



Poetry: The Experience of Listening

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ABSTRACT

As a verbal art, the “specifica poetica” of poetry is incontestably its peculiar rhythmic and sound patterning. Regarded as a ‘twin-sister’ of music, as it originally was meant to be sung, poetry offers a different experience of language and the world. Reciting a poem, reading it ‘aloud mentally’, or simply listening to someone else’s recitation is not a trifle experience. It may prove unsettlingly significant in the light of recent philosophical treatments, inscribed into Heidegger’s existential thought based on his multi-dimensional notion of temporality intrinsic in Being/Dasein, notably, Jean-Luc Nancy, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jacques Derrida. In the present essay, I shall primarily focus on Nancy’s compelling conception of the act of listening which he expounds in his book *Listening*. Drawing upon a plethora of philosophers, such as, Heidegger, his friend Lacoue-Labarthe and others, Nancy elaborates a forceful understanding of the act of listening beyond the meaning-bound, message-focused one. With a challenging, rich philosophical verve, Nancy probes the experience of listening to music, (poetic) rhythm and even to mere human voices’ timbre and links it to our own awareness of our own subjectivity, as well as perceiving subjects engaging with the world surrounding us. Listening mirrors our own selves. It makes reverberate our silent, inner depths whose essence lies beyond the meaning-loaded constructs which define our existence. Being fundamentally temporal, the subject’s economy is perceived, from this temporally existential view, as governed by an unremitting mimetic deferral, continuity and inception, or in rhythm’s logic, repetition and spacing . Poetry, like music, sets (rhythmic, sound) expectations and is perceived as an experience of immanence. The act of listening to a poem being recited or simply ‘reading it aloud mentally’, echoes the subject’s very economy and the perpetual, inceptive deferral underlying its formation, while at the same time reinforces it. What Nancy calls “to listen with all its being” (35), is what Whitman seems to exhort his reader to perform in his exhilarating work *Song of Myself* to which I refer in the second part of the present essay.

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"I celebrate myself, and sing myself." -Whitman

As a verbal art, the "specifica poetica" of poetry is incontestably its peculiar rhythmic and sound patterning. Regarded as a 'twin-sister' of music, as it originally was meant to be sung, poetry offers a different experience of language and the world. Reciting a poem, reading it 'aloud mentally', or simply listening to someone else's recitation is not a trifle experience. It may prove unsettlingly significant in the light of recent philosophical treatments, inscribed into Heidegger's existential thought based on his multi-dimensional notion of temporality intrinsic in Being/Dasein, notably, Jean-Luc Nancy, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jacques Derrida. In the present essay, I shall primarily focus on Nancy's compelling conception of the act of listening which he expounds in his book *Listening*. Drawing upon a plethora of philosophers, such as, Heidegger, his friend Lacoue-Labarthe and others, Nancy elaborates a forceful understanding of the act of listening beyond the meaning-bound, message-focused one. With a challenging, rich philosophical verve, Nancy probes the experience of listening to music, (poetic) rhythm and even to mere human voices' timbre and links it to our own awareness of our own subjectivity, as well as perceiving subjects engaging with the world surrounding us. Listening mirrors our own selves. It makes reverberate our silent, inner depths whose essence lies beyond the meaning-loaded constructs which define our existence. Being fundamentally temporal, the subject's economy is perceived, from this temporally existential view, as governed by an unremitting mimetic deferral, continuity and inception, or in rhythm's logic, repetition and spacing. Poetry, like

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Nancy's reading of Hegel:

Nancy's thought draws heavily upon Hegel's aesthetics and work *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. In one of his major books, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, Nancy proclaims, from the outset, that "Hegel is the inaugural thinker of the contemporary world." (3) He hails his thought for stripping naked the tyranny of "abstraction," the "given" signification and revealed the "absolute negativity of the Absolute" which refuses to be subsumed under any reducible construct, but rather "appears to constitute all experience of this world and its consciousness of itself." (4) Rather than being bound up with prior, external and fixed "sense", consciousness of itself, the Heglian subject absolves itself from "synthesizing representations" (4) and emerges as a self-conscious self in perennial, infinitely "immanent," and restless consciousness of itself and history: "Self" cannot precede itself, because self is precisely the form and movement of a relation to self..." (My emphasis, 4) It is "the restlessness of immanence" that the subject experiences in his/her engaging with itself and the world: "The subject is what

it does, it is its act, and its doing is the experience of the consciousness of the negativity of substance, as the concrete experience and consciousness of the modern history of the world..." (Nancy's emphasis, 5)

Hegel's notion of "the restlessness of the negative," as read by Nancy, the keeping at bay of any fixed any pre-supposed or pre-given constructs of meaning (10) in the subject's both relation to itself and to the world, aims to supplant the void Platonic or Cartesian abstractions by the immediate sensuous experience which is congenial to the self's, or the "Spirit's", in Heglian lexicon, very economy, being edemically unseizable:

"Spirit is not an inert being, but on the contrary, absolutely restless [unruhig: "troubled", "agitated," "restless"] being, pure activity, the negating or ideality of every fixed category of the abstractive intellect: not abstractly simple but, in its simplicity, at the same time a distinguishing of itself from itself: not an essence that is already finished and complete before its manifestation, hiding itself behind its appearances, but an essence which is truly actual only through the determinate forms of its necessary self-manifestation. (Hegel quoted in Nancy, 6)

