein*’s relation to *das Man* in *Being and Time*, according to Nancy being-with becomes the opening that gives the *passage* of sense, as an address to opening within the world to what is infinite. Obligation is what opens the finitude of being to be thought in terms of a singularity, as the each time of an

²² *Ibid* p.2.

existence; however, insofar as it is obligation that brings being to the singularity of its finitude, as an address to the incommensurable, obligation necessitates the contingency of being in its exposure to a fundamental plurality of being. Obligation opens within the world to what is infinite and constitutive of being-with, and provides an ontological picture that is premised upon "exposure." As I argue in chapter five, the figure of Christ plays a critical role in how this ontology of exposure intersects with being-abandoned. Drawing upon Nancy's reading of the body in his deconstruction of Christianity, and how an ontology of "exposure" intersects with the notion of being-abandoned that plays a critical role in revealing the figure of Christ that persists within Western metaphysics, I argue that our exposure is premised upon the loss of presence. It is to Nietzsche, that Nancy turns time and again, for guidance on the question of how this loss of presence might be re-read through the prism of giving justice to existence. Nietzsche renders this loss in the following terms,

What alone can be *our* doctrine? That no one *gives* man his qualities—neither God, nor society, nor his ancestors, nor he himself...The fatality of his essence is not to be dis-entangled from the fatality of all that has been and will be.²³

Pausing for one moment, we could reflect on the mode of abandonment that Nancy experiences through the words of Nietzsche in the opening epigraph. What Nietzsche describes is a picture of the "human," not only bound to its temporal being devoid of a governing *eidos*, but also exposed to the world as spacing, in the trajectory of what is common to being—a lack of presence. The fatality of the human's essence, in which it remains entangled, is precisely how we must approach our understanding of the vulnerability inherent in Nancy's ontology of *exposure*. Reflecting again on the themes with which I began this conclusion, according to Nancy, Nietzsche depicts the human condition in terms of a continuously withdrawing *presence*.

Presence torn, wrenching presence. Presence is to the world in not being in

²³ Nietzsche, "The Four Great Errors" *Twilight of the Idols* s.8. in *The Portable Nietzsche*, p.500.

that world. It stands before and in the withdrawal from itself. What thus occurs to presence is what occurs to the order of the world itself. Without a principle, the world no longer provides justification to the order that organized its significations.²⁴

Not only does the “human” lack a given-ness, so too does the world; the condition of “wrenching presence” provides the initial conditions of experience. Abandonment is to think through the withdrawal of presence, stripped of any meaning beyond pure withdrawal. However, to stop at this point—where sense finds its limit in thinking that is at once finite but which addresses the infinite—would be to ignore the manner in which thinking itself is for Nancy always already part of an experience of the world in its materiality. In essence Nancy forms an ontology that dwells within the *ex nihilo* of abandonment, but at the same time, gives sense through an engagement with the plurality of that abandonment. It is in the particular way that Nancy stages a radical materiality, as I discuss in chapter five, that allows Nancy to pose an exposure to plurality in terms of touch. The term *comparution* allows Nancy to picture the process of making-sense from within this materiality, whilst avoiding the shackles of determinism.

The materiality of *comparution*, is one in which bodies are always exposed to sense through their *with*; in other words, the exposure of bodies alongside one-another at the limit of touching, but always *partes extra partes*. Being *compears* in the sense that it comes before and touches the world through its exposure to being. This is not thought in terms of a communion of the body in which the body becomes the form through which meaning is recognised, nor do we find in this gesture an attachment to some over-arching common-being to which the body is comparatively measured in quanta of intelligibility; rather the body is thought and is born to presence in the each-time of this *with*. Sense is never invested within the body, or in a singular one-sided recognition, it is through the *with* of bodies that something like sense takes place. In order to reconcile the manner in which sense takes place through the dis-position of bodies, Nancy draws upon the notion of the “ecotechnical.” Technicity—a topic that I ex-

²⁴ Nancy, “An Experience at Heart” *Dis-Enclosure*, p.76.

plore in chapter six—is a way of thinking the *passage* of sense in the *comparution* of being, and how the touch of bodies forms the *passage* of this taking-place. The “ecotechnical” is the technicity of bodies that come together as a world, and a “sense” of the world in this coming together. Technicity is therefore a way of describing the manner in which bodies as *exposed* are always touching, what Nancy calls an “*areal* connection.”²⁵ Importantly, bodies do not touch *in* the world; rather the touching of bodies *is* the world. The eco-technical gestures towards the possibility of justice *in* the technicity of being, in how abandoned-being opens the possibility of “letting being to be”; but likewise, it is a reflection upon the increasing articulation of this exposure in the world, and the articulation through which injustice continues to take place.

