

1.9 TOUCHING BODIES: READING JEAN-LUC NANCY ALONGSIDE HUSSERL

[TOCANDO CORPOS: LER JEAN-LUC NANCY COM HUSSERL]

JULIA DINIZ E CARVALHO¹

<https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0009-0005-3708-2243>

University of Alberta – Edmonton, Alberta, Canadá

Abstract: In this article I show how Nancy's thinking on *toucher* inherits but also radically departs from Husserl's phenomenology of the body in *Ideas II*. First, I show how touch is crucial to the constitution of *Leib* as 1) unity not subject to fragmentation, 2) zero point of orientation, and 3) bearer of localized sensations. Then, I show how Nancy's understanding of *toucher* subverts the Husserlian characteristics of the *Leib* and hence undermines the centrality of intentionality that remains present in the later Husserl.

Keywords: *toucher*; Nancy; Husserl; *Ideas II*

Resumo: Este artigo demonstra a maneira pela qual o pensamento de Nancy sobre o *toucher* é herdeiro, mas, ao mesmo tempo, radicalmente se distancia da fenomenologia do corpo de Husserl em *Ideas II*. Em primeiro lugar, demonstro a maneira como o toque é crucial para a constituição de *Leib* como: 1) unidade não sujeita à fragmentação, 2) orientação ponto zero, e 3) portador de sensações localizadas. Em seguida, demonstro a maneira pela qual a compreensão de Nancy do *toucher* subverte as características husserlianas de *Leib* e assim mina a centralidade da intencionalidade que permanece presente no Husserl tardio.

Palavras-chave: *toucher*; Nancy; Husserl; *Ideas II*

Introduction

Since the publication of Derrida's book *Le Toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy* (2000), the relationship between phenomenology and Jean-Luc Nancy's thinking of the body has come to the fore. In Derrida's book, Husserl's *Ideas II* is taken as a 'guiding work' to read this relationship, since deconstruction would be distinguished from the French reception of phenomenology, therefore requiring a reconstruction of the context that takes the foundational work on the phenomenology of the body as a starting point. Nevertheless, almost twenty years later, scholarly works on Nancy and phenomenology still point to this relationship as a philosophically fertile ground, and Derrida's suggestion of rereading *Ideas II* in light of Nancy's thinking was yet to be done. Taking up such indication, I aim to show how and in which sense Nancy deconstructs some aspects of Husserlian phenomenology of the body, while also bringing some phenomenological concerns to bear on the deconstructive approach.

In *Ideas II*, Husserl defends a phenomenological distinction between lived bodies (*Leib*) and extended bodies (*Körper*) that differs from the classical views on the same distinction. Unlike what might be expected, it is not merely ensoulment or self-movement that differentiate lived bodies and extended ones. For Husserl, animation, although important, is not sufficient for the constitution of lived bodies. In order for a body to be constituted as a lived body, a more primordial feature is necessary: the body must be the bearer of localized sensations. As a consequence, two other features distinguish lived bodies from extended bodies: 1) lived bodies are not subjected to fragmentation, and 2) they constitute the zero point and unity of orientation. Taken together, these three exigencies rely on the sense of touch and point to the essential role of tact in a phenomenology of the body. In a general outline, one could trace the constitution of *Leib* in three steps: First, in touching, sensing 'spreads out' throughout the body and in that moment a *Leib* is constituted (before that, it was only a *Körper*). Second, I can localize these sensations on *the* body over and over again: no matter what changes I face in sensibility – from cold to warm and so on – I can always trace these changes back to the unitary surface in which these sensations, along with their changes, are always located. It conforms a *unity*. Third, all the other things that appear to the constituted *Leib* will refer

back to it: *Leib* is now the ‘zero point of orientation’ from which I experience the world. As a result, I can only constitute the *Leib* through the contact with another materiality (be it a *Leib* or a *Körper*) which is *simultaneously* constituted as an object for that *Leib*. However, by insisting on *Leib* as the ‘zero point of orientation’ in the world, the relation with the outside (without which there is no *Leib*) seems to be forgotten. Of course, Husserl does not completely disregard such relation, which is made clear when he presents exceptional cases of ‘regular constitution’ of bodies such as fluid bodies (air, river) and transparent solid bodies. Such bodies depend on other bodies in order to have their edges and limits established, and for this reason they cannot be perceived directly. Rather, these bodies need a foreign medium in order to be perceived *and* in order to have their limits as bodies.

In order to claim that Nancy philosophically inherits a phenomenological approach of the body while completely deconstructing each of the distinctions that traditionally sustain it, I will first turn to the constitution of *Leib* in Husserl’s *Ideas II* and then to Nancy’s radicalization and transformation of the three aforementioned aspects of it. Such transformation can be synthesized in the three following shifts: 1) from the sense of touch to the notion of *toucher*, 2) from unity to fragmentation, 3) from the ‘zero point of orientation’ to the absence of origin and primordially of relation. These shifts, as I show, deconstruct the centrality of intentionality and thus allow us to see how Nancy’s thinking on the body radically departs from a phenomenological approach.

Rereading *Ideas II*

In the first paragraph of *Ideas II*, Husserl presents his starting point: nature as an object for the natural sciences. Natural sciences usually call ‘nature’ the totality of the space-time universe, which would constitute the totality of possible experiences. However, for Husserl, there is already a problem here: this space-time universe includes all ‘mundane’ things, but not all individual objects in general, and therefore does not include all possible experiences¹. Following the formulations already expressed in *Ideas I*², this is due to the relation consciousness establishes to its objects, which is given by

¹ HUSSERL, 2000, p. 3. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as Id. II. This point is also addressed in HUSSERL, 1983, § 55. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as Id. I.

