

# Nancy and Hegel: Philosophies of Community, Singularity and Relational Being

Leda Richarda Walnut Channer

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
the Manchester Metropolitan University for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of History, Politics and Philosophy  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
2017

# Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Donal Channer, 1949 – 2015.

There are many people without whom this thesis would never have been begun, been endured or been completed. I may have been the singular who wrote it but it was made possible by what became for me a community of support.

My Director of Studies Keith Crome, who took up the post at the eleventh hour, has truly been the saviour of this thesis. The saintly Deborah Bown, research administrator and problem solver extraordinaire, has gone above and beyond as she does every day for many students. My annual reviews with Kate Mc Gowan have been invaluable and restorative.

There are various students who undertook the Ph.D. journey with me at MMU and the support and camaraderie of Eileen Pollard, Jon Greenaway, Caroline Bayliss-Green and the other toilers in room 117 has been much appreciated. Special thanks must go to Martin Kratz, fellow Nancy wrangler and coffee addict.

I would also like to thank the organisers of various conferences who allowed me to present knotty parts of the thesis and untangle them in public:

- *being/intimate/political: Jean Luc Nancy* at the University of Athens, Greece (*Institut français de Grèce*, in association with *Université Bordeaux Montaigne* (EA Telem), March 2015.
- *The Society for European Philosophy and The Forum for European Philosophy Joint Conference* at Utrecht University, Netherlands, September 2014.
- *The London Conference in Critical Thought*, at Royal Holloway University of London, June 2013 for whom I also co-organised a stream of three panels of papers on the thought of Nancy.

I also could not have completed this thesis without the support of my friends and family and I'll be forever sad that my beloved Dad won't be here to see the thing completed, so excited and proud was he to see it started.

The final but probably greatest thanks go to my wife, Nicole Leferink, whose support and encouragement throughout this whole process has been unwavering, marrying her half way through it all was the best thing I've ever done. *Dank je wel mijn vrouw!*

# Abstract

This thesis will develop the claim made by Nancy in the essay “Shattered Love” that it is possible to read Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, for the expositions they offer on relational being, *despite*, for Nancy, their dialectical structure. I will argue that for Nancy, the situations that Hegel calls Self-Consciousness and The State are better understood as Singularity and Community respectively, both of which are relations to be experienced not works to be achieved, and which furthermore are the same relation, the same situation of Being. Hegel’s project of dialectical assimilation, I will argue, can be seen therefore as one that tries to convert this problematic multiple non-presentable Being into a singular identity which does have presence.

Whilst the current Nancy scholarship acknowledges Nancy’s preoccupation with Hegel’s philosophy as evidenced by Nancy’s two books on Hegel, there is at present no study in the secondary literature on Nancy’s reception of Hegel’s philosophy generally, let alone with a specific focus on community and social being. This thesis therefore will seek to offer a trajectory of Nancy’s reception of Hegel’s philosophy, covering both Nancy’s works on Hegel, *The Speculative Remark* and *The Restlessness of the Negative* and the two most well-known works specifically concerned with community and social being, *The Inoperative Community* and *Being Singular Plural*. Additionally, it will seek to position Nancy’s reception of Hegel against a backdrop of the receptions of Marx, various French Twentieth Century receptions and also a selection of those from the Analytic tradition.

In conclusion, following a reading of Nancy’s essay, “The Surprise of The Event” I argue that Hegel misses what Nancy calls the very “event-ness” of the situations of Community and Singularity with the consequence that he ends up with sundered instances or moments rather than the movement he wishes for. Finally, I will argue that Nancy’s response to the problem of trying to preserve the event-ness of event is to provoke a situation of simultaneous separation and connection, or to give it for Nancy its proper name, wonder.

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	02
Abstract	03
Table of Contents	04
Abbreviations	07
Epigraph	08
<b>Chapter One – Introduction</b>	<b>09</b>
<b>1.1 Introduction</b>	<b>09</b>
Problematic	
“Shattered Love”	
<b>1.2 A History of the Dialectic</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>1.3 Hegel and the Dialectic</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.4 Receptions of Hegel's Philosophy</b>	<b>35</b>
Marx and the Dialectic	
French Twentieth Century Philosophical Receptions of Hegel’s Philosophy	
Responses to Hegel’s Philosophy from the Analytical Tradition	
<b>1.5 Conclusion</b>	<b>52</b>
Thesis Trajectory	
<b>Chapter Two - Nancy on Hegel's Philosophy</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction</b>	<b>56</b>
Problematic	
<b>2.2 A History of Nancy</b>	<b>58</b>
The Anglophone Reception of Nancy’s Philosophy	
<b>2.3 The Speculative Remark</b>	<b>72</b>
Introduction	
<i>Aufheben</i> , Remark, Speculative, Syllogism, Logic and Chance	

Malabou's Plasticity	
<b>2.4 The Restlessness of the Negative</b>	<b>85</b>
Introduction	
Restlessness, Becoming, Logic, Trembling, Sense and We	
Derrida's Semiology and Foucault's Genealogy	
<b>2.5 Conclusions</b>	<b>98</b>
Reflections	
<b>Chapter Three - Nancy and Hegel on Community</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction</b>	<b>103</b>
Problematic	
<b>3.2 The State in Hegel's <i>Elements of the Philosophy of Right</i></b>	<b>107</b>
<i>Elements of the Philosophy of Right</i>	
The State	
Unrest in The State	
<b>3.3 Community in Nancy's <i>The Inoperative Community</i></b>	<b>122</b>
<i>The Inoperative Community</i>	
Community	
Community and The State	
<b>3.4 Conclusion</b>	<b>136</b>
Reflections	
<b>Chapter Four - Nancy and Hegel on Singularity</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>4.1 Introduction</b>	<b>142</b>
Problematic	
<b>4.2 Self-Consciousness in Hegel's <i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i></b>	<b>145</b>
<i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i>	
Self-Consciousness	
A Self That Does Not Complete	

4.3 Singularity in Nancy's <i>Being Singular Plural</i>	165
<i>Being Singular Plural</i>	
Singularity	
Singularity and Self-Consciousness	
4.4 Conclusion	182
Reflections	
<b>Chapter Five – Conclusion</b>	<b>189</b>
5.1 Summary	189
Outcomes	
5.2 “The Surprise of the Event”	199
Community, Singularity, Event	
5.3 Surprising Trajectories	211
Bibliography	218
Appendix 1	229
Appendix 2	230
Publications	231

# Abbreviations and References

The following abbreviations are used for frequently referenced works by Nancy and Hegel.

## Works by Nancy

- SL “Shattered Love”
- SR *The Speculative Remark*
- RN *The Restlessness of the Negative*
- IC “The Inoperative Community”
- JHM “The Jurisdiction of the Hegelian Monarch”
- BSP “Being Singular Plural”
- BEL “*Rives, Bords, Limites (de la singularité)* Banks, Edges, Limits (of singularity)”
- SoE “The Surprise of the Event”

## Works by Hegel

- EPR *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*
- PoS *The Phenomenology of Spirit*
- SL *The Science of Logic*

Publication details are given in footnotes for the first reference for each text and also in the bibliography.

The reader is not a simple reader, free in regard to what he reads. He is desired, loved, and perhaps intolerable. He cannot know what he knows, and he knows more than he knows. He is a companion who gives himself over to abandonment, who is himself lost and who at the same time remains at the edge of the road the better to disentangle what is happening and which therefore escapes him.

Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*



# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

#### Problematic

In this chapter I will offer a reading of Nancy's essay "Shattered Love" which suggests that Hegel's *Elements of The Philosophy of Right* and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* could be read for the expositions they offer of Relational Being, a fairly uncontroversial claim. However, as we shall see, for Nancy the dialectic will turn out to be that which obscures relation and therefore the accounts of relational Being that Nancy reads in Hegel's project generally, are ones which will be unexpected and unintended, that will as Nancy will describe in his essay "Surprise of the Event" "surprise Hegelian thinking from the inside."<sup>1</sup> The claim and therefore the task of the thesis becomes one of reading accounts of relational Being in Hegel's texts *despite* their dialectical structure.

Reading Nancy and Hegel together presents a number of challenges. The first seems to be an unhelpful mismatch in their styles of exposition, Hegel is dedicated

---

<sup>1</sup> Nancy J.L. "The Surprise of the Event" in *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert.D.Richardson and Anne.E.O'Byrne, (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 2000), p.164

to system and structure, whilst Nancy is equally committed to fragment and incompleteness. The second is that each has an utterly idiosyncratic writing style and a reputation for being formidable to read. Of Hegel's writing style Marx said he "did not care for its grotesque and rocky melody"<sup>2</sup> and it is true that it is a shock to find out how a project that sets out to be logical and rational can be expressed in such murky prose. Nancy on the other hand presents an entirely different problem, his fragments and mediations are as Marie-Eve Morin describes, "straightforward and affirmative, in an almost unsettling way."<sup>3</sup> Seemingly simple sentences most frequently of the form X is Y, or X is nothing other than Y, reveal themselves to be expressing something more complex than a simple equivalence between X and Y, especially as this equivalence is never argued for in Nancy's texts. Before his reader has barely caught their breath, a typical Nancean technique is to bombard his reader with further assertions, X is Y, Y is Z and Z, is nothing other than X, all implying but not arguing for some kind of relationship between X, Y and Z. As Morin explains, "it is worth emphasizing from the start that Nancy's concept of sense, as opposed to signification, is not only central to the content of his philosophy but also the form of his writing."<sup>4</sup> What this means from the start is that we are dealing with a writer for whom signification is not simple and is always in play. The way therefore, to navigate these potentially choppy waters is to use the philosophy to understand the writing and the writing to understand the philosophy. The obvious problem therefore is where to start

---

<sup>2</sup> Marx, K "Letter to his father, 1837" in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 6

<sup>3</sup> Morin, M-E. *Jean-Luc Nancy*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), p. 5

<sup>4</sup> Morin, *Ibid.*

with this approach, the simple truth being that one has no choice but to jump in building up a picture of both the philosophy and the writing as one goes along, the challenge lying in structuring the subsequent report on this activity in a comprehensible way. The guiding principle that writing style is intrinsic to the philosophy being expressed and that comprehension of one will aid the comprehension of the other will however be followed and applied not just to my considerations of Nancy's texts but also Hegel's.

In this Introduction, I will therefore further define the task of this thesis in the following way. I will start by explicating the claim that Hegel's *Elements of The Philosophy of Right* and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* could be read for the expositions they offer of relational Being *despite* their dialectical structure, as I find it in Nancy's essay "Shattered Love". Next, I will provide a context for this claim by offering a history of thought about the dialectic, considering the Pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle and Kant and beginning a sketch of Hegel's use of the dialectic as a response to Kant. I will then build on the sketch by offering an overview of Hegel's project and the place of the dialectic within it. In order to provide a context for Nancy's readings of Hegel to be explored in the following chapters, I will then offer considerations of various receptions of Hegel's thought. I shall begin with a consideration of Marx's take up of Hegel's dialectic, before moving next to consider French Twentieth Century receptions of Hegel and then finally offering selected responses from the Analytical tradition. Finally, I will set out how the task of the thesis will be taken up in the following chapters.

## “Shattered Love”

In his essay “Shattered Love,”<sup>5</sup> Nancy offers the thought that, “Love does not call for a certain kind of thinking, or for a thinking of love, but for thinking in its essence and its totality. And this is because thinking, most properly speaking, is love.” (SL p. 84). Furthermore, we have missed the “rendez-vous” with love, (we have not yet met it and understood it) because we have thought it dialectically. Similarly, we have missed the rendez-vous with thinking because we have also thought thinking dialectically. For Nancy, the varied thinking about love that has occurred so far has tended to begin from a “philosophy of love” that would hold that “love is the extreme movement, beyond the self, of a being reaching completion.” (SL, p. 86). In this depiction, love would be something in which we transcend ourselves to achieve a kind of completion in communion with the object of our love. Therefore, for Nancy love under this view is inherently dialectical. For Nancy,

If the dialectic is the process of that which must appropriate its own becoming in order to be, exposition on the other hand, is the condition of that whose essence or destination consists in being presented; given over, offered to the outside, to others and even to the self. The two regimes do not exclude one another (they do not form a contradiction) but they are not of the same order. (SL, p. 89)

If the dialectic is a process in which something is given only as a completed unity in which its problematically opposing components are subsumed, then exposition is that in which all parts are offered in all their problematic opposition. If something cannot be given as a unity it becomes problematic to speak of and Love

---

<sup>5</sup> Nancy, JL. “Shattered Love” in *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Lisa Garbus and Simona Sawhney, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). Hereafter referred to in the text as SL, followed by page number.

for Nancy is just such an entity. For Nancy, allowing the offering of the essence of Love to take place requires a reticence.

Nancy does, however, offer us some words and statements about what, for him, love *is*:

Love arrives, it comes or else it is not love. [...] exposed to arrival and departure, the singular being is traversed by the alterity of the other, which does not stop or fix itself anywhere, neither in "him" nor in "me", because it is nothing other than coming and going. (SL, p. 98)

Love for Nancy is that in which the singular being is touched by the arriving other in its crossing of the singular being. This crossing of the other is incessant and restless and what touches us in its crossing, in each arrival, is its very alterity. The moment of contact is also a moment of separation and it is this moment, or better, this situation that is for Nancy, precisely, love. For Nancy there are many types of love, as "love arrives in all the forms and in all the figures of love; it is projected in all its shatters." (SL, p. 101). This situation of a moment of contact which is also a separation, is not just limited to a pair of romantic lovers, it is the same situation that exists between pairs and larger numbers of friends, family members and other groupings. But in each case, whoever and how many are involved it is the same situation and each evokes all the others (the shatters) or the possibility of all the others.

Nancy offers some comment on perhaps the most well know dialectician, Hegel, but only in elusive glimmers; whilst "the dialectic" is frequently referenced, Hegel's actual name is far less so. However, Nancy does make some mention of Hegel specifically and in the essay, Nancy states that,

there is not one Philosophy that has escaped this double constraint [saying and failing to say that thinking is love]. In each, love occupies a place that is [...] essential and subordinate (as, in Hegel, in the theory of The State). (SL, p. 86)

For Nancy, all philosophy, thus far, has failed to say explicitly that thinking is love (which we must remember for Nancy means contact that is also separation) but at the same time has allowed that notion to be read in it, or to put it another way, has inadvertently offered it. This “double restraint” (Nancy goes out of his way to avoid a setting up a contradiction) of saying and not saying is also present for Nancy in what he reads as Hegel’s depiction of love as relation as set out in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. In his reading of this text, in which Hegel considers The State as the most perfect form of relation between beings that would allow there to be no contradiction between morality and freedom, Nancy seems to be implying that it can be read for what it offers, perhaps inadvertently, about love as relation (casting it as both essential and subordinate) as much as what its author intends it to say. Later in the essay, Nancy says that,

The being that has become through a dialectical process is perhaps destined to be exposed (one could show that this is what happens, despite everything, at the end of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*) – but the dialectic knows nothing of this, it believes it has absorbed the entire destination in the becoming-proper. (SL, p. 89)

Whilst the dialectical process is that which seeks to resolve contradiction and present a completed unity, it is not incompatible with exposition (they are not a pair of opposites) but rather exposition is readable through or in the dialectical process although the dialectical process (or its creator) is unaware of this. For Nancy, when Hegel believes he is completing unity he may just be exposing and offering instead and Nancy seems to be implying that Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* can be read for this unintentional exposition.

Towards the end of the essay, Nancy touches on why the topic of love is so fruitful for him. In his discussion of joy, which Nancy describes as the “verb of love” (SL, p.107), it is the action, the doing, the happening or experience of the otherwise abstract notion of love. Nancy says, “to joy poses without reserve the question of singular being, which we are no doubt barely on the way to broaching. It is the question of that which remains “self” when nothing returns to the self.” (SL, p. 107) The action or experience of love is for Nancy, the posing of the question of singular being. This is because for Nancy, love, as that in which there is contact and separation at the same time, poses, unavoidably, the question of singular being or what it is that contacts and is separate, that returns to itself. Framed against Hegel’s project this would be the question of what it is that Self-Consciousness is when it returns from the other. For Nancy, “there is this brilliant, shattering constitution of being. Love does not define it, but it names it, and obliges us to think it.” (SL, p. 108) What emerges at this point is that for Nancy, being has the same brilliant shattering constitution he has described love as having but that love does not name Being but poses the question of it. By implication we can also see that Being will have the same structure of contact and separation for Nancy. For Nancy the demand is clear, we must endeavour to find a way to think this paradoxical structure.

What emerges from this reading is the notion that we have missed love, and by extension thinking because we have thought dialectically, that is we have thought that being is something that can be captured in a concept, the resolution of a pair of

opposites into a unity, rather than conceiving of it as that which is offered and exposed. We have had tantalising hints that we could explore this further by reading Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, for what they inadvertently expose about the situation of simultaneous connection and separation and what it means to be a singular being and by extension what sort of being it is that is other than singular, a situation I will provisionally term 'relational being.' For Nancy, we are in fact obliged, by the name love, to think this situation, which is for him the situation of being. Therefore, the initial problematic here becomes the question of relational being, how this question has been thought by Nancy and Hegel and how Nancy can read this question in a discourse by Hegel that Nancy claims none the less occludes it. The next stage in refining this problematic will be to further clarify the term dialectic, beginning with a consideration of its use prior to its take up by Hegel.



## 1.2 A History of the Dialectic

Gilbert Ryle, following Favorinus, speculates that in order to describe a practice which pre-existed Plato himself, Plato coined the noun dialectic, from the Greek verb *διαλέγεσθαι* which, Ryle maintains, means to debate and discuss; specifically to “discuss by means of question and answer”.<sup>6</sup> Several thousand years later in Hegel’s hands, the term has become, according to Stephen Houlgate, the name for:

the principle whereby apparently stable thoughts reveal their inherent instability by turning into their opposites and then into new, more complex thoughts, as the first thought of being turns first into the thought of nothing and then into the thought of becoming.<sup>7</sup>

What Nancy has in mind Hegel’s very specific appropriation of the term, or rather the method it refers to or comes to refer to, in his hands. To fully understand Nancy’s reception of Hegel’s thought on dialectic, it is necessary to see the scope of the passage from Plato to Hegel that the term itself takes. Unsurprisingly, the path of this journey is long, deviant and hotly contested, to consider all the thinkers involved or implicated and all the twists and turns of the adventure would require a separate thesis length work at the very least. However, a brief consideration of the activities taking place in Ancient Greece that came to be known as dialectics and the reaction to these of Plato and Aristotle, especially Aristotle’s use of the syllogism as a more reliable means of establishing truth

---

<sup>6</sup> Ryle, G. ‘Dialectic in the Academy’ in *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle*, ed. Renford Bambrough, (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1965) p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Houlgate, S. *An Introduction to Hegel; Freedom, Truth and History*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 38

should make a good foundation. Following this I shall proceed to Kant's attempts to better Aristotle's syllogism by showing the hidden unity behind the antinomies in the Transcendental Dialectic. This will provide a point from which to establish Hegel's use of the dialectic as a reaction to both Kant more immediately before him and Aristotle further back.

Gilbert Ryle describes a practice in Ancient Greece in which two opponents agree to a kind of verbal battle or duel. The first puts forward a thesis and the second, by use of questions answerable only with "yes" or "no" attempts to drive the first into a contradiction or "elenchus". If the first upholds their thesis without contradiction they win, but, if they are made to contradict themselves, the second is victorious. The second is also victorious if the first is reduced "to silence, to an infinite regress, to mere abusiveness, to pointless yammering or to an outrageous paradox".<sup>8</sup> Following Aristotle's descriptions in *The Topics*, Ryle gives several purposes for this elenctic duelling; gymnastic, periastric (both related to training and education), agonistic, (enjoyment of competitive element), eristic (to compete publicly in order make money from those who pay to see such an event and also who wish to be trained themselves) and philosophical. Both Plato and Aristotle frown on elenctic duelling for eristic purpose, however, according to Ryle,

there can be no reasonable doubt that what Isocrates calls 'eristic' and Aristotle calls 'dialectic' is, despite the veto in *Republic VII*, being taught to young men in the Academy in or before the middle 350's; that Plato approves this teaching; and that Aristotle teaches it, in fairly close connection with his teaching of rhetoric.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Ryle, *Ibid.* p.40

<sup>9</sup> Ryle, *Ibid.* p. 43. For subsequent commentators, "eristic" becomes a rather unhelpful catch phrase for any kind of elenctic duelling. Whatever its purpose, I have therefore tried to stick to elenctic duelling to keep a clear path through the various sources.

Certain aspects of elenctic duelling therefore are acceptable to Plato and Aristotle and will go on to become the kinds of logical processes we have in mind when we use the term dialectic. However, the claiming of certain aspects of elenctic duelling as proper for philosophy and the denigration of other aspects, and the subsequent labelling of their exponents, marks an important moment, arguably nothing less than the birth of philosophy itself. The exponents of the adjudged unfavourable aspects of elenctic duelling are the group generally known as the Sophists. Although membership is frequently hotly contested, it is a label that to some extent with the term Pre-Socratics. The Sophists, as Keith Crome explains, were:

prominent [in the Athens of Pericles] as itinerant teachers who sold their wisdom, who could sway an audience and assembly with their words and in particular, given the litigious Athenian environment, persuade a judge by way of an argument.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst the initial objection appears to be that the Sophists sold their wisdom, the objections of Plato and Aristotle are more complex and in fact on closer investigation reveal themselves to be concerned with the status of truth in the arguments made by the Sophists.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato has Socrates discuss the merits of speaking over writing but in respect to both modes, marks out a certain kind of communication and purpose behind that communication, saying:

if any of them [poets, orators and lawmakers] has done his work with a knowledge of the truth [...] he ought not to be designated by a name drawn from those writings but by one that indicates his serious pursuit. [...] To call him wise, Phaedrus, would, I think, be going too far: the epithet is proper only to a god; a name that would fit him better, and have more seemliness, would be 'lover of wisdom' or similar.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Crome, K. *Lyotard and Greek Thought*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 14

<sup>11</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. R.Hackforth, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1952), 278 b

For Plato's Socrates, then, there is a certain kind of truth seeking enquiry that would mark out the enquirer as different to those that sell a technique to establish or persuade a "truth" or who produce poetry, make speeches or write laws whilst not concerned with establishing truth. However, this kind of truth seeking enquirer (including those who produce poetry, make speeches or write laws *with* a concern for truth) could not be accurately called wise, as this is a state of perfection that applies only to the divine. The more appropriate and modest term for Plato, would be to describe this kind of enquirer as a lover of wisdom, a philosopher. For Plato, things that exist and have substance, are particular examples of a universal form or idea, which is the particular thing's true being, however we cannot apprehend this form or idea. The true being of things therefore is unknowable and therefore to pretend to have access to complete truth is hubristic and deluded. Crome explains that, for Plato, not only was the hubris of the Sophists preventing them from establishing truth or even understanding what it would mean to do so, but furthermore:

the sophists who rather than genuinely taking into view the *eidē* -the ideas- and the articulation of being that appertain to them, seek to conceal all differences, so as to be able to make one thing seem like another, and thus unlike what it really is.<sup>12</sup>

The aim of the Sophists was to eradicate or cover over difference and where necessary make one thing look like another so as to present a unified winning argument, such a technique could not therefore account for the relation of the universal and particular, as Plato has it. For Plato then, dialectic as a term becomes mired as the general catch all for the denigrated elenctic duelling for eristic

---

<sup>12</sup> Crome, *Ibid.* p. 53

purpose attributed to the Sophists. However, when put to philosophical purpose the dialectic has a use as a tool for Plato, in analysing the parts of a thing under consideration and pointing out contradictions, as evidenced not only by its use in his own academy but also by his practice of delivering Socrates' wisdom to us in dialogues.<sup>13</sup> It will be Aristotle however, who, taking up (and to some extent cementing for future philosophical interpretation) the critique of the wrong-headed and hubristic dialectic of the Sophists, proposes a technique to better establish truth than the dialectic.

The technique Aristotle proposes as superior to dialectic is that of demonstration, and the specific logical operation that enables this is generally referred to as a syllogism. In the *Prior Analytics* Aristotle explains that:

a demonstrative proposition differs from a dialectical one, because a demonstrative proposition is the assumption of one of two contradictory statements (the demonstrator does not ask for his premiss, but lays it down). Whereas a dialectical proposition [is a] choice between two contradictories.<sup>14</sup>

A proposition is a sentence in its simplest form which affirms or denies something about something else, or to put it in formal terms, predicates something of a subject. In a dialectical proposition we cannot deduce any truth or falsity from the proposition itself, we can only choose, somewhat blindly, between contradictory propositions offered by different speakers. Aristotle's demonstrative proposition is a sentence which allows us to deduce truth or falsity from its very structure, and

---

<sup>13</sup> "Dialectic as question and answer is the Socratic element which forms the single thread running through his altering conceptions of the method". Hall, R. *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy Volume I*, ed. Paul Edwards, (USA: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1996), p. 386

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, in *The Complete works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathon Barnes, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995.) 1, 24a 21

the “contradictory” parts, or premises, are both offered by the same speaker, or writer. In *Prior Analytics* Aristotle offers the following: “If A is predicated of every B, and B of every C, A must be predicated of every C.”<sup>15</sup> In this configuration the proposition is a universal affirmative (A is predicated of every C), however it is quite possible to also formulate it as universal negative as Aristotle offers in the next line, “Similarly also, if A is predicated of no B, and B of every C, it is necessary that A will belong to no C”. Furthermore, it is also possible to formulate affirmative and negative particulars, e.g., A is affirmed (or denied) of some, or a sample of, C’s and also to create yet more variations by consideration of three further modalities which Jonathan Barnes describes as “assertoric, apodeictic and problematic.”<sup>16</sup> However, whether affirming or denying about universal or particular cases, in whatever modality, what all the various permutations have in common is the structure of two premises and a conclusion which is reached via deduction (or assumption as in the larger quote above). The two premises which Aristotle describes as contradictory, are not in opposition as would occur in a dialectic in which each of the participants claim that something is or is not the case. In this way, the special ability of the syllogism to provide demonstrative truth or falsity is that it precisely that sidesteps opposition. For Kant also, opposition and contradiction is also problematic in propositions and where it occurs, is the site of a misunderstanding of the nature and possibility of knowledge, which he sets out to show in the Antinomies of Pure Reason presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

---

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Ibid.* p. 41, 4, 26a 1

<sup>16</sup> Barnes, J. *Aristotle: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 46

In the *Critique*, Kant sets out to provide an answer to the question: “how are *a-priori* synthetic judgements possible?”.<sup>17</sup> Seeking to reply to both Hume’s empiricism and Leibniz’s rationalism at once, he uses the four Antinomies to demonstrate the unacceptable dialectical illusions fallen into by what Howard Caygill calls “an illegitimate extension of finite human reason beyond its proper jurisdiction.”<sup>18</sup> This would be the application of reason without *also* accounting for the empirical aspects of understanding. Each Antinomy deals with a different “transcendental concept” or philosophical problem, which is in dispute because, in each case, we must transcend what can be derived by experience alone in order to understand the particular problem and importantly for Kant to understand understanding itself. The dispute of the first Antinomy is concerned with the competing claims that Space and Time are Finite versus Space and Time are Infinite. The dispute in the second Antinomy is concerned with the claim that all things are composites of Simple Parts versus the claim that all things are composite but there are no Simple Parts. The third Antinomy is concerned with the claims that Causality is in accordance with the laws of nature *only* versus the claim that Causality is in accordance with the laws of both nature and Freedom or Spontaneity. The fourth Antinomy is concerned with the claim that there is a Being whose existence is necessary to the world versus the claim that there is no Being whose existence is necessary to the world. Kant presents the opposing sides of the Antinomies and provides a proof for each, labelling one ‘thesis’ and the other ‘antithesis’, showing how, due to the misuse of reason (alone), both are plausible.

---

<sup>17</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 55, B19.

<sup>18</sup> H. Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 76

Kant's aim is to show how each antinomy arises in the first place due to a misunderstanding about what makes experience possible, namely, the transcendental unity of apperception.<sup>19</sup> For example, in the third Antinomy Kant gives the thesis that to explain appearances, "it is necessary to assume that there is also another causality [than the laws of nature], that of freedom", followed by the antithesis: "there is no freedom; everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with laws of nature."<sup>20</sup> The third Antinomy, and indeed all the antinomies, are according to Douglas Burnham and Harvey Young the result of "a confusion (by reason) of appearance and thing in itself."<sup>21</sup> According to Kant, when we perceive a relation of cause and effect we are in fact seeing the necessary time-order of appearances, rather than the actual objects. It is perfectly possible therefore for something to exist outside the time-order of the series being perceived and this appears as free. The solution to the third antinomy (and in fact all the antinomies) is therefore not a logical deduction but instead an understanding that there was never an antinomy to start with. Dialectic for Kant therefore is an illusion of opposition caused by not understanding the nature of understanding, but its solution is not a unity of the paradox at hand, but instead, the dissolving of that paradox to reveal an underlying moment of the unity of entirely different opposition, that of the world and appearances. It will be Hegel

---

<sup>19</sup> This is also Kant's aim with the Paralogisms, which precede the Antinomies and the Ideal of Pure Reason, which deals with arguments for the existence of God, and which follows the Antinomies in the section of the Critique entitled the Transcendental Dialectic.

<sup>20</sup> Kant, *Ibid.* p. 409, B473

<sup>21</sup> Burnham, D and Young, H. *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 149



who will finally propose a solution to the “problem” of dialectic which explicitly sets out to both dissolve and preserve opposition at one and the same time.

John Llewelyn summarises Hegel on the underlying assumption Kant makes in his discussion of the antinomies:

As Hegel says, Kant believes the general structure of the world to be as it appears. It is this belief which prevents Kant from achieving the right solution of the antinomies, the solution hinted at by Aristotle.<sup>22</sup>

For Kant, whilst it is not possible to fully know and experience the thing in itself, preventing appearance from being a true reflection of the world, this reflection is incomplete rather than mis-matched. For Kant there is no doubt that the world conforms to a certain structure: experience of it occurs in conformity with the pre-given framework of the categories, even if that experience gives a restricted view of the world. Whilst Kant is concerned with understanding how we understand, the assumption that there is no difference between how the world appears and how the world *is* prevents him from better understanding difference, and that where opposition occurs,

each of the two opposed sides contains its other within itself and neither can be thought without the other, it follows that neither of these determinations, taken alone, has truth; this belongs only to their unity. This is the true dialectical consideration of them and also the true result.<sup>23</sup>

For Hegel, opposition is not the marker of a misunderstanding about how we understand in the first place, but will turn out to be special kind of relationship in

---

<sup>22</sup> Llewelyn, J “Kantian Antinomy and Hegelian Dialectic” in *Hegel's Critique of Kant* ed. Stephen Priest, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p.88

<sup>23</sup> Llewelyn, *Ibid*, p. 92, quoted from Hegel, GWF. *Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 164

which the truth of each opposed side “belongs” to their unity. In fact, for Hegel it will turn out that there is no truth without the unity of opposites, but this unity is always one in which the opposition is not lost or dissolved but is, somehow, preserved. This special paradoxical kind of unity, which Hegel will call speculative, is achieved in the operation Hegel calls the *Aufhebung* or sublation as part of the famous three-stage process most commonly associated with the term ‘dialectic’, which will be examined in more detail shortly.<sup>24</sup> Truth in speculative unity as the solution to antinomy is hinted at for Hegel by Aristotle’s proposition, which, as Crome put it; “consists in a holding together (*sunthesis*) and a separating (*diairesis*) of subject and predicate.”<sup>25</sup> Whilst the unity achieved between A and C through the middle term of B, is readily grasped in the formulation “If A is predicated of every B, and B of every C, A must be predicated of every C”, it is imperative for Hegel that we not diminish the fact that B also stands for what separates and distinguishes A from C. Whilst Aristotle himself does not deny the double effect at work in the proposition, as we saw earlier his focus is on a unity in order to provide a deductible demonstrative proof. As Llewelyn remarks, “it is by no means unusual to find in Hegel ‘exaltations’ of authors deemed to have had his own insights without fully realizing they were having them.”<sup>26</sup>

At this stage we now have before us at least the trace of a journey by the dialectic from the name of a discarded and decidedly non-philosophical practice in ancient

---

<sup>24</sup> Whilst it will be Hegel’s commentators and successors that will largely insert the terms “thesis”, “antithesis” and “synthesis” into his work, most notably Engels and Marx, the repeating triadic forms and three stage process is found everywhere as will be explored in later chapters.

<sup>25</sup> Crome, *Ibid.* p. 54

<sup>26</sup> Llewelyn, *Ibid.* p. 100

Greece, to a useful tool for pointing out illusion and misunderstanding to better highlight the true nature of understanding in Kant's hands. Under Hegel, the dialectic as a method will become the solution to opposition, a solution, which, will turn out for him to both preserve and resolve opposition at the same time. The next task therefore is to consider Hegel's project and the place within it of the dialectic, as well as considering the aftermath of his project and the take up of his philosophy by subsequent philosophers.

### 1.3 Hegel and the Dialectic

Born in Stuttgart 1770, into what was the relatively new Kingdom of Prussia, Hegel lived through an extraordinary period of change in his own country and in Europe generally.<sup>27</sup> In 1788 Hegel attended a Seminary in Tübingen where he met Hölderlin and was later joined by Schelling, meanwhile in 1789 the French revolution had begun. Lacking the funds to consider an entry level unsalaried university teaching position, Hegel took up private tutoring posts in Bern and Frankfurt for several years before his father's death in 1797 provided him with an inheritance. In 1801 he joined his friend Schelling at the University of Jena where he was to stay until 1807. In 1806 Hegel finally achieved his first salaried role at Jena and was drafting *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as Napoleon who had been crowned Emperor of the French, defeated the Prussian troops at the Battle of Jena. In 1807, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* was published and widespread reform in all areas of governance including education began in Prussia in order to bring it into line with the ideals of the French Empire, in many cases assisted by many Prussians who had been agitated for reform along these lines before finding themselves at war with the French.<sup>28</sup> During this time Hegel was briefly an editor of a newspaper in Bamberg before settling as the Rector of the *Aegidiengymnasium* in Nuremberg for the next nine years. Also during this time

---

<sup>27</sup> The history of Prussia, its geographical territory and its status is long and complex but the moment of change from Duchy to Kingdom occurred in 1807 with the coronation of King Frederick as King in Prussia. Koch, H.W. *A History of Prussia*, (London: Longman, 1978), p. 72

<sup>28</sup> According to E.J. Feuchtwanger there had always been "an affinity between Prussia and France and it had been no mere accident that the two countries had so often been in alliance." Feuchtwanger, E.J. *Prussia, Myth and Reality: The Role of Prussia in German History*, (London: Oswald Wolff, 1970), p. 99

Hegel began publishing the various sections of *The Science of Logic* beginning in 1812 with Volume 1 *The Logic of Becoming* and in 1813, publishing Volume 2 *The Logic of Essence*. In 1815 Napoleon was defeated in at Waterloo and the alliance with Prussia ended. The following year Hegel took up a teaching post at the Fredrick William University of Berlin (now the Humboldt University) established during the reforms and published the Volume 3 of *The Science of Logic, The Logic of the Concept*. In 1821 *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* was published. Hegel remained at Berlin until his death in 1831, the same year he was decorated by Fredrick Wilhelm III of Prussia. His final publications during his time in Berlin were the three editions of *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* in 1817, 1827 and 1830. Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History, Lectures on Aesthetics, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* and *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, were all published posthumously.<sup>29</sup>

Hegel's project and particularly his writing style has a certain notoriety, according to Peter Singer, "of all the Western philosophers, Hegel has gained the reputation of being the most impenetrable"<sup>30</sup> while for Robert Pippin, "his language and approach were so heterodox that he has inspired as much controversy about the meaning of his position as about its adequacy."<sup>31</sup> Added to this is Hegel's habit of revising his works, the *Encyclopaedia* was revised and re-published twice after its

---

<sup>29</sup> For a fuller chronology of events Hegel's life and lifetime see Houlgate, S. *An Introduction to Hegel; Freedom, Truth and History*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. xiii.

<sup>30</sup> Singer, P. Hegel entry in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 365

<sup>31</sup> Pippin, R. Hegel entry in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 367

original publication and *Elements of The Philosophy of Right* also features lengthy additions made by Hegel in subsequent re-editions. That Hegel is as controversial for how he writes, as what he writes, is not coincidental, a project concerned with a special kind of paradoxical unity will always prove challenging to convey. A useful way in to Hegel's thought, already begun in the history of the dialectic given above, is to consider the motivations behind Hegel's project. For Michael Inwood these can be summarised in the following way:

How can we be sure that we know things as they are in themselves and not simply (as Kant says) as they appear to us? [...] How can a philosophy be constructed which does not depend on unproven and controversial presuppositions? Hegel also took seriously the fact that man (but not on his view nature) has a history. We cannot suppose (as Kant had done) that all men at all times share essentially the same thoughts or categories. A philosophical system must do justice to the fact that human thought, as well as human life, develops over time.<sup>32</sup>

For Hegel then, we must understand things as they are in their essential being not just as they appear, we must not rely on unproven presuppositions and we must understand that humankind develops over history and that there are no shared thoughts or categories that do not change. Philosophy, Inwood adds, "must, in Hegel's view, form a single system, in which not only the answers to such problems as these, but all human knowledge, has a place."<sup>33</sup> For Hegel then, the challenge is to find a system which can account for what is real and what is appearance and therefore explains the assumptions we can fall into and how human thought develops, a system that can account for difference. For Peter Singer,

It follows from [Hegel's] absolute idealism that ultimate reality is to be found in what is mental or intellectual, not in what is material. It is to be found, to be specific in rational thought. Logic is therefore the study of this ultimate reality in its pure form, abstracted

---

<sup>32</sup> Inwood, M. Hegel entry in *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Mautner, (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 264.

<sup>33</sup> Inwood, *Ibid*, p.264

from the particular forms it takes in the finite minds of human beings or in the natural world.<sup>34</sup>

The reality that Hegel is looking for will therefore be found in rational thought, which, for Hegel, underlies appearances, mistaken assumptions and the changing development of human thought. It will be rational thought, abstracted from the minds of finite humans, that will be able to account for change and difference and the study of this thought is Logic. The guiding principle for the shape of this logic, that Hegel both expects to find it conforming to and which he shapes his procedure after, is dialectical as Stephen Houlgate explains:

The dialectical principle, is for Hegel, the principle whereby apparently stable thoughts reveal their instability by turning into their opposites and then into new, more complex thoughts, as the thought of being turns into the thought of nothing and then into the thought of becoming. This principle Hegel tells us, is 'the soul of all genuinely scientific cognition' and is what gives his thinking its distinctive character by breathing life and freedom into the concepts that he thinks through, by making his thought move in a way that ordinary thought is not used to.<sup>35</sup>

By attending to and explaining a situation in terms of how when thinking it, understanding goes through a process of thought negating itself before becoming a new more complex thought which encompasses both the original thought and its negation will, for Hegel, allow us to separate out what is real (i.e. rational) and what is change and appearance. As Houlgate says this, combined with Hegel's focus on how this process occurs over time for humanity, gives Hegel's writing a characteristic feel of movement.

The new complex thought we will discover, is the truth in speculative unity preliminarily sketched earlier, which for Hegel is properly called the concept or

---

<sup>34</sup> Singer, P. *Hegel*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.76

<sup>35</sup> Houlgate, S. *An Introduction to Hegel; Freedom, Truth and History*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p.39

sometimes the idea. This complex thought or concept comes about through what Hegel calls the *Aufhebung* or sublation. Michael Inwood explains that *Aufhebung* comes from the German verb *aufheben*, which has three main senses: “

- (1) ‘to raise, to hold, to lift up’
- (2) ‘to annul, abolish, destroy, cancel, suspend
- (3) ‘to keep, save, preserve’”<sup>36</sup>

The *Aufhebung* is therefore the moment in which the new complex thought is able to take up the original thought and the thought that is the original thought’s negation and allow them to both negate or cancel each other yet also to both be preserved. For Hegel, establishing the concept of the object or situation being thought about would allow us to see both what is real and rational and the appearance that negates it. Hegel’s project therefore is to examine the object or situation at hand and establish its concept and, as Inwood points out, “Hegel often conflates the logical sublation of a concept with a physical sublation of a thing.”<sup>37</sup> What this means is that Hegel often locates a logical sublation in physical synthesis, a child being the synthesis or sublation of its parents for example.

