

Corps propre or corpus corporum: Unity and Dislocation in the Theories of Embodiment of Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Luc Nancy

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Phenomenological theories, especially those of Merleau-Ponty but also of Husserl in *Ideas II*, have gone a long way towards undermining the “traditional” opposition between body and mind, and the value judgment associated with this opposition, whereby the body is seen as opaque, passive, and resistant to signification, while the mind is hailed as the origin of all meaning and willful movement.¹ If we want to unsettle this opposition, we can do so at least in two ways. We can, on the one hand, retain the opposition but undermine the value judgment attached to it. Mind is active and bestows meaning, body is passive and resistant to signification, yet none of this is seen to warrant the value judgement that mind is superior to the body. In other words, there is nothing inherently negative about the passivity and opacity of bodies. There is another option, however. We can explore the possibility that material or bodily nature could itself constitute the locus of sense-making processes, which will turn out to be necessary preconditions of any meaningful relations between mind and world. This latter option is the path trodden by phenomenologists. Emerging from a different set of philosophical concerns, this is also the route that has been followed of late in a more radical fashion by the new materialists, who seek to rethink matter as itself exhibiting a form of agency.²

What will be, in this context, the position of Jean-Luc Nancy’s theory of embodiment? His view of the body is unique, I want to claim, because while it does undercut the traditional dichotomies between matter and spirit, or body and mind, it does so without appealing to the signifying or expressive body of phenomenology. Nancy refuses to reduce the materiality of the

body either to an expressive medium or to an opaque and dense mass. As a result, bodies make sense, but in a non-intentional, non-phenomenological way, that is, in a way that is not linked to the meaningful appearing of what is.

In order to develop this claim, I would like to contrast Nancy's view of the body with Merleau-Ponty's description of embodied existence in the *Phenomenology of Perception*³, leaving aside as much as possible Merleau-Ponty's later work. Both Nancy and Merleau-Ponty develop their thinking of the body by starting with a non-dualist reading of Descartes. As we will see however Nancy's reappropriation of the *partes extra partes* ends up blurring the distinction between *corpus meum* and *alia corpora* in a way that is completely foreign to phenomenological analyses of embodied existence. Here, Merleau-Ponty remains ultimately more faithful to Descartes, in that he maintains the lived body as a third notion irreducible to either thought or extension, and hence necessitating its own way of being conceived.

If I read Nancy alongside Merleau-Ponty, it is not therefore because I believe, as Ian James does, that Nancy's thinking "cannot be understood without reference to"⁴ phenomenology. Indeed, I think that bringing Nancy too close to phenomenological concerns with the lived body actually risks obfuscating the originality of his thinking of the body. Like James, I think that Nancy's starting point is that of a primary fragmentation or dislocation. Yet, my view diverges from his in that, as I hope to show, this starting point undermines any attempt to assimilate Nancy's body with the lived body or body-subject of Merleau-Pontian phenomenology. Reading Nancy alongside Merleau-Ponty helps us bring to the fore the role played by inorganic matter, and more specifically the stone, in Nancy's understanding of the sense of the world.

My paper will be divided into four parts. First I will elaborate Nancy's view of the body starting with his reading of Descartes. I will then turn to Merleau-Ponty in order to sketch his

engagement with Descartes and point out how this engagement informs his understanding of the lived body as it is developed in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Finally, I will highlight three points of divergence between Nancy and Merleau-Ponty, which I hope will demonstrate, in conclusion, how Nancy departs from a phenomenological understanding of the body.

I. Nancy on Descartes: the body and the soul

In “Unum quid,” the last chapter of his 1979 *Ego sum*⁵, Nancy claims that Descartes is not a Cartesian dualist, at least not if one understands by this term that there is an *ontological* demarcation between the soul and the body. This claim might seem surprising but it is part of a line of interpretations of Descartes that have pointed out that so-called Cartesian dualism is an oversimplification of Descartes’s own thinking, one that becomes evident once we pay attention to the Sixth Meditation, *The Passions of the Soul* and the correspondence with the Princess Elizabeth. These interpretations⁶ point out that Descartes does not merely elaborate the problematic relation between a thinking thing and a body-object. Rather we already find in his texts, under the guise of the union between the soul and the body, a description of human existence, of what is later called the lived body or the body-subject, even though we are forced to recognize that it is difficult to find a place for the body-subject in Descartes’ first philosophy.

In a certain way, Nancy’s reading of Descartes pushes this non-dualistic interpretation even further. Not only does he draw from the Sixth Meditation, as a way of thinking the body-subject, he will additionally attempt to show that the *ego* of the cogito is not, *pace* Heidegger, the self-certain subject (ES, 146). Indeed, Heidegger interprets the Cartesian Cogito as the moment of the self-grounding and self-positing of the subject of thought and knowledge. Heidegger takes the Cogito to be the inaugural moment of modern metaphysics, where the ‘I’ becomes the *sub-*

jectum, the underlying subject of representation. At this point, certainty becomes the measure of truth and truth becomes the adequation between representations within the subject and objects that stand before it.⁷ Nancy's reading of Descartes disrupts this Heideggerian reading by showing that the ego is not the thinking substance, but rather the gaping mouth that unfounds the subject in the very moment of its foundation. One could say that the uttering of *ego cogito* represents, for Nancy, the moment of the self-foundation or self-creation of the subject. Such a "subject" however, would not be substance but rather ex-istence—an existence, what is more, that is necessarily ex-tended.

