

**Body, Transparency and Tactile Dwelling:**

**Are we Nearly Here Yet?**

Submitted to Cardiff University

for consideration for

PhD Critical and Cultural Theory

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**Summary:**

This thesis proceeds from an attempt to articulate the body. At its core, however, is not the attempt to offer a definition of the body but instead to articulate a problem of touching on it. As such, it is motivated by a question at once banal and impossible: *Are we nearly here yet?* Following Jean-Luc Nancy's engagement with the account of space and being-there proposed by Martin Heidegger, it relates the materiality of the body to a broader role of touch and sense in constructing a world of engagements in which the body is never "here" but always "there", always exposed in its touch upon the other. Following Nancy, this thesis begins by opening an ontological formulation of space and embodiment in which the materiality of the body allows for sense to pattern a world of bodies always separated from each other but situated in relation to each other.

Sense, on Nancy's account, is both bodily and conceptual; sense is the touch of vision, of the hands, of the body, and of understanding. Emphasising this multiple formulation of touch, this thesis offers an ontology of space as both material and transparent, in which this transparency figures the potential of the world to be continually re-spaced according to the touches and relationships enacted within it.

After establishing this ontology of body and touch, the thesis enacts a series of attempts to approach the body, conducted in relation to encounters with bodies through photographs, painting and self-portraiture, as well as encounters with bodies that reveal aspects of their particular embodiment at moments of disruption or in their pathological relationships to the world. In each case, what is explored are figures of approach and withdrawal, turn and return, in which the body is nearly available to touch, but always elusive.

**DECLARATION**

This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, nor is being submitted concurrently in candidature for any degree or other award.

Signed .....Kay Westoby..... (candidate)

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This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of ...PhD Critical and Cultural Theory .....(insert MCh, MD, MPhil, PhD etc, as appropriate)

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This thesis is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

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## **Introduction**

### **Are we nearly here yet?**

This thesis began with far loftier intentions than it has since come to realise. In the initial stages of the project, it was motivated by a desire to explore the temporality of the body and the intelligibility of its changes across time. What was missing, however, from its speculations as to the temporal structuring of the body was the body itself. What was the object whose temporality was so elusive? Was the temporality in each instance that of the same body, or even a compatible formulation of body? The attempts it made to reconcile the problematic and shifting temporal nature and durabilities of the body each time traced themselves back to a dissolved referent, or to a multiplication of referents, of bodies, differently conceptualised, that resisted attempts at integration.

This thesis, therefore, took a step back, to seek the referent that it had previously been assuming.

The return to a starting point of body is a return to materiality. We cannot express what is meant by body without both articulating its solidity, its physicality, and also without questioning the problematic relationship between this and our ideas of the (at least seemingly) non-physical. The duality we most commonly bring to bear on the body opposes it to mind or to soul, emphasising this sameness of substance between the body and other objects of the physical world. Such dualism is most famously expressed by René Descartes. Mind and body, he asserts:

are in fact substances which are really distinct one from the other [...] we cannot understand a body except as being divisible, while by contrast we cannot understand a mind except as being indivisible. For we cannot conceive of half a mind, while we can always conceive of half a body, however small; and this leads us to recognize that the natures of mind and body are not only different, but in some way opposite.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, Descartes argues:

absolutely nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing [...] on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body and can exist without it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, rev. edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1986] 1996), pp. 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> Descartes, *Meditations*, p. 54.

This is not to suggest that Descartes denounces any role of the body in influencing mind or consciousness, but that it is only consciousness of which we can have no uncertainties, and that we can be sure is necessary for our existence.

In distinguishing the corporeal substance from that of consciousness we get a physical conception of body. However, the awareness of the difference between the body of the human or animal, who, in some way, animate and live their bodies, and the pure materiality of body as unanimated physicality enforces a further question of what relation we bear to our bodies (or what relations our bodies impose upon us). This distinction is typically phrased as the Leib/Körper distinction. In his introduction to phenomenology, Edmund Husserl writes:

To be sure, everyday induction grew into induction according to scientific method, but that changes nothing of the essential meaning of the pregiven world as the horizon of all meaningful induction. It is this world that we find to be the world of all known and unknown realities. To it, the world of actually experiencing intuition, belongs the form of space-time together with all the bodily [*körperlich*] shapes incorporated in it; it is in this world that we ourselves live, in accord with our bodily [*leiblich*] personal way of being.<sup>3</sup>

As translator David Carr remarks, ‘*Körper* means a body in the geometric or physical sense; *Leib* refers to the body of a person or animal’.<sup>4</sup> The physical body (*Körper*) is akin to that substance Descartes states the body shares with all other physical entities. In contrast, the *Leib*, the lived body, recognises the embodiedness of existence, and the insistence that our mode of being in a world is always embodied, and always structured by the nature of this body.

Body, *human* body, is at once a body, a region of some form of corporeality, existing within some formulation of spatialised relation to other matter, yet it is also *the* body, somehow uniquely human, both in its form and in its ability to either communicate with, or cause to emerge, our consciousness. Recounting her time as a medical student studying anatomy and dissection in a morgue, Christine Montross describes her experience of a late-night laboratory session, commenting: ‘[t]wenty bodies in the room, only we two breathing.’<sup>5</sup> The tensions between the two formulations

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<sup>3</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 50.

<sup>4</sup> Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, p. 50 (footnote 15).

<sup>5</sup> Christine Montross, *Body of Work: Meditations on Mortality from the Human Anatomy Lab* (New York: Penguin, 2007), p. 39.



of body are here exposed in the dependence of the lived body on its material counterpart, a counterpart that nonetheless resists complete identification with it. As Montross notes, the human body is substantially similar but other to the corpse; these corpses ‘were people, are people, were loved, are loved, were bodies, are bodies’.<sup>6</sup> In an account of body, it is imperative to engage with the elusive difference between living body and physical body, while retaining the essential ties between the two. Rather, therefore, than proceed to question the temporality of a notion of “body” that was as yet undefined, this thesis changed direction, and instead is aimed at articulating this question of body that holds together connected but divergent definitions and entities.

At the heart of this new direction was a new question. ‘Are we nearly there yet?’: this question is familiar, and encodes an unproblematic connection between ideas of locality and direction. Yet it is the body as physical being that bears a simplistic, geometric relationship to a body at another locality. Conversely, it is the living body, the self whose embodiment allows it to be present in a world, which is oriented *towards* another body, rather than merely alongside it. The complication arises when one considers that such orientation places the self always outside itself. We are always, as Chapter One explores, *there* where we touch and engage with the world. We intuitively have a sense of being *here*, of residing at a location (an idea of bounded location shaped by the physical aspect of the body), yet we cannot indicate it either with our hands, our eyes, or even language, without an act of pointing to it, an act which displaces that which is indicated from that which indicates.

Having, in *Being and Time*, turned away from questions of bodiliness, Heidegger turns back in *The Zollikon Seminars*, referencing his earlier neglect.<sup>7</sup> He writes: ‘[w]e will now try to move somewhat closer to the phenomenon of the body. In doing so, we are not speaking of a solution to the problem of the body. Much has already been gained merely by starting to see this problem.’<sup>8</sup> This thesis similarly abstains from offering any solution. Instead, it offers a reformulation of this question that I happened to overhear a child ask: *Are we nearly here yet?* However unintentional

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<sup>6</sup> Montross, *Body of Work*, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger makes reference to ‘Dasein’s spatialization in its “bodily nature”’ but comments, in parentheses: ‘(This “bodily nature” hides a whole problematic of its own, though we shall not treat it here.)’

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p. 143.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols-Conversations-Letters*, ed. Medard Boss, trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), p. 81.

on the child's part, it expresses this basic frustration of the body, the reduction of its core challenge to an impossibly simple, seemingly obvious question. We are always here, except that we are not. What this thesis offers instead is an attempt to take on this "nearly", an attempt to draw closer to the body, to "my" body, that underlies and permits all my engagements with the world, yet which can only ever be accessed itself as an object of engagement. In the second, third and fourth chapters this attempt to approach the body is conducted in relation to questions of encounter with bodies through photographs, painting and self-portraiture, as well as encounters with bodies that reveal elements of their embodiment at moments of disruption or in their pathological relationships to the world. In each case, what is explored are figures of approach and withdrawal, turn and return, in which the body is nearly available to touch, but always slips away.

In these figures of approach and return, that which is attempted is a touch on the body, the attempt to reveal it under the touch of our hands or eyes, within the touch of our understanding. In each of these, the central figure is that of touch. It is touch to which the first chapter of this thesis is devoted. Returning to the idea of the physical body as a site of physical continuity, separation and contact, this thesis begins by offering an ontology of space and bodies which proceeds from this materiality of contact.

Chapter One begins by clearing a space in which to find the body. The primary concern here is with a figure of touch, employed to negotiate the dichotomy between the idea of the body as reducible to inert matter and the body as inextricable from an embodied self engaged in a world and interacting with other objects. Cartesian dualism, in its commitment to the double substances of soul and body, requires the material commonality between one's body and its surroundings in order to complete the interactions that supply an ever-shifting stream of qualitative phenomena to the self, and to respond, to engage with the world rather than passively receive it. The body thus exists in relationships to its surroundings that allow material interaction. In addition, it is through such interactions that the self receives the conscious experiences that characterise it, and which mere matter, as non-animated collections of materiality, lacks. This chapter turns, therefore, to a figure of touch, a term capable of straddling this duality of relation between objects. As Jacques Derrida observes, of all available senses, there are grounds for such privileging of the bodily, tactile nature of touch as the essential element of relation:

no living being in the world can survive for an instant without touching, which is to say without being touched. [...] We can live without seeing, hearing, tasting, and smelling (“sensing,” in the visual, auditory, gustatory, and olfactory senses), but we cannot survive one instant without being with contact, and in contact. [...] That is where, for a finite living being, before and beyond any concept of “sensibility,” touching means “being in the world.” There is no world without touching [...].<sup>9</sup>

In the exploration of this ontology of space and touch, this chapter follows the ontology of bodies advocated by Jean-Luc Nancy. As Chapter One explores, Nancy establishes an ontological space in which the materiality of the body allows for sense to pattern a world of bodies always separated from each other but situated in relation to each other. Sense, on Nancy’s account, is both bodily and conceptual; sense is the touch of vision, of the hands, of the body, of understanding, that relates to the world as to a plurality of bodies, separated from each other but entering into sense through their relationships.

His move towards a more tactile conception of the sense that constitutes or reveals a world, Patrick Roney suggests, constitutes a fundamental aspect of Nancy’s reworking of the phenomenological tradition from which he proceeds:

[...] there is a second way in which Nancy understands the limitations of phenomenology, which is more illuminating when it comes to the difference between sense and its others, including signification, referentiality and meaning-bestowal. In so far as it seeks to uncover the essential structures of appearance, both the phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger privilege a kind of seeing. By contrast, sense does not invoke sight but rather the plurality of the senses and most especially touch, which in turn is the most plural of all the senses. Phenomenology fails to address the heterogeneity of sense and, by extension, the

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<sup>9</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 140.

There is an interesting example of this to be drawn from the actual, human experiences of Helen Keller, who lost both the sense of sight and of hearing in infancy. In her autobiography, she recounts that the illness ‘closed my eyes and ears and plunged me into the unconsciousness of a new-born baby’. In this unconsciousness is the figure of undifferentiated unity of being in which no consciousness, no separation of world and self, can exist. However, even deprived of these dominant modes of experiencing the world, she soon returned to a life in which she could differentiate objects, and could understand herself as differentiated from people and from the objects around her, reconstituting herself in a world of relations. ‘My hands felt every object and observed every motion, and in this way I learned many things’, she writes. ‘Soon I felt the need of some communication with others and began to make crude signs.’ Eventually, touch and her hands allowed her entry into language, and into a more formalised mode of dividing and patterning the world. This priority of touch is illustrative of the role of sense in forming a world, as well as supportive (if not conclusive) of Derrida’s advocacy of the primacy of touch. What is particularly revealing, however, is the association Keller’s text draws between her hands feeling and her hands observing; our easy privileging of sight and of a discourse of sight rests here upon a more fundamental, tactile sense of discrete objects and relations that reveal a world.

Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life and the World I Live In* (n.p.: Gridl Press, 2013), pp. 3-4.

discrete differences that compose the world; that is the claim. If it could, then it would have to confront a plurality that did not presuppose a *sensus communis*.<sup>10</sup>

In this chapter I advocate a model of space that, following Nancy, is physically continuous, broken into regions delineated by lines of contact that impose a non-material separation. Along these lines of contact run not space but spacing, the non-material fissures of a non-substance, that nonetheless demarcate two surfaces alongside each other.

The primary move in my formulation, however, is to prioritise the intertwined languages of touch, understanding, meaning and vision that Nancy opens up, and which Derrida refers to as a tendency in phenomenology of the becoming-haptical of the optical'.<sup>11</sup> 'I see', I can remark, and speak not of vision but comprehension; I touch on a topic, and use my mind not my hands. Gazes can meet, we can feel the brush of gazes across us, the touch of eyes upon us. This chapter reworks touch to bind to its inherently material, physical substance these interconnecting discourses in which it functions as sense, as an acknowledgement of or capacity to relate. This is done by starting with Nancy's figure of the symbol and its entry into meaning by a connection which must always be forged (be found) between a plurality of beings. Meaning must initiate and acknowledge a contact. Nancy's figure is already material, utilising a figure of a broken pot, for which the fracture line functions as an inscription of a meeting between two newly created lines and bodies for contact. My chapter works from this figure, but with the aim to also incorporate the touch of vision to those of materiality and meaning. Instead of the broken pot, it offers an image of broken glass, or of a transparent substance which, subjected to strain, is striated with opaque fractures lines that denote touch. Thus formulated, this image is used to offer figure of space as continually reshaped, respaced, by the touches of our engagements on the world.

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<sup>10</sup> Patrick Roney, 'The Outside of Phenomenology: Jean-Luc Nancy on World and Sense', *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 32.4 (2013), 339-347 (p. 344).

<sup>11</sup> Derrida, Jacques, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 123.

## **Chapter One – Touch and Space**

### **1.1 – Introducing Touch**

That there is an inherent connection between the body and touch is indisputable. Intuitively, we know that much of what we mean by touching is bodily and tactile, yet our understanding of touch is divided between the experience and physicality of contact. As Gernot Böhme remarks, '[t]he Cartesian concept of the body [i.e. *Körper*], has meaning to the extent that we objectify human bodies in the same way as other things and subject them to scientific methods'.<sup>12</sup> This materialistic notion of the body gains support from our intuitive understanding of touch: touch requires the physical contiguity of two differentiated objects. Each body is a body amongst bodies. Yet, such a scientific definition of touch in terms of matter and space clearly does not capture our personal, phenomenological experiences of touch. Such a notion offers, however, a discourse we may often fall back on in arbitrating our experiences. I might, for example, imagine feeling someone touching me, or brushing past me; on such occasions I might question whether this person “actually” touched me, meaning by this the physical materiality of contact that we mean when we speak of one person touching another person or thing. In this scenario, I am the more passive object of a touch, and indeed the toucher may neither have intended nor even felt the contact. In such instances, the phenomenological experiences of touch is subordinated to an understanding of touch framed in terms of physical proximity. To use a familiar scenario, competitive swimming requires this physical touch of the competitor on the wall of the pool in arbitrating the results; the competitor’s relation to the wall in any capacity other than that of material contiguity is deemed irrelevant.

So figured, it is my body that touches, and, moreover, that touches the material “bodies” around it. This materiality of our conception of touch is something to which I will return throughout this thesis. In particular, the merging discourses of tactility, vision and thought with respect to touch will be examined. The direction of influence in these merging discourses is neither unidirectional nor clearly definable (indeed, seeking to separate the three out into individuated strands undermines the subtleties of any true claims about the embodied nature of selves). However, to begin where language may

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<sup>12</sup> Gernot Böhme. ‘The Concept of the Body as the Nature We Ourselves Are’, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 24.3 (2010), 224-238 (p. 225).

most easily lead us, touch seems first and foremost a physical, material, tactile, bodily phenomenon. In this turn to the physical we step closer to that which, this thesis will argue, is at the heart of notions of touch, we approach the question of the *limit* or horizon with regard to which one can speak meaningfully of touch. Touch is a matter of limits, of encounters with the boundaries and limits that receive and resist our contact. In touching, I encounter resistance, rather than an unknowing penetration, and this resistance, however much a matter of phenomenological experience, typically calls us back to the material component of our existence – the *Körper* – and its interactions at its surface (skin) with the surfaces around it. It is the limits of the body (understood as something other than a mere *Körper*) this thesis wishes to approach: the body understood as the contour of that which touches, the contoured limit of my body which another being may touch.

## **1.2 – Heideggerian Touch**

One allure of identifying the body with the biological emanates from the stability and constancy this seems to offer; no matter the volatile and shifting way in which we are oriented towards the world, the body so defined offers a tantalising boundary against which the world can rest. Yet Heidegger resists this conceptualisation, questioning the implicit account of touch that underlies it. In *Being and Time* he writes:

As an existentials, ‘Being alongside’ the world never means anything like the Being-present-at-hand-together of Things that occur. There is no such thing as the ‘side-by-side-ness’ of an entity called ‘Dasein’ with another entity called ‘world’. Of course when two things are present-at-hand together alongside one another, we are accustomed to express this occasionally by something like ‘The table stands “by” the door’ or ‘The chair “touches” the wall’. Taken strictly, ‘touching’ is never what we are talking about in such cases, not because accurate re-examination will always eventually establish that there is a space between the chair and the wall, but because in principle the chair can never touch the wall, even if the space between them should be equal to zero. If the chair could touch the wall, this would presuppose that the wall is the sort of thing ‘for’ which a chair would be *encounterable*. An entity present-at-hand within the world can be touched by another entity only if by its very nature the latter entity has Being-in as its own kind of Being – only if, with its Being-there, something like the world is already revealed to it, so that from out of that world another entity can manifest itself in touching, and thus become accessible in its Being-present-at-hand. When two entities are present-at-hand within the world, and furthermore

are *worldless* in themselves, they can never ‘touch’ each other, nor can either of them ‘be’ ‘*alongside*’ the other.<sup>13</sup>

This account directly challenges the view that the body (as *Körper*), as the physical component of a self, is the central figure in touch. The phenomenon of touch... This phrase contains within it the splintering and merging that is deeply ingrained and implicated in our entire language of contact. The phenomenon, on one hand, is an occurrence, often a phenomenon in nature, out in the world of things, something to be pointed to and reified in some sense. In contrast is the phenomenon at the heart of phenomenology, where phenomena are refigured, are regarded perhaps as purely figureable, and entirely encounterable, only as experiences, as qualia. Heidegger’s notion of the encounter and of the world-liness or world-less-ness of a being are more complex concepts than this, but figured at a more basic level the chair has no encounter with anything in this sense. The forces of the wall act upon it, it acts upon the wall, but it experiences no encounter with the wall, either as a wall or as a more indefinable region of solidity. Moreover, the chair has no encounter with itself, has no sense of its own being, let alone of its own being *as* chair.

The chair possesses neither a sense of self nor a world. Unlike Dasein, unlike this kind of being which the human has, the chair is not the kind of being which is always already situated in a world where it finds itself alongside entities it is capable of encountering. The region of corporeality which we would regard as a chair lacks any capacity for encounter, for touch. Touch on such models is uni-directional in the sense that it is one-sided: Dasein touches the chair, the chair does not touch him (or her). However, it is interesting to note that *y* is not touched by *x* if *x* is worldless, yet would be touched if this *x* has a world (i.e. if *x* is Dasein). *y*, the worldless, which does not encounter its toucher, which does not feel the touch, can nonetheless be touched. *Touching*, to touch, is a phenomenological act, a phenomenological experience of the toucher. Yet here being touched does not seem to belong to the object, to *y*, but is instead an aspect of the toucher’s qualitative and, moreover, conceptual or understanding-related activity. The toucher understands that there is ‘something like’ a world beyond him- or herself in which objects will be found, and also understands the chair *as* a chair, in the sense that it understands the object *as* an object with a certain function, and as an object to which one comports oneself in a certain way. This aspect

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), pp. 81-2.

of phenomenological experience binds touch always to understanding in its partitioning of the world. As Heidegger writes, '[w]e never really first perceive a throng of sensations [...] rather, we hear the storm whistling in the chimney [...] Much closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves.'<sup>14</sup>

This idea introduces the central notion of meaning or interpretation. This account of *touching* seems intuitive; it permits us to merge our physical and experiential aspects of touch in the play of qualia emerging from the interaction of the contour of the body with its physical surroundings. Yet a focus not on touching but on being-touched is arguably more revealing. We must be wary of asserting that the region of corporeality which we regard as the chair touches the region of corporeality that is Dasein's body: to retreat to a description of material proximity retreats too far from the living, experienced sense of touch. In saying that *the chair is touched by Dasein*, what we are instead encouraged to conclude is that this description itself (the description of this region *as a chair*) is the response to, a consequence that arises with, touching. Instead of encountering undifferentiated matter, in this touching Dasein encounters the chair. The encounter is an encounter-as, that is, a bodily interaction with a material environment that, in the touch, is already touched-as a certain form of object. To assert that the chair is touched by Dasein is to assert that Dasein has touched and that "chair" is what emerges in this touch. The encounter has been conceptualised, thought, or recognised as a chair. Being touched does not belong *to* the object, but is instead an implicitly integral feature operative in the constitution of its singularity, of its boundedness in and as that object that emerges from the touching performed by Dasein.

Arguably, this idea of being-touched pertains to a greater subtlety and import than notions of touching as a mere point of contact between entities. At the heart of this configuration is the tangle of our modes of understanding and conceptualising the body. To touch on the environment requires a material proximity and physical interaction with it. The resistance to penetration, the slip of friction that influences the motion of contact,

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (Abingdon: Routledge [1977, 1993] 2008), pp. 83-139 (p. 95).

As Maurice Merleau-Ponty articulates it, this mode of being in a world that we possess (but the chair lacks) places us, 'in a relation of pre-established harmony' with the things found in vision, 'as though [the viewer] knew them before knowing them'. 'I do not look at a chaos, but at things', he writes 'things we could not dream of seeing "all naked" because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh.' As such, in articulating – in encountering – chair, I have already touched it: touch upon it is no longer a mere possibility but already realised.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 131-3.



exists in some fashion between the worldless and the worlded alike. The touch, however, that is at stake is the touch of the understanding, the hermeneutic touch that re-patterns and interprets the physical contiguity. This unidirectionality will acquire significance for understanding the body when we move away from our unexamined standard delineations of the body as the intuitively obvious naked, bounded form, and instead begin to recompose it in terms of the way it engages with the world, and thus turn to its touches and engagements with the world.

### 1.2a – Thinking Hands

The associations being made here between corporeal touch and conceptualisation arguably find their most explicit elaboration in the following passage from Heidegger's *What is Called Thinking?*:

We are trying to learn thinking. Perhaps thinking, too, is just something like building a cabinet. At any rate, it is a craft, a "handicraft." "Craft" literally means the strength and skill in our hands. The hand is a peculiar thing. In the common view, the hand is part of our bodily organism. But the hand's essence can never be determined, or explained, by its being an organ which can grasp. Apes, too, have organs that can grasp, but they do not have hands. The hand is infinitely different from all grasping organs, paws, claws, or fangs different by an abyss of essence. Only a being who can speak, that is, think, can have hands and can be handy in achieving works of handicraft.

But the craft of the hand is richer than we commonly imagine. The hand does not only grasp and catch, or push and pull. The hand reaches and extends, receives and welcomes and not just things: the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hands of others. The hand holds. The hand carries. The hand designs and signs, presumably because man is a sign. Two hands fold into one, a gesture meant to carry man into the great oneness. The hand is all this, and this is the true handicraft. Everything is rooted here that is commonly known as handicraft, and commonly we go no further. But the hand's gestures run everywhere through language, in their most perfect purity precisely when man speaks by being silent. And only when man speaks, does he think not the other way around, as metaphysics still believes. Every motion of the hand in every one of its works carries itself through the element of thinking, every bearing of the hand bears itself in that element. All the work of the hand is rooted in thinking. Therefore, thinking itself is man's simplest, and for that reason hardest, handiwork, if it would be accomplished at its proper time.<sup>15</sup>

As this passage recognises, in a discourse of touch the hand has a central place. It is the hand to which we grant the full priority of touch. Ask someone to touch something and they unthinkingly extend their *hand*. The hand is that which can manipulate, can move;

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<sup>15</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Perennial, 1976), pp. 16-7.

it can turn something around for new angles of inspection. It is the component of the body with the greatest flexibility of shape. Our wrists swivel, our fingers feather out from the palm in five directions, each with its own variants on autonomous movements. Each bends in multiple places, and their foldings and movements constantly reshape the palm itself. The hand can mould to each object it encounters, and can also bring objects into interaction with other regions of the body. It is the body part with the greatest precision, that can stretch and support larger items or manipulate the material world with great intricacy. Arguably, the only other component or region of the body over which we may have such precise and responsive control is our tongue, along with lips, mouth and vocal equipment. Like the dexterity of the hand, the precision of language generation is astounding, a precision that allows such subtle differentiations, the divisions of the similar and proximal into discrete and distinguishable unities.

For Heidegger, the actions of the hand surpass all conceptions of it that regard it as simply a dextrous organ of a body. Instead, the hands and our handiness are together revealed to constitute a fundamental aspect of Dasein, of being human. The hand, or rather the touches it enacts and permits, is constantly engaged in a network of meaning recognition and creation that cannot be encompassed by the notion of the hand as a mere organ and instrument. The hand's touches constantly pattern that which is met by the hand *as* that which touch recognises. That 'all the work of the hand is rooted in thinking' reaffirms this connection between physical touch (and bodily touching more generally) and the touch of understanding. The hand is thus both bodily and yet in some sense other than the body. We are told that the hand is that which reaches and extends, and in this very simple statement we find the complex dual nature of the body in our engagement with the world. We do not, we can note, state that the *body* reaches or extends, nor would we speak of the flexing of muscles or joints, the pivoting of the shoulder and so on. The reaching of the hand is in some sense not so much corporeal as corporeally enacted or facilitated. We would never usually speak of extending the body in this way. Instead, we would retreat to a vision of body that, broadly, retains its own limits and measurements.<sup>16</sup> Extension of the body in the hand's fashion is not so much extension as realignment with the objects of the world. Yet, the hand extends, and this

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<sup>16</sup> 'Vision' here could double for 'concept' or 'understanding'. The ties between the visual and conceptual, as (well as tactile and manual) grasping or recognition lie at the heart (again a more-than bodily term) of this chapter. In particular, Heidegger's explicit doubling of vision and understanding is discussed in towards the end of Section 1.4b below.

extension is one *from* the body rather than *of* the hand or body, enacting a partial separation from the body that to some extent demonstrates the duality present in touching.

The easy (the ‘common’) division of identity into body and self (body and mind) has no space for this hand. As the emphasis on its association with thinking suggests, the hand here takes on and bears agency; it orientates us with the world, it manipulates the environment, reorganising and establishing relationships and modes of use, significance and awareness. We think of the body’s skin as a unified boundary, but this is not simply an outline of the body but the point of embodied contact with the world.<sup>17</sup> Yet hands demonstrate the non-equality of the skin as merely an undifferentiated corporeal component of the body. I touch the skin of my hands to the skin of my face, and while both register a contact, it is typically my face that seems touched and my hands which do the touching. Touching is an activity. The doing of a self that becomes aware of its own selfhood and understands the world in which it anticipates and encounters objects is a doing; it is activity and engagement. It is inherently mobile, but not simply mere motion but active relating-*to*. There is becoming aware and an understanding *through touch*.

What emerges from this is the complex association of the body with location. Heidegger’s account, as already stated, resists any division of our being into self and body. Thus, to state that the hand simply demonstrates an extension of the self beyond that which is more obviously body is, on this view, clearly wrong. Yet the fact that this implication remains in our language is important. What I would suggest needs to be emphasised is the spatiality inherent in reaching and extending. That the hand, in its dual capacity as thinking and as physical, reaches and extends expresses this same duality in our constructions of space. To extend is to imply the movement of the corporeal body such that it achieves corporeal contact with the other material body to be touched. Yet, that the hand rather than the body extends also conveys a sense that the body remains with or as a localised “here”, allowing the object to which the hand goes to be in some sense “there”. The act of reaching thus exemplifies the complexity of all touching as affirming the discreteness yet simultaneous contiguity of the two objects (that which touches and that which is touched) by reaffirming our belief in the separateness of ourselves from that which we touch, even as we compose and negotiate

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<sup>17</sup> This idea is discussed in more detail in Section 1.4b below.

a world through the network of touches we perform. We encounter things always “there” where we touch them, yet do so from “here”. The hand that extends beyond the body indicates in this slippage of partial separation the complex double status of the body’s materiality with regards to its location, its “hereness”. We have a sense of existing where we are, an indexical point of presence, for which the body, in its bounded corporeality, offers an easy placeholder or delineation. However, the same materiality is that which facilitates contact and touch, and it is touching that carries us away from the “here” so that instead we are always “there” where we encounter the limits of the other and engage with it.<sup>18</sup>

### **1.3 – Space**

#### **1.3a – The Unidirectionality or Onesidedness of Touch**

The emphasis in the preceding sections has been on touch as an activity. This activity does not merely relate matter to matter, but offers an understanding and recognition of the objects of a world *as* that which they are, as that as which touch reveals them. In doing so, it has focused on its unidirectionality, such that the activity of this touching does not require any reciprocity. This formulation opens an internal rift between touching and being touched that returns our focus to the role of the body. The touched body receives some boundary, some boundedness (some unity) in the unifying and unitising touch-as that singularises a region of the material into one entity that is accessed (and sustained) in this being-touched. The merely corporeal does not phenomenologically respond to the touch, does not feel the touch in a manner that reciprocates with its own touching. However, the object that is touched must be re-figured, re-examined when this is not the case. I touch another person, recognising them *as* a person, and thus as an entity that does indeed feel this touch, that can experience this touch as their own touch on me. Similarly, this initial mode of being-touched is also splintered by the famous example of my right hand touching my left. We can feel as if we are touching or we can feel the being-touched, and the feeling of both (even if we

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<sup>18</sup> That we can direct our touch upon ourselves demonstrates a further complication in this continual slippage from “hereness”. The touch upon ourselves must always find itself “there” under touch, and in doing so further dislocates the sense of “here” from which my touches proceed from the supposed “here” that can only be discovered, instead, somehow “there”.

can never feel both simultaneously) threatens to divide us.<sup>19</sup> It raises to prominence a phenomenological feeling of being-touched that is hard to characterise on the same model as the being-touched of the chair. This challenge to the unidirectionality of touching is one which motivates a need for a development of this mode of thinking about touch. First, however, I wish to introduce a discussion of space in relation to touching that I believe provides an important framework for thinking about both touch and the body, and in relation to which these questions and challenges can be more fully developed.

### 1.3b – From Touch to Space

That which this chapter explores is the concept of space that opens up through a focus on touch, using touch (a phenomenon that returns us literally and theoretically to the body) to formulate the potentials of space that a discussion of dwelling can develop.

A focus on the operation of space within Heidegger's work is not unprecedented, with Jeff Malpas being a particular advocate of the centrality of place and spatiality in his philosophy. As Malpas asserts, 'spatial and topological notions have a problematic status in Heidegger's early work, and there is no doubt that the idea of topology emerges as an explicit and central idea for Heidegger quite late in his thinking.'<sup>20</sup> However, spatiality is present in Heidegger's thinking from his early emphasis on and formulation of *Da-sein*. As Malpas notes, 'what guides that thinking, if only implicitly, almost from the start, is a conception of philosophy as having its origin in a particular idea, problem, and, we may also say, experience: our finding ourselves already "there," in the world, in "place."<sup>21</sup> Being, in other words, is always already *situated*. The 'fundamental orientation of *Being and Time*', Malpas writes, 'would

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<sup>19</sup> In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty states: 'if I can, with my left hand, feel my right hand as it touches an object, the right hand as an object is not the right hand as it touches'. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, he returns to question whether 'my hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without'. This is a question of 'a veritable touching of touch, when my right hand touches my left hand while it is palpating the things, where the "touching subject" "passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things'.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 105.

Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 133-4.

(See also my discussion of this figure in section 3.3c below.)

<sup>20</sup> Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*, p. 6.

seem, from the start, to be directed at the articulation of what is an essentially topological structure – the structure of just that mode of being that is constituted in terms of its “there.”<sup>22</sup> However, the engagements of Da-sein with the world are such that the traditional Western modes of theorising space in terms of measurable extension seem, to borrow Malpas’s assessment, ‘completely inadequate to understanding the situatedness that is the starting point for Heidegger’s inquiry’. How, in turn, Malpas asks, ought we ‘to understand the topology that is at issue here?’<sup>23</sup>

My suggestion, to be explored in this chapter, is that we should seek to understand this topology through an elucidation of the figure of touch and touching. Noting that Dasein’s situatedness is inherently dynamic, Malpas remarks that Heidegger’s ‘topology is increasingly interpreted in terms of temporality’, but that it is ‘in relation to spatiality that the attempted prioritization of temporality turns out to be problematic – and this is indeed a reflection of the ineliminability of spatiality, in some sense [...] within the structure of topology.’<sup>24</sup> Alongside this temporality, he also indicates the significant status of the notion of being-*in*, of inside-ness, in Heidegger’s work.<sup>25</sup> Yet, what I find striking about Malpas’s reading, including his return to the topic in a later book, is the lack of any reference to touch.<sup>26</sup> While his account gives priority to encounter, and seems to regard touch as part of this, I would suggest that touch has the greater ability to straddle the dual aspects of encounter and the physical, spatial proximity that underlies it.

I stated above that touch is seen as fundamentally bodily. Yet, even in this bodiliness touch becomes a point of entrance to the non-extended aspect of how we understand our existence: touch belongs also to the realm of meaning, of interpretation. As will become evident, Heidegger’s stance resists the diminution of space to measurable extension, and this resistance, I wish to stress, has to be interpreted hand in

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<sup>22</sup> Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, p. 67.

<sup>23</sup> Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, pp. 65-6.

<sup>24</sup> Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, p. 66.

<sup>25</sup> Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> Touch is not wholly absent from Malpas’s discussion, but seems to be absorbed within a broader notion of encounter. In *Heidegger’s Topology* he cites passages in which Heidegger has used the term ‘touch’, but Malpas does not refer to touch in his own discussion. In the epilogue of *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*, he makes a brief but overt reference to touch as an intrinsic part of the figure of encounter which is central to his account. He writes: ‘In every act we touch something, respond to it, move in relation to it, and our lives are constituted by such encounter and response as if those lives were made up of the reciprocating movements between interconnected threads in a dense and intricate web’.

Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place: Explorations in the Topology of Being* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), p. 255.

hand with his resistance to Cartesian reductions of the human to the substances of extended body and non-extended self. Dasein is neither one nor the other: it is neither mere corporeality nor pure spirit. Nor, moreover, is Dasein simply understandable as an amalgam of both together. Heidegger's Dasein is an embodied being, rather than being a union of two substances, it is something to which these substance divisions cannot be applied. That which Dasein is may appear to have characteristics in common with these ideas of self and of body, but to seek to define it in these heavily-laden terms risks missing the being of Dasein as the entity (a unity rather than a union) it is.

Dasein is (a) being *in* the world. This in itself is hardly controversial, but there is more to the use of "in" and, I would argue, of the definite article, which does raise more contentious questions. "The" world sounds unitary, more universal: there is the world, and Dasein is in it. So too, we might assume, are other people, chairs, tables, hammers and so on. Yet, firstly, the chairs and tables are in the world in a different manner to Dasein, and secondly, the notion of world-hood that arises from Dasein's engagement with it, or with its surroundings, begins to undermine this universality of *the* world. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes:

What is meant by "Being-in"? Our proximal reaction is to round out this expression to "Being-in 'in the world'", and we are inclined to understand this Being-in as 'Being in something'. This latter term designates the kind of Being which an entity has when it is 'in' another one, as the water is 'in' the glass, or the garment is 'in' the cupboard. By this 'in' we mean the relationship of Being which two entities extended 'in' space have to each other with regard to their location in that space. Both water and glass, garment and cupboard, are 'in' space and 'at' a location, and both in the same way. This relationship of Being can be expanded: for instance, the bench is in the lecture-room, the lecture-room is in the university, the university is in the city, and so on, until we can say that the bench is 'in world-space'. All entities whose Being 'in' one another can thus be described have the same kind of Being – that of Being-present-at-hand – as Things occurring 'within' the world. Being-present-at-hand 'in' something which is likewise present-at-hand, and Being-present-at-hand-along-with in the sense of a definite location-relationship with something else which has the same kind of Being, are ontological characteristics which we call "*categorical*": they are of such a sort as to belong to entities whose kind of Being is not of the character of Dasein.

Being-in, on the other hand, is a state of Dasein's Being; it is an existiale. So one cannot think of it as the Being-present-at-hand of some corporeal Thing (such as a human body) 'in' an entity which is present-at-hand. Nor does the term "Being-in" mean a spatial 'in-one-another-ness' of things present-at-hand, any more than the word 'in' primordially signifies a spatial relationship of this kind. 'In' is derived from "*innan*" – to reside? "*habitare*", "to dwell". '*An*' signifies "I am accustomed", "I am familiar with", "I look after something". [...] The expression '*bin*' is connected with 'bei', and so 'Ich bin'

[‘I am’] means in its turn “I reside” or “dwell alongside” the world, as that which is familiar to me in such and such a way. “Being”, as the infinitive of ‘*ich bin*’ (that is to say, when it is understood as an *existential*), signifies “to reside alongside ...”, “to be familiar with ...”. “*Being-in*” is thus the formal existential expression for the Being of Dasein, which has *Being-in-the-world* as its essential state.<sup>27</sup>

As Malpas observes, the description of objects as “in” space and “at” a location’ suggests an understanding that sees an object’s place to be a matter of spatial location.<sup>28</sup> They have what Malpas refers to as ‘objective spatiality’, existing within ‘unitary, but also undifferentiated, “space”’.<sup>29</sup> We can describe them as ‘located within the framework of space that does not give priority to any one location or region within it’.<sup>30</sup> Objects which are ‘present-at-hand’, unlike Dasein, have this mode of “being-in-something”, of being “in” space. They do not encounter each other, nor are they related to each other by anything other than objective, ‘numerically-given’ measurements.<sup>31</sup> In contrast Dasein is not merely in space, but *there*, there in a world of relationships. The “in” of such “Being-in” is not spatial, but one of being, residing and dwelling, one of relationship, touch and understanding. Dasein’s being is one not of internality, of insideness, but of residing alongside. As stated above, the chair and wall can never be alongside objects, but merely “by” them, in a relation of localities. This alongsideness of Dasein, then, invokes a different kind of spatiality, with this notion of the alongside being figured not with this emphasis on locality and geographical relation, but through the relations of use or equipmentality (the ready-to-hand), through the network of understanding and meaning by which Dasein is related to things.

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<sup>27</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.79-80.

<sup>28</sup> Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, p. 68.

<sup>29</sup> Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, p. 72.

<sup>30</sup> Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, p. 72.

Malpas discusses this space as measurable, indifferent extension in relation to both an Aristotelian model of ‘being-contained’ within an enclosing body, such that a body can be said to be in a place if there is another body which surrounds it, and a more Cartesian model in which place can be thought of as position, where such places or positions are plottable like geometric coordinates within a realm of pure extension. The Aristotelian place or *topos* is understood as ‘tied to a bounding inner surface’ of the container or body (where “body” here means simply the thing in its physical extendedness’). In contrast, Malpas writes that ‘Descartes takes “l’espace” to be identical with the area or volume enclosed within the container and “le lieu” to be just a matter of the container’s position’. Each notion or definition, Malpas notes, is tied to a concept of the extended body. ‘From the idea of space as tied to a particular body,’ he writes, ‘it is easy to arrive at a more generalized notion of space as the extended realm within which all bodies can be contained.’ Such ideas of space as independent and unlimited seem a “natural extension” from the concept of the particular space that exists within any particular enclosing body’.

Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, pp. 68-71.

<sup>31</sup> Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, p. 73.



The objects that are “in” space may not relate to each other, but their presence is informed by the way in which Dasein not merely relates to things, but constitutes them *as* objects through relation to touch and what it creates. This emphasis on touch and understanding is foregrounded in the description of objects in objective spatiality not simply as there but as ‘present-at-hand’. They are encountered, present *to* that which encounters them. They may be materially, objectively existent within an indifferent, undifferentiated space, but this statement and its recognition of such objects requires a ‘grasping things as spatial in this sense’, which has required Dasein, with its different way of Being, ‘to grasp those things as “objects” and so as “objective”’.<sup>32</sup> It is this which gives rise to a more complex figure of space.<sup>33</sup>

Andrew Mitchell describes Heidegger’s formulation of space in *Being and Time* as inherently Dasein-centric:

First, let us note that Dasein is, in a certain sense, at the “center” of this space, or at the very least it organizes this space around its own ends. Insofar as space arises through the equipment attending the projects of our concern and all our equipment points around to Dasein itself as its ultimate purpose, space arises with Dasein as its focus. [...] Space becomes a function of Dasein. [...] Dasein is the organizing principle of its worldhood.<sup>34</sup>

Space, on this account, is not that through which Dasein moves, that which holds its objects for dynamic engagements with them, but is instead in some sense a derivative aspect of Dasein’s understanding of his potentials of comportment towards that which he or she sees as around him or her. Mitchell identifies three problematic consequences

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<sup>32</sup> Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, p.72.

<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that in *Being and Time* Heidegger does suggest that a less “worlded” aspect of space can still be accessed. Heidegger writes: ‘Dasein’s own spatiality is essential to its basic state of Being-in-the-world’ (p. 148). ‘As Being-in-the-world, Dasein has already discovered a “world” at any time. This discovery, which is founded upon the worldhood of the world, is one which we have characterized as freeing entities for a totality of involvements’ (p. 145). The space, he writes, which is thus ‘disclosed with the worldhood of the world’ is one which ‘lacks the pure multiplicity of the three dimensions’ and as such, a conceptualisation of space as ‘the pure “wherein”’ of measured, measurable position, ‘still remains hidden’ (p. 145). However, Heidegger notes, ‘[t]he fact that space essentially shows itself in a world is not yet decisive for the kind of Being which it possesses. It need not have the kind of Being characteristic of something which is itself spatially ready-to-hand or present-at-hand.’ (p. 147) He suggests that ‘one may go through a series of stages in laying bare pure homogeneous space’, arriving thus at ‘the purely metrical science of space’ where regions of involvement are ‘neutralized to pure dimensions’ (p. 147). However, space becomes accessible in this manner, ‘only if the environment’ (and that which we encounter within it) ‘is deprived of its worldhood’ (p. 148). What is less clear, however, is the degree to which this is possible. While equipment can be divorced from its ready-to-hand-ness, it is harder to overcome the role of the hand, of touch and recognition, in engaging with the bodies that exist in space.

Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 145-8.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew J. Mitchell, *Heidegger Among the Sculptors: Body, Space and the Art of Dwelling* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2010), pp. 6-7.

of this Dasein-centric model of space.<sup>35</sup> Firstly, he notes, ‘[g]one is the sense of being lost in space or the feeling of space’s overwhelming excess’. Also lost, he argues, is the potential of space to interrupt or disrupt activity and achievement. ‘Built for projects,’ he writes, organised in relation to equipmentality and Dasein’s activity, ‘this space offers no resistance to projects’ achievements. Thirdly, he claims that ‘this space is eerily devoid of objects’:

Chairs do not touch the wall. They do not share the same space and are unable to encounter each other. Space does not bring any relation to them, it serves no mediating purpose. [...] The things themselves do not enter space; instead our space serves to grant us unilateral access to their deployment in our projects. The mediating role of space – its communicativity and commutativity, its *reciprocity*, the ways in which space allows for relationships through separation and *varies* these relationships according to the disruptions, interferences, and calmings that it suffers at the time – all this is absent from Dasein’s spatiality.<sup>36</sup>

That for which Mitchell argues, and that which he asserts characterises Heidegger’s later writing, is an acknowledgement of space in terms of its uncertainty, its corporeality and its potential to interrupt and in which things come to appearance in new and variable relations. While much of Dasein’s being in a world is such that space is indeed patterned according to his or her engagements and activities, there remains a material, corporeal aspect of space, a ‘mutual belonging together of space and body’ that informs Dasein’s relationship or connection to the rest of being.<sup>37</sup>

The differences of spatiality Mitchell criticises, I would argue, bear strong patterns of resemblance to the double standard of touching that arises in Heidegger’s early work. The move towards a hermeneutic haptics exploits the material contact and touching operative in our manual interactions with our surroundings, yet simultaneously effaces this materiality in the recurring shift towards the “touch” of understanding, the interpretative aspect of touch. This shift, by which the dual nature of touching as material and conceptual is manipulated, pulls the material and bodily phenomenon of contact into the discourse of understanding, which then proceeds to disqualify purely material contiguity from this reformulated account of touch. Space, too, as Mitchell’s discussion indicates, is refigured by this reformulation of touch, such that space is oriented around the uni-directional capacity for touch exercised by Dasein but unreciprocated by that which is touched. Unable to touch, to encounter, these objects are

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<sup>35</sup> Mitchell, *Heidegger Among the Sculptors*, p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Mitchell, *Heidegger Among the Sculptors*, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> Mitchell, *Heidegger Among the Sculptors*, p. 14.

unable to be in spatialised relations with other objects, other than those relations Dasein might attribute to them as a result of his own spatial patterning of the world.

Mitchell's account of Heideggerian space at this stage of Heidegger's philosophy reveals a space that is centred around Dasein, organised by Dasein's needs and by Dasein's own understanding, rather than a space of objects and world in which Dasein acts. In relation to this, it is worth returning briefly to Heidegger's account of the hand. I mentioned above that the emphasis on the hand's involvement in thinking is part of the role touch plays in relating to the world meaningfully. His account, however, goes further, emphasising language and the sign. As this passage re-affirms, the human has a privileged role in Heidegger's account, and has this because of this association of human touch with thinking. In this respect, Dasein's touch on and of the world is uni-directional. Yet, while we can of course articulate words to ourselves, Heidegger's introduction of language and signs here has a real potential to transform the model of space and Dasein's orientation in space by admitting a further human being with the same mode of relating to its environment and to its own being.

In relation to this discussion of language, I wish to introduce an alternative account of the relation of self, body, language, space and touch offered by Jean-Luc Nancy. The formulation of body and self in his philosophy makes explicit its debt to the Heideggerian philosophy Nancy expressly wished to rework and revise. Moreover, Heidegger's hermeneutic emphasis on meaning is taken up by Nancy, and the close connection between thought and touch discussed above is afforded a central role in his account.

#### **1.4 – Touching Nancy's Meaning**

'We Are Meaning,' Nancy proposes in the very first words of *Being Singular Plural*.<sup>38</sup>

He continues:

But we are meaning in the sense that we are the element in which significations can be produced and circulate. The least signification just as much as the most elevated (the meaning of "nail" as well as the meaning of "God") has no meaning in itself and, as a result, is what it is and does what it does only insofar as it is communicated, even where this communication takes place only between "me" and "myself." Meaning is its own communication or its own circulation.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 2.

The sense of meaning discussed above in relation to Heidegger is meaning originating from an essentially equipmentally determined “as”. It operates as a feature of Dasein’s comportment towards his environment, with the manner of this comportment utilising an understanding or interpretation of the elements of this environment *as* a hammer, *as* a chair, table or nail. The touches of thoughts, of vision, of hands on the environment are touches that never simply encounter corporeal lumps of matter, but are touches that are constantly informed by and informing a patterning of interpretation, meaning and understanding across Dasein’s world.

Here, by contrast, Nancy is making explicit a further aspect to meaning, that of communication. One element of this concerns not so much signification but signifiers. A nail has meaning borne of one person’s understanding of it, of how to comport one’s embodied being towards it, of what purposes it can fulfil in relation to other goals and other elements of the world. Yet the signifier “nail” operates somewhat differently, functioning in meaning if it is communicated, and if enables the communication and communicability of our understanding of nails. Nancy’s concern, however, is not with meaning and signifiers, but with a more foundational understanding of what meaning is:

*Being itself is given to us as meaning. Being does not have meaning. Being itself, the phenomenon of Being, is meaning that is, in turn, its own circulation – and we are this circulation.*

There is no meaning if meaning is not shared, and not because there would be an ultimate or first signification that all beings have in common, but because *meaning is itself the sharing of Being*. Meaning begins where presence is not pure presence but where presence comes apart in order to be itself *as* such. This “as” presupposes the distancing, spacing, and division of presence. Only the concept of “presence” contains the necessity of this division. Pure unshared presence – presence to nothing, of nothing, for nothing – is neither present nor absent.<sup>40</sup>

Here we are given a development of the “as” emphasised by Heidegger. Nancy stresses the spatial operation in this “as”, identifying that at the heart of any one thing’s being itself *as* itself is its division from that which it is not. Presence must be divided to yield meaning, and thus inscribed into Nancy’s account is the plurality, and, furthermore, the *touch*, that arises from this account of division. This understanding yields the central concept informing his account of meaning and the title of the work in which he offers the account: *Being Singular Plural*. Any demarcation of the singular requires the

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<sup>40</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 2.

plurality, both for its demarcation against what it is not, and for a plurality amongst which meaning can be communicated and circulated: ‘Being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* and as the *with* of this singularly plural coexistence.’<sup>41</sup> Meaning, and thus being, is for Nancy constituted by divisions, by limits separating the totality into singularities, into singularities constituted by and constantly implicating this division that in dividing nonetheless holds them in relation with the other. This discourse of division, of limits, is also in consequence one of contact, of touch, and indeed touching is explicitly included in the operation of Nancy’s ontology. It is this return to touch, and relatedly a return to the body, to which I now turn.

#### 1.4a – Nancy and the ‘Touch of Meaning’

Nancy writes:

Everything, then, passes *between us*. This “between,” as its name implies, has neither a consistency nor continuity of its own. It does not lead from one to the other; it constitutes no connective tissue, no cement, no bridge. Perhaps it is not even fair to speak of a “connection” to its subject; it is neither connected nor unconnected; it falls short of both; even between, it is that which is at the heart of a connection, the *interlacing* of strands whose extremities remain separate even at the very center of the knot. The “between” is the stretching out and distance opened by the singular as such as its spacing of meaning. That which does not maintain its distance from the “between” is only immanence collapsed in on itself and deprived of meaning.