For Hegel, once we have established the concept of a given object or situation, the movement can begin again, as Singer explains:

Every dialectical movement terminates with a synthesis, but not every synthesis brings the dialectical process to a stop in the way that Hegel thought the organic community of his own time brought the dialectical movement of history to an end. Often the synthesis, although adequately reconciling the previous thesis and antithesis, will turn out to be one-sided in some other respect. It will then serve as the thesis for a new dialectical movement.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Inwood, M A *Hegel Dictionary*, Oxford: Blackwell, 19920, p. 283

<sup>37</sup> Inwood, *Ibid.* p. 284

<sup>38</sup> Singer, Peter. *Hegel*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.78



For Hegel, once we have established the concept of the given object or situation what we frequently discover is that the synthesis or sublation that has taken place is only partial, or rather, whilst it preserves the original thought and its negation, it is revealed that it still does not completely account for the object or situation being considered and therefore it is necessary to treat it as an original thought and finds its negation and a new concept, opening up a path of development we can trace. In this way, we now have before us a complete system which will allow us to understand a given situation in terms of what is real and rational about it and what is mere appearance and presupposition. Furthermore, we can also then slot this into an account of the development of human consciousness (which Hegel calls Spirit but also sometimes Mind) through history. For Hegel, the dialectical progression of history will come to an end in a situation in which the sublation or synthesis will account for the world as it is and there will no longer be any opposition between the concept and the world and no need for further dialectical process. Hegel calls this situation Absolute Knowledge and famously describes it as a situation in which “what is rational is actual; And what is actual is rational .”<sup>39</sup> In this situation, the rational, the true reality that previously underlies appearance, is now no longer hidden, as there is now no conflict between the rational and appearance, the rational is actual and present.

However odd it may sound to modern ears, the rationality Hegel seeks is, for him, not incompatible with religious faith. Whilst other religions can “reveal” this

---

<sup>39</sup> Hegel, G.W.F, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H.B.Nisbet, ed. Allan Wood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 20

rationality, it is, for Hegel, Christianity that reveals the truth of rationality most satisfactorily. As Stephen Houlgate puts it, “the word ‘God’ in Hegel’s view, is thus religion’s word for what philosophy knows to be reason or the ‘Idea’; that is, absolute reason active in the world.”<sup>40</sup> For Hegel, rationality is to be found, to be revealed by the dialectic, as that which underlies change and appearance because ultimately God is rational.

The impact of Hegel’s thought has been felt profoundly since his works were published. Much of the philosophical reaction to Hegel has centred around his concept of the *Aufhebung*, this is particularly true of the French Twentieth Century reception and especially the thinkers often categorised as post-structuralist, whilst the typically Analytical and Anglophone response has objected to Hegel’s idealism and levelled charges of mysticism. Marx’s take up of Hegel’s dialectic as method for examining history and especially the Master/Slave dialectic as a way to understand class relations, has propagated the impact of Hegel’s thought well beyond philosophy. In order therefore, to contextualise Nancy’s own readings of and engagement with Hegel’s thought and in particular the dialectical method, the final task of this chapter will then be to briefly consider these other reactions.

---

<sup>40</sup> Houlgate, *Ibid*, p. 244

## 1.4 Receptions of Hegel's Philosophy

### Marx and the Dialectic

Hegel's impact has been widely felt, not only within Philosophy but beyond, as

Bertrand Russell acknowledges:

Outside of pure philosophy, many Protestant theologians adopted his doctrines, and his philosophy of history profoundly affected political theory. Marx, as everyone knows, was a disciple of Hegel in his youth, and retained in his own finished system some important Hegelian features.<sup>41</sup>

The important Hegelian feature that Marx famously retains, is that of the dialectic.

It will be Marx and also Engel's reading of Hegel with a focus that sees that "Man not the Idea is the true subject" as Michael Rosen puts it, that will pave the way for the later theories of Dialectical Materialism.<sup>42</sup>

Marx completed a doctoral thesis in philosophy at the University of Jena in 1841 entitled "The Difference between Democritus' and Epicurus' Philosophy of Nature".<sup>43</sup> At this time Marx associated with a group of thinkers interested in the philosophy of the relatively recently deceased Hegel and who were subsequently labelled the Young Hegelians.<sup>44</sup> In the thesis, Marx says of Hegel:

It is conceivable that a philosopher should be guilty of this or that inconsistency because of this or that compromise; he may himself be conscious of it. But what he is not conscious of is that in the last analysis this apparent compromise is made possible by the deficiency of his principles or an inadequate grasp of them. So if a philosopher really has compromised

---

<sup>41</sup> Russell, B. *History of Western Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 2005), p.661

<sup>42</sup> Rosen, M. Marx entry in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol 6, London: Routledge, 1998, p. 119

<sup>43</sup> Marx, K. "Doctoral Thesis" in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 11. Trans. David.McLellan

<sup>44</sup> Hegel died in 1831, exactly a decade before Marx's thesis was accepted at the same university Hegel was employed at during the production *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

it is the job of his followers to use the inner core of his thought to illuminate his own superficial expressions of it.<sup>45</sup>

Developing the inner core of Hegel's philosophy to expose the superficial expressions of Hegel's philosophy became then imperative for Marx and his colleagues. Peter Singer explains that:

For the young Hegelians, the 'superficial expression' of Hegel's philosophy was his acceptance of The State of politics, religion, and society in early nineteenth century Prussia: the inner core was his account of Mind overcoming alienation, reinterpreted as an account of human self-consciousness freeing itself from the illusions that prevent it achieving self-understanding and freedom.<sup>46</sup>

For Marx and his fellow Hegel enthusiasts, the inner core of Hegel's philosophy, his dialectical account of alienation and the possibility of self-consciousness achieving self-understanding and freedom could be extracted from Hegel's unfortunate acceptance of contemporary political conditions in nineteenth century Prussia. Chief of the illusions that might prevent Self-Consciousness from achieving its own full understanding was Religion, famously for Marx "the opium of the people."<sup>47</sup> Marx's transformative reading of Hegel does, then, extract Hegel's method of examination of a matter under consideration, the dialectic, and the method for dealing with history that arises from it, but leaves behind all religious and metaphysical aspects, in this way the subject of philosophy for Marx becomes Man not Idea.

---

<sup>45</sup> Marx, K. "Doctoral Thesis" in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 13

<sup>46</sup> Singer, P *Karl Marx*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 15

<sup>47</sup> Marx, K. "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" in *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. Joseph O' Malley and Annette Jolin, ed. Joseph O'Malley, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) p. 131

Peter Singer explains that “when the Prussian government suppressed the newspaper he had been editing, Marx started work on a critique of Hegel’s political philosophy.”<sup>48</sup> Whilst this projected critique of Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* was never finished, Marx did produce a short essay intended to detail what this work would contain.<sup>49</sup> It is in this short essay “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”, that two important new themes arise, the proletariat as the redemption of humanity and the suggestion, as Singer puts it that “criticism by itself is not enough” to achieve this.<sup>50</sup> For Marx, The State as Hegel explicates it in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, is problematic because, as he says in the unfinished notes,

Sovereignty, the ideality of the State, exists merely as internal necessity as idea. And Hegel is satisfied with that because it is a question merely of the idea. [...] Had Hegel started with real subjects as the bases of The State it would not have been necessary for him to let The State become subjected in a mystical way.<sup>51</sup>

For Marx, the key issue here is that Hegel does not start with real subjects, he determines what they must be from the starting point that The State will be a concept, that it will be a whole with parts that will be revealed as contradictory and that the subjects of The State will be these parts. In this way, the proletariat are not considered for what they are but what they need to be to fit Hegel’s system. What this insight combined with Marx’s attention to the role of Slave as worker gives rise to, is the notion that “Philosophy cannot be actualised without the abolition [*Aufhebung*] of the proletariat; the proletariat cannot be abolished

---

<sup>48</sup> Singer, P *Karl Marx*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 21

<sup>49</sup> Marx’s notes for this study are generally published as “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, with the separate essay appended at the end.

<sup>50</sup> Singer, P *Karl Marx*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 23

<sup>51</sup> Marx, K. *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. Joseph O’ Malley and Annette Jolin, ed. Joseph O’Malley, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) p. 23

without the actualization of philosophy.”<sup>52</sup> For Marx, the final synthesis, the becoming real of the situation in which there is no opposition, and for him in which Germany is emancipated, will occur when the proletariat is abolished, or rather when it no longer exists as a category to describe one specific class against others because there will be no class difference. For Marx, therefore, the dialectic as method is unproblematic and he and those who take up his thought will put it to much use. For Marx, the problem with Hegel’s use of the dialectic, is therefore not with the tool itself but what it is applied to. Marx’s transformation of the dialectic then leaves its structure and movement untouched but radically re-directs its focus. As we will come to see, French Twentieth Century receptions of Hegel will also grapple with whether or not to reject the dialectic (and specifically the *Aufhebung*) as method or tool or retain it but re-orientating the focus of its use.

#### French Twentieth Century Philosophical Receptions of Hegel’s Philosophy

The French Twentieth Century Philosophical scene was undeniably affected by Hegel’s thought, for Bruce Baugh in *French Hegel*,

It is Hegel who most haunts French thought: nowhere is French philosophy more ambivalent and conflicted in its attitudes towards a philosopher, strenuously resisting and “correcting” Hegel at the very moment it find him most seductive. [...] It’s as if French philosophy of the past century had to deny Hegel in order to affirm him, and affirm him in order to deny him.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Marx, K. “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right” in *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. Joseph O’ Malley and Annette Jolin, ed. Joseph O’Malley, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) p. 142

<sup>53</sup> Baugh, B. *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2003), p.1

The various twists and turns of these occurrences of resistance and seduction are numerous, complicated and hotly disputed, the thinkers involved are as much in reaction to each other, as they are to Hegel. For Baugh, it is a “common-place that Hegel’s influence began with Kojève and ended with structuralism and post structuralism,”<sup>54</sup> referring to the tactic of tracing a coherent line from the work of Kojève in the 1930’s, positioning Hyppolite’s work on Hegel as a response to that of Kojève, and then continuing this line through to two of Hyppolite’s later students, Derrida and Foucault. Indeed, this is very much the trajectory that is offered by Judith Butler in *Subjects of Desire* in which her focus is on the structure of Desire as given in the section on Self-Consciousness in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>55</sup> For Baugh, whose primary focus is the reception of Hegel’s Unhappy Consciousness as given in the section on Self-Consciousness in *The Phenomenology*, this tactic minimises the significance of Jean Wahl’s *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* in 1929, which provides for Baugh:

[a] penetrating analysis of an internally divided and self-alienated subject, a subject that strives vainly for synthesis but instead oscillates between self and not-self, being and nothingness.<sup>56</sup>

However, as the aim here is to provide a sketch of the French Twentieth Century reception of Hegel with specific reference to the *Aufhebung* and the dialectical process against which I can outline Nancy’s own reception, I will stick with the tactic of a consideration of the trajectory of responses by Kojève, Hippolyte,

---

<sup>54</sup> Baugh, *Ibid*, p. 7

<sup>55</sup> Butler also includes the thought of Sartre and later Lacan and Deleuze.

<sup>56</sup> Baugh, *Ibid*. p.5. Baugh’s consideration also includes, Lefebvre, Fondane, Breton, Bataille, Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze.

Derrida and Foucault, but will consider the commentary of Butler and Baugh.<sup>57</sup> A more detailed discussion of Derrida and Foucault's response to Hegel will also be given in the following chapter where they will be used to draw out the specificity of Nancy's own readings of Hegel.

To bring together the specificity of Kojève and Hyppolite's readings of Hegel's thought and also the commentary of both Butler and Baugh it will be necessary to briefly consider Hegel's aim in the Self-Consciousness section on *The Phenomenology*, although this will be explicated later in greater detail. In short, Hegel's concern in the section is Desire as that by which Consciousness comes to painfully realise that there is a consciousness other than itself and the subsequent process by which it attempts to negate this other consciousness in a bid to be once again, a unified, sublated Self. Hegel will go on to explain that consciousness and the other consciousness will take up opposing positions that he calls Lord and Bondsman (frequently also alternatively translated as Master and Slave) who each desire the other's recognition. Before they are finally sublated in the dialectical process, these positions will come to reside together in a truly wretched individual that Hegel calls the Unhappy Consciousness who cannot complete into a unified Self. These three positions, and many others, form steps on the way to a final situation described at the end of *The Phenomenology* in which there will be no opposition between Self and what is not the Self, in which truth as unity between

---

<sup>57</sup> Additionally, at this time Wahl's work on Hegel's Unhappy Consciousness remains untranslated.



opposites is real and actual, in which History will be complete, the situation Hegel calls Absolute Knowledge.

Kojève's interpretation of Hegel comes to us almost entirely from *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (1947) which was composed of a selection of lectures given on *The Phenomenology of Spirit* at the *École des Hautes Études* from 1933 to 1939. Kojève's reading of Hegel is highly influenced by Marx, whom he invokes from the outset of *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, with the following epigraph: "Hegel.....erfasst die *Arbeit* also das *Wesen*, als das sich bewährende Wesen des Menschen."<sup>58</sup> In short, Kojève's reading of Hegel accepts Hegel's description of the development of human consciousness over time through dialectical process but diverges over what would constitute the end of this historical process. For Kojève,

Man was born and History began with the first Fight that ended in the appearance of a Master and a Slave. [...] History stops as the moment when the difference, the opposition, between Master and Slave disappears: at the moment when the Master will cease to be Master, because he will no longer have a Slave; and the Slave will cease to be Slave because he will no longer have a Master.<sup>59</sup>

For Hegel, the Master and Slave are positions that are in opposition as they each desire the other's recognition that is, they each need to negate or sublimate the other in order to be a unified self. These positions are ultimately sublated as part of a much longer, ongoing dialectical process which results in a situation in which

---

<sup>58</sup> Kojève, Alexandre. *Introduction to the reading of Hegel; lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H.Nichols, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), p 3. The following translation is given by Robert Stern and Nicolas Walker. "Hegel sees labour as the essence of man, the self-confirming essence, of man." *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol 4, London: Routledge, 1998, p. 293

<sup>59</sup> Kojève, A. *Introduction to the reading of Hegel; lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H.Nichols, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), p.44

there is no longer any opposition between Self and not Self, in which mutual recognition is not oppositional. But for Kojève, as Michael Roth puts it, “once this desire was satisfied, history properly-so-called, was over.”<sup>60</sup> The satisfaction Kojève has in mind is the mutual recognition that would come about through a revolution in which the Slaves overthrew the Masters. According to Butler, for Kojève,

the ultimate project of desire is less a dialectical assimilation of subjectivity to the world, and the world to subjectivity, than a unilateral action upon the world in which consciousness instates itself as the generator of historical reality.<sup>61</sup>

Desire is for Kojève, the “motor of history”<sup>62</sup> and the dialectic is movement of this motor, it is what results from struggle but what ceases to move once that struggle is over, which for Kojève comes about by actual physical means. Dialectic for Kojève then, arises from history, it does not exist separate to history, a notion Bruce Baugh points out was already present in other interpretations of Hegel, notably, Koyré.<sup>63</sup> For Baugh,

The fundamental difference between Kojève and Koyré is that whereas Koyré historicizes being by introducing the dialectic of human temporality into its heart, Kojève reduces being to history, and excludes the dialectic from nature.<sup>64</sup>

The dialectic is then, for Kojève, exclusively human as it is the human experience of struggle, and the moment of sublation comes about in human action. For this reason Kojève’s reading of Hegel is often referred to as anthropological.

---

<sup>60</sup> Roth, M. Kojève entry in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol 5, (London: Routledge, 1998, p. 289)

<sup>61</sup> Butler, J. *Subjects of Desire*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), *Ibid*, p.69

<sup>62</sup> Roth, *Ibid*. p. 289)

<sup>63</sup> Baugh, *Ibid*. p. 26

<sup>64</sup> Baugh, *Ibid*. p. 26

Hyppolite's interpretation of Hegel is generally taken from his texts *The Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (1947) which arose from the commentary supplied with his French translation of *The Phenomenology* in 1939 and *Logic and Existence* (1953) which aims to bring together *The Phenomenology* and Hegel's later *Science of Logic*. Hyppolite's reading is similarly influenced by Marx and for Robert Stern and Nicolas Walker, "Hyppolite emphasizes Hegel's foreshadowing of Marx's account of alienation and agrees with Kojève that recognition is capable of overcoming the tension between self and other."<sup>65</sup> Hyppolite's focus however is less strictly anthropological than that of Kojève, and for Bruce Baugh, this means Hyppolite marks a shift in focus in studies of Hegel, from "from "man" to language."<sup>66</sup> Baugh's main focus is his observation that in *The Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hyppolite,

analysed language as Spirit's negation of man's natural Dasein, which by actualizing and expressing the individual self who speaks, produces a split between the natural, particular self and the "universal" self expressed by the pronoun "I". The "laceration" [...] of language thus both expresses and effects the laceration of consciousness, reflecting back to Spirit its alienation from itself."<sup>67</sup>

The laceration or alienation in language therefore both reflects and engenders consciousness own alienation from itself, or as Hegel wants it, the dialectical progress of the development of consciousness or Spirit. For Baugh this focus usefully opens up the notion that in reading Hegel we can read for a description of negativity, of the second stage of the dialectic, in which "the power of the negative" is no longer that of human existence, but [that of the] negativity of

---

<sup>65</sup> Stern, R and Walker, N. Hegelianism entry in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol 4, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 293

<sup>66</sup> Baugh, *Ibid.* p. 32

<sup>67</sup> Baugh, *Ibid.* p.31

language.”<sup>68</sup> As we will see shortly this notion was to prove especially significant for Hyppolite’s students.

Butler’s interest is in Hyppolite’s consideration of time:

For Hyppolite, the absolute is not an achievement as such, but the dialectic of achievement and loss. [He] understands his own project less as a re-writing of Hegel than an elaboration of some underrepresented Hegelian themes [specifically] the interpretation of absolute knowledge as the thought of time.<sup>69</sup>

For Hyppolite, the apparent final situation in which there is a unity between oppositions, or absolute Knowledge, is not a situation which achieved and secured, but is in fact better understood as the human experience of time. In *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hyppolite says that,

Human experience allows the self to discover itself and substance to reveal itself to the self. This experience necessarily takes place in time [...]. Time is thus the disquiet of consciousness which has not attained itself, which sees itself as outside itself.<sup>70</sup>

Time is that in which the self discovers itself and what is not itself, it is the medium in which the self brings together opposites. Time is therefore speculative and as such it is the very medium of the disquiet of consciousness. For Hyppolite, this medium of disquiet in which oppositions are experienced and brought together is the same situation Hegel wants in the projected Absolute Knowledge.

For Hyppolite, “most contemporary thinkers [...] generally prefer what Hegel calls “unhappy consciousness” to what he calls “spirit. [...] They accept Hegel’s

---

<sup>68</sup> Baugh, *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Butler, *Ibid.* p.83

<sup>70</sup> Hyppolite, J. *Genesis and structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1979), p. 579

phenomenology but reject his ontology.”<sup>71</sup> Hyppolite is almost certainly referring to Wahl here who Baugh describes as rejecting “as illusory the Hegelian attempt to reconcile existence through speculative thought and so turned away from the mediation of the [concept] and the dialectic based on it.”<sup>72</sup> For Hyppolite however, despite his assertion that he will not enter the debate, there seems to be an attempt to accept both Hegel’s phenomenology, as evidenced by his account of the alienation of the unhappy consciousness and his focus on language as Baugh points out, but there is also a certain acceptance of Hegel’s ontology by re-casting the Absolute Knowledge that Hegel is after as the experience of time. For Baugh, by “extending the theme of the unhappy consciousness into being, language and discourse, Hyppolite plays a key role in the Hegel interpretation of his students, Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault and Althusser”<sup>73</sup> This key role, however, is often one of highlighting a problem which the students in question take up and react against. For Butler, this double influence is felt in Derrida’s work in the following way:

Although both Hyppolite and Derrida reveal the limits of the autonomous subject Hyppolite wants to retain the subject as an internally contradictory being, while Derrida argues that the subject no longer makes conceptual sense if referentiality is no longer possible.<sup>74</sup>

Hyppolite’s drawing attention to the limit of what the subject is, as given in Hegel’s philosophy, opens up for Derrida that this subject in fact no longer makes conceptual sense, however much for Hyppolite this internal contradiction is not problematic. Baugh is in general agreement here but makes the further point that:

---

<sup>71</sup> Hyppolite, *Ibid*, p. 205

<sup>72</sup> Baugh, *Ibid*, p. 25

<sup>73</sup> Baugh, *Ibid*, p. 28

<sup>74</sup> Butler, *Ibid*, p. 179

like Hyppolite, [Derrida] finds [subjectivity without a human subject] in the negative differences in language, in which each term is defined by what it is not but deprived of the mediating synthesis that for Hyppolite makes what each term *is not* into each other.<sup>75</sup>

For Baugh, Hyppolite's and Derrida's shared agreement of the limits of the subject if not the ramifications of this limit, arises from the observation of negative difference in language, a theme Derrida famously went on to develop and which will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

For Baugh, Hyppolite's influence on Foucault is also profound:

For Foucault [...] Hyppolite's analysis of the genesis and structure of discourse, conceived as the "discourse of being", especially his grasp of "the singularity of history, the regional totalities of science, the depths of memory" "traversed and formulated the most fundamental problems of our age."<sup>76</sup>

For Foucault, Hyppolite's elucidation of the discourse of Being and grasp of the structure of History, as he reads it in Hegel, is fundamental to the formulation of the problem of History that Foucault was famously trying to work against and which will be considered more fully in the coming chapter. For Butler this means that, "like Derrida, Foucault is playing homage to Hyppolite but in such a way that a proper elucidation of Hegelian themes requires a turn *away* from Hegel."<sup>77</sup> An approach that recognises that to properly elucidate certain themes given within a text (themes given both intentionally or unintentionally) may involve a move away from the writer being read or a transformation of their text will prove highly characteristic to Nancy's own reading of Hegel. For the Analytic tradition, elucidating the themes in Hegel's texts in an adequate manner has frequently

---

<sup>75</sup> Baugh, *Ibid*, p. 31

<sup>76</sup> Baugh, *Ibid*, p.32

<sup>77</sup> Butler, *Ibid*, p.180

involved something stronger than a move away from his thought, however a brief consideration will be offered below of recent more sympathetic readings.

#### Responses to Hegel's Philosophy from the Analytical Tradition

In his paper, "The Rise of the Non-Metaphysical Hegel" Simon Lumsden refers to the common origin myth that "both traditions [Analytic Philosophy and Post-Structuralism] are often represented as having their genesis in the rejection of Hegel's metaphysics."<sup>78</sup> He then goes on to chart the emergence and development since the 1970s of "the non-metaphysical Hegel, which takes his thought to be a continuation of the Kantian project of critically examining the presuppositions of any normative claim."<sup>79</sup> Lumsden takes as his starting point what he describes as the resurgence of interest in Hegel's thought that began with the publication of Charles Taylor's *Hegel* in 1975, the decline of British Hegelianism having taken place following the First World War. Before beginning a consideration of Lumsden's paper, then, it is worth filling in a little more of the Anglophone Analytical tradition's reception of Hegel.

According to Pippin, who Lumsden will later consider in his paper, "in Great Britain with its long sceptical, empiricist and utilitarian tradition, Hegel's work had little influence until the latter part of the nineteenth century."<sup>80</sup> This nineteenth century scholarship was spear-headed by,

---

<sup>78</sup> Lumsden, S. "The Rise of the Non-Metaphysical Hegel", in *Philosophy Compass*, 3/1 (2008) p. 51

<sup>79</sup> Lumsden, *Ibid.* p.51

<sup>80</sup> Pippin, *Ibid.* p.370

Bosanquet, Mc Taggart and especially Bradley, all of whom were interested in many of the metaphysical implications of Hegelian idealism, what they took to be a Hegelian claim for the 'internally related' interconnection of all particulars within one single, ideal, or mental substance.<sup>81</sup>

For Robert Stern and Nicholas Walker, Bradley's main insight was the "conviction that from the perspective of the Absolute all *aporiai* could be overcome"<sup>82</sup> whilst for Bosanquet it was imperative "to show how in these forms [judgement and syllogism as laid out by Hegel] all abstraction from the whole turns out to be incoherent".<sup>83</sup> What was attractive in Hegel's philosophy for these two thinkers therefore was a system that accounted not only for all particulars but also all *aporiai*, as demonstrated by the incoherence that results from abstraction from a whole or conceptual understanding. However, for Pippin this was a brief flourishing was bought to an end by,

Moore and Russell [who] waged a hugely successful counter attack in the name of traditional empiricism and what would be called "analytic philosophy" against such an enterprise and in this tradition largely finished off the influence of Hegel.<sup>84</sup>

The account of Hegel that Russell gives the chapter devoted to him in *History of Western Philosophy*, is indeed dismissive, describing Hegel's project as one of intellectualising the "mystic insights" of his youth.<sup>85</sup> Russell does concede however that there are others engaged in similar projects who are less coherent and less comprehensive than Hegel. For Russell, two things distinguish Hegel from these thinkers, "One of these is emphasis on logic [...] the other distinguishing

---

<sup>81</sup> Pippin, *Ibid.* p. 370

<sup>82</sup> Stern and Walker, *Ibid.* p. 288

<sup>83</sup> Stern and Walker, *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Pippin, *Ibid.* p.370

<sup>85</sup> Russell, Bertrand, *History of Western Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 2005), p.661



feature (which is closely connected with the first) is the triadic movement called 'dialectic.'<sup>86</sup> Russell reconstructs Hegel's use of the dialectic concluding that

throughout the whole process, there is an underlying assumption that nothing can be really true unless it is about Reality as a whole. From this underlying assumption there is basis in traditional logic, which assumes that every proposition has a subject and a predicate.<sup>87</sup>

As we saw in the earlier discussion of Aristotelian logic the proposition aims at establishing the whole but for Russell, Hegel's interest the resolution of the dialectic in a paradoxical unity is unacceptable. For Russell, ultimately, Hegel's project is misconceived from the beginning:

Hegel thought that, if enough was known about a thing to distinguish it from all other things, then all its properties could be inferred by logic. This was a mistake, and from this mistake arose the whole imposing edifice of his system. This illustrates an important truth, namely, that the worse your logic, the more interesting the consequences to which it gives rise.<sup>88</sup>

Lumsden picks up the story of Hegel's reception on the Anglophone Analytic tradition at a similarly scathing point:

In the analytic tradition Hegel's name is synonymous with a type of metaphysics, the murkiness and obscurity of which was corrected by the clarity of common sense, the methodology of the natural sciences and propositional logic, the success of which has relegated interest in Hegel to that long list of great errors that is the history of ideas.<sup>89</sup>

For Lumsden, the Analytic return to Hegel begins with Charles Taylor in the 1970s whom Lumsden describes as taking the view that Hegel responds to the challenge set in motion by Kant's project "by reverting to an essentially pre-critical metaphysics."<sup>90</sup> However, according to Lumsden, "ultimately for Taylor, Hegel's project fails because the diverse and disparate forces unleashed in modernity

---

<sup>86</sup> Russell, *Ibid.* p.662

<sup>87</sup> Russell, *Ibid.* p.663

<sup>88</sup> Russell, *Ibid.* p.674

<sup>89</sup> Lumsden, *Ibid.*, p. 52

<sup>90</sup> Lumsden, *Ibid.*, p. 53

cannot be contained in the pre-critical spiritual unity Hegel creates for them.”<sup>91</sup>

For Lumsden, despite Taylor’s assertion that Hegel’s project ultimately fails, his book does at least work to serve to re-engage thought with Hegel; transition to a non-metaphysical take up of Hegel begins with Klaus Hartmann. For Lumsden, “Hartmann rejected any conception of Hegel’s thought that presented itself as a grand metaphysical project” but focussed instead on Hegel’s logic which he claimed had an internal coherence and “reconstructs the real in a manner satisfactory to reason alone, the consequence of which Hartmann argued is that the categories of Hegel’s logic are self-legitimizing.”<sup>92</sup> For Lumsden, however, a way must be found to guarantee that this self-legitimizing logic gives any understanding of the world and this comes with the publication of Robert Pippins, *Hegel’s Idealism* in 1989. According to Lumsden, Pippins key achievement is the insight that,

core Hegelian concepts [spirit, reason, and ethical life] do not describe fixed attributes of the world or some kind of cosmic spiritual substance but are best conceived as conditions of the world’s intelligibility, conditions that are however historical achievements and which are themselves able to be transformed.<sup>93</sup>

Spirit, or human consciousness, is then, under this view, the historically constituted way in which we understand the world and as such is changeable, rather any kind of metaphysical substance. Furthermore “on this post Kantian non-metaphysical view of Hegel the way Spirit transforms itself (through the movement of the negative) is through the recognition of deficiencies in existing prior norms.”<sup>94</sup> The dialectic under this view, therefore becomes the recognising

---

<sup>91</sup> Lumsden, *Ibid*, p.54

<sup>92</sup> Lumsden, *Ibid*, p.54

<sup>93</sup> Lumsden, *Ibid*, p.56

<sup>94</sup> Lumsden, *Ibid*, p.59

(and presumably the correction of) deficiencies. The Concept is similarly transformed into the 'space of reasons' or "the socially and historically mediated space in which the determinations of our experience are forged".<sup>95</sup> Nancy's approach, as we will come to see, will certainly prove to be non-metaphysical in Lumsden's sense in as much as he will not posit any cosmic or religious entities.<sup>96</sup> He will not be in disagreement with Pippin on the socially and historically constituted nature of our understanding and experience, however what remains to be delineated is how Nancy will deal with the problematic non-being of the negative without, for the analytic tradition, falling into what could be described as 'mysticism'.

---

<sup>95</sup> Lumsden, *Ibid*, p. 61.

<sup>96</sup> As will be discussed in the following chapter, Lumsden will claim Nancy's reading of Hegel as non-metaphysical in his essay "Reason and the Restlessness of the Speculative: Jean-Luc Nancy's Reading of Hegel".

## 1.5 Conclusion

Having clarified the problematic by looking at the history of the use of the dialectic, having considered Hegel's use of the dialectic and its place in his project, having considered the responses to Hegel's dialectic by Marx, and various of the French Twentieth Century philosophical traditions and a selection of the Analytic tradition, we are now in a position to establish the tasks of the rest of the thesis.

### Thesis Trajectory

In Chapter Two, the aim is to establish Nancy's distinctive reading of Hegel. I will begin by delineating of the scope of Nancy's philosophical project and the place of his interest in Hegel within it, as well as considering Nancy's Anglophone reception. I will next offer readings of Nancy's two texts on Hegel, *The Speculative Remark* from 1973 and *The Restlessness of the Negative* from 1997. I will then show how the key notions I find in these texts relate to the problematic of relational being set up in this chapter, consolidating the problematic and guiding the readings of Nancy and Hegel that follow. I will also contextualise this problematic by considering commentary on its handling by Hegel from Catherine Malabou, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. These readings of the Nancean texts and the contrasting readings used for clarification, will be consolidated into the guiding thought that for Nancy, Sense and Identity are understood as the situation of multiple significations held together in restless movement, a problematic situation which has no presence. Taking contributions from various

of Nancy's Anglophone commentators, this thought will be applied to the original task of reading *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* for the expositions they offer on Relational Being, and will be shown to clarify the task as one of reading *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* for an account of The State in Unrest and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* for an account of a Self that does not Complete.

In Chapter Three, the aim is to follow the clue (or the challenge) given by Nancy and to read Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* for what it exposes about the situation of simultaneous connection and separation and what it means to be a singular being, a situation that I provisionally termed relational being. To contrast with this reading, I will offer a reading of Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* from 1986, which gives an account of the specific type of relational being that is human beings in a social group with a distinct identity. This is the same situation I shall argue, that Hegel depicts in his description of the participants in *The State in Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. The aim will be to contrast two accounts of a particular kind of relational being, one structured dialectically and one offered via a non-dialectical exposition. To aid this I will also consider contributions from various of Nancy's Anglophone commentators. In conclusion, I will argue that for Nancy, Community is a relation to be experienced not a work to be achieved like Hegel's State, and therefore the situation of The State in unrest, The State unable to complete, is the very same situation that Nancy terms Community. Additionally, I will assert that for Nancy, Hegel only unintentionally exposes the situation of simultaneous separation and connection

that is the Relational Being of Community, or group identity based on restless negativity, and that a consideration of singular identity based on restless negativity will become the focus of the following chapter.

In Chapter Four, the aim is to follow the other clue or the challenge given by Nancy and to read Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* for what it also exposes about Singularity. To contrast with this reading I will offer a reading of Nancy's *Being Singular Plural* from 1996 which gives an account of the specific type of relational being that is between one being and another, the same situation I shall argue, that Hegel depicts in his description of the coming –to-be of Self-Consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The aim will once again be to contrast two accounts of a particular kind of relational being, one structured dialectically and one offered via a non-dialectical exposition. To aid this I will also once again consider contributions from various of Nancy's Anglophone commentators. In conclusion, I will argue that for Nancy, as Singularity is Being Singular Plural and therefore co-essential with other singularities it is indissociable from the situation of Community. Therefore, as Community was argued to be relation to be experienced not a work to be achieved, Singularity must also be understood as a relation to be experienced not a work to be achieved. I will also assert that as Hegel's account of Self-Consciousness requires that Self-Consciousness completes itself and overcomes its own internal contradiction, a self which does not complete is, therefore, the same situation as Nancy's Being Singular Plural.

In Chapter Five, I will summarise the previous chapters and consolidate the explication so far, offering a consideration of the outcomes. I will argue that for Nancy, the situations that Hegel calls Self-Consciousness and The State are better understood as Singularity and Community respectively, both of which are relations to be experienced not works to be achieved, and are the same relation, the same situation of Being. Hegel's project of dialectical assimilation, I will argue, can be seen, therefore, as one that tries to convert this problematic multiple non-presentable Being into a singular identity which does have presence. I will next offer a reading Nancy's 1996 essay, *The Surprise of The Event*. Following this reading, which I will use to argue that Hegel misses what Nancy calls the very "event-ness" of the situations of Community and Singularity with the consequence that he ends up with sundered instance or moments rather than movement he wishes for. Finally, before considering further trajectories for study that arise from this thesis, I will argue that Nancy's response to the problem of trying to preserve the event-ness of event is to provoke a situation of simultaneous separation and connection, or to give it for Nancy its proper name, wonder.

# Chapter Two

## Nancy on Hegel's Philosophy

### 2.1 Introduction

#### Problematic

In this chapter, I will offer a reading of Nancy's texts on Hegel's thought, *The Speculative Remark* (1975) and *The Restlessness of the Negative* (1997), which will draw out the themes of the multiple significations of sense and the restless movement of identity. I shall argue that for Nancy, both sense and identity are those in which multiple significations are held together in restless movement.

At the close of the previous chapter I identified the initial problematic of the thesis as the question of relational being, which, I defined provisionally as being concerned with what it means to be a singular being and by extension what sort of being it would be that would be other than singular, in a situation of simultaneous connection and separation. While the later chapters will follow Nancy's hints that we could explore this further by reading Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in this chapter the aim is to prepare for this by establishing Nancy's distinctive reading of Hegel in the texts *The Speculative Remark* and *The Restlessness of the Negative*.



I shall begin with a consideration of Nancy's project and the place of his interest in Hegel within it. I shall also consider the Anglophone reception of Nancy's work, paying particular attention to suggested readings strategies. Next I shall offer an explication of Nancy's text, *The Speculative Remark*. To clarify this reading, I will consider it alongside Catherine Malabou's notion of Plasticity as a response to Hegel's notion of the Speculative in her text, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic* (2005). Following this I shall then move to an explication of Nancy's text *The Restlessness of the Negative*. To further clarify this reading, I will consider it alongside Jacques Derrida on semiological difference in "The Pit and The Pyramid"(1982) and Michel Foucault on historical difference in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"(1984) both as responses to Hegel on identity and difference. I will also consider contributions on the work of Derrida and Foucault as offered by Judith Butler and Bruce Baugh.

Finally, in conclusion, I shall summarise and consolidate my explications of Nancy's texts and those of Malabou, Derrida and Foucault, drawing out the themes of the multiple significations of the event of sense and the restlessness movement of relation. I will then use the contributions of Victoria Fairfield and Emilia Angelova to show how the task of the thesis will become one of reading *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* for an account of The State in Unrest and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* for an account of a Self that does not Complete.

## 2.2 A History of Nancy

Nancy was born in Caudéon near Bordeaux, France in 1940. He gained his *licence de philosophie* (analogous to a Bachelor's degree) in 1962, his *diplôme d'études supérieures de philosophie* (analogous to a Master's degree) in 1963 and his *agrégation* (required to teach in the French public education system) in 1964, all at the Sorbonne. Nancy's master's thesis was supervised or directed by Paul Ricouer, (whose assistant at this period was Jacques Derrida) and was entitled "*La Religion de Hegel*". Nancy was also associated around this time with a group of Christian students lead by the Jesuit philosopher Georges Morel in discussions on Hegel. Following his time at the Sorbonne, Nancy taught in the French town of Colmar before taking up a post at the Institute de philosophie at the Université de Strasbourg where he obtained his *Doctorat de troisième cycle* in 1973, again supervised by Paul Ricouer and entitled, "*Le Discours de analogue de Kant.*"<sup>1</sup> In 1987, Nancy was also awarded a *Doctorat d'Etat*, the French doctorate given in recognition for published work, for *Experience de la liberté*, his text focussing on freedom as thought by Kant, Schelling and Heidegger. In this work, he was supervised by Gérard Granel and members of the jury included Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard. A holder of visiting guest lectureships, in amongst other places, The Free University of Berlin, and Berkeley, Nancy nevertheless stayed at primarily attached to Strasbourg until his academic retirement in 2004,

---

<sup>1</sup> *Doctorat de troisième cycle*, is a three-year PhD degree introduced into the French academic system to align with the procedures followed in other countries, particularly America and the UK. For a brief biography of Nancy and a helpful guide to French academic culture see Alan.D Schrift. *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy: Key Themes and Thinkers*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

and therefore, at least geographically, separate from the centralised Parisian intellectual scene.<sup>2</sup>

Nancy's philosophical interests are both broad in scope and prolific in output, his writing did not stop during his grave health crises in the 1990s (a heart transplant, the recovery of which was aggravated by cancer) and continues beyond his academic retirement to the present day. Significant works in Nancy's output representing his major themes are as follows; "The Political", (*La retrait du politique*, 1983 with Lacoue-Labarthe), Community, (*La communauté désœuvrée*, 1986), The Body (*Corpus*, 1992), Art (*Les Muses*, 1992), Ontology (*Être singulier pluriel*, 1996), The Deconstruction of Christianity (*Adoration*, 2010) and Sexuality, (*Corpus II*, 2012). Most recently Nancy has returned to the themes that preoccupied him earlier in his career, with the publication of the book *La Communauté désavouée*, a follow up to *La communauté désœuvrée* and an article for the journal *Angelaki* entitled "The Political and/or Politics", both in 2014. Thinkers Nancy has given exclusive focus to in published book length works, include Hegel (*Le Remarque Spéculative*, 1973 and *L'inquiétude de négatif* in 1997), Kant, (*Le discours de la syncope. I. Logodeadulus*, 1973) and Descartes (*Ego Sum*, 1979). With his frequent early collaborator, Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe, he also published a text on Lacan, (*La titre de la lettre*, 1973). Many other works are focussed on particular philosophical concepts Nancy wishes to re-think, the re-thinking of which involves a deep engagement with a multitude of thinkers

---

<sup>2</sup> Morin, M-E. *Jean-Luc Nancy*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2012) and Devisch, I. *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

associated with, or with whom Nancy wishes to associate, the concept in hand, such as the consideration of freedom in the thought of Kant, Schelling and Heidegger in *Experience de la liberté*, 1988. Much of Nancy's copious writing on Heidegger's thought takes this form, casting Heidegger as a kind of frequent reference amongst a chorus of other thinkers, a role he also affords to Derrida and of course Hegel.