Rather than speaking of 'the Cogito', that is, the deduction of my own existence through methodical doubt, Nancy focuses on the uttering 'ego sum, ego existo' as it is produced in the Second *Meditation*. As such, the phrase 'the uttering of ego' is ambiguous and oscillates between a subjective and objective genitive: is ego the subject of the uttering or is it the object of the utterance? While it seems that the ego must pre-exist the expression of its existence—first I exist and only then can I utter: I exist—Nancy will read *ego sum* as a sort of pure performative, that is, as a performative without underlying substrate or subject (ES, 122-3). Before the subject of the *énoncé* (the I that is spoken of in the statement) and the subject of the *énonciation* (the I that speaks), there is the verb, *énoncer*, an action without subject, the opening of a gaping mouth that articulates "ego" (ES, 124, 162). In this opening of the mouth, in this articulation of the "o," ego produces its own distinction from everything else, that is, it produces itself as distinct.

In this production of this distinction, we have a torsion or reversal of the inside and the outside. This reversal is probably best laid out by Antonia Birnbaum in her text on Nancy's reading of Descartes titled, 'To Exist Is to Exit the Point.'⁸ During the stage of doubt, I seem to retreat from the outside world into the interiority of thought. But, Birnbaum writes, "in cutting

itself off from the world, the ‘auto’ of auto-affection and the ‘I’ of the ‘I am, I exist’ don't regain an interiority closed in upon itself but experience themselves in the concentrated extremity of thought” (C, 147). Here is the torsion or inversion: the “outside” world as extension is an interiority, that is, this world has no outside and I am in it. But during the time of doubt, the ego “determines exteriority by exempting itself from everything that renders it present to the inside of the world” (C, 147). While this exemption looks like a withdrawal from exteriority into intimate self-presence, like a *retranchement* to something solid and stable, it in fact pushes the withdrawal to the outermost extremity of the interior, to the point where it falls outside of the world. Nancy writes of the cogito: “Thus, the *extremity* constitutes, in all respects, the position and the nature of the *cogito*. *Extremum* is the superlative of *exterum*: the extremity is that which is most exterior. It is, of all the things that are interior, the one that is farthest out. In all extremity, not only do the interior, the inside, or the property of a being reach their limit, the ultimate point of their completion and of their closure, but they also exceed this closure and undo their own completion” (ES, 115). The I that is produced in this way is the thinking substance, and as such it is not extended: it is a point without extension, and this is why it can be the farthest removed from the “inside.”

The question is: why would Nancy argue that it is the *unum quid* of the Sixth Meditation, the “kind of unit” I form with my body, rather than the thinking substance of the Second Meditation, that utters “ego”? It might be easier to answer this question if we start by asking how it happens that the uttering of ego, which produces the ego’s distinction from everything else, comes to cover over the evidence that it is I, *unum quid*, who say “I am.” We find an explanation in *Corpus*, where Nancy explains by way of everyday examples: “When I struggle or breathe, when I digest or suffer, fall or jump, sleep or sing, I know myself only as being what struggles or

sings, grimaces or scratches itself; that, and not someone, or at any rate not as an ego distinct from every other thing. That, then, instead of this one, or this one who is only that” (C, 139–40; trans. mod.). Here I cannot even say that what is known is *my own* body; there is only the indistinction between myself and the struggle itself. “The more effective this identity is, the more indistinct it is, and the less there is to know, properly speaking. The less, therefore, is there knowledge of a “body proper,” since the structure [*l’instance*] of propriety or property has vanished” (C, 140; trans. mod.). As soon as *unum quid* distinguishes or affirms itself by uttering “ego” it produces something proper, an I that can say “I,” and ob-jects the body. It can then say: “I am my body,” but only because it is effectively not its own body anymore but holds it at a distance.

If *unum quid* can, out of a state of indistinction, come to utter “ego” and affirm itself as existing, it is according to Nancy because from the start it does not have the structure of substantial presence but of the to-itself (*à-soi*). The to-itself denotes for Nancy the movement of existence as being-towards itself so that, in accordance with Derridean *différance*, there is no self at the origin of this movement, the self being an effect of the movement toward an exteriority that it can never fully reappropriate or fold back into itself. This inappropriable exteriority is the limit upon which the self is exposed to itself and to others, a limit that properly belongs neither to the inside nor to the outside. While it is true that exposure at the limit is a central tenet of Nancy’s ontology, interpreters have a tendency to overemphasize exposure and gloss over the fact that this exposure, which we could also call sensibility (both intelligible and sensible), is the result of, or is made possible by, the withdrawal of any ground that opens, spaces, or extends any being. Without this spacing or this opening of extension, there would be only a black hole: what is would collapse upon itself and would not succeed in coming to presence. Substantial presence

is, according to Nancy, precisely such a black hole: the negation of presence-to-self, the point without extension, non-extension concentrated in itself (C, 75). Existence, on the contrary, is a rupture of presence, or in Nancy's words, the "hollowing out of [pure] presence, which is the possibility and even the most proper nature of its *coming*," its presentation "in the difference with itself."⁹

This explains the importance Nancy attaches to the figure of the mouth in his reading of Descartes.¹⁰ Playing on the double meaning of areal, Nancy speaks of the areality of the mouth: the mouth is an area whose ontological status is beyond the opposition real/unreal/ideal. The area of the mouth is a place that has the quality of neither real nor ideal, neither sensible nor intelligible, space. It is a dislocation that opens an incorporeal gap, a difference within continuous space or within the extended substance. The mouth is extension, but a completely different kind of extension than the one theorized by Descartes under the heading of the extended substance. It is this mouth that allows Nancy to make sense of Freud's famous "psyche is extended: knows nothing about it".

At the same time, Descartes could not be completely oblivious to this extension. While we seem to have, in Descartes, pure extension on the one side and pure cogitation on the other, Nancy notes, that "thought is sensing [*la pensée est sentante*]" (C, 131). This means both that sensing is a mode of thinking, and that thought thinks because it senses itself thinking. In order to sense itself thinking and to know itself as that which thinks, and hence to really think, since there is no thinking that is not also aware of thinking, thought has to encounter an obscurity or opacity, an exteriority that makes it "sensitive." If thought were only thought, if it were purely luminous, clear, and transparent, it would not sense anything, and it would not sense itself think. Hence it would have no way of knowing itself as something that thinks. As Nancy says: "The

psyche is first *psyche* by its *extension, partes extra partes*, and by the opacity to itself in which it remains with respect to this exteriority-in-itself, or with respect to the *to-itself* that constitutes it.”¹¹ The soul knows itself and is present *to* itself thanks to its being opened to and touched by something extended that it cannot think or know.