Nancy argues that, ““Creation” is the *technē* of bodies. Our world creates the great number of bodies, creates itself as the world of bodies (shedding light on what was always *also* its worldly truth). Our world is the world of the “technical,” a world whose cosmos, nature, Gods, entire system is, in its inner joints, exposed as “technical”: the world of the *ecotechnical*.”²⁶ By creating bodies the “the world of the *ecotechnical*” exposes the inside of the world and being, giving meaning to the touch of the body to body. It is in this capacity for exposure that the world can reveal the heart of the matter, and indeed, it is by revealing this heart that Nancy opens the world to the possibility of justice. The true test of vulnerability and the possibility of justice begins here, at the heart of being created in the *technē* of bodies. *The heart itself is created in this technē.*

THE HEART OF THE MATTER IS NON-ALL

If the body is always an outside, impenetrable, and configured by Nancy as parts outside parts, where does this leave thinking with regards to an inside? How

²⁵ Nancy, *Corpus*, p.89.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

does one approach the notion of the heart of being? Nancy plays tactfully with this question through the notion of *psyche*. Psyche is the motif by which Nancy regards what Derrida describes as the “irreducible *divisibility*”²⁷ of the body. If the body is impenetrable, then there is a point of opaqueness from which, and, to which, the body addresses the shared finitude of existence—what might be described as the point of “*nonknowledge*.”²⁸ This is an important part of Nancy’s ontological depiction of the body, and touch, as it provides the impenetrability that allows bodies to be thought in both their *technicity* and *plasticity*. In doing so, Nancy has provided a novel and radical thought of materialism, one that does not allow for any thought of ontological investment within (or, inside) the body. Again, this is a necessity for Nancy’s ontological picture, because if there were any manner of ontological investment this would form a mode of ontological vitalism or invigoration of the inside of the body, which in turn would necessitate a certain Idealism of the body. However, in the same gesture of opaqueness necessary for thinking the body as such, Nancy’s ontology forms a lacuna at the site of the body. In order to expand on this lacuna, Nancy summons an obscure Freudian aphorism that is invoked by thinking through the notion of the exposure of the body. As we can see from the quote below, this mode of thinking *psyche* necessitates a picturing of both the body and thought through the notion of *weight*.

This is certainly the way that *psyche is extended...she knows nothing about it*. Psyche, here, is the name of the body, as presupposed *neither* according to a substratum sunk into matter *nor* according to an already-given superstratum of self-knowledge...Because *sense* has no origin, because *being-without-origin and coming-to-be-extended, being-created, or weighing-such, indeed, is “sense”*.²⁹

It is precisely through the notion of *weight* that Nancy can picture a sense of the body and thinking that is without foundation, but at the same time bring justice to the figure of origin *qua* originarity of being into our shared sense of finitude. It

²⁷ Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.14.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Nancy, *Corpus*, pp.95.

is weight that gives the body its ontological primacy as being born-to-presence in each and every moment. And it is also through the motif of weight that Nancy overcomes the Heideggerian emphasis on authenticity.³⁰ It is a weight that we experience, it imparts the pressure of thought itself at the heart of the body, while at the same time the experience of this weight “remains a *limit-experience*.”³¹ In describing thought through the notion of weight Nancy challenges both the spatio-temporal empirical figure of a thinking mind (trapped) within the body, and the ephemeral figure of a thinking mind that eludes the notion of extension within the world. Thus, through the motif of weight Nancy is able to maintain a sense of materiality within his ontology of the body, whilst at the same time, bringing justice to the notion of sense or meaning that lacks foundation. This lack of foundation opens the space for, as Fiona Jenkins describes, “an eye attuned to *whatever comes*.” A resistance or suspension of the signification of the body;

In a sense what is to be marked here is precisely life’s exposure to its own contingency, and the problem and question become how that does not, on the one hand, collapse into indifference, the banality of utter substitutability that also renders all suffering that belongs to the “mass” of bodies, to be of no account; or on the other, be countered with the desire to redeem all suffering, to make it meaningful in a way that is indexed to “humanity.”...*that the world happens* is the law of its justice, justice to birth and death.³²

Thus the sense that meaning lacks foundation is not some complicated form of nihilism or negative theology, but simply giving justice to the fact that “the conditions of meanings...are always woven into the opacity of meaning.”³³ The *technē*

³⁰ C.f. Morin, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, pp.132-3.

