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Susanna Lindberg

Splendid Splintered Being

It is easy to notice that the words “splendid splintered being” of my title, while not exactly a translation, are nonetheless a nod to the word “*éclat*,” which is one of Nancy’s many signature words. What is *éclatant* is brilliant, radiant, shining, splendid in the sense of *splendor*. With Nancy, we do not seek the splendor of the sun outside of Plato’s cave, but the brilliance of *éclats*, splinters like sparkles that spangle throughout the night. This splintering does not belong to high Romanticism’s nocturnal visions. It belongs to the world *en éclats*, shattered, because originally *éclaté*, which is not exactly exploded but dispersed and fragmented; such is “the space that is common to us all... at once as a distended, desolate extension—the ‘desert that grows’—and as a broadly open, available extension.”¹ In this paper, I would like to show that this *éclat* is also the mineral glare or sheen that lies in the bosom of the Earth and that signals Nancy’s unheard-of *philosophy of nature*.

The title “splendid splintered being” translates *l’être en éclats* rather than *l’être éclatant*, and it thereby deliberately mimics the title of Nancy’s wonderful article “Shattered Love” (“*Amour en éclats*”). Of course, splendid splintered being has everything to do with splendid splintered love, because the latter is fundamentally the love of being’s splendor, that is, the hard and impenetrable core of philosophy, as explained in another article, “*Le cœur des choses*.”² Being is what I will speak about. The question of being is at the heart of Nancy’s thinking, for him it is the invisible core question of philosophy, its most splendid question, even after it has lost its once solid ground, has encountered the catastrophe of groundlessness, has been exploded and splintered by the force of nothingness. Ever since *The Experience of Freedom*, being is for Nancy the freedom that “bursts” and “shatters into splinters”

1 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le sens du monde* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), p. 20. English translation: *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 9.

2 “*Amour en éclats*” and “*Le cœur des choses*” are both published in Jean-Luc Nancy, *Une pensée finie* (Paris: Galilée, 1990). As “*Le cœur des choses*” is not included in the English translation of *Une pensée finie—A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003)—I will refer to the French edition. The translations are my own.

(“la liberté essentiellement s’éclate”).³ Freedom is the “archi-originary bursting of pure being” (“éclatement archi-originaire de l’être pur”)⁴ and its lightning-like irruption into existence (“Avec l’éclat—éclair et éclatement, éclatement d’un éclair—c’est le coup d’une fois, l’irruption existante de l’existence.”⁵)

Nancy works within the aftershock of the earthquake that was the crisis of metaphysics, a crisis which began to shatter philosophy in the early twentieth century and whose continuous quaking actually defines the field of “contemporary continental philosophy.” Nancy works literally *right up against* phenomenology, *tout contre la phénoménologie*, which started, after all, explosively with the *epoche* of the question of being. Of course, instead of simply suppressing metaphysical questions, phenomenology sedimented, transmuted and decanted them, until Heidegger unearthed them in a rejuvenated form by posing his epoch-making “question of the sense of being.” Nancy’s thinking only makes sense right up against this question, through which Heidegger re-philosophizes phenomenology. Nancy comes right after the Heideggerian question of being and draws the energy of his work from his opposition to it, hence it makes sense for us to explain Nancy’s thinking of being against Heidegger’s.⁶

Nancy and Heidegger don’t share the same metaphors: Heidegger does not invoke the question of being in terms of mineral or sidereal splendor. As soon as he asks what makes the luminous *Lichtung* possible, he starts to hearken to sounds and calls coming from the distance: For him, the darkness surrounding being is like a forest of audible echoes, not the firmament of visible sparkles. But these images are utterly secondary to the fact that Nancy and Heidegger share the same situation of thinking, namely, the necessity of starting with *being-in-the-world*. Heidegger describes it in terms of the *Dasein* (who is the place in which being becomes a question), and of *Being*, which is nothing substantive or substantial but the event of being (*Ereignis*) and the gift of being and time (*es gibt Sein, es gibt Zeit*). According to *Identität und Differenz*, the

3 Jean-Luc Nancy, *L’expérience de la liberté* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), p. 80. English translation: *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 57.