Conversely, it is by being opened to thought, penetrated by it in some non-spatial way, that the body senses itself. A body in so far as it senses itself as body cannot be a mass closed upon itself. Nancy gives the example of the organs: when I am healthy, I do not feel my stomach or my heart; they are silent. Here we can speak of an interiority or an intimacy, which is not of the order of the sensible/sensitive but rather of the mass (C, 129). When I feel my stomach, it is both from the outside and as an outside (*c'est du dehors*) (C, 128). This is what is at stake in the word *soul*. The soul “doesn’t represent *anything other* than the body, but rather the body outside itself, or this other that the body is, structurally, for itself and in itself” (C, 126). What we have to think is not an opposition between body and soul but the soul as “the body’s difference from itself” (C, 126). The soul is the fact that *there is* a body, this body. The soul is the presence of the body, “its position, its ‘stance,’ its ‘sistence’ as being *out-side (ex)*” (C, 128).

In order to think this relation between the soul and the body—which, it should be emphasized again, is not a relation between two things, since each is nothing but the ontological spacing or opening-*to* of the other—Nancy will redeploy the Cartesian *partes extra partes* beyond its application to the extended substance, and insist on the *ex-* of the extra. While Descartes thinks the ‘extra’ as undifferentiated void, for Nancy the extra is the place of differentiation, of the articulation of one body or one part of the body with and against another (C, 97; see also C 29, 143). For Nancy, space is always and everywhere filled, a body always opening unto another, more or less subtle body. If this filled space does not collapse into a mass,

if it “spaces itself” and give place to existence, it is because of the extra that articulates bodies against bodies, and parts against parts.

It is in relation to this extra, which is for Nancy the place of the event of sense, that the differences between Nancy and Merleau-Ponty will appear more sharply. Before drawing out these differences, let us turn to Merleau-Ponty and articulate his view of the lived body in its relation to the Cartesian union of the soul and the body.

Merleau-Ponty, Descartes and the lived body

In the famous interviews with Georges Charbonnier in 1959, when the latter questions him regarding the meaning of his research in “first philosophy,” Merleau-Ponty replies: “The starting point for this research was in fact pretty traditional. I recall very well that, at the end of my studies, I was quite taken with the relations between the soul and the body as a problem that interested me especially.... I continued in that direction for about fifteen years.”¹² Throughout this research, the figure of Descartes plays a prominent role. It is true that many commentators position Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy in stark opposition to Descartes and speak of Merleau-Ponty’s fundamental discovery of the body-subject as a “victory over Cartesianism.”¹³ While this affirmation is not completely false, we must not forget that it is also Descartes who describes the union of the soul and the body as a third notion irreducible to both extension and thought, one that necessitates its own, distinct way of being conceived. Of course, for Descartes, the union, insofar as it is essentially confused, is relegated to the domain of unreflected life. At the same time, as Merleau-Ponty points out, what is confused has its own clarity, a clarity that is obfuscated by any method that seeks to purify, analyze or disentangle the union, which lead to the problems of skepticism and solipsism.¹⁴ At the same time “it seems contradictory,” for Merleau-Ponty, “to guarantee this living knowledge or ‘natural inclination’ that teaches us the

union of the soul and the body ... through the divine truth that is nothing other than the intrinsic clarity of the idea” as Descartes does. But, Merleau-Ponty continues, “perhaps Descartes’s philosophy consists in taking up this contradiction” (PP, 52/44).¹⁵

Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Descartes seeks to integrate unreflected and reflective life, the *unum quid* of the Sixth Meditation and the *Cogito* of the Second Meditation, by proposing a circular reading of the *Meditations* that is not unlike Nancy’s.¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty’s puzzle is that of the beginning: Why does the mediator begins to meditate? The answer lies in the relation of interdependence between reflection and the domain of the unreflected, from which reflection itself emerges. Merleau-Ponty, like Nancy, sees the *unum quid* of the Sixth Mediation, not as the last step in the reconstruction of the edifice of knowledge, but as the experience that underlies meditation and doubt, and to which the mediator returns, in order to live and dwell in it, after he has explored it methodically.¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty explains this relation between meditation and pre or post-meditative experience as follows:

Reflection is not absolutely transparent for itself, it is always given to itself in an *experience*, ... it always springs forth without itself knowing from whence it springs. ... But if the description of the unreflected [*l’irréfléchi*] remains valid after reflection, and if the “Sixth Meditation” remains valid after the “Second Meditation,” then, reciprocally, we know this unreflected itself only through reflection and it must not be placed outside of reflection like an unknowable term. Between myself, who is analyzing perception, and the self who is actually perceiving, there is always a distance. But in the concrete act of reflection, I cross this distance; I prove, by doing it, that I am capable of *knowing* what I was *perceiving*; I overcome [*je domine*, I survey,] in practice the discontinuity of these

two I's; and, in the end, the *cogito* would have the sense not of revealing a universal constituting power or of reducing perception to intellection, but rather of observing this *fact* of reflection that simultaneously overcomes [or surveys] and maintains the opacity of perception. (PP, 53/45)

In this circular reading, the experience of the union of the soul and the body is not relegated to unreflected life but finds its place within reflection as the ground from which reflection arises and upon which it rests. This is why Merleau-Ponty will insist on the facticity of reflection rather than on the discovery of the thinking thing, a discovery incapable of explaining why I sense and perceive in the first place.¹⁸

Hence, while Merleau-Ponty remains critical of Descartes's ontological dualism, of the separation between the thinking substance and the extended substance, he nevertheless seeks to integrate both the truth of the union and the truth of dualism in his description of embodied experience.¹⁹ The assumption is that while the truth of the union is, in some way, the truth of our embodied pre-reflective life, in is no less the case that doubt, reflection and dualism likewise find their impulse in this embodied live and must hence be explained on that basis. Understanding the union of the soul and the body requires that we take seriously Descartes's rejection of the metaphor of the pilot in the ship; tying the union to the possibility of reflection requires that we understand the relation between the soul and the body on the model of expression.

