Returning to the 'With-world:'

Jean-Luc Nancy's 'Fundamental Co-ontology' and the Ethics of *Mitsein*

Jean-Luc Nancy's *Être singulier pluriel* (1996) - published in English as *Being Singular Plural* (2000) - could perhaps be characterized as the multiple performance of a single gesture; a densely articulated repetition of a central tenet which may, in time, come to stand as his distinctive contribution to (and possibly closure of?) the lineage of Post-Heideggerian French thought. This gesture is a self-conscious return to an original point of departure, an attempt to disinter from Heidegger's monumental *Sein und Zeit* (1926) the positive ethico-political implications of a 'fundamental ontology' of *Mitsein*, implications which, Nancy would suggest, Heidegger sacrificed in his concern to extract the authentic totality of *Dasein* from its imbrication in the 'narcotic' and 'tranquilized' social world of '*Das Man*.' To this extent then, Nancy's intervention functions as both a critique of Heideggerian thought (it is, as Simon Critchley observes, essentially a 'rewriting of *Being and Time*' Cf. WBW) while also remaining, nonetheless, faithful to the architectonic of Heidegger's project; in distinct contrast to Levinas' repudiation of ontology (his insistence that the very idea of essence is inimical to ethics), Nancy's thought continues – albeit with radical reconfiguration – to operate within the terrain of the '*Seinsfrage,*' his archaeological return to Heidegger's founding text in some sense a reprise of the gesture by which Heidegger himself attempted to excavate the forgotten meaning of Being from the origins of the tradition.

On initial inspection Nancy's central insight – *Being is not simply simple, and neither is it simply non-simple* – appears both (in itself) simple and derivative, an impression which belies the originality and sheer difficulty of *consistently* thinking Being as that which refuses the archaic disjunction of the One and the Many. Nancy articulates this insight throughout the course of the text in a formidable array of formulations, moving from the early motif of 'sharing,' through the Derridean invocation of 'spacing' and the Heideggerian tropes of the 'between' and the 'with,' in

order to arrive at a distinctive constellation of concepts which may be collectively characterized as the 'co-structure.' His central assertion - presented in a form which must ultimately be recognized as (quasi)-transcendental[1] - is that *the (condition of) possibility of Being is the co-existence of beings*, as he writes:

> Being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* and as the *with* of this singularly plural coexistence. (BSP: 3)

Or again:

> Presence is impossible except as copresence. (BSP: 62)

Of course, Nancy does not explicitly forward a clearly delineated Kantian-style deduction for this transcendental assertion, but, as suggested, his choice of formulations alludes to (and draws on) the influential schemas of several notable pre-cursors. From French Post-structuralism - and most particularly, his teacher, Jacques Derrida - Nancy has inherited an appreciation of signification's dependence on difference:

> Meaning begins…where presence comes apart….[and] presupposes the distancing, spacing and division of presence. Only the concept of 'presence' contains the necessity of this division. Pure unshared presence…is neither present nor absent. It is the simple implosion of a being that could never have been - an implosion without any trace. (BSP: 2)

Or to recast the same point in the numerological lexicon of Greek metaphysics; a vocabulary which - as the title of the piece suggests - infuses Nancy's thought:

---

[1] "Being-many-together is the originary situation; it is even what defines 'situation' in general. Therefore, an originary or *transcendental* 'with' demands…to be disentangled and articulated for itself." (BSP: 41) [My italics]

The One as purely one is less than one; it cannot be, be put in place, or counted. One as properly one is always more than one. It is an excess of unity, it is one-with-one, where its Being in itself is copresent. (BSP: 40)

[T]he One is more than one…because 'one' cannot be counted without counting more than one. (BSP: 39)

In the course of his interrogation of the Situationist critique of capital - which, he maintains, is still subject to a metaphysics of authenticity which presupposes "a sphere of proper and isolated individuality as the starting point" (BSP: 67)[2] - Nancy deploys an argument reminiscent of the Lacanian account of the specular origins of self in order to memorably reformulate Guy Debord's famous slogan:

There is no society without the spectacle because society is the spectacle of itself…this itself must be understood as a play of mirrors…There is no appearing to oneself except as appearing to one another…one could not even begin to be an other for oneself if one had not already started from the alterity with – or of the with – others in general….the truth of the play of mirrors must be understood as the truth of the 'with.' In this sense, 'society' is 'spectacular.' (BSP: 67-8)

Furthermore, he translates - in a manner worthy of Irigaray - this understanding of 'alterior' relation as the pre-condition of self-appearance into an account of the 'together' requisite to the process of material birth:

Nothing and nobody can be born without being born to and with others who come into this encounter, who are born in their own turn. The 'together,' therefore, is an absolutely originary structure. What is not together is in the no-time-no-place of non-Being. (BSP: 61)

