

Jean-Paul Martinon, “Between Freedoms: Jean-Luc Nancy’s Haunting Categorical Imperative,” in *Mono Kurgusuz Labirent* 10-11 (Summer 2011), unpaginated, © Mono Kurgusuz Labirent 2011.

Allow me to perform here for you an imperative: I am going to read Jean-Luc Nancy’s text, “The Kategorien of Excess” and it is imperative that justice is seen to be done to this text. By this I mean that even though nobody constrains anybody, even though nobody calls for justice, I cannot escape the fact that as soon as I start reading Nancy’s text, an imperative to do it justice, to read it rightly or justly, immediately imposes itself onto me. I cannot betray this text. It has to be read “properly.” This does not mean to say that Nancy’s text calls me to respect a dominant interpretation (here the tradition of reading Kant) or that I know what “reading properly” means. This simply means that there is somewhere, maybe in Nancy’s text, a *call* to the reader to respond to it respectfully, rightfully, or at least justly. How is one to understand this *call* to responsibility that appears to come from his text and obliges me to perform it here for you?

But beware, this question of reading is not mine alone. It is a question of responsibility that we *all* share: it is of course mine first and foremost (after all, I have chosen this text), but it is also yours. It is *your* responsibility: you, who have picked up this essay and started reading it here and now, in a place and time I cannot even begin to imagine. And in this unknown location and occasion, I am telling you—in a ghostly voice—that you too are responsible not for my reading, but for *your* reading of Nancy’s text through my reading of it. Will you hear this call? Will you try to get hold of Nancy’s text to contrast and compare your reading with mine? And then, after that, will you read Kant’s work in order to contrast and compare your reading of Nancy with his reading of Kant? And how far will you go? How much respect will you show? How far will you push your investigation in order to gain a *respectful* understanding of the topic at hand? As Jacques Derrida says in a commentary on Levinas’s work: “One’s reading is... no longer merely a simple

reading that deciphers the sense of what is already found in the text; it has a limitless (ethical) initiative.”ⁱ

Of course, this call for total respect is delusional: we all know that there *will* never be a “proper” reading of Nancy’s text. The ethical initiative is indeed limitless: there *will* never be a truly respectful understanding of the topic at hand. Who could claim such a thing? The situation is in fact a different one: Yes, you—the reader—produce Nancy’s text, my text. You perform the text; you read whatever you want from it. We all know this: you are the author of the text you are reading. In this way, contrary to what one might expect, the imperative I feel resonating in Nancy’s text and that I am trying to convey to you here and now in *this* text is therefore not that of the text itself. It is an imperative that *you* create. It is an imperative that enjoins your thoughts in your reading of these texts. So it is not just a question of *being seen* to be responsible or doing justice to Nancy or Kant, but it is a question of realising the imperative that structures your approach to reading and therefore your approach to an author and this before any call for a response or call to responsibility is been uttered.

The consequence of this reversed focus is that curiously or paradoxically, by picking up this essay, by engaging yourself with a reading of Nancy’s work, you are self-obligating yourself. By reading this essay, by noting that this essay is an essay on Nancy’s text, “The Kategorien of Excess,” you are obligating yourself freely. However, this does not mean that you are sovereign and autonomous in your choice of text, in your reading of these lines. The obligation or the imperative is here of another order. It is the order of what always already remains within “the law of absolute heteronomy,”ⁱⁱ that is, it obeys a radically different law than the one passed by religious or secular institutions, parliaments, or by chief justices. It also obeys a different law than that imposed by scholarship or erudite reading: one that makes you feel obliged to respond in a scholarly way, for example. This law of absolute heteronomy is a law that simply encourages reading. How? What law obliges our reading, our thought? We don’t yet know. The only thing we can say for the moment, is that we are held hostage by this law of absolute heteronomy,

this constant dislocation between this text and the other, our thought and our next thought; a dislocation that forces us, that self-obliges us to read properly, to do justice, to be faithful.

