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Touch and Liminality: Between Derrida and Nancy

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In his book *On touching – Jean-Luc Nancy,* Derrida writes that one of the revolutionary aspects of Nancy's philosophy is the fact that touch is not exclusive to human beings (or human-like objects). There is no privilege to the human touch. As Nancy explicitly states in his *Sense of the World,* for him, even a stone touches[1]. Considering the importance of the notion of *being-with* has in Nancy, the notion of touch appears not as ontological relationship between entities but as a fundamental characteristic engendering his perspective of *Being* as a whole. Derrida traces this totalization of touch, whether it is a possible ontological principle, while simultaneously offering an account of his own. In his account, touch is invariably tainted by the untouchable: by an impropriety that taints its full realization. In that way, Derrida questions Nancy's ontology without fully dismissing it. He explores his theory with a degree of welcoming curiosity while keeping his distance from full association.

For Derrida, the liminality of touch concerns the impossible or possible relations between objects. For Nancy, the fact of existence can only be understood through the liminality of being-with so through the constant touching of the untouchability of the world. This is fundamentally the difference between Derrida's and Nancy's conception of touch and untouchability. While Derrida explores touch as a relation between entities characterized

by an ontological in-betweenness, Nancy points at touch as the crucial mark of the ontological condition of being-with. This distinction is best illustrated by the two different formulation: Nancy defends the formulation ‘there is no “the” X’, while Derrida prefers the formulation ‘X if there is any’ [s’il y en a].

What is at stake is what Derrida refers by the ‘*logic* of the limit: what lets itself be touched does so on its border and thus does not let itself be reached or attained even as it exposes the untouchable itself, the other border of the border, to touch.’ (*On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* 299). Or in other words, the concern with touch is equivalent to the concern with the limits of reality and the possibility of grasping it: how things are together? Where and how do they touch?

Neither Derrida nor Nancy provide a definite answer, but they point at the aporetic nature of the question: one can never really touch anything; at the same time, there is no absolute isolation. Moreover, is touching something we do, or is it something that happens to us? Can one really touch without being touched?[2] It seems like touch enjoys a distinct status from other senses. It is simultaneously the most banal of the senses, i.e., simple contact, and impossible to grasp. That is, there is no ultimate co-extensive communality. There is no harmonious touch that can translate into a ‘proper’ common world. Still, there is no intact condition of absolute privatized isolation. For both, things are neither intact nor in contact.

This article will explore the fundamental difference between these two postures towards the limit without arguing that those are opposing theories. McQuillan (‘Toucher I’ 203) is right in suggesting that Derrida is not convinced by Nancy’s ontology, but he overemphasizes the distinction between the two by characterizing it as a confrontation. McQuillan’s analysis of Derrida and Nancy’s disagreement is both illuminating and problematic since, despite their differences, Derrida’s suspicion is not a confrontation. Derrida challenges or stretches Nancy, but he never surpasses him. In other words, he never loses touch of Nancy. They are not opposed or facing each other, they are doing a strange dance of learning how to be together: testing each other’s limit only to discover that they are already adjacent.

McQuillan (‘Toucher I’), adopting what he sees is Derrida’s position, argues against Nancy, that in his argument that ‘there is no “the” X’, he cancels the possibility of any

concrete philosophical theory since it is a determination that there is no determination. He even affirms that Nancy invents an object (touch) only to annul its existence (‘Toucher I’ 205-207). It overlooks both Nancy’s and Derrida’s points. Firstly, despite his suspicion, Derrida affirms that both movements share the deconstructive impetuous:

> And ‘if there is any’ doesn’t say ‘there is none,’ but rather, there isn’t anything that could make room for any proof, knowledge, constative or theoretical determination, judgment-especially not any determining judgment. It is another way of inflecting the ‘there is no “the”’, It isn’t the same, precisely, for here are two irreducibly different ‘deconstructive’ gestures. The fact remains that this multiplicity announces itself as ‘deconstructive.’ It is necessary to account for this analogy or affinity, to say deconstruction in the singular again, in order to say it in the plural, in the ‘singular plural’-and explain at least why in the two syntagmas, the ‘there is’ turns to a conditional (if there is any’) in one instance and to a negative modality (‘there is no…’) in the other. The ‘any [of something]’ [*en*] (‘if there is any’) precisely refers to what there is not, commanded by the defining article (‘there is no “the”…’). (*On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* 288)