As suggested above, Nancy's assertion of the necessity of the 'co-structure' is dependent on an account of Being as that which emerges or appears through originary conjunction. Here, Nancy is employing - as is also implied by the transcendental structure of his thought[3] - the traditional association of origins and essence - perhaps most clearly articulated by Heidegger in 'The Origins of the Work of Art' (1935)[4] - in order to challenge the way in which the tradition has consistently attempted to construct the essence of Being as both temporally and spatially unified through endowing it with a univocal, simple and immanent origin. This strategy - which may be broadly termed *autarchy* - has been enacted in numerous forms throughout the history of philosophy, but we will here focus on the way in which it operates in relation to substantialist accounts of the essence of Being.

Substance has traditionally been defined as that which originates entirely from itself and is independent of all that is foreign, external or other to itself. As Spinoza famously asserts in the *Ethics*:

By substance, I understand that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; in other words, that, the conception of which does not need the conception of another thing from which it must be formed. (E: Definition 3)

---

[3] Any argument which seeks to ascertain the conditions of possibility of a given phenomenon is necessarily engaged in the question of origination (the conditions of possibility *are* the conditions which allow something to come-into-being or originate) and the attempt to elucidate the way in originary conditions determine (or are a necessary precondition) of a particular essence, nature or being. In fact, from this observation it would appear that transcendental argument and the origin-essence association function within the same conceptual schema but perhaps operate in contrary directions, i.e. transcendental argument deduces conditions of possibility on the basis of an observation about essence (e.g. The 'transcendental unity of apperception' necessitates the synthetic function of the categories), whereas originary narratives - particularly those of an autarchic character - attempt to determine essence on the basis of a particular understanding of origins.

[4] "Origin…means that from which and by which something is what it is and as it is. What something is, as it is, we call essence. The origin of something is the source of its essence." (OWA: 143)

Spinoza's classic formulation makes readily apparent the imbrication of the notions of self-sufficiency and self-origination (conception) implied by the term *autarchy*. Originally, the Greek-concept of 'au)ta/rkeia' referred to the self-sufficiency and independence of a sovereign-state - as described by Aristotle in his *Politics* (Cf. Book IV: 1291a10-12) - and there is, moreover, no apparent record of a term 'au)ta/rxhj' in classical antiquity. However, by the beginning of the modern-period, the fact that self-sufficiency necessarily implies self-origination had generated the conceptual conflation evinced in Descartes' use of the term 'au)ta/rxhj' to describe the nature of science:

> [B]y science, I mean the ability to resolve all questions and discover by ones' own means [par sa propre industrie] everything that the human mind can find in science: and the one who possesses science does not expect much of others and because of that, can be properly called self-sufficient [peut être proprement appelé au)ta/rxhj]." (OD: Vol XII Supplement: 2-3)

Descartes appearance at this juncture is, of course, apposite, for it is the Cartesian determination of the essence of man as '*res cogitans*' which still stands as the paradigmatic exemplar of the substantialist account of Being. In the *Discourse on Method* (1637) - shortly after the celebrated formulation of the '*cogito*' argument - Descartes writes:

> I had…recognized in myself very clearly that intelligent nature is distinct from corporeal, considering that all composition is evidence of dependency, and that dependency is manifestly a defect. (DM: 56)

And thus he reaches the conclusion that:

> I was a substance, of which the whole essence or nature consists in thinking, and which… depends on no material thing. (DM: 54)

This desire to extract Being from material imbrication is one of the hallmarks of the autarchic account of essence and the Cartesian form of this gesture can, in fact, be read as a re-inscription of the Platonic elevation of the *archê* of Being into the realm of intelligible Ideas. Arguably, an equivalent motivation is behind both accounts; the desire to establish the immateriality – and hence the immortality – of the soul, which, as Derrida notes in *Plato's Pharmacy*, depends on Being "having no relation at all with any outside." (PP: 104)

It is perhaps in his clear recognition of the illusion and logical artifice involved in the determination of Being as self-sufficient substance that the axial importance of Heidegger's intervention in the history of metaphysics resides. The 'Analytic of *Dasein*' can, with relative ease, be read principally as an attempt to undermine the 'indubitable' foundation Descartes had bequeathed to Western subjectivity and the never-to-appear Second Division of Part Two of the treatise - intended as "a phenomenological destruction of the history of ontology" (BT: 63/SZ: 39) - was to have been devoted, Heidegger indicates in the Introduction, to Descartes and the "ontological foundation" of the "'*cogito sum.*'" (BT: 64/SZ: 40) In his later writings, Heidegger was to provide some fairly explicit critiques of the Cartesian subject's posture of self-sufficiency, noting, for example, in *The End of Philosophy* (originally published in 1962 as part of Volume II of *Nietzsche*)*,* that the *cogito*'s function as a "*fundamentum absolutum et inconcussum*" which is "removed from every threat" is derived through its establishment as an axiomatic "basis which no longer depends upon a relation to something else, but rather is absolved from the very beginning from this relation, and rests within itself." (EP: 26)