Why should we focus on the imperative with regards to Nancy's text? There are two reasons for focusing on such a topic. The first one is self-evident: *If I am not mistaken, if I read properly, Nancy's text is about the categorical imperative and as such calls on us to reflect on what enjoins our thinking.* This is, in all appearances, his aim or his topic. We *must* therefore be faithful to that. Secondly, Nancy's text (and his work in general) is a text that not only has a topic (the categorical imperative); it also strives to give resonance to the imperative voice.ⁱⁱⁱ "The Kategorien of Excess" performs an imperative; it is a demand for a response, a demand for a responsible response to what Kant and Nancy are saying. In other words, over and beyond my (irresponsible?) performance, the text operates or performs the imperative and as such calls for a reflection on how we respond to this imperative. What do we *do* with Nancy's imperative? How do we *respond* to it? These two reasons therefore gives us an incentive to trace the many points in Nancy's text where an imperative is not just explained, but is expressed *categorically* for us, his readers.

So let us respond, let us react to this imperative that comes from Nancy's text. After all we wouldn't want to just remain purely in the realm of the indicative: limiting ourselves, for example, to the way Nancy *indicates* to us how the categorical imperative enjoins our thought. What would be the point of that? How can anyone indicate the imperative without at least enjoining the imperative of indication? If one is going to address the imperative, then there is the imperative to put the imperative to work. This does not mean, however, that Nancy includes imperative orders or directives in his texts and that we should look for them. This only means that to address the imperative is already to hear the imperative resonate in his (or our) text. There is an inevitability here that needs to be obeyed. As James Gilbert-Walsh rightly remarks in his own respectful reading of Nancy's later text "The free Voice of Man," "we should not expect Nancy or any other thinker to prescribe

determinate directives for action; nevertheless, when the imperative is what is at issue, some link to concrete action (and to what it would mean, concretely, to 'obey' rather than 'disobey' the imperative voice) *must* be drawn."^{iv}

So let us *indicate* and therefore also—necessarily—*enjoin* each other with the way Nancy *indicates* and *uses* the imperative first in his work overall, then in the text that concerns us here: "The Kategorien of Excess."

First and foremost, since I am highlighting the difference between imperatives and indicatives, it is clear surveying a little Nancy's work that, for him, the imperative *must* be understood—at least to some degree—independently of an indicative. The reason is simply that an indicative institutes a future present, while an imperative necessarily ruptures it. As he says in "The Free Voice of Man": "The imperative is irreducible to the logicity of the present indicative, and to the present in general, for it does not even indicate something like a future present. Rather, it ruptures the present of its commandment in an originary manner... [In other words,] the imperative cannot call to account the theory of its freedom. As a result, it separates itself from itself."^v This is the incredible nature of the imperative: it cannot be indicated; its freedom suffers no characterization and no theory. If one is therefore going to be respectful of or to the imperative, then it can only be understood as a rupture that can never be explicated or theorized for otherwise it would lose its imperativeness.

As a rupture of the present, the imperative therefore lacks a metaphysical status. This is a tricky idea because the very mention of the word "imperative" already presupposes the possibility of a well-defined and singularized entity that we can all identify. But can we? If we are seriously going to address what ruptures the present, then we have no choice but to focus on what differs and defers, that is, on what always evades the very possibility of presence. As such, the imperative cannot be properly dissociated from *différance*. The imperative is indeed an imperative if, like *différance*, it evades presence. This is not something new. As Nancy says with reference to Derrida's famous word: "*différance* obliges, *différance* (if it has anything) has the structure and

nature of an obligation, prescription, and injunction, even if these terms can no longer be understood in accordance with its ethico-metaphysical concept. Difference *obliges* differently.”^{vi} Understood in this way, then the imperative for Nancy, is really *an arch-imperative*, i.e. what involves the incalculable possibilities of the performative. In this way, Nancy’s imperative is what is necessarily inaugural; what incurs responsibility and remains always already dangerous as it opens itself to the risk of the incalculable.

At such incredible limit, as this intangible breaking point, the imperative is therefore no longer what can be described as the expression of a command such as, for example: “Come!” Reduced to what can be heard as breaking up the present, the imperative can only do one thing: to withdraw as soon as it is uttered. Necessarily confused with the advent of space and time, “the imperative spaces.... In the most general way, the [imperative] spaces itself from itself as fact.”^{vii} As such, it can only divide or double itself within its own self-presentation. The crucial consequence of such an understanding of the imperative is that contrary to what everyone would hope for, it simply cannot be perceived within an empirical horizon. The imperative withdraws as soon as it commands. The imperative “*happens* as the imperative’s withdrawal from its own self-presentation.”^{viii} It “*happens*”^x and this happening, which is incommensurable with all forms of indication, curiously, but most sternly, enjoins a necessity: that of reacting or responding^x to the injunction.