In his book, *The Muses*, Nancy investigates the true sense behind the plurality of both senses and art and what lies behind their actual correspondence. Keeping to Hegelian thought, Nancy argues that the true essence of art is hemmed into the phenomenon of sense that senses itself (sensing) (30). Such self-reflexive sensuousness of "sense" in art which has a twofold significance has

its roots struck into “poetry” as both a verbal art and production, “poesis”:

Poetry presents itself simultaneously as *pars toto* of art and as *totum pro parte* of technique. This chiasmus is that of intelligible sense (art of the word, *pars pro toto*) and of sensuous sense (poesis, production that is, if not material in the ordinary sense, at least regulated by the exteriority of its end.) (Nancy’s emphasis, 30)

The chiasmus or the double bind of poetic/artistic production which puts at play the exteriority of the intelligible, hitherto assigned sense and the irreducible “sensuous essence” of phenomenal, receptive experience (27) leads to a “tension” which continuously underlies poetry and the arts in their plurality: “a literally untenable tension toward a before-ness (or behind-ness) of sense insofar as what “produces” it as such is the fact of its being first of all received, felt, in short, sensed as sense.” (28)

Nancy highlights, in *The Muses*, the poetic essence, or what he refers to as “sensuous essence” of artistic production. Art or the arts are perceived by Nancy as a sort of backdrop for a dialectical interplay between “intelligible sense” (verbal art) and “sensuous sense” which is fundamentally ‘poietic’ one. According to Nancy, a mutual intrusion, “a double encroachment,” governs the relation between poetry and the rest of the arts, a double bind law which brings into play the intelligible, linguistically reducible, and the sensuous, the phenomenally, immediately perceived sensory reality, irreducible as such: “(Sensuous) sense senses only if it is oriented to an object and if it values it in a meaningful, informative, or operational context; reciprocally, (intelligible sense makes sense only if it is, as one says, “perceived” and “the intuitive or perceptive relation to intelligible sense has always included, in finite being in general, an irreducible receptivity.” (28)

How can “sensuous sense” make “intelligible sense”?

Nancy argues that such process takes place in arts thanks to their “poetic subsumption” which allows for an “intellection of its receptivity as such” or

“the receptivity of its intelligibility”: (intelligible) sense that reckons itself through sense as perception and experience. Nancy does not fail to remind us that “receptivity” is fundamentally multiple, drawing upon a plethora of senses and experiential phenomena like intentionality, spirituality, memory etc., hence the plurality of arts. In this respect, Nancy asks a twofold question: “What is the aesthesis of significance, what is its receiving organ? And what is its sensation, what taste does sense have...?” In other words, how does the “sensuous” lead to its “intelligibility”? According to Nancy, only a self-reflexive approach of sense to itself, in which “sense demands from itself its own condition of production”, focused upon both its own “activity” and “receptivity” can effectively broach the sensuousness of art(s). Nancy calls for an approach to senses, based on a sort of a meta-logic, a “logos” that would be “the pathos of pathos.” (29) Investigating the experience of sense sensing itself is what Nancy remarkably ventures in *Listening and On Touching*. In the present article, I shall focus on his singular approach to the act of listening which helps us fathom our irresistible drive to both music and rhythm as we subject ourselves to their workings.

Nancy’s Listening:

In his compellingly concise book *Listening*, Nancy starts his expository argumentation to decipher the unfathomable behest of music over the listening subject by laying emphasis on the ‘vibrational’ nature of music; the emission of a sound is necessarily based on a movement of “referral,” an “echo,” a “resonance” by spreading in time and space: sounding while at the same time lodging into the subject (6). When coupled with sense, music still preserves its dual, reverberational essence since “meaning” itself is “a reference.” (7) Nancy refers to Aristotle’s notion of “aesthesis,” as a “perception,” that of the subject’s feeling itself sense [se-sentir-sentir], and argues it finds an even more resounding echo in the register of sound due to the intrinsic “referral” dialectics which underlies the structure of both self-perception and listening:

One can say... that meaning and sound

share the space of a referral, in which at the same time they refer to each other, and that, in a very general way, this space can be defined as the space of a self, a subject. A self is nothing other than a form or function of referral: a self is made of a relationship to self, or of a presence to self, which is nothing other than the mutual referral between perceptible individuation and an intelligible identity... the point or occurrence of the subject would never have taken place except in the referral, thus in spacing and resonance... To be listening, will always, then, to be straining toward or in approach of the self... (Nancy’s emphasis, 8-9)

Music’s fundamental characteristics, operating similarly in rhythm in poetry, “spacing” and “resonance” cast a “presencing,” in a Heideggerian sense, echo in the subject. In his introduction to Lacoue-Labarthe’s edifying book *Typography*, Derrida reminds us of the true economy of rhythm: what is rhythm but “spacing” and “repetition”:

In the beginning, rhythm says von Buhlow. Another way of marking the fact that there is no simple beginning; no rhythm without repetition, spacing, caesura, the “repeated difference-from-itself of the Same,” says Lacoue-Labarthe... We are “rhythmed” ... in such a way that rhythm no longer occurs as a predicate. (31)

It is precisely rhythm’s both musical (purely acoustic) and repetitive (reminiscent of mimesis) essence interspersed with caesuras, the “inscriptive force of spacing,” which makes rhythm reverberate as an “echo of the subject.” Equally the subject’s economy draws on the dialectics of mimetic repetition punctuated by subjective withdrawal or desistance. It is, thus, governed by a “double bind,” according to which rhythm/music both interrupts, through the subject’s temporary cathartic loss, and reinforces subjectivity, through his or her resumption of the figural, onto-eidetic self.

