

The heart of the matter: Jean-Luc Nancy

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Abstract

Curriculum theorists write about things that no one wants to talk about. Currere is not just about lived experience, but it is also about death. And it is this that no one wants to talk about. This is what Heidegger called Being-Toward-Death. I write about a professor who died several days before his seminar began. That professor was Jean-Luc Nancy, whose work was deeply influenced by Jacques Derrida. Derrida is a familiar name to curriculum theorists, but Jean-Luc Nancy might not be. Christopher Fynsk—a well-known philosopher and friend of Nancy’s—had the courage to teach Nancy’s seminar only a few days after Nancy died. I took that seminar. The year was 2021. The seminar was held at the European Graduate School. In that seminar I began studying Nancy’s work. This paper is an introduction to Nancy’s work.

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Introduction

I would like to introduce Jean-Luc Nancy’s work to curriculum theorists who might not be familiar with him. Nancy’s work is as important as Derrida’s and curriculum theorists might re-consider broadening horizons by giving Nancy a try. Let me preface this by saying that Nancy is not an easy read. In fact, his work is extremely demanding and difficult. Our task as curriculum theorists is not to make what is difficult easy. No, the difficulties and obscurities must remain intact through a careful—and close reading—of Nancy’s oeuvre. To *honor* Nancy—in this time of mourning—after his recent death, is of the utmost importance, at least to me. This paper is a tribute to Nancy.

I was to take a Seminar with Jean-Luc Nancy at the European Graduate School in August of 2021. Several days before the seminar, Nancy died. For his colleagues and friends—I felt rather sick at heart. I did not know him, but they did. At the time, I wondered how anybody could pick up his course and go on—at the most Beckettian moment in teaching—when they could not go on and yet—they had to; someone had to pick up the course and teach. How does one teach another’s course with a broken heart? I was surprised that someone did. What struck me about the course—which was taught by Christopher Fynsk—a well-known philosopher and Dean of the European Graduate School—was that Fynsk took a sharp turn into Heidegger. The students were rather baffled at this and in the chats they asked: Why are we doing this? Upon reflection, I think I have a clue but still I am not sure. Fynsk has done much work on Heidegger, Nancy was steeped in Heideggerian thought. Fynsk was a friend of Nancy’s as well. Perhaps that turn was about friendship and mourning.

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Derrida once remarked that the very thing we call friendship means knowing that one of us will die before the other. Brault and Naas (2001) remind us of Derrida's "Politics of Mourning" whereby "One must always go before the other. In the *Politics of Friendship*, Jacques Derrida demonstrates that this is the law of friendship—and thus of mourning... There is no friendship without the possibility that one friend will die before the other; one friend must die first" (p. 1). This is an unbearable thought, but this thought must be considered if one is truly a friend to an Other. When death comes too soon, friendships are shattered, hearts are broken. I cannot speak for anyone, but I can only imagine what the faculty at European Graduate School—might have felt, after Nancy's death.

Curriculum theorists write about things that no one wants to talk about. *Currere* is not just about lived experience but it is also about death. And it is this that no one wants to talk about. This is what Heidegger called Being-toward-Death. A professor dies several days before class begins. Who talks about this? Who writes about the unthinkable? A beloved colleague, father and friend of the faculty—at European Graduate School—dies several days before class begins. I just could not imagine a more difficult situation. As I began to dig into Nancy's work, I hesitated at its (im)possibilities, its difficulties and its demands. It took me several re-starts, difficult readings, to begin to put the puzzle of his work together—the best that I knew how. It is remarkable how much Derrida (2005) loved Nancy. In fact, Derrida's *On Touching-Jean-Luc Nancy*—is a loving and remarkable tribute to Nancy's work. I have never read anything like *On Touching*. Philosophers tend to remain in the realm of intellectualizations, not admitting personal relations or anything personal for that matter. Walter Benjamin kept a rule with himself—never mention the "I" in one's writing. The erasure of the "I" is an unfortunate commonplace of academe.

Nancy's *L'Intrus* is a striking paper in that it is by far the most intimate and personal philosophical memoir (of sorts) I have ever read. I was stunned when reading *L'Intrus*. I mentioned to Christopher Fynsk that I didn't know if I could go on reading more, for I felt that transference—around issues of serious illness—was getting in the way of my own working on the text. An ongoing monologue in my head turned to a kind of re-traumatization of my own horrors suffering from a deathly form of cancer. I wrote about that cancer in the midst of the pandemic in *Curriculum Studies in the Age of Covid—19: Stories of the Unbearable*. But confronting my own *daimon*—as Socrates might put it—I plowed on. Socrates' *daimon*—that oracle within—told him what *not* to do. The oracle-within—is not magical—it is the voice of No, perhaps conscience. My oracle—within—told me No, you must go on—even though you cannot—a most Beckettian oracle. So I plowed on although the running monologue of my own horrors kept interrupting me.

