

# Photography Theory

Photography Theory (DOM-E3045)  
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# **Jean-Luc Nancy and the image (photography and film)**

17 March 2022

Jean-Luc Nancy: *The Ground of the Image* (2005)

Jean-Luc Nancy: *L'Évidence du film. Abbas Kiarostami. The Evidence of Film.*  
2001

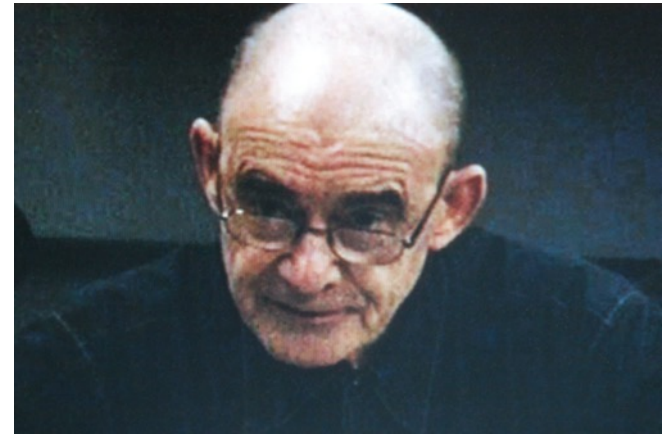
Immelé, Anne and Jean-Luc Nancy, *WIR*. Filigranes Éditions, 2003.  
“Trafic / Déclat” in Nicholas Faure *Portraits / Chantiers*. Genève: Mamco,  
2004.

# Jean-Luc Nancy (b. 1940-2021)

- Professor of philosophy, Université Marc Bloch, Strasbourg
- First book: *Le titre de la lettre* (1973) with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe

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- *La communauté désœuvrée* (1986, The inoperative community)
- The basis of a community is not the process of unification, but a community is based on political nature of resistance
- Based on Georges Bataille and the death of the other
- A community cannot be objectified (place, persons, buildings, institutions)
- Worklessness (*désœuvrement*) not production and accomplishments
- Maurice Blanchot's answer: *The Unwobable Community* *Tunnustamaton yhteisö* (1983, suom. 2004)
- literary / art's "community"
- Communication is not based on speech but on exposure to death
- Jean-Luc Nancy: *The Disavowed Community* (2016, French 2014)



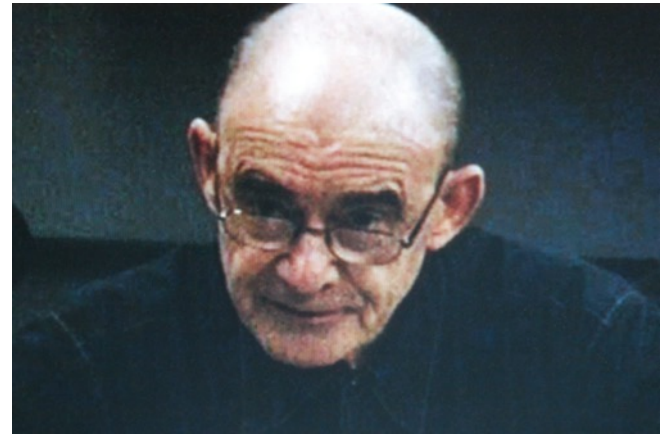
- *Etre singulier pluriel (Being Singular Plural, 2000)*
- How to speak of "we" so that "we" does not become an exclusive entity
- Being is always "being with"
- "I" is not primary to "us"
- "Being with" is not only belonging to a group but exposure to others

