

Love and the Image in Nancy and Lacan

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This essay examines Nancy's philosophy of the image through Lacan's remarks about love. In *L'Oscillation distinct*, Nancy outlines a parallel between love and the image through their relationship to presence as lack. Starting from this comparison between the image and love through themes of lack and the temporality of lack, this essay will outline a symmetry between Nancy's understanding of the image and his understanding of the self. Nancy's elaborations on the force of the image and on the groundlessness of the image lead to the Lacanian agalma and to the Lacanian formulation 'love is giving what one does not have'.

Introduction: Nancy and Lacan

The writings of Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Lacan, though crucial in contemporary continental thought, are less commonly found on the shelves of art historians. Jean-Luc Nancy turned to questions of art in his later works, after having established himself first as a political philosopher. His most important writings about art are collected in two volumes: *Les Muses* (*The Muses*), and *Au fond des images* (*The Ground of the Image*).¹ Lacan never collected his thoughts on art into a single volume – and in fact did not much care for writing and publishing.² Yet the year 1973 was revelatory for Jacques Lacan: Lacan, the famous talker, whose weekly seminars were crowded with auditors and who had published infrequently, was being read!³ In 1973, Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe published a book entitled *Le Titre de la*

1 J.-L., Nancy, *Les Muses*. Paris: Galilée, 1994 (J.-L., Nancy, *The Muses*. Trans. P. Kamuf. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); J.-L., Nancy, *Au fond des images*. Paris: Galilée, 2003 (J.-L., Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*. Trans. J. Fort. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). *Multiple Arts: The Muses II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) collects Nancy's additional essays on the arts into a volume that does not exist in French. See also a special issue of *Journal of Visual Culture* 2010, vol. 9, no. 1 on Nancy and visual studies.

2 This sense, confirmed in Élisabeth Roudinesco's biography, is also suggested in Lacan's opening remarks of his *Écrits*.

3 A. Parker, *The Theorist's Mother*. Duke: Duke University Press, 2012, p. 45.

lettre: une lecture de Lacan (*The Title of the Letter: A Reading of Lacan*)⁴, a close reading of Jacques Lacan's *écrit* 'L'Instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud' ('The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud').

Lacan himself praised *Le Titre de la lettre* highly in his 1973 seminar (later published as *Encore*): 'I can say in a certain way that, if it is a question of reading, I have never been read so well – with so much love.'⁵ Jacques Derrida recommended the book in his essay 'Le Facteur de la vérité' ('The Purveyor of Truth'): 'for a rigorous reading of Lacan, [I refer] to the fundamental and indispensable book by Jean-Luc Nancy.'⁶

Le Titre de la lettre was the beginning of Nancy's writing career. Many books were to follow over the next more than four decades – yet this first one was about Lacan. Nancy, however, did not achieve fame as a dedicated follower of Lacan. Nancy's reading of Lacan was deconstructive; Lacan, though certainly worthy of attention, belonged, in Nancy's estimation, to the sphere of metaphysics that needed to be overcome. In Nancy's late writing about art, Lacan's name is hardly mentioned at all.

Despite Lacan's lower profile in Nancy's later writings on art, this essay tries to examine Nancy's recent philosophy of the image through Lacan's theoretical remarks about love. Here, the relationship between the two thinkers is dialogical instead of deconstructive, Nancy becomes an interpreter of Lacan, Lacan adds to our understanding of Nancy, and the result clarifies both Lacan's understanding of love and Nancy's concept of the image. The inspiration for this perhaps somewhat surprising reading comes from Nancy's essay 'L'Oscillation distincte'⁷ (from *Au fond des images*, 2003), where Nancy outlines a parallel between love and the image through their relationship to presence:

Yes, yes, giving presence means giving to someone who is not there something that one cannot give him. It is the squaring of the circle, or of love, which gives something one does not have to someone who does not want it, as a psychoanalyst (which is to say, a specialist in image-texts) once said. The image gives a presence that it lacks – since it has no other presence than the unreal one of its thin, filmlike surface – and it gives it to something that, being absent, cannot receive it.⁸

Not only does Nancy refer to Lacan's concept of love and point to the structural similarities between love and the image, Nancy also identifies the psychoanalyst as

4 P. Lacoue-Labarthe, J.-L. Nancy, *Le Titre de la lettre: une lecture de Lacan*. Paris: Galilée, 1973.

5 J. Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX: *Encore*, 1972–1973. Transl. B. Fink. New York: W. W. Norton, 1998, p. 65 (*Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan*. Livre XX: *Encore*, 1972–1973. Paris: Seuil, 1975, p. 62). Lacan was more reserved about the ending of the book, the last thirty pages, which present the Lacanian bar as primordial and foundational and thus belonging to the sphere of Western metaphysics. In fact, Lacan's praise is a curious response to what he calls a book 'written with the worst of intentions'.

6 J. Derrida, *The Purveyor of Truth*. – *Yale French Studies* 1975, no. 52, p. 39; J. Lacan, *Le Facteur de la vérité*. – *Poétique* 1975, no. 21.

7 This essay was first published in an exhibition catalogue: J.-L. Nancy, R. Durand, S. Faupin, *Sans commune mesure: image et texte dans l'art actuel*. Paris: Léo Scheer, 2002.

8 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 66 (*Au fond des images*, p. 126).

somebody who has a special position in the discourse of the image. A psychoanalyst as a specialist in image-texts – this definition alone validates our interest in the psychoanalytic side of the question of the image.