This, of course, does not mean that the union is a composite of a thinking substance and an extended substance. As Sara Heinämaa rightly points out: "body as part of the union should not be confused with body as the extended substance; and the same holds for the soul: as part of the union it is not merely the principle of thinking."²⁰ The union and its component can only be known through the union and not through reflection. As a result, the duality of the union should

not be confused with the ontological dualism between thought and extension, or between subject and object. It makes no sense to ask how an intellect can move a piece of extended matter; such a question is based on an equivocation between the body thought of from the third-person perspective (piece of extended matter obeying causal laws) and the body as it is lived in sensible experience.

When we say that the union must be understood according to the relation between a sense and its manifestation or expression, it is crucial to insist on the fact that this relation is not the accidental joining of two separate terms: sense is only fully itself in its manifestation or expression. Accordingly, the terms of the union can never be completely separated without each ceasing to be what it is, in the same way that a joy that lacks the means of expressing itself withers away while jumping and laughing without joy are merely empty gestures.²¹ The thought that cannot express itself (because of tiredness, illness or timidity), that is, the thought that experiences the resistance of the body, never reaches itself as clear thought. On the other hand, the body which “by a play of mechanisms which its past life has built up” “limits itself to mimicking intentions which it *does not have any longer*”²² (as does, for example, the hand of Proust’s dying grandmother, which keeps thrusting the blankets aside, still performing personal gestures, even though personality itself is disintegrating) is no longer fully a body.

If the relation of expression allows us to overcome *ontological* dualism and prevents us from positing the results of analysis as the explanation of unreflected experience, it also explains the duality of union, and the origin of the distinctions of its components: the tired, sick body resists expression, the intention does not succeed in expressing itself, or the body moves itself without intention or sense. “In these cases of disintegration,” Merleau-Ponty writes, “the soul and the body are apparently distinct; and this is the truth of dualism.”²³

III. Merleau-Ponty and Nancy: Three points of divergence

At this point, I want to pause and relate more explicitly what Merleau-Ponty says of one's own lived body to Nancy's thought of the body. Both find in the *unum quid* of the union a description of the body that overcomes the ontological dualism of pure mind and pure matter. As a result both think the body not as a mass but as an opening or spacing, and as the place of sense. What I want to suggest at this point is that while the lived body of Merleau-Ponty is experienced as a kind of unity, Nancy's body is constituted by a fragmentation that is never mended. To be clear, I am not claiming that Merleau-Ponty posits the body as a metaphysical unity: the unity of the lived body is a *Leistung*, an achievement of intentional, meaningful life, one that arises out of a certain material exteriority and is always prone to disintegration. I am also not saying that the descriptions of embodied life in Merleau-Ponty are phenomenologically inaccurate. In truth, I take them to be more accurate to the phenomena than are those of Nancy at this level. What I hope to show though, is that Nancy takes things in a different direction because for him there is something more at stake than a mere description of the lived body. In order to understand the kind of fragmentation or dislocation that underwrites Nancy's corpus here, I would like to outline three points where this difference between unity and dislocation comes to the fore.

(1) the analysis of the touching-touched

When Nancy picks up the phenomenological analyses of self-touching in *Corpus*, he points out that these analyses "always return to a primary interiority" (C, 128). Derrida develops this remark in his *On Touching* in order to claim that the originality of Nancy's thinking of touch lies in its insistence upon "a difference in the very inside of haptics" (OT, 229) or a "technical supplementarity of the body" (OT, 224).

The long analysis of touch in various figures of the tradition undertaken by Derrida in *On Touching* aims to show, first, that there is at the heart of touch a desire to master and assimilate that on the edge of which touch happens, and, secondly, that this desire to assimilate is predicated upon a certain homogeneity. Touch is here thought in terms of identity, homogeneity and presence and this even when a certain distance and interruption is emphasized. For example, in Husserl's or Merleau-Ponty's analyses of self-touching, the touching never coincides or merges with the touched, and it is indeed in preserving this distance, this difference between touching and touched, that there can be sensing. Yet, this sensing, this proto-reflection, folds back upon itself since it gives rise to the synthesis of one's own body. The sensing-sensed duality is what allows me to experience this body as my own. Derrida writes: "This detour by way of the foreign outside ... is ... what allows us to speak of a 'double' apprehension (otherwise there would be one thing only...) and what allows me, after undergoing this singular experience, ... to say 'this is my body'" (OT, 175). The experience of self-touch is what puts me in touch with, or makes me present to myself, so that the loop of the touching-touched closed itself upon an interiority. Never does the distance between touching and touched undermine the integrity of my own body.²⁴

On the contrary, Nancy's thinking of touch, Derrida writes, "first recalls sharing, parting, partitioning, and discontinuity, interruption, caesura—in a word, syncope" (OT, 156). In the same way that Derrida shows in *Voice and Phenomenon* how hearing-oneself-speak in immanent soliloquy cannot take place in the immediacy of an instant (an instant that, in order to guarantee self-presence, would have to be without dimension and hence without exteriority), Nancy will speak, instead of a self-touching-oneself that would lead back to an interiority, of a self-

touching-you (*se-toucher-toi*).²⁵ Very simply, there is no 'I' that overcome or surveys in reflection the distance between hand and hand, I and you.

