

The Powers of Jean-Luc Nancy's Thinking

An Encounter With:

Ignaaas Devisch, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.
255 pages.

Daniele Rugo, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Thinking of Otherness: Philosophy and Powers of Existence*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013. 210 pages.

Frédéric Neyrat, *Le communisme existentiel de Jean-Luc Nancy*. Fécamp: Nouvelles éditions Lignes, 2013. 72 pages.

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Scholarship on Jean-Luc Nancy in the English-speaking world has been growing in the past few years, but most publications have taken the form of edited collections or single journal articles.¹ It is therefore encouraging to see two book-length studies published by Bloomsbury. Both books were first published in 2013 in Bloomsbury's series "Studies in Continental Philosophy," and appeared in paperback edition in 2014. This is, however, as far as the similarity goes. Indeed, both the focus of each work and the approach privileged by each author could not be more different. Devisch's book focuses exclusively on Nancy's conception of community (relying on other parts of Nancy's oeuvre only in so far as they help illuminate this conception) and brings it to bear on the communitarianism/liberalism debate that took place in the 1980s and 1990s. In this sense, it is not a book intended for Nancy scholars and will at times appear tedious or superficial to those familiar with Nancy's corpus. Rugo's book, on the other hand, is presented as providing a "sustained account of the relationship between Nancy, Levinas, and Heidegger" (back cover) on the problem of otherness. Though the book contains many lucid interpretations of these three thinkers and remains accessible, it does not introduce Nancy's thinking but rather seeks to situate it with regard to Heidegger's and Levinas' conception of otherness.

¹ For some recent edited collections, see Alexandrova *et al.*, Hutchens, Gratton and Morin, Goh and Conley, Goh and Murray.

The strength of this book resides in the carefulness of its comparative work: neither Nancy nor Levinas is presented as a monolithic bloc that can be set squarely against the other. At the same time, contrary to what a superficial reading might lead us to assume, similarities between Heidegger and Levinas are underlined while differences between Nancy and Heidegger are pointed out. But, as we will see, the book offers much more than a comparison between Levinas and Nancy. Frédéric Neyrat's book exemplifies yet another approach to Nancy's work. At about a quarter of the length of the two other books, one cannot expect to find in it an exhaustive study of Nancy. Yet it does capture, in its assertive and passionate style, something of the political force of Nancy's thinking all the while situating his "existential communism" within the broader contemporary philosophical context, both European and North American (Badiou, Rancière, but also Graham Harman and the speculative realists). I will discuss each book in turn and show ultimately how both Rugo's and Neyrat's books address some questions or issues raised but left unanswered in Devisch's book.

Ignas Devisch states clearly in the Preface to *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community* that his intention is neither to write a monograph on Nancy, nor to uncritically take up his thought of community. Rather, he wants to "confront the contemporary debate on community with a writer who has made the question the central theme of his work" all the while pointing out "the unthought in Nancy's oeuvre itself" (xiv). This unthought will be capitalism. This might appear strange at first sight, but the specific sense of this unthought will be developed at the end of the book. For now, let us begin with the general trajectory of the book. The book is divided in three sections containing two chapters each. The first section sets up the terms of the debate and introduces Nancy's thought, the second one develops Nancy's "social" ontology and the third expands on the political implications of that social ontology.

The first section, titled "The Question Concerning Community: A *Status Quaestionis*," begins with a short recapitulation of the contemporary debate on community. Explaining the debate between liberals and communitarians in terms of an appeal to an unencumbered self rather than a situated self, Devisch then shows how the communitarian appeal to an inherently social self—here exemplified by MacIntyre's revival of the "social Aristotle" (Nussbaum)—operates by means of a nostalgia for a "lost community" that one is called to revive. It is exactly this conception of community as lost origin that Nancy will reject. As a result, Nancy will offer us a way of "breaking open" the metaphysical horizon within which both liberals and communitarians remain trapped (36). Indeed, what both camps have in common is what Nancy has called, in *The Sense of the World*, the ideal of self-sufficiency: either the individual or the community is thought of as closed totality (*Sense* 103-

117). Here, as Devisch shows, Nancy takes up Derrida's deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence, or what he first called "immanentism" and then the "metaphysics of auto-production" (38). The "supplement" that inherently affects the origin with a difference and a delay means, from Nancy's perspective, that community is inherently incomplete or inoperative. Yet it is also this "supplement of/at the origin" that underlies and gives its plausibility to the paradigm of the "lost community," its appeal to a return and its logic of the "final effort." The latter, as Devisch explains, requires a constant appeal to "just another last effort," or just another last *sacrifice*, to realize the immanent community by expelling all otherness outside of it. But since a community only lives on thanks to its difference from itself, the "last effort" is either not really the last or else it results in pure death, what Nancy calls in *Corpus* "a black hole" (*Corpus* 75).