In what sense is the psychoanalyst a specialist in image-texts? One supposes that Nancy alludes here to Lacan's concept of a mirror stage, where, according to Lacan, the mirror image of a child supplies wholeness and unity to an infant's preceding existence, which was a disorganised and fragmented experience of living in the world: an infant recognises himself/herself in the mirror and this recognition helps the infant to position himself/herself. When reading Nancy, we might postulate that every image shares the structure of a mirror image. The image is like a Lacanian mirror in front of me, which makes me say both 'This is me' and 'This is my image'. It is a mirror before the viewer of the image, where a spectator can see, in an image, a reflection of him/herself. Yet there is another Lacanian mirror, situated inside the image: Nancy writes that the image 'is distinguished from itself', it 'is not self-identical.'⁹ The image sees within itself its own reflection, so that it can say at the same time 'I am a flower' and 'I am an imaged flower'. The image, then, is at least a double mirror.

Nancy refers to Lacan as a specialist in image-texts, thus combining, in the figure of a psychoanalyst, the knowledge of the visual and the textual. Nancy might be alluding to Lacan's distinction between the Imaginary, Real and Symbolic, developed on the basis of the concept of a mirror stage: the Imaginary needs the Symbolic. At some point, an image needs to be supported by the approval of somebody who gives the image a name, thus attaching the image to the field of symbolic significations.

For Lacan, the identification with one's image transforms the subject.¹⁰ Identification with an image creates a sense of security, yet this is illusory, an identification with something outside, something that is not a person but 'merely' an image. Thus the mirror-stage identification with and through an image introduces the child to an experience of the self through lack, through absence, not through the existential question *who am I?*, and not even through more age-appropriate recognition of one's abilities. The psychoanalyst is a specialist in image-texts, insofar as he is interested in the construction of the subject (the lacking subject) through images which are supported by semiotic elaborations of the normative social world. In other words, a psychoanalyst is a specialist in image-texts insofar as he deals with the images that are written into the symbolic order of a cohabited world.

Nancy does not work explicitly through these Lacanian categories, yet he follows the Lacanian connection between the image and the subject. We see in the quote above that image and love are connected by lack and, more specifically, by a lack understood through its temporal structures: 'The image gives a presence that it lacks...'¹¹ The image for Nancy becomes something other than a question of imitation or representation; echoing Lacanian psychoanalysis, the image becomes a

9 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 70 (*Au fond des images*, p. 132).

10 J. Lacan, *Écrits*. Paris: Seuil, 1966, p. 2.

11 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 66.

reflection on the self; it echoes and participates in the structures of being in the world.

Starting from this moment of comparison between the image and love through themes of lack and the temporality of lack, this essay will outline a symmetry between Nancy's understanding of the image and his understanding of the self. The topic of love and image can be developed in different directions. I follow two of these: (1) the force of the image, and (2) the groundlessness of the image. The first theme leads us to the Lacanian *agalma*, and the second to the Lacanian formulation 'love is giving what one does not have'.

1. The force of the image, or image, text and the *agalma*

Nancy's essay 'L'Oscillation distincte' ('Distinct Oscillation') starts with the words of the painter Eugène Delacroix: 'The writer has to say almost everything to be understood. In painting, a kind of mysterious bridge is built between the soul of the figure and that of the spectator.'¹² Why start a philosophical essay with the words of a painter, instead of a philosopher or even a belletrist, a novelist or a poet – especially if these words are somewhat misleading? The writer, of course, does not have to say almost everything to be understood; the writer can say a great deal in a few words. It would seem instead that the words of a painter are necessary to supplement 'the mysterious bridge' from the image to the spectator, as if paintings call for something in addition to paint on a canvas, some supplemental explanation, some theorisation around them – similarly to the manner of each piece of writing calling for more writing.

For Nancy, the words of Delacroix serve as an entry into a conversation about the relationship between image and text: both image and text manifest and reveal, produce and shed light.¹³ There is always a tension between the two, yet both of them 'present something'.¹⁴ A literary text also provides us with images and, *vice versa*, a painter supplements his oeuvre with words. Literary images have a similar status to painted images.

In the essay 'L'Image – le distinct' ('The Image – the Distinct', first published in 1999) Nancy provides a textually produced image from Edith Wharton's novella *Summer*. Nancy reads Wharton's description of a girl on the doorstep:

A girl came out of lawyer Royall's house, at the end of the one street of North Dormer, and stood on the doorstep.

The springlike transparent sky shed a rain of silver sunshine on the roofs of the village, and on the pastures and larchwoods surrounding it. A little wind

¹² J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 63 (Au fond des images, p. 121).

¹³ J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 64 (Au fond des images, p. 122).

¹⁴ J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 64 (Au fond des images, p. 121).

moved among the round white clouds on the shoulders of the hills, driving their shadows across the fields.¹⁵

Here, the gaze of the girl extends the image from the girl to the surrounding landscape, to pastures and larchwoods, transparent sky, hills and fields. Nancy comments on this verbal image in a very Heideggerian way: 'What happens is this: with the 'girl' ... an entire world 'comes out' and appears, a world that also 'stands on the doorstep,' so to speak – on the threshold of the novel....'¹⁶ The Heideggerian moment of opening up the world happens both in visual and literary images.