To revert to Nancy’s evocation of Aristotle’s notion of “aesthesis,” the subject’s “feeling-oneself-feel,” which is according to Nancy only conceivable in terms of

"referral", the perennially relegated, then enacted convergence of the "perceptible" and "the perceived", is comparable to the register of sound as "renvoi" or "spaced spacing", or better still, "acoustic space." (8) The 'congeniality' Nancy depicts between the subject's awareness of itself as always occurring as a form of "referral" or "delay" and the act of listening is seminal to the understanding of his existential, not without Heideggerian echoes, of the 'presencing' power of the act of listening.

Nancy binds the act of listening to a "straining" toward the self (9); to be listening winds necessarily to an approach of the self, not in its subjective manifestation, nor as the other, but in its "structure ... as such," that is as a perennial form of inception or "an infinite referral". In this sense, Nancy argues: "When one is listening, one is on the lookout for a subject, something (itself) that identifies itself by resonating from self to self, in itself and for itself... at once the same and other than itself, one in the echo of the other..." (9) Accordingly, to indulge in the act of listening subjects the listener to a form of an inner "tension" which affects not the way he/she engages with his subjective self or the Other (the musician's or by extrapolation the poet's) but to the self in its most fundamental, originary formation, its ever incipient configuration, reinforcing, thus the notion of self-presence.

Nancy further explains how the sense of presence triggered by the act of listening to music, and as we may argue, by extrapolation, to a poem's sonorous and rhythmic patterning being either recited loud or read aloud mentally, is not attributed or attributable to any outer, or subjective objectifiable, constant construct, but rather to a perennially fluctuating presence, at the very image of sound modulation. The latter is only conceivable as movement, transfer, expansion and diffusion:

Rather a coming and a passing, an extending and a penetrating... It is a present in waves on a swell, not in a point on a line; it is a time that opens up, that is hollowed up, that is enlarged or ramified, that envelops or separates, that becomes or is turned

into a loop that stretches out or contracts, and so on. (13)

Such intermittently swelling back forth, distending and retracting dialectics of sound modulation assigns to sound a multi-dimensional "spaciality." According to the latter, the subject simultaneously is "penetrated" by sound and "opens up" both inwardly and externally, to his surroundings: "Listening thus forms the perceptible singularity that bears in the most ostensive way the perceptible or sensitive (aesthetic) condition as such; the sharing of an inside/outside, division and participation, the de-connection and contagion." (My emphasis, 14) One may argue that the intrinsic properties to listening to music highlighted by Nancy are congenial to (poetic) rhythm whose fundamental economy is based on division/spacing and repetition, subjective withdrawal or in Lacoue-Labarthe's terms "desistance" and infectious participation.

The sense of presence which sound or music communicates is "omnipresence", or better still, a "co-presence" marked by "contemporaneity", a sort of "presence in presence" (16). Far from being a fixed, linear presence, but rather fluctuating, communicative and participational, the "presence in presence" which music instigates is comparable to the workings of rhythm which Nancy defines as "time in time", ruled by a sort of a double constraint which makes it work both by and against time via repetition and caesura, as well as its modulatory variations like cadence and tempo:

... [I]t is nothing other than the time of time, the vibration of time itself in the stroke of a present that presents it by separating it from itself, freeing it from its simple stanza to make it into scansion (rise, raising of the foot and beats) and cadence (fall, passage into the pause). Thus, rhythm separates the succession of the linearity of the sequence or length of time: it bends time to give it to time itself, and it is in this way that it folds and unfolds the subject. (Nancy's emphasis, 17)

Nancy's last claim about rhythm's role in the revelation and reinforcement of the subject's economy echoes that

of his friend philosopher, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe who sustains in his essay "The Echo of the Subject" that due its twofold nature, lying somewhere between beat and figure, "rhythm is the condition of possibility for the subject."