4 Ibid., p. 81 / 58.

5 Ibid., p. 110 / 82.

6 See Nancy, *Le sens du monde*, p. 32 / *The Sense of the World*, p. 17. I explain Nancy’s relation to phenomenology in more detail in my “Pourquoi Jean-Luc Nancy n’est-il pas un phénoménologue?,” *Lignes*, no. 68 (2022), pp. 225–232.

two are maintained in relation by their intimate correspondence—by the co-response in which one calls for the other, which is also the internal structure of the *Lichtung* of *aletheia*.

Now let us see, step by step, how Nancy deconstructs all the elements of this fundamental situation: the *Dasein*, the question of being, and the *Lichtung*. After that, we should be able to see how he digs into the Earth and discovers in its depths the glimmer of a mineral sidereal being.

1.

How does Nancy deconstruct Heidegger's *Dasein*?

It is well known that especially in *Being Singular Plural* he invites us to a redoing of the existential analytic from the point of view of being-with, such that the *Dasein* is rearticulated as *Mitsein*. Especially in *Corpus*, he also develops a thinking of bodies, *corpora*, that add weigh, sense, and even sensuality to existence. These are important moves in the direction of an originary ethics, but this is not my direction here.

This time I am interested in the *Dasein* only as the place of the question of being. When Heidegger speaks of the *Dasein* facing the event of being, he mostly appears to describe a call heard by a solitary thinker. In this moment the *Dasein* is alone, not radically alone as in being-towards-death, nonetheless apart from the tumultuous crowd. It (the *Dasein*, it feels silly to refer to it by the gendered pronouns “he” or “she” so I say “it”)—it is not totally isolated because it is in dialogue with the few other thinkers and poets who have also heard the call of being, but these are never its contemporaries. These are either in its past, like Heraclitus and Hölderlin, or yet to come, but never here and now, *da*. Those who have heard the calling of being and who try to respond to it in their irremediably preparatory work are rare, separated, courageous, often tragic thinkers and poets who sometimes lapsed into folly. The subject of philosophy is not the abstract, nameless ego: It is a *Dasein* responsible for the question “who?”. And although this is a question with no definitive answer, the “who?” is still a thinker or a poet whom we can *name* in our dialogues with him (never her).

Nancy turns totally against this heroism of thinking. (Actually it was Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe who had deconstructed the heroism of thinking, but Nancy presupposes his friend's work everywhere.) Nancy's thinking is anti-phenomenological insofar as it

does not build on a first-person point of view nor does it even pose the question of the subject of philosophy: There is no ego, no self-consciousness, no transcendental ego nor even the *Dasein*. Nancy does not speak about the *thinker* but about *thinking*, *la pensée* (that must in his case be translated by *thinking* rather than *thought*, although both are linguistically correct). In this respect he is much closer to Hegel than to Heidegger.

What is this “thinking”? Nancy explains it concisely in “La surprise de l’évènement.” Thinking has no subject—although a subject can sometimes result from thinking, as in the cases of Descartes, Kant and Hegel, whom Nancy studied in his first books. Instead of being a subject’s *act*, thinking *happens*, it *takes place*. It surprises; it also surprises *itself* when it realizes that it does not know *who* thinks, *what* is thinking, and even *if* this is thinking. Thinking happens, it comes and surprises.⁷

Although thinking is not the subject’s act, the surprise of thinking still happens *to us* and actually makes a *community* of us. Nancy emphasizes that thinking happens to a *plurality* (also practically: Nancy belongs to the rare philosophers who actually worked together with others, especially, but not only, with Lacoue-Labarthe). One does not think alone, thinking happens to more than one: Not to the *rare ones* described by Heidegger, the solitary heroes of being who stand always alone, each one marking an epoch of the history of being, but to *more than one* who share a need of thinking *here and now* and who therefore form something that Nancy calls a community, a generation, or an epoch.⁸ This is not a fusional community of a common sense: Like Nietzsche’s “we good Europeans” (“*nous autres bons européens*”), it is the community of stellar

7 In this, Nancy is momentarily close to the kind of phenomenology that developed the idea of *asubjective thinking* (especially Jan Patočka) but Nancy does not speak in negations (*a-subjective*, *non-subjective*) because as a good Hegelian he believes that negations conserve what they wish to overcome.