Whether an image is written or painted, the image gathers the world together with its 'intimate force', a certain kind of 'energy, pressure, or intensity'.¹⁷ Yet what is this intimate force, *sa force intime*, of the image? Does this intensity support the mysterious bridge sensed by Delacroix? As Nancy comments on Wharton's literary image of the girl on the doorstep,

...traits and lines of the image (its outline, its form) are themselves (something from) its intimate force: for this intimate force is not 'represented' by the image, but the image is it, the image activates it, draws it and withdraws it, extracts it by withholding it, and it is with this force that the image touches us.¹⁸

The form of the image is its intimate force, or it is *something of* its intimate force: the force has something to do with the form of the image, but it is something more. The force should not be confused with an aura; as Nancy states, force is completely different from 'any magical aura'.¹⁹ Rather, the force is linked to desire and to the position of the viewer of the image, whom it touches, pulls and draws. The image transmits the 'force of the passion', writes Nancy.²⁰ Nancy explains it through the example of a portrait: 'A portrait touches, or else it is only an identification photo, a descriptive record, not an image. What touches is something that is borne to the surface from out of an intimacy.'²¹

In a similar spirit, we could add that a *paysage* touches, or else it is just a descriptive record. Any kind of image must reach out to the viewer, or it is not an image in Nancy's sense. (Also, every religion produces 'pious bric-a-brac', *les bondieuseries*, where 'religiosity of the subject degrades or crushes the image'²² – again, these are not images in Nancy's sense, there being no force at work.) Every image, if it is an image, 'pulls and draws.'

The force of the image can only happen through me, through the viewer; it requires my involvement:

15 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 4 (Au fond des images, p. 17).

16 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 5 (Au fond des images, p. 18).

17 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 2 (Au fond des images, p. 13).

18 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 5 (Au fond des images, p. 18).

19 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 6 (Au fond des images, p. 20).

20 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 6 (Au fond des images, p. 20).

21 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 4 (Au fond des images, p. 16).

22 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 6 (Au fond des images, p. 20).

The image touches me, and, thus touched and drawn by it and into it, I get involved, not to say mixed up in it. There is no image without my too being in its image, but also without passing into it, as long as I look at it, that is, as long as I show it consideration, maintain my regard for it.²³

This is a double argument: first of all, it is a Heideggerian argument about our primary openness to the world. The world matters to us, because we turn ourselves towards it, we open ourselves up to it. An artistic image matters to us, if we show consideration. Martin Heidegger explains this through our attunement or state-of-mind: 'a state-of-mind implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us.'²⁴ Pure beholding would never make us feel a certain way if it were not for our attunement to the world. Just staring at an object would not mean encountering the object – before facing the object, we are already tuned to noticing it – or to not giving our attention to it. Receptivity to an art work presupposes a certain openness. More conservative viewers, possessed by the idea that modern art is inaccessible, are unlikely to be touched by a work of modern art.

The Heideggerian layer provides the foundation for a Lacanian layer. Nancy says, 'There is no image without my too being in its image....' The image is always about myself, or otherwise it turns out to be a descriptive record or bric-a-brac, i.e. something that does not touch me. I might respond to the presented atmosphere (the quietude of a landscape) or a feeling of lack or desire, or to the intensity of expression. Or, more concretely, I might recognise something of my own experience. In looking at the painting *The Death of Marat*, for example, I might recognise the fantasy of a beautiful death. I might also think of Victor Hugo, Eugène Delacroix, a battlefield so different from the calm composure of Marat, or the fact that the painter Jacques-Louis David sent hundreds of people to death – the painting occupies a space inhabited by desires, reminiscences and allusions. Yet Nancy does not combine the force of an image with the narrative structures of the experience of the viewer. Nancy does not intend the force of the image to be mystical, but it also seems to escape the sphere of the rational.

Lacan would call this force an *agalma*. According to Lacan, *agalma* comes from *agallo*, 'to adorn, to ornament'; it signifies ornament and adornment.²⁵ *Agalma* is 'a precious object, a jewel, something which is inside'.²⁶ Lacan developed this concept in his *Transference* seminar in 1960–1961, in which he reads Plato's *Symposium* and puzzles over Alcibiades' confession of his failed attempt to seduce Socrates. In *Symposium*, Alcibiades draws a parallel between Socrates' unremarkable appearance and boxes with images of ugly satyrs on the outside and superbly beautiful *agalmas*,

23 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 7 (*Au fond des images*, p. 21).

24 M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Trans. J. Macquarrie, E. Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1978, p. 177 (*Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1986, p. 137).

25 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre VIII, Le Transfert*, 1960–1961. Paris: Seuil, p. 167 (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII: Transference, 1960–1961*, unpublished translation by Cormac Gallagher, p. x, 1).

26 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre VIII*, p. 170 (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII*, p. x, 3).

precious gifts, on the inside. Agalma is ‘the good object that he [Socrates] has in his belly,’²⁷ writes Lacan. It is something that draws Alcibiades towards Socrates, something that Alcibiades longs for – and feels that he himself is lacking. In other words, *agalma* is the object of desire,²⁸ the name of the feeling of lack in Alcibiades.

Agalma is thus something very precious and rare: ‘we only find it in a being when we really love.’²⁹ It is unique and unrepeatable: ‘each time you encounter agalma – pay careful attention – ... if you look closely at it, you will perceive that it is always a question of something different.’³⁰ Agalma is exceptional in its singularity, and at the same time it is something hidden, hidden perhaps in Socrates’ belly. Alcibiades does not have access to Socrates’ agalma. The agalma is imaginary; it is something that Alcibiades believes Socrates has, yet he has no way to prove it.