From one singular to another, there is contiguity but not continuity. There is proximity, but only to the extent that extreme closeness emphasizes the distancing it open up. All of being is in touch with all of being, but the law of touching is separation; moreover, it is the heterogeneity of surfaces that touch each other. *Contact* is beyond fullness and emptiness, beyond connection and disconnection. If “to come into contact” is to begin to make sense of one another, then this “coming” penetrates nothing; there is no intermediate and mediating “milieu.” Meaning is not a milieu in which we are immersed. There is no *mi-lieu* [between place]. It is a matter of one or the other, one and the other, one with the other, but by no means the one in the other, which would be something other than one or the other (another essence, another nature, a diffuse or infuse generality).<sup>42</sup>

These paragraphs touch on the very question of what constitutes contact and touch. If we return to Heidegger’s rejection of the touch between chair and wall, we see the denial of the material or geometric description of touch as zero-distance, replacing it with the encounter-with and experience-of that attends this physical closeness. Touch

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<sup>41</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, pp. 5-6.

requires distinct objects, distinct locations or, in terms of time, distinct moments. What is problematic, however, is what guarantees this distinctness. For non-contiguous objects, the problem doesn't tend to appear: their separateness, their distance from each other, isolates them from each other. However, elide this distance as touch requires, and this spatial separation cannot stand at the moment of contact. Yet there must be separation, and for this reason Nancy's explicit introduction to his theory of the *between* is crucial. His discourse is one of contact, one of touch, but his primary action is to separate the concepts of contiguity and continuity that we typically unite. Nancy's response is to insert a *between* that disrupts continuity, yet is of such a type as to not impede contiguity. It opens a distancing between the two touching elements, without constituting anything physical. It spaces without actually being constituted by any of the material of the world which composes space. In a very real sense, the *between* is a nothing, yet it holds separate the two things that are thus held in an act of touch and connection.

Nancy proceeds to discuss touch as touch, but we can note that his description of the *between* calls on a physical figure for its explanation, inscribing the physical, and in this (albeit restricted) sense the bodily, further into his philosophy. In utilising the knotted strands as a figure for the *between*, for touch, and also therefore for *meaning*, he utilises a discourse which, as Heidegger does, creates a place for meaning and touch to be scrutinised together. This is made more explicit one page later:

I say "that is, that it is." It is not a "fact" and has nothing to do with any sort of evaluation. It is a singularity taking refuge in its affirmation of Being, a touch of meaning. [...] The touch of meaning brings into play its own singularity, its distinction, and brings into play the plurality of the "each time" of every touch of meaning, "mine" as well as all the others, each one of which is "mine" *in turn*, according to the singular turn of its affirmation.

Right away, then, there is the repetition of the touches of meaning, which meaning demands. This incommensurable, absolutely heterogeneous repetition opens up an irreducible strangeness of each one of these touches to the other. The other origin is incomparable or inassimilable, not because it is simple "other" but because it is an origin and touch of meaning.<sup>43</sup>

Central to these passages is the recurring emphasis on the 'touch of meaning'. Moreover, such touch and delineation of meaning is not static; instead there is repetition and a constant repatterning of touch. This plurality of touches over time not only accords with the plurality of touches at any one time, and the necessity of having a

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<sup>43</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 6.

plurality against which any instance can be defined or enter into meaning. This plurality temporally extends the notion of touch employed, providing further refutation of any static, uninhabited, physical-geometric account of touch, and instead returning it to an ongoing process of *touching*, an action unfolding and changing in time.

Remaining for now with the touch of meaning, we can turn to the figure of the *symbol* which Nancy inscribes at the heart of his account of meaning. The symbol suggests an account of meaning that requires this notion of touch connecting while retaining the separateness of two distinct but interrelated concepts. As Nancy remarks, ‘The proper value of symbolism is in making a *symbol*, that is, in making a connection or a joining’.<sup>44</sup> Most basically, a symbol is one discrete entity standing for or informing the meaning of another distinct entity, with meaning emerging in the connections established between the two elements. Symbols could not work if the two were not separate, as they would collapse into a unity that could reveal nothing other than self-sameness. As Nancy continues: ‘The sole criterion of symbolization is [...] the capacity for allowing a certain play, in and by the image-symbol, with the joining, the distancing, the opened interval that articulates it as *sym-bol*: this word simply means “put with” (the Greek *sun* equals the Latin *cum*), so that the dimension, space, and nature of the “with” are in play here’.<sup>45</sup> The join or contact opening in the “with” of the symbol is the meaning that opens in the distancing enacted by the presence of the “between” operative in the contact of the two halves.

Again, however, in utilising this figure of meaning, Nancy’s account of the symbol returns to a physical figure for its inspiration and elaboration. In his earlier work, *The Sense of the World*, he writes:

But there is more. In a paradoxical way, it is precisely when the symbolic order is interrupted that it arrives at its own essence. The *symbolon* is breakage as much as reunion: it is breaking-for-reunion. It has its truth in being-divided. There is never one *symbolon* alone. Like the *singulus*, it exists only in the plural – and the *singuli* are always as many *symbola*.

*Symbola* are the potsherds of recognition, fragments of pottery broken in the promise of assistance and hospitality. The fragment carries the promise that its fractal line will not disappear into a gathered whole but, rather, will rediscover itself elsewhere, lip against lip of the other piece. The symbolic fragment affirms that its fracture *is still itself elsewhere*, otherwise.

The supreme law of the symbolic is not the constitution of a consistent link and a continuous circulation. It lies further back, in a more withdrawn place,

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<sup>44</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 57.

<sup>45</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 58.

in that which gives the condition of possibility of a link or exchange, an interlacing, a communication in general, by means of message or touch, *mimesis* or *methexis*, and that which always involves, and cannot but involve, the sharing out of the secret of communicability itself (a *symbolon* was also a secret).<sup>46</sup>

The account of the symbol offered here is important, but what is striking is the etymological revelation of the materiality of the notion of symbol Nancy is employing. As a footnote in *Being Singular Plural* clarifies, ‘the Greek *symbolon* was a piece of pottery broken in two pieces when friends or a host and his guest, parted. Its joining would later be a sign of recognition.’<sup>47</sup> The connection at work in the function of the symbol is shown in materiality, and, furthermore, this materiality here emphasises the temporality at work. A symbol is never simply union, but re-union, and this re-union centralises the separation or breakage that is ontologically prior to or necessary for this union. The singular fragments are never able to be singular but achieve their delineation as breakage produces fragments capable of touching. Even when this touch is enacted, and the fragments, for example, of the pot are held together, these fractal lines remain, however internal.

Moreover, however, this image is part of a pervasive emphasis on materiality and touch that is fundamental to Nancy’s wider philosophy. Anne O’Byrne remarks:

the *symbolon* has a material existence; specifically, it has a surface and edges that will be set alongside and touch the edge of its companion piece. It functions through touch as much as by sight, allowing Nancy to make a shift away not from the ocular metaphor as such but from the assumption that what is primary is the singular seeing eye/I [...]<sup>48</sup>

The deprioritising of the eye is supplemented by such focus on material contact. What is being contended here is that touch is a commonality of the experience of thinking, vision and manual or bodily feeling. In this regard, touch does not capture simply the material touch of a hand or body, but is a mode of encountering. To this end, the shift to be explored should not be one away from vision, but a reformulation of thinking, seeing and feeling that addresses this centrality of touch. It is therefore important to note that what is deprioritised is not seeing, but the metaphor or discourse of seeing, and touch and sight are equal partners in the symbol. It is the metaphor that is one of physicality, of touch, and this idea is that which I am pursuing in this chapter.

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<sup>46</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 136.

<sup>47</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 200 (note 51).

<sup>48</sup> Anne O’Byrne, ‘The God Between’, in *Re-treating Religion: Deconstructing Christianity with Jean-Luc Nancy*, ed. Alena Alexandrova (New York: Fordham UP, 2012), pp. 215-218 (p. 220).



What is suggested in O’Byrne’s analysis is the need for a move to touch motivated by the plurality of Nancy’s ontology. The shift she mentions is not so much that away from the seeing eye, but from the *singular* seeing eye. In Nancy’s account, regardless of whether there might be a seeing eye experiencing the object in a certain, human, way, in the underlying ontology are elements of existence in patterns of contact through fracture and reunion. This emphasis on touch, and on the necessary plurality of contact, informs his remark that ‘[a] singularity is always a body, and all bodies are singularities’.<sup>49</sup> He states that his ‘thinking is in no way anthropocentric; it does not put humanity at the center of “creation”’, for although Nancy does not elide the difference that humans have to other elements of the world, the being they partake in is that of all other being.<sup>50</sup> He writes:

In humanity, or rather right at humanity, existence is exposed and exposing. The simplest way to put this into language would be to say that humanity speaks existence, but what speaks through its speech says the whole of being. [...]

If existence is exposed as such by humans, what is exposed there also holds for the rest of beings. There is not, on the one side, an originary singularity and then, on the other, a simple being-there of things, more or less given for our use. On the contrary, in exposing itself as singularity, existence exposes the singularity of Being as such in all being. The difference between humanity and the rest of being [...] does not distinguish true existence from a sort of subexistence. [...] A stone is the exteriority of singularity in what would have to be called its mineral or mechanical actuality. But I would no longer be a “human” if I did not have this exteriority “in me,” in the form of the quasi-minerality of bone: I would no longer be a human if I *were* not a body, a spacing of all other bodies and a spacing of “me” in “me.” A singularity is always a body, and all bodies are singularities (the bodies, their states, their movements, their transformations).<sup>51</sup>

The human for Nancy has if not a privileged then at least a different relationship to existence in that in its capacity for touch, for meaning and relationality, the world and existence are exposed and rendered to some extent available for interaction, activity and understanding. However, underlying this differentiation between the human and non-human is nonetheless a sameness of existence. Nancy’s accounts seeks to ‘avoid giving the impression that the world, despite everything, remains essentially “the world of humans.”’ It is not so much the world of humanity as it is the world of the nonhuman to

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<sup>49</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 18.

<sup>50</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 17.

<sup>51</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, pp. 17-8.

which humanity is exposed and which humanity, in turn, exposes.’<sup>52</sup> As with any other being, the human is exposed, exteriorised, spaced in lines of contact along and against other bodies. ‘[M]an’, Nancy emphasises, ‘is “also” animal, “also” living, “also” physio-chemical’.<sup>53</sup>

Touch has such a key role in Nancy’s ontology because it is in its own way a material one. As Diane Perpich remarks:

it is by virtue of being a *body* that differs from other *bodies* even as it is in contact and contiguous with them that one is human. In other words, it is in virtue of being a body and not just a set of possibilities or purposes that I am both exposed to the world and the one who exposes or represents it’.<sup>54</sup>

The symbolon, the broken pot, represents not simply meaning or language but the understanding of meaning (of understanding itself) as recognitions of the relations between bodies, and the relations that create singularities in their lines of fracture (both breakage and union) from other singularities. Language is a human “touch of meaning”, if we wish to call it this, but unlike Heidegger’s linkage of touch to speech and thought in the above account of the hand, the true touch at the heart of Nancy’s ontology is that of bodies, not language or thought.

It is through the human, in the sharing of meaning that is language, that the plural singularity is exposed, that ‘the all of being is exposed as its meaning, which is to say, as the originary sharing according to which a being relates to a being, the

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<sup>52</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 18.

<sup>53</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 18.

Man shares its materiality with the rest of being, with the inanimate, the living (plants, perhaps), and the animal. Each of these has a different relationship to touch, with the animal having a greater capacity to differentiate the world and orient itself towards such divisions. In the seventh sketch compiled in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s collection of course notes, *Nature*, Merleau-Ponty considers the evolutionary emergence of man, and with him, his capacity of touch, from the ‘pre-vital’. Quoting Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s assertion that ‘[m]an came silently into the world’, Merleau-Ponty remarks that this silence indicates an absence of ‘rupture’, but instead a gentler continuity arising from a basic similarity of structure. The human is ‘the body touching itself, seeing itself’, and that for which the world is that which lies accessible as “‘the other side’” of his body’. Yet the touches that divide this world and encounter it on one’s outside have an evolutionary tie to the animal, and its ability to see, to touch the world, which is also tied to the non-living. ‘There is a “metamorphosis,” not a beginning from zero’, Merleau-Ponty notes; man has emerged through transformation of something of some foundational sameness. He continues, ‘the relation of the human and animality is not a hierarchical relation, but lateral, an overcoming that does not abolish kinship. Even mind is incredibly penetrated by its corporeal structure: eye and mind.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*, comp. Dominique Séglaard, trans. Robert Vallier (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), pp. 267-8.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper Perennial, [1959] 1975), p. 184.

<sup>54</sup> Diane Perpich, ‘*Corpus Meum: Disintegrating Bodies and the Ideal of Integrity*’, *Hypatia*, 20.3 (2005), 75-91 (p. 79).

circulation of a meaning of the world that has no beginning or end'.<sup>55</sup> In Nancy's account, such relationality is inherently material and bodily, and, therefore, returns to their attendant spatiality. In particular, rather than an account of bodily singularity in which matter and bodies are found within their boundaries at their own positions or coordinates, the relationships between bodies are a function of an exteriorising of body itself. Nancy writes that '[t]he ontology of being-with is an ontology of bodies' (inanimate or sentient), but adds that '[a]bove all else, "body" really means what is outside, insofar as it is outside, next to, against, nearby, with a(n) (other) body, from body to body, in the dis-position'.<sup>56</sup> Nancy's account gives priority to contact: 'All of being is in touch with all of being'.<sup>57</sup> The body exists as a singularity only in its division from, and thus its delineation against, the body of an other. It is this that necessitates the crucial notion of the outside, the importance of a boundary of contact.

In searching for the body – in searching for *my* body – I must find it in its constitution as a particular singularity in a material space populated by, composed of, body-singularities in contact. That which the next section of this chapter attempts is a clarification, or refiguration, of such space. This I will be attempting by exploring the image of the broken pot, returning to the above-discussed connections between vision and touch to refigure this image. The goal of this in part is to make visible the fracture lines internal to the pot, and in part to return from the universal all-touching materialism to the singular and subjective perspective discussed by Heidegger's account, but figured still in accordance with Nancy's ontology.

#### **1.4b – Touch and Transparency – the Perspex Block**

We have asked of the space of the body, and this relation of the body to spatiality appears in the following passage from *Corpus*, Nancy's primary work dedicated to the body:

Bodies aren't some kind of fullness or filled space (space is filled everywhere): they are *open* space, implying, in some sense, a space more properly *spacious* than spatial, what could also be called a *place*. Bodies are places of existence, and nothing exists without a place, a *there*, a "here," a "here is," for a *this*. The body-place isn't full or empty, since it doesn't have an outside or an inside, any more than it

<sup>55</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 83.

<sup>56</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, pp. 83-4.

<sup>57</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 5.

has parts, a totality, functions, or finality. [...] Yet it is a skin, variously folded, refolded, unfolded, multiplied [...].<sup>58</sup>

That space is filled everywhere repeats the assertion that all being is in touch with all being. All of reality is contiguous, continuity broken only by the between, which is no space, and not to be understood as a form of spatial emptiness. Also, as discussed above, to be a body is to co-exist with other bodies and to achieve one's singularity in relation to these other singularities: space, or the totality of reality, is filled with matter (is, perhaps, a fullness of matter), and to be a body is not to be a region of matter in a geometrical space that is somehow amenable to being abstracted from that with which it is filled (or perhaps more accurately, from the matter which composes it). Similarly, we cannot view the body as either empty or full for these very terms suggest something vessel-like or impermeably bounded, with a clear barrier of containment. The body, Nancy's philosophy asserts, has neither inside nor outside, but is instead a skin. As quoted above, Nancy asserts that '[a]bove all else, "body" really means what is outside', and if the body is a place of existence, it is a place of existence determined by its contact with the other, with that which, lying contiguous but outside, marks its boundary along the separation of the 'between'.<sup>59</sup>

This formulation seems to approximate something in some sense two-dimensional (although the associated notions of spatiality attached to this renders "two-dimensional" a problematic term), and this is captured by the shift from our physical idea of the solid body to the, still physical, image of its skin. There is some credence to a claim that the skin (prior to any discussion of hands, eyes, or thought) is what touches. Physiologically, the skin contains a multitude of sensory receptors for pressure, heat and pain, and both physiologically and figuratively, the skin marks the point of contact of body and world. That the body is not to be viewed as a three-dimensional solid lump of matter bounded by a skin, but instead as a skin itself, as an edge of contact that contains nothing behind it other than this contact, has crucial significance in figuring both the body and the relation of a self (of a person or singularity) to space.

To make explicit the model of space I am proposing, I wish to respond to Nancy's image of the fractured pot with another, very similar one. To respond here, however, is not to counter or seek to replace, nor even to answer any call to answer any question, to supply any lack, or to extend. It is to respond not in a linear fashion of

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<sup>58</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p.15.

<sup>59</sup> Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 83.

moving beyond Nancy's image, but of placing another *with* it, beside it – to add another fragment into the circling, multi-directional communion/communication between the images. What I wish to suggest is that instead of figuring the fractures within a pot, we consider fracture lines within a block of glass, plastic or Perspex. Moreover, I wish to suggest that we consider this block representative of the totality of being.

Working first from our standard modes of thinking about the glass, the first property that we would attach to it might be that of transparency. If we consider a standard piece of glass covering a photo in a frame, the glass is merely protective, and seeks (if such a phrase may be pardoned] to withdraw into invisibility. The transparency of the glass is, here, its crucial characteristic, the aspect of its essence as we might define it by its function. It merely preserves: our eyes, looking at the picture, see not the glass but the image behind it. The glass in its transparency is designed to not interfere with our visual *touch* on the photograph. Yet, the preservation presupposes that the glass be touched, and that its presence-to-touch, its presence-with and -alongside the picture and alongside us indeed be integral to it. Dirt, dust, liquids, sharp edges, and indeed, our fingers (sticky or otherwise) are not to touch the image, are to be prevented from such contact. While the touch of our vision is to penetrate, to be oblivious to, the glass, the touch of our hands and the contact of the world is to be prevented. Figured through the discourse of touch, transparency is revealed to be a complex negotiation of touch and non-touch, of barrier and access, of a seeming nothing that cannot, in fact, be nothing. Moreover, the example of the glass reifies this concept, it emphasises or indicates the physicality operative between the objects of the world. It is this play of the physical and the visual touch that motivates the employment of this analogy.

To return to my stated intention, let us consider the transparent block itself, not as one object between objects on either side (and thus within a wider space), but as a totality, as space perhaps, or matter. The transparency of the block assumes a different significance or import when considered in isolation from that which lies behind/against – and indeed, before/in front of – it. Here transparency seems akin to nothing: nothing is to be viewed within it, nothing external is distorted by it. It struggles to be spaced, for there is nothing within it that is to be identified or isolated, and nor is there anything inside it to perform any spacing. However, if we follow the example of Nancy's cracked pot, we can imagine the same block as if it had been dropped, or bashed against a surface, or repeatedly bent and distorted at a certain point. We are all familiar with the sight of materials which, so treated, do not shatter or disintegrate into separate

fragments, but instead become virtually opaque, clouded by a myriad of tiny internal fractures which blossom, white, similar to a bruise.

The internal solidity of the material is changed but not destroyed. The block retains roughly its previous form, its previous alignments, but these are patterned by those slight rifts, that separation, that opening, lying between. Prior to that clouding of the transparency, we might have declared the internal components (if this term can for now be tolerated) to be touching, to be in contact, contiguous and, moreover, also continuous. The internal contact of the same would have been maintained by a seamless contact, a contact effacing itself in its own continuity.

Nancy's ontology recalls the monist Parmenides's account of ontological being as the Absolute, as the unchanging, undivided and indivisible unity. Concluding that key aspects of our experience, such as concepts of time and change, were logically contradictory, Parmenides has been interpreted as proposing a model of the "real" world as being an unchanging, indivisible, undifferentiated unitary Absolute. According to this interpretation, this Absolute subsumes everything, while emptying the term "everything" of true ontological content. All appearance of change, all our sensory experiences of a plurality of beings, sounds, selves and even more primitive data such as colour and sound, are misleading, and do not reveal the world as it is revealed by reason. There is no plurality to which "everything" can apply. The thing that is is *all* that is, and it contains no division into parts, and remains ever the same, unchanging.<sup>60</sup>

For Nancy, one can never have a singularity without the plurality, as for it to be recognisable as a singularity or body, for it to be conceivable as a discrete entity, there must always be the concept of differing and dividedness. His image of the pot, but more so this image of the Perspex, captures this division of meaning and understanding and differentiation in an ontological whole that retains its all-pervasive contiguity. The touches internal to the undamaged Perspex block efface any dividedness of being, with

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<sup>60</sup> The specific nature of Parmenides's monism can be formulated in multiple ways; Patricia Kenig Curd, for example, considers material, numerical and predicational monism, before arguing that it is primarily the latter to which his account is committed. As such, the claim that, '[t]here are no internal divisions which would allow it to be broken or separated from itself; thus, being cannot be scattered and gathered, but is all together', can also be formulated as, 'there are no predicational divisions within what is: should it be F it is all and only F with no allowances for also being G'. What is particularly interesting about this emphasis on the predicate is the similar association it draws between division and meaning. As with Nancy's account of the symbolon, division and meaning are not isolable from each other. Meaning is essentially plural: as Parmenides' predicational monism demonstrates, the singularity of a predicate or meaning collapses back into a unity in which it cannot be articulated.

Patricia Kenig Curd, 'Parmenidean Monism', *Phronesis*, 36.3 (1991), 241-264 (p. 253).

all of being in undifferentiating continuity as well as contiguity. It is only singularities, we may note, that Nancy specifies are contiguous but not continuous. Subject the Perspex to trauma and the contiguity is retained, but the fracture lines and the divisions, the intrusion and patterning of a “between” not composed of the Perspex’s own substance but merely its division, transform this unity. No longer transparent, the block has become translucent. Were something to be enclosed within the material, visual access to that which lies around it would have changed. Setting aside the metaphorical question of the light source, this person now can no longer see through the block without obstacle, but, equally, now has something to see. The block in this scenario has no outside, and thus its complete transparency reveals nothing to the touch of vision. Admit fracture lines and the impediment to vision permits entrance to that which vision can touch, and what it touches is the boundary line of the fissures, of the contact. Without admitting these fractures, these touches, which permit entry of a singularity (and in consequence a plurality), the block would remain Parmenidean, neither singular nor plural for these concepts would have no meaning.

Moreover, this model need not be temporally static. I stressed above the validity of figuring understanding and meaning as touch, and as Nancy emphasises, meaning goes in all directions, and is in a constant flux of patterning and repatterning. We can imagine a transparent block in which the fissures and divisions are constantly shifting, constantly occurring between (constantly forging a “between” between) different regions or zones of the block, and constantly changing the amount of space between these fissures, constantly changing the proximity of these lines, or interrupting the previous transparency between these with new fissures that obscure the visual access to those behind.

The introduction of this Perspex block has not been designed merely to provide a different but equal way of figuring the Nancy’s ontology of touch. Instead, its inclusion is intended to serve two main purposes. Firstly, it was designed to make explicit the potential for association between space and touch, to provide a model of being that both demonstrates how touch creates meaning through division of something touching, and also how these touches and divisions also can be regarded as inherently indicative of (or even constitutive of) a certain model of spacing and spatiality. Secondly, the turn to the figures of transparency, translucency and opacity extends the associations this chapter has been highlighting between the tactile or manual touch and the touch of understanding. These two figures have already been shown to be formed in

close conceptual relation to each other, with the two seemingly separate areas of being or experience informing each other and being inter-related in our engagements with the world. This image of the Perspex block continues this by adding the third element of the touch of vision.

Anne O'Byrne remarks that Nancy's account of touch represents a move to the tactile or bodily away from an established philosophical preference of utilising ocular or visual figures. Stressing a somewhat different focus on aurality, Adrienne Janus likewise praises both Heidegger and Nancy for their movement from and critique of an ocular bias in Western philosophy.<sup>61</sup> My return above to a figure of vision is not an attempt to reinstate the primacy of the visual, but to refigure it in relation to the mode of touching. For those of us with the capacity for vision, to ignore its prominent role in our understanding of objects, world and space is to banish from our theory a very real aspect of how we are situated in space and in relation to space and its objects. Heidegger's discussion in *The Zollikon Seminars* utilises this figure of vision in his discussion of the space and existence of a table which Dasein can see from his own location. I will be returning to this in the following section, but for the moment it is enough to note a more fundamental observation Heidegger makes in this text:

Two kinds of evidence must be always kept in view.

1. We "see" the existing table. This is ontic evidence.
2. We also "see" [phenomenologically] that existence is not a quality of the table as a table; nevertheless, existence is predicated of the table when we say it *is*. This is ontological evidence.

We affirm the table's existence, and we simultaneously deny that existence is one of its qualities. Insofar as this occurs, we obviously have existence in view. We "see" it. We "see" it, but not like we "see" the table. Yet, we are also unable to immediately say what "existence" means here. "Seeing" has a double meaning: optical, sensory sight, and "seeing" in the sense of "insight".<sup>62</sup>

I have already emphasised the utilisation of the figure of touch in our discourse of meaning and understanding; here the figure of vision is also employed in an account of understanding. The three figures of vision, touch and understanding are all inter-related,

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<sup>61</sup> Anne O'Byrne, 'The God Between', p. 220.

See Adrienne Janus, 'Listening: Jean-Luc Nancy and the "Anti-Ocular" Turn in Continental Philosophy and Critical Theory', *Comparative Literature*, 63.2 (2011), 182-202.

It is, however, also worth noting that in the passage quoted below, Heidegger's association between sight and understanding instead uses the visual as a primary framing of our concept of thought and our relationship to our being in a world.

<sup>62</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols-Conversations-Letters*, ed. Medard Boss, trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), p. 7.



all mutually influencing. We can add to this the compelling possibility of relating vision to touch, purely in their similarity of function as modes of sensing. Touch, being more than just bodily contact, is a form of access to and recognition of an object by a self, and to this extent vision is ultimately very similar. Moreover, vision is ultimately related to the body just as touch is, operating as interpretation of stimuli received by the body, and also directed and related to the world by the movements of the body based on our expectations and needs as derived from our understanding of our self and environment. One of the motivations in refiguring Nancy's ontology in this way is to exploit these associations to reveal new aspects of space and touch. Formulations of space have often been criticised for portraying it as homogeneous and undifferentiated, merely a grid-like, non-dynamic area in which things exist at co-ordinates or ranges of co-ordinates. The re-figuration of material touching in terms of a (still material) transparency presents a mode of relating to this potential homogeneity, such that space and spacing are homogeneous only when no contact of touch, understanding or vision differentiates it; or, alternatively, these touches of understanding and experience are shown to require variegations and disturbances of this homogeneity. Furthermore, that the still homogeneous regions inside a block with specific fracture lines are transparent facilitates the hypothesis that space is only homogenous when absent to thought – the homogenous is that which is non-visible, untouched, and which, while still enacting a separation, is always subordinated to and eclipsed by the spaced object.

Both the figure of the fracture and the figuration here of a transparency between two separate fractures permit us to return to and endorse Nancy's emphasis on the body being a skin rather than filled space. A body is only ever visible to another (bearing in mind the relation of vision to touch and thought) along the line of contact of the other's touch on it, whether this is along the line of separation from the remainder of existence, from that which is outside it, or whether this is through a region of transparent space that is untouched in the touch on the perceived body. It is on and against skins only that touch rests, with this skin effectively preventing any touch on anything behind it. The contours of a body, of a singularity, are thus contours along a skin which, folded into these contours, presents them for and through touch.

### 1.5 – Return to Space and Touch – Heidegger

Nancy's reformulation of touch permits us to return with a question for the Heideggerian account of touch. To what extent, we might ask, could we claim to ever perceive touches other than our own? Heidegger's assertion rests on the claim that most entities do not experience other objects as we do: the chair never encounters the wall, thus, to state it most simplistically, the chair does not touch the wall. Both, though, although they never encounter me, are touched by me, in a touch that is a condition and result of their differentiation, their singularisation in my experience (whether tactile or visual). Both become part of my world, figured as chair, as wall, and, moreover, understood and perceived to be in close proximity to each other. It is the touch of my understanding that is the condition of their singularised existence in this world as chair and wall, and we can question the relationship these acquire within my understanding. Might not the chair touch the wall or the floor in some sense to the degree that this physical description (that is, of this proximity as touch) retains currency in my understanding of their spacing? Do the physical aspects underlying my ideas of touch, my own interactions and potential for interactions with the spaced elements of my world, re-inscribe into this interpreted environment a form of touch?

Nancy comments on Heidegger's formulation of touch in this way, referencing a similar example in which Heidegger asserts that a stone lying on the floor is not really "touching" it as it is worldless and without encounter with or access to the world. Nancy writes:

why does one have to determine "access to" *a priori* as the only way of making-up-a-world and being-toward-the-world? Why could the world not also *a priori* consist in being-among, being-between, and being-against? In remoteness and contact without "access"? Or on the threshold of access?<sup>63</sup>

The touch of the stone on the earth, he claims, is only determined negatively by Heidegger, relegated from the realm of touch because it lacks even an animal's awareness, let alone lacking the true nature of human touch.<sup>64</sup> Nancy argues:

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<sup>63</sup> Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>64</sup> In the passage from *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* which Nancy quotes, Heidegger writes: The stone is without world. The stone is lying on the path, for example. We can say that the stone is exerting a certain pressure upon the surface of the earth. It is 'touching' the earth. But what we call 'touching' here is not a form of touching at all the stronger sense of the word. It is not at all like *that* relationship which the lizard has to the stone on which it lies basking in the sun. And the touching implied in both these cases is above all not the same as *that* touch which we experience when we rest our hand upon the head of another human being. [...] Because in its

Heidegger apparently fails to weigh precisely the weight of the stone that rolls or surges forth onto the earth, the weight of the *contact* of the stone with the other surface, and through it with the world as the network of all surfaces. [...] Concerning the head on which he would like to place a patriarchal hand, Heidegger forgets, first of all, that it has *also* the consistency and, in part, the mineral nature of a stone. He misses the exposition of surfaces through which, inexhaustibly, delayed, arrival singularly exhausts itself.

The stone, no doubt, does not “handle” things [...] But it does *touch* – or *it touches on* – with a passive transitivity. It is touched, same difference. [...] There is a difference of places – that is to say, place – dis-location, without appropriation of one place by another. Here is not “subject” and “object,” but, rather, there are sites and places, distances: a possible world that is already a world.<sup>65</sup>

Nancy is emphatic in asserting the physicality underlying our cases of human “proper” touch. What is forgotten in Heidegger’s theory, Nancy argues, is an awareness that a contact of surfaces is operative underneath and as a condition of all cases of touch, including those on which Heidegger is willing to bestow the term.

As demonstrated above, Nancy’s challenge to Heidegger is not intended to deny the different relationship of the human to the environment. His reconstitution of touch is not one that denies the experiential, subjective aspects of encounter, but a broadening of the term to include the physicality which is an underlying condition of such touch. In advocating the spatial model of the transparent block in the previous section, my aim was to offer a figure of the materiality of contact while also allowing for subjective and mobile touch.

### 1.5a – Heidegger and Translucent Space

Heidegger gives arguably his clearest account of space in the early pages of *The Zollikon Seminars*, and in so doing he utilises a similar reference to transparency (in his case, translucency), describing a formulation of space in which it effaces itself between

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being a stone it has no possible access to anything else around it, anything that it might attain or possess as such [...]. (pp. 196-7.)

Nancy is particularly critical of the account of human touch offered here, suggesting that is of ‘a completely different order of “touching,” not merely human but at once solemn and consecrated.’ ‘There is definitely no question here of a human touch’, he continues. ‘Rather, a hieratic and paternal pose fraudulently substitutes a knighting for a touch.’ Even as Nancy proceeds to offer a reformulation of touch more generally, he criticises here a standard of touch that exceeds or deviates from a more everyday and engaged form of human touching.

Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, pp. 196-7.

Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p. 60.

<sup>65</sup> Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p. 61.

the points of contact of Dasein's interest and engagement. In the early sections of this text, Heidegger considers the scenario of a man looking at a table:

How does Dr. R. comport himself to this table here? The table shows itself to him through space. Space is also pervious for the appearance of the table. It is open, free. A wall can be put between the observer and the table. Then space is no longer pervious to seeing the table but is open for building a wall. Without its openness, a wall could not be built between them.

Therefore, the spatiality of this space consists of its being pervious, its being open, and its being a free [realm]. In contrast, the openness itself is not something spatial. The open, the free, is that which appears and shows itself in its own way. We find and situate ourselves in this open [realm], but in a different way than the table.

The table is in its own place and is not simultaneously there where Dr. R. is seated. The table there is present-at-hand, but as a human being Dr. R. is situated in his place on the sofa, and he is also simultaneously at the table. Otherwise, he could not even see the table at all. He is not only at his place and then also at the table, but he is always already situated here *and* here. He is ontologically *situated* in this space [the room]. We are all in this space. We reach out into the space by relating to this or that. In contrast, the table is *not* "situated" in space.

The open, the free [realm]—that which is translucent is not grounded on what is in space. It is the other way around: What is in space is grounded on the open and on the free.<sup>66</sup>

Space here is shaped by objective facts: the table is not visible through the wall.

However, Dasein's engagements are not with space so much as with the objects that are allowed to show themselves within it. Akin to my model of the Perspex block, reaching out does not encounter or relate to space, but to specific objects.

This formulation expresses a clear debt to his earlier thinking, such that space is a space for living compartment to the objects it contains. A few pages later he states of space: 'It is a space for living; it contains useful things. There is an orientation to things in space. Things have a special meaning for the people who live there. They are familiar to some [of the people], but strange to others.'<sup>67</sup> What is interesting to note is the difference between the 'useful things' space contains and the people who, instead of being contained in space, 'live there'. Those who live or reside in space are oriented to the things it contains, with space figured not merely as a vessel or region of containment

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<sup>66</sup> Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 8.

<sup>67</sup> Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 10.

but as that through which these objects reveal or show themselves to those who live alongside them and relate to them as objects of potential use or manipulation.

What I find compelling about this formulation is the model of space as this translucent region through which objects show themselves. This translucence, not dissimilar to my model of the Perspex block, posits space as something which separates objects, but which also effaces itself in a mode of being, here translucent and pervious, such that it enables objects to be revealed to (revealed by) the touch of our hands or eyes which reaches out to these objects without encountering a barrier. Space on this account is pervious, open and free, without being the homogeneous map of potential coordinates of physics. This openness is to a showing or exposure of the object to that which recognises, understands and can use it. On Heidegger's formulation, the openness of space is such that, as with my model of transparency between two objects, Dasein is able to see the table. However, this transparency is a region of openness such that a wall (or in the case of my Perspex block, a further fracture) can occur between Dasein and the table. At this point, the transparent region pervious to showing-to Dasein concerns the space (the spacing) between the wall and Dasein, rather than between Dasein and the table. This formulation, it should be noted, returns us to the accusations of Dasein-centricity discussed above. Nancy's materialistic ontology in which all of being touches allows the openness of space between any fracture lines, not merely those visible to a human eye or "I". In contrast, for Heidegger, after the building of the wall space is no longer pervious to seeing the table. This in itself would not require the Dasein-centric orientation of space, but it is interesting to note the remark that 'the open, the free, is that which appears and shows itself in its own way.' Dr. R (Dasein) and the table are both in the open, Heidegger states, despite differences in how they are so located or situated, but we can note the emphasis on showing, on being open to perception, which indicates a complex relationship to Dasein, to that which has the capacity for perceiving, operative in this formulation of space.

The inequality between Dasein and mere objects is part of this figuration of space. The two categories are differently located in space in accordance with Heidegger's earlier model of touching and the possession of a world. The worldless table, he writes, is merely in space, at its location. It shows itself through space to the perceiver, but space is not pervious to any touches of the table (visual, physical or conceptual) on anything else. This is here figured in terms of a complete singularity of location. In contrast, Dasein, perceiving the table, thinking about the table, performs a

similar movement to when he reaches through space to touch it (space is pervious to this touch, this access). In these touches, Dasein is both “here” in his own location and “here” at the table: it is necessary that he be also there in order to touch it.

What is interesting about this formulation is the model of singular-plural it seems to engage. In touching its world (therefore in having its world) Dasein is always plural in terms of his location. Even with closed eyes, Dasein’s relation to its world, Heidegger notes, is such that it has an expectation of the table being there (one that would be revealed by the shock or disappointment of this expectation were the table to vanish in the interim): ‘[e]ven when your eyes were closed, you were by the table.’<sup>68</sup> Similar to the transparency of space in the glass block, the perviousness of space here is its capacity to not impede this plurality or multi-presence of touch. This plurality allows for or necessitates the act of reaching that affirms the discreteness as well as plurality of Dasein. Without a space through which to reach (whether manually or visually) there would be no meeting of Dasein’s two locations. The act of reaching is one that, as with the space between two touching entities, both elides the spacing or distance *between* the two, yet also indicates a movement from and thus the separate location of that which reaches. Instead of being merely there by the table, Dasein is there because of a reaching *from* somewhere else. Space defined through its openness to Dasein’s touches is thus bordered by Dasein. If Dasein is at the “there” wherever he touches his world, the limits of that world, and arguably that space itself, are inhabited by Dasein and marked by that point of habitation. Dasein thus exists at the limit of the touch on the table, touching only the table, and nothing beyond that limit itself.

### 1.5b – Here and There

This duality of location expresses a similar tension to that between the subjective and objective figures of bodiliness. In touching, one is always *there* where the touch occurs. The touch is characterised by the action of touching and by that which it touches. At the same time, however, the touch inscribes both contact and the separation that contact necessitates. I am there at the table, my fingers are there on my keyboard, my palm there on the mouse, but even as contact places me there up against these objects it inserts a between (however non-spatial) that casts me back in some sense underneath this surface of contact. In figuring the body as skin Nancy refers not to a boundary or

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<sup>68</sup> Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 11.

substance that conceals that which lies beneath, but instead pure surface. As such, it is always exteriorised, always oriented outwards.

In the essay ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’ we find a similar formulation of space and the doubling of location in the act (the contact) of relation. In this essay Heidegger seeks the relationship between man and space, offering an account of man’s dwelling in space in terms of a series of relationships and constructions that structure space around the concerns and activities of those who live there. ‘[D]welling itself’ he writes, ‘is always a staying with things’, a relating to and existence among things which are nonetheless preserved and freed as the essence they are.<sup>69</sup> Heidegger acknowledges the possibility of thinking of space mathematically as pure extension, in which ‘places may be treated as mere positions’, replaceable by ‘a mere marker’, and ‘nearness and remoteness between men and things can become mere distance, mere intervals of intervening space’.<sup>70</sup> As his repetition of “mere” suggests, such a formulation of space is presented as bare, and lacking in key elements of man’s spatiality. This sense of space, he argues, ‘contains no spaces and no places’. Space as pure extension allows the possibility of measuring things, but, he writes, the universal applicability of such aspects of space ‘can in no case make numerical magnitudes the ground of the essence of space and locales that are measurable with the aid of mathematics’.<sup>71</sup> Instead, the essence of the spaces of our daily existence, the essence of the locales that provide for such spaces, is grounded in building and dwelling.

Heidegger offers an example of a bridge as such a building. The bridge is a gathering, a locale, that makes space for a site. He writes that the ‘bridge gathers the earth as landscape around the stream’: it causes the streams banks to lie across from each other, in relation to one another, ‘it does not just connect banks that are already there’.<sup>72</sup> ‘Before the bridge stands,’ he argues, ‘there are of course many spots along the stream that can be occupied by something’. However, ‘[t]he locale is not already there before the bridge is’ but ‘comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge’.<sup>73</sup> As a consequence of this understanding of space, Heidegger refutes the impression that in speaking of man and space the two stand on separate sides, facing each other. Space ‘is

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<sup>69</sup> Martin, Heidegger ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’, in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (Abingdon: Routledge [1977, 1993] 2008), pp. 239-255, pp. 246-7.

<sup>70</sup> Heidegger, ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’, p. 250.

<sup>71</sup> Heidegger, ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’, p. 251.

<sup>72</sup> Heidegger, ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’, p. 248.

<sup>73</sup> Heidegger, ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’, p. 249.

neither an external object nor an inner experience. It is not that there are men, and over and above them *space* [...] Even when we relate ourselves to those things that are not in our immediate reach, we are staying with the things themselves.<sup>74</sup> Instead, Heidegger presents us with a similar formulation of the *thereness* of man as he relates to objects in space:

We do not represent distant things merely in our mind – as the textbooks have it – so that only mental representation of distant things run through our minds and heads as substitutes for the things. If all of us now think, from where we are right here, of the old bridge in Heidelberg this thinking toward that locale is not a mere experience inside the persons present here; rather, it belongs to the essence of our thinking *of* that bridge that *in itself* thinking *persists through* the distance to that locale. From this spot right here, we are there at the bridge – we are by no means at some representational content in our consciousness.  
[...]

we always go through spaces in such a way that we already sustain them, by staying constantly with near and remote locales and things. When I go toward the door of the lecture hall, I am already there, and I could not go to it at all if I were not such that I am there. I am never here only, as this encapsulated body; rather, I am there, that is, I already pervade the space of the room, and only thus can I go through it.<sup>75</sup>

That which is particularly intriguing about this formulation is the role of conceptual, rather than merely visual or tactile, touch. Dr. R. is *there* at the table when he sees it – this *thereness* is the condition of him seeing it. In ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’, in the imaginative navigation of or situatedness within a space of dwelling, it is this reaching beyond one’s positional *here* that holds and sustains a space of relations that I pervade through such relationality.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Heidegger, ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’, p. 251.

<sup>75</sup> Heidegger, ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’, pp. 251-2.

<sup>76</sup> Georg Simmel comments on how the bridge and door each engage with a negotiation of separateness and unity but argues that ‘the door represents in a more decisive manner how separating and connecting are only two sides of precisely the same act’. He states:

The human being who first erected a hut, like the first road-builder, revealed the specifically human capacity over against nature, insofar as he or she cut a portion out of the continuity and infinity of space and arranged this into a particular unity in accordance with a *single* meaning. A piece of space was thereby brought together and separated from the whole remaining world. By virtue of the fact that the door forms, as it were, a linkage between the space of human beings and everything that remains outside it, it transcends the separation between inner and the outer. Precisely because it can also be opened, its closure provides the feeling of a stronger isolation against everything outside this space [...]

The finitude into which we have entered somehow always borders somewhere on the infinitude of physical or metaphysical being. Thus the door becomes the image of the boundary point at which human beings actually always stand or can stand. The finite unity to which we have connected a part of infinite space designated for us, reconnects it to this latter; in the unity, the bounded and boundaryless adjoin one another, not in the dead geometric form of a mere



As Heidegger's language suggests, this doubling of location requires revision of embodiedness. To be 'never here only', to also be *there*, insists upon a sense of being that is not restricted to or solely identified with an 'encapsulated body'. The boundary of the body, therefore, cannot simply be enclosure or containment that points inwards to define its location. While he does not refer to it, as Nancy will, as skin, Heidegger also indicates the externalising which is operative at the body's boundary: 'A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its essential unfolding*.'<sup>77</sup> Heidegger discusses this Greek account of appearance in more detail in *Introduction to Metaphysics*. In early Greek questioning of beings, he writes, 'beings were called *phusis*', a term often translated with the Latin term "natura" and its connotations of birth. For the Greeks, Heidegger claims, *phusis* articulates 'what emerges from itself [...], the unfolding that opens itself up, the coming-into appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance'. '*Phusis*', he states, 'is Being itself, by virtue of which beings first become and remain observable.'<sup>78</sup>

The equating of body with skin is an expression of how it is encounterable by others.<sup>79</sup> It is also that formulation of body that places it in contact. It is the edge at

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separating wall, but rather as the possibility of a permanent interchange – in contrast to the bridge which connects the finite with the finite.

In this formulation, we find a reiteration of the idea that a unity must be cut out against the rest of being. As Nancy articulates, there is an infinity of being but we access it not only through the imposition of meaning which can only articulate touched, bounded regions, but through the reduction of a unity of meaning to a unified body or singularity. Any act of distinction that undermines a unity ceases to be a single meaning, and instead the proliferation of meaning offers a proliferation of distinct unities. The room, here, can offer the figure for this; it is a space defined not by its inside but by its distinction from that which adjoins it, that from which it is separated.

More complex in Simmel's discussion is the connection of the finite to the infinite. For Nancy, unity can never be singular; if one does, indeed, cut out a section of undifferentiated infinitude and bound it in a single meaning or particularity, that which it rests against cannot be an untouchable expanse of the infinite, but always another particularity. Simmel's account nicely expresses the role of interchange, and in the figure of the door there is, indeed, a richly expressive image of contact and communication. What must be emphasised, however, is that while the remainder of infinity is always available in shifting formulations of relation, and that enclosure in a room, within a unity, is always shaped by the door's connection of it to what lies beyond, that which lies outside is pulled into some form by the same presence of the door that connects them. One cannot step from a doorway into empty space. It has two sides, and thus can be approached from two sides. Each mode of approach is a gathering of that space into a relation and connection. The door marks an interchange between two, between a plurality, which each form along its establishment of connection and exposure to the other.

Georg Simmel, 'Bridge and Door', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 11 (1994), 5-10 (pp. 7-8).

<sup>77</sup> Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', p. 250.

<sup>78</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, rev. trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, 2nd edn. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 15-16.

<sup>79</sup> In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche offers a similar formulation of the move to touch on surfaces: 'Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live: what is needed for that is to stop bravely at the surface, the fold, the skin;

which one is knowable, and that at which the other, resting against it, is encountered in touch. It is the entrance to plurality that allows one's singularity to be defined. In Andrew Mitchell's discussion of the relationship between space and body in Heidegger's work, he does use a figure of skin to demarcate the boundaries of the body that take on this significance. In Heidegger's spatiality, Mitchell notes: 'we always extend beyond the skin, with the body a perpetual entrance to the world. We are always arriving'.<sup>80</sup> In a passage almost reminiscent of Nancy he writes:

Our concerns extend beyond ourselves, our bodies do not end at our skin, our bodies are beyond ourselves, our concerns make up our skin. There is nothing but skin for such a disorganized (nonutilitarian) body, skin understood as surface of sense, as unfurling sheets of sheer phenomenality.<sup>81</sup>

While this account emphasises the touching and sensing of the one extending beyond and via the skin, its 'surface of sense' also is the surface granted to the touch of the other. Again, reminiscent of Nancy's phrasing, Mitchell asserts: 'The spacing of space is partly the permissiveness of bringing these bodies out of themselves and granting them passage beyond themselves. Space is a separation that allows for contact'.<sup>82</sup> We are touched *there* by the other, just as the skin which comprises our body encounters the world *there* along its surface of contact.

As touching beings, as beings always situated within a world of comportment and relationship, the *there* of our being-there is reasonably accessible. That which is harder to access is the persistent question of one's *hereness*. As Mitchell observes '[t]he body functions not so much as a passport but as a passage; there is nothing identifiable

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to worship appearance, to believe in shapes, tones, words - in the whole Olympus of appearance! Those Greeks were superficial - *out of profundity!*' In the articulation of 'the surface, the fold, the skin' his language is similar to that which Nancy will employ. In particular, the connection between surface and skin is one that recurs across the text.

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), pp. 8-9.

<sup>80</sup> Andrew Mitchell, *Heidegger Among the Sculptors: Body, Space and the Art of Dwelling*, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2010), p. 40.

<sup>81</sup> Mitchell, *Heidegger Among the Sculptors*, p. 93.

<sup>82</sup> Mitchell, *Heidegger Among the Sculptors*, p. 44.

Mitchell particularly emphasises the reciprocity of contact that occurs in his assertion that the world erodes us. 'To appear here [in the world]', he writes, 'is to have to find a place amid the turmoil, the currents, and the undertow of bodily existence. And even when a place is found, it is always out in the open, exposed to the elements' (p. 53). Mitchell emphasises that our appearance in the world is not only one in which we are the primary active participant, and that being capable of touching is inevitably accompanied by the touch of others that is required in such exposure. Yet more striking in Mitchell's account is his insistence that this exposure and contact does not merely change us, or shape our becoming, but that it effects our decay: the world 'wears us down and erodes us' (p. 56).

or localizable about it in any one place'.<sup>83</sup> In flaying the skin from a figure of surrounding and enclosing, and laying it out as pure surface, the physicality on which Nancy's account insists cannot offer a convenient, geometric location for the *here* of the embodied being. As a touching self, the body is constituted in its press against the world it touches. As object accessible to the touch of others, it is only ever touched as a surface available for contact. If the touch seemingly penetrates the skin, what is revealed is not so much an essentially hidden interior, but a new surface, a new facet of the body made available through the same process of exteriorisation. In knowing the body as touching, touch extends outwards upon the objects with which one interacts. Similarly, in regarding the body as an object knowable through touch, such touch always comes from outside. Even if the touch comes from oneself, one only ever approaches and touches from this external orientation. As Nancy states in *Corpus*, 'corpus is never properly me. [...] It's always an "object"'.<sup>84</sup> The indexical nature of subjectivity, the sense of me, of being an "I" who is "here" is always displaced by, always inaccessible to, the touch that seeks to find it. 'Nothing of the "me" is extended', Nancy asserts: 'as soon as *I* is extended, it's also delivered to others. [...] A body's always ob-jected from the outside, to "me" or to someone else. Bodies are first and always other – just as others are first and always bodies.'<sup>85</sup>

The touching skin which the body is enables sensation and experience, but can only ever be subjected to touch by the approach from an external perspective, an other touching an other. In *Corpus* Nancy emphasises this exteriority of the skin by introducing the term "expeausition", binding the skin (*peau*) to this insistence on the outside (*ex*).<sup>86</sup> Nancy comments that being exposed 'does not mean putting something on view that would have previously been hidden or shut in' but that '[t]he body is the being-exposed of the being'.<sup>87</sup> Bodies are never simply contained within boundaries, never given without this givenness-to and movement away from the "here" where they seemingly rest. Instead, Nancy asserts:

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<sup>83</sup> Mitchell, *Heidegger Among the Sculptors*, p. 40.