8 For example, Nancy notes that the task of rethinking concepts such as the *event* or the *worldliness of the world* was more than shared—undertaken together—by many thinkers at that time. See Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, note 19, p. 176; and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), note 1, pp. 48–49; Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne O’Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), note 32, p. 198. Following Nancy’s idea, in a symposium and hopefully in this collective book too, I do not think, argue, and claim alone, but thinking might *take place*, we might be surprised by thinking. We think with Nancy and with one another, not because we say the same thing but because we share a common *cause* of thinking.

friends (*Sternenfreundschaft*) who do not need to agree in order to be with each other.

In *The Sense of the World* especially, Nancy shows why the question of thinking is also the question of *style*. “Thinking is surprised when the event happens.” Style emerges from this surprise of thinking when it engages a work of sense. Style must be thought in a polemical relation to the idea of *method*. Method is the answer Modern philosophy gives when asked how it reaches truth and what makes it think that this truth can be shared by others. Rationalism, empiricism, dialectics, phenomenology, logical empiricism are methods in this sense: ways of exposing truth (e.g. as critique, as system...) that each time also determine the kind of subject that can reach this truth. Heidegger’s description of the *path* of thinking (*Gang*) was already a deconstruction of the principle of the method, because a path is not a general tool of thinking but a *unique* trace of the experience of being. Nancy’s idea of *style* rises from the same necessity for thinking to reflect upon its own gesture. However, for Nancy, the style is neither a universal method nor is it just the trace of a singular experience, for it also bears the trace of a *shared experience* that determines a certain *community* of thinking. For example, Nancy thinks that Heidegger and Badiou write in the style of truth, whereas Nancy and some others look for *another gesture* and “this different gesture is what is at stake in contemporary philosophical labor.”⁹ It looks for “another style, writing and exscription of philosophy” which does not think in the register of phenomenon anymore but in the register of “the dis-position (spacing, touching, contact, crossing).”¹⁰ As Nancy explains in the chapter “Philosophical Style” in *The Sense of the World*, the other style that he is looking for keeps a distance from the splendor of appearing—*éclat*, again—that defines the phenomenological style as well as from the oracular-poetic style of late Heidegger. It needs to distinguish itself both from myth and from science; it is engaged in a debate with literature in order to find a certain *absence of style*; and it develops as a *sharing of voices*.¹¹ All

9 Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p. 19.

10 Ibid., p. 176.

11 A style that corresponds to the ex-cription of the sense of the world must respect this world. *Ceterum censeo*: I believe that the style of writing expected of academic philosophers today, and that is taught to students, is totally without style and therefore incapable of enunciating the sense of the world. *When using it, we stop thinking*.

of this deserves to be explained in detail, but here it suffices to say that these considerations do not rise from “acoustic-decorative” aesthetic concerns but reflect the *ethos of thinking* that needs to correspond to its task, *making sense of the world*. Style results from thinking conceived as a praxis of sense.

2.

How does Nancy deconstruct Heidegger’s *question of being*?

We know that especially in *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy counters the Heideggerian question of being by developing a thinking of singular plural being. Although the idea of singular plurality can also evoke a very different path to being than the one chosen by Heidegger—that chosen by Democritus, Lucretius, Spinoza, and Deleuze—its radicality comes to the fore when it is examined as a deconstruction of (Heideggerian) phenomenology.