Alcibiades wants a sign of love from Socrates to prove to himself that the agalma ‘was at his mercy’;³¹ this, he imagines, would guarantee the fullness of his existence. Socrates refuses – he refuses Alcibiades’ seduction, and he refuses even to acknowledge the existence of the agalma in his belly.

Agalma can be described as an invisible, imaginary object, but also as a force that draws a human being towards somebody else, or towards something else, towards a work of art that touches us. Nancy writes about the intimate force of the image as something that is not represented by image, but is somehow enclosed in it, so that ‘... the image activates it, draws it and withdraws it, extracts it by withholding it, and it is with this force that the image touches us.’³² Nancy’s image becomes a box with an agalma hidden in it, so that we cannot call upon its intimate force, yet we are touched by it. The image becomes a site of recognition of the self as a lacking subject.

2. Groundlessness of the image, or giving what you do not have to give

In the essay ‘L’Oscillation distincte’, Nancy moves from a comparison between the image and the text to the specificity of the text-image in a silent film, where words become parts of the visual imagery of the film, when they are inserted as images on the screen. Remarkably, Nancy introduces the theme of presence through moving film-images: even in a film, the image gives presence to the subject:

Making an image means producing a relief, a protrusion, a trait, a presence. Above all, the image gives presence. It is a manner of presence. Manner and matter of presence.³³

27 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre VIII*, p. 213 (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII*, p. xii, 9).

28 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre VIII*, p. 181 (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII*, p. x, 12.).

29 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre VIII*, p. 182 (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII*, p. x, 13).

30 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre VIII*, p. 173 (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII*, p. x, 5).

31 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre VIII*, p. 213 (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII*, p. xii, 9).

32 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 5 (*Au fond des images*, p. 18).

33 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 66 (*Au fond des images*, p. 125).

The image gives presence. Nancy generally focuses on the lack of presence in the image rather than on the presence of the image, yet here Nancy starts out by asserting the presence of the image: above all, the image gives presence. Nancy does not explain further, yet we might confirm his point with this image (see Fig. 1):



Willy Zügel. Theodor Christomannose monument (1912). Karerpass, Südtirol / Passo di Costalunga, Alto Adige. Kõrgus 2,70 m, pronks.

Foto John Phillips.

Willy Zügel. Theodor Christomannos monument (1912). Karerpass, Südtirol / Passo di Costalunga, Alto Adige. H 2,70 m, bronze.

Photo by John Phillips.

This is a work of art, a bronze eagle almost three metres high, an *image* of an eagle (it is not a living eagle, though it has borrowed the shape of an eagle), situated in the middle of mountaintops in the South Tyrol in Italy. This bronze eagle very clearly does not represent anything else outside of itself; it is an image of itself only, and very much present as such. Many things here contribute to the sense of presence: the quietude of the figure, the immensity of the figure (somehow big things seem to be more present than small things) and, of course, the surroundings. The eagle is very present, because it inhabits exactly the right place for itself, guarding and overlooking the valley and the vastness of the mountains around it. A painting in a museum can never be present in the same way, because its home is a storage place; it is clearly somewhat misplaced and somewhat uncomfortable. Also, a three-dimensional sculpture, though still an image, a technical creation, seems more present than a two-dimensional painting.

The bronze eagle, created in 1912 by Willy Zügel, is known as the Christomannos monument, dedicated to the memory of Dr Theodor Christomannos, a passionate mountain climber, who (I am quoting an internet page for local tourism) 'had a

decisive role in turning this area into a tourist attraction'.³⁴ Yet clearly the bronze eagle carries no trace of connection with Dr Theodor Christomannos (it does not look at all like a mountain climber); the information plaque with the name Theodor Christomannos on it is discreetly hidden behind a bench opposite the majestic eagle; the eagle can easily maintain its autotelic existence as a work of art, undisturbed by unnecessary references to tourism or other futile human aims. Also, the connection between the monument and its creator is carefully hidden; the name of the sculptor is not on the information plaque and – on a desolate mountainside – it is nearly impossible to find anybody who could give the spectator any information about the artist.³⁵

This bronze eagle has become part of a landscape, it has merged with the ground and the sky in a way that its presence has become unquestionable. Yet, if at exactly the same spot stood a living eagle of exactly the same size and appearance, the effect would be quite different. Instead of beauty, mountaineers would sense danger and terror.³⁶ It has to be a work of art and not a living creature, for us to enjoy its presence.

The bronze eagle differs in many significant ways from a painted portrait or a written landscape, yet it reveals a presentness that is more or less perceptible in every work of art. If we look at Caravaggio's *Death of the Virgin*, or *The Death of Marat* by David, the presence of the image is overshadowed by narrative temporality³⁷ yet without this sense of presence the work of art would not exist. As Timothy J. Clark points out, this presentness was important for David: 'The job of a painter, in his [David's] opinion, was to conjure Marat back from the realm of the dead, and make his body and attributes present.'³⁸ When David envisioned Marat lying dead in the bathtub, then there, in the painting, Marat is still lying in the bathtub, still present, still freshly dead, the water still red with blood – whereas, in the real world, centuries have passed, the bathtub was emptied of blood long ago, the body buried, and the murderer punished. Even at the time that David painted Marat in the bathtub, the dead body was not lying in the bloody water: the body was undergoing decomposition, and David used his own imagination to create an image in the way he considered most proper. The painted Marat in the bathtub will always be exactly there, in the moment of death, his whole life gathered into this one final and crucial scene.³⁹ Yet, at the same time, the presentness of the painted Marat points to the absence of Marat and to the imagined nature of the whole scene.