McQuillan reads this as meaning that there are two deconstructions, one of Derrida and the other of Nancy, but this does not seem to be Derrida’s intention with his argument. This liminality that distinguishes Derrida from Nancy might be irreducible, but Nancy’s deconstruction is still another way of inflecting the same thing. Their difference is not what separates them but what joins them in a singular-plural deconstructive movement. In setting the line between himself and Nancy, Derrida is not banishing Nancy from deconstruction or separating his project from Nancy’s. Quite the opposite, the line is drawn over their common ground, over their one shared territory of deconstruction. What McQuillan sees as Derrida pushing back, is in fact his continuous attempt to touch. Nancy and Derrida are separated by that which binds them. Rather than choose one side or the other, one must walk this very thin line between both theories – fully recognizing the invariable liminality in their discussion about liminality[3].

Secondly, Nancy’s formulation is not annulling existence, he exclusively negates the definite article ‘the’. He is arguing that a thing’s existence is not given to a definition. His

formulation argues that there is something, but since there is no ultimate definition of it. This seems consistent with Derrida approach so it cannot be easily dismissed as a problematic deconstructive approach. In fact, as Derrida does, touch and liminality in Nancy (and in general) present an investigation deserving of deconstructive engagement.

There is no limit

One can point at the question of the relation between touch and ontological communality as the fundamental distinction between the two authors. This tension boils down to Derrida's *law of tact*: 'in the sense of knowing how to touch *without* touching, without touching *too much,* where touching is already too much' (*On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* 67). Or in Nancy's formulation: 'Touch *is* the interval and the heterogeneity of touch. Touch is proximate distance. It makes one sense what makes one sense (what it *is* to sense): the proximity of the distant, the approximation of the intimate.' (*Muses* 17). In other words, touch is being able to know the limit in both meanings of the term tact: the limits of my existence and when it comes in contact with the world, but, moreover, understanding the limits of our actions – what kind of normativity (tact) that condition requires.

Derrida argues that we are always already touching, and every touch is always too much since touching is impossible. The 'without' marked by Derrida plays the same role as Schuback's 'without': 'I understand this as without, as with-the-without, as entre-être, being-in-between.' (*Being With the Without* 77). It is a touch without completion, i.e., without full contact, and all there is to touching. Touch is in-between, it is limitrophe, it stops short of touching in an everlasting movement of abstinence under the law of tact. Touch is contact that abstains from reaching – it is without its object.

For Nancy, touch is also *without* completion but in a slightly nuanced absence of completion. Touching means that occurrences are simultaneously singularly distinguished from the world (untouchable) and in touch with the world. For Nancy, being is *in*-common, so it is singular only inasmuch as it is invariably touching/sharing the world

as a distinct/specific thing (i.e., as co-extensive): ‘Singularities have no *common being.* But they *com-pear [com-paraissent]*each time *in* common in the face of the withdrawal of their common being, spaced apart by the infinity of this withdrawal-in this sense, without any relation, and therefore thrown into relation.’ (*Experience of Freedom,* 68).

For example, his account of the *Corpus* is nothing more than the fact that body and soul cannot be the same, at the same time that they invariably take place together. They are the *differance* of one another. Simply put, *corpus* is the fact that living is necessarily both thought and matter. *Corpus* is not the aggregation of both. It is not the sense that makes sense of the body by organizing the relation between body and soul: it is the event of body and soul taking place together, it is the fact that both happen in the most intimate way despite being distinguished. It is the co-extension of both. Nancy calls this intimacy the ‘se toucher toi’ [self touch you], because soul and body touch each other, hence making them distinct from each other, at the same time that they are touching themselves by touching each other. They touch themselves because *corpus* entails the ‘oneness’ of the living thing without anything is common. So, despite their untouchable distinctness, body and soul are one singular-plural sense (i.e., *corpus*).