³¹ “We certainly do experience the weight of thought. Sometimes the heaviness, sometimes the gravity of a “thought” (“idea,” “image,” “judgment,” “volition,” “representation,” etc.) affects us with a perceptible pressure or inclination, a palpable curve – and even, with the impact of a fall (if only the falling of one’s head into one’s hands). But this experience remains a *limit-experience*, like any experience worthy of the name. It does take place, but not as the appropriation of what it represents; this is why I also have no access to the weight of thought, nor to the thought of weight.” Nancy, “The Weight of a Thought” in *The Gravity of Thought*, p.76.

³² Fiona Jenkins, “Souls at the Limits of the Human” *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 16(4), p.166.

³³ Nancy, “The Weight of a Thought” *The Gravity of Thought*, p.83.

of bodies provides Nancy with a manner of thinking this opacity, and at the same time, impresses upon the reader the limit of experience that is *psyche*. What we might call the conscious mind in another philosophical parlance remains for Nancy an extension at the heart of being, *partes extra partes*, and what cannot be thought in that extension remains unknowable. As Derrida wrestles with the weight of Nancy's thought, he comes time and again to the figure of the heart in Nancy; the heart of another, that becomes the defining point of technicity and plasticity within Nancy himself. Conjoining the physical apparatus of the heart, as it beats in the chest of oneself and an other, the heart *at the same time* conjoins that opacity of the self to others in Husserl's phenomenological analysis. As Derrida describes, this heart-feeling or empathy is the closest Husserl comes to Nancy's depiction of opacity, and in particular, to how we share the disposition of bodies in their shared finitude.

As Husserl depicts, this heart-feeling is a grasping to which we could necessarily describe a weight, the gravity involved in a heavy heart, weighed down by the empathy one feels in one's contact with the other.

Concerning the experience of others, every person, in virtue of his Body, stands within a spatial nexus, among things, and to each Body for itself there pertains the person's entire psychic life, grasped in empathy [heart-feeling]³⁴ in a determinate way, so that therefore if the Body moves and occupies ever new places, the soul, too, as it were, co-moves. The soul is indeed ever one with the Body.³⁵

The weight of the body, and the weight of thought, brings together the figure of the body and soul, in the shared finitude of existence. A *heart-feeling* that touches

³⁴ In Derrida's *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy* pp177-179 he describes three stages in Husserl's engagement with *Herzgefühl* (heart-sensation); the first "solipsistic", the second "mediated" by the sensation of touch, the third an "image" of the "touching-aspect" as indicative of a co-presence or a touched and hence mediated self-image. By indicating that in Husserl's text I read his notion of empathy as *heart-feeling* I wish to open a possible line of enquiry between an embodied existence as purely corporeal and Nancy's notion of existence as an embodied exposure that is touched and touches. Despite developing this to some degree in the conclusion, it remains an open line of enquiry for future development, particularly with regards to Nancy's *L'Intrus*.

³⁵ Husserl, "Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy (Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution)" *Edmund Husserl: Collected Works Volume III*, p.176.

both the heart of the other and one's own, in the same breath of enunciation that depicts the syncope of bodies in a shared existence. The other as *l'intrus* (the intruder), who comes without being invited, who stays and remains a stranger, opaque, touching the very heart of our being, exposing us to the excess that I am in my opacity.³⁶ *Heart-feeling* and touching remain an excess, an opening onto the world as exscription that is the *technē* of the body. Always a body that is an outside touching the shared finitude that *is*, a psyche extended that remains opaque and untouchable. Nancy's materiality cannot thus be thought in simple spatio-temporal terms, it is always rupturing and excessive, outsides alongside outsides in a syncopated enunciation of the world. The material, as with the body, is non-All—and it is the *heart-feeling* as empathy that reveals this non-All to being.

The syncopated convulsion, this contraction of the inside and the outside, is also this (still and spoke [*tu et dit*]) discourse, a difference at the heart of the *I*, the articulation that can be disarticulation of an ego, an ego capable of touching it to the heart in touching its heart.³⁷

³⁶ Nancy, "The Intruder" *Corpus*, p.170.

³⁷ Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy*, p.35.

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