The first element of this deconstruction is the destruction of the very form of the *question*—a work Derrida already started in *De l’esprit*. Nancy does not formulate a question of being coming from yonder and catching the thoughts of the *Dasein*. Thinking happens directly on things *because there are things*. Nancy exposes it in the most profound fashion in “Le cœur des choses” where he says: “At the heart of thinking there is something that defies all appropriation by thinking [...] this thinking is nothing else than the immanent immobility of things, *that there are things*.”¹² The “there are,” the *qu’il y a des choses*, is the weight and the gravity of things even before there is presence.¹³ Like “the heart or the core of the stone exposes the stone to the elements,” Nancy continues, things are there in that they are exposed to the element of their use and usury, so that “the event itself, the coming to presence of the thing, participates in this elementary essence.” Furthermore, as soon as the thing is there and comes to presence, “it is already sense, it is in the element of sense.”¹⁴ This is how the anonymity of being is *exscripted* directly in things, so that it can eventually be further exscripted in whatever writing. I would love to show—but I can only mention it here—how this heavy, anonymous upheaval of things, this movement between their gravity and their exscription

12 Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, p. 199.

13 Ibid., pp. 200–201

14 Ibid., pp. 202–203.

to presence, sense and writing, doubles the profound dialectics between gravity and light that is the core of Schelling's philosophy of nature. Neither Schelling nor Nancy begin the thinking of nature from the subject; both describe it as the upheaval of elemental being that is there, and then most surprisingly turns into thinking in the movement Schelling calls *light* and Nancy calls *exscription*. When Nancy describes the heavy movement of *being that is there*, he is also very close to Derrida's *khora*,¹⁵ except that Nancy describes the core of things in terms of the heaviest possible materiality, whereas Derrida describes the origin of sense in terms of a fictive materiality without matter.

By thinking things insofar as they *are there* and *bring about* thinking, Nancy distances himself from the thinking of the *gift of being* developed by many later phenomenologists. It is true that he sometimes describes being in terms of the *offering* of *agathon*¹⁶ or of the sublime offering at the limit of presentation.¹⁷ In these examples, "offering" has a positive sense only insofar as it is opposed to the idea of the *gift* of being, because the latter tends to project a *giver*: The gift holds an echo of the ontotheological creator God even when it has been replaced by the neutral "*es*" of "*es gibt Sein*" and "*es gibt Zeit*." Being is not given *by* and it is not given *to*: Being *is* and this is why *we are*, too. In the article "L'amour en éclats," which is like the second section of the article "Le cœur des choses," Nancy proposes a thinking of *love* that oversteps the debate on economical vs. aneconomical *exchange* that haunts the discussion of the gift. As he says: "Love frustrates the simple opposition between economy and noneconomy. Love is precisely—when it is, when it is the act of a singular being, of a body, of a heart, of a thinking—that which brings an end to the dichotomy between the love in which I lose myself without reserve and the love in which I recuperate myself, to the opposition between gift and property."¹⁸ Although love is all the singular sparkles of love (*éclats de l'amour*) that stud the world, the article aims at more than a human emotion: It aims at love as the ontological constitution of things. Nancy describes the coming to presence of beings as the love that bursts out in "outbursts of joy"—I would translate

15 Ibid., note 1, p. 208.

16 Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p. 53.

17 Nancy, "The Sublime Offering," in Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p. 239.

18 Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, p. 260.

éclats de joie by “sparkles of joy”—of being.¹⁹ “There is this brilliant or shattering constitution of being [or sparkling constitution of being: *constitution éclatante de l’être*]. Love does not define it, but it names it, and obliges us to think about it.”²⁰ The coming to presence of being is its love and thinking is the love of being.

As was said above, the second element of Nancy’s deconstruction of the Heideggerian question of being is his opposition, in the name of its *plurality*, to the unity of being. He does not demonstrate the plurality of being but on the contrary posits it as the fundamental principle on which everything else rests: “*The plurality of beings is at the foundation [fondement] of being*. A single being is a contradiction in terms.”²¹ Nancy does not say that there *is being* but that there *are things*: “If there is something, there are several things, otherwise, there is nothing, no ‘there is.’”²²