Nancy argues that the sense of "awareness of time" listening may impart to the subject is far from being "instantaneous"; but rather "differential" (20). Being and sound are conceivable only as a form of "renvoi" or "referral" as has been pointed out. Their logic is not punctual, but rather strung along of continuum which binds it to the past and makes it anticipate the future, a sort of evocative summoning:

[M]usic (or even sound in general) is not exactly a phenomenon; that is to say, it does not stem from a logic of manifestation. It stems from a different logic, which would have to be called evocation, but in this precise: while manifestation brings presence to light, evocation summons (convokes, invokes) presence to itself. It does not establish it any more than it supposes it already established. It anticipates its arrival and remembers its departure, itself remaining suspended between the two: time and sonority... (21)

From the "birthing cry", whether it be a "complaint" or "song," to the orgasmic outburst to the "last murmur," the subject's life is orchestrated by rhythm and sound emission. Such acoustic manifestations are meaning-free. They are conceived by Nancy as "originary," characterized by "... the inchoate value of an articulatory or profferatory release that is still without intention and without vision of signification..." (28). Those preliminary rhythmic eruptions are the wordless expression of "the speaking body"; they reverberate with "pure resonance" (Bernard Baas quoted in Nancy, 29) or as Lacoue-Labarthe paraphrased by Nancy "the subject of the subject" (29). Though Nancy's argument, expounded in his book *Listening*, is not in the first place to demonstrate the mimetological, "typographical" bearings of rhythm in relation to the subject formation, but rather to auscultate the act of listening when performed with all one's being as an

open access to a new form of signification beyond meaning. While Lacoue-Labarthe focuses on the etymological roots of rhythm as “rhythmus” and philosophical and linguistic treatment of the concept of rhythm, such as Democritus, Plato’s or Benveniste’s, Nancy’s approach is immersed in the purely bodily, physical act of listening, giving in to the behest of (musical) patterned sound and rhythm. The subject, for Nancy, is fundamentally a “diapason subject” (16), a sort of “resonance chamber” which reverberates with flooding in and out sounds, echoes, rhythmic patterns throbbing from the innermost depths of subjectivity, or rather before subjectivity, the ever inceptive (re) birth of the subject consigned to delay:

... the investigation would lead us toward the formation of the subject first of all as the rhythmic reployment/ deployment of an enveloping between “inside” and “outside”, or else folding the “outside” into the “inside”, invaginating, forming a hollow, an echo chamber or column (well before any possibility of a visible figure presentable in reflection: long before any “specular identification”). The same direction would take us toward an aspect of rhythm different from the one that mimetic and “typographical” logic arrests and freezes in place: namely, rhythm as figure “broached by time,” hence moving and fluid, syn-copated, beaten out as a measure is and, consequently, linked to dance (as moreover, Benveniste indicates in his study on the word *rhythmos*). Rhythm not only as scansion (imposing form on the continuous) but also as an impulse (revival of the pursuit). (38-39)

It is obvious from Nancy’s definition of rhythm and its workings upon the subject that he assigns to it an ‘originary,’ ‘ontological’ dimension, well beyond the measurable, temporally scanned one. He seizes upon Lacoue-Labarthe’s phrase “broached by time” which applies to both rhythm, as a (folded/unfolded) manifestation of time and the subject, whose formation and fluidity are punctuated by time as a perennial movement of deferral to showcase such confluence between rhythm and the conception of the sub-

ject. However, Nancy’s passage, quoted above, makes a stronger claim about the grounding temporality of the experience of rhythm formulated into highly sensual terms, the most striking of which would be “invaginating”. In *The Muses*, Nancy elaborates a whole allegory about being “penetrated” and experiencing the “penetration” by poetry’s rhythm. From an essentially phenomenological angle, rhythm is perceived, sensuously, as beyond the inscriptive register, it is usually reduced to, or even the figural force it has been assigned with reference to its etymological roots. For Nancy, rhythm stems as an empowering “impulse”, a salvific, almost orgiastic, vital drive and we are irresistibly carried away, transported, so to speak, by the ebb and flow of its modulations.

Whitman’s *Song for Myself*

The reason behind my choice of Whitman’s *Song for Myself* despite the fact of its being not particularly rhythmic, as it is written in free verse, is its both conceptual and sensuous wealth which is deeply in tune with Nancy’s approach to sense and the act of listening in particular. Both Whitman and Nancy foreground, not without phenomenological and transcendental dimensions, the sensuousness of the experience of senses and are axed upon the potentially limitless self-knowledge such experiential exploration of the act of “sense that senses itself” may purport. Regarding Whitman’s long poem *Song for Myself*, one may claim it to be a true paean to the transcendently rallying power of the senses, “... a celebration of a mystical experience that merges spirituality with the experience of sexuality and the body... and its exploration of the limits of human knowledge and language.” Killingsworth lays emphasis on Whitman’s initial vocations as “a balladeer and populist exhorter of others,” (35) which marshals evidence for his deep sense of and revelry in both the sound and the voice and awareness of their impact upon the listeners.

Blending the epic with the lyrical (27), Whitman’s poem may be read as a powerful plea to the other to engage with the speaker with a new mode of being, according to which the borders between

selfhood and otherness dissolve. The speaker leafs through the catalogue of senses to reach a sort of cosmic dimension of existence which binds him to himself, to others and the whole universe under the auspices of Transcendentalism. Among the senses which allows the speaker in *Song of Myself* to reach out for the other is listening; he invites his “soul”, his fellow lover or even singer, to give free vent to his “throat,” to emit a meaning-free “lull”, which is beyond the conceptual, capable of voicing their enduring unison: “I loaf and invite my soul/ Loaf with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat/Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the best, /Only the lull I like, the hum of your valvèd voice” (Section I) The erotically-charged imagery and musically vibrant quality of Whitman’s lines with the run-on liquid and fricative sounds, the respectively /l/ and /r/ sounds echo the speaker’s yearn for a transcendently sensuous and sensual communal experience which would be triggered by the power of voice’s pure sound.