<sup>84</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 29.

<sup>85</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 29.

There is a suggestion of this externality of approach in 'Building Dwelling Thinking'. When we turn "inward", Heidegger suggests, when 'we come to our senses and reflect on ourselves, we come back to ourselves from things *without ever abandoning* our stay among things'. There is here a similar displacement of location: we turn to the body not *from* within it, but *from* elsewhere.

Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', p. 252.

<sup>86</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 33.

<sup>87</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 34.

Bodies always about to leave, on the verge of a movement, a fall, a gap, a dislocation. (Even the simplest *departure* is just this: the moment when some body's no longer *there*, right *here* where he was. The moment he makes room for a lone gulf in the spacing that he himself is. A departing body carries its spacing away, itself gets carried away as spacing, and somehow it sets itself aside, withdraws into itself – while leaving its very spacing “behind” – as one says – in its place, with this place remaining its own, at once absolutely intact and absolutely abandoned. [...])

This spacing, this departure, is its very intimacy, the extremity of its separation (or, if we prefer, of its distinction, its singularity, even its subjectivity). The body is *self* in departure, insofar as it parts – displaces itself right here from the *here*.<sup>88</sup>

The challenge of the body becomes the challenge of *my* body, the reconciliation of the materiality that defines its bodiliness – that offers it over to the touch of the other, and that also *permits* its encounters of the other – with the same materiality that displaces the subject, the index (the I, the me, the here). One cannot know one's body, cannot touch it, without being displaced outside it.

### **1.6 – Nancy's Body**

In this thesis about the body, therefore, the question of the approach to bodies, and in particular to one's own body, must be foregrounded. The following two chapters will explore images of (and imaging of) the body to explore the touch on and approach to the body that comes from outside, and thus binds the body wholly to the appearance of it beneath the touch in question. However, in the remainder of this chapter I wish to turn to Nancy's account in his essay 'L'Intrus' of his first-hand experiences of his own body, and the displacements and inadequacies of his touches upon it. In so doing, moreover, this account of subjective experience of body, and the attempt to touch upon it in such a way as to understand – to grasp – its bounded identity, is set within and against a medical discourse. As such, this attempt to encounter the individual, intimate experience of one's own body is framed within an approach to the body which traditionally frames it materially and objectively. Medicine can be regarded as interacting with the body in its full material givenness and its material openness to division. During training, medical students are aided in their understanding of anatomy through the dissection of a corpse. However individual, however given as a unity, the body understood in this way is one which is wholly available in its exteriority, such that

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<sup>88</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 33.

any cut, any manipulation of its materiality, is possible. Any division of it may transfigure its surface; it is endlessly available for exposure.

In ‘L’Intrus’, Nancy uses his own experiences of undergoing a heart transplant to interrogate the intrinsic integrity of his body, the notions of mineness and inclusion or exclusion that are operative within our conceptualisation of what is meant by “my body”. The focus on the transplant opens up the relation of the body to the self in several ways. Most obvious is the uneasy ownership of the new heart: his own chest cut open, his own heart removed, and the heart taken from another person inserted, his ability to lay claim to this new heart as his own is compromised. Moreover, however, this extends to his old heart, not merely because it has been physically removed, but because its failure opens a rift between its operation and life-trajectory and that of his “self”. ‘If my heart was giving up and going to drop me,’ he asks, ‘to what degree was it an organ of “mine,” my “own”?’ Was it even an organ? [...] It was becoming a stranger to me, intruding through its defection – almost through rejection, if not dejection.’<sup>89</sup> To deviate slightly from Nancy’s own formulation, the trajectory of his heart differed from that of his sense of self, his I, ceasing even while identity in some sense survives.<sup>90</sup>

The exteriority that Nancy sees as essential to the body is explored in relation to more intuitive ideas of ourselves as defined by interiority, such that we identify as that which lies within us. Through Nancy’s titular notion of intrusion, he explores the relationship (and the vulnerability) of such interiority to that which touches on us from outside. Moreover, the essay moves to articulate the otherness of that which we regard as internal and intimate, relating such otherness to the touch that, as with the preceding discussion, displaces itself in its approach. ‘Everything in this affair’, he states at one point, ‘comes to me from elsewhere and outside – just as have my heart and my body, which are an elsewhere “in” me.’<sup>91</sup> What is revealed is a complex formulation of intrusion, interiority and otherness that cannot take just one form.

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<sup>89</sup> Nancy, ‘L’Intrus’, trans. Susan Hanson, *New Centennial Review*, 2.3 (2002), 1-14 (p. 3).

<sup>90</sup> In this discussion of the intervention of the operation in both prolonging his life and altering his sense of identity, Nancy acknowledges the historical contingency that influences the ‘I’. As he states, were the option of a transplant not possible, the sense of divergence between his heart and his identity would not occur to the same extent, for it would be inconceivable that he could survive the final failure of his heart. As he remarks, “‘I’ always finds itself caught in the battlements and gaps of technical possibilities.’

Nancy, ‘L’Intrus, p. 3.

<sup>91</sup> Nancy, ‘L’Intrus’, p. 6.

The initial intruder in Nancy's account is not the new organ he receives in the transplant; instead, the first intrusion is of the heart that falters, and brings attention to itself in doing so. His heart, he remarks, becomes a stranger by ceasing to be invisible, insensible. The heart with which he find himself confronted is strange, an intruder: '[n]ot "my heart" endlessly beating, as absent to me till now as the soles of my feet walking'.<sup>92</sup> Its defection becomes an intrusion as it emerges from a former state of invisibility: 'something was detaching itself from me, or was coming up in me, there where nothing had been: nothing but the "proper" immersion in me of "myself" that had never identified itself as this body, even less as this heart, and that was suddenly concerned with and watching itself.'<sup>93</sup> This immersion or absence to awareness is such that the presence and awareness that replaces it becomes an intrusion, the intrusion of something that, intruding, must be in some sense other. The notion of "myself" does not identify with the body that may be typically invisible to it. In the body's facilitation of the touch (of hands, eyes or understanding) on the other, the body must necessarily efface itself. It itself is untouched in the act of touching. The body's touch on itself is like the skin folding back across itself, and in this exposure of the body to touch, touch cannot be directed elsewhere. As such, we can figure the body (in its engagements beyond itself) as a site of transparency in which the self is immersed such that it does not block the immediate visibility or availability of that which lies outside it. In the self's "proper immersion" in walking, in moving from *A* to *B*, the body undertaking it – the soles of the feet – is absent for identification. In becoming visible, in claiming the touch of Nancy's physical and mental awareness, the heart is an intrusion into this former state of invisibility (of transparency).

However, Nancy's very formulation of "proper" immersion in me of "myself" further complicates this picture. As 'L'Intrus' later states:

My heart was becoming my own foreigner—a stranger precisely because it was inside. Yet this strangeness could only come from outside for having first emerged inside. A void suddenly opened in my chest or my soul – it's the same thing – when it was said to me: "You must have a heart transplant. . . ." Here the mind runs into a non-existent object – there is nothing to know, nothing to understand, nothing to feel: the intrusion on thought of a body foreign to thought. This blank will stay with me, at the same time like thought itself and its contrary.

This half-hearted heart can be only half mine. I was already no longer in me. I already come from elsewhere, or I come no more. A strangeness reveals

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<sup>92</sup> Nancy, 'L'Intrus', p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> Nancy, 'L'Intrus', p. 3.

itself “at the heart” of what is most familiar – but familiar says too little: a strangeness at the heart of what never used to signal itself as “heart.” Until now it was foreign by virtue of its being insensible, not even present. But now it falters, and this very strangeness refers me back to myself: “I” am, because I am ill. (“Ill” is not the proper term; my heart is not infected— it’s stiff, blocked, rusted.) But what is done for is this other, my heart. Henceforth intruding, it must be extruded.<sup>94</sup>

Not merely is the foreign that which intrudes as presence, but Nancy’s account also acknowledges a variant of foreignness that exists in absence. ‘Until now’, we are told, ‘it was foreign by virtue of its being insensible, not even present.’ The uneasy relationship between belonging and exclusion finds little answer, and the inverted commas surrounding “proper” and “myself” take on a very genuine questioning and hesitation. The heart, as Nancy’s text is fully aware, is used in discourse in close connection with ideas of self and centrality, yet these notions of the self and heart, and the core of the self expressed in phrases such as “at the heart”, figure “heart” differently to the heart itself. The familiarity operative within the normal immersion of the self is a familiarity which signals no objects with which to be familiar. The appearance of these objects thus functions as a form of intrusion, as well as functioning as an intrusion that reveals this familiarity and absence as an aspect of the body that is vulnerable to intrusion in this way.

Beyond the transplant itself, Nancy’s essay details the efforts undertaken by medical staff to maintain the fragile unity of his body and new heart. The heart, coming from the other, is genetically foreign, and the body resists it. ‘L’Intrus’ goes so far as to hypothesise that ‘identity is equivalent to immunity’, with the immune system’s identity being ‘something like [one’s] physiological signature’.<sup>95</sup> The notion of other that circulates in formulations of identity is figured specifically as ‘the immune system’s other’. The immune system functions as that which determines the division between what belongs to the body and what instead lies against it. Nancy’s new heart is that which, being other, ‘cannot be a substitute, but that has nonetheless become one’.<sup>96</sup> The body’s resistance results in biological rejection, a term Nancy finds dissatisfying for the image it presents of the body expelling (figuratively vomiting out) the foreign heart. Instead, Nancy writes, ‘it is a matter of what in the intrusion of the *intrus* is intolerable’

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<sup>94</sup> Nancy, ‘L’Intrus’, p. 4.

<sup>95</sup> Nancy, ‘L’Intrus’, p. 9.

<sup>96</sup> Nancy, ‘L’Intrus’, p. 8.

and which instead of leading to expulsion leads to mortal consequences for the body that, unable to live without it, can also not live with it.<sup>97</sup> The host's immune system must be lowered to reduce its hostility to the heart, but this is done by reducing the body's capacity to resist intrusion more generally, and thus not only is the body at great risk of disease, but the barrier of exclusion and designation of inclusion or interiority key to our notions of identity is also weakened and partially withdrawn. 'Slowly, but surely,' as David Palumbo-Liu comments, 'the encasement of the individual gives way to a radical invasion of otherness.'<sup>98</sup> The body permits the intrusion (which through this quasi-permission is but a quasi-intrusion) of a host of supposedly alien diseases, and is also rendered weaker and unfamiliar to the self.<sup>99</sup> The intrusion of these diseases, however, is a further intrusion not from a clearly structured outside but from within. Normally lying dormant within one's physiology, the weakened immune system does not so much permit them entry but permit them intrusion into awareness, into parts of the body's functioning from which they are otherwise kept.

Thus the heart transplant process establishes a two-fold strangeness:

The treatments given to the one who has received the grafted organ lower his immunity so that his body will better tolerate the foreign element. Medical practice thus renders the grafter a stranger to himself: stranger, that is, to his immune system's identity – which is something like his physiological signature.

In me there is the *intrus*, and I become foreign to myself. [...] But becoming foreign to myself does not reconcile me with the *intrus*. Rather, it would seem that a general law of intrusion is exhibited: there has never been only one [*il n'y a jamais eu une seule intrusion*]. As soon as intrusion occurs, it multiplies, making itself known through its continually renewed internal differences.<sup>100</sup>

There is no easy identification of the self. The intruder remains foreign, and additionally remains that which necessitates the changing of the body's relation to its immune-signature. The intruder intrudes, the self intrudes, the immune system itself in some sense becomes other through its suppression. Moreover, Nancy asserts that it is the law of intrusion that it multiplies as soon as it occurs. Part of this multiplicity is temporal and iterative: the internal differentiation enacted by the presence of the stranger is continually renewed. Yet there is more than one difference renewing itself. What

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<sup>97</sup> Nancy, 'L'Intrus', p. 8.

<sup>98</sup> David Palumbo-Liu, 'The Operative Heart', *The New Centennial Review* 2.3 (2002), 87-108 (p. 96).

<sup>99</sup> The self is also rendered unfamiliar by the intrusion of the technical upon it, by the presence of medical devices, and by the role it plays in the circulation of meaning and sense of contemporary medical discourse.

<sup>100</sup> Nancy, 'L'Intrus', p. 9.



emerges is the plurality of intrusion that fundamentally challenges the identity or identification of that which is intruded upon. The self is constantly differing, constantly different, and thus different as that to be differed from. Moreover, the violation of the body's integrity, yet the simultaneous affirmation of some entity discrete enough to be invaded and survive the intrusion without assimilation exposes the ongoing tussle of boundaries and identifications. What in the material is properly the body? What in the body is properly the self? Where is me, myself, my identity?

As Anne O'Byrne writes, '[a]n experience such as Nancy's is, first of all, a particularly dramatic reminder of the divisibility of the individual.'<sup>101</sup> She continues, '[i]f my heart can be taken out of my body and a different heart put in its place, then I have come apart.' As such, the divisibility indicated is more than a division that has occurred. This divisibility is a constantly present potential of the body to not only be regarded as composed of parts, but in consequence to be vulnerable to replacement of these parts. It could be additionally stated that such divisibility need not even require replacement. As with any operation that partitions the body, the transplant enacts an intersection between the living body of our living engagements and the uninhabited matter of the anatomical body. The man-made division of Nancy's heart and body operates as an extreme physical procedure asserting this divisibility, operating not as the standard mode of such division but as its most extreme manifestation. The heart can be isolated as heart, and so too can eyelashes, loose hairs, fingernails, and thus fingers, limbs, and other organs. Even without a physically enacted division, Nancy's model of touch, of meaning which begins where things come apart, reveals the fissures and potential lines of disintegration we can conceive within our bodies. These begin to erode our easy relation to our body as a unified singularity. The additional complication of the replaceability of these parts serves to further expose the potential for the body to open along these fracture lines to that which is other yet which can make its own touches on the body in these places.

This section began with the intention of using the body, and Nancy's own turn to the body in 'L'Intrus' to explore his formulation of touch and from this the situation of body in an appropriate understanding of and relation to space. 'L'Intrus' thus needs to be related back to the ontology described above. Making this connection explicit, Palumbo-Liu articulates the centrality of Nancy's account of the Singular Plural to this

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<sup>101</sup> Anne O'Byrne 'The Politics of Intrusion', *The New Centennial Review*, 2.3 (2002), 169-187 (p. 170).

transplant scenario and the concept of intrusion more generally. The intruder is that which is both inside and yet not part of the entity by a simple relation of belonging. The intruder gets in without having been admitted, and without the right to be there.

Moreover, ‘his coming will not cease; nor will it cease being in some respect an intrusion: that is to say, being without right, familiarity, accustomedness, or habit, the stranger’s coming will not cease being a disturbance and perturbation of intimacy’.<sup>102</sup>

Palumbo-Liu comments that in this account ‘we have the articulation of, precisely, being/singular/plural, wherein both the singular and the plural retain their co-extensive identities’.<sup>103</sup> The singularities of the body and of the intruder enact a partial, and challenging merging, and the complex pattern of touching they achieve refers back to the seemingly paradoxical nature of touch as separation and fusion. Nancy’s account of the “between” imposes a non-material separation to break the continuity of matter even as it makes possible the preservation of contiguity. Nancy’s account of intrusion, Palumbo-Liu writes, ‘brilliantly insists on preserving the integrity of the other against such incorporation’.<sup>104</sup> As long as the intruder remains strange or foreign, it will never ‘cease being in some respect an intrusion [...] a disturbance and perturbation of intimacy’.<sup>105</sup> Palumbo-Liu asserts that in the heart transplant ‘L’Intrus’ discusses, we find ‘the perfect realization of Nancy’s ontology’.<sup>106</sup>

The individual cannot absorb this component into his self, even as it is increasingly absorbed into the material component of the self (the corporeal body) whose identity with this self is part of what is being examined. The two remain in some sense separate in this relation of intrusion. Yet nor can the individual retreat or progress to a level in which the former self, combined with the new components, becomes some greater (or even, we might add, simply other) being and achieve unity in that way

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<sup>102</sup> Nancy, ‘L’Intrus’, pp. 1-2.

<sup>103</sup> Palumbo-Liu, ‘The Operative Heart’, p. 98.

<sup>104</sup> Palumbo-Liu, ‘The Operative Heart’, p. 98.

<sup>105</sup> Nancy, ‘L’Intrus’, p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> Palumbo-Liu, ‘The Operative Heart’, p. 96.

For Palumbo-Liu, however, the heart transplant is not merely an illustration but a scenario that operates at the limits of what Nancy asserts, offering a ‘radical upsetting of a sense of separateness’. Recalling Nancy’s figure of the interlacing strands of the knot, where the formulation of the “between” keeps separate the extremities of each strand even in the knot’s centre, Palumbo-Liu considers the possibility that the transplant is accompanied by an ‘intense and inescapable pressure to discern whether or not this particular interlacing/interpenetration does not fuse Nancy into the other, and vice-versa’. While acknowledging that both arguments can be made, he suggests that this scenario can be interpreted as ‘the technologically-affected “fusion” that accentuates a mutual identity of self and other ‘within the interstitial space of indeterminate ownership of the heart. Herein, the stranger and Nancy share a liminal space or dis-position of organs and identity’ (pp. 95-6).

through the subordination of what up to that point had become the self in something else. The heart transplant thus features as perhaps the epitome of the following passage of Nancy's *Birth to Presence* from which Palumbo-Liu quotes:

Limits of matter (gases, liquids, solids), limits of kingdoms (mineral, vegetable, animal), limits of the sexes, limits of bodies, limits where sense becomes impossible, absolutely exposed, poured out, removed from any mystery, offered as the infinitely folded and unfolded line of all the bodies that make up a world. This world is their exhibition, that is, also their risk. Bodies run the risk of resisting one another in an impenetrable fashion, but they also run the risk of meeting and dissolving into one another. This double risk comes down to the same thing: abolishing the limit, the touch, the absolute, becoming substance, becoming God, becoming the Subject of speculative subjectivity. This is no longer the absolute, but saturated totality. But as long as there is *something*, there is also something else, other bodies whose limits expose them to each other's touch, between repulsion and dissolution.

Of course, *there is never any* "touching" as such, nor is there ever any "limit" as such: but this is why there is something, all things, as absolute, separated and shared out bodies.<sup>107</sup>

Palumbo-Liu quotes the second half of the first paragraph here, and in doing so articulates the delicate balance of touch that constantly affirms a plurality whenever it affirms a singularity. Bodies which in touching cease to be an intruder but instead fuse into the other, dissolve into a unity which must then find its touch on other singularities. If it meets only to enact this fusion then touch and limits are nullified. They become wholly continuous, rather than contiguous, lacking the "between" operated in such contiguity. Yet if no touch is entertained, no touch which imposes on and juts up against it, then there is nothing against which it takes its identification as singular. The heart transplant is thus a clear epitome of Nancy's ontological formulation, with the intruder and the intruded, the invasion and lingering separation, and, moreover, the threatening dissolution into a confusion of contacts that all but nullify the idea that there is any unified self to be found amongst or around them.

### 1.6a – The "Airy" Body and Skin

In addition to the complex otherness of both Nancy's heart and body, L'Intrus also establishes the complex relationship between skin, surface and interiority. The transplant is a surgery, a cut into the skin that exposes that which was previously hidden, and which we intuitively regard as internal. In this cutting of the skin we return to

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<sup>107</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 206.

Nancy's rejection of interiority, and identification instead of the body with skin. In *The Inoperative Community*, Nancy emphasises this impossibility of a touched interiority. If what is seemingly "inside" is exposed, then it, too, becomes surface:

Properly speaking, there is no laceration of the singular being: there is no open cut in which the inside would get lost in the outside (which would presuppose an initial "inside," an interiority). The laceration that, for Bataille, is exemplary, the woman's "breach," is ultimately not a laceration.<sup>108</sup> It remains, obstinately, and in its most intimate folds, the surface exposed to the outside. [...]

"Laceration" consists only in exposure: the entire "inside" of the singular being is exposed to the "outside" [...].

The open mouth is not a laceration either. It exposes to the "outside" an "inside" that, without this exposition, would not exist.<sup>109</sup>

The gesture of cutting that would sever and penetrate the boundary of the body is instead offered here as a refolding of body that consists in a shifting surface of contact. Nancy's consistent emphasis on the exteriority of the body is not a reduction of body to skin but a reformulation of body as skin that operates in accordance with his foregrounding of contact. The body that we may wish to imagine as a bordered corporeal form that offers also the locus of our *here* is not stripped of its physicality and solidness. However, the "interiority", the "inside" that we typically don't touch but merely assume to be there is confronted with the understanding of the body as site of encounter. The assumed interiority, exposed to the gaze or gesture that touches it, rises up into surface in this exposure; the touch finds it already exposed, already outside.

I wish to remain with this notion of skin and the folds of and around the body by turning to an example I encountered in recent months. This example, in a similar style to Nancy's, remains with concrete cases of the body, and also with a body as encountered through a medical procedure. This example emerges from an anecdote recounted to me by a family friend following attempts by medical staff to carry out

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<sup>108</sup> In *Guilty*, Georges Bataille writes: 'What's requisite for communication is a defect or "fault." Communication enters like death through a chink in the armor. What's required is an overlapping of two lacerations, mine, yours.' (p. 30) There must, for Bataille, be a wound, a pain and incompleteness, for communication to take place. The 'woman's "breach" to which Nancy refers occurs later in the text. 'Two individuals communicate [...] through the channel of their lacerations', Bataille suggests: 'In each person, the hidden laceration [...] is laid bare [...] avidly adhering to the laceration of the other person. When lovers meet, it's a delirious situation of mutual laceration' (p. 154). This image of the lovers offers what Nancy describes as Bataille's "exemplary" laceration. Bataille describes the irreplaceable individuality of an object as 'a finger that points to the abyss'. 'Individuality', he continues, 'is the revelation of a woman who shows her lover her *obscene* parts. A finger designating laceration. It's the identifying mark of laceration, you could say' (p. 157).

Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, trans. Bruce Boone (Los Angeles: Lapis Press, 1988), p. 30, p. 154.

<sup>109</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, Trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 30.

diagnostic and informative scans on his colon. These scans proved inconclusive and ineffectual for their intended purpose because, as it was described, he had an “airy colon”. The phrase stops one short in its incongruity; even now, it causes me to pause. Firstly, we typically aren’t inclined to give the colon much thought, we don’t in fact think of the body’s constitution all that much at all. Secondly, the word “airy” is surprising. Air is that which surrounds us; airiness is often connotative of a larger space with circulation and room to move whereas the body typically seems solid. As indicated above, we can conceive of our bodies in their day-to-day engagements as transparent, untouched by our attention in their facilitation of our projects and orientations to the world. Relatedly, we could also figure our bodies as generally opaque to us: even when I redirect my attention to myself, I do not, for example, spend much time thinking about the body’s intricate construction, the layers and parts that lie beneath my skin. I neither touch, visualise nor conceptualise my bones, nerves, blood vessels, valves, and so on, even though I never am exactly devoid of the knowledge that I possess these. We don’t visualise the colon, we don’t think of it as loops of tissue, coils, muscles and blood, let alone its contents. We don’t consider the work that goes into the transformation of our food, the processes constantly ongoing. Yet we are confronted with this firstly by the scan itself, which imposes a quasi-penetrative gaze on this unseen aspect, and secondly by the term “airy” which, not only indicating an abnormality however benign, cannot be assimilated and thus recurs, continually standing out and constantly renewing this imposing gaze. What occurs is something very similar to that which Nancy experiences when his heart transplant transforms his relationship to his own heart. The heart of his former experience was largely invisible to him, not, he writes, ‘an organ, not a deep red, muscular mass with pipes sticking out of it, which I now suddenly had to picture to myself’.<sup>110</sup>

This chapter is engaged with touch and with space, and this milder, rather trivial and significantly more simplistic example enables a clearer focus on the aspects of touch that are ongoing in one’s body. This airy space in my friend’s colon, as with Nancy’s own heart transplant, is significant partly because of its more basic medical import, and partly because it de-familiarises our bodies. It reveals the alien-ness both of the body to our thoughts and our thoughts to the body we believe them directed at and from. Compared to the heart transplant (and, indeed, to most medical procedures), a

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<sup>110</sup> Nancy, ‘L’Intrus’, p. 3.

small pocket of air in my friend's colon is much milder, quieter, more unnoticeable, more easily appropriable, and (nearly) normal. Yet it opens a space, it exposes the supposedly basic material substrate of the self to the spacing of *touch*. I have emphasised the ties between the body and touching, and discussed Nancy's all-touching state of all-being. This hole in the body confronts us with touch. Material, all-touching contiguity remains, it is just that where this cavity opens up, the body both touches air rather than body, and is also forced into a gesture of self-touching. It is not a physical laceration, but it nonetheless opens up the body's supposed interiority. It cuts open, in that it cuts out a previously absent region, and renders it as surface.

I wish to propose that we can relate this scenario to the model of space and touch I suggested above. The body, Nancy states, is a folded skin, not a filled space, but this is not how we typically conceive it, and indeed the abandonment of our habitual view must be necessitated by something. Let us consider the body as we tend to regard it. I suggested above that it was opaque, but I wish to assert very clearly that the model of the Perspex block reveals the virtual equivalence of absolute transparency and opacity. The opacity of the body functions as its transparency (and vice versa) because this solidity, this lack of variegation, that engenders this opacity/transparency allows it to fade from focus. I do not sense the chair on which I'm sitting as through a structure of bones, blood, muscle and skin which separate my brain and perhaps my spatial location of my 'I'; instead, the chair starts where my body ends, and my perception of it appears to begin also at this end of my body, at this "skin" of touching, with the rest of the body behind this skin so opaque as to make no difference, as to be transparent to this touch.

In the example of the Perspex block, because all is continuous without variegation, the block remains transparent: place two objects within it and (assuming they were able to see) they would be able to see each other with nothing between opposing this touch of vision. Yet, this transparency is a form of opacity to the extent that all is unvariegated, all is solid, and thus nothing can be seen. It appears transparent to us only because we exist outside it; we see through it because it permits our vision to touch something opaque on the other side of it. The quasi-equivalence of solidity and transparency is not one I propose lightly, but instead propose in such a way as to confront our understanding of touch. As far as my classification of my hand *as* hand is concerned, it is for its purpose opaque, solid, unvariegated. It moves as a discrete singularity to touch other objects. As such, the material components beneath the skin are

quasi-transparent in that they offer no barrier to this sensing and are themselves un-sensed.

Having compared the Perspex block to the fragmented pot above, such that the fracture in the pot, invisible in that scenario enters into visibility so figured, we can enact a similar analogy with the body. If we were to begin cataloguing its anatomy, we might call to mind those models in which the component parts of liver, lungs, stomach and so on can be appropriately packed into their internal compartments, combining to create a solid object yet one that, like Nancy's fragmented pot, is patterned by these internal touches, these internal fracture lines. If we take this example a step further and pattern this model as made of glass rather than plastic, what emerges when these touches are permitted visibility and presence as touches is a body which has lost this transparency and taken on a form of translucence, patterned by the white lines of contact and separation between its parts.

Moving one step still further and returning to my friend's airy colon, we can figure the body as we typically do. The model above is a model whose pattern of contact and touches is determined by our awareness and divisions of it into these components. This is not the typical body of our normal experience. Instead, if thought of the body as more like a glass model, then the pocket of air in my friend's colon can be figured as a bubble in this glass. It enters into awareness as an empty space where we had previously figured no space. We can picture the glass object with this internal, not fracture, but white line of separation and internal division from perfect self-continuity. The challenge that this airiness thus provokes is one of firstly, incorporation, and secondly, internal touch, touch taking place beneath the easily defined external skin of the body.

The air in my friend's colon is to some extent a perfectly normal part of his body – it had certainly been invisible and inconsequential until that point, such that this bubble, this pocket of air, is not so much that which needs appropriating by the body as an existing element of the body's own self-transparency. As with Nancy's heart transplant, that which appears as an intruder, that which in some sense calls for appropriation, has already been excluded. Yet, also as with Nancy, this exclusion becomes pertinent because it reveals that this process is recurring and multiple. There is a reason why the fractured pot and the anatomical model show no divisions on the outside. Yet, particularly with the anatomical model, while those divisions are to some extent in place because of functional differences, these differences nonetheless only

divide the body into contiguous parts because of our recognition of these parts *as* these particular singularities. Confrontation with the colon in the illness, in the scan, and in this description is an encounter also with the body's divisibility. It is never simply that there is the body, nor that there is the body and the colon. Understanding the process of division our conceptual touches enact on the body is an understanding of the potentially infinite divisions it can undergo.

As Nancy remarks, '[r]eceiving the stranger must then also necessarily entail experiencing his intrusion'. This air pocket on my friend's scan, Nancy's own heart in his chest... their intrusion is felt, but is felt long after the physical presence, the material being of these elements has developed. What is experienced is this reception; they enter into *presence* in this present moment of reception, of (partial) initial recognition. What is experienced is not a physical intrusion into some neatly bounded body, but the intrusion of an experience of sight or touch that, in this present, patterns the presence of the body, and works to retrospectively reconstitute the body. The air pocket and the heart are experienced anew, and this experience intrudes, but these entities are not so much experienced in their intruding but experienced as already intruded. Their presencing marks the intrusion of a new figuration of our previous model of body. This presencing newly reveals the air pocket, reveals it as something new to understanding – new to the touch and sight of insight and conceptualisation – but this separation, this discreteness, that permits its recognition is not the intrusion of the discrete forcing entry and forcing a quasi-union, but a process of separation in which this new is carved from the old. The air pocket was already there, and the intrusion of it on our understanding has a troubled relationship with any claim of it being already-intruded. Its former intrusion is a retrospective application.

My friend's airy colon, however, can also function not as a model of intrusion but as a model of the opening of the body to self-touching. We think of air as nothing; while scientifically incorrect, unlike Nancy's foreign heart, the air in my friend's colon can alternatively be regarded not as a physical intruder but a literal model of the between, the not-nothing which it is that which yet prevents continuity and establishes touch. This air pocket enacts Nancy's law of separation, holding open the internal density or opacity of my friend's body in a fragmented patterning. Just as the potsherds remain fragmentary while the fracture line of their contact is hidden within the pot, this touch on nothing that interrupts and forbids the body's continuity holds the body in a frozen moment of self-touch through self-separation. The continuity (the density) of the



body is here interrupted, it is opened to separation; before, there was at this place no singular surface of skin that was capable of touch, yet this opening creates two surfaces separated by a between. Again, rather than being permitted to figure the body as a three-dimensional region of existence, this formulation demonstrates the move in Nancy's ontology to the surface, to the limit inherent in his focus on skin. This air pocket, rather than being a three-dimensional area in a larger area or volume is instead figured along the two-dimensional line of contact. Instead of a cavity in the body, we are presented instead with the skin of the body, the body's region of touch and exposure to its other, folding back on itself, self-touching where once it was continuous.

### **1.6b – Opening and Folding – Skin, the Colon and Excrement**

When we choose to consider the body not as merely opaque or transparent, but as a collection of parts or functions we find it rich with significances. The heart most fundamentally is merely a pump, a mechanism that sustains the blood flow to other areas of the body so that they may perform their individuated tasks. Yet, as Nancy's essay explores and utilises, the heart is connotatively rich, suffused with our ideas of soul, love, self and identity. In contrast the colon, my friend's colon, is a bodily region we tend to shirk, a region of the body from which we tend to avert our gaze. Yet, as with Nancy's void in his chest, the cavity the above discussion explores has significance for our sense of self and its precarious relationship to ideas of wholeness and protective, protected interiority. Our safeguarded freedom to think of ourselves as whole units bounded and contoured by a boundary of out- and in-side is, as with Nancy's heart transplant, called into question by this region of the body.

The colon is, in terms of the body's dynamism, a more revealing space than we might tend to consider it. The body in Nancy's philosophy in particular is a place of *opening*, and the body's openings are raised to prominence in his discourse. Yet the opening at the end of the colon is one of excrescence, of the movement *out*-wards. Moreover, to remain within a fairly corporeal discussion, this opening marks the colon as a site of the body's change, dissolution and temporality. Our bodies continually shed themselves (dead skin, hair, nails, scabs, dandruff...) yet the colon is a passage occupied by matter the body is preparing to expel. In a most basic formulation, we supplement our bodies when we eat, and deplete them in the *ex*-pulsion of waste. Yet delineating that which constitutes my body amidst this dynamism is complex and

perhaps impossible to fix. When does my food *become* my body? When does it *cease* to be so? Our simplistic tendency to seek the boundary of our body in a preserved barrier of a skin that encloses and unifies it seems inadequate. (Such a view would also make a compelling study of a child eating with open mouth, their body opening and closing around half-chewed food, this substance oscillating across this boundary of (with)in and (with)out.) However we formulate it, the contents of the colon grows increasingly foreign to the body, increasingly other; in increasing degrees, this matter ceases to be that which the body expels, but instead (or simultaneously) something external, a feature almost of the environment that *in-trudes* upon the body, that makes its presence felt, that forces the body into an engagement of sensation and response. Moreover, this engagement maps the division of sensing and sensed onto a body whose integrity, whose boundary of self and other, is in constant dissolution or refiguring.

I wrote above of the essential connection between bodies and touch, of our common intuition of the body as the self's organ of touch, and capacity to be touched. Yet in formulating the body as the touchable component of a self, do we risk conflating body with skin? Biologically, the skin is the largest organ of the body, and, with biological legitimacy, we think of it as enclosing the body, as forming the barrier of the body's inside-outside limit. That which parts or penetrates the skin may inspire fear or horror, such as a broken bone sticking up through the skin, or requires a strange distancing and dislocation of self. Surgery, for example, requires the temporary suspension of self, the reduction of the living body to a more corpse-like, purely biological state, and the arguably distancing, neutralising rituals of sanitation, protective clothing, fabric shielding off the areas of the body that are not to be touched, that retain too much of their ability to evoke an awareness of the living person.

Returning to the colon, unless we preserve the skin as a boundary with dense, undifferentiated, opaque space within, then working from the colon to the mouth we risk positing a channel through the body of the non-bodily, the other (even if we stop short of channelling all the way through). This channel creates a constant touch on the other by and within the body, and a touch on the other that prevents the body's easy touch on itself, a touch that either closes up the body to opacity/transparency, or opens it to subdivision. Nancy's conception of the body as a skin variously folded is one to which this thesis must return and return. As I've attempted to show with the above discussions of the colon and the body's own internal touches more generally, the body touches on that which, through this touch, is regarded as the body's other and also

touches on itself in a manner which disturbs its tendency towards effacement and invisibility. If we return to the model of translucency tentatively proposed above, these touches are the lines that become visible, that pattern the block, and we can see in this tissue of white lines the potential to view a skin (two-dimensional lines) as opposed to dense (three-dimensional) space. Nancy's conception cleverly interrogates our conflation of body and skin through this phenomenon of touch. Rather than permitting the touching-skin to enclose the body, the body is figured purely as skin, as touch. The skin-which-the-body-is is here "folded" almost in on itself, a skin of phenomena and sensation and contact on and with the world folded around and across.

### 1.6c – Opening and Closing, Folding and Refolding – The Dynamism of Touch

In Nancy's formulation, the skin of the body is not static but, as stated above, 'variously folded, refolded, unfolded, multiplied'.<sup>111</sup> It not only changes in its mobile relationships with the world, but is always open to change in its relationship to the body itself. In this final section, I wish to offer one further example of the body in moment of self-touch with respect to this issue of temporality.

I am writing much of this chapter during weeks patterned with illness; having barely recovered from one I find myself quickly inflicted with another. Yet, as Nancy's 'L'Intrus' demonstrates, it is the periods of the body's afflictions that often reveal it anew.<sup>112</sup> I have written of my friend's colon; at the other end of the body I find myself

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<sup>111</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 15.

<sup>112</sup> The fourth chapter of this thesis will turn to explore the body from a personal experience of bodily pain. Such a move has precedent. In *Ecce Homo*, Friedrich Nietzsche explains how his own theory is influenced by a dominant presence of sickness in his life. 'It was sickness that first brought me to reason', he writes (p. 27). Sickness was not only attended by physical experiences and bodily constraints or limitations, but it also acted as a prompt to thought and re-evaluation:

Sickness *slowly freed me* [...] At the same time my sickness gave me the right to a complete reversal of all my habits; it allowed, it *commanded* me to forget; it presented me with the *necessity* of lying-still, of idleness, of waiting and being patient... But that means thinking!... My eyes alone put an end to all bookwormishness, in plain English, philology: I was released from "books," for years I read nothing more – the *greatest* good deed I have ever done for myself! – That most underlying self, covered over as it were, grown silent as it were under a constant *obligation to listen* to other selves (– and that is what reading means!) awakened slowly, shyly, doubtfully – but at last *it spoke again* (pp. 61-2).

This sickness permitted a new 'return' to himself as a new recovery. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche similarly notes:

I am well aware of the advantages that my erratic health gives me over all burly minds. A philosopher who has passed through many kinds of health, and keeps passing through them again and again, has passed through an equal number of philosophies; he simply cannot but translate his state every time into the most spiritual form and distance - this art of transfiguration just is philosophy. We philosophers are not free to separate soul from body as the common people do; we are even less free to separate soul from spirit. We are no thinking frogs, no

similarly refigured. Of the apparatus of in- and ex-halation, of this opening of the body to some outside, of its opening that reveals its dependence on taking-in and giving-out, I am newly aware. In addition to a cough that forces my body to pain, and triggers a headache behind my eyes, it hurts to swallow, to perform a simple bodily action that is normally invisible to us. I feel my throat as spaced out, as a space I can touch through the pain it invokes, a pain that surges down my neck and up behind my ears. There is an identification of myself with this space that accompanies this awareness: this space cannot be denied. Yet this identification is simultaneously a withdrawal and separation. So alien is this pain that it is almost as if it is felt by another, and it is as this other that I identify, I am divorced from and thus able to touch on this newly patterned space.

Yet, my new relation to my throat is not just spatial but temporal, and a temporal in a manner different to the retrospective “already” of Nancy’s intruder, of the body revealed to be already strange, or already touching. As stated above, the pain in my throat does indeed space my body, and exposes me to and as this spacing, but more than this, I feel this area as a kind of temporal paralysis. Or, more accurately, my feelings of this throat are suffused with a desire for this paralysis, with a sense of ideal immobility. It hurts to swallow, and this knowledge repatterns my sense of my body, giving rise to a desire to refrain from swallowing, a desire not to perform an action of which I am normally oblivious. Not only do I experience the desire to return to a normal state of unnoticed swallowing, but I find myself actively trying to achieve such immobility, to fulfil the desire for my body to make no move, to undergo no change. Yet both swallowing and my sore throat remain raised to heightened awareness, and I feel torn with the conflicting desires to not swallow – to not experience further pain – and to swallow, as if in doing so I may swallow the more muted attendant pain and substance I feel in my throat. In each case, the desire is for a restoration of invisibility; I wish to

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objectifying and registering devices with frozen innards - we must constantly give birth to our thoughts out of our pain and maternally endow them with all that we have of blood, heart, fire, pleasure, passion, agony, conscience, fate, and disaster.

Illness here is a recall to a bodiliness of experience to which thought should attend, rather than ignore. The human condition of man is not perfection, from which illnesses and ailments are dismissible aberrations. ‘The unconscious disguise of physiological needs under the cloaks of the objective, ideal, purely spiritual goes frighteningly far’, Nietzsche comments, ‘and I have asked myself often enough whether, on a grand scale, philosophy has been no more than an interpretation of the body and a misunderstanding of the body.’ Instead, attending to the relationship between thought and material condition has a place in philosophy, of which sickness is a vivid reminder. ‘[A]s for illness’, he later suggests: ‘are we not almost tempted to ask whether we can do without it at all?’

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Ecce Homo*, pp. 61-2.

Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, pp. 5-6.

perform the touch or the action that will permit my touch and attention to turn back away from my body.<sup>113</sup>

This experience of body illustrates some of the complexities of encountering the body. As ‘L’Intrus’ discusses, the attempt to touch upon and claim oneself involves a confrontation with the exteriorising, exposing aspect of bodiliness. We think of the body as the locus of *hereness*, but one necessarily touches oneself in a dislocating gesture that touches it *there*. The touch that proceeds from the here where I am to seek that here is dislocated from identity with that here, even as that supposed here is rendered available only there under touch. This is not, however, to nullify the connection between the body and the indexicality of here, but instead to question the availability of such hereness to encounter. The ability of the body to be the here from which touch proceeds – even as all touch occurs *there* against that which is touched – relies on the body’s ability to efface itself in touching so as not to claim touch upon itself. In the most recent example discussed, the fairly banal sore throat, we get a further reminder of the distortion of access to the body in its availability to us. The body that lies under touch is not only *there*, but is so because it ceases to achieve the transparency that permits us to be *there* elsewhere in the world. In this form of touch that the body most readily calls upon itself, the body we encounter is already in some sense pathological. The spacing of the throat, the beating of the heart, the movements of breathing: all these intrude upon awareness when normal function is challenged.

However, these scenarios demonstrate a fundamental dynamism both in our touches on the world and of the material, corporeal component – the body – that enacts (that *is* the enactment) of such touch. In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger urges us to ‘contemplate the narrower and wider sphere within which we dwell, daily and hourly, knowing and unknowing, a *sphere that constantly shifts* its boundaries and suddenly is broken through.’<sup>114</sup> As Mitchell remarks, ‘space is a movement, a

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<sup>113</sup> I read this section back, months later, and rediscover my throat. Health had restored it to transparency, but the reminder of its potential for presence respaces my body. Even just naming “throat” increases my awareness, and the heavy-handing proliferation of swallowing in the text directs my concentration. I try swallowing, and feel it in my throat and in my ears. I sit, almost paranoid, and wait to see if I will do so again, undirected. When? Will I feel it? How often, I find myself asking, does my body do this unnoticed? *It’s just like breathing*, I tell myself, and suddenly my breath is present in my thoughts. *Or like my pulse*, I think, and fancy I can hear it beneath my ears. I imagine the blood beneath my skin, not only present at all, but in motion, surging in stages. I remember my chest keeps rising, my whole body in motion. It will not stay still. The mobility disconcerts me, dissonant against the steady presence of my sense of self, of my “I”.

<sup>114</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 38. (Emphasis added.)

“spacing.” There is no space that would be unaffected or neutral with regard to the bodies around it’. Instead:

As this permissive, differentiating, and mediating fluctuation, the spacing of space itself gives rise to a contoured, variegated field of space: space no longer abstract and frictionless, but itself already gathering and furrowing and stretching out and snapping back, into regions, distances, directions, and bounds.<sup>115</sup>

Nancy’s account of spatiality is one that relates engagement and activity to body and touch; its phenomenological tactility is offered in a relationship to materiality that places body and the bodiliness of encounter at the core of experience. The world in which we dwell is both in motion materially, as matter is rearranged independent of our knowledge of it, and constantly in motion with regards to our experience of it. Our touch on the world is never static. The body that pulls our attention back to it (for example, in illness, although this of course is not a pre-requisite for self-touching) or finds itself under our touch is a reminder of the ability of touch to constantly repattern the world. It is a dynamic figure of spatiality, and the space of the body is equally exposed to this dynamism.

Moreover, the touches on the body that interrupt our touch on other bodies of the world (“bodies” here understood as singularities), also serve to recall us to the materiality of our own body and its accompanying motion. In its effacement in external engagement, the body tends towards stasis by default: if it is not *there* beneath our touch, if it remains unseen, invisible and transparent, there is nothing brought to presence there that can be in motion. However, the intrusive reminders of corporeality, however temporary, endow our understanding of the body with their reminders of its constant motion. The occasional movement of the throat, the constant motion of the lungs and diaphragm, the beating of the heart, the unrelenting flow of blood, and the ongoing movement and chemical changes of the food we have taken into the body: all these appear to us under typically fleeting self-touches. However, they do not cease when the touch does, even if they cease to be present to us.

The body is thus inherently tied to change and mobility. The materiality of the body that we find when we touch upon it (and the mobility of the processes of this body that sustain it) is the same materiality that places us in dynamic relationships of contact and interaction with a dynamic world around us. Such motion is operative in our

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<sup>115</sup> Mitchell, *Heidegger Among the Sculptors*, p. 44.

engaged dwelling in the world, as well as at work when we turn our touch (of hands, vision and understanding alike) back upon the body.

## **Chapter Two – Repose**

The aim of the previous chapter was to renegotiate a discussion of touch. Underlying this was a foregrounding of a way of understanding the body as that which touches. In doing so, it invoked Nancy's account of singular plurality, an account at the heart of which is an idea of bodies. In this, bodies are entities bounded as unities through being separated from other bodies along lines of division achieved by contact. The chapter thus drew on two aspects of our understanding of bodies, in which they may be both that which touches and that which is touched. These elements are placed in tension when one's self seeks to touch its own body, to touch on the substrate that demarcates and facilitates both its material and touchable and also interactive, touching and engaged presence in the world.

As indicated in the introduction, this thesis is directed at the strange, disorienting question: *are we nearly here yet?* In Chapters Three and Four, this endeavour to find and touch the boundaries of the body that grounds us in a material *here* will be dominant. First, in Chapter Three, it will engage with an image of an embodied self engaged in self-capture. Following this, Chapter Four will move past fixed images to recall and attempt a lived, elusive encounter with my own body. In this second chapter, however, this search is both deferred and prepared for through a discussion of the roles images and imaging can play in this dual conception of the body as touching or seeing, and as touched or seen. In particular, it will use a discussion of the portraiture of painter Lucian Freud to motivate a move from ideas of the pose, and its association with temporal and bodily stasis, to a figure of re-pose. In this, the embodied self who reposes is engaged with a fluctuating and repeating series of self-encounters through which they may approach their embodied being.

This discussion, however, begins with an account of pathological mode of touching and seeing that enacts a transition from the account laid out in the previous chapter to the distorted "sight" of the camera. This discussion explores the first-hand experiences of someone with Tourette's Syndrome, whose way of being in a world and being there amongst the objects around him is greatly influenced, and complicated, by his condition.



## **2.1 – The Static Image**

### **2.1a – Busy Body: Tourette’s Syndrome**

Tourette’s Syndrome (TS) has acquired a sort of cultural infamy. Appearing occasionally in popular culture, the disorder is typically reduced to uncontrolled, or uncontrollable, crude vocalisations, often presented for comic effect. While such vocalising – coprolalia – is a real and difficult symptom for many sufferers, it is by no means universal, and, equally, by no means the only effect of the condition. Andrew Buckser, for example, suggests that only around ten percent of sufferers may exhibit coprolalia among their symptoms.<sup>116</sup> TS is instead characterised by a far more diverse range of bodily and vocal tics, each varying according to the individual, and varying, too, across the course of his or her life, with the actual trajectories being very hard to predict. Also contrary to common perception, these tics are very rarely uncontrolled; instead, sufferers retain some control over these physical movements while experiencing uncontrollable urges to perform them.

These symptoms of TS make it, in part, a highly visible disorder, and the third chapter will return to this aspect of the condition. However, TS often has a far less visible, and certainly far less famous, impact on the way Tourettics experience the world around them.<sup>117</sup> In particular, TS has significant levels of comorbidity with other psychiatric conditions such as obsessive compulsive disorder, attention deficit disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. As Buckser observes, on the strength both of academic research and personal interviews with Tourettics:

The strongest association is with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). The rate of OCD among TS patients is so high that some observers see them as part of a common condition; among my own informants, although only a few have had a formal diagnosis of OCD, all have experienced OCD-like symptoms, and most have thought that they would qualify for such a diagnosis.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Andrew Buckser, ‘Before Your Very Eyes: Illness, Agency, and the Management of Tourette Syndrome’, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 22.2 (2008), 167-192 (p. 172).

<sup>117</sup> In using the term “Tourettic” here to indicate those with TS I am following the practice used by writers such as Buckser. This terminology is not, however, universal. In his autobiography, for example, Tourette’s sufferer Nick van Bloss expresses a preference for the term “tourettist”, observing that it ‘sounds almost as

innocuous as motorist, philanthropist or even florist’

Nick van Bloss, *Busy Body: My Life with Tourette’s Syndrome* (London: Fusion Press, 2006), p. 9.

<sup>118</sup> Buckser, ‘Before Your Very Eyes’, p. 173.

While some of the symptoms of these, too, are visible, this comorbidity with OCD in particular indicates a profoundly different way of viewing the world for Tourettics that diverges from the more normal visual experience of people without the condition.

In his autobiographical account of life with TS, Nick van Bloss observes that the tics that comprise the trademark symptom of Tourette's 'are not the whole story', with key aspects of his experience of the disorder remaining 'unseen and unnoticeable', 'hidden and secret'.<sup>119</sup> His personal experience with TS not only affects his relationship with his own body but also establishes him in a fundamentally different relationship with the world around him:

To try and show you how very different my brain is to yours, let me ask you a few simple questions: Do you know how many wheels a double-decker bus has got? Do you know how many windows your house or flat has? How many horizontal lines do you have on your forehead when you frown? The word Afghanistan has (no counting please) how many letters? How many pairs of shoes do you have? How many carriages did the last train that you took have and how many seats were in your carriage and how many were occupied when you alighted? Could you get all of those answers if you really, really thought about them? Probably not. In fact, I should hope that you couldn't. You would be somewhat odd if you could. Unfortunately, I know the answers to all of the above. [...]

You will happily sit in a coffee shop and concentrate on your coffee, a newspaper or on the person who is with you. Your concentration, or rather your broader vision of the details of your surroundings, will be, quite naturally, limited. You will be aware of things, people, etc in your rather blurred peripheral vision, but you will not be disturbed by them. You will not be bombarded by them.

Well, I unfortunately am numerically bombarded – assaulted by everything that is not only in my direct line of vision, but the peripheral stuff too. [...] Like most Tourettisms, it's exhausting; I'll be constantly trying to filter the useless details out. They are not welcome in my head, but they remain there nonetheless.<sup>120</sup>

At the heart of Van Bloss's experience is a relationship with his environment that lacks key aspects of the transparency articulated in my previous chapter. Rather than existing in a world where the trivial has a tendency to transparency, Van Bloss similarly experiences the world as divided into objects (into individual bodies) but experiences each as making a claim on the touch of his vision. Present throughout all of Van Bloss's activities is a pathological clamour of details, accompanied by what he describes as an intrusive and non-negotiable compulsion to count and inventory. This experience is not

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<sup>119</sup> Nick van Bloss, *Busy Body: My Life with Tourette's Syndrome* (London: Fusion Press, 2006), p. 63.