Among the many consequences of the fundamental plurality of being, it suffices to mention two here. Firstly, it invites us to think finitude not as privation but as relation.²³ Finitude is conceived as privation above all by Heidegger, who thinks it as a relation to death or to nothingness. In order to think finitude as relation, it is not enough to conceive of it as a relation that stretches between already constituted beings, but one has to understand how *being happens by the spacing* or *by the distending* in which and from which things *result*. In other words, being is not an interiority that can also express itself to the outside. Instead, “the sense of being is existence, it is being-self-outside-of-self.”²⁴ Being is *être-à*, *being-right-here* is also *being-towards*. Being is nothing else than being exposed to (*être exposé*) and being exscripted (*être excrit*). As we shall see in a while, because spacing is originary, sense emerges in the happening of space between things. Another important feature of the plurality of being is the eventlikeness of being. Things are not eternal like Lucretius’s atoms, they are eventlike, they happen, and maybe they are just events. Their being is not a constant light, it flickers, twinkles, glitters, sparkles.

19 Ibid., p. 273.

20 Ibid.

21 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 12.

22 Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p. 58.

23 Ibid., pp. 29–30.

24 My translation from Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel*, p. 31. See Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 12.

3.

How does Nancy deconstruct Heidegger's *Lichtung*?

What Heidegger calls *Lichtung*, clearing, is being-in-the-world in the event of truth, *aletheia*. *Lichtung* is truth as the opening of the world in the light of being. Such an opening can take place because being gives itself as a question to the *Dasein*—who takes it upon itself to look for the sense of being. Heidegger also describes *Lichtung* in pseudo-poetic terms, the kitschy sound of which Nancy rejects, but which still belongs essentially to Heidegger's thinking. In such terms, *Lichtung* is the ray of light in the midst of obscurity and the deeper resonance in the midst of silence. It is also the domain of simplicity that can only be found when the noisy rustling of technological civilization is silenced, if only for a moment. However, it is not an Edenic state of nature: It is a historical place that is deployed in language when noisy everyday chatter gives way to poetry and thinking.

In *The Sense of the World*, Nancy says that the style of thinking that he is after distinguishes itself from such a style of truth and instead seeks the gesture of sense. For Nancy, truth is *being-such* (*l'être-tel*) whereas sense is *being-towards* (*l'être-à*).²⁵ Truth *punctures* whereas sense *connects* one to the other, *le sens enchaîne*, in the sense of relating, associating, linking.²⁶ Truth "punctures" because it takes place between being and the *Dasein*, who is struck as if by lightning by the question of the sense of being. The stroke of this question opens up the *Lichtung*. Sense *connects*, and what is most important is that it does not link being and thinking in mutual responsiveness, it connects things with one another. I like to think that sense not only connects human beings but all kinds of things: "Something is free to be stone, tree, ball, Pierre, nail, salt, Jacques, number, trace, female lion, daisy."²⁷ These open lists of very different things can be found in many of Nancy's texts and especially in *Corpus*, where they exemplify the unlimited plurality of things that are there.²⁸ Sense takes place as spacings between all kinds of

25 Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p. 12.

26 Ibid., pp. 14, 176.

27 Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, p. 221.

28 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris: Métailié, 1992), English translation: "Corpus" in *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 2–121. See also Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p. 56: "It is a question of understanding the world not as man's object or field of action, but as the spatial

things and not only between humans. Sometimes the exscription of sense leads to thinking. But not all sense is philosophical nor is it necessarily human. Sometimes it is just the pressure of beings against one another, sometimes their practical use of one another, sometimes their sensitive touching, sometimes the intellectual signifying.