So what do we have? A breach of the present, an imperative that withdraws itself, and a response: there is no doubt that (in) the differed and deferred “situation” we are addressing here, there are two voices at stake. These voices are necessarily confused, but need nonetheless be made distinct for the imperative commands us, each time, asymmetrically: On the one hand, there is the one who utters the imperative and on the other, as it were, there is the one who hears the imperative, who is summoned by the obligation, who reacts to the breaking of the present by this imperative—and even perhaps in some cases, imperious—voice. This does not necessarily mean that there are two subjects. The *hearing* of the imperative can be the *saying* of the imperative—hence my confused start: imperative or responsibility, Nancy’s

imperative or self-obligation? In any case, and however one understands it, when it comes to the imperative, one is therefore always already in a dissymmetrical situation which is inevitably reminiscent of Levinas's work, who Nancy always reads carefully. Indeed, as Levinas teaches us with regards to the ethical encounter: "The dissymmetry of a relationship keeps me always solitary and unmatched [*dépareillé*] in regard to the other. In the social superstructure, in justice, the "me," as deposed, shall again find the imperative and, by way of the imperative, autonomy and equality."^{xi} So when it comes to the imperative, we are therefore always already in a "situation" in which we are rejected from the possibility of an equality or a generalisation. Nancy's imperative can only therefore be heard with bent neck and eyes raised towards on high.

However, Nancy is not Levinas and therefore the imperative cannot be interpreted in the same way that, for example, the Sixth Commandment befalls the always unequal, but never characterizable face-to-face. For Nancy, the imperative can only truly be understood as if stemming from a community, in the *constitution* of the community, as it comes and disjoins itself. As he writes in a response to Derrida's question that the imperative is always already understood in an economy of negotiation: "For me, the imperative of sense is this call that stems from the heart of any community, or from any world whatsoever; it is a call to resist what is established, what calls for calculation; it is a call to resist the possibility of domination, etc. It is thus the close call to align oneself with the impossible, with what cannot be calculated."^{xii} It is therefore in this community, i.e. this *recognizable* community of dissymmetrical happening, that the imperative can be voiced and/or heard. There is no radically Other here holding you hostage for a response, there is only that which has already been *amortized* as the other with a small "o"; this alter ego who breaks the present by voicing an imperative here and now in and as this community.

Finally, the crucial aspect of Nancy's overall work on the imperative is that the imperative can never become law. For Nancy, the imperative is, as James Gilbert Walsh again observes, "a measure [that] would 'necessarily destroy

itself just as soon as it [were] made a universal law'. The force of the imperative is concrete, but this force is, each time, the force of a singular-differential breach which [can] be subordinated to no criterion."^{xiii} The important aspect of this is that the imperative cannot be made into a universal principle for all time; it cannot sit across the ages *in eternam veritas*. This imperative also obeys no conventional logical argumentation that guarantees its applicability *to all*. The major consequence of this view is that, however one approaches it, the imperative must therefore resist its pretensions to maintain itself as myth. The imperative is necessarily the breaking of myths.

So in the light of this very brief and without doubt irresponsible reading of Nancy's understanding of the imperative, what is Nancy doing in "The Kategorien of Excess," this text written as early as 1983 as the introductory essay for *L'Impératif Catégorique*^{xiv}? What is it that we are given to understand? What imperative is he enjoining us to think through? And most importantly, in what concerns us here, how can we respond sensibly to the injunction that comes from his essay? Right from the start, Nancy clearly tells us that his aim is not just to re-read Kant and especially here *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, but to simply "indicat[e] the imperative's *insistence* for a thinking, our thinking..."^{xv} This is obviously a double strategy: on the one hand, he is giving us not an imperative, but an *indication*, a philosophical argument. On the other hand, he clearly remarks that this indication is necessarily enjoined by an imperative, without which there would be no indication. This double strategy is typical for someone who takes finitude seriously, that is, who takes, as we will see, the limits of philosophy in his stride. There will be no major announcement, just an indication that cannot evade the imperative *under which* it has been produced. So what is this imperative that structures Nancy's careful and generous philosophical indication?