After having introduced the main ideas surrounding Nancy's thought of community in Chapter 1 and having showed their affinities with a Derridian deconstruction of the paradigm of the loss origin in Chapter 2, Devisch will delve more deeply into what he calls Nancy's "social ontology" in Chapter 4. In the meantime, Chapter 3, titled "From Hobbes to Rousseau," which is according to me the least successful chapter of the book, walks us through Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant and the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, all that in thirteen pages. The discussion of Hobbes and Rousseau relies almost exclusively on Esposito's *Communitas* and is not detailed enough to be meaningful to readers without previous knowledge of Esposito's reading. The short excursus on *Being and Time* also lacks precision. Let me give two examples. First, the "fundamental openness" of Dasein, which Heidegger calls Being-in-the-World, is described as "the *transcendent* character of Dasein." This phrase is followed by a reference to *Being and Time* and leads one to believe that it is Heidegger's own. Yet, Heidegger never calls Dasein transcendent. Instead he speaks of Dasein's transcendence: Dasein "*must transcend* the entities" it deals with (Heidegger H.363), which means that Being must always already be understood, that world must always already be disclosed, etc. None of this means that Dasein is a transcendent entity, though we could say that Dasein is the transcending entity (and indeed, in light of Heidegger's discussion of the confusion surrounding the term "transcendent" in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, which the author points to a couple of lines further down, the use of the word transcendent is objectionable here).² Another confusion arises from the juxtaposition of *Besorgen* and care. In the Macquarrie and Robinson's translation, which the author is using, *Besorgen* is translated consistently as concern, while care renders *Sorge*. So when Devisch then says that

² There is a slightly more detailed explanation of this transcending on page 112.

Dasein “is fundamentally ‘caring’ because it is always in a world,” this is at best confusing and at worst false since care names, for Heidegger, the whole of Dasein’s Being, structurally articulated in terms of existentiality, facticity and falling, and not just one’s involvements in the world with others.

At this point, it should be mentioned that *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community* is a translation based on a book published in Dutch in 2003, *Wij: Jean-Luc Nancy en het Vraagstuk van der Gemeenschap in de Hedendaagse Wijsbegeerte* [*We: Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community in Contemporary Philosophy*].³ At least some of the confusions can be attributed to translation issues, but the lack of precision compounded with the many awkward phrasings certainly affect the readability of the book and to a certain degree also the credibility of some of its explanations.

After quick appraisal of the possibility of a non-metaphysical ontology in relation to Levinas’ criticism of the Western logos and Derrida’s deconstruction of the ontico-ontological difference, Devisch turns to the core concepts of Nancy’s ontology: compearance, being-in-common, being-toward, being singular plural, sense, trans-immanence. Though competently executed, it is hard to tell how convincing this exposition of Nancy would be for political philosophers in the Anglo-Saxon world. Certainly, that Nancy offers us of way of thinking community that allows us to conceptualize the social bond differently that as immanently given and that he, therefore, has something important to offer to a certain strand of social and political philosophy, is a point well taken. Yet it is not clear that all the details of the exposition are necessary for the purpose that the book sets for itself or, paradoxically, that the brief nature of each section offers enough details to really bring out the specificity of each concept. For example, on page 94, one reads: “being upwells ... The world wells up ... Sense upwells.” At this level of generality, all of Nancy’s concepts seem to blend into one another. It is true that these three words are discussed again in subsequent sections but it is not clear whether there’s a difference that makes a difference here, and what that would be. This, I find, is a problem with Nancy’s writings in general. At some level, every core notion seems to blend with the others. Hence the crucial question when writing about Nancy is: what work is a

³ There are only minor differences between the two versions: a section on transcendence, temporality and destiny in Heidegger (*Wij* 122-130) as well as a section on doing justice to existence (*Wij* 208-221) have been removed from the English translation, while a critical discussion of McIntyre’s Aristotelianism (17-20) has been added. The section on Globalization (Part 3, Chapter 5) is also slightly different: the discussion of origin and the ex nihilo was moved to Chapter 4, the references to “Urbi et Orbi” have been removed and a section on civil society has been replaced by a discussion of the failure of Marxism.

specific notion doing that another is not? Or more concretely: what is added by speaking of world rather than sense, and so on?