Nancy's focus on Hegel in published works begins as previously mentioned with the publication of one of his earliest books, *Le Remarque Speculative* in 1973. In the intervening period between the appearance this text and the publication of *L'inquiétude de négatif* in 1997, Nancy also published several essays and articles concerned with various aspects of Hegel's philosophy. "Jurisdiction of the Hegelian Monarch" appeared in the journal *Social Research* in 1982 and is concerned with the Monarch or Sovereign in Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. "Identity and Trembling" appeared in the journal *Hypnoses* in 1984 and is concerned with Hegel's structure of self-consciousness when applied to hypnotism. "*L'amour en éclats*" appeared in *Alea* magazine in 1986 and is concerned with philosophies of love and their adherence to a Hegelian dialectic structure. "*Surprise de l'événement*" appears in the collection published as *Being Singular Plural* in 1996 with no prior appearance that I can find, and is concerned with the notion of event in Hegel's philosophy. In this same period, Nancy references Hegel, frequently in other works (it is hard to find a work by Nancy without at least one Hegelian reference in the index) but usually as part of a general historical philosophical context when considering specific issues or

themes. The only other work in the period between the publications of *Le Remarque Spéculative* and *L'inquiétude de négatif* and which comes close to approaching the single author study found in them, is *Les Muses* which appeared in 1994. This text is concerned with the question "why are there several arts and not just one?" and Nancy considers this question in several essays with a particular focus on Hegel's Aesthetics but amongst other philosophies of art and aesthetics. Nancy's career has also included frequent collaboration, most notably with Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe at the beginning of his career, publishing the previously mentioned text on Lacan and *La retrait du politique*, as well as *L'absolu littéraire: Théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemande*, in 1978. The pair also organised the famous *Les fins de homme conference* on Derrida's work in Cerisy-la-Salle in 1980. Following this, at Derrida's suggestion, they set up the *Centre de recherches philosophiques sur le politique* to further consider questions arising from the conference on the nature of the political. Nancy's association with Derrida is also a long one, not only was Derrida assistant to Paul Ricouer during the supervision on Nancy's master's thesis but he was also on the jury panel for Nancy's *Doctorat d'Etat (L'expérience de la liberté, 1988)*. Whilst there have been many friendly skirmishes between the two thinkers perhaps the most well-known written evidence of the fond interaction between the two is Derrida's *Le toucher: Jean-Luc Nancy* in 2000 which examines philosophical thought on touch with a strong focus on the work of Nancy. The English translation of this text carries a piece written by Nancy the day after Derrida's death. Disentangling the thought of Nancy and Derrida is complex and certainly an endeavour that could easily fill

a separate thesis. For Marie-Eve Morin, one way to delineate this difference is to consider the two thinkers on community:

In a gesture similar to Heidegger's, who crossed out Being in an attempt to remove it from its metaphysical interpretation as presence, as essence, it is also necessary, for both thinkers, to put community under erasure, and to think a community that is not an essence, not an identifiable totality which receives its meaning and determination from a transcendental signified.<sup>3</sup>

For Derrida that erasure is total, even the term must go, but for Nancy the term itself and its associated concretions of meaning are valuable, the “erasure” must take the form of an interruption rather than an obliteration. Nancy's work has also inspired, or perhaps more accurately provoked, another thinker into a literary response. Following the publication of *La Communauté désœuvrée* in 1983, Maurice Blanchot produced the *La Communauté inavouable* in which he considers community using Nancy's text as a starting point and sets out the thought that community is not something that can be affirmed or avowed. Typically, Nancy replied to both Derrida and Blanchot in print, the dialogues with his interlocutors clearly still continuing sometimes after many years and sometimes even after death, the various translations of texts affording opportunities to keep the conversation going. Nancy replied to Blanchot in an essay entitled *La Communauté affrontée* which appears in the 2001 Italian translation of Blanchot's text according to Morin (Morin JLN, p. 15) and more recently in the book *La Communauté désavouée* which appeared in 2014. In 2013, nearly a decade after Derrida's death, Nancy addressed concerns Derrida had expressed in *Le toucher* over the term Fraternity, in an article in the journal *Angelaki*.<sup>4</sup> Nancy has also written on and collaborated

---

<sup>3</sup> Morin, M-E. “Putting Community Under Erasure: Derrida and Nancy on the Plurality of Singularities”, *Culture Machine*, Vol 8 (2006) [www.culturemachine.net](http://www.culturemachine.net)

<sup>4</sup> Nancy, J-L. “Fraternity” in *Angelaki*, 18: 3, Sep 2013, pp.119-123. Trans. Sarah Clift.

with, various film makers and other artists, such his collaborations with choreographer Mathilde Monnier (several texts and a “dance conference” in 2002 entitled *Allitérations*) and his text on Iranian film maker Abbas Kirsotami (*L'evidence du film*, 2010).

From a traditional start of studies of canonical philosophical thinkers, Nancy's thought has progressed, via a focus on “the political” whilst not himself being a political agent (Morin notes that Nancy was not involved in the events of May 1968), into a veritable explosion of diversity in terms of topics, including many outside the more traditional philosophical purview. Nancy has managed to occupy a space somewhat on the outside of the French intellectual scene yet has remained intimately involved in conversations and interactions with major thinkers spanning decades. If there is one thought that could connect this excess and divergence of thought, that could sum up Nancy's philosophical project, it is Nancy's own thought of connection *par excellence*, the thought of Being Singular Plural. Morin describes this “axiomatic” thought as follows:

the singular plural means that there are singularities whose identity or selfhood can only be found in their “relation” to other singularities; what exists finds itself in being exposed to or being in contact with other singularities in such a way that nothing exists or makes sense on its own.<sup>5</sup>

For Nancy, all being is singular plural; to be is to be singular in relation to plurality. To have meaning is, and is only, to have meaning in relation. What characterises Nancy's approach to his divergent corpus, is a commitment to taking an existing

---

<sup>5</sup> Morin, M-E. *Jean-Luc Nancy*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), p. 2

concept and exposing the relations that are at play in its meaning, whilst re-casting this meaning as an event of sense.

### The Anglophone Reception of Nancy's Philosophy

The 1990s saw the English language translations of *La communauté désœuvrée* (1991) and *La retrait du politique* (1997) written and published in French the previous decade and in 1996 *Les Muses*, published in French in 1994. Stanford University Press also brought together and translated a collection of essays which had appeared separately elsewhere entitled *The Birth to Presence*, (1993).<sup>6</sup> Also in 1993, the Journal Paragraph produced a special issue on Nancy, in which appeared Derrida's essay, "Le toucher: Jean-Luc Nancy", later to be published as a book length work.<sup>7</sup> Also published this decade were a monograph on the theme of Difference which included consideration of Nancy's work, and a more general collection of introductory essays on Nancy's thought.<sup>8</sup> The 2000s saw the English translations of *Être singulier pluriel*, 2000, published in French in 1996 and several more texts, most notably Nancy's two texts on Hegel, *Le Remarque Spéculative* in 2001 (French publication 1973) and *L'inquiétude de négatif* in 2002 (French publication 1997) and *Corpus* in 2008 (French publication 2000) . The quantity of Anglophone secondary literature at this time, also increased with two monographs on Nancy's work on the themes of Futurity and The Fragment and a

---

<sup>6</sup> Nancy JL, *The Birth to Presence*, ed. Brian Holmes, trans. Brian Holmes and others, (California: Stanford University Press, 1993)

<sup>7</sup> *Paragraph*, Vol 16, Issue 2, July 1993. Ed. Peggy Kamuf

<sup>8</sup> *On Jean-Luc Nancy: The Sense of Philosophy* ed. Darren Sheppard, Simon Sparks, Colin Thomas, (London: Routledge, 1997) and May, T. *Reconsidering Difference. Nancy, Derrida, Levinas, Deleuze*. (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).



collection of essays on The Political in Nancy's work.<sup>9</sup> Nancy's thought was considered alongside other thinkers on the themes of Futurity, Aesthetics and Phenomenology/Deconstruction.<sup>10</sup> The 2010s have seen the translations of works both current, as Anglophone interest by this time is such that the gap between original French publication and English translation has dramatically reduced, as well as works from Nancy's rich back catalogue. Notable translations this decade have included *L'Adoration* in 2012, *Corpus II* in 2013 and *La Communauté désavouée* in 2016, all appearing in English a year after they were written and published in French. A long awaited English translation of *Ego Sum*, Nancy's text on Descartes from 1979, also made an appearance in 2016. The last decade has correspondingly seen something of an explosion of Anglophone secondary literature. Book length texts devoted solely to Nancy's work, have appeared this decade on the themes of, Legality, Religion, Ontology/Sense and Nancy's specific brand of ontology the thought of Being Singular Plural, Otherness, Community, The Political, and Visual Culture.<sup>11</sup> Nancy's thought has been considered alongside

---

<sup>9</sup> Hutchens, B.C. *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy*, (Chesham: Acumen, 2005); James, I. *The Fragmentary Demand*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Armstrong, P. *Reticulations: Jean-Luc Nancy and the Networks of the Political*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Martinon, J. *On Futurity: Malabou, Nancy and Derrida*, (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2007); Ross, A. *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy: Presentation in Kant, Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Nancy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Watkin, Christopher. *Phenomenology or Deconstruction? The Question of Ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur and Jean-Luc Nancy*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> *Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice, Legality and World* ed. Ben Hutchens, (London: Continuum, 2011); *RE-Treating Religion: Deconstructing Christianity with Jean-Luc Nancy* ed. Ignaas Devisch, Laurens ten Kate, Aukje Van Rooden, Alena Alexandrova, Jean-Luc Nancy, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011); *Jean-Luc Nancy and Plural Thinking: Expositions of World, Ontology, Politics, and Sense*, ed. Peter Gratton and Marie-Eve Morin, (New York: SUNY press, 2012); Morin, M-E. *Jean-Luc Nancy*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2012); Rugo, D. *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Thinking of Otherness*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Devisch, I. *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); *Nancy and the Political*, ed. Sanja Dejanovic, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015); *Nancy and Visual Culture*, ed. Carrie Giunta and Adrienne Jones, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

other thinkers, on the themes of Atheism, as well as been the subject of journal special issues with the themes of Film and Visual Culture.<sup>12</sup> A more general un-themed collection of essays on Nancy was published as well as dictionary of Nancy's most well used terms.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst most of the monographs devoted solely to Nancy acknowledge the influence of Hegel's thought on Nancy, at the very least observing that there are two texts in Nancy's oeuvre devoted explicitly to Hegel, they all (including the previously mentioned texts by Blanchot and Derrida) decline the project of developing an extended analysis of Nancy's relationship with the thought of Hegel. There is also a vast and overwhelming array of journal articles, papers and book chapters devoted to Nancean thought on a plethora of topics, but again, there is little which considers the thought of Nancy and Hegel together and none which focus on a comparison of the two thinkers on the specific topics of community and singularity.<sup>14</sup> Of the very small minority which do consider the two

---

<sup>12</sup> Watkin, Christopher. *Difficult Atheism: Post-theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011); *Film Philosophy*, Vol 12, No 1, 2008. Ed. Douglas Morrey; *Journal of Visual Culture*, Volume 9, Issue 1 April, 2010. Ed. Louis Kaplan and John Paul Ricco.

<sup>13</sup> *Nancy Now*, ed. Verena Conley and Irving Goh, (Cambridge: Polity, 2014); *The Nancy Dictionary*, ed. Peter Gratton and Marie-Eve Morin, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> This thesis restricts itself to a consideration of the Anglophone reception of Nancy's work, however in the midst of a final days of the preparation of this thesis I received an email informing me of the existence of an as yet untranslated essay by Jean-Francois Kervégan, entitled "*Un hégélianisme sans profondueur*" which was originally given as a paper at a symposium at *Collège international de philosophie*, in Paris in 2002, and which Kervégan wishes to show that a certain reading of Hegel can help us think what it is that Nancy wishes us to think about community: "Je voudrais simplement montrer que Hegel, lu d'une certaine manière, peut nous aider à penser ce que Nancy nous invite à penser." Kervégan, Jean-Francois. "*Un hégélianisme sans profondueur*" in *Sens en tous sens; autour des travaux de Jean-Luc Nancy*," (Paris; Galilée, 2004), p.25. Whilst translating the essay and also opening up the consideration the reception of Nancy's work is sadly not possible at this time, it would undoubtedly be a rich and interesting area of study arising from this thesis.

thinkers, there are none which precisely coincide with the problematic sketched earlier, that of Nancy's reading of relational being in Hegel's thought when for Nancy that very thought occludes it.

Morin is especially interested in Nancy's focus on Hegel's mode of presentation in *The Speculative Remark*, noting that:

Nancy pays more attention to the way in which the system is presented than to its argumentative legitimacy. This emphasis allows him to "read" *Aufhebung* not merely as the governing method of a totalizing and self-enclosed thought, but as a movement that dissolves and restores, fractures and reweaves.<sup>15</sup>

For Morin, it is important that Nancy's method of reading allows him to read Hegel's *Aufhebung* or sublation as both an intended operation of locking down and fixing meaning but also as the marker of the occasion of the play of meaning, neither fully closed down or nor utterly lost. This generous reading allows the intended logic to play out whilst observing what is actually at work in the structure and presentation of the text and which is interrupting and disturbing it.

Hutchens lists Nancy's two book length texts on Hegel and briefly considers Nancy's essay "The Jurisdiction of the Hegelian Monarch" before concluding that "ultimately, Nancy presents captivating intuitions about singularity and sense, multiplicity and Praxis that represent compelling engagements with Hegel, yet he does not identify his own proposals with Hegelian thoughts beyond this critical requisitioning."<sup>16</sup> For Hutchens singularity/multiplicity, (and therefore Nancy's

---

<sup>15</sup> Morin, *Ibid.* p.10

<sup>16</sup> Hutchens, *Ibid.* p.27

thought of Being Singular Plural) sense and Praxis in Nancy always refer to an underlying engagement with Hegelian logic but as he rightly observes this is not a declared engagement. However, Hutchens declines to comment on whether this undeclared engagement could be considered a guiding intention across the entirety or the majority of Nancy's work, commenting that: "Nancy's work has not yet yielded its primary focus. After all, his erudition encompasses, Romanticism and techno music, phenomenology and communitarianism, Hegelian logic and contemporary cinema."<sup>17</sup>

The thinkers above have not depicted Nancy's reading of Hegel as problematic, however in Simon Lumsden's "Reason and the Restlessness of the Speculative: Jean-Luc Nancy's Reading of Hegel" it is clear that for him, Nancy's reading of Hegel is limited. Lumsden is dissatisfied with a reading of the dialectic that neither wholly concludes nor wholly does not conclude, because for him "it is reason that reconciles differences and functions as the motor of thought's self-correcting capacity [and this] self-correcting capacity of reason is however ignored by Nancy."<sup>18</sup> If we can understand the self-correcting capacity of reason to be the same as the return to self, described earlier, then it would seem a hard reading to claim that Nancy ignores this when it is re-interpreting this event that seems to comprise his entire philosophical project. Lumsden concentrates mostly on *The Restlessness of the Negative*, *A Finite Thinking* and *The Experience of Freedom*. Interestingly, the text that Lumsden does not consider is *Being Singular Plural*,

---

<sup>17</sup> Hutchens, *Ibid.* p.4

<sup>18</sup> Lumsden, S. "Reason and the Restlessness of the Speculative: Jean-Luc Nancy's Reading of Hegel" in *Critical Horizons*, Volume 6, 2005 - Issue 1, p. 218.

which would have provided a more nuanced reading of this event, an event Nancy calls Sense. Lumsden acknowledges that for Nancy the term Sense has a particular meaning saying that it is “designed to conceive of a non-metaphysical process of making creation” but in the next breath claiming that is merely the chosen term Nancy uses for a concept.<sup>19</sup> For Nancy whilst the event of Sense may describe the event otherwise referred to as Concept, this would not in any way constitute an endorsement that the two terms are interchangeable.

The secondary literature which does not focus specifically on Nancy’s readings of Hegel can however offer some useful insight on reading Nancy, on any topic. Rugo points out that, “Nancy’s approach [...] rarely relies on a historical or literal reading; it is rather a reading that aims at appropriating the underlying ground of existential analysis.”<sup>20</sup> For Rugo then, it is important to read Nancy for how he himself reads, that is, for an underlying existential analysis, or perhaps an undeclared engagement as Hutchens mentioned previously. Rugo goes further, “one should pay attention to the fact that Nancy’s writing responds to the same structure of plural sense and incommensurability that his work attempts to advance as the very core of its conceptual agenda.”<sup>21</sup> For Rugo the structure of Nancy’s writing is the same as or is demonstrative of, what Nancy is trying to say about being in this undeclared engagement, that it is plural and multiple and is never only singular. Nancy’s texts therefore are not just about Being Singular

---

<sup>19</sup> Lumsden, *Ibid.* p. 217

<sup>20</sup> Rugo, *Ibid.* p.2

<sup>21</sup> Rugo, *Ibid.* p.3

Plural, they are themselves Singular Plural, a singular voice speaking many meanings.

To comprehend Nancy's philosophy presents therefore a complex demand as James observes:

Nancy's philosophy, most evidently his thinking of the "singular plural", turns persistently and insistently around the demand imposed by a thinking of being in which any possibility of unity and identity has withdrawn, and where the multiple demands to be thought without reference to any overarching unity or totality.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, James warns us, "to read his work in terms of a system, or to offer a summary presentation or résumé of the work in its entirety, would be to miss the way in which it functions as thought."<sup>23</sup> To attempt to think the multiple without reference to unity would require a reading which did not seek to identify a system or to totalize but which would endeavour to keep in play each brilliant, shattering burst of meaning, a reading which takes the form of that which it is reading, as a clue to how to proceed.

Several insights have now emerged which pertain to the initial problematic which was originally defined as reading Hegel's *Elements of The Philosophy of Right* and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* the expositions they offer of relational Being *despite*, for Nancy, their dialectical structure. Firstly, with regards to reading Nancy, we should be aware that there is an undeclared engagement with Hegel taking place (Hutchens), that the structure of Nancy's writing follows the non-dialectical

---

<sup>22</sup> James, *Ibid.* p.3

<sup>23</sup> James, *Ibid.* p.4

structure of how he believes Sense functions (Rugo) and accordingly we must not read him looking for a system (James). We must also watch for the way Nancy himself reads Hegel in such a way that the overlying logic is allowed to function whilst the underlying disruption is none the less observed (Morin). Finally, in order not to fall prey to the trap of thinking that Nancy simply fails to provide an account of what that self is as a result of its interaction with another (Lumsden) we must pay particular attention to Nancy's specific notion of the event of Sense in which meaning and identity is created. With these insights in mind it is now possible to proceed to a consideration of Nancy's two texts on Hegel's thought, *The Speculative Remark* and *The Restlessness of the Negative*.

## 2.3 *The Speculative Remark*

### Introduction

In the introduction to *La titre de la lettre*, Nancy's text concerned with Lacan and co-authored with Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe, they state that:

The following pages only appear in the form of "book" because they exceed the limits of publication in a journal. Without a doubt, it is inevitable that this presentation [...] runs at least the risk of producing one of the effects that our culture attaches to a "book" [...] a kind of binding effect [...] and that might lead one to think that this had the intention of being "a book on Lacan."<sup>24</sup>

The book length works in Nancy's oeuvre are characterised by a constant attempt to avoid producing "a book", that is a larger length text with an argument set out over chapters, on a given theme or thinker and that would offer a definitive encapsulation of that theme or thinker. Instead, the most frequent form Nancy offers, is that of collections of essays, oral presentation transcripts or other short forms of writing that have appeared separately. Of those which do present a longer work divided into chapters, the chapters themselves frequently consist of linked mediations rather than arguments and Nancy himself points out that these chapters need not necessarily be read in order.<sup>25</sup> As will become clearer as Nancy's distinctive notion of sense emerges in the following reading, for Nancy it is imperative to prevent totalisation. *The Speculative Remark* is one of the seemingly more systematic works and presents us with six chapters, a preamble

---

<sup>24</sup> Nancy, JL and Lacoue-Labarthe P. *The Title of the Letter, A reading of Lacan*, trans François Raffoul and David Pettigrew, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), p.1

<sup>25</sup> In the English language translation of *The Experience of Freedom*, the order of the first three chapters are rearranged from that of the French publication, apparently un-problematically and with the approval of Nancy. See Translator's Note in Nancy, J.L. *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget MacDonald, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993)



and an epilogue instead of an introduction and a conclusion, and a “*Remark*”, a two page section of prose not accounted for in the chapter structure.

Nancy states that an alternative title for *The Speculative Remark* could have been “*Essay on the Hegelian Concept of Aufheben*”<sup>26</sup> and apart from the petty inaccuracy that the text is certainly longer than an essay, at least in the more modern sense of a shorter piece of writing, the alternative title is otherwise unproblematic. What it doesn’t express however is Nancy’s focus on *aufheben* as presented in *The Science of Logic* rather than any other of Hegel’s works, and Nancy’s interest in Hegel’s presentation of *aufheben* in *The Science of Logic* in a remark, an appendix to the text not otherwise accounted for in its structure. Crucial for Nancy is that way Hegel finds himself forced to deal with *aufheben* in his own highly systematic text, and for Nancy this speaks more about the true nature of *aufheben* than what Hegel himself actually says or writes about it. The various chapters, preambles and remarks of *The Speculative Remark*, do not build an argument but offer exactly the kind of linked meditations mentioned previously, many of which repeat each other. Therefore, my approach will be to present the most salient of those, and whilst these will be presented in the order in which they occur I will not attempt to provide a trajectory of the chapters as such.

---

<sup>26</sup> Nancy, JL. *The Speculative Remark*, trans. Céline Suprenant, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 1. Hereafter to referred to in the text as SR, followed by page number.

*Aufheben*, Remark, Speculative, Syllogism, Logic and Chance

Considering Hegel's remark on *aufheben*, which occurs in Book One, Section One of *The Science of Logic*, Nancy observes that a sleight of hand occurs in Hegel's phrasing in the opening sentence of the remark and he quotes and comments: "To sublimate [*Aufheben*] and the sublated [*das Aufgehobene*] constitute one of the most important concepts': a plural works as a singular." (SR, p.29). Two things, the act of sublating and that which has been sublated, have been condensed into a single thing, a concept of sublation. In merely naming the constituent parts (the process and the product) of the sublation, Hegel has in fact performed one. In a related point, Nancy observes that "*Aufheben* is the name of the suppression of The States that are sublated into moments." (SR, p. 39). Sublation, for Nancy, is the name of an event of the suppression of situations of difference in which the entities that differ are rendered as moments.

Reflecting on the site of the treatment of *aufheben* in *The Science of Logic* (in his own unaccounted for Remark) Nancy notes that:

In the *Science of Logic* the treatment of expressions takes place almost exclusively in the appended texts that the Remarks constitute (or occasionally, in texts whose status is somewhat comparable, such as the untitled introduction to the section on objectivity). (SR, p. 47).

Expressions in this sense, that is Hegel's sense, mean something like terms (Nancy gives unity and synthesis as examples of expressions dealt with in remarks) and for Nancy it is significant that explanation of these tends not to be not dealt with within Hegel's triadically structured chapters, sections and paragraphs which are arranged to facilitate the reading the process of the dialectic. Instead these often

overdue explanations are frequently given in additions and other non-systematic discourses appended to the main text.

Nancy notes Hegel's self-described "delight" that the word *Aufhebung* (the product of the sublation) has a two-fold meaning and specifically that these two meanings oppose one another.<sup>27</sup> Hegel is similarly delighted with all words which this "speculative meaning" and the excess of these kinds of words in the German language. For Nancy, it is noteworthy that "chance and happiness reign were one expected the analysis of accident or an excess of language" (SR, p. 55). For Nancy, analysis of this apparent linguistic quirk would show that it is not a case of language amusingly replicating logic but that the logic of the *Aufhebung* seems to have taken its shape, unwittingly, from the function of language in the case of words with this special "speculative meaning".

Moving his focus away from the Remark, Nancy considers Hegel's use of syllogism later in *Science of Logic*, noting that, "the entire course of Hegelian syllogistics consists in suppressing successively all the determinations attributed to the syllogism as such [...] the outcome of the syllogism is its own passage over into "the object" (SR, p. 81). For Nancy, Hegel's aim is that, in the syllogism, the varying

---

<sup>27</sup> The remark as cited in the *Speculative Remark* opens "To sublimate" has a twofold meaning in the language: on the one hand it means to preserve [*aufbewahren*], to maintain [*erhalten*], and equally it means to cease, to put an end to [*ein Ende Machen*]." (SR, p.24). In the original French, Nancy's citations from Hegel were his own translation and certain words and terms had their original German counterparts supplied in brackets. The English translator Céline Suprenant has matched these citations with the text of the A. V. Miller translation of *The Science of Logic* for the Humanities Press edition of 1989 (the remark appears on page 106 of that text). She has modified where necessary to "preserve Nancy's gloss", including supplying the original German that Nancy was so keen to preserve.

meanings attributable to the two statements will be bound together in their sublation into the conclusion, a conclusion which is always a fixed singular object and can be treated and spoken of as such. However, for Nancy, “the *Aufheben* is not a concept whose intelligibility a demonstrative play of propositions might lead to: *Aufheben* is to read propositions, to read a writing whose form “undergoes a change” and that indeed requires a “painful effort...” (SR, p. 85). For Nancy, the moment of sublation, in which the varying meanings attributable to terms, including opposing meanings, are held together in an event of sense, occurs in the reader in the act of reading, although this does not constitute a claim that is limited to the act of reading. For Nancy, therefore, *aufheben* is already experienced in Hegel’s text (in any text) before Hegel begins to expound it and attempt to capture it in a logic.

Nancy reflects that the attempt to fashion a system based on the logic described above may well be doomed:

having organised the speculative staging of the wreckage, and determined to present it in the most realist manner through its discourse and its words, Hegel suddenly would appear to have lost control of the staging, a "real" wreckage might have taken place. (SR, p.126)

In Hegel’s staging of the wreckage (the presentation of the unacceptable contradictions that arise in the situations that are speculative) via his system designed to present in a realist manner all speculative situations by reading them backwards from the assumed outcome that is their sublation, the very staging itself ruptures for Nancy and Hegel is forced to append his texts with remarks, additions and re-writings. *Aufheben* is, for Nancy, the event of sense, the holding together of meaning (including but not limited to pairs of opposing meanings), it

is not a special moment in logic that can be reached or understood only by a special kind of logical deduction but is something which occurs itself in spite of this logic, making itself most manifest in the wreckage of this logic.

For Nancy, the role of chance will prove helpful in illuminating his particular understanding of *aufheben* or sublation:

By giving oneself over to the chance of happy finds in language [...] one always risks letting oneself be caught in unawares by a *Witz*, and the delight that speculative thought at times experiences always risks being carried away in some voluptuous debauchery." (SR, p. 140)

To be caught unawares in a *Witz*, a joke, pun or other linguistic situation with an excess of meaning, (including opposing meanings) is precisely to experience *aufheben*, it is to experience sublation in the only way for Nancy that it actually exists, as an experience. Avoiding the excessive debauchery of an unplanned *Witz* whilst none the less making clear what one is would seem to be Hegel's entire project, a project which none the less has "continually broken here and there, haphazardly, in additions or in remarks, the course of its own meaning." (SR, p.142) The difficulty in following the *course* of the meaning of Hegel's project (as opposed to comprehending a description of its end destination) is well known, as the varying opposing factions of Hegelian scholarship has demonstrated almost since Hegel's work first appeared and as was discussed in the Introduction. For Nancy, however the difficulty in following the course, the unavoidable wreckage that occurs in the attempt, is the most fruitful moment in which to experience *aufheben*.

The English language edition of *The Speculative Remark* appeared in 2001 and Nancy added a note at the end regarding its relation to *The Restlessness of the Negative* which had appeared in French a few years earlier and was to appear in English the following year. In it he notes that he was already, twenty-eight years earlier, preoccupied with unrest in relation to Hegel but that it had taken someone else's reading of his text to point this out:

the rapid and incessant movement that goes simultaneously for and against the "proposition" in order to achieve "speculation" and, more generally, goes for and against language in order to reach thought, [...] troubles the sovereign power of the *Aufhebung* [...] prevents absolute knowledge from absolutizing itself (SR. p.148)

For Nancy, what Hegel wants as a progressive movement from one proposition to another and then on to their sublation, (and similarly a progressive movement from one possible meaning of a word and another and on to their sublation) is in fact a restless repetition back and forth between these moments or significations. The sovereign power of the sublation that Hegel wants, is therefore troubled, agitated and threatened by this restlessness for Nancy and Absolute Knowledge as a final situation in which there will be no opposition between the concept and the world and no requirement for further sublations or restless movement, will not come to pass, in that form.

Having explicated Nancy's meditations offered in *The Speculative Remark*, the following picture has emerged. For Nancy, something inadvertent occurs in the phrasing of Hegel's remark that means that the *Aufhebung* will be a site of suppression and for Nancy the fact that this happens in a remark appended to the main text is significant. Nancy also finds it significant that Hegel considers

speculative words as chance linguistic quirks and appears not investigate this as such. For Nancy, Hegel's syllogism suppresses multiple significations, however in doing so it also highlights them, happening most fruitfully in unplanned moments in a text. Nancy acknowledges a certain foreshadowing of the theme of restlessness which he picks up in his later text *The Restlessness of the Negative*. In order to consolidate the reading of *The Speculative Remark*, I will offer next a reading of Catherine Malabou's *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, which also offers Plasticity as a more nuanced reading of Hegel's *Aufhebung*.

#### Malabou's Plasticity

Catherine Malabou introduces her notion of plasticity in *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, the published version of her doctoral thesis, which could also have been alternatively titled *An Essay on the Hegelian Concept of Aufheben* relatively unproblematically. In the text, Malabou's focus is the question of whether the philosophy of Hegel has a future, in the sense of whether it can account for future conceptually and whether Hegel's philosophy is of use in the future. Malabou takes as her starting point an observation she attributes to Heidegger that in Hegel's philosophy the future, and for that matter the past, "necessarily appear as either a *present* time which is just past, or a *present* which is yet to come".<sup>28</sup> Malabou makes it clear however that, "it is not my purpose here to stage a confrontation between the Hegelian and Heideggerian conceptions of

---

<sup>28</sup> Malabou, C. *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans Lisabeth During, (Oxford: Routledge, 2004), p.3

time.”<sup>29</sup> For Malabou, it is Hegel’s occasional references to the notion of plasticity that reveal his understanding of futurity as itself, not just a projected present. Therefore, in what she admits will be a transformative movement, Malabou will look for instances of plasticity both as explicitly mentioned in Hegel’s work and also as what she calls as the “unforeseen in Hegelian philosophy.”<sup>30</sup>

For Malabou, “plasticity’s native land is the field of art,” as the form giving that occurs in sculpting and the form receiving that is undergone by a given material that becomes a sculpture, characterizes perfectly the two senses of plasticity.<sup>31</sup> She notes that English, French and German substantives, ‘plasticity’, *plasticité* and *Plastizität*, are all derived from the Greek root *plassein*, which mean to model or mould. She notes that as an adjective, plastic has two senses, it describes something that is malleable and can take form but it also describes the power to mould and give form. For Malabou, what is of interest is not just that the one term can service the apparent polar opposites of form giving and form receiving but that it can stretch even further and she notes that plastic has also come into use as a descriptor of a certain kind of explosive material. For Malabou the word *plastic* is itself plastic, “the word draws itself to extremes, both to those concrete shapes in which form is crystallized (sculpture) and to the annihilation of all form (the bomb).”<sup>32</sup> For Malabou, plastic is a term to describe, in a variety of applications, the quality of being able to encompass contradictory extremes.

---

<sup>29</sup> Malabou, *Ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Malabou, *Ibid.* p. 7

<sup>31</sup> Malabou, *Ibid.* p. 8

<sup>32</sup> Malabou, *Ibid.* p. 9



Something that is plastic will have what Malabou calls a “hetero-affected” structure, it will be some kind of whole whose internal structure contains otherwise mutually exclusive or mutually unknowable components. Plastic becomes for Malabou, not just a description of sculpture and sculpting but also a way of thinking, that is found originally in the thought of Hegel.

For Malabou there are three important uses of the term *plasticity* in Hegel’s thought and these all occur in texts appearing after *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. The first use occurs in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*; the published compilation of lectures given on art in Heidelberg and Berlin between 1818 and 1829 and the term is used to describe both the giving and receiving of form in exactly the way outlined so far. The second use occurs in the same text but also in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, another compilation of lectures given between 1821 and 1831 in Berlin. In each text, Malabou notes, that for Hegel, “‘plasticity’, describes the nature of those Greek figures who represent an individuality he names as ‘exemplary’ and ‘substantial.’”<sup>33</sup> These “plastic individualities” such as Socrates and Xenophon, are so called by Hegel, as Malabou explains, because they receive spirit bodily and then give it form by fashioning their own morality. The third use occurs in the various versions of *The Science of Logic*, which were later condensed and refined into the third book of Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* entitled *The Philosophy of Mind*. Malabou explains that for Hegel, “the philosophical reader and interlocutor are of course receptive to the

---

<sup>33</sup> Malabou, *Ibid.* p. 9

form, but they in turn are led to construct and form what they hear or read.”<sup>34</sup>

The practice of taking up the form of the concept on offer but in doing so shaping it oneself is then inherent to philosophy and is itself plastic. It is this third use of plasticity in the *Encyclopaedia* that Malabou makes the main object of *The Future of Hegel* and which is of course of most interest in connection with Nancy’s *The Speculative Remark*.

For Malabou the situation that Hegel wants as the product of the *aufheben* or sublation, is better thought of as plasticity. For Malabou, “plasticity is a name for the originary unity of acting and being acted upon, of spontaneity and receptivity. A medium for the differentiation of opposites, plasticity holds the extremes together in their reciprocal action.”<sup>35</sup> Plasticity is that which holds together extremes but preserves the mutual exclusivity of the parts. The extremes have not come together and been synthesised into a whole by plasticity, instead plasticity describes an originary unity of whole and parts that has never been anything else. The subject, for Malabou, becomes something which is not the result of the sublation but is something that has always been a whole with contradictory parts. The subject is hetero-affected and as such is that which is able to contain the contradictory concepts of past and present and project itself into the future; it can speculate.

---

<sup>34</sup> Malabou, *Ibid.* p. 10

<sup>35</sup> Malabou, *Ibid.* p. 186

For Malabou, plasticity is then, a method of thinking and just as Hegel seems to find no limit to what is explainable by dialectics, so Malabou is able to find plasticity described where ever dialectic process is described. However, for Malabou the fact that plasticity is so rarely named, is testament to its unique quality and she says:

The scarcity of references to the concept of plasticity is thus evidence of its distinct mode of presence, which is that of originary synthesis, maintained only in the interval between presence and absence.<sup>36</sup>

Plasticity, then, is itself plastic, it is the middle term or rather the original unity of presence and absence. It is the unseen in Hegel for Malabou, as it is what is both explicit and implicit in his text, it is the situation mis-labeled as and mis-articulated as the process of the dialectic. This reading is not one which would refute dialectics and intend it violence, but is instead one which articulates in a deeper manner that which dialectics sought to explain. It is a reading which allows a reading of Hegel at face value and one which at the same time “ventriloquizes” his text but without necessarily taking an opposing position to it.<sup>37</sup>

Malabou’s notion of plasticity would appear at first glance to have much in common with Nancy’s notion of the event of sense and indeed the approach of both thinkers to reading Philosophy, and to reading Hegel in particular, would also seem to be broadly in sympathy. For Malabou, to read a philosopher’s account of a concept is unavoidably to participate in the construction of the concept.

---

<sup>36</sup> Malabou, *Ibid.* p. 18

<sup>37</sup> In an essay co-authored with Judith Butler, Malabou refers to reading the work of a philosopher as a ventriloquizing them. Malabou, C. and Butler, J. “You Be My Body for Me: Body, Shape, and Plasticity in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit”, in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011). p.611

Therefore, “the concept of plasticity itself must be put into play.”<sup>38</sup> Her text then would be one that will allow plasticity to function in both its senses and to be read as form giving as well as form receiving. This kind of reading that would allow significations to remain in play and not be fixed via sublation into a concept would seem to be exactly the kind of reading Nancy has in mind and as he remarks in the Preamble to *The Speculative Remark*; “To read Hegel’s text is thus, if not to rewrite it, at least to repeat its exposition plastically.” (SR, p. 7). For both thinkers then there would seem to be an intent to avoid the fixing of differing significations into a concept, that is to think outside the logic of the *aufheben*. For Malabou though, the differing significations are hetero-affected, their unity is not a result of the *Aufhebung* or sublation but is their originary state of being. However, as they are *hetero*-affected the differing significations are in pairs. To ventriloquize Nancy for a moment, Malabou valuably stages a reading of Hegel’s *Aufhebung* in which the relation of different things is understood as originary rather than the result of process but one in which opposing relations are still always between binary pairings. This focus on pairs of opposites comes of course from the fact that Malabou derives her notion of plasticity from Hegel whose logic is founded, for Nancy, on the observation of specific words with a pair of meanings which are in opposition.

---

<sup>38</sup> Malabou, *Ibid.*p.7

## 2.4 *The Restlessness of the Negative*

### Introduction

*The Restlessness of the Negative* was published (in French) in 1997, a full twenty-four years after *The Speculative Remark*. Nancy says in his added note to the English language edition of *The Speculative Remark*, that the book was typical of its epoch in that it featured “an immoderate taste for exploiting all the resources of language” and that this epoch was one that “was discovering that one does not philosophize outside language and that the body of the latter is also the flesh of thought” (SR, p. 148). Nancy’s use of puns and other speculative words and indeed his practice of not re-naming concepts but rehabilitating them while still allowing his new and the many acquired old meanings to still be at play, has in fact stayed with him his entire career. *The Restlessness of the Negative*, with its eleven chapters or sections, each a meditation on a single word, term or expression, associated (more or less opaquely) with Hegel’s philosophy, is no exception. These sections, however, do not offer a progressive trajectory, unlike *The Speculative Remark* which for all of the attempt not to offer us a book on Hegel, did none the less give a loose structure which Nancy could interrupt with Remarks and other devices. *The Restlessness of the Negative* on the other hand, is nothing but remark, nothing but interruptive devices, there is not even a scene setting (or scene disturbing) introductory move nor is there the closure of an epilogue or conclusion. As became increasingly more typical in Nancy’s writing following *The Speculative Remark*, the text offers us, less what Nancy claims Hegel has written

about each word in the title of a given meditation but more the multiplicity of what it has made Nancy think. Although there is no introduction as such, Nancy does state in the first section that, “we do not claim here to restore Hegel, nor do we expound a “Hegelianism”: we read Hegel or we think him such as he has already been reread or rethought up to us.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore we are not offered arguments for or against, or even analysis of specific problems, but instead witness an act of speculation in two of the many available dictionary senses; a reflection or conjecture and the taking of a risk in search of profit.<sup>40</sup> In the instances in which Nancy attributes a notion to Hegel, there is no distinction made between instances in which Nancy is claiming that Hegel himself claims such and such a thing or, instances in which Nancy has found a contrary meaning in Hegel’s words that Hegel may not have intended or fully realised, both are attributed to Hegel resulting in sometimes surprising statements such as the claim that Hegel is the opposite of a totalitarian thinker in the second section. In this way, Nancy’s reading of Hegel allows at least two different Hegel’s to exist in the discourse and risks his reader’s restless movement between the two, in this way it is a reading and a writing of Hegel that is truly speculative, requiring a “painful effort” (SR, p. 132). My approach shall be as before in that I will not offer a trajectory that would unite and order the chapters but the salient points about the problematic at hand.