Nancy starts from a simple and yet provocative statement: "Nothing is more foreign—or stranger—to us than the categorical imperative... [it] manifests an inadmissible antitheses of the freedom whereby we define or assert ourselves. The *imperative* suppresses the freedom of the initiative, and the

categorical imperative suppresses the freedom of deliberation.”^{xvi} The starting point of his essay could not therefore be clearer: we believe in one simple principle or fundamental right: freedom, the freedom of self-determination and anything that comes to contravene it (like for example a categorical imperative or a command) is an anathema, an offense to our modern ethos. In other words, nothing is stranger to our modern *ethos* than the idea of an imperative and above all of a *categorical* imperative.

But this is not all. There is something yet more perplexing in this provocation, something yet stranger about our understanding of freedom and the way we abhor the possibility of an interruption to this freedom. We have made our cherished freedom into our very own categorical imperative. As Nancy says: “Freedom itself, this freedom conceived as a state—or as a being—withdrawn from every power and from every external command, this freedom is posited as a ‘categorical imperative,’ by which we mean, at the very least, that it is not open to debate. (This is, for instance, the explicit or implicit motif in most general practice of defending “human rights.”)”^{xvii} So this is the paradox with which Nancy starts his essay: on the one hand, we elevate freedom to the state of a categorical imperative and yet at the same time, this freedom does not tolerate the very possibility of a categorical imperative. The question that Nancy raises at the start of his essay is therefore not that this paradox needs to be sublated or overcome, but that it needs to be addressed (or indicated) for, as he says, this paradox is the very imperative of our thought. How so?

For there to be thought, there needs to be an imperative. We are always already enjoined to think over and beyond what we are able to. We are always given more than we can think. This does not mean that there is “something” that imposes itself to thought in order for it to flourish or be spontaneous. This only means that thought takes place and this taking place occurs without any constraint, any imposition; it occurs and its occurrence is an imperative. In other words, nothing constrains us from thinking and yet we are compelled to always think more than we are able to. As Nancy tells us: “Perhaps we cannot even think without insisting, in one way or another, that this very thing—‘thinking’—immediately obeys some secret intimation. So

through or because of its very withdrawal, the imperative draws nearer to us.”^{xviii} Nancy’s imperative cannot in this way be dissociated from the advent of thought—it is, as we said, an arch-imperative, the obligation of *différance*.

As such, this imperative can only do one thing. It cannot impose itself as if an external order or command given to us by God and it cannot be given to us by a legislative body, as if a decree that remains always already to be obeyed and/or challenged. Nancy’s imperative is necessarily alien to these formulations. Because it breaks the present, because it disturbs the future present, because it comes with thought, Nancy’s imperative can only, as he himself says, haunt us. “Haunt [*hante*] is, according to its accepted etymological origins, what inhabits or occupies [*habite*] or, on a more knowing etymological reading, what returns to the stables, to the hearth, to the home. *Haunt* is from the same family as *Heim*. The proximity of imperatives might well be the *Un-heimlichkeit* that haunts our thinking; a disturbing peculiarity that disturbs only because it is so close [*si proche*], so immediate in its estrangement [*si prochaine dans son étrangeté*].”^{xix} This is the strangeness of what we have to deal with here: an imperative that cannot be dissociated from the thought that we have of it. In other words, to think the imperative is to think—if it can be thought at all—the *haunting* way thought manifests itself.

Now, obviously, it cannot be a matter of taming this imperative in order to get a good look at it before it vanishes. And it cannot be a matter of domesticating or pacifying its haunting. How could thought stop itself for a second in order to contemplate or tame itself?^{xx} In order to answer this question, we should perhaps recall Walter Benjamin’s analysis of the Sixth Commandment, a commandment that does not precede the deed, but *comes* with the deed. He writes: “For the question ‘May I kill?’ meets its irreducible answer in the commandment ‘Thou shall not kill.’ This commandment precedes the deed, just as God was ‘preventing’ the deed.”^{xxi} The similarities with Nancy’s views on the imperative are here striking. While the commandment haunts all of our deeds, the imperative haunts all of our thoughts. Let us hear Nancy on this: “time—the element of thinking—never oversteps itself; this limit, in short, defines it. To think is neither to predict nor to prophesy nor to deliver

messages, but to expose oneself to what happens with time, in time. In the time of haunting, there can and must be a thinking and an ethics—if ethics it is—of haunting.”^{xxii} The imperative thus takes place in this step that never oversteps itself—the step/not.^{xxiii}