The third part of the book constitutes, according to me, the clearest and most successful one. It begins with an account of freedom, responsibility and sovereignty in an effort to draw out the political implications of Nancy's social ontology. These questions then open onto the problematic of *globalisation/mondialisastion* (globalization/world-forming), which is discussed without references to *The Creation of the World* or *Globalization* (which appears only in French in the bibliography). This is especially puzzling since Devisch will raise issues with regards to Nancy's treatment of capitalism in the last chapter of the book, and Nancy provides his most sustained account of capitalism in the first chapter of *The Creation*.

The last chapter addresses the "problem of the intrinsic *political* meaning of Nancy's ontology." The impossibility of questioning the political from within, now that every alternative form of government—alternative to parliamentary democracy or to what Nancy calls a "managerial democracy" (*Truth* 1)—has collapsed, might be, Devisch intimates, what pushed Nancy toward the ontological and the social (122). The question is whether it is now possible to make the transition from the social back to the political. Devisch starts with Nancy's calls for "a renewed reflection on the place of politics and the meaning of democracy" (155), a reflection that takes as its point of departure the singular plural of existence. The discussion of democracy, which is fairly short, does not take into account Nancy's book *The Truth of Democracy*, published in 2008 (though it does take into account the two earlier pieces that were included with the English translation in 2010). Indeed, no main writings of Nancy published after 2002 either in French or English are taken into account. In the context of the recent publications, it would be interesting to know whether Devisch still holds that Nancy "offers little in the way of a clear answer to the question of what constitutes the problem of democracy or of politics in general" (153). Devisch then shows how the existential starting point of Nancy's reflection on the social does not offer us a "third way" between communitarianism and liberalism, but rather breaks open the debate by changing terrain (162). In this way, Nancy's move to the ontological is a "highly political gesture, an *engagement even*" (160). Still, Devisch is not completely satisfied with this move on Nancy's part. In the last section of the book, "Looking awry at Nancy," Devisch claims that exposing Nancy's thought to the communitarianism/liberalism debate can help us uncover the "unthought" in Nancy. This unthought, Devisch is clear, cannot be explained by the finitude of Nancy's discourse; rather, it is something that Nancy, because of his existential starting point, cannot take into account but that keeps returning to haunt his work. What is lacking from Nancy's thinking, according to Devisch, is a certain "cultural

critique” (172). While Nancy can raise the problem of capitalism as a *problem*, he is unable to integrate this problem within his analysis of the paradigm of the lost community so as to explain the reason or foundation of this paradigm (174-175). Again, it would be interesting to know whether Devisch sees in some more recent texts that treat the problem of capitalism at some length the beginning of an answer to his questions. I am thinking here not only of the first chapter of *The Creation of the World*, “Urbi and Orbi,” but especially of *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Catastrophes*. I am also a bit puzzled by the claim that Nancy does not ponder “the how and the why of the paradigm of a lost community” (177). It is here that I think a discussion of Nancy’s work on myth and on the deconstruction of Christianity would have been helpful. Indeed, I would say that the paradigm of lost community (or of lost origin) is not the symptom of capitalism’s destruction of communal ties but rather the symptom of more profound civilizational change from polytheism to monotheism, or of what Nancy called “the ‘entry’ into signification” (*Gravity* 28). The mutation, which underlies the paradigm of lost community and gives rise to what he calls “the West,” also transforms the meaning of wealth and opens up the possibility of equivalence and accumulation (see Morin 49-55). This is not to say that there is not a specific problem of capitalism. But what capitalism does is not destroy community; rather it uncovers our naked being-with by undoing signification, that is, by undoing all transcendent signified to which we have hitherto appealed: God, Man, Reason, the Nothing, etc. Here Nancy’s gesture recalls Heidegger’s complex relation to nihilism and modern technology. For Nancy, it is within capitalism’s undoing of all ends, what he also calls ecotechnics, and hence within the (very real) “danger” it represents, that “the saving power grows,” to use one of Heidegger’s favourite line by Hölderlin. In other words, the undoing of all ends opens up the possibility of thinking “sense” (in Nancy’s technical use of the term) as that which underlies and drives the order of signification (metaphysics, the West) and hence of passing beyond this order. From this perspective, all of Nancy’s meditations on sense can be seen as direct responses to his imperative to “think better of capital” (Devisch 177). Here we could point out another similarity with Heidegger. The existential analytic proposes, in the language of ontology, a self-interpretation of Dasein, one that is possible today and which, if taken up, ought to open onto a non-metaphysical thinking of Being and of the human being. The ontological register ought to be read as a call, an imperative to enter a thought that has the potential, if not the power, to transform our relation to Being. A similar tension between the ontological register and the ethical or imperative way of speaking is found in Nancy.