<sup>120</sup> Van Bloss, *Busy Body*, pp. 63-5.

just one he knows to be atypical, but one which sits in opposition to Van Bloss's own desired experience and which intrudes and interferes in his intended engagements in his world.

Although his account makes no attempt to engage more philosophically with TS, some of Van Bloss's language aligns with the discourse explored in this thesis. Perhaps most tellingly, in describing his experience of supermarkets, he remarks that 'for me, your world can be terrifying'.<sup>121</sup> Aisles, shelves, displays and products make incessant claims on his attention, and he experiences a disorienting and excessive sensitivity to the sounds and people around him. At the heart of this is the relationship between environment and activity that determines his place within this environment, a relationship that constructs the world of each individual, as well as a shared sense of world between members of a culture or community.

Whereas the first chapter of this thesis foregrounds the tendency of an environment towards transparency during successful, engaged activity in this world, Van Bloss's account reveals a pathological mode of being that prevents the achievement of such transparency and thus of dwelling in a coherent, reliable, non-intrusive world. As his account suggests, our environments are constructed within the normal limits of activity and engagement; we can construct large buildings, permit clutter, and design heavily populated public spaces because these can be tolerated by non-pathological being in this environment. Rather than offering a claim to see our world more fully or truthfully, Van Bloss's account suggests that he does not actually experience *our* world as such. It is not his world, but 'your world', one to which he does not fully belong due to his inability to exist within it in a more normal manner.

Van Bloss's account demonstrates one form of engagement with the world, and my own experience another. The mass of matter and form before me yields a world to me, revealing itself under the touches of my engagements. Some of these may be more general; I perceive objects which reveal themselves as and through my recognising them. Such patterns of recognition may indeed be more individualised, but others are formed through my immersion in a world of others before and alongside me, within a *they* that influences such perception of the world. Regardless, the world does not so much yield to my touch, but yields to presence through my touches, touch patterning the world around me through my own engagements. Sitting, now, at my desk, I am

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<sup>121</sup> Van Bloss, *Busy Body*, p. 69.

fortunate to be able to focus purely on a small area of my computer screen. Not only do I lack any real awareness of my own movements in typing, but the peripheral sprawl of cables, coffee cups, stacked books, stationary, teaching notes and further debris fades into irrelevance. Even the majority of the dust stains and smears on the laptop screen itself go unnoticed unless they intrude upon the small section of my focus. I stare out of my window (a window to which I had previously paid no conscious attention) and speculate as to how Van Bloss might receive the view it offers, looking for the first time at my own window, at the number of windows on the cathedral, at the contrast between clean and discoloured stonework, at the finite, quantifiable number of scaffolding poles both constructed and piled up for construction. In doing so, I turn my eyes to a gargoyle, however, and realise (after the fact, of course, I cannot quite catch it as it happens) that in focusing on one object, the rest again fades into the transparency of my absent touch.

### **2.1b – Clutter and the Photographic Image**

Over the course of researching this thesis, a camera was placed in my hands. From growing familiarity with this technology emerged a distorted double for my own eye as I began to encounter in the images captured a divergence from my own normal mode of seeing. In the above account of TS, Van Bloss's pathological vision is beset by the clamour of objects rendered opaque within the gaze, objects that would typically remain transparent for me. This repatterning of touch and transparency is similarly apparent in photography, and in the way the medium modified my relationship to clutter, to seemingly extraneous yet insuppressible detail. Wielding a camera, I was almost immediately made aware of how much it "saw" that I did not. More accurately, I was made aware of how much it held (or held back) for vision in a way that the world of my experience seemed not to. I encountered very different patterns of transparency when comparing the experience of focusing my attention on an object on my desk to that of focusing my lens upon the object. Rendering the photographic image revealed details previously excluded from my attention. I was made aware of the grain of the wooden desktop, I could count the number of lines in the grain between two sections of my intended object, and I found my attention repeatedly pulled back to small imperfections in the varnish of the desk's surface that time and again interrupted my perusal of the main object.

Rather than revealing the world through the patternings of my own engagements with it, the camera equally abstracted the multiple variations in the material reality (in the variegated play of light) before it, rendering each equally present in the resulting image. Nick van Bloss begins his account of TS by issuing an invitation to the reader to ‘take a good look at all the peculiar layers of strange and exhausting clutter that make up my existence.’<sup>122</sup> Although his primary aim is to explain his own exceptional experience of the world, that which his account also reveals is the clutter lying available to vision in the environments around us yet which never fully enters our experience of the world. The photograph offers a similar invitation.

Many of Bill Brandt’s images play with this claim that clutter and objects make both upon the space of the image and upon our visual attention. In his collection, *Brandt Nudes*, several of his sitters pose in starkly empty rooms with an unusual or jarring object selected for heightened attention. In contrast, Figure 21 presents an environment composed almost entirely of clutter and plays with our visual relationship to presence and absence. The over-proliferation of detail in the backdrop renders the model’s naked skin a site of relief from detail; it becomes a welcome absence. Unlike for Van Bloss, the minutiae of the cluttered setting are of no immediate interest to us, and our eyes seek out the form we can recognise *as* a body with only limited awareness of its visual particularities. And yet, the image recalls us to the photograph’s tendency to render all details and hold them static before us, as we pause before the image. In this excessively detailed image we are nonetheless taunted by the withholding of the details we would normally take for granted. Moving beyond our initial recognition of a naked female body, we seek out the familiar details of its face. The eyes, however, are concealed behind a heavy mess of hair. In seeking the human, in looking at the picture in accordance with normal interactions with people and world, we are pulled instead into the lines of detail that draw us away from the face and the body towards the

For copyright reasons this image has been redacted.

Figure 2.1 – Bill Brandt, *Nude, Campden Hill, London* (1975, October 29) (*Brandt Nudes*, p. 141)

<sup>122</sup> Van Bloss, *Busy Body*, p. 7.

insignificant busyness of the clutter behind them. The concealment of the model's eyes has the further effect of returning her to the status of object. Rather than imaging her as an agent, like the viewer, who sees and who touches, the photograph takes away her vision (while also neutralising her hands and their ability to touch) and emphasises her status within the photograph as a region of physical matter and light that is evenly rendered by an indifferent, mechanical lens.

Figure 2.2 explores both our normal and photographic relationship to clutter from the other extreme. Not only does it use large blocks of darkness and light to eradicate the minutiae of detail that the camera may capture, it foregrounds a further



*Figure 2.2 - Bill Brandt, Nude, Campden Hill, London, (1954, February) (Brandt Nudes, p. 33)*

removal of the clutter of daily life. The image is composed so as to guide touch to the female figure. Were this not an image, in our primary visual engagement with this body, objects that are irrelevant to this touch and interaction might typically fade into transparency. In contrast, the photograph's fixity would allow these objects a form of presence, holding them up for the potential touch of the viewer. The image engages with this dissonance, and simulates the "real-world" pattern of seeing, the transparency at work in such qualitative visual experience, by physically

manipulating the material environment. Objects not present in engaged vision are denied material presence in their removal from the room. I would suggest, however, that the image draws attention to these manipulations. The high-ceilinged room is barren in its absolute emptiness. The floor-to-ceiling windows, which exceed the boundaries of the photograph, call further attention to the scale of this space, while the somewhat impressionistic trees they show beyond the glass serve to reinforce the contrasting emptiness of the starkly delineated room, with its clearly defined straight lines and absence of content. The details of the trees manage to replicate the transparency of the environment during normal dwelling. They fade into insignificance even while remaining just present and available for a touch we have little interest in bestowing; our attention remains on our main point of interest, the body.

The structuring of touch in the image is partly achieved through the manipulation of the scene before the camera. However, the trees, which lie slightly out

of focus, suggest a more traditional method of controlling the visual reception of a photograph. In 1889, Peter Henry Emerson first released *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art*, in which he advocated a model of photography that combined the imperative to photograph the world as it is without alteration, with the need to produce images that replicated actual experience of this world. Rather than impose one's creative intentions on the physical world before the lens, the camera, he acknowledges, 'must take whatever is before it'.<sup>123</sup> However, he calls for the employment of differential focus in order to allow the resultant image to manage what Robin Kelsey describes as a 'hierarchy of attention' that replicates that of a person, giving 'an impression to the eye as nearly identical as possible to the impression given by the natural scene'.<sup>124</sup> Emerson describes an imaginary experience of rowing on a lake and seeing a beautiful girl leaning against a tree; in this scenario, he argues, 'our eyes are fixed on the ruddy face and we can look at nothing else'. It is only this that we see 'directly and sharply'. We are conscious of other elements of her surroundings, he posits, 'but we see clearly and definitely only the charming face. Thus it is always in nature, and thus it should be in a picture.' Should the whole image be rendered in sharp detail, he claims, the picture disappears, with the girl still 'there' but 'a mere patch in all the sharp detail'.<sup>125</sup> Instead, Emerson recommends that '[t]he field of indirect vision must be suggested in a picture, but subordinated'.<sup>126</sup> Although Emerson's strategy is different to the environmental manipulation in Brandt's photographs, present in both is the awareness of the divergent mode of photographic vision from that of lived experience.

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<sup>123</sup> Emerson cites this aspect of photography as one of the objections levelled against photography in support of the claim that the medium is artistically limited. In response, Emerson does not deny this necessary element of photography, but argues that this objection 'is not of any vital importance'. Instead, it challenges the photographer to exercise artistic judgement and skill in the selection, rather than the manipulation, of the photographed scene.

P. H. Emerson, *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art*, 2nd edn. (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1890), pp. 286-7.

<sup>124</sup> Emerson, *Naturalistic Photography*, p. 150.

Emerson also argues that no region of the photograph, even that which should be its primary focus, should be rendered with full sharpness, as this too is a deviation from the level of focus achieved by the eye.

<sup>125</sup> Emerson, *Naturalistic Photography*, p. 151.

<sup>126</sup> Emerson, *Naturalistic Photography*, p. 120.

### 2.1c – The Photograph as Wholly Given, Exposed to Dynamic Touch

While Brandt's images manipulate or engage with an environment to explore the way in which our vision touches on the bodies present, the photograph can only suggest the demarcation of objects within certain regions of its pigmentation or pixilation. As with the transparent Perspex of the previous chapter, there is a wholeness of presence to the photograph that is prior but inaccessible to a touch of vision that sees it in and through an ever-redefinable patterning of objects (bodies). As quoted above, Van Bloss describes his visual experience in terms of its 'layers of strange and exhausting clutter'. A similar temptation to utilise the figure of layers can emerge from my account of transparency. I imagine a scene as a stack of transparencies, of small items printed on individual sheets of acetate, layers that can be combined or isolated, each a touch that pulls that which is touched up out of the mass of potential to become an individualised body, set against everything else. In Figure 2.3 we are presented with a comparatively banal scene of domestic clutter, rendered with a fairly even focus. The image is given as a totality, yet our attention is free to move between the objects it recognises. There is a bottle, there a pear, there a stain on the table cloth. The viewer is free to build a picture of isolable items, his or her experience guided by the image's composition. Yet even as the image can be viewed in the layers of recognised bodies, the truth of the photograph in its underlying materiality is one of far greater divisibility across the surface which comprises it.

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes emphasises the photograph's '*Totality-of-Image*' stating that it 'gives itself out as complete – *integral*, we might say, playing on the word. The photographic image is full, crammed: no room, nothing can be added to it.'<sup>127</sup> The photograph is saturated space.<sup>128</sup> In this concise passage, we find hints of the

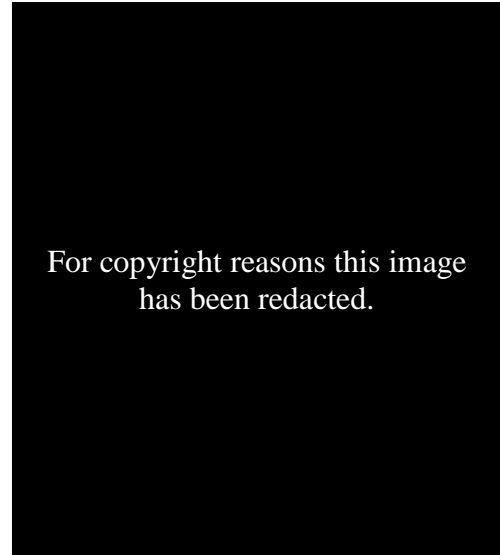


Figure 2.3 – Bill Brandt, *Nude, Campden Hill, London*, (c. 1945) (*Brandt Nudes*, p. 25)

<sup>127</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 89.

<sup>128</sup> While slightly unclear on this point, there is a suggestion in Barthes's text that this completeness of the image is related to the completeness of the underlying material reality. Barthes writes that 'the Photograph always carries its referent with it'; there is 'no photograph without *something* or *someone*'. However, he also asks, 'of all the objects in the world: why choose (why photograph) this object, this



language of touch that touches from the outside, alongside elements of a Heideggerian conception of death.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes that Dasein, as a being-*there* in the world, is always oriented ahead-of-itself. This structure of care directs it always ahead in its engagements with the world, and thus Dasein is always oriented towards its future potential and possibilities. This structure consequently entails that Dasein, being-*there*, is always incomplete: ‘there is always something still outstanding, which, as a potentiality-for-Being for Dasein itself, has not yet become “actual”. It is essential to the basic constitution of Dasein that there is *constantly something still to be settled*.’<sup>129</sup> Rather than representing an end or an interruption of being, Death operates as state of unification at which Being is necessarily, inescapably complete. Heidegger’s Dasein continues beyond Death in neither act nor potential; there is nothing more that Dasein can do, no more that can be added to the totality of its existence. There are no ends left open. It is enclosed within this completeness. To use Barthes’ terms, it is ‘full, crammed’, filled up to and by the limits of itself. However, Dasein, as being-toward-death, cannot experience its own death, only that of others. As the previous chapter emphasised, this *thereness* of Dasein is a condition of its touch on and engagement with the objects of the world; however, ‘[w]hen Dasein reaches its wholeness in death, it simultaneously loses the Being of its “there”’.<sup>130</sup> Death is the constant threat, attendant in the structure of Dasein’s own being, of the possibility of the impossibility of

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moment, rather than some other?’ The bonds between Photography and its referent he describes as involving photography ‘in the vast disorder of objects’. While his account here remains a discussion of objects rather than of the play of light and matter, the reference to disorder perhaps suggests disorder not only among objects but in the possibility of recognising them amongst the flux of optical impressions. Unlike the eye, the camera can freeze the moment and record not only the way it is perceived at that point, but the other potential ways of viewing it. In his doubling of choosing-photographing this object-moment there is this implicit step back from the intentions and perceptions which seek in the image what is found by the eye, to the mechanical rendering of an objective, rather than object-laden, spatio-temporal moment. (*Camera Lucia*, pp. 5-6.) As Susan Sontag comments, ‘[t]he photograph is a thin slice of space as well as time. In a world ruled by photographic images, all borders (“framing”) seem arbitrary. Anything can be separated, can be made discontinuous, from anything else.’ The Photograph is an objectifying intercession that slices out a momentary state of being, and can be guided by intentions and perceptions. However, its atomic rendering of reality rests upon (and for Sontag, reinforces) the understanding that that from which it takes its images is by nature non-atomic, a continuity available for infinite patterns of division.

Barthes, *Camera Lucia*, pp. 5-6.

Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, [1971] 2008), p. 22.

<sup>129</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 279.

<sup>130</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 281.

existence: '[d]eath, as possibility, gives Dasein nothing to be "actualized", nothing which Dasein, as actual, could itself be.'<sup>131</sup>

Dasein, totalised in the cessation of potential for further possibility and further touch, thus cannot engage with its own self as total. Instead, this enclosure opens only outwards. While not expressive of the full ontological significance of death, Heidegger notes that:

when someone has died, his Being-no-longer-in-the-world (if we understand it in an extreme way) is still a Being, but in the sense of the Being-just-present-at-hand-and-no-more of a corporeal Thing which we encounter. In the dying of the Other we can experience that remarkable phenomenon of Being which may be defined as the change-over of an entity from Dasein's kind of Being (or life) to no-longer-Dasein. The end of the entity qua Dasein is the beginning of the same entity qua something present-at-hand.<sup>132</sup>

The object present-at-hand does not exteriorise itself through touch, but is available, as extremity and surface, to the touch of the other. While Barthes' claim that the image 'gives itself out as complete' may more basically serve to indicate that it can only ever be disseminated as a totality, this gesture of giving *out* is particularly apt. The completeness of the photograph must simultaneously point beyond its own completeness. The photograph is an act of death in the sense that it slices out a body – it divides it from the other and from the whole other of being – and offers it wholly. In doing so, we who touch on it are cast to the outside of it, and can access this wholly-presented whole because we are not contained within it, and because nothing more may enter or depart the image.

The wholeness of death is always only available from the outside. The photograph, like the corpse, is offered in a static wholeness of presence, and is offered to that which is still mobile, still incomplete and at liberty to touch. Like the corpse, it can be broken down under an exploratory touch that is free to demarcate not only familiar parts, but ever smaller or more randomly defined regions. Divorced from a context of interaction, that which the image presents is held static under the mobile touch of the viewer.

The photograph is frozen. Any interval that unfolds across the capture of the photograph is, in the end, reduced to a single image that can testify to certain changes, but that cannot itself change. The photograph reduces all life to a static interval that will

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<sup>131</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 307.

<sup>132</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 281.

be exceeded by the act of looking; even the viewers of a long-exposure photograph could, if they chose, study the image for longer than the interval of its creation. This stillness operates in juxtaposition to any standard model of seeing. In John Berger's seminal text on seeing, he writes, '[o]ur vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are'.<sup>133</sup> In contrast, when we direct our attention to a photograph, we are presented not only with our ongoing dynamic vision, but the static visual components of the photograph, around, amongst and across which our own vision roams. The image thus acquires a strange status as that which exposes to us the dynamism and essential restlessness of touch and vision by placing this not in relation to an equally mobile world but to something inherently static. The static, whole image always evades us. It is wholly given, but never wholly received, revealed only through a series and flow of touching.

This figure of motion is related, here, to a study of the static image that is free to roam across its surface and turn its attention from one point of interest to another. A similar dynamism of viewing is foregrounded in an account of the image by Kendall L. Walton that, rather than attending merely to a sequential but close perusal of the image, emphasises the temporal freedom and extended interval of the viewer's experience standing before an artwork. Walton offers an account of pictures as 'props in games of make-believe in which people participate visually, and also psychologically'.<sup>134</sup> Facing a visual representation of an object, Walton suggests, the viewer imagines *seeing* that object, it is fictional that he sees that object. Participation is neither passive nor momentary but entails a relationship towards an activity such that one's specific comportment or engagement subtly changes across its duration. He offers as analogous the example of a child's use of a hobby horse. Interacting with the stick, or standing before the painting, a world opens and expands to include the participant. Of course, the two are not completely alike. In particular, the stick is effaced in use; the child does not look at it, but instead imagines a horse. Attending to the details of such props is detrimental to the imaginative activity. In contrast, Walton notes that the content of 'the

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<sup>133</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC and Penguin, 1972), p. 9.

<sup>134</sup> Kendall Walton, *Marvelous Images: On Values and the Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 78.

picture world depends on the picture, on a pattern of shapes and colors on a flat surface'.<sup>135</sup>

Walton uses a cartoon from an issue of *The New Yorker Magazine* to illustrate his argument.

The cartoon (fig. 2.4) depicts a visitor to an art gallery standing before a framed picture of cacti in the desert sun. The sun in the image shines on the viewer, casting a shadow of him upon the gallery floor. 'Most accounts of pictorial representation recognize only the world of the picture,' Walton argues, 'and have the viewer standing outside that

world and observing it.'<sup>136</sup> The appeal of this cartoon is the blurring of these boundaries, and the emergence or creation of a (fictional) world of the image in which the viewer is included. On Walton's account, the shadow marks the viewer's participation in the world in which the sun is present. 'This gentleman is not in the picture world proper, inside the frame,' Walton states, 'but there is a larger world extending in front of the picture that includes both him and the saguaro cactuses in the picture.'<sup>137</sup> In this expansion of the picture world, the (fictional) sun casts a fictional shadow behind the man who (fictionally) sees it.

In the positing of the imaginative experience as an element of the extended time of viewing a picture the image itself takes on a strange, distorted presence. The hobby horse permits an extended imaginative game because it effaces itself in the activity. The person who views the artwork and recognises its contents as more than frozen pigmentation but as a flower, a building or a person must both engage with these objects as beings of a type which endures and changes in a real, temporal world, and also sustain the image within the activity in its fixed state, as the unchanging ground which prompts these engagements. Whether such engagement with an image requires the viewer to inhabit imaginative worlds is far from clear. In his critique of Walton's position, for example, Noël Carroll argues that such games of make-believe are an 'ad hoc and extraneous' theoretical postulation 'we can easily and more economically do



Figure 2.4 – Frank Modell, Drawing of an art gallery, *The New Yorker Magazine*, 1 December 1951.

<sup>135</sup> Walton, *Marvelous Images*, p. 68.

<sup>136</sup> Walton, *Marvelous Images*, p. 74.

<sup>137</sup> Walton, *Marvelous Images*, pp. 69-70.

without'.<sup>138</sup> However, what Walton's account does call to prominence is the temporality of the act of *seeing* that diverges from the temporal fixity of the static image. Were the picture within Modell's drawing a photograph rather than painting, for example, the light transmitted from the sun would have been present only across the interval of exposure. This light would have formed the image, but it is the light in the viewing gallery that permits the viewer to see the image and to imaginatively recognise or reconstruct its contents, as it is this that endures across the time of the viewing. Walton's account posits not merely a shared world but its attendant shared temporality, a bridging of a gap that ultimately reveals the separateness it attempts to overcome.

### 2.1d – Death and the Pose

In the previous section the figure of death was related to the wholly-given-ness of the photographic image. Death also figures in the photograph as that which it imposes and that which it cannot show. Every photograph extracts a moment, an interval, from the flow of time, and holds it static to be looked at from outside. Not only does a photograph always show death by showing only that which is no longer, but the still image is an imposition of completeness and fixity on both inanimate and animate beings alike. Death has a central place in Barthes' account, in which the photograph is characterised by the "that-has-been"; that which the photograph portrays was once there before the lens, but equally is no longer there, and no longer as it was at that point.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, Barthes writes, '[b]y giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future.' Studying a photograph of his mother as a child, Barthes is intensely aware of a loss that has already happened. He tells himself, 'she is going to die'. For Barthes, every photograph, even the most recent, whose subjects are still living, presents 'a catastrophe which has already occurred'.<sup>140</sup> That to which the

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<sup>138</sup> Noël Carroll, 'Mimesis as Make-Believe', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 45 (1995), 93-99 (p. 97). Carroll instead suggests that 'we can analyse pictorial representation in terms of recognition, without recourse to postulating games in which we play at imagining seeing'. Moreover, he argues, the figure of recognition avoids the consequence Walton accepts in his account that the representation at work in art is always fictional. Carroll suggests that this leads to an unsatisfactory inability to cleanly differentiate between fictional and non-fictional representations. Returning instead to a more basic account of recognition, he argues, has the additional benefit of retaining our ability to recognise and distinguish, for example, the non-fictionality operative in the representation that comprises a portrait.

<sup>139</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 79.

As Barthes emphasises, '[i]n Photography, the presence of the thing (at a certain past moment) is never metaphoric' (p. 78). 'Every photograph', he writes a few pages later, 'is a certificate of presence' (p. 87).

<sup>140</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 96.

photograph grants presence is already lost, and this loss stands in for and summons the greater loss and greater absence that is to come.

The photograph can contain only a limited interval of life before it is completed, and before this enclosure enacts a severance of that which it fixes in place from the ongoing flux which eludes it. The photograph may be essentially bound to death, and serve as a marker of the inevitable change and death which its subjects will face (will *have* faced), but even as it struggles to present life within its fixity, it struggles far more to

actually portray death. This tension is illustrated in the work of Julia Margaret Cameron, a photographer known for her use of long exposures, slightly blurred figures and willingness to embrace imperfections in order to coax life into her work.<sup>141</sup> Despite some success at portraying life in this manner, in a contrasting image of a child's corpse (fig. 2.5) Cameron is successful at portraying death only when the image is placed within the wider context of her oeuvre. While her other works can supply some testimony to an enduring, living presence before the lens, this image has none of these markers of life. However, it is also unable to testify to the subject's state as already-dead. Stillness is a basic condition of the photograph, and in its indifferent imposition by the medium, it slips away from a subject who might also present it. Death in photography functions akin to a colour filter; if, for example, everything is imaged through a lens that renders it red, then that which is actually red prior to being imaged is lost within the resulting photograph, unable to be differentiated.

For copyright reasons this image has been redacted.

Figure 2.5 – Julia Margaret Cameron, *Deathbed Study of Adeline Grace Clogstoun* (1872)

<sup>141</sup> Robin Kelsey remarks that even if death cannot be dispelled entirely from Cameron's works, they still 'traffic [...] in the irrepressibility of life'. Rejecting a tradition in which sitters were encouraged to remain as still as possible to ensure sharp images, Cameron, Kelsey suggests, 'ensured that her subject [...] would be unable to subdue all of their bodily vitality'. Instead, the removal of props such as head rests that aimed to help fix the body before the lens into the same stasis as the photograph, 'invited signs of bodily life, including trembling hands and welling eyes, to infiltrate her apparatus'. Her work, Kelsey suggests, demonstrates life by showing the failure of people, of their 'untameable bodily energy', to approximate the deathliness of the image. In privileging 'the incapacity of the living body to remain motionless', not only does life (however brief) return to the captured image, but I would suggest that what is also exposed is not only the artificial stasis imposed by the lens, but the artifice on the part of its subjects in seeking to replicate in advance this stillness and suspension.

Kelsey, Robin, *Photography and the Art of Chance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 86.

This tendency of the photograph to impose death is complicit in creating the eeriness of Jeffrey Silverthorne's post-autopsy photograph, *Woman who Died in her*



Figure 2.6 – Jeffrey Silverthorne, *Woman who Died in her Sleep* (1972)

*Sleep* (fig. 2.6). The effect is partly achieved by artful staging to arrange the corpse in a posture suggestive of both sleep and a demure coyness that operates in tension with the extensive cutting and rough rebinding of flesh. However, the photographic medium's inability to express the temporal endurance of death (as well as the coming change and deterioration of flesh) across the flow of time further unsettles the image. On the strength of the image alone, the subject need not be dead: with sufficient stage make-up a model could be used to create an artificial image of death, just as this corpse has been artificially made-up and arranged to

suggest life. The inevitable ambivalence of photography towards demarcating life against death accentuates and disorients the already disconcerting bodily arrangement in the image.

In many images, subjects pose before the camera. In doing so, they temporarily adopt in life the stillness-to-come of the photograph. Of course, not all photographs are posed. Whereas Brandt offers carefully composed images of nude bodies, and equally crafted portraits, photographs can be taken without the awareness of their subjects, or captured in the midst of an action in which the figure does not fully control the details of the image to be made of them. Such images engage with both people and bodies. The camera treats them wholly as surface, as object; it is irrelevant to the photograph how that person viewed their body, how present it was to them at the time of capture, and what body-image they inhabited or possessed at that moment. Such photography reveals a surface of a body that cannot touch itself without transforming that which is touched. Photography can touch on the body when it is invisible to the embodied self. In so doing, its regard for the body in its utter objecthood allows it to approach the person who is oriented wholly towards their activity. It approaches from outside without requiring that they do the same.

In contrast, the posed photograph can give the poser a strange experience of self-as-object that pulls the self partially out of its immersion in a world of activity. Barthes describes the photograph as 'the advent of myself as other', writing that 'the Photograph

(the one I *intend*) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object'.<sup>142</sup> Barthes ties the experience of photographic objectification into an encounter with death that doubles that which we experience when we look at images of others. When one poses, not only does one do so in the awareness that the camera creates an image of a moment that will thus be preserved in the face of its inevitable loss, but one's preparation for this requires a similar complicity in self-objectification. For Barthes, the awareness of being 'observed' by the lens of the camera enforces a fundamental change in experience. He writes: 'I constitute myself in the process of "posing," I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image. This transformation is an active one: I feel that the Photograph creates my body or mortifies it, according to its caprice'.<sup>143</sup> Barthes describes the gesture of photography as one of embalming, but in posing before the lens this process of fixing a still form begins prior to the action of the shutter.<sup>144</sup>

The photograph's association with death rests on its relationship to touch. The mechanical nature of the photograph allows its contact with a material reality to be foregrounded, as the lens records the light that reaches it. The photograph then preserves this touch, transforming it into an enduring image, an unchanging surface, across which the mobile touches of the viewer are free to roam. The idea that a photograph is a touch, a contact, is advanced by numerous writers; Robin Kelsey, for example, describes Julia Margaret Cameron's work as creating 'subtle spaces of contact'.<sup>145</sup> Kendall L. Walton's account of the photograph also insists on its ability to mediate touch between the scene before the camera and the viewer who stands before the image. The photograph, he argues, is transparent, allowing light reflected from an object to inform the pattern of light received on the retina. Through the photograph, he argues, as through a telescope, one "literally sees" its subject. In advancing this account of touch, however, he faces the challenge of the dissonance between the touch the photograph preserves and the touch the viewer performs. The interval of capture, whether instantaneous or extended, is compiled into an image which is wholly, instantaneously present; the long exposure photograph can be viewed across a much

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<sup>142</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 12.

<sup>143</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pp. 10-1.

<sup>144</sup> see Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 14.

<sup>145</sup> Kelsey, *Photography and the Art of Chance*, p. 82.



shorter interval than that of its creation. Moreover, the touch of the viewer is not limited to this immediacy of the image, and the freedom of the gaze to explore at leisure undermines any claim to literal seeing. That which this viewer touches can no longer be that which the lens captured, but instead the photograph insists on its mortified objecthood. The conscious act of posing places one before a lens, armed with the knowledge that one short interval of contact from a life patterned by myriad touches and engagements will be held back, or carried relentlessly forwards, for the future touches to come, touches to which the one posing will not be able to respond.

## **2.2 – Lucian Freud and the Art of Re-Pose**

### **2.2a – Duration, Pose and Posing**

The clashing time scales of photographic exposure and its endurance both before and during the gaze of the viewer are partly mediated by the creative process of painter Lucian Freud. Freud was a consistently slow painter, producing his works over the course of multiple sittings and across numerous months.<sup>146</sup> In practice, the duration of time Freud spent studying and painting the scenes he captured far exceeds that which any viewer will spend looking at each image. This is not just a matter of the time Freud will have spent studying his developing painted image; that which is also integral to Freud's paintings is the duration of real life which is caught up in their creation. Recounting his own experience posing for Freud, David Hockney remarks, '[a]ll the hours I sat were layered into it; he had always added, rarely taken anything away'.<sup>147</sup> The image may be static, but while the person posing for the camera may hold each pose for mere seconds, Freud's process requires his models to find a way to inhabit this static state across an extended duration.

In the discussion of Brandt in the first half of this chapter, I drew attention to the necessary manipulations of an environment required to allow an image of it to replicate experience of it. To some extent, Freud requires a similar mechanism of interference in a scene. His images, certainly when treated as a collection, do not seek to offer a photographic illusion of frozen movement. Nor do they seek to deny the necessity of

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<sup>146</sup> Martin Gayford suggests that for Freud a portrait head could take one hundred and thirty hours to paint, with a full-length figure taking longer in relation to the amount of additional work.

Gayford, Martin, 'Introduction', in *Lucian Freud: Painting People* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2012), pp. 10-13 (p. 11).

<sup>147</sup> David Hockney, 'You Can Smoke, But Don't Tell Kate Moss', in *Lucian Freud: Painting People* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2012), pp. 14-7 (p. 17).

imposing stasis on such movement during the time of the image's creation. What they do, however, is explore the experience of such stasis, folding it back into – and extending it across – a temporal interval.

If what we might encounter in certain photographs, certain images, is the pose, what we find in Freud's work is an ongoing engagement with posing itself. The tension between living and death in photography is, in part, the tension between 'he poses' and 'he has posed'. The image locks into, locks up (even, locks out) a single moment and holds it infinitely present. In this unyielding present, the flowing back, away, of the past from the image locked out from it is insistently available to the one viewing the image. As the discussion in the previous half of this chapter indicated, one looks at a photograph and knows it to represent a small subsection of living that continues around it. I would suggest that in contrast to this, that which characterises Freud's sitters is not the presence of the sitter who poses, but the presence of the sitter posing, the presence of posing itself. One can say of Freud's sitters, 'she *is* posing', 'she has *been* posing'. Their pose is not so much a moment in time, but an activity, a posture, an attitude, into which time enters. The presence of the continuous lingers in his paintings.

In fact, of course, the time frames are finite and at least theoretically knowable and quantifiable; it would be possible to spend as long with the image as Freud spent with both the image and the scene it reflects. However, the tendency towards temporal excess in Freud's images plays with something akin to Walton's discussion of the experience of the image in the preceding half of this chapter. The imaginative space of viewing the image of a resting or sleeping figure imposes less divergence between image and experience. If one can engage a game of make-believe when viewing, to use another of his examples, a painting of a boat in high seas, this is only possible by permitting the imaginative world to exceed the image.<sup>148</sup> It is not possible to experience the frozen moment of the image because it allows no temporal space in which this imaginative experience can unfurl. One cannot imagine either exhilaration or fear without the awareness that these must be accompanied by the rolling of the waves and the movement of the ship as these emotions play out. In contrast, one can typically view Freud's paintings, can imagine experiencing that which they depict, without running into the limits of the excess they already encode. I can see the reclining figure, the languid couple, the standing figure holding him- or herself still, and begin to engage

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<sup>148</sup> See Walton, *Marvelous Images*, pp. 67-75.

with their experiences of semi-artificial, yet wholly genuine, stasis. There is the potential to experience a similar perusal of a still form to that experienced by the painter, and this is not simply the encounter with the object when isolated for extended viewing. It is accompanied by the potential to imaginatively experience the wilful stillness and suspension of the figures. The process which makes of them a still, fixed image is not a simplistic reduction of life to a moment, but a process which trades on their own awareness of this partial transformation of themselves to something definite and unchanging, along with their own awareness of the flow of time and change that is integral to this imaging.

### **2.2b – Holding still: *Pose versus Re-Pose***

In this way, there is resonance between Freud's paintings and Cameron's photography. Her work, too, enfolds a measure of potential excess into the temporal space of the image: one could study a long-exposure photograph for a short duration without exceeding the interval the image depicts. However, Freud's paintings go beyond this, and I would suggest that the difference relates to the distinction I wish to draw between 'pose' and 'repose'.

It is repose, rather than pose or posing, that most fully characterises Freud's paintings. His sitters return again and again to the same room, the same environmental arrangements, and to the same bodily configurations. Once there, they offer over themselves to this stasis – or rather, to the maintenance of this stasis. Resting, resignation and vigilance each form part of the process, and it is the tensions between these that the term 'repose' is well-suited to express. Such tension can be read within the word's etymological structure. To pose; to pause. In the root alone is the tension between stasis and action. The pose is a cessation that must be sustained. While the short-exposure photograph can effortlessly freeze a moment, approximating such motionlessness within the flux of actual time is an activity. This sense of maintenance as an active process can be read into one interpretation of the prefix 're-'. It is a repeat, a return, an enacting of the same again and again, a sameness that exists only in iterations that undermine the persistence of one thing as enduringly the same. However, the prefix is likely not to indicate repetition so much as it functions as an intensive. It gives emphasis to the cessation; it is not just a pausing but something more sustained, more

substantial. The study of repose is not simply the study of one posing, but of one given over to greater cessation, to a suspension of other activity.

The tensions, of course, return. For Freud's work, repose is not simply rest. For all that his sitters yield themselves over to a form of absence, they must also return, again and again, to presence. They are confronted with their inactivity, forced to make an activity of sitting still, or, on other occasions, perhaps, encouraged to engage with the active process of disposing themselves to absence, to relaxation. As such, the strange tension between the presence and absence of the body as material site of the self and as present engagement in a world is pulled into view. Although Freud's works explore this in a variety of ways, there are certain common features that recur across his oeuvre. Integral to his process was the practical necessity of the sustainability of any given posture. The duration and frequency of the sittings required his models to adopt positions into which their body fell somewhat, although not wholly, naturally. The bodies in Freud's paintings cannot be portrayed in a posture that separates the body from its manner of being in space and in (and especially across) time.

This is illustrated in the contrast between Freud's paintings and his attitude to his photographic portraits. Freud expressed a general dislike of being photographed, and a particular distaste of the stereotypical 'photograph of the artist at his easel' or 'of painters staring into the distance'.<sup>149</sup> Indeed, the photographs that comprise the collection *Freud at Work* often do not include him, but instead take as their subjects his paintings, sometimes accompanied by their sitters, at various stages of the creative process. While Freud felt more at ease being photographed by David Dawson, two of the most intriguing images in the collection come from those taken by Bruce Bernard despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that 'he made everything pretty painful'.<sup>150</sup> These images (figures 2.7 and 2.8) stand out in their compositional and tonal distance both from cataloguing a painter and his oeuvre and from more traditional portraits. Freud claims he once told Bernard, 'I'd rather be the model and you the photographer', and this preference works within these images to create something both highly photographic and uniquely personal.<sup>151</sup> In each image, the pose adopted is unsustainable for any reasonable duration; none of Freud's paintings could have engaged with such a

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<sup>149</sup> Sebastian Smee, 'A Late Night Conversation with Lucian Freud', in *Freud at Work*, Bruce Bernard and David Dawson (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006), pp. 11-42 (p.30).  
p. 30.]

<sup>150</sup> Smee, 'Conversation with Lucian Freud', p. 30.

<sup>151</sup> Smee, 'Conversation with Lucian Freud', p. 30.

sitter. He poses; he does not repose. Even as these photographs demonstrate the mobile potentials of this body in this environment, they also depict a lived body comported towards the primary aim of being looked at. The photograph holds an aspect of the body visible, and in these images this visibility is supplemented by the increased levels of seen-ness that accompany these poses. Breaking through the invisibility of the body – to itself and to others – in its routine, expected, engaged relationships with the world (or as part of the world of others), these poses make the body present to itself and to others.

In these images, Freud's pose effectively colludes with the operation of the photograph with respect to presence and absence. The photograph has the ability to hold a moment present against a background of absence that surrounds it and is excluded from it. It renders and it holds visible. This is particularly apparent in motion shots, where the camera is able to grant an individual visibility to an instant that is pulled out to form a single frame from a larger, encompassing motion. In the absence of the camera, these moments typically lie absent or transparent within the wider act that is made present. In these photographs of Bernard's, this allocation of saturated visibility to a short duration is pulled into convergence with a short moment of increased visibility for Freud's body. In posing before the lens

For copyright reasons this image has been redacted.

Figure 2.7 – Bruce Bernard, *Lucian Freud posing as a Henry Moore* (1983)

he has chosen to forego an attempt at acting out a natural immersion in his environment, and instead chosen short-lived poses that break off and up from the non-visibility of his body's normal comportment. His choice to engage with the medium in this way forms an emphatic juxtaposition with his own painted output. He has chosen to be held visible in an activity of heightened and fleeting visibility. The photograph offered in figure 2.7 extends this idea further into the realm of the sculptural, with Freud having chosen to imitate the work of Henry Moore. 'I think the best thing is to decide on a definite pose,' he observed, 'such as – why not? – a Henry Moore! So I tried to be one of those ghastly works, those ghastly – to me – genteel statues.'<sup>152</sup> The choice to perform is personal, even as the choice of performance is self-consciously imitative. Moreover, the pose he chooses to adopt is one that is dependent upon the photographic medium to be sustained. Unlike his own sitters, who take on the role of real-time living statue, and

<sup>152</sup> Smee, 'Conversation with Lucian Freud', p. 30.

come to inhabit the pose with their own repose, Freud's posture is necessarily short-lived. Man can only be sculpturally posed with the assistance of the medium that allows that performance to outlive the duration for which the self (the thing that is both I and body) can subordinate itself to it.

Despite this divergence, both Freud's paintings and these photographs of him share an understanding of the body as shifting presence and absence, and understanding that doesn't just seek to present the body seen, but engage with the body *as* something that is seen, is laid open to vision. The startling physical ability demonstrated in the photograph of Freud's headstand initially obscures the success of the photograph as a work of composition. The pose is predominantly personal; its ability to shock is subordinated to revealing a personal truth about the body on display. Rather than being a complete image for aesthetic study, the photograph initially stands out for its testimonial function. Here is a man who, despite advancing age, can perform a seemingly effortless and immaculate headstand, and for whom this feat is sufficiently commonplace as to inspire only warm indulgence in its witness. Once this shock abates, however, the image begins to flatten back into an impressive confluence of lines and affect. The crisp horizontal of the bottom trouser cuff finds a sympathetic echo in the belt around their waist, and, moreover, aligns nearly exactly with the top of the boarded window in the background. Furthermore, the tongue of the heavy boots aligns with the lower edge of the white beam running across the top of the wall, and the tips of these shoes touch the upper edge of the image. The precise neatness of these lines is testament either to careful staging, posing, or camera positioning, or to supreme good fortune. It also has the further effect of lifting the heavy shoes further outside the internal framing of the photograph. Underscored by this is the transient liberation of the body from the normal confines of gravity, physics, and engaged living within one's world. It seems no coincidence that beneath the inverted body the bedsheets are neatly tucked in, revealing a larger expanse of the floor which the body has, however temporarily, forsaken. The body has flown up,

For copyright reasons this image has been redacted.

Figure 2.8 – Bruce Bernard, *Lucian Freud standing on his head, with daughter Bella* (1985)

away from these strictures, and the heavy boots that seem as if they should thud towards the earth are instead released further beyond the suggested confines of the space. However spontaneous the image, however fortunate the convergence of lines, the relationship in which the body here is held is one of photographer and model. Freud's awareness of the personality that inhabits any pose is retained, but so too is the yielding over of the body to being seen. His paintings demonstrate this dual understanding of the body that allows it to be both integral to the subject and an object another may find touch and encounter.

As a painter, Freud's disinterest in pure posing is a resistance to a form of theatrical artifice that depersonalises the sitter. As Barthes observed, posing is a constitution of oneself in preparation for being rendered as an object, as an other.<sup>153</sup> It is something designed to influence how others experience me not *here* as I engage with the world, but *there*, there where they touch upon me. In posing for the photograph, the self diverges not just from the image being created, but from its own sense of authenticity. 'I pose,' Barthes writes, 'I know I am posing, I want you to know that I am posing'.<sup>154</sup> This is partly due to the disruptive nature of presence-to-self. Posing makes of oneself an image not simply because someone else is looking, but because one must touch on oneself; attention is dragged away from there where one engages with the world to try and find and manipulate the contours of *here* where one is believed to be. As Barthes acknowledges, the self is not meant to be reducible to stillness, to the 'heavy', 'stubborn' motionless of the image and the experience of posing reinforces this non-identity.<sup>155</sup> Barthes' self-confessed desire for his awareness of this artifice to be acknowledged is in part a desire to allow this object to communicate and retain something of the self which it simultaneously squeezes out.

Freud's aim in posing his paintings was not simply to banish such artifice but to negotiate it, to engage with the real self during this experience of self-distortion. In conversation with Michael Auping, he identified this layering of action, inaction and act: 'When you first start a painting, a sitter will often feel they need to act, and they will try to pose. If someone is really posed, it's not that interesting, too much like acting. There is something still and artificial.'<sup>156</sup> The requirement to not merely be

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<sup>153</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pp. 10-14.

<sup>154</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 11.

<sup>155</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 12.

<sup>156</sup> Michael Auping, 'Lucian Freud in Conversation with Michael Auping', in *Lucian Freud: Portraits*, ed. Sarah Howgate (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2012), pp. 204-219 (p. 213).

present before the gaze of the other but to yield one's activity to formal stillness pushes the subject away from a familiarity of self which is expressed in this self-manipulation through posing. Constrained by the act of offering themselves to the painter's vision, the sitters cannot simply act in relation to their own engagement in the world (a series of engagements that intermittently allow and require one's own absence to self). The studio environment is not designed as a world to be inhabited; it is constructed partly through the residual traces of the painter's activity, and partly with a view to being looked at by the artist and subsequently by those who view the paintings. The sitters' lack of engaged being in this environment is further emphasised by the physical constraints of posing. Shaped and constrained by this self-configuration that allows oneself to be objectified, the stillness the models must adopt commences an uneasy overlap of selfhood and objecthood. The artificiality indicated here in Freud's description is interpretable as a response to this threat of objectification that seeks to restore it to more familiar acts of self and agency: if one is acting, one's inability to be unproblematically oneself may, perhaps, be overshadowed. As Freud's account indicates, the slipping sense of self-identity that the pose enforces can be supplemented or countered by an attempt to claim this non-identity in more familiar terms.

Freud's paintings offer a range of variations on this mediation between the self and its otherness. Unsatisfied by merely painting artifice, he wished to find poses that interested him, but which also held true to the self posing in that configuration. Explicitly, his interest was in poses which permitted the creation not simply of a true portrait, but an interesting and new image. As such, this process of constituting oneself for the purpose of constructing the image was neither denied nor wholly concealed. Freud described the process of deciding upon a pose as one of both agreement and mutual exploitation between the two (or more) parties:

It's difficult to say how a pose comes about with any portrait. It just happens. We come to an agreement. I usually ask them to hold a pose based on something I see that seems new or odd to me. It's usually not what they think I'm looking at. I suppose you might say we exploit each other. I am allowed to make a painting based on their presence in my studio, and they are allowed to make that presence known in different ways.<sup>157</sup>

This allusion to exploitation refuses to deny the artifice of the pose and the specific broader activity of the creation of the image that contoured the way in which his sitter

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<sup>157</sup> Auping, 'Conversation', p. 209.



was present in their environment. However, Freud also recognised that such interference in the sitter's mode of being in that space would not (even if desired) erase the individuality of the self who is present throughout.

Freud not only recognised the inability of a person to conform their body wholly to the shape imagined by the other, but also actively sought to avoid the passivity of such complete yielding of the self. He commented: 'You cannot make a person stand or sit exactly as you want or as you think you want. They will do it their own way, even if it is subtle.'<sup>158</sup> What this offered was the 'living presence' that he sought to work with, and which he sought to convey. As Freud's sitters have attested, he was even reluctant to paint the background of an image without the sitter also present; his interest was not simply in the body as pure corporeal form, but as in some sense living flesh in and through which the person was present before and alongside him during the process and experience of painting. It is in this need for lived bodies rather than posed forms that his work most clearly demonstrates not pose but repose. His sitters were called to negotiate and come to inhabit a not wholly natural bodily configuration at the place where its artifice met and was mediated by authentic presence. Even speaking of pure pragmatics, Freud remarked that, 'because they will have to hold the position for many hours over many weeks, they have to be comfortable.'<sup>159</sup> Despite his overarching focus on the body, Freud's response to it consistently refrained from regarding its potential as purely a matter of its physical form. The boundaries and configurations of the body in which he was interested were partly determined by aesthetic considerations, but always mediated by the relationship between the physical mass before him and the self with which it was bound. The body's form was not wholly isolable from the deportment of the body in its history of engaged existence within its world, nor separable from consideration of how the embodied self would dispose itself across the course of many sittings.

The acknowledgement within Freud's works of this duration of their construction is not dissimilar to that which we find in Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs. Freud's transition from the highly detailed, precisely delineated paintings of his early career to often larger canvases and thicker brush strokes enacts a similar disinterest in prioritising the illusion of both perfect stillness and the suitability of such

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<sup>158</sup> Auping, 'Conversation', p. 213.

<sup>159</sup> Auping, 'Conversation', p. 213.

stillness to (re)present a living figure. Still precisely composed and painted, the later works with their coarser and seemingly more spontaneous brushstrokes not only achieve far greater vivacity. The impression they offer of the sitter is expansive, fleshy and not quite pinned down; this resistance to finely painted reduction allows some easing of the temporal tensions between the moment(s) shown and the work required to show it.

### 2.2c – Two Men in the Studio (1987-9)

Other markers are more idiosyncratic. In *Two Men in the Studio* (1987-9), the standing man's feet seem to bulge beyond our expectations; were we to join painter and model in the studio, at no one time would these feet look like this. Such imperfections in anatomy



Figure 2.9 – Lucian Freud, *Two Men in the Studio* (1987-9)

are not uncommon in Freud's paintings, and it is telling that his self-avowed interest lay not in recreating the sitter's self-image but in painting the *presence* before him. The flattening, almost grotesque feet indicate a restlessness and a weightiness that speaks back to the circumstances of the figure (re)posing before the easel and artist. They are weary, lacking in purposeful animation and poise; they also cannot quite stay still. They are neither animated by the poised tension of an action about to be begun, nor stilled through the acting of an intention sufficiently strong to hold them wholly in place. The body above is stretched taut into an almost impossible pose to maintain, and these misshapen feet

anchor this self-alienated body. At the point where the body rocks, however minutely, on its grounding, they are not quite containable in perfect stillness. As a result, Freud's depiction of them does not permit them to fade into invisibility but instead makes their call on our attention every bit as insistent as that of the strained torso. Both aspects feed back into our awareness of the challenges of posing in such a fashion. The anchorage they provide, and the stable restfulness of the body, can only be imperfectly achieved, and this imperfection demands that both work and viewer acknowledge the physical, extended activity of not simply posing like this, but inhabiting this pose for the duration required across sittings spanning over a year.

These bulging, non-sculptural feet mark the slippage from pose to repose, as well as insisting on the sense of repetition and return inherent in the latter. Unlike many of Freud's images, it is impossible to imagine that the standing figure is comfortable. The feet provide dual testimony to both the man's restlessness and his immobility. He has moved, but not much. These movements are sufficiently small to be constrained to a small section of canvas, and to small deviations in the (re)alignments of flesh. The model is not depicted in a moment of perfect stillness that the image replicates and perpetuates, but he himself must enact the perpetuation through an ongoing process of replication. He must have found a way to tolerate standing in this position, so must have relaxed (to some extent) into a variant on the position that is tolerable. In the act of composing his body, so, his awareness will have turned to himself, made of his own location and posture the *there* beneath the touch of his awareness. In the possibility of tolerating his position, this touch is freed to turn elsewhere, to allow the body, however briefly, to sink back beneath the act of touching, and allow a different *there* to rest under the touch itself. Completing (and restarting) the cycle, the shifting and strain of the challenging stillness will have recalled the figure to himself, to return to his body as the other, as held for the other, and in accordance with the demands of the other than engage with it as an object to be touched and seen. Thus finding himself again, the pose is corrected, actively maintained, until it can once again slide back into the absence of a here that can lose itself behind a flow of touch that moves beyond it.