Untamed and ungraspable, always elusive and yet always pervasive, the imperative is really the condition of possibility for thought—the arch-imperative of thought; thought as it differs and defers itself. This does not mean that it only concerns the ephemeral world of abstract ideas. As Nancy sternly reminds us in his text, the imperative is “itself the transcendental of praxis”^{xxiv}—hence its closeness to Walter Benjamin’s interpretation of the Sixth Commandment and its irreducibility to our deeds. The imperative concerns thought, not as an idea produced by mental activity alone or as a transcendent reality existing only in the empyrean, but as a deed indistinct from the agent who performs it, from the body who performs it.^{xxv} As such, the imperative is a deed always already engaged by the body that performs it; an imperative that coerces the one who utters it to always *be* more than he or she can.

But to what end? What does it achieve? The immediate answer is that, for Nancy, this imperative is not a way of promising or fixing an end or an accomplishment. The imperative simply allows for thought to take place; it does not destine thought to a particular end. This is not a self-defeating remark or some attempt to highlight the absurdity of human actions and/or thoughts. To say that the imperative is neither promissory nor preordained is to tragically reverse the way we look at our achievements. In this, Nancy is again reminiscent of Benjamin’s Angelus Novus, whereby the angel of history, turned toward the past is pushed by a storm blowing from Paradise and propelling him into the future to which his back is turned.^{xxvi} Nancy here understands our imperative in a similar way: as a way of abandoning, of tragically letting go of our destiny. In this way, instead of marching forward, we are haunted by the irreducibility of the abandonment caused by our very own imperative. As he writes: “Perhaps the categorical imperative is only a transformation of tragic truth, a truth that destiny has essentially abandoned.

The law abandoned—to itself. What *haunts* us, what has haunted us ever since our loss of tragedy's representation or since the imperative began to present us with its irreducibility, is this abandonment."^{xxvii}

But Nancy's thought on the imperative does not have the structure of an allegorical dramaturgy. The reason for such a lack is simple: there can be no self-governing subject (an angel) witnessing the wreckages of civilizations. The abandonment Nancy is referring to concerns an immediacy that is hard to pin down because it does not allow for the self-legislation of the subject. This abandonment is without doubt an abandonment to death, but where death is understood as *the* incommensurable *in* finitude, *in* what pervades it—i.e. what is always already "under our skin" as Levinas would say. In this way, the abandonment that allows our next thought to encourage yet another thought is that which gives in to *the* incommensurable *in* this life. This is not a mystical thought. This incommensurable really refers to *the idea* of an outside, to *the* immeasurable as articulated *by thought*, i.e. the *sense* of finitude shared by a community. In this way, the imperative abandons us to our very death, whereby death is always already here understood as what can be *recognized* as arriving every second of time. Hence the fact that the imperative, for Nancy is always already concerned with limits: "the imperative imposes the law as the outermost, unrecoverable limit *on the basis of which* the injunction is addressed."^{xxviii}

And this is where Nancy operates the most radical shift in the understanding of the categorical imperative. We said at the start that according to Nancy we are currently living under a paradox: on the one hand, we elevate freedom to the state of a categorical imperative and yet at the same time, this freedom does not tolerate the very possibility of a categorical imperative. If we take into account everything that has been argued so far, then how can one understand this paradox anew? Let us summarised our reading: the imperative haunts us because it enjoins our thought. The imperative is an arch-imperative that never oversteps its time and engages us body and soul in an abandonment to finitude. Without destination, in the errancy of our haunting, the imperative thus marks us as this limit, this incommensurable.

The turning point here is in the understanding of this marking, this limit or this incommensurable. How can one understand this limit that never allows for an outside properly speaking? Contrary to what one would expect, this limit, this sense, is not some meta-phor of the metaphor. This limit, this sense, is most simply freedom itself. Now freedom is not here the classical *liberum arbitrium* or the subjectivist free will. Freedom for Nancy is this limit to which the subject abandons him or herself.