Nancy is careful not to draw too much attention to the presentness of the image.⁴⁰ Remarkably, in 'L'Oscillation distincte' he chooses film as an example of the pres-

34 <http://www.tiersertal.com/Sehenswertes/Christomannos-Denkmal-am-Karerpass.html> (accessed 11 November 2012).

35 Willy Zügel was well known for his animal sculptures; he also created many national monuments. See E. Feilen, Willy Zügel, 1876–1950: Leben und Werk. Recklinghausen: Bongers, 1989.

36 We might ask, of course, whether ridiculous or remarkable, if instead of mountainscapes with live animals we are now climbing through mountains inhabited by bronze eagles.

37 Timothy J. Clark offers a lengthy exploration of this narrative in T. J. Clark, Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, pp. 15–53.

38 T. J. Clark, Farewell to an Idea, p. 48.

39 Even the destruction of the painting does not completely efface this presence: see V. Sarapik, Keel ja kunst. Tallinn: Underi ja Tuuglase Kirjanduskeskus, 1999, p. 254–262.

40 Our previous contemplation on the Christomannos monument, though inspired by Nancy, would for Nancy somewhat overstress the presentness of the work of art.

ence of the image. In a painting, a work of art is clearly present-ed to the viewer, it stands in one place, it does not move, and it does not physically change over time in an easily perceptible way. In film, the situation is different; one image – one frame – is mostly indistinguishable from another. The ‘making a presence’ is still perhaps too clear if we stare at the text-image, singled out from the endless flow of images in the film. Perhaps that is why Nancy did not provide any examples of film shots in the essay: the separate shot of an image-text is really not as singularly present in a film; it soon disappears into the continuous flow of images.

So, Nancy’s next move is to turn away from the presence:

But what is ‘giving presence’? Isn’t it giving what cannot be given: what is or is not? You are present or you are not. Nothing will give you presence except your arrival, which is no one or is yourself. Come on, now, show yourself!⁴¹

Marat is dead and buried, and no painting can keep him in the state of dying. Presence cannot be given by somebody or something else, and a painting cannot maintain the presence of something that vanished long ago. Notably, Nancy here personalises the image. He does not write about the experience of the spectator as a theoretical problem; he says: ‘You are present or you are not.’⁴² Nancy turns the question of the presence of an image into a question about me, myself. It is not just a question of art or representation, it is now my personal question, and I am present or I am not: ‘There is no image without my too being in its image...’⁴³ The monument of an eagle up in the mountains may be present, but it cannot give me more presence than for this single moment when we stare at each other. I cannot partake in its presence (actually I can, but not for long); in the end I need to leave the cliff. The two-dimensional image of the dead Marat or Mary in a crowded exhibition hall can share its presence even less. A literary or filmic image can perhaps share more of its presence, because it can step out of an exhibition hall and create a world of a suitable size, smell and colour around itself, since, paradoxically, a succession of images can form an imaginative presence – a certain atmosphere, a certain wholeness of expression – that a single image cannot sustain.

It is from this perspective that Nancy introduces the fragment that was the inspiration for this paper: ‘Yes, yes, giving presence means giving to someone who is not there something that one cannot give him.’⁴⁴ The image gives presence to something that remains absent. It gives presence to the subject of the image, yet this subject, the subject-matter, exists in the image only in an imagined form. Or, as Nancy wrote earlier: ‘The image is a thing that is not the thing: it distinguishes itself from it, essentially.’⁴⁵ While the image of Marat dying gives a presence to Marat’s death, at the same time the image reveals its powerlessness: it cannot decide the questions of Marat’s death. Marat cannot receive the impossible gift of eternal dying, since

41 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 66 (*Au fond des images*, p. 126).

42 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 66 (*Au fond des images*, p. 126).

43 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 7 (*Au fond des images*, p. 21).

44 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 66 (*Au fond des images*, p. 126).

45 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 2 (*Au fond des images*, p. 13).

he is dead and buried. Nancy draws a parallel between image and love through the impossible. Yet, how exactly can we understand the mysterious formula of love as giving something one does not have to someone who does not want it?

Lacan developed his formula 'love is giving what one does not have' in the 1960–1961 seminar on transference. Lacan wonders, in the beginning of the seminar, how it is that psychoanalysts have not really added anything to the debates about love. Lacan proceeds to read Plato's *Symposium*. When he analyses Diotima's speech (which Socrates retells, instead of presenting his own speech about love), Lacan's question is about the limits of knowledge: the intermediary between science and ignorance is *doxa*, something that is true, but 'the subject is incapable of accounting for it,' for the subject 'does not know why it is true'.⁴⁶ What characterises the *doxa* is 'to give the formula, the logos, without having it'. Lacan emphasises this formula because 'of the echo there is in this formula with what we give here in this place as being that of love which is precisely 'to give what one does not have''.⁴⁷

