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Expositions of World, Ontology, Politics, and Sense

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FIVE

NANCY'S MATERIALIST ONTOLOGY

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When he insists that the world—our world, the world we create—is the world of bodies, Nancy fleshes out his thought that the world is the resolution of fact into sense; the world is the never-ending resolution of the fact *of bodies* into the sense *of bodies*. Thus, we can begin to grasp the radical reach of his materialism.[1] Nancy cannot be described as a materialist in the manner of the Epicureans or of Engels, and although he would reject any attempt to reduce our bodies to mere matter, it is nevertheless his commitment to the insurmountable materiality of bodies that gives his ontology its weight and makes it unique. Yet what can that materiality mean? What sense is there in a materialism developed in the context of Cartesian dualism, or a thought of material being that inherits the abstractions of Heidegger's fundamental ontology, or an understanding of material bodies that echoes Bachelard's materialist rationalism, or a post-Christian materialist reading of incarnation? More to the point, what can be the meaning of a materialist ontology that bears the mark of all of these?

In Nancy's hands, the meaning this materialist ontology turns out to rest on the displacement of meaning and his determination to locate sense in the world of material bodies, a world that must constantly change thanks to the mortal passing away and natal newness of bodies. Given that his concern is with bodies rather than matter as such (if we can even conceive of such a thing), and given that fact and sense are engaged in a creative, worldly mutual resolution, Nancy provides us with an ontology in motion.

EXTENSION, NOT *RES EXTENSA*

In such an endeavor, Descartes seems a particularly unlikely interlocutor. Yet Nancy's *L'extension de l'âme* [The Extension of the Soul] (C, 136–144) is an essentially materialist re-reading of Descartes' dualism that provides an important insight into Nancy's understanding of the materiality of the body or, as we will see, the body–soul union. All materialisms can escape reductive monism by virtue of the place allotted within them to the nothing as the opening for indetermination, and we have seen that Nancy's thought of the *creatio ex nihilo* relies on a conception of the material world as being shot through with God in the form of the nothingness that lies between. This particular engagement with Descartes is an occasion to work through that structure again in explicitly material terms. Nancy's starting point is the thought that thinking substance does indeed share in the essential attribute of matter, that is, extension. He quotes Descartes' correspondence with Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia:

> But, since your Highness notes that it is much easier to attribute matter and extension to the soul that to attribute to it the capacity to move a body and to be moved by it without having matter, I suggest that you feel free to attribute this matter and this extension to the soul; this is no more than conceiving it as united with the body.[2]

After all, Descartes reminds Elizabeth, this is what we do all the time in the course of our lives. It is only in the context of a very particular sort of epistemological quest that the mind turns only on itself, preoccupied with the certainty of its knowledge and the task of ascertaining truth. Yet even then, as soon as it avails itself of sensation, the union of body and soul is manifest and then immediately realized when we turn from philosophizing to action. With that turn the union becomes effective and all the less open to being known, at least with regard to the clear and distinct knowledge on which Descartes relies.

It is not that the two substances are erased or circumvented or collapsed. Instead, it is a matter that they be allowed to emerge as epistemological devices rather than as metaphysical givens. Descartes deploys the thought of substance in the *Meditations* in the service of the clarity and distinctness of ideas and, in order to serve their epistemological purpose, *res extensa* and *res cogitans* must be rendered utterly distinct. When he later encourages Elizabeth to think of them as sharing the defining attribute of matter, we are not witnessing the dismantling of the Cartesian universe, but only the necessary lapse from philosophical, meditative withdrawal into

the lived world. In that world, we experience ourselves as an ensemble of body and soul in a way that has something of the clarity of thought but also much of the murkiness of sensation.