---

<sup>39</sup> Nancy, JL. *The Restlessness of the Negative*, trans. Jason Smith and Steven Miller, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) p.7. Hereafter referred to in the text as RN, followed by page number.

<sup>40</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary lists five main definitions with several variations of these in the entry for speculate. *Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1989) p. 171

Restlessness, Becoming, Logic, Trembling, Sense and We

Nancy states that “Hegel is the inaugural thinker of the contemporary world.” (RN, p. 3). This world is one of individuals separate and alone, with the securities of religious community and a totality of knowledge no longer available. These individuals are forever on the quest to find themselves but for Nancy, “self” cannot precede itself, because “self” is precisely the form and movement of a relation to self.” (RN, p. 4) Self for Nancy is not something that could be lost, to be found further up along the path ahead of us but is the very movement of self-relating to self, the opposite of a destination. However, for Nancy, the description of the restlessness of the movement of self-relating to self in Hegel is an accurate description of experience, even if this description is then slotted into Hegel’s dialectical progress of history and larger system.

Nancy states that in the following ways; “absence of beginning and absence of end, absence of foundation and absence of completion, Hegel is the opposite of a ‘totalitarian’ thinker.” (RN, p.9). For Nancy, Hegel’s thought is not totalitarian, it can access and describe perfectly a state of restlessness which has no beginning or end, foundation or completion, whatever the eventual use this description is put to. Nancy considers the frequently made accusation that Hegel presupposes “the absolute” and then pretends to find it, but counters that the absolute as Hegel describes it, is purely and simply the experience of being, the implication being that as an experience we all undergo it is impossible not to bring it to our thinking, sometimes even fooling ourselves that we have found it. For Nancy, “everything is in the absolute restlessness of becoming” (RN, p. 12). For Nancy

then, Hegel's description of becoming is identical to the restless movement of self in relation to itself that Nancy wants. Even though Hegel wants to then slot this description of becoming into an onward progression leading to a final perfect situation of Absolute Knowledge, Nancy still values its accuracy as a description of experience.

Nancy states that:

with the name "logic" Hegel reclaims what has continuously constituted the *logos* of philosophy: [...] *logos* signifies that no identity is given [...] and that identity and unity are always [...] the movement of self-identification and self-unification. (RN, p. 21)

For Nancy, what Hegel's logic allows us to see, whatever its intention, is in fact that identity is not simply available, that is, identity is always the endless, restless movement between that self and not-self. This movement is therefore a unity of sorts but it is a restless durationless unity (durationless because it neither fully exists nor fully does not exist) a glimpse or a snapshot of which is mistaken for a permanent fixed unity or a concept. In this way for Nancy, thought as that which posits the passage or movement between itself and another thing, is in fact the absolute, here and now. The absolute is not the final destination of a refined and evolved thinking to be reached only after many dialectical repetitions but is the medium of the movement between self and not-self, it is thought itself.

Nancy considers the self as found in its relation to the other (because Nancy is referring to Hegel's conception of self he talks about *the*, singular, other here) and makes the connection with trembling in Hegel's philosophy: "this being-self-through-the-other, gives itself as that by which 'substance ....is made to tremble.'"



(RN, p.43)<sup>41</sup> For Nancy, the presentation of the self as that which *is* in the passage between itself and the other is not a unified whole as Hegel would have it, but a trembling between the poles of self and other. Nancy elaborates:

Trembling is like the unity of pain and joy, - like a unity that would not be a unity and could in no way be one, and that would be one, would resemble *itself*, only to the extent that it would only be vibration differing from itself. The self has its unity in trembling of itself. (RN, p. 44)

The apparent unity of the self that Hegel sees is in fact the occurrence of the trembling, as if actually seeing a trail of movement between self and not self, captured like a blur in a photograph.<sup>42</sup> For Hegel, however this blur is a third entity that has the same presence, the same reality as the self and the other, it is the concept that would unite the opposing beings. For Nancy, we “could register in Hegel a whole series of tremblings [...] we would also have to notice that Hegel does not properly give the concept of this image. It comes to him in those places where categories fail and themselves tremble.” (RN, p. 44). For Nancy, everywhere Hegel finds or creates a concept there is a misunderstood trembling, and everywhere that Hegel’s own text itself fails and trembles (where remarks and additions are forced to deal with overflow and themselves disrupt the triadic structure) there is trembling resisting concept.

---

<sup>41</sup> Hegel citation from Hegel, G.W.F *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind: Part III of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, trans. William Wallace, (London: Oxford University Press, 1975). P. 94

<sup>42</sup> Nancy does not reference Kierkegaard so it is not possible to be sure if he is referring to Kierkegaardian trembling here. Trembling as a theme also crops up Nancy’s essay on Hegel on hypnotism “Identity and Trembling” but again Nancy does not reference Kierkegaardian trembling. Finally, a further possible unacknowledged possible Kierkegaardian reference occurs in *Being Singular Plural* in the use of the notion of the “leap”; this reference and the possibility of opening up a consideration of Nancy’s unacknowledged relationship to Kierkegaard is discussed in the conclusion.

Nancy observes that as Hegel points out there are two possible significations of the word sense, one pertaining to the organs by which we access the world and the data they supply and one pertaining to having a general notion or overview of something. Nancy continues that; “the sense of the word sense is [...] in the passage of each one of the two significations into the other. This passage will not allow itself to be grasped as a third independent situation.” (RN, p. 46) The word sense will always have two meanings and we will always understand in it its play between the two, but this play, this passage is not a thing that is separate to these two senses that can be considered as a third term with equal presence as we saw above. This play is mediation and as such it is beyond number. Nancy continues:

The decisive concept at the heart of mediation [...] is designated by a term [*Aufhebung*, that has] the remarkable property of conjoining two opposite senses, and of thus being itself, in itself and ultimately upon itself, the operation of the mediation of sense in general.” (RN, p.51)

For Nancy, the remarkable property of the term *Aufhebung* is not a strange and unexpected delight that occurs in this and a few other remarkable words, as Hegel has it, but in fact the very operation of sense that occurs in every word but which is more noticeable here because it mediates words with opposing meanings. In this way for Nancy, “the dialectic is only an operation, and sublation is only this strange autosuppressive category, to the extent that one isolates in the analysis the formal or operative moment.” (RN, p. 52) The dialectic, Hegel’s chain of sublated opposites, each third term becoming the first of the next triad, is in fact not a chain at all but for Nancy is the result of a logic which freezes or isolates the operation of sense at the very moment of its operation and mistakenly takes it for a third term.

For Nancy, “the absolute is between us. It is there in itself and for itself, and, one might say, the self is between us.” (RN, p. 78) For Nancy, the absolute is not a distant state of perfected knowledge to be reached at the end of a chain of dialectical operations but what is right now between us. It is that there is understanding or sense between us and that there is us, that we are in relation. The Self is movement back and forth along the passage between possible significations and between itself and what it is not. It is not a destination reached by journey out of myself through the other and back into myself, or rather it is that journey but constantly repeated with no final destination. Furthermore, at the same time that journey is being undertaken from the opposite direction by the other (and in fact by multiple others). I am the unrest between myself and others and for Nancy I am nothing else. For Nancy, Hegel in some way knows this, the unrest of the self is described everywhere in his work, but never left as unrest. Instead this movement is always frozen in a dialectical snapshot and slotted into the great dialectical chain of history.

Having explicated Nancy’s meditations offered in *The Restlessness of the Negative*, the following picture has emerged. For Nancy, Hegel, is the inaugural thinker of the contemporary world of the restless self and despite his totalising system, is not a totalitarian thinker. This is because for Nancy what Hegel’s thought offers us is a description of restless becoming and it exposes, however unintentionally that identity is not given. For Nancy, Hegel mistakes the “trembling” between Self and what is not Self for a third thing, an object. For Nancy, the play between meanings is an event of sense and again for Nancy Hegel mistakes this play, this passage is

mistaken for a third thing or an object. For Nancy the situation he calls “the we or the between us” is what Hegel wants in Absolute Knowledge but here and now. In order to consolidate these readings it will be instructive to consider two other thinkers from the French Twentieth Century Philosophical scene, Derrida and Foucault, considering Derrida’s Semiology and Foucault’s Genealogy as Hegelian critique.

### Derrida’s Semiology and Foucault’s Genealogy as Hegelian Critique

In “The Pit and The Pyramid: Introduction to Hegelian Semiology”, Derrida describes

a typical movement of the Hegelian text [...] the juxtaposition of an empirical content with a henceforth abstract form, an exterior form superimposed on that which it should organize. This is manifest particularly in unnoticed contradictions, contradictions without concepts and not reducible to the speculative movement of contradiction.<sup>43</sup>

For Derrida, then, Hegel’s attempt to think difference ends in imposing a form on what it should be organising and investigating. Judith Butler picks up this point in *Subjects of Desire*, stating that Derrida “accepts the Hegelian project to think difference itself, but wants to argue that Hegel’s own method for achieving that goal effectively precludes its realization.”<sup>44</sup> Like Nancy, Derrida sees Hegel’s presuppositions as guiding and forming and nowhere is this more clear than where contradictions occur in Hegel’s texts which are not resolved or sublated, either because Hegel has apparently not noticed them or because they are unsublatable.

---

<sup>43</sup> Derrida, J. “The Pit and The Pyramid” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), p. 102.

<sup>44</sup> Butler, J. *Subjects of Desire*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 178

For Derrida, “the theory of the signs belongs to the third moment [...] the sign, then, will be an agency or essential structure of the Idea’s return to self-presence.”<sup>45</sup> The sign as the name of the signifier and the signified is a sublation, an *Aufhebung* and for Derrida the sign will therefore be an imposition not a finding. The need for a third term to name the play or difference between the signified and the signifier arises for Derrida from an assumption made not just by Hegel: “In determining Being as presence (presence in the form of the object, or self presence under the rubric of consciousness), metaphysics could treat the sign only as a transition.”<sup>46</sup> The play or difference between sign and signifier does not have presence and as Being or identity has presence as a prerequisite, a third term is needed to convert this play or difference in order to be able to think it.

Both Nancy and Derrida’s projects can be said to be characterised by an intent to think the non-presence of that which Hegel wishes to sublimate and convert into something with presence, an intent to think the being of non-being. However, while Nancy lets the wreckage lie and risk that when we read him we miss those occasions where he has allowed significations to be in play, Derrida appears less reticent. As Bruce Baugh points out, “very much like the surrealists, Derrida champions a process of infinite self-negation and infinite becoming-other.”<sup>47</sup> Derrida prefers to disrupt and prevent a third moment of the dialectic by championing infinite self-negation through a more active programme of

---

<sup>45</sup> Derrida, J. *Ibid.* p. 74

<sup>46</sup> Derrida, J. *Ibid.* p. 71

<sup>47</sup> Baugh, Bruce. *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism.* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), p. 134

signposting significations in play, most notably with his term *différance* and with disruptive presentations such as the double columns of separate texts in works such as *Glas* or the essay “Tympan”.

In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” Foucault describes his notion of genealogy and whilst he does not explicitly name Hegel the essay is frequently read as critique of Hegel’s thought.<sup>48</sup> For Bruce Baugh, in the essay, Foucault “eschews Hegelian History in favour of a genealogy that analyses the configurations of power that result from the haphazard play of forces.”<sup>49</sup> It is the play and multiplicity that Foucault wishes to draw attention to and preserve that will prove useful here.

In the essay, Foucault declares that,

Genealogy does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher might compare itself to the molelike perspective of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for “origins.”<sup>50</sup>

For Foucault, borrowing heavily from Nietzsche, genealogy is not opposed to history as such, that is it is not opposed to the reading of events chronologically, but what it is opposed to is the imposition of ideas and schemas that are external or post hoc to what has been found by the historian or the person performing the genealogy.

---

<sup>48</sup> “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” first appeared in *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite* in 1972. As we saw in the previous chapter, Hippolyte’s reading of Hegel had a profound effect on Foucault.

<sup>49</sup> Baugh, *Ibid*, p. 167

<sup>50</sup> Foucault, M. “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in *The Foucault Reader*, trans. Donald. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, (London: Penguin, 1984) p. 77

For Foucault, despite the name he gives to his technique,

Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion.<sup>51</sup>

For Foucault, the genealogist would be the observer of passing events who would keep them held in their dispersal rather than ordering them according a structure such as the dialectical view of history in which humanity passes through epochs each of which resolves the contradictions of the previous one, finally evolving into a perfected state of Absolute Knowledge.

As critical to Foucault as the dispersal of events, is the recognition of the multiplicity of their beginnings. According to Butler, Foucault “takes issue with narratives of historical experience that presume that the multiplicity of present historical phenomena can be derived from a single origin.”<sup>52</sup> For Foucault himself, “what is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of things.”<sup>53</sup> For Foucault, the idea that things or historical events begin from a single point does not reflect what we find when we look at the actual beginnings of things. Even a seemingly easily definable beginning, such as the popularly held idea the First World War began with assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (an event we can pin down to an exact time and place) is an imposition of the desire for a singular origin onto what is in

---

<sup>51</sup> Foucault, *Ibid.* p.81

<sup>52</sup> Butler, *Ibid.* p.185

<sup>53</sup> Foucault, *Ibid.* p.79

fact a multiplicity of events and factors. A dialectical ordering of history presupposes a beginning point against which an opposition can occur.

Foucault's project, can similarly to Nancy and Derrida's, be characterised as one which would seek to show the multiplicity, difference or non-being of that which Hegel would seek to show as singular, self-identical presence. Foucault, like Derrida, also proposes a method to highlight difference and offers Genealogy as a way to read difference in the chronological ordering of events. Nancy's project by contrast is notable for its general reluctance to use neologisms with the notable exception of Being Singular Plural, frequently working with a concept in play without fully stripping it of its previous problematic significations, or to propose methods, instead preferring to evoke an experience which reflects the method. In his attempts to show multiplicity, difference and non-being, Nancy seems keen to avoid a potential trap which Bruce Baugh outlines in discussing Derrida on Foucault and Levinas,

Neither Levinas nor Foucault, can say what he wants to say, and in fact in trying to say it they just say the opposite of what they intended. This dialectical reversal is very familiar to readers of Hegel, and an indication of the extent of the debt that Derridean deconstruction owes to Hegelian dialectics."<sup>54</sup>

In trying to signpost difference, there is always a risk of inadvertently taking up an anti-position to Hegel and supplying what would be the anti-thesis to Hegel's thesis, in this way critique of Hegel always risks being swept up in the dialectical process itself. Nancy's project can then be read as being concerned with a

---

<sup>54</sup> Baugh, *ibid*, p. 121



minimisation of this risk, employing a generous reticence in what seems like a more passive offering the exposure of multiplicity and difference.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Nancy uses this expression in the essay "Shattered Love" explicated in the previous chapter in which Nancy says that what is required to think Love in all its shatters is a generous reticence, generous because it would allow all meanings of the word to function and reticent because it would not seek to convert the multiplicity into a singular meaning. Nancy, Jean-Luc. "Shattered Love" in *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Lisa Garbus and Simona Sawhney, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 82

## 2.5 Conclusion

### Reflections

Having explicated Nancy's two texts on Hegel's thought, *The Speculative Remark* and *The Restlessness of the Negative*, and also considered alongside these, Malabou on Plasticity and Derrida and Foucault on Semiological and Historical Difference, I will next draw out the themes of the multiple significations of the event of sense and the restlessness movement of relation.

In the explication of *The Speculative Remark*, the following main points were highlighted. For Nancy, a sleight of hand takes place in Hegel's phrasing in the Remark leading Nancy to state that the *Aufhebung* is a site of suppression. For Nancy, Hegel's dealing with the *Aufhebung* in a remark is significant, as is Hegel's decision to regard words that are speculative as chance linguistic quirks and not to investigate this as such. Nancy regards Hegel's use of the syllogism as inappropriate as it aims to suppress multiple significations into single objects. For Nancy, however, the wreckage this attempt fruitfully points to, is or are the multiple significations it tries to suppress. Chance plays a key role and for Nancy meaning most often happens in unplanned and unexpected moments. Finally, Nancy acknowledges the foreshadowing of his concern with restlessness in Hegel's thought. For Nancy, Hegel's *Aufhebung*, in its attempt to resolve problematic opposing pairs in fact exposes the multiple significations at play in an event of sense. Malabou's notion of plasticity offers a reading of the *Aufhebung*

in which the unity is originary rather than given as a result of an operation and would appear to be in sympathy with Nancy on the inappropriateness of the *Aufhebung*, but crucially Malabou offers a reading of relation as between a binary pair. For Hegel, meaning comes from the resolving of binary difference in a logical operation whereas for Nancy meaning itself is the exposing, most fruitfully when occurring by chance and therefore always undeclared, of difference, or multiple significations in relation.

In the explication of *The Restlessness of The Negative*, the following main points were highlighted. For Nancy, Hegel is the inaugural thinker of the contemporary world in which the self is on an endless quest to find itself. For Nancy, Hegel is the opposite of a totalitarian thinker, despite his totalising system because within it Hegel does offer for Nancy a description of the restlessness of becoming. For Nancy, Hegel, whatever his intentions does illuminate for us that identity is not given. For Nancy, self is in fact a trembling between self and what is not self, and this passage is mistaken by Hegel and generally, for an actual object. For Nancy, the play between the various possible meanings of sense demonstrates an event of sense-making, what Hegel calls an *Aufhebung*, itself. For Nancy, “we” or that there is a between us is the very occurrence, here and now of what Hegel wants in Absolute Knowledge. For Nancy, identity is not given and this is exposed for us by Hegel’s project which mistakes the restless trembling between self at not self for a singular object. Derrida recognises that Hegel’s system cannot account for this trembling or play between significations as it has no presence and therefore must convert it into a third term which it can speak of, giving Hegel’s theory of the

sign as an example. Foucault also recognises that Hegel imposes a structure onto that which he is investigating and proposes Genealogy as method to keep the various events of history in play in their dispersal, just as Derrida proposes methods to preserve Semiological difference such as his term *différance*. Nancy's highlighting of difference and multiplicity is by comparison more passive, employing a generous reticence.

These points are picked up by Victoria Fairfield and Emilia Angelova and point us towards the proposed readings of the following chapters. In "The re- in recognition: Hegelian returns" Victoria Farefield considers Nancy's reading of Hegel's dialectical logic (among others) and her focus is the moment in which Self-Consciousness returns to itself following its interaction of the other, the moment in which Self-Consciousness completes its own dialectic as laid out by Hegel in *The Phenomenology*. For Farefield,

Nancy's appropriation of the Hegelian dialectic as a means to rethink the relation between individual and community does not reproduce a structure of binary oppositions between self and other, identity and difference, but rather makes such a structure impossible to sustain.<sup>56</sup>

For Farefield, Nancy's non-binary reading of the dialectic is one in which there is no return to self or completion of the dialectic of self. However, neither is there the expected binary opposite of a return to self which would be abandonment to that which is wholly not self. Self for Farefield's Nancy is that which is neither returned to nor not returned to. In "Nancy and Hegel: Freedom, Democracy and

---

<sup>56</sup> Victoria Farefield "The re- in recognition: Hegelian returns" in *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* Volume 13, Issue 1, 2012, p. 132.

the Loss of the Power to Signify”, Emilia Angelova considers how Nancy’s reading of Hegel confirms for him, a loss of the power to signify and the implications of this with regard to the notions of Freedom and Democracy.

In an unorthodox Hegel, for whom the system does not complete itself in the present, because it depends on loss as its operative ground, Nancy reads loss and the negativity of spirit as mutually co-constitutive, co-ontological and thus as an unrest, since it can never close itself”<sup>57</sup>

For Angelova, what Nancy reads in Hegel (which is not the same as Nancy making a claim about what Hegel says) is a system that does not in fact complete, where the possibility of signification is lost. For Angelova’s Nancy, the negativity which prevents the completion of the dialectic (or the progression of spirit) is characterised by its perpetual unrest. Therefore, the challenge laid down by these two pieces would be to read *The Phenomenology of Spirit* for an account of Self that does not complete and *Elements of The Philosophy of Right* for an account of The State which remains in unrest.

Nancy’s underlying concern with relational being, that is being understood as always in relation and always in unrest, is behind his characteristic readings of Hegel in *The Speculative Remark* and *The Restlessness of the Negative*. In *The Speculative Remark* Nancy’s concern with relational being focuses his attention on the multiple significations of sense that Hegel’s *Aufhebung* suppresses, as to understand that sense is an event of multiple significations requires an understanding of being as always in relation to multiple other beings. In *The*

---

<sup>57</sup> Angelova, E, “Nancy and Hegel: Freedom, Democracy and the Loss of the Power to Signify.” in *Nancy and The Political*, ed Sanja Dejanovic, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p.68

*Restlessness of the Negative*, Nancy's concern with relational being focuses his attention towards practices which will best expose the multiple significations of sense given the problem that relational being does not have presence as it is a restless trembling or movement. For Nancy, being as that which is relational, casts both sense and identity as those in which multiple significations are held together in a ceaseless restless movement which does not have presence and it this distinctive understanding of relation that must be borne in mind in the following chapters in which Nancy's thought will considered alongside Hegel on The State and Self-Consciousness.

# Chapter Three

## Nancy and Hegel on Community

### 3.1 Introduction

#### Problematic

In this chapter, I shall offer a reading of Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* which exposes an account of The State in unrest, which I shall argue, is the very situation that Nancy terms Community in his essay "The Inoperative Community". In the previous chapter I established Nancy's distinctive reading of Hegel in the texts *The Speculative Remark* and *The Restlessness of the Negative*, offering readings in which I drew out that for Nancy Sense and Identity is understood as the situation of multiple significations held together in restless movement, a problematic situation that has no presence.

Following the clue that arose from the reading of "Shattered Love" in the Introduction (that *Elements of The Philosophy of Right* and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* could be read for the expositions they offer of Relational Being), a new challenge emerged. The challenge for the thesis thus became the task of reading *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* for an account of The State which remains in unrest and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* for an account of Self that does not

complete. Providing an account of The State which remains in unrest, will therefore be the task of this chapter but finding it will be problematic as for Nancy it will be exposed in Hegel's text rather than given. However, a State which remains in unrest, I shall argue, is precisely what Relational Being looks like in a given group, a situation Nancy terms Community.

What complicates this task is that not only will this account of The State remaining in unrest not be given in Hegel's text, (he is precisely trying to show us how The State is in fact complete) but an account of how to expose it will also not be given in Nancy's work as such. There is also nothing in the secondary literature on Hegel or Nancy with a direct focus on this task. However, a clue as to how to proceed can be found in Peter Fenves foreword to Nancy's *The Experience of Freedom*.<sup>1</sup> In his foreword, Peter Fenves asks us to consider Nancy's exposition of freedom as a palimpsest in which Kant and Hume's attempts to think freedom are clearly visible through Nancy's text. A palimpsest is created when the original hand lettered text of a book or scroll is scrubbed out or otherwise removed and new text is written on the now blank pages, as in the reuse of medieval books and scrolls. Sometimes these underlying texts are discovered when the codexes or manuscripts are examined using modern techniques and in other cases trace chemicals in the ink of the original texts react and reassert the original text in a ghostly echo. Therefore the way forward will be to read Hegel's text for an account of a State which

---

<sup>1</sup>Nancy, J.L. *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget MacDonald, Stanford: Stanford University press, 1993), p.20



remains in unrest, that asserts itself through the surface of Hegel's text. To clarify this, I will then turn to Nancy's essay, "The Jurisdiction of The Hegelian Monarch" which comments on the role of the Monarch or Sovereign in Hegel's State, as this is the nearest we can get to an account that will even provisionally delineate the relation between Nancy's community and The State in unrest. This then will be the second task of this chapter.

I shall begin by explicating Hegel's description of The State as it appears in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, beginning with a condensed summary of the trajectory of *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, and the place of the discussion of The State within it. Attending to Morin's observation in the Introduction, regarding the way in which Nancy reads Hegel such that the overlying logic is allowed to function whilst the underlying disruption is none the less observed, I will draw out the places in the text in which Hegel's logic and structure begin to unravel and reveal a State in unrest.<sup>2</sup>

Next, I will explicate Nancy's description of Community as it appears in his essay "The Inoperative Community", beginning with a summary of the collection of the same name that the essay appears in and its relation to the other essays in it. Following the advice of Nancy's commentators in the Introduction that in Nancy's writing there is an undeclared engagement with Hegel taking place and that this writing is purposefully non-dialectical or non-systematic in structure which

---

<sup>2</sup> Morin, M-E. *Jean-Luc Nancy*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2012),p.10

reflects the way Nancy believes Sense itself functions I shall draw out the undeclared engagement in “The Inoperative Community” with Hegel’s theory of The State, paying attention to the way in which Nancy’s non-dialectical text allows this engagement to be exposed.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, in conclusion I will outline the relationship between Nancy’s account of Community and The State in unrest, drawing on Nancy’s essay “The Jurisdiction of The Hegelian Monarch” and contributions from Nancy’s commentators in the Anglophone reception, Roupa and Devisch. I will draw out how this relationship exposes Nancy’s concern with Relational Being as that in which both sense and identity are those in which multiple significations are held together in a ceaseless restless movement, pre-emptively sketching the crucial role of Nancy’s thought of Being Singular Plural to be discussed in the following chapter.

---

<sup>3</sup> Rugo, D. *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Thinking of Otherness*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) and Hutchens, B.C. *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy*, (Chesham: Acumen, 2005), p.27

### 3.2 The State in Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*

#### *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*

Hegel's concept of The State is expounded in his text, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, which in short is concerned with freedom, which for Hegel is experienced in the fullest sense when living an Ethical Life as a participant in The State.<sup>4</sup> The progression to this fullest sense forms the trajectory of *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, with the various parts and sections of the book describing stages which appear initially as the final destination and fullest sense of freedom but which are ultimately moved beyond.<sup>5</sup>

*Elements of the Philosophy of Right* is one of Hegel's later works, appearing in 1821 after *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, *Science of Logic* and at least the first edition of *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and *The Science of Logic* were published as works of philosophy but the *Encyclopaedia* and *Elements* were both intended as guides for students undertaking Hegel's lectures; the *Encyclopaedia* for his students in Heidelberg and *Elements* for Hegel's students in his subsequent post in Berlin. However, the sharp relief of the complex structure of Hegel's textbook, is somewhat blurred by his own numerous and

---

<sup>4</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H.B. Nisbet, ed. Allan Wood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), referred to in the text as EPR, with paragraph number denoted by §). In Hegel's text many of his sections have the same name as the concept he is advancing in it that section. To differentiate which I am talking about I will refer the concept as The State and the book section as *The State* and will apply this to similar concept /title pairings.

<sup>5</sup> As is typical of Hegel's large texts there is a notable tripartite structure to *Elements*, however this structure becomes increasingly more complex as the text progresses, please see Figure 1, Diagram of Structure of *Elements of Philosophy of Right*, in Appendix 1.

frequently lengthy additional remarks (known as the *Anmerkungen*) and those of some of his students (known as the *Zusätze*) made in each new publication of the text to the otherwise succinct short numbered paragraphs that the text is actually comprised of. The reader is immediately faced with the problem of whether to read each *Anmerkungen* as it appears or to try to grasp the original trajectory first before accommodating the interruptions, some of which run to several pages whereas the paragraphs they are appended to are rarely more than ten lines long. Added to this are the notes from Hegel's students which can vary in relevance and can be lengthy, all of which means that the challenge of maintaining the trajectory of the text becomes quite substantial.<sup>6</sup> In order to contextualise the section in which Hegel's discussion of The State appears, I will offer a summary of the three main divisions of the text and then a summary of the division in which it appears, namely, of Part 3 *The Ethical Life*.

*Elements of the Philosophy of Right* is divided into three main divisions, Part 1, *Abstract Right*, Part 2, *Morality* and Part 3, *The Ethical Life*. Part 1, *Abstract Right*, is concerned with Free Will. In this conception, freedom means to be able to choose and self-determine and does not exist only when favourable external factors allow it, but is instead something which exists when we claim our right to it; we are free when we will freely whatever the situation. In this sense Free Will is entirely formal and abstract; despite this it is, however, still violable. Part 2,

---

<sup>6</sup> Dudley Knowles does claim however that "no-one has demonstrated that these secondary sources are unreliable (which says something about Hegel's style of lecturing as well as testifying to the assiduity of his students" Knowles, Dudley. *Hegel and the Philosophy of Right*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. xvi

*Morality*, is concerned with Moral Will. This is what we will when we take responsibility for protecting the freedom of others alongside our own, when we will to promote the Free Will of others. However, for Hegel, if we will the freedom of others alongside our own, because we believe we should act only in accordance with what we would will to be universal law and therefore we are barred from wishing for freedom just for ourselves, all we have achieved is the empty formalism of duty for duty's sake that Hegel attributes to Kant. Part 3, *The Ethical Life* is intended as the resolution of *Abstract Right* and *Morality*. However, this gargantuan third part dwarfs the two preceding parts and accounts for well over half the entire text of *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. *The Ethical Life* is concerned with how we can will freely for ourselves and morally for others without contradiction and not from duty alone in full understanding that the two are in fact inseparable. For Hegel, there are three "moments" of *Ethical Life* and in the first two, which he calls The Family and Civil Society and which he describes in the sections of the same name, we achieve this only partially. However, we achieve the fullest expression of *Ethical Life* in the moment which Hegel calls The State and which he describes in the section of the same name.

In the section of Part 3, *The Ethical Life* entitled *The Family*, Hegel expounds his concept of The Family by which Hegel means marriage (by which he means the legalised union of differently gendered humans.)<sup>7</sup>In marriage, we unify the

---

<sup>7</sup> As Dudley Knowles points out the prime objective here is that marriage is shown as the "objective establishment" of the union of two committed partners, the only logical reason they have to be male and female is that Hegel believes men and women have different innate characteristics and wants these to be resolved in marriage too. Knowles, Dudley. *Hegel and the Philosophy of Right*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

welfare of our partner and ourselves and create a new sphere of shared freedom. In the section of Part 3, *The Ethical Life* entitled *Civil Society*, Hegel expounds his concept of Civil Society as that in which we unify the welfare of ourselves and others, in two ways through two different social institutions. Hegel calls the first one The Police (by which he means not just the public body charged with preventing and dealing with crime specifically, but also public authorities charged with what he calls other “needs” such as education) and the second The Corporations (by which Hegel mean something like a guild of tradesmen). However in the moments of both The Family and Civil Society, the unifying of our own welfare with that of others is driven by primarily by self-interest, benefits to others are purely secondary effects. In the section of Part 3, *The Ethical Life* entitled *The State*, Hegel expounds the concept that forms the resolution of these two moments, and provides what Hegel believes will be a non self-interested unifying of welfares, which will show why both the concept of and the section, *The Ethical Life*, is the resolution to *Abstract Right and Morality*.

In order to summarise the trajectory of *Elements*, the full complexity of the structure has been necessarily condensed, however it is worth commenting that *Abstract Right* and *Morality* are also each divided into groupings of three numbered sections and in *Abstract Right*, two of these sections are subdivided into three lettered sub-sections. The trajectory of the entire text can be given by summarising the resolution of each part, which is essentially, what I have done above. However, as we shall see in Part 3, Section 3, Subsection A, *The State*, it will become increasingly hard to follow the structure of the concepts under

discussion. Already in Part 3 the resolution, which one would expect to be singular, has been shown to be in fact made up of three sections, which correspond to three more moments. *One* of these sections will in fact be further subdivided several more times before we reach the final point of (conceptual) resolution for all preceding parts, sections, myriad sub-sections and their corresponding moments. This final logical point, which it must be noted, is not at the end of text, will be the sub-section entitled *The Power of The Sovereign*.

## The State

Until now we have had only a working description of what The State does; it allows us to will freely for ourselves and morally for others without contradiction and not from duty alone but in full understanding that the two are in fact inseparable. However, before preceding further into the complicated structure of Hegel's explication of it, it will be useful to set out a working description of what The State *is* for Hegel. Stephen Houlgate explains that:

The State is the union of fully autonomous, rights bearing individuals who consciously and willingly identify with one another simply on the basis of common membership of that union; that is simply on the basis of common citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

The State therefore is a special union in which the members consciously and willingly identify with one another and thereby unify their welfare, not as a beneficial side effect from an action taken primarily out of self-interest but because they share common citizenship. For Hegel, The State as this special union

---

<sup>8</sup> Houlgate, Stephen. *An Introduction to Hegel; Freedom, Truth and History*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 207

is “the actuality of the Ethical Idea”<sup>9</sup> and furthermore “it makes no difference what is or was the historical origin of The State in general (or rather of any particular state with its rights and determinations)” (EPR, remark to § 258). For Hegel, this special union is not associated with a particular style of government or political doctrine but is what happens when a nation or country is constituted in such a way that citizens unify their welfare through their shared common citizenship, which for Hegel is the making manifest of the Ethical Idea, the attaining of the highest sphere of freedom. For Hegel this is made possible in The State (having failed or rather not fully completed in Civil Society and also in The Family), by the unifying power of The Sovereign.

Hegel’s explication of The State is laid out in three lettered sub-sections but unlike previously, it is not clear that these three sections follow the established pattern, in which, the third subsection is the resolution of the preceding two which oppose one another.<sup>10</sup> In sub-section A, *Constitutional Law*, Hegel expounds the structure of The State. In sub-section B *International Law*, Hegel considers the relations of The State with other states, specifically the mutual recognition of each other’s Sovereignty by a pair of States in the act of war. In sub-section C, *World History*, Hegel looks at the development of The State through different epochs. B and C do not further subdivide but A *Constitutional Law* divides into *two* further subdivisions, I *The Internal Constitution* and II *External Sovereignty*, the latter of

---

<sup>9</sup> Hegel, G.W.F *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H.B.Nisbet, ed. Allan Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), § 257, hereafter referred to in the text as EPR, followed by paragraph number.

<sup>10</sup> Please see Appendix 1. Diagram of Structure of *Elements of Philosophy of Right*.



which is concerned with the State's relation with other states and therefore covers much of the same ground as B *International Law*. *The Internal Constitution* is then further divided into a *The Power of The Sovereign*, b *The Executive Power* and c *The Legislative Power*. The Executive and Legislative Powers describe powers that belong to the Sovereign but which are deputised to various administrative bodies to allow them to perform their functions. It is in *The Power of The Sovereign*, that Hegel believes he has finally given the description how the Sovereign provides the unity between Abstract Right and Morality, and resolves all the pairs of opposition we have encountered so far.

*The State, Section A. Constitutional Law, I The Internal Constitution, a The Power of the Sovereign*

For Hegel, "the constitution [of The State] is rational in so far as The State differentiates and determines activity within itself in accordance with the nature of the concept." (EPR, § 272) This means that for Hegel constitution of The State should consist of three elements in a relation such that two of these elements are differing internal parts and the third is their resolution. For Hegel,

"The political state is therefore divided into three substantial elements:

- (a) The power to determine and establish the universal - the legislative power;
- (b) The subsumption of particular spheres and individual cases under the universal - the executive power;
- (c) Subjectivity as the ultimate decision of the will - the power of the Sovereign, in which the different powers are united in an individual unity which is thus the apex and beginning of the whole, i.e. of constitutional monarchy." (EPR §273)

The Legislative power is concerned with the drawing up of the laws of The State for the benefit of citizenry and therefore this power establishes the universal good. The Executive power is concerned with execution of the legislature drawn

up by the Legislative power in order to bring together particular interests with the universal good. For example, the drawing up of and the enforcement of a speed limit restriction is done to benefit not just the particular interests of say, the people who lobbied for it in the first place or the particular people using a particular road it applies to, but to benefit anyone using roads in general. In this way, for Hegel, the particular is subsumed under the universal. What is crucial for Hegel however is that the Sovereign ratifies the law via their decision, both when the law is drawn up and when the Sovereign lends their name for it to be executed under as a result of their decision, thereby providing the unity between the universal and the particular. Whilst a government could also provide the ratification of, and the authority under which, to execute the law, for Hegel this must be done by the Sovereign so that the unity between the universal and the particular occurs in a single entity, via a single decision. In this way for Hegel the particular which was subsumed under the universal in the second step is also present, or as Hegel has it the universal is present in and for itself. The Sovereign then, is a truly exceptional being; specifically they are, and are the only being capable of being, a universal particular. For Hegel in this way the structure of The State will then reflect the structure of the concept, the Legislative and Executive powers are moments in the concept, as are the universal and the particular, and the Sovereign will be their synthesis; the special unifying power of the Sovereign is that of a sublation.

For Hegel, this third moment in the power of the Sovereign has a further consequence:

The third moment in the power of the Sovereign concerns the universal in and for itself, which is present subjectively in the conscience of the monarch and objectively in the constitution and laws as a whole. To this extent the power of the Sovereign presupposes the other moments, just as it is presupposed by each of them" (EPR, §285)

The universal in itself and for itself is present in the Sovereign in two ways, subjectively in their conscience which is used to make the decision and objectively in the laws they ratify which are then executed in their name. However, despite the temporal sequence expected, that a law must be ratified before it can be executed, and the fact that Hegel orders these moments numerically and explicates them in that numerical order, these moments each presuppose the other for Hegel; they are coexistent. Until these three coexistent moments are present, then a national grouping is just that; it is only a State, that is, it only attains its Sovereignty, if the three moments of the power of the Sovereign are present.

*The State, Section B, International Law and C, World History*

For Hegel, "the nation state is the spirit in its substantial rationality and immediate actuality, and is therefore the absolute power on *earth*, each state is consequently a Sovereign and independent entity on relation to others" (EPR, §331). A State is an expression of the Ethical Idea and therefore an immediate and actual instantiation of Spirit. However, there is, on earth, more than one State. Two national groupings which have achieved their Sovereignty will recognise each other's Sovereignty absolutely and for Hegel "the fact that States reciprocally recognise each other as such remains, even in war" (EPR, §338). When two States are drawn into conflict it is not because one does not recognise the other,

(whatever the quarrels about the legitimacy of particular territories), they are at war precisely because they recognise that each other's absolute Sovereignty is what is in conflict and that one must submit to the other.<sup>11</sup>

Just as Spirit can make itself present in more than one State at the same time, so, Hegel reveals, it has made itself present in different States in the past but in varying degrees, each time more perfected:

The States, nations and individuals involved [are] the unconscious instruments and organs of that inner activity in which the shapes which they themselves assume pass away, while the spirit in and for itself prepares and works its way towards the transition to its next and higher stage. (EPR, §344)

Spirit then, develops itself via instantiations of The State. For Hegel there are four main epochs that mark a definitive stage in Spirit's development via The State; "The world-historical realms are four in number: 1.the Oriental, 2. the Greek, 3. the Roman, 4. the Germanic." (EPR, § 354) In the Oriental epoch, Spirit is "submerged in its essence" (EPR, § 353) and is lost in its being, unaware of itself. In the Greek epoch Spirit becomes aware of itself, it has knowledge of itself and has moved from pure being to being-for-itself. In the Roman epoch this self-knowledge is absorbed and Spirit becomes opposed to the objective world in which it was lost in the Oriental realm. In the Germanic epoch the opposition between Spirit as lost in the objective world and Spirit as the absorption of self-knowledge is to be resolved, as the Spirit has "returned from infinite opposition" (EPR, §353) transformed and now has the ability to encompass the opposition. For

---

<sup>11</sup> As we will see in the following chapter, this is essentially the same dynamic as between the Lord and Bondsman in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Hegel, “the task of accomplishing this reconciliation is assigned to the Nordic principle of the *Germanic peoples*.” (EPR, § 358). With this exultant description of the potential for The State to exist in fullest expression in the Germanic world-historical realm, the world-historical realm in which he was living, Hegel brings *Elements of The Philosophy of Right* to a triumphant end.