The major consequence of this is that paradoxically freedom is effectively here confused with death, this limit, i.e. with what cannot be measured. As Nancy writes in his doctoral thesis published a few years later: “Freedom is the withdrawal of being, but the withdrawal of being is the nothingness of this being, which is the being of freedom. This is why freedom is not, but it frees from being, all of which can be written here as: freedom withdraws being and gives relations.”^{xxix} This freedom—i.e. this limit—therefore gives us a radical different understanding of the paradox we are grappling with here: Today we might have elevated freedom to the state of a categorical imperative that suffers no imperative, but in this paradox we fail to see that this categorical imperative that we hold so dearly is in fact *our own address to freedom*, our own address to this limit—death. The imperative is not a hindrance to our freedom; it is our address to freedom. As Nancy says: “The imperative is essentially addressed to freedom.”^{xxx} In other words, by addressing ourselves to the other, we *enjoin* the other’s freedom, the possibility of the other *to be other* to ourselves, that is, to be our interlocutor, our addressee.

Now the question we need to address is inevitably *why* is it *categorical*? What differentiates this imperative that does not constraint freedom from other imperatives? After all, could one not say that Nancy’s imperative simply belongs to any other form of addresses (interpellation, prayer, order, call, demand, exhortation, warning, etc.) that enjoins our thinking and haunt us equally every second of time? And if this is the case, then what is so special about this imperative? The answer is straightforward: “the imperative is categorical because it is addressed to a freedom and so cannot in advance submit the maxim of that to the condition of an end.”^{xxxi} In other words, the

imperative we are grappling with here is categorical because, as we said, it can never overstep itself. If it did, then it would become necessarily hypothetical, open to debate and questioning.

So what are we left with, if anything? Nancy's understanding of the categorical imperative is one in which there is no space for the self-positing of the subject (this does not exclude, however, of course, the existence of free will). Nancy's categorical imperative concerns what in the subject is not subject: this limit, this sense of finitude that offers us not an unsublatable paradox, but the possibility of freedom, a way out of our *aporia*, a chance move on the high seas. As such, Nancy's categorical imperative is really the possibility of being interpellated by the other, whereby the other is not understood as a self-contained subject, but as an other *understood* as always already Other to me, an other always already confused with (my) death, that is, with what is *not* me. In this way, and contrary to what one might think, the imperative "affirms the freedom of the addressee... and intends or abandons it to the imperative. In this way, the imperative categorizes the essence or nature of man, doing so in excess of every category, in excess of what is proper to man."^{xxxii}

Have I performed here for you Nancy's imperative? Have you being enjoined in thinking differently about the categorical imperative, a thinking that without doubt betrays Kant? Nancy has given us an incredible re-interpretation of the Kantian categorical imperative. He freed it from the constraints of the self-governing subject and brought it right up to its most dangerous limit, a limit that no longer resembles anything we could have anticipated: a limit that refuses to see itself as a dead-end, but resembles instead the provocation of an imminent *break* with the present: our freedom. In doing so, he has offered us the possibility of thinking further about our freedom than we ever were able to until now: a freedom confused with our own limits, our own finitude, in the limitless enjoined of thought. This offering is Nancy's interpellation; a call neither constraining nor authoritative. He does not force us to read his text in this or that way, properly or justly. Through his text, through his generous gift, he affirms our freedom; he simply appeals to our rectitude, that is, to the way we respond to his call, our role of addressee; freedom to freedom. This does

not mean that he affirms us, his readers, as free individuals able to do what one pleases with his text, but he affirms us *in* our freedom, that is, in the *dangerous* task of having to interpellate him back with more questions and arguments.