If God is the being for whom knowing and being are one, and we are beings for whom there is always a gap between what is known and what is, Descartes' struggle was to identify the contours of that gap from the point of view of knowledge. His aim was to develop a method for training our thinking to refrain from affirming anything it cannot clearly grasp, thus narrowing the scope for error. Yet this scope will never be entirely closed, not least because what we encounter most readily in our efforts to know the world—our bodies—are not simply objects of knowledge. Nancy writes:

> The body knows itself as a soul, or as intimately united with soul. But the soul knows itself as what is extended, not across the body but along the body's extension. . . . The soul is extended right along what is extended, not as a content in a container (nor as a pilot in a ship) but as the extension of the unextended, through which the thing extended (or the body) is known in its union with what is unextended. (C, 139)

Thus, the body presents a locus of resistance and impenetrability, but not by simply being opaque.[3] Instead, it displaces the oppositions of clarity–obscurity, subject–object, passivity–activity, and self–other and is, rather, the space for experience. Knowing may be the province of the mind and sensation may be the province of the body on Descartres' account, but experience is derived from the union of the two. "[T]he soul doesn't experience the body, any more than the body does the soul. But someone experiences, and the 'one' of this someone is altogether justly the indistinct motion of this "experiencing" (C, 144). If mind and body belong in the order of substance, their union is of the order of relation (C, 141).

After all, these substances share a characteristic that makes relation possible; both are susceptible to movement. When Descartes conjures the image of animal spirits that race through our limbs or when he describes the trembling of the pineal gland, he is offering ways of understanding that the world is both "a totality of extended emotion and moving extension us and extended emotion" (C, 142–143). We are exposed, and exposition is "the indistinctly corporeal and incorporeal movement of that which is extended in an indissociable double sense: which is endlessly divided [*partagé*] into impenetrable *partes extra partes* and which endlessly penetrates and is penetrated as *extra*-position in itself" (C, 143).[4] This is a materialism that shows us thought moving to and beyond its limit in matter in a way that eventually allows us—singular, plural, corporeal, natal beings—to emerge *as* sense.

Ian James grasps the thrust of this reading of Descartes clearly when he describes Nancy as taking the terms *soul* and *body* and using them to explain the movement of sense and embodiment in his own ontology. James writes, "In the body which feels, walks, sleeps, and eats, sense or soul is extended, the awareness of a meaningfulness conferred upon sensation is itself sense or soul, and it is in the extension of the sensible or animate body that the union of body and soul occurs."[5] I would add that, as a form of materialism, this is necessarily a finite thinking. Material does not confound itself with its own meaning, and the world of bodies does not run the risk of taking the fact of its being to be identical with the sense or meaning of being. As Nancy writes in *Birth to Presence*, the body has the same structure as mind, but it does not presuppose itself as the reason for that structure.[6] In the union of body and soul, body encounters the sense of sensation while the soul runs up against the obdurate and complex materiality of bodies, confronting there its own limits and thereby its own hubris.

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. As Gaston Bachelard points out in *Le matérialisme rationnel*, a genuine "materialism of matter" must be informed by the enormous plurality of different materials.[7] In the same way, Nancy argues in *Being Singular Plural* that the ontology of being-with must be materialist "in the sense that 'matter' does not designate a substance or a subject (or an anti-subject) but literally designates what is divided of itself, what is only as distinct from itself, *partes extra partes*, originarily impenetrable to the combining and sublimating penetration of a 'spirit' understood as a dimensionless, indivisible point beyond the world."[8] Matter spaces itself out as the plurality of bodies that present their many surfaces, different volumes, and differentiated bodies to the touch of our bodies. They are together and we are in the midst of them, all essentially with one another. This differentiation is not the result of the imposition of a principle of individuation or the application of any form or structure that is not itself material. It relies only on materialism's capacity to reach the limit of matter in the nothing which, for Nancy, is the "with." "[The 'with'] really is, 'in truth,' a mark [*un trait*] drawn out over the void, which crosses over it and underlines it at the same time, thereby constituting the traction and tension of the void" (*BSP*, 62).