(2) The synthesis of one's own body versus the *partes extra partes*

One of the key points of Merleau-Ponty's analyses in the first part of the *Phenomenology of Perception* is to make us grasp the kind of unity proper to one's own body against a conception of the body as constituted of parts in external relations with each other. To the Cartesian *partes extra partes*, Merleau-Ponty opposes the body schema, the synthesis of my own body.

The body schema is not an image or sketch of the objective body but the way in which my body (my body and all its appendages: cane, feather of the hat, and so on) is at my disposal in movement as an articulated whole and is not an undifferentiated mass. I know where my legs are, and this means that, unlike the patient Schneider, who needs to make preparatory movements to find his arm before carrying out the movement demanded by the psychologist (PP, 120/105), I do not have to represent my legs in my mind or move them before I start to walk. I know where my elbow has to be in relation to my hand to grasp this book on my shelf without having to look at my elbow or calculate the angle it must make (PP, 116–7/102). The implicit unity of my body underlies my gesture and is responsible for its natural, flowing character, a character it could not have if I had to actively synthesize representations.

Merleau-Ponty explicitly distinguishes this unity of envelopment or implication of my own body, which he will later call a "cohesion without concept" (VI, 196/152), from any kind of collection or assemblage. He writes: "the body's parts relate to each other in a peculiar way: they are not laid out side by side, but rather envelop each other. My hand, for example, is not a collection of points. ... [T]he space of my hand is not a mosaic of spatial values. Likewise, my entire body is not for me an assemblage of organs juxtaposed in space. I hold my body as an

indivisible possession and I know the position of each of my limbs through a *body schema* [*un schéma corporel*] that envelops them all” (PP, 114/100–1).²⁶

Of course, Merleau-Ponty recognizes the possibility of a disintegration of the body schema. In the discussion of anosognosia, for example, that is, when a patient experiences her arm as a long, cold snake, or when another patient ties his arm to his body so that he does not lose it (PP, 173/149–50), we see the body itself falling into pieces, literally, *partes extra partes*. Yet, Merleau-Ponty also specifies that the rejected or ob-jected body part cannot be completely so since the patient does still know where to find the cold snake or the falling arm.

We have seen that for Nancy, on the contrary, the *partes extra partes* describes the relation between bodies (and between parts of bodies) because the extra is the place of differentiation or articulation. Yet, unlike Merleau-Ponty, Nancy’s articulations do not form a coherent whole by implication or envelopment. Articulation, Nancy writes in a different context, “is only a juncture, or more exactly the play of the juncture ... without the mutual *play* ... ever forming into the substance or the higher power of a Whole.”²⁷ It is what allows Nancy to say that a body “doesn’t have an outside or an inside, any more than it has parts, a totality, functions, or finality”; rather it is “a skin, variously folded, refolded, unfolded, multiplied, invaginated, exogastrulated, orificed, evasive, invaded, stretched, relaxed, excited, distressed, tied, untied” (C, 15). As a result, “... a body is never *completely whole*” and “there’s no experience of *the* body” (C, 101). Rather, the body is always dislocated into heterogeneous zones.²⁸

(3) The synthesis versus the plurality of the senses

The system of equivalences of the body schema serves not only to integrate the parts of the body into a whole and assure the coherence of the body in relation to various tasks, that schema is also responsible for the cohesive integration of various sensory (and kinetic) experiences. A mode of

sensory experience translates itself into other modes without having to pass through reflection or representation because each sensation is a certain mode of movement or of behavior of the whole body. This relation of envelopment explains, among other things, how I can recognize my gait on a screen even though I have never seen it from the outside (PP, 174/150–1). The motor or kinaesthetic sensation calls or evokes a visual sensation.

For Nancy, the plurality of the senses cannot be collected into a systematic whole. Not only is there no intelligible or sixth sense into which all the sensible senses would find their truth and no transcendental sense that would be the condition of possibility of sensing, but there is also no system of the senses. On this point Merleau-Ponty might agree. But there remains for Merleau-Ponty a body, and this body effects the synthesis of the senses and turns the perceived object into an intersensorial object (PP, 270–2/242–4). For Nancy, on the other hand, sensing is always a spacing: “Sense *is* a distance [*un écart*]: the distance between a subject and itself, or between one subject and another, or the distance, within the same subject, between those distinct subjects that are the (organs of the) senses. This is why we cannot look for some final compenetration [*compénétration*] of the senses in a synesthesia, any more than we can absorb the different senses within some intelligible assumption. We can never say ‘the’ sensible in the singular: there are only sensibles, there are only sensibilities.”²⁹

In *The Muses*, Nancy had used a passage from Deleuze’s book on Francis Bacon to explain the relation between the plurality of sensations. The passage from Deleuze reads: “Between a color, a taste, a touch, a smell, a sound, a weight ... there would be an existential communication that constitutes the “pathic” (nonrepresentative) moment of sensation. ... [T]he sensation of any particular domain ... is directly plugged into a vital power that exceeds all domains and traverses them.”³⁰ The idea of a “vital power” into which all sensations would be

plugged sounds strange in Nancy's mouth. And indeed, Nancy immediately adds: "it must only be noted that the 'originary unity of the senses' that is invoked here proves to be nothing but the singular unity of a 'between' of the various domains of sensation and that the existential communication happens only in the element of the "outside-of-itself" [*hors-de-soi*], of an exposition of existence."³¹ In other words, Nancy insists again on the discretion (in the mathematical sense) of sensations (each time this color, this taste, this sonority), on the exteriority in which they stand with regards to one another and on the unbridgeable limit between them that is the place of their "communication."

IV. Le corps propre or corpus corporum

The result of Nancy's emphasis on the dislocation of the body is, as I would like to now show, a radical blurring of the line between the living, sensing body (*Leib*) and the extended substance (*Körper*) that marks a radical departure not only from Descartes but also from phenomenology more generally.