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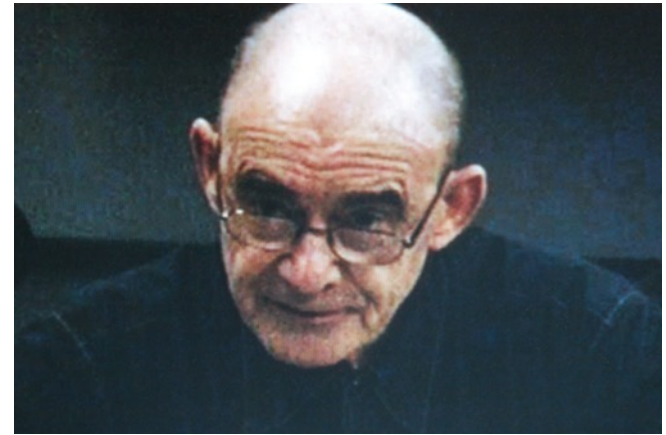
- *Les Muses 1994 (The Muses)* on art and culture
- Art as "multiple" in relation to senses
- Contemporary art as presentation (instead of representation)
- *Multiple Arts (The Muses II) 2006*

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- Nancy got seriously ill in the end of 1980s
- Heart transplant and cancer
- *L'intrus (2000) The Intruder [Tunkeilija, Filosofin sydän (2010)]*



- *Corpus* (1992 suom. 1996)
- Fascinating book / "book on fascination" (S. Lindberg)
- Fascination (and weight) of thinking
- Extreme singularity, "now", beyond active/passive
- One of us (we share the world that we "hear" in Nancy's text)
- True -> weighs, reason -> evidence
- *Corpus* (body, material thing, community, work...)
- World is composed of corpuses
- Sense (*sens*) of bodies, of the world
- Sense is not only meaning but something sensed
- Sense happens in a body ("body presses thinking")
- The place where being happens (*avoir lieu, takes place*)  
place of the body
- exposition
- Touch (not subject/object) towards other bodies



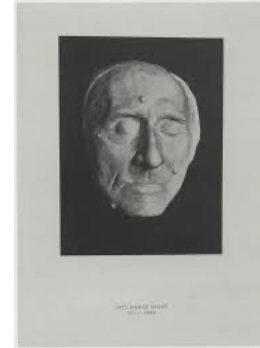
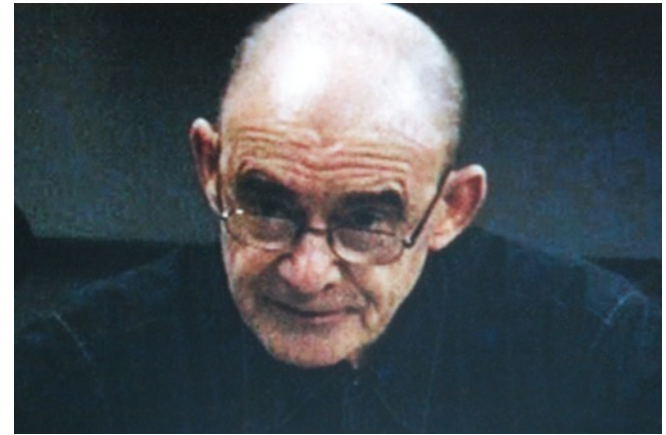
- Image comes late into Nancy's thinking, around 2000
- Influences by Martin Heidegger, Maurice Blanchot
- *Au fond des images* (2003), *The Ground of the Image* (2005)
- Ontology of corpuses, sense, exposure
- Explores how the corpuses touch each other
- The area of the image is something that is *separate* from the world of corpuses
- "L'image – le distinct" (Image – separate, distinct)
- Image forces us to think of distance / preservation of distance / it is that what stands apart from the world and its usability
- Image is sacred (because it is separate / cut off)
- Image is not a thing, or copy (Platonic mimesis) but the semblance of a thing
- For Nancy image is not the "untrue part" of reality (Plato: idea-object-copy/image) but that what *is present*
- *mimesis* and *methexis* (i.e. participating in the image)
- Image is pure semblance



- An image does not represent but presents (is evident, *évidence*)
- Image is like a portrait (an image of an image): "not in that it would reproduce the traits of a person, but in that it [...] *extracts* something, and intimacy, a force".
- (Cf. Image *par excellence* is a photograph of a death mask. Cf. Blanchot's image as a cadaver, which "resembles itself")

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- The power of the image is like the power of an artwork for Heidegger: it severs the usability of the world (but for N it is not speaking the "truth" as it is for H)
- Looking rather than a view or representation
- The truth of the image, NOT as *evidence of something*, BUT as *something evident*
- Evidence as referring to the "immemorial time" (beyond memory – before birth and after death)







Immelé, Anne and Jean-Luc Nancy, *WIR*. Filigranes Éditions, 2003.