### **2.2d – Large Interior, Paddington (1968-9)**

Freud's sitters were required to sustain a prolonged, unnatural stillness, and in so sustaining it, were inevitably challenged to inhabit this stillness in as natural a way as possible. In creating work that engaged not simply with the product of this process but the process itself, Freud not only depicted the experience of the sitters, but also allowed certain of his paintings to turn back to reflect the creator's side of the process. As the next chapter will explore further, much of this becomes evident in his self-portraits. *Interior with Hand-Mirror (Self Portrait)* (1967), for example, utilises the contrasting space between the background and the hand mirror to demonstrate the similarly cramped necessity of holding oneself still within an environment for the sole purposes of looking and being looked at. In *Large Interior, Paddington* (1968-9), there is a partial inversion of this dynamic. The majority of Freud's work seems to proceed, fairly

unproblematically, from an inconspicuous and unremarkable vantage point. Accounts of how Francis Bacon was required to sit ‘knee-to-knee’ with Freud indicate a self-imposed requirement on Freud’s part to maintain a parallel stillness to that of his model.<sup>160</sup> However, in accounts by later sitters, this changed, and Freud recognised the shift towards a different attitude of looking:

In the beginning, I often sat very close, and we were both very still. Then, when I loosened up my brush strokes, I think that was when I started to move around more. I find now if I take too fixed a position, I lose the person, if you know what I mean. The painting will begin to flatten. I feel a need to see as much of the subject as I can, sometimes from different angles. A portrait isn’t just a flat image. It is a person. It needs to have dimensions.<sup>161</sup>

In *Large Interior, Paddington*, this motion does not simply facilitate the creation of the image, but is depicted within it.

The image is strange and disorienting. Its composition seems distorted by errors in perspective, yet the errors seem too fundamental to be mere error. The bold, geometrically precise, parallelogram of white skirting establishes the lines and planes of

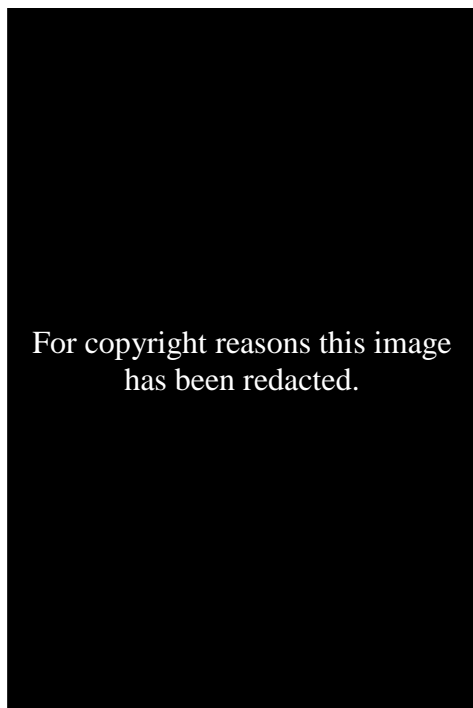


Figure 2.10 – Lucian Freud, *Large Interior, Paddington* (1968-9)

the image. Similarly, the lines of the walls rising up to the ceiling and across from the corner seem initially to lie parallel to the framing axes of the canvas. Yet, moving towards the right of the image, the new line of the skirting, while initially reasonably parallel to the lines of the first white block, warps and bends, veering away from the rigid lines and opening out again, the shadows suggesting a curve, a space bending away again from the eye perceiving it. This distortion occurs behind the plant pot, which itself sits jarringly against the composition. The roundness of the circle at its top suggests a downward-looking vision, an

angle that the image cannot reconcile with the walls in the top left. Next to the pot lies the child, a strange body that seems both small and over-sized, and that finds itself contorted into an impossible angle where the torso joins the legs. It is not an image at all

<sup>160</sup> Sebastian Smee, *Freud: Beholding the Animal* (Cologne: Taschen, 2009), p. 24.

<sup>161</sup> Auping, ‘Conversation’, p. 213.

replicable by the flicker of a simple camera shutter. The girl's posture is given as entire, as intact, yet could not have so existed within a single moment. At some point she must have turned, the gaze must have shifted.

The image collates multiple perspectives and enfolds them within a static image that makes only a token attempt to replicate a single moment of vision. Instead, the body depicted is shown in its presence to the one viewing it. The plant pot anchors the scene, but not in a way that stabilises it. Instead, it weighs down, pulling down a viewing that hovers above it. The stems of the plant warp and sink down into its darker depths, even as the floor also warps around it, almost rolling the girl down towards its centring act of gravity.

The painting plays on the excesses and limitations of the image. The girl presented is available to the viewer who imaginatively engages with Freud's image in a way that seems to demand movement. As viewers, we are invited to share not just the position of observer, but a role of mobile, extended observation. At the same time, however, the image is not cinematographic; it does not separate into individual, complete frames. On the contrary, the painting is suffused with the possibility that it can only ever be complete by being broken down. Freud's distorted, unsettling image forces a union of what is common across his time of observation and of what is disparate. We can see a girl by a pot, but we must also see a girl's torso at this angle, her legs at another; we can imaginatively assume a view down upon the plant pot that yields the depicted view of its upper surface, but must also assume a flatter, differently angled view that finds the girl where and as she lies. This unconcealed distortion challenges the viewer to acknowledge it, and makes the act of observation complicit in this manipulation of the relation between representation and that which is represented. Moreover, this necessity of mobile, extended engagement with the image works to reflect to the viewer his or her own participatory role as a self who touches, rather than an entity being touched.

As Barthes' account argued, posing offers oneself over as object for the other. In requiring this object to be held still while the subject painting the image is not only free but obligated to move, the non-equality of touch between subject and object infiltrates the relationship. Were this interior to be unpopulated, this relationship between subject and object would be a comparatively simplistic focus of the painting. The disorienting shifts in perspective would signal this division between the engaged subject who reaches out *there* towards its world, and the mere form, the body that does not discover

itself but is discovered there where reaching is concluded. The challenge in this painting, however, resides in the girl's perceived nature as straddling the easy division between living subject and corporeal, malleable body. Rather than there being only the artist who forges the image and the scene and the image that are yielded to the artist's manipulations, *Large Interior, Paddington* includes the presence of one who is not simply yielded by essential nature to the painter, but who must actively yield to the creative process. It is perhaps no coincidence that the strange relationship of the girl and the plant pot offers the central tension in the image. The girl, offered over to the artist's gaze, experiences the pull of the inanimate object she is at risk of seeming to become. It is only to the extent that we can interpret her presence as that of a living, touching self that her figure offers resistance to this pull.

This uneasy tripartite appears in a photograph of Freud working on *The Brigadier*, (2003-4).<sup>162</sup> The photograph divides into three entities: painter, painting and painted. By slightly lengthening the exposure, motion enters the image, but in adhering only to Freud himself, the divisions and relationships between these entities are established. The figure of Freud is blurred in the act of ascending (or descending) the rough steps that allow him to reach the higher sections of the canvas. The image itself remains stable, but is clearly unfinished, with its openness to future change thus signalled. Only the sitter remains wholly still, frozen into unity with the nature of a complete image (the photograph) even as our ability to interpret the scene allies him by nature to the mobile, living human who is the painter.

## 2.2e – Sue Tilley and Leigh Bowery

Freud's paintings enact the objectification of bodies even as the length of time of their creation (which Freud does not seek to exclude from his paintings) insists on the presence of the person who places and holds their body there. Freud's paintings are thus positioned along the problematic line between the easy dichotomy of body and mind or self. The realism for which his art is renowned is corporeal and fleshy, yet his work is also portraiture. Rather than render physical objects, his work concerns itself with people, with their living presence. His attitude to his paintings of horses captures something of this tension. He referred to these images, too, as forms of portraiture, while also explicitly relating his human subjects to a form of inherent animality. His

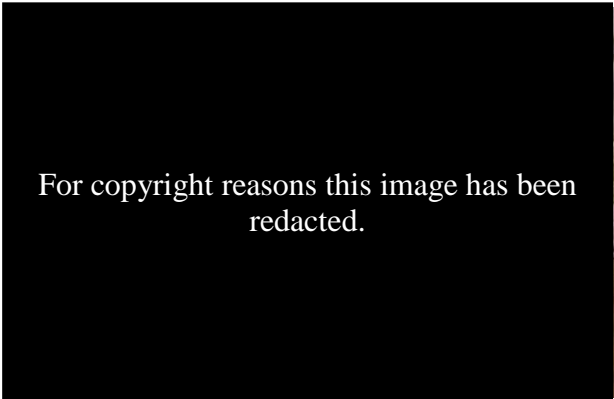
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<sup>162</sup> Bernard, Bruce and David Dawson, *Freud at Work* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006), p. 184.

focus remained on the body, but its mass is never presented as separable from the self with which it is unified. Freud's paintings depict people, but in each case the individual is, however transiently, glimpsed as matter. Freud's bodies, however, are not inert matter, matter at true physical rest, but bodies in repose, *people* resting and animating this matter through such individuated being within an environment.

This study of repose permits a greater study of flesh. There is, in Freud's work, a sensitivity to the way in which flesh conforms to the environment, to the way in which matter meets, yields to and resists matter. We see this most viscerally in paintings of Freud's two fleshiest sitters, Sue Tilley and Leigh Bowery. Both are people, yet their abundance of matter insists we as viewers make due acknowledgement of their corporeal substance. In *Benefits Supervisor Sleeping*, Sue Tilley yields herself to sleep, and her body yields itself to physical conformity within its material environment. The arm follows the contours of the back of the sagging couch; the hand follows the curve of the breast that presses it between flesh and fabric; the foot, pushing against the environment, insinuates itself into a gap this insinuation opens up in the sofa, in the world. The flesh of the immobile body folds and pushes against itself, following the material pull of gravity into the downwards arc, pushed up in places against and by the push of other flesh, as where the curve of the knee forces a new configuration. The body lies in position, not animated by movement, and reveals its own corporeality.

Tilley's sleep marks one end of a spectrum of repose in Freud's works. Leigh Bowery, while similar to Tilley in the physical monumentality of his flesh, marks the other. Tilley's sleeping body achieves a self-abandonment to a form of repose that most closely approximates a purely physical distribution of flesh; in contrast, Bowery's presence among Freud's paintings comes close to more commonplace ideas of posing. Bowery was a physical performer, and as such was used both to holding physically demanding postures and to arranging and inhabiting his body in accordance with how it was intended to be seen. To some extent, his performance relied on how his body could be dis-posed of to serve artistic and visual aims. For Freud, this relationship Bowery



For copyright reasons this image has been redacted.

Figure 2.11 – Lucian Freud, *Benefits Supervisor Sleeping* (1995)

had with his body was not only exceptional but illustrative of the relationships Freud's acts of painting established with the bodies depicted:

Obviously I'm very aware that I'm using people to make pictures with. But I realised that the fact that he was a performer meant that whatever he did, he was still in a sense performing, because of his physical awareness, which was extraordinary. [...] I'd obviously never met anyone remotely like that. But I was very aware of *his* awareness of being an instrument. So it gave me a lot of scope: what degree to pose him, to let him relax, and so on.<sup>163</sup>

Freud's painting process was always performed in service of the creation of a static image of a certain aesthetic value; whatever touches were carried out during the studio sittings, the painting released at the end of the process was the concrete trace of these visual and conceptual touches. However, Freud's reaction to Bowery was not simply a response to his functional ability to hold a demanding pose, and thus his value did not lie purely in his ability to subordinate his body to the demands of the creation of something separate and other. His presence in Freud's studio did not merely inspire Freud's awareness of the instrumentality of the bodies reposing before him. As these interview comments suggest, part of what seems to have made him a compelling study for Freud was his (Bowery's) own awareness of such instrumentality.

Phoebe Hogan describes Bowery as inherently sculptural. 'Freud had once said that sculpture was his first love,' she writes, 'and he owned a copy of Rodin's *Balzac* [...]. Bowery's form naturally lent itself to a sculptural approach, and Freud energetically exploited the potential of both his huge figure and his ability to maintain contorted poses.'<sup>164</sup> As discussed above, Freud's own attempts at being sculptural required the complicit artifice of the camera to succeed. Hogan's account of Bowery's role, however, can only present half of the equation. The sculpture renders a body as complete, and freezes a moment of its presence in time. The painting, for the most part, does the same. Creating both sculptures and paintings is a temporally extended process that results in an object that instead is stable over time. However, although the distinction is at best a generalisation, there is a sense in which the painting may be interpreted as a representation of how something is *seen* while the sculpture may be seen as representing how something *is*. Realist sculpture, for example, has a potential absent from painting of creating a replica of a body that matches its physical dimensions. Of course, this distinction is problematic, but particularly in such sculpture

<sup>163</sup> Smee, 'Conversation with Lucian Freud', pp. 34-35.

<sup>164</sup> Phoebe Hogan, *Lucian Freud: Eyes Wide Open* (New York: New Harvest, 2014), p. 121.



the translation of a three-dimensional body to a three-dimensional object is intuitively different from the translation of a body into a two-dimensional image. Regarding Bowery not only as suitable for sculpture but as inherently sculptural seems to have already begun a process of translation in which Bowery has already been assimilated into the temporal freezing of a momentary form. In consequence, on such an account the self who holds himself still, who poses and reposes, risks slipping from view.

In *Leigh under the Skylight* (1994) he poses standing on a table. Despite the concentration and physical discipline required to stand in a fixed position for such a

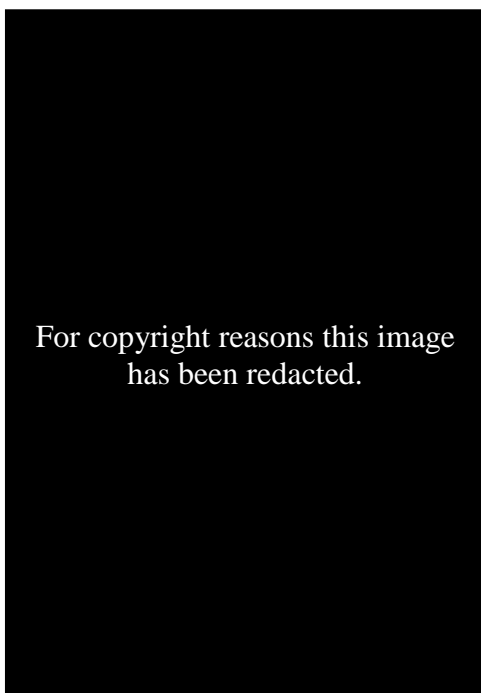


Figure 2.12 – Bruce Bernard, *Leigh Bowery posing for Leigh Under the Skylight*, 1994 (1994)

duration, Bowery's pose appears so effortless as to seem almost light-hearted. The result is an image that plays with the convention of posing in art.

Bowery appears traditionally statuesque, more nude than naked. As Hogan remarks, '[a]lthough his ankles are delicately crossed, his huge body is torqued in a pose that recalls Rodin.'<sup>165</sup> However, an element of portraiture, of personality, creeps in almost surreptitiously. Such reference to existing art underscores the element of performance at play. The portrait is of a body composing itself into posing, a body inhabited in such a way that it not only poses fleetingly for an enduring image,

but occupies for this prolonged duration a pose for the vision of the other, to be captured and to

endure. Such duality is a recurring aspect of Freud's artistic collaboration with Bowery, an interaction in which performance balanced against personality, and captured the element of performance within portraiture.

With Bowery, Freud was making an image of someone who consciously lent his body to be seen and to be imaged. He could therefore create images not of a pose but of posing, and create an object from a body that was already known to its subject through its ability to be objectified. Hoban remarks that although in Bowery's performance work he was often adorned with extravagant costume, piercings and jewellery, in Freud's

<sup>165</sup> Hogan, *Eyes Wide Open*, p. 122.

studio Bowery was utterly naked. ‘He wore no makeup,’ she writes, ‘and he shaved himself from head to foot, to afford the artist even fuller exposure.’<sup>166</sup> The stripping away of clothes was not a simple move to nakedness, not a deprivation or opening to fuller vulnerability. He was neither naked, nor the idealised nude, but a figure aware of the theatricality of the blurred edges of both. The act of shaving testifies to this, indicating a controlled exposure of the body that was more than a man without his clothes, and instead a man offering over his body in service of both vision and image-creation. Freud’s account of Bowery describes him as ‘very aware, very relaxed, and very encouraging in the way that physical presence can be. His feelings about clothes extend to his physiognomy even, so that the way he edits his body is amazingly aware and amazingly abandoned.’<sup>167</sup> The tension between awareness and abandonment characterises Freud’s oeuvre, applicable to all his sitters conscious of the act of being painted, yet lapsing into the abandonment (or at least resignation) that accompanied the sheer duration of the sitting. Where Bowery is distinctive, however, is in not simply being aware of being seen, but in his greater, professional awareness of *how* he is seen and how he can moderate it.

This play in the image is foregrounded in Bruce Bernard’s studio photograph taken near the end of the painting process (fig. 2.12). Despite demonstrating the swollen proportions of Freud’s painting, it is the human who becomes less real. Bowden instead is dwarfed and pushed back into the corner. The framing of the image works to place the floor at the painting’s feet, with the human lifted, removed from a ground of activity or engagement. He is dislocated from the scene and placed on an artistic pedestal, while at the same time his reduction in comparative size sets him up almost as a miniature statue or trophy. The positioning of the photograph also places the painted image in the approximate line of sight of the human figure. As a result, there is a lingering impression that Bowery is imitating the work, looking to it to guide the arrangement of his body. Even in works by Freud that capture the natural (re)pose of a person, and the accompanying natural distribution of their mass, the demands of sitting and re-sitting for the painting requires the modelling of one’s person in accordance with the image being created, and thus in accordance both with the past in which it began and with the future to which it is directed.

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<sup>166</sup> Hogan, *Eyes Wide Open*, pp. 121-2.

<sup>167</sup> Lucian Freud, qtd. in Hogan, *Eyes Wide Open*, p. 122.

The portrait of Tilley suggests that the sitter is sleeping. While we might suppose her to have spent much of her time in the studio asleep, we certainly cannot assume that she was fully asleep for all moments in the creation of the image. The stillness of her sleep and the absolute stillness of the final image are complicit in a form of en-corpse-ing of her body, in which it seems to yield to a more purely physical distribution of mass. However, even in this image, Tilley's presence-to-self cannot be assumed to have fully yielded to become only presence-to-the-other. This is not a photograph of someone asleep, but a painting composed over a long series of sittings. While much of the image is a response to a sleeping form, it is simultaneously an image of someone returning again and again to a space in which she returns again and again to sleep, and, in turn, to wakefulness.

This repeating pattern of sleeping and wakefulness plays out alongside the overarching offering of one's body to the gaze of the other. What this establishes is a dissonant pattern of touch at work around the sitter's body. Discussing Lucian Freud's oeuvre, Jeffrey St. Clair categorises Freud the painter as a voyeur. He writes, 'Many of the figures are asleep, exposed, vulnerable. You can't help feeling that they have in some way become Freud's victims.'<sup>168</sup> However, while it would be naïve to deny the subtle presence of (or at least engagement with) such echoes of uneasy sexualisation in these images, I believe this slightly miscategorises the nature of the victimhood at work. That to which these figures are vulnerable is not presentation as a sexualised, or sexually available object, but a more basic presentation as object. They are subjected to being seen, being treated as visible and touchable, and are presented both in this potential of visibility and in its realisation, such that they are presented as seen, as touched.

Presenting them as victims inappropriately touched by the painter, St. Clair's emphasis speaks to some of the tensions emerging from the embodied selves with whom Freud makes contact. The emphasis on victimhood paints these people explicitly as selves rather than mere objects, but this vulnerability which affects the self arises from its capacity to be lost within a corporeality that overwhelms it. What is particularly problematic in St. Clair's account, however, is the negation of agency and self-presence that is connoted by victimhood. These bodies are open to Freud's touch, but the offering

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<sup>168</sup> Jeffrey St. Clair, 'Flesh and Its Discontents: The Paintings of Lucian Freud', in *Serpents in the Garden: Liaisons with Culture & Sex*, eds. Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair (Petrolia, CA: Counterpunch, 2004), pp. 177-185 (p. 181).

of these bodies is also an integral aspect of their presence before his gaze. Freud is not the voyeur who subsumes the self within the body against its will; he is a voyeur only because his sitters permit him to respond to their visual presence in this way. Rather than being candid, surreptitious photographs, these images arise from a process in which this offering of oneself to be objectified is accompanied by a new, shifting pattern of self-touch and self-presencing on the part of the sitter that engages with deeply fundamental aspects of embodied being.

These bodies rest *there* at the end of the gaze of the other. However, unlike Heidegger's example of the chair and the wall, while the painting created is inanimate the person being painted is not. The sitters are capable of being-there in a world which is constructed through their own touches, and as such are people who, like the painter, are not merely there where the other perceives them, but in some shadowy sense, also here at the intangible other side of their own touch on the world. His sitters may turn their attention to objects that rest *there* at the end of their gazes and in doing so exist in relation to their own *here* in that environment. So too, aware of their own subjugation to scrutiny, might they seek to turn their touch to their own physical form, and place this *there* under their own touch. What arises are multiple constructions of their own presence within the environment. That which is so compelling about Freud's depictions of body is the sense that in constructing these formulations of the body's thereness, there is a greater push towards engaging with what it means for it to be "here".

I can point at something and declare: "it is there". I can relate it to my own sense of my location, and to the location of another object. Accompanying and facilitating this is an intuitive awareness of my own hereness. Most basically, I might reason that I have to be present for things to be present to me; touching may not always in two directions, but it must at least occur between two points. Asking, "where am I?" or "where is here?" endeavours to place under the pole of touch that touches something *there*, rather than at the pole of *here* to which this response returns.

Self-awareness seems intuitive, and operates to some degree prior to the acts that intervene to affirm or explore it. Self-contact, however, always requires some act of self-exteriorising. Touch always issues outwards, and the self discovered under this touch cannot escape this outside-ness. Touching oneself must exteriorise oneself; the toucher must find himself not here-where-he-is but there-where-he-touches. He finds himself only there-where-he-is-touched, where the touch is completed, unable to encounter himself in the here from whence his touching is initiated. I exist as the dark side of each touch, somehow under it, but not in the same manner as that in which the table lies under my hand. I am instead inside the touch, but again in a manner than requires

adjustment to our understanding of interiority. This adjustment is at work in Nancy's reformulation as the body not as a solid object, nor as a hollow one. As he states in *Corpus*, his account of the body regards it as a skin; the whole body in this sense is

a skin, rather than bounded *by* skin. It is in a crucial way all surface, a malleable sinuous surface that shifts and fluctuates and folds and unfolds upon and across itself. To draw an analogy with the photograph, this skin has no underside. To offer a further analogy, it is like the shift from model A to model B in *Figure 2.13*. In A, it is that which is interior that is bounded and defined; in B, such definition belongs to the realm of touch and encounter that takes this definiteness and boundedness from its contact with the body. As such, the supposed interiority of the one touching, of the *here* the toucher occupies, is left to some extent amorphous and inaccessible, excluded from the realm of contact. That which is outside the self lies within and under touch.

In model B, that which is interior to the self gains its shaping from the pattern of contact established through this exteriorising touch. As such, that which structures who I am is that with which I engage. Touching on my own body (whether externally or through more intrusive or imaginary procedures) may attempt to engage with that which influences the manner of my daily existence but which may be either unknown or simply assumed. This account of exteriority is not, for example, an attempt to deny the shaping influence of physical factors, whether they be obvious (height, body shape, sensory ability) or concealed, subtle and unknown (hormones, lung capacity, the early stirrings of illness). Instead, its contention is that the process of exploring or

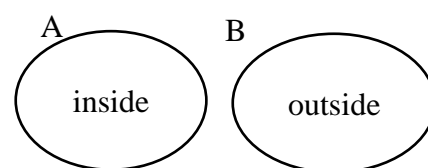


Figure 2.13 – Original Diagram

acknowledging these influences requires them to fall under the touch of attention that places them as the *there* or *that* that is touched by the untouched *here*. This remains the case even as these factors we find *there* still influence the manner in which we find and respond to them.

All touches on the body must come from outside, and by posing before the painter, this external touch upon the body is sustained. In holding the required pose, the sitters are forced to engage with this outside of the body. Always visualised, they can imagine this visualisation, mapping their experience being in that environment onto the other's simultaneous experience of perceiving them. In addition, this process of directing attention towards the physical configuration of the body intervenes in a more immersive form of engaged being-there in a world. Rather than the body slipping discretely into the invisibility that facilitates the touch on the hammer, the computer, the person one converses with, the body that disappears behind touch reappears at the other end of it. Of course, typically one cannot devote hours to a sole focus on the body's lines and limits. The bodies that find the sustainable poses in which to repose are ones that have found a way to temporarily absent themselves from the act of constant bodily self-maintenance. Tilley who slips into sleep, the reclining women who are left to their silent reflections, the physically constrained sitters who nonetheless sustain conversation with the artist, are all permitted to direct the touch of their attention to other ideas or objects they encounter. Across the same interval, this attention will, of course, re-enact further returns to the body. The itch that calls to be scratched, the cramp or soreness that offers its testimony to unnatural stillness, the instability of balance, or a basic desire to reengage with a wider environment; these all place the body back under one's touch, and interrupt this tenuous absence with presence.

Tilley's sleeping portrait offers the simplest example of this. It formulates such absence not in the touch beyond the body behind which one's sense of hereness resides intangible and unobserved, but as a more intrinsic absence of any such touch. Asleep, Tilley rests *there* where the other's touch finds her, but she *is* not there, is not engaged in the world constructed through these engagements. Such relationships between sleep, absence and presence are fundamental to understanding the relationship between a body and repose.

## 2.2f – Sleep, Repose and Rocking

In *Corpus*, Jean-Luc Nancy's formulation of the body as skin, and of the body as ex-peased, challenges our tendency to treat the body as a bounded entity with the skin marking the limit, and the body consisting of what lies inside these limits. In his short text, *The Fall of Sleep*, Nancy again places this idea of interiority under scrutiny by associating it with intangible absence rather than accessible presence.

By falling asleep, I fall inside myself: from my exhaustion, from my boredom, from my exhausted pleasure or from my exhausting pain. I fall inside my own satiety as well as my own vacuity: I myself become the abyss and the plunge, the density of deep water and the descent of the drowned body sinking backward. I fall to where I am no longer separated from the world by a demarcation that still belongs to me all through my waking state and that I myself am, just as I am my skin and all my sense organs. I pass that line of distinction, I slip entire into the innermost and outermost part of myself, erasing the distinction between these two putative regions.

I sleep, and this *I* that sleeps can no more say it sleeps that it could say that it is dead.<sup>169</sup>

Again, this passage formulates the self, the thing 'that I myself am' as skin and sensing, as the demarcating that is the line of contact I have with the world that thus marks my division from (or within) it. As such, although this extract begins by capturing an intuitive interiority of sleep, its sense of falling away and withdrawing inwards from those boundaries of contact against the world, such interiority is itself exposed to scrutiny. The *I* that thus withdraws withdraws with it the presencing of sense that sustains the boundary of the self against the world. The *I* is no longer separate from the world, and it is from this separation that our notion of the body's interiority is derived. Interiority must lie beneath the contact that marks the outside, and without such touching this idea of the inside is unsustainable. Asleep, the contact on the world dissolves, and one becomes an entirety or wholeness of being. Yet this is not a being-there that can touch, that can enact any form of exteriority.

'I' is itself a bounding, an edging, and these distinctions dissolve in sleep:

I now belong only to myself, having fallen into myself and mingled with that night where everything becomes indistinct to me *but more than anything myself*. I mean: everything becomes more than anything myself, everything is reabsorbed into me without allowing me to distinguish me from anything. But I also mean: more than anything, I myself become indistinct. I no longer properly distinguish myself from the world or from others, from my own body or from my mind, either.

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<sup>169</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), p. 5.

[...]

I fall asleep, that is to say, “I” fall, “I” no longer exist, or else “I” “exist” only in that effacement of my own distinction. In my own eyes, which no longer look at anything, which are turned towards themselves and toward the black spot inside them, “I” no longer distinguish “myself.”<sup>170</sup>

To return to the terms of the first chapter, here, the sleeping self loses the distinctions that permit plurality, and in doing so cannot sustain its singularity. In this later text, Nancy’s account of sleep posits this strange form of existence that undoes all the divisions that structure the world and which at the same time structure the self. ‘The sleeping self is the self of the thing in itself: a self that cannot even distinguish *itself* from what is not “self,” a self without self, in a way, but that finds or touches in this being-without-self its most genuine autonomous existence.’<sup>171</sup>

The sleeper is formed in the negatives of absence: ‘Not there, not now, not here, not thus.’<sup>172</sup> Tilley’s image offers us a sleeper who is wholly surrendered to the touch of the other that finds her there; asleep, she engages in no touches of her own that work to construct a world around her. Asleep, she is only there where the other finds her, not there where she engages a world. As such, her image offers a strange layering of absence and presence. Nancy writes, ‘I fall asleep and at the same time I vanish as “I.”’<sup>173</sup> However, in surrendering key elements of her being-there, Tilley’s sleep might offer some insight into the nature of her presence beneath this absence of engagement. If she is not *there*, and if no touches reach out to return to her *here*, the sleeping body takes on an unfamiliar existence, one which inevitably cannot be touched by one who is awake, and with it a different formulation of the self’s hereness. As Nancy argues:

It [sleeping existence] is that which essentially comes undone, detaches itself and releases itself even from any relation with its own detachment. The thing in itself knows nothing about other things, and everything that appears to it or makes itself felt to it comes only from itself, comes to it in self from self, without any distance to travel, without any performance to present.

There is no representation, there is barely presentation, barely presence. The presence of the sleeper is the presence of an absence, the thing in itself is a thing of no-thing.<sup>174</sup>

Nancy’s account formulates sleep not as the absence of presence but as the presence of an absence. By doing so, his account of sleep offers a figure capable of relating to the

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<sup>170</sup> Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, p. 7. (Emphasis added.)

<sup>171</sup> Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, p. 15.

<sup>172</sup> Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, p. 43.

<sup>173</sup> Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, p. 11.

<sup>174</sup> Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, p. 15.



search in this thesis for the body that is here during its own effacement as it presences the *there* of its touch.

Integral to Nancy's account is this impossibility of contact with the state in which contact is dissolved. I can wake and know that I have slept; I can also, Nancy observes, experience something of the ephemeral fall into sleep that precedes it. What I cannot do is find myself sleeping, just as I cannot touch that which is actively touching, for what I seek is the underside of touching, not the object touched. In the following passage, Nancy links the sleeping state, dark and empty of touch, with night. What is particularly revealing about this passage is the precise imprecision of how night is described.

For night – through a major difference from day – is no more external than it is internal. Day is wholly outside; day is before our eyes, at the tip of our hands and feet, on our tongue, and in the porches of our ears. Night identifies outside with inside; the eye sees in it the underside of things, the back of the eyelids, the invisible layer of the other side of things, the underpinnings, crypts, skins turned inside out. It is the world of *substance*, that which exists underneath and itself exists on nothing else.<sup>175</sup>

This passage reaffirms this aspect of hereness as the underside of experience. It is a substance that can never be touched: it is intangible, 'invisible' and inaccessible. More than this, however, is the refusal to demarcate this night as fully inside. Day here functions as normal being; everything rests as and where we touch it. It is the normal passage of ourselves to the exteriority we rest against, and, Nancy observes, day is 'wholly outside'. We do not get the same, though inverse, claim for night: it is not wholly inside, even as it exists underneath. The difference is the fundamental challenge of access to this sense of hereness that this thesis seeks. We are told that night *identifies* outside with inside, that the eye *sees* it in the backs of the eyelids. Nancy's precision here articulates the necessity of approaching this intangible, inaccessible inside with the identifications and analogies we find on the outside.

### 2.2fi – *Rocking*

We approach from the outside, and return to the outside. Nancy's account is not one of sleep, but of the titular *fall* of sleep. It is an account of transition, where this dissolving interiority underneath presence, an interiority that is inherently a form of absence, is something that is approached and then returned from. 'I sleep,' it is quoted above, 'and

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<sup>175</sup> Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, p. 23.

this *I* that sleeps can no more say it sleeps that it could say that it is dead.’ Later in the text this figure of death returns:

Like death, sleep, and like sleep, death – but without awakening. Without a rhythm of return, without repetition, without a new day, without tomorrow.

Like death, sleep, for the body stretches out along there, is alone there outstretched. Outstretched along there, *there*, a here like nowhere. Nowhere else but a weighty body cast down, laid out, left on the ground. Like sleep, death: body deposited.<sup>176</sup>

Death is the ultimate interior absence; the corpse is the final figure of the sleeper’s inability to distinguish his- or herself from anything else. Such interior absence is never resolved, and its presence exists only at the end of the gaze of the other. Death is the absence we encounter when we are incapable of encounter. In contrast, we wake from sleep. In doing so, we discover this absence in the shift of the world, the slippage of time, that allow us to reconstruct an interval during and from which we were absent.

This thesis is a search for a body that is not only constantly in its own motion, but which also constantly eludes of our touch upon it. The emphasis I have placed on repose rather than pose is a response to this fundamental mobility of the body. That which is compelling about Nancy’s formulation of sleep is not merely its discussion of interiority, exteriority and absence, but its refusal to associate sleep with stasis, and instead to discuss it in relation to the fundamental figure of rocking. In its simplest manifestation, rocking is a facilitation of the fall of sleep. Rocking is the cradling of the infant that allows the absence of sleep to infiltrate and suffuse its presence. ‘But whatever one’s age,’ Nancy writes, ‘no one enters sleep without some sort of lullaby. No one can do without being led along by a cadence of absence that penetrates presence [...] Rocking movements put us to sleep because sleep in its essence is itself a rocking, not a stable, motionless state.’<sup>177</sup> In this figure of rocking is the motion-in-rest that I have attributed to repose. Repose is not absolute rest but a stillness sustained by repeated maintenance that returns, and returns again, to hold the body there where it finds itself after slipping into and emerging from absence.

Nancy’s emphasis on this mobile state of sleep allows it to speak to a more fundamental structure of the world. It is ‘a cadence one does not even perceive, since it is precisely the cadence of absence that penetrates presence.’<sup>178</sup> As such, it offers a

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<sup>176</sup> Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, p. 41.

<sup>177</sup> Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, p. 30.

<sup>178</sup> Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, p. 30.

broader understanding of absence than merely that in which we rest in our beds at night.

Nancy continues:

Rocking is a matter of high and low and of right and left, of the great symmetries, asymmetries, and alternations that govern crystals, tides, seasons, the cycles of planets and their satellites, exchanges of oxygen and carbon dioxide, captures and releases, assimilations and evacuations, nervous systems, attractions and repulsions between metals, between fauna and flora, between sexes, between stellar masses, black holes, quarks, and infinitesimal jets of dust... It is a matter, to conclude or rather to begin, of the initial beat between something and nothing, between the world and the void, which also means between the world and itself.

It is a matter of the space in between, without which no reality can take place and without which, accordingly, no reality is real without a connection to some other relation from which it is separated by the interval that distinguishes them and that links them to each other according to the very pulsation of their common nonorigin – since in fact nothing makes or marks origin, nothing but the spacing and balancing of *nihil* among things, beings, substances or subjects, positions, places times. Nothing but the swaying of the world makes the cradle or rather cradling within which everything awakens – awakening to sleep as well as to waking, awakening to self as well as to throbbing and rocking in general.

This account builds on the description of “between” which figures in *Being Singular Plural* and which is discussed in my first chapter. “Between” is the intangible that is integral to touch; it is the division that cannot be touched itself, but which spaces a world into discrete objects that can be discovered, or discover each other, through the contact that occurs across this facilitating between.

As discussed above, Nancy’s account of sleep engages with the complexities of interiority and exteriority that suffuse our understanding of the deictic ‘here’ and ‘I’ on which we call so often. Surrounding this absence of, or within, sleep, however, is the broader action of rocking which is integral to our ability to approach this hereness. For Nancy, it is the motion of sleep and awakening, the motion in which we are cradled by the world. Building from this, I would suggest rocking offers the figure of the motion of our immersion in the world, our way of being-*there* in it, approaching it, and, crucially, the motion of our approach towards the ‘I’ and the ‘here’ that, however intangible, remain integral to our touching on the world beyond us.

The question of the body returns me, again and again, to the question of approaching it. To return to the question, *are we nearly here, yet?*, there are two ways to interpret the relationship between body and approach in which it is bound up. This thesis has been dedicated to approaching the body, and takes its current form from an ultimate failure to fully do so. Part of this failure rests on the more simplistic division of

body and self, and on the slightly more complex division of corporeal, inert body and lived body, or body as living presence. To engage with the world *as* entities rather than as undifferentiated existence, Nancy divides this into singular-pluralities, into *bodies*, entities that exist only in their divisions from other entities or bodies. Bodies, then, are always that which are approached by our touches, visual or tactile. However, in engaging with the world, I do so as an embodied aspect of it, and it is through my body that I approach. Approaching and touching comprise presence. That from which these touches flow lies thus behind presence, not present itself, and therefore folds back into a strange form of non-presence.

In the arc of this chapter's approach to the body, it must be emphatically stated that rocking does not feature in this discussion as the movement that carries us towards a touch on the body. Rocking is not a motion towards and away from the body, just as it is also not a motion to and from the world. All rocking is a movement not from presence to absence or absence to presence, but always from presence to presence. To return to Nancy's original terms, one does not, I would argue, rock from sleep to wakefulness and back. This is not because of a confusion of original motion and directionality; it is not simply a resistance to the confusion of whether one first rocked from sleep to wakefulness or vice versa. Even if this uncertainty is not without value, this offers a misleading interpretation of the fundamental motion of rocking in and of itself. Rocking always moves towards, never away. On the sine wave that rocks and oscillates around its centre, we cannot regard the sections where it arcs through the negative region of the graph as a movement through absence. All motion, all approach, occurs amongst presence. Absence is not an area of the movement of rocking, but the points at the ends of each motion where it both stills and renews its motion.

The swing of the pendulum and the curve of the sine wave are bounded by their outer limits, yet consist not of these but of the movements in between. These limits are approached almost asymptotically. Even if the sine wave can be described as touching on its outer limits, it cannot be described as remaining there. Instead, the curve approaches ever closer to its limit, to its own nullification as curve, yet in the instant of reaching this limit it is already moving away again. Rocking, too, is the motion of breathing. I can be aware of breathing in and aware of breathing out; however, even as I note the switch from one to the other, I can never quite identify or experience the transition between the two. I catch myself exhaling just after the motion has begun. When I find myself performing those motions they are always already just begun. In

this motion is the approach to sleep and the exit from sleep; in this motion also is the movement towards the lived body that always fails to fully get it within its grasp.

The rocking motion is a constant motion of approach that can never rest at its destination but arrives only to turn away. In this frustration is the challenge of this thesis. *Are we nearly here yet?* The answer is yes, but at the same time, the sentiment behind the question will always meet with disappointment. We are always near the hereness of the body, and what it means for me to be here shapes every variant of my engagement with the world that I make as a being-there, just as the pendulum and sine wave take their shape from this limit.

In their states of repose, Freud's sitters engage in their own relationships to this rocking motion of presence. The necessity of sustained occupation of their poses clears space for them to slip away from a self-conscious awareness of the external, corporeal form of their bodies. Thus released, they can inhabit their surroundings such that their hereness can reside underneath and facilitate their engagements with the world beyond their bodily limits. In these moments, their bodies and their explicit sense of self may be effaced by engaged life. Across this, however, stands the reminder of the stasis and visibility of their body that may always return their touch to themselves. Their bodies must hold position, and the gaze of the other bears witness to it. Inevitably, they must return to and renew their pose; just as inevitably, their focus will again recede from it. Repose thus enacts this rocking motion of absence and presence that Nancy depicts as the more general swaying motion of the world. That which is compelling about Freud's creative process is its more explicit engagement with this motion. Rocking is a movement of presence and absence, but in the repose of his sitters is the possibility for this motion to enter into presence. Even if the elusive absences at its outer limits cannot be known, this enacting of repose raises the possibility of making known the movements that approach it.

### **Ch3 – In Van Gogh’s Shoes**

The previous chapter concluded with people, who, posing for painted images, found themselves in a suspended moment of repose in which they could fluctuate between an awareness of being-imaged (in accordance with the visual and material presence of a fixed posture and corporeal relationship to their environment), and a freedom to direct their attention away from their selves and their bodies. In this rocking oscillation was a figure of return to self-presence, to a point of intersection (nearly tangible but fleeting) at which their existence as material bodies to be touched could be approached by their capacity to touch on others, and on their selves as others.

This chapter initially enacts a shift from the primarily first-hand experience of seeing and touching a world to continue to consider this visibility of one to the other. Bodies reach always outside themselves to touch on others, and, in turn, are exposed along their surfaces, exposed always on an outside for the variable touches of the other. This chapter thus begins by considering the offering of a body over to the other, but does so in order to establish a foundation from which to explore the duality of touch when the one to which the body is offered is oneself as toucher.

This chapter begins (and ends), however, with a return to medical discourse; more specifically, it begins at a point of desired convergence between personal experience of the particularity of the individual body and the language and ways of understanding it offered by culture and medical discourse.<sup>179</sup> The opening section continues the focus on Tourette’s Syndrome in the previous chapter. Building on the first-hand account of TS offered by Nick van Bloss, the focus here moves to a more scientifically-framed study of the condition conducted by Andrew Buckser. This study concerns itself not with the biological or neurological substrates or effects of TS, but instead with how it is perceived, and how these perceptions are managed by its sufferers. What this section works to demonstrate is a form of self-perception that is sensitive both to the abnormal level of visibility of the bodies of Tourettics, and to how this can be understood and managed through an ordering of and relation to space that is

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<sup>179</sup> As stated in my introduction, anatomical discourse plays a dominant role in shaping our concept of the body each of us inhabits. The body described by anatomy is generalised, yet the operation of medicine is motivated by a repeated need to relate this to the individuality of each patient, each body, that presents itself for treatment or study. In turn, it should be noted, such study and treatment of the individual feeds back into the development of the general concept of the body that is central to the practice.

patterned by the lines of visible touch. This self-perception establishes a touch of self-awareness that this chapter then pursues into the self-portrait.

### **3.1 – Tourette’s Syndrome: Spaces of Invisibility**

Andrew Buckser’s account of TS works to frame the disorder semantically. Although Nick van Bloss’s account vividly demonstrates a range of the more personal, subjective experiences and challenges that colour the Tourettic’s experience, Buckser’s account of TS focuses on the exposure of the Tourettic to an external perspective. Whereas my earlier discussion of Van Bloss focused primarily on his mode of experiencing the world around him, the most recognisable symptoms of TS, physical and vocal tics, are ones that radically alter how its sufferers are experienced and perceived by others.

As Buckser emphasises, part of any disorder or illness is the way culture understands it and relates to those affected.<sup>180</sup> As such, illness is attended by challenges beyond their immediate effect on the one afflicted. A key aspect of this, he argues, is ultimately a semantic challenge, as the abstract terms we employ to describe symptoms ‘never adequately capture bodily experience’ or ‘fully express the complex and intimately personal physical experience of disease’.<sup>181</sup> The unresolvable challenge of communicating this to the doctors who then diagnose and treat the problem thus establishes a ‘gulf’ between patient and caregiver that can never be wholly crossed. Beyond this, however, the semantic dimension of symptoms manifest in a body extends to further challenges in how we as a culture respond to certain illnesses. Some may be familiar, and symptoms such as coughs and sneezes (to offer trivial examples) offer no challenge to our common understanding of the body. However, Buckser writes:

Cultural classification of illness is often a difficult process, with stubborn physical symptoms and stubborn cultural categories sometimes resisting easy articulation and integration.

Where that articulation is especially difficult, it can produce a dysfunction of its own, a difficulty that grows not out of the disease process itself, but out of the classificatory dilemma which that process creates in a particular cultural context. Just as certain objects can pose categorical problems in certain cultural systems [...], so too certain symptoms can clash distinctively

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<sup>180</sup> Andrew Buckser, ‘The Empty Gesture: Tourette Syndrome and the Semantic Dimension of Illness’, *Ethnology*, 45.4 (2006), 255-74 (p. 256).

Buckser’s prioritising of the semantic dimension of Tourette’s Syndrome builds on the understanding that ‘illnesses are culturally constructed from symptoms of disease processes which can be classified into many different syndromes. Cultures do this by relating symptoms to understandings of the body, of morality, and of social difference.’

<sup>181</sup> Buckser, ‘The Empty Gesture’, p. 257.

with particular cultural understandings of body and illness. [...] The failure of the illness to fit within the categories of this culture produces a disorder all its own, a stigma that can inhibit both medical treatment and social relationships [...].<sup>182</sup>

Buckser uses these considerations to offer a discussion of Tourette's Syndrome that focuses on how its symptoms often fall into conflict with the cultural modes that receive and interpret them.

One of the challenges inherent in TS is its uneasy, shifting, and ambiguous place within everyday understanding of the controlled or uncontrolled body. The stranger we encounter who demonstrates a violent array of unusual and often seemingly alarming tics or vocalisations risks interpretation as threatening, contemptible or pitiable; he or she appears to lack control over their body in a culture where such bodily and self-control is an integral element of our understanding of personhood. In contrast, the Tourettic who, as with one of the participants in Buckser's study, finds himself compelled to vocalise racist epithets at a memorial service for Martin Luther King Jr. may find himself receiving condemnation according to a schema in which he had sufficient control over his actions to be held ethically accountable for them.<sup>183</sup>

Buckser's account poses this semantic challenge as a fundamental aspect of life with TS, and, moreover, as one of the biggest burdens for those afflicted by it:

Tourette does not shorten life, limit mobility, or impair cognitive or emotional function. It does, however, impose a constant problem of self-presentation, a need to manage the confusing and misleading impressions that tics make on other people. While the genesis of TS is neurological, its most important symptom is semantic, the ongoing need to attach meaning to what are quite literally empty gestures.<sup>184</sup>

Part of the need for this is the inherent visibility of the condition, or, at least, of certain of its symptoms. Of course, for those affected by select other conditions, invisible symptoms present their own challenges for sufferers; unless an illness visibly fits into cultural modes of recognising and interpreting it, the response of people around them may fail to adequately understand or respond to their illness. In contrast, however, tics may not only be highly visible, but a central challenge of TS arises from the way in which it changes the visibility of those afflicted.

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<sup>182</sup> Buckser, 'The Empty Gesture', p. 257.

<sup>183</sup> See Buckser, 'Before Your Very Eyes', p. 179.

<sup>184</sup> Buckser, 'The Empty Gesture', p. 256.



The “normal” body is typically unobtrusive. In any public space, the people who stand out as distinctive do so in their deviations from this norm. Van Bloss’s account emphasised the visibility of his own body to himself, with its tics manifesting as repeated interruptions that return his awareness to the regions of his body in which they manifest. Buckser’s account details a more external visibility, that of the TS sufferer’s heightened visibility to others. His account also describes strategies employed by many of these people to lessen such obtrusiveness, but in so doing, returns focus to the question of the atypical self-visibility of the TS sufferer.

Bucker’s account gives several examples of how the perception of tics can be managed, detailing strategies of displacement, misattribution and contextualization. The latter, ‘putting tics in a discourse’, seeks to control how, rather than whether, tics are seen. If such tics must remain visible, then the Tourettic may explain their presence to the person witnessing them in order to communicate the semantic emptiness of the gesture.<sup>185</sup> In contrast, the other two strategies modulate the visibility of the tics themselves. Misattribution works not by concealing the movement, but by hiding it in plain sight such that its commonality diminishes its visibility to the point where, although still potentially visible, it is unlikely to register strongly in people’s perception.<sup>186</sup> Perhaps the most unexpected strategy, however, is displacement. That some tics may be, and are, concealed is not in itself surprising, but the accounts of some of Buckser’s interviewees detail a level of success that challenges our assumptions about our normal level of immersion in the complex and densely populated environments around us.

Most basically, displacement involves putting tics out of sight. This operates against the over-simplified narrative that assumes all tics are uncontrollable:

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<sup>185</sup> Buckser, ‘Before Your Very Eyes’, p. 179.

<sup>186</sup> Buckser’s research suggests that many of the participants in his study used misattribution to irritation as a core strategy:

Rubbing the eyes at the same time, however, or pulling on the lid, can transform a blink to a symptom of allergy, weariness, or visual difficulty, symptoms easily understood and dismissed by observers. [...] Covered by a pretended sneeze or noseblow, a nose twitch becomes a cold symptom. Combined with a wave of the hand, a head jerk becomes a reaction to a mosquito. Dermatitis can account for scratching tics, uncomfortable clothing for shoulder rolls, or smoke allergies for coughs.

In the case of such misattributions, the gesture may not even be noticed, or will be dismissed quickly. If noticed, instead of seeming unfamiliar or disconcerting, misattributions offer the viewer an explanation that tends towards the banal and unobtrusive, or, failing that, a cause for sympathy or empathy.

Buckser, ‘Before Your Very Eyes’, pp. 177-8.

What is uncontrolled about a tic is not the movement itself, but the need to move, the urge to make a very specific gesture or sound. Observers often compare the experience to a sneeze, something that can be briefly suppressed but that must eventually come out. That possibility of suppression opens a door to representational action. It means that tics can be displaced – they can be delayed or relocated to times and places where others will not observe them.<sup>187</sup>

One simple displacement strategy involves structuring one's routine to include intervals of solitude into which tics can be deferred. Here invisibility is achieved not through the non-visibility of the gesture in itself, but through the lack of vision to touch upon it. Moreover, with solitude not always possible, Buckser remarks that '[s]paces of invisibility exist within any social interaction'.<sup>188</sup> These may be physical spaces such as pockets and the undersides of tables, where the tic occurs behind an obstacle to vision. More remarkable are the temporal spaces of invisibility sufferers find in which to tic. These temporal spaces require not the absence of another person but the absence of their touch. Rather than modifying one's environment one monitors it, acting in accordance with increased awareness of the level of one's visibility to others.

