

H-France Review Vol. 18 (January 2018), No. 2

Jean-Luc Nancy, with Adèle van Reeth. *Coming*. Translated by Charlotte Mandell. New York: Fordham University Press, 2017. x + 155 pp. Bibliographic references and notes. \$75.00 (hb) ISBN 9780823273461; \$22.00 (pb) ISBN 9780823273478.

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This translation of Jean-Luc Nancy's 2014 volume *La Jouissance*—whose title has been rendered in English, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, as *Coming*—is a welcome addition to the already large corpus of work by one of France's most influential and prolific contemporary philosophers. Fordham University Press has played a commendable role in making Nancy's work available to an Anglophone readership. In the last decade alone, they have published translations of over twenty texts by or featuring Nancy, including such well-received titles as *Noli Me Tangere: On the Raising of the Body* (2008), *Corpus* (2008), *Corpus II: Writings on Sexuality* (2013), and *The Disavowed Community* (2016).

From his earliest work, much of which was undertaken in collaboration with the philosopher Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy's thought has turned on the intersections of philosophy, politics and the arts. With Lacoue-Labarthe, he co-authored five books, including *Le Titre de la lettre: une lecture de Lacan* (1973) [*The Title of the Letter: A Reading of Lacan* (1992)] and *L'Absolu littéraire: théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand* (1978) [*The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (1988)]. Together they founded the Centre de recherches philosophiques sur la politique in 1980. Nancy's interest in the inter-relations between philosophy, politics, and art has continued to drive his work throughout his long career. Over the past two decades, his philosophy has come to increasingly focus on questions about the body, the senses, and sexuality—a part of his work that has gained much more scholarly attention in the English-speaking world than it has in France. The text of *Coming* is representative of this part of Nancy's work, and draws further attention to how important his wider concern with the interweaving of philosophy, politics, and the arts is to a proper understanding of his writing on sexuality and body.

Coming consists primarily of the text of a long interview with Adèle van Reeth. This is followed by a number of recent occasional works, some of which are the text of lectures, related, some more closely than others, to the general themes of the interview.

Van Reeth is well known to French audiences, although perhaps not to Anglophone ones, as host of the popular radio show and podcast “Les Chemins de la philosophie,” broadcast on *France Culture*. Van Reeth is an experienced and engaging interviewer of contemporary philosophers, able to draw out the complexities of their work and to elucidate their context and contributions for a general audience. The text of *Coming* seems addressed to a similar audience as that of “Les Chemins de la philosophie.” As such, it serves the valuable purpose of making Nancy's ideas accessible to a wider public. For readers not familiar with Nancy's work, *Coming* will provide an accessible introduction to his thinking. Those who are familiar with his work will still find much to admire in this erudite and thoughtful interview, whose conversational tone departs from the sometimes dense and clotted prose that often arises from attempts to render Nancy's plays with language in English, obscuring the elegance of his style in French.

Coming begins with a preface by Nancy that notes the impossibility of translating the French title, *La Jouissance*, into English. In French, Nancy explains, the usage of this word “is divided into two distinct values: the legal meaning of complete ownership (one enjoys, *jouit de*, great wealth) or else the sensual meaning of delectation or of voluptuousness—exclusively sexual voluptuousness following the usage that is dominant today in European French” (p. vii). While the noun *jouissance* is “thus used less to designate a state than the action or movement of *jouir*, enjoying” (p. vii)—a meaning that explains the choice to use “coming” for the English title—this translation nonetheless serves to elide the juridical meaning of *jouissance* in favour of the sexual meaning, whose dominance it thus reinforces in a way that undermines the thrust (pun intended) of Nancy’s argument in the remainder of the book. Anglophone scholars of sexuality and/or French theory familiar with work published in this field since the 1980s will be well aware of the difficulties *jouissance* poses the English translator: the English edition of Roland Barthes’ *Le Plaisir du Texte* [*The Pleasure of the Text*], translated it as “bliss.” In translations of the work of H  l  ne Cixous, who has written at length about the entwining of the legal and sexual meanings of *jouissance*, the word is more often kept in the original.

Etymologically, Nancy notes, “there is no special relationship between the word *jouir* (from the Latin *gaudere*, to rejoice) and sexuality” (p. 4). Although this has become the dominant understanding of *jouissance* in the present day, this meaning is relatively recent; for a long time, *jouissance* “had a mainly legalistic sense, designating the effect of complete possession of something, a possession that allows a complete, limitless use of what I own” (p. 4). Much of the following conversation is dedicated to a consideration of the ways in which this juridical meaning continues to inform its sexual significance. Understood in Western philosophy as the “exceptional, exorbitant, exuberant” (p. 36), this “complete possession” or “limitless use” has clearly come to shape the sexual dimension of *jouissance*.

Neither the law nor sexuality operates the same way for people of different genders, sexualities or races, however. Roland Barthes, writing from the perspective of a gay man, had much to say on this topic. H  l  ne Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julie Kristeva have discussed this at great length from a feminist perspective. More recently, scholars in queer, trans and critical race studies have examined the relationships between sexuality and the law in voluminous detail.

So it is disconcerting to discover all of this work is overlooked in *Coming*. Despite its careful and insightful parsing of the relationship between the legal and sexual meanings and applications of *jouissance*, no consideration is given to how either law or sexuality is inflected differently according to one’s differently positioned subjectivity or body. Aside from glancing references to Marguerite Duras and Fran  oise Sagan, Nancy has nothing to say about the writing or experiences of women on this topic. This is a particularly striking omission given that H  l  ne Cixous, in particular, has written voluminously on the gendering of *jouissance*, and its relation to property rights.[1] Similarly, there is a brief mention of AIDS, but no queer theorists are cited. A short discussion of video games suggests that Nancy is entirely unaware of the burgeoning field of digital sexuality studies and the newer scholarship on digital intimacy.

As a result, *Coming* seems a strangely anachronistic text, returning to an older canon made up of figures such as Freud and Lacan, and writers such as Sade, Bataille, and Henry Miller.

If readers can get past this aspect of the text—and I would imagine that there are many who will not—there are nonetheless many insights and much to enjoy in following Nancy’s undeniably subtle and erudite train of thought. His discussion of the summons of May ’68, “to enjoy without restrictions,” demonstrates how this is enriched by recognising the ongoing importance of the legal meaning of *jouissance* at this time. It is important to understand, he argues, that “the word *jouissance* was not understood then as it is today, as a kind of jubilation or sexual frenzy. It was applied to a consumption of objects and bore the mark of words and thoughts that were very important in the history of Christianity: covetousness, greed, concupiscence. *Jouissance* was ‘restricted’ by definition. ’68 wanted to free itself of bourgeois, petty sin, not

to consume outrageously” (p. 73). Here we see the significance of another of the central threads of Nancy’s philosophy—his reflections on Christianity—woven into his discussion of *jouissance*, and the extent to which this context, perhaps not so familiar to Anglophone readers, casts new light on the specific political and activist moment of May ’68. It is always a pleasure to follow the thoughts of such a careful and creative philosopher as Nancy. However, unlike the *soixante-huitard(e)s* whose politics shaped Nancy’s philosophy, some of the limitations in Nancy’s own approach to the study of *jouissance* may make *Coming* a book difficult “to enjoy with restrictions” or reservations.

NOTES

[1] See, for example, Hélène Cixous, *Le Rire de la Méduse et autres ironies* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2010); Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *La Jeune Née* (Paris: Union Générale d’Éditions, 1975); and Mireille Calle-Gruber and Hélène Cixous, *Hélène Cixous, photos de racines* (Paris: Editions des femmes, 1994).

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ISSN 1553-9172