It is precisely this reviving, reinvigorating exultation in rhythm and sound, not without cathartic undertones, which Whitman probes in his compelling work *Song of Myself*. In this long poem in question he makes a paean to the power of sound, the act of ‘true’ listening and the reinforcement of the self as a lively entity open onto both its inner tensions and the world surrounding it, to engage fully in the world: to be in the world in the Heideggerian sense, one may contend. In section 26, the speaker asks for nothing but “listen.” His acknowledged purpose is to enrich his proper “song”, to render it more vibrant, throbbing with all sorts of sounds, whether natural, animal or human, sounds resounding from the country or the city. Obviously by “song”, Whitman is referring to his own poem rightly titled “*Song of Myself*” to make a glimpse at (lyric) poetry’s original association, by the Greeks, with song:

Now I will do nothing but listen,
To accrue what I hear into this song, to
let sounds contribute toward it.
I hear bravuras of birds, bustle of
growing wheat, gossip of flames,

clack of sticks cooking my meals,
 I hear the sound I love, the sound of
 the human voice,
 I hear all sounds running together,
 combined, fused or following,
 Sounds of the city and sounds out of
 the city, sounds of the day and night...

The speaker's exacerbated reveling in the act of listening to all sorts of sounds whose echoes he seeks to capture in poetry is not an infatuated poet's whim, but philosophically grounded. We can read in the speaker-poet's near obsession with sound a consuming desire to hanker to his proper self-manifested as alterity, a sort of "grounding attunement." One should note that the above mentioned sounds by Whitman and the following plethora in the subsequent lines are not haphazard, but characterized by rhythm: mesmerizing, like the birds' acoustic "bravuras," or delicate like the "flames" crackling or even the more precious sound of the grown wheat germ breaking loose from the wrapping husk and bran. The poet-speaker seems to be 'animated' by his love for rhythm's multifarious manifestations surrounding him; even the "clack" of the cooking sticks becomes music to his ears. He is open to rhythm in its generic meaning, which Nancy defined above as not only "scansion," but "an impulse (revival of the pursuit)," the subject's own "pursuit" of himself temporally conceived.

It is interesting that Whitman evokes in the passage quoted above his love for "human voice": "I hear the sound I love, the sound of the human voice," since we find an enlightening extrapolation on rhythm through the reference to the notion of human voice and "timbre" in Nancy's philosophical treatment of sound and music and their role in grounding the subject. For Nancy, timbre is the resonance of resonance, the primordial preliminary experience of "listening:

Timbre is thus the first correlative of listening, and it is through it that we can better approach what is straying here from a simple phenomenology... it is necessary to say that before any relationship to object, listening opens up in timbre, which resounds in it rather than for it... Resonance is at

once that of a body that is sonorous for itself and resonance of sonority in a listening body that, itself, resounds as it listens. (My emphasis, 40)

Accordingly, listening 'to' timbre binds both the subject to itself and to the other, creates a sort of "private experience" (Wittgenstein quoted in Nancy, 41), a sort of a exhilarating meta-acoustic phenomenon. It is no surprise that in the following lines, Whitman's reveling in human voices and their varying timbre from strict to joyful is exacerbated into their association with the music of a gripping, grandiose opera whose intoxicating melody propels his mind into cosmic levels:

I hear the chorus, it is a grand opera,
 Ah this indeed is music--this suits me.

A tenor large and fresh as the creation
 fills me,

The orbic flex of his mouth is pouring
 and filling me full.

I hear the train'd soprano (what work
 with hers is this?)

The orchestra whirls me wider than
 Uranus flies,

It wrenches such ardors from me I did
 not know I possess'd them,

It sails me, I dab with bare feet, they
 are lick'd by the indolent waves,

I am cut by bitter and angry hail, I lose
 my breath,

Steep'd amid honey'd morphine, my
 windpipe throttled in fakes of death,

At length let up again to feel the
 puzzle of puzzles,

And that we call Being.

The engrossing experience of listening to all sorts of sounds ending with human voices, and probably to his own voice reciting his poem/song, which he heartily seeks to transcribe in his verse is startlingly associated with the broaching of our entire "Being." The last line resounds as a sort of epiphany regarding the whole mystery of the act of "true" listening which would be conducive to a deeper apprehension of one's proper "Being." One is tempted to read Whitman's reference to "...that we call Being," capitalized, in a manner reminiscent of Heidegger's, to link it

to Heidegger's own notion of "Being."