While *Being and Time*'s extended meditation on the Cartesian *cogito* never materialized, there is, nonetheless, a fairly evident correlation between the form of the argument Heidegger presented in *The End of Philosophy* and his earlier determination of *Dasein* as '*In-der-Welt-sein*.' This

correlation is also suggested in the latter half of Chapter III of the 'Analytic of *Dasein*,' dedicated to outlining the 'contrast between our analysis of worldhood and Descartes' Interpretation of the world.' Here, Heidegger notes that Descartes "takes the being of 'Dasein' (to whose basic constitution Being-in-the-world belongs) in the very same way as he takes the Being of *res extensa* – namely, as substance," (BT: 131/SZ: 98) and underlines that to Descartes' mind (as to Spinoza's), the "Being of a 'substance' is characterized by not needing anything." (BT: 125/SZ: 92) However, the Cartesian *cogito* as an axiomatic and substantial substratum ('*subjectum*') represents, Heidegger contends, "a failure to master the basic problem of Being," (BT: 127/SZ: 94) to the extent that the "person is not a Thing, not a substance, not an object." (BT: 73/SZ: 47) Rather, Heidegger suggests:

> Being-in…is a state of Dasein's Being…one cannot think of it as the Being-present-at-hand of some corporeal Thing…'in' an entity which is present-at-hand…'*Being-in' is…the formal existential expression for the Being of Dasein, which has Being-in-the-world as its essential structure*. (BT*:* 79-80/SZ: 54)

To Heidegger's mind Being-in-the-world is (as its typography indicates) a "unitary phenomenon," (BT: 78/SZ: 53) for it "is not he case that man 'is' and then has, by way of extra, a relationship-of-Being towards the 'world.'" (BT: 84/SZ: 57) *Dasein*'s very Being is (constituted in and through) its Being-in-the-world, understood by Heidegger as a circumspective engagement with the totality of objects which are given to us, not as substantial 'Things' ('*Vorhanden*'/present-at-hand), but as 'equipment' with which we are non-theoretically concerned ('*Zuhanden*'/ready-to-hand).[5] Thus, the fact that the

---

[5] "Being-in-the-world…amounts to a non-thematic circumspective absorption in references or assignments constitutive for the readiness-to-hand of a totality of equipment." (BT: 107/SZ: 76)

existential structure of Being-in-the-world is essential to Dasein - as Heidegger famously

formulates "*The essence of Dasein lies in its existence.*" (BT: 67/SZ: 42) - gives the lie is to the

Cartesian (auto)-conceit of a de-worlded and self-sufficient thinking substance.

On this point Heidegger and Nancy would be in complete accord, for, as Nancy notes:

> [T]here has never been, nor will there ever be, any [real] philosophical solipsism. In a
> certain way, there never has been, and never will be, a philosophy 'of the subject' in the
> sense of the final [*infinie*] closure in-itself of a for-itself. (BSP: 29)

As opposed to the Heideggerian emphasis on *Dasein*'s involvement with the object-world of its

circumspective concern, Nancy's assertion of the impossibility of the closure of Being is - as we

will return to shortly - more particularly attentive to *Dasein*'s necessary imbrication with an

inexhaustible list of both human and non-human beings.[6] His critique of Descartes' illusory erasure

of the world - pithily captured in his reformulation of the Cartesian axiom "*Ego sum=ego cum.*"

(BSP: 31) – hence foregrounds the importance of *others:*

> Descartes can claim to be alone and worldless, precisely because he is not alone and
> worldless…The *ego sum* counts as…as a first truth, only because its certainty can be
> recognized *by anyone*. So, to articulate it completely would be to say: *I say that we, all of
> us and each one of us, say 'ego sum, ego existo.'*" (BSP: 66)

For both thinkers however, Being is a 'being-between'[7] or a 'being-with' which cannot, Nancy

contends, echoing Heidegger, be conceived as:

---

[6] Notably, Nancy is careful to remain as inclusive as possible about the beings necessary to the fabric of 'with-world' and opens it to "all things, all beings, all entities, everything past and future, alive, dead, inanimate, stones, plants, nails, gods – and 'humans,' that is, those who expose sharing and circulation as such by saying 'we,' by *saying we to themselves* in all possible senses of that expression, and by saying we for the totality of all being." (BSP: 3)
[7] The 'between' is a phrase common to both Heidegger and Nancy's ontologies; "*Dasein is the Being* of this 'between,'" (BT: 170/SZ: 132) "Everything, then, passes *between us*." (BSP: 5)

