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Terror at the Heart of Sleep – Night Terrors, Nancy, and Phenomenology

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ABSTRACT

Sleep is soothing, silent, and serene, until it is not. Sleep is often troubled, disturbed, or even “disordered” as the medical literature describes it. This paper begins from an extreme form of such disturbance—terrified sleep. Night terrors (*pavor nocturnus*), in which sleep is violently interrupted, offer important insights into sleep and the methods by which it is studied. The sanitising nature of the medical classification of night terrors as part of a continuum with sleepwalking and yet strikingly distinct from nightmares, leads us into the arms of a more traditional, first-person, phenomenological investigation of night terrors. Without denying the power of both approaches, this paper offers a deconstructive alternative reading of this troubling of sleep through Jean-Luc Nancy’s rethinking of the body, its suffering and materiality. Nancy, and Derrida, help us tarry with the body terrified and trembling in night terrors. First the paper explores the medical incisions within sleep that carve out night terrors, as a delimited phenomenon. This is followed by a consideration of what phenomenology can, and crucially cannot, add to our understanding of night terrors. Next a deconstructive critique of the phenomenological concepts of *Leib* and *Körper* is utilised to return to the material body gripped by the night terror. This in turn leads to an alternative account of this parasomnia through a post-Nancean phenomenology of terror as distinct from fear and *Angst*. The paper closes by drawing out several conclusions about the body, sleep, and phenomenology’s limits when approaching the somnolent.

KEYWORDS

sleep; night terrors;
phenomenology; Nancy; the
body

Introduction

Sleep is soothing, silent, and serene. Except when it is not. Parasomnias, disorders, and disturbances, leave sleep, and us, troubled.¹ Nightmares and night terrors, sometimes referred to as sleep terrors or by the Latin classification *pavor nocturnus*, are, as these names suggest, fear inducing and terrifying phenomena. Whether you awake drenched in sweat and with your heart pounding or suddenly, in the cold light of day, are yanked back into the horrifying scenery of a half-forgotten nightmare, such experiences jar with the peacefulness of normal, “healthy,” sleep. Those interested in the philosophical investigation of sleep might do well to dwell on this different, twisted and horrifying, face of sleep. Furthermore, these disturbing disruptions of our sleep merit, in themselves, philosophical, in addition to their usual medical, consideration.

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Everyone will at some point experience a nightmare. However, the same cannot be said of night terrors. This essay begins by using this distinction—found in medical literature on sleep disorders—as an invitation to consider the constitution of this peculiar parasomnia: night terrors. Throughout this essay such clinical delimitations, and incisions—such as that between night terrors and nightmares—are interrogated and pushed towards their limits. Very broadly, as the strands of this distinction will be unpicked through the course of this essay, nightmares are understood as any “bad dream” which leaves one feeling unpleasant and which one can, in principle, recall and recount. In contrast, night terrors, are bodily sleep phenomena which lead to a violent awakening accompanied by screams and automatic defensive movement, though this is often temporary and unremembered. Phenomenology offers further opportunities for considering this terror swallowed by the night. The focus on the lived experience of the sufferer grants a means of exploring both this suffering and the confusion that comes from the retreat of any cognitive content associated with such suffering. Despite the strengths of such a methodology, in this case the night terror proves doubly resistant to phenomenological analysis. Firstly, sleep itself, which following Aristotle’s *On Sleep*—and Heidegger’s reading of him—can be understood as a binding of perception [aisthēsis], withdraws much of the phenomenological content with which the phenomenologist would usually work.² Secondly, as we will see shortly, the night terror presents a peculiar paucity of appearance in addition to the blanket withdrawal of somnolent life more generally. If the nightmare returns in waking, then the problem for the phenomenologist who would assess night terrors is that they reach for a memory which they find missing.

Such problems for phenomenology suggest an alternative focus. A focus which, truly, screams at us from the body wracked by the night *terror*. It is a body terrorised. In the second half of the essay these two terms: “the body” and “terror” are reassessed in light of Nancy’s critique of phenomenology’s treatment of the body. In opposition to both the “lived-body” and the objective body of medicine Nancy offers an alternative account of the materiality of the body, especially in its suffering. In the last sections of the essay lessons are drawn out both for sleep itself—in finding that the sleep *disorder* remains within, and at the heart of, the *order* of sleep—and for a post-Nancean phenomenology of terror which does justice to this most dis-organising affect. This account of terror is contrasted with two distinct affects/aesthetic states, fear and anxiety, from Heidegger’s *Being and Time*.³

I

There is, of course, an important first step we must make if we are to even begin to address night terrors philosophically. Namely, they must be established as a distinct phenomenon and not reducible to a broader category—the most obvious of which would be the common nightmare. Medical literature and modern science resists just such a move whilst, simultaneously, raising the possibility that another candidate sleep disorder may come to subsume night, or sleep, terrors. “Sleep terrors and sleepwalking . . . are closely related . . . On the basis of their many similarities, these two conditions have been considered recently to be part of the same nosologic continuum.”⁴ This proximity, this “nosologic continuum,” is striking for what it passes over without comment. If the

sleepwalker and the one who suffers from night terrors are alike in their distance from orderly sleep—they both may move, speak, and perform activities usually reserved for the waking—they are strikingly dissimilar in the affects which accompany such aberrant somnolent behaviours. The somnambulist's *dis*-orderly serenity and remarkably skilful coping with their environment juxtaposes with the extreme terror of the one who leaps from their bed, flailing, screaming, and thus shares their terror with all who these disturbances touch. Nonetheless, perhaps sleepwalking is the larger category of phenomenon, within which night terrors amount to only one subcategory. Night terrors, under such a reading, would be, *first*, understood in their proximity to sleepwalking, and only, *second*, nuanced by the addition of the affective state of fear, terror, or extreme disturbance. Yet, what, when exploring these somnolent phenomena, justifies the prioritising of, supposedly neutral, physical or observable features over and above the affective/aesthetic elements of these parasomnias? It is tempting to read back from this tendency to a problematic privileging of the observer standpoint, the typical position of the sleep scientist and, to a lesser extent even of the clinician. It is almost as if white coated figures stood behind a sound proofed glass window and watched a series of sleeping bodies perform similar, aberrant, movements whilst the piercing screams of those in the grip of night terrors fall on deaf ears. A sleep-partner, phenomenologist, or indeed a painter would surely approach these somnolent-phenomena very differently.⁵