Lacan's interest here lies in the necessity of speaking without knowing, from a position of not knowing, which, as he stresses, is not ignorance, but a way to encounter what is there, as a tragic poet might speak in the style of a clown. In *Symposium*, Socrates chooses to talk through the words of Diotima in order to show that 'there is no discourse about love except from the point where he did not know'.⁴⁸ The myth told by Diotima explains the birth of Love from the union of the sleeping (and not knowing) Poros, the son of the omniscient Metis, and Aporia, absolute poverty, who has nothing at all. Here is the explanation given in Lacan's seminar (in the preceding week):

...when one formulates 'love is giving what one does not have', believe me, I am not the one who is telling you this in connection with ... one of my hobby horses, it is quite evident that this is what is in question here because the poor Penia, by definition, by structure has properly speaking nothing to give, except her constitutive lack, aporia. ... it is a question here of giving a discourse, a valid explanation, without having it. It is a question of the moment when, in her development, Diotima is going to be led to say what love belongs to. Well, love belongs to a zone, to a form of affair, a form of thing, a form of pragma, a form of praxis which is at the same level, of the same quality as *doxa*, namely the following which exists, namely that there are discourses, ways of behaving, opinions – this is the translation that we give to the term *doxa* – which are true without the subject being able to know it.⁴⁹

What strikes me here is that Lacan, speaking of love, does not really speak about love. Nancy starts to speak about love instead of an image. Lacan here seems

46 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan*. Livre VIII, p. 159 (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII, p. ix, 6).

47 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan*. Livre VIII, p. 159 (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII, p. ix, 6).

48 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan*. Livre VIII, p. 161 (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII, p. ix, 8).

49 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan*. Livre VIII, p. 150 (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII, pp. viii, 11–12).

to be more interested in the question of doxa, of giving a truth that one does not have. Or, from a different perspective, Lacan does not speak about love, but rather he, like Socrates, offers a myth instead of an explanation. Lacan explains himself through Plato: 'And throughout the whole Platonic work we see in the Phaedo, in the Timaeus, in the Republic, myths emerging, when they are required, to supply for the gap in what cannot be assured dialectically.'⁵⁰ A myth is a sequence of images. When Lacan speaks about love as giving what one does not have, he offers as an explanation a mythical image of a completely poor Penia seducing the sleeping Poros. We can later supplement Lacan's text with a sensible commentary, for example: 'the beloved can only offer what she or he doesn't have because what we love in her or him is always something that exceeds the beloved'⁵¹, yet Lacan himself does not add anything of the kind to his image of lacking lovers. (Later in the same seminar, we learn about agalma and we get to know that, in order to love, one must feel lack, incompleteness; one must feel that the other has something that one does not have – and this imaginary something invites and excites love.)

So, Lacan offers an image and a text, an image of Penia and Poros and the text 'love is giving what one does not have', attached to the image. He offers the image that Socrates offers, that Diotima tells as already told. The recycled image is revived through a new inscription ('love is giving what one does not have'). If, Nancy says, image desires text, then here we also perceive the opposite: a text, a rational explanation escapes behind an image.⁵²

Lacan does not know but offers an image instead (we, the readers, do not actually believe him. We suspect that he knows, but does not want to share his knowledge – not out of egoism, but that he actually considers this way, an image way, to be more truthful than a logical explanation).

Nancy does know. In the round-table discussion 'Love and Community', held at the European Graduate School in August 2001, Nancy offered some comments about love and Lacan:

Lacan's definition is that *love consists in giving what one does not have*. Of course this is a definition by impossibility, because how can you give what you don't have? [---] Love consists in my giving from me what is not mine in any sense of a possible possession of mine, not even my person. So *to love* means to give what is behind or beyond any subject, any self. It is precisely a giving of nothing, a giving of the fact that I cannot possess myself. [---] In other words, love is to share the impossibility of being a self.⁵³

50 J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre VIII*, p. 147 (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII*, p. viii, 9).

51 F. L. Restuccia, *Amorous Acts: Lacanian Ethics in Modernism, Film and Queer Theory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006, p. 5.

52 Lacan later brings the same topic up in a different context, in connection with the register of having: 'The thematic of having I have been announcing to you for a long time by formulae such as the following, love is giving what one does not have [---]. What he [a child] does not have, what he does not dispose of at this point of birth, of revelation of genital desire, is nothing other than his act. He has nothing but a draft on the future. He establishes the act in the field of project' (J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre VIII*, p. 263 (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VIII*, p. xv, 9)).

53 *Love and Community: A Round-Table Discussion with Jean-Luc Nancy, Avital Ronell and Wolfgang Schirmacher*, <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-luc-nancy/articles/love-and-community/> (accessed 27 October 2011).

And Nancy added at the end of his talk:

Everywhere in Lacan's system you have this haunting nothingness, which here gives perhaps a certain pessimistic or ironic sound to his definition of love, 'to give what you don't have', but perhaps this is not the only side of Lacan's thinking here. Although there is so much in Lacan about an originary lack and so on, I just want to insist that I would underline that the impossibility of love should not be interpreted as a lack, as an originary lack, because every lack is to be filled if possible. Love means precisely to fill the emptiness with emptiness, and thus to share it.⁵⁴

Nancy suggests that filling emptiness with emptiness is somehow more optimistic than giving what one does not have. Yet we receive from Nancy's talk two excellent formulae about love: 'love is to share the impossibility of being a self' and 'love means to fill the emptiness with emptiness, and thus to share it.'

