Jean-Luc Nancy (1940–), born in Caudéan, near Bordeaux in France, is a prolific French poststructuralist philosopher of the last half century. Nancy studied at lycées in Baden-Baden and Bergerac. He achieved his licence de philosophie in the subject of philosophy from the Sorbonne in Paris in 1962. He completed his diplôme d’études supérieure des philosophie in 1963 and agrégation in 1964. At the Sorbonne, Nancy studied with Georges Canguilhem (1904–95) and Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005). Ricoeur supervised his thesis on Hegel’s philosophy of religion. After graduating from the Sorbonne, Nancy first taught for a short period in Colmar and then became an assistant at the Institut de philosophie in Strasbourg in 1968. Under the supervision of Ricouer, he obtained his doctorate in 1973 by writing a thesis on Kant’s analogical discourse. He was given the position of the maître de conférences at the Université des sciences humaines in Strasbourg where he lived and taught for twenty years until his retirement in 2002. He intended to complete a doctorate in theology there, but in the end he wrote on Kant. Under the supervision of Gérard Granel (1930–2000), Nancy achieved his Doctorate d’État at the Université de Toulouse in 1987 by writing a dissertation on the problem of the experience of freedom in Kant, Schelling, Hegel,
Heidegger and Sartre which was published as *L’expérience de la liberté* (1988).

Derrida and Lyotard were on the examining committee of his Doctorate. According to Nancy’s non-subjective notion of freedom, freedom lies in one’s being thrown into the world and into existence. Coexistence in the world is the condition of free existence and not a limitation imposed upon it. Nancy was a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Strasbourg and a Visiting Professor at the Freie Universität Berlin, the University of California, Irvine and the University of California, Berkeley. He was also involved as a philosophy professor in the cultural delegations of the French ministry of external affairs. Nancy was the fellow traveler of Derrida and Derrida himself considered Nancy a ‘postdeconstructionist’, which is an acknowledgement of the originality of Nancy’s work. Unlike other French philosophers, Nancy did neither become a member of elite Parisian educational institutions like the École normale supérieure, nor participate directly in the event of May 1968. He had less impact on contemporary philosophy as he always remained on the margins, but this marginal position gave him greater freedom. He teaches presently at the University of Strasbourg and is George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel Chair and Professor of Philosophy at The European Graduate School (EGS).

The philosophy of Nancy emerges in the wake of the twentieth century French reception of the thought of Nietzsche and Heidegger, a reception also known with respect to figures like Blanchot, Bataille, Deleuze and Derrida. His philosophy is

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influenced by Bataille, Blanchot, Descartes, Hegel, Kant, Nietzsche and Heidegger. His main philosophical topics are: the question of community, the nature of the political, German Romanticism, psychoanalysis, literature, technology and hermeneutics. He has introduced into philosophy important concepts like singularity and plurality, existence, world, creation, finitude, freedom, sharing and sense. Nancy has composed a number of books on the German Romantic tradition in philosophy and his philosophical thought communicates a view that the withdrawal of sense or the loss of transcendental meaning is the contemporary condition of humanity.

Nancy’s philosophical career can be divided into some distinct phases. During the first phase of 1960s, Nancy was politically committed. The association with the French nonconformist Left inflected much of his thinking in relation to politics, community and globalization. Nancy’s work is situated in deconstructive thought from the 1960s onward which undermines the metaphysical notions of presence or the transcendental sense and tries to rethink the disjunctive relation of presence to itself. He is critical of the exercise of sublation (Aufhebung) which appropriates or idealizes the materiality or naked existence of being, and thus, thinks of the transcendence of immanence. In his insistence on the relation between thought and mind, Nancy’s work becomes poststructuralist. Though Nancy’s philosophy is critical of transcendental ideals, his philosophy is one of generosity and charity. His first published work of the 1970s

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2 The intellectual context of the 1960s saw the rise of thinkers like Foucault and Derrida.