In the 36th of his "Indices on the Body," Nancy writes: "Corpus: a body is a collection of pieces, bits, members, zones, states, functions. Heads, hands and cartilage, burnings, smoothnesses, spurts, sleep, digestion, goose-bumps, excitation, breathing, digesting, reproducing, mending, saliva, synovia, twists, cramps, and beauty spots. It's a collection of collections, a *corpus corporum*, whose unity remains a question for itself" (C 155). We find in Nancy's works many such enumerations, many such corpuses. What is notable in these enumerations is that they all contain what could be considered category mistakes. They mix together nouns and verbs, anatomical parts with first-person activities and experiences. In short, they confuse the body I experience in the first person with the body conceived from the third-

person perspective, for example the body of medicine or physiology. Of course, if Nancy confuses, or collects, *Leib* and *Körper* in one corpus, it is not because he overlooked Merleau-Ponty's analyses, which should have cleared up this confusion for us once and for all. Rather, they show us that Nancy's bodies, unlike Merleau-Ponty's lived body or body proper, are neither "living" nor "proper." Hence I think it is necessary to nuance Ian James's claim that *both* Merleau-Ponty and Nancy, when using the term "body," do not refer to the body as an object.³² Though this might not be false, it does not follow that what they refer to is the body subject, a body who is so properly my own that I should not even say that I *have* it as my own, but that I *am* it.

When Nancy worries in *Corpus* about the philosophies of the "body proper" it is because under the form of the body-subject, what they seek to display or make present is "Property itself," or Being-to-self incarnated, made substance (C, 5). For Nancy, all thoughts of the "body proper," are "laborious efforts at reappropriating what we used to consider, impatiently, as 'objectified' or 'reified,' [but] all such thoughts about the body proper are comparably contorted: in the end, they only expel the thing we desired" (C, 5). Against the body proper, then, Nancy will have no problem affirming that the body "is always an 'object,' a body ob-jected precisely *against the claim of being a body-subject* or a subject-in-a-body [*un sujet-en-corps*]" (C, 29). This affirmation should not be too striking given what we said in the first section. For Nancy, the body proper can only be a reconstruction after the fact, an objection to the body that is ob-jected in the uttering of ego: "Either [the body is] just an 'extending of itself,' and too early for the 'proper,' or it's already caught in this contrariety, already too late. *But corpus is never properly me*" (C, 29).

Hence, rather than taking Nancy's description of his heart transplant in *L'intrus* as the story of the disintegration of his own body through the intrusion of something foreign in it (not only the intrusion of the heart of a stranger, but first of all the intrusion of a disease that rendered his own heart inoperative and hence foreign), we should rather learn from this text that the body "itself" is always a stranger, always foreign not only to "me" but also to itself. As Diane Perpich puts it: "*L'Intrus* ultimately suggests that there is never a single moment when the body falls to pieces and is no longer one's own; that is, there is no threshold that the body approaches and having crossed over it is no longer recognizably one's own body. Rather, the law of intrusion is that the alterities of the body are always multiple and multiplying."³³ Rather than thinking of his own body as the site of identity and integrity and equating illness with intrusion and loss of ownness, Nancy ends up claiming all the strange foreigners that invade his proper body as integral to his own identity: "I am the illness and the medical intervention; I am the cancerous cell and the grafted organ; I am the immune-depressive agents and their palliatives; I am the bits of wire holding together my sternum; and I am this injection site permanently sewn into me below my clavicle; just as I was, for that matter, already these screws in my hip and this plate in my groin. I am becoming like a science-fiction android, or the living-dead, as one day my youngest son says to me" (C, 170). We might be tempted to read this affirmation as a reclaiming of identity and integrity and reduce it to Merleau-Ponty's Marcellian affirmation: "I am my body,"³⁴ but we would, I think, be missing the radicality of what Nancy is trying to think. The intruder is not some other who, in a Hegelian fashion, we would have to learn to tame and would in the end appropriate or recognize as our own. Intrusion is not some event that befalls a body, which was previously whole and integral; rather it is the *most proper* state of the body. Hence, when I say that *I am* the intruder, it is not because I succeeded in appropriating that intruder and

now identify with the intruder; rather *I am* the intruder, because it is thanks to the strangeness and foreignness that my body is and always remains for itself and for me that I can say “I” at all.

It should be mentioned here that such strangeness is not a function of traumatic experiences such as Nancy’s heart transplant, though these certainly make it more conspicuous. Even the body that we normally consider to be healthy and whole contains exteriority within itself. In *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy speaks of the stone as a foreign body that is both out there, in what we call the “outside world,” and within my own body, as the “quasi-minerality of bone.”³⁵ The stone within my own body does not lose its strangeness and foreignness because it now belongs to the body that *I am* and thereby is raised to the power of intentionality and expression by my living body. The stone in my body remains an exteriority, in such a way that I cannot really call this body my own by opposition to the other bodies in the world, the stone for example. Exposition then is not limited to the exposition of a living body, a flesh, to the outside world; exposition is already played out within the body itself. At the same time, the stone that lies out there is not a mass, but is itself already ex-tended, ex-posed. It is only as body, that is, as extension, as a spacing that gives place to existence, that this stone can exist in its minerality and hence that “its hardness [can] *feel* hard.”³⁶ For both Merleau-Ponty and Nancy, it is clear that we cannot understand such a “*feeling* hard” as the encounter between the stone and a consciousness, but the question is whether it is necessarily a function of an encounter between the stone and my own body, that is, a living, sensing body that has the capacity to adapt itself to the weight of the stone, to respond to the pressure it exerts on the hand, for example.