At the end of his explication, Hegel’s State has come to us in glimpses. The State’s internal constitution has been given to us, that is, the parts which correspond to the pairs of opposites that are resolved in a concept have been given to us, but we know no more than when we began the section about what it would look like or how it would actually function. We have been told that The State exists when the three moments co-exist but not how that situation of co-existence comes into being. Whilst we have been given a long list of situations and examples in which we nearly achieve this greater sphere of freedom (in which we can act for ourselves and for others with no contradiction and in such a way is not revealed as underlying self-interest), we have been given no examples of it in action other than that we are told that the ability and the task to achieve it lies with the “Nordic principle of the Germanic peoples”.

Hegel’s reluctance to provide a better description of The State can be explained by the fact that he feels it is simply not required. In the Introduction to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel says that “the concept of right, so far as its *coming into being* is concerned, falls outside the science of right; its deduction is presupposed here and is to be taken as *given*.” (EPR, § 2). For Hegel, the aim here

is to expound the science of right, therefore its concept, and the structure of the concept in general (including the process of its coming to be) are to be taken as given, as already deduced. The aim therefore is to describe how the perfect State *would be* constituted in line with this pre-given conceptual structure; considerations of how it would function and the presenting of examples, should there be any, are not really necessary to this description of what is essentially a fantasy state which displays the features of a pre-given principle.<sup>12</sup>

### Unrest in The State

If for Nancy identity is that which exists in a restless trembling between significations, then Hegel's theory of State would seem to seek to set about an entirely different task of establishing the precise stable moment in which the identity of The State is conferred. The text itself is situated historically just prior to the moment in which the German peoples are about to realise The State according to Hegel's account of World History.<sup>13</sup> For Hegel, a national grouping

---

<sup>12</sup> For Marx, Hegel's theory of The State is "this abstract and extravagant thought about the modern state, whose reality remains in another world" which in fact reflects the fact the modern State "abstracts from actual man, or satisfies the whole man in an imaginary way." Marx, K. "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" in *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. Joseph O' Malley and Annette Jolin, ed. Joseph O'Malley, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 137

<sup>13</sup> *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* was written in 1820 as Hegel's own state, Prussia, was recovering, consolidating, and planning for the future following a tumultuous few decades in which it had suffered a humiliating military defeat at the hands of its once great friend, the French Empire in 1806. Hegel had finally secured a salaried teaching position after an unsettled few years during which the Prussian education system was reformed in line with the principles of the French Empire. Like many thinkers at the time Hegel had openly admired Napoleon at the battle of Jena in 1806 (which famously claimed to have heard from his workroom as he worked on *The Phenomenology*). Finding himself in a university associated with the previous reforms in a state trying to regain its identity and unsure of what to reject and what to keep, having previously publicly admired Napoleon, Hegel's choice to assign the forward facing task of a new perfect State to the Germanic peoples, while insisting on the lack of significance of specific political doctrine or history, seems pragmatic. See Haffner, Sebastian. *The Rise and Fall of Prussia*, trans. Ewald Osers, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), Koch, H.W. *A History of*

becomes a State *when* the three moments of The Executive Power, the Legislative Power and The Power of The Sovereign are present in its constitution, a situation which allows Ethical life to exist. An account of *how* these moments come to be or indeed pass out of being is not within in the purview of the Science of Right for Hegel, instead, he offers accounts of situations which do not meet the criteria in which the three moments are present and which occur earlier in the text, forming stages on the way in the logical progression.

Hegel's State is intended to reflect the structure of the concept in which three things exist in relationship in which one thing is the resolution of the two opposition of the two other things, and the structure *Elements of the Philosophy of Right itself* is set up to show a trajectory in which this happens over and over again resulting in a final stable moment of identity of The State. Hegel intends that The Executive Power and The Legislative Powers are moments in which the Sovereign's power is deputised and that the Power of The Sovereign is the moment in which the Sovereign provides the unity between the three moments, supplying the sublating function of the concept. Bewilderingly however, Hegel tells us that these three essential moments in fact *presuppose* one another, forcing the conclusion that they arrive into being all at once, at the same time, (despite the fact the one is the resolution of the others and Hegel has ordered them numerically). This would run contrary to one of the given features of a

---

*Prussia*, (London: Longman, 1978), Feuchtwanger, E.J. *Prussia, Myth and Reality: The Role of Prussia in German History*, (London: Oswald Wolff, 1970).

moment, which is that they do not co-appear but appear sequentially.<sup>14</sup> This sets up a kind of temporal dysphoria against the background of Hegel's strict logical progression, a dysphoria which is further heightened by Hegel's describing The State in the present tense whilst insisting it has not yet happened. Having reached Part 3, Section 3, A, I, a *The Power of the Sovereign*, we have found not the stable moment in which The State can arrive but instead an identity which is located between three moments, whose temporal existence is unresolved, an identity which cannot be said to be at rest.

For Hegel it is necessary that the ultimate decision, which ratifies the law, is taken by a single person in whose name it is executed, but this single person could not be a president or prime minister or other elected official who would otherwise be a member of The State. This person needs to be someone, in fact the only one, who has a very specific relationship to The State; this person is not a member of The State, they are for Hegel, the embodiment of it. From this it follows that because a Sovereign is necessary to a State, then the members of The State as fellow members, are such only on account of the existence of the Sovereign. It is the sovereign who gives The State its identity or meaning as a State and the

---

<sup>14</sup> The focus on the word moment requires checking that original German does not use a different term. As can be seen by comparing "The power of the sovereign contains the three moments of the totality within itself" (EPR §275) with the original German "*Die fürstliche Gewalt enthält selbst die drei Momente der Totalität*, (Hegel, G.W.F. *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, (Berlin: Academie Verlag, 1981) in fact the very same term is used. The German *momente* and the English moment come from the same Latin root and principally carry the same meaning, that of a usually small but indeterminate unit of time. However, in German, the term it also carries a meaning which translates to something more like element or feature. This could therefore mean either that when Hegel describes the moments of The State he is simply describing its features, elements or parts and not its events as such, or, that there is no difference between the features and the events of The State for Hegel.



members their identity and meaning as members of it. However, this means that the relationship of members of The State to one another is in fact mediated via the Sovereign; they can have no direct relation to each other. The only person in The State who has direct relation to its members, and in fact to the entirety, the multiplicity of the members all at once, is in fact, the Sovereign whose function is precisely that of the event of sense. The power of the Sovereign is precisely that of sublation but in giving sense to the multiplicity of members of The State it is not a binary pair that is sublated but a multiplicity. The Identity of The State as given in Hegel's text therefore not only uncertainly suspended between three moments it is also a sublation which gives sense to a multiplicity rather than a binary pairing. What is revealed in this unrestful State and which is exposed in Hegel's attempt to provide exactly that which would allow a stable fixed single identity State, is, surprisingly, an essential co-existence. As will be seen in the next section (and explored more fully in the final section) co-existence will be a central theme in Nancy's account of Community.

### 3.3 Community in Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*

#### *The Inoperative Community*

Nancy's account of Community is given in his essay "The Inoperative Community" which appears in the collection of the same name. Traceable to the same urge to rethink the political that caused Nancy and his frequent collaborator at the time, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe to convene the 1980 *Les Fins de l'homme* conference on Derrida and politics, the collection is broadly concerned with community, that is, the history of the thinking of the relation between groups and singular beings as essence.

The collection appeared in 1986, approximately two years after the closure of the *Centre de Recherches Philosophiques sur la Politique*, which was set up following *Les Fins de l'homme*. The original French publication of the collection in 1986, consisted of three closely interlinked essays, "The Inoperative Community", "Myth Interrupted" and "Literary Communism" and a further two essays "Of Being-In-Common" and "A Finite History". These last two were replaced by the essays "Shattered Love" and "Of Divine Places" in the 1991 University of Minnesota edition, which I shall be using here. The first three essays can be read as a whole, (indeed in the original French edition they are named parts 1, 2 and 3) and if read in the order they appear in the collection they appear to run on, one from the other, in terms of content. Stylistically they are very similar; there are no introductions, conclusions and arrangements of sections to progress an argument,

just paragraphs of widely varying length which offer reflections on the topic in hand occasionally interrupted and by default arranged into groupings by a typographic device of a line of three stars.<sup>15</sup>

“The Inoperative Community” as will be more fully explicated shortly, is concerned with philosophies of community and their tendency to think community as that which is lost or broken and which must be reinstated or mended. Community under this view is a specific state of affairs that can be achieved or completed and is very much not here now, but is to come. For Nancy however, community is that which happens in the suspension of what he calls the communitarian project, that which happens as this project “unworks” itself. “Myth Interrupted” is concerned with myth, all myths, as being fundamentally the myth of community, the promise of communion. For Nancy myth interrupts itself by its own realisation that what it is telling is not true, that its narrative, as narrative, is mythic. For Nancy the interruption of myth is concomitant with the suspension of the communitarian project, the very circumstance in which community actually occurs. “Literary Communism” is concerned with the kind of writing that would permit myth to interrupt itself and community to happen, in contradistinction from the kind of writing that would aim to convey a message and thereby achieve the completion of communion. For Nancy the kind of writing that would do this is one that is

---

<sup>15</sup> Nancy is frequent user of the three dot ellipsis in his prose. The three star device used here seems to perform much the same function for each essay as the three dot ellipsis would do in a sentence, it seems to denote something missing or not included, and so separates what is either side of but it also signifies that what is either side of the ellipsis is in some way connected.

offered or abandoned at what he calls the limit at which singular beings share one another. This limit is also the site of the occurrence of community.

The other two essays offered in the English collection are less well connected in content and different in structure, both to each other and the original three, featuring either titled sections or numbered parts. "Shattered Love", which was considered in the Introduction, is concerned with the notion that "thinking is love"<sup>16</sup> and that we have misunderstood love because we have misunderstood thinking, in both cases because we have thought them dialectically. "Of Divine Places" is concerned with the notion that what thought encounters at its extreme, at its limit, is something which was once considered divine. These essays are included in the collection because they connect loosely and somewhat in the manner of a postscript, with what Nancy wants to say about community and thinking and also community and limits. The other two essays offered in the original French collection are again different in tone to the first three; "Of Being-in-Common" is concerned with what would constitute the task of an ontology of community and what is key for Nancy is that the question posed should be concerned with the community of being not the being of community. "Finite History" is concerned with the event of community, or the happening of being, which is always being-in-common. For Nancy we can only grasp this if we can think history as other than successive and causal, that is, if we can think it non-metaphysically. Nancy calls this kind of history a finite history.

---

<sup>16</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc. "Shattered Love" in *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Lisa Garbus and Simona Sawhney, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 84

## Community

Written at the invitation of Jean-Christophe Bailly editor of *Aléa* magazine, where it first appeared 1983, the essay “The Inoperative Community” is generally considered as engagement with Bataille, but this engagement has become somewhat overshadowed by the subsequent engagement between Blanchot and Nancy over “The Inoperative Community”.<sup>17</sup> Gregory Bird observes that descriptions of the debate between Nancy and Blanchot are usually “polarized into the debate between the Heideggerian tendency to prioritize the “with” and the Levinasian tendency to prioritize the “other””<sup>18</sup> when thinking community, with the former attributed to Nancy and the latter to Blanchot. For Bird what is germane is that “Blanchot insinuates that because Nancy’s theory [of community] fails to move beyond the hypostasis in language it also fails to move beyond the Christian as well as the foundational sense.”<sup>19</sup> Reading Nancy and Blanchot’s texts, the debate between Nancy and Blanchot is at times hard to pick out, for all the characterisation of it as a debate they seem to be largely in sympathy in their descriptions of how community has been thought thus far and the problems associated with thinking it. For Blanchot, Nancy fails to provide a sufficient account of how to overcome the difficulty of speaking of community (beyond

---

<sup>17</sup> The engagement with Blanchot was covered in the Introduction. With regards to Bataille, in a subsequent shorter piece “La Communauté Affrontée”, Nancy explains that when the invitation to write on community arrived he was “finishing year long course dedicated to Bataille considered from a political angle [and was] researching, very precisely, the possibility of a hitherto unheard-of resource that would avoid fascism and communism as much as democratic or republic individualism”. Nancy JL, “The Confronted Community” trans. by Jason Kemp Winfree in *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille: Community and Communication*, ed. Andrew J. Mitchell and Jason Kemp Winfree (Albany: State University of New York Press 2009), p.21.

<sup>18</sup> Bird, Gregory. “Community beyond hypostasis, Nancy responds to Blanchot” in *Angelaki*, vol 13, No 1, April 2008. P. 3

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8

merely diagnosing it) and therefore of speaking of oneself as part of a community, of avowing oneself to be part of a given community. However, as we shall see, and maybe this is why Nancy describes himself as stunned at the reproach he feels Blanchot has levelled at him, the difficulty of speaking of community is given much attention in *The Inoperative Community* as is the aim to offer an exposition of community rather than to offer anything too prescriptive that would risk being mistaken for a proposal of a new politics.<sup>20</sup>

As is typical of Nancy's work, "The Inoperative Community" does not set out a sustained argument but provides a series of reflections on community, how it has been thought and how that thought misses for Nancy what community actually is. However, Nancy gives no new phrase or term to indicate when he is using the term community to denote what he thinks community is, nor does he give a new phrase or term to denote when he is referring to a previous and for him, incorrect understanding of community. The term is left very much in play as an interruptive device, frequently understandable only by its context making picking out an argument problematic. What will become clear however, is that whether using the term community to denote the previous connotations of the term that he wishes to move away from, or whether setting out his new understanding of the term, community means for Nancy, the situation of singular beings in relation to a group. Also problematic is Nancy's practice of, as previously mentioned, not

---

<sup>20</sup> In *La Communauté Affrontée*, Nancy describes Blanchot's response to "The Inoperative Community" as both a "resonance" and a "reproach" by which he felt "stunned". Winfree and Mitchell, *Ibid*, p. 23.

providing titled segments to guide his reader through an argument but creating varying sized groups of paragraphs by occasionally introducing a line of three stars to divide them. Whilst the paragraphs in each of the fifteen divisions seem to carry through a general thought that links the paragraphs in each division, there is some repetition across paragraphs and across divisions which prevents the order of their appearance being used to imply the progression of an argument. Therefore in order to convey the scope of Nancy's thought on community but trying to avoid merely reproducing his text, I shall present his explication by offering a brief summary of the topics of the divisions and drawing out further those passages in which Nancy's thought of community exposes itself.

In division 1, Nancy introduces and misquotes the Sartrean trope that communism is the "unsurpassable horizon of our time."<sup>21</sup> In division 2, Nancy offers the thought that the singular being has been thought, "since Hegel at least" (IC.p.3) as an individual, that is, as nothing but one of the pieces which make up the whole that is community or one the pieces it breaks down into. In division 3, Nancy states that

Singularity never takes place at the level of atoms [...] rather it takes place at the level of the *clinamen*, which is unidentifiable". It is linked to ecstasy: one could not properly say that the singular being is the subject of ecstasy, for ecstasy has no "subject" -but one must say that ecstasy (community) happens to the singular being. (IC, p.7)

---

<sup>21</sup> Nancy, JL, "The Inoperative Community" in *The Inoperative Community*, trans.Peter Connor, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p.1. Hereafter referred to in the text as IC followed by page number. In *Search for a Method*, Sartre actually states that Marxism is the unsurpassable horizon of our time. In her translation of Sartre's text Hazel Barnes renders this much referenced sentence as "I consider Marxism the one philosophy of our time which we cannot go beyond". Sartre, J.P. *Search for a Method*, trans .Hazel.E. Barnes, (New York: Vintage, 1963), p.xxxiv

The clinamen is the name given by Lucretius to his notion of the swerve that atoms make when falling through space :

When atoms move straight down through the void by their own weight, they deflect a bit in space at a quite uncertain time and in uncertain places, just enough that you could say that their motion has changed. But if they were not in the habit of swerving, they would all fall straight down through the depths of the void, like drops of rain, and no collision would occur, nor would any blow be produced among the atoms. In that case, nature would never have produced anything.<sup>22</sup>

For Nancy the value of this account is that the atom is *an* atom only in the event of the clinamen, when it is cast as *an* atom because now there are other atoms with which it has come into contact in the swerve. For Nancy to be singular is not to be originally singular, like the thought of the individual, but rather it is to find oneself as singular in a situation, an ecstasy, with other beings, precisely because there *are* other beings.

In division 4, Nancy states that communism cannot communicate this aspect of singularity and that philosophies of community have so far ignored this. In division 5, Nancy tells us that so far, community “has been thought of on the basis of a lost community – one to be regained or reconstituted.” (IC, p. 9) The thinking that has taken place on community has been tinged with nostalgia and fuelled by the assumption that community is a thing gone and past and that furthermore, the task of thinking it behoves the task of reviving it. In division 6, Nancy asserts that this perceived loss is itself constitutive of a coming together and creating community. Furthermore, this kind of community is “indissociable” (IC, p. 14) from

---

<sup>22</sup> Extract from Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* in *The Epicurus Reader*, trans. and ed. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson, (Cambridge: Hackett, 1994), p. 65



death, as death is that in which community reveals itself as the living come together over the dead. In division 7, Nancy says of Bataille that he,

is without doubt the one who experienced first, or most acutely, the modern experience of community as neither a work to be produced, nor a lost communion, but rather as space itself and the spacing of the experience of the outside, of the outside-of-self. (IC, p. 19)

For Nancy, Bataille realises that community is in fact not a work to be achieved (a loss to be made whole) or gone forever in a communion that we no longer have or that has died. For Nancy what Bataille offers is a description of an experience of the spacing of oneself and what is outside that self, what occurs at the limit of oneself. For Nancy this is a description of the situation of a singular being as a singular being in relation to other beings. This situation Nancy calls, variously, ecstasy or community. However, whilst Nancy finds this description in Bataille, he acknowledges in division 8, that for Bataille, community and ecstasy remain as two separate “poles”.

In division 9, Nancy asserts that only a discourse that exhausts itself “can indicate to the community the sovereignty of its sharing (that is to say *neither present* to it nor *signify* to it its *communion*)” (IC, p. 26). To communicate communion, that is, what occurs in ecstasy or community, a discourse must exhaust itself and leave its readers/witnesses to move beyond it. A discourse that completes a work, which it then can present or signify using a term, could not communicate the spacing is that communion for Nancy.<sup>23</sup> In division 10, Nancy states that “A singular being

---

<sup>23</sup> Nancy further considers discourses which aim to complete themselves in the essay “Literary Communism”. Nancy, JL, *The Inoperative Community*, various translators, ed Peter Connor, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)

*appears*, as finitude itself: at the end (or the beginning) with the contact of the skin (or the heart) of another singular being” and that “finitude co-*appears* or *compears*” (IC, p. 28). For Nancy, as singular being is revealed at the limit of a being, a limit the singular being realises only in encounter with another being, with other beings, then the limit or finitude of a being is always a co-appearance or compearance. In division 11, Nancy tells us that,

Community necessarily takes place in what Blanchot has called “unworking” referring to that which, before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which no longer having to do either with production or with completion encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension.” (IC, p. 31).<sup>24</sup>

Community, or ecstasy, or singular beings knowing themselves as singular in encounters with other such singular beings, is a situation which takes place at the point of the interruption of a work or project. Community has habitually been thought of as lost because it occurs when there is loss, or more accurately an interruption, suspension or prevention of completion, however it occurs in the moment of this realisation, not in the success of resulting projects which aim to recapture what has been lost.

In the short, interruptive, fragment that comprises division 12, Nancy reproduces a paragraph from *The Experience of Freedom*, his text on freedom in Kant, Schelling and Heidegger concluding that “the emotional element that gives an obsessive value to communal existence is death” (IC, p.34). This insert echoes the

---

<sup>24</sup> Nancy borrows this term not just from Blanchot but also from Bataille as he acknowledges in footnote in which he says “there are two ways to escape the dialectic (that is to say mediation in a totality) –either by slipping away from it into immanence or by opening up its negativity to the point of rendering it “unworked” [désouvrée] as Bataille puts it” (IC, p. 156). I discuss Ignaas Devisch’s elaboration of this footnote in the conclusion to this chapter.

earlier assertion that loss and death provokes communion. In division, 13 Nancy states, “For Bataille community was first and finally the community of lovers” and that “in spite of Bataille, and yet with him, we should try to say the following; love does not expose the entire community.” (IC, p. 36). For Nancy what Bataille is really describing in his description of community is the rather more exclusive communion between, the ecstasy between, lovers, rather than the communion between a larger number or indeed between a singular being and multiplicity itself.<sup>25</sup>

In division 14, Nancy explains that to get at what he wants exposed about community, that is the relation between singular beings and multiplicity in general, we must think of what he calls “the political” not as a “work of love or of death” (IC, p. 40) but beyond those limits. For Nancy,

It [thinking the political] exposes these limits, it never passes beyond them, nor passes beyond community. But at every instance singular beings share their, limit share each other on their limits. They escape the relationships of society (“mother” and “son”, “author” and “reader”, “public figure” and “private figure”, “producer” and “consumer”), but they are in community, and are unworked. (IC, p. 41)

To think the political means for Nancy, to think community, to think singular beings in communion with other singular beings and knowing themselves as such. This is a communion or relation beyond specific relationships as we know and name them but is instead a sharing of limits by singular beings. In this sharing, singular beings are unworked by one another, they are prevented from fully

---

<sup>25</sup> The relation of lovers is taken up by Nancy in the essay “Shattered Love”. Nancy, JL, *The Inoperative Community*, various translators, ed Peter Connor, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)

completing the enclosure of the singular yet they are also prevented from completing total communion, they are in ecstasy, they are in community.

Finally, in a postscript note added on the occasion of the English language publication of *The Inoperative Community* collection, Nancy takes the opportunity to address a comment in Blanchot's text *The Unavowable Community*. Responding to Blanchot's observation that a flaw in language leads us *not* to not consider what it is to be in common, when considering community, Nancy explains that;

Nothing is more *common* to the members of a community, in principle, than a myth, or a group of myths. Myth and community are defined by each other, at least in part -but perhaps in totality- and this motivates a reflection on community according to myth (IC, p. 42)

For Nancy, what members of a community have in common is sense of collective identity, the narrative of which is myth.<sup>26</sup>

### Community and The State

Having reached the end of Nancy's essay, any mention of reading the essay as engagement with Hegel remains undeclared. Early in the piece in his discussion of the *clinamen*, Nancy asserts that he is after an understanding of singular being or singularity that would not be that of the individual as it has been though thus far and particularly by Hegel. Nancy goes on to remark that Hegel's individual passes through experience with "staggering opinionatedness" (IC, p. 3) but does not develop this remark or give any indication that he will do so later in the essay. In

---

<sup>26</sup> Nancy takes up the connection between myth and community in the essay "Myth Interrupted". Nancy, JL, *The Inoperative Community*, various translators, ed Peter Connor, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)

order to read for an undeclared engagement, it will be necessary to consider the moments in which Nancy's thought on community exposes itself as highlighted above to see how these could function as undeclared engagement on Hegel's State.

For Nancy, community is not a work to be achieved, but the very experience of loss of communion. He also observes that this experience has been taken to signify that community is broken and must be repaired or made whole. For Hegel, The State would occur in a discrete moment of culmination and completion as the resolution of a previous situation of opposition. In its final perfect instantiation it would also be the culmination of a history of previous incomplete attempts to achieve The State. Hegel's projected perfect State would make an excellent example of the kind of project to achieve community as a work that Nancy has in mind and is allowing to potentially expose itself.

For Nancy, singular beings know themselves as singular in encounters with other such singular beings in which they mutually realise and establish their finitude. Singular being is then for Nancy in fact always a co-appearance and this situation is precisely that of community or as Nancy sometimes prefers, ecstasy. As we saw earlier this encounter of simultaneous connection and separation takes place in the face of loss and the attempt to regain connection, being paradoxically achieved in the failure of the project. This achievement however is not a completion but what Nancy calls, after both Blanchot and Bataille, an unworking. Nancy invokes the mythic figure of "Penelope who reweaves the fabric of intimacy

without ever managing to complete it" (IC, p.10) to explain unworking as interruption of a project which is in turn begun again in the next instance or in the morning light like Penelope's cloth. Community for Nancy, like Penelope's weaving, is never fully completed, nor fully lost and gone. Hegel also invokes the figure of Penelope in *Elements of The Philosophy of Right*, in order to distinguish what he is doing from what he describes as a certain kind of philosophical outline, "if only because it is imagined that what philosophy puts forward is as ephemeral a product as Penelope's weaving, which is begun a fresh every day." (EPR, p.9). Hegel is clearly very keen to avoid a philosophical project with as troublesome an existence as the product (or lack of product) of Penelope's loomwork and instead wants something more rigorous and in his own terms, real. Hegel therefore locates the event of the completion of his logical process in the physical body of a single individual, the Sovereign or Monarch and would of course be entirely unable accept a State whose existence was in an unworking between multiple beings. Nancy's thought of community becomes therefore almost the exact inverse of Hegel's State as a depiction of the relation between singular beings and groups, but as Nancy is keen to avoid setting up an opposition and risking implying a dialectical process he cannot declare any engagement but instead merely allows it to potentially expose itself.

For Nancy, it is only possible to communicate communion, the experience of community, in a discourse which exhausts itself. In his text, Hegel very much tries to present a discourse which completes a work, not just in terms of its conceptual content but also its careful triadic structuring. However, at the intended

conceptual moment of the resolution of all the previous oppositions and the place in the text (Part 3, Section 3, A, I, a, The Power of The Sovereign) in which Hegel places this moment there appears to be a breach. This is the most heavily annotated section, with half of the eight paragraphs which make up the section accompanied by Hegel's own extremely lengthy *Anmerkungen* or later remarks (as well as his students *Zusätze*), the reader can almost feel Hegel trying again and again to communicate what it is he wants to say about The State.<sup>27</sup> This is also the very location at which it is revealed that there is an essential co-existence at the heart of Hegel's State. If for Nancy, the experience of community can occur in a text that exhausts itself and unworks itself, interrupting and preventing its own closure, then to read Hegel's text is precisely to experience such an unworking.

---

<sup>27</sup> In one instance, a succinct more technical ten line paragraph has a remark added to it that exceeds two pages in a more reflective prose style.

### 3.4 Conclusion

#### Reflections

At the beginning of this chapter I set out the intention of offering a reading of Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* which exposes an account of The State in unrest, which I promised to argue, is the very situation that Nancy terms Community in his essay "The Inoperative Community". So far, I have explicated Hegel's description of The State as it appears in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, beginning with a condensed summary of the trajectory of *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, and the place of the discussion of The State within it, drawing out the places in the text in which Hegel's logic and structure begin to unravel and reveal a State in unrest. I have also explicated Nancy's description of Community as it appears in his essay "The Inoperative Community", beginning with a summary of the collection of the same name in which it appears, its relation to the other essays in it and drawing out the undeclared engagement in "The Inoperative Community" with Hegel's theory of The State. What remains is to outline the relationship between Nancy's account of Community and The State in unrest, drawing on Nancy's essay "The Jurisdiction of The Hegelian Monarch" and various of Nancy's commentators in the Anglophone reception and to draw out how this relationship exposes Nancy's concern with Relational Being, pre-emptively sketching the crucial role of Nancy's thought of Being Singular Plural to be discussed in the following chapter.



Having drawn out Nancy's undeclared engagement with Hegel's theory of The State the following points emerged. Nancy's notion that community is not a work to be achieved can be read as an engagement with Hegel's project as one which would try and achieve community in the form of The State. Nancy's notion that Singular being is always in fact co-appearance in an unworking can be seen as an engagement with Hegel's attempt to achieve and fix community by locating its completion in the body of a single individual, the Sovereign. Nancy's notion that only a discourse that exhausts itself can communicate the experience of community can be seen as an engagement with Hegel's attempt to provide a completed discourse that could communicate the concept of community. However, what occurs on reading Hegel's text is that whatever his intentions, an experience of an unworking is none the less communicated. Any engagement Nancy is involved in with Hegel's text has to be undeclared, Nancy does not want to set up something that could become an opposition to Hegel's text and instead all that can implied is that the engagement is potentially exposed in Nancy's text. Nancy is less reticent in his essay "The Jurisdiction of the Hegelian Monarch."<sup>28</sup> This essay appeared originally in 1981 in an annual collection of works by several thinkers involved with the *Centre de recherches philosophiques sur le politique*

---

<sup>28</sup> The English translations of Hegel's text generally refer to the Sovereign, Sovereignty and render the section title as the Power of the Sovereign. The original German uses *fürstliche, souveränität* and the title section is *die fürstliche Gewalt*, whilst French translations of Hegel's text tend to use *le prince, La souveraineté* and the section title is *Le Prince*, following the German. Nancy's use of Monarch (*le monarque*) therefore seems odd as it clashes with the general French terminology for Hegel's Sovereign which seems to avoid *le monarque*. By translating Nancy's terminology directly Mary Ann and Peter Caws, carry over Nancy's clash using Monarch against the more usual English terminology for this text, Sovereign. However, in order to avoid clashing with the terminology of my citations I will use the term the Monarch in order to refer the same individual previously referred to as the Sovereign. Hegel, G.W.F. *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, (Berlin: Academie Verlag, 1981) and Hegel, G.W.F. *Principes De la philosophie Du droit*, trans André Kaan with preface by Jean Hyppolite, (Paris: Gallimard, 1940).

which was subsequently published in English as *Retreating the Political* (1997) although the essay was omitted from the English publication.<sup>29</sup> The essay did however appear the next year in the in English in the journal *Social Research*.<sup>30</sup> For Nancy, the Monarch “is the co-presence of the elements of The State and of the moments of its Idea [...] he is -and is only- the synthesis of The State”.<sup>31</sup> The Monarch is, for Nancy, a construct made to house the moment of synthesis or sublation in The State. The Monarch is therefore the completion of the dialectic housed in a human body in order to actualise it. Furthermore, for Nancy,

The monarch simply actualizes the logic of subjectivity [...].And it is indeed this logic which, in principle, hides or forbids the question of relation. There is no "real" problem of relation once the relation - even thought of as the actualization of a self in another- takes its origin in the movement of a *self* which goes to *its* exterior in order to *appropriate itself*. (JHM, p. 153)

For Nancy, the logic actualised by the Monarch is in fact that of subject, by which he means the singular being completed via a dialectical process in which it engages with an other and returns to itself from this opposition. This view would cast all being as singular first and relation only as problematic stage to be resolved on the way to the completion of the subject. However, what is valuable in this description is the *movement* of the self as it goes to its limit to appropriate itself, after all this occurs in Nancy’s description of the singular being in community. Crucially for Nancy though this singular being remains in unrest, it does not complete into a new enclosed self having passed through the problematic relation

---

<sup>29</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe, P and Nancy, J-L, *Rejouer le politique, Cahiers du Centre de recherches philosophiques sur le politique*, (Paris: Galilée, 1981)

<sup>30</sup> Nancy JL, “The Jurisdiction of The Hegelian Monarch” in *Social Research*, Volume 49, No. 2 (Summer 1982): pp. 481-516. Trans. Mary Ann Caws and Peter Caws,

<sup>31</sup> Nancy JL, “The Jurisdiction of The Hegelian Monarch” in *The Birth to Presence*, ed Brian Holmes, trans. Mary Ann Caws and Peter Caws, (California: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 115. Hereafter referred to in the text as (JHM) followed by page number.

never to return again. For Nancy there is an unintended consequence to the exceptional status of Hegel's Monarch:

Strictly speaking, we should say that in the organic totalization of the Hegelian State the monarch is lacking: either he is not an individual or he is one, and then he is excepted from the totality, he exceeds it or he remains withdrawn from it [...] beyond what Hegel thinks, - he [the monarch] actualizes union by not completing relation, by inscribing it in the space of separation, which is that of relation itself. (JHM, p. 140)

The Monarch, as the physical housing of the moment of the synthesis of The State, in fact exceeds The State, therefore the Monarch themselves cannot be a member of The State. For Nancy this apparent exclusion or separation is in fact relation itself, which means therefore that the only singular being in The State in relation as Nancy sees relation, i.e., as connection and separation at the same time, is the Monarch.

Vicky Roupa considers Nancy on Hegel's Monarch in "On Politics as Effectuation: Jean-Luc Nancy's Encounter with the Hegelian Monarch". Roupa explains how according to Nancy, Hegel's embodying of the completed concept of The State in the actual body of the Monarch, usefully highlights, "a crucial gesture, one that is typical of the entire tradition of Western philosophy, which thinks of the political as effectuation, as the making effective of an essence."<sup>32</sup> Hegel's insistence on making the synthesis actual in the very body of the Sovereign is depicted here as a continuation of the metaphysical tradition of making essence effective, of requiring all being to have presence, and for Roupa's Nancy, it is imperative to show the impossibility of this.

---

<sup>32</sup>Roupa, Vicky. "On Politics as Effectuation: Jean-Luc Nancy's Encounter with the Hegelian Monarch" in *Journal for Cultural Research*, Volume 9, Issue 4, 2005, p. 408

For Ignaas Devisch in *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*, for Nancy, “everything for Hegel is centred on the absolute disorder of becoming” and this prompts Nancy to enthusiastically take up Bataille’s “elaboration of the Hegelian negation without use [as] a way of escaping the dialectic.”<sup>33</sup> For Nancy, the disorder of becoming, when being is neither non-being nor being, is what Hegel is centred on as something to be resolved, however, for Nancy it is that which is never truly resolved and never at rest which is of interest and indeed use. In a footnote early on in “The Inoperative Community, Nancy remarks that “there are two ways of escaping the dialectic [...] either by slipping away from into immanence or by opening up its negativity to the point of rendering it “unworked” [désouvrée] as Bataille puts it” (IC, p. 6). Under this view, Nancy’s project becomes one of always opening up negativity in Hegel. Devisch explores this footnote in an earlier essay, “The disclosure of a metaphysical horizon, or how to escape dialectics”, remarking that in “The Inoperative Community”, Nancy seeks to do escape the dialectic by “disclosing” a community that would be a “contemporary form of social bond that does not end up in a fusional or dialectical relation identities.”<sup>34</sup> For Devisch’s Nancy what community is truly, that is when viewed non-dialectically or non-metaphysically, is a social bond which is not the result of the fusing together of its constituent members but a bond which is nothing more

---

<sup>33</sup> Devisch, I. *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.29

<sup>34</sup> Devisch, I. “The disclosure of a metaphysical horizon, or how to escape dialectics” *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 2010, Vol. 29 Issue 1, p.26

than the sharing by the members of the experience of restless negativity, a social bond which is an identity based on a restless negativity.

Nancy's concern with Relational Being is exposed in "The Inoperative Community" because for him, Community *is* relation. To relate this to the points that emerge as engagements with Hegel, Community is not a work to be achieved but relation to be experienced. Singularity is always a co-appearance and an unworking between multiples because it is relation. Community can only be communicated as an experience by a discourse which exhausts itself because relation can only be experienced, its essence cannot be made effective as Rousseau has it, or captured in a concept but is experienced in interruption and loss. Hegel's use of the Monarch to try and make this essence of community effective results in nothing but an actualisation of the logic of subjectivity although it does for Nancy, albeit unintentionally, expose a situation of simultaneous separation and connection which for him is constitutive of relation. Additionally, the Monarch itself does provide a depiction of Singularity as Nancy wants it but at the cost of denying this to the other members of The State. As Devisch points out, what Nancy offers in "The Inoperative Community" is a depiction of group identity based on restless negativity. If community is relation and singularity is relation and "The Inoperative Community" gives us a depiction of group identity based on restless negativity, then what is currently missing so far is the development of a depiction of singular identity based on restless negativity, this Nancy will call Being Singular Plural.

# Chapter Four

## Nancy and Hegel on Singularity

### 4.1 Introduction

#### Problematic

In this chapter I shall offer a reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* which exposes an account of The Self that does not complete, which I shall argue is the very situation that Nancy terms Being Singular Plural in his essay "Being Singular Plural" and furthermore that Being Singular Plural is indissociable from the same situation that Nancy terms Community.

In the previous chapter I offered a reading of *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* which exposed a view of The State in unrest, which I argued, is the very situation that Nancy terms Community. This was done in order to meet the first part of the challenge to read *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* for an account of The State which remains in unrest and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* for an account of Self that does not complete. Providing an account of the Self which does not complete will therefore be the task of this chapter and whilst the account of the Self will be explicitly given in Hegel's text, this account will assume completion. A Self that

does not complete, I shall argue is precisely what Relational Being looks like in a singular being, a situation Nancy terms Being Singular Plural.

In Hegel's text an account of a self is quite explicitly given. However, whilst Nancy's work features frequent reference to Hegel's thought, as was explored in the Chapter Two, there is no piece that sets itself up to directly comment on *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as a whole or the section within it on Self Consciousness which will be used to consider Hegel on Self. There is also, once again, nothing in the secondary literature on Hegel with a direct focus on this task, therefore, once again delineating the relation between "Being Singular Plural" and Hegel's account of Self-Consciousness will be the second task of this chapter.

I shall begin by explicating Hegel's description of Self-Consciousness as it appears in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, beginning with a condensed summary of the trajectory of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, and the place of the discussion of Self-Consciousness within it. As previously, I shall follow Morin's observation regarding the way in which Nancy allows Hegel's logic to still function whilst at the same time observing the underlying disruption as well as bearing in mind Peter Fenves notion of palimpsestic reading as discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I will draw out the places in the text in which Hegel's logic and structure begin to unravel and reveal a Self which does not complete.

---

<sup>1</sup> Morin, M-E. Jean-Luc Nancy, (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), p.10 and Nancy, J.L. *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget MacDonald, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p.20

Next, I will explicate Nancy's description of Being Singular Plural as it appears in his essay "Being Singular Plural", beginning with a summary of the collection of the same name that the essay appears in and its relation to the other essays in it. Once again, following the guidance given in the Introduction by various of Nancy's commentators that there is an undeclared engagement with Hegel taking place and that this writing is purposefully non-dialectical or non-systematic in structure which reflects the way Nancy believes Sense itself functions, I shall draw out the undeclared engagement in "Being Singular Plural" with Hegel's theory of Self-Consciousness, paying attention to the way in which Nancy's non-dialectical text allows this engagement to be exposed.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, in conclusion I will outline the relationship between Nancy's account of Being Singular Plural and a Self which does not complete, drawing on Nancy's essay "Banks, Edges Limits (of singularity)" and contributions from Nancy's commentators in the Anglophone reception, Morin and James. I will again, draw out how this relationship exposes Nancy's concern with Relational Being as that in which both sense and identity are those in which multiple significations are held together in a ceaseless restless movement.

---

<sup>2</sup> Hutchens, B.C. *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy*, (Chesham: Acumen, 2005), p.27 and Rugo, D. *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Thinking of Otherness*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)



## 4.2 Self-Consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Phenomenology of Spirit

Hegel's concept of Self-Consciousness is expounded in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, which in summary is concerned with the development of consciousness through experience.<sup>3</sup> The progression of this from what Hegel calls Sense-Certainty, through many descriptions of intervening stages, to what he calls Absolute Knowing forms the trajectory of the text.

*The Phenomenology of Spirit*, which appeared in 1807 and is one of Hegel's earliest and most well-known works, is intended as an introduction to his philosophical system.<sup>4</sup> At the time of its composition, Hegel had been an unsalaried lecturer at the University of Jena for several years (living on a rapidly dwindling inheritance) and had eagerly accepted a lucrative if inflexible publishing contract, which required that he submit chapters as they were finished with little opportunity to revise them.<sup>5</sup> The progression of the stages of consciousness in the text itself does seem marked by this constraint, the various stages are given in descriptions of

---

<sup>3</sup> As in the previous chapter, it is the case here that the Hegelian concept under consideration is laid out in the section of the same name. To differentiate which I am referring to I will refer the concept as Self-Consciousness and the book section as *Self-Consciousness* and will apply this to similar concept /title pairings.