3 The books published by Nancy during the 1970s include *La remarque spéculative:* *(Un bon mot de Hegel)* (1973), translated as *The Speculative Remark: (One of Hegel’s Bon Mots)* (2001); *Le titre de la lettre* (1973), translated as *The Title of the Letter: A Reading of Lacan* (1992); *Le discours de la syncope* (1976), translated as *The Discourse
includes important close readings of key modern philosophers such as Descartes, Hegel and Kant. He develops the critiques of German Romanticism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and philosophical subjectivity during this phase. He makes collaborations with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe\textsuperscript{11} and his intellectual development is greatly influenced by Derrida’s philosophy of deconstruction\textsuperscript{12}. Nancy had close relationship with Derrida in terms of friendship and continued dialogue with him until his death in 2004\textsuperscript{13}. In his interview with Sergio Benvenuto, Nancy expressed that Derrida “got stirred up (il s’affolait) about everything; he continually brushed up against madness (folie) in always testing the infinite fragility of traditional assurances (culture, knowledge, thought)”\textsuperscript{14}. Through Derrida, he understood the irreversible turn in philosophy taken by philosophers like Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Bataille and Freud: “Suddenly, there was for me a new way of thinking at work in the century, in the concrete and living of the world of 1960 (or 1962, to be precise: the end of the war in Algeria, the beginning of a new history, and even of an afterword history…).)

Philosophy suddenly found, for me, the actuality of its movement, of its act and gesture\textsuperscript{15}.” In 1980, Nancy and Labarthe organized in Cérisy-la-Salle the famous


\textsuperscript{11} In collaboration with his colleague in the University of Strasbourg Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy has also written books in 1970s such as \textit{Le titre de la lettre} (1973), translated as \textit{The Title of the Letter: A Reading of Lacan} (1992) and \textit{L’Absolu Litteraire: Théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemande} (1978), translated as \textit{The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism} (1988).

\textsuperscript{12} The \textit{Title of the Letter: A Reading of Lacan} (1992) is a deconstructive reading of Lacan’s essay “L’instance de la lettre dans l’inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud (1957)”, translated by A. Sheridan as “The Agency of the letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud (1977)” which was presented as a lecture at the Sorbonne on May 9, 1957.

\textsuperscript{13} Nancy paid a tribute to Derrida which was entitled “Salut à toi, salut aux aveugles que nous devenons” and published in \textit{Liberation} on October 11, 2004. The text was published in English translation as “Salut to you, salut to the blind we become” in \textit{Corpus}. Trans. Richard A. Rand. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008[2000]: 313–314.


\textsuperscript{15} “On Derrida: A Conversation of Sergio Benvenuto with Jean-Luc Nancy”. Nancy also talks about his relationship with Derrida in another interview conducted by Lorenzo Fabbri published as “Philosophy as Chance: An Interview
conference on Derrida and politics called *Les fins de l’homme* which not only helped establish Derrida as one of the foremost figures of contemporary philosophy but also inaugurate for them an in-depth discussion of contemporary politics as well as articulate the philosophical questioning of the political. Following Derrida’s suggestion, Nancy and Labarthe founded the Centre de recherché philosophiques sur le politique in 1982 with an aim to open a space to advance the question of the political dimension and implications of deconstruction which arose during the Cérisy-Colloquium on Derrida. They recognized the complete domination of politics and economy in contemporary society and sought retreat from this domination through opening a space from where the essence of the political outside of the terms of contemporary political categories can be questioned. For this, they extended the definition of totalitarianism to include both Marxism and liberal democracies as forms of totalitarianism. The Center produced two major philosophical works out of this engagement: *Rejouer le politique* (1981) and *Le retrait de politique* (1983). The Center was closed down in 1984, four years after its opening, for its dissociation from research and philosophical questioning, broad understanding of totalitarianism and its separation of politics from the political. Nancy’s early work revolves around two interrelated problems: one, the question of the exposition of philosophical thought (which leads to the question of literature), and second, the subject of philosophy. In the late 1980s, when Nancy was in his forties and at the height of intellectual


14 “The Ends of Man”

15 “The Center for Philosophical Research on/of the Political”

16 Claude Lefort and Lyotard etc. were invited to deliver lectures on the topic of the political at the Center.

17 Nancy’s also engages with the notion of democracy in *Vérité de la démocratie* (2008), translated as *The Truth of Democracy* (2010).