This should be viewed against Derrida’s assessment of self-coincidence:

> To signal this, I earlier quoted [Merleau-Ponty’s observation] that ‘it is a non-coincidence I coincide with here,’ which could serve as a motto for the unity of this double movement. It is a formula that I may by all means reverse ad infinitum without harming any formal discursive logic: if I coincide with a noncoincidence, I do not coincide with my own coincidence, and so forth. Coincidence and noncoincidence coincide with each other in not coinciding; coincidence and noncoincidence coincide without coinciding, and so forth. All that remains is to think the cum and the ‘with’ otherwise. (*On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* 198)

Derrida agrees with Nancy argument about self-touching and the limits of coincidence. Furthermore, he signals that this haptical condition is also the ground for reflecting on communality and togetherness. In other words, the *law of tact* is not only descriptive. It is

this tangency between touch as ontology and touch as normativity. For both Derrida and Nancy, the question of touch is invariably equivalent to the question how reality can be one with itself: the totality of all things and the togetherness they form. The main issue faced by both is that despite any attempt to limit touch, it remains both boundless (untouchable/unlimited) and only partial.

The evident question here is: how can totality be indefinite if it is all there is? Nancy argues that totality is not partial, and yet, it is not a self-coinciding solid unity. Here once again the reference to Schuback's point about being 'without' is relevant. Understanding being's lack despite its totality is essential for understanding the possibility of the world despite its incompletion. Nothing is missing but it is not complete. As Schuback puts it in her introduction: 'Not nothing, but with-out. That is why our starting point is not connected with issues of creation and its nothingness, but with the without-ness, so to speak' (*Being With the Without* 2).

The question of the 'without' plays a central role here because it is one way of understanding the difference between the two approaches. 'Without' can refer to either a restriction or a finitude. It can either refer to a completed or full object that lacks a specific element or an object fully present but that simply cannot be completed. This is best illustrated by the distinction between broken and fragile or Rosset's (*Le réel. Traité de l'idiotie*) distinction between *incurable* and *inguérissable.* Broken/*incurable* might be incurable, but it is only so by lacking a cure that could reinstate its integrity. *Inguérissable* might not be integral but it is only so in terms of its fragility (without-ness). Despite being fully accomplished it is still a finite realization of infinite possibilities – it is all there is *without* ever fully being what it is.

When both Nancy and Derrida comment on the touch *without* touching, the *without* points at two conception of limit. Derrida is arguing that touching is *incurable*. It is limited by an impossible supplement that is fundamental to it. While for Nancy touching is *inguérissable* since it merely finite realization of infinite possibilities. It is fragile in its limitations despite invariably occurring[4].

Derrida does not believe the articulation of touch could develop into a metaphysics of presence[5]: 'No logic of sense, and not even a logic of touch, not even an ultratactile

haptics, would then yield, it seems to me, to an ontology of presence (if one still dares use this pleonasm)' (*On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* 130). But the question of the extent to which Nancy's ontology is an 'ontology of presence' remains open. The fact that Nancy ontologizes touch and Derrida does not follow him in this movement does not mean that Nancy's ontology in fundamentally flawed.

Touch and Extension

Returning to Derrida's distinction between the formulation 'there is no "the" X', and 'X if there is any' [*s'il y en a*] which hinges on the possibility of actually touching, one could articulate this difference via their conception of the meaning of any possible point of contact. Perhaps a good way of engaging with the nuance that separates Derrida from Nancy in their approach to touch is to translate their arguments into their understanding of touch in terms of extension. Untouchability implies that touch is always limited to a non-extended point. Touch is not an intersection or accumulation of points. In touching, things do not cross each other, they remain distinguished. In other words, the question of touch can be understood as the question of the possible co-extension of two entities.

For Derrida the extension of being refers to existence's untouchable limit. Things exist on an always approaching limit like a horizon. Untouchable refers to the fact that reality exists on the verge of occurrence but never fully exposed as a graspable extension that touches (and is touched). Derrida argues that there is no touch because there is no possible end to the infinite spacing: there can be no final point of contact where things meet. Touch is limited to a tangentiality, to an attempt of encounter, to the several movements in the direction of an encounter. As Derrida states, in tangentially, the meeting point has no extension. It is merely this 'passing by' untouchable encounter (*On Touching, Jean-Luc Nancy* 36; 106).