[A]t all accidental, and is in no way the secondary and random dispersion of a primordial essence. It forms the proper and necessary status and consistency of originary alterity as such. *The plurality of beings is at the foundation of Being*. (BSP: 12)

This necessary and co-original plurality of being(s) does not, Nancy underlines, "constitute a particular predicate of Being" but instead, "constitutes the essence of Being, a constitution that undoes or dislocates every single, substantial essence of Being itself." (BSP: 28-9) Being is not to be conceived as the self-sufficient and autarchic substance of traditional ontology for "before…the ego" there is a "co-originarity according to the with" (BSP: 41) which renders a "single being…a contradiction in terms. Such a being, which would be its own foundation, origin and intimacy[8], would be incapable of Being." (BSP: 12) By contrast, Being is, Nancy asserts, to be accessed through the originary 'with' of the 'co-structure' or, as he will distinctively characterize it, the "Being singular plural" which denotes that "the essence of Being is only as co-essence…or being-with." (BSP: 30)

The "being-singular-plural"– hyphenated in a manner reminiscent of Heideggerian typology – is Nancy's inscription of ontological resistance to the endlessly repeated polarization of the One and the Many. The hyphen, he explains, "is a mark of union and also a mark of division, a mark of sharing that effaces itself, leaving each term to its isolation *and* its being-with-the-others." (BSP: 37) Being is both - simultaneously, indissociably – One and Many, and it is for this reason, Nancy informs us, that the Latin-derived 'singular' is suitable to denote the 'isolation' aspect of the oscillation of the 'with:'

[T]he term *singuli* already says the plural, because it designates the 'one' as belonging to 'one by one.' The singular is primarily *each* one and, therefore, also *with* and *among* all the others. The singular is plural. It also undoubtedly offers the property of indivisibility, but it

---

[8] 'Intimacy' is the term Nancy deploys to denote self-identity and which he defines as "the extremity of coincidence with oneself." (BSP: 11)

is not indivisible in the way substance is indivisible. It is instead indivisible in each instant [*au coup par coup*] within the event of its singularization. (BSP: 32)

This invocation of an apparently temporal singularity is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of Nancy's formulation of the singular plurality of Being, for, from both Levinas ('synchrony') and Derrida ('presence'), we have learned to be somewhat suspicious of the 'now.' Nancy's intention, however, seems far from the enfolding of many synchronous events into a particular moment which may then be extended – or excised – from temporal discontinuity in the effort to construct an eternity, or a temporally unified totality. Rather, the 'blow' of the instant gestures, once again, away from an ontology of substance towards the thinking of Being as event (or *praxis*?); Being's singularity is made manifest in each instant in the *con*stellation, or *con*figuration, of the plural "'us' as web or network that is reticulated and spread out." (BSP: 28) As such, the singularity of Being is always "an instance of 'with': singulars singularly together" in a "togetherness" which "'assembles' them insofar as it spaces them" in which "they are 'linked' insofar as they are not unified." (BSP: 33)

Nancy's critique of substantial Being thus suggests two important (and inter-related) points of departure from the Heideggerian account outlined in *Being and Time*; firstly, as we will return to later, he rejects Division Two's attempt to 'grasp the totality of *Dasein*' through the unity of temporal ecstases, suggesting that "the taking place of the *there* and as *there*, does not involve primarily the succession of the identical; it involves the simultaneity of the different." (BSP: 96) The *there* of Being is not to be converted into a temporal identity but must remain true to the instant in which its reticulated plurality is brought into its punctual configuration. This insistence on the 'instance of difference' is a consequence of the ontological priority Nancy accords to the Analytic of *Mitsein* and his intention to faithfully unfold the consequences of the determination of

'there-being' (*Dasein*) as 'being-with' (*Mitsein*), consequences which were ultimately, he would suggest, disavowed by Heidegger.

Heidegger's delineation of *Mitsein* is the subject of the Fourth Chapter of Division One of *Being and Time*, which concerns - the title informs us - 'Being-in-the-world as Being-with' and also, not inconsequentially, the characterization of the 'Being-with' world as the world of 'The 'They'' ('*Das Man'*). As the heading suggests, Heidegger conceives *Mitsein* as a particular instantiation of the essential structure of *Dasein* as Being-in-the-world, a structure with which, he claims, it is 'equiprimordial' ('*Gleichursprünglich*' Cf. BT: 149/SZ: 114). Given the impossibility of a worldless subject, Dasein is equally, Heidegger clearly recognizes, inconceivable (arguably in both senses) in the absence of others. He writes:

> In clarifying Being-in-the-world we have shown that a bare subject without a world never 'is' proximally, nor is it ever given. And so in the end an isolated 'I' without Others is just as far from being proximally given. (BT: 152/SZ: 116)