In his book, Devisch notes two points of divergence between Nancy and Levinas: Nancy emphasizes the finite otherness of the world rather than anchoring openness into an infinite, and infinitely transcendent

Other (108-109); by integrating otherness into his ontology in a way that escapes Levinas's criticism, Nancy is able to place archi-ethics at the core of ontology rather than in opposition to it (92-93). These two claims form the starting point of Daniele Rugo's *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Thinking of Otherness*.

As I already said, Rugo does not provide an introduction to Nancy, but rather seeks to underline the originality of Nancy's thinking with regards to Heidegger. In order to highlight Nancy's creative appropriation of, and hence also his distance from, Heidegger, Rugo argues that the presence of the third interlocutor" is required: Emmanuel Levinas (1). The book is written in clear prose and provides lucid in-depth explanations of all the philosophers with which the book engages. Hence the book succeeds in putting into dialogue vastly different thinkers without using anyone of them as a mere foil. The analyses are always careful, showing how the similarities and differences might not always lie where one would think at first sight. The book also contains many bullet-point summaries closing dense sections and reminding the reader of what should be taken from the discussion moving forward. While the pedagogical nature of these summaries might be annoying to some, they prevent the reader from getting lost in the density and apparent circularity of Nancy's style (as we saw in Devisch). As Badiou has claimed, Nancy's style is "entirely affirmative, built almost monotonously around equivalences signaled by the verb 'to be'" (Badiou 17): being is existence is finitude is sense is world is sense is finitude, etc. In order to remove the impression of "general equivalence" from Nancy's thinking, it is essential to highlight the differential work being done by the "is" between each pair of concepts (and in both direction). Rugo's book achieves just that.

The book is divided into three long chapters, each taking up a moment of finite existence: body, world, with. From the start, these three fundamental notions are presented as indissociable moments of existence in a manner that recalls Heidegger's articulation of the tripartite structure of Being-in-the-world: "If the body is that which consistently keeps moving 'towards the world,' the world being the very place where this transcendence becomes factual, the *with* is the hyphen that separates and maintains this transcendence" (6). The book ends with concluding remarks, which attempts to understand the work of otherness that has been uncovered at the heart of existence in terms of powers of existence.

The first chapter, titled "Exposure," focuses on the body. This is because the body is the place of existence: the place where existence is exposed (i.e., appears in all its concretion) and exposes (to oneself and others). This discussion of the body as exposing/exposed will lead to a first statement of the role of otherness in Nancy:

By otherness one should read here not only other human beings, rather the very movement towards that which does not come from the body and does not return to it, a movement that does not recuperate an identity, nor establish a propriety. The body is delivered to other bodies and to sense as always other from itself. However this other is not more foreign than my “own” body. (48)

Here we have in a nutshell the originality of Nancy’s position with regards to both phenomenology and Levinas.

