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## **An Antihumanist Reinterpretation of the Philosophy of Singularity**

### **Abstract**

This article takes a close look at the discussion of singularity in Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* and *Being Singular Plural* as an attempt to negate the subject/object dichotomy and create a new context for a re-evaluation of resistance. With its aim of refuting individualistic subjectivity, the philosophy of singularity puts forward that the humanist point of view unnecessarily polarizes individuality and community. By placing a challenging scenario of antihumanism against the humanist sense of responsibility, the philosophy of singularity questions whether it is possible to do philosophy without saying 'I'. This antihumanist stance, which replaces the 'I'/other' differentiation with Nancy's 'the other of another,' chooses to strengthen the link between ontology and resistance in the notion of coexistence, beyond traditional hypotheses on immanence or transcendence. In order to discover the manifestation of coexistence within the frame of an antihumanist philosophy of singularity, this article begins with digging deep under the notion of individualistic subjectivity to show that it embodies a hollow and plastic category. Following this, Nancy's stress on the term 'ecstasy' will be grounded upon the Freudian theory of drives and the concept of coexistence will be situated in a dark realm that the humanist worldview would expect in the least. And finally, against the background of this theoretical structure, values such as modesty and responsibility will be highlighted as an attempt to uncover an alternative moral consciousness that weaves itself out of an indefinite possibility lurking under the skin of the individual/community enigma.

### **Keywords**

Singularity, Jean-Luc Nancy, Subjectivity, Negative Anthropology, Philosophy of Ethics.

‘Man’ is the ideology of dehumanization.

(*The Jargon of Authenticity*, 59)

The issue or notion of singularity has been overlooked by a majority of philosophical spheres; however, this ignorance toward singularity can roughly be attributed to the very strong possibility that it might already be serving as quite a fundamental aspect of the problem of subject/object dichotomy. G. W. F. Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* is probably the best example of the initial statement of this article in that it keeps hinting at singularity without really mentioning it by its full name. Following in his steps, Martin Heidegger might also be said to have built his own understanding of singularity thanks to the heavily topographical introduction of his famous Dasein. This already-thereness of singularity, especially when it comes to the concept of individualism and the harmonious or dissonant relationship it may have with human community, has also proven to be a significant concern for modern thinkers. Gilles Deleuze, for example, discussed singularities in three of his major works; *A Thousand Plateaus* (with Félix Guattari), *The Logic of Sense, Difference and Repetition* alongside with Alain Badiou, who made the concept of singularity central to his reinterpretation of ‘the event’ in his *Thinking the Event* and “Eight Theses on the Universal”. This article, however, is based on a rereading of Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Inoperative Community* and *Being Singular Plural*. The peculiar experience of reading these books acts not as a trip taken to the realm of classical philosophy, where we uncover what was previously hidden, but as perusing a favourite novel for the second or third time to give one more recognition to an idea or ideal that all readers are already well familiar with. Nancy’s excursions through the various tenets of singularity have an aspect that tries to avoid the sphere of knowledge as much as it can and for this reason, his work comes across as literature transfigured philosophically. His is an attempt to do philosophy by making use of the non-communicative aspect of the act of writing literature; an attempt at silence even. Much as it is quite a challenging task to speculate on a philosophy such as Nancy’s, which instantly forces its author to follow a circular movement instead of coming at a coherent, well-designed argument, this article aims to take a critical look at three central problematic areas that Nancy discusses under the general title of singularity. Through additional readings of Maurice Blanchot’s *The Unavowable Community*, Giorgio Agamben’s *The Coming Community* and another short text by Nancy, “Freud—so to Speak”, the issue of subjectivity will be posed as a value that leads to deformed models of society; the notion of ecstasy or ek-stasis will be reviewed according to its close relationship with the Freudian Trieb; and finally, Nancy’s concept of sharing will be portrayed as a new way of dealing with ontology. With this structure in mind, this article distances itself from Deleuze’s and Badiou’s readings of singularity. In Deleuze’s above-mentioned works, we can only seldom remark a parallel drawn between singularities and resistance while this paper engages itself primarily with an ethical praxis that takes resistance as its driving force. Badiou’s analysis, on the other hand, despite being very similar to that of Nancy’s on many instances, is still difficult to integrate into the context of antihumanism from which this article derives its radical texture. The overall impact of this article hopes to achieve the negation of the humanitarian impression that Nancy’s work on singularity seems to convey at first sight, as a contribution to the discipline of negative anthropology. The

givenness of singularity, as discussed by Nancy, is more to do with what is nonhuman in human than with an authoritarian rereading of the human condition which supposedly acts as an invisible link that ties us all together. Instead of providing its reader with another mythology of human community, Nancy's singularity underlines the death of the human ego and calls for a new understanding of sharing that resists conventional ethics.