In line with the critique of substantial Being, Heidegger asserts that the involvement of Dasein with others "does not have the ontological character of a Being-present-at-hand-along-'with' them within the world," furthermore suggesting - in terms which have clearly left an indelible impression on Nancy's thought - that this "'with' is something of the character of Dasein" and that by "reason of this with-like Being-in-the-world…the world of Dasein is a with-world. Being-in is Being-with-Others." (BT: 154-5/SZ: 118) He thus concludes that "as Being-with, Dasein 'is' essentially for the sake of Others. This must be understood as an existential statement as to its essence." (BT: 160/SZ: 123)

This is the pronouncement which Nancy will fashions into the fundamental axiom of his thought, noting that:

> Heidegger clearly states that being-with (*Mitsein, Miteinandersein* and *Mitdasein*) is essential to the constitution of *Dasein* itself. Given this, it needs to be made absolutely clear that *Dasein*, far from being either 'man' or 'subject,' is not even an isolated and unique 'one,' but is instead always the one, each one, with one another. (BSP: 26)

This fact - that Being, or meaning, is only ever co-constituted, that "*Dasein* has already revealed itself as being-with and reveals itself as such before any explication" - must "[f]rom now on" be taken, Nancy dramatizes, as "the minimal ontological premise;" (BSP: 27) "the structure of the *there*" is, he underlines, "the structure of the with." (BSP: 98) It is in this capacity that Nancy accords Heidegger his position in the pantheon of those philosophers who have initiated decisive revolutions - 'Copernican turns' - in the thinking of Being and its attitude (taken literally) to the world. He writes:

> The existential analytic of *Being and Time* is the project from which all subsequent thinking follows…It does not signify that this analytic is definitive, only that it is responsible for registering the seismic tremor of a more decisive rupture in the constitution or consideration of meaning (analogous, for example, to those of the 'cogito' or 'Critique'). (BSP: 93)

Yet, while the "shock waves" emanating from the existential analytic continue to ramify through the history of thought, the project initiated by Heidegger in the First Division of *Sein und Zeit* is not, Nancy asserts, "complete." (BSP: 93) While Heidegger acknowledges *Mitsein* as both 'essential' and 'equiprimordial,' the 'Analytic of *Dasein*' fails, Nancy contends, "to attain the co-originary dimension and expose it without reservation," and rather, in spite of the "affirmative assertion of co-originarity," Heidegger "gives up on the step in the consideration of *Dasein* itself."

(BSP: 26) Nancy seems to suggest two principal - and imbricated - reasons why Heidegger failed to fully unfold the implications of the 'Analytic of *Mitsein*,' the first of which is to be found, unsurprisingly, in Heidegger's predominantly dismissive characterization of the 'with-world' of *Das Man*.

While Heidegger does allow for the possibility of positive modalities of *Mitsein* – 'solicitude' ('*Fursorge*') and perhaps also 'empathy' (Cf. BT: §26) – these are largely overshadowed by his portrait of the 'with-world' as dominated by '*averageness*' and "the 'levelling down' [*Einebnung*] of all possibilities of Being." (BT: 165/SZ: 127) Existing 'proximally and for the most part' within this world, *Dasein* is subject, Heidegger notes darkly, to the "dictatorship of the 'they'" which "prescribes the Being of everydayness," (BT: 164/SZ: 126-7) that through which *Dasein* loses its authentic Being, falling into the world and its distractions, dissipated in the narcotic tranquilization of 'idle talk' and 'curiosity.' (Cf. BT: Division I, Chapter 5. Section B) Thus dispersed within 'the One,' *Dasein* is not, Heidegger asserts, "itself," its "being has been taken away by the Others" (BT: 164/SZ: 126) or, as he most famously formulates, "Everyone is the other, and no one is himself." (BT: 165/SZ: 128)

While Heidegger may here be giving voice to the fundamental intuition (and particular prejudice of philosophers) that much of what passes for meaningful exchange in the realm of 'publicness' is at best ossified convention and at worst, superficial banality, his account of the potential modalities of 'with-Being' is deeply reductive and at times, bordering on hysterical. This dystopian vision – steeped in disavowed Judeo-Christian rhetoric – simply eliminates all the possible configurations of the circulation of meaning between the twin poles of, as Nancy notes, "common chatter and…absolute poetic distinction," (BSP: 87) and moreover, makes the mistake of "confus[ing] the everyday with the undifferentiated, the anonymous, and the statistical;" (BSP: 9) an error by which the multiplicity of forms of social-being are "produced as nothing other than that conversion which

levels out" and "ends in the domination of mediocrity, of the common and average measure…with the 'common-mediocre' concealing the essential 'common-with.'" (BSP: 82)