A night terror is not, thus, merely a fearful *and* somnolent form of perambulation. How then are we to describe, and identify, the night terror? It is important to consider night terrors from the perspective of those who encounter the one so gripped as well as from the experiences of the sufferer—and who could doubt this characterisation, that they suffer or are pained by the night terror?⁶ Is it not the body which pushes this beyond doubt? The palpitations, the sweating, the hyperventilating, such “movements” remain whereas the memory, the experiential content, the consciousness of this terror, leaves barely a trace. Note here that the Latin *pavor*, which makes up part of the classification of this condition, can mean not only “terror” or “fear” but also the body trembling with such. This suggests that night terrors are, thus, not only a matter of internal experience but also of the body moved, uncontrollably, by fear.

What then if one instead attempts to isolate night terrors by beginning with this suffering, with the affective/aesthetic experience? Such an attempt, which is implicit within the clinical literature's reductive talk of “phenomenology” (usually limited to the reported experiences of patients) naturally brings us into proximity to other frightening parasomnias—nightmares and sleep paralysis. From such a starting point our question becomes: “how are night terrors to be distinguished from these neighbouring phenomena?” To begin with sleep paralysis: such attacks are, definitionally, accompanied by comparative cognitive clarity and leave behind detailed and extremely disturbing memories.⁷ Night terrors by contrast are rarely remembered. Here we also see the main diagnostic means by which clinicians distinguish night terrors from their most common cousins, nightmares.⁸ Upon awaking from a night terror—either immediately or after returning to sleep (which is common enough that some medical sources describe the person suffering from night terrors as remaining asleep⁹)—the ability to recall the details of the episode is significantly reduced when compared with ordinary nightmares.¹⁰ Both the terrifying “dream content” and the behaviour it causes—which is well beyond the normal twitching, mumbling, and tossing and turnings associated with even particularly

bad nightmares—are lost to the sufferer.¹¹ Perhaps it is this absence of content, this missing phenomenological well-spring, that is at the root of the ambiguous naming practice: night *or* sleep terrors? The association of night terrors with the night—with the blackness which precedes and may accommodate or prohibit sleep—can lead one back to the equality of night,¹² to the indistinction of “the night in which . . . all cows are black.”¹³

These motivating differences, however, find confirmation, for the sleep scientist approaching the night terror that is, in a further distinction. Night terrors are located within the deepest, quietest, or slowest wave, periods of sleep. They are, like sleepwalking, a parasomnia of the non-rapid eye movement (NREM) stage of sleep.¹⁴ In contrast, nightmares “occur at any time of the night” and are identified as parasomnias of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep.¹⁵ It is worth noting that this distinction, along with those between sleep paralysis and nightmares just explored, implies a conception of sleep itself, sleep’s essence, proper sleep, and its *true* depths. Sleep is minimally mobile—almost but not quite without agitation. Sleep slips away from memory—which only touches on sleep *as absent*, or more exactly still *as absenting itself*, when we awake. Sleep exists as part of a scale, along which we move, and which can be carved up into stages, between absolute attention and inattention—a modern re-writing, or at best re-imagining, of the distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness. Furthermore, this account of sleep’s essence *begins* with the affective account of night terrors before swiftly leaving behind such description in favour of an *objective*, measurable, and detached, locating of night terrors on a diagram, or scale, of sleep and waking.

Crucially, this image, or figure, of sleep is not only presupposed by but is also constructed out of such distinctions. In important senses, it is the sleep of the sleep laboratory (though it most certainly both pre-existed and prefigured that space). This figuration of sleep is an amalgamation of the concrete instances of troubled sleep which populate the lab—the sleep of those who have brought themselves to the lab in the hopes of *re-ordering* their sleep—and the abstract image—the promise which motivates the patients’ journeys to the lab—of a healthy, well-ordered, sleep. Between, that is, the idealised past of a time when sleep was sound and the dream of a future when sleep lies calm and still. The categorisation of sleep’s disorders arises between these poles of ordered sleep—bounded and delimited by sleep in good order, right beside, and complementary to, the activities of the day. This categorisation, constructed as it is within the framework of dreams of sleep, of a dream of a *proper night’s sleep*, is necessarily also a sanitisation of sleep.¹⁶ It places sleep on the inert side of the age-old dualisms of mind-body, spirit-matter, conscious-unconscious—dualism that, with the help of Nancy will be problematised below. Such a process of sanitisation is, ironically, uncondusive to sleep—anyone who has visited a sleep clinic knows this long before their head hits a uniform, and anti-bacterial smelling pillow. This particular case of sanitisation, the incision between sleep terrors and nightmares, cuts off disorders at the heart of sleep, disorders of sleep *itself*, from disorders of lighter sleep, of sleep afflicted by at the very least *rapid eye movement* (REM). It is, in other words, an attempt—a necessarily failed attempt—to categorise night terrors such that they, placed firmly beyond the realm of waking life, cannot trouble the implicit understanding of sleep at work behind such processes.