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- ⁱ Jacques Derrida, "At This Very Moment in This Work, Here I Am," translated by R. Berezdivin, in Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, eds., *Re-Reading Levinas* (London: The Athlone Press, 1991), p. 25.
- ⁱⁱ Derrida, *Re-Reading Levinas*, p. 25.
- ⁱⁱⁱ There is no space here to articulate such a claim. For an excellent analysis of the way the imperative is at work in Nancy's work, see James Gilbert-Walsh, "Broken imperatives: The ethical dimension of Nancy's thought," in *Philosophy Social Criticism*, 2000; Vol. 26; No. 2, pp. 29-50.
- ^{iv} Gilbert-Walsh, *Philosophy Social Criticism*, p. 31, my emphasis.
- ^v Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Free Voice of Man," in *Retreating the Political*, ed. Simon Sparks (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 48-9.
- ^{vi} Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, p. 46, my emphasis.
- ^{vii} Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, p. 49.
- ^{viii} Gilbert-Walsh, *Philosophy Social Criticism*, p. 45.
- ^{ix} There is no space here to explore this advent. For the verb "to happen," see Jean-Francois Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," in *The Lyotard Reader*, translated by David Macey, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 199.
- ^x There is no space here to explore the difference between "reaction" and "response"; a difference, which would imply (another imperative) to study the way in which animals and human beings respond to imperatives. For a brief, but insightful analysis of this theme, see Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy, "Responsabilité - du sens à venir," in *Sens en tous sens: Autour des travaux de Jean-Luc Nancy* (Paris: Galilée 2004), especially pp. 195-7.
- ^{xi} Emmanuel Levinas, "The Ethical Relationship as a Departure from Ontology—Friday, March 5, 1976," in *God, Death, and Time*, translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 182, translation modified.
- ^{xii} Derrida - Nancy, *Sens en tous sens*, p. 181, my translation.
- ^{xiii} Gilbert-Walsh, *Philosophy Social Criticism*, p. 45.
- ^{xiv} "The Kategorien of Excess" represents the introductory essay for *L'Impératif Catégorique*. See Jean-Luc Nancy, "Le Katégorien de l'Excès," in *L'Impératif Catégorique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983). The first English translation of this essay appeared for the first time in Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Kategorien of Excess," translated by James Gilbert-Walsh and Simon Sparks, in *A Finite Thought*, ed. by Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). Henceforth abbreviated as Nancy, *A Finite Thought*, followed by the page number in the English translation followed by the page number in the original French between brackets.
- ^{xv} Nancy, *A Finite Thought*, 135 (10).
- ^{xvi} Nancy, *A Finite Thought*, 134 (9).
- ^{xvii} Nancy, *A Finite Thought*, 135 (9).
- ^{xviii} Nancy, *A Finite Thought*, 134 (10).
- ^{xix} Nancy, *A Finite Thought*, 136 (11).
- ^{xx} This is reminiscent of Alain (Emile Chartier)'s ironic retort to the poet who wishes to halt time: "For how long will time suspend its course?" See: Alain (Emile-Auguste Chartier), *Elements de Philosophie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941), p. 80.

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- ^{xxi} Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections, Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, translated by E. Jephcott, (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), p. 297.
- ^{xxii} Nancy, *A Finite Thought*, 136 (11).
- ^{xxiii} For this step/not, see Jacques Derrida, "Pas," in *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 1989).
- ^{xxiv} Nancy, *A Finite Thought*, 143 (20).
- ^{xxv} There is no space to examine this in detail. Suffice to say for now that for Nancy, the body is the first to articulate space (and) time. It is that which touches—to use Nancy's word—the world, the others, or the Other. The body is a limit, the opening of the event of Being [*Ereignis*]. In this context, the body cannot be understood as if a physical object constructed within a specific social or cultural discourse. For Nancy, the body, following Merleau-Ponty is that which takes place at the limit; it is an event *at* the limit of sense, in the emergence of sense and signification, and therefore of its imperative. For further on this topic see: Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, translated by Richard A Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008) and Jean-Paul Martinon, "Survenue" in *On Futurity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 69-109.
- ^{xxvi} Walter Benjamin, "Theses in the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, translated by H. Zorn, ed. H. Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1973), p. 294.
- ^{xxvii} Nancy, *A Finite Thought*, 149 (29).
- ^{xxviii} Nancy, *A Finite Thought*, 150 (29).
- ^{xxix} Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, translated by Bridget McDonald (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 1993, p. 68.
- ^{xxx} Nancy, *A Finite Thought*, 150 (30).
- ^{xxxi} Nancy, *A Finite Thought*, 150 (30).
- ^{xxxii} Nancy, *A Finite Thought*, 150 (30), translation modified.