The problem with phenomenology, according to Nancy, is that in focusing on intentionality—on meaningful relation between an intentional instance or power and what is meaningfully given to that power—it ends up electing this intentional power as the sole locus of

sense and interpreting all things as meaningful only *for* this intentional power, that is, insofar as these things become intentional correlates. Merleau-Ponty's great achievement within the phenomenological movement is to have moved this locus of sense away from a transcendental consciousness back into the lived body itself and to have emphasized the dialectical, two-way relation between subject and object rather conceiving of the subject as imposing its meaning on an inert object. Yet, Merleau-Ponty is still too much of a phenomenologist for Nancy in that he thinks access, meaningfulness, or sense in terms of commensurability. Body and thing, hand and stone, solicit and respond to each other, adapt themselves to each other. The stone that I pick up enters into the circuit of existence, my gesture responds and adapts itself to its weight.

Though Nancy's meditations on the stone are doubtless one of the most puzzling parts of his corpus, I think it is fair to say that their goal is turn our attention radically away from our own experience, our own living bodies, toward what Nancy calls the sense of world. Body, or rather corpus, here does not mean contact of self to self, but rather exteriority, *partes extra partes*. "*Corpus*:" Nancy writes, "all bodies, each outside the others, make up the inorganic body of sense"—inorganic because not organized into a whole, inorganic also because tied to spacing or exteriority, rather than interiority, life, or property.

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¹ If I put the word traditional in quotation marks right from the start, it is because I am well aware that phenomenologists, including Merleau-Ponty, found resources to undermine this opposition within the actual text of the tradition, for example, in Descartes, as I will show below.

² Though the label "new materialism" is as contested as that of "speculative realism," theorists generally considered to belong to the group include Elizabeth Grosz, Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad, and Jane Bennett, among others. For an introduction to the field of new materialism in all its diversity, see Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (eds), *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Tel, 1976), translated by Donald A. Landes as *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2012). Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as PP. Page references, separated by a slash, will be first to the French original, then to the English translation.

⁴ Ian James, *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 66.

⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Ego sum* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979). Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as ES.

⁶ among which we could include Susan James's, Lisa Shapiro's, Sara Heinämaa's, but also Jean-Luc Marion's as well as, as we will see later, Merleau-Ponty's.

⁷ See among others, Martin Heidegger, "Metaphysics as History of Being," in *The End of Philosophy*, ed. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 28–30. Original German in *Nietzsche II, 1939–46* (*Gesamtausgabe* 6.2), 432–4.

⁸ In Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2008), 145–9. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as C.

⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Gravity of Thought*, trans. François Raffoul and Gregory Recco (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1997), 64.

¹⁰ See among others, ES, 152, 161–163; C, 25. See also Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 20–1, 24–5. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as OT.

¹¹ Nancy, *Gravity of Thought*, 83. See also C, 21, 95, 144.

¹² Cited in Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, *Le scénario cartésien. Recherches sur la formation et la cohérence de l'intention philosophique de Merleau-Ponty* (Paris: Vrin, 2005), 17–8 note 4.

¹³ Remy C. Kwant, *The Phenomenological Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1963), 11. See also John F. Bannan, *The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), 51–7; Gary Brent Madison, "Flesh as otherness," in *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 29–31; Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London, Routledge, 2000), 404; M. C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, Second Edition (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), Chapter 1; and Taylor Carman, *Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 52–3 and passim. Sara Heinämaa, by contrast, claims that Merleau-Ponty finds in Descartes "a fruitful discussion on the mind-body compound." See her "From Decisions to Passions: Merleau-Ponty's Interpretation of Husserl's Reduction," in *Merleau-Ponty's Reading of Husserl*, ed. Ted Toadvine and Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002), 127–46, here 135. The claim is further developed in her "The Living Body and its Position in Metaphysics: Merleau-Ponty's Dialogue with Descartes," in *Metaphysics, Facticity, Interpretation: Phenomenology in the Nordic Countries*, ed. Dan Zahavi et al (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), 23–48. De Saint-Aubert also qualifies Merleau-Ponty's relation to Descartes as ambivalent and shows how Merleau-Ponty finds his own premises in what he calls the "Cartesian tremor [*le tremblement cartésien*]." See *Le scénario cartésien*, 21 and 38. As such, the dualist par excellence for Merleau-Ponty, the one who has forgotten the ambiguity of the union, is probably not Descartes (or Husserl), but Sartre.

¹⁴ "[E]very analysis that *disentangles* renders unintelligible." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Tel, 1979), 316, translated by Alfonso Lingis as *The Visible and The Invisible* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 268. Henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as VI. Page references, separated by a slash, will be first to the French original, then to the English translation.

¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty underlines how, for Descartes, there is a non-distinct clarity of what is confused, "for example, when someone feels an intense pain" (*Principles of Philosophy*, Part One §46) against Gueroult, who does not see any contradiction in claiming that we obtain clear and distinct knowledge of the nature of the sensible as obscure and confused. While the understanding, on Gueroult's reading, dissolves the unreflected into reflection, on Merleau-Ponty, it is "given as a reflection upon the unreflected that it absorbs neither in fact nor in principle" (PP, 53/44). On Merleau-Ponty's reading of Gueroult, see De Saint-Aubert, *Le scénario cartésien*, 33–4, 41–2.

¹⁶ On this circular reading, see Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours 1959–1960* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 225–6. See also Merleau-Ponty, *L'union de l'âme et du corps chez Malebranche, Biran et Bergson. Notes prises au cours de M. Merleau-Ponty à l'École Normale Supérieure (1947–1948)* (Paris: Vrin, 2002), 16, translated by Paul B. Milan as *The Incarnate Subject: Malebranche, Biran, and Bergson on the Union of Body and Soul*, (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2002), 35.

¹⁷ In a note from March 1961, Merleau-Ponty writes: "Study the pre-methodic Descartes, the *spontaneae fruges*, that natural thought 'that always precedes the acquired thought'—and the post-methodic Descartes, that of after the VIth Meditation, who lives in the world after having methodically explored it" (VI, 320/273–4).