The chapter opens with a discussion of the elided place of the body in Heidegger’s thinking, which reviews the section on spatiality in *Being and Time*, the discussion of *Zerstreuung* in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* and Heidegger’s remarks in the *Zollikon* seminars. This overview allows Rugo to show how Nancy’s thinking of the body “does not repeat Heidegger’s discourse; rather, it attempts to open Heidegger to his own possibilities” (17). Like Heidegger, Nancy refuses to consider the body as mere extension. At the same time, Rugo rightly underscores the differences between Nancy’s discourse and those of a phenomenology of the flesh or of the body proper (*Leib*). It is in Spinoza that, according to Rugo, Nancy finds an ally for thinking the “liberation of the body” from the metaphysical or Christian dualism that sustained the thought of Incarnation. This turn to Spinoza might seem surprising. Indeed, we find just a few remarks about Spinoza scattered in Nancy’s work, but the echoes of Spinoza in his thinking call for lengthy developments, of which we find a first attempt here. Developing Spinoza’s logic of expression with the help of Deleuze, Rugo shows how Spinoza complicates the dichotomy between interiority and exteriority that underlies the Greek and Christian concepts of Incarnation so that “we can start tracing that auto-deconstructive development of external principles and divine places” (40) central to Nancy’s thinking of the body. After discussing the various ways in which the body is open for Nancy and helpfully summarizing the main points of the discussion, Rugo turns his attention to Levinas. The claim here is that while Nancy takes Heidegger’s silence over the body as a promise, which he sets out to fulfill in his own work (namely, the possibility of thinking the body outside of a metaphysics of substance), Levinas takes this silence as a call for a radical interruption of Heidegger’s philosophy that would bring it “back to its responsibility” (49). In his discussion of Levinas, Rugo rightly emphasizes how separation, which “is played in the movement of retreat and discretion” (59), is also the condition of possibility of the existent’s opening onto the world (i.e., the condition of enjoyment and living from). Hence we find in Levinas the same movement of enclosure and exposure as in Nancy. I would also add that the juxtaposition of Nancy with Levinas’ intertwining of dependence and independence, of the body as distance from the world and extension toward the world, has the advantage of highlighting the moment of

withdrawal in Nancy's conception of the self or of singularity, a moment that is often concealed by an overemphasis on the ex- of exposure.

The discussion of the body as the exposure of existence naturally leads to the question of the world of bodies, of the spacing between us. Hence the question that drives the second chapter is "What happens between us?" The space that opens between us is the place of relation and of sense. This between is what ensures that there is a world, which is neither a mass (an agglomeration) nor a mere juxtaposition (indifference). Rugo first shows how Nancy's point of departure for thinking the world is the Heideggerian claim that the world is not an object to which a (otherworldly) subject is intentionally related. Rather, sense "belongs to the structure of the world" (69) and only happens in an "immanent experience of the world" (68). Like Heidegger again, the world will be, for Nancy, linked to *ethos* and *habitus*. Such a conception of the world is possible, and this is where Rugo's analysis leads us next, through the deconstruction of metaphysics and its onto-theological constitution. That Nancy's finds resources for this self-deconstruction within "the text" of Christianity itself, while Heidegger sees Christianity as fully implicated in metaphysics is not Rugo's concern. Rather, it is within the modern tradition of a Spinoza, who "consistently departs from the Christian onto-theological tradition" (80) and a Leibniz, whose Reason, as Heidegger shows, "was already showing its own limit, undoing itself and opening up to the lack of principles" (83) that he looks for such a deconstruction.

What has emerged from this discussion is the relation between us and the world: we take place as world and the world is the taking-place of us (88). In order to confront the question of what happens between us from another angle, Rugo turns to cinema and more specifically the cinema of the body Deleuze finds exemplified primarily in the films by American director John Cassavetes. But Rugo does not merely intend to show how Cassavetes' films provide examples of Nancy's concepts or how Nancy's concepts explain Cassavetes' films. Rather, it

is a matter of investigating how both philosophy and cinema creatively confront a problem, in this case the problem of our being-together in its relation with the question of the sense of the world. ... It will be thus a matter of following and exposing the cinematographic idea as it happens in the image and not of imposing ideas from the vantage point of a conceptual constellation (63).

The discussion of Deleuze and Cassavates is extremely enlightening, even for those who are not familiar with either. The description of Cassavates' use of close-ups in *Faces*, which Rugo calls "contrapuntal," is especially interesting. While one might think that the close-up absolves the face from all relations, the way in which Cassavates accumulates close-ups achieves

the openness that is normally accomplished with a long shot. In this accumulation, no face stands out as *the* character of the movie, while each face stretches out toward another face that is outside of the frame.