Another feature that differentiates Nancy's "sense" from phenomenological "truth" is the explicitly *technical* nature of sense. For him: "Sense is identical to the exercise of *techné*." Classical phenomenology tends to look for truth cleansed of the artifices of technics. Hence Heidegger's *Lichtung*—even though it must ultimately be articulated by language—is characterized by silent simplicity that can only be discerned if the technical framework of *Ge-stell* is removed. Analogically, Merleau-Ponty's flesh—although it is also revealed by art—is exemplified firstly and foremostly by carnal, sensitive touching. Nancy, on the contrary, defines the spacing of things in terms of technics—that is not just the way in which humans use nature but the way in which things relate to one another. In *The Sense of the World*:

The world of technology, or the "technicized world", is not nature delivered up to rape and pillage. [...] It is the world becoming *world*, that is, neither "nature", nor "universe" nor "earth". [These are names for rationalized totalities.] World is the name of a gathering [*assemblage*] or being-together that arises from an *art*—a *tekne*—and the sense of which is identical with the very exercise of this art. [...] It is thus that a world is always a "creation": a *tekne* with neither principle nor end nor material other than itself. [...] But it is necessary to come to appreciate "technology" as the infinite of art that supplements a nature that never took place and will never take place. An ecology properly understood can be nothing else than a technology.²⁹

In other words: Technics is not the way in which human beings use nonhuman beings. It is the way in which all things are together as world. Things do not just brush against one another like an impenetrable atom grazes another one. Things affect one another because their very being is being-to-the-other. This "to," this "à," is not just a neutral contact over the gap opened in the contact itself,

totality of the sense of existence, a totality that is itself *existent*, even if not in the mode of *Dasein*."

29 Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p. 41.

it is an active spacing in which things relate to each other *practically*. The *praxis* of things is neither a *theoria* nor a *poiesis*.³⁰ It is a *techne* and an art. We are used to speaking of human technics, but here technics characterizes everything that is. If one wants to distinguish a properly human *praxis*, then it would be the knotting of bonds, *nouage du lien*, and the tying of sense, *nouage du sens*,³¹ that characterizes politics.

4.

At the beginning of this paper, I said that I would like to show you a glimpse of an unheard-of *philosophy of nature* that Nancy evokes and sketches but never completes. So: Does Nancy's singular plural being really imply a philosophy of nature, which he invokes several times but always in a conditional or future tense? (But also: Can contemporary philosophy of nature exist in any other tense, must it not always *tend towards* a natural science in perpetual becoming and work *with* it?)

Indeed, Nancy's philosophical work does not contain a fully-fledged philosophy of nature—no more, by the way, than it contains a fully-fledged philosophy of technics, either. However, he often points at the possibility of a philosophy of nature, at least at the time when he called his philosophy a materialism and an atheism,³²—before he got caught in (what I consider to be) the ambiguous spiderweb of the deconstruction of Christianity.

What I call Nancy's philosophy of nature includes *all things there are*—"something is free to be stone, tree, ball, Pierre, nail..."—but it lingers on two exemplary types of beings: the stone (*pierre* without the capital letter) and the farthest reaches of outer space (*confins*). These examples belong to phenomenal nature and not to the mathematized image of nature constructed since early Modernity. In the framework of phenomenology, it is noteworthy that Nancy's examples belong to the *mineral* kingdom and not to the domain

30 "Technology is quite precisely that which is neither *theoria* nor *praxis*. [...] *Tekne* makes coming get going, so to speak, where 'coming' refers to *différance* of presentation. *Tekne* thus withdraws from presentation the values of 'self' (on the side of the origin) and 'presence' (on the side of the end)." Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, pp. 40–41.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 103, 111.

32 "It will thus be a matter of 'atheism', but of an atheism where everything demands to be done," Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, note 54, p. 184.

of *life* that has stimulated many contemporary philosophers (after the German Romantics: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, Deleuze, Agamben...). Nancy links the stone to Heidegger's famous lecture course *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, in which the stone is defined as "worldless," whereas the animal and the human are defined as different *accesses* to the world. Against Heidegger, he asks why the "access" to the world should be defined in terms of identification and appropriation—"why could the world not also a priori consist in being-among, being-between and being-against? In remoteness [or in distancing: *éloignement*] and contact without 'access'?"³³ Here we find once again the move from truth to sense, from puncture to relation, and now from sensitive experience to the numbest contact. For the contact is the minimal condition of being. In "Le cœur des choses," the stone stands for the immobile inaccessible core of things (and not for their beating heart), for the fact of their *being there*, for the *gravity* of their being and also for the hard glimpse, *éclat*, of their presence to one another. The *stone* is the surprise of existence (or as Nancy said in *The Experience of Freedom*: "the stone is free"³⁴). It can be captured by signification, like when it is the stone of Kaaba or Christ's gravestone,³⁵ but it does not need such a capture to be the surprise of being-there.