II

Should one not calm oneself and stay still, if only for a moment. For otherwise this critique of the sanitisation of sleep risks moving all too rapidly from one notion of proper sleep—healthy and well-ordered sleep—to another—the proper sleep of the phenomenologist whether approaching or arising again from the bed.¹⁷ One could understand this as a risk of slipping, of falling perhaps, into the phenomenological tradition's common criticism that the natural attitude privileges the body as object, *Körper*, over the body as lived, *Leib*. Why is this a risk? Why should one resist this move from clinical categories and distinctions to the riches of the phenomenological method? Indeed, the phenomenological method *is* an important corrective to the sterilised and standardised approaches to night terrors. The phenomenologist's privileging of the lived experience of the sufferer of night terrors provides a bulwark against overly quick moves away from the affective/aesthetic element of this phenomena. From, that is the *terror* of night terrors.

Nonetheless, there are at least two reasons to pause here and to be cautious about such a move. Firstly, there is the fact that when faced with this *disorder* of somnolent *life* the phenomenologist is presented with a perfectly ordinary feature of sleep taken to an extreme; namely, the disappearance of phenomenal content. The night terror retreats from the lived experience of the sufferer. If nightmares often fade and are forgotten, then the night terror is defined by a far more radical resistance to appropriation into waking consciousness. In this way the phenomenologist arising from the night terror finds themselves in the company of the sleep scientist—here they share enough common ground to make the same incision into sleep. This might be rephrased thus: the phenomenological method presents us not with a host of riches surrounding night terrors—riches distinct from the results of, and beyond the reach of, the sleep scientist—but rather with the striking paucity which confronts one who would bring sleep and phenomenology into dialogue. Two exceptions—and they are crucial exceptions that reverberate through the rest of this essay—to this phenomenological poverty can be sketched as the secondary presence, as echo or reflection, of the night terror in the waking body and in others who were awake during, or awoken by, the sufferer's episode.¹⁸

The second reason one might, when it comes to a consideration of night terrors, resist a simple shift from the clinical privileging of the sleeping body as *Körper* towards a phenomenological reading of the body as *Leib*, rests on Nancy's more general critique of the *Körper-Leib* distinction and of the thinking of the body which underlies it. As Nancy,¹⁹ Derrida,²⁰ and many others in their wake, have noted, this particular distinction in the phenomenology of the body is intimately connected with Husserl's famous analyses of two hands "self-touching."²¹ It is here that the *Körper-Leib* distinction in phenomenology is born, but also, and essentially, the haptocentric privileging of touch over the other senses which Derrida will diagnose.²² In explicating this distinction's roots in Husserl's *Ideas II* one can identify the core feature of the phenomenological approach to the body which Nancy repudiates—what he calls its return to "a primary interiority."²³ With this critique in hand it will be possible to return to night terrors via Nancy's alternative reading of the terrified body. From there an unfolding of terror itself can be offered and conclusions drawn about night terrors and the somnolent more generally.

III

For Husserl the moment of two hands “self-touching” is crucial in that it is the moment at which the distinction between two modes of our constituted bodily consciousness is achieved. These are, of course, *Körper*—the callouses where the fingers join the palm, the raised but pliable veins on the upper side, in other words, the hand, and body, as intentional object—and *Leib*—the localisation of sensation (*Empfindungen*). If *Körper* is constituted as the intentional object of our body and is, as such, akin in kind to those other intentional objects all around us—from keyboards and birds to, crucially, the bodies of other people—then *Leib* is fundamentally not some other, equivalent, object for intentionality. *Leib* is constituted *as* unique *by* the distinctive variety of sensations which form it. Touch is not alone here but it does amount to the model by which this special variety of sensations are understood.²⁴ These *localised* “sensings” (*Empfindnisse*) are to be distinguished from all other, non-localised, sensations. Such others are given as parts of a jigsaw, as within and forming a manifold. Non-localised sensations are, in other words, given through adumbrations (*Abschattungen*). The visual sensation we have of another’s hand is, for Husserl, distinct from the sensing we have of our lived-body, our *Leib*, in that the former is only ever given partially, as situated within a perspective and as indicating the absent sides of the hand one might see if it were to be turned over.

The sensing which spreads over the surface of the hand and extends into it is not a real quality of a thing (speaking always within the frame of intuitions and their givenness) such as, for example, the roughness of the hand, its color, etc. These real properties of a thing are constituted through a sensuous schema and manifolds of adumbrations. To speak in a similar way of sensings would be quite absurd.²⁵

As Slatman points out, it is this unique feature of sensings which grants the lived-body [*Leib*] its distinction from intentional objects, including our material body [*Körper*].

One’s body as one’s own, as *Leib*, is given without any perspective and is thus entirely present. Consequently, Husserl argues that the *Leib* comprises the “zero point” of all orientations, its spatiality being characterized as an “absolute here.”²⁶

It follows, crucially, that *Leib* is not to be understood as the equivalent, if opposed, side of a symmetrical distinction.²⁷ Slatman describes this as the “ambiguity” of Husserl’s account.²⁸ *Leib* is both constituted by transcendental consciousness *and* the origin point, “absolute here,” from which all constituted consciousness of the spatiotemporal world is possible. This latter would seem to amount to a transcendental condition for the possibility of phenomenological life and one co-extensive with and based in our material, embodied, life. It is this ambiguity that has been read by later phenomenologists, most famously Merleau-Ponty, as situating the phenomenological subject as embodied *within* and, crucially, *of* the world.

However, other readers, such as Derrida and Nancy, have seen in this ambiguity a sleight of hand. Derrida, for example, criticises the *Leib-Körper* distinction as failing to constitute two equal modes of consciousness of our body but instead producing a priority of body as *Leib*, as the body *proper*. To return, momentarily, to the guiding themes of this essay—night terrors and sleep—it is now possible to see that the phenomenological account of the body asleep begins with this embodiment, this “zero point,” and critiques

accounts such as the medical carving up of sleep and its disorders, for missing the priority of *Leib*.

Yet such a priority, such an origin point, may not be so easily established. Derrida's critique responds explicitly to tensions within Husserl's development of the distinction. He wonders:

... whether there is any pure auto-affection of the touching or the touched, and therefore any pure, immediate experience of the purely proper body, the body proper that is living, purely living. Or if, on the contrary, this experience is at least not already *haunted*, but *constitutively* haunted, by some hetero-affection related to spacing and then to visible spatiality—where an intruder may come through.²⁹

Derrida's worry can be summarised as follows: how can Husserl move from the *doubled* interplay of *Körper-Leib*, in self-touching, to the *singular* priority of the body-proper? Derrida is pointing out—and Nancy will share this intuition—that the phenomenological approach to the body, and the *use* of the distinction we are engaging with, travels along traditional train tracks away from the materiality of the body and towards what that body is *not*, the soul, self, mind. However, such a route will, of course, be unable to do away with the station, or sidings, of the materiality of the body through which it has, necessarily and constitutively, passed.

This detour by way of the foreign outside, no matter how subtle, furtive, and elusive, is at the same time what allows us to speak of a “double” apprehension (otherwise there would be one thing only: only some touching or only some touched) and what allows me to undergo the test of this singular experience and distinguish between the I and the non-I, and to say “this is my body,” or, quoting Husserl himself, to draw the consequence that “I, the ‘subject of the Body,’ can say that what belongs to the material thing is its, not mine. [*Ideas II*, p. 157]” For that, it is necessary that the space of the material thing—like a difference, like the heterogeneity of a spacing—slip between the touching and the touched ...³⁰

Here Nancy and Derrida share an appreciation for the necessity of exteriority in thinking through, and of, the body. It is precisely phenomenology's insistent return to interiority—to the same or proper—that Nancy finds at work in the *Körper-Leib* distinction. If Derrida wonders at the possibility of such a move, then Nancy is adamant that it is impossible.

The phenomenological analyses of “self-touching” always return to a primary interiority. Which is impossible. To begin with, I have to be in exteriority in order to touch myself. ... the body is always outside, on the outside. It is from the outside. The body is always outside the intimacy of the body itself.³¹

This critique of the phenomenology of the body and its founding distinction should warn us off any overly quick move away from the *Körper*-obsessed clinical approach to night terrors into the arms of an equally obsessive and equally fantastical illusion of an originary experience of night terrors, or in fact any experiences, *prior* to the material being of such. A phenomenology of night terrors, or of sleep, runs the risk of just such an obsession, of just such a fantasy—the fantasy of an interior, and secret, heart of sleep. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand Nancy's insistence on the impossibility of a “primary interiority” as a repudiation of the metaphysics of the subject, of a privileged identity, a rejection of aesthetics as constitutively solitary, *and* a rejection of *any* primary origin point for meaning or sense. This rejection operates no matter

where, or to *what*, the transcendental priority is endowed.³² Nancy refuses the very structure of transcendental explanation and instead demands that we tarry with the fact of bodies. This is Nancy's rethinking of touch as—in line with Derrida's internal critique of Husserl's notion of self-touching as an originary auto-affection (or auto-aesthetics)—interruption, noncoincidence, and difference. As Donald A. Landes puts it Nancy substitutes the “quasi-transcendental of mediation” for the transcendental structure internal to phenomenology.³³

IV

Nancy situates phenomenology's approach to the body within a broader tradition which he names and describes thus; “*incarnation*, where Spirit infuses the body.”³⁴ This term can help us to clarify Nancy's refusal of transcendental method, of what in that method *utilises* or steps through, or better *over*, the body, and towards, something, anything, else. Such a move reduces the body to what Nancy terms “the signifying body”:

The signifying body—the whole corpus of philosophical, theological, psychoanalytic, and semiological bodies—*incarnates* one thing only: the absolute contradiction of not being able to be a *body* without being the *body of a spirit*, which disembodies it.³⁵

This disembodiment of the body is what Nancy finds at work in the phenomenological account of *Leib*, of the “‘body proper,’ which would, in fact, be only a figure of the soul, alone knowing itself properly through an extended figure.”³⁶ Here one sees that his rejection of the body as it operates in phenomenology, entails a dismissal of the concept of “body” unless it be understood as, in the words of Juan Manuel Garrido, only “what one cannot incorporate, decorporate, what *excripts* [*sic*] itself at the very moment of being eaten and digested, or understood or signified.”³⁷

For the purposes of this essay, this helps to frame and structure any, post-Nancean, attempt to clarify night terrors, and sleep itself, as *bodily* phenomena. It also helps to situate Nancy's terminological shifts. Whilst a nuanced and charitable reader of Merleau-Ponty, he is, in this regard, forceful in rejecting any approach to the body via the term “flesh [*chair*].” “In this sense, the ‘passion’ of the ‘flesh,’ in the flesh, is finished—and this is why the word *body* ought to succeed on the word *flesh*, which was always over abundant, nourished by sense, and egological [*égologique*].”³⁸ This quotation is taken from Nancy's, 1993 book, *The Sense of the World*. However, already in 1990, in an early version of the reflections that would later form *Corpus* (), we read that one ought, so as to think through and out of the bind of Incarnation, dispense with the “very idea of body.”

... in order to think such *mimesis*—and to elaborate the whole dogmatics of Incarnation—, one had to dispense with the *body*, with the very idea of body. The body was born in Plato's cave, or rather it was conceived and shaped in the form of the cave: as a prison or tomb of the soul, and the body was first thought *from the inside* ...³⁹

Against this weighty legacy of the body conceived from “the outset ... in the anxiety of this confinement.”⁴⁰ Against this “cave-body” Nancy insists on bodies, in the plural, and does so at the expense of any *true*, *proper*, *ideal*(ised) form of the bodily.⁴¹ “Corpus,” the title of Nancy's reflections on body and bodies, has the advantage of being both singular and plural: “Corpus: a body is a collection of pieces, bits, members, zones, states,

functions. Heads, hands and cartilage, burnings, smoothnesses, spurts, sleep”⁴² However, it is to another connotation of this word that we must now turn our attention: corpus suggests the corporeal, the corpse, and *Körper*. It suggests in, other words, the materiality of bodies.

Nancy’s move away from “flesh,” via “body” and then “bodies,” to “corpus,” as such, not only illustrates his course away from phenomenology but also carries with it certain risks.⁴³ It risks—with its co-opting of both materialism and the Cartesian schema of *partes extra partes*—appearing to return straight into the arms of materialist and mechanistic conceptions of the body. Nancy will, of course, mutate, as he co-opts, these specific terms—one monist, “materialism,” and one dualist, “*partes extra partes*.” Matter in his philosophy, as our explication of his critique of interiority suggests, is not to be thought of as “substance or mass . . . which is self-containing and coinciding with itself.”⁴⁴ To understand the body as substance is to subject it to a transcendental ordering, to a hierarchy which never truly encounters the body as body but always seeks the meaning, significance, or truth *in* the body. It is in resisting this tendency that Nancy makes appeal to the body’s materiality: “A body’s material. It’s dense. It’s impenetrable. Penetrate it, and you break it, puncture it, tear it.”⁴⁵ This speaks against the possibility of finding a “hiding place” for the body’s “secret.”⁴⁶ Such materiality of the body is to be contrasted with Incarnation’s structuring of the body in relation to its truth and negation: spirit. Garrido articulates it thus: “for the truth of such a body [the body of Incarnation] to be revealed, it must be *penetrated*, even destroyed, so that Spirit will be free.”⁴⁷ For the purposes of this essay this means that one cannot hope, whether via phenomenology of the natural sciences, to find the truth, or essence, of night terrors, or indeed of sleep, *within* the sleeping body. Or perhaps better: any attempt to do so risks trampling over, or throwing to the wayside, the body in its materiality.

If the materiality of the body is not to be mistaken for the substantiality of a condition upon which, or through which, meaning, truth, and signification arrives, then, equally, this matter should not be considered a *mass*. The mass is concentration “without extension, without exposition, a point.”⁴⁸ For Nancy the body is anything but a point in isolation. Nancy is aware of the phenomenological critique of naïve materialism and is anything but pre-phenomenological. This is how he rereads Descartes’ *Partes extra Partes*: bodies are exterior already, they are singular plural. “*Partes extra partes*: here, what is impenetrable is not the massive thickness of the *pars*, but the displacement of the *extra*.”⁴⁹ We should be careful not to read this mutation as a merely theoretical gesture—the material density of bodies is all too often literally converted into the mass of the mass grave.

Where there’s a mass of bodies, there’s no more body, and where there’s a mass of bodies, there’s a mass grave. And this is concentration. It’s one of those aspects of the corpse . . . it’s the cadaver forming a mass.⁵⁰

These mutations in the corpus of bodily terminology and ontology are already in contact with the ethical and political concerns of our world of bodies. Already here we see what a Nancean approach offers us in rethinking night terrors; namely, the prioritising and recognition of the sleeping body suffering in terror.

How then, given the weight of the tradition of Incarnation, is the body to be ex-posed beyond and before the signifying body of the tradition? One way that this comes into view is through suffering.⁵¹ Suffering does not, it must be acknowledged, necessarily point one towards the body in its resistance to signification. The figure of Christ, as well as the logic of sacrifice which it incarnates, demonstrates that the suffering body can all too easily be read as the means to some end, to some meaning, to some/the truth. Nonetheless, sometimes something about such uses and abuses of the suffering body repulses us. It is to this aspect of the suffering body that Nancy draws our attention in the passages from *The Sense of the World* directly following his warnings on the “over abundance” of “egological [égologique],” “passions” of the term flesh.⁵²

For what is coming is the world of bodies, and suffering is simply established there, if one can put it this way, without any depth of passion whatsoever. This could mean that it is tendentially “anesthetized” (but what would *tendentially* then mean?): not merely in hospitals, but also, in another way, in wars that are no longer accompanied by the pathos-laden celebration of suffering, but the cold horror of ignoble stupidity. It means for sure that suffering is no longer sacrificial. And thus, that it is in no way redemptive. . . .

To know what stance to take, when there is nothing left to say, in the face of a deposited body (and yet not to resort to anatomy lessons, another way of establishing significations): when we know this, then only will we be able to think through the belonging of suffering (or unhappiness) to the constitution of sense *without sublating* suffering in sense. That is, we will be able to posit this suffering as inassimilable, irreconcilable, and intolerable.⁵³

This world, of suffering bodies, is our world. A world, according to Nancy, in which the sacrificial logic—like the penetrative logic of Incarnation (and one might add the logic of the mass [grave, incarceration, manipulation])—repulses us with a force that throws us back into an acknowledgement of the “inassimilable, irreconcilable, and intolerable” suffering of bodies. It is within this register, this world, that one can reconceive night terrors. To do so it will be necessary to chart a course between the Scylla of the sleep disorder pinpointed on an anatomical diagram and the Charybdis of a phenomenological suspension of bodily materiality.

V

How now to return to night terrors, to terror at the heart of sleep? Such a return will need to be a return to the impenetrability of sleeping bodies, *as* disordered, *and* as always already conditioned by exteriority. It would also require the caveat that this sleeping body, this “heart” of sleep, is precisely not a point, *pars*, which can form a foundation upon which to build but rather a spacing, *extra*, which, in true somnolent fashion, tarries where it lies rather than leading swiftly on to . . . “better things.” This is not the sleeping body *enlivened*, the body *incarnated*, or sleep hollowed out and stuffed full of secrets. So much for what the body wracked by night terrors is *not*. What can one say of this body? One can say that it suffers. That it suffers its terror.

In the spirit of this *ipsa via corporali* a closer inspection of the “terror” of night terrors seems appropriate. As an affect/aesthetic state, terror sits in proximity to other affects, or moods, made famous by the Heideggerian tradition. Yet, if terror is to be read as an affect of suffering one must be careful not to reduce it to Heideggerian moods of fear [*Furcht*]

and anxiety [*Angst*]. In contrast, Heidegger explicitly describes terror [*Entsetzen*] as a modification of fear.⁵⁴ Fear is to be taken as the general category and terror exists as species of fear. A species confined to very specific circumstances. When “something threatening breaks in suddenly . . . fear becomes *alarm* [*Erschrecken*].”⁵⁵ However, fear can also become “*dread* [*Grauen*]” if “that which threatens has the character of something altogether unfamiliar.”⁵⁶ For Heidegger, terror is the combination of alarm and dread. It is a composite modification of fear and is existentially delimited by this origin point. In this sense, Heidegger’s account of terror suffers from the same structural problem as the clinical definitions of night terrors—it loses sight of the phenomenon in approaching it through a privileged neighbouring phenomenon.

Sufficiently careful description of terror, however, helps to provide an alternative account. The trembling terrified body is neither focused outwards to something signified as terrifying, nor does it call one back to the authentic *self* in its being-towards-death. The radicality of the experience of terror can be sketched—in words that recall Nancy’s multiplying motifs of the limit, surface, and skin—as being “scared out of one’s skin.” Terror’s extremity hoists one out of one’s self, out of one’s interiority. Neither should this be taken, as Nicholas Zingale and Ralph Hummel suggest—contra the letter of Heidegger’s categorisation of terror, as a species of *Angst*.⁵⁷ Terror, in our analysis, is not simply the loss of an intentional object. Neither is it an anxiety of the “no-thing” but rather a different kind of curtailing of our signifying procedures. A different kind of *dis*-ordering of the order of significance. Terror, in its experience, is the exteriorising of the body as materiality. The terrified body, like the suffering body, is a refusal of any and all significations by which to define it—a body which confronts one with a striking paucity of resources from which to build its isolation, its cavern, its prison. Heideggerian fear and anxiety are both affects which act as stepping stones away from the body gripped by them and towards some other significance. Terror, conversely, is the stumbling stone to such steps beyond the body, or rather bodies. After all, terror is at least as contagious as laughter and in this it shares the traits of the affective/aesthetic more generally conceived.⁵⁸

VI

How to understand the *night* terror within this corpus of terms: terror, suffering, bodies? The night terror can be seen as the suffering body but only in so far as it refuses interpretation, refuses discourse. This refusal in the *sleep* terror is doubled. Recall Aristotle’s characterisation of sleep fetter or bond [*desmos*] over perception [*aisthēsis*] and as immobility [*akinēsia*].⁵⁹ A body which withholds the signs of its suffering from the waking mind, from consciousness, except in so far as it catapults one into waking, into discourse. Here, recall the first problem facing the phenomenologist who turns to face this phenomenon as it retreats—its paucity of content. What the phenomenologist encountered as a puzzle and problem the Nancean reading confirms as fundamental to the pseudo-phenomenon. We are left anesthetized in our inability to explain that which brings us to the condition of seeking explanations for our terror-wracked bodies. It ushers in a silence which echoes the screams which precede it. The night terror’s terror is not a terror *of* the suffering body but *as*—Nancy might say “right at”—the suffering body. A terror already slipped from

consciousness but evidenced in tachycardia, in hypnopompic jerks, and receding auto-defensive movements. It is a terror which cuts speech, interpretation, and analysis short and leaves only bodies still wracked by its terror and slowly coming back to themselves—here the plural is both conceptual and literal, as all who have shared living and sleeping space with the sufferer of night terrors will attest. Nick Ut's most famous photo, "The Terror of War" (1972), is appropriately titled. The photo is of terror, it touches one, takes one's breath away, and does all of this with the force of bodies which are not signifying but are precisely refusing justification and explanation.⁶⁰

What of the medical incision, between such and the more commonplace nightmare, with which this essay began? It is true that the night terror, following this analysis, can be privileged over the nightmare in so far as the former can be seen as a falling away from the order of signification. In contrast, the nightmare, leaves all too many signs of its content lingering into the day. The distinction is preserved, the night terror is not reducible to the nightmare. However, and crucially, neither could one make a similar reductive move in the opposite direction. There can be no subsuming of the nightmare into the night terror. Instead, the night terror, placed as it is on the anatomical "diagram" of sleep, at the "heart" of sleep, within NREM sleep, is always already the expelling of any signifying origin point for sleep or sleep's disturbances. Instead, night terrors draw one, in the wake of their withdrawal, from this disorder of sleep towards sleep's disorderliness, its disturbances and deformities. "Different, bodies are all somewhat deformed. A perfectly formed body is a disturbing, indiscreet body in the world of bodies, unacceptable. It's a diagram, not a body."⁶¹ No matter how one "cuts it" the sleeping body contains the unease, disruption, and disorder of a terror antipodal to sleep's supposed essence: uninterrupted, serene, still. Night terrors show—in never showing up in the cold light of day—that the sleeping body is antipathical to the signifying body. "The body is *ours* and *proper* to us precisely to the degree that it doesn't belong to us and evades the intimacy of our proper being, if this being ever even exists, something the body, precisely, should make us seriously doubt."⁶²

Conclusion

What to conclude from this terrorising of the heart of sleep? This particular sleep disorder, as bodily in the sense we have explored, does not stand out from somnolent life but rather brings the impenetrability of sleep and the body together in their disorderliness.⁶³ This offer means by which one can learn from night terrors without being restricted to medical and phenomenological accounts of them, and, more generally, orderings of the sleeping body. It is only if prefigured, via the structure of Incarnation, as a cavernous space awaiting the philosophical exploration, that sleep, and the sleeping body, can be read as cleaved from its disorders. In contrast, one should read night terrors as *sleep* terrors, as *disorderly sleep* as opposed to a disordering *of* a previously orderly sleep. Having awoken from sleep, our day, our insomnia, is always already disordered by sleep and the terrorised trembling of the night terror, in its doubling refusal of significations, sticks in the maw of our wakeful attempts to escape, be done with, and move on from such material suffering.

Notes

1. "Parasomnias" is a medical term for varieties of sleep disorders which involve "abnormal" movements, behaviours, and emotions. Sleep disorders is a broader term which includes the most commonly reported form of sleep disorder: trouble getting or staying asleep, insomnia.
2. Aristotle. *On Sleep*, pp. 1004–1012 [453b12–458a32]. Also see, Heidegger, Martin. *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, pp. 62–63.
3. The connection between art, and the aesthetic, and affect, being affected or—in Nancean language—touched rests on a rereading of both the aesthetic and of perceptions. The aesthetic, in this sense, eschews the disinterested gaze of the detached spectator, contra Stolnitz, for example in his "'The Aesthetic Attitude' in the Rise of Modern Aesthetics." Following Schuback, it is possible to read Aristotle's use of *aisthēsis*, perception, as originally, in the case of humans, "the capacity to discern between good and evil, the just and the unjust." "The Hermeneutic Slumber," pp. 131–132. Schuback draws us away from reading this account of perception as prioritising the ethical and instead points to the crucial status of "seeing differences" here. *Ibid*, p. 132. It is in this sense that this essay reads perception and aesthetics as, at its root, a being touched by difference—prior to any categories (attractive and unattractive) or schemas (true or illusory) by which this difference is ordered.
4. World Health Organisation (WHO), *The ICD-10*, p. 148. "Nosology" is the branch of medical science dealing with the classification of diseases.
5. It is worth stressing at this point that the goal of this essay is not to dispute the findings or processes of clinical and scientific investigations into night terrors or any other sleep disorder. Instead, it aims to reassess and to explore sleep's relationship with some of this disorder. In this sense, any critiques of clinical approaches to night terrors and their relations to other sleep disorders are not designed to alter clinical diagnostic practices but rather to learn as much as possible from the phenomena which such practices both aim at and, crucially, construct. Nonetheless, it is plausible that the larger scale findings of this research—in particular, the finding that sleep is not easily severed from its disorders and disorderliness—would prove illuminating for higher-level conceptual approaches within clinical discussions of "healthy" sleep and sleep's relationship to wellness and the good life.
6. This reading of night terrors as the *suffering* somnolent body is explored in the second half of this essay.
7. Sleep paralysis and its relationship with nightmares will be returned to in the penultimate section of this essay.
8. World Health Organisation (WHO), *The ICD-10*, pp. 148–9.
9. Mayo Clinic, "Sleep Terrors (Night Terrors)".
10. For example, Uguccioni, G. et al. "Fight or flight?," pp. 391–398.
11. Here there is a proximity between the nightmare and the night terror, at least in the sense of something left behind when we wake—though in both these cases we are only too happy to do so.
12. See, for example, Nancy, J-L. *The Fall of Sleep*, p. 21: "The passage to this other is created by the equality of night. All nights are equal. All equally suspend the time of difference . . .".
13. Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 9.
14. See, Szelenger. "Sleepwalking and night terrors," pp. 263–270.
15. World Health Organisation (WHO), *The ICD-10*, p. 148.
16. Sanitisation which comes from "sanitary" has as its root the Latin *sanus* which already presents the equivocation between the sound of mind, sanity, and the sound of body, healthy. Nietzsche returns, eternally, when surrounded by such terms.
17. In this section, and throughout this essay, phenomenology, and the phenomenological, are discussed in a generic way. However, it is clear that phenomenologists often disagree and in highly significant ways. In so far as the target of the discussions which follow can be narrowed, it should be said that those phenomenologists that have strained against, and extended or stretched out the phenomenological method in the wake of Husserl, should be considered less vulnerable to the critiques which follow. Nonetheless, Nancy's disquiet

regarding the Merleau-Pontian term the flesh [*la chair*] and more generally to the place of origins and foundationalism in phenomenology, illustrates that the exact line of demarcation between traditional phenomenological method, à la Husserl, and more radical and flexible phenomenologists would require a finer grained analysis than is possible here.

18. This essay will focus on the former of these aspects in what follows but the latter is ever present and offers a justification for pursuing a Nancean approach to this night terrors given his thinking of community, touch, and being-singular-plural.
19. Nancy. "On the Soul," in *Corpus*, p. 128.
20. Derrida. *On Touching*, *passim*. See in particular, Ch. 8, pp. 159–182.
21. Husserl. *Ideas II*, Section Two, Ch 3, Sc. 36, pp. 152–154.
22. Derrida. *On Touching*, p. 161. "... in Husserl, as in Plato and so many others, ... the implicit philosophy of the gaze—as paradoxical as this may appear—always and necessarily *fulfils itself*, ... in an intuition tactually filled-in and in the hyperbole of continuistic haptocenteredness."
23. See note 19 above.
24. Husserl. *Ideas II*, pp. 158–159: "Obviously, the Body is also to be seen just like any other thing, but it becomes a *Body* [*zum Leib wird*] only by incorporating tactile sensations [*Einlegen der Empfindungen im Abtasten*], pain sensations [*das Einlegen der Schmerzempfindungen*], etc.—in short, by the localization of the sensations as sensations. In that case the visual Body also participates in the localization, because it coincides with the tactual Body, just as other things (or phantoms) coincide, ones which are constituted both visually and tactually, and thus there arises the idea of a sensing thing which 'has' and which can have, under certain circumstances, certain sensations (sensations of touch, pressure, warmth, coldness, pain, etc.) and, in particular, have them as localized in itself primarily and properly. This is then a precondition for the existence of all sensations (and appearances) whatsoever, the visual and acoustic included, though these do not have a primary localization in the Body."
25. *Ibid*, p. 157.
26. Slatman. "The *Körper-Leib* Distinction," p. 205.
27. This is what Derrida is pointing towards when he reminds us that "*psychic reality* here forms the explicit theme, or the only one, in fact, of this phenomenology of the body proper." Derrida, J. *On Touching*, p. 173. Our attention has already been drawn to this ten pages earlier in *On Touching* by recalling "the title of chapter 3 [of Husserl's *Ideas II*, Sc II]—"The Constitution of *Psychic Reality* Through the Body.""*ibid*, p. 163 This *instrumentalization* of the is explored below.
28. Slatman. "The *Körper-Leib* Distinction," p. 206.
29. Derrida. *On Touching*, p. 179.
30. *Ibid*, p. 175.
31. Nancy. "On the Soul," *Corpus*, p. 128–29.
32. See note 28 above.
33. Landes. "*Le Toucher* and the Corpus of Tact," p. 90.
34. Nancy. *Corpus*, p. 17.
35. *Ibid*, p. 69.
36. Nancy. *Corpus*, "The Extension of the Soul," p. 139.
37. Garrido. "Jean-Luc Nancy's Concept of Body," *Epoché*, Vol 14, 1, Fall 2009, p. 203.
38. Nancy. *The Sense of the World*, p. 149.
39. Nancy. *The Birth of Presence*, "Corpus," p. 191. Garrido eloquently summarises this move as follows: "When Nancy affirms, at the beginning of *Corpus*, that body is 'our invention' ('Who else in the world knows it?' he asks in C, 9 [p. 5 of the translation, *Corpus*]), he means above all a Christian invention, from the crucified body or, before that, from Plato's body-cavern up until the "proper body" and the "flesh" of Modern phenomenology. All the possibilities of the understanding of body, in the West, are somehow contained in the sentence of Jesus: *hoc est enim corpus meum*." Garrido. "Jean-Luc Nancy's Concept of Body," p. 201. See also, Nancy's dialogue with Esposito "Dialogue on the Philosophy to

- Come,” translated by Timothy Campbell, in *Minnesota Review*, 75, 2010, p. 86: “Flesh,’ conversely, is not a word I use because it is too tied to the Judeo-Christian tradition and to Husserl and Merleau-Ponty’s use of it (will this perhaps be the weak trace of an affiliation?). It is a word of the in-itself and not of the outside-itself.”
40. Nancy. *Corpus*, p. 69.
 41. *Ibid*.
 42. *Ibid*, “Fifty-eight Indices on the Body,” p. 155. Nancy continues this list, as he so often does. Nonetheless, we might tarry with sleep a little longer than he does.
 43. *Ibid*, p. 153: “A body, bodies: there can’t be just one, and the body bears the difference.”
 44. Slatman. “The *Körper-Leib* Distinction,” p. 207.
 45. Nancy. *Corpus*, “Fifty-eight,” p. 150.
 46. *Ibid*, p. 156.
 47. Garrido. “Jean-Luc Nancy’s Concept of Body,” p. 203.
 48. Nancy. *Corpus*, “On the Soul,” p. 124.
 49. Nancy. *Corpus*, p. 29.
 50. See note 48 above.
 51. The body of pleasure and that of suffering are similar though importantly distinct in Nancy’s analysis: “What is a body of pleasure? It is a body detached from the schemas of perception and operation. [Here recall, . . . In any case, what is blurred is everything that is organized for—subordinated to—the task of effecting something external. . . . The same holds for the suffering body, though in the mode of refusal, resistance, and repulsion, whereas pleasure is appealing and is requested again and again indefinitely.” Nancy. *Corpus II*, p. 93.
 52. See note 38 above.
 53. *Ibid*, pp. 149–150.
 54. Heidegger. *Being and Time*, pp. 181–182 [H142]. There is, as so often, a question regarding the translation in this case. *Entsetzen* is usually translated into English as horror, whereas *panischer Angst* or simply *Terror* also do some of the work of the English word “terror” in modern German. However, Heidegger’s explicit building up of *Entsetzen* out of fear displays qualities which justify Macquarrie & Robinson’s decision in this case. (It can be added that the Stambaugh translation further supports this decision. See, Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*, 1996, p. 133 [H142]).
 55. Heidegger. *Being and Time*, p. 181 [H142].
 56. *Ibid*, p. 182 [H142]. Stambaugh translates *Grauen* as “horror.” See, Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans Stambaugh, J., p. 133 [H142].
 57. Zingale, and Hummel, “Disturbance, Coping, and Innovation: A Phenomenology of Terror,” *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, Vol 30, No. 2 (June 2008), p. 213.
 58. A longer Nancean reading of bodily terror would, naturally enough, need to unpack the terrorized body politic. An initial strength that such a reading possess is that it provides a detailed vocabulary by which to describe the reactionary violence, that follows and may contribute to further terror/ism, of efforts to return to an impossibly inviolable completeness. Such a reading would bring Zingale and Hummel’s work into dialogue with Nancy’s as well as Esposito’s reading of Hobbes on terror’s distinctiveness from fear in the philosophy of Hobbes. See, Esposito, *Communitas*, Ch 1 “Fear,” pp. 20–40.
 59. Aristotle. *On Sleep*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Barnes, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. 1991, p 1006 [454b10]. See also Schuback’s insightful reflections in “The Hermeneutic Slumber.”
 60. This is not to claim that terror, suffering, and bodies will not come to be interpreted. The woman who the girl pictured grew into, Phan Thi Kim Phúc, has located the origin of her Christian faith in the events and suffering which Ut’s picture forces us into contact with. For our purposes it is enough to remember that this interpretation—even if understandably privileged—is never exhaustive of the material exteriority pictured.
 61. Nancy, *Corpus*, “Fifty-eight,” p. 152.
 62. *Ibid*, p. 157.

63. Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 101: “Because we aren’t ever done with a body’s entirety, as love and suffering show, because bodies are no more totalizable than they are founded, there’s no experience of the body, any more than there is an experience of freedom. But freedom itself is experience, and the body itself is experience: an exposition, a taking-place.”

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