As is here intimated Nancy's objection to Heidegger's portrait of *Das Man* is, of course, more fundamental than the simple ascription of a failure on Heidegger's part to give a sufficiently textured account of the modalities of *Mitsein*. The reduction of being-with to average-everdayness serves, in effect, to disavow the fact that *Mitsein* "codetermines the essence of existence" (BSP: 82) by positing the dissipation of the 'They' in distinction to an ideal of Dasein's 'ownmost' Being; an ontology of authenticity which is to Nancy's mind, as we have explored, an *a priori* impossibility. For Nancy, the exchange which occurs within the punctual configurations of social space is not a devaluation of an authentic meaning issued from the interior of the individual, it is, rather, the only possible location of the plural origins of meaning:

> Meaning is the passing back and forth and sharing of the origin, singular plural. Meaning is the exhibition of the foundation without foundation, which is not an abyss but simply the *with* of things that are, insofar as they are. *Logos* is *dialogue*…the *cum-*, the *with* of meaning, the plurality of its springing forth….It is not enough, then, to set idle chatter in opposition to the authenticity of the spoken word…replete with meaning. On the contrary, it is necessary to discern the conversation and sustaining of being-with as such within chatter. (BSP: 87)

It is therefore becoming evident that Nancy considers the existential analytic to be riven by an internal contradiction; on the one hand, the Heideggerian critique of substantial Being is grounded on the determination of *Dasein* as Being-in-the-world - of which *Mitsein* is an equiprimordial dimension - a determination which seems to suggest that the structure of Being is necessarily open and could not be conceived as autarchic, self-identical, immanent or authentic. Heidegger, however, is equally insistent that *Dasein* is that "Being which…is in each case mine," (BT: 67/SZ:

42) and clearly recognizes that the possibility of "*authenticity* and *inauthenticity*" as "modes of Being" are necessarily "grounded in the fact that any Dasein whatsoever is characterized by mineness." (BT: 68/SZ: 43) Not insignificantly, these twin aspects of the character of *Dasein* ('mineness' and 'essence as existence') are introduced by Heidegger on the very first page of the first chapter of the first division of *Sein und Zeit* and the treatise thus comes into focus as a working through of the way in which *Dasein* is a being which both opens onto the world while still retaining the dimension of immanent enclosure necessary to its designation as authentic.

In principle, Nancy - with his characterization of the singular plurality of Being - is not opposed to the drawing of *Dasein* as a being which exists as a 'both' and would in no way stipulate its necessary conformity to the 'either/or' structure of logical contradiction. His concern with the existential analytic is that Heidegger, in fact, conceives this 'both' as a classical polarity in which "we have pure exteriority and pure interiority at both extremities" (BWBT: 3) rather than remaining true to the simultaneity of openness and enclosure implied by the structure of the 'with.' Thus the working through of 'mineness' and 'essence as existence' which Heidegger undertakes in *Being and Time* is not, as Nancy would like, an exploration of the way in which Being is at all times - in each instant - *both* singular and plural but is, rather - as suggested by the demonization of *Das Man* and the assertion of its ruinous impact on authentic Being - an attempt to effectively extract an isolated ego from its dispersal in the 'They' and provide an account of how 'ownmost' Being is nonetheless possible *in spite of* the essential existential structure of *Dasein* as '*in-der-Welt-sein*' / *Mitsein*. This is the context in which Nancy notes, somewhat ruefully:

> The analytic of *Mitsein* that appears within the existential analytic remains nothing more than a sketch; that is, even though *Mitsein* is coessential with Dasein, it remains in a subordinate position. As such, the whole existential analytic still harbors some principle by which what it opens up is immediately closed off.
> (BSP: 94)

This foreclosing on the implications of the Analytic of *Mitsein* - a gesture which is simultaneously the enclosing of *Dasein* itself - is, arguably, the substantive objective of Division Two of *Being and Time* in which Heidegger, famously, introduces 'Being-towards-death' and 'anticipatory resoluteness' as the operative mechanisms of *Dasein*'s individuation. In the opening pages of the second division Heidegger clearly acknowledges that the existential structures he has attributed to *Dasein* present him with a methodological problem in that "any entity whose Essence is made up of existence, is essentially opposed to the possibility of our getting it in our grasp as an entity which is whole." (BT: 276/SZ: 233) This conclusion - which, one suspects, Nancy would strenuously endorse[9] - is entirely dissatisfactory as far as Heidegger is concerned and the rest of the treatise is hence dedicated to demonstrating how, in fact, it is possible to "guarantee the primordiality which fundamental ontology demands" (BT: 275/SZ: 232) by "forc[ing] the *whole* of Dasein…into…phenomenological view." (BT: 276/SZ: 23) The violence which here surfaces in Heidegger's language is not without significance and is perhaps a point of origin of Levinas' life-long stipulation of the incompatibility of ontology and ethics. Heidegger, however, is unconcerned at this juncture with anything other than "br[inging] to light existentially the Being of Dasein in its possibilities of *authenticity* and *totality*," (BT:276/SZ: 233) and thus proceeds to embark on the elucidation of the way in which "Being towards death…proves to be the ontologically constitutive state of Dasein's potentiality-for-Being-a-whole." (BT: 277/SZ: 234)