The simple mineral is also the first step of the philosophy of real nature in Hegel's philosophy of nature. In his systematic presentation, the stone stands for *gravity*, which is for him the first, albeit paradoxically *unliving*, phase of the *logic of life*, whose movement is conserved in a petrified form in the stone. Gravity is the fundamental law of heavenly mechanics, whose slow waltz appeared to the Moderns as the regular harmony of the closed solar system, but which has totally exploded, *éclaté*, in contemporary astronomy [following the soundtrack of Kubrick's *2001 Space Odyssey*, con-

33 Ibid., p. 59. Nancy also speaks about the stone in "Le cœur des choses," Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, pp. 202, 214–217.

34 Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, p. 159. Nancy continues: "In this sense, the stone is free. Which means that there is in the stone—or rather as it—this freedom of being that being is, in which freedom as a 'fact of reason' is what is put at stake according to co-belonging." Then he continues by emphasizing that this claim is above all a question and a provocation.

35 Nancy, *Une pensée finie*, pp. 207, 217. Christ's gravestone is central to Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me tangere* (Paris: Bayard, 2003). English translation: "*Noli me Tangere*," in *Noli me Tangere, on the Raising of the Body*, trans. Sarah Clift, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naess (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 3–56.

temporary celestial harmonies sound like György Ligeti rather than Johann Strauss³⁶. Nancy says that “In order to be understood as a world of sense—of ‘absent sense’ or exscribed sense—the world must also be understood in accordance with the cosmic opening of space that is coming towards us [...].”³⁷ “Today, if something like a ‘philosophy of nature’ is possible in a new way, it is as a philosophy of confines [*confins*: the farthest reaches of outer space].”³⁸ Such a philosophy of nature follows the movement of the explosion of classical celestial harmony, of the expansion of space truly *partes extra partes*, of the splendid splintered sparkling extension of infinite space. The obscure shining stones are the ontological measure of this space.

The mineral, sidereal character of Nancy’s “philosophy of nature” helps in understanding the particular kind of materialism he is after. Although he refers fondly to the ancient atomists, it is only in order to nod to the infinite plurality of things and to the indifference of star-gods, but not in order to embrace the idea of the ultimate components of the world. Matter is neither the unique substance of being nor the plurality of elementary substances: Nancy’s materialism follows his ontology and is the thinking of plurality in terms of the *events* that take place *between* things. Because it thus thinks being in terms of the event of sense, Nancy’s materialism is still a phenomenological materialism, if matter can be said to be a phenomenon, or a materialism which brings phenomenology to its extreme limits—where it can also be expressed in terms of a modal ontology, as Boyan Manchev shows in this volume. Heidegger loaded his word *Earth* with the phenomenological impossibility of thinking of matter or of thinking of it otherwise than as the limit of the world. Derrida reinterpreted the same impossibility in terms of *khora*, which is a thinking of materiality as the retreating of materiality, and a thinking of this dimension, not as a simple limit, but as an understanding that here thinking must rely on bastard reasoning, almost on fiction. Contrary to this, Nancy does not stop at the thinking of the limit of experience but oversteps it towards the thinking of the limit that a thing is to the other thing. He does not see the Earth as an impenetrable obscurity but he digs for the stones whose glare shows the extension of the obscurity;

36 Nancy refers to the film and its music in Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, pp. 38–39, but he only names Strauss.

37 Ibid., p. 37.

38 Ibid., p. 40.

he does not see the universe through the myth of an artisan god but through the planets and the stars. Like Hegel, he affirms the materiality of things and a material thinking of this materiality, and like Schelling, he shows how thinking is the way in which the gravity of matter itself turns into shards of presence that make the “brilliant or sparkling constitution of being (*constitution éclatante de l'être*).”