Buckser found that all the participants in his study utilised this strategy, achieving a seemingly implausible freedom to tic unseen:

In a conversation, [one informant] said, he always closely watched the eyes of the person he was speaking to; he would hold his tics until the eyes looked away for a moment, and in that second he could move unseen. [...] One man served for years as a judge, spending much of his day as the centerpiece of lengthy and very public legal proceedings, without anyone ever noticing his TS. 'You'd be surprised,' he told me, 'how little people actually look at the judge during a trial.' By paying careful attention to sight lines, conversation patterns, and the eye movements of others, people with Tourette can find unobserved space into which tics can be displaced.<sup>189</sup>

Operative in this strategy are complex repatterning of the ties between space and touch, in this instance visual touch. The TS sufferer can consider space from the visual perspective of the other, and, casting themselves as object lying (intermittently) beneath this other's shifting touch, can recognise the points in which his or her presence collapses back into the transparency of the untouched, unobserved space in which it is effaced. This, however, requires that the Tourettic, as observing, touching subject, must saturate this space of invisibility with their own visual touch. Ticking, one is visible to oneself. Doing so in the knowledge that one is not observed requires that the space be

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<sup>187</sup> Buckser, 'Before Your Very Eyes, p. 175.

<sup>188</sup> Buckser, 'Before Your Very Eyes, p. 176.

<sup>189</sup> Buckser, 'Before Your Very Eyes, p. 176.

patterned and striated by the double touch on the other and on the lines of the other's touches. In the judge's place, most people need not notice much beyond that demanded by the job, one's own body included. Similarly, in conversation, I may heed the words of my conversational partner, but may pay little attention to his body or the direction of his gaze, and may pay even less to my own body. The Tourettic, however, might be motivated to prevent such things from lapsing into transparency. Instead, managing TS in this way requires 'the maintenance of two distinct levels of awareness in daily life'.<sup>190</sup> The Tourettic must attend to his job or the conversation, while simultaneously remaining highly aware of his own body, and alert to whether the gaze of the other renders him visible or invisible at any spatial or temporal point.

### **3.2 – “To-be-looked-at-ness”: Nudes, Portraits and Self-Portraits**

Buckser describes this aspect of life with TS as 'constant attention to self-presentation'.<sup>191</sup> Such a demand merges awareness of how one is seen by others with increased self-awareness. As discussed in the previous chapter, such increased visual attention characterises Lucian Freud's work. While the artist closely observes the model, by entering into this relationship with the observer the sitter is constrained by the imperative to not only remain visible, but to control key details of this visibility. This example from art is perhaps comparatively trivial, yet requires a similar form of attention to self-presentation. There are, however, differences. Unlike the Tourettic, the model's primary restriction is controlled physical form; the corresponding demand that she or he sustain high levels of self-awareness (or awareness of self-presentation) is somewhat diminished. As the portrait of a sleeping Sue Tilley demonstrates, what is imperative is the control of presentation to the other. The model is in a unique position to consider (even, to be confronted with) how she is present to herself, but the touch of her attention is free to wander, and her body is permitted to lapse into self-invisibility. Tilley is permitted to sleep as long as doing so does not undermine the prior arrangement of her form. By contrast, the Tourettic's example finds a closer parallel in self-portraiture. Cast in the fluctuating roles of both observer and observed, the artist exists within a similar constraint of vigilant attention to his or her manner of presentation.

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<sup>190</sup> Buckser, 'Before Your Very Eyes', p. 177.

<sup>191</sup> Buckser, 'The Empty Gesture', p. 260.

The artist's relationship to his or her subject is one of near-constant attention. The artist's visual touch returns repeatedly to the model, and does not simply find the figure *there* as a familiar body, but accompanies this recognition of the body *as* a unified human form with conceptual and visual touches that divide the body. *There* is a hand, a freckle, an intriguing angling of the neck. Moreover, *there* may be a certain region of colour, *there* another. The body of the observed is offered in this dual wholeness and material divisibility to the gaze that seeks to recreate wholeness but must do so through an accumulation of discrete components. The oscillating status of the self-portrait artist demonstrates perhaps the most unsettling context for this tension. The body subjected to these dividing touches asserts its wholeness not merely *there* as the unified body recognised as such, but also in some sense *here*, as a unified substrate for the activity of both looking and painting, as the *here* from which touch proceeds only to return to itself *there*.

In *Being Nude*, Jean-Luc Nancy and Federico Ferrari reject the possibility of the 'isolated nude'. They write: '[i]sn't nudity first of all a "facing?" Though it is one that never as a vis-à-vis, because the nude does not look. It is looked at, and also looks at itself.'<sup>192</sup> In a later vignette they return to and modulate this description of the gaze of the nude:

The gaze of the nude is blind to itself. It does not know and cannot see itself. It only knows how to be exposed in its absolute transparency to the other. The nude appears, moving in the gaze of another body – a bare question of a gaze that vouches for its own existence.

The two gazes – the nude's and that of the one who sees the nude – meet in an indefinite point. Perhaps it is at the skin of the eyelids, this aperture/shutter, much like the diaphragm of a camera, which allows the external world to come inside. And it is in the meeting of gazes, at the limit of the threshold that divides them (and, naturally, at the surface of bodies) that the nude takes on its true significance.<sup>193</sup>

Nancy and Ferrari write that '[t]he nude is *presence* above all', but this presence is not formed by a relationship of interactive or reciprocal touch. As they state, the nude does not look, its gaze returns only to itself. The nude is 'a presence exposed to the gaze of others' that 'always finds itself being looked at', yet never looking, never finding that which lies beyond its own skin.<sup>194</sup> The nude is a reformulation of the "*expeausure*"

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<sup>192</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy and Federico Ferrari, *Being Nude: The Skin of Images*, trans. Anne O'Byrne and Charlie Anglemire (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), p. 29.

<sup>193</sup> Nancy and Ferrari, *Being Nude*, p. 92.

<sup>194</sup> Nancy and Ferrari, *Being Nude*, p. 75.

discussed in the first chapter of this thesis: in formulating the body not as filled or empty space within a shaping border of skin, but instead *as* this skin, Nancy locates body along the lines of contact that both reveal and comprise it. The essential characteristics of the nude are that it is both wholly exposed and wholly skin, yet the skin of the nude lacks the sensory, touching capacity of a self. The nude's significance lies explicitly at 'the surface of bodies' and the gaze that touches it as an object.

Responding to Nancy and Ferrari, Amy Sherlock claims that the nude is thus 'characterized by a certain to-be-looked-at-ness'. Moreover, she applies this not only to the finished image, but to the process of its creation. 'To pose nude', she writes, 'is to offer oneself to the gaze of the other, to presuppose this gaze, but also, crucially, to imagine (or to image) oneself from the side of the other.'<sup>195</sup> This experience of posing characterises my discussion of repose in the previous chapter, and is a crucial aspect of self-portraiture. While a sleeping Sue Tilley need not maintain any imaginative activity during her sittings, the painter who turns his gaze on himself (and, conversely, the painter who finds himself under his own gaze) cannot escape this awareness of a form of presence that is situated in the gaze of one who is other. Across his career, Freud painted several self-portraits, including one that explicitly portrayed him at work on its creation. However, in several of his portraits of other models, he also gestures towards the process of creation for these nudes. In so doing, Freud patterns the space of or within his images with complex striations of attention and visual touch that gesture, more or less overtly, towards this essential "to-be-looked-at-ness" of those being depicted.

Freud desired each image to be somehow new, rather than another iteration of his previous works, and not simply another "Lucian Freud". Of course, as Martin Gayford comments, if his goal was to achieve such a level of difference that a work may not be immediately discernible as one of his, then he failed.<sup>196</sup> It doesn't take much familiarity with his output to be able to identify a painting as painted by him, or at least painted in his distinctive style. However, despite high levels of similarity between

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<sup>195</sup> Amy Sherlock, 'Multiple Expeasures: Identity and Alterity in the "Self-Portraits" of Francesca Woodman', *Paragraph*, 36.3 (2013), 376-391 (p. 383).

<sup>196</sup> Martin Gayford, *Man with a Blue Scarf: On Sitting for a Portrait by Lucian Freud* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012), p. 79.

Asked by Gayford whether the differences in his self-portraits was attributable to inevitable changes in appearance (even on a day-to-day basis), Freud replied: 'Partly it is, yes, but partly also to do with not wanting to have a signature.'

paintings there is a playfulness in the seeming repetition that on notable occasions functions as a kind of spot-the-difference game. The collection compiled for publication by the National Portrait Gallery manages to be attentive to this play of difference amongst similarity. On one double page, we find both *Naked Girl* (1966) and *Naked Girl Asleep II* (1968).<sup>197</sup> The similarity of pose is echoed in the similarity of the paintings' names. The names Freud allocated to his paintings are never elaborate but instead detail the sparse facts of the image. There are many "naked"s in the collection, several "naked girl"s, and, as the quantifier suggests, more than one "naked girl asleep". *Naked Girl Asleep II* is a modification of a modification of a stock subject for Freud, and as with all his paintings, part of the claim each makes to individuality is dependent on a similar recognition of what is common to all. On this double page of reclining nudes, the juxtaposition of the two allows us to see what makes the pose unique to each sitter. Each has her right arm angled and raised, but one has the other arm tucked across her breast; the face on the left is angled away from painter and viewer, while the girl on the right watches out, and keeps the process of her imaging in view.

Because we can understand each nude as an iteration of a familiar type (and, of course, not just in Freud's work but in the greater history of nudes in art), we can gain greater access to how each iteration manipulates or alter the form. In *Flora with Blue*

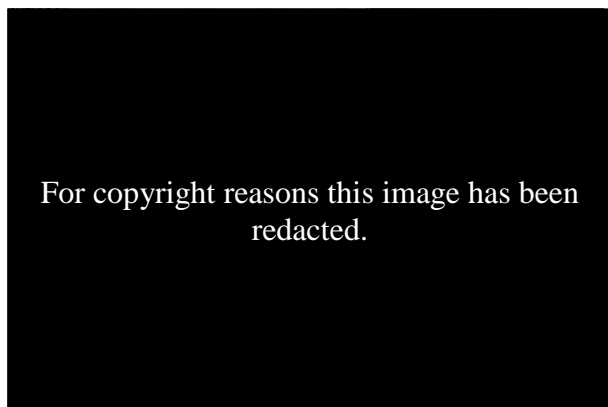


Figure 3.1 – Lucian Freud, *Flora with Blue Toenails* (2000-1)

*Toenails* (2000-1) (fig. 3.1) there is a familiar image of a naked body painted in its exposed particularity. However, the painting also emphasises both the materiality of the creative process (the physical presence of the man standing before the sitter), and the reality of seeing and being seen, of the exposure to vision, operative in both this process

and the finished work. The shadow of what is presumably the artist's head is cast over the bed, inscribing within the image the process of observation and exposure at work. Moreover, this shadow is also suggestive of the materiality of the viewer who stands before the artwork. By stepping into the painter's position, the viewer is called to relate

<sup>197</sup> Howgate, Sarah (ed.), *Lucian Freud: Portraits* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2012), pp. 108-9, cats. 44-5.

to the canvas not merely as an imaginative work but as a product of contact with an individual, material body in its exposed singularity.

The same inclusion of the process of production can be found in another painting of the same year, *Freddy Standing*. Here, Freud's reflection is included surreptitiously in a way that suggests the environmental contingencies that make his image appear, while underscoring the inevitability of his presence within the room. The lowered blind obscures the same head that casts a shadow over Flora, but instead Freud's hand raises a brush to his canvas.

Freddy is backed into a corner and held on display. He is naked, but rather than diffusing or contextualising this nakedness within a world of engagements, the



Figure 3.2 – Lucian Freud, *Freddy Standing* (2000-1),

composition literally spotlights this nakedness as the exposure it is. The doubling of the shadows attests to this role as imaged, replicating as they do his form. Freddy's body is an element in an interaction that regards his body as visible and replicates specific aspects of how it is seen in order for these to be visible to others. Freddy is visible, to both Freud and to us; moreover, the painting is a confrontation with the knowledge of his visibility in addition to the knowledge of his body which such visibility facilitates. That which works such as this and *Flora* demonstrate is that this visibility of a body, however inherent in its materiality, also depends upon a relationship to an observer that is both physical and subjective. There is a relationship of contact in which Freddy is both regarded as and rendered an object of a successful touch. Such completed touching requires both that intention to find his body at the end of a touch, and the environmental possibility of doing so. Freud's self-inclusion in this painting works to emphasise the nude's inherent "to-be-looked-at-ness", and demands acknowledgement of the relationships of presence and contact that facilitate the network of vision and visibility.

In a similar fashion, that which is most compelling about *Interior With Hand-Mirror (Self-Portrait)* (1967) (fig. 3.3) is not the details of the face painted, but the awareness enforced on the viewer of the physical and spatial positioning of the painter

in his environment. Freud stars in this image not as its subject but as its creator; that which fascinates are not the details of his body which he makes visible but the awareness of the relationships that are necessary to make them so. The hand mirror is a small region of reflective surface isolated against a far greater expanse of uninteresting space. The painting creates a sense of constriction that freezes the painter's body into a fixed relationship to his environment. Freud is required to stand in the one particular position that will show his reflection on this one particular surface.

*Freddy Standing* demonstrates Freud's repeated

decision to allow his works to retain and emphasise the conditions of their creation and their consequent status as material objects worked on over time within an environment that includes model, painter and painting. Moreover, the image indicates the varying types or degrees of presence each of these elements claims or is allotted. Whereas *Freddy* is multiply exposed, the process and agent of the image's creation are peripheral and obscured. However essential they are as necessary conditions of the image's creation, they are far from necessary inclusions within the image created. In *Freddy Standing*, the presence of the artist is primarily the presence of the observer and creator. The painter must have turned the touch of his observation on himself in order to include this presence, but the image signals this aspect as peripheral. In *Flora with the Blue Toenails* the painter is shadow, a suggestion of presence. In bold contrast, Freud's 1993 self-portrait *Painter Working, Reflection* (fig. 3.4) foregrounds this self-relationship operative in the self observing and painting itself.

In this self-portrait, Freud offers not only an image of himself, another naked portrait, but an image of himself *as* the artist. The aging man on the canvas stands almost entirely naked, but for the presence of his heavy unlaced shoes. In one hand he holds aloft a palette knife, in the other a paint-board. These tools of artistic production work alongside the title to suggest that the painter is not merely creating an image of himself, but endeavouring to offer an image of himself in the act of image-creation. This process, the title suggests, is mediated also by a mirror in which Freud, as artist, is free to observed himself, as object. The body painted is made available to be looked at, but this arises from a mode of engaging with the body to be painted as an object under



For copyright reasons  
this image has been  
redacted.

Figure 3.3 – Lucian Freud,  
*Interior with Hand-Mirror (Self-Portrait)* (1967)



touch. In self-portraiture one must offer oneself over to the objectifying touch of oneself. As Amy Sherlock observes:

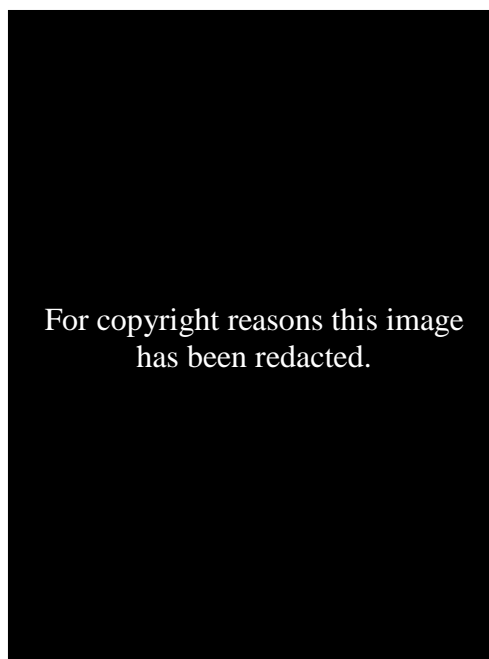
In order to become visible to oneself, one must look from the side of the other. It is only through the position of the spectator that there can be an image of the self, [...] But in this superimposition of gazes, something escapes or withdraws: the artist can only look at himself blindly. And the spectator, now occupying the artist's former position thus conceals it, 'rubbing out' the overlapping gazes of artist as subject and artist as object that define the self-portrait. The self-portrait is caught in this slippage of gazes, which is at once the condition of its possibility and its impossibility. The subject, blind to itself, is unmade [...] according to its own image. In order to become visible to oneself, one must look from the side of the other: The representation of the self therefore entails a projection of the self outside of itself.<sup>198</sup>

As indicated in the first chapter of this thesis, touch necessarily occurs between a plurality of bodies; there must be at least two sides to every contact. Self-portraiture must therefore entail a division of self that divorces the artist from the body he or she surveys (a body *there*, under the artist's touch), even as that body is the material substrate and condition of the act of touching (the *here* from which touch proceeds). As Sherlock states, this touch must approach its objectified body from an unsettling externalised perspective.

### **3.3 – In Van Gogh's Shoes: Nakedness and Equipmentality**

*Painter Working, Reflection* is subject to this slippage of gazes that problematises the self-relation of the artist. However, this image is notable for the degree to which it acknowledges, even if it cannot resolve, the overlapping gazes and self-otherness that Sherlock identifies. Central to this engagement with self-otherness, I would suggest, is the strange inclusion of the shoes adorning the otherwise naked body. What does it mean that the figure is both naked and garbed in shoes?

This tension echoes (and creates space for) the same tension that characterises the self-portrait and the self-contact. The tension created



For copyright reasons this image has been redacted.

Figure 3.4 – Lucian Freud, *Painter Working, Reflection* (1993)

<sup>198</sup> Sherlock, 'Multiple Expeasures', p. 384.

by the shoes arises from their status both as clothing or adornment, which is incompatible with nakedness, and as equipment, which instead can be integrated (at least partially) into the naked, unadorned body.

### 3.3a – Nudity and Nakedness

Nakedness is not an uncomplicated term, particularly in relation to art and its tradition of the nude figure. Kenneth Clark famously distinguishes nakedness from the idea of the more idealised nude that is a recurring element of art:

To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes, and the word implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition. The word “nude,” on the other hand, carries, in educated usage, no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenceless body, but of a balanced, prosperous, and confident body: the body re-formed.<sup>199</sup>

It is worth noting that the “to-be-looked-at-ness” of the nude is present in this distinction. Nakedness is defined here in terms of the subjective experience of the ones who find themselves in that state; the confidence of the nude, in contrast, is not even attributed to a nude subject, but instead a projected image that is applied to it from the observer’s perspective. Nakedness is personal where nudity displaces the individual and works with ideals in the service of which the individual body is offered, and within which it is subsumed. In their collection of short essays on the nude, Nancy and Ferrari identify such distinctions as ones which more recent art has challenged. ‘For us moderns,’ they remark, ‘the Nude in itself does not exist. It has disappeared forever. The Nude met its end with the end of all humanism, that is, the end of all visions of the world that insisted that there was an evident universal essence of man. Man is not evident, not even in the nude.’<sup>200</sup> In Freud’s oeuvre we find the sort of naked portrait that usurps this idealism. Each is marked by the specificity of a living, individual body.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 23.

<sup>200</sup> Nancy and Ferrari, *Being Nude*, p. 12.

<sup>201</sup> Frances Borzello defends a similar position in her book *The Naked Nude*, arguing that non-idealised nakedness has come to replace the tradition of the ideal, confident, and much reproduced classical nude. This idealised nude, she suggests, still remains, but has shifted from the realm of supposedly “fine art” into that of commercial photography. ‘Alongside commercial and fashion photography, a category called the ‘artistic’ nude has been a staple of photography books aimed at the amateur practitioner from the start of the 20th [sic] century. Here we find images of flatteringly lit, voluptuous young women, coyly hiding their sexuality as the reclining nudes of fine art fame have done for centuries.’

Frances Borzello, *The Naked Nude* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012), p. 10.

In Clark's account, nakedness is marked by a deprivation that contrasts with the confidence and prosperity afforded to nudity. The body is exposed, but such exposure is a cause for embarrassment and disempowerment. The naked body is lacking, stripped of those appendages that moderate its engagements in the world. In the shift away from such idealised nudity this sense of exposure through deprivation is replaced by a greater focus on revelation. That of which one is deprived (and it may still be a deprivation) is akin to costume or disguise; that which is lost is that which nakedness asserts to be non-essential. We find a similar distinction articulated by John Berger:

To be naked is to be oneself.

To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude. (The sight of it as an object stimulates the use of it as an object.) Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display.

To be naked is to be without disguise.

To be on display is to have the surface of one's own skin, the hairs of one's own body, turned into a disguise which, in that situation, can never be discarded. The nude is condemned to never being naked. Nudity is a form of dress.<sup>202</sup>

Nakedness is a movement of revelation that approaches the self in its embodied individuality. In contrast, the exposure integral to nudity slips away from the self to rest on a surface that is only accessed as object. The naked self is revealed along its surface, even as the nude encloses the self behind a surface.

### 3.3b – Equipment and the Limits of the Body

In *Painter Working, Reflection*, Freud's shoes, clinging to the skin of the naked body, might be interpreted as performing a concealment. They are a contingent presence in Freud's existence, and obscure something essential to Freud (his feet), and of which he cannot be deprived without a radical alteration of his body schema. However, if we consider the shoes as more than optional elements of a disguise but instead as tools that shape the performance of a particular activity or aim, their removal risks instead concealing the truth of Freud's way of being in his world in the activity of painting. The picture itself guides us towards this interpretation: we are informed that the image is not simply of the painter, but of the painter *working*. Moreover, the other objects that the image relates to the artist's body are tools of his trade. The paint board and palette knife Freud wields are essential components of the painting's creation, and it is possible to

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<sup>202</sup> Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, p. 54.

interpret the shoes in a similar fashion. Such a tension rests on the seemingly essential truth one wishes to expose. It is convenient to regard its biological matter and form as the body's most essential state; everything it includes is, if not quite inseparable, then at least as yet unseparated from one's being in a world. Freud's body is permanently in attendance. However, this material essentialism encounters a limit as to what its body reveals about the self's mode of being in world.

Of course, all clothing choices and decisions of self-presentation play a similar role in shaping both one's relation to the world and the way in which one is received. It is a trivial example, but if I choose to walk in heels, these may not only subtly affect how I am perceived by others, but have a very real physical effect on the relationship between myself and the pavement which the act of walking initiates. My steps shorten, for example, and I know myself both more vulnerable and more alert to any unevenness of its surface. To turn to a more substantial example, the career of former American president Franklin Delano Roosevelt was made possible by the use of equipment that allowed him to overcome some of the very real physical limitations imposed by his biological body. Partially paralysed after contracting Polio, FDR's body was no longer capable of walking, or even standing, unaided. However, using a range of tools and strategies from wearing locking leg braces (partially concealed through specially tailored trousers) to elevating whole roads to avoid stairs, FDR was able to give the appearance of independent mobility.<sup>203</sup> All these supplementations were, undeniably, a carefully maintained disguise. A study of his fully naked body would offer a depiction of the deprivation demanded by such nakedness; it would reveal an essential truth as to his body's potential relationship (thus deprived) to an environment. However, that which it couldn't reveal would be the relationships and engagements that actually comprise FDR's lived presence in his world.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> See Hugh Gregory Gallagher, *FDR's Splendid Deception*, 3rd edn. (St. Petersburg, FL: Vandamere Press, 1999).

<sup>204</sup> David Meschutt traces the influence of this disguise on the portraits made of Roosevelt. FDR declined many of the requests for sittings that he, as president, inevitably received. Even in cases where sittings were organised, artists would sometimes use their limited allocation of time to create accurate representations of his head, face and sometimes hands. When working from these preliminary sketches or beginnings, some would use a model to pose in Roosevelt's place. As Meschutt notes, this resulted in some images being 'false', with the model adopting a pose that would have been physically impossible for FDR himself to sustain. We might conclude that such images align more naturally with the idea of the nude than that of the naked: despite their attempts to render something individual and truthful (even if, as Meschutt notes, artists chose to use their works to emphasise or suggest certain characteristics such as determination), these images are achieved through a generalising of FDR's body that regards it as interchangeable.

We might consider these examples in terms of a continuum of closeness to the body, one on which prostheses and transplants seem much closer than clothing and jewellery. It seems intuitively unreasonable to suppose that a transplanted organ or a surgical addition such as a pacemaker or replacement hip challenges the boundary of nakedness; neither offers a challenge to the easy equation of the skin with the body's natural boundary. In equating the naked with the limit of skin, this understanding of what comprises the whole of the body proper is reinforced. However, in positing the naked body along the lines of naked skin, we define it through the touch – external – that rests against this skin. Berger's account arguably correctly identifies the tension here, even as it fails to fully evade it. In his distinction between nudity and nakedness, he defines nudity in relation to being looked at. Such looking is a touch from outside that regards what is touched as object. To refer to my first chapter, such looking is akin to the self that touches the chair; the viewer touches on the nude with no interest in whether the object touched is simultaneously capable of touching. In contrast, nakedness depends on the copula; one *is* naked, but one can only *become* a nude. *Being* naked emphasises the experiential aspects of this state, and thus makes touching rather than simply being touched an integral element of nakedness.<sup>205</sup>

As the nude indicates, the touch that makes of the embodied self an object is one that comes from outside, and need not attend to whether that which it touches is capable of reciprocal touching. The boundaries of the body it enforces align with the boundaries it recognises. In contrast, nakedness thus formulated is bound to an understanding of self as a touching, interactive agent that engages with and responds to the world that its touch reveals to it. The experience of nakedness is a deprivation because it repatterns and displaces “normal” modes of touch on and interaction with a world. We might assume that part of this relates, as with nudity, to a confrontation with the self-as-imaged. Nakedness changes how we are seen. It is not only a different disguise or costume, but one that (as with Tourettics' tics) has a greater inherent visibility in its

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David Meschutt, 'Portraits of Franklin Delano Roosevelt', *American Art Journal*, 18.4 (1986), 2-50 (p. 28, 31).

<sup>205</sup> This distinction between being and becoming should, of course, be approached with caution. While becoming is a useful figure of transition, and can thus emphasise the subjective experience which exists prior to the offering of one's self to be objectified, it does not wholly exclude the *being* of the nude. If the nude is fully regarded as untouching object, one cannot become it, just as one cannot become dead without ceasing to be *there* in a world. What this tension reinforces is the role of a doubled perception of self. Nudity is applied from without; it is a product of recognition (or a misrecognition) that relates to it only as surface. The one whose body, posed for the artist, is regarded as a nude may pose and experience doing so *as* naked, even as this fails to find a reciprocal recognition in the artist or spectator.

deviation from the norm. However, the deprivation that nakedness entails may also include a disruption of normal or habitual ways of touching one's environment. The emphasis on touching here is not one that returns to the self-as-imagined, but instead one that reflects how touching reaches beyond the body to interact with a world it finds *there* under its touch.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty offers several examples of habitual behaviours and engagements with a world that allow a rethinking of how and where we place the limits of the body. These range from the rather inconsequential donning of an extravagant hat, to the everyday and clearly functional driving of a car, and to the case of a blind man who consistently uses a cane to negotiate his environment. 'To get used to a hat, a car or a stick', he suggests, 'is to be transplanted into them, or conversely, to incorporate them into the bulk of our own body. Habit expresses our power of dilating our being-in-the-world, or changing our existence by appropriating fresh instruments.'<sup>206</sup> The driver does not use his or her car by continually relating to it through a series of reminders and calculations. Instead, the car mediates an action that reaches through and beyond it. Just as a person wearing a familiar hat does not need to constantly calculate its height clearance, the habituated driver does not have to direct the touch of his or her attention to calculating widths and distances, nor to actively managing the increments of force applied to an accelerator. Instead, the driver is free to attend to speed restrictions, lane changes, gaps and hazards. It is not the car but the use to which it is subordinated that commands attention, an effacement of the equipment facilitated by the habitual familiarity that has diminished its claim on his or her awareness.

Merleau-Ponty's most compelling example is that of the blind man. Whereas the car and the hat relocate the self's sense of its own physical boundaries, the cane is figured not simply as a resizing or reshaping of form, but as a prosthetic sensory organ. Like the eye or the hand that discover the world under their touch, the cane creates a point of contact with the world through which the world is known and that establishes the separation between that which is touched and that which touches. The blind man is not first conscious of holding the stick and then conscious of the feedback his hand receives. As Merleau-Ponty emphasises, such equipmental habit 'relieves us of the necessity' of such deliberated interpretation.<sup>207</sup> The cane's use is not one of mediated

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<sup>206</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 166.

<sup>207</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 176.

information transfer at the limit of the seemingly “natural” body; instead, it directly reveals that which it touches. ‘The pressures on the hand and the stick are no longer given; the stick is no longer an object perceived by the blind man, but an instrument *with* which he perceives. It is a bodily auxiliary, an extension of the bodily synthesis.’<sup>208</sup>

This emphasis on perception speaks to a seemingly more fundamental aspect of what it means to be an agent capable of (and delineated by) touching. Underlying the use of the cane is its role in facilitating the interactive touches on the world that accompany and enable the self’s aims and activities. The blind man’s cane offers a seemingly more foundational example, in that what it appears to facilitate is touch itself. Of course, the distinction is not a complete one. One does not perceive separately to the network of understanding, relationships and activities in which one is immersed. Even in the example of the blind man, the cane is not simply furnishing him with coarse data, but with the features of the world around him as he navigates it. However, that which this example emphasises is a redefining of the boundary between ourselves and the objects of our environments, with a re-formulation of the limit at which we touch and are separated from our world. By utilising physical touch and contiguity, the stick supplies the most accessible example of this: the boundary between self and other lies along a line of material contact.

Yet, as explored in my first chapter, material proximity is not the only measure of contact. It is perhaps highly appropriate that the stick replaces the touch of vision with material touch. As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the touch of vision (and the even more abstract touch of imagination or conceptualisation) operates by effacing into transparency that which is not touched but ignored or unseen, in order to draw a line of contact at what would seem to be a distance from the body and from the self. In looking at a picture on a wall, in looking at (or even imagining) a door, touch occurs at and as a boundary between them and myself, regardless of distance between our more objective positions in space. Operating as a more immediately simple example of touch, the blind man’s cane makes a compelling case for the redefinition of what comprises the synthesis of body that a self subordinates to and uses for the activities in which it is engaged. Between the hand, the stick and the pavement, everything is materially proximate, materially continuous. In his sense of touching against the pavement, the separation that inserts contiguity into this continuity occurs not between

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<sup>208</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 176.

the hand and the cane, but between the cane and the pavement. It is along this line that we find the separation that demarcates the two bodies in contact.

### *3.3bi – Nakedness, the Skin of the Body and the Incorporation of Equipment*

Such bodily integration of equipment-in-use reveals the tension of the nakedness of Freud's self-portrait. On one hand, his role as artist is dependent upon an accompanying subjugation of his body to the status of an object to be observed. Under the touch of such observation, not only is his body exposed to be examined, but, along with knife and palette board, Freud's shoes stand out as distinct objects, and their presence as clothing sits in tension with the otherwise naked figure. On the other hand, the artist is seeking not simply an objectified body but the form of himself as painter. When put to work they become more than mere props; as with the blind man's cane, the specific usefulness of the palette knife and shoes incorporates them into Freud's body, allowing them to be part of his "naked" state within such an activity. The limit of the body thus engaged doesn't lie at the skin of the hands and feet, but at the points of contact that shape Freud's interactions. The painting forms not against his hand but at the limit of the knife as it transfers paint to canvas. Similarly, inasmuch as Freud, while working, is oblivious to the specific presence of his feet (aided by shoes that protect against the potential interruptions of splinters), his feet don't touch shoes which in turn sit against the floor. Instead, to the degree that he is even aware of walking or standing, this line of contact between body and floor lies along the outer sole of the shoe. In addition, by reducing environmental interruptions and facilitating easy locomotion that demands little of Freud's awareness, both shoes and feet fold into the body's transparency to the self whose primary points of contact with its world lie in its vision and at the tip of its knife.<sup>209</sup> Moreover, unlike the knife and paint board, this equipmentality of the shoes facilitates not only the act of painting but the act of observation. Even as an observer capable of scrutinising the object-appearance of his shoes, Freud's freedom to look without external interruption is partly facilitated by these same shoes.

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<sup>209</sup> In this example of Freud's shoes we find a similar figure to that which Jean-Luc Nancy references in 'L'Intrus'. As mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, Nancy describes his heart in its earlier state of unobtrusive, successful functioning as being 'as absent to me till now as the soles of my feet walking'. The successful equipmentality of Freud's shoes is the maintenance of this unobtrusiveness or absence of the body in its capacity to engage in the world rather than be recalled to touch on itself.

Nancy, 'L'Intrus', p. 3.



We think of nakedness – or more accurately, the naked skin – as a limit between what is proper to one and what is other. It divides inside and outside. In such equipmentality, this external limit of the body shifts to the outer edge of the technology being employed, and in this shift the distinction between, for example, man and cane, painter and shoes, is effaced for the user, even as it remains accessible from a perspective that views it outside of this use. This effacement recalls the variable patterning of space discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. Andy Clark uses a similar figure of transparency to describe this aspect of our relationship to certain technologies:

A transparent technology is a technology that is so well fitted to, and integrated with, our own lives, biological capacities, and projects as to become [...] almost invisible in use. An opaque technology, by contrast, is one that keeps tripping the user up, requires skills and capacities that do not come naturally to the biological organism, and thus remains the focus of attention even during routine problem-solving activity. [...] In the case of such opaque technologies, we distinguish sharply and continuously between the user and the tool. [...] By contrast, once a technology is transparent, the conscious agent literally sees through the tool and directly confronts the real problem at hand. The accomplished writer, armed with pen and paper, usually pays no heed to the pen and paper tools while attempting to create an essay or a poem. They have become transparent equipment, tools whose use and functioning have become so deeply dovetailed to the biological system that there is a very real sense in which – while they are up and running – the problem-solving system just is the composite of the biological system and these nonbiological tools.<sup>210</sup>

Clark adopts a similar focus on a form of integration or synthesis that incorporates something within the limits of the ‘problem-solving system’ so that touch, sight and activity occur at this limit, unmediated by additional touches. Moreover, what is also worth noting is the potential here for the slippage of transparency from the technological to the biological. As with my own first chapter, this account places opacity not in the body but at the lines of contact along the objects it encounters. It is as a transparent object that the technology forms a composite with the body; by extension, the composite too is transparent. The body more generally is transparent, unseen, in its subordination to its task.

Clark’s account is notable, too, for its recognition of technologies or tools that fail to achieve the ideal transparency of true equipmentality. Similarly, it recognises that such equipmental being belongs to the object only when in use. That which cannot fully

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<sup>210</sup> Andy Clark, *Natural Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), pp. 37-8.

efface itself in use, that which changes or breaks down and thus interrupts use, or simply that which is transparent while usage is ‘up and running’, but subsequently released from use, (re)appears under a touch that discovers it. Rather than being part of the transparent body of the *hereness* from which touch proceeds, such incomplete or imperfect equipment is instead discoverable *there* beneath one’s touch.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger uses the example of a hammer to discuss our way of relating to and understanding equipmental being.

Equipment can genuinely show itself only in dealings cut to its own measure (hammering with a hammer, for example); but in such dealings an entity of this kind is not grasped thematically as an occurring Thing, nor is the equipment-structure known as such even in the using. The hammering does not simply have knowledge about the hammer’s character as equipment, but it has appropriated this equipment in a way which could not possibly be more suitable. In dealings such as this, where something is put to use, our concern subordinates itself to the ‘in-order to’ which is constitutive for the equipment we are employing at the time; the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is – as equipment.<sup>211</sup>

Heidegger expresses some of the tension in our dual relationship to the hammer as equipment in use and as an isolated, abstracted entity. In the former instance, its true equipmental kind of being manifests in its ‘readiness-to-hand’. However, utilised in this way, the hammer may be encountered in its equipmental being, but this encounter does not reveal other aspects of the hammer’s being when separated from this context. As he writes, such ‘[d]ealings with equipment subordinate themselves to the manifold assignments of the “in-order-to”.’ Conversely:

The kind of Being which equipment possesses – in which it manifests itself in its own right – we call “readiness-to-hand”. Only because equipment has this ‘Being-in-itself’ and does not merely occur, is it manipulable in the broadest sense and at our disposal. No matter how sharply we just look at the ‘outward appearance’ of Things in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand. If we look at Things just ‘theoretically’, we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand. But when we deal with them by using them and manipulating them, this activity is not a blind one; it has its own kind of sight, by which our manipulation is guided and from which it acquires its specific Thingly character. Dealings with equipment subordinate themselves to the manifold assignments of the ‘in-order-to’.<sup>212</sup>

No longer in use but present-at-hand, our directed attention and activity no longer flows through it but focuses on it, touches on it.

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<sup>211</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 98.

<sup>212</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 98.

However, a primary path to the encounter of a hammer as present-at-hand arises from the disruption of such effacing use, when a change in the hammer or an unexpected aspect of it interrupts our use or intended use. The relationship a hammer bears to us changes if it breaks; similarly, a hammer may rise to presence beneath the touch of our hands or eyes if its inability to match our expectations make both our expectations and the object itself more visible to us. Heidegger observes:

Something ready-to-hand with which we have to do or perform something, turns into something ‘about which’ the assertion that points it out is made. Our foresight is aimed at something present-at-hand in what is ready-to-hand. Both by and for this way of looking at it, the ready-to-hand becomes veiled as ready-to-hand. Within this discovering of presence-at-hand, which is at the same time a covering-up of readiness-to-hand, something present-at-hand which we encounter is given a definite character in its Being-present-at-hand-in-such-and-such-a-manner.<sup>213</sup>

Heidegger invites us to consider the assertion, “this hammer is too heavy”. It is the hammer as a present-at-hand object to which we attach properties such as mass, yet its description as ‘too heavy’ speaks to the failure of an equipment, defined as it is with respect to the relation between Dasein, the hammer and the object of the activity. In being excessively heavy, the hammer has already surfaced from immersion within the activity of hammering in which such a description could be appropriate. However, as an abstracted object with material properties, the hammer may have mass, but it cannot be “too heavy” in isolation from the aim which reveals the inappropriateness of its physical properties. As he writes, in speaking of the mass that gives an object the “property” of heaviness, such discourse ‘is no longer spoken within the horizon of awaiting and retaining an equipmental totality and its involvement-relationships’. Instead, ‘[t]o talk circumspectively of “too heavy” or “too light” no longer has any “meaning”; that is to say, the entity in itself, as we now encounter it, gives us nothing with relation to which it could be ‘found’ too heavy or too light.’<sup>214</sup> To utilise the visual simplicity of Clark’s terminology, we might state that descriptors can only be applied to the opaque object that, by virtue of being opaque, lies before vision. The equipmental aspect of the hammer’s being consists not in the descriptions applied to the object as and when it is opaque, but to the transparency that evades and resists such descriptions.

Were Freud fully clothed, *Painter Working, Reflection* would be largely unremarkable. Instead, nakedness supplies a context in which Freud’s tools are both

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<sup>213</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 200.

<sup>214</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 412.

part of him and separate, transparent and opaque, ready-to-hand and present-to-hand. This is not to say that the painting permits them to be both at once, but rather that it holds both potentialities of these objects. Freud's status within the artwork as both the self that touches and the object touched renders simultaneously present in the painting the dual contexts in which these two states of the tools arise. The nakedness that in practice would have no direct impact on the equipmentality of these tools nonetheless establishes them in a context of the limit of Freud's presence in the world, and enables us to understand their variable interpretation both as this limit and as found at it.<sup>215</sup>

### 3.3bii – *'The Origin of the Work of Art': Equipment and Image*

In one of Heidegger's later discussions of art we find both this equipmentality (readiness-to-hand) and the thingness (presence-at-hand) of that which can be used. In 'The Origin of the Work of Art', Heidegger presents both the tensions between equipmentality and thingness and the difficulty of the attempt to access equipmentality from outside of the acts in which it is operative. In this essay, Heidegger discusses an image of what he perceives to be the shoes of a peasant woman, as painted by Vincent van Gogh. It is through the mediation of the painting, he proceeds to assert, that we can discover the equipmentality of the shoes.

Heidegger does not, however, begin with the discussion of the function of the artwork so much as he claims to use the artwork to 'facilitate a visual realization' of the initial point of study, a piece of equipment. Just as this thesis does not seek to present

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<sup>215</sup> In a discussion of the paintings of Mark Rothko, James E. B. Breslin compares a photograph of Jackson Pollock working on a canvas and Mark Rothko sitting and studying one of his own works. 'Both artists', he suggests, 'are presented as immersed in their work.' This immersion thus sends them out beyond the bodies through which they both observe and create these paintings; their gazes are directed towards their work, their bodies effaced into transparency in the immersive process of forming or contemplating their work. That which Breslin offers is two contrasting portrayals of such immersion within the artistic process. 'Rothko has drawn back from his painting in order to take it all in – unlike Pollock, who is too far inside his painting to see all of it. Pollock acts; Rothko meditates.' However, neither form of engagement is wholly different to the other. Rothko, it is emphasised, has not so far vacated the creative role so as to assume purely that of receiver: 'even in his more relaxed attitude, he too, is at work – weighing, feeling, measuring, judging his painting'. In *Painter Working, Reflection* Freud presents both these roles of the artist, the one who observes and the one who paints. In each, his body is transparent, effaced; it facilitates the creative processes without intruding and calling touch upon itself. Yet in Freud's self-portrait, the artist's body also figures as the object of observation. Effaced in the acts of creation and observation, a version of it as object is revealed during the act of observation that distances Freud from his body. There is, as Breslin suggests, this alternation of creation and observation, but with the additional layering of the duality of the body that effaces itself in its touch on itself-as-object.

James E. B. Breslin, 'Out of the body: Mark Rothko's paintings', in *The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture since the Renaissance*, eds. Kathleen Adler and Marcie Pointon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 43-51 (p. 43).

the body but to approach it, Heidegger's initial inquiry concerns approach: 'what path', he asks, 'leads to the equipmental quality of equipment?' Heidegger elects to 'choose as example a common sort of equipment – a pair of peasant shoes', noting that even without the exhibit of a particular example, everyone is acquainted with such an object. This familiarity is followed by a recognition that while we may understand that the equipmentality of the shoes 'consists in its usefulness', this usefulness inevitably lies beyond the access afforded by looking at or imagining the shoes when not in use. He writes: '[t]he peasant woman wears her shoes in the field. Only here are they what they are. They are all the more genuinely so, the less the peasant woman thinks about the shoes while she is at work, or looks at them at all, or is even aware of them. She stands and walks in them.'<sup>216</sup> As the discussion in my previous section indicates, the equipmentality of the shoes could be expressed by the fact they permit a reformulation of this last assertion as "she stands and walks": in the act of walking that they facilitate they are transparent, lying untouched by the awareness they allow her to direct elsewhere. The peasant, utilising the equipment, cannot touch it. Conversely, in touching it, its usefulness evades us. Heidegger asserts, '[a]s long as we only imagine a pair of shoes in general, or simply look at the empty, unused shoes as they merely stand there in the picture, we shall never discover what the equipmental being of the equipment in truth is.'<sup>217</sup>

And yet... As Jacques Derrida emphasises, Heidegger's account turns on a tension or contradiction Heidegger introduces with those two words.<sup>218</sup> All the challenges of approaching equipmentality remain, *and yet* the painting somehow interrupts and redefines the standard approach to the equipment. It interrupts, we might suggest, the path that is to meet its own interruption in its inevitable failure to arrive at equipmentality, and somehow redirects the attempted approach onto an unforeseen route. Heidegger writes that the shoes ostensibly belong to an 'undefined space' that reveals no knowledge of where these shoes stand.<sup>219</sup> And yet:

And yet –

From out of the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-

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<sup>216</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (Abingdon: Routledge [1977, 1993] 2008), pp. 83-139 (p. 100).

<sup>217</sup> Heidegger, 'Work of Art', p. 100.

<sup>218</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 337.

<sup>219</sup> Heidegger, 'Work of Art', p. 100.

spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and the earth's unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of bread, the worldless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the *earth*, and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself.

But perhaps it is only in the picture that we notice all those about the shoes. The peasant woman, on the other hand, simply wears them.<sup>220</sup>

Heidegger's description here of his encounter with the painted shoes is one that he argues reveals or discloses a basic truth of the shoes and the peasant woman's relationship to her life and her world that the shoes' equipmental being enables.

As Karsten Harries notes, this 'generally taken for granted service' of equipment (ours and the peasant's), 'is absent from the shoes in the painting. Their conspicuousness contrasts with the inconspicuousness of what we just wear.'<sup>221</sup> They are not in use, and nor can we use them; any equipmental readiness-to-hand they might suggest is forestalled by their isolation and reproduction in a painting that holds them before us, near but at a distance we cannot cross. However, that which Heidegger's encounter with the work establishes or describes is a relation or access not to the shoes, nor even to the woman's relationship to the shoes, but to the relationship to her world that the shoes facilitate. That which 'pervades' the shoes is notable for its lack of relation to them. There are moments in his description that indicate the thingness of the (painted) shoes; the opening is dark, they are leather, they have soles. However, as with the example of the heavy hammer, these descriptions slide towards use. The 'worn insides' may indicate a material quality of the boots but the suggestion of wear expresses the awareness of repeated use that accompanies and elucidates this property. So, too, is 'the stiffly rugged heaviness' already a description that evokes, before the sentence arrives there, a sense of motion, and a sensation of a walk weighed and shaped by the boots. The shoes for the peasant are invisible in use, and while the painting holds them as a visible element of Heidegger's encounter, they are also largely effaced in his response to them.

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<sup>220</sup> Heidegger, 'Work of Art', p. 101.

<sup>221</sup> Karsten Harries, *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger's 'The Origin of the Work of Art'*, (n.p.: Springer, 2009), p. 86.

This equipmental invisibility is sustained by what Heidegger terms the ‘reliability’ of the shoes.

The equipmental being of the equipment consists indeed in its usefulness. But this usefulness itself rests in the abundance of an essential Being of the equipment. We call it reliability. By virtue of this reliability the peasant woman is made privy to the silent call of the earth; by virtue of the reliability of the equipment she is sure of her world. World and earth exist for her, and for those who are with her in her mode of being, only thus – in the equipment. We say “only” and therewith fall into error; for the reliability of the equipment first gives to the simple world its security and assures to the earth the freedom of its steady thrust.<sup>222</sup>

This emphasis on reliability shares the endurance of habit that we find in Merleau-Ponty’s account. The reliable is shaped as much by what it has been as by what it is currently being, and also by the reliance on what it will continue to be. Whereas the account of touch I advanced in my first chapter emphasised the openness of space to constant, mobile repatterning, the reliability of equipment secures a largely stable set of touches and relationships. The reliable places us always in touch with, always in, the world of our relationships; just as the blind man’s stick so constantly supplies a world to him, so too do the shoes of the peasant.

‘To be a work means to set up a world’, Heidegger writes, and ‘[t]o work-being there belongs the setting up of a world.’<sup>223</sup> In answer, Heidegger suggests:

The world is not the mere collection of the countable or uncountable, familiar and unfamiliar things that are at hand. But neither is it a merely imagined framework added by our representation to the sum of such given things. *The world worlds*, and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home. World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen. World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being. [...] A stone is worldless. Plant and animal likewise have no world; but they belong to the covert throng of a surrounding world into which they are linked. The peasant woman, on the other hand, has a world because she dwells in the overtness of beings. Her equipment, in its reliability, gives to this world a necessity and nearness of its own. By the opening up of a world, all things gain their lingering and hastening, their remoteness and nearness, their scope and limits.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Heidegger, ‘Work of Art’, p. 101.

<sup>223</sup> Heidegger, ‘Work of Art’, pp. 108-9.

<sup>224</sup> Heidegger, ‘Work of Art’, pp. 108-9.

The peasant's world is spaced by her relations to and across it, and the work can hold open this world for the one who views the painting. Yet this holding open of the world is only one aspect of the artwork. In addition: '[t]he work moves the earth into the open region of a world and keeps it there. *The work lets the earth be an earth.*'<sup>225</sup>

'The earth' Heidegger asserts, 'appears openly cleared as itself only when it is perceived and preserved as that which is essentially undisclosable'.<sup>226</sup> The earth is that which allows the world to be by a partial giving over of itself to it which nonetheless retains its inaccessible separateness. As Iain D. Thomson observes, the truth Heidegger's material painting allows its viewer to receive is one of an 'essential tension in which the phenomenologically abundant "earth" both makes our intelligible worlds possible and also resists being finally mastered or fully expressed within any such "world."<sup>227</sup> Earth shows itself 'only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained'.<sup>228</sup> The world is in a constant attempt to gather the earth into the intelligibility of relations amongst which we dwell, but the earth always retains a partial elusiveness. In the artwork, both aspects of the being of the equipment can be accessed without fully cancelling each other out. It holds together the equipment in its use, and the network of relations in which this use is intelligible, with the earthliness and resistance to incorporation of that from which the equipment and world are drawn. The artwork, then, offers a privileged site of access.

In the work, Heidegger writes, 'beings as a whole are brought into unconcealment and held therein', and in "beings as a whole" that to which he refers is 'world and earth in their counterplay'.<sup>229</sup> That which Thomson emphasises is that this counterplay is a relationship of 'strife', a strife 'that is built into the structure of all intelligibility (that is, the structure whereby entities become intelligible as entities)'.<sup>230</sup> That which art teaches is that 'we will never exhaust the possibilities inherent in what we like to call "reality"' and that 'being will never be completely revealed'.<sup>231</sup> The earth is that which 'both informs and resists conceptualization', an 'ineliminable elusiveness'

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<sup>225</sup> Heidegger, 'Work of Art', p. 110.

<sup>226</sup> Heidegger, 'Work of Art', p. 110.

<sup>227</sup> Iain D. Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 91.

<sup>228</sup> Heidegger, 'Work of Art', p. 110.