² See, especially, Id. I, §55.

sense-bestowing, and cannot be extended to consciousness itself: we do not have any kind of meta-intentionality, and consciousness is always turned to something transcendent that cannot be identified or merged with the immanence of consciousness. In this sense, consciousness is not given to us in the way the objects of nature are given to us and it is not, therefore, a mere part of the nature that would compose the totality of the space-time reality.

This is the background of Husserl's *Ideas II*: between material nature and animal nature, “an essentially grounded difference” is established from the outset and is remarkable at first sight (Id. II, §12, p. 30). Material nature, then, is referred to a basic (and lower) sense of nature, while animal nature is referred to an expanded (and higher) sense of nature, concerning “things that have a soul, in the genuine sense of ‘life’” (Id. II, §12, p. 30). Although nature has now a stratified sense, ‘merely’ material entities and animate beings share the same spatio-temporal world. The stratification of the nature is how Husserl expands the sense of nature, which can no longer refer just to the actual material world, but also to all “possible realities”³. In this context, the body is what binds ‘merely’ material entities and animated entities into the same spatio-temporal world. But the body is, on the other hand, also the responsible for their distinction (i.e., the distinction between material and animated entities). For Husserl, it is not without reason that Descartes has designated extension as the essential attribute of the material thing and distinguished it from the psychic or spiritual realm, which, as such, not only lacks extension, but essentially excludes it (Id. II, §12, p. 31). But even if Husserl disagrees with the Cartesian view that *extensio* is the essential attribute of the material thing—which he identifies as materiality instead, since the later implies not merely spatial but also temporal extension—Husserl maintains the Cartesian position according to which it is the *extensio* aspect that allows for the distinction between the two strata of nature (Id. II, §12, p. 31). The temporal aspect of materiality fore sought by Husserl does not take a role in this distinction of nature between two strata.

For Husserl, extension is the “spatial corporeality” (*Raumkörperlichkeit*⁴) that is always essential to the concrete determinateness of a thing (Id. II, §13, p. 32). However, extension is not to be confused with a property of the thing, for there is a distinction of

³ Cf. Id. II, §12, p. 30.

⁴ All German terms in brackets are added by me from HUSSERL, 1991.

principle between the properties of the thing and its extension. The properties of the thing, such as its color, weight, texture, and so on, may change according to the circumstances in which the thing is given, without the thing itself being fragmented. Extension, on the contrary, essentially preserves in its essence the ideal possibility of fragmentation: every fragmentation of extension fragments the thing itself, and every fragmentation of the thing itself fragments the extension. In other words, there is a co-essential relationship between thing (*Ding*) and extension, so that a thing, insofar as it is fragmented, does not incorporate in itself this modification as a modification of any of its property; rather, an *other* thing is constituted out of this division. Among its determinations, the thing has as its primary quality pure corporality (*Körperlichkeit*). This quality is universal and invariant to every thing: regardless of their content and particularity, the thing is extended. However, things are not given to us as an undifferentiated whole or as replicas of the same exemplar. This is due to the modifying sensual qualities, which also appear in every thing. These qualities, which according to Husserl are secondary, are what guarantees the differentiation of things with respect to each other and to itself. In this sense, the modification of the properties of the thing does not result in the fragmentation of the thing. But extension, not being a property, constitutes an essential relation to the thing so that, in the case of absence of extension, there is no thing (*Ding*)—and vice versa (Id. II, §13, p. 34).

This co-essential relationship between thing and extension leads to the first definition of body [*Körper*]. As Husserl puts it: “body [*Körper*] is a real [*reale*] determination, but it is a fundamental determination (an essential foundation) and form of all other determinations” (Id. II, §13, p. 34, my emphasis). Thus, extension is, for Husserl, the essential attribute of materiality: it can be seen as a ‘real property’ (*reale Eigenschaft*) only insofar as it presents itself as the essential form of all other properties. It is in this sense, Husserl calls pure corporality (*pure Körperlichkeit*) the primary quality of the thing that grounds the secondary qualities, that is, the modifying sensual qualities. Since the reality (*Realität*) of things is founded on extension, and this is, in turn, sufficient for individuation⁵, extension can be read as a kind of limit of things. This aspect, as we shall see in the following, will be intensified in Nancy’s thinking, but it is, to a certain

⁵ “A This-here, the material essence of which is a concretum, is called an *individuum*” (Id. I, §15, p. 29, emphasis in the original).

extent, already announced by Husserl, inasmuch as extension is sufficient for there to be individuation.

Humans and other animals, insofar as they are founded on corporeality (*Körperlichkeit*), have, as well as mere things, their position in space. However, one difference arises: “It would be bizarre, however, to say that only the man’s Body [*Menschenleiber*] moved but not the man, that the man’s Body walked down the street, drove in a car, dwelled in the country or town, but not the man” (Id. II, §13, p. 35). Thus, for Husserl, it becomes evident that there are differences between the properties of the animate body (*Leibeseigenschaften*) and the properties of material bodies. In this sense, properties of the body such as weight, height, etc., which we ascribe to us, properly belong (*eigentlich*) only to the material body (*materiellen Leib*). The fact that we have body (*Leib*) implies that we also have weight, size, and so on, and that the place that I occupy is, ‘also’, the place of my body (*Leib*). However, Husserl adds: “do we not sense from the outset a certain difference, by virtue of which locality belongs to me somewhat more essentially?” (Id. II, §13, p. 35).

With this question, Husserl opens the way for the next step to be taken: to differentiate animal realities (soul-endowed bodies) from merely material realities. Animal realities, with their lower and necessarily material strata, presuppose material realities. But, unlike these, animal realities possess another system of properties, beyond those established in the material scope: psychic properties. It is precisely these that turns a material body (*Körper*) into an animate body (*Leib*), that is, an organ for a soul (*Seele*) or spirit (*Geist*). However, psychic properties are not material, and therefore have no extension and do not fill the bodily (*leibliche*) extension in the manner of material properties. Moreover, these aspects do not happen in accidentally but are rather essential, so much so that Husserl states that humans and other animals are not material realities (*materielle Realitäten*) in the proper sense (*eigentlichen Sinne*) (Id. II, §14, p. 36). With this statement, Husserl points to the specific sense extension acquires in animal realities. As we have seen above, an essential feature of extension is the ideal possibility of fragmentation. The parts of the material thing, that is, of the *res extensa*, are independent of each other, as in the Cartesian model of *partes extra partes*. Humans and other animals, on the other hand, cannot be fragmented. In this sense, a vital organ – say, the heart – once fragmented from an animal body, can no longer be a *Leib* (but only a

Körper). Thus, unlike ‘mere’ material bodies, the animated bodies of humans and other animals, by their psychic aspect, present something like a spread out (*Ausbreitung*) which, however, has no extension (*Verbreitung*) in space (Id. II, §14, p. 36). This aspect will be the basis for a distinction between localization (*Lokalisation*) and extension (*Extension*), which we will discuss later when we introduce the body (*Leib*) understood as the “zero point” of the orientation. For the moment, it is sufficient to hold that for Husserl animated bodies (*Leib*) are not material realities in the proper sense and this is due to the impossibility of their fragmentation, which is an essential feature of extension.

It is noteworthy that Husserl adds an appendix to §16, which introduces a limitation to the analyses hitherto described: they are restricted to the solid body (*fester Körper*) (Id. II, §16, p. 56). These make up a rigid spatial figure and are constituted by means of sight and touch. There is, however, another type of material bodies, which are medium (*Medium*) that fills the space containing solid bodies. The air and a river are bodies of this kind. These do not make up a rigid spatial figure nor do they have definite edges, and thus they depend on the composition of other bodies to have their moving boundaries momentarily established⁶. It is interesting to note here that these bodies, which are material but are not solid, are not given to us directly, as they need another body in order to have their own bodies established:

If we take into consideration the possibility of a fluid body, then we have to say that such a thing *cannot be perceived originally* but can only be acquired by means of indirect processes of experiencing and thinking⁷.

Transparent solid bodies form yet another exception to “material things of the primordial and originally constituted type”. In this case, what distinguishes them from “normal” material bodies is not their fluidity or the indeterminacy of their limits, as in the case of the air and the river. Rather, their specificity lies in the fact that they do not necessarily present visual aspects. Thus, the appearance of their edges and boundaries is not achieved through vision and, moreover, depend on their relation to other bodies. It is from contact with other bodies that the transparent solid body can recover its visual

⁶ See Id. II, §16, p. 57.

⁷ Id. II, §16, appendix, p. 57, emphasis in the original.

aspect. Hence, it is touch that restores the “normality” missing in the transparent solid bodies:

Transparent solid bodies themselves already represent a deviation from the normal case of original constitution. (...) It has no surface colors, and it presents no visual aspect whatsoever. But with changes in the orientation, “edges” emerge, by virtue of its relation to other bodies, and thereby visual appearances emerge as well (...). Thus it is touch which gives these bodies as normal bodies, though to “normal” constitution there belongs precisely a parallel givenness for sight and touch (Id.II, §16, appendix, p. 58).

It is interesting to note that, whether in the case of fluid or in the case of transparent bodies, what allows for the “complete” constitution of their aspects is their contact with other bodies. This point anticipates a kind of interdependence between bodies that will be intensified in *Ideas II* but radicalized in Nancy. Let us now turn to this movement. When analyzing the constitution of material nature in its relation to the sensible body, a kind of interdependence between bodies is delineated: the proper apprehension of the complete givenness of the thing does not happen in isolation. Rather, the proper apprehension of the thing refers back to the animate subject that perceives it. This referential aspect between the thing and the animated subject is radically intensified when Husserl affirms that the thing *depends* on the subject of the experience and has to be in relation with “*my Body [Leib] and my ‘normal sensibility’*” (Id. II, §18, p. 61, emphasis in the original). In this sense, the body (*Leib*) is a ‘medium of all perception’ (Id. II, §18, p. 61), and every appearance in the world is referred back to subject, and this is why *Leib* is called the ‘zero point of orientation’. The body (*Leib*) is then the *hic et nunc* that accompanies every intuition and from which the pure ego can intuit space and the sensible world.

The reason for the stratification of nature is now clear: The *Körper* that ‘becomes’ *Leib* by being endowed with animation and sensitivity and upon which any appearing thing is dependent, is, so to speak, halfway between the immanence (of consciousness) and the transcendence (of the physical thing). If *Leib* is the means of access of consciousness to the outer world, animated corporeity cannot be transcendent in the same way as things are, for if it were, it would be constituted as an object for consciousness and would be something absolutely separate from consciousness, following the Cartesian mind-body distinction. But this animate corporeity, unlike mere things, has the specificity of presenting consciousness as “*a subordinate real event within that world*” (Id. I, §53, p. 124), as a point of referential intersection (or zero point of orientation) in the appearance

of material things. It is the ‘first and original’ sense of consciousness as participant in transcendence (i.e., participant in material nature), which allows us to take it as part of the world. This, in turn, is only possible because of its bond with the body, which guarantees the participation of consciousness in the material, and consequently, the intersubjective world.

In its bond with consciousness, the body (*Leib*) acquires a quite distinctive feature. It holds a peculiar type of transcendence: on the one hand, it includes the material aspect of the body, which is shown by profiles; on the other hand, it also implies the impossibility that consciousness, due to its bond with the body, also appears in profiles or is enriched by their apprehension. This peculiar transcendence, of course, also brings something of the immanent with it, since it refers back to pure consciousness (Id. I, §53, 125-126). The bond of consciousness with the body thus preserves the possibility that the experience could be directed to the perceived object, that is, what is transcendent, as well as to the absolute life of pure consciousness. The consciousness–body bond therefore establishes a double orientation between the transcendent psychological experience (which is contingent) and transcendental life (which is necessary)⁸. This bond between soul and body presents its limit case in the example of the hands touching each other. Let us see why this is a limit case.

In the constitution of spatio-temporal things, as we have seen, the body (*Leib*) manifests itself as the zero point of orientation, so that the natural object intuited always presents itself in reference to the subject. In the investigation of the constitution of reality through animated bodies, Husserl will start from the constitution of corporality (*Leiblichkeit*) (Id. II, §36, 152). The example privileged by Husserl in this analysis will be the example of the hands (of the same animated body) touching each other, for in this example the parts of the body in question can be both seen and felt through touch. This example allows, on the one hand, to show how in the contact of one’s ‘own’ body it is possible to perceive it as an ‘outside’, in a way similar to that in which we perceive other things. On the other hand, this example shows the limits and differences of this specific type of perception: being constituted simultaneously by sight and touch, the hands of the same body that touch each other have the location of their sensations coinciding with the object that is being constituted. That is, the tactile sensation of this perception is located

⁸ Cf. Id. I, §53, p. 126 *et seq.*

in the hands, and these, in turn, are the doubly constituted object⁹. The example, then, anticipates and prepares the elucidation of the double presentation in the case of animate bodies, since it embraces both the merely material aspect of these bodies and also the aspect that will differentiate them from the bodies of mere physical things, namely their character as organ of senses, or as ‘bearers of localized sensations’. To say it using the example: when the right hand touches the left hand I can either turn to the sensation of the right hand that grasps the left hand as something like any other that appears from the touch, or I can turn to the left hand itself, where the sensations emerging from the touch are also located: “If I speak of the *physical* thing, “left hand”, then I am abstracting from these sensations (...). If I do include them, then it is not that the physical thing is now richer, but instead *it becomes Body, it senses*” (Id. II, §36, p. 152). I can also switch my attention between one hand and another, so that the right is now touching, then touched by the left hand and vice versa. Finally, the example presents us the specificity in the constitution of an animated body (*Leib*) experiencing itself: it presents itself both as an external material thing (i.e., as *Körper*) and as being my ‘own’ body (*Leib*).

The experience of the location of sensations in the body already appears in the tactile experience of merely material things, which is already a double experience: the external object (the material thing) is constituted by the same tactile experience as the body (*Leib*), which is the bearer of sensations, and constituted as an object as well¹⁰. The animated body can therefore turn both to the determinations of the thing and to its ‘own’ body as the bearer of the location of these sensations:

Moving my hand over the table, I get an experience of it and its thingy determinations. At the same time, I can at any moment pay attention to my hand and find on it touch-

⁹ On the duplicity of the constituted object see below, especially, p. 12 n. 10. See also Id. II, §36-37.

¹⁰ Husserl will be explicit about this analogy: “In the case of one hand touching the other, it is again the same [of the hand lying on the table], only more complicated, for we have then two sensations, and each is apprehensible or experienceable in a double way. Necessarily bound to the tactual perception, of the table (this perceptual apprehension) is the perception of the Body [*Leib*], along with its concomitant sensation of touch. This nexus is a necessary connection between two possible apprehensions: pertaining correlatively to that, however, is a connection between two thinghoods that are being constituted.” (Id. II, §36, 154). The difference between the tactile relationship *Leib-Körper* and the tactile relationship of the hands of the same *Leib* lies in the fact that the latter is a *doubly* double experience, since it constitutes two sensations (one in each hand), and each sensation, constitutes two objects (the external object and the *Leib* itself). Thus, in the case of the hands of the same *Leib*, four objects are constituted, each of the hands being simultaneously constituted as an external object and as *Leib*: “in the case in which a part of the Body [*Leib*] becomes equally an external Object of another part, we have the double sensation (each part has its own sensations) and the double apprehension as feature of the one or of the other Bodily part a physical object.” (Id. II, §37, 155).

sensations, sensations of smoothness and coldness, etc. In the interior of the hand, running parallel to the experienced movement, I find motion-sensations, etc. Lifting a thing, I experience its weight, but at the same time I have weight-sensations localized in my Body (Id. II, §36, p. 153).¹¹

At this point we can note that it is not simply animation that distinguishes *Leib* from *Körper*. The fact of moving spontaneously – the exclusive quality of animated bodies (*Leib*) – is not enough for a *Körper* to become *Leib*. It is also necessary to locate the sensations ‘on’ or ‘in’ the animate body. That is, there must be sensing for a mere thing to become *Leib*. The sensations, in turn, are only possible from the contact with other material things.

It is not by chance that the examples given by Husserl of the localization of sensations in the constitution of *Leib* have hitherto been examples of tactile perception. Although Husserl has decided to begin with a perceptual experience that can be both seen and touched, touch occupies a privileged position¹². The reason for this privilege is precisely the possibility of double sensations¹³. In the tactile experience, the body itself as perceiver is constituted together with the external object. This doubling provided by touch, which locates the tactile sensation in the body itself, is what allows me to perceive my body as ‘mine’, and therefore as distinct from other material things – and this is, precisely, the process of constitution of *Leib*. In the visual experience, the eye does not appear as vision to the seer herself, nor as a localized sensation that would coincide with the external object. In general, I cannot have direct perceptual intuition of my own eye as a seer, and in vision, there is no phenomenon of double sensation:

¹¹ Husserl will return to the example of the hands touching the table when analyzing again the possibility of the shift of attention between the perceived object and the location of the sensations in the percipient body (*Leib*). He will also mention, for the same purpose, the tactile perception of the weight of a paper, the softness of the surface of a glass, the delicacy of the edges of a glass (Id. II, §36, 154).

¹² “...the sense of touch always plays its part, as it is indeed obviously privileged amongst the contributions to the constitution of a thing” (Id. II, §18, 75).

¹³ This is the reason made explicit by Husserl (see *infra* the next quotation and n. 14). Although not discussing the priority of touch, Michela Summa presents, in addition to this, another reason for the privilege of touch, namely the continuity of the tactile experience in our relationship with the world from which it follows that tactile sensations are the only ones that cannot be suspended. Summa also goes a little further in concluding the consequences of the duplicity of tactile experiences and states that these, by their reference to the sensitive location in the body, “put us in closer contact with material nature”. (See SUMMA, 2014, p. 280-81 n.14). In my view, however, the assertion that tactile experiences put us “in closer contact with material nature” is only one way of reading the duplicity of the tactile experience. The reverse statement is also possible, as it is precisely this duplicity that can make a *Körper* to become *Leib*, establishing this as something distinct from the extended bodies, and therefore distancing it from material nature.

I do not see myself, my Body [*Leib*], the way I touch myself. What I call the seen Body is not something seeing which is seen, the way my Body [*Leib*] as touched Body [*Leib*] is something touching which is touched. A visual appearance of an object that sees, i.e., one in which the sensation of light could be intuited just as it is in it—that is denied us. Thus what we are denied is an analogon to the touch sensation, which is actually grasped along with the touched hand ... If, ultimately, the eye is an organ and, along with it, the visual sensations are in fact attributed to the Body [*Leib*], then that happens indirectly (Id. II, §37, 155-56)¹⁴.

At this point Husserl differentiates location from extension. Unlike the extension of merely material bodies which are subject to fragmentation by their quality as independent parts, that is, *partes extra partes*, animated bodies (*Leib*) and their aspect of ‘localized sensations’ cannot be confused with the extended thing. Sensations are ‘spread out’ on the surface of the body and do not constitute a real quality of the ‘thing’ – that is, of the merely material (or *Körperlich*) aspect of the animated body (*Leib*), and therefore are not constituted by a series of profiles as things are.

Through this ‘non-fragmenting unity’ of the body (*Leib*) Husserl asserts that tactile sensations give us ‘the hand itself’ (*die Hand selbst*), not the state of the material thing, and states that “all sensing pertain to my soul; everything extended to the material thing” (Id. II, §37, p. 157). It is because it constitutes a non-fragmentary location that I recognize as being mine that this surface, through the sensations constituted through tactile perception, “manifests itself immediately as my body [*Leib*]” and this is why I can differentiate what comes from my body from what comes from material things (Id. II, §37, p. 157).

We return here to the privileged position of touch: if *Leib* is necessarily constituted through tactile sensations, for Husserl, a subject who could only see could not have an appearing *Leib* (Id. II, §37, p. 158). It would be as if the ego in question could move the “material thing body” (*das materielle Ding Leib*¹⁵), but not the *Leib*. This is because, although animation and kinesthetic processes play an important role, allowing for

¹⁴ In a footnote, Husserl is quite explicit about the indirect aspect of the experience of seeing my own eyes and compares it with the experience of seeing the eye of others: “Obviously, it cannot be said that I see my eye in the mirror, for my eye, that which sees *qua* seeing, I do not perceive. I see something, of which I judge indirectly, by way of ‘empathy’ that it is identical as my eye as a thing (the one constituted by touch, for example) in the same way that I see the eye of an other” (Id. II, §37, 155 n.1). Further on Husserl will return to this point: “Each thing that we see is touchable and, as such, points to an immediate relation to the Body [*Leib*], though it does not do so in virtue of its visibility” (Id. II, §37, 158).

¹⁵ Id. II, §37, p. 158, emphasis in the original.

possible sensations, this is not enough for the location of sensations in the body. To bear sensations, the movement must be intertwined (*verflochten*) with the localized sensations. And since localized sensations are first possible through tactile perception, the body as *Leib* can only be constituted by touch.

What differentiates the body (*Leib*) more radically from other things in material nature is therefore their capacity to bear sensations, which can only be grasped by touch. For Husserl, tactile sensations are the condition for all sensations and apparitions in general. They are the ones that give me the intuition of my body as a unit that follows myself in all my lived experiences. Thus, the sense of touch is responsible for the constitution of *Leib* and for the access to the body as my ‘own’, as a unity that follows my experiences. In this sense, touch gives access to “the interior of the body [*Leib*]”, and to “the interiority of psychic acts”, since these are mediated by the location of the field of touch¹⁶.

Now that we have seen how, in Husserl, animated bodies differ from mere extended bodies, as they entail 1) unity not subjected to fragmentation, 2) zero point of orientation, and 3) bearer of localized sensations (which differ from mere extension); we can now see how Nancy’s thinking of the body, no matter how phenomenologically informed, takes up and transforms each of the Husserlian characteristics of the body¹⁷, and thus departs from the phenomenological approach.

Jean-Luc Nancy: *toucher* as *leitmotiv*

In reading Nancy alongside Husserl, I am proposing a twofold interpretation of *toucher*: on the one hand, we can apply to the body what Ian James claims about space, that is: the deconstruction of phenomenology also “serve to intensify...the initial divergences which Husserl’s writing originally articulates from the classical paradigm” (JAMES, 2006, p. 66). In this sense, Nancy’s thinking of the body maintains at least one aspect (and a fundamental one) of the Husserlian phenomenology of the body: there is no

¹⁶ Cf. Id. II, §45, p. 173-174.

¹⁷ For similar reasons, Luka Nakhutsrishvili has suggested the *toucher* as an ‘(anti) phenomenological’ motive in Nancy’s thinking. I am afraid, however, that the oppositional sense of ‘anti’, would still blur the phenomenological precedence of the theme, even if kept in parenthesis (NAKHUTSRISHVILI, 2012, p. 157-180, see especially, p. 158).

appearance without touch. Nancy's thinking radicalizes the "foreign medium" already thought by Husserl: the *contact* between bodies necessarily constitute their limits in such a way as to expose the ontological impossibility of a common substance¹⁸.

On the other hand, it is also Nancy's thinking on *toucher* that will completely deconstruct a phenomenology of the body: there is no *Leib/Körper* division, no unity, no 'zero point of orientation', no localization and, finally, no intentionality. In this sense, as Marie-Eve Morin states, "bringing Nancy too close to phenomenological concerns with the lived body actually risks obfuscating the originality of his thinking of the body" (MORIN, 2016, p. 334).

Keeping that in mind, I intend to show in the following how Nancy thinks *toucher* as a material condition for existence of bodies. This can be indeed traced back to Husserl, or at least, to a certain reading of Husserl. However, for Nancy, there is no *toucher* without separation (*écartement*) even in the classical example of my "own" body touching itself. The relation between contact and separation that Nancy's *toucher* implies can be seen as a radicalization of the Husserlian "foreign medium". However, for Nancy, this exteriority occupies a more fundamental position: it does not consist in exceptions to our perception of solid bodies. Rather, for Nancy, there is no relation of sense without a sort of "foreign medium".

Unlike the Husserlian analysis, for Nancy, the tactile experience does not come back to itself after passing through the exterior (as in the constitution of the body as proper)¹⁹. It is for this reason that Derrida affirmed a kind of interruption and spacing in Nancy's analysis about the *toucher*, and also his distinction in relation to the French

¹⁸ NANCY. The Extension of the Soul. In: *Corpus*, 2008, p. 143. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as ES.

¹⁹ "Nancy insists that in touching, what is touched always remains outside of what touches it, so that the law of touch is not so much proximity as separation.... [W]hat is touched is always the impenetrable. If touch penetrated into the touched, it would not be touching... What is touched, then, is not so much another body but the open, the limit or the spacing between bodies. Hence touching always touches the untouchable. In his understanding of touch, Nancy distances himself from the phenomenological analyses of self-touching.... 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 or difference between touching and touched that there can be sensing. Yet, this sensing, this 'proto-reflection', folds back upon itself in order to give rise to the synthesis of one's own body. The duality sensing-sensed is what allows me to experience this body as my own... 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: my own body. Never does the distance between touching and touched undermine the integrity of my own body. On the contrary... Nancy will speak, instead of a self-touching-oneself that would lead back to an integrity, of a *se-toucher-toi*.... [T]here is no 'I' that overcomes or surveys in reflection the distance between hand and hand, I and you." (MORIN, "Touch," in: *The Nancy Dictionary*, 2015, p. 229-32).

reception of Husserlian phenomenology (DERRIDA, 2000, p. 184, 207). In stating the exteriority of the *toucher* and the impossibility of a “return to itself”, Nancy explicitly opposes Husserl’s (and also Merleau-Ponty’s) analysis of the right hand touching the left hand. It is worth quoting this passage, since it makes references of both phenomenologists explicitly:

Have you already encountered yourself as pure spirit? No. This means that you are like me, that we only gain access to ourselves from outside ... This is what skin is. It’s through my skin that I touch myself ... There are some celebrated analyses by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty on this question ... [b]ut curiously ... [t]he phenomenological analyses of “self-touching” always return to a primary interiority. Which is impossible. To begin with, I have to be in exteriority in order to touch myself. And what I touch remains on the outside²⁰.

From this we can notice the change of meaning that the word (or the sense of *toucher*) acquires in Nancy’s thinking: 1) it is not one of the five senses of the living body; 2) *toucher* cannot be gathered into a point of origin²¹. In other words: *toucher* is not perception, and it is also not “localized”. It is rather necessarily fragmented, non-recognizable in one side of the relation.

For Nancy, even bodies endowed with psychic acts do not give access to a “fixed presentation” that would compose a unity. Psychic bodies have *Ausdehnung* rather than giving the location of the body “proper” as a unity of all lived experience. For Nancy, there is no sense to maintain the distinction between bodies as bearers of localized sensations (*Leib; Ausbreitung; Lokalisation*) on one side, and bodies as merely extended (*Körper; Ausdehnung; Extension*) on the other side. Therefore, *toucher* is not understood as in Husserl’s phenomenology, that is, as one of the five senses that only *Leib*-bodies are able to experience (Cf. Id. II, §36), for that would imply that *one* body feels another body external to “itself” and that it can refer these determinations back to “itself”. For Nancy, *toucher* does not give access to an interiority. On the contrary, even “my” body is always given to me from the outside. As Juan Manuel Garrido says, “As long as there is touching, there is ex-position, and therefore I become inaccessible to myself” (GARRIDO, 2009, p. 195). The origin, as Nancy says, “is an interval/separation”²². Insofar as the *toucher*

²⁰ NANCY, “On the soul,” in: *Corpus*, 2008, p. 128-29.

²¹ NANCY, “Surprise de l’événement,” in: *Être singulier pluriel*, 2013, p. 201. Or, to say it in another way, “l’origine est un écartement” (NANCY, 2013, p. 35).

²² “l’origine est un écartement” (NANCY, 2013, p. 35).

has no origin, it is not possible to trace the path, so to speak, that would lead us to the location of sensations, and consequently to the constitution of the body as “proper”.

It is always in reaffirming the otherness inscribed in the experience of bodies (including what I call, in the singular, “my body”) that Nancy is explicit about his distance from phenomenological accounts on the body: “It’s from bodies that we have, for ourselves, bodies as our strangers. Nothing to do with a dualism, a monism, or a phenomenology of the body” (NANCY, 2008, p. 19). The tone of its distancing from phenomenology is indicated by the plural (“it is from bodies”) used by Nancy. Here, other things and bodies of the world are not referred back to “my” body. Rather, my ‘own’ body depends on the relation to other things. Thus, the ‘zero point of orientation’ is no longer the body I recognize as ‘mine’. The “zero point” is given in the plural because my “own” body is already given to me in relation to other bodies. In thinking *Leib* as the “zero point of orientation” phenomenology asserts an interiority of the “self”: insofar as only my *Leib* would be suited to be the “point of orientation”, there is a priority of the constitution of my *Leib*, from which all the other things and bodies are constituted, being presented always in reference to my *Leib*. For Nancy, the reference point is not on one side of the relation (i.e., the animated body), but in the relation itself, since nothing is given prior to it. Thus, everything in the surrounding world is not simply in relation to *Leib*, it is rather in a material relation to another thing, whether that thing is a *Leib* or not. This primordially of the relation, in turn, implies not only that a body is always given together with other bodies, but that my “own” body is given to me as another. There is separation even if it concerns the body I call “my own”: “My hands touch one another; my body recognizes itself coming to itself from an outside that it itself is (...) Our being entwined with the world has always, from the start, exposed us right down to our most intimate depths”²³.

From this we can see how Nancy radicalizes Husserl’s thinking about the “foreign medium”. For Husserl, if something stands between the perceiving subject and the perceived object, there is no longer an immediate perception, and the appearance of things undergoes a modification: “If I interpose a foreign *medium* between my eye and the things seen, then all things undergo a change in appearance” (Id.II, §18, 65). In these cases, the “foreign medium” makes the contact mediated and the intuition indirect. It is only in cases

²³ NANCY, “Strange Foreign Bodies,” in: *Corpus II: Writings on Sexuality*, 2013, p. 84.

in which there is a “foreign medium” that it becomes senseless to assert an immediate sense (“seeing without any mediating things - touching by immediate contact, etc.” [Id. II, §18, p. 65]). For Nancy, the “outside” that my “own” body is, and the gap (*écartement*) without which there is no *toucher*, implies that there is no sense relation without a sort of “foreign medium”. Thus, there is no coincidence between my touching hand and my touched hand – not even in the minimal sense that the touching sensations are localized on my ‘own’ body. First of all, they can only touch because there is an interval, a spacing between them. Since my “own” body is given to me as a foreign exteriority, in Nancy’s thinking, there is no “immediate contact” or “direct intuition”. In this sense, Nancy’s radicalization of the “foreign medium” which, to a certain extent, finds its origins in Husserl’s analyses of the body and the senses, is also what distances Nancy’s thinking from a phenomenology of the body.

Nancy’s radicalization of the ‘foreign medium’ can be understood as the retrieval of the ‘*extra*’ of the Cartesian *partes extra partes* not as an undifferentiated void, but as the extension of the outside that precisely gives place to the differentiations (NANCY, 2008, p. 97; MORIN, 2012, p. 129.). For Nancy, insofar as the movements of a body imply the passage from one place to another – the “spacing of places” – they are, in a broad sense, extensions (ES p. 141-42). Thus, “extension” is not the essential attribute of materiality that distinguishes between a lower material stratum of nature, and a superior psychical one. Extension is rather the distance between places, figures, and movements (ES p. 141). It is the outside and the *between* without which nothing appears. In this sense, Nancy claims that: “The ‘extra’ is not another ‘pars’ between the ‘partes’, but only the sharing of the parts” (NANCY, 2008, p. 29). The extra is the relation (which always implies the detour through the outside) by which the world is given to us. According to Nancy, I know myself by the beating of my heart, by the bond with a nail, by the surface of a table upon which my hand rests. I know myself, therefore, from the extension, which in turn, is always differentiating itself, that is: I know myself as beatings of the heart, as nail; I know myself as surface (ES p. 142). In this sense, it is by the extra understood as relation to the outside (heart, nail, table) that existence is given to us: “The *extra* of the impenetrable parts is here confounded with the *existo*: ex-ist, being *ex*, is to be exposed according to corporeal exteriority, it is to be in the world, and, in a more radical fashion, is being world” (ES p. 143).

There is no “self” that precedes the relation to something other, to the outside. As Nancy says: “it becomes instead a question of thinking the (...) being outside the self, (...) the coming to self as a ‘self-sensing’, a ‘self-touching’ that necessarily passes through the outside - which is why I can’t sense myself without sensing otherness and without being sensed by the other”²⁴. If we insist in the impossibility of interiority, it is to mark the difference between Nancy’s thinking and phenomenology. Nancy’s reading of the *extra* marks the limit of phenomenology²⁵, once the emphasis on the outside, and the impossibility of appropriation undermine the phenomenological sense of intentionality insofar as the flux of lived experience does not reflect a unity²⁶. For Nancy, extension thought as the place of differentiation, the “between” from which the world is given, replaces phenomenological intentionality with a “tension from the outside”.

If, in Husserl, touching is a pre-condition for all appearances, from which I constitute my *Leib* and upon which I then base my intentionality, for Nancy, this return to a unity of consciousness is never made: touching is a material relation that does not precede nor surpass our experience of the world. No intentional subject is constituted out of it: it is just an openness to the co-appearance between bodies: one after another, or one as another. In this endless process, bodies *never* cease to differentiate themselves from themselves *and* from each other, and no totalization is possible. For Nancy, correlation, if we want to keep the phenomenological term, is never between consciousness and object, but between appearance and appearance, and what appears is always a body. Thus, Nancy’s thinking on *toucher* departs from a conscientialist (and phenomenological)

²⁴ NANCY, “On the soul,” in: *Corpus*, 2008, p. 133.

²⁵ As Marie-Eve Morin shows in “*Corps propre or corpus corporum...*”. This text also deals with the relationship between Nancy’s and Merleau-Ponty’s thoughts

²⁶ “Intentionality is what characterizes *consciousness* in the pregnant sense and which, at the same time, justifies designating the whole stream of mental processes as the stream of consciousness and as the unity of *one* consciousness...Under intentionality we understand the own peculiarity of mental processes ‘to be consciousness of something’...In every actional cogito a radiating ‘regard’ is directed from the pure Ego to the ‘object’ of the consciousness-correlate in question, to the physical thing, to the affair-complex, etc., and effects the very different kinds of consciousness of it...There belong here, moreover, mental processes of the actionality background, such as the ‘arousal’ of likings, of judgements, of wishes, etc., at different distances in the background or, as we can also say, at a *distance from* and a *nearness to the Ego*, since the actional pure Ego living in the particular cogitations is the point of reference...With respect to their own essence these non-actionalities are likewise already ‘consciousness of something’” (Id. I, §84 “Intentionality as Principal Theme of Phenomenology”, p. 199-201, emphasis in the original).

“Imperturbably I must hold fast to the insight that every sense that any existent whatever has or can have for me in respect of its ‘what’ and its ‘it exists and actually is’ is a sense in and arising from *my* intentional life”. (HUSSERL, 1982, §43, p. 91, my emphasis).

approach insofar as the *toucher* remains always fragmented, without origin or orientation, and necessarily opened to the other.

Bibliographical References

DERRIDA, Jacques. *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*. Paris: Galilée, 2000.

GARRIDO, Juan Manuel. Jean-Luc Nancy's Concept of Body. *Epoche: A Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 14(1) (2009).

HUSSERL, Edmund. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Tr. D. Cairns. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982.

HUSSERL, Edmund. *HUA IV: Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*. Ed. M. Bimmel. Dordrecht: Springer, 1991.

HUSSERL, Edmund. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*. Tr. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000.

HUSSERL, Edmund. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*. Tr. F. Kersten. The Hague: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983.

JAMES, Ian. *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

MORIN, M.-E. and GRATTON, P. (eds.). *The Nancy Dictionary*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015.

MORIN, Marie-Eve. Corps propre or corpus corporum: Unity and Dislocation in the Theories of Embodiment of Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Luc Nancy. *Chiasmi International* 18 (2016).

MORIN, Marie-Eve. *Jean-Luc Nancy*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012.

NAKHUTSRISHVILI, Luka. Corps propre et corps technique(s) : Jean-Luc Nancy et la phénoménologie. *Studia Phaenomenologica* XII (2012).

NANCY, Jean-Luc. Strange Foreign Bodies. In: *Corpus II: Writings on Sexuality*. Tr. A. O'Byrne. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.

NANCY, Jean-Luc. Surprise de l'événement. In: *Être singulier pluriel*. Paris: Galilée, 2013.

NANCY, Jean-Luc. *Corpus*. Tr. R. Rand. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.

NANCY, Jean-Luc. The Extension of the Soul. In: *Corpus*. Tr. R. Rand. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.

SUMMA, Michela. *Spatio-temporal Interwinning: Husserl's Transcendental Aesthetic*. Cham: Springer, 2014.

ⁱ **Julia Diniz e Carvalho** é doutoranda em Filosofia na University of Alberta (Canadá), com ênfase em filosofias contemporâneas francesa e alemã, em especial, Fenomenologia e Desconstrução. Atualmente leciona cursos de graduação na University of Alberta, dentre eles, “Existencialismo” e “Filosofia Política”. Possui mestrado e graduação em Filosofia pela UFMG e graduação em Artes Visuais pela UEMG. **E-mail:** juliadinizz@gmail.com