18 The important papers of these two books are collected, translated and published in *Retreating the Political*. Ed. Simon Sparks. New York: Routledge, 1997.
production, he suffered several health problems. His heart began failing in 1990 and the doctors suggested heart transplant. When the medical operation for it had emerged only two decades before, Nancy underwent heart transplant. Though Nancy had lengthy struggle with the trauma of the heart transplant and cancer which made him withdraw from academics, he carried on the task of writing. Nancy gave a touching account of his heart transplant operation in his book *Lintrus* (2000), translated as “The Intruder” in *Corpus*[^21^] which was made into a film of the same name by Claire Denis in 2004. Derrida also talked about Nancy’s heart transplant in his book *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*[^22^] (2000). The tendency toward commentary, evident during 1960s, is displaced in his writing of the 1980s and early 1990s in favor of more ambitious and wide-ranging works. His more mature work of the 1980s, 1990s and early twenty first century offers a radical reformulation of Heideggerian ontology in the context of which he publishes a number of important works. These philosophical texts engage with a range of major philosophical questions: community, the nature of the political, freedom, embodiment, and shared worldly existence. Initial responses to Nancy’s philosophy in the 1980s and 1990s focused on the political dimension of his work, and suggested that Nancy’s work is primarily concerned to develop the philosophical critiques of political concepts such as community, freedom and humanity. This recent phase of Nancy shows his widespread interest in the political dimension of deconstructive or poststructuralist thought and addresses our contemporary social and political condition. The demand to think the political condition of the present and the last centuries leads Nancy to address the important


idea of community which is predominant in modern thinking. Nancy comments on
the philosophical thought of Bataille and proposes the term community to designate
the inherent exposure of man to the other. In the years since his heart transplant in
1990, Nancy’s focus has shifted away from commentaries on other thinkers towards
the development of a philosophy of his own, a philosophy guided by the conviction
that philosophical systems are impossible. During this phase, Nancy has produced his
most important works: *La Communaute desoeuvree* (1986), translated as *The
Inoperative Community* (1991); *Être singulier pluriel* (1996), translated as *Being
Singular Plural* (2000), and *La Creation du monde; ou, La Mondialisation* (2002),

At the end of 1990s, Nancy also explores the inner structure of monotheism,
and the legacy of Christianity within Western culture and thought, a project which has
come to be known as the “deconstruction of Christianity.” The two volumes of *The
Deconstruction of Christianity* carried this enterprise: *La Déclosion: Déconstruction
du christianisme* 1 (2005), translated as *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of
Christianity*24 (2008) and *L’Adoration: Déconstruction du christianisme* 2 (2010),
translated as *Adoration: The Deconstruction of Christianity II*25 (2013). This project
engages with a broad range of questions relating to the fate of Western cultural values
at the beginning of the twenty first century. His thesis is that Christianity and
monotheism in general carries within it the logic of its own self-overcoming. This
destabilizes seriously the received notions of the theological and the secular, of theism
and atheism. Nancy conjoins monotheism, atheism and nihilism in order to free up the
thinking of the divine as the opening of the world. The program of deconstruction of

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23 Nancy’s early books *La communauté desoeuvrée* (1986), translated as *The Inoperative Community* (1991) and
*Corpus* (1992), translated as *Corpus* (2008) had dealt with the concept of community.
Christianity which makes possible the ontology of the singular plural of the world is not only an important contribution to continental philosophy but also to contemporary world. His philosophical critiques are consistent with Derrida’s project of deconstruction and their principal purpose is the identification of an ontologically ‘pure’ form of political concepts, freed from their contamination by the philosophically suspect interests of party and ideology. However, purity is impossible in Nancy’s view because unity is impossible. Ontology is only a matter of fragments whose relation to one another is at best uncertain. Nancy’s early texts *Corpus* (1992); *Visitation: de la peinture chrétienne* (2000), translated as “Visitation: Of Christian Painting”26; and *Noli me tangere: Essai sur la levée du corps* (2003), translated as *Noli Me Tangere: On the Raising of the Body*27 (2008) explore the major scenes of Christianity. In his late writing about art and thinking about the deconstruction of Christianity, Nancy shifts away from the Heideggerian language of finitude and finite existence toward a language of infinity and the infinitude of bodily sense experience.

For Nancy, literature marked the most important art in the 1970s and 1980s, but since the mid-1990s Nancy’s work has increasingly focused on questions relating to art and aesthetics. He has written books which treat the question of art and artistic presentation in more general terms. In the 1990s and 2000s, Nancy’s interests have also expanded to painting, cinema, music, theatre, dance, installation, lithography and photography and composed notable works in collaborations with eminent artists like Mathilde Monnier, Claudio Parmiggiani, François Martin and Bernard Moninot. Like Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe and Sarah Kofman, Nancy attaches greater importance to literature (for example, in addressing the particularity of poetry) than the visual arts

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like painting and film. Literature allows an exposure of meaning to existence and of existence to meaning. He also addresses the relation of literature to philosophy through espousing the becoming-theory of literature. Recently there has been a new development of interest about Nancy’s thinking on art and aesthetics which will be explored in this chapter examining his preoccupation with the Holocaust. His philosophy of sense has opened the way for a contemporary and future reconsideration of the referential function of literature and art as well as for a rethinking of the status of the artistic image, specifically in relation to the visual arts and the film.

NANCY AND THE HOLOCAUST


*L’Absolu Litteraire: Théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemande* (1978), translated as *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* 28 (1988) and written by Nancy in collaboration with Lacoue-Labarthe, is the first authoritative study of the emergence of the modern concept of literature in German Romanticism. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe trace this concept from the

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philosophical crisis bequeathed by Kant to his successors, to its development by the
central figures of the Athenaeum group: the Schlegel brothers, Schelling and Novalis.
They situate the Jena “fragmentary” model of literature, a model of literature as the
production of its own theory, in relation to the development of a post-Kantian
conception of philosophy as the total and reflective auto-production of the thinking
subject. Analyzing the key texts of the period, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe articulate
the characteristics of romantic thought and at the same time show historical and
systematic connections with modern literary theory. Thus, The Literary Absolute
shows the romantic origins of some of the leading issues in current critical theory.

The Inoperative Community²⁹ (1991) is a collection of five essays originally
published in French in 1985 and 1986. The first three chapters “The Inoperative
Community,” “Myth Interrupted” and “Literary Communism” were published as La
Communaute desoeuvree (1986); the fourth chapter “Shattered Love” was published
as “L’amour en éclats” in Aléa (1986) and the fifth and final chapter “Of Divine
Places” was published as “Des lieux divins” in Qu’est-ce que Dieu?

Philosophie/Théologie. Hommage à l’abbe Daniel Coppeters de Gibson (1929–1983)
in 1985. They are translated and published in a single volume as The Inoperative
Community in 1991. In these five essays, Nancy examines community as an idea that
has dominated modern thought and traces its relation to concepts of experience,
discourse, and the individual. Contrary to popular Western notions of community,
Nancy shows that it is neither a project of fusion nor production. He argues that
community can be defined through the political nature of its resistance against
immanent power. Nancy also engages philosophically with the role of myth in the

establishment of community and the role of remythization today. In addition, he continues a discussion with Blanchot and Bataille.

“Le mythe nazi,” published first in English in collaboration with Lacoue-Labarthe as “The Nazi Myth” (1990), is a nuanced investigation of the psychic origins of totalitarianism. It returns to the concept of Freudian identification in order to establish it as a major political and psychoanalytic concept which needs to be reconsidered in the post-Holocaust. In the studies of totalitarianism from Third Reich to Moscovici, there is a Freudian readiness to associate one of twentieth century Europe’s foremost political crises, i.e. fascism, with one of twentieth century Europe’s foremost intellectual movements, i.e. psychoanalysis. In “The Nazi Myth,” Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe raise the question of traditional associations between fascism and psychoanalysis in order to demonstrate the complexities that arise when fascism and psychoanalysis are implicated with one another. Their response to the possibility of an inherently fascist psychoanalysis is to factor into this association the specificity of Jewish identity by implying that the phenomenon of identification is a psychic response experienced only by the Gentiles within Jewish experience. Nancy’s primary interest in forging a ‘return to Freud’ via identification is the question of the fate of the Jew within the German Gentile psychic organization of the social bond between the masses and their leader. In response to the problematic question ‘Is psychoanalysis a Jewish science?’ Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe seem to pose the question ‘Is psychoanalysis an inherently Gentile fascism?’ They revisit the connection between the psychosocial bond (Bindung) and fascism by emphasizing on the racial fixations of Nazi ideology as an Aryan myth necessarily constructed on the exclusion of the Jew.

Both argue that German totalitarianism encouraged “identificatory mechanisms” to configure itself as a myth: “it is in the German tradition, and nowhere else, that the most rigorous reflection on the relationship of myth to the question of identification is elaborated.” The result of the psychic phenomenon of Germany’s mimetic identification with Greece (Bindung) is myth as “the mimetic instrument par excellence”. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe discuss how for German National Socialism it was only a small but sinister step to link the formation of myth with race, by citing scandalous works such as Alfred Rosenberg’s *Myth of the Twentieth Century* (1936) where race, as the bearer of myth, is celebrated for its power to consolidate individuals into a group identity. Their argument drives to the point that myth is a cultural and psychic formation which is explicitly non-Jewish. Nazism evolved into a racial ideology due to the overemphasis on the idea of “type”, by Rosenberg and the likes, as “an absolute, concrete, singular identity”, as “the fulfillment of the myth itself”. For Rosenberg, Jew is an “antitype” and by definition excluded from participation in mimetic identifications such as myth. The perverse racial logic of German National Socialism, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe state, is that any process of identification is not only inherently psychic and inherently totalitarian, but also inherently outside of Jewish experience.


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32 Pp.296-97  
33 p.298  
34 p.307  
Nancy and Aesthetics

Following Nancy’s critique of Nazism, the present section examines Nancy’s thinking about art and aesthetics. Nancy’s discourse on art remains in a “constant and problematic proximity” to the great modern philosophical statements on art. Nancy takes first Hegel’s definition of art as “the sensuous presentation of the Idea” as his point of departure. According to Nancy, Hegel and Heidegger do not pay attention to the materiality of the artwork. Materiality, as an important part of artwork, is put at service of another instance: Idea or Truth. Hegel affirms the plurality of arts only to produce a classification and hierarchization of various types of arts, while Heidegger affirms that there is at bottom only one art, Dichtung. Nancy stresses the irreducible materiality and plurality of art in contrast to Hegel’s and Heidegger’s understanding of art which misses the material, sensuous aspect and plurality of art by subordinating it to a single higher principle. He tries to conceive the work of art in itself and beyond the simple account of its production or reception. The traditional discourses in their attempts to grasp art from the perspective of creation (poesis, genius) or reception (judgment, critique) leave out the birth or shock, the coming to presence of the image. According to Nancy, only when art is liberated from its function/vocation as the sensible/sensuous presentation of the Idea (Hegel) or the manifestation of Truth (Dichtung in Heidegger), each work of art, each color, each sound becomes a singular material burst of sense. Art becomes essentially fragmented. Nancy’s non-representational and non-metaphysical understanding of the work of art helps read better the artistic texts. For example, when Nancy writes on Caravaggio’s painting Death of the Virgin or François Martin’s Semainier, he not only provides a theory of painting in general but also gives an interpretation of a painting in particular. Nancy’s
writings on art are not theoretical discourses about art which turn artworks into concepts or ideas. They touch the materiality of artwork and encounter the artwork in its singularity. Art dissolves into a plurality of singularities: art forms, artworks, materials and techniques. The periodization of Nancy’s engagement with art is problematic, yet it can be divided into four categories 36. (a) The discussions of the essence of art in light of Hegel’s and Heidegger’s aesthetics and of the death of art in the postmodern world 37. (b) The discussions of specific art forms: poetry, painting, portrait, music and drawing 38. (c) Works on various artists: contemporary painters like On Kawara 39 and Jean-Michel Atlan 40 and the filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami 41. (d) Works on dance performance, theatre, installation, lithography and photography written in collaboration with artists like Mathilde Monnier 42, Claudio Parmiggiani, François Martin and Bernard Moninot. The first and second engagements were prominent in 1990s and early 2000s, while the third and fourth are frequent. Keeping this categorization in mind, the philosophy of art espoused by Nancy in following major works is studied here: L’Absolu Litteraire: Théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemande (1978), translated and published in collaboration with Lacoue-Labarthe as The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism (1988); Le sens du Monde (1993), translated as The Sense of the World (1997); Les

37 In works such as Les Muses (1994), translated as The Muses (1996)
40 Atlan: Les détrempes (2010)
42 Dehors la danse (2001) and Allitérations (2005)

L’Absolu Litteraire: Théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemande, translated as The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism (1988)\(^4\) and published by Nancy in collaboration with Lacoue-Labarthe, is the first authoritative study of the emergence of the modern concept of literature in German Romanticism. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe trace this concept from the philosophical crisis bequeathed by Kant to his successors, to its development by the central figures of the Athenaeum group: the Schlegel brothers, Schelling and Novalis. The study situates the Jena “fragmentary” model of literature, a model of literature as the production of its own theory, in relation to the development of a post-Kantian conception of philosophy as the total and reflective auto-production of the thinking subject. Analyzing the key texts of the period, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe articulate the characteristics of romantic thought and at the same time show historical and systematic connections with modern literary theory. Thus, The Literary Absolute renews contemporary scholarship, showing the romantic origins of some of the leading issues in current critical theory.

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\(^4\) See footnote 28.
"Le sens du Monde" (1993), translated and published as *The Sense of the World* (1997), is an essential exploration of sense and meaning and acknowledges the contemporary crisis or lack of meaning in our time, and the lack of a world at the centre of meanings we try to impose, Nancy presents a rigorous critique of the many discourses, but especially the discourse of art history, which talks and writes its way around the gaping absences in our lives. He also offers fragmentary readings of writers such as Nietzsche, Hegel, Marx, Levinas, Lacan, Derrida and Deleuze as their work reflects his own concern with sense and the world. The question of sense informs our understanding of the world. Nancy argues that “sense” and “world” in our situation, in which traditional notions of sense have been devalued, must be seen as between “myth” and “nihilism”, i.e. between spurious returns to some absolute and a yielding to the abyss of nothingness. What that new “trasimmanent” sense of the world must be is argued nicely in a section on art. The reworking of existential phenomenology into an ontology of finite sense which affirms the non-totalizable singular plurality of shared worldly existence is Nancy’s most significant contribution to contemporary French philosophy. He openly deconstructs and reformulates Heidegger’s thinking of being and builds upon and transforms Merleau-Ponty’s late ontology of flesh. According to Nancy, sense needs to be viewed as a fundamental order of meaning which underpins and makes possible our apprehension of the world in the first instance: sense is the sense of existence which is or makes sense, without which sense would not exist. The fundamental ontological and existential status of sense in Nancy’s thinking places it in excess of abstract conceptuality, of language, or of any relation of signifier to signified. Sense is that which bodily existence has always already engaged in order to experience an intelligible spatial or worldly environment.

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Importantly, sense is that shared horizon against which the experience of a meaningful world is experienced in common with others. Nancy’s ontology of sense is one in which the relation to others is always shared in a fragmented multiplicity of bodies, or it exists only in a singular-plural bodily spacing of sense. Nancy’s thinking about community, embodiment, aesthetics and politics is all related to his philosophy of sense as it develops throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

*Les Muses* (1994), translated and published as *The Muses*\(^{45}\) (1996), begins with an essay that introduces the principal concern sustained in the four succeeding ones: Why are there several arts and not just one? This question focuses on the point of maximal tension between the philosophical tradition and contemporary thinking about the arts, the relation between the plurality of the human senses (to which the plurality of the arts has most frequently been referred) and sense or meaning in general. Throughout the five essays, Nancy’s argument hinges on the culminating formulation of this relation in Hegel’s *Aesthetics* and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* about art as the sensible presentation of the Idea. Demonstrating once again his renowned ability as a reader of Hegel, Nancy scrupulously and generously restores Hegel’s historical argument concerning art as a thing of the past, as that which is negated by the dialectic of Spirit in the passage from aesthetic religion to revealed religion to philosophy.

*Au fond des images*, a collection of essays on images and visual art, originally published in French during 1999-2004 and translated as *The Ground of the Image*\(^{46}\) (2005), argues that the images are marked by deep ambivalence and though denounced as superficial, illusory and groundless, the images are at the same time


\(^{46}\) See footnote 32.
attributed with exorbitant power and assigned a privileged relation to truth. The images are also mistrusted by philosophy, forbidden and embraced by religions, manipulated as spectacle and proliferated in the media, but they never cease to present their multiple aspects, paradoxes and receding spaces. Nancy explores the questions about images through an extraordinary range of references: What is the that lies in the depths and recesses of an image which is always only an impenetrable surface? What secrets are concealed in the ground or in the figures of an image which never does anything but show just exactly what it is and nothing else? How does the immanence of images open onto their unimaginable others, their imageless origin? From Renaissance painting and landscape to photography and video, from the image of Roman death masks to the language of silent film, from Cleopatra to Kant and Heidegger, Nancy pursues a reflection on visuality that goes beyond the many disciplines with which it intersects. He treats such vexed problems such as the connection between image and violence, the sacred status of images, and in a profound and important essay, the forbidden representation of the Shoah. In the background of all these images lies a preoccupation with the finitude, the unsettling forces envisaged by the images that confront us, the limits that bind us to them, the death that stares back at us from their frozen traits and distant intimacies. In these rigorous and complex essays, Nancy as a central figure in continental philosophy continues to work through some of the most important questions of our time.

Multiple Arts: The Muses II\(^7\) (2006), a collection of Nancy’s writings on art, delves into the history of philosophy to locate a fundamentally poetic modus operandi there. It represents a daring mixture of Nancy’s philosophical essays, writings about artworks, and artwork of his own. With theoretical rigor, Nancy elaborates on the

intrinsic multiplicity of art as a concept of “making,” and outlines the tensions inherent in the faire, the “making” that characterizes the very process of production and thereby the structure of poetry in all its forms. Nancy shows that this multiplication that belongs to the notion of art makes very single work communicate with every other, all material in the artwork appeal to some other material, and art the singular plural of a praxis of the finite imparting of an infinity which is actually there in every utterance. In the collection, Nancy engages with the work of Francois Martin, Maurice Blanchot and On Kawara, among others.


*Noli me tangere: Essai sur la levée du corps* (2003), translated and published in English as *Noli me tangere: On the Raising of the Body*49 (2008), is a collection of Nancy’s writing on Christianity and religion, especially Christian parables which share with the much of modern literature. It is also the best example of his writings on art. The book analyzes *Noli me tangere* paintings by such remarkable painters as Rembrandt, Drer, Titian, Pontormo, Bronzino and Correggio. It is in tacit dialogue with Derrida’s great tribute to Nancy’s work in *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy* (On Touching Jean-Luc Nancy). The title essay focused on this charged encounter between Christ and Magdalene, is a bold reading of the Bible, and a valuable contribution to Nancy’s project of deconstruction of Christianity. The scene in the Gospel of John in which the newly risen Christ enjoins Mary Magdalene, *Noli me tangere*, a key moment in the general parable made up of his life, is a good example of this sudden appearance

in which a vanishing plays itself out. Resurrected, he speaks, makes an appeal, and leaves. *Do not touch me.* Beyond the Christ story, this everyday phrase says something important about touching in general. It points to the place where touching must not touch in order to carry out its touch.

*Le Plaisir au dessin* \(^{50}\) (2009), translated and published in English as *The Pleasure in Drawing* \(^{51}\) (2013), addresses the medium of drawing in light of the question of form, of form in its formation, as a formative force, as a birth of form. In this sense, drawing opens less toward its achievement, intention, and accomplishment than toward a finality without its end and the infinite renewal of ends, toward lines of sense marked by tracings, suspensions, and permanent interruptions. Recalling that drawing and design were once used interchangeably, Nancy notes that “drawing” designates a design that remains without project, plan, or intention. His argument offers a way of rethinking a number of historical terms (sketch, draft, outline, plan, mark, notation), which includes rethinking drawing in its graphic, filmic, choreographic, poetic, melodic and rhythmic sense. If drawing is not reducible to any form of closure, it never resolves a tension specific to drawing but allows the pleasure of drawing to come into appearance, which is also the pleasure in drawing, the gesture of a desire that remains in excess of all knowledge. Situating drawing in these terms, Nancy engages a number of texts in which Freud addresses the force of desire in the rapport between aesthetic and sexual pleasure, texts that form also turn around the same questions concerning form in its formation, form as a formative force. Between the sections of the text, Nancy has placed a series of “sketchbooks” on drawing,

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\(^{50}\) Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2009.

composed of a broad range of quotations on art from different writers, artists or philosophers.

In *Nus sommes: La peau des images*[^52] (2006), translated from the French into English by as *Being Nude: The Skin of Images*[^53] (2014), Jean Luc-Nancy and Federico Ferrari encounter the nude as an opportunity for thinking in a way that is stripped bare of all received meanings and preconceived forms. In the course of engagements with twenty-six separate images, they show how the nudes produced by the painters and photographers expose this bareness of thought and leave us naked on the verge of a sense that is always nascent, always fleeting, on the surface of the skin, on the surface of the image. While the nude is a symbol of truth in philosophy and art alike, what the nude definitively and uniquely reveals is unclear. The authors argue that the nude is always presented as both vulnerable in its exposure and shy of conceptualization, giving a sense of the ultimate ineffability of the meaning of being. Although the nude represents the revealed nature of truth, nude figures hold a part of themselves back, keeping in reserve the reality of their history, parts of their present selves, and also their future possibilities for change, development and demise. Skin itself is a type of clothing, and stripping away exterior layers of fabric does not necessarily lead to grasping the truth. In this way, the difference between being clothed and being nude is diminished. The images that inspire Nancy and Ferrari to contemplate the nudity of being show many ways in which one can and cannot be nude, and many ways of being in relation to oneself and to others, clothed and unclothed.

Nancy’s most interesting works are written in direct collaboration with the artists to accompany a dance performance, an installation, lithographies, etc. Instead taking the work of art as an object of study in order to produce an interpretation of it, Nancy thinks with the artist and the artist also creates the work with the thinker so that thought is a response to the work and the work is a response to thought. The first collaboration Nancy did with the choreographer and dancer Mathilde Monnier out of which two works were produced: *Dehors la danse* (2001) and *Allitérations: Conversations sur la danse* (2005). They also presented a dance conference called *Allitérations* in 2002 wherein Nancy read a text to accompany the movement of bodies. Nancy wrote texts in accompaniment with the photographs of Jacques Damez, Anne-Lise Broyer and Anne Immele; the installations of Claudio Parmiggiani and the works of visual artist François Martin. He also wrote poetic commentaries on each of the poems of Virginie Lalucq’s (1975–) serial poem *Fortino Sámano* (2004) and poems to accompany the lithographs of Bernard Moninot. He

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54 Monnier is the head of the Centre National Chorégraphique of Montpellier since 1994.
56 Paris: Galilée, 2005. (“Alliterations: Conversations on Dance”) *Allitérations* was a creative and critical project made over a number of years and consists of a publication and a performance. It is partially translated by Noémie Solomon in Chapter 43 of *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012)
57 *Lombée des nues* (Marval, 2007)
directed in collaboration with Federico Ferrari a montage by adapting the cornerstone of German literature Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust, Part One* for the show staged premiere by the Italian artist Claudio Parmiggiani at the Teatro Metastasio Stabile della Toscana in Prato (Italy) on May 26, 2004.

**Conclusion**

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64 The project was translated into Italian by Franco Fortini. The booklet of the show was published in Italian by the Ori editors as *Faust by JW Goethe* (The Ori, 2004) which contains, among others, an entire dramatic text and an introduction by Nancy.