<sup>4</sup> Hegel had previously published an extended essay entitled *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* and several pieces in the *Critical Journal of Philosophy* which he edited with Schelling but *The Phenomenology* is his first book length text.

<sup>5</sup> Hegel famously completed the last few hurried sections to meet his deadline as the battle of Jena raged outside and the French defeated the Prussian army. Desperately trying to meet his deadline to avoid a harsh penalty threatened by his publisher and Hegel found himself faced with the challenge of how to get the final pages of his manuscript to the publisher and when the only route was through a warzone and across enemy lines. See, Houlgate, Stephen, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). p. 1 and Singer, Peter. *Hegel, A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 10

consciousness assuming an immediate position, subsequently adopting an opposing position and then finally realising the way forward is to encompass both but frequently unable or unwilling to do so, making the whole into a series of stages between which it is in fact we the reader that make the progression. Stephen Houlgate characterises this effect by casting Hegel and his reader as the Phenomenological Observers, “our role as phenomenologists, is to think through the experience that consciousness is required to make by its own conception of the object. [...] ‘we’ comprise the philosopher (acting as phenomenologist) and the readers of the *Phenomenology*.”<sup>6</sup> The progression or movement between the stage described is performed then by both Hegel and his reader.

The various stages in the development of consciousness are divided amongst the three major divisions of the text, giving *The Phenomenology* a noticeably tripartite structure, like *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, and again there is an imbalance to the text with the third section being considerably larger than the preceding two.<sup>7</sup> *The Phenomenology* does not suffer the interruptive *Anmerkungen* and *Zusätze* of *Elements*. It should be noted however that the section that will be explicated later in this chapter, and the section that has been of most interest to French Hegelian scholarship, is the one that disrupts the tripartite structure. The simplest way to begin to understand the text initially is to consider the relationship between the three major divisions. *Part A Consciousness*, is concerned with a kind

---

<sup>6</sup> Houlgate, Stephen, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 23

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 2, Diagram of the Structure of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

of consciousness whose object is something other than itself.<sup>8</sup> *Part B Self-Consciousness*, is concerned with a kind of consciousness whose object is itself.<sup>9</sup> *Part C Reason*, is concerned with the kind of a consciousness whose object is a unity between itself and what is not itself, that is both a unity between subject and object and a unity between the individual and the universal. However as can be seen in the diagram of the structure in Appendix 2, the chapters labelled with Roman Numerals from their own progression through the three parts.

In *A Consciousness*, Hegel describes three main stages of consciousness in this division, which he calls *Sense Certainty*, *Perception* and *Understanding* and which he explores in sub-sections of the same name. In *I Sense Certainty*, consciousness initially believes that that the object is immediate and simple and that knowledge of it is therefore immediate and specific (this thing, here, now). For Hegel, observing the experience of the negation of this belief that consciousness undergoes, causes us as Phenomenological Observers to realise that knowledge is in fact relational (this thing not that one, here not there, now and not previously or in the future). In *II Perception*, consciousness takes the object to be a self-identical thing with many properties and where these properties are contradictory properties (different heres and nows); this is a fault of perception not the object. For Hegel, observing the experience of the negation of this belief causes us to realise that relational knowledge allows for opposition and separation as much as it does connection and unity. In *III Force and Understanding*, consciousness takes

---

<sup>8</sup> Robert Stern summarises this the dialectic of the object. Stern, R, *The Routledge Guide Book to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), p. 43

<sup>9</sup> Robert Stern summarises this section as the dialectic of the subject. Stern, *Ibid.*, p. 71

the opposing properties of the object to be a play of forces in which each solicits the other in turn. For Hegel, observing the negation of this belief causes us to realise that that the knowledge we have of the object is in fact a process in which differences arise and immediately undermine one another, Hegel calls this infinity.

In *B Self-Consciousness*, the pattern of subdivisions and corresponding stages, established so far and which will be picked up again in *C Reason*, is abandoned. There is only one numbered subdivision in part *B Self-Consciousness* and this is entitled *IV The Truth of Self-Certainty*. This is itself further divided into two sections entitled *A Lordship and Bondage*, and *B Stoicism, Scepticism and The Unhappy Consciousness*. In both the sections Hegel describes the further consequences of consciousness's inability or unwillingness to encompass the opposing positions it has encountered through its experience. For Hegel, Self-Consciousness is a new stage of consciousness in which consciousness recognises that the infinity (the process of differences arising and undermining each other) it has found in the object is also found in itself. In this section, which will be explicated further shortly, consciousness now seeks to understand itself in relation to another consciousness rather than an object. By the end of this section consciousness is struggling to resolve an impasse between itself as individual and what is other than it and therefore universal.

In *C Reason*, Hegel reverts to the previous pattern of explicating three main stages of consciousness which he calls *V The Certainty of Truth and Reason*, *VI Spirit and VII Religion*. Also included in this part, although much shorter than the others (just

over two pages), and without the usual explication of an initial position, an opposing one, and the impasse between them, is the final destination for consciousness and Hegel's grand finale, *VIII Absolute Knowing*. In *V The Certainty of Truth and Reason*, consciousness initially believes that there is an immediate unity between the individual and the universal and it takes both itself and the world to have that structure. For Hegel, observing the negation of this belief causes us to realise that for an individual consciousness it is they themselves that makes the universal actual and that to truly understand the universal we must next observe a consciousness that is not individual. In *VI Spirit*, consciousness is now not an individual consciousness but is the consciousness of individuals (self-consciousness plural) bound by law (the universal).<sup>10</sup> This kind of consciousness initially believes that there is an immediate unity between law and an individual. For Hegel, observation of the experience of the negation of this belief (via the intermediate opposing belief that the unity of the individual and the universal occurs in or is mediated by language and several further stages in which the individual finally comes to see the universal or absolute as that which is made manifest between individuals) causes us to realise that the next stage of consciousness would need to understand this absolute as the divine and to see itself, self-consciousness, in the divine. In *VII Religion*, consciousness is now not that of an individual but of that of a religion. This consciousness initially does not see itself in the divine and represents the divine to itself as nature in general or as a specific animal or, Hegel claims, plant. The advent of religious practices in which

---

<sup>10</sup> In *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel expands of the sketch of Spirit begun in this chapter.

the divine is represented in a human form provides negation of the other initial type of religious practice for Hegel. However, these newer practices which see the divine as having human form still conceive of the true nature of the divine as available to self-consciousness only in glimpses and Hegel calls these practices Revealed Religion. For Hegel, observation of this negation causes us to conclude that what is required is a religion or a religious consciousness in which it is conceived that the divine is manifest and in a form such that self-consciousness can see itself in the divine. For Hegel, this religion or religious consciousness is Christianity. However, for Hegel there is one final stage of consciousness in which the consciousness comes to realise that it is not just that they can see their own shape in the divine, but that there is an essential identity between them.

In *VIII Absolute Knowing* Hegel describes this final stage, or rather he describes what it will be when it eventually comes to pass. Absolute Knowing will be a consciousness which has being as its object. This will be a consciousness which will have replaced what Hegel calls picture thinking with thought which is an understanding that the subject and object, the universal and the absolute have the same form, that of the concept.

### Self-Consciousness

The discussion of Self-Consciousness, as can now be seen from the overview just given, occupies a slightly odd place in *The Phenomenology*.<sup>11</sup> Logically, Self-

---

<sup>11</sup> For Judith Butler, whose main interest in the *Phenomenology* is desire which is discussed in the Self-Consciousness section, "The appearance of desire at this juncture is curious, for if the progress of the *Phenomenology* is impelled by desire, why does desire emerge as an explicit

Consciousness is the bridge between Consciousness and Reason, but the size of the third part, *C Reason*, locates the discussion of Self-Consciousness not halfway through the text as might be reasonably expected but in fact barely a quarter of the way through the entire text. As previously noted the structure of part B *Self-Consciousness* is not the tripartite one used in part A *Consciousness* or part C *Reason*, just one numbered subdivision is given (rather than three).<sup>12</sup> Within the single numbered subdivision, the pattern of initial position, an opposing one and a third position that would encompass both is frequently present. However, this single subdivision is then followed by two further subdivisions (*A Lordship and Bondage* and *B Stoicism, Scepticism and the Unhappy Consciousness*) which further examine the consequences of consciousness being unable to take up a position that would encompass the opposition described. This all combines to give the discussion of Self-Consciousness and its location in the text the feel of a short interruptive diversion before the main part of the text begins. This description seems startling, almost absurd when considered against the extraordinary influence this particular section of *The Phenomenology* has had not just on French Twentieth Century Philosophy as but more widely both culturally and globally speaking, due to its take up and transformation by Marx as we saw in the discussions in the Introduction.<sup>13</sup>

---

theme only in the fourth chapter of the text?" As we will see, the *arrival* of Self-Consciousness is problematic as arrival, as it seems for Nancy and Butler that its content is pre-supposed from the beginning by Hegel. Butler, J. *Subjects of Desire*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 24

<sup>12</sup> Please see Appendix 2, Diagram of the Structure of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

<sup>13</sup> For Peter Singer, "perhaps the most celebrated passage in the Phenomenology concerns the relationship of a master to a slave, it well, illustrates what Hegel means by dialectic and it introduces an idea echoed in Marx's view of the relationship between capitalist and worker." Singer, Peter. *Marx* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 17

*Part B, Section IV) The Truth of Self-Certainty*

Hegel's discussion of the concept of Self-Consciousness occurs in the short numbered subdivision entitled IV *The Truth of Self-Certainty*. In this section, Hegel expounds what he considers to be the next logical form of consciousness given the impasse reached in the previous section. In the prior section *A Consciousness*, consciousness has as its object something that is other than it. In this form, consciousness understands that the differing properties of the object before it, are due to what Hegel calls a Play of Forces in which differences solicit each other reciprocally and therefore *are*, that is they exist, only through each other. Initially however consciousness believes that in actuality or appearance, these differences are dissolved in unity whereas in the non-actual concept or inner being, these differences are held together but with their differences none-the-less intact. At the close of *A Consciousness*, consciousness is facing an impasse between appearance and inner being and for Hegel it is we, (writer and reader as Phenomenological Observers) who realise that "we have to think pure change, or *think antithesis with in the antithesis itself, or contradiction.*"<sup>14</sup> The antithesis of antithesis, or pure change, is for Hegel infinity, or "the simple essence of life, the soul of the world, the universal blood, whose omnipresence is neither disturbed nor interrupted by any difference." (PoS, pp162). Instances of difference are merely separate "sundered moments" of this infinity. What was taken for opposition is in fact therefore the self-relation of this infinite essence of Life. According to Hegel therefore,

---

<sup>14</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 99. pp. 160. Hereafter referred to in the text as PoS, followed by paragraph number.



we do not need to ask the question, still less to think that fretting over a such a question is philosophy, or even that it is a question philosophy cannot answer, the question *viz.* 'How, from this pure essence, how does difference or otherness *issue forth* from it?' (PoS, pp. 162).

This realisation that difference is in fact the self-relation of the infinite essence of Life is not made by consciousness as a result of its experience (which has led to an impasse) but by us as readers, as we reflect on what consciousness has undergone.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, once we realise the proper nature of difference, that it is the result of viewing moments of self-relation in isolation, it is no longer necessary to concern ourselves with *how* this wrongly imagined difference arises. What is important for Hegel is that consciousness as it is at the end of Part A, is not capable of the reflection and realisation that we have just undergone and therefore the next move is to examine the next stage of consciousness in the search for the kind that is capable of the reflection and realisation described.

Hegel begins *IV The Truth of Self-Certainty*, with a description of the initial position of this new stage or shape of *self*-consciousness. Initially Self-Consciousness is aware of itself and that which is not itself, or that which is other, and it takes this other to be mere appearance. Truth for Self-Consciousness is no longer to be found in the object which revealed itself as a sundered moment of the infinite essence of Life, and although Self-Consciousness still does not understand this, it none the less feels the need to negate what is other than it. Therefore, for Hegel, "in point of fact self-consciousness is the reflection out of the being of the world

---

<sup>15</sup> For Houlgate, "sense-certainty experiences those micro-transitions [it experiences its belief being negated] but it does not experience the macro-transition- we do." Houlgate, *Ibid.*, p. 43

of sense and perception, and is essentially the return from otherness.” (PoS, pp167). Self-consciousness finds its truth in its return from having negated otherness, from having consumed it, a process which Hegel terms Desire and which forms the first moment of Self-Consciousness.<sup>16</sup>

In the second moment, Self-Consciousness begins to find this negation less satisfactory. For Hegel, this is because this Self-Consciousness is negating instances of otherness but not otherness itself. For Hegel, “Thus self-consciousness, by its negative relation to the object, is unable to supersede it” (PoS , pp.175). By relating to the object (the instance of otherness) as something that must be negated, Self-Consciousness makes itself dependant on the object, all the while unaware that it is not negation of the object but instead negation of what that object is an instance of (otherness) that will actually satiate the Desire of Self-Consciousness. The effect is that negation or consumption of the object is unsatisfactory and that the object is in fact still un-negated and not superseded. For Hegel, it is clear that a third moment of Self-Consciousness is required.

In this third moment Self-Consciousness achieves satisfaction “when the object itself effects the negation within itself.” (PoS, pp.175). It now appears that there is a situation in which Self-Consciousness can achieve satisfaction and this is when the object negated, the instance of otherness, is in fact able to carry out that

---

<sup>16</sup> Butler makes the point that Desire at this stage in the *Phenomenology* is associated with “animal appetite” a connotation carried more strongly in the German *Begierde*, but that for Hegel human desire will be distinguished from animal desire “in virtue of its reflexivity, its philosophical project, and its rhetorical project.” Butler, *Ibid*, p. 33

negation itself. For Hegel, what we Phenomenological Observers realise is that the only entity capable of this self negation is something else with consciousness, thus, for Hegel, “*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.*” (PoS, pp.175). Self-consciousness achieves satisfaction in its return to itself following the negation of an other (or the causing of negation within an other) that is also a self-consciousness. Self-Consciousness then, finds its satisfaction in what Hegel calls a “double reflection” (PoS, pp.176). For Hegel, “with this, we have already have before us the Notion of Spirit. What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is- [...] ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I.’” (PoS, pp.177). At this stage, Self-Consciousness is experiencing unity with another Self-Consciousness only through negation; what we the Phenomenological Observers realise is that unity that Self-Consciousness is enjoying comes not from the negation of the other but the mutual recognition between itself and the other Self-Consciousness, the further development of which will become Spirit. At this point in the text however Hegel prefers to postpone describing the next stage of consciousness but instead to consider the consequences of a relation between self-consciousnesses in which there is there is recognition but in which status is unequal, that of the Lord and Bondsman.<sup>17</sup>

*Part B, Section IV, Subsection A) Lordship and Bondage*

---

<sup>17</sup> A similar translation problem occurs here as with Sovereign and Monarch in the previous chapter. Whilst English language translations of Hegel use Lord and Bondsman, Hegel’s commentators and interlocutors often use Master and Slave, such as Judith Butler and Bruce Baugh. To avoid clashing with my citations I use Lord and Bondsman. Baugh, Bruce. *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), Butler, J. *Subjects of Desire*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

Hegel begins his explication by describing the initial position of the two self-consciousness who will become the Lord and Bondsman. For Hegel, "Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness: it has come *out of itself* [...] it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an other being." (PoS, pp. 179). Self-consciousness is faced by another and so "comes out" of itself, leaving itself behind and losing itself. The first Self-consciousness (Georg) realises the second Self-consciousness (Wilhelm) resembles itself, Georg. In this realisation, Georg finds himself again. What has happened is not that Georg sees himself and Wilhelm as the same, but that he sees Wilhelm as like himself (Georg), in the sense of modelled after or in relation to an original. However, exactly the same thing has been happening for Wilhelm on the other side of the interaction. This is important because for Hegel, "action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both" (PoS, pp. 182). What follows will be the consequence of both Georg and Wilhelm *each* recognising the other, not as an equal but as something other which is in some way like themselves but crucially is not fully, equally, so.<sup>18</sup>

Hegel explicates this paradoxical double occurrence of a kind of one-sided recognition further, "appearing thus immediately on the scene, they are for one another like ordinary objects, *independent* shapes, individuals submerged in the being [or immediacy] of *Life*." (PoS, pp.186.) Each self-consciousness appears for the other as a kind self-consciousness which is like themselves but which differs

---

<sup>18</sup> For Houlgate, "Self-consciousness's situation is ambiguous, therefore because the way in which it sees itself in the other deprives it of a clear consciousness of *either* itself *or* the other". Houlgate, *Ibid.* p. 90

by being more object-like and submerged in Life. Each self-consciousness, which regards itself as a pure abstraction from Life or pure negativity, then seeks the death of the other at the risk of its own life, in order to demonstrate this lack of attachment to Life as “it is only through staking one’s life that freedom is won.” (PoS, pp.187) However, the demonstration is meaningless if it is not recognized and this recognition requires that the other who does the recognising and the one who is recognised are both alive. In this way for Hegel, “this trial by death, however, does away with the truth which is supposed issue from it”. (PoS, p. 114, pp. 188). If either party win the trial by death and therefore the other dies, mutual recognition cannot take place, therefore the two self-consciousness are faced with an impasse and assume new roles.

In this final position,

there is posited a pure self-consciousness, and a consciousness which is not purely for itself but for another, i.e., is a merely *immediate* consciousness, or consciousness in the form of *thinghood*. [...] The former is the lord, the other is the bondsman. (PoS, pp. 189)

The two self-consciousness who until now have been, despite both their refusal to acknowledge it, in fact exactly the same, now become to two different types of self-consciousness. The first type, the Lord, still believes itself to be free from attachment to life but allows the other to live and to provide the desired recognition of this. The second type gives up seeking the death of the Lord and submits, truly becoming the thing-like consciousness that each self-consciousness initially took the other to be, this is the Bondsman.

However, just as with previous stages of consciousness, reflection on the part of the Phenomenological Observer reveals that the understanding that

consciousness has of its own experience turns out to in fact invert what is occurring. Both the Lord and the Bondsman see the Lord as being independent and less dependent of life and things as it is the Lord that has won the struggle and now no longer has to deal with things directly. This is because the Bondsman can prepare things for consumption by the Lord who is then free to consume for pleasure, unlike the Bondsman. In this way, the Lord is reaffirmed to himself as Lord. However, what we as Phenomenological Observers can see is that the Lord is dependent on the Bondsman to mediate for him between himself (the Lord) and what he is not; the Lord is therefore not the independent nature he (and the Bondsman) take him to be. For Hegel,

just as lordship showed that its essential nature is the reverse of what it wants to be, so too servitude in its consummation will really turn into the opposite of what it immediately is. (PoS, pp. 193)

The Bondsman shares the Lord's view that the Lord is less attached to things and independent and that the Bondsman is more attached and essentially dependant. The Bondsman see things as independent and resisting him, and that negation is only for the Lord who consumes things. What we as Phenomenological Observers can see is that that in fact the Bondsman achieves a different kind of negation to the Lord, he does not consume or obliterate things but instead changes them by working on them.<sup>19</sup> In working on things and imposing a new form on them, the Bondsman sees his selfhood in the object he is working on and accesses a freedom denied the Lord. This freedom is not in spite of the fact the work undertaken by the Bondsman is forced through fear of death at the hands of the Lord, as for

---

<sup>19</sup> For Robert Stern, "the slave therefore comes to a different conception of individuality from that adopted by the master (who has not gone much beyond desire)". Stern, *Ibid.* p. 85

Hegel, “in fear, the being-for-self is present in the bondsman himself; in fashioning the thing he becomes aware that being-for-self belongs to *him*.” (PoS, pp.195) It is in labour that the Bondsman becomes aware of himself as pure negativity, unattached to Life and being-for-self, (i.e. himself as he was before he submitted to the Lord), precisely because he sees this being-for-self in the thing he has transformed. Just as the Bondsman has begun to realise what we as Phenomenological Observers can see, so too does the Lord for whom the Bondsman becomes the constant reminder of the Lord’s utter dependence. In the next section, *Stoicism, Scepticism and The Unhappy Consciousness*, Hegel explores further the experience of the Bondsman.

*Part B, Section IV, Subsection B) Stoicism, Scepticism, The Unhappy Consciousness*

For Hegel, the Bondsman will pass through three stages as he becomes aware of his conflicted freedom. In the first stage, Stoicism, the Bondsman attempts to negate things not by consuming them or working on them but by thinking about and understanding them, as for the Stoic, “in thinking I am *free*, because I am not in an *other*.” (PoS, pp. 197) The Stoic turns inwards into themselves in their enslavement and is indifferent to things and Life, finding freedom in thought. As Phenomenological Observers we quickly see that this freedom is only abstract and not actual and that the negation is only partial. For Hegel it is “Scepticism [that] is the realization of that which Stoicism was only the Notion, and is the actual experience of what the freedom of thought is.” (PoS, pp.202) The Sceptic commits truly to finding freedom in thought and is not just indifferent to things and Life but “annihilates” them in thought, regarding them as having no reality exterior to

thought and to be merely a “medley” of sensuous appearances. The Sceptic also considers their own changing perceptions to have no reality and to be part of this medley or flux of Life and each of these previous perceptions are also annihilated. In this way for Hegel, at this stage, “consciousness itself is the *absolute dialectical unrest*.” (PoS, pp.205) as The Stoic cannot settle on an identity but constantly, restlessly moves on from what it previous took itself be and what it find itself to be now in the freedom that comes in the wake of the annihilation. For Hegel “from this experience emerges a *new form* of consciousness which brings together the two thoughts which Scepticism holds apart,” (PoS, pp.206) that is, a form of conscious which holds together the previous annihilated self and the newly discovered self. This new form of consciousness is the Unhappy Consciousness.

In the Unhappy Consciousness “the duplication [of consciousness] which formerly was divided between two individuals, the lord and the bondsman, is now lodged in one.” (PoS, pp. 206) The Unhappy Consciousness is, however, as yet unaware that it is an essential part of its nature to be duplicated in this way, true awareness does not come until the consciousness reaches stage of Spirit. The Unhappy Consciousness sees itself instead as problematically divided into two opposing parts or identities, the individual Changeable and the universal Unchangeable, although it “takes *itself* to be merely the Changeable, and the Unchangeable is, for it, an alien Being.” (PoS, pp. 208) As the Unhappy Consciousness is unable to settle happily in either of these identities it assumes that its essential nature must be to be Changeable and that the part of it which seems to be Unchangeable is an alien part. The Unhappy Consciousness therefore is alienated from its own



essential nature which we the Phenomenological Observers can see.<sup>20</sup> Faced with this impasse, the Unhappy Consciousness seeks to “raise” itself out of its individual Changeable nature and seek union with the universal Unchangeable.

Hegel describes three stages of the experience of the attempt to achieve union with the Unchangeable by the Unhappy Consciousness; Devotion, Gratitude, Asceticism. In Devotion, the Unhappy Consciousness does not relate to the Unchangeable as a thinking thing but feels a devotional yearning towards it. In this way Consciousness can achieve a union of sorts with the Unchangeable but cannot grasp its conceptual form and Hegel says that Consciousness “only *feels* it [the union]and has fallen back into itself.” (PoS, pp.217)

In the second experience, the Unhappy Consciousness comes to believe that things are incarnations of The Unchangeable. It is through the beneficence of the Unchangeable which has surrendered its “embodied form” (PoS, pp.220) that Consciousness is able to negate things by desire and working on them. In a reciprocal gesture the Unhappy Conscious now surrenders itself in gratitude and seeks union with the Unchangeable in this way. However, this surrender is an action and in acting, the Unhappy Consciousness asserts itself as an individual and the union immediately collapses.

---

<sup>20</sup> For Bruce Baugh, “at the stage of the unhappy consciousness, consciousness experiences itself not simply as negativity but as a nothing.” Baugh, Bruce. *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), p. 3

In the third experience, Asceticism, The Unhappy Consciousness becomes “aware of itself as *this actual individual* in the animal functions.” (PoS, pp.225) In the wake of the collapse of the attempted union with the universal Unchangeable, the Unhappy Consciousness becomes painfully aware of its own individuality which prevented the union and turns against its own physical or animal self which is now the enemy or that which mediates the union with the Unchangeable. In an attempt to relieve itself of the burden of its hated individuality, the Unhappy Consciousness “casts upon the mediator or minister its own freedom of decision, and herewith the responsibility for its own action.” (PoS, pp. 136) In this sacrifice, the Unhappy Consciousness “*in principle* obtains relief from its misery” (PoS, pp.137) that is, it does allow itself to be taken over by the Unchangeable or so the minister tells it. However, as it has surrendered its own individuality the Unhappy Consciousness can take no enjoyment from this or feel any abatement of its wretchedness. For Hegel, a new type of consciousness is now required, one that could truly comprehend and indeed be the unity of the individual Changeable and the universal Unchangeable and this will turn out to be Reason. Hegel will then spend the remainder (and by far the largest part) of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* explicating this stage of consciousness.

#### A Self That Does Not Complete

If for Nancy, identity is that which exists in a restless trembling between significations, then the account of Self that Hegel gives in his explication of Self-Consciousness, would seem to be concerned with an entirely different task of establishing what would be necessary for the Self to be complete and be at rest.

Whilst Hegel takes us through various iterations of the self and in the description of the Unhappy Consciousness offers us a Self utterly unable to complete and be at rest, for him the Self unable to complete is a problematic stage to be overcome on the way to eventual completion.

In *Part B, Section IV) The Truth of Self-Certainty*, Hegel warns us of the danger of sundering moments as it gives the misleading impression that difference is between different entities whereas in fact it is always for him, merely the essence of Life relating to itself at different times or in different instances. In essence Hegel is making the valid point that describing movement in stages fails to capture movement, that each stage is a frozen snapshot like the images on a zoetrope drum which only give the illusion of movement. However, for Hegel the movement we are missing is when we sunder moments is the self-relation of one over-arching entity whose presence does not occur as a temporary event in restless movement but which is always in existence however appearance might mislead us. What is surprising is that, despite the warning not to sunder moments, that is exactly what Hegel does as each stage of consciousness is abandoned as we the Phenomenological Observers move to the next stage of consciousness. Hegel's account of the development of conscious exposes countless incomplete interactions of self discarded along the way.

In *Part B, Section IV, Subsection A) Lordship and Bondage*, each of the mortally opposed self-consciousness can see itself only in the return from negating the other but is unable to achieve this as such as it to complete here would require

killing the one who provides the necessary recognition. The two selves described who go on to become either the Lord or The Bondsman, are each a self which cannot complete. Whilst further reflection reveals that the initial state of dependence and independence of these two is ultimately the opposite of what it appears to be, they remain incomplete and new stage of consciousness is posited to overcome the impasse.

In, *Part B, Section IV, Subsection B) Stoicism, Scepticism, The Unhappy Consciousness*, the Stoic turned away from the world and things in his enslavement, affecting an indifference towards them. The Sceptic on the other hand tries to actively annihilate the world and things including himself in order to find himself as he “returns” from that annihilation. The wretched Unhappy Consciousness who tries in vain to surrender its individuality in the universal only to assert its individuality in the very act, is truly a self that cannot complete its identity. Paradoxically however it does assert itself in the face of all that is not itself. As we will see in the next section, this paradoxical individuality will be central to Nancy’s account of Singularity.

### 4.3 Singularity in Nancy's *Being Singular Plural*

#### *Being Singular Plural*

Nancy's account of his notion of Being Singular Plural is given in his essay "Being Singular Plural" which occurs in the collection of the same name. The collection is made up of essays which relate more or less to this central idea in which there are, as Morin describes,

singularities whose identity or selfhood can only be found in their "relation" to other singularities; what exists finds itself in being exposed to or being in contact with other singularities in such a way that nothing exists or makes sense on its own.<sup>21</sup>

Published in French as *Être singular pluriel*, in 1996, the original collection consisted of five essays including the title one, with a sixth essay added for the Stanford University Press translation I shall be using.<sup>22</sup>

The essay "War, Right, Sovereignty-Technē" appeared first in *Les Temps Modernes* 1991 and is concerned with being-with in the context of International Law as part of a response by Nancy to a request for a reflection on War and Technology. The essay "Eulogy for the Mêlée" is concerned with the multiplicity of identity with a particular focus on the identity conveyed by the proper name "Sarajevo", (the city itself was still under siege at the time the essay was written). The essay appeared in several journals and magazines in 1993 (in German in *LettreInternationale*, in

---

<sup>21</sup> Morin, M-E. *Jean-Luc Nancy*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Nancy, JL. *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert.D.Richardson and Anne.E.O'Byrne, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Hereafter referred to in the text as BSP followed by page number.

Serbian in *Mostovoi*) as well as in French in *Transeuropéennes* whose director Ghislane Glasson-Deschaumes had requested the piece.<sup>23</sup> The essay “The Surprise of the Event” is presented without prior publishing details and appears in the original French line up so it is fair to assume that it was written for the original French publication of the *Being Singular Plural* collection. The essay itself is concerned with the notion of event as Nancy finds it in an isolated quote from Hegel’s *Science of Logic* and the need, for Nancy, to think the surprise and chance inherent in event in order to be able to comprehend the event of meaning or identity. Like *The Speculative Remark*, the essay does not provide a critique of *The Science of Logic* as a whole, but uses a single sentence as a taking off point for a meditation. The essay “Human Excess” appeared in the *Journal européen* in 1984 and is concerned with number and excess, that is, the excess, multiplicity or plurality inherent for Nancy in meaning and in relation. The essay “Cosmos Basilius” has been added for the English translation and appeared first in the internet journal *Basileus* in 1998. The essay is concerned with the diverse nature of the unity of the world (we share it which means we equally access it and are divided by it) and how, or if, justice can function in this situation.

### Singularity

The essay “Being Singular Plural” is considerably more substantial than the other essays in the collections (it is well over three times the length all the others essays except “War, Right, Sovereignty-Technē”), consisting of thirteen separate titled

---

<sup>23</sup> See footnote in Nancy, JL. *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert.D.Richardson and Anne.E.O’Byrne, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 205

sections, which, says Nancy, “can be read in any order” (BSP, p. xv) having been composed non-sequentially. However, the fourth, fifth and sixth sections, which include one entitled Being Singular Plural, were presented together as a separate piece by Nancy at a conference at Vanderbilt University in 1996 entitled “Openings: The Space of Thinking” in January 1996. Uncharacteristically, Nancy gives a very clear intention in the preface to the collection, declaring that “this text does not disguise its ambition of re-doing the whole of “first philosophy” by giving the “singular plural of Being as its foundation.” (BSP, p. xv). What follows however is not a treatise, which Nancy claims is inappropriate for this task and for which at the time of writing he had not the strength but instead an offering of thirteen interlinked meditations on singular plural being as that which is foundational for a consideration of Being, foundational for Philosophy.<sup>24</sup> As Nancy points out there is a certain amount of repetition amongst these thirteen sections and therefore I will proceed by briefly describing each but giving a more focussed reading on the central three sections which work well as a cohesive section of their own. These are the same three sections which were presented together as a piece at Vanderbilt University.

In the first three sections, We Are Meaning, People Are Strange and Gaining Access to the Origin, Nancy considers the notions that “there is no meaning if it is not shared” (BSP. p. 2), “from one singular to another, there is contiguity but not

---

<sup>24</sup> In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s Nancy had suffered serious ill health, undergoing a heart transplant and then a fight with cancer which developed as a result of the medication he took in order to stop his body rejecting the new heart, famously writing about this experience in the essay “The Intruder” Nancy, J.L, *Corpus* trans. Richard A. Rand, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

continuity ” (BSP. p.5) and the idea that “if the origin is irreducibly plural [which for him it is] it need not operate then, in the dialectical mode.” (BSP, p. 12) For Nancy meaning is always shared but however that meaning is not passed from one to another, but exists where we meet, where we are contiguous. Origin therefore is not the one true version of accounts or meaning, but something that is plural, it signifies nothing other than shared meaning and a dialectical approach which would seek to resolve this plurality would not expose this. The next three sections The Creation of The World and Curiosity, Between Us: First Philosophy and Being Singular Plural formed the paper given by Nancy at Vanderbilt University in 1996 and I will explicate these in further detail in the section that follows this one.

In the next four sections, Co-existence, Conditions of Critique, Co-appearing and The Spectacle of Society, Nancy considers the suitability of Situationist critique (and the thought of Guy Debord in particular) as a tool for exposing Being Singular Plural.<sup>25</sup> For Nancy this “critique remains obedient to the most trenchant and “metaphysical” tradition of philosophy, [...] the refusal to consider an order of “appearances.” (BSP, p.52) and furthermore, “there is no society without the spectacle of society” (BSP. p. 67). For Nancy, in order to understand Being Singular Plural we must attend to how it appears (i.e. between us) which means not

---

<sup>25</sup> Nancy’s section title is a deliberate play on Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle*. For Debord, “The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as society itself, as part of society [...] but due to the very fact that this sector is *separate*, it is in reality the domain of delusion and false consciousnesses, the unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of universal separation” Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb, (London: Rebel Press, 2000) p.7



regarding appearance as something false which obscures a hidden true reality and recognising that spectacle is itself a co-appearing and therefore constituent of society not a secondary corruption of it. For Nancy what is to be gained if we can do this, is the insight that, *“not only must Being with one another not be understood starting from the presupposition of being-one, but on the contrary, being-one [...] can only be understood by starting with being-with-one another”* (BSP. p.56). For Nancy, singular being can only be understood by starting from being-with-one another because what this shows us is that in fact being-one and being-with one-another are the same thing, an insight which is lost when we try to multiply being-one in order to understand being-with one another.

In the final three sections, The Measure of the “With”, Body, Language and Co-existential Analytic, Nancy considers the notion that “the “we” is not a subject [...] neither is the “We” “composed” of subjects”, (BSP. p. 75) and that, “Language is the exposing of plural singularity” (BSP, p.84). For Nancy, the “we”, that is being-with-one another, is not something that can be looked at as a made up of subjects which form something that itself is singular and which can then be considered as subject itself, rather, being-with-one another is nothing other than plural singularity, which is exposed in language. In the final section, Nancy concludes the essay by setting his project in relation to that of Heidegger (for Nancy Heidegger’s consideration of *Mitsein* is a preliminary sketch of being singular plural) and stating that, “we understand ourselves infinitely, ourselves and the world and nothing else” (BSP. p.98). For Nancy, what is possible for us to understand is ourselves which means understanding the relation between ourselves as beings

that are with one another, and the relation between ourselves and anything and everything that is not ourselves, that is, the world.

### *The Creation of The World and Curiosity*

In the first of three sections originally presented as the Vanderbilt paper, Nancy states that, “the concept of the “creation of the world” represents the origin as originally shared, spaced between us and between all beings.” (BSP p. 15) For Nancy, the very notion of the creation of the world does not show that there must be a creator but instead points to an implicit understanding that “the world” is a situation of the experience of “between us” and it comes to be *as* this world, as a situation that is already between us.<sup>26</sup> As such, the origin of the world or of the situation between us, is shared and in fact for Nancy this points to the inescapable conclusion that origin itself is shared.

Meditating further on the notion of creation, Nancy says, “if creation is indeed this singular ex-position of being, then its real name is existence. Existence is creation, *our* creation; it is the beginning and end that *we* are.” (BSP, p. 17) If we accept creation as something that is without a creator but which, in a way particular to itself, exposes the coming into being of being itself, then for Nancy its real name is existence, because there is for him no difference between being and being’s coming into being. This simultaneous being and coming into being is for Nancy the situation of “we” or the between us and as such it is our creation, i.e., it belongs

---

<sup>26</sup> Nancy does not indicate that he is referring use of this term by any particular thinker.

to the we. The situation of the “we” is therefore indistinguishable from its coming into being, it arrives as it *is*.

Turning to consider further the notion of world in the notion of the creation of the world, Nancy states that, “it is not so much the world of humanity as it is the world of the nonhuman to which humanity is exposed and which humanity, in turn, exposes.” (BSP, p. 18) For Nancy when we are in this situation of there being a world it is not immediately apparent to us, to each being that forms the us, that the others who also form the us are also human, in fact they appear as nothing but otherness or pure alterity. For Nancy, “we find this alterity primarily and essentially intriguing [...] because it exposes the always-other as origin.” (BSP, p. 19) The alterity of those who also form the us, is essential to us and endlessly curious to us, because it exposes always the plurality of origin. Seemingly paradoxically, as the us we all share the experience of finding those who also make up the us to be other.

#### *Between Us: First Philosophy*

In this next section, Nancy considers the history of (and what a history itself would be) of philosophical politics, including a consideration of the relation between philosophy and “the city”, before stating that, “philosophical politics regularly proceeds according to the surreptitious appeal to a metaphysics of the one-origin, where at the same time it nevertheless exposes, *volens nolens*, the situation of

the dis-position of origins.” (BSP, p. 24) <sup>27</sup> For Nancy, philosophical politics as project which would seek to provide a philosophical ground for the understanding of and organisations humans in social groups or communities, is guided by the urge that the truth of a situation is; something that is singular, which underlies the appearance of a situation and must be therefore be revealed. However, this does not stop that project, whether or not it wishes or intends it, from none the less exposing the multiplicity of origin in its attempt to bring to light the one true origin. For Nancy, “once this horizon [political philosophy] is deconstructed however, the necessity of the plural singular of the origin comes into play.” (BSP. p. 24) When we reflect on the project of philosophical politics and consider how its underlying assumptions guide its conclusions, what becomes clear is that we must attend to the both singular and plural nature of the origin. For Nancy whilst always shared this origin is always singular in that it occurs each in time in each of us that share it, therefore it is, however problematically, both singular and plural.

Next, Nancy considers what he characterises as the most recent attempt at a first philosophy, that of Heidegger, referring to the famous opening of *Being and Time* in which Heidegger states that the question of the meaning Being has “today been forgotten.”<sup>28</sup> For Nancy,

it is less important to respond to the question of the meaning of Being (if it is a question, and if we do not already basically respond every day and each time...) than it is to pay attention to the fact of its exhibition. (BSP. p. 28).

---

<sup>27</sup> The usual expression of this Latin phrase is *nolens volens* meaning willing or unwilling but for some reason which he does not give, Nancy reverses the order here. The meaning however is not lost.

<sup>28</sup> Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p. 2

For Nancy, the question of Being is in fact responded to, so therefore it is in some way asked, in our experience of being, over and over, each day and every time. For Nancy, what is key is to attend to is the exhibition of Being, that is, *how* we experience Being, which for Nancy is as one of the “we”, a situation which we find ourselves each time already involved in.

### *Being Singular Plural*

In this next section, the final of the three that make up the Vanderbilt paper, Nancy focuses explicitly on his notion of Being Singular Plural. He begins by commenting on the syntactic function of the phrase; ““being” is a verb or noun; “singular” and “plural” are nouns or adjectives; all can be rearranged in different combinations.” (BSP, p. 28) The multiplicity of possible orderings of these three terms is important for Nancy because it prevents singular and plural becoming predicates of Being. For Nancy, it is also vital to note that “Being does not pre-exist its singular plural. To be more precise, Being absolutely does not *pre-exist*; nothing pre-exists; only what exists exists.” (BSP, p.29) For Nancy there is no being before we can think of it as singular plural, it is already always singular plural, not least because nothing pre-exists its own existence.

For Nancy, “*Being singular plural* means the essence of Being is only as coessence.” (BSP, p. 30) Being, then, does not have a singular essence but has coessence, that is an essence that is shared. Being is not Being unless it is plural and singular also therefore it shares its essence with them. Nancy continues,

Each time, “Being” is always an instance of Being [...] it is also always an instance of “with”; singulars singularly together, where the togetherness is neither the sum, nor the incorporation, not the “society”, nor the “community” (where these words only give rise to problems). The togetherness of singulars is singularity “itself. (BSP. p. 33)

Being is both singular and plural because it is always a singular instance of Being but it is also a singular instance of Being with. I am always a singular instance of me, but I am always with other singulars, I am a Being among Beings regardless of physical proximity. The with that I share with other Beings is not defined by number, not ensured by legislation or membership of community but it is coessential in that I am me in relation to other beings, as they are each themselves in relation to me and each other (for them I am just one of the others). Therefore, we share the fact that our essence is shared, our Being is coessential. For Nancy this is what singularity is, the sharing of the fact that we are singular only in relation to one another, there is no singular without a plural that a given singular, is an instance of.