The third chapter of the book deals with three points of separation between Nancy and Levinas: “the idea of the world; the syntax used to identify the relationship with the other; the notion of an element beyond the terms of this relationship” (108). Rugo first returns to Levinas in order to situate his notion of separation as enjoyment and living from with regard to Heidegger’s Being-in-the-world, raising two critical questions: doesn’t enjoyment still presuppose something like a prior disclosure? Can enjoyment really be conceptualized apart from the logic of the “in view of”? (117-118) Rugo therefore argues that Levinas’ discourse is not as antithetical to Heidegger’s as he leads us to believe and that if he is going to succeed in introducing desire into the world, Levinas needs “a world that is not immediately thematized, but disclosed, and as such open as the always already open,” like the one that “can be found only in Heidegger’s work” (123). Here, Nancy is closer to Heidegger in that he sees the world not as a container within which our existential adventure takes place, but as the very enactment of sense, as the “with-in,” as Rugo appropriately puts it. At the same time, since it has been shown that Levinas is closer to Heidegger than he thinks, this also brings him closer to Nancy. It is on the basis of this rapprochement on the question of the world that a discussion of originary otherness can take place. Here, the separation between Nancy and Levinas is sharper as they seem to move “in opposite direction” (127). Levinas rejects the category of *Mitsein*, which he reads as implying a reduction of the Other to the Same, a symmetry and an indifferent side-by-side that elides responsibility. Nancy rejects the category of the Other, because it elides the plurality of the world by creating a height, a transcendent position from which sense and responsibility befall us. Here again, Rugo shows how Levinas understands *Mitsein* as a category while Nancy (following Heidegger) understands it in its existential sense. Rugo turns again to Cassavates, whose contrapuntal cinema brings to the fore such a kind of Nancean being-with, where each *one* is with and among all others. What Nancy effectuates is a reversal of the priority of the One (the Subject, the Totality) of the kind sought by Levinas, but without appealing to the Other or the Infinite. Rather otherness is at the heart of being itself so that the Levinasian opposition between ontology and ethics does not hold anymore. After discussing Nancy’s originary ethics, Rugo turns to the problem of the Third in Levinas in order to show how the introduction of a third term reintroduces instrumentality. Both in the discussion of *Illeity* and of the Third Man, Levinas carries out a similar movement: he introduces an exteriority with regard to the relation to the Other and “relativizes” a relation that he wanted to be absolute. As Rugo argues, through the relation to the Other, I am now drawn to God and to justice so that the relation becomes “a moment in view of something else” (156).

Following Levinas through to the end, Rugo will wonder: “Does not Levinas, by way of a series of odd moves, reach a position not at all distant from the one from which Jean-Luc Nancy advances his analysis in the first place?” (162).

The fourth chapter, which serves as a conclusion, aims “to define in greater detail the specific gesture” of Nancy’s philosophy (167). Here Rugo underlines the way in which Nancy distances himself from Heidegger’s preference for “the exceptional and the heroic” (167). Rugo shows how “the undecidability of existence” undoes the primacy of the ontological (and hence of any neutral term that would contain concrete existence in advance). Existence is undecided and undecidable not because of a failure to own up to its authentic destination, but because existence has no proper destination. The undecidability of existence is its power(s) to exist, that is, its power(s) to make sense, which necessarily also means to *re-open* sense, each time anew. This is the work (without work) of otherness in Nancy: “the ‘not yet’ of existence itself, the fact that existence still always needs to be existed and existed anew, at every moment other than itself” (175). Such a thought of existence necessarily also transforms philosophical thinking: “*existence as the force of the each time eludes a thinking of its beginning as it eludes that of its closure*” (184). What this means is that philosophy cannot master existence by means of the generality of concepts. Rather philosophical concepts “have to be existed, that is, they have to be crossed over, sliced open by existence, by the singular touch of existence” (185).

François Raffoul in his review of Rugo’s book remains unconvinced by the passage through Levinas and insists that Nancy operates with categories radically foreign to Levinas’s thought. While I agree with Raffoul about this difference, I think that Rugo is fully aware of it, too. But by showing the limitations of Levinas’ reading of Heidegger, he brings Levinas closer to Nancy (rather than the reverse) and succeeds as a result in responding to criticisms of Nancy such as Critchley’s (166) by rescuing Nancy’s thinking of otherness and of ethics from the Levinasian framework without taking away any of its radicality. There is “radical” otherness and exteriority in Nancy, but what is original in Nancy is that this radicality (inappropriability, unrepresentability, heterogeneity) owes nothing to height or transcendence. As Nancy writes in “Finite History”:

To exist, therefore, is to hold one’s “selfness” as an “otherness,” and in such a way that no essence, no subject, no place can present *this otherness in itself*—either as the proper selfness of an other, or an “Other,” or a common being (life or substance). The otherness of existence happens only as “being-together.” (*Birth* 154-155, trans. mod.)