The principal mode of Being-towards-death's operation is clearly temporal; having converted the primarily spatial formulation of the *Dasein*'s essential structure as Being-in-the-world/Being-with-others into 'primordial temporality' via the pivot of the care-structure, Heidegger is then able,

---

[9] Nancy rejects in principle any designation of Dasein as 'mine' in a manner which suggests its enclosure, arguing that "*'mineness' is itself only a possibility that occurs in the concurrent reality of being-each-time-with.*" (BSP: 97)

effectively, to endow *Dasein* with authentic Being through the unity of temporal ecstases represented in the experience of 'anticipatory resoluteness.' As suggested previously, Nancy's emphasis on the punctual event of Being - the way in which, we imagine, the configuration of plural origins shifts, with kaleidoscopic indeterminacy, from one instant to another - can be read as a rejection of the Heideggerian attempt to enfold both the factical past and the not-yet of the future in the encompassing temporal singularity of the 'Moment of vision.' Perhaps even more pertinent for Nancy however, is the fact that Heidegger's deployment of the 'horizon' of death rests upon his assertion that it is a 'non-relational' event which endows authenticity through its undoing of Dasein's imbrication with others:

> The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualizes Dasein down to itself…It makes manifest that all Being-alongside…and all Being-with Others, will fail us when our ownmost potentiality-for-Being is the issue. The entity which anticipates its non-relational possibility, is thus forced by that very anticipation into the possibility of taking over from itself its ownmost Being, and of doing so of its own accord. (BT: 308/SZ: 263-4)

This characterization of death – upon which the Heideggerian extraction of authentic *Dasein* essentially rests – is one which Nancy flatly, but understatedly, rejects. He writes:

> Death takes place essentially as language; reciprocally, language always says death…Death as such, [like] birth as such, takes place as language: it takes place in and through being-with-one-another. Death is the very signature of the 'with'…It follows then that one is never born alone, and one never dies alone. (BSP: 89)

Moreover:

> If being-with is indeed co-essential to Being *tout court,* or rather is to Being itself, this ownmost possibility is coessentially a possibility of the with and as the with. (BSP: 90)

17

Nancy's commitment to the operation of the 'with' is therefore, in its own, non-totalizable manner, absolute,[10] and this commitment provides the axiomatic basis from which he indicts Heidegger's contorted disavowal of the Analytic of *Mitsein*, characterized neatly as "a matter of "'forgetting the between' rather than 'forgetting Being.'" (BSP: 76) It is here that Nancy's re-inscription of the Heideggerian process of the 'disclosure' of Being with his own preferred term of 'exposure'[11] comes more clearly into focus, for the Heideggerian phrase suggests the unconcealment of a potentially immanent entity while Nancy's formulation, by contrast, implies the necessity of with-being's positioning always outside itself, or, as Nancy will also have it, its 'dis-position.'[12] The consequences of the Heideggerian disavowal are, ultimately, Nancy suggests, ethical, and he traces what he calls "that obstruction which decided the terms of being-with's fulfillment, and its withdrawal" (BSP: 93) to the notorious passage in *Being and Time* (Cf. §74) in which the specter of the 'people' and their 'destiny' make their first appearance in Heidegger's thought in terms which are rhetorically continuous with those of the 'Rectoral Address.' While it is beyond the scope of the present enquiry to undertake an extended investigation of the extent to which the 'Self Assertion of the German University' may be seen as operationally consistent with the ontology of authentic historicizing executed by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, we may perhaps gain some insight into the ethical implications of Heidegger's disavowal of the Analytic of *Mitsein* by examining Nancy's assertion that through it, Heidegger is guilty of 'being-with's fulfillment, and its withdrawal.'

---

[10] "That Being is being-with, absolutely, this is what we must think." (BSP: 61)

[11] For example; "Existence, therefore, is not a property of *Dasein*; it is the original singularity of being, which *Dasein* exposes for all being." (BSP: 18) It is notable that Nancy's deployment of this term - while relying heavily on its etymological construction to denote the formal configuration of Being – also makes operative its common signification in terms of 'vulnerability.' Arguably, one of the principal motives for the attempt to construct the enclosed, inviolable and autarchic ego is the guaranteeing of the security of self (the principle of 'l'indemne' as Derrida would say) and hence, the necessary 'exposure' of the self serves to remind us that the removal of the ego from "exteriority and contingency" (BSP: 53) is, in fact, a chimerical ideal.