Before briefly clarifying the notion of "Being" in Heidegger's thought to potentially account for Whitman's message and better fathom its transcendental dimension, we may refer first to a preliminary step to be taken towards the full appreciation of our existence, which is the recognition of the full scope of the body. According to Heidegger, a "turning" has to be undertaken to counter the alienating, anti-body tradition, spurning the bodily and the sensual. Frank Schallow comments on Heidegger's "turning" and his philosophical exhortation for a re-immersion into "Being" through the medium of the body and the "enactment of temporality" as follows:

Hence, the countermovement of forgetting, the turning around of the question itself or its recollection, implies a dynamic of temporalization that inserts Dasein into the heart of physis as the diversity of being's manifestness. In the turning, time emerges as the "name" for being, in such a way as to stand for both the unity and diversity of the possibilities of its manifestness. (149)

To better fathom Heidegger's message about how to enact such unity and diversity of possibilities of our "Being," which may be read as the base of our transcendental "Being" hailed by Whitman, we need to remind ourselves of the major characteristics of Heidegger's "Dasein/Being." Though it is difficult to sketch the complexity of Heidegger's notion of "Being" expounded in his magnum opus *Time and Being*, we may argue that according to Heidegger, "authentic Being" is fundamentally temporal. It is marked by "primordial temporality:" it "temporalizes itself" in that it is not a temporal platitude made up by clear-cut stages, past, present and future, but rather a sort of multi-layered, prism-like "entity" (376). According to Heidegger, "authentic" existence is the one which makes possible the merging of those three temporal dimensions, making them strung into one mode of being as such (377). Such mode of being, extolled by Heidegger, is intrinsically "ecstatic" in that it can only be experienced through a "standing outside" of oneself

through the unity of the three “ecstasies”: the three projections of myself towards the future, which implies reverting back “towards-oneself” since the future culminating into death leads “back to” my having been or past, and finally resolve to live “alongside,” “letting-oneself-be-encountered-by” the present (377). Heidegger laments that the dominant inauthentic mode of being falls short of the “authentic temporality” which is “the principle,” “a poliori fit denomination” (Heidegger’s italics, 377) of Being. Hence, the ecstatic is the visceral vein of Being’s sustenance and the governing law of primordial/authentic temporality; the latter being “... primordial “outside of itself” in and for itself.” (377)

Such “primordial mode of temporality” (376) can only be enacted by the subject’s active participation through his “concernful” immersion into the world, which seems to be Whitman’s own message based on a call for a new engagement with the world, as is the case in the following lines which echo the speaker’s exalted exhortation that:

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, not look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books.

You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me, you shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself.

Only through the experience, in Heideggerian terms of our thrownness” and “resoluteness” to take up our “originary openness” onto the world can the projection of one’s limitless possibilities alongside a finite line of time take place.

To carry on with Heidegger’s notion of Being of which we can found echoes in Whitman’s “Song of Myself”, apart from the poet’s blatant use of the term “Being,” we may add that Heidegger stresses the fact that Dasein/Being, being enacted through “care” in its “existential-temporal meaning” “... Dasein is essentially ahead of itself. Proximally and for the most part, concernful Being-in-the-world understands itself in terms of that with which it is concerned.” (Heidegger’s emphasis, 386)

Accordingly, each shall set up “expectations” for himself, be “ahead-of himself” following his own pace and interests. For Heidegger, Dasein is “uncertain;” it is both “temporalized” and “individualized.” (386) It comes to itself in the form of “anticipation” whose layout is tailored according to each one’s “ownmost potentiality-for-Being” (386), which would correspond to each one’s specific “concernful” engagement with the world, the amount of “care” that he or she would invest into the world and which would lead to the full (present) blooming, “disclosure” of his (past) inherent possibilities: “Factically, Dasein is constantly ahead of itself, but inconstantly anticipatory with regard to its existentiell possibility.” (386) In the following lines from Song of Myself, we find resonance to Heidegger’s individualized and participatory notion of Being: “Not I, not anyone else can travel that road for you, /You must travel it for yourself.”

Apart from being individually experiential or participatory, Heidegger’s Dasein/Being is, as has been pointed out above, fundamentally anticipatory. In this sense, Heidegger sustains that Dasein/Being involves the subject’s own readiness, “resoluteness” to “await,” set expectations and check their realization in the future:

To the anticipation which goes with resoluteness, there belongs a Present in accordance with which a resolution discloses the Situation. In resoluteness, the Present is not only brought back from distraction with the objects of one’s closest concern, but it gets held in the future and in having been. That Present which is held in authentic temporality and thus is authentic itself, we call the “moment of vision”. (205)

The “moment of vision” Heidegger evokes is a sort of sensuous epiphany since it is inexorably accompanied, according Heidegger, by an experience of “rapture” in the sense of being “carried away” (386), which brings us back to the notion of “ecstasy,” evoked previously in relation to Heidegger’s thought.

We may conclude, after this digression into Heidegger’s temporalized notion of Dasein/Being, that being

irrevocably “ahead of itself;” Dasein/Being merges past, present and future through “expecting”, “awaiting” and ecstatic “disclosure.” Dasein/Being may be thus read as the praxis of “ecstasy”. Similarly, we may regard the experience of listening as assimilable to the experience of our vey Being, being essentially temporal and rapturous.