While Rugo is clear that otherness does not mean for Nancy the human Other, he does not insist on the extension that the concepts of existence and sense receive in Nancy, and which transforms the Heideggerian paradigm more profoundly than we are led to believe. Indeed, though Rugo introduced Levinas to show the originality of Nancy with regards to Heidegger (1), he ended up distancing Nancy from Levinas by aligning him more closely with Heidegger than is probably the case. It is in relation to Frédéric Neyrat's *Le communisme existentiel de Nancy* that both Devisch's focus on the social nature of Nancy's ontology and Rugo's claim that "Nancy follows Heidegger rather faithfully in understanding the disclosure of the world" (109) will show their limitation.

Neyrat presents his short book as an *essai* (11), and hence he has no pretention of providing an exhaustive analysis of Nancy's oeuvre. Rather, he attempts to outline the singularity and show the force of Nancy's philosophical gesture in today's philosophical landscape. According to Neyrat, deconstruction is not the ultimate aim of Nancy's thinking; rather, his thinking opens onto an existential communism. This communism, which we could call ontological though Neyrat will refuse the word to avoid a reactive nihilism (70), also provides a powerful critique of modernity and hence opens onto *a* politics (*une* politique), rather than merely leading to a rethinking of the political (*le* politique).

While Neyrat claims the word "existentialism" to name Nancy's thinking, he is not aligning Nancy with Sartre or with Heidegger: while Sartre and Heidegger restrict existence to a specific entity who, thanks to its freedom or its understanding of Being, stands in meaningful relation (and hence in a certain sense in opposition) to the rest of beings, Nancy applies the term to all that is. This does not mean, however, that Nancy returns the word existence to its traditional meaning as presence-at-hand. That everything exists means that everything is in a certain way transcending, turned toward the outside. According to Neyrat, Nancy's ontology gives us the means to resist individualism and human exceptionalism, while avoiding two wrong solutions to these problems: (1) a "relational" ontology that insists excessively on interconnectedness, forgets the distance necessary for *rapport*, and leads to the agglomeration of everything with everything; and (2) a flat ontology that erases differences and, by overcoming humanism "*par le bas*," ends up leading to the general equivalence of everything with everything. What the new ontologies lack to "overcome nihilism" is a thinking of relation as separation and of existence as excess or surplus.

In his most recent writings, Nancy appeals to the word *struotion* (from the Latin *struo*, to amass, to heap) in order to conceptualize our (un)world, our *monde en mal de monde*. Struotion is "the state of the 'with' deprived of the value of sharing, bringing into play only simple contiguity and its contingency" (Nancy & Barrau 49). Neyrat's (and

Nancy's question is: "Comment sortir d'un tel cauchemar? Comment rompre l'équivalence des objets? ... Comment faire droit aux singularités sans les rapporter à quelque principe d'équivalence?" (15-16). The answer lies in Nancy's first philosophy, which Neyrat will present swiftly but without sacrificing either clarity or precision. The result is a powerful introduction to Nancy's ontology that also has the advantage of situating it with regards to recent developments in Continental philosophy, especially object-oriented ontology (OOO). Neyrat shows how OOO's "categorical extension" of existence is fully compatible with capitalism (23-24). Nancy's "existential extension," on the other hand, interrupts all continuity and equivalence in favour of the "perpétuelle *hachure du monde*, le *criblage continu* de transcendance venant interrompre toute équivalence" (31). Here, it becomes evident how Nancy's ontology is intimately related to the deconstruction of Christianity, and to our ability to rethink the Outside not as what is beyond the world but rather as an internal outside, the *écart* that opens within the world, what Neyrat calls "le dehors du dedans" (38-39).⁴ At this point, Neyrat offers a pointed criticism of OOO and speculative realism. In both of these,

quelque chose semble tenter d'échapper au monde serré des interconnexions obligées, mais sous la forme d'un objet, d'une substance ou d'une matière mathématisable se situant hors de la subjectivité : le dehors est d'ores et déjà canalisé, substantivé, localisé et désigne en réalité un *dedans*, l'intériorité d'une chose que l'on pourra décrire spéculativement ou scientifiquement (38).