On the other hand, for Nancy, tangentiality is significant in the sense that the notion of point marks the truth of the encounter. As he affirms, 'Truth punctuates, sense enchains' (*Sense of the World* 14) so the tangentially of the point is merely the empty truth of the untouchable encounter: tangency happens only as a punctual fact of its occurrence, but not as something in itself. This is the meaning of Nancy's argument that 'there is no "the" touch'. Touch is not 'the' sense of existence, so it does not form a space of being.

He argues that things are already at their limit as exposed occurrences in the world and it is precisely this punctual liminality that makes them untouchable. Touch does not take place (has extension); it simply punctuates the fact of things' occurrence as being-with.

Before any further development on this issue, it is crucial to emphasize that Nancy is not arguing that touch is the essential sense of being. Existence is not reduced to touching. Nevertheless, it is a central part of Nancy's ontology, so the question of its status deserves a careful inspection. For Nancy, touch is more than mere contact or a relation between things, it marks the empty truth of being: a fact so evident it is ungraspable (or untouchable in Derrida's sense).

This contiguous or adjacent condition of being is parallel to Derrida's *law of tact*. We are always already touching, and every touch is always too much since touching is impossible: touching as the condition of being implied in being-with means that occurrence is simultaneously singularly distinguished from the world and completely in touch with the world. This is the meaning of Nancy's affirmation that things are tangible: 'Sense is concrete: that is, it is tangible *and*impenetrable (these two attributes mutually imply each other)' (*The Sense of the World* 11).

According to Derrida and Nancy, one touches only the untouchable: one can only touch the limit of touching and never actually come in contact. No matter how close two objects are, it is always possible to distinguish them, or else they would be the same. The sole fact that one comments on the existence of two things already presupposes their distinction. If two things cannot occupy the same space, then it is quite trivial that there must be something between them that separates them thus making contact impossible — a medium without mediation.

On the other hand, things never stop touching. There is no thing in isolation: there is no intact object segregated from all other things. Derrida's reference to Husserl's distinction between seeing and touching illustrates this point. One never sees oneself seeing. One can look in the mirror and see one's own eye, but the eye does not see itself seeing. There is a blind spot conditioning vision. Touching, on the other hand, must sense itself sensing. One is constantly touching and being touched; it is a non-mediated sensing. Touching is immediate. It is always already taking place. It is possible to see without being seen, but it is impossible to touch without being touched. Derrida's account is

consistent with Nancy's affirmation that being is *in*-common making it singular only inasmuch as it is invariably touching/sharing the world as a distinct/specific impenetrable thing (i.e., as co-extensive)[6]. Derrida points to the fact that touching always touches the limit since one only touches the outside of the thing. Even if one penetrates a thing, one does not touch but its surface. One is never really inside (*On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* 103).

Nancy on his side defends the idea that there is no inside to things (*Muses* 36). This is fundamentally the meaning of his argument that there is no essence to things, that is, there is no hidden factor underneath the thing's occurrence. Returning to the definition of being as taking place, it becomes clear that existence is invariably external. The extensive 'whatness' of existence demands this liminality of being. This is the 'ex' (ex-cription, ex-position…) that appears so often in Nancy. It is not a movement from inside to outside; it is the fact that being is always already taking place in the world, fully exposed hence already touched in its extensive condition. Put differently, the extension of being is a 'surface of contact'. Being is always at its own threshold (*Ego Sum* 115-116).

In that sense, things are impenetrable (*The Birth to Presence* 189): not because it is impossible to overcome their external layer and access their essential nature, but because there is no essential nature to be revealed. There is nothing to things beyond their taking place, so there is nothing 'hidden inside'. This is his indirect response to Derrida's suspicion that touch cannot develop into an ontology because one cannot gain access to anything. When Derrida argues that one cannot touch the heart of things, Nancy responds that one does not stop doing that. One is always at the heart of things but this is not in any way a separate privileged position that allows one to grasp reality – reality is ungraspable because there is nothing to grasp. Touch does not need to invade a limit or enter anything in order to reach the untouchable. The untouchable is so only in its patency[7].