If we now return to the image, we understand an image, through love, as a place of encounter, perhaps an impossible encounter. Nancy designates by art 'nothing other than the divided and shared out access to our common presence'. Art is a space, 'through which, at times, it is possible for us to visit one another, that is, to approach and to perceive one another'.⁵⁵ Both image and love are spaces of encounters that point to their uttermost impossibility – yet nevertheless succeed, supported by a mysterious force, an imaginary agalma.

And I will end with the words of Lacan: with love 'there is no greater gift possible, no greater sign of love, than the gift of what one doesn't have.'⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Love and Community.

⁵⁵ J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, p. 125. This essay 'Visitation: Of Christian Painting' ('Visitation (de la peinture chrétienne', 2000) is added to the English translation and is not included in the French *Au fond des images*.

⁵⁶ J. Lacan, *Le séminaire. Livre IV: La relation d'objet et les structures freudiennes*. Ed. J.-A. Miller. Paris: Seuil, 1994, p. 140.

Nancy ja Lacan armastuse ja kujutise vahekorras

EPP ANNUS

Artikkel analüüsib Jean-Luc Nancy kujutisefilosoofiat, tuginedes Jacques Lacani armastusekäsitlusele. Essees „Eristuv võnkumine” (*L'Oscillation distinct*) kõrvutab Nancy kujutist ja armastust ilmaoleku kaudu. Lähtudes kujutise ja armastuse võrdlusest osutab artikkel Nancy kujutisekäsitluse ja enesekäsitluse võrreldavusele. Nancy arusaamad kujutise jõust ja kujutise põhja kadumisest juhivad arutelu Lacani *agalma* mõisteni ja väiteni, et „armastus on selle andmine, mida andjal ei ole”: nii Lacani armastusekäsitluse kui ka Nancy kujutisekäsitluse keskmeks on ilmaolek.

Jean-Luc Nancy pöördus kunstiküsimuste poole oma oma hilisemates teostes, olles enne tuntust kogunud eelkõige poliitiliste huvidega filosoofina. Suur osa Nancy kunstikäsitlustest on koondatud kogumikesse „Muusad” (1994) ja „Kujutise põhi” (2003).¹

Nancy filosoofikarjääri avas Philippe Lacou-Labarthe'iga kahasse kirjutatud käsitlus Jacques Lacani psühhoanalüüsist „Kirja pealkiri: Lacani lugemine” (1973)², mis lähtus ühe Lacani seminari kriitilisest lähilugemisest. Järgnevates kirjutistes vältis Nancy otseseid viiteid Lacanile. Seetõttu Nancy filosoofiat Lacani psühhoanalüüsiga tavapäraselt ka ei seostata, ent käesolev kirjutis püüab avada Nancy kujutiseteooria ja Lacani armastusekäsitluse vahelisi paralleele.

Kirjutis lähtub ühest Nancy esseest „Eristuv võnkumine” (*L'Oscillation distinct*) tekstikatkest:

Jajah, kohalolu andmine tähendab sellele, keda siin pole, selle andmist, mida talle ei saa anda. See on ringi ruudustamine või armastuse ruudustamine. Armastuse, mis annab midagi, mida andjal ei ole, sellele, kes seda ei taha, nagu ütles psühhoanalüütik, see tähendab, kujutis-tekstide asjatundja. Kujutis annab kohalolu, mida tal ei ole – sest tal pole muud kohalolu kui ebareaalne kõhna, filmiliku pinna kohalolu –, ja ta annab selle kellelegi, kes, kuna teda ei ole, ei saa seda vastu võtta.³

1 J.-L. Nancy, *Les Muses*. Paris: Galilée, 1994 (J.-L. Nancy, *The Muses*. Trans. P. Kamuf. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); J.-L. Nancy, *Au fond des images*. Paris: Galilée, 2003 (J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*. Trans. J. Fort. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

2 P. Lacoue-Labarthe, J.-L. Nancy, *Le Titre de la lettre: une lecture de Lacan*. Paris: Galilée, 1973.

3 J.-L. Nancy, *Au fond des images*, lk 126.

Mis mõttes on psühhoanalüütik kujutis-tekstide asjatundja? Nancy viitab siin ilmselt Lacani peeglistadiumi käsitlesele, mille järgi laps loob kujutluse oma terviklikkusest peegli kaudu: laps tunneb enda peeglis ära ning loob oma peegelpildi abil arusaama endast kui Minast. Lacani järgi tekib Mina paradoksaalsel ja illusoorisel moel: laps identifitseerib ennast millegagi, mis on temast väljaspool: mitte iseendaga, vaid oma kujutisega. Kui kanname sama arutluskäigu üle Nancy kujutiseteooriale, siis saame väita, et igasugune kujutis on peegelkujutis: kujutis on nagu Lacani peegel minu ees, see on paik, kus ma näen iseenda peegeldust. Ja lisaks on igas kujutises peidus veel teinegi, sisemine peegelstruktuur: kujutis näeb iseenda sees iseenda peegeldust, nii et ta saab üheaegselt öelda nii „Olen lill” kui ka „Olen lille kujutis”. Kujutis on niisiis vähemalt kahekordne peegel.

Nancy järgi koondab kujutis endasse intiimset jõudu (*force intime*), mille kaudu kujutis meid, vaatajaid, puudutab. Nancy selgitab kujutise intiimset jõudu kui energiat või intensiivsust: kujutise intiimne jõud ei ole kujutises representeeritud, vaid see on kujutis ise. Kui kujutisel (portreel, maastikumaalil) ei õnnestu meid oma intiimse jõuga puudutada, siis pole see kujutis, vaid kirjeldav salvestus. Kujutise jõud sunnib meid osalusele.