¹⁸ It is true that in the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty posits a tacit cogito within unreflective life, a silent contact of myself with myself, the role of which is to explain the possibility of reflection and language. Merleau-Ponty later came to criticize the tacit cogito because it “should make understood how language is not impossible, but cannot make understood how it is possible” (VI, 227/176). We find the response to this self-criticism in Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the *Cogito* in his last lectures (from 20 April, 27 April, 4 May 1961), where he rethinks the uttering “*ego sum, ego existo*” as an operative cogito. The reading of Descartes in these lectures displays interesting parallels with Nancy’s. The ego, which appears in the utterance “*ego sum, ego existo*” is not, contra Gueroult, the idea of myself as thinking substance (a simple nature, an essence), but a certain non-dissimulation or presence to self as an opening *to...* Following Nancy we could say that what comes to utter itself there is a certain indistinction of embodied life, but one that was not a mass, but already spacing and to-itself. See Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours*, 245, 251, 263, 267.

¹⁹ The union “is based on the original operation which establishes a meaning in a fragment of matter and makes it live, appear and be in it. In returning to this *structure* as the fundamental reality, we are rendering comprehensible both the distinction and the union of the soul and the body.” Merleau-Ponty, *La structure du comportement* (Paris: PUF, 1967), 226, translated by Alden L. Fischer as *The Structure of Behaviour*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 209. On the contrary, Descartes can only alternate between pre-reflective life and reflection. See his Letter to Princess Elizabeth, 28 June 1643 (AT III 690–5). This alternation is what Merleau-Ponty called, in 1957–1958 and following Maurice Blondel, “ontological diplopia.” See Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, *Vers une ontologie indirecte. Sources et enjeux critiques de l’appel à l’ontologie chez Merleau-Ponty* (Paris: Vrin, 2006), 124–7; see also *Le scénario cartésien*, 35–8.

²⁰ See Heinämaa, “The Living Body,” 28.

²¹ See Alphonse de Waelhens, *Une philosophie de l’ambiguïté. L’existentialisme de Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1951), Chapitre II, especially p. 52

²² See Merleau-Ponty, *Structure*, 226/209.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Although one could object that this does not apply to the Merleau-Ponty of *The Visible and the Invisible* anymore, we still find there at least a *tendency* to emphasize the contact or coincidence of self-touching. See for example: “But this hiatus between my right hand touched and my right hand touching, between my voice heard and my voice uttered, between one moment of my tactile life and the following one, is not an ontological void, a non-being: it is spanned by the total being of my body, and by that of the world; it is the zero of pressure between two solids that makes them adhere to one another” (VI, 195/148). Or: “the flesh, the *Leib*, is not a sum of *self-touchings* (of ‘tactile sensations’), but not a sum of tactile sensations plus ‘kinesthesia’ either, it is an ‘I can’—The corporeal schema would not be a *schema* if it were not this contact of *self* with *self*...” (VI, 309/255). On coincidence, see OT, 211–5.

²⁵ Of course, Derrida worries that touching cannot be the figure or the name of interruption or of exteriority, and that in succeeding to interrupt itself, this interrupted touch still renders the intangible (the limit) accessible, present (OT 38; see OT 295–6).

²⁶ In the 1950s, as he is delving into child psychology and psychoanalysis and deepening his understanding of the body schema through a renewed reading of Paul Schilder, Merleau-Ponty comes to put more emphasis on the originary entanglement or *Ineinander* of body schemata. As a result, Merleau-Ponty abandons the priority given in the analyses of the *Phenomenology of Perception* to my own body (*le corps propre*). See the note cited by Emmanuel de Saint Aubert in *Être et chair. Du corps au désir: L’habilitation ontologique de la chair* (Paris: Vrin, 2013), 129. A thorough study of the generalized regime of the *Ineinander* in the later Merleau-Ponty would probably lead us to reevaluate the emphasis we are putting here on the unity and integrity of my own body against dislocation. Whether this would result in a *rapprochement* between Merleau-Ponty and Nancy remains to be seen. It remains true that Merleau-Ponty thinks the openness of my own body not only in terms of encroachments, envelopments, and intertwinements, but also in terms of mixture and confusion, and this already since the *Phenomenology of Perception*, where we can read: “we are mixed up with the world [*mêlés au monde*] and with others in an inextricable confusion” (PP, 518/481), we are “intermingled with things [*mêlangés aux choses*]” (PP, 503/466). The twists and passages between inside and outside seem to have a *tendency* to dissolve the limit that separates and distinguishes in favor of a confused mixture where neither the one nor the other are identifiable. Nancy, for his part, remains suspicious of the idea of mixture and prefers that of *mêlée*. At the same time, it is also unclear whether Nancy’s emphasis on uncrossable, unpassable limits does not operate a flattening out of the encroachments, intertwinements, envelopments, of the depths and shadows that give the world and others their reality and sustain the work of desire. On the latter point, see Christopher Watkin, *Phenomenology of Deconstruction? The Question of*

Ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur, and Jean-Luc Nancy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 170–7.

²⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1991), 76.

²⁸ On zones, see Jean-Luc Nancy, “The ‘There Is’ of Sexual Relation,” in *Corpus II: Writings on Sexuality*, trans. Anne E. O’Byrne (New York: Fordham University Press), 16–7.

²⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, “Extraordinary Sense,” in *The Senses & Society*, vol. 8, no.1 (2013): 10–3, here 12–3.

³⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 23.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² James, *Fragmentary Demand*, 131.

³³ Diane Perpich, “Corpus Meum: Disintegrating Bodies and the Ideal of Integrity,” *Hypatia*, vol. 20, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 75–91, here 83.

³⁴ On the reference to Gabriel Marcel, see De Saint Aubert, *Le scénario cartésien*, 81–99.

³⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 18.

³⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 322.