This seems reasonably obvious regarding thoughts, since thoughts do not have internal or external parts, and one could hardly argue that it is possible to cut a thought in half or be within a thought (there is no 'half-idea'). In other words, a thought is always a singular impenetrable thing. We can be fully consumed or focused on a thought or feeling, but never penetrate it. It is always a contemplation from the 'exterior': one contemplates

something ‘distinct’ from oneself[8].

Still, Nancy’s touch-based ontology must account for ‘physical objects’ in order to be relevant. For example, thinking of a ball made of a gel-like substance, one can obviously hold it in their hand and therefore touch its limits, but even if one introduces their finger inside the surface so that their finger is ‘inside’ the ball, one has not penetrated the gel. One is still touching the gel from the outside. Now, even if the finger is completely engulfed by it, given that they are separate things, there is always a space of distinction between them. One could argue that they have penetrated the circumference, but this is also not true. One is not inside the ball. One is only touching it from another point. The circumference has not incorporated the finger. Its shape changes around the finger, but the ball remains the ball and the finger remains an intruding object[9]. This is the most basic principle that two things cannot occupy the same space at the same time. At the exact moment that the finger is introduced, the space previously occupied by the ball is no longer occupied by it. In that way, it is impossible to enter the thing. One might put their hand inside it and still one would just encounter the limit of the thing. As in Derrida’s terminology, it remains untouchable.

One might argue that this argument is absurd since everyone has entered a room or placed an item inside a bag. The experience of accessing something is natural. Intuitively, one comprehends that all things have volume and depth, so it seems absurd to deny that things have interiority. Nancy’s argument concerning black holes overcomes the challenge (*Corpus* 73). Singularities (black holes) are only accessed from the outside. One is always on the exterior of a black hole since it has no inner side: *there is* only gravity. In that sense, one cannot enter a black hole. If one were to enter a black hole, one would only encounter more ‘black hole’ (i.e., gravity). The same is valid for a room or a bag: even if one enters them, one only encounters ‘room’ or ‘bag’, that is, one only finds the liminal extension of those things. One is never absolutely ‘in’ the bag or the room, even though one is undeniably inside them. In an oblique way, Nancy seems to be confirming Derrida’s argument about untouchability and externality precisely by disagreeing with him.

Nancy is arguing that undoubtedly there are things, but there is nothing they ultimately are since there is no essence – hence, there is no ‘the’ X. He shows it is impossible to

fully touch the sense of X. One can only be-with it (touching it from the outside). In fact, there is nothing more to being (to 'thinghood'/'whatness') than this sensing, i.e., the fact that existing is constantly taking place and therefore touching without ever contacting anything. Derrida's formulation, on the other hand, seems to imply that despite its occurrence, something is never completely itself; it lacks something essential, so one wonders 'if there is'. This suspicion is directly transferred to Nancy's certainty that things undoubtedly *are*. Still, if there is touch even if there is no 'the' touch, just as there are things even if there is no 'the' thing, then it seems that Nancy is not offering an ontology of presence but one of lack. It is precisely an ontology of tact in the molds that Derrida seems to suggest: one that touches reality without fully grasping it.

Derrida's disbelief in Nancy's accomplishment is most evident in their conversation ('Interview with Jean-Luc Nancy' 115), when Derrida explicitly mentions his interest in 'a before'. For him, there always seems to be a before (not chronologically, but as a condition) that limits touch. Derrida, referencing McLuhan, argues that our time is the era of touch which for him develops into the taboo of touching. As in the *law of tact,* the fact that touching is ubiquitous makes Derrida interested in preserving this contact from extrapolating into a full-blown hold of the untouchable. Touch is not only unable to reach inside but should also avoid trying. Nancy, on the other hand, is concerned with 'what comes after', that is, with what are the implications of *what is,* regardless of how it came to be. Those are vital questions because his possible response to Derrida's criticism is equivalent to showing Nancy's success in his groundless ontology. Or in other words, showing that the *law of tact* can form a community (a *with*) without limits that does not infringe the untouchable condition (a condition of infinite finitude).