Nancy kujutise jõudu võib mõista Lacani *agalma* mõiste abil. *Agalma* on Lacani järgi väärtuslik objekt, mis on peidetud armastatu sisse, see miski, mis tõmbab armastatu ligi ja mille järele armastaja oma armastatus igatseb. See on ihaobjekt, miski, mis armastajal endal on puudu ja mida ta armastatu kaudu igatseb endale võita. *Agalma* on haruldane, alati

eripärane ja määratlematu. *Agalma*'t võib kirjeldada kui nähtamatut, ettekujutatud objekti, aga ka kui jõudu, mis tõmbab inimolendit kellegi teise poole. Või millegi teise poole – ehk ka kunstiteose poole, mis meid puudutab. Sel viisil mõistetuna saab kujutisest paik, kus vaataja tajub iseenda mittetäielikkust.

Essee „Eristuv võnkumine” arutleb Nancy kujutise üle kahel omavahel vastanduval viisil. „Ennekõike loob kujutis kohalolu,” kirjutab Nancy.⁴ Seda seisukohta sobib illustreerima Theodor Christomannose monument (skulptor Willy Zügel, 1912, vt ill 1), peagu kolme meetri kõrgune pronksist kotkafiguur Lõuna-Tirooli mägedes, kõrgel kaljunukil. Hiiglaslik pronksist kotkas mõjub mäetipul, all avaneva sügava oru taustal eriliselt kohalolevana: kohalolu aitab luua kuju suurus (suured asjad tunduvad kindlamini kohalolevad kui väikesed asjad) ning asjaolu, et kuju näib olevat täpselt õiges kohas, on saanud osaks ümbritsevast maastikust.

Samalaadne kohalolu, enamasti küll vähem silmatorkaval määral, on omane igale kujutisele. Jacques-Louis Davidi kuulus maal „Marat' surm” (1793) koondab endas muuhulgas ka Prantsuse revolutsiooni loo (s.t kohaloluta, ajas lahtirulluva narratiivi), aga, nagu kunstiajalooline Timothy J. Clark kinnitab, püüdis David ise maali kaudu Marat'd otsekui surmast tagasi tuua.⁵ Maalil lamab Marat ikka veel vannis, ikka veel just äsja surnuna – mis siis, et tegelikult on Marat' surmast möödunud sajandeid ja et isegi maalimise ajal polnud Marat' kuju enam vannis lebamasa.

4 J.-L. Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, lk 66.

5 T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, lk 48.

Marat' kuju viitab ka just nimelt sellele ilmaolekule: Marat on surnud ja maal ei suuda teda tagasi ellu tuua. Kui kujutis loob kohalolu, siis loob ta seda, mida on võimatu luua. Nancy jaoks on just see võimatus kujutise jaoks keskne. Just sellest perspektiivist toob Nancy sisse viite Lacanile ja Lacani armastuskäsitlusele: kujutis loob mittekohalolevat kohalolu, armastus on selle andmine, mida andjal ei ole.⁶ Nii Lacani armastusekäsitluse kui Nancy kujutisekäsitluse keskmeks on ilmaolek.

Oma 2001. aasta ettekandes „Armastus ja kogukond” püüab Nancy omakorda Lacani formuleeringut lahti seletada. Nancy rõhutab, lacanilikust armastuse-arusaamast kõneldes, et selle keskmeks ei pruugi me mõista mitte puuduolekut, vaid jagamist. Armastus on iseduse võimatuse jagamine, kinnitab Nancy Lacani jälgedes.

Armastuse paradoksaalsus seisneb selles olemise ja mitteolemise vahepealsuses, kus armastatus igatsetakse seda, millest puuduolekut enese juures tajutakse. Samas pole see „miski” sõnastatav, see on *agalma*, kättesaamatu ja kujutuslik, miski, mille armastaja on teise inimesse kujutuslikult loonud. Sestap ei saa armastust ratsionaalselt ära seletada, sest armastusel pole ratsionaalset põhjust.

Nancy püüab Lacani lugeda n-ö optimistlikult, mitte puuduoleku ja olematuse kaudu, vaid võimaluse kaudu kujutusliku põhjaga olematust jagada. „Armastus tähendab tühjuse täitmist tühjusega, ja sealjuures selle

jagamist,” kinnitab Nancy.⁷ Võime ju irooniliselt küsida, kas tühjuse täitmine tühjusega on vähem pessimistlik, kui selle andmine, mida ei ole olemas? Siiski saame me Nancy mõttekäigust kaasa võtta jagamisetunde, mida saab omakorda jagada Nancy kujutiseteooriaga. Nancy ja Lacani abiga võime mõista kujutist kui kohtumispaika ja kunsti kui ruumi, kus on võimalik kokkusaamine. Nii kunst kui armastus on võimatud, kujutuslikud kohtumispaigad, mis sellegipoolest on ikkagi ka võimalikud – vahest tänu mõlema intiimsele jõle või *agalma*'le.

6 Vt J. Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre VIII, Le Transfert, 1960-1961*. Paris: Seuil, lk 150.

7 *Love and Community: A Round-Table Discussion with Jean-Luc Nancy, Avital Ronell and Wolfgang Schirmacher*, <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-luc-nancy/articles/love-and-community/> (vaadatud 20. III 2013).