According to this materialist ontology, bodies are exposed to one another across the void and this is how being is exposed. Nancy points out more than once that he conceives of beings in all their material variety—"inanimate, animate, sentient, speaking, thinking, having weight, and so on" (*BSP*, 84) or "stones, plants, nails, gods . . . and 'humans'" (*BSP*, 3)—but, just as Dasein is fundamental to Heidegger's ontology, we turn out to occupy a position of privilege in Nancy's exposition of being. Singular bodies are placed or disposed in relation to each other, impenetrable to one another in the sense that each occupies a place to the exclusion of all other bodies. They are also impenetrable in the sense, mentioned above, that no body yields to the advances or indeed the glance of spirit that approaches or looks down from a point of view that is exterior to the world, that is, exterior to the being-together of bodies. As a result, 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." Turning again to the language of Descartes, Nancy writes, "The truth of the *ego sum* is the *nos summus*; this 'we' announces itself through humanity for all beings 'we' are with, for existence in the sense of being-essentially-with, as a Being whose essence is the with" (*BSP*, 33).

This material being is all that being is. Being happens through a natal spacing—posing, disposing and exposing—of our bodies as well as according to our natal mode of being in time, which I explain below. Moreover, material being is and is in relation according to our natal mode of relation. It is not that there were no stones or fish, fibers or breath (*BSP*, 3) before there were humans, but rather that what existed without us could exist only factically, and not intelligibly. Without our being there to expose being as shared, that is, without our being there to say "we," the fact *that* fish and fibers *were* could not emerge as the problem of facticity, which is to say, as the demand for sense. By saying "we," we open up the distinction between the fact that we beings are and what that fact means; we open up the world as the infinite movement of fact and sense towards one another and we expose the singularity of finite beings as plural singularity.

What this means in terms of temporality is that we are bodies that come to be and pass away according to the specific rhythm of "being born, dying, open, closed, enjoying [*jouissant*], suffering, touching one another, swerving" (C, 65; trans. modified). The syncopated temporality of our birth means that we are always running to catch up with ourselves, always struggling to make sense of the fact that we already are. Additionally, even as birth sets us into relation, it is also our coming to be as singular beings. Heidegger begins his existential analytic with the remark that the being in question is "in each case mine [*je meines*]."[9] Nancy's version of this "each time" is the singular birth to presence of each of us. Being is each time me—existing, material, extended me. What drives his singular plural analytic is not the groundlessness of Being but rather the thought that every being, every singular coming-to-presence, every singular exposition, is itself groundless.[10] Each new coming is the origin; the world begins its turn each

time with me (*BSP*, 19); the creation *ex nihilo*, creation after no model, happens with each one of us.

This is neither an individualistic nor an anthropocentric (or even zoo-centric) ontology. Even as I speak in terms of *my* birth, it is with an appreciation of the attenuated mineness that is at play in that specific phrase and of the singular plural existence of any "I." At most, it is fundamental in the sense of providing *a* starting point for ontology, but it does so as a point of access to the Being of beings, not as a foundation on which all ontology can be built. As Nancy writes,

> The simplest way to put this into language would be to say that humanity speaks existence, but what speaks through its speech says the whole of being. What Heidegger calls "the ontico-ontological privilege" of Dasein is neither its prerogative nor its privilege: it gets Being on its way, but the Being of Dasein is nothing other than the Being of being. (*BSP*, 17)

In terms of natal spacing, birth sets us in place, disposes us among and with other singular material beings. Our coming to be—that is, the birth that has already taken place *as well as* the birth that is always taking (*BP*, 23)—is always a coappearing, not least in the sense that we are looking at the world almost as soon as the world sets eyes on us. Yet exposure happens earlier and more intimately, as Nancy allows when he addresses exposition as *expeausition*, folding *peau*, French for skin, into a word that otherwise suggests the work of vision. We are *ex-peaused*, skin to skin and flesh to flesh from the earliest moments of our existence, when we come to be as finite beings with and within another singular finite being. Those earliest moments happen in our mothers' bodies but in the mode of being-with as well as within, *partes extra partes*. Our spatial, extended existence means that we are at a distance from one another. Even as our bodies will later reach out and touch and entwine, they will nonetheless remain in a relation of exteriority; our natal spacing is the fact that this is the case right down to the touch of the fetus and the maternal body. This, even before the enunciation of "we," is the exposure or exposed sharing that gives rise to what Nancy terms the prelinguistic mutual interpellation of singularities.[11] Even in the womb, touch separates as it brings together; material being is originally shared out (*partagé*) even as it is most intimately shared (*partagé*).[12]

ON THE THRESHOLD OF FINITUDE

The tools Nancy offers for thinking natal spacing come not in a consideration of the maternal–fetal body relation but through an analysis of the (not

unrelated) sharing that happens in sex. Lacan pronounces that there is no sexual relation ("*Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*") but Nancy's response, in *L'« il y a » du rapport sexuel* [The "there is" of sexual relation], is that sex is the relation that reveals relation as such while simultaneously revealing us as finite, in-finite beings who are always coming to be.[13] In a gesture towards the relation between sex and birth (or, more accurately, between the sexual relation on the one hand and the relation of parents and children on the other), Nancy acknowledges this coming to be as happening out of the generative sexual relationship that is the origin of each of us. Lacan was right if the claim was that there was no such *thing* as the sexual relation; this no-thing-ness between a couple is the ground for the pleasure that exceeds their relation, and, occurring as procreation, it is the nothingness at the ground of each life. The essay provides for a material but also essentially *generational* ontology in which we move toward and beyond one another.

Sexual relation is already an odd term. As Nancy points out, it has a legalistic or medical air and is a strictly physical or physiological objectification of something more appropriately designated by verbs. Just as we must understand being as a verb if ontology is to be kept in motion, sex, as the revelation of relation as such and therefore of being as such, must be understood as an action rather than an object. We talk about having sex, or making love, but both terms do the work of objectification; "sleeping together" quite precisely misses the action itself. The French word is *baiser*: As a noun, it means "a kiss"; as a verb, it is best translated as "to fuck."[14] Thus, the term "sexual relation" is already an attempt to convert an action into something that can be reported—related—for a medical record or before a court. The attempt is doomed to failure, suggesting that "there is no sexual relation" simply means that "there is no report or account that captures what it is that happens when a couple couples" (*IRS*, 17). It is not that all accounts of the sexual relation must fail because of some lack in language; the ontological point is that the sexual relation is not a thing at all.

When Nancy writes that relation is "of the order of what the Stoics called the incorporeal" (*IRS*, 21), he is not retreating to a version of spirit or *res cogitans*. He is rather restating the materialist insight that what happens between bodies is precisely not-bodied. The incorporeal—for the Stoics, this consisted of the fourfold of space, time, emptiness and the said—is what makes it possible for bodies to distinguish themselves. Without it, there would be an undifferentiated material mass. We have seen that distinction separates and makes relation possible, nowhere more clearly than in the sexual relation.[15] Nancy writes, "The sexual is not an example of the category 'relation'; rather, in the sexual, relation has its integral/integrated extension and exposition" (*IRS*, 26). He does not claim this ontological privilege of sex as originary, but rather points to its capacity to reveal our finitude and also our infinity; "[w]hen one makes love, one poses or exposes relation *as such*" (*IRS*, 51).

The two terms—"relation" and the "sexual"—do not coincide but are understood together. Citing Aquinas, Nancy argues that relation is "accidental, that is, itself related to some substance or subject that it is itself not. . . . In other words, on the one hand relation and separation of subjects are the same thing, and, on the other, this same thing is sameness itself as differing/deferring itself" (*IRS*, 24). Thus the logic of relation is neither a logic of identity nor a logic of constitutive loss (*IRS*, 25). It is a logic that instead owes something to that other Lacanian axiom "that there is no all at all." Relation and the sexual share this differing/deferring structure (which is also, as I argued above, the structure of creation). The sexual is no more substantial than relation. Rather, Nancy writes:

> [T]he sexual is its own differing and its own distinction. To distinguish oneself as sex or as sexed is precisely 1) what makes sex or sexed-ness, 2) what makes sexual relation possible and, 3) what does not create its own entelechy or end. For no-one is man or woman without remainder, no more than anyone is homo- or heterosexual without remainder. (*IRS*, 27)

This is neither to reify sexual difference, nor simply to multiply sexual differences. Once again, it is a matter of displacing the thought of thing and substance and setting relation in motion:

> The difference of sexes is not the difference between two or several things, each one subsisting for itself as one (one sex): it is not like a difference between types or between individuals, nor is it a difference in nature or degree. It is the difference of sex insofar as sex defers itself. (*IRS*, 30)

Understanding this *différance* in terms of desire means grasping a *movement* of difference that is not driven by loss. There is no object of desire, Nancy argues, in the sense that what is desired is not a static, autonomous thing. He writes, "What desire desires is not objectified, is not placed before it, over against it, but instead is a part of the desiring movement. . . . It is neither a lost object nor the subject of a quest, but the projection itself, the throwing, the sending, the address" (*IRS*, 35). This is what is revealed in the Freudian analysis of the tension of desire and pleasure, or, in Nancy's terms, the infinity of desire-pleasure, "which is the infinity of sex deferring itself" (*IRS*, 35).

According to the Cartesian schema, infinity forms a pair with finitude: there is the infinite thinking substance (God) and the finite thinking substance (the ego). Finitude on this model is a state of lacking the scope of the infinite; it is the state of having boundaries beyond which lies all that infinity has and finitude lacks. At the same time, these boundaries make finitude complete and graspable in a way that infinity is not by virtue of infinity's having no end. The French is "*fin*"; the verb "to finish" is "*finir*." *In-fini*, an adjective, can thus be read as *not finished*, more readily suggesting an on-going temporal state than the spatial infinity that comes to mind with Descartes. Rather than finitude being a small space carved out in the great expanse of the infinite, what is finite is what is over and done, while what is infinite is endless. It is not that the infinite is not yet over, but rather that it is not the sort of thing that is ever over. It goes on; it keeps moving.

If *finition* is the process of finishing, of adding the final touches to something as the finishers employed in the fashion industry or in construction take care of the *finissage* of a garment or a building, giving it a finished look, then *infinition* is the eschewing of that, the refusal of that final polish, the refusal of the boundary where we would be obliged to stop. It is unfinishing that renders something in-finite. It is also where sex and relation come together again.

> [T]here is sexual relation in force everywhere relation finds itself in play . . . that is to say, everywhere where something is in play that we could call an *actual infinition* [infinition en acte] of two, or more than two, finite realities turning towards one another, opening to one another the intimacy of their infinity. Nothing can define jouissance and relation better than the *intimacy* of the *infinite* and the *infinity* of the *intimate*. (*IRS*, 44)

Relation is incorporeal but it occurs between bodies. There is no better image for this than the one produced by Plato in Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium*: humans are originally half-people, each of whom was once attached to another as part of a single rounded body with four arms, four legs, two sets of genitals, and so on (190d). These half-people were finite realities created by the cut of Apollo and then tweaked and arranged by Hephestus, their genitals and heads rearranged until they were finished off. But built into them—into us—is a propensity to turn to one another, exposing to one another the deepest, most intimate parts of themselves, the parts that shows their *in*finition, their lack of finish. This is the intimacy of the infinite and the infinity of the intimate.

It is not a matter of the bad infinity that involves being forever stuck in a dead end, the infinity Nancy describes in Christian terms as the infinity of the missing object. Instead, this is the good infinity of—again in Christian terms—the rising subject, the actual infinity that applies to the act because the act always surpasses, exceeds, and undoes itself. It is of the essence of

sex that it exceeds itself; this is the sense of its infinity (*IRS*, 39). Relation, thanks precisely to its finitude, punctuates that infinity, interrupting it, giving it pause, shaping it, and finishing it off. After all, what happens when Aristophanes' half-people fuck? If they were originally cut from one of the man–woman circles, they have babies and, if they came from man–man origins, they have the pleasure of sex and can go about the affairs of the city. (The woman–woman combination fades from sight [191b-e].) In both cases, relation binds them together as though to restore their wholeness but, in both cases, sex goes beyond them and their relation, generating pleasure and children. The original, complete—and therefore monstrous—circle people had no knowledge and no need of either.[16]

Insofar as we think of ourselves as complete or susceptible to completion, we are drawn on by the promise of relation, only to be undone by the excess of the sexual. Insofar as we engage in the deeply modern endeavor of approaching perfection, we engage coming to be as the experience of increasing coherence, autonomy, and certainty, as in Descartes' emergence out of the accumulated uncertainties and half-knowledge of childhood into the self-certain clarity of the *cogito*.[17] Insofar as we understand our coming to be sexual according to the same model, we dwell on the moment of determination—the "finition"—of certain sexed identities (which even Nancy acknowledges) without also appreciating the infinition of those identities exposed in sex. Making love is an action in which the actors expose their own infinition, "on the threshold of finitude" (*IRS*, 51). Once we also grasp that we come to be—which is also to say, come to be sexual—*sexually*, we see that it is an essentially natal finitude.

Despite their shared structure, the excess of pleasure and the excess of fertility have nothing to do with one another; they need not coincide and the one need not be superimposed on the other, since pleasure is not the generative force and the child is not the product of pleasure. They stand, rather, as two distinct figures of the incalculability and un-relatability of excess, figures that, if anything, seem to avoid knowing about one another at all (*IRS*, 42). Yet, much as pleasure ignores fertility and much as the child avoids recognizing herself in the relation of her parents, it remains the case that we each come to be out of a sexual relation and the infinity that is exposed—not brought about—when we make love has its origin in the fertile sexual relation from which we emerged.

BIRTH *EX NIHILO*

When philosophy has attended to this emergence, it has construed it in terms of distrust (Descartes), conflict (Hegel), anxiety (Heidegger) or love

(Oliver).[18] I have been arguing, using Nancy's work, that the sexual relation is, in any case, infinite in the sense of *unfinished* and *unfinishable*; moreover, it is materially so and this is what has yet to be made concrete. We emerge within and out of our mothers' bodies. As we saw above, Hegel writes of the soul's emergence and Nancy discusses the status of the child in the mother. Now we must approach the same question in the most material, embodied terms. Nancy argues that the child in the mother *is* only insofar as it is in another. The fetus is never part of the maternal body, but it cannot differentiate itself from itself; it *is* only insofar as it is acted on. Yet what would it mean for a fetus to differentiate itself from itself, even as it has its being in another? What would that look like? How would we recognize it?

Mark Taylor argues that the work of differentiating ourselves gets under way in our bodies' attempts to create immune identity, though he notes at the same time that this attempt often fails.[19] The function of our bodies' immune system is to identify foreign elements—bacteria, viruses, transplanted organs—and to mount a defense against attack. The fetus is differentiated *by* the maternal body, but this can happen only because what is produced there is a new body that is genetically only half-related to it. Sexual difference and sexual reproduction mean that what comes to be in the womb is immunologically different from the maternal body that puts it in place and constitutes its place. From the point of view of the maternal immune system, how does the fetus escape detection and rejection as a foreign entity? The answer appears to lie in the placenta, the point of contact between the bloodstreams of fetus and maternal body. The placenta is generated from the fetus' genetic material and is a place remarkably lacking in the markers that would alert the maternal body to the foreignness of what she is carrying. Thus, the fetus is indeed differentiated by and from the maternal body but in such a way that, immunologically speaking, the womb is a relatively neutral space where the fetus begins the work of learning identity in the original chaos of difference.[20]

According to Taylor's analysis, the relation between the maternal body and fetus cannot be considered originary. It is not the forum in which the relation of self and non-self has its first expression because "the body is [already] inwardly divided,"[21] as when the immune system that is meant to defend against intrusion attacks the body itself. The capacity to distinguish between self and non-self is not innate, and must be acquired. "One's immune system does not seem to recognize the epitopes on molecules and cells that are part of one's own body. . . . Self-tolerance is . . . something the immune system 'learned' in embryonic life by either eliminating or 'paralyzing' all lymphocytes that would produce self-recognizing antibodies."[22] This makes the *auto*immune response originary or, as Taylor puts it, "the auto-immune response is antecedent to both self-unity and self-identity." But

this is like saying that God is the creator of time and existed before time. Just as *before* has no referent in the absence of time, *auto*immunity has no referent when there is as yet no self. More precisely, then, the immune/autoimmune response is functioning before it can begin to learn the difference between self and non-self and before it can learn to tolerate self. This is also to say that it functions before its functioning can be differentiated into immunity and autoimmunity.

This is not a question of an initial moment of confusion or a distinctly fetal condition. If it were, medicine would know little about it given the relative invisibility—advances in medical imaging notwithstanding—of the fetus compared with the availability to vision of—not to mention the therapeutic demands made by—child and adult bodies. How then do we know about this aspect of fetal life? Rather than a case of Hegelian mantic knowledge, we have to think in terms of the Heideggerian "whence?" The question of origin is an echo of our coming to be; the fact that autoimmunity remains common in adult bodies is the echo of the original chaos of immune/autoimmune responses. Grave's disease, Reiter's syndrome, rheumatic fever, systemic lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, Crohn's disease, myasthenia gravis, multiple sclerosis, and insulin-dependent diabetes are all autoimmune diseases common enough to indicate that the learning, once it is under way, very often remains incomplete. Taylor writes, "Though it seems impossible, the body is simultaneously itself and other than itself."[23]

Thus, when the relation fetus and maternal body is specified as the first forum for identity formation, it is as the immunological forum created by the fetus itself as a product of sexual difference. Maternity and paternity together determine the child as new and unknown. Maternity, in addition, requires the opening of a space within the woman's body that is not precisely her body but that nevertheless marks her as a maternal body. Having shared in the generation of difference, the maternal body withholds its identity in order to make possible the development of another identity in the course of the fetal struggle to discern self and non-self. It is a struggle that is not resolved at the moment of birth and may never be resolved. Autoimmune diseases manifest themselves at every stage of life and are a concrete instance of what Nancy calls the passing of identity. Moreover, the details of the functioning of immunity/autoimmunity before and after birth suggest a continual passing that does not begin in a conflict between self and other, self and mother, but in a space that is formed within and by the maternal body and configured as an immunologically privileged space by the joint efforts of the fetus—itself a strange amalgam of maternal and paternal identity—and the maternal body. The material that goes to make up the fetus's body and the placenta is provided by the maternal body: the form it takes and, in particular, the immunological nonidentity of the placenta,

is determined by the maternal–paternal combination that is the new fetus. The space thus formed is where differing and deferring of self and non-self gets under way; it is the nothing out of which we are born.

CONCLUSION

The world is created *ex nihilo* and, once we understand the world as the world of bodies, this is another way of saying that we are born out of nothing. Birth does not stand for or stand in for the creation; birth *is* the creation of the world. Bodies—natal, growing, changing, aging bodies—are always coming, always something other than entirely present and this lays at the root of the Nancian impulse that everything is possible (*BP*, 197). It is also the source of our responsibility for creation and for being creative. This is far from being an exhortation to fertility[24] because, as Nancy writes in *The Sense of the World*, "[t]hat which is born in birth is not, first of all, a product or the engendered term of an author or parents, but precisely *being* insofar as nothing posits it and insofar as all exposes it, always singular being" (*SW*, 155). There is no accounting for the fact that we are here; there is no sense to our being here, *other than our being here*. This is what Nancy identifies as the responsibility of sense. If, as I claimed at the beginning, the world is the resolution of fact into sense and sense into fact, it is we who resolve, and we do all that that word connotes by dissolving, transforming, harmonizing, deciding on and deciding for our being here in our finitude. We do it infinitely.

We do not do it willy-nilly. Being is not a state but an activity and there are distinct and competing ways of being a world of bodies; Nancy identifies the globalized version and the world-formation version, a distinction François Raffoul and David Pettigrew make clear in their translators' introduction to *The Creation of the World* or *Globalization*:

> On the one hand, there is the uniformity produced by a global economical and technological logic—Nancy specifies, "a global injustice against the background of general equivalence"—leading towards the opposite of an inhabitable world, to "the un-world." And, on the other hand, there is the possibility of an authentic world-forming, that is, of a making of the world and of a making sense that Nancy will call . . . a "creation" of the world.[25]

The resolution of fact and sense is the movement—never-completed—of the one toward the other. What I have argued here is that, as creation, it moves according to the syncopated rhythm of our natality, the beat of our generational life.