## CRITICIZING INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES: BEING 'OTHER'

The starting point of a great number of philosophical adventures is the question of individuality. As a very human term, individuality is sometimes appropriated for other animate beings, most often animals, as an attempt to give them a special, autonomous value beyond their lives merely as species. To be an individual, in the traditional sense, is to be able to extract oneself from the group; to be able to stand out as a unique character and in its most tragic cases, to transform oneself into the figure of a powerful leader or a hero. Before the age of leaders and heroes, man was faced with a reality called nature and somehow, probably thanks to his abilities that differentiate him from the rest of the living world, managed to tackle numerous hardships brought forward by the pure forces of nature. During the course of history, human's status against nature only strengthened, as a reaction to which certain movements such as Romanticism endeavoured to erase this status and create a harmony between the humanitarian and the natural.<sup>1</sup> Beyond, yet still closely related to man's struggle with nature, is the question of community, which has preserved its enigmatic character since the humankind learned how to write critiques of itself. The treatment of individuality as a given, though most modern thinkers believe it is actually a value falsely crafted by different processes of immanence, has necessarily required from humanity to consider the question of community; the state of being together under these or those national, cultural and historical sets of values. However, the kind of community in which all members are treated as equals—in mainly socio-economic terms—has not yet been exemplified on a mass scale. Putting all varieties of affirmative values such as nationality and culture out of the picture, Blanchot and Nancy were especially concerned with the failure of the socialist project in *The Unavowable Community* and *The Inoperative Community*. Both Blanchot and Nancy attempted to understand the factors which led to the fall of the socialist ideal through the limits and possibility of community. At the heart of these philosophical attempts is, of course, the issue of subjectivity.

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<sup>1</sup> For both classical and radical examples of this, see: Friedrich Schlegel, 'Athenäum Fragments' in *Philosophical Fragments* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'absolu littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1967). Maurice Blanchot, *L'espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980). Georg Lukács, 'On the Romantic Philosophy of Life' in *Soul and Form* (London: Merlin Press, 1974).

The notion of subjectivity is in close affinity with the human condition because the human being, as a unique force in itself, has felt the need to prove itself against the external object, which can be signified by nature, social structures, governments, institutions, etc. Even though subjectivity has served as a useful tool to fight against state-based oppression, various sociological and cultural ideologies, so, roughly anything that we might call a “system”, it has also been the closest ally of communitarian and even fascistic trends. The intimate relationship between subjectivity and oppressive models of society has come to be criticized and deconstructed by a majority of continental philosophers, who questioned, maybe for the first time, the human condition. For the critics who began questioning the validity of the humanist argument following World War II, negative anthropology resists the “theological shadows lurk[ing] in the history of modern thought, in concepts and ontological arrangements that ground notions of man, and even in political movements that flaunted their secular credentials” (Geroulanos 2010: 6). The theological background of the humanist argument, dating back to the teachings of the Bible, has come to act as a transparent layer over all areas of life and placed its mark on all historical eras beginning from the European Enlightenment. The exertion of the word ‘human’ in positive sciences and studies of history alike transformed itself into an intolerance toward whatever is not human; an impulse to categorize among different forms of human; a giant disrespect for nature and in consequence, two atrocities that changed the course of history: the world wars. The impact that these wars made to most European philosophers created a flux of disbelief in the notion of humanity, which found its strongest representation in what we call negative anthropology today.<sup>2</sup> In Stefanos Geroulanos’s words, “what modernity has done, accordingly, is dehumanize our existence in and interpretation of the world, by defining it through a scientific radicalism that represses and indeed obliterates its own religious, tragic, metaphysical, radically heterogeneous dimensions and instead becomes itself a metaphysics” (2010: 86-7). Negative anthropology, or antihumanism, acts against the metaphysics of humanism and aims to look at all areas of life from something that is not human. The very first sacrifice made to this end is, of course, the reverence for the notion of individualistic subjectivity.

Having merged the failure of the socialist project and the dead end of humanist individuality, Blanchot and Nancy tend toward the idea that the insistence on a subjective viewpoint is at the core of both problems. Following the trails of Georges Bataille, Blanchot states that the individual’s need for community is based on the

<sup>2</sup> For examples of post-war antihumanism, see:

Thierry Maulnier, *La Crise est dans l’homme* (Paris: Redier [La Revue Française], 1932).

Alexis Carrel, *Man the Unknown* (London/New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935).

André Malraux, *The Temptation of the West*, trans. R. Hollander (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

André Malraux, *Man’s Fate [La Condition humaine]*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Vintage, 1990).

Emmanuel Levinas, “De l’évasion,” *Recherches philosophiques V* (1935–36): 373–92.

Jean Hyppolite, “Humanisme et hégélianisme,” in *Umanesimo e scienza politica*, ed. Enrico Castellani (Milan: C. Marzorati, 1951).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

principle of insufficiency; or in his own terms, the excess of a lack. This lack exists in every single human, which calls itself an individual, and the urgency to build a community comes exactly from the excess of this lack. In this way, communities are formed in an illusion that if these separate human entities live together, the excess of their lack can be reconciled with affirmative values, such as culture, history and language. Thus the humankind has formed its various ideologies, cultures and national ideals, each revolving around a metaphysics of humanity and each as a means of proving that the lack does not exist; that instead, man exists as an autonomous individual in the system that he built together with the other members of his community. Especially the recent thinkers of negative anthropology, who are not afraid of using the term antihumanism literally, take the lead from their structuralist and post-structuralist ancestors and suggest a viewpoint that openly resists the theology of humanism so that we can imagine a community not based on left-wing ideologies or the claim of 'equality for all,' but on the notions of the nonsubjective and the nonhuman in human.<sup>3</sup>