Considering the notion of Being Singular Plural and the wider scope of his own work, Nancy states that, “the retreat of the political does not signify the disappearance of the political [...] the retreat of the political is the uncovering, the ontological laying bare of being-with.” (BSP. p. 37) The need to “retreat” the political was made by Nancy during the period in which worked closely with Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s culminating in the setting up the *Centre de recherches philosophiques sur le politique* following the conference on Derrida organised by the pair entitled *Les fins de l’homme*. The retreat of the political, that is the deconstruction of the theories of how to ensure

being-with through legislation and social organisation constitutes for Nancy the “ontological laying bare” or the exposing of the coessential nature of Being, that it is Being Singular Plural.

Finally, Nancy turns to consider the problematic presentation of coessence;

The co- itself and as such, the co-presence of Being, is not presentable as that Being which “is”, since it only in the distancing. It is unpresentable, not because it occupies the most withdrawn and mysterious region of Being, the region of nothingness, but quite simply because it is not subject to a logic of presentation. (BSP, p. p.40)

For Nancy, the with of being-with, between us, relation or co coessence is precisely that which separates *and* connects simultaneously. It is not presentable because is not *a* being, it has no existence except as coessential with Being. This does not mean it is some kind of underlying mysterious or secret inner being which must be revealed to fully understand Being, but, is that which Being exposes.

Singularity and Self-Consciousness

Having reached the end of Nancy’s essay, as before, any mention on Nancy’s part of reading the essay as engagement with Hegel remains firmly undeclared. However, Nancy does not omit mention of Hegel’s thought entirely and in the section entitled Being Singular Plural, he remarks:

when Hegel begins the *Phenomenology of Spirit* with the moment of “sense certainty”, where it appears that consciousness has not yet entered into relation with another consciousness, this moment is nonetheless characterised by the language with which consciousness appropriates for itself the truth of what is immediately sensible (the famous “now it is night”). In doing so, the relation to another consciousness remains surreptitiously presupposed. (BSP. p. 31)

For Nancy, the philosophical tradition has generally explained singular being first and dealt with relation of these singular beings afterwards as a kind of secondary

phenomenon. However, for Nancy, these kinds of accounts given of singular being usually presuppose relational being, a point he also makes with respect to Heidegger and Descartes in the same section. In the case of Hegel, this presupposition is revealed, for Nancy, by Hegel's language or in fact by language itself. For Nancy, the problematic different heres and nows that self-certainty grapples with regarding its own perception are in fact merely the stand-ins for the different heres and nows that belong to other beings that consciousness will be forced to deal with later in its progress through Hegel's text. For Nancy, to give an account of Singularity will be, necessarily and unavoidably, to simultaneously give an account of beings in relation. Beyond this early remark, the engagement with Hegel's thought becomes more opaque and therefore, in order to read for an undeclared engagement, it will be necessary to consider the moments in which Nancy's thought on Singularity exposes itself in the account above to see how these could function as undeclared engagement on Hegel's Self-Consciousness.

In the explication given above of Nancy's own explication of Singularity, I wish to draw out several key points to consider as engagements with Hegel's thought. These are; that for Nancy to understand Being Singular Plural we must look at how it appears, that "we" is not a subject and relatedly that "we" arrives in the same manner in which it exists, that the question of being is not forgotten but lived every day and the finally that the coessence of Being Singular Plural is exposed when we attend to its coexistence.

For Nancy, to understand Singularity or Being Singular Plural we must attend to how it appears. Singularity appears simultaneously with, or is coexistent with



beings in relation, a situation Nancy calls, variously, “we”, “between us” or sometimes” being-with-one-another”. For Nancy observing this provides the insight that we cannot understand Being Singular Plural from “being-one” and multiplying it but must start from understanding “being-with-one-another”. Nancy characterises the refusal to consider the order of appearances as “metaphysical” but apart from the claim the Situationist critique falls under this criterion, he does not elucidate which other thinkers this would also do so. As we have already seen Nancy believes Hegel to presuppose relation in his account of the supposedly singular start of the journey consciousness takes in *The Phenomenology*. In the previous chapter, we saw that for Hegel the coming-into-being of the concept of right fell outside the science of right but in *The Phenomenology* he states in the Preface that “it is this coming –to-be of *Science as such* or of *knowledge*, that is described” (PoS, pp.27). Hegel’s intention is to describe to us his reader how consciousness own experience appears to itself at various stages of the development of consciousness. This is not the same as attending to appearance of the coming-into being of consciousness itself and furthermore the sequential staging of the different stages of conscious with the Phenomenological Observer as the one who connects these leaps would obscure any glimpse of the coming-to-be of the individual stages. For Nancy, the exposure of the simultaneous coexistence of singularity and being-with one another has an appearance of a different order to that of an individual stage. Hegel’s project would then, despite’s its own intentions, make an excellent example of the type of project that refuses to attend to the appearance of the coming-to-be of consciousness and can only comprehend isolated stages of it, missing therefore

the simultaneous coexistence of Singularity and beings in relation. This does not mean however that Hegel will be unable to give an account of Singularity that would satisfy Nancy but that he will give it in spite of his project and as we saw in the previous chapter, in a moment of unworking.

For Nancy, the being-with-one-another or the “we”, is not a subject itself, nor is it a singular identity which is composed of a conglomeration of subjects. If Singularity is coexistent with the “we”, then there are two implications for Singularity from this notion, firstly that for Nancy, Singularity is not a component part of the “we” and secondly that for Nancy Singularity or being-one is not a subject. Additionally, for Nancy, the “we” arrives *as it is*, its existence and its coming-to-be are simultaneous, Singularity therefore must also arrive as it is, in simultaneous coming-to-be with being-together. In the preface to *The Phenomenology*, Hegel tells us,

“The True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than essence consummating itself through its development. Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a *result*, that only in the *end* is it what it truly is; and that precisely in this consists its nature, viz, to be actual, subject, the spontaneous becoming of itself” (PoS, pp. 20)

For Hegel, for something to be what it is, to be true, whole, actual and to have the single identity of a subject, is something that is a result at the end of a process, and end he calls the Absolute. Hegel’s depiction of Self-Consciousness as that which finds itself in the return from the other, is for him only a stage on the way to the final perfect insatiation of consciousness (it’s end) which he calls Absolute Knowing. Hegel’s depiction of the Unhappy Consciousness as a being in whom the consciousness of both the Lord and The Bondsman are lodged and who is

alienated from himself unable to reconcile his opposing natures is not a depiction of a subject with a single identity but one of a Singular being who is problematically (for Hegel) coexistent. Hegel's Unhappy Consciousness would then serve as a useful model for Nancy's Singularity or Being Singular Plural despite its mode of arrival and place in a larger scheme, or to put it in Nancean terms, the Unhappy Consciousness offers and exposes itself as a depiction of being Singular Plural.

For Nancy, the question of the meaning being is responded to every day and each time that each of us are and also that we, as we, are. For Nancy, it is attention to appearance or co-appearance of our being that will tell us more about being than a reformulation of the question of being, a point Nancy makes in reference to Heidegger. If Being Singular Plural is that which arrives as simultaneous coexistent Singularity and Being-together and for Nancy Being is nothing other than Being Singular Plural then the question of being is responded to each day and every time by a simultaneous coexistence. For Hegel, for all that he claims to be performing phenomenology, it is not possible to be content with observing the each day and every time occurrence of Being Singular Plural or The Unhappy Consciousness as a response to the question of Being, to know what is true and actual about being, the question must be framed in terms that will produce a result, which, resolves the prior opposition to give a whole in which "the true" can be known. The re-doing "first philosophy" that Nancy admits to as an ambition (rather than declares) would then be one which would not mean to achieve its ambition by re-framing a question but by attending to the appearance, not of how consciousness would

appear to itself in particular situations but to the mode in which Singularity appears as coexistent to being-together.

For Nancy, what is exposed when we attend to the simultaneous coexistence of Being Singular Plural is that Being Singular Plural is itself coessential. Nancy generally avoids neologisms, preferring to leave established tropes in problematic play but in the creation of his term Being Singular Plural he purposefully formulates a proposition in which the three components could be ordered in any combination without loss of meaning. Being Plural Singular for example would express the same coessential coexistence of the Singular and the Plural that Nancy is after and for Nancy this prevents Singular and Plural being predicated of Being and exposes the coessentiality of the three terms. What this coessential coexistence means for Nancy is that as Being is always coessential and coexistent with Being with, then Being is, and is only, Being Singular Plural and it *is* in an instant or an event. To be singular is to be coexistent with those with whom one is together in an occurrence of Being Singular Plural and as an occurrence, Being Singular Plural is not therefore for Nancy, “subject to a logic of presentation”. (BSP, p.40). As a temporary event of the being-together of two different entities, Being Singular Plural has no single identity to be presented, it remains therefore unpresentable and problematic therefore to speak of and for Nancy must be instead exposed. It is this exposing that Nancy is after when he describes his call for a retreat of the political as an ontological laying bare of Being Singular Plural. As we saw previously, for Hegel the Absolute is a result,

“But this result itself is a simple immediacy, for it is self-conscious freedom at peace with itself, which is has not set the antithesis on side and left it lying there, but has been reconciled with it.” (PoS, pp. 21)

For Hegel, the final stage of Consciousness, Absolute Knowing, is one in which consciousness is reconciled with itself, with its own internal oppositions, and it's being is now one of simple immediacy, it arrives as it is. In this final stage, consciousness does seem to be somehow coessential, the antithesis has not been discarded but somehow incorporated in a way that does not dissolve the antithesis but allows it to be somehow presentable together with the thesis. However, for Hegel, what is presented is a simple immediacy, an identity, singular. Therefore, what Hegel wants at the culmination of the progress of consciousness is, one the hand, similar to what Nancy wants in Being Singular Plural, immediate spontaneous coming to be of the coessential, but on the other hand, Hegel wants this to be presentable, to be converted into something presentable, something therefore singular. For Hegel, “the Absolute is not supposed to be comprehended, it is to be felt and intuited.” (PoS, pp. 6) The presentation therefore of this simple immediacy of a paradoxical coessential singularity is not to be comprehended or understood but is an experience of a different order. What we have now is a description strikingly similar to Nancy's assertion that Being Singular Plural is not subject to the logic of presentation. The key difference however is that for Hegel this occurrence is not felt each day every time “we” are, but is the result of a process. For this reason, the Unhappy Consciousness which corresponds to Nancy's description of Being Singular Plural as of course do many other stages of incomplete consciousness that Hegel describes in *The Phenomenology*, will not do for Hegel but must be reconciled, must be resolved to complete the process.

## 4.4 Conclusion

### Reflections

At the beginning of this chapter I set out the intention of offering a reading of Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, which exposes an account of a Self that does not complete, which I promised to argue is the very situation that Nancy terms Being Singular Plural in his essay "Being Singular Plural". So far, I have explicated Hegel's description of Self-Consciousness as it appears in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, beginning with a condensed summary of the trajectory of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and the place of the discussion of Self-Consciousness within it, drawing out the places in the text in which Hegel's logic begin to unravel and reveal a Self which does not complete. I have also explicated Nancy's description of Being Singular Plural as it appears in his essay "Being Singular Plural" beginning with a summary of the collection of the same name in which it appears, its relation to the other essays in the collection and drawing out the undeclared engagement in "Being Singular Plural" with Hegel's account of Self-Consciousness. What remains is to outline the relationship between Nancy's account of Being Singular Plural and a Self that does not complete, drawing on Nancy's later essay "Banks, Edges, Limits (of singularity)" and various of Nancy's commentators.

Having drawn out the undeclared engagement with Hegel's account of Self-Consciousness, the following points emerged. Nancy's notion that in order to understand Being Singular Plural we must look at how it appears, can be read as an engagement with Hegel's missing of the appearance of the coming-into being

of Self-Consciousness and attending only to isolated stages of consciousness. Nancy's notion that that the "we" is not a subject or composed of subjects and relatedly that the "we" arrives in the same manner in which it exists (it is coexistent with singularity) can be read as an engagement with Hegel's need make singularity a stage on the way to beings in relation, a situation which arrives as a result and the end of a process. Nancy's notion that the question of being is not forgotten but lived or responded to every day whilst framed in his essay as a response to Heidegger in particular can also be seen as an engagement with Hegel's claim to be performing Phenomenology but failing to attend to "each day and each time" occurrence of singular plural being, instead creating a structure that aims to yield a final result to the question of being. Nancy's notion that that Being Singular Plural is not just coexistent with being-together it is also coessential, can be read as an engagement with Hegel's exposure of coessence in the structure of Self-Consciousness but his unwillingness to leave this problematic coessence in its state of unspeakable unrest.

Some eight years following the publication of the *Being Singular Plural* collection, Nancy published a short essay on Singularity in the journal *Angelaki*, entitled "Banks, Edges Limits (of singularity)." In the essay, whilst not using the term Being Singular Plural as such, Nancy seems very much to continue where he left off in *Being Singular Plural* by further refining his description of what it means to be singular.<sup>29</sup> Nancy begins by asking and answering the following: "What is a

---

<sup>29</sup> "Banks, Edges, Limits (of singularity)" even features a similar style to "Being Singular Plural", replicating the divisions of text occasionally separated this time by a three dot rather than a three star ellipsis.

singularity? It is that which occurs only once, at a single point (out of time and out of place, in short), that which is an exception.”<sup>30</sup> For Nancy, what is of interest is the point at which a singularity becomes a singularity, or becomes an exception and he examines the limit between the singularity and what is, or those that are, *not*, the singularity, remarking:

the limit is therefore the interval, at once parted and without depth or thickness, which spaces the plurality of singulars; it is their mutual exteriority and the circulation between them. As a result, the limit is just as well what the singulars have in common. (BEL, p. 46)

If the limit is what is between singulars then the edge is the exterior facing of a singular and therefore for Nancy, “in it [the edge] the unique limit pluralizes itself while singularizing itself”. (BEL, p. 48) The edge as the exterior facing of a singular is the site at which the singular is singular in the face of its limit, or of that which or more accurately or those who are not, the particular singular. The arrangement of singulars and the limit between them is not a pre-given pre-existing harmony but arrives in a rupture and for Nancy, “these forces or else this unique, discontinuous force of tearing opens the limit and detaches the edges. The edge as separation, tearing, is the bank [*rive*].” (BEL, p.50) For Nancy, just as river carves out the space it occupies and creates banks, so the limit and the edges are created by force. For Nancy, all existents therefore face each other over a limit like settlers of new lands facing off over a river, remarking and punning that “all existents are *rivals*.” (BEL, p. 51)

---

<sup>30</sup> Nancy, J.L. “Rives, Bords, Limites (de la singularité) Banks, Edges, Limits (of singularity)”, in *Angelaki*, Vol 9, no 2, Aug 2004. P41. Trans. Gil Anidjar. Hereafter referred to in the text as BEL, followed by page number.



Hegel's name is not evoked in the essay but an undeclared engagement would seem to be at work once again; the mutual recognition as mortally opposed opponents of the Lord and Bondsman would surely be the model of existents as rivals, *par excellence*, as Nancy likes to put it. Nancy does reference Bataille's engagement with Hegel's thought however, noting that,

the limit is this "nothing-in-common" through which communication occurs; if one wills, the partaking of birth and death, and therefore the partaking of a *nothing* or of a Negativity without use [*negativité sans emploi*], following Bataille's expression, which could also be transcribed here as a sense without signification. (BEL, p. 46)

The limit as the in-between of singulars is therefore the "we", the between us which is coexistent and coessential to singularity as has been explicated above. In the previous chapter, we saw that Nancy also calls the we or the in-between, community and that this occurs in an unworking, in the partaking of negativity without use or sense without signification. Nancy also calls the we or the limit, finitude, which he states is the "proper mode of access to being or sense." (BEL, p.44) As we have already seen for Nancy sense is an event of the holding together of multiple significations rather than the transmission a single signification from one singular to another, therefore for Nancy the limit of the existence of the singular is also the site of the event of sense and therefore the situation Nancy calls both Being Singular Plural and Community.

If the singularity that Nancy is describing in his essay is the same as a self then for Nancy that self is formed in this same space of unworking and he remarks:

the end of a narrative is founded by right on the very organization of the narrative [...] but the end of existence[...] begins and ends only by interrupting, that is to say by un-achieving. No process said to be "natural" or "technical" can be led to a completion that would not be as well interruption. (BEL, p.45)

For Nancy a singular *is*, that is its existence is defined or its end given, in an un-achieving or interruption. The edges and the limit, the singular and the we, are formed in an interruption. Furthermore, any process, either natural or technical, that is any organisation of narrative can lead only to a completion that is itself an interruption. As we have seen for Nancy, Hegel's account of Self-Consciousness can be read as exposing a self that does not complete and that remains restless interrupting its own completion in its restlessness exactly as Hegel's own text interrupts itself. For Nancy, "to think singularity is necessarily to think outside myth [...] but also necessarily at the extremity of metaphysics." (BEL, p. 44) To think Singularity requires then letting go of process, narrative or myth and of the framing of a question that would seek un-earth the singular truth of what it is to be singular, instead we must pay attention to experience of Community and Being Singular Plural which is the each time each day response to the question of Being. Morin echoes this point remarking that, "there is a mythic Hegelianism (a Hegelian system presented as complete and total explanation of everything that is) that is interrupted by the written, material presentation of this system"<sup>31</sup> and describing this notion as Nancy's interest in *The Speculative Remark*. If for Nancy to think Singularity or Being Singular Plural is to think outside myth then the over-arching myth the thought of Being Singular Plural is engaged with is that of Hegel's total system. However, we should not mistake Being Singular Plural for a myth or system itself, as we have seen Nancy has taken great care with its formulation, and Morin points out, "in a sense, the "singular plural" furnishes the "axiom" of

---

<sup>31</sup> M-E Morin, *Nancy*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), p. 94

Nancy's thought, from which everything else follows. Yet it is also this "axiom" that undermines all attempts at finding any "wholeness" or "systematicity" in his thought."<sup>32</sup> Being Singular Plural is that which the multiple significations of Nancy's thought are both held together and separated.

James also notes Nancy's active prevention of totality, remarking that

Nancy's philosophy, most evidently his thinking of the "singular plural", turns persistently and insistently around the demand imposed by a thinking of being in which any possibility of unity and identity has withdrawn, and where the multiple demands to be thought without reference to any overarching unity or totality.<sup>33</sup>

For James, the multiple in Nancy's thought is informed by thinking of being in which to be is not be a single identity, but a relation between singularity and multiple singulars. It is this very understanding of being as relation, that being is always relational being, that means that Nancy's thought can never be a system but is nothing but the restless trembling of between various significations, it is relation itself.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, for Nancy, Community is a relation to be experienced not a work to be achieved. In this chapter it has been argued that Being Singular Plural and Community are terms that describe the same situation relation being which is simply all being, or as Nancy prefers Community and Singularity are indissociable. Therefore, Singularity, like Community, must be a relation to be experienced not a work to be achieved. Hegel's account of the Self-

---

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2

<sup>33</sup> James, I. *The Fragmentary Demand*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p.3

Consciousness is one in which the Self-Consciousness must complete itself, but his description of the Self-Consciousness which struggles to complete, in particular the account of the Unhappy Consciousness would therefore be a description of Being Singular Plural, which as we have seen is for Nancy self which is nothing other than being itself.

# Chapter Five

## Conclusion

### 5.1 Summary

This thesis began with the suggestion, gleaned from Nancy's essay "Shattered Love" that Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* could be read for the expositions they offer on Relational Being, despite (for Nancy) their dialectical structure. Having performed these readings and run the experiment so to speak, it is now possible to consider the outcomes of the enquiry and to reflect on new trajectories of enquiry suggested. However before beginning this final task of the thesis, a task I will support by drawing on Nancy's essay "The Surprise of the Event", I will summarise the stages of the enquiry so far.

In the Introduction, I began by explicating Nancy's essay "Shattered Love" and elucidating the suggestion offered above that Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* could be read for the expositions they offer on Relational Being despite (for Nancy) their dialectical structure. Following this, I clarified the suggestion by offering a brief history of the dialectic. I began with Pre-Socratic elenctic duelling practices in Ancient Greece in which opponents attempt to drive each other into contradictions and moved on to Plato's rejection

of these as adequate for genuine truth seeking (although useful for identifying difference) and Aristotle's offering of demonstration as a superior method of establishing truth as it does not merely offer a choice between "two contradictories."<sup>1</sup> I next discussed how for Kant in the Antinomies in *the Critique of Pure Reason*, the dialectic is an illusion of opposition caused by not understanding the nature of understanding and how for Hegel, opposition itself is not the marker of a misunderstanding about how we understand in the first place, but a special kind of relationship in which the truth of each opposed side "belongs" to their unity. In the next section, I built on the emerging account of Hegel's dialectic and summarised Hegel's project and place of the dialectic within it. In the final section of the Introduction, I set the scene for a consideration of Nancy's reception of Hegel's philosophy and the dialectic in particular; beginning with a consideration of Marx's enthusiastic use of dialectic as method but with a radical new focus I considered Kojève's anthropological interpretation of Hegel's philosophy which sees the unifying moment of the dialectic as human action and Hippolyte's speculative interpretation in which the unifying moment is not final but repeats over and over. Following this I offered a selection of responses from the Analytical and typically Anglophone reception of Hegel, considering Russell's rejection of Hegel's project on the grounds of mysticism and faulty logic as well as a sketch of Pippin's reading of the dialectic as the recognition of deficiencies.

---

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, in *The Complete works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathon Barnes, New Jersey: (Princeton University Press, 1995.) p. 30, 1, 24a 21

In Chapter Two, I began by sketching Nancy's project depicting his interest in Hegel's thought as a frequent theme, as well as offering a summary of the Anglophone reception of Nancy's work. Nancy's notion of Being Singular Plural as that in which singularities find their meaning in relation to other singularities was highlighted as connecting the varied scope of his thought and this view was also shown to be taken up by many of Nancy's Anglophone commentators. Next, in order to prepare for the readings of *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and accompanying readings of *The Inoperative Community* and *Being Singular Plural*, I offered readings of Nancy's two texts on Hegel, *The Speculative Remark* and *The Restlessness of the Negative*. In the reading of *The Speculative Remark*, I explicated Nancy's concern with Hegel's concept of *Aufhebung* as that which, as an attempt to resolve problematic opposing pairs, in fact exposes the multiple significations at play in an event of sense. This was contrasted with Malabou's notion of plasticity which also sees relation between entities that differ as something that does not come about as a result of an operation, but which does view this originary relation as hetero-affected rather than between multiple differing entities. In the reading of *The Restlessness of the Negative*, I explicated Nancy's concern with a notion of identity as restless negativity, a notion he finds exposed in Hegel's work, but which Hegel wishes to convert into a non-problematic identity with presence. This thought was considered as it is taken up by Derrida and his notion that Hegel's theory of the sign seeks to convert the problematic semiological difference at play between the sign and the signifier. It was also considered with respect to Foucault's notion that Hegel's account of history as dialectical progress seeks to convert the

historical difference at play between the multiple origins of events. It was observed Derrida and Foucault set about more active programs of signposting difference and keeping it unresolved than Nancy whose approach is marked by a more passive generous reticence. These readings of the Nancean texts and the contrasting readings used for clarification, were consolidated into the guiding thought that for Nancy, Sense and Identity is understood as the situation of multiple significations held together in restless movement, a problematic situation which has no presence. This thought was considered in the light of insights from Victoria Fairfield and Emilia Angelova, that Nancy's non-binary reading of the dialectic is one in which there is no return to, or completion of self and that Nancy reads in Hegel a system that does not in fact complete and is in perpetual unrest. These observations were applied to the original task of reading *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* for the expositions they offer on Relational Being, which was clarified into the task of reading *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* for an account of The State in Unrest and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* for an account of a Self that does not Complete.

In Chapter Three, I contrasted Nancy and Hegel on Community by offering a reading *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* read for an account of The State in Unrest and a reading of Nancy's text *The Inoperative Community*. I began with an explication of Hegel's notion of The State as laid out in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* in which I drew out the coexistence of the three required moments of the Power of the Sovereign at the heart of Hegel's account of The State which, as essential coexistence, make a final moment of dialectical unity problematic,



rendering the identity of The State as one unrest and therefore incomplete. I then offered a reading of *The Inoperative Community* in which I drew out Nancy's notion of Community as essentially inoperative, interrupting itself and coming into existence again over the shared pain of that interruption. Reflecting on these two differing accounts of beings together and also considering Nancy's essay "The Jurisdiction of the Hegelian Monarch" I offered the following observations. For Nancy, community is a not a work to be achieved whereas for Hegel The State occurs as a culmination to a process. For Nancy Singular Being is always co-appearance whereas for Hegel singular being is a complete state in itself (or should be) however the only entity that fits this description in The State is the Sovereign or Monarch. Finally, for Nancy Community can only be communicated in a discourse that exhausts itself whereas for Hegel The State must be expounded in a dialectical discourse which completes its intended trajectory. I also considered Roupa's observation that The Monarch or Sovereign is the vessel for the event of the synthesis in Hegel's intended dialectic, and as such, is part of a metaphysical tradition of making essence effective as well as Devisch's observation that Nancy's elaboration of inoperativity is a way of using Hegel's workless negation to escape the dialectic. In conclusion, I argued that for Nancy, Community is a relation to be experienced not a work to be achieved like Hegel's State, and therefore the situation of The State in unrest, The State unable to complete, is the very same situation that Nancy terms Community. Additionally, I asserted that for Nancy, Hegel only unintentionally exposes the situation of simultaneous separation and connection that is the Relational Being of Community, or group identity based on

restless negativity, and that a consideration of singular identity based on restless negativity would become the focus of the next chapter.

In Chapter Four, I contrasted Nancy and Hegel on Singularity by offering a reading of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* read for an account of A Self which does not Complete and a reading of Nancy's text *Being Singular Plural*. I began with an explication of Hegel's notion of Self-Consciousness as laid out in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in which I drew out the restless nature of Hegel's Self-Consciousness particularly so in his account of the tormented Unhappy Consciousness who is unable to reconcile the contradictory aspects of his nature and therefore complete as a Self. I then offered a reading of *Being Singular Plural* in which I drew out Nancy's notion of Being Singular Plural as Singularity that is essentially coexistent with other singularities making it problematic to present. Reflecting on these two differing accounts of Singularity and also considering Nancy's essay "Banks, Edges, Limits" I offered the following observations. For Nancy, in order to understand Being Singular Plural we must attend to how it appears whereas Hegel, despite his assertion that he will describe the coming-to-be of consciousness, ends up describing isolated stages of consciousness leaving the reader to connect these stages and assume their coming-to-be. For Nancy, neither the "we" (the other singularities that are coessential to any particular singularity) nor Singularity itself, is a subject, something with a unified presentable identity whereas for Hegel an un-unified Singularity is unacceptable and therefore the tormented Unhappy Conscious alienated from its own self, must be resolved. For Nancy, the question of being or Being Singular Plural is responded to "each

time every day”, whereas for Hegel the question must be framed in a discourse that is structured logically to produce a result. For Nancy Being as Being Singular Plural is coessential as is reflected in his (uncharacteristic) coining of the term Being Singular Plural and this essentiality occurs in a temporary event, whereas for Hegel, Being can only be coessential in the final event of Absolute Knowledge in which coessentiality would finally be presentable. I considered Morin’s observation that Nancy’s notion of Being Singular Plural functions as an axiom from which his philosophical project follows and is that which prevents his project from becoming a system. I also considered James’ observation that Nancy’s notion of Being is one in which the possibility of unity and identity is lost. In conclusion, I argued that for Nancy, as Singularity is Being Singular Plural and therefore coessential with other singularities it is indissociable from the situation of Community. Therefore, as Community was argued to be relation to be experienced not a work to be achieved, Singularity must also be understood as a relation to be experienced not a work to be achieved. I also asserted that Hegel’s account of Self-Consciousness requires that Self-Consciousness completes itself and overcomes its own internal contradiction, therefore a self which does not complete is the same situation as Nancy’s Being Singular Plural.

#### Outcomes

For Nancy, the situations that Hegel calls Self-Consciousness and The State are better understood as Singularity and Community respectively, both of which are relations to be experienced, not a work to be achieved, and furthermore they are the same relation, the same situation. This situation, which for Nancy is the basic

situation of Being, or as he prefers Being Singular Plural, is also one in which Sense and Identity are revealed as multiple significations held together in restless movement. Being is revealed therefore for Nancy, as that in which existence and essence have the same structure, that of multiplicity held together in connection and separation. What is deeply problematic about this situation, this account of Being, as we saw in the discussion in Chapter One, regarding Nancy's and Derrida's projects, is that it offers no completed or resolved singular existent, there is no entity or identity to present, just a situation to experience. For Nancy, this experience best provoked in a discourse which exhausts itself, in the interruption of Community by itself and in the inability of Self to complete itself in the face of other Singularities.

Hegel's project of dialectical assimilation can be seen therefore as one that tries to convert this problematic multiple non-presentable Being into a singular identity which does have presence. As we saw in Chapter Two, this is for Rousseau, part of the metaphysical tradition of making essence effective. Hegel's method for achieving this is via the third stage of the dialectic, the moment of sublation or synthesis. In both the *Elements of The Philosophy of Right* and *The Phenomenology*, whilst we are given descriptions of multiple occurrences of the lead up to a sublation (situations of opposition) and then the post-sublation situation, what is consistently missing is the moment of sublation itself. In *Elements of The Philosophy of Right* the "final" moment of sublation which will unify and ratify the previous sublations that have lead up to it is placed by Hegel in the action of an individual, The Sovereign or Monarch of The State. In *The*

*Phenomenology*, the final moment which will unify and ratify all the preceding sublations is that of Absolute Knowledge, a state of perfection in which humanity will finally be able to conceive of truth as the unity of opposites.

However, if we reflect on the role of The Phenomenological Observer, described by Stephen Houlgate in Chapter Three, as a role played by both Hegel and his reader and who is the one who makes the leap each time between the lead up to a sublation and the post-sublation situation, then we start to see a situation of unity of opposition already occurring. The moments of sublation in each stage of consciousness in *The Phenomenology* and each stage of entities together *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, are not described to us or given to us. The argument for their necessity is given, as is the desired new situation resulting from the sublation, but the occurrence of the sublation is in the reader as they assimilate this information and in Hegel as the one who gives this information and who has already conceived it. This results in the trajectory of both *The Phenomenology* and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* taking the form a string of separate occurrences which appear to all intents and purposes to be a series of sundered moments which Hegel precisely warns against in *The Phenomenology*. Furthermore, that Hegel can conceive of the unity of opposites surely means that humanity has already achieved Absolute Knowledge and achieves it again, each time in other person who plays the role of the Phenomenological Observer, that is, Hegel's reader.

The occurrence of this unity, each time in the reader as Phenomenological Observer, is I would argue, the same occurrence as Nancy's "each time every day" response to the question of Being. Whilst Hegel claims in *The Phenomenology* to be doing a Phenomenology and attending to the coming-into being of the stages of consciousness, he never the less fails to attend to the experience of the Phenomenological Observer. Not attending to the experience of his own understanding and that of his reader, means that Hegel misses the sublation that occurs each time between the described stages, the already here and now of Absolute Knowledge and which is for Nancy, nothing other than the problematic non-presentable Event of Sense. To further bring out this notion, I will next offer a reading of Nancy's essay of Hegel's notion of Event, "The Surprise of the Event".

## 5.2 “The Surprise of the Event”

The “Surprise of the Event” appears in the *Being Singular Plural* collection, and in it Nancy is chiefly concerned with “the “surprise” in the sense of its being an attribute, quality or property of an event, but [also] the event itself, its being or essence.”<sup>2</sup> This articulation of the surprise inherent in the event or better, event *as* surprise, comes via a consideration of a specific sentence in *Hegel’s Science of Logic*:

*But philosophy is not meant to be a narration of happenings but a cognition of what is true in them, and further, on the basis of this cognition, to comprehend that which, in the narrative, appears as a mere happening [or pure event- Trans].*<sup>3</sup>

Nancy offers two possible readings of this sentence, the first “canonical” one holds that “the task of philosophy is to conceive that which the event is only the phenomenon” (SoE, p. 160) whereas in the second reading,

Hegel wants to think the essence of what escapes a logic in which essence is understood as substance, subject or ground, in favour of a logic of the “to happen”, the whole essence of which is in the state of “agitation” that consists in not subsisting. (SoE, p. 163)

For Nancy, this Hegelian sentence is not a simple instruction to disregard the illusory phenomenon in favour of the truth which must underlie it, and only once that is secure to examine the phenomenon, but an attempt to think what essence would be outside of a logic that thinks essence as substance or subject and would

---

<sup>2</sup> Nancy J.L. “The Surprise of the Event” in *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert.D.Richardson and Anne.E.O’Byrne (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 165. Hereafter to referred to in the text as SoE followed by page number. Although this is a similar tactic as used by Nancy in *The Speculative Remark*, here the sentence in question is part of the main body of the text, rather than an appended remark.

<sup>3</sup> Happening is the Millar translation of *Geschehen* but the translators point out the event is also used. Hegel quoted by Nancy, SoE, p. 159, emphasis Nancy’s own. Original source given by translators as Hegel, GWF. *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V.Miller, (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1989), p. 588, §1303.

instead understand essence as that which is restless and unrepresentable. Nancy admits that this is at the “extreme limit” of what he can make Hegel say, but that his (Nancy’s) aim is to “surprise [...] Hegelian thinking from the inside.” (SoE, p.164) to make it say what it did not expect to say and in the process expose what Nancy himself wants to say about Surprise and Event.

For Nancy, Hegel’s desire to understand what is true in happenings or events, that is, what is graspable and presentable and what therefore is *not*, reflects at least a curiosity about how essence could work if it were not a quality of a single fixed entity.<sup>4</sup> For Nancy, in his curiosity,

Hegel seizes the *Geschehen*; he stops it or inspects it in its coming and going; he fixes its concept (it’s *Geschichte*). But in doing so, he demonstrates that it is exactly in the seizing that he misses it as such. In this way he opens *volens nolens*, the question of the “as such” of the *Geschehen*. (SoE, p.164)

For Nancy, Hegel observes the occurrence of occurrence itself and he conceptualizes it, he breaks it down into its parts and draws up a schema of how those parts come together in a specific order to produce a result. In seizing that which he is studying and identifying the presentable parts and summarising their relationship, Hegel has stilled the restless movement of the parts and is therefore unable to observe the “as such”, the mode in which what happens, happens, much like a lepidopterist attempting to deduce how a butterfly might move through the air by manipulating the wing of the now dead butterfly that he has caught in a trap. However, for Nancy, whatever Hegel’s intention, his missing of the very

---

<sup>4</sup> The translators point out that either happening or event is applicable to French term *arriver*, which is the term Nancy generally uses to refer to what Hegel calls *Geschehen*.



movement he is interested in, highlights the need or the challenge to think the “as such” of *Geschehen* or the event-ness of event.

Nancy is aware however of the complexities of the challenge, asking, “How is one to think “as such” where the “as” does not refer to any one “such”? [...]one cannot even express “the event” without losing its event-ness.” (SoE, p. 165) The “as such” or the event-ness of event is not a single presentable thing, it is precisely the complex relationship between multiple parts and as such it has no presence. To express the event-ness of a particular event, one has little choice but to enumerate the parts as Hegel does and therefore lose the vital event-ness of the event. In this way for Nancy, “it [the event] exceeds the resources of any phenomenology, even though the phenomenological theme in general has never been more magnetized by anything else.” (SoE, p. 169) The approach Nancy will offer to counter this will be one in which, rather than attending to occurrence of occurrence by studying, analysing and presenting, the very event-ness of event will be allowed to surprise us in an event of meaning, it will be attended to by experiencing it.

If the event is not a single presentable thing, then for Nancy it is nothing other than negativity-for-itself, however this is,

not negativity understood as Hegel understood it, as “abstractly related to itself “[but is that which] must be understood as the nonabstract, itself understood as not the result [of some process- Trans]. This is exactly what Hegel lets fall by the wayside. (SoE, p. 170)

For Nancy, this kind of negativity is not that which is the abstract unknowable aspect of an entity that can only be known through a negation which comes as a

result of process, unifying it with that which is positive, has presence and is knowable. What Nancy has in mind would be a positive negativity, an essence which would not be a quality of a single fixed entity and it is the curiosity for this which Nancy claims that Hegel lets drop. For Nancy to think the event as negativity for-itself, that is, the event as the occurrence of that which is not presentable in the very mode of that which is not presentable, means that “the experience of nothing is what we are trying to approach: the thinking-surprise of the event.” (SoE p. 171) To think this negativity, to experience this nothing is to be surprised by thought. In this way, the negativity that event is, does not become “negativity as a resource, as an available foundation, as nothingness or an abyss from the depths of which the event would come; for such an “event” would still be a result.” (SoE p. 172) Negativity must stay for Nancy as that which is not presentable, it must not, as in Hegel’s project be sublated into something with presence and turned into a resource or foundation which would become a foundation for a series of sublations.

Event so far has been characterised as that which is the same as negativity and which is only thinkable as a surprise of thought and which would be lost if it were to enumerate its parts and schematise it. The account has focussed on what event is not and how Hegel has missed it, but the essay turns at this point to deliver a positive account of event and what Hegel was prevented from seeing.

Nancy states that,

The surprise *is not* anything. It is not some newness of Being that would be surprising in comparison to the Being which is already given. When there is the event [...], it is the “already” which leaps up, along with the “not yet”. (SoE, p. 171)

The surprise of the event is not the event of a new entity which is surprising in relation to what already is (it is not the new product or result of a process), it is precisely the event of what-already-is being what it already is, but not yet being what it is not yet. Event is what already is, right *now*, as it happens, both in the sense of when it happens and the way in which it happens. Nancy continues, saying that “the surprise is nothing except the leap right at [*à même*] Being, this leap where event and thinking are “the same.” (SoE, p. 172) The surprise of the event is for Nancy a leap in which Being and thinking are same, or to put this another way, in which Being and meaning are the same. The Surprise of the Event is therefore what has been considered so far in this thesis under the name the Event of Sense. For Nancy, then, Being occurs in an event of meaning, in which what already exists, occurs in the mode and in the time, the temporal location, in which it already exists. This occurrence is always unexpected because, as it is not the end of a process it must be unprecedented, unanticipated. This occurrence then is nothing other than pure event.

As an event of sense, Event is necessarily unifying, but for Nancy, “the unity of the event is not numerical. It does not consist in being gathered at a point of origin (for ontology there is no Big Bang).” (SoE, p. 175) Event for Nancy is not unifying in the sense of providing a singular point of origin for what follows it, it is not a fixing or a concretising of singularity. Furthermore,

If the event were fundamental and unique in the ordinary – or “metaphysical”- sense of these words, it would be given, and this giving would also be the originary dissolution of all event-ness. There would be no surprise. Only because it is not given, but instead happens, is there surprise and an unpredictable multiplicity of what might now be called the arrivals (or the “arrivings” ) of the unique event. (SoE, p. 175)

If event provided a singular point of origin, then as something singular it would be able to be given. As event is not singular and is instead a holding together (where *a* holding is not a single thing) of multiplicity; event invites the enumeration and schematisation of these multiplicities, however if this is done then an event becomes able to be given, the very event-ness of event is lost. Event therefore is not given but instead *happens* (it “just happens”) and what takes place in this unprecedented happening is the “arrivings” of multiplicity, held together in an event of unity, an Event of Sense.