Touch refers to two aspects of the configuration of being in common. 'Common' means that there is no intact being. Every existing thing must invariably occur within the togetherness of all existing things. The world is merely this fact: all things take place together without any essence joining them. Common is the fact that being is co-extensively being-with. The second aspect is the fact that being is ordinary. It is specific but not extraordinary since there is no individualizing essence. Hence, being is invariably common. Touch marks the banal fact that being is substantially nothing more than the act of existing as an occurrence among other things.

This is the logic behind the *se-toucher-toi* formulation: being is being-at-the-limit of superficiality/tangibility. There is a truth of this touch, but it is untouchable since it never moves beyond the already patent co-extension of the world. The limit is untouchable not as a horizon but as the always already established impossibility of being fully in contact. This fundamental punctual truth of the tangentially is the condition of being.

The superficiality that is perceived as problematic for Derrida, appears as the logic in Nancy's account. For Derrida the notion of finitude ('all there is') demands a closure and therefore the impossibility of limiting creates the untouchable condition: the finite condition of the world does not allow the completion of the infinite possibilities of touching. In other words, touch is always too superficial to be a proper touch. For Nancy, in being superficial, touch touches all there is. There is not internal secret to be accessed by an immersive contact. It is not that one should not penetrate the other, it is that one cannot penetrate the other. The other will remains only as it is superficially given.

One could see that there are two laws of tact at play here. The descriptive law that does not allow contact and the normative law that dictates the rules of this relationship. If one states with Derrida that in touch the limit is always to come, one also adopts the normative posture of not reaching out too much or too little: 'A tangent touches a line or a surface but without crossing it, without a true intersection, thus in a kind of impertinent pertinence. It touches only one point, but a point is nothing, that is, a limit without depth or surface, untouchable even by way of a figure. Suppose one were to reach there, what would give one the right to touch it?' (*On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy,* 131).

On the other hand, this normative law cannot be upheld if one states that touch is always already at its limit[10]. There is no way of keeping distance or upholding a hygienic contact of tact if every instance of touch is always already too much and too little. Too much because it is this fully extensive contact of existence and too little because it is just a punctual tangentiality. Liminality in this second reading is inherently borderline [limitrophe]: this almost that is always already there. The limit is both a separation and a union. It is a border that marks the communality of the togetherness, so any tact is contingent and excessive. The truth is that there is always already touch.

Conclusion

Borrowing the conceptual framework employed by Deleuze and Guattari without fully touching it (perhaps one could even say: tangentially touching it), one could use the distinction between smooth and striated to comment on togetherness. A smooth togetherness is one that is untouchable because there is nothing given to touch. It is not the fact that nothing is sensed but the fact that nothing can be sensed within the parallel co-extension of the two objects: the smoothness of the line forming the surface of contact creates a white blindness. On the other hand, a striated togetherness is one of friction and tension: an impure (*immonde*) contact that activates sensory perception.

Derrida and Nancy do not each fall within one side of this binarity. For both of them touch is both smooth and striated without being none. The *law of tact* alerts precisely to the trap of smoothness and the necessity of striated touching:

‘Of all that, there is never any “immediate” given. Where has experience ever encountered (perceived, seen, touched, heard, tasted, felt) the purely smooth? […] The concept of smooth is not smooth-no more than there is any rigorous concept of the haptical here, for the haptical then depends on the smooth, in a correlative, determining fashion. The relation between smooth and striated, therefore, does not constitute a reliable conceptual opposition, but rather an idealizing polarity, an idealized tendency, the tension of a contradictory desire (for pure smoothness is the end of everything, death itself) from which only a mixed given, a mixture, an impurity comes forth in experience.’ (*On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, 125)

Togetherness is not a harmonious relation of self-enclosed monads. It is not the untouchable of windowless entities but rather the liminality of what seems to be ‘monads that are purely windows’. Derrida does not use this exact formulation, but this seems to be the heart of his discussion over Nancy’s usage of Heidegger and Husserl in *Being Singular Plural* (*On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, 200): this fundamental idea in Nancy that being is at the limit of co-presence and co-incidence.