Nancy’s philosophical probing of the act of listening may be perceived as highly influenced by Heidegger’s temporal and existential thought. Following Nancy’s case expounded in his book *Listening*, What Heidegger refers to as a “dynamic of temporalization,” (365) which would be enacting Being by striking anew the experience of its temporality, proceeds, for Nancy, through rhythm in music, poetry and ordinary sounds when hearkened to ‘truly;’ with all one’s Being. As has been demonstrated in the first part of the present essay, music, and more generally rhythm is perceived at the image of the subject’s own economy: perennial ebb and flow of referral, a transcendental synthesis of an inexorably lost past casting a shadow over the present, the same present setting expectations for the future. An ever-incipient occurrence of the emerging subject struggling to get “a glimpse of itself” and the awaited realization of a beat, a rhythmic pattern internalized by a listener. Rightly titled “Song,” Whitman’s long poem *Song of Myself*, though composed in free verse, resounds as an anthem, a passionate paean to the power of song and the act of listening. It does comprise mesmerizing rhythmic passages, punctuated as such by the engaging, highly infectious flow of rhythm and sound, as is the case with the following lines with their sweeping hexameter tempo transpierced by two occasional trimeter lines. The instances of alliteration (“song” and “sounds”; “fused” and “following”) and anaphora (“I hear”) only add to the musical quality of the passage:

B -o- b B -o- B o

Now I will do nothing but listen,

-o- B -o- B b-o- B -o-
B o B -o- B o

To accrue what I hear into this song, to
let sounds contribute toward it.

o B o B -o- B - B -o- b o
B B o B

I hear bravuras of birds, bustle of
growing wheat, gossip of flames,

B o b B -o- B
clack of sticks cooking my meals,

o B o B o B o B -o- B
o B

I hear the sound I love, the sound of
the human voice,

o B b B b -o- B -o- B
o B -o- B o

I hear all sounds running together,
combined, fused or following,

B -o- B -o- b =o~ B o
B -o- B o B

Sounds of the city and sounds out of
the city, sounds of the day and night...

Subjecting oneself to the workings
of sound patterned into verse, music or
even to the timbre of a vociferous con-
versation leads to the experience of one's
own "Being," the throbbing "friction" (39)
with the unnamable, the ever-elusive,
self-deferring essence of both sound and
self. In this sense, Nancy sustains:

But what is a figure that is throbbled
as well as stressed, "broached by time,"
if not a figure that has already lost
itself and that is expecting itself, and
that calls to itself ... What else is but

a subject—and then isn't the subject
itself the starting of time in both
values of the genitive: it opens it and
is opened by it. Isn't the subject the
attack of time? (Nancy's emphasis, 39)

Accordingly, the subject's very
economy is played out, modulated by
time and the temporal that is rhythm.
It undergoes temporal vicissitudes,
lending itself to both continuity and
disruption, loss and regain. Being aware
of time through sound settings leads
necessarily to being aware of oneself. To
say it differently, laying oneself open to
the workings of rhythm's rules which are
intrinsically repetitive and reverberational,
titillates, entices the subject into pricking
up its ears in order to experience itself as
what it really is, an echo.