For Nancy, in conclusion, “If Being simply were, nothing would ever happen, and there would not be any thinking.” (SoE 176) If Being were simple, then singular beings would have correspondingly singular being which would be complete and resolved without any interaction with other beings, this would be a non-relational being. If this kind of being existed then there would be no need for thought because being that does not require interaction and relation to know itself as singular would experience no contradiction, no multiplicity to bring together in an event of sense. Thought as an event of sense is therefore a response to the experience of being a being whose being is not simple, whose being means that to know oneself as singular can only occur in relation to multiplicity. However, being a being whose being is not simple and responding to this, occur in the same event, there is no prior different being. In this way, the event of sense which is nothing other than the event of being which is always unprecedented, it is always surprise.

Community, Singularity and Event

At the close of the consideration of the outcomes of the enquiry above, Hegel's accounts of Self-Consciousness and of The State, were shown to offer an unexpected unity in the experience, not of Self-Consciousness itself or The Sovereign or indeed any of the inhabitants of The State, but instead in the experience of what Stephen Houlgate calls the Phenomenological Observer, a role played both by Hegel himself and his reader. This unity which occurs each time for the reader in an event of sense in connection with Hegel's text, was argued to be the same occurrence as Nancy's "each time every day" response to the question of Being. The unity experienced by both players of the role of the Phenomenological Observer, is, therefore the event of Being as Nancy wants in "The Surprise of the Event".

As we saw above, for Hegel this unity only arrives properly in Absolute Knowledge, a perfected state of consciousness which arrives as the final sublation at the end of a series of prior sublations. This description of the *arrival* of Absolute Knowledge would appear to match the description of the surprise of the event as a new kind of being which is surprising because it differs from what precedes it, a description Nancy says is not the surprise he is after. However, the content of what Hegel claims arrives in Absolute Knowledge, that unity of opposition is possible, is unproblematic for Nancy provided it is taken out of its place in the sequence and understood instead not as the product of a result but the Event of

Sense in the now that *was* for Hegel and the now that it *is* for his reader.<sup>5</sup> Absolute Knowledge re-framed (or re-time framed) in this manner, is then already happening constantly in Hegel's texts, it is everywhere but in a typically Nancean phrase, it is never said. Hegel's elaborations of situations of opposition and difference are similarly unproblematic for Nancy, but the various sublations or rather the moving onto a next section in which sublation seems to have already occurred but the experience of the Phenomenological Observer is not accounted for, mark the sites therefore of missed events, or better, event missed.

Hegel's notion of The State in *The Elements of The Philosophy of Right*, would, under this view of Absolute Knowledge re-time framed, mark the site of the missed event of Nancy's Community. The moment in which beings are finally able to exist in true freedom in which there is no opposition between morality and duty, is the moment which they are able to share their being as Nancy has it. Hegel however, places this moment as the final sublation after series for sublations and characterises it as the decision of the Sovereign, he gives this singular event a physical single location, he gives it presence. For Nancy, he therefore loses the event-ness of the event of Community, he loses its nature as the experience of the unanticipated occurrence of the simultaneous separation and connection of what already is, beings together.

---

<sup>5</sup> It is the mistaking of the event of sense, or the action of the Phenomenological Observer, for a *third* moment, of a new surprising being, that gives rise to the triadic structure of the dialectic in Hegel's thought.

Hegel's notion of Self-Consciousness in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and specifically the account of The Unhappy Consciousness under the view of Absolute Knowledge re-time framed, would similarly mark the site of the missed event of Nancy's Being Singular Plural. The moment in which the pain that the Unhappy Consciousness felt at being unable to reconcile itself and what is not itself, is finally resolved in a moment in which there is no longer any opposition at all, in which multiplicity is recognised as being coessential with singularity as Nancy has it. As before, Hegel places this moment as the final sublation after series of sublations and while he doesn't give this event a physical location, as all opposition is now resolved the opposition between that with presence and that without presence is resolved also. For Nancy, as before, Hegel loses the event-ness of event as that which holds multiplicity together in the now, and therefore the experience of the unanticipated occurrence of the simultaneous separation and connection of what already is, beings together.<sup>6</sup>

The consequence of missing the event-ness of event is not just that Hegel therefore does not arrive at Nancy's notion of beings together as Community or singular being as Being Singular Plural and the further realisation that Community and Being Singular Plural are one and the same, but that Hegel ends up with the

---

<sup>6</sup> Nancy therefore would appear to be one of Hyppolite's "contemporary thinkers" who deny the possibility of synthesis and who prefer The Unhappy Consciousness as an account of Being. However it is not quite right to claim that Nancy accepts Hegel's phenomenology and rejects his ontology, Nancy welcomes Hegel's phenomenology but finds its focus lacking and he accepts Hegel's ontology but re-frames it, or rather de-frames it by doing away with dialectical process by means of interruption and unworking, see Hyppolite, Jean. *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1979), p. 205.

very sundered moments he warned against. In *The Phenomenology*, Hegel tells us that difference is merely what results from sundering moments of the essence of life in its relation to itself and that we must attend to the over-arching self relation of life, however, his enumeration of the various oppositions that precede the final destinations of the decision of The Sovereign in *Elements of The Philosophy of Right* and Absolute Knowledge in the *Phenomenology*, cast those oppositions as separate sundered instances. The overarching self-relation of life that we are supposed to attend to, is the missed experience of the Phenomenological Observer.

As we saw in the explication of The Event of Sense, attending to and expressing the event-ness of event presents the problem of the difficulty of speaking of that which has no presence. Additionally, when trying to express the event-ness of event in relation to Hegel's thought on event, Nancy faces the challenge that given the long shadow Hegel's thought and specific technique has cast over thought on opposition and difference, any philosophical move that takes a contra or anti position to Hegel's thought risks being sucked into the dialectic process itself. To be anti-dialectical, is of course a position contained within the structure of Hegel's notion of the truth of two opposites being contained in their unity, it is to provide the antithesis to Hegel's thesis, the truth of both of which is known in their unity. If this truth is not yet clear it is merely because Absolute Knowledge has not yet arrived. As we saw in "Shattered Love" as explicated in the Introduction, for Nancy we have missed the rendez-vous with love and therefore with thinking (because thinking is love) because we have thought dialectically, therefore we can safely



say Nancy's position is to think outside a logic of the dialectic. However, whilst Nancy is certainly for a non-dialectical approach it is quite firmly Hegel's technique that he is working against rather than a wholesale rejection the content of Hegel's project as we have seen in Nancy's consistent fascination with Hegel's thought. For Nancy, to reclaim Hegel's useful descriptions of opposition, negativity and also the descriptions Nancy finds that Hegel does not intend, to rescue all these treasures from their place in the schema, Nancy favours an approach which reflects what he says about the structure of meaning and how it works in the event of sense.

Throughout those of Nancy works I have explicated in this thesis, this approach has been more or less obliquely described or intimated under various names; interruption, unworking, the surprise of the event. In his consistent effort not to schematise and name techniques Nancy rarely sticks with his own terms, keeping his thought restless and preventing easy summarisation and accidental concretisation into any concepts but especially wrong ones. What characterises Nancy's approach however is an intent to acknowledge that the existence and essence of the thing under consideration are the same and to make his consideration and exposition reflect that structure. The existence and essence of both Singularity and Community is simultaneous connection and separation. Community and Relational Being are the same situation, the same river, to use the analogy in "Banks, Edges, Limits", viewed from different banks. Nancy's approach to convey this, is to provoke an experience of simultaneous connection and separation, an event of sense.

To provoke us, his readers, into an experience of simultaneous connection and separation, Nancy provides us with multiplicities to bring together. As we have seen in “The Surprise of the Event” this happens anyway, whenever we think, and it is the primary experience of Being for Nancy. However, Nancy’s strategies, if we can call them such, of presenting not arguments but meditations and fragments as Ian James calls them, of avoiding progressive structures in texts and insisting that the fragments he provides can be read in any order, of preferring to use existing terms and work with both the rehabilitated sense he wants to bring to them as well as their complicated and contradictory histories, all provoke the interruptions, unworkings, surprises and events he finds so useful in promoting the experience of simultaneous separation and connection he is after. However, the exception Nancy makes to these strategies is the coining of his term Being Singular Plural, the term that Morin finds “axiomatic” in his work. This term, as we saw, is designed such that it’s three components can be arranged in any order, it provides a multiplicity of significations that make thinking it nothing other than experience of simultaneous separation and connection. To think Being Singular Plural (for both Nancy and his reader) is to experience Being Singular Plural, to think Being Singular Plural is to experience Being as it happens, in the event of it’s happening and in the manner of its event, it is to think it’s essence *as* its existence. In the “Surprise of the Event” Nancy gives another name for this experience, “In going much further back than Hegel, as far back as the Platonic and the Aristotelian topos of “wonder”, what may need to be understood is that this is the task of philosophy, and that philosophy is surprised thought.” (SoE, p. 165)

### 5.3 Surprising Trajectories

If Sense is, as Nancy has it, an unprecedented event in which we experience the simultaneous connection and separation inherent in holding together of multiplicity of significations which are in restless movement, then my task as the writer of this thesis has been to record and convey the events of my readings of Hegel and Nancy's texts. As reader and writer in this thesis, I have therefore played both parts inherent to the role of the Phenomenological Observer. The constraints of the academic exercise that is the PhD thesis have meant that I have had to be more explicit than Nancy in my communication, I cannot so happily leave to chance that event of sense occurs in my reader in the way in which I need it to, I cannot exercise the "generous reticence" he calls for in "Shattered Love." To present an argument is to de-limit the range of overwhelming significations presented to the reader and to minimise the interruptive devices, even at the risk as Nancy points out of losing the event-ness of event or the experience of Being. The events of my reading of Nancy and Hegel's texts therefore featured more significations, more trajectories of thought than I could coherently include in any kind of in-depth elaboration in this thesis and I therefore will sketch these here.

In "Being Singular Plural" Nancy considers Heideggerian Being-with remarking that,

The analytic of *Mitsein* that appears within the coexistential analytic remains nothing more than a sketch; that is, even though *Mitsein* is coessential with *Dasein*, it remains in a subordinate position. (BSP, p. 93)

It would be hard to argue that Heidegger does not realise the coessentiality of *Dasein* and *Mitsein*, the explication of this occupies a significant portion of *Being*

*and Time* and Heidegger is quite explicit; “So far as *Dasein* is at all, it has Being-with-one-another as it’s kind of Being.”<sup>7</sup> Picking out Nancy’s claim and tracing how for Nancy whilst Heidegger recognises the coessentiality of *Mitsein* and *Dasein* he still affords *Mitsein* a secondary role (it is certainly true that *Dasein* is expounded first and *Mitsein* is explained by means of in reference to this prior articulation) would provide a rich seam of enquiry. Nancy does not elaborate on the potential project in detail in “Being Singular Plural” and whilst Heidegger is one of his frequent reference points when sketching a philosophical backdrop to a topic in hand, Nancy has to date not produced studies on Heidegger of the length and focus he has lavished on Hegel. However, he does hint at direction this study could take;

What is necessary is that we retrace the outline of its analysis and push it to the point where it becomes apparent that the coessentiality of being-with is nothing less than the matter of the co-originary of meaning. (BSP, p. 94)

Any comparative study of Nancy and Heidegger on Being Singular Plural and the apparently problematic coessentiality of *Dasein* and *Mitsein* would need therefore to orientate itself via a consideration of the approaches of both Nancy and Heidegger to meaning and sense-making.

Kierkegaard is not a thinker whom Nancy makes a frequent reference as he does with Heidegger, he references Kierkegaard briefly in “Shattered Love” as one of many who have written on love, but gives no indication of how one might bring

---

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962) p. 163, H 125.

together their projects.<sup>8</sup> However, Nancy's concern with the leap of thought in "The Surprise of the Event" echoed for me, a similar concern with leap that Kierkegaard exhibits in *Fear and Trembling*. As we saw for Nancy in the event there is a leaping up of what already is and Nancy goes on to remark that "thinking can only be accomplished by a leap of thought- by thought as a leap, as the leap that it knows and is aware of becoming necessarily.( SoE, p.172) This notion of thought occurring in a leap into something that it already is and already knows, reminded me instantly of Kierkegaard's remark that,

It is said that the dancer's hardest task is to leap straight into a definite position, so that not for a second does he have to catch at the position but stands there in it in the leap itself. <sup>9</sup>

This remark is made during the Preamble from the Heart which proceeds Kierkegaard's main explication of Abraham's action in his interrupted attempt to obey God's command to kill his son. For Kierkegaard, Abraham is a Knight of Faith, he is one who can move past the initial stage of being Knight of Infinite Resignation, a position of being resigned to the impossibility of saving his son in any way, to a position of faith that if he obeys God and really does kill his son, then through his faith in God and an earlier promise that he will not lose his son, the paradox will be somehow be resolved and he will indeed kill but keep his son. For Kierkegaard, the movement between being the Knight of infinite Resignation and

---

<sup>8</sup> As was discussed in Chapter Two, there is a possible (and unacknowledged) reference to Kierkegaardian trembling in *The Restlessness of The Negative*. Nancy, JL. *The Restlessness of the Negative*, trans. Jason Smith and Steven Miller, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p.44

<sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alistair Hannay, (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1985), p.70.

the Knight of Faith is that of a leap in which the Knight of Faith assumes the position in the leap. In a footnote to this passage Kierkegaard says that,

*Every movement of infinity occurs in passion, and no reflection can bring about a movement. That's the perpetual leap in life which explains the movement, while mediation is a chimera which in Hegel is supposed explain everything and besides is the only thing he has never tried to explain.<sup>10</sup>*

Abraham is therefore willing to live the paradox and not to attempt to resolve it, to mediate it. For Kierkegaard, Hegel's philosophy is therefore an attempt to mediate the paradox, to make a composite of the disparate parts which would seek to explain the whole. For Kierkegaard, it is the leap that explains the movement, reflection cannot bring it about but would instead create a hypothetical construct as mythical and implausible as a fire breathing lion with a snake's head for a tail and the head of goat protruding from its back. Any attempt to bring together the thought Nancy and Kierkegaard could prove instructive if it orientated itself via the notion of an unresolved paradox. Also, to be considered in such an enquiry would be a comparison of Nancy's interruptive devices and attempts to provoke unworkings by not offering traditionally structured progressively argued theses with Kierkegaard's frequent offering of his writing in a variety of forms also outside the standard theoretical treatise and under a variety of pseudonyms.

In the Preface to the *Being Singular Plural* collection, Nancy acknowledges the specificity of writing about community and being together in his specific historical

---

<sup>10</sup> Kierkegaard, *Ibid*, p.71

era, drawing particular attention to the end of the siege of Sarajevo in the year the collection was published.<sup>11</sup> He asserts that in his now,

This earth is anything but a sharing of humanity. It is a world that does not even manage to constitute a world; it is a world lacking in world, and lacking in the meaning of world, it is an enumeration that brings to light the sheer number and proliferation of these various poles of attraction and repulsion. [...] It is a litany, a prayer of pure sorrow and pure loss, the plea that falls from the lip of millions of refugees every day; whether they be deportees, people besieged, those who are mutilated people who starve, who are raped, ostracized, excluded, exiled, expelled. (BSP, p. xiii)

Nancy acknowledges the difficulty of saying the “we” he will go on to explore in “The Inoperative Community” essay, when that “we” has to encompass both those who are currently suffering and those who have perpetrated that suffering. When I began this thesis, I was content with Nancy’s desire to re-treat the political and to maintain reticence regarding prescriptions for his diagnosis of an inoperative community. As I have completed final stages of this thesis during a time of profound political change as the United Kingdom prepares to leave the European Union (it remains unclear whether article 50 will or will not be triggered before I submit) it has become harder not to search for some kind of answer in Nancy’s writing. As I have explained my thesis to people unwise enough to ask me about it, I have had to explain over and over that I sadly don’t have a solution to unite a post-Brexit Britain. Community remains however on Nancy’s mind and in 2014 he published *The Disavowed Community*, a collection of essays in response to Blanchot’s *The Unavowable Community in 1983*, itself a response to *The Inoperative Community*.<sup>12</sup> Also in 2014 Nancy published a short article in *The*

---

<sup>11</sup> The essay “Eulogy for the Mêlée” is dedicated to Sarajevo. Nancy, JL. *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert.D.Richardson and Anne.E.O’Byrne, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p.145

<sup>12</sup> Nancy had also made much shorter response to Blanchot in an earlier essay called “The Confronted Community” which appears in *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille: Community and*

*Political and/or Politics* in which he re-iterates the need to resist the urge to prescribe a politics saying that “It is too late to found a State of any kind and too early to have an intimation of something else.”<sup>13</sup> It would seem then for Nancy, we are still unable to risk a politics that would be as concrete as Hegel’s State but it is still too early to know what the alternative is, we are still struggling to think the thought of Inoperative Community, we will always struggle to think Community, all we can do is to think it by experiencing it. In July 2016, not long after the result of the United Kingdom European Union membership referendum, Nancy gave an interview in which he was asked why the Soviet form of communism had failed. In his reply, he warned against prescribing solutions without analysis, in this case a universal minimum wage, and remarked that,

The truth is that nowadays, in order to invent, first we must think. And we must scream as well. Brexit was an outcry by those who have been treated with contempt by the ruling class in Europe. We have to listen to that outcry. But what should we understand from it? That is what remains to be seen.<sup>14</sup>

For Nancy, it seems we must experience and therefore think (they are coexistent and coessential) the simultaneous situation of separation and connection inherent in the United Kingdom’s leaving the European Union, we must attend in particular to specific feeling of the inoperativity of a specific community as expressed by the referendum result. For Nancy, as ever, it is too early to know what this means. It may however mean for Nancy, what this always means, that

---

*Communication*, ed. Andrew J. Mitchell and Jason Kemp Winfree, (Albany: State University of New York Press 2009)

<sup>13</sup> Nancy, JL. “The Political and/or Politics” in *The Oxford Literary Review*, 36.1, (2014). Trans. Christopher Sauder, p.6.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.alejandradeargos.com/index.php/en/all-articles/21-guests-with-art/1418-interview-with-jean-luc-nancy-the-west-is-no-more>



where there is separation there is also connection. In the preface to the *Being Singular Plural* collection, following the devastating list of reasons why we struggle to think the “we”, Nancy continues that,

What I am talking about here is compassion, but not compassion as a pity that feels sorry for itself and feeds on itself, Com-passion is the contagion, the contact of being with one another in this turmoil. Compassion is not altruism, nor is it identifications; it is the disturbance of violent relatedness. (BSP, p. xiii)

# Bibliography

## Works by Nancy

### *Essay Collections*

Nancy, JL, *The Inoperative Community*, various translators, ed Peter Connor, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)

Nancy, JL, "The Inoperative Community" in *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)

Nancy, Jean-Luc. "Shattered Love" in *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Lisa Garbus and Simona Sawhney (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)

Nancy, JL and Lacoue-Labarthe P. *The Title of the Letter, A reading of Lacan*, trans François Raffoul and David Pettigrew, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992)

Nancy, J.L. *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget MacDonald, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993)

Nancy JL, *The Birth to Presence*, ed Brian Holmes, trans. Brian Holmes and others, (California: Stanford University Press, 1993)

Nancy JL, "The Jurisdiction of The Hegelian Monarch" in *The Birth to Presence*, trans Mary Ann Caws and Peter Caws, (California: Stanford University Press, 1993)

Nancy J.L. "Finite History" in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes, (California: Stanford University Press, 1993)

Nancy, J.L. *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert.D.Richardson and Anne.E.O'Byrne, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000)

Nancy J.L. "Being Singular Plural" in *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert.D.Richardson and Anne.E.O'Byrne (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 2000)

Nancy J.L. "The Surprise of the Event" in *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert.D.Richardson and Anne.E.O'Byrne (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 2000)

Nancy, J.L. *The Speculative Remark*, trans. Céline Suprenant, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001)

Nancy, J.L. *The Restlessness of the Negative*, trans. Jason Smith and Steven Miller, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002)

Nancy, J.L., *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008)

*Journals, Papers and Book Chapters:*

Nancy J.L. "Of Being-in-Common" in *Community at Loose Ends*, ed.The Miami Theory Collective, trans. James Creech, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991)

Nancy, J.L. "Rives, Bords, Limites (de la singularité) Banks, Edges, Limits (of singularity)", in *Angelaki*, Vol 9, no 2, Aug 2004. pp. 41 -53. Trans. Gil Anidjar

Nancy JL, "The Confronted Community" trans. by Jason Kemp Winfree in *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille: Community and Communication*, (ed. Andrew J. Mitchell and Jason Kemp Winfree (Albany: State University of New York Press 2009)

Nancy, J-L." Fraternity" in *Angelaki*, Vol 18 , no 3, Sep 2013, pp.119-123 .Trans. Sarah Clift.

Nancy, J.L. "The Political and/or Politics" in *The Oxford Literary Review*, 36.1, (2014).  
Trans. Christopher Sauder.

## Works on Nancy

Blanchot, M. *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris, (New York: Station Hill Press, 1988)

Derrida, J. *On Touching - Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005)

*Monographs with single focus on Nancy:*

Armstrong, P. *Reticulations: Jean-Luc Nancy and the Networks of the Political*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2009)

Devisch, I. *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Question of Community*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

Hutchens, B.C. *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy*, (Chesham: Acumen, 2005)

James, I. *The Fragmentary Demand*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006)

Morin, M-E. *Jean-Luc Nancy*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2012)

Rugo, D. *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Thinking of Otherness*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

*Monographs with focus on various authors including Nancy:*

Martion, J. *On Futurity: Malabou, Nancy and Derrida*, (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2007)

May, T. *Reconsidering Difference. Nancy, Derrida, Levinas, Deleuze*. (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995)

Ross, A. *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy: Presentation in Kant, Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe, and Nancy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007)

Watkin, Christopher. *Difficult Atheism: Post-theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011)

Watkin, Christopher. *Phenomenology or Deconstruction?: The Question of Ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur and Jean-Luc Nancy*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009)

*Essay Collections and Dictionaries on Nancy:*

*On Jean-Luc Nancy: The Sense of Philosophy*, ed Darren Sheppard, Simon Sparks, Colin Thomas, (London: Routledge, 1997)

*RE-Treating Religion: Deconstructing Christianity with Jean-Luc Nancy*, ed Ignaas Devisch, Laurens ten Kate L, Aukje Van Rooden, Alena Alexandrova, Jean-Luc Nancy, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011)

*Jean-Luc Nancy: Justice, Legality and World*, ed Ben Hutchens, (London: Continuum, 2011)

*Jean-Luc Nancy and Plural Thinking: Expositions of World, Ontology, Politics, and Sense*, ed Peter Gratton and Marie-Eve Morin, (New York: SUNY Press, 2012)

*Nancy Now*, ed Verena Conley and Irving Goh, (Cambridge: Polity, 2014)

*The Nancy Dictionary*, ed Peter Gratton and Marie-Eve Morin, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015)

*Nancy and the Political*, ed Sanja Dejanovic, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015)

*Nancy and Visual Culture*, ed Carrie Giunta and Adrienne Jones, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016)

*Journals and Papers*

Angelova, E, "Nancy and Hegel: Freedom, Democracy and the Loss of the Power to Signify." in *Nancy and The Political*, ed Sanja Dejanovic, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015)

Bird, G. "Community beyond hypostasis, Nancy responds to Blanchot" in *Angelaki*, Vol 13, No 1, April 2008

Devisch, I. "The disclosure of a metaphysical horizon, or how to escape dialectics" *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 2010, Vol. 29 Issue 1

Farefield, V. "The re- in recognition: Hegelian returns" in *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* Volume 13, Issue 1, 2012

Lumsden, S. "Reason and the Restlessness of the Speculative: Jean-Luc Nancy's Reading of Hegel" in *Critical Horizons: A Journal of Philosophy and Social Theory*, Volume 6, Issue 1, 2005

Morin, M-E. "Putting Community Under Erasure: Derrida and Nancy on the Plurality of Singularities", *Culture Machine*, Vol 8 (2006) [www.culturemachine.net](http://www.culturemachine.net)

Roupa, V. "On Politics as Effectuation: Jean-Luc Nancy's Encounter with the Hegelian Monarch" in *Journal for Cultural Research*, Volume 9, Issue 4, 2005

*Journal Special Issues on Nancy*

*Paragraph*, Vol 16, Issue 2, July 1993. Ed. Peggy Kamuf

*Film Philosophy*, Vol 12, No 1, 2008. Ed. Douglas Morrey

*Journal of Visual Culture*, Volume 9, Issue 1 April, 2010 Ed. Louis Kaplan and John Paul Ricco

## Works by Hegel

Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977)

Hegel, G.W.F. *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1981)

Hegel, G.W.F. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H.B. Nisbet, ed. Allan Wood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Hegel, G.W.F. *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox, ed. Stephen Houlgate, (Oxford University Press, 2008)

Hegel, G.W.F. *Principes De la philosophie Du droit*, trans. André Kaan with preface by Jean Hyppolite (Paris: Gallimard, 1940)

Hegel, G.W.F. *Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Hegel, G.W.F. *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller, (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1989)

Hegel, G.W.F. *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind: Part III of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, trans. William Wallace, (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

## Works on Hegel

### *Monographs:*

Baugh, Bruce. *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003)

Butler, J. *Subjects of Desire*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999)

Houlgate, Stephen. *An Introduction to Hegel; Freedom, Truth and History*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991)

Houlgate, S. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

Press: 1986).

Inwood, M. *A Hegel Dictionary*, Oxford: Blackwell, 19920, p. 283

Knowles, D. *Hegel and the Philosophy of Right*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002

Kojève, A. *Introduction to the reading of Hegel; lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991)

Malabou, C. *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans Lisabeth During, (Oxford: Routledge, 2004)

Rose, D. *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, (London: Continuum, 2007)

Stern, R. *The Routledge Guide Book to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002)

Llewelyn, J "Kantian Antinomy and Hegelian Dialectic" in *Hegel's Critique of Kant*, ed. Stephen Priest, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987)

Singer, P. *Hegel*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983)

*Journals, Papers and extended Encyclopaedia Entries*

Butler, J and Malabou, C. "You Be My Body for Me: Body, Shape, and Plasticity in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit", in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011). p.611

Derrida, J. "The Pit and The Pyramid" in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982)

Foucault, M. " Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *The Foucault Reader*, trans. Donald. F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, (London: Penguin, 1984)



Hyppolite, J. *Genesis and structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1979)

Inwood, M. Hegel entry in *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Mautner, (London: Penguin, 2005)

Lumsden, S. "The Rise of the Non-Metaphysical Hegel", in *Philosophy Compass*, 3/1 (2008) pp.51-65.

Pippin, R. Hegel entry in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

Roth, M. Kojève entry in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol 5, ( London: Routledge, 1998, p. 289)

Singer, P. Hegel entry in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

Stern, R and Walker, N. Hegelianism entry in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol 4, (London: Routledge, 1998)

*Other works with strong reference to Hegel:*

Sartre J.P. *Critique de la raison dialectique: précédé de question de méthode*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1985)

Sartre, J.P. *Search for a Method*, tran. Hazel.E. Barnes, (New York: Vintage, 1963)

## Other Works

*Pre-Socratic Philosophy*

Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, in *The Complete works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathon Barnes, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995)

Barnes, J. *Aristotle: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000

*The Epicurus Reader*, trans. and ed. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson, (Cambridge: Hackett, 1994)

Barnes, J. *Early Greek Philosophy*, (London: Penguin, 2001)

Ryle, G. 'Dialectic in the Academy' in *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle* ed. Renford Bambrough, (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1965)

Crome, K. *Lyotard and Greek Thought*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004),  
*Plato, Phaedrus*, trans. R.Hackforth, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1952)

### *Kierkegaard*

Kierkegaard, Søren, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alistair Hannay, (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1985)

### *Kant*

Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

Caygill, H. *A Kant Dictionary*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)

Burnham, D and Young, H. *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007)

*Hegel's Critique of Kant*, ed. Stephen Priest, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987)

### *Marx*

Marx, K. "Doctoral Thesis" in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). Trans. David McLellan

Marx, K. "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" in *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). Trans. Joseph O' Malley and Annette Jolin, Ed. Joseph O'Malley

Marx, K. *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. Joseph O' Malley and Annette Jolin, ed. Joseph O'Malley, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970)

Rosen, M. Marx entry in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol 6, London: Routledge, 1998

Singer, P *Karl Marx*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)

### *Heidegger*

Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962)

### *Russell*

Russell, B. *History of Western Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 2005)

### *Situationism*

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb, (London: Rebel Press, 2000)

### *French Twentieth Century Philosophy*

Schrift, Alan.D. *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy: Key Themes and Thinkers*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006)

### *Prussian History*

Feuchtwanger, E.J. *Prussia, Myth and Reality: The Role of Prussia in German History*, (London: Oswald Wolff, 1970)

Haffner, Sebastian. *The Rise and Fall of Prussia*, trans. Ewald Osers, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980)

Koch, H.W. *A History of Prussia*, (London: Longman, 1978)

### *Dictionaries*

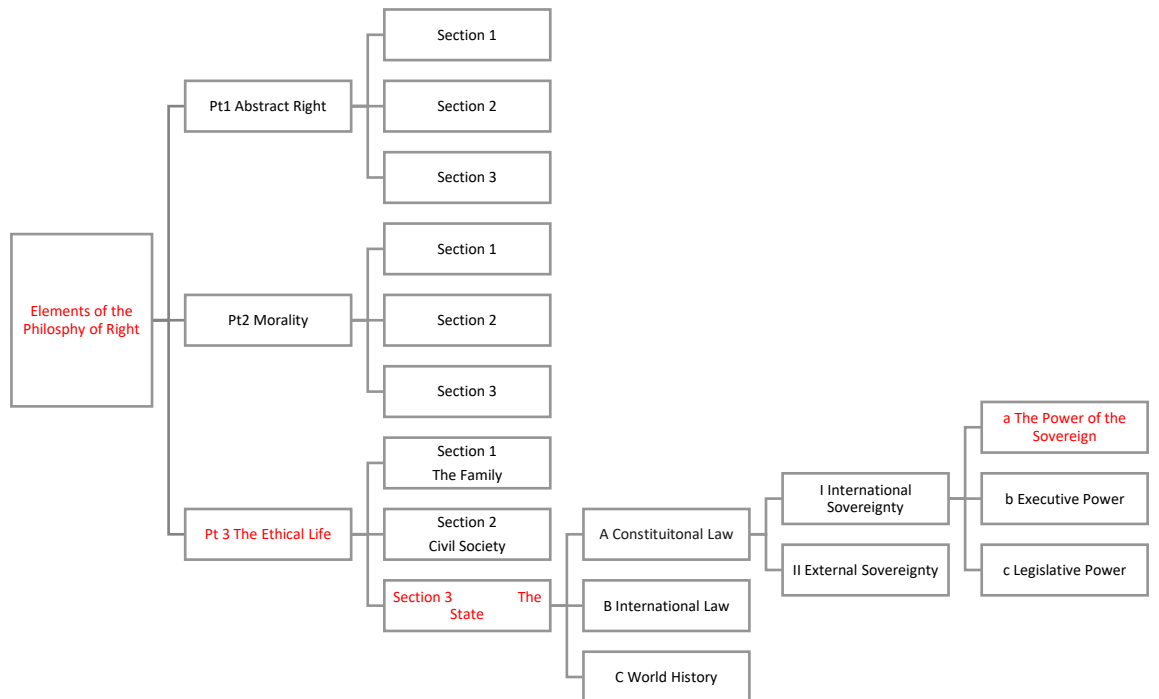
*Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1989)

*The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy Volume I*, ed. Paul Edwards, (USA: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1996)

*Oxford Duden German Dictionary*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

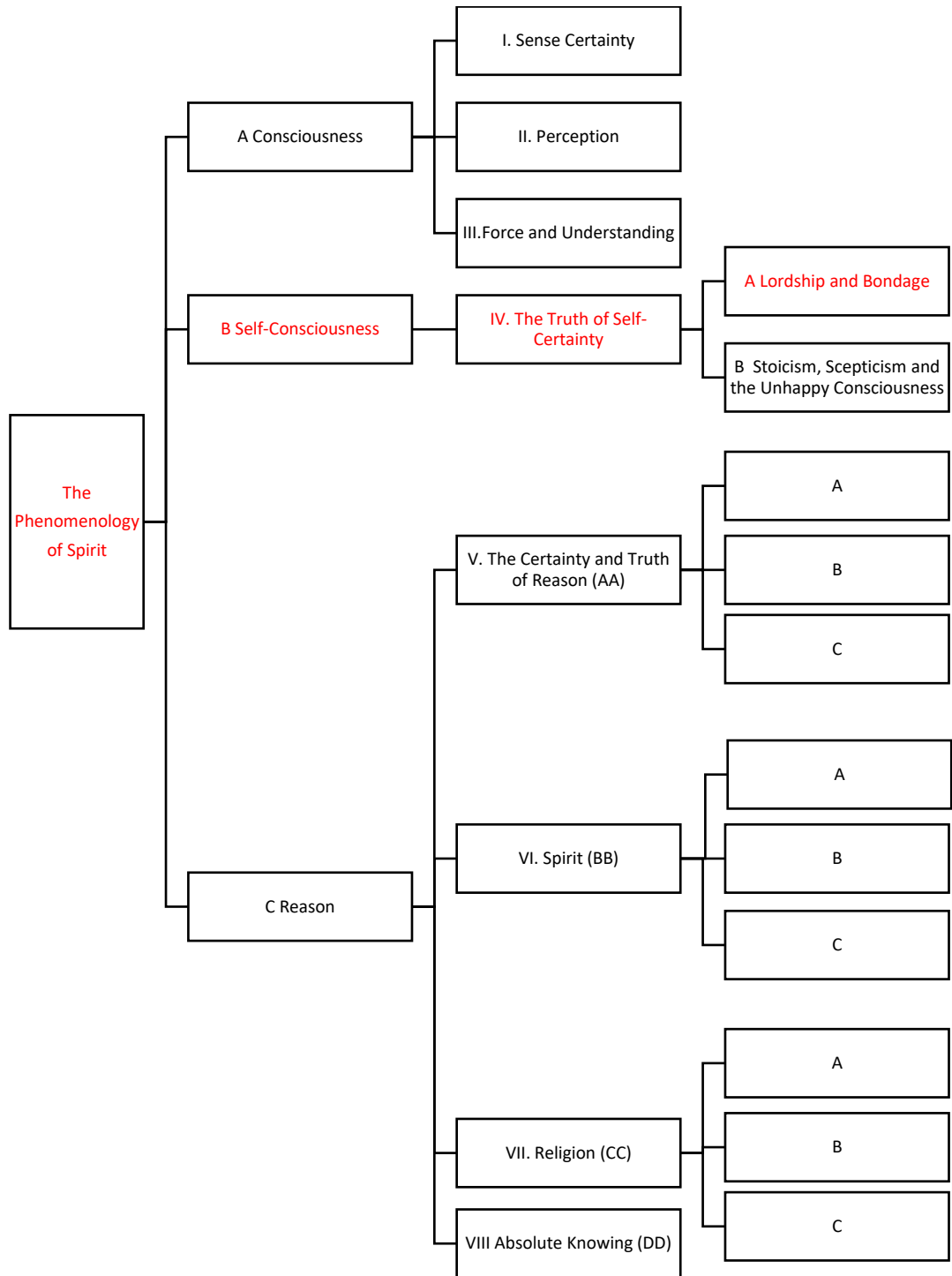
# Appendix 1

Figure 1, Diagram of the Structure of *Elements of Philosophy of Right*



# Appendix 2

Figure 2, Diagram of the Structure of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*



## BOOK REVIEWS

**Jean-Luc Nancy**, by Marie-Eve Morin, Cambridge, Polity Press, £15.99 (paperback), pp. 188, ISBN 978-0-7456-5241-2

Nancy is well known for both the diversity of his corpus and his insistence that meaning (sense) arises, as Morin puts it, from moving across sentences rather than from the internal signification of a single sentence. Morin's response to this challenge is to discuss four trajectories of Nancy's thought, named in the chapter headings as Christianity, Community, Politics and Body to Art, through their relation to what is probably Nancy's most well-known ontological concept 'being singular plural'. Morin advises that these four chapters can be read in any order following an initial reading of the first chapter entitled Ontology. In this review I will, therefore, look first at the Ontology chapter before discussing the remaining four and finally evaluating the success of Morin's approach.

Morin's aim in the chapter on Ontology is to sketch Nancy's ontological project and its divergence from that of Heidegger. Nancy's problem with Heidegger's ontology is that being-with remains on the side of the average, everyday, common existence in a false dichotomy with common existence on one side and *Dasein*, on the other. For Morin, what is significant in Nancy's thought of being singular plural is that being-with is essential to existence; *Dasein* is in and only in, its being-with. Importantly, finitude for Nancy will not be the delimitation of a particular being against infinite common being (this he calls finiteness) but will describe instead a being that exists at its limit, at the exact point at which its interior singularity is exposed or opened to exterior plurality. The product or creation of this event is sense or meaning, with world as a totality of sense; a thought at odds with the conception of a pre-existing world in which particular instances of *Dasein* find themselves thrown alongside one another.

Morin's aim in the chapter on Christianity is to show how Nancy's deconstruction of Christianity makes possible an ontology of finitude. According to Morin, Nancy holds that Christianity is essentially self-deconstructing, containing within it thoughts and concepts which unsettle theism. The resulting and unavoidable atheism inherent within Christianity has the paradoxical character of being without God but still monotheistic, what Nancy calls absentheistic or nihilism. However, for Nancy nihilism is to be seen not as a ground and abandonment to the immanent but an opening between transcendence and immanence. This opening is the same in which the singular being is exposed to exterior plurality in the thought of being singular plural.

Morin's aim in the chapter on Community is to show how Nancy's ontology arises from the thinking of community which chronologically precedes it. For Morin, Nancy shows that community has thus far been thought of as pure unobstructed communion between the members of the community and has been tinted always with nostalgia for a lost community. However, for Nancy true communion would be a black hole of immanence. For Nancy, community is what happens in the inevitable failure of attempted communion, when the community experiences its own absence. Community therefore is the exposure of immanence to transcendence and the limit point between the two. It is also the exposing of the limit point between the singular being and the exterior plurality, the exposing of human beings as essentially in relation.

Morin's aim in the chapter on Politics is to examine the relation between Nancy's ontology and his thinking on politics. For Nancy, the essence of the political is relation, and thus far, classical philosophical conceptions of the political have not allowed this view. Social contract type theories suppose a relation-less natural human state prior to the inception of the social contract whilst Hegel's State, as realization of ethical life, absorbs the relations between citizens into a pure subjectivity. For Nancy these conceptions are not surprising, however, for just as philosophy has missed the being-with of being singular plural, then philosophy's own coexistence with politics has caused politics to miss the relation as the essential nature of the political. For Nancy what makes us human, namely that our being is necessarily being-with, or being singular plural, makes us political in the same stroke.

Morin's aim in the chapter on Body to Art is to show the relation of Nancy's ontology to his thinking of the traditional dichotomy of mind and body. For Nancy this dichotomy is broken down in the thought of exscription. For Nancy, sense is an event between two bodies, a statue therefore is not an imprisoned incarnated Idea made intelligible in physical form, it does not refer to or signify anything, but its meaning or sense occurs in the encounter (via the statue) between the body that made the statue and the body that views it. Sense, then, is a material embodied event in which sense and body are each at their limit in the same way as the singular being and the exterior plurality it is exposed to, are, in the thought of being singular plural.

What Morin has done in this book is give a series of meditations on what is for her Nancy's central ontological concept, being singular plural. In this book, we are introduced to the extraordinary range of Nancy's thinking and despite the necessary condensing, are not spared the complexities of the problematic at play. We are, however, given a useful touchstone to return to when we are overwhelmed; this approach makes the book an extremely useful and remarkably clear introduction to Nancy's thinking. The great success of this approach is that even if on first reading we do not grasp each aspect of the various Nancean projects discussed, we do at least gain an increasingly strong sense of the central concept of being singular plural, allowing greater insight each time we return to Nancy's thought in this text or any other.

Leda Channer  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
[L.Channer@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:L.Channer@mmu.ac.uk)  
© 2014, Leda Channer