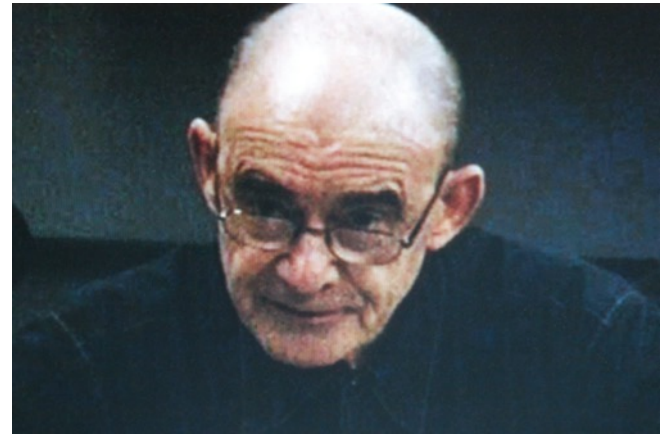
- Photography as the place where thinking takes place
- Love, poetry, thinking as happening on the threshold (*pas encore*) "The step not beyond"

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- Photography as keeping distance *itself*
- Photography as tide (approaching and retreating)
- In between: holding a tension (stable/unstable)

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- In Immelé's images foreground often e.g. table, surface etc. The image floods our vision
- Photography goes beyond its border (cf. with painting which fortifies its frame)
- Photography extends its frame in a tactile way (books are appropriate for it)









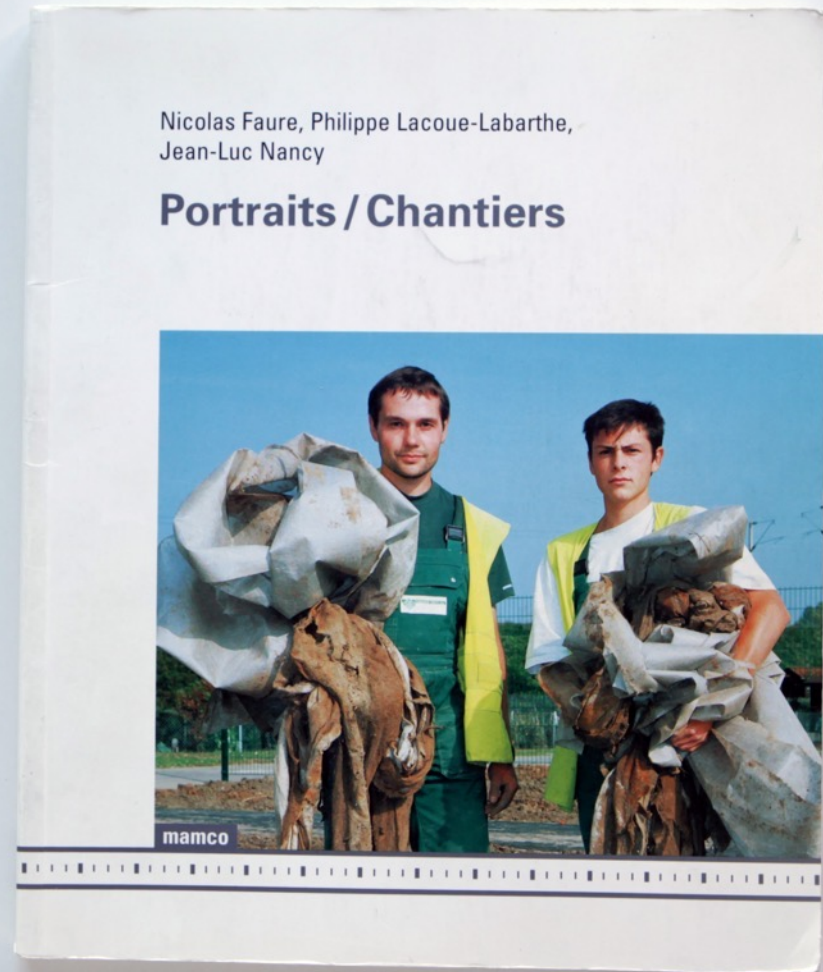
- In *Iconographie de l'auteur* Federico Ferrari and Jean-Luc Nancy separate the maker of the work (*l'ouvrier*), writer, photographer and then the author (*l'auteur*), who is responsible for the singularity of the work
- Author "engraved" in the work
- Work is not about use, exchange or meaning
- One cannot meet the author face on (the author has no face like the maker of the work)
- Like reading a book creates the author of a book, so also looking at a photograph creates the "portrait of its author". That author is not a ghost, illusion or projection. But literally the work's *iconography*, its way of writing the author as image.