Endnotes

1. Aviram, (23).
2. I am referring myself, here, to a theory of the subject based on musical aesthetics elaborated by Nancy's life-long philosopher friend and collaborator whose approach I have clarified in my article "Rhythm Reconsidered: Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's Musical Aesthetics of the Subject." Lacoue-Labarthe's twofold treatment of the subject's experience of (musical) rhythm, notably, by drawing on the very etymological roots of the term 'rhythmos' meaning schema or imprint, apart from other references to linguists and philosophers' treatments of the term rhythm, like Benvenist and Plato which corroborate the fact that rhythm pertains, as well, to the figural, not solely acoustic. Due to its twofold nature, reconciling the acoustic with the figural, rhythm has the power, according to Lacoue-Labarthe, to cause both our loss, sending us back to our pre-figural self, and our reinforcement through our yielding to self-writing compulsion. Lacoue-Labarthe draws, in his approach, among other theories like Lacan's thought, upon Nietzsche's cathartic notion of Dionysian musical energy as conducive to the momentary experience of primal/originary pain and union before the Apollonian takes over again through the resumption of the figural, dream order and the veil of Maya, or veil of illusions which guarantees the subject's salvific catharsis without the risk of its loss or madness. To recapitulate, Lacoue-Labarthe sustains that rhythm/music has the power to extirpate us from our pre-subjectal state; it has the power to 'send us back' to the remotest realms of our subjectivity, being endemically of a nonsensical, beyond-or-before meaning, nature. However, due to its intrinsic repetitive essence, rhythm resonates as repercussion, echo, and reverberation because it is definable only on the basis (the spacing and the division in the Same, the repeated difference from-itself of the Same). According to Lacoue-Labarthe, musical catharsis, subjectal loss induced by rhythm, may make up for the intrinsic "deadly repetition" one is prone to according Lacan's theory of the subject. Being inexorably confronted with the irredeemable divergence between the 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic', the subject retracts into "desistance": "[...] it will never recover from the mortal insufficiency to which, according to Lacan, its prematuration has condemned it." Only through a "dialectic of recognition", Lacoue-Labarthe argues, can the subject come to itself (47). According to this dialectic, the subject comes to itself only by losing itself. The 'destabilising division of the figural', due to the disruption of the subject's stability intrinsic to the mimetic mechanism of identification is counterpointed by the compulsion to self-repetition or self-writing and the re-immersion into subjectivity. The latter's condition of possibility is based on the repetitive alternation between subjectal desistance or loss and the resumption of subjectivity. Similarly, due to its musical, acoustic essence, but not exclusively, rhythm is repetition punctuated by silence or caesuras, or as Derrida, in his introduction to Lacoue-Labarthe's book *Typography*, defines it, "the repeated difference from itself." (16)
3. "... dissolves all substance" (25).
4. Such intrinsic instability of the self, or what John Martis refers to as "the essenceless essence" of the subject, is also echoed in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's philosophical and Lacanian reading of the subject's formation clarified above.
5. Obviously Nancy, like Hegel, plays on the double meaning of sense; in both phrases he points to the sensuous, perceptive meaning.
6. "Production, in the singular and absolutely, is nothing other than the production of sense." (The Muses, 28)
7. Obviously Nancy draws upon Hegel's phenomenological aesthetics of art. In his book *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel argues that our aesthetic apprehension of a work of art does not merely draw upon the sensuous as exclusively sensory, but as "spiritual", by which Hegel designates the rational, as well (35): "What is agreeable for these senses [sight and hearing] is not the beauty of art." (39) Hegel sustains that both music and painting produce "a shadow-world", which is far from being a pitfall but rather a credit, as they have the power to summon deeper layers of conscience: "These sensuous shapes and sounds appear not merely for the sake of themselves and their immediate shape, but with the aim, in this shape of affording satisfaction to higher spiritual interests, since they have the power to call forth from all the depths of consciousness a sound and an echo in the spirit. In this way the sensuous aspect of art is spiritualized, since the spirit appears in art as made sensuous." (Hegel's italics, 39) The mind and memory are titillated, reactivated, so to speak, in the vicinity of art. "Intentionality" is an additional factor in the matrix of artistic apprehension. It consists in our conscious engagement with the exterior world, marked by "desire", a Hegel sustains: "In this appetitive relation to the external world, man, as a sensuous individual, confronts things as being individuals; likewise he does not turn his mind to them as a thinker with universal categories; instead, in accord with individual impulses and interests, he relates himself to the objects, individuals themselves, and maintains himself by using and consuming them, and by sacrificing them his own self-satisfaction." (36)
8. The Muses, (28).
9. Derrida in his introduction to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's *Typography*, (32).
10. *Typography*, (35).
11. *Typography*, (65).
12. Martis on the subject
13. Nancy makes a glimpse, here, at his philosopher friend Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and his essay "The Echo of the Subject". I shall go back, more in depth, to his approach when I analyse Whitman's poem. Nancy's claim is reminiscent of Lacoue-Labarthe the subject's desire to have "a glimpse of itself" (*Typography*, 85).
14. "... Listening is passing over to the register of presence to self, it being understood that the "self" is precisely nothing available (substantial or subsistent) to which one can be "present," but precisely the resonance of a return [renvoi]." (Nancy, 12)
15. Lacoue-Labarthe uses the term "desistance" to evoke subjectal loss incurred by rhythmic, musical dispossession, (85).
16. "... Its presence is never a simple being-there or how things stand, but is always at once an advance, penetration, insistence, obsession or possession, as well as a presence "on the rebound"..." (15)

17. Martis traces such inexorable delay to the intrinsic, "essencelessness essence" of the subject." (174)
18. Lacoue-Labarthe quoted in Nancy, (36).
19. In *The Muses*, Nancy evokes refers to "the heart" and "will" being "penetrated" by the artistic medium (46).
20. *The Cambridge Introduction to Whitman*, 26.
21. In *Romanticism and Transcendentalism*, 200. Habich argues that Whitman's conception of the self is deeply in tune with Emerson's Transcendentalist vision expounded in his essay *Nature* which regards the self not as a self-centred, egotistical entity, but rather a form of consciousness that can only conceive of itself and evolve through its engagement with other selves and its surrounding world: "Through me the afflatus surging and surging... through me the current and index." (Emerson quoted in Habich, 201).
22. *Cambridge Introduction to Walt Whitman*, 32.
23. Nigel Guy Wilson, 585.
24. In *Being and Time* (128). Heidegger defines "attunement" as "mood," prior to cognition, marked by a "fleeing," "turning away" from the "burdensome character of Da-sein." In this form of being, the self has already found itself: "In attunement, Da-sein is always already brought before itself, it has always already found itself, not as perceiving oneself to be there, but as one finds one's self in attunement." (127) Being "removed from thinking," Heidegger sustains, "Attunement discloses Da-sein in its "grounding attunement" thrownness, initially and for the most part in the mode of an evasive turning away." (Heidegger's emphasis, 128)
25. *Being and Time*, (377).
26. [Song of Myself](#)
27. [Song of Myself](#)
28. I have borrowed this phrase from Lacoue-Labarthe in his evocation of the subject's proneness to its own loss induced by music or rhythm (145).

RHYTHM MARKERS

- B emphasized beat
- b unemphasized beat
- [B] virtual beat
- O emphasized offbeat
- o unemphasized offbeat
- o- double offbeat
- [o] virtual offbeat
- [B] virtual beat
- ô implied offbeat
- ~o~ triple offbeat
- =o- double offbeat with the first part emphasized
- o= double offbeat with the second part emphasized

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