The speculation above almost instantly brings to mind the question of the other. This question emerges exactly out of the problematic of subjectivity because simply, if this is an *I*, you have to be an *other*: whatever makes me a subject directly makes you an object within the context of epistemology. What Nancy achieves with his work on singularity is a negation of both these statuses of *the I* and *the other*. By claiming that "identity [...] is always the other of another identity" (2000: 149), Nancy destroys every single position that might be taken as a unique individual. In Nancy's philosophy, there is nothing magical about the human condition and no one has privilege over another because every sentient being has its own singular position. The dialectic of otherness, then, turns into an immensely egalitarian way of looking at one another, which advocates the idea that *I* am (is) an *other* and the *other* is (am) *I*. This formula, if we may call it so, also underlines the idea that there is no "higher Ego or We" (1991: 15) in the community Nancy and Blanchot write about. The human condition, which requires subjectivity as a means of fighting against the external agents and utilizes immanence to create those subjectivities, has also given rise to various models of society that do nothing but hamper freedom. These different models of society are in fact embodied by the ultimate *I*; all the separate egos merged in one, be it a nation, God or a powerful leader and the obliteration of free thought/action is caused by this ultimate *I*. The philosophy of singularity goes hand in hand with negative anthropology because it refuses the politics of subjectivity altogether and deprives the ego of the autonomy it thinks it has by defining every *I* as an *other*. The otherness of each person to himself also takes the issue of recognition out of the picture and replaces it with contestation. In Blanchot's and Nancy's community, there is no room whatsoever for one person recognizing himself in the other, because the other is only an instance and space of lack like oneself and where there can be no recognition, there can only be contestation.

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<sup>3</sup> For recent examples of antihumanism, see:  
 Thomas Ligotti, *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race* (New York: Hippocampus, 2010).  
 John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Penguin, 2008).  
 John Gray, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (London: Granta, 2003).  
 Tony Davies, *Humanism* (London: Routledge, 1997).

Contestation should not be read as conflict caused by differences between two points of view; the contestation that Blanchot and Nancy stress does not refer to an environment of competition. For them, every *I* contests an *other* as a break or as an interruption of the very process of subjectivity. Every *other* that the *I* comes across does not interrupt the process of subjectivity because it is different than the *I* but because it is exactly the same as the *I*. Every *other*, in a way, reminds the *I* of the fact that immanence works similarly for these two supposedly different standpoints and states that both the positions are singular thanks to the plurality of the singulars. In Hegel's philosophical system, to recount a well-known example, every birth is "an event" (Nancy 2000: 172) because it disturbs the overall process of life of all the existent subjectivities. But *the happening* of this event is exactly what deprives subjectivity of its separate position from the system, for it is not formed or produced; it happens, just like every *other* happens to the *I*. This *happening* is employed as a very useful tool in both Blanchot's and Nancy's discussions of community because it stands at the very opposite to the notion of work or production. In the philosophy of singularity, nothing is produced; there are only singulars happening to each other and events happening to certain multiplicities of these singulars. Even though Hegel serves as a great influence for Nancy's thought, the concept of *happening* or *the event* removes any textbook understanding of both immanence and transcendence from the general frame of singularity.

Immanence refers to a process, a personal or even isolated process which makes one different than the other but which, in the final picture, creates human masses based on the subjectivity that it advocates and this situation must rightfully present the human condition as the oldest paradox on earth. Similarly, transcendence is another form of work or production, which aims not at creating something anew but reaching a point that is already perfectly complete. This striving toward completion stands at the opposite end from the discussion of singularity and this new way of looking at community, which comes along with it. As every act of production stems from some kind of subjectivity, for I have to be autonomous in order to create something, and as every act of production in the realm of community has failed, there is the urgent need to think community anew and without the human in the picture, by removing everything that is human from the picture. Usually, "community [...] is seen as something full—a substance, a promise, a value—that does not let itself be emptied out by the vortex of nothingness" (Esposito 2009: 25), so communities are believed to remain intact even though individuals on their own are expected to break down more easily. However, Nancy's singular angle on the issue is contrary to what is generally assumed because his community designates a unity of otherness. Accordingly, Roberto Esposito reads Nancy quite aptly with his remark that "if community is always the community of others and never of oneself, this means that its presence is structurally inhabited by an absence—of subjectivity, identity, and property. It means that it is not a 'thing'—or, it is a thing defined precisely by its 'not'" (2009: 27). In this way, negative anthropology gives way to the negation of community as we have come to know it so far. From this negative view, community does not point toward something complete in itself; something that is made up of the affirmative coming together of individuals, so community does not signify something that transcends the subjectivity of man alone in its form of ultimate

subjectivity. Thanks to this dialectic of individual/community, transcendence itself is revealed to be only another project of human intention, instead of pointing us toward something divine.

## DEATH AND EK-STASIS

Against the *humanity* that is hidden under the skin of transcendence and all portrayals of affirmative subjectivity, Nancy seconds Bataille in making a single exception for death while criticizing notions of transcendence and in claiming that sovereignty is nothing. It must first of all be remembered that “Hegel’s, Nietzsche’s, Heidegger’s” systems of thought all “attempt(s) at making death possible” (Critchley 1997: 68), so death is already a unique agent in the history of philosophy but all the same, Bataille is still the core name in Nancy’s interpretation of death. The remark, “blindfolded, we refuse to see that only death guarantees the fresh upsurging without which life would be blind” (Bataille 2001: 59) summarizes the importance of death for Nancy’s reading of singularity better than any other philosopher because it sees death not as a source of negativity, downright nothingness or a justification for sacrificing one’s life for it. Instead, this remark recognizes the possibility of imagining alternatives for individuality, community and transcendence in death. For Nancy, death is the only moment of transcendence in the philosophy of singularity and there is sovereignty only in “the sovereign exposure to an excess (to a transcendence) that does not present itself and does not let itself be appropriated (or simulated), that does not even *give* itself—but rather to which being is abandoned” (1991: 18). However, the moment of death is not the religious death at all, which, by making death merely a threshold that leads to ‘the other side’, actually deprives death of all its importance for the discussion of singularity. Death is sovereign not in that it is a passing over to another kind of space, but in that it marks the sole event that cannot in any way be internalized by the *I* or shared with others. This is the sovereignty of death and death is the only sovereignty known and because sovereignty is death, sovereignty is, at the same time, nothing. Sovereignty is the ultimate or the only nothing that the *I*, every single *I*, is exposed to unconditionally. Death is what makes us all singulars, as parts of an overall singularity, because it is the only common that cannot be shared.

In light of the above speculation, Agamben’s statement, “humans are separated by what unites them” (2007: 89) not only refers to language, but also to the reality of death, at the moment of which the *I* and the *other* are ontologically united but as singulars, separated. Against immanence and wrapped up in its transcendence as the finitude of each singular, death is *imminent*. My death is the only thing that belongs to me, but that which is also not mine because like all *other* singulars, *I* am (is) nothing but a lack. Death is the always-possible otherness, ready to happen any minute of any day. It is my vulnerability, my infinitely and passionately open vulnerability, to the final/finite negation (of *my own* personal capital). It is also the indefinite connection that ties me to the *other* and helps me, through thinking death (before it finally comes about) understand in an infinite moment that the *other* has actually never existed. Death is the absence of a life that has already never been present and when it is already impossible to say *my* or *mine*, except with the intention of underlining their complete futility, the age-

old issue of subjectivity goes down the drain along with the millions of different systems that humanity has so far built. There is nothing to produce, according to the first chapter of *The Inoperative Community*, and the only condition that persists within the context of plural singulars is that of negative anthropology because both the individual and community have to be not reconstructed but rethought first.

It goes without saying at this point that Nancy's original motivation to focus on death and emphasize its importance for the introduction of an ethics of singularity was Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. According to Simon Critchley, Nancy's fundamental sentiment when he started to work on singularity was that "*Being and Time* must be rewritten without the *autarkic telos* and tragic-heroic *pathos* of the thematic of authenticity" (1999: 54). However, this task proves more than problematic merely given the fact that thinking death and adjusting the life of Being according to it comprise the only path that can lead to authenticity according to Heidegger's major work dating back to 1927. So it would not be irrational at all to claim that it is practically impossible to separate the discussion of death from that of authenticity within a predominantly Heideggerian context. All the same, a link can still be established between Nancy's critique of our textbook understanding of community and Heidegger's mistrust in the 'public'. According to Heidegger, being aware of the reality of death as an end not only reshapes the singular's approach toward its Being as 'care' but it also separates the singular from the 'publicness' of 'the they', which clumsily evades the significance of this sovereign event. It is argued in *Being and Time* that "publicness proximally controls every way in which the world and Dasein get interpreted, and it is always right [...] because it is insensitive to every difference of level and of genuineness and thus never gets to the 'heart of the matter' ('auf die Sachen')" (1962: 165). What can accomplish this Hegelian ideal is of course Dasein, which, in the accompaniment of death, is "in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being" (1962: 294).

What fascinates Nancy in Heidegger's thought is, in fact, the assertion that death is recognizable to the singular only thanks to another singular's death. "*The 'they' does not permit us the courage for anxiety in the face of death*" (1962: 298), according to Heidegger and against the endeavor of 'the they' to hide away all the details surrounding someone's demise, Heidegger's revolutionizing idea inspires Nancy to imagine new coexistences. In this way, the socially-binding aspects of the reality of death leave their place to freedom, a relentlessly creative freedom that connects the being of the singular to its utmost possibility for authenticity. Nonetheless, this "*freedom towards death*", in Heideggerian terminology, is not only "*a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the 'they'*" but which is also "*factual, certain of itself, and anxious*" (1962: 311). On this note, it is indeed worth drawing a conclusion from the above discussion in this article that the singularity which Nancy suggests is far from being factual, self-conscious and anxious. *Being and Time* insists that "anxiety individualizes Dasein and thus discloses it as '*solus ipse*'" (1962: 233), which so far seems irrelevant to Nancy's reading of singularity, whose essential modus operandi is to deconstruct individualities. Moreover, by means of this deconstruction, Nancy imagines singulars on a plane where each one does not look anxiously upon its own end through the end of another; but where each singular catches (or becomes caught up in) events of coexistence with other singulars to resist the dominant discourse of community.



Heidegger's discussion of death, on the other hand, puts less stress on coexisting with others within the world, than the state of 'das Nicht-zuhause-sein', which causes the discussion to keep coming back to the individualization of Dasein through uncanniness and the anxiety caused by it.