<sup>229</sup> Heidegger, 'Work of Art', p. 116.

<sup>230</sup> Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p. 75.

<sup>231</sup> Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p. 76.



that is ‘*essential* to what things are’.<sup>232</sup> ‘For equipment to be ready’, Heidegger writes, ‘means that it is released beyond itself, to be used up in its usefulness’: ‘the more handy a piece of equipment, the more inconspicuous it remains’. ‘Not so’, however, ‘when a work is created’: ‘[t]he event of its being created does not simply reverberate through the work; rather, the work casts before itself the eventful fact that the work is as this work, and it has constantly this fact about itself’.<sup>233</sup>

I would suggest that Freud’s self-portrait, *Painter Working, Reflection*, is in a unique position to further dramatise this tension between that which is used up and that which is held back. In emphasising the double status of the shoes (and body) as both that which facilitates touch and that which is touched, the painting can engage with a similar unresolvable tension in the dual intelligibility of the shoes. Freud’s shoes are always oscillating between readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand, between presence and usefulness. The moment in which attention turns to them, and the viewer brings itself before them, they are nearly simultaneously part of the here and the there. In their role in looking at the reflection and at the image, the shoes-as-equipment are effaced, used up within the act of looking much as with the hammer. In the painting, however, the earth resists; the shoes oscillate between assimilation and resistance.

### 3.3biii – Meyer Schapiro and Van Gogh’s Shoes

Prompted by Heidegger’s essay, Meyer Schapiro offers an interpretation of the painting that seemingly corrects a misattribution of these shoes. Rather than being the shoes of a peasant woman, he argues, Van Gogh’s subject matter is in fact a pair of the artist’s own boots. Schapiro argues that this misattribution reveals the flaws in Heidegger’s professed response to the artwork he discusses, suggesting also that his account is flawed by inattention to ‘the artist’s presence in the work’ and the relationship between artist and subject matter.

Following his claims of misattribution, Schapiro argues that Heidegger ‘has indeed deceived himself. He has retained from his encounter with van Gogh’s canvas a moving set of associations with peasants and the soil, which are not sustained by the picture itself.’<sup>234</sup> Moreover, he argues that Heidegger is additionally mistaken in

<sup>232</sup> Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p. 79.

<sup>233</sup> Heidegger, ‘Work of Art’, p. 123.

<sup>234</sup> Meyer Schapiro, ‘The Still Life as a Personal Object – A Note on Heidegger and van Gogh’, in *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist and Society: Selected Papers* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), pp. 135-42 (p. 138).

believing this truth he claims to find is exclusive to encounters with the image. He writes:

It would be a mistake to suppose that the truth he uncovered in the painting – the being of the shoes – is something given here once and for all and is unavailable to our perception of shoes outside the painting. I find nothing in Heidegger’s fanciful description of the shoes pictured by van Gogh that could not have been imagined in looked at a real pair of peasants’ shoes.<sup>235</sup>

Schapiro’s account seems to make the mistake of naively assuming such an encounter would happen, and in particular that it could happen in such a way that the mode of encounter is not relevant. Heidegger’s main argument is not that a given pair of shoes mediates a particular relationship to a world; instead, his argument is about the mode of encounter that allows this truth to disclose itself. Such knowledge is not simply difficult to ascertain, but by nature that which we *do not* find either when using the equipment or in studying it out of use; there is something particular to the artistic encounter that sustains this difference in access.

I do not look at my own shoes and find disclosed in this visual encounter such truth of my way of being in a world. I would, to some extent, agree with Schapiro, however, that this non-access is perhaps not absolute. If I look at the pair of shoes I wore to work consistently for a year, and actually take the time to look with care and absorption for the ties between the thing and the aims I achieved while using it, perhaps some of my world emerges. The scuffed toes speak to a year of kneeling on coarse carpet, and the deep creases across the toe might afford some awareness of the mobility I achieved in them. The variable wear across sole and heel indicates a slight imbalance in my manner of walking that I can never catch myself performing, and slight smears and residue of boot polish exist as revealing traces of care, and even of a social demand that these shoes – as objects also to be looked at – give a sufficient impression of professionalism. Yet such looking is neither my standard inattention to my shoes nor a normal form of looking that analyses only the shoes’ “thingness”. As with the hammer that is “too heavy”, I am engaged in a mode of approach subject to slippage between analysing them as objects and as objects understood in a context of use.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Schapiro, ‘The Still Life as a Personal Object’, p. 138.

<sup>236</sup> In this mode of engagement with my shoes there is perhaps an echo of something akin to Walton’s “imaginative games of make-believe” that featured in my second chapter. Such a mode of study of the shoes can only operate by the fluctuating shifts between visual study and imaginative remembering. Walton’s account linked the study of images to imaginative activity, and even if the accounts are very different, it is arguably such an aspect of responding to an image that infiltrates a study of the objects that allows disclosure of this kind.

This sense of the transformative nature of such looking has other real-world examples. I cannot imagine a scenario in which I could actually look, as Schapiro suggests, at a real pair of peasants' shoes without disrupting the relationships they bear between a world and a self. The fact of my interaction with them may not change their material properties, but it transforms them from actually existing simply as a peasant's shoes. If, as is more plausible, I encounter them in a museum, then the resulting disclosure of truth and world is perhaps beholden to a similar operation as that in the image. Such shoes are abstracted and displayed, and reveal themselves again through a visual attention willing to linger on them in their abstraction. Framed, enclosed behind glass, there is a sense in which they are no longer shoes but an exhibit akin to sculpture or painting, in which their availability for use is dramatically altered, and their primary mode of relation to another is as something visual.

Schapiro's insistence that the shoes are "actually" a specific pair – belonging to a specific person and with a specific relationship to the artist – yields a focus on particularity that also risks eliding Heidegger's move to the general. While Heidegger writes that 'Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is* in truth', in the paragraph immediately prior, he also writes, '[t]he artwork lets us know what shoes are in truth.'<sup>237</sup> Schapiro comments that Heidegger 'finds in the picture of the shoes a truth about the world as it is lived by the peasant owner without reflection', but the qualifier, "by the peasant worker", could be removed without distortion of Heidegger's argument.<sup>238</sup> While his discussion of the disclosure enacted by the painting focuses on the revelation of a world for an individual person, the argument more generally is that the encounter with the artwork is one that allows a world to be set up or set forth. Heidegger rejects the notion that the artwork qualifies as artwork because of successful depiction of an actual pair of shoes 'somewhere at hand', or that the artwork is a product on to which the likeness of something actual is transposed. The particular being whose truth has set itself to work in the artwork is particular to and in the painting, rather than particular in its referent in some reality the image replicates. As he states: '[t]he work, therefore, is not the reproduction of some particular entity that happens to be at hand at any given time; it is, on the contrary, the reproduction of things' general essence.'<sup>239</sup> The example of the shoes serves to elucidate

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<sup>237</sup> Heidegger, 'Work of Art', p. 102.

<sup>238</sup> Schapiro, 'The Still Life as a Personal Object', pp. 139-40.

<sup>239</sup> Heidegger, 'Work of Art', p. 103.

a form of encounter with an artwork in which one can experience the dual status of equipment in its touchable *thereness* before us, in its presence-at-hand in its material configuration, but also as something which can only be experienced through a form of activity that combines visual attention and presence with a more imaginative, experiential capacity to approach the relationality of an object in a world, to come closer to the *here* in and from which it performs these relations.

It is not the specificity of the shoes but the guidance of a mode of encounter in which the object is removed from both a context of pure use and of pure presence. As Karsten Harries observes:

Openness to the being of equipment requires an even more radical distancing from the way we ordinarily use it. It calls for a different kind of sight. An artwork can become the vehicle of such a leavetaking from the everyday that let's [sic] us attend to what usually does not seem to matter at all.<sup>240</sup>

This sight can function as a counter to the 'blindness' she describes as inherent in the utilisation of equipment; one does not see that which one uses. Heidegger's readers, she notes, are not even brought to stand in front of the material painting, but are still imaginatively removed to a new relationality to what is held in the static image. These readers, she states, had to transport themselves out of their everyday, '[e]ntering the vicinity of art, if only in thought'.<sup>241</sup>

### **3.3c – Painter Working, Reflection: Detachment and (Re)Attachment**

In Heidegger's account it is the bringing of oneself in front of the artwork and the mode of encounter this permits that is important. The prevarications within Heidegger's account as to the specifics of the painting suggest that such particularities are less significant than the type of encounter more generally. We do not even know *which* painting (we are told Van Gogh painted several), we do not know *where* the shoes painted are supposed to stand and, in a later edition, Heidegger adds the further comment that the painting also denies us knowledge of the shoes' owner.<sup>242</sup> In *Painter Working, Reflection* there is none of these ambiguities. The painter stands in his shoes in his studio and works on his own self-portrait. Freud's decision to include his shoes in

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<sup>240</sup> Karsten Harries, *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger's 'The Origin of the Work of Art'*, (n.p.: Springer, 2009), p. 87.

<sup>241</sup> Harries, *A Critical Commentary*, p. 89.

<sup>242</sup> See Meyer Schapiro, 'Further Notes on Heidegger and Van Gogh' in *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist and Society: Selected Papers* (New York: George Braziller, 1994) pp. 143-151 (p. 150). And Harries, *A Critical Commentary*, p. 87.

this painting allows it to offer a serendipitous accompaniment to Heidegger's original discussion. Worn as they are here, they offer an intersection between the equipmentality Heidegger sees in Van Gogh's painting of shoes, and Schapiro's competing assertions that these shoes are, in fact, those of Van Gogh himself, and thus those of creative agent. Moreover, they place the equipment firmly within not just a context of use but within an act of use.

As I indicated above, even removed from a theoretical context of Heidegger's discussion and its subsequent debate, the shoes are arguably the most compelling element of the image. Regardless of the account one wishes to give of them, they jar with the nakedness of the figure, and attract the touch of attention that divides them from the body depicted, and seeks to then place the two in relation. This relationship between body and shoes, and its influence on how the image as a whole is received, has competing interpretations. Frances Borzello writes that, '*Painter Working, Reflection* is a portrait of the vulnerable artist, a vulnerability underlined by the unlaced boots, which add an air of the tramp to the image.'<sup>243</sup> She further remarks: '[t]here is nothing heroic about his self-portrait as an old man with stooped posture and the unlaced boots that protected him from the paint and splinters of the studio floor.'<sup>244</sup> In contrast, in one of the few discussions of the self-portrait to make explicit reference to Van Gogh, Linda Nochlin stresses the role of the boots not simply as foot protection, but as a deliberate, self-conscious echoing of Van Gogh, and thus their almost symbolic role in denoting Freud's place within an artistic tradition:

Despite Lucian Freud's token obeisance to the humility of Van Gogh's boots, in his self-portrait *Painter Working, Reflection* he seems literally to "reflect" the mythology constructed about him; heavy with Rembrandtian overtones, this is a portrait of the aging artist as the traditional old master. [...] His body is presented as softening, even decaying, but still powerful. Armed as he is with palette knife and penis, the pathos of his fading physical strength is allegorically deployed to contrast with his undiminished creative powers.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Frances Borzello, *The Naked Nude* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012), p. 120.

<sup>244</sup> Borzello, *The Naked Nude*, p. 120 (image caption).

It is worth noting that while the equipmental quality of the boots features here, the role of equipmentality in Borzello's description is not one that integrates the shoes with the body but instead seems implicitly to divide them. The boots, in the necessity of their use, suggest the vulnerability of the feet and body that is called to presence against them. That the boots themselves are described as unlaced posits them as similar lacking or deprived, and the tramp-like air she attributes to them make them markers, complicit with both his age and nakedness, in emphasising his vulnerability and deprivation.

<sup>245</sup> Linda Nochlin, *Bathers, Bodies, Beauty: The Visceral Eye* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 245-7.

The shoes here take on a very different significance than they do for Borzello. Instead of the unheroic vulnerability of an aging man needing the protection from his own environment that the shoes provide, Nochlin's association between Freud's shoes and Van Gogh's emphasises the subject as a self-aware actor within a contemporary mythology.

The parallels I cannot help but draw between Freud's image and Heidegger's discussion tie these shoes more strongly to equipmentality than symbolism. It is perhaps telling that, in the subsequent paragraph's discussion of Alice Neel's *Self-portrait* (1980), Nochlin is seemingly more willing to recognise the equipmental role of Neel's glasses than she is of Freud's shoes. 'She too', Nochlin asserts, 'holds the tools of her trade. The brush tells us she is an artist, as does the rag and the resolutely deglamorizing eye-glasses. Old people need them to see, old artists especially, although they are hardly part of the traditional apparatus of the nude.'<sup>246</sup> Nochlin's text presents them as devoid of any association with glamour or myth and instead allows these spectacles to belong to the (refashioned) realm of the nude or naked figure, bound to it (and by extension, somehow part of it) as a result of their necessity for the imaging of the naked body that the artist is enacting. It is curious that even as she attaches these tools to Neel, she detaches them from Freud and assigns to them to an isolable, merely symbolic presence.

While my remarks on the parallels between Freud and Heidegger have made no attempt to place these correspondences within the sphere of the artist's intentions, Nochlin's discussion of the shoes seems to offer some speculation as to the intended effect of the shoes within the composition of the image. As Nochlin's account indicates, Freud's choice to wear these Van Gogh-esque boots can be seen as an emulation of the artist and an attempt to either share, appropriate or honour the recognition afforded to him. However, we can also relate the painted presence of these shoes to Freud's familiarity not simply with Van Gogh but with his output. In a conversation with William Feaver about the work of artist John Constable, Freud volunteers an

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James C. Harris offers a markedly similar interpretation, describing it as 'a full-length frontal portrait of a naked defiant old man wearing unlaced boots who is holding up his paint brush in his right hand like a weapon, with his palate held in his left like a shield'. Here, little mention is made of the shoes beyond a material description, and his tools become weapons in a fight that, seemingly, aims beyond the creation of an image. As with Nochlin, Harris seems to position Freud in battle, rather than suspended and (if only partially) immersed in the far more modest activity of self-encounter and self-imaging.

James C. Harris, 'Lucian Freud's Reflection (Self-Portrait)', *JAMA Psychiatry*, 70.5 (2013), 455-6 (p. 456).

<sup>246</sup> Nochlin, *Bathers, Bodies, Beauty*, pp. 245-9.

(unspecified) image of painted shoes by Van Gogh as an example of the artist's engagement with observational truth.<sup>247</sup> He remarks:

Constable's paintings are more structured than the Impressionists'. He was not concerned with revolution: he was concerned with truth-telling. [...]

I may be quite wrong, but I can't see Van Gogh's 'Boots' without Constable behind them. I don't mean it's an immediate link but, to me, that kind of interest, observation and indulgence are things that exist in Constable.<sup>248</sup>

In thus associating Van Gogh's shoe paintings with a form of artistic truth-telling, Freud seems to adopt a roughly similar attitude to that which Schapiro expresses in describing these as 'veridical portraits of aging shoes'.<sup>249</sup> There is a shared insistence on observation as the primary characteristic of the image. As the previous chapter has emphasised, Freud's oeuvre is characterised by this drive to observe and express the individual form of that which he paints. It can only be speculation to wonder whether the association Freud finds between Van Gogh's shoes and observation is one that influenced his own relationship with his work shoes. They exist as tools for the painter working, but perhaps Freud's engagement with Van Gogh's own observations of his shoes has primed them, for Freud, as objects to be observed in their detachment from use.

Schapiro suggests that a closer expression of Van Gogh's relation to the shoes (and painting) that Heidegger discusses is offered by Knut Hamsun in his novel *Hunger*. In this, the first-person narrator chooses to study the appearance of his *own* shoes, motivated by the realisation that he had never really seen them before. This study was not simply static, but noted the ways in which the movements of his feet also interacted with their shape and the creases they bore, and lent them expression. These shoes, we are told, affected the owner 'like a ghost of my other I – a breathing portion of my very self.'<sup>250</sup> This intimate, personal connection is central to Schapiro's interpretation of the painting in question. He suggests that even if we imagine a Van Gogh painting "actually" of a peasant woman's shoes, Heidegger's account 'would still have missed an important aspect of the painting: the artist's presence in the work. In his account of the

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<sup>247</sup> This conversation was originally published in the French catalogue of a 2002-3 exhibition of John Constable's works. Lucian Freud had been invited to participate in the selection of works that would comprise the exhibition, of which William Feaver was the British curator.

<sup>248</sup> William Feaver, *Lucian Freud on John Constable* (London: The British Council, 2003), pp. 59-60.

<sup>249</sup> Meyer Schapiro, 'The Still Life as a Personal Object', p. 139.

<sup>250</sup> Knut Hamsun, *Hunger*, trans. George Egerton (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), p. 13. see Schapiro, 'The Still Life as a Personal Object', p.139.

picture he has overlooked the personal and physiognomic in the shoes that made them so persistent and absorbing a subject for the artist'.<sup>251</sup> Even if the intimacy is not one of ownership, it remains an intimacy that emerges through a personal and absorbing contemplation of the objects. Such intimacy is arguably akin to that which Freud himself admired about (seemingly) the same image. It is not just a depth of observation he remarks on, but also the accompanying 'interest' and 'indulgence' that speak of a deeper relation to the shoes than a mere regard for them as form and colour.

Schapiro claims that Van Gogh's works demonstrate the difference between such an intimate approach and a disinterested one. Describing a still life composition that included wooden peasant sabots alongside an assortment of objects and vegetables, Schapiro remarks that van Gogh gave these 'a clear, unworn shape and surface like the still-life objects he had set beside them on the same table'. In contrast, he argues that the level of detail and attention rendered in Van Gogh's painting of what Schapiro takes to be the artist's own boots is such that 'we can speak of them as veridical portraits of aging shoes.'<sup>252</sup> In the former, the clogs are treated in their material thingness. In the so-called portrait of the shoes, they are approached and rendered by the artist *as* that which they are in a wider network of relations. They are recognised *as* the shoes of a person intimately connected to them, and their form is understood as shaped by a usage which is part of this *as* of their Being.

Written in 1968, some of Schapiro's remarks seem tailor-made to Freud's painting of over two decades later. The account they give of a deeply intimate equipment revealed in an act of self-portraiture defines a space into which Freud steps. Freud's shoes combine elements from the two partially polarised descriptions of Van Gogh's shoe paintings. Freud's feet are clearly not adorned with shoes of the 'clear, unworn shape and surface' that Schapiro attributes to van Gogh's image of the peasant's wooden clogs. However, the shoe upon the painter's left foot is perhaps more visually similar to the sheet in the background than it is to the painter's body. Despite some discolouration on the toe, it is less variegated in tone and more even in form. Similar lack of variegation affects the foot that slides into it, glossing the precise angling of the ankle joint. The other shoe is more detailed; partly a matter of the angle of the foot, we nonetheless see more of the sole and some of the shadowing that accompanies its

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<sup>251</sup> Schapiro, 'The Still Life as a Personal Object', p.139.

<sup>252</sup> Schapiro, 'The Still Life as a Personal Object', p.139.



planting upon the wooden floorboards. We also see more detailing in the uppers, with a greater range and unevenness of colour and tone, and bulging and distortion along the rising line of the leather. There is also the suggestion of the uppermost eyelet for once-present laces. Whatever the level of intentionality that renders these differences, there are parallels between these and the peasant's shoes on one hand and the artist's on the other. Alternative parallels could also be drawn between the competing presence of the shoes as self-effacing equipment and objects of study. The comparative smoothness of the left shoe is perhaps indicative of a lower level of attention that speaks both to the self-effaced visibility of the object in use, and to the disinterest that accompanies an object studied purely for form separated from personal familiarity and association. In contrast, the right foot demonstrates the same intricacies of attention that characterise Freud's portraiture.

The connection between this dual rendering of materiality and dual modes of looking gestures towards the challenge at work in self-contact. The degree of close attention to the intricate materiality of the shoe is proportionate to the degree to which their personal connection to the painter is effaced. The more engaged Freud would be in study the shoes as objects, in touching and replicating the details of the objective presence, the more their absence as transparent-in use would increase. In *Painter Working, Reflection*, the figure of the artist stands in these shoes and performs both the shoes' effacement in use and the observation that detaches them in order to see the objects as themselves. As such, it recalls the impossible gesture of self-touch that Merleau-Ponty describes:

if I can, with my left hand, feel my right hand as it touches an object, the right hand as an object is not the right hand as it touches: the first is a system of bones, muscles and flesh brought down at a point of space, the second shoots through space like a rocket to reveal the external object in its place. In so far as it sees or touches the world, my body can therefore be neither seen nor touched. What prevents its ever being an object, ever being 'completely constituted' is that it is that by which there are objects. It is neither tangible nor visible in so far as it is that which sees and touches.<sup>253</sup>

Clearly establishing the painted, observed figure as also occupying the observing, creative role allows the painting to gesture towards an attempted identification of the embodied artist with the body his observation reveals, even as this process of observation offers a figure of (and thus a refiguring of) this self-relation. Freud's image,

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<sup>253</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 105.

as with Merleau-Ponty's touching hand, enacts a gesture of touching that aims towards contact with that which touches. However, the self-immersion that properly unifies an embodied self is characterised by the act of touching on the external other revealed *there* in this touch. Any attempt to formalise, to offer a figure of, such identification with a touching body is subject to the exteriorising displacement for which Nancy argues. Identification must always divide a unity in order to place it on both sides of the identificatory equation. That which such acts of identification *can* claim as one's own can only ever be a body in its otherness and objecthood; as Merleau-Ponty emphasises, it is inaccessible – unavailable for touch – as 'that which sees and touches'.

### 3.3ci – Attachment and Detachment

In Freud's painting, the shoes draw attention to the complex lines of integration and exclusion that relate the observed body to the observing self. However, they also extend the question of such exclusion to the body's relationship to itself as a unified whole.

In his discussion with Heidegger and Van Gogh, Derrida frames key aspects of his approach in terms of attachment. Van Gogh's painting, for Heidegger, discloses a world in which such lines of attachment may be seen as both present and effaced. The shoes are attached to their wearer, and this attachment both sustains and is sustained by the peasant's undisturbed dwelling in her world. At the same time, however, the work operates through the isolation of the shoes from both world and owner, and, further, from the actual realm of their being in their translating to their state as painted objects. In Freud's painting, the shoes are shown as in-work within a work. However, as discussed above, this simple attachment breaks down when the painting's scene duplicates the separations and detachments that are present in Van Gogh's. The shoes may be in-work within the image here, but so too are they pulled out-of-work through being looked-at, a looking on the part of the painted painter that images them both imaginatively as he stands before the shoes (or, at least, before their reflection) and in paint upon a canvas.

Derrida extends his questioning of the shoes to the feet that their presence suggests, describing the shoes (as equipment, as clothing) as "haunted" by the form of that to which their usefulness is attached.<sup>254</sup> He writes:

These shoes are more or less detached (in themselves, from each other, and from the feet), and by that fact discharged: from a common task or function. *Both*

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<sup>254</sup> Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, p. 303.

because they are visibly detached and because – never forget the invisible ether of this trivial self-evidence – they are *painted* objects (out-of-work because they're in a work) and the 'subject' of a picture. [...] And what is said of the shoes can also be said, although the operation is more delicate around the ankle, of the neck or the feet.<sup>255</sup>

Not only do the shoes attach to and detach from the feet but they also suggest a similar possibility of detachment that can divide these feet from the undivided unity of the body. They offer a figure of severance or separation in the suspension of relation in which the attachment occurs. By extension, I would suggest that the same structure permits the imminent rediscovery in *Painter Working, Reflection* of a detachment of hand that the painting (both act and object) enacts and enforces. The knife delineates a potential function and motion of a hand that, discoverable in (or rather, after and before) this act, allows the hand to detach under scrutiny.

We find this more clearly in the strange immobility of the female figure in *Painter and Model* (1986-7) (fig. 3.5). Whereas *Painter Working, Reflection* suggests the inclusion of the Freud's palette knife within the process by which the

image is created, the painter and tools depicted in *Painter and Model* are held in a pose that seemingly remains static before the artist. The paintbrush the painter-figure holds is equipment rendered opaque, reduced to its thingness in the facsimile of use that, unable to complete the touch and gesture beyond it, can only return to itself. The relationship of incorporation that allows the body – as the touching substrate of a self – to expand to the limits of equipment can also be inverted. Rather than being related to the brush in a direction or aim that reaches beyond it, the painted figure is frozen into a relation of touch upon the brush, such that it becomes an object of contemplation.<sup>256</sup> A similar objectification extends also to the hands that hold the brush. In this painting, we see a



Figure 3.5 – Lucian Freud, *Painter and Model* (1986-7)

<sup>255</sup> Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, p. 283.

<sup>256</sup> The ambiguity here is one that extends to the dual presentation of the female figure as both elements of the titular painter and model. The action of the real artist's hand overtakes the inaction of the painted artist, and creates space for the awareness both of that which she imitates and the fact of its status as mere imitation. The artist, Freud, is free to contemplate the object-status of the brush divorced from but suggestive of use, and so too is the female sitter, who poses thus.

literalised occurrence of Merleau-Ponty's account of self touch: the figure can, with one hand, feel the other as it touches the brush. In so doing, the hand touched is (however briefly) severed from the unity of the body that touches, pushed out and against it, externalised through this contact that finds it there. Perhaps mere seconds before, that hand, that region of matter, had been unified within the untouched, transparent body that touched the brush; perhaps, mere seconds later, it will be once again (re)attached, (re)integrated into the absence of the embodied self's *here*.

*Painter Working, Reflection* confronts a similar challenge. Both the hand of the "actual" painter and the painted hand of the painted painter hold the tool that they will use and have used to depict the hand in a posture of holding it. However, that which the image declines to do is attempt to paint this hand in the act of painting; in this, the hands of the actual painter and of the painted figure diverge, as do their relationships to the knife they hold. The image suggests a relationship of use between self (and body) and palette knife but declines the impossible attempt to fully depict it. The titular "painter working" indicates the dual activities of observation and creation, but the figure is painted only in the pose that accompanies observation. We find this same confrontation between multiple layers of touch and touching in the later work *Freddy Standing*. While Freud includes within the image the presence of himself as painter whose touch both looks at Freddy (the man) and a miniature representation of *Freddy Standing* (the painting in progress), his composition of the scene reveals the additional challenge of this painter looking at and depicting his own body, already caught between its multiple touches. The blind is lowered to the exact height at which his head is obscured, and with it the painting no longer needs to attempt to superimpose in one image the multiple touches of vision. Freud's self-inclusion in the image captures the touch of his vision on Freddy's body, yet in order to paint himself the line of vision that he is depicting must not only be lifted away from the canvas, but also diverted from Freddy. By obscuring the gaze of the artist, the painting evades confronting the impossibility of looking at the painter looking elsewhere.

In *Painter Working, Reflection*, the suspension of the activity of painting renders incomplete the integration of knife and self (naked self) that is achieved during the activity of painting that puts the knife to use. The knife is not so much revealed just below (along, or as) the surface of contact, not revealed as the extremity of the self which touches, but instead is pushed just beyond it. Unlike the shoes, which retain their equipmentality in supporting the act of looking, the observer looking at his reflection in

the mirror can touch on the knife as a discrete object. Similarly, the observer who must pose before the mirror to compose himself for this objectification bears in that activity no relationship of use to the knife he holds. As the one who is not object, but who sustains the pose that permits himself-as-object to be sought, Freud is similarly free to touch the knife as an object, present-at-hand, that is other to himself. Moreover, in these instances of slippage from equipmental use to thingly presence-at-hand, the knife that detaches is able to draw the hand with it. No longer touching, and instead immobilised in an unnatural pose, the hand is exposed in a non-completed act of touching. As in *Painter and Model*, the self is free to return its touch to its own body, and turn the touch of vision or contemplation towards the hand in a touch that regards it as a discrete object. The position of the hand may instead be revealed as that which the self's attention touches, whether by sight or by attention to sensory data that reveals not the object the hand grasps but the hand itself.<sup>257</sup> The hand is detached not from the biological composite of the body, but from the body's self-effacing *hereness* from which touch proceeds.<sup>258</sup>

The complexity of the image results from the multiple layering of its subject (as the one who poses, as the posed figure-to-be-looked at, as the observer, and as the

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<sup>257</sup> I can, if I choose, tense my hand and become conscious of it not as that which reveals, but as a set of sensations that I perceive as somehow separate from the act of perception. They reveal my hand *as* something, *as* a configuration or at a certain location. Similarly, if I still my hand in the act of writing, I can shift the touch of my awareness so that what touch reveals is not the shape of the pencil, but the shape of my hand as it is held around it. That doing so requires some concentration speaks to the more natural use of the hand as that which reaches at the limit of the body to find that beyond it.

<sup>258</sup> While not directed at Lucian Freud's work, nor at any particular painting, Anne Hollander's discussion of pubic hair and male genitalia perhaps hints at a similar form of divisibility and detachment that is operative in visual depictions of male nakedness. She writes that the male body is differentiated from the female body in art because:

the male genitals constitute a distinct interruption in the formal scheme – a clump of flesh differentiated [...] in color and texture from the rest of the composition. [...] Women's bodies have no such egregious interruptions of shape: breasts are like buttocks or knees – projections easily assimilable to any three-dimensional sense of corporeal harmony. (p. 136.)

The male genitals, as figured here, interrupt the body's unity; they are detached through difference, through a touch that cuts them out and demarcates them as a discrete object against the rest of the body. It is perhaps, therefore, no surprise that Linda Nochlin describes the figure in *Painter Working, Reflection* as 'armed with palette knife and penis' (see section 3.c): each makes a similar claim to a discrete, identifying touch that sets it against the rest of the undifferentiated body. In Greek vase painting, Hollander adds, pubic hair was used to minimise this disruption and 'formalize the vexing transition between genital and bodily flesh'. Whereas in *Freddy Standing* (2000-1) the penis does seem to emerge less starkly from a shadowy region of pubic hair, Freud's *Painter and Model* (1986-7) in particular foregrounds the male genitalia in such a way that they do seem to call for differentiated visual touch that notes and demarcates them as separate. The sitter's reclining posture with sprawling legs emphasises the location of the genitals at the very extreme of the body, even as the neat circle of the scrotum, with its fairly even red colour, offers a line of neat excision at which such detachment can occur.

Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1975] 1993), p. 136.

painter). This results in intricate and incompatible formulations of the thereness and hereness of the figure that are nonetheless simultaneously held together in the image. Overlapping in the fixed, complete image are the shifting patterns of presence as the location and orientation of the self necessarily oscillates between its multiple situations. The *here* of the figure is variable, with each variable presented in an image that, as image, necessarily demarcates the figure *there* within the lines of contact that compose him. The *here* of the self figured in the painting can only be hinted at or inferred; as with any touch the viewer is always outside, external to, the object touched. Concerned as the image is with showing a painter engaging in an attempted self-contact, the *thereness* that the image necessarily imposes also serves to indicate the inevitable displacement involved in any attempt to touch on one's own touching self, the toucher always slipping to the outside of, to lie against, the object that touch reveals *there*.

### **3.4 – Figures of Approach and Movement**

This immobilising simultaneity and superimposition of constantly dynamic, continually repatterned touch demonstrates the challenge of self-touch. The body is always offered for a touch from outside, and in Freud's self-portrait the figure is simultaneously wholly surface, observed from this external perspective, and the self who conducts these touches of observations. To touch on its own body, this self must be displaced from it, and the painting offers an image of this approach of a self that seeks to claim itself through touch. This relationship is partially mediated by the mirror, by the titular reflections. The *there* where the active self touches is not strictly against his own skin, but against the surface of mirror, which offers a distanced image of the body for touch that thus mediates the self-distancing, the externalising dislocation of self, that is enforced by self-contact. The mirror, however, also insists on the problematic attempt operative in this image to not only touch and recreate an image or object of oneself, but to more explicitly attempt to touch oneself in the act of touching. The mirror offers a facsimile of the distorted and frustrated double gaze of the nude and the viewer Nancy describes in *Being Nude*, as quoted earlier in this chapter.<sup>259</sup> While the gazes seemingly meet in the mirror, only one figure can see, can touch; the gaze of the nude as object is blind to itself, and this unequal encounter at the surface of the body is at once a gesture of self-touch in which the corporeal substrate of the self is exposed and the enacting and

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<sup>259</sup> See Section 3.2.

maintaining of a division in which the attempted identification can only occur across a distance that holds the two separate. The touch refuses to allow the toucher to exist in and as the interiority of that which it touches, even as it touches on the material body which is the seeming locus, the assumed *here*, from which this touch proceeds.

As discussed in Jean-Luc Nancy's account of sleep, interiority in the sense of one's being wholly within, without touch that encounters the world along the exposure of skin, can only be figured as unconsciousness, as an absence of sense: sleeping, "'I' no longer exist, or else 'I' 'exist' only in that effacement of my own distinction'.<sup>260</sup> As a result, immersion within one's self without the accompanying orientation of the self towards the outside lacks the capacity for contact that would enable it to relate itself to its own interiority. 'I sleep,' Nancy writes, 'and this *I* that sleeps can no more say it sleeps that it could say that it is dead.'<sup>261</sup> Yet as his account emphasises, sleep is a state into and from which we transition. 'Like death, sleep, and like sleep, death –' Nancy writes, 'but without awakening. Without a rhythm of return, without repetition'.<sup>262</sup> The interiority of death is fixed and absolute; as with the discussion of death and the image in the second chapter of this thesis, that which is fixed within death can bear no relation to itself. It can only be touched from outside. We cannot know ourselves in sleep's lack of capacity to touch, yet, unlike with death, we can indirectly relate to this interiority of sleep through an ongoing rocking motion of approach and withdrawal. In both Derrida's discussion of Heidegger and Van Gogh's shoes, and Jean-Luc Nancy's account of drawing, we find similar figures of motion at work that shape our engagement with the body and offer dynamic models of the ways in which we can approach a fuller understanding of the whole that is the embodied self.

### 3.4a – Lacing

Derrida's text makes repeated reference to a figure of lacing and interlacing, an action that binds (but also marks as separate) the multiple surfaces and aspects of that which is understood, or at least understandable, through its relationship to modes of attachment.

Of the product which is the pair of shoes, he writes:

insofar as it is a usable product, and especially insofar as it is a product of the  
genus clothing, it is invested, inhabited, informed  
- haunted

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<sup>260</sup> Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, p. 7.

<sup>261</sup> Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep*, p. 5.

<sup>262</sup> Nancy, *The Fall of Sleep* p. 41.

- by the “form” of another naked thing from which it is (partially and provisionally?) detached [...] and to which it seems to be waiting (seems to make us wait for it) to be reattached, reappropriated. It seems to be made to be retied. But the line of detachment (and thus of the out-of-use and the idleness alike) is not only the one which goes around the shoes and thus gives them form, cuts them out. This first line is already a tracing of coming and going between the outside and the inside, notably when it follows the movement of the lace. It is therefore not simple; it has an internal border and an external border which is incessantly turned back in. But there is another line, another system of detaching *traits*: this is the work *qua* picture in its frame. The frame makes a work of supplementary *désouvrement*. It cuts out but also sews back together. By an invisible lace which pierces the [...], passes into it then out of it in order to sew it back onto its milieu, onto its internal and external worlds.<sup>263</sup>

In the constantly shifting relation between the shoes and their wearer (both painted and real) *Painter Working, Reflection* enacts the double movement of detachment and reattachment. Lost (and found) between these two is attachment itself. The shoes can slip on and off the painter’s physical feet as he moves through his world. The shoes can also move in and out of vision or awareness in his fluctuating process of observation and immersion. To borrow from one of Derrida’s remarks, they pass from in work to in a work (pulled, as it were, ‘out-of-work because they’re in a work’), oscillating also from equipment to object, from nakedness to its interruption.

Would that Freud’s painting were a definitive response to Heidegger, Schapiro and Derrida; one might have wondered as to the significance of the absence of shoelaces from this work. Of course, the question remains open. We need not (in a manner perhaps reminiscent of Schapiro’s search for the real-world “truth” or represented object within the painting) observe that the lack of laces corresponds readily with the lack of laces adorning or binding the shoes on Freud’s own feet. If the lack of laces need not signify purely the object represented, might it have the potential to signify a looseness of attachment? A ponderousness weighing at the base of a body at work? Might we, perhaps, look at these unlaced shoes and see (perhaps now akin to Heidegger’s less particular imaginative activity) and feel in these tools or garments the shuffling gait enforced on us by shoes that threaten constant detachment, that inhibit free movement? Like walking as a child in an adult’s shoes, perhaps it is possible to look at Freud’s feet and relate not to the invisibility of equipmentality but to its breakdown. Alternatively, the viewer might look at the painted image, might, perhaps, turn to seemingly documentary photographic evidence of the shoes in use, and see the absence of laces as

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<sup>263</sup> Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, pp. 303-4.



an indication of true attachment. Perhaps the lack of lacing is not lack but a lack of necessity. Perhaps the shoes need not be lashed on, and thus need not stand out, disjointed, in their interval of attachment, but instead slip on almost as invisibly as they remain on.<sup>264</sup>

In each of these speculations, the lines of attachment between shoes, body and Freud himself (whatever that may mean) are exposed for questioning. Unlike Van Gogh's painted shoes, these are firmly attached to their wearer, laces or not. However, this attachment is not one that renders them wholly transparent. However much they efface themselves in use (and thus belong through such absence to the nakedness of the figure), they reassert their presence under the touch of observation. Lacing is an act of union, and thus is a figure of the separateness that is both the antecedent and remainder of any act of uniting. Not unity, but union; two held together. By being both (and neither) wholly absorbed into Freud's (naked, unadorned) body and (nor) a separate entity, the painting holds body and shoes as attached, bound together even in their distinction.

What must also be asserted is that the figure at work is not that of the lace but of the act, the movement, of lacing. Without the possibility for motion and change which is its designated and recognised function, the shoe lace sinks down from union to unity. It is no longer a uniting, active element that holds the shoe together, but, rendered immobile, joins within the togetherness that forms the mass of undivided shoe. It is motion, and the openness to change this motion permits, that distinguishes the weaving of the shoelace from that of the stitching which is part of the shoe's manufacture. We pay little heed to the stitching (originally a movement) which holds together two separate bits of leather, nor to the adhesives or studs that affix sole to uppers. They once served in an act of uniting, but this is now closed into fixity (or fixed into closure). If we notice these elements, we do so only when the unity (transparent, opaque – either way, undivided) breaks down into re-recognised parts, when, for example, the sole begins to detach from the leather.

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<sup>264</sup> Maybe another viewer would relate differently again, lying somewhere between these views (yet not as a continuum) and see the looseness of the attachment as indicative of a realm of work, a world of work, in which such looseness is appropriate and non-intrusive, in a way that could not be sustained outside the studio. The body painted does, after all, stand still. Whether or not it matters that there exists photographic evidence of Freud ascending and descending steps while painting, it is harder to evoke the bodily sensation of thwarted or awkward movement in such shoes when looking at a scenario in which motion is excluded.

This motion of lacing offers a similar motion to that of the rocking:

Like a lace, each “thing,” each mode of being of the thing, passes inside then outside the other. From right to left, from left to right. We shall articulate this *strophe* of the lace: in its rewinding passing and repassing through the eyelet of the thing, from outside to inside, from inside to outside, *on* the external surface and *under* the internal surface [...]<sup>265</sup>

This lacing, this interlacing, with its *strophe* of shuttling back and forth, inside and out enacts a similar oscillation to that which featured so strongly in the preceding chapter’s advocacy of repose. The figure of lacing binds this seemingly static image with the integration of layers and potentials for attachment that can only be experienced by a rapid shuffling of perspective and understanding, each nonetheless pierced and bound together at the static point of the image. While the figures of rocking and lacing are different, each is a figure of approach that constantly turns away. To return to the previous chapter, this motion always requires that point of pivot, that point somehow both properly internal and yet external, lying, as it does, at the extremity of any movement inwards. In Freud’s self-portrait there are no laces. If anything, it is the palette knife that leads the movement in and out of the scene, the world, the artwork. The shoes lie at the end(s) of this motion as both an extremity of the body that effaces itself in the body’s actions, and an extremity of the body-as-object that eyes touch and the palette-knife commits to canvas.

### 3.4b – Drawing

This shuttling of the lace enacts a similar movement to the rocking pendulum motion that concluded the previous chapter. It is this figure of approach and movement that characterises the relationship to a body (in particular, to one’s own body) that can only be fleetingly touched in a touch that draws away from it even as it draws towards it. Jean-Luc Nancy’s figure of rocking pervades his account of sleep, but a similar emphasis on motion is advocated in his account of drawing.

Nancy defines drawing as ‘the opening of form’, both in the sense of origin and beginning, and in the sense of its ‘inherent capacity’. ‘According to the first sense,’ he writes, ‘drawing evokes more the gesture of drawing than the traced figure. According to the second, it indicates the figure’s essential incompleteness, a non-closure or non-

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<sup>265</sup> Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, p. 299.

totalizing of form.’ That which drawing engages cannot, he argues, be ‘detached entirely from a sense of gesture, movement or becoming’; instead drawing draws itself forward before the forms which are traced, drawn and disposed.<sup>266</sup> It is the initiating of a trace (one that ‘must always be discovered again’), ‘the singularity of the opening – the formation, impetus, or gesture – of form’.<sup>267</sup> Drawing opens up towards a form that is discovered – that forms – through this movement of drawing. ‘Drawing is not a given, available formed form’, Nancy asserts.<sup>268</sup> Instead:

it is the gesture that proceeds from the desire to show this form and to trace it so as to show the form – but not to trace in order to reveal it as a form already received. Here, to trace is to find, and in order to find, to seek a form to come (or to let it seek and find itself) – a form to come that should or that can come through drawing.<sup>269</sup>

Nancy again returns this figure to his account of an endless play of division, which delimits the bodies that make up our recognisable world through the paths of separation that yield forms. ‘[O]ut of nothing comes form, [or] nothing becomes form – in other words, distinction, separation, and opening.’<sup>270</sup> Like the cracks within glass, form emerges in the separation and patterning of the nothingness that is the transparent unity.

Just as importantly, this movement of drawing and of art, this movement that traces forms through an opening of a gesture of discovery, reveals more than the simple facts of what appears and of the appearance of these things. Instead, drawing reveals the underlying movement of ‘coming into appearance’.<sup>271</sup> This becoming visible that art reveals, however, is not confined solely to art, and is instead an ongoing, unceasing movement through which appearances manifest and change and dissolve. Drawing as a motion reveals this wider movement and rhythm of existence. As Nancy claims, ‘[i]t is about showing the infinity of becoming visible; the movement through which appearance is possible cannot itself be finished, that appearance is necessarily *finite* (accomplished form, achieved contour detached on a ground).’<sup>272</sup> Each appearance that emerges in this movement of coming to visibility may be finite, but there is an ongoing movement that subtends and surpasses them. Rather than a movement that blurs and

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<sup>266</sup> Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing*, p. 1.

<sup>267</sup> Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing*, p. 1, p. 3.

<sup>268</sup> Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing*, p. 3.

<sup>269</sup> Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing*, p. 10.

<sup>270</sup> Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing*, p. 95.

<sup>271</sup> Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing*, p. 92.

<sup>272</sup> Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing*, p. 93.

overlays each finite appearance, drawing as a gesture engages the movement (‘infinite by nature’) through which these finite appearances emerge.

As a result, we can note that the movement of art (the ongoing movement of drawing, forming and creating) sits in tension with the static artworks (the static forms) that it produces and supersedes. ‘Drawing comes to open and does not close off’, Nancy writes, but the completion of the work is nonetheless a closure.<sup>273</sup> This closure, however, is not attainable by drawing, but only by the withdrawing and relocation of its movement. The movement of art towards form (always movement *towards*) is instead ‘a desire that is impossible to fulfil or bring to completion: a desire that is infinite and *unfinishable*’.<sup>274</sup> The final artwork is not a fulfilment of drawing itself, but a stopping of this motion. It has been said that a work of art is never finished but merely abandoned.<sup>275</sup> We might contrast this with Heidegger’s assertion that ‘the painting is finished with the last stroke of the brush.’<sup>276</sup> For Heidegger, the painting’s way of being is marked by ending; it remains present-at-hand in a way that is characterised by its “finishedness”.<sup>277</sup> In each of these statements, the completion of the artwork (a completion of a process that offers an object which is itself complete) is determined by circumstances external to the image, and dependent upon a continuation of activity that is different to the activity of its creation. Such completion does not belong to the movement of drawing that sustains the creative process but is imposed from without. The finishing of painting (of *a* painting) requires subsequent engagement with the

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<sup>273</sup> Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing*, p. 76.

<sup>274</sup> Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing*, p. 94. (Original emphasis.)

<sup>275</sup> Although sometimes attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, Darren Hudson Hick notes instead that the remark “A poem is never finished, only abandoned” was attributed to Paul Valéry by W. H. Auden. Hick himself advances only a sufficient but not necessary condition of the finishedness of the artwork: the release of it to publication. (That this is only sufficient, not necessary, is indicated by the reasonable assumption that there are many finished but unpublished works.) Rather than abandonment, instead the artist (if alive) must make the decision to designate the artwork as at this stage. However, there perhaps remains a different sense of abandonment at work. Hick suggests that it is not the decision to publish but the actual distribution before the public eye that marks such completion; in this, the artwork is abandoned by the viewer with the uniquely privileged relationship to the work that permits viewing to influence the composition of the image (the artist may still make changes), and offered over to those who may only receive it as a totality.

See Darren Hudson Hick, ‘When Is a Work of Art Finished?’, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 66.1 (2008), 67-76.

<sup>276</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 289

<sup>277</sup> Unlike the ending or “stopping” of rain, in which the rain is no longer present-at-hand, the cessation of a road or an artwork is such that it remains present. Moreover, while the cessation of these things leaves them present-at-hand, they may be so in either a finished or unfinished way. The road that breaks off when under construction has a different way of being present to the road that is completed. Similarly, the artwork that the painter has deemed complete is as equally present as that which is abandoned, deemed unfinished, but on which work has fully ceased.

See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 289.

artwork to be such that does not alter it, that no longer draws it towards a form to come. “Finishedness” may belong to the artwork (and, by extension, to the appearances that comprise it) but cannot belong to the coming to appearance that characterises (and is revealed by) its process of creation.

### 3.4c – Oscillation and excess

In *Flora with Blue Toenails* the artist’s presence is indicated within the work as a material body; the presence of what is presumably the artist is included in the physicality of paint and thus as occupying the same temporality of the model being painted. However, the painting shows only the shadow of a head, and while its inclusion within the work suggests it belongs to the artist, this shadow has the potential to indicate (even if only fictionally) the position of a viewer standing before the canvas at any stage of its creation or display. As such, it is capable of gesturing towards an engagement with the canvas that will be performed following the completion or finishing of the work, and which thus exceeds the duration of creation. Although very different – particularly with regards to the specific identity of the observer – *Painter Working, Reflection* is capable of gesturing to a similar engagement with elements of the image after its completion. However, the artwork also is capable of pointing towards the excess of living engagement with a work that continues beyond its completion (and which thus marks the work as complete through an attitude of finality or abandonment).

In this painting, the figure depicted exists in three roles, two of which the image makes explicitly visible. Freud is both observed object and the self who observes this object or body. In conjunction with the descriptive title, the tools this figure holds suggest that the observer is also the painter, who must intermittently turn from the pose of observation in which the body is depicted in order to create the image. As such, Freud in this self-portrait can be seen as enclosed within an act of looking that was both precedent and antecedent to the acts of drawing and painting that render him thus. Looking must have occurred prior to painting, and it is plausible to imagine that a final stage of observation was performed to assess the completeness of the painted image. As such, the oscillation between roles inherent to the self-portrait locks it into an already suspended, never completed, game of catch-up. The person painted, the object rendered, can never fully represent the same person as the one who survives and completes the process. Freud can never paint the person he is after he has finished that image, he must

always take that step beyond the person he leaves behind on the canvas. The completion of the image requires an abandonment that is haunted by excess. Some fraction of that which is present during the final act of self-observation must be absent from the painting.

The body (the other-as-body) is that which we encounter in (as) the particularity of its appearance under touch:

A body's always ob-jected from the outside, to "me" or to someone else. Bodies are first and always other – just as others are first and always bodies. I'll never know my body, never know myself as a body *right there* where "corpus ego" is an unqualified certainty. By contrast, I'll always know others as bodies. *An other is a body* because only *a body is an other*. It has this nose, that skin color, this texture, that size, this fold, tightness. It weighs this weight. It smells that way. Why is this body thus, and not otherwise? *Because it is other* – and alterity consists in being-*thus*, in being the thus and thus and thus of *this* body, exposed all the way into its extremities. The inexhaustible *corpus* of a body's features.<sup>278</sup>

The image fixes an appearance, and renders itself wholly as appearance. We can traverse its surface with a series of touches with their own micro-revelations as to the specificity of the image, but it is given as wholly-given. Freud's self-portrait may reflect the changing nature of his body across the painting's creation, but this accumulation of touches ultimately ceases into particularity. Freud's imaged body has *this* nose, *that* skin colour, *this* posture and that expression. In its knowability in this specificity, it is asserted in its alterity, and such alterity must always be touched by the self across a distance (at least, across a separation). The objection of the body, Nancy asserts, 'will have come *in the very coming* of the other'; a coming, an arrival, that is only possible across this separation.<sup>279</sup> This coming, we might note, announces too a motion, a movement, and in movement is the entry of time and, correspondingly, inevitably, change. The separation that allows one to receive the image enforces, as Barthes emphasised with the photograph, the image's status as the "this has been".

The same applies to any act of self-touch or self-identification. I must always step beyond who I have been up to now, and in stating 'I' I must turn back and claim what I have been, claiming it in a gesture from beyond, from outside that which I call to claim into myself and identify as. As humans dwelling in a world structured by our engagements, we are always oriented forwards, *towards* the aims and ends of our interactions. Insofar as we have a sense of the self which we are, of the form of that

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<sup>278</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, pp. 29-31.

<sup>279</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 31.

which sustains our sense of *hereness*, that which we carry or project ahead with us can only be an “I” claimed in a past gesture of self-touch. In his self-portrait, Freud engages with and creates an image of himself-as-other with which he seeks to identify. However, Freud can, indeed must, step away and step beyond that other even in that process of identification. The act of self-portraiture performs a gesture of imperfect doubling that cannot touch on his self *as* a touching agent, and that also yields an object that applies only to who-he-has-been, and never quite to who-he-is.