In order to introduce Nancy's work to those who are not familiar with him, what I do here is set the stage, the backdrop—for trying to understand Nancy, or at least grapple with his texts. One cannot understand *L'Intrus* if there is no contextualizing beforehand. In the face of much stammering, stumbling and stuttering I ventured on—in the most difficult waters of philosophy. I cannot say that I understand, but I grapple. What I do connect with—although I would not say understand—is his disorientation and dissociated states after suffering from traumatic illness. One does not understand the suffering of another, but empathy and connectedness, however limited they might be, make us human. Without (limited) empathy we must ask whether we have lost our humanity. I want to thank Avital Ronell—especially—

for encouraging me to push on and to keep my manuscript floating around in order to find a home for this most difficult writing. Too discouraged to go on—Avital prompted me to go on. To find a home for this manuscript, I come home. I am at home here—with my colleagues and friends in curriculum studies. I only hope that this reading—however difficult—makes a difference to our field and to the very movement of *currere*—as an ongoing project of struggle in the face of unspeakable suffering. So I shall begin in the face of I know-not-what.

How does one conceptualize an event—such as a heart transplant—that goes beyond conceptualization? Lacan might offer a way into this problem. Dolar (2018) tells us that Lacan’s object a “stands at the core of psychoanalysis, and he considered the theory of object a to be his major contribution” (p.23). Lacan (1978)—in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*—paradoxically remarks that he attempts to formulate what he “call[s] the refusal of the concept” (p. 18). “*Objet petit a*” is just that a nonconceptual concept. At least that is how I interpret this. Dolar (2018) explains this “bit of the real” that doesn’t quite coincide with any given entity, with any existing thing, yet tenuously and tenaciously preservers within them” (p.23). For Dolar, the “object voice” became a focus of his work, something to which Dolar gave a body of literature, as it were. Dolar draws this “object voice” from Lacan and takes off with it.

The jumping off point for this essay is that drawing on Dolar and his thoughts on Lacan’s objet a, what is suggested here is that perhaps we could think of another objet a, such as the heart, and more specifically the heart transplant. The heart that is removed and then replaced with the heart of another does not “coincide” (Dolar, 2018, p.23) with anything. The very transplant of the heart is *objet* heart, if you will, something that is beyond concepts but yet must still be conceptualized in order to attempt to grasp—if that is even possible—the experience around which Jean-Luc Nancy suffered after having survived a heart transplant. The heart that was his, disappears; the heart that he receives from an Other who has died cannot even be put into words—this very event, this crisis Nancy suffered is beyond explanation, beyond signification, an event that slips, an *objet* heart, if you will. The mere thought of this event is the (im)possibility of what Lacan (1978) calls the “real as encounter” (p. 55) if you will. This “encounter” is an (im)possible thing to understand, both on an ontological level, on a phenomenological level or perhaps on no level whatsoever. Lacan (1978) remarks: “the real should have presented itself in the form of that which is unassimilable—in the form of the trauma” (p. 55). Indeed, Nancy’s experience of the heart transplant is just such an “unassimilable” “trauma.” What strikes me in Nancy’s brief article about this “unassimilable trauma” is the non-narrative narrative of his experience. I say non-narrative narrative because as he attempts to write the very experience of this thing that happened to him, that was something beyond language or understanding, he does—in many ways—write into being, if you will, the experience of something beyond experience, that which is “unassimilable.” Nancy’s *L’Intrus* is a kind of autobiographical case study that reads as a kind of poetic-psychoanalysis or philosophical poetics.

The second large point that is emphasized in this paper is that paradoxically the heart transplant cannot be reduced to one’s own interiority because it is—at root—an experience of relationship. The strange relationship of which I speak is one heart to another, the transplanted heart and the estranged heart removed from the body. Freud spoke of one unconscious to another—a strange transferential relationship. Nancy’s heart transplant might have been that too, for where is the unconscious if not in the heart of the matter, in the heart in the relationship

between the subject of the transplant and the object of the heart of the Other. Camus wrote about the stranger—a familiar reference to most—but is the experience of the one heart to another not stranger than one can even think? The experience and the writing of the experience—as we shall see in a while—are simply unimaginable and, indeed, as Lacan would put it “unassimilable.” That the transplanted heart is always-already in relation to the one who gave as a gift the heart of the Other with the subject who takes in, not only introjects, but literally takes in, the heart of the Other within the walls of the chest? Whose heart is beating? To whom does one thank for the gift? For, the one who gives the gift dies, while the one who receives it lives. Nancy’s experience and the very writing of the experience stuns. And in fact, Nancy’s *L’Intrus* is, in fact, a stunning piece of writing.

Jacques Derrida wrote about specters. Derrida’s (1994) *The specter of Marx* was followed by *Archive Fever* (1996) which dealt with the specter of Freud. Jean-Luc Nancy—a prominent philosopher deeply influenced by Jacques Derrida—is now—yet another specter. In August of 2021 Jean-Luc Nancy (2021) died shortly after penning his final work *A Much too Human Virus*. Nancy’s work is enormously important for philosophers, psychoanalysts, literary scholars, poets and artists. Nancy left behind a large *corpus*¹ of work that is illuminating for psychoanalysis in its intersection(s) with philosophy-to-come (as Derrida might have put it). The specter of Jean-Luc Nancy remains indelibly *impressed*—in a kind of *Archive Fever*—as Derrida (1996) might say. Nancy’s death is still so near in time and space and yet so far away as the distance between the past and future ever widens.² In fact, Derrida (2005) wrote a text indebted to Nancy titled *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*. Derrida’s text is a testimony to Nancy’s work on the senses. Nancy wrote on many topics from aesthetics, to politics, from technology to religion. In fact, Nancy’s (2013) text *Adoration* is a testimony to *Theory as a Prayerful Act*—as James Macdonald (1995) might have put it. Nancy’s work is sublime, exquisite, painful, poetic.

Nancy (1997) addresses what he calls “Philosophical labor” (p. 19). Doing philosophy is indeed a kind of labor. But there is another kind of labor-at-hand when reading Nancy. The kind of labor of which I speak pertains to what Andre Green (1999) calls *The Work of the Negative*. Adorno (2007) once remarked that philosophy should deal with what it is *not*. Philosophy is not psychoanalysis. And yet, there are some who engage in a more psychoanalytically-oriented philosophy. Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva and Jean Laplanche could all be considered psychoanalytically-oriented philosophers. What I propose in this paper, is doing a reading of Nancy through the work of Jean Laplanche (1999). In particular, I want to focus on Nancy’s (2002b) *L’Intrus*—an essay written after his heart transplant. *L’Intrus* is a kind of philosophical mourning, a poetic expression of deeply felt suffering. Nancy’s essay is what Serres (2000) would call the “third-instructed,” or “*Le Tiers-Instruit*” (np), for it falls into that third space between philosophy and psychoanalysis, between poetry and mourning. This paper is *a work of mourning*. There is no other way to begin such a paper other than *with* a sense of *Mourning and Melancholia* (Freud, 1915). Derrida (1994) speaks to the issue of mourning:

First of all, mourning. We will be speaking of nothing else. It consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by identifying the bodily remains and by localizing the dead (all ontologization, all semanticization—philosophical, hermeneutic, or psychoanalytical—finds itself caught up in the work of mourning but, as such, it does not yet think it; we are posing here the question of the specter (p. 9).

The specter of Jean-Luc Nancy is upon us. *Mourning work* and *the work of mourning* is upon us. *Working through* the loss of Nancy, this paper is a testimony to his work. As Andre Green (1999) works the negative (psychoanalytically), Jean-Luc Nancy (2002a) works the *Restlessness of the Negative* in the spirit of the Hegelian dialectic. Although Hegel is not the focus of this paper, Nancy's restlessness is. Like Augustine, Nancy restlessly wrestles with God; while at other times Nancy wrestles with the senselessness of the loss of sense; still at other times he wrestles with the muses; and yet at other times he wrestles with the failures of the political, and more specifically—for the purposes of this paper—Nancy wrestles with his own psychological suffering after his heart transplant.

Nancy's range of thought is breathtaking. Nancy's (1991, p. 153) restless wrestling with that which is ineffable and aporetic: those uncanny "happen[ing[s]]"—as Nancy would put it—are at the heart of suffering and are especially illuminating for both psychoanalysts and philosophers. Of note, Nancy's writing comes home *with-in* Freud's *unheimlich* (unhome of the uncanny), especially after he passes through a life-near-death ordeal. This essay focuses on Nancy's (2002b) essay *L'Intrus*. However, in order to get a sense of Nancy's work-at-hand, a study of *L'Intrus* must be preceded by a brief introduction to Nancy's thought—in the context of psychoanalytic musing,—in order to situate his thought. I focus on the uncanny interrelations between Nancy's (2002b) *L'Intrus* and some psychoanalytic concepts offered up by Jean Laplanche (1999). A *working-through* of Nancy's aporetic and ineffable concepts leads to that which is always-already "unreconciled"—as Fysnk (2002, p. 24) puts it. Nancy's *corpus* unmoors and unsettles; the "irreconcilable" in Nancy's work—as Fysnk (2002) puts it—echoes what theologian Karl Rahner (2004) calls the "past- all-graspsness" (p. 128).

Working through the Restlessness of the Negative

In the spirit of the restlessness of the negative, I begin this paper in a move of negative theology or negative philosophy by saying what I think Nancy's work is *not*. Here, I shall briefly wrestle with some of Nancy's commentators. By suggesting where I differ with some of his commentators, I offer an alternative perspective on what I think Nancy's work means in a rather broad context—focusing mostly on the intersections of psychoanalysis and philosophy (something which the commentators upon which I draw do not do). Although I do not think there is one, singular over-arching principle in Nancy's work, there are some through-lines and threads that can be traced throughout many of his texts. I will focus on what I call co-implicating aporias that become especially pronounced in Nancy's (2002b) essay *L'Intrus*—which I will get into after wrestling with some broader contexts in which his work is discussed.

Peter Hallward (2005) remarks that "The most striking and original contribution to French philosophy...has been given by an effort to think principles marked by their essential singularity...a singular principle is by definition non-relational" (p. 159). Hallward (2005) gives examples of singular principles at the heart of French philosophy—if you will, namely: "Bergson's time...Sartre's consciousness. . .Henry's life. . .Levinas's Other" (p. 159). Whether one can reduce any philosopher's work to a singular principle is a debate worth having. But in the case of Jean-Luc Nancy, it is difficult, if not impossible to reduce Nancy's work to any one principle. As Against Hallward (2005) I argue that Nancy's work is *not* "non-relational."

In fact, it is the *relational* that is at the heart of Nancy's work. Here, I shall offer some examples of the way in which Nancy's work is, indeed, relational. As we shall see, *L'Intrus* is—at a most

fundamental level—a relational event, from one heart to another, as I said at the outset of this paper. But this relation is one that is what Lacan (1978) calls “unassimilable” (p. 55)—it is an excess, a slippage; it is beyond representation, language. And yet, paradoxically, Nancy does capture in language and representation that very excess, slippage and—strangely enough—that which is—as Lacan says is “unassimilable” (p. 55). One of Nancy’s many philosophical *musings*³ concerns the concept of sense. The concept of sense is inherently *relational* because in order to sense anything at all one has to sense some *thing* or some *one*—as Derrida (2002) would put it. Whether one senses an object or a sentient being, one senses that which is Other to the self. Beyond the sense of self, the Other stands in relation-to-the-self in a way that is *Otherwise than Being*—to borrow Levinas’ (1998) phrase.

Although Nancy does not draw on the work of Jean Laplanche (2000), what Laplanche teaches is just how relational the self is, especially when the self struggles with the Oedipal drama. For a moment let us muse on Laplanche (1999) as a supplement to Nancy in order to draw out the implications of the self-Other relation. Also—as a brief aside—I should note at the outset that I draw on Laplanche (1999) in particular because what I say here will later connect—in uncanny ways—to how one might interpret Nancy’s struggles and sufferings as he attempts to make sense of the lack of sense-making concerning his heart transplant. Laplanche’s (1999) psychoanalytic orientation is incredibly helpful when trying to understand—at some level—Nancy’s sufferings. The relationality of the self-other, or the *being-with*, as Nancy puts it drawing on Heidegger’s (1962) *Mitsein*, is a complication beyond language, beyond signification. Derrida and some French postmodern philosophers incorporate psychoanalytic thought into philosophy. Laplanche—who might be considered both a philosopher and psychoanalyst is a case in point. Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari, Julia Kristeva, to name but a few, do in fact take the unconscious seriously. However, analytic philosophy rarely—if ever—deals with the concept of the unconscious.

Being-with—the concept that is the specter of Heidegger (1962)—is a relation (that Nancy draws upon in his own fashion) that is inhabited by specters, unconscious relations. These hauntings—or what Derrida (1994) called hauntology—are what Freud called the uncanny (or the *unheimlich*)—which loosely translates as the *not-at-home within the home (of being)*. *Parapraxis* (doing something or saying something inadvertently) or even *de ja vu* experiences feel strange, as an unwelcomed stranger inhabits the house of the self. The stranger within—is the unhome (*unheimlich*)—of the self, the uncanny of the self, the unhome at the heart of being. This stranger within—no matter how strange—is still strange-in-relation to the observing ego, or the self-reflecting upon itself.

Laplanche discusses the specters of the Oedipal drama—what Freud called the family romance—that inhabit the house of self, the house of being. The self is not one; rather it is multiple. The self-engages in introjection, projection, incorporation, even self-evaporation, wrestling with specters that inhabit the psyche. The father, the mother and the child are the specters of the Oedipal drama—what Deleuze and Guattari (2000) calls “daddy-mommy-me” (23). In the case of the schizophrenic—who “*scrambles all of the codes*” [italics in the original] (p. 15)—the erasure of “daddy-mommy-me” in a movement self-erasure and self-shattering is at hand. This self-shattering or evaporation of the ego results in psyche’s “being somewhere else, beyond or behind or below” (p. 23) the Oedipal drama. Within the Oedipal drama—the self is

always-already in- relation to-and-with Others. But in the case of Nancy, the heart of the matter is even more complicated. Who is implanted within? Whose heart inhabits whom? When the heart recipient addresses the “I” and the Other within—to whom is the “I” really addressing? Whose mother, whose father? Whose self is left after making room for the heart that is “implanted” (Laplanche, 1999, p. 136) within-the-self, in the heart of being, in the house of being. Who is Nancy addressing under the shadow of whose object? Of whose mother? Of which father? Who exactly is “implanted” (Laplanche, 1999, p. 136) within the heart of the transplant? Whose Other is within the self?

Laplanche (1999) says that the “other thing (*das Andere*) that is the unconscious is only maintained in its radical alterity...[w]hen the alterity of the other person is blurred, when it is reintegrated in the form of *my* fantasy of the other” (p. 71). But for Nancy—after the heart transplant— what does this mean? What exactly gets “blurred” with the Other’s heart transplanted within? The loss of one’s own heart, the erasure of the heart of being—its very removal and replacement—complicates anything that is in fact “reintegrated” or taken up in “fantasy” of the Other, of the stranger within. The stranger within—the transplanted heart—is stranger than one possibly think.

The self never wholly understands the-who to-whom one is addressing. This strange not-knowing-who-I am-addressing becomes all the more apparent in the context of Jean-Luc Nancy’s experience of his heart transplant. His self is doubled—by the heart implanted from another—and at the same time his very self is under erasure. Psyche-under-erasure, though, is not otherworldly, it is, contrarily, deeply this-worldly, it is, indeed underneath what Heidegger (1962) called “the worldhood of the world” (p. 91). Hallward’s (2005) contention that Nancy’s work is “extra-worldly” (p. 160) is especially counter to Nancy’s (2002b) *L’Intrus*. Nancy’s work—generally speaking— is *not* “extra-worldly.” What could be more worldly than working through—psychically— the heart of another transplanted within.

Nancy’s work is *not* about abstract concepts without any relation to the concrete, as Hallward (2005) intimates. Hallward (2005) claims that Nancy does not address “actual relations” in the “actual world.” Nancy’s (2002b) *L’Intrus* (alongside many of his other works) counters this claim, for, indeed, it is an essay that is about “actual relations” in the “actual world.” Nancy writes a deeply intimate narrative (not only about himself) but in-relation-to and *with* his doctors and his son: he writes about his (haunting) relationship with a stranger who gave Nancy the gift of the heart. Nancy’s sense of *Fear and Trembling*—as Kierkegaard (1983) would put it— is not “extra-worldly” (Hallward, 2005) at all. Rather, Nancy’s (2002b) worldliness is never more so than in *L’Intrus*. As Nancy squarely faces the real possibility of dying; finitude presses upon him in the most concrete sense. Even before his heart transplant, Nancy (1997) wrote that it is important not to forget what finitude means. He repeatedly states that “*finitude is the truth of which the infinite is the sense*” [italics in the original] (Nancy, 1997, p. 29). For Nancy, infinity is not otherworldly, it is of this world, and it is finite, it is what Nancy (1997) calls the “infinite finite” (p. 29), or unending finitude.

What Nancy’s Work Is: Co-implicating Aporias

Nancy’s work addresses double-gestures, odd pairings, ineffable aporias— even before the advent of his heart transplant. These double-gestures are made concrete in the very experience of the very removal of his own heart and the replacement-*with* the heart of a stranger. A heart

removed, a heart transplanted, the death of one's own heart, the life-giving gift of another's heart is indeed a co-implicating aporia. How does one even think this? Intellectuals speak of the unthinkable in abstract terms, but the heart that is transplanted is the unthinkable made concrete. What could be stranger than a heart transplant? One cannot live without a heart. And yet, there is always the chance that the heart transplanted will be rejected by the very body that needs that heart in order to live.

Co-implicating aporias are concepts that run parallel to one another in an aporetic, unresolvable, tension, always-already "unreconciled" (Fynsk, 2002). Nancy's (1997) phrase the "infinite finite" (p. 29) is one such co-implicating aporia. "Infinite finite" (p. 29), Gasche (2017) points out, is a "lexicological testimony to this effort to break the classical subordination of finitude to infinity" (p. 5). Gasche (2017) notes that the infinite finite "resonates, no doubt, with Levinas' talk of the "infinitely Other" (p. 2). But unlike Levinas' "infinitely Other," Nancy attempts to undo the wedge created by radical alterity. Against the backdrop of another's heart transplanted within one's chest, alterity is always-already, in the double-gesture of this movement. The living heart transplanted within is the stranger *becomes one* (or not) with the body that accepts (or does not) the transplant. The heart of the Other becomes one's own heart. Is that merger a kind of oneness-in—alterity? That is a strange paradox indeed. If the Other's heart is *absolutely Other* to the body with whom the heart must merge—more than likely the merger will fail. The body has to take-in the stranger and make the stranger (the transplanted heart) his own. What kind of alterity is this?

For Levinas, absolute Alterity (of the infinitely Other) creates a schism between the self and the Other. This schism is exactly what Nancy is attempting to avoid. Nancy *works* double-gestures, double-movements, co-implicating aporias in order to think aporetic concepts at-once and together-with, rather one over-against another—if you will. Welch and Panelli (2007) point out that Nancy does not split concepts into "binary poles" but rather uses double gestures like infinite finitude, singular plural, concordant discordance in a "continuum condition of co-constitution" (p. 350). Further, this "co-constitution" does not devolve into "sameness" or "fusion" (Nancy, 1991, p. 15). While, at the same time, Welch and Panelli (2007) note that Nancy avoids the "senselessness of singular finitude" (p. 351). Nancy (2000) uses the phrase *Being Singular Plural* to point out that Being is always-already co-constitutive-with a plurality of beings. The self—as a singular being—does not live in a vacuum, but *lives-with* a plurality of beings that are also, at the same time, singular beings. *Being Singular Plural*—another co-implicating aporia means to *live-with* (and in-relation-to) tension (See Nancy, 2000). Nancy, says Christopher Watkin (2007), emphasizes that "[t]he 'with' is neither a unity nor a disseminating multiplicity but a 'concordant discordance'" (p. 56). Watkin (2007) puts it this way: "a *concordia discors* of proximity-in-distance...share in their "compearance", a non-essentialized, non-localizable ontology" (p. 59). A non-essentialized ontology is one where being or being-with is without essence, without foundation, being-with is a process of *towardness*, a process of "happening"—Nancy (1993, p. 163). The co-implicating aporia of the "concordant discordance" is again another way to run concepts in parallel rather than drive wedges between that which is seemingly oppositional. This continual co-implication (co-implantation, a play of Laplanche's (1999) term "implantation" p. 136) of seemingly competing yet parallel non-dual concepts is what I would consider the continual *Restlessness of the Negative* that Nancy (2002a) derives from his reading of Hegel.

Jean-Luc Nancy's *L'Intrus*: The Heart of the Stranger

Nancy's (2002b) essay *L'Intrus* is deeply personal and deeply relational. He writes of his relations with his physicians, his son, while focusing on the singularity of his terrible ordeal of having had a heart transplant and subsequently suffering from cancer. And yet—because he has within him the transplant of an Other's heart, his singularity is—in a sense—doubled. The Other's heart within makes his very existence singular plural—to use his phrase. Nancy's (2002b) essay *L'Intrus* is about the *intrusion*, the stranger-of the Other's heart within. Nancy (2002b) begins *L'Intrus* this way: “The intruder [*L'Intrus*] enters by force, through surprise, or ruse, in any case without the right and without have been first admitted” (Nancy, 2002, p. 1). Nancy (2002b) uses these words: “*intrus*” (p. 10), “intruding” (p. 6), “intrudes” (p.7), “intrusion” (p. 9) to describe the heart transplant which feels as if a “stranger” (p.7) enters into his body. The intrusion, or intruder is the *heart* that is transplanted. Nancy emphasizes that the multiple has become—literally and figuratively—a part of him. The sense of the multiple will become a key to unlocking the way in which Nancy philosophizes the world in general. For Nancy, not only is *the multiple* a philosophical idea: it is a lived idea, a lived-experience, or as Husserl would say it is *Erlebnis*. The heart that is transplanted is the living- multiple. Nancy (2002b) says “I who find myself here more double or multiple than ever” (p. 4). Nancy's *doppelgänger* is the *heart*, the stranger that is transplanted within.

Nancy (2002b)—at the edge of lived-experience—states that life and death are “intimately woven” (p. 6). The “I” “withdraws to an infinite distance” while simultaneously “subsides into an intimacy more profound than any interiority” (p. 12). This is the *working* of the aporia of the life-death experience is both—phenomenologically—an “infinite distance” whilst at the same time a “profound” “intimacy.” Nancy (2002b) comments: “The multiple stranger who intrudes upon my life (my feeble, winded life, which at times slides into a malaise that verges on a simply astonished abandonment” (p. 7). The admission of suffering, the “malaise” and sense of “abandonment” of which he speaks echoes Kierkegaard's (1983, 1980a, 1980b) *Fear and Trembling, The Concept of Anxiety, The Sickness Unto Death*.

Nancy emphasizes the sense that there is something “multiple” occurring, something that “multiplies” (p. 9), what Nancy calls “polymorphous dissociation” —perhaps a borrowing from Freud's phrase polymorphous perversity— after the heart transplant. The subsequent cancer that Nancy got after his heart transplant had some relation to immune-suppressing medications that had to be given after a heart transplant in order that the body would not reject the heart. But to be so compromised, so immune-suppressed opens one to cancers, infections. Nancy's (2002b) transplant, secondary infections, cancer, chemotherapy and radiation left him feeling “worn, jagged and ravage[ed]” (p. 10). Nancy (2002b) experienced a “slackening, floating strangeness, suspended between poorly identified states, between sufferings, incapacities, lapses... a difficulty or opacity” (p. 11). These terrifying vague states of ineffability, the “opacity” of being “dissociated” and weakened terrify: Nancy entered into a strange passage of being, what Heidegger (1962) called *Being-toward-death*. It is important to note that Nancy states that he is “dissociated” (2002b, p. 9). This description—this non-narrative narrative is Lacan's (1978) “unassimilable” (p. 55) *objet a*. It is what I call the *objet* heart at the heart of the matter.

Christopher Fynsk (2002), Nancy's friend and colleague asks: “ “But where is Jean-Luc”” (p. 26)? Fynsk (2002) goes on to state that “[t]he self many of us identify with “Jean-Luc” detaches and goes on almost without itself” (p. 27). Dissociation is the very detachment of the self from

itself; it is as Freud might say a defense mechanism that paradoxically holds the self together, even though in dissociation. Without the ability to dissociate, the self would enter into a self-shattering and dissolution, a deterioration of the selfhood-of—self. Or as Fynsk (2002) puts it: “The question bears most immediately on the enigma of a self that cannot properly be located anywhere in the body, and yet cannot be apart from one” (p. 30). Laplanche’s (1999) “enigma” is enfleshed in the very heart transplant of what Laplanche (1999) calls—in another context—an “implantation” of a “foreign body” within (p. 136). In his very flesh, in the very sense of this body, Nancy performs the double-movement of being-there and not-being-there *with* the stranger within (the heart that is not his—and yet now it is his own).

Christopher Watkin (2007) writes of a “Different Alterity” (p. 50) and, indeed, this “different alterity” is not felt in the abstract, but in the flesh. And yet, Watkin (2007) claims that “It is not the question of alterity that preoccupies Nancy” (p. 53). But isn’t it? Rudolph Gasche (2017) states that for Nancy the question *does* concern alterity. In fact, Gasche (2017) states that for Nancy—in the context of Nancy’s other writings— “Rather than resting in its self-presence, this strange subject is exposed to an otherness to such a degree that it itself is other to it self” (p. 8). Between this floating sense of detachment of being-there and not-being there, of being in the body and not being in the body simultaneously Nancy works alterity in-the-flesh at the very heart of himself (as his own heart is removed while another’s is transplanted within). Whose heart? Whose self with another heart within? The very heart of a relation of non-relation is built in the heart transplant itself.

Whose heart was given to Nancy? Who is Nancy afterwards? Is he still himself, or is he himself-in-another, or another-within-himself? The body’s confusion—as one heart is exchanged with another—is the heart of dissociation. The relation of non-relation, the living to the dead, the one who has given the gift of the heart is the relation of non-relation with one who is dead. Thus, relation is at the very heart of Nancy’s heart transplant. And yet the relation is a non-relation because the Other whose heart has been given is the gift of life-in-death. One lives while the Other dies. But the one who lives can only live if the Other dies. This is the relation of non-relation and relation-with the stranger who is no more. Jean Laplanche (1999) suggests that an “implantation” (p. 136)—whether one thinks of this literally or figuratively as the “enigmatic message” of the unconscious (or emanating from the heart of the Other)—is always-already subject to what Laplanche calls “intromission” (p. 136). Whether thought of an intrusive introjection or the psychic fallout after a heart transplant— “intromission” serves to “short-circuit” that “foreign body that cannot be metabolized” (p. 136). Nancy’s “polymorphous dissociation” his “slackening, floating strangeness” and Fynsk’s (2002) statement “Where is Jean-Luc?” (p. 26) is what Laplanche (1999) calls the “short-circuit” (p. 136), this psychic fallout from the “implantation” (p. 136) and “intromission that cannot be metabolized” (p. 136) psychically because of the heart transplant.

In the French intellectual tradition the notion of the stranger—the Other— can be found in such writers as Baudelaire, Camus, Derrida, Jean-Laplanche, Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, to name but a few. But in the context of Nancy’s work— the meaning of the stranger becomes even stranger. In Nancy’s case, the Other within is *literally* someone else’s heart that is transplanted in his body. Nancy (2002b) says “One emerges from this adventure lost” (p. 11). For Nancy, the Other within, is the Other of the Other who is now dead. There is no other kind of alterity as strange as the one Nancy attempts to articulate. Nancy (2006) remarks that “sense

does not entail that something is signified; rather, it entails the difficulty of saying” (p. 29). The sense of sense has little to do with that which is said. That language represents something—or anything—is thrown into question. Should language represent—or signify—something or anything? Perhaps not.

The “difficulty of saying” (p. 29)—as Nancy (2006) puts it—is that which exceeds what can be said. That which is difficult to say inheres in the excess that is the Other of Otherness. The “difficulty of saying” is even beyond the notion of alterity. Nancy pushes the boundaries of thought to the edges. Nancy (1997) writes about the importance of finding one’s footing in what he calls “oriented displacement” (p.12). Another word for “displacement” is disruption. Displacement, disruption, intrusion, invasion—the stranger within, is the very heart of the matter—for Nancy. Can readers find footing reading Nancy at all? This is the very challenge that Nancy poses. Psychoanalytically, finding one’s footing—or not—in-the-midst-of-trauma becomes the imperative to—as Derrida might say—live-on. In fact, in-the-midst-of-trauma—one is both unmoored while living-on, as Derrida would put it.

Some claim that without a sense of death, we would not get anything done There would be little urgency toward the work-at-hand. Death is not a consolation—in this sense— but it is a reality that needs to be incorporated into our lives. In a sense, the very possibility of death—especially if one is living on the edge of serious illness— shatters lived-experience. It is at the juncture of this shattering that one finds purpose; it is at the juncture of this shattering that Nancy wrote beyond what language can say. That the shattering of the self is the site where one find’s one’s work—is the strange paradox living on the edge of life-and—death. Shattering the self (through the realization that there is no consolation in death) is indeed heartbreaking. But as anthropologist Ruth Behar (1997) once noted: the only work worth doing is the work that breaks your heart. Indeed, our hearts are broken with the recent death of Jean-Luc Nancy who has contributed invaluable work to philosophy, psychoanalysis, the arts, literary studies and poetry. Nancy lived on the edge of death, *working* the edge of language, *working* the aporia of the sense of sense. It is with heart that I write these words, that I pen this essay as a testimony to the life and work of Jean-Luc Nancy.

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Footnotes

¹ The word *corpus* is a play on a title of one of Nancy's (2016) books titled *Ego Sum: Corpus, Anima, Fabula*. NY: Fordham University Press.

² Jean-Luc Nancy died in August of 2021. Nancy was due to teach a seminar titled *In the Name of the Father* beginning in late August at the European Graduate School. However, Nancy died before the seminar began. The seminar at the European Graduate School that Nancy was to teach was taken up by Christopher Fynsk, Dean of the European Graduate School after Nancy's death.

³ Nancy writes about the word musings in two texts. See for example, Nancy (1996). *The Muses*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press and Nancy (2006). *Multiple Arts. Muses II*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. An over-arching point Nancy makes is to point out that muse is not singular, rather muses is singular plural. There are, in other words, multiple muses in the arts (i.e. poetry, painting, music) but they each have unique singularities.