An appropriate engagement with Derrida disbelief is exploring the way the notion of touch can overcome the limit while remaining within the limit of untouchability. It is not a confrontation with his theory of touch but, as Nancy offers, an indirect confirmation of this account. Nancy argues that, despite the separation and impenetrability of things, there is touch. Put differently, despite the fact that touching is always an encounter with the untouchable, there is such a thing as touch. In fact, it is all there is since being is being-with. Things touch each other even though Nancy argues that they never *really* come in contact with each other. So, for Nancy, there is touch despite (or even because) there is no 'the' touch, that is, because there is no ultimate definition/contact. For Derrida, it seems there is never touch because there is no 'the' touch. It is an aporia of contact that is best left unresolved. Derrida is still concerned with the condition of touch as the way to ground it – a concern with being's condition of possibility (a before) – only to find that it is impossible and conclude that there is no ground for existence. Nancy, on the other hand, defends that there is touch even if there is no ground for it. Things *are,* regardless of their 'before'[11].

Using Derrida's own words against himself, it would be to argue that Nancy shows how the impossible happens:

> The impossible of an impossibility that is in truth what takes place: 'the impossible is what takes place.' Madness. I am tempted to say of this utterance, itself impossible, that it touches on the very condition of thinking the event. There where the possible is all that happens, nothing happens, nothing that is not the impoverished unfurling or the predictable predicate of what finds itself already there, potentially, and thus produces nothing new, not even accidents worthy of the name 'event.' (*On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, 67)

If for Derrida one can only touch that which is not given to touch, that which is without conditions, it seems the madness of Nancy must be read as a compliment and not a dismissal. Despite their differences and mistrusts, Derrida never denies that he is interested in the same issue of infinite finite (« Dialogue entre Jacques Derrida, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe et Jean-Luc Nancy », 88). One could understand that Nancy is merely

responding to Derrida ‘if there is X’ with a Derridean ‘hardly’ since it is precisely in this unconditioned impossibility that one finds the groundless possibility of reality. Derrida is tempted by Nancy’s argument that being happens only in its lack of conditions: the liminality of possibility. He recognizes the deconstructive move even if he cannot adopt it. He acknowledges Nancy is ‘playing by the rules’ even if he does not like his tactics.

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1 As a matter of fact, Nancy's project seems to purposely oppose such privileging of human touch (Gratton and Morin, *The Nancy Dictionary* 67).

2 Or in other words: can one grasp without being grasped? Can one 'sit outside' to grasp everything as in a *cosmotheoros?*

3 There is an interesting dynamic where one finds that Derrida and Nancy, in an inversion to the common liberal formula, often 'disagree to agree'. They seem to constantly confront each other by confirming to a certain level what the 'adversary' is proposing. It is neither an agreement nor a disagreement, it is this liminal in-betweenness.

4 Nancy has referred to this as a Hegelianism *without* the spirit perhaps in an interesting parallel with Zizek's "coffee without cream" argument. This is an interesting argument but too much of a diversion to be explored here.

5 And in this point I recognize McQuillan's argument is correct.

6 Still, he holds that this togetherness does not develop into an ontology.

7 Again, not in complete disagreement with Derrida's logic: "je me souviens d'avoir dit « *quelquefois les absents sont plus présents que les présents* «, c'est-à-dire que quelquefois vivre côte à côte avec quelqu'un est la meilleure manière, ou la plus mauvaise manière, de s'en distraire et de ne pas s'apercevoir de sa présence." (« Dialogue entre Jacques Derrida, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe et Jean-Luc Nancy » 87)

8 One is never identical to one’s thoughts in the same way that the body and the mind are not one in *Corpus.*

9 See Nancy (*Corpus* 161).

10 Which does not mean that there is no normativity at all.

11 As Nancy puts it: they are occupied with similar object but while Derrida argues for the undecidability, he argues for anastasis. (« Dialogue entre Jacques Derrida, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe et Jean-Luc Nancy », page 88)