Against the background of Heidegger's anxiety, what is utilized in Bataille's, Nancy's and Blanchot's texts, as an attempt to locate the possibility of community, is ecstasy. Ecstasy is generally associated with being overwhelmingly happy and it also carries the connotation of having exceeded one's own limits. The violation of these limits is even better signified with the term *ek-stasis*, which stands for the situation of having left behind whatever state the agent in question was previously in. Moreover, the term can be said to point at a state of being state-less. Nancy supports the idea that subjectivity prevents the *happening* of a community to a group of singulars and he employs *ek-stasis* to use it as an antidote for subjectivity. However, for the reason that both in Nancy's and Blanchot's discussions of community the element of work or production is completely out of the picture, *ek-stasis*, similarly, cannot be used as a strategy. Blanchot goes so far as to claiming that "nobody can know what it [ecstasy/*ek-stasis*] is about" (1988: 19) and refuses to do an in-depth reading of a very significant *instance of community*, the May 68' events, through the lens of *ek-stasis*. Just like a great number of other issues that remain untouched or merely implied in Blanchot's philosophical works, how *ek-stasis* might be related to the *happening of community* rests in silence. Agamben, on the other hand, forms a strong relation between the antihumanist view and *ek-stasis* with his remark, "the threshold is not [...] another thing with respect to the limit; it is, so to speak, the experience of the limit itself, the experience of being-within an outside. This *ek-stasis* is the gift that singularity gathers from the empty hands of humanity" (2007: 75). While "the empty hands of humanity" designate the fact that the project of forming an egalitarian community has repetitively failed—and dominantly due to humanity's ancient obsession with subjectivity—*ek-stasis* appears to be a blessing that might introduce a new meaning to coexistence. However, the problem with this 'gift' is that it cannot be located, found or used with the intention of anything external; the special value and meaning of this 'gift' lie beneath the very fact that it is given, that it merely *happens to us*.

## CLINAMEN AND THE THEORY OF DRIVES

Against the background of Blanchot's and Agamben's interpretations of *ek-stasis*, the most revealing explanation of the term has been made by Nancy. Leaving the overall significance of *ek-stasis* in Nancy's philosophy for the final part of this discussion, the relationship between the term *clinamen* and *ek-stasis* should first be pointed out because *clinamen* is the very element that makes *ek-stasis* possible. *Clinamen* functions as an extension of the singular, which does not necessarily include anything related to the singular's social or cultural condition as a being. If we assume that there is a possible threshold between any two singulars, like Agamben, we should say that *ek-stasis* takes place exactly on this plane and through the *clinamen* attached to the singulars. When the two *clinamens*, which are *the more* of both these singulars, touch and cling onto each other, *ek-stasis* takes place. Thus, we can see that, for Nancy,

and later, for Agamben, ek-stasis is not simply moving beyond one's limits but it is actually the touching of two clinamens, those two neutral extensions that each singular carries along with itself. Nancy's reading of the clinamen also explains his very intimate affinity with the Freudian id and superego. Both acting as shared spheres of humanity, yet both completely removed from the autonomy of the ego, Nancy's antihumanist tendency finds its most fitting example in his indebtedness to Sigmund Freud.

One significant thing that should be noted, though, is the difference between the shared spheres of the id and the superego and C. G. Jung's collective unconscious. This gap between Freud's and Jung's thinking stems from the fact that the Freudian terms do not act as parts of a humanitarian mythology. The two thinkers' immense difference from each other comes from the fact that Freud was always removed from a positive, constructive idea of humanism while Jung wanted to believe in the existence of a shared memory for a very specific, supposedly superior species such as the human being. So, the collective unconscious serves as a very static index of the history of humanity while Freud's terminology already takes the fragmentation of humanity for granted and attempts to locate the motions as a part of which the agent expresses or realizes himself. This is why the id and the superego remained to be two incomplete terms in Freud's studies, which were defined in different ways in his different texts. Nancy employs this ambiguity in making sense of ek-stasis and clinamen and writes that the id and the superego are the "being-with"; "the co-constitution of the "ego" (2000: 44-45). Thus, Nancy follows Freud's steps in making the movement against humanism, which turned into "a metaphysics that obliterates man under the pretext of promoting him" (2010: 86-7), and it should be underlined once again that Nancy's attempt to bring together negative anthropology and singularity does not promote hopelessness or despair; on the very contrary, it stands for a possibility of rethinking the notion of togetherness.

Nancy tries to explicate, in "Freud—so to Speak", the significant position *Trieb* holds for his ontological rereading of community. Translated into English as *drive*, *Trieb* holds the central point in Nancy's text due to the fact that it is more than "instinct" yet less than "intention" (2008: 146). Sympathizing with Freud's lifelong endeavour to explore the human condition and his inability to find the right context in which to discuss it, Nancy's text implies that Freud's most important contribution is the stress he placed on the theory of drives. The term, in Nancy's interpretation of Freud's studies on the subconscious, designates the addition to a singular, which acts as an "elsewhere" where the singular "rise[s] and become[s] what [it] can be" (2008: 146-147). This transformation cannot be exemplified by the after-life of religious thought or the immanence of "inverted theologies" such as atheism (2008: 147). To the very contrary, for Nancy, "this 'elsewhere' is within us," it is "being" (*ibid.*); it is *Trieb* in constant motion until the moment of definitive motionlessness, death. So, Nancy's clinamen, which makes ek-stasis possible, comes from the Freudian *Trieb*: the drive(s) that sets the singular in motion against the imminence of death. This is why Nancy's references to the id and the superego do not simply underlie the collective unconscious, which is motionless and which in fact acts as an agent of subjectivity in the end, but they, on the very contrary, try to locate what is beyond the basic conception of the human being as an attempt to re-think community. Since the ideal of community has so far not been realized due to its subjective undercurrents, Nancy's restructuring of the id

and the superego implies that community is possible only given that the human's ego is broken through.

It must then be no wonder that death and love are pointed out by Nancy and Blanchot as the two phenomena that make community possible. *Eros* and *Thanatos* in Freudian terminology, these two phenomena act as two unique elements in the philosophy of singularity, which surpass the human condition. Generally interpreted in Freud's studies as two opposing forces (even though we cannot definitely say that Freud never indicated the generic unity of the two terms), *Eros* and *Thanatos* are not only terms or basic drives but also two fundamental spheres that are associated with the human, yet removed from it by definition. *Eros* and *Thanatos* are there to explain the motives behind various human actions; however, they are never completely human and they always indicate the interaction between at least two human beings. The sharing of love and death are the two sharings that are basically impossible but they also serve as the unified drive behind the course of life. With the advent of immanence and the rise of the ego—causing the emergence of *the Ego*—the human condition was forced on humans by humans themselves, forming a paradox. Nonetheless, a re-visit to Freud's *Eros* and *Thanatos* teaches us that “the theory of drives is our mythology” (2008: 149) and this forgotten mythology comes back in the forms of love and death as two elements that make community possible. Having another look at love and death makes it clear why community is never created or formed; the singulars are only *driven* toward community by the forces of love and death. And accordingly, follows the statement that community cannot be produced; it is always already there and it is always already impossible under humanist terms.

It should then be said that the plane on which ek-static singulars meet must be beyond the personal capital, beyond subjectivities and even beyond the socialist ideal: it must be and *can already only be* beyond human. According to Nancy's reading, *Trieb* is a term utilized by Freud to talk about an effort or a forced meaning, which happened before and which will also happen after signification (*ibid.*). If we go back to Blanchot's comments on the May 68' events based on the above reading, it is not a surprise that he described the events as uncanny in their innocence (1988: 30) because their innocence can be placed right between instinct and intention; before and after the humanness of signification; in the realm of *Trieb*; and unconditionally beyond human. “What is man?,” asks Geroulanos and answers his own question by saying that “we can only know what he is not” (2010: 18). Nancy's reading of community is also based on this ‘not’; instead of coming up with a formula for an egalitarian, ideal togetherness, he reveals a form of community whose essence does not have any space for any grounding material. Geroulanos continues his inquiry on the nature of man accordingly, by stating that “whatever its specific rights and wrongs, every humanism is fundamentally bound to the community's self-regulation; it is thus arbitrary, auto-productive, and all but tautological” (2010: 21). Removing ourselves from this tautology, these forced, plastic versions of togetherness might only be possible through a thinking that negates anthropology. This is why Nancy openly states that we must go beyond all possible horizons and it is also why the two principal components of *Trieb* in general, *Eros* and *Thanatos*, act as antihuman agents making community possible; they are *the more* of every horizon set by humanity against humanity.

## TOWARD A NEW ETHICS: THE SHARING OF THE WORLD

In *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy asserts that, “community or the being-ecstatic of Being itself” (1991: 6) is the question that we are ultimately faced with; however, he answers his own question by pointing out that community *is* the being-ecstatic of Being itself and using it as the fundamental premise of his much later work, *Being Singular Plural*. What this premise means is that there can be no community unless Being itself has moved beyond itself; gone right upon its own threshold. On a deeper level, it means that Being itself loses its status as a given and all the singulars come together within a sphere of *giving* when community happens to us. This giving underlies a very important term in Nancy’s philosophy of singularity: responsibility. While the process of immanence and the achievement of transcendence tend to regard the individual, society, the absolute, etc. as a set of givens, singularity leaves no room for any givens whatsoever. With no givens and nothing to produce, singularity rises out of *the with*, which is not a fact, but something that is in a constant motion of appearing and disappearing between (at least) two singulars until the moment of death. Nancy’s discussion of *the human excess*, as a reply to Blanchot’s *excess of a lack*, means nothing other than *the more* of every singular, the clinamen, Trieb. Nancy’s usage of the phrase, *human excess*, does not come from the idea that the excess is made up of what is human, but from the intimation that there is something that exceeds every human—every singular—and creates an abundance of the excess. This excess marks Nancy’s unique way of rereading ontology. In his own words, “Being, then, is finite, in the sense that there is no ‘infinite speed,’ but its finitude has no measure; it is its own total measure of Being. In this sense, it is infinite, but an infinitude that consists in being its own excessive measure. The result is not Being as a substance, but Being as responsibility” (2000: 182-183). Being is finite because there exists the reality of death but death as finitude has no measure whatsoever because it is the common among humans, which cannot be shared, and that is why there is an excess of death, making finitude infinite. So all the singulars have a responsibility toward another singular under the imminence of death, which both marks their finitude and due to its excess, makes the plurality of those singulars, Being, infinite.

The above finitude/infinity dialectic brings out the question of the divine in Nancy’s philosophy of singularity. He surely intends to set a new meaning for the divine by utilizing such a discourse and this discourse is seconded by Agamben as we can see that both writers set the matter of *ethos* or ethics as a cue to follow up on. Nancy writes that terms such as “community, death, love, freedom, singularity” are “names for the ‘divine’” not because they “substitute for it” or because they “sublate it” but because they do not include any references to “anthropomorphism” or “anthropocentrism” (1991: 11). So, Nancy’s divine is the complete opposite of the human-centred worldview of dominant religious ideologies and also the notions of subjectivity brought forward by atheism. Nancy’s divine is a direct reference to the issue of community because it is only through *the with* that we can talk about ontology and *give* meaning to existence. In this schema, the world is transformed from being the representation of humanity, to being “the exposure” of it (2000: 18) and “there is no presence that is not (in its being, not as an attribute) *exposed* to sharing” (1992: 385). All notions of

production and subjectivity also disappear into thin air and the vulnerability of humanity is fully revealed in Nancy's discourse on singularity.

Agamben supports a similar view by stating that "if humans were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would be possible" (2007: 50). So the ethos of togetherness can only be practised based on a lack; a "not"; an abundance of what negates humanity within humanity. What we find in this new ethical experience, according to Agamben and Nancy, is the recognition of *the with*; the recognition that *Being is and has always been Being-with*. As the position of a singular designates being equally alike and equally different to all other singulars, forming one plural singularity, we are no longer discussing the issue of how to bring a group of singulars together; we are now talking about the always-possible ek-stasis that is in constant motion of appearing and disappearing right in-between these singulars. Termed as the *whatever* in Agamben's *Coming Community*, the notion of the singular manifests a brand new ontology, which focuses on a fundamental indifference posited against all kinds of social or cultural attributes the singulars or the *whatevers* come to have. Within this context, the only angle we can have is that of relationality; Being as, and only as, the relation between and amongst singulars. Nancy thinks that this relation, this *with*, "does not go anywhere; it does not constitute a process, but it is the closeness, the brushing up against or the coming across, the almost there of distanced proximity" (2000: 98). So, there is no discourse of unity but an always-possible, imminent closing-up and distancing-from of the singulars, which *happens* to the singulars.

It is beyond any doubt that the idea of sharing the world is deeply related to the origins of Dasein which, Heidegger feels the need to say is the world, "if one should want to identify the world in general with entities within-the-world" (1962: 154). In the early chapters of *Being and Time*, the 'I' is not only designated as "a certain privileged point—that of an I-Thing", but more as a "Being-in in terms of the 'yonder' of the world that is ready-to-hand—the 'yonder' which is the dwelling-place of Dasein as *concern*" (1962: 155). It is possible so far to understand why Nancy constructed his philosophy of singularity on Heideggerian ontology; however, all the radical aspects of this new ontological-ethical approach are exposed to significant damage when the statement that "if Dasein is there no longer, then the world too is something that has-been-there" (1962: 445) is taken into consideration. Heidegger's Dasein is construed in such a way that it belongs only within the context of human mind. This sentiment is taken on in its entirety in his much later "Letter on Humanism" where he openly asserts that "only the human being is admitted to the destiny of ek-sistence" (1998: 247). Here, Dasein, which is individualized by anxiety, is completely separated from other entities which are categorized under the same name along with 'world-historical' and 'world-conscience'. So, in Heideggerian singularity—if we can call it that at all—the Being-with of Dasein is a lot higher in importance than other, non-human singulars, which all the same are parts of this Being-with. On the very contrary to both Nancy's rereading of singularity and the antihumanist ethics which this rereading relies on, Heidegger's Dasein remains solitary on the exalted plane of "*authenticity and totality*" (1962: 276) upon acquiring "the essential poverty of the shepherd" (1998: 260). As Geroulanos also writes, "Heidegger's is a humanism without man, a humanism that negates man to get to him—and in this sense, at once a protohumanism and a hyperhumanism" (2010: 249).

In antihumanist singularity, however, there is not much room for a shepherd absolutized within itself and thus separated from his flock; Nancy's singularity asserts the kind of sharing which consists both of the human and of the non-human.

Giving no more room to producing or forming something, the philosophy of singularity negates both systematization and subjectivity and opens up a new dimension: a new ethical realm that is based on the principle of responsibility toward the *other*. So, Levinas's critique of the "bourgeois drive toward self-sufficiency, which involves the construction of an I that forgets and oppresses all that is 'not-I'" (2010: 176-177) is fulfilled by the ethical aspect of the philosophy of singularity. Only in this way humanity is transformed into a merely biological name or a category which is no longer signified but exposed through *the with* between any two singulars. But either Levinas's or Nancy's/Agamben's "opposition does not mean that such thinking allies itself against the humane and advocates the inhuman, that it promotes the inhumane and deprecates the dignity of the human being" (2010: 235). On the very contrary, thinking against humanity is utilized by these philosophers as a method of rethinking, reimagining better communities not only for humanity but also for all other things that share the world with it. Nancy makes it clear that "the sharing of the world is the law of the world. [...] Cosmos, nomos" (2000: 185) and our responsibility refers exactly to this sharing which is "always incomplete [...] For a complete sharing implies the disappearance of what is shared" (1991: 35).

With the above remarks, Nancy also gives a strong reply to Blanchot's imagining of a community, in which "the 'I' and the 'other' do not live in the same time, are never together (synchronously), can therefore not be contemporary, but separated (even when united) by a 'not yet' which goes hand in hand with an 'already no longer'" (1988: 42). It is true that the *I* and the *other* are both separated and united during the courses of love and death—two essential terms in this discussion of community—however, this is not a hopeless, indefinite separation; it is, on the contrary, a separation whose opposite is not unity. The image of community that Nancy, and Agamben though indirectly, reveal is as open-ended as the question of ethics, so Critchley's remark that "*fundamental ontology is ethical and ethics is fundamentally ontological*" (1999: 245) is perfectly to the point. Nancy's vision of *sharing* provides us with "a program of work" (1992: 386), which is full of challenges most of which defy our subjective, human viewpoint. What is named 'work' here is also "much less the completed production than this very movement, which does not 'produce' but opens and continually holds the work open" (2007: 65). In a nutshell, the work of sharing revolves around a lack and aims toward the kind of humility that clears the space where all beings can co-exist without identifying themselves with this or that affirmative value. During this practice of revolving, the *I* and the *other* are in a relationship of a remote closeness, where the distance is not mourned and the proximity is not interpreted as a finalizing, blissful touch. Both states being beyond human—and I believe Blanchot's reading of community is still within humanitarian limits—the remoteness and the closeness are driven by Eros and Thanatos. Where these two drives meet, community happens and our final concern is to explore the ethical experience that makes it possible, for all the singulars, to recognize and respect this happening, *the coming of this community of resistance*, which no longer relies on the textbook definition of man.

## AN OPENING

Nancy's philosophy of singularity may not be fully original at surface value due to its Hegelian and Heideggerian influences but his boldness in taking the matter of singularity up to the level of community-thinking is so far unmatched both in structure and style. The highlights of Nancy's work are the amount of respect placed on the concept of relationality, the various angles from which the notion of subjectivity can be destroyed and the assertion of the possibility that community may have always been a question of non-human drives. These aspects of singularity not only fascinate but also puzzle their reader because it sounds too challenging a thought to base all the highlights above on post-war antihumanism. However, imagining communities from a nonhuman angle renders the notion of togetherness all the more ethically valuable: the erasure of the human ego and the emphasis on the theory of drives carry the potential to guide us out of the mess we made of living together. Maybe the whole point of Nancy's philosophy of singularity is to awaken a sense of responsibility in its reader (be it a philosopher or a mine worker) so that we can all begin communicating on that indefinable, silent and humble plane of mere existence. The most important word of this plane of existence and the ultimate substitution for *the I* might be *the we*. Nancy writes in his book on Hegel that "'we' is not something—neither object nor self—that the absolute would be near, as if the absolute were itself another thing or another self. On the contrary: that the absolute be or wants to be near us means that it is our 'near us,' our just-between-us [*entre-nous*], the just-between-us of our manifestation, our becoming, and our desire" (2002: 78). So the discussion of transcendence above, within the context of singularity, is quite different than both Hegel's absolute knowing and Heidegger's authoritative, heavily-conceptualised Being. Nancy, by not defining the absolute as if it were a separate entity and removing the anthropological priority from his speculation on togetherness, takes us to the mere existence of *the we* and the ethical responsibility that it suggests. The urgency of the question of ethics points at a new vision of the world as exposure of humanity, which is now a hollow biological term, and strives toward a new understanding of moral responsibility, which is no longer anthropocentric. It is even possible to say that ethics has never been feasible from a *human* point of view; that ethics demands from us to leave behind our statuses as separate human subjects and look at the exposure of this world anew from the viewpoint of *the we*, which cannot be planned or produced, only experienced through our mutual lack, *our human excess*. *Sozusagen*, but we always say something "approximately," like Nancy believes he does with Freud (2008: 149) and this article believes it does with Nancy. It is fascinating how humanity has always been obsessed with systematization and completion yet all that it has produced is unfortunately incomplete. But this incompleteness is not something to get sunk into or mourned; Nancy's antihumanist singularity only celebrates life by underlining the imminence of death. More importantly, it shows us that both individual and communal resistance depend on a circular course. Thanks to his ultimate argument against argumentation, Nancy portrays visions of togetherness with the aptness of a literary genius.

## Tekillik Felsefesinin Antihümanist Bir Yeniden Okuması

### Öz

Bu makale, Jean-Luc Nancy'nin *Inoperative Community* ve *Being Singular Plural* isimli eserlerinde işlediği tekillik kavramını, mevcut özne/nesne ikilemini olumsuzlama ve direniş olgusuna yeni bir bağlam yaratma çabası ile ele alıyor. Birey olma düşüncesini ortadan kaldırmayı amaçlayan tekillik felsefesi, hümanist bakış açısının bireysellik ile topluluk nosyonlarını gereksiz şekilde zıtlastırıldığını savunur. Hümanist sorumluluk bilincinin karşısına iddialı bir antihümanizm tablosunu yerleştiren tekillik felsefesi, "ben" ibaresi olmadan felsefe yapmanın mümkün olup olmadığını sorgular. Aynı ayrı "ben" ve "öteki" demenin yerine, Nancy'nin tabiriyle "ötekinin ötekisi"ni koyan bu antihümanist konum, ontoloji ile direniş arasındaki bağı, geleneksel içkinliğin ve aşkınlığın ötesinde, "bir aradalık"ta güçlendirmeyi hedef alır. Bu çalışmada, bir arada var olmanın antihümanist tekillik felsefesi bağlamındaki görünümünü keşfetme amacıyla, öncelikle bireysellik kavramının altı oyularak, bunun aslında içi boş ve bütünüyle yapay bir kategori oluşturduğuna dikkat çekilecek. Daha sonra Nancy'nin ekstaz kavramı Freudyen id ve itkiler teorisinde temellendirilerek bir aradalık, hümanist dünya görüşünün hiç beklemeyeceği, karanlık bir alanda konumlandırılacak. Son olarak, bu genel teorik çerçeve içinde sorumluluk ve tevazu değerlerinin önemine vurgu yapılarak, birey/bir aradalık çıkmazının altında yatan sonsuz olanaklılığa göz kırpan alternatif bir ahlak bilinci önermesi yapılacaktır.

### Anahtar Sözcükler

Tekillik, Jean-Luc Nancy, Öznellik, Negatif Antropoloji, Ahlak Felsefesi.



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