[12] For example, "Being…does not have any other meaning except the dis-position of this 'between.'" (BSP: 27) "'To be' is not the noun of consistency; it is the verb of dis-position." (BSP: 96)

As previously discussed, Nancy's conception of the 'with' demands that we recognize that, *at each instant*, Being is both singular and plural, a notion of punctual and reticulated singularity which he sharply distinguishes from both the immanent totality of the individual and the strict separation of numerically identical particulars within a totality. (Cf. BSP: 32) Each of these options may perhaps be conceived as opposite extremities of the 'with,' in one case the 'with' is effectively strengthened or 'filled up' so that the singular becomes a discrete particular within the whole (equivalent perhaps to the annihilating gesture of exclusion by which the one separates itself from the other), while, in the opposite case, the 'with' is dissolved or 'emptied out' so that the singular merges into the totality (a gesture of consumption or absorption). In naming these operations of the with's fulfillment, Nancy pulls no punches; they are, he states simply, evil:

> [E]vil is only ever [found] in the operation that fulfills the with. One can fulfill the with either by filling it up or by emptying it out…In the first case, the singular becomes a particular within a totality, where it is no longer either singular or plural; in the second case, the singular exists only on its own...as a totality. In either case, murder is on the horizon, that is, death as the operative negativity of the One, death as the *work* of the One-All or the One-Me. (BSP: 92)

Arguably, in the second division of *Being and Time* Heidegger performs both operations of the with's fulfillment. In the first instance, 'anticipatory resoluteness' is intended to particularize *Dasein* so that it exists as a self-contained and authentic entity within the totality but then, in the passages on the 'destiny of the *Volk*,' Heidegger effectively reinscribes the mechanism of authentic individuation back into the whole, rendering the 'people' a singular totality with a unified will and destiny. This portrait is presently – not unlike the Analytic of *Mitsein* itself – little more than an opening sketch, and it remains to be seen to what extent Heidegger's engagement with National Socialism can be determinatively traced to his disavowal or 'fulfillment' of the 'with.' Nonetheless, it seems beyond doubt that, for Nancy, faithfulness to the Analytic of *Mitsein* is an ethical

imperative; an injunction which offers perhaps the only chance of charting a course between the twin evils of exclusion and consumption, operations endlessly re-performed – in both our political and intellectual history - in the attempt to endow Being with an identity which, Nancy tells us, it never has, and never *could* have, possessed.

This is the sense in which Nancy, *contra* Levinas, informs us that "no ethics would be independent from an ontology" and that "only ontology, in fact, may be ethical in a consistent manner." (BSP: 21) It is our task now, he seems to suggest, to return to Heidegger's epic treatise, and "forcibly reopen a passage beyond that obstruction" (BSP: 93) represented by the disavowal of *Mitsein*, guided, in our turn, by that "axiom of any analytic that is to be called coexistential;" the understanding that "there is no 'self' except by virtue of a 'with,' which, in fact, structures it." (BSP: 94) It is not a matter, he tells us, of

attempting "'to complete' the merely sketched-out analysis of *Mitsein,* nor is it a matter of setting up *Mitsein* as a 'principle' like it deserves," because "'[i]n principle' being-with escapes completion and always evades occupying the place of a principle." (BSP: 93-4) Nonetheless, what is crucial is "to reverse the order of philosophical exposition" (BSP: 30) by which *Mitsein* was subordinated to the Analytic of *Dasein*[13] – and to the imperative of Dasein's 'mineness' – and to ensure that the "themes of being-with and co-originarity" are "renewed" in order to "'reinitialise' the existential analytic." (BSP: 27) Thus, he underlines:

> 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 a matter of the co-originarity of meaning – and that the 'meaning of Being' is only what it is…when it is *given as with*. (BSP: 93-4)

---

[13] "Heidegger…does not introduce the co-originarity of *Mitsein* until after having established the originary character of *Dasein*." (BSP: 30-1)

References/Index of Abbreviations

BSP   Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000)

BT   Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962)

BWBT Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Being-with of Being-there.' Unpublished paper.

DM   René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* in *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*, trans. F.E. Sutcliffe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968)

E   Baruch Spinoza, Ethics, trans. W.H. White (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2001)

EP   Martin Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (London: Souvenir Press, 1975)

OD   René Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, eds. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Léopold Cerf, 1913)

OWA Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art' in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993)

PP   Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy' in *Dissemination*, ed. and trans. Barbara Johnson (London and New York: Continuum, 2004)

WBW Simon Critchley, 'With Being-With? Notes on Jean-Luc Nancy's Rewriting of *Being and Time*' in *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity* (London: Verso, 1999)