Nicéphore Niépce, 1827



Nicolas Faure, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe,  
Jean-Luc Nancy

## Portraits / Chantiers



mamco



Nicolas Faure  
**Portraits**

Moses Agemang Berchie



- Construction sites like factories taken outside: city in the state of work, or on a hospital bed, or open heart surgery (cf. Nancy's own heart transplant)
- Shows something about the work (project) completed (the tramline), and something about the city itself (how the city works alongside the work, supports it)

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- The ideality of plans vs. the chaos of putting them in operation (like a superimposition)
- Photographs of construction sites become "construction sites" of vision
- The construction site reveals its own principle (and a photograph of a construction site reveals the principles of photography)

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- *Looking* constantly puts itself in relation to things (like the construction site to the various "landmarks")
- Placing, preserving, interpreting



Place de Bordeaux



Place de la République

**‘Cinema presents—that is to say shares (communicates)—the intensity of a look upon a world of which it is itself part and parcel** (a film properly speaking and as video, as television, but also as photography and as music [...])

It is part of it precisely in the sense that it has contributed to its structure as it is now: as a world where **looking at what is real is resolutely substituting for every kind of visionary seeing, foreseeing and clairvoyant gazing.** [...]

Clearly, films turn out (with photography, of course, and starting with it: Kiarostami never forgets this, and this will have to be discussed) to be something very different from a relatively new support for received ways of experience (stories or feelings, myth or dream, etc.). **Well beyond the medium that it also is, cinema adds up an element: the element of looking and of what is real insofar as it is looked at.** All in one, film is ubiquitous, it can take in everything, from one far end of the earth to the other

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Evidence of Film*, p. 20.

# Jean-Luc Nancy on Kiarostami's films 1/2

-Jean-Luc Nancy: *L'Évidence du film. Abbas Kiarostami. The Evidence of Film.* (Yves Gevaert Éditeur. Bruxelles, 2001)



- The films do not illustrate the world, but *image it* (work on the world's visibility) its *evidence*
- The weight of present (now)
- The gravity of the image
- Death as part of life (ever present)
- A small moment/life and the "grand scale of things" present simultaneously (in *Wind Will Carry Us* the western world vs. Persia, (What would it be in *Close-Up*?)
- relation to light, place, film (skin), communication
- relation man/woman, life/death, old/new, actor/director...
- leaving things open (confronting them as open, in the middle of things)
- the films' (inner) multiplicity
- the films are not only *about* metaphysical themes, but *are themselves* meditation and metaphysics

# Jean-Luc Nancy on Kiarostami's films 2/2

"Kiarostami is not just one new film maker,  
but the witness to the renewal of cinema".



- away from genres - > a new beginning for film (as film)
- an invitation to look at *each image* and not just waiting for what comes next
- forces to look
- makes the form of the world *evident*

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- A new way of looking, which is not only the look of representation, but the *event of looking*
- Cinema/film is a *place for thinking*
- Respect (to film, when showing, and when not showing), respecting seeing/looking
- the movement of looking (the beginnings of films, "openings")
- Movement of film itself (compares with the movement of film: winding roads, cars)
- Pure movement (not just moving to/from, e.g. the tin can in *Close up*)