NOTES

1. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), p. 31. Henceforth cited as C. See also Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 155. Henceforth cited as *SW*.

2. Descartes' letter to Elizabeth, June 28, 1643, quoted in C, 11.

3. We do not commonly think of bodies as impenetrable, but Nancy addresses the penetration involved in sex (e.g., although it is more than an example) using the term *intusseption* from the Latin *intus* meaning within and *suscipere*, to take up.

4. For an explanation of *partes extra partes*, literally "parts outside parts," see Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 143: "The structure of parts outside parts is central to Nancy's thinking of the spacing of sense and of the effraction of sense and matter that is the 'taking place' of bodies and the creation of the shared world."

5. Ibid., p. 137.

6. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 200. Henceforth cited as *BP*.

7. Gaston Bachelard, *Le matérialisme rationnel* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953), p. 4.

8. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Anne O'Byrne and Robert Richardson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 83–84. Henceforth cited as *BSP*. See also Marie-Eve Morin, "Thinking Things: Heidegger, Sartre, Nancy" *Sartre Studies International* 15:2 (Winter 2009), pp. 35–53.

9. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Maquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 1962), H. 42, pp. 67–68.

10. Heidegger writes in the *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, "When being is posited as infinite, it is precisely then that it is determined. If it is posited as finite, it is then that its absence of ground is affirmed," quoted in Jean-Luc Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 9. See also Morin, op. cit.

11. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1991), p. 29. See also "Verbum caro factum," in *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. by Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 81–84, where incarnation is described as the becoming world or flesh of the world.

12. This is also the structure of sense. See *BSP*, 2.

13. Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'« il y a » du rapport sexuel* (Paris: Galilée, 2001). Henceforth cited as *IRS*.

14. This choice is not an altogether happy one but I have not found a better option among the alternatives, which range from the archaic term *to swive* (my thanks to Tim Hyde for drawing my attention to this) to all the too familiar sex verbs in contemporary slang.

15. See *BSP*, pp. 91–92 where Nancy elaborates on the syncopation in the relationship between the presupposition and disposition of our being.

16. Their excess, rather, took the form of a violent assault on the gods. See *Symposium* 190b.

17. See the opening sentence of Descartes' *Meditations* and also Susan Bordo's commentary on Descartes' desire to shed his childhood self in "Selection from *The Flight to Objectivity*" in *Feminist Interpretations of René Descartes*, ed. Susan Bordo (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

18. See Descartes' First *Meditation*, Hegel's famous Antigone analysis in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, section 470, Heidegger's *Being and Time* § 40 and finally Kelly Oliver, *Family Values* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 60–61.

19. Mark Taylor, *Nots* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), pp. 214–256.

20. Derrida makes considerable use of the term *autoimmunity*. See, for example, *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), pp. 42, 51, 65. But he has insisted, at least in conversation, that the term for him has nothing to do with the biological occurrence of autoimmunity. This claim is complicated by a footnote to *Religion* where he writes: "As the phenomenon of these antibodies is extended to a broader zone of pathology and as one resorts increasingly to the positive virtues of immuno-depressants destined to limit the mechanisms of rejection and to facilitate the tolerance of certain organ transplants, we feel ourselves authorized to speak of a sort of general logic of auto-immunization" (p. 72 n. 27). His resistance to the biological model is, in my view, a resistance to the mobilization of that model as determinative or originary in a way that accepts uncritically the distinction that allows biology to present itself as the real or the natural and therefore beyond question.

21. *Nots*, p. 253.

22. Jerne, quoted in ibid., p. 252

23. Ibid., pp. 252–253.

24. Hannah Arendt writes of "the aboriginal command, 'Be ye fruitful and multiply,' in which it is as though the voice of nature herself speaks to us." Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), p. 106.

25. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World* or *Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), p. i.