After having presented the key ideas of Nancy's ontology, Neyrat turns to the relation between ontology and politics. In the section called "Communauté (politique, religion, ontologie)," Neyrat insists on the transformation of Nancy's thinking from the early texts on the political and on community in the 1980s to the more recent ones on adoration and democracy. The early texts sought to think community ontologically as that which unworks immanentism (or what Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe call totalitarianism, that is, the archi-political foundation of politics that leads to the dissolution of the specificity of politics and its diffusion in the entire social body). At this point, community was both an ontological and a political term, but it remained unclear how the unworking of immanence could be both an ontological principle and a political program. By moving more clearly to the ontological plane (with terms such as being-in-common and being-with), Nancy was then able to distinguish ontology

⁴ It would be interesting to unpack the resonance with Merleau-Ponty here. When Merleau-Ponty speaks of "the inside of the outside" and "the outside of the inside", it is normally in relation to a system of equivalences between inside and outside and the reversibility of sensing. The question would be whether this reversibility also necessitates an *écart*, a limit that opens and distances as radically as the Nancean limit, and hence displaces the connotation of "equivalence."

and politics (49). At this point, a politics can be reactivated to resist immanentism because it is untied from its relation to the archi-political phantasm of foundation. Politics preserve heterogeneity, both the heterogeneity of the in-common and of itself with regards to this in-common.

Neyrat will then show how this politics has imposed itself to Nancy because the risk of immanentism has taken a new name today: equivalence. Here, Neyrat responds to Devisch by unfolding Nancy's critique of the two faces of equivalence, its monetary and its technological faces (53) and by showing how Nancy's ontology is precisely what allows us to resist or to fight against equivalence by proposing an "*égalité des incommensurables*" or a "*communisme de l'inéquivalence*" (56), an "egalitarian aristocracy" (Nancy, *Truth* 33) or "a Nietzschean democracy" (22)

Neyrat's next question is: what does such a politics look like? We know that this politics cannot propose a finality but must leave room for "ce qui ne se programme pas, ne s'écrit pas par avance mais se donne, ici et maintenant, comme monde" (57). This politics is not a program but an imperative: to make possible existential communism by "instituting" the disruption of equivalence, by "taking charge" the incommensurable (62). What is instituted here is a paradoxical *us*, which Neyrat proposes to write *no/us* (playing on the contradiction between the French *nous* and the English *no us*) (64). The power, force or pulsion of this politics does not come from either the individual or the people but from this paradoxical *no/us* and its internal outside.

Neyrat ends his discussion of this politics by pointing to its "difficulté pratique": Can it move beyond the negative model of interruption (Derrida, Rancière) toward a more positive affirmation without resorting to myth and to figuration? Can it configure the space of the in-common without appealing at least to the *promise* of a figure? These are not criticisms of shortcomings found in Nancy's books but rather a task opened by his work that remains for us to take up. Neyrat closes his book with an epilogue titled "Le principe du hibou" where he justifies his use of the term existential (rather than ontological) and affirms the primacy of the exuberance existence (of the place where existence is "made") over thought. It is in this sense that Nancy's philosophy is an exo-philosophy, not just a philosophy that thinks the outside (since such an outside would remain internal to thought) but one that leads "au revers de ce dehors interne" (72), to the other side of this internal outside, where existence is lived (or felt).

Neyrat's book is militant: its goal is to harness the force of Nancy's thought in the struggle against a world becoming unworld. It is not an academic exercise, which does not mean that it is not absolutely

careful conceptually. It only means that rather than seeking to explain, defend or undermine Nancy's view, it seeks not only to think but also to find the conceptual weapons to fight against the becoming unworld of our world. In doing so, it shows, convincingly I think even if not in great detail, the superiority of Nancy's approach over the variety of new realist movements in Continental philosophy. As such, it is an invitation to remember, in the midst of all the academic publications I alluded to at the beginning, that more is at stake here than interpretative debates around an oeuvre.

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