Self-portraiture is a movement of self-approach, and the final chapter of this thesis turns to take up such a project, turning from the art of others to a personal experience of body, of *my* bodiliness. The final movement of this current chapter, therefore, begins this transition by turning to images of the body in service of medicine, an area in which objective knowledge of the body combines with intensely personal experiences of it. Jessica Rosenberg offers a personal account of the events that followed her mother’s diagnosis with thyroid cancer.<sup>280</sup> In particular, she articulates how aspects of the medical response to her illness (including photographs and images of the body used in service of these) imposed a necessity fragmentation and division on the body in order to heal it. As with the above discussion of Freud, who ultimately exceeds and moves beyond the objectified, divisible body with which he engages as artist, the divisions enacted by medical practice upon Rosenberg’s mother were not intended to outlast or even remain cotemporaneous with the patient once healed. The one whose body is imaged, whose boundaries are known, touched, asserted, will then proceed to carry off their body (or be carried off and onwards by and in their body) beyond this proliferation of fragmentary touches. In Rosenberg’s example, the impermanence of the image is integral to the intention; after all, what is the value of a photograph of a diseased body part if the subsequent procedure does not seek to render the original images obsolete? The photograph is taken not in the mere knowledge but in the overt hope that it will soon be out of date.

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<sup>280</sup> Jessica Rosenberg, ‘Snapshot’, *Feminist Studies*, 26.2 (2000), 377-9.

### **3.5 – Fragmentation, Wholeness and (In)Tolerable Detachment**

#### **3.5a – Intolerable detachment**

Derrida observes that the strophe of lacing ‘makes the thing sure of its gathering, the underneath tied up on top, the inside bound on the outside, by a law of stricture.’<sup>281</sup> Such surety, however, cannot be absolute, because the lacing is an openness to gathering where stricture exists only alongside the potential for loosening. The touch on the body *as* a body, *as* a particular body, is a similar act of gathering that can also become undone. The same touch that unifies can also divide, just as Freud’s shoes can detach from the wholeness of the figure, with the feet threatening to detach along with them. As emphasised in the first chapter of this thesis, it is materiality that is the substrate of contact, that allows the world to be recognised, engaged with and ultimately divided up along lines of contact that unify bodies into singularities; it is this same availability for touch and division that leaves the patterning of the world into these arrangements of singularities open to change and repatterning.

Derrida remarks that ‘[d]etachment is intolerable’, and references the desire operative in the debate between Heidegger and Schapiro’s responses to ‘hurry to tie up the thread with the subject’ (where the term “subject” itself is multiple and entangled). Freud’s painting is not a figure shown in detachment; contrary to Van Gogh’s image(s) of shoes, it is not, after all, an image of shoes that are in any sense abandoned, left without clear attribution to their owner or use. Yet the internal logic of the painting, and what its painted subject suggests or reveals about the operations that went into the creation and composition of this depicted subject, demonstrates the impossibility of sustained tolerance for the body’s not only possible but inevitable and necessary operations of detachment and divisibility. *Painter Working, Reflection* allows us to consider both the resolution and the (permanently open) opening of this intolerable detachment. The painted shoes are firmly attached to the painted owner, the painted subject who might claim them. However, as stated, Freud’s nakedness in the image emphasises the dual status of the figure as both the self who touches, and whose equipment is integrated into his unified body, and as the objectified body that the self-s touch reveals there. The body as object does not simply wear the shoes, a repatterning of the relationship between skin and shoe that re-detaches the boots and asserts their own potential singularity against the other singularities depicted in the image.

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<sup>281</sup> Derrida, *Truth in Painting*, p. 299.



The unity of the body that touches and the open divisibility of the body that touch objectifies exist in an unresolvable tension that we experience in varying degrees within our own lives. The intermittent touches upon ourselves retract the *there* of our engagements to lie against the assumed boundaries of our body, and in doing so they interrupt the touches elsewhere, beyond ourselves, in which we are engaged. In this suspension of engaged interaction with the objects of a world, we are reminded instead of the ties between the body (the corpse, the corporeal) and this potential for endless division. As Freud works, the shoes efface themselves within the body that does not touch itself but reaches out to touch its world. Observed, the shoes are available as divided from the body, and the striations of touch that mark this region of matter (or this subset of visual data) as shoes separate it from the body. This divides the previous unity. In so doing, however, the shoes gesture towards the biological body's potential to be divided and fragmented. The shoes can be seen *as* shoes, and this *as* is a delimiting that separates. The same can occur for the feet that disappear beneath the layer of leather, the layer of brown, that comprise the shoes. In seeing the shoes as attached to Freud's feet, we implicitly partition this body. Rather than seeing simply a unity which bears both shoes and paintbrush, we can see a body which includes feet, hands and arms. Underlying this is the act of translation to paint that is the operation of the *painter working* that the image depicts. Even if we didn't divide the body into legs, arms, hands, and eyes, we must acknowledge a division that has already occurred in which this section accords with that brush stroke.

### 3.5b – Fragmentation in Service of Wholeness

Rosenberg positions her discussion of her mother's illness in an intersection with the account of death and photography offered by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*. Running through this text is Barthes's search not only for an account of the Photograph, but for a specific photograph of his mother, which he terms the Winter Garden Photograph. In seeking the latter, he is aware of its differing status for the disinterested viewer and for himself. 'It exists only for me', he writes, '[f]or you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture.'<sup>282</sup> In response to this subjective relation, Carol Mavor observes that 'Barthes's emphasis is less on the *real* maternal body represent in the Winter Garden Photograph' than it is on a thread that travels towards the mother that he

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<sup>282</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 73.

cannot show us. Even if this image were to be produced, its meaning could not be: '[o]nly Barthes can have *his* mother, *his* maman.'<sup>283</sup> Rosenberg's account is built upon a similar distinction. The image permits multiple ways of relating to its content, but ultimately rests on the fact that what it shows is capable of being imaged. We can respond to bodies as wholes, units with varying significances and enmeshed in complex, unique networks of relationships. However, the image reveals the material divisibility of a body as a mass of light-reflecting matter bound up within the laws of physical interaction.

The standard dichotomy of self and body endorses, for one, a conflict between wholeness and divisibility. 'I' (or at least, the self) is always wholly given, wholly itself; physical matter is inherently divisible, potentially infinitely.<sup>284</sup> Quite literally, the physical body can be chopped up. Moreover, even if physical matter cannot be divided into infinitely smaller pieces, it remains subject to infinite possibilities of division and fragmentation. The lines that divide wholeness into parts pulled out against each other can fall anywhere, and enforce a *between* anywhere that creates new fragments. Typically speaking, the medical body is anatomical in this way, its unity always built upon a necessary acknowledgement of this divisibility. 'Twenty bodies in a room, only we two breathing', says the medical student of the morgue. Body here is unitary, and is counted in discrete numbers that speak of its wholeness. However, the unitary body animated by and gathered around a single life meets its oppositional counterpart in the corpse that, no longer breathing, relies on physical continuity to mark its formal boundaries, along with its association, now yielded, with the lived functions that once flowed through its parts.

As indicated in the first chapter, the unified self is such that it is always at least partially effaced in the touches of its dwelling in a world. The self is always *there* where its touches of understanding, vision and body rest against the singularities with which it is engaged. In contrast, that which touch reveals as present-at-hand can be variously encountered in a multiplicity of touches and recognitions. As such, wholeness is allied to absence just as presence cannot be disentangled from division. This play of

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<sup>283</sup> Carol Mavor, *Reading Boyishly* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 144.

<sup>284</sup> Of course, as the first chapter of this thesis emphasised, in articulating 'I' one already is caught in a slippage from self to object in the attempt to touch on and demarcate the referent or body of this indexicality.

wholeness and unity against fragmentation characterises Jessica Rosenberg's personal response to the association Barthes's draws between the photograph and death.

Responding to Barthes's emotional reaction to the photograph of his mother, Rosenberg relates Barthes's remarks on the inevitability of death not to a photograph but to the body of her own mother at a time of medical crisis. As discussed above, Barthes comments: 'In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die. I shudder [...] over a catastrophe which has already occurred.'<sup>285</sup>

Rosenberg writes:

After the diagnosis, Barthes's insight no longer seemed to comment on the nature of photography, but on my mother's body. Her figure wore death now not as an anonymous necessity, like any other body, but as an imminent possibility. This body, that bore me, conceived me, carried me so often, had been designated as sick: each time I touched her, I brushed the skin not of my mother but of a sick person; each time I looked at her, I saw a body that death had already begun to invade. Her skin, limbs, thoughts, carried on as they had before but were reclassified. Her cells spoke not only of their end, but of its incipience, its enemy presence metastasizing Death was not a teleological necessity, as it is in Barthes's photograph, but an immediate process. I was silently terrified.<sup>286</sup>

In this reclassification, the body of Rosenberg's mother is laid open to medical fragmentation, divided into parts to be examined, photographed, and tested, and to be discussed as parts, treated to different procedures, and, for some of these parts, to be removed. Such medical scrutiny results in the emerging presence of her mother's corporeal form as something divisible and fragmentary, even as Rosenberg's emotions of fear respond to the loss of something whole.

This loss of wholeness is both immediate and imminent. The ultimate loss feared is of her mother: a living, unitary self which could disappear into death. More immediately, however, Rosenberg's account indicates the slippage into fragmentation that was already taking hold. The duality of both mother and sick person beneath the skin she touched speaks of the alienation of the body when *seen*, when made visible, in this way. The link Rosenberg draws with Barthes's account of the photograph is founded on this tension between wholeness and division. This conflict characterises not simply the personal aspect of photography but the broader relationship its process of taking records has to the world in which it intervenes. We can never see the world as anything other than divided; seeing is in part the enactment of this division. However,

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<sup>285</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 96.

<sup>286</sup> Rosenberg, 'Snapshot', p. 377.

the camera itself doesn't see, and its presence in the world is, materially and mechanically, one which acts within a greater mechanical, physically consistent unity, and still insists on fragmentation.

As Rosenberg comments, '[w]e believe that a photograph is a moment, immortalized, but Barthes claims that it speaks to us in mortality. The permanence of an image's angles and contrasts foretells the future impossibility of those forms.'<sup>287</sup> The mechanical nature of photography may make it one with a reality that, bound throughout by the same laws, need not differentiate itself to proceed with its own unchanging flow. However, the photograph interrupts this, and marks off a fragment for us to study *as* something. The photograph is, in its own distorted way, a testimony of pure presence, but the eyes that can retrieve this presence by the touch that draws its subjects up and against its wholeness must always lag behind that which they touch. Similarly, the pure presence in the photograph bears witness to its own absence (the absence that has already overtaken the image), as well as to the absence from the image of that which bounds it (temporally and spatially), and from which it has been fragmented. Amidst this multiple fragmentation, Barthes recoils from the loss of something whole. As the photographed fragment testifies to its own loss, its own slip into absence, it testifies to the division of a body (a body in terms of something whole), into parts that are present and absent. As such, the photograph is caught between wholeness and division. The play of absence and presence across the fragmentary relationship we have with the body or self photographed ultimately serves, and slips back into, what Rosenberg describes as a more 'essentialist model', a more unified construct, of the identity being mourned.<sup>288</sup> 'Barthes', she writes, 'sees his mother not in fragmented limbs but as a unified figure [...] The threat of mortality, outside the frame of the picture, makes the image whole'.<sup>289</sup>

This play of wholeness and division brings itself to bear on the challenge of accessing my own body. In its intact entirety, it is both available for the dividing, identifying touch that comes from outside, and also wholly present, undivided, as the wholeness of my being within the material reality in and against which I find myself as part. Touch fragments, so anything I wish to get within my grasp (visual, tactile or

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<sup>287</sup> Rosenberg, 'Snapshot', p. 377.

<sup>288</sup> Rosenberg, 'Snapshot', p. 379.

<sup>289</sup> Rosenberg, 'Snapshot', p. 379.

conceptual) must be fragmented. This chapter is dedicated to a discussion of images because this thesis is, fundamentally, one of endeavouring to see the body.<sup>290</sup> Where Barthes' account, and Rosenberg's response to it, resides to a large degree in the way in which they relate this fragmentation to something whole. It is perhaps no coincidence that Barthes should have alighted so firmly on death in his account of the image, given the relationship death, too, has to unity. The fragment is inherently transient, but it does not die. It is the nature of continuity that it may be divided anywhere; indeed, it makes no sense to speak of any *where*, any *there*, of division, as division occurs prior to such labels of separation. This vulnerability of any such lines to be redrawn is matched by the certainty that temporal change similarly bears away fragments into a wave of new ones to come. That which dies, therefore, must resist or at least extend over fragmentation; it is the person who dies, not the person-*as* that flickers momentarily beneath our touch. Barthes's grief is not for that single moment of his mother's life that the photograph immortalises, nor for the moments that it doesn't. Engaging with the fragment leads to fear of the death of the whole.

Rosenberg's account builds on this foundation, but explores a different relationship between the fragment, death and the unitary. She is explicit in her acknowledgement that specific ways of seeing the body, and in particular those emerging in medical practice, fragment it. However, in resistance to the hopelessness she encounters in Barthes's view, her own account details her experience of the need 'to believe in the power of fragmenting a body in order to care for it.'<sup>291</sup>

As Rosenberg notes, '[h]ealth renders the body anonymous to medicine.'<sup>292</sup> The nature of medicine is to concern itself not with the healthy body but with the ones which are no longer whole. As with Heidegger's broken hammer, the body appears, corporealizes, under the gaze of medical enquiry only when it deviates from the norm. This healthy norm is not the object of study but the state that precedes investigation. The gaze, the touch, of the healthy body is always directed outwards, only returning to itself when something causes it to jolt out of this self-invisibility. As such, Rosenberg comments, '[w]e know the body through its expressions of irregularities. The healthy body remains unexplored and unknown – unpenetrated by medicine and instead labelled

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<sup>290</sup> Of course, following the precedent established in the first chapter, this attempt to "see" the body should be acknowledged to also include that of understanding the body, of encountering it in some form.

<sup>291</sup> Rosenberg, 'Snapshot', p. 379.

<sup>292</sup> Rosenberg, 'Snapshot', p. 378.

and thrown into a pool of equiprobable distribution, its chances the same as anyone else's.<sup>293</sup> This impression of penetration is one which will be explored in the fourth chapter. The word has an emotive power that captures Rosenberg's sense of her mother having been made a 'victim' of the touch of medical diagnosis. As a technical or more literal description, however, I would suggest that the word does not engage the fuller picture of what such touches seem to enact. These means of accessing and rendering the body as visible break through the body as undifferentiated wholeness, suffuse with a continuity of self, rather than discontinuity of isolated parts. The problem resides in the effect of this disruption. Penetration is a breaking in, a breaking through, that does not destroy the idea of inside and out, of a bounded entity, but instead reinforces this. It is a celebration, however dreadful, of getting inside a barrier that remains largely intact to accentuate this trespass. In contrast, fragmentation enacts an insidious assault on such boundaries, breaking down the body into parts with their own limits, their own delineations of within and without. Subject to this proliferation, the lines of the body-proper, the body we believe we know, is in danger of being lost. If I break a piece of glass and see the resulting web of cracks, I might question to what extent, or under what interpretative conditions, I still have one piece, rather than many.

This fragmentation she extends to the photograph used in service of medical treatment: '[a]s a photograph portends death, an X-ray, an MRI, or a pathology chronicles medicine's fragmentation of its object.'<sup>294</sup> The medical photograph exists at an intersection between neutrality and intention. The mechanical autonomy of the camera is part of what makes photography resistant to full assimilation into "art". Medical photography utilises this neutral record to gain accurate information about the body in question; it takes a mechanical record, replicating the physical, material nature of the biological body in order to then treat it in accordance with this physical logic. However, such images are carefully directed, responding to clear wishes and intentions. Moreover, such intentions act on, and re-enact, interpretative divisions of the body into parts or fragments. This image may photograph a lung, that image a thyroid gland, another may photograph a specific region in order to further demarcate the regions of the tumours being sought. Beyond this, is the further intention that characterises Rosenberg's overarching response to her mother's circumstances. Her intention is to

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<sup>293</sup> Rosenberg, 'Snapshot', p. 378.

<sup>294</sup> Rosenberg, 'Snapshot', p. 378.

cure her mother. This curing is a regaining of something whole, a body which is allowed to recede from and proceed beyond such fractures. The illness has enforced an awareness of the body as something whole which may die, along with an awareness of the body as something whole but other. The body of our engaged being in the world fades from our attention, gathering its unity around itself in its own collective unobtrusiveness. In contrast, the whole that may die is a whole body recalled to its own divisibility, to the corpse.

This body is both anatomic and atomic. The atom is indivisible, that which cannot be cut; anatomy is a division, a cutting up. Rosenberg's experience, her desire to believe in the healing potential of fragmenting the body, is a search for faith that the atomic body-self does not only deteriorate to the anatomical corpse, but that responding to the body as anatomical can also function to restore the body to its atomic state. 'In life,' she comments, 'my mother too has been fragmented, and has been saved, more whole without the body parts than with them, warding off death's imminence but made whole by its certainty.'<sup>295</sup>

While Rosenberg's account is arguably primarily focused on this tension between wholeness and fragmentation, the photographic image has a central place in her discussion. Central to this, I would suggest, is the image's complex relationships between presence and the touches that engage with presence. These tensions are bound together in the final stages of her article:

In the past few weeks, those surrounding the surgery, I have had to entrust my mother to science, but I also have needed to resist its methods in order to call her my mother. I refused to see her through a surgeon's eyes. In the face of someone who wanted to define her by what was to be cut open, cut out, monitored, I had to recover an essentialist model of both her identity and my own. In the photograph, Barthes sees his mother not in fragmented limbs but as a unified figure – the separate function of each organ and each gland allied towards death, the ultimate and inevitable telos. This threat of mortality, outside the frame of the picture, makes the image whole and makes a body more than the functions of organs.

[...]

While Barthes's mother dies in his imagination as the ancient figure unified in the photograph, my mother survived in medicine's fragmented renderings of her thyroid gland. Science's photographs do not see death's imminence but instead divide it until it is powerless.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Rosenberg, 'Snapshot', p. 379.

<sup>296</sup> Rosenberg, 'Snapshot', p. 379.

Both Barthes and the surgeon respond to the photograph as a tangible, indisputable trace of what stands present before the camera. However, while the surgeon requires a precise witness of what is present, so that she may map this onto the body lying present before her in the theatre, Barthes responds to something that is wholly gathered before the lens, regathered as whole by his own act of identification and recognition, yet which does not survive that interval of capture. The presence retained within the image exists only in conjunction with its absence beyond the image. The image pulls a moment into a form of presence that is laid infinitely open to a myriad touches and divisions that interpret this presence.



## **Ch4 – This is My Body...**

The structure of this thesis has been reasonably simple. It has, in Chapter One, offered a conceptual framework of space, and in particular of spatial relationship, grounded on Nancy's primary understanding of the singular plurality of body. Chapter Two has focused for the most part on the image: on images of bodies, and on the relationship between ideas of body and ideas of the image itself. In the third chapter, this discussion of the image has turned to the self-portrait, and its complex movement of self-imaging, while the discussion has also begun to enact a final transition away from the visual photographic or painted image. This final section follows the gesture of transition in the preceding section not away from the image, but nonetheless towards the self imaging itself, towards the self understanding itself through identifications with and against the self-image it can offer. In this last stage, what is enacted is a movement of intimacy.

The previous chapter explored a body experienced through a movement of detachment and (re)attachment, encountered in (and complicated by) the moments where its engagement with its world was disrupted. In the final section of this chapter, the focus began a return to biological and medical disruption introduced in the first chapter. In particular, it acknowledged the disruption of the normally inconspicuous body that illness brings about, but focused primarily on how this disruption and threatened dissolution of the body opened it to a practice of medical treatment and diagnosis which sought to restore the body to unassuming wholeness, but could do so only by a continuation of its threatened fragmentation. This chapter continues this move from image to experience, and presents a body known in its brokenness. It engages with the mineness of this body, this body typing these words, exposing itself, now, along with the marks on paper. It is a body becoming mine in its breaking, yet resisting this assimilation into possession in the same events of breakage. More than that, it is a body cracked open for a you, a you that is the I of my looking, and a you that is the reader other than me.

In Lucian Freud's painting, the farmer who raises food up from the fields becomes the artist who raises the image up from the world. Moreover, he becomes the embodied self who raises his body up within itself to an image before and within the self who looks upon it. The painting dramatizes, and also freezes, the process and moment(s) of encounter with the body; it reveals the way in which the body is revealed,

a mode of revelation in which, ultimately, the self must encounter itself. The same exists in Nancy's essay, 'L'Intrus'. It is an essay about self, about the challenge at the heart of speaking "I". Yet it is also an essay about body, another element of Nancy's corpus, and his corpuscular interest. Bodies feature in the division and unification of *Being Singular Plural*, the body inhabits both title and text of *Corpus*. In 'L'Intrus', the body becomes incontestably *his* (Nancy's) body, the body of the *I* seeking to encounter it, to experience the body as an articulation, and, further, to articulate this to a further reader. In doing so, the *he*, the *I* behind, within, touching the body is thrown into dislocation from the possession of the body being articulated.

Just as this thesis is engaged in demonstrating the impossibility of simply uttering 'my body', so too is it concerned with questioning the possibility of body without encounter(s). Lying at the heart, at the skin, as the skin of encounter is a self, and in this final section of this thesis, it is the body in an act, a process, and a series of moments of self-encounter that is to be exposed for scrutiny.

#### **4.1 – Divisibility and Wholeness**

##### **4.1a – Division**

In *Corpus*, Nancy concludes not just with a restatement of the plurality of bodies, but with the plurality of touch that is the condition for such plurality. In his final chapter, instead of offering an essay that aspires to wholeness, he lists fifty-eight 'indices', each a touch that approaches a body that is given in each touch, yet is not stable across them. 'Why indices?' he asks:

Because there's no totality to the body, no synthetic unity. There are pieces, zones, fragments. There's one bit after another, a stomach, an eyelash, a thumb-nail, a shoulder, a breast, a nose, an upper intestine, a choledoch, a pancreas: anatomy is endless, until eventually running into an exhaustive enumeration of cells. But this doesn't yield a totality. [...] the pieces, the cells, change as the calculation enumerates in vain.<sup>297</sup>

As Nancy states, 'a body never stops stirring', and this endless motion rests in the plurality of touches in which it is caught. As the first chapter of this thesis stated, touch for Nancy is inherently tied to meaning, and in the endlessly mobile touches they perform and through which they are encountered, he writes, bodies exist as 'an extravagance of sense'.<sup>298</sup> All touches impart an *as* of recognition, meaning, or

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<sup>297</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 157.

<sup>298</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 153.

identification; all of these divisions mark a fragment in their engagement with it. Yet as Nancy writes, the totality we intuitively know of ourselves, the unified body of which we have such conviction, always eludes us. ‘Why indices rather than characters, signs, distinctive markings?’ Nancy again asks: ‘Because the body escapes, is never sure, lets its presence be suspected by not identified. [...] All we have at our disposal are indications, traces, imprints, and vestiges.’<sup>299</sup>

In the discussion of images in the previous two chapters, the fixity of the body-imagined is offered over to the mobile touches of the person (the inherently bodily, touching self) who views it. This fixity of the image we associate with death, and with its imposition of a completeness that suspends both its ability to change and its engagements with a world; it is wholly offered over, static, to the flux of another’s gaze. As Nancy suggests, ‘a body seems to assume its sense only once it’s dead, fixed’.<sup>300</sup> The body of the medical textbook aspires to the imposition of such fixedness. In anatomical discourse, the body – the human body – is not just a physical structure, but a consistent type of physical structure. Its parts and the relations between these are there to be catalogued and understood as individuations on a stable general structure. Jessica Rosenberg’s account of her mother’s scans and X-rays offers a similar stability, freezing a particular part of the body within a stable set of relations. The medical student expects to become familiar with the fixed image of the body; the touch upon it need not roam, and does not anticipate new and shifting relations to what it holds present. Similarly, the photographs used to treat Rosenberg’s mother are used to freeze a particular part of the body within a specific relationship of sense and response. The doctor makes an intentionally stable identification, rather than returning, again and again, to new possibilities of division.

And yet, despite these anatomical abstractions, such fixity of the body is unencounterable. In Lucian Freud’s offering of his body as image, the touches that capture it are inherently mobile. Moreover, while the imaged body is held fixed for our perusal, the relations to it, the patternings we impose across it, are not characterised by this stasis. There a hand, a shoe, a foot, a leg; the image is held, is laced, together, but the wholly-offered surface is not touched, all in one, as a whole, but across the unfolding mobility of time.

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<sup>299</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 156.

<sup>300</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 153.

This mobile repatterning and repartitioning of the other's body applies also to our own. In *Corpus II*, Nancy offers an account of the partitioning of the body, of its "zoning", as encountered in the mutual touches of sex. In particular, he offers the figure(s) of erogenous zones, divisions of the body that demarcate edges and regions under the touch of oneself and another. Moreover, these regions need not adhere to any patterning of the body in accordance with the more stable and recurring partitions that we might find in a textbook. Such zones, he asserts, 'are worth nothing, as substances or organs'; if they are to be regarded as organs, they are 'not of any physiological body'.<sup>301</sup> 'Zones are mobile and fleeting circumscriptions,' Nancy observes, 'identical to the gestures that designate them as zones and excite or inflame them. In this sense, there are as many zones as there are gestures, indefinitely repeated and modulated.'<sup>302</sup> The whole body can become erogenous, in an incalculable, unpredictable susceptibility of the body to respond to itself, to the other, to new forms of contact with and against another, that reveal new ways of understanding itself. Against the generally undifferentiated, indifferent unity of flesh are contacts and caresses that call into (however fleeting) definition a new region of body: '[a] detached zone, set apart, reserved for a mystery'. Such divisibility is the condition of our embodiment, and so too is its constant renewal and redistribution.

#### 4.1b – Intimacy and Interiority: Skin, Surface and Penetration

*Hoc est enim corpus meum*

Nancy's *Corpus* begins with these words.<sup>303</sup> "This is my body": a religious tenet, a ritual (sacred but familiar), a symbol, a claim to material fact co-opted into theology. More than this, beyond this and outside, an underlying truth of bodiliness.

*This*. Indexical. A gesture of pointing, an indexical gesture that binds the *there* and the *here* of a touch. The copula, the predicate phrase used to assert an identity, which the "my" will later (re)claim. With it, the "as" of the image, or recognition; I understand this *as* a body, and in my relation to it. Then *body*, the shifting centre of this

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<sup>301</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus II: Writings on Sexuality*, trans. Anne O'Byrne (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 16.

<sup>302</sup> Nancy, *Corpus II*, p. 17.

<sup>303</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 3.

thesis, but not just *body: my body*. In the possessive *my* lies the truth of the *I* once pronounced, the attempted ownership of self Nancy articulates in every act of self-identification. This body is mine; it is set apart in order to be folded back in, identified in order to be re-assimilated.<sup>304</sup>

This phrase, however, is itself just a fragment, divided from its echo and completion: *this is my body, broken for you*. We can trace the integral role of breakage in Nancy's thesis back to the broken pot that asserts that being-there is always a being-with, each singularity always defined against another. These two parts of this phrase exist (for me, an echo from childhood) as fragments held together in a stable relation, and this echo of brokenness, unspoken in Nancy's text, nonetheless resonates in his account. The phrase (1 Corinthians, 11:24) is also translated: "this is my body, which is for you" and "this is my body, which is offered for you". The giving of the body is inherently tied to breakage. It is both broken off as a unit, extracted up from the rest of the world, and broken in itself, cracked apart, newly figured, an intimate exposing of its surface.

Breakage has a basic potential for intimacy: intimacy involves the revelation and sharing of an "inside", a penetration to something hidden, internal, that can only be achieved by a rupture of a surface. As discussed in Chapter One, the spacing of the internal body is not a demarcation of a region that is somehow "inside", and which can retain this interiority in the touch that exposes it. Instead, the touch refolds, repatterns the skin which the body is, revealing a new configuration of surface along which this previously hidden region is exposed (*expeasured – outside as skin*). Instead of skin surrounding a filled space of calculable volume and depth, in the contact that encounters body, '[d]epth rises to the surface, to the surfaces.'<sup>305</sup> Nancy continues: '[t]he surface is not laid upon a depth: it is depth that appears and makes a whole surface.'<sup>306</sup>

The term "intimate" derives from two Latin roots, combining the meaning of innermost or deepest with that of having been made known, announced or impressed. The engagement in this chapter with intimacy is focused primarily on the intersection between these two aspects. Intimacy in the sense of internality, of being innermost, a

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<sup>304</sup> *This is my body*. Christianity here asserts itself as a religion grounded upon an articulation of division. God takes on a body, a form, and is thus divided. The structure of the trinity is the dramatization of bodiliness: the body is not Jesus, yet it is; Jesus is not God (the Father), and yet he is; both are understood though their union with the spirit, articulated because they touch it, articulatable because they are different. Not merely the other of man, the trinity divides and reunifies God, and allows meaning to enter.

<sup>305</sup> Nancy, *Corpus II*, p. 71.

<sup>306</sup> Nancy, *Corpus II*, p. 72.

core deeply bound to the body, is a gesture towards unity, towards sameness. That which is intimate to and within me is intrinsic to me, integral, and in this sense of integrity is that sense of wholeness. Yet one is intimate *with*, and one intimates *to*. As with the singular plural of Chapter One, the intimate part is a part of a whole, capable of coming apart, being seen as apart (a part), in order to be made known, and to be related back to this whole to which it belongs. Even belonging is a relation that affirms separation. The body intimates, and in doing so is dislocated from the one who receives this knowledge, who has it impressed upon them, or feels its impression. Whatever is an intimate element of myself, innermost, becomes this separate part, this recognised element, only through intimation. Intimacy is not just what is innermost, but the touch on the innermost that permits the encounter. Nancy writes:

we are interwoven with the world [...] our being entwined with the world has always, from the start, exposed us right down to our most intimate depths. The “inside” is always between outside and outside, and this *between* – the *between* of its lair, its cave of myths and phantoms of interiority – is, in the end, nothing but another *outside*. [...] “inside” or “in itself” can only ever be give outside, an *internal outside*.<sup>307</sup>

It is this encounter, this sharing and communion that combines the interiority of the intimate (of the mainly hidden, of that which is often concealed) with the intimate touch that allows what is innermost to be known by oneself (and thus claimed as one’s own, as integral to one’s self) as well as shared with another.

These figures of intimacy, intimation and breakage find expression in the related figures of penetration and sexual intercourse. Penetration, as absolute or actual penetration, opposes the emphasis on exposure and touch which are integral to Nancy’s formulation of bodies in contact with each other. So figured, penetration could only ever break apart; it can never truly break into. As Nancy observes, ‘[a] body is penetrable only according to one of two opposing logics: the logic of assimilation or the logic of destruction. Either the foreign material is assimilated by the body [...] or it cuts into the integrity of the body, wounding it, tearing it even mutilating or lacerating it.’<sup>308</sup> In this failure of integrity is the destruction of the unity which the body is. Instead, we can return to Nancy’s figure of the folded, refolding skin which the body is. The penetration which the body survives is not a penetration but a reorganisation and revelation. It

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<sup>307</sup> Nancy, *Corpus II*, p. 84.

<sup>308</sup> Nancy, *Corpus II*, p. 83

respaces the body with a movement that retains a semblance of intrusion, yet intrudes as and through reorganisation, repatterning, rather than in a true passage to the inside.

The term “intimacy” can function as a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Intimating is a making known, yet it is a making known that shrouds itself in concealment. To intimate is never to state but to suggest, to offer the presence of something knowable, the suggestion of an outline to be recognised, yet there is always already the retreat. Intimacy suggests an inside, yet negotiating intimacy requires negotiating a contact with this inside, and thus with finding a path towards this site of contact. As such, intimation is a process of making known that nonetheless retains something inaccessible; the intimate touch is a contact with something previously hidden, yet it cannot touch on interiority as this insideness. In the act of intercourse, we find an image of skin, of intimacy, of the flux of the body, and of touch. However, we can only find this by a re-theorisation of the act that offers something more than penetration. Penetration presupposes an inside and an outside, and a passage from one to another. In this, it expresses intimacy. Yet in “true” penetration, the outside would be broken through and left on the surface, while the penetrative agent enters to something underneath, something that is not exposed, not surface.

What, however, can be made of this entrance? This is a thesis on touch, and touch occurs along surfaces, at the surface. A penetration that touches on the inside inscribes a surface – *ex*-scribes these sites as surface. The body has no meaningful inside; the divisions and touches that allow meaning into the body multiply ad infinitum in the refolding and flexing of an ever new surface. The body beneath the skin – to the extent that such a description can be permitted – is either the transparency of uninterrupted continuity, or the infinite division of fracture upon fracture that renders it opaque. In either instance, one cannot reach below the skin; one must remain with, along, at the surface. As such, the seeming penetration of the surgical knife, or the wound that threatens to tear the body into openness, can only reiterate and repattern the intrinsic openness and exposure by which the body is already and always constituted. Nancy writes: “[r]ight down to the depths of its viscera, between the fibers of its muscles and all along its irrigation channels, the body exposes itself, exposes to the outside the inside that constantly recedes, fleeing ever deeper into the depths of the

abyss that it is.’<sup>309</sup> The “inside” of the body can only be ‘abyss’: it is only nothingness, shaped by the material surface and folds of the body exposed in encounter with that which touches it. Penetrative vaginal sex, therefore, does not penetrate a sealed body, but only disturbs the surface of a body that seems to lie in a certain configuration. Such “penetration” instead reveals new foldings of the body, new spacings of the body along new lines of contact; it reveals a surface which the vagina is when touched, a new spacing in which communication occurs.

This has been a visual thesis; let it offer a further visual aid. If the body is a skin (variously folded...) rather than filled space, we could liken it to a balloon. Contact, interaction – and the spacing that arises from this interactive contact – occurs at a skin or a surface, and a balloon is all surface. It is not, strictly, surface, of course, but the thinness of its membrane encloses an inside that is not really the balloon itself, but shaping and contour. It is possible to imagine penetrating the balloon; it is a well-known children’s party trick to apply tape to the surface, and insert a pin. What this penetration reveals is the hollowness of such an act. There is contact of a kind, but all contact remains at the surface, the tiny orifice with its edges in contact with a small fraction of the pin’s surface; the rest of the pin encounters nothing, but intrudes vaguely onto nothingness (onto a nothingness in which there can be neither awareness nor meaningfulness of such intrusion). In contrast, we can imagine prodding a balloon with an implement designed to reshape rather than pierce. In particular, we might imagine an underinflated balloon, all the more flexible, all the more skin-like in its ability to fold and refold, to crumple in upon itself in ever-changing, ever-changeable self-relations. Press into this surface, and it moves, it stretches. The shape – moreover, the spacing – of the balloon changes. This pressing enacts a contact that does not penetrate this surface but remaps it; it creates (and reveals – is, indeed, there any difference?) these new spacings and figurations of the body and its capacity to touch, where previously no sensation of contact, of touch or openness, had existed.

This remodelling offers a reformulation of sexual activity – of vaginal intercourse primarily – that gestures towards firstly, a mutual contact, and equally first,

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<sup>309</sup> Nancy, *Corpus II*, p. 85.

Commenting on the dissection of the cadaver, former medical student Montross observes: ‘[t]he skin of the chest pulls back easily after we have made the incisions, and the body opens like a book.’ Here, too, we have the absolute availability of the body for exposure; here, also, we have the association of this with sense. There is no hidden inside, only a proliferation of touches that identify, recognise, and place zones in oppositions.

Montross, *Body of Work*, p. 25.



the underlying potential of the body to reshape, to remodel itself, and to experience itself in the spacing of the touch it receives and enacts. For Nancy, too, the relationship between touch and penetration leads to a similar need to re-image our discourse of sex, and to re-emphasise contact:

The world of bodies is the nonimpenetrable world [...] rather, it is a world where *bodies initially articulate space*. [...] A body only ever “penetrates” the opening of another body *when killing it* (which is why the sexual lexicon is completely meager, a lexicon of nothing less than murder and death...). But a body “in” a body, ego “in” ego, doesn’t “open” anything: it is *at the very* opening that the body already is, infinitely, and more than originally so; this crossing takes place *right there*, without penetration, this melee occurs without mingling. Love is the touch of the open.<sup>310</sup>

As Nancy emphasises, the discourse of sex is lacking. Intimacy... Intercourse... The ideas of sexual contact these terms express oppose that of penetration, they present a negotiation of tact, touch and communication between equally engaged, equally touching bodies (selves). For Nancy, penetration is a rupture of surface. ‘A body’s material’, he writes, too. ‘It’s dense. Penetrate it, and you break it, puncture it, tear it.’<sup>311</sup> There is no easy passage to an inside of the body, and certainly not one that preserves it. ‘Nothing less than murder and death’ might seem to overstate the case, indeed, it is an imaginative stretch to fully apply this description to a typical act of intercourse. But that is, of course, the point. The description, in its exaggeration, distances the term from the act which it fails to describe. A dead object does not touch; penetration would reduce sex to a one-directional touch. A chair does not touch the wall and nor does it touch the body sitting upon it. So, too, does a discourse of penetration preclude the contact of intimacy and the exchange of intercourse.<sup>312</sup>

#### **4.1c – A Detour to(wards) Wholeness (Incomplete, Incompletable)**

In this respacing of intercourse that repatterns the body, we can also note not just that the body, as a whole, shifts to accommodate touch, but that these refoldings need not only be the maintenance of the body as a unity, but the offering of new regions it can

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<sup>310</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, pp. 27-9.

<sup>311</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 150 (Index no. 1)

<sup>312</sup> In this chapter, with its recurring (albeit fairly contingent) focus on the sexed body, on the body as it opens to gender, we might note related reasons to advocate a changing vocabulary. If it is a discourse of death, it is a discourse of female death, of death ascribed to a supposedly passive partner. Replacing this discourse permits a revised understanding of sexual contact, and particularly of this female or supposedly passive contact. The discourse of touch and of an unfurling, repatterned skin, invites reciprocal contact; most fundamentally, it acknowledges and creates a space for this partner’s contact. In intercourse, this sealed region of the body unfolds.

touch (can sense, be aware of, can name) as new divisions and new unities that rise up against this wholeness. The vagina is, after all, the most famous of the erogenous zones, and its emergence to the zoned surfaces of the body occurs (most typically) in such engagements.

Returning, then to this zoning, we find Nancy's assertion that '[t]he moment it is born the whole body sets itself into zones, distributes itself into uncertain territories of multiple revelations'.<sup>313</sup> It is in the body's nature as a site of openness and exposure in constant relation to the other that it is always accessed, always revealed, in the partitioning of the touches upon it. As stated above, these encounters are a repatterning and revelation of surface. It is not simply that a pen (or a finger) draws a line around a square inch of skin and thus marks it as present. Nor is it a simple matter of a revelation of a hidden but ever-present surface of the vagina. In each instance, there is the potential for a demarcation of flesh (skin), an accounting that can record a new shape or new contour of our surface. However, such zonings are also part of a recall of attention to the surface and the spacing of the body, as well as a gesture towards a wholeness that emerges from such divisions yet is not fully encounterable in them. The former of these two points shall occupy the next section of this chapter. First, however, let us dwell briefly on the impossible aspiration of touching the body in its wholeness. As this thesis has numerously articulated, the touch on the body must always come from outside, and always dislocates the *here* of touching outside the *there* alongside which these touches occur. And yet.

We retain a sense of wholeness, even as our attempts to touch the unification of touching and touchable body inevitably fail. Wholeness, though, however elusive, retains its own sense of proximity. This thesis opened with the question: "Are we nearly here yet?" *Here* always seems near. In the fall of sleep, discussed in Chapter Two, the fall is an approach towards unity. Even if the unity of which sleep consists is the impossibility of touch, Nancy nonetheless emphasises the fall, the sensation of approach, along with the similarly near-tangibility of waking, of the experiences of retreating and emerging from unity from which we can gain some impression of a closeness now lost. Such wholeness also retains a lingering presence in 'L'Intrus' in the symbolic presence (the symbolic *absence*) of the heart. '[W]hat can it mean to replace a

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<sup>313</sup> Nancy, *Corpus II*, p. 28.

heart? The thing exceeds my capacity to represent it.’<sup>314</sup> Not only does the procedure fall outside of an easy accounting (and far exceed familiarity), but the transplant is being performed on an organ ‘whose symbolic renown has long been established’.<sup>315</sup> The heart is bound to our ideas of life such that we often place it as central, as if life or self to some extent resides there. The heart is a locus of *hereness*, a figure associated with the unity of self.

In the sexual encounter, too, there is an approach towards this *hereness*, this site of somehow contained integrity and interiority. As an engaged being-in the world, I am comprised of my engagements. I can never experience myself in separation from my experiences of, my touches on, the other. I am there at the door, at a line of text on a page, there at the nail I hammer into the wall. I am there gathered in attention along a line of thought, in a contemplation of an object; I am there, if fleetingly, at the knuckles of my fingers as I fidget with them. In the touch on one’s body, one approaches it from outside, rendering it an object of contemplation, a *there* I approach from a *here* I cannot unproblematically identify with it. In the erogenous zoning of the body there is some of this movement of a return to self that contemplates the body as a surface, and discovers, anew, its contours, regions and divisions. Yet this return to the body reveals more intimately the balance of our embodiment between its availability to precise, spatialised mapping and a vaguer awareness of its spacings that returns them to their subordination in the pursuit of another aim or engagement. The sexual encounter is not a relation to something wholly beyond the body, nor is it an activity in which self-touch occurs with the aim of relating to oneself as object. Instead, even in the stimulating of particular spatialised erogenous regions, what is aimed at slips away from such spatialisation towards an experience that is always *there*, always at the other end of what is sensed, yet which slips closer towards interiority, towards (though never quite reaching) a more indexical sense of an occurrence *here* in a contraction of the reach of touch.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Nancy, ‘L’Intrus’, p. 7.

<sup>315</sup> Nancy, ‘L’Intrus’, p. 7.

<sup>316</sup> It is, perhaps, no coincidence that the phrase “le petit mort”, with its impending slide towards unconsciousness, is now most commonly associated with orgasm. In addition to its demarcation of a path, its fall, towards the deathliness of sleep, perhaps it captures something of the slippage of bodily pleasure away from the extremities, and towards a gathering of self and sensation that is not aimed at any divisions or demarcations or bodies, but experienced in this absence of orientation *towards* anything but its own unity and presence.

There is perhaps a correlate of this in Elaine Scarry's account of pain. Pain, she argues, is unique in its lack of directedness. It 'takes no object at all', and is an exceptional experience 'by not having an object in the external world'.<sup>317</sup> In vision and hearing, she asserts,

one seems to become disembodied, either because one seems to have been transported hundreds of feet beyond the edges of the body out into the external world, or instead because the images of objects from the external world have themselves been carried into the interior of the body as perceptual content, and seem to reside there, displacing the dense matter of the body itself.<sup>318</sup>

This view reiterates a duality of *here* and *there* that comprises touch or sense; Scarry's figure of sense is a transportation in which mediating distance is effaced (in the terms of this thesis, effaced into transparency) and the touch of vision or hearing locates the self out in the world. Moreover, the sensing body effaces itself to the point of disembodiment; Scarry is seemingly fully externalised, body left behind in the passage across distance that moves away from any containment in a physical, bodily locus. In contrast, pain cannot surpass the body, it recalls the self to body, and recalls the body to self. Moreover, Scarry goes further to state that pain is 'wholly without objects', 'pain is not "of" or "for" anything – it is itself alone'.<sup>319</sup> We might, however, consider whether pain remains externalising. Does it, for example, in pulling us back to ourselves do so through the gesture of self-touch that renders the body the object of touch, that offers it as a there? Perhaps. If I get a paper cut on my finger tip, this zones a region of my body which is to some extent the referent of this pain. However, in contrast we can recall times of pain in which its pure presence threatened to overwhelm any spacing of the body that offered up in the experience a bounded unity for touch.

Scarry defines pain as essentially lacking a referent, and in accordance with this frames pain as inaccessible to language. Beyond articulating a challenge of speaking and communicating pain, Scarry's analysis thus dovetails with Nancy's account of meaning as requiring communication and contact between two singularities. Pain, lacking an object, inhibits the self within the body and thus deprives it of orientation towards an aim. Pain hovers in Scarry's account as an imminent threat of impossible singularity.<sup>320</sup> It thus offers, perhaps, a tantalising glimpse of an encounter with self that

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<sup>317</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 5, p. 161.

<sup>318</sup> Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 165.

<sup>319</sup> Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 162.

<sup>320</sup> See Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 5.

does not dislocate the self into an object *there* at touch, but which overwhelms the self with an uncomfortable *hereness*. This *hereness* however, is not a touch (after all, *a touch on what?* It has no object...) Pain is a disruption, and yields no knowledge or understanding; these aspects only return when pain lessens enough to once again demarcate a region, and allow a touch on a body in which understanding of it once again is permitted through relation.

## **4.2 – Intimate Self-Encounter**

### **4.2a – Nancy and L’Intrus**

‘Bodies are strangers’, Nancy asserts: ‘they are made of the outside, of the *extraneitas* that makes up the strangeness of the stranger.’<sup>321</sup> Our encounters with our bodies are inevitably at risk in partaking of this strangeness. Firstly, the touch from outside constitutes as object that which we also use to touch and to find objects in our world. Secondly, in many of the encounters we have with our bodies, the encounter occurs because of a strangeness or change in the body that pulls it up out of its normal transparency in facilitating the touch beyond it.

Much of this thesis has been devoted to following Nancy, seeking to find the body for myself, and finding him, the body of his work, always ahead of me. In this final section, it shall follow him into intimacy. This thesis has been, at its heart (its core... its corpus...), a search for the body. However, the starting point that chapter one is devoted to opening is the foundational assertion that the body is never singular. The body exists only in encounter, and in an essential plurality which permits its separation into its discreteness. From my own starting point in embodied existence it is implausible to think that I could encounter *the* body as something capable of including and expressing my own body, let alone the multiplicity of bodies I encounter daily. Equally, too, this perspective reveals the impossibility of encountering my own body as *a* body, as a unity within which the encounter itself can be subsumed.

However, just as the concept of a body necessitates plurality, so too does it require singularity. In its most general sense, when we pronounce “body” we gesture towards a unity, towards something conceived of as whole, as *a* whole. I may never be able to actively encounter the unity of my body without disrupting it, but, equally, I may

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<sup>321</sup> Nancy, *Corpus II*, p. 85.

never be able to abandon an implicit understanding of my body as unified. Yet in seeking this unity, there is constant recourse to its moments of fracture. As with the broken hammer, I encounter the fact of my unified immersion within myself only retrospectively (and in anticipation), looking back from and through a vantage point of contact emerging from my division from this unified existence. This relationship between the self and the body reveals itself to me only in the relationship between me and my body. As with Nancy, whose most bodily text *Corpus* concludes not in the general realm of bodies but in discussion of his own particular embodiment, this chapter functions as an invitation to intimacy with *my* body, myself inviting my encounter, and thus writing, finally, not the body, nor yet a body, but an encounter. This chapter touches not on body, but on the touch which reveals body.

As Philip M. Adamek asks, ‘If I began by stating that *L’Intrus* is an intimate work, would I not find universal consensus for my claim?’<sup>322</sup> ‘L’Intrus’ offers a personal account more intimate, Adamek suggests, than autobiography. It offers not events or anecdotes about the person *behind* the text, or the person who can somehow be revealed or lifted out. It invites the reader to encounter both Nancy’s body and Nancy’s encounter with his body, an encounter that reveals a body opening out, losing its closure against the world. Nancy’s body is making itself known through the revelation of what is innermost, even as it questions and disrupts the understanding of both this notion of an inside, and of the simplistic unity of the *I* who would seem to possess this inside.

Nancy writes:

“This is my body” = the constant, silent assertion of my lone presence. It implies a distance: “this,” here’s what I put before you. It’s “my body.” Two questions are immediately implied: To whom does this “my” refer? And if “my” indicates “property,” what is its nature? Who’s proprietary, and what’s the legitimacy of his property? There’s no answer to “who,” since it’s the body just as much as the body’s proprietor, and no answer to “property,” since it is just as much a natural right as a right to work, or to conquest (when I cultivate and take care of my body). “My body” therefore indicates the impossibility of assigning both terms of the expression. (Who gave you your body? Only you yourself, since no program, genetic or demiurgic, would have been sufficient. But you before

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<sup>322</sup> Philip M. Adamek, ‘The Intimacy of Jean-Luc Nancy’s *L’Intrus*’, *The New Centennial Review* 2.3 (2002), 189-201 (p. 189).

It should be noted that Adamek is referring to *L’Intrus*, the original French text. My own reference is to the translation provided by Susan Hanson (who consulted with Adamek), rather than to the translation offered in Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Corpus*, which is translated by Richard A. Rand.

yourself, then? You behind your birth? And why not? Am I not always on my own back, and on the verge of reaching my body?)<sup>323</sup>

*Corpus* becomes not just a description of bodies, a corpus of bodies (corpses and living). It engages with the encounter with the body, and underlying the idea of the body is the starting and end point of *my* body, of the constant presence I carry with me, which carries me. Perhaps more than bodies in a general or material sense, the experience each one of us has of being embodied underlies what we mean when we ask what the body is. And it is in the seeming impossibility of articulating the answer that the question finds itself repeated. The following section will seek to enact a similar movement of self-encounter to that which Nancy experiences in the disruption of the heart transplant, focusing on the more banal but ubiquitous and recurring disruptive intrusion of the body that occurs during menstruation.

#### **4.2b – Menstruation and Contraception: Interruption and the Uninterrupted**

##### *A Routine Pathology?*

Nancy's discourse is, at least in part, a medical one. His situation takes form within the contours of hospital, diagnosis and treatment, discovers aspects of its articulation amongst the pages of a case study. My shift here towards fertility draws out personal experience through a similar lens of medical understanding. In doing so, I am seeking to retain both intimacy and anatomy, and also to gesture towards experiences of body less dramatic, less extreme, and certainly less rare than Nancy's own self-encounter.

Nancy's account is of both the body's dynamism and its enduring condition. What it reveals is a body always already capable of division, