Afterword, which is a welcome addition to the English translation, this may not actually provide a phenomenological solution. Here, still with Patocka in mind, he presses the possibility that the ultimate realization of phenomenology would take the form paradoxically of a cosmology, or a “cosmobiology,” as if “we abandoned phenomenology at the very moment in which we succeeded in establishing its possibility” (150). To his credit, Barbaras ends on an incisive and stimulating note of self-interrogation. But it may well be that the prospect of running aground in this way stems less from phenomenology per se and more from the “non-participant” approach that Barbaras has adopted. For the sake of the project, then, the range of questions that we need to ask should thus be expanded: Can a phenomenology of life culminate in disinterested theoretical judgments? Does “perceptual faith” not confer an indelible normative horizon? Does phenomenology not show us that the realization of philosophy is, at the end of the day, a matter of practical reason?

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On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy

JACQUES DERRIDA

The English translation of Derrida’s Le Toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) is a welcome revitalization of a subject that evoked much interdisciplinary attention two to three decades ago. In a text that tempts us back to the body, but with a difference, Derrida offers a characteristically tentative yet searching engagement with the works of his friend and philosophical ally, Jean-Luc Nancy. It is one of Derrida’s most ambitious and demanding texts perhaps since The Politics of Friendship (1997), for he not only traces the thematic surfacing of touch in Nancy’s writings but also regards the esteemed thinker in relation to a history of philosophy of touch, from Plato and Aristotle to theologian Jean-Louis Chrétien. The implicit and explicit dialogues between philosophers who have addressed touch inform Derrida’s celebration of Nancy’s works such as A Finite Thinking, The Experience of Freedom, Being Singular Plural, L’intrus, The Experience of Freedom, and Corpus. Following Derrida’s foreword, three sections of chapters loosely structure the readings: “This is—of the other,” “Tangents/Exemplary Stories of the Flesh,” and “Punctuations: ‘And You.’” Each section follows the haptical in various thinkers while
illuminating Nancy’s inventions, most notably “there is no the sense of touch,” “a finite thinking,” “sense is touching,” “ex-crip-tion,” “spacing,” “being singular plural,” and “to self-touch you.” In addressing such concepts and phrases unique to Nancy’s work, Derrida presents a rigorous, tangential, anecdotal, and often intimate tribute. Although the text delightfully meanders and far exceeds Derrida’s humble aim to provide an “introduction” to Nancy, it never loses touch with its promise to clarify how the latter shares and parts ways with his intellectual peers, opening new avenues of thought.

Part I consists of six chapters containing Derrida’s exploration of the metaphysics of touch—primarily in Aristotle, the Gospels, St. Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Berkeley, Freud, Heidegger, and Levinas. All the while Derrida turns and returns to Nancy’s works in an attempt first to examine his direct and indirect responses and challenges to somewhat ossified concepts, and also to seek out anticipations of touch in writings by Nancy which do not directly use the word but conceptually approach it. This section is challenging for it is poetic, suggestive, and contains extant reflections on the untranslatability of the reflexivity and connotations of the other found in French phrases such as se toucher. There is a feeling of excess, of multitudinous paths introduced in preparation for the central and final parts of the book. It is crucial to enjoy the pleasure of immersion in ideas without attempting to grasp too firmly all that is raised in Part I, because later chapters resonate with and clarify what is introduced here. In short, the reader is strongly advised to exercise her “negative capability” in order to enjoy the academic but also literary experience of a philosophical inquiry that contains motifs, images, and anecdotes, and gathers meaning retrospectively. Certainly the book will bear several readings from different, though converging, vantage points (epistemological, ethical, theological, etymological), and with due attention to the voluminous notes. Primarily, the following question is raised: If the soul or psyche, Aristotle’s animating principle, is understood in terms of its distinction from the material body (in the metaphysical body-soul duality), why is it that we can speak of touch in the realm of the intangible, such as emotion, in terms of the figure of “the heart”? This question gives rise to the touchability of the intangible, and the untouchability of touch, aporias that inform the entire book and draw us to Nancy’s suggestion that the psyche or soul and body are not easy to differentiate, and that touch does not emerge as a single sense but seems to absorb the other senses as well. We can, for example, experience the touch of the gaze. (Hence, Nancy writes, “there is no the sense of touch.”) The foundations of metaphysics are quickly exposed as faulty assumptions. It is true that much—perhaps too much—is addressed in Part I, but if one thread is to be identified in these six opening
chapters it is Nancy’s problematization of the immediacy of touch: for Nancy, self-contact, an experience that in metaphysics gives us access to self-knowledge, means contact not only with self but also with the other: “And in doing this, his ‘intervention’ touches and tampers with the philosophical gigantomacy surrounding intuition and intuitionism—no less” (119). In other words, there is no pure sense of touch, no pure access to self through touch.

In Part II, a section of five chapters playfully called “Tangents,” Derrida zeroes in on deconstructing intuitionism through detailed readings, most notably of Felix Ravaisson, Maine de Biran, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Didier Franck, and Jean-Louis Chrétien—an excellent resource on these thinkers, thanks to Derrida’s practice of reading generously. Of Husserl, for example, Derrida writes: “Now, it is better to remain very close to the letter of the text before we ask the questions seemingly raised by the reasons or the arguments...” (174). This practice of close, appreciative reading is consistent throughout the entire book, though the tangents on Husserl and Merleau-Ponty are the most enlightening of all five, demonstrations of Derrida’s acrobatic ability to read Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Nancy through each other while recognizing their unique achievements. After teasing out contradictions in Husserl’s assertion of direct access to self through self-touch, Derrida clarifies Husserl’s “rigor” by examining Merleau-Ponty. In Signs, Merleau-Ponty claims to interpret Husserl while asserting that the subject has direct access to the other through an act of substitution: my sense of self is gained through a reflexive self-touching, of the right hand with the left, for example; the other is directly accessed when my right hand is simply replaced by the hand of another, in a handshake. Derrida returns to Husserl’s assertion that the other can never be directly accessed in order to show Merleau-Ponty’s misreading of Ideas II. It becomes clear that Nancy’s attention to the reflexivity of touch shows a dialogue with Husserl and Merleau-Ponty; we also come to see his remarkable difference from both in his insistence on an in-consistent, non-co- incidental self, a kind of spacing between the double touching-and-touched in the reflexive se toucher. Derrida’s examination of all three thinkers, including Nancy’s departure from the two phenomenologists, shows how intuitionism may lead to ignorance of what is beyond appropriation in the other; Nancy’s approach protects that which exceeds substitution. Derrida’s familiar lexicon surfaces at this point in a beautiful passage that speaks to intuitionism and the ethical implications of Nancy’s challenge to it: “I ask whether there is 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, a host, wished or unwished for, a spare and auxiliary other, or a parasite to be rejected, a pharmakon that already having at its disposal a dwelling in this place inhabits one's heart of hearts as a ghost" (179–80). The text is most satisfying at points like this, where Derrida brings his own language ("hauntings," "pharmakon," "I ask whether there is any pure...") to bear upon the language of Nancy ("spacing," "one's heart of hearts"), to produce writing that is simultaneously precise and suggestive.

The final section of the book, Part III, is comprised of two chapters and a postscript, and claims to be "starting over again" in its pursuit of all that differentiates Nancy from other thinkers of touch (277). The need to "start over" is a recurring theme in the book; it is a reflection perhaps of a desire to defer a point of completion, a need to eschew any claim to full knowledge or understanding that conventional conclusions or endings try to accomplish. Maybe to be true to Derrida's sensibilities it would be best to approach this book as a series of openings, without claims to definitive readings of his friend's work. At the same time, at the points where Derrida starts over again, he is at his clearest, and so these beginnings provide relief and orientation. The final chapters return to question what Nancy has to offer beyond a repetition of thinkers before him. Nancy's phrase, "the self-touching you" is celebrated as an invention that dislocates self-presence by introducing the other, "you" into this experience. The other/"you" extends beyond another human being and into the realm of technology, or "ecotechnics," a line of thought that separates Nancy from previous thought about the body: Nancy's attention to the other that disrupts presence-to-self (and challenges metaphysics and Christian theology), his examination of the disruption of the body's consistency through the ever-present possibility of operations, prosthetics, and transplants, his examination of life/death's contingency upon the technical circumstances of medical science. The other is in this case technology, something so foreign yet so pertinent to the body/self's survival or continued life. At this point, Derrida quotes at length from L'intrus, where Nancy reflects upon his own experience of a heart transplant. The final chapters of the book are appropriately intimate, peppered with anecdotes about Nancy, and close with some thought about "the virtualization" of touch through various technological innovations as the continued complication of the human's relation to the body.

It is difficult to find fault with a thinker who is careful to read with such sensitivity and generosity. That said, the absence of any particular attention to Luce Irigaray, save a few appearances in the notes, may not be an oversight, but it is a disappointment, especially in the section devoted to "Writing the Body" in Nancy's Corpus (285). Since contemporary
French philosophy is of special interest to this study, the absence of an examination of Nancy's correspondence with Irigaray and, for that matter, Cixous, might be read as neglectful. On a more generous note, it would be appropriate to acknowledge that one of Derrida's gifts to his readers is a body of work that unquestionably sets thought in motion, while leaving plenty of room for work to come. Quite moving are Derrida's expressions of hesitation, and while they might be read as conventional, his humility comes across as genuine. In approaching the end of the book, in a proclamation of his sense of his own limitations, Derrida asks us to eschew what he has written: “I'm now sincerely asking that this book be forgotten or effaced, and I'm asking this as I wouldn't have done—with as much sincerity—for any of my other books. Wipe it all away...” (301). Derrida, the faithful and close reader, shares his writings only on the condition that his readers do not resort to the mistake of substitution; just as touching necessarily touches upon a limit that marks an inaccessible beyond, Nancy's works will always exceed the minds, no matter how great, that attempt to think them.

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The Cultural Politics of Emotion
SARA AHMED
New York: Routledge, 2004; 224 pages.

Sara Ahmed argues that emotions are social, cultural, and political rather than personal or primarily internal phenomena. According to Ahmed, the everyday understanding of emotions takes an inside-out approach: emotions are interior, subjective, and psychological. They are my emotions. I may exteriorize emotions by acting on them or expressing them. You may then respond to them, showing the movement of emotions to be from the inside out. A less common theory of emotions, held by certain sociologists and anthropologists, is that emotions are social and cultural practices. This theory takes an outside-in approach in studying phenomena such as group and crowd psychology. In the latter case a psychological model continues to be employed, wherein the crowd is psychologized as an individual who “has” emotions prior to any member of the crowd, but the direction in which emotion is thought to move has been reversed: the emotions of the group are internalized by me, moving from the outside in.

Ahmed's approach is closer to the outside-in theory but is also distinct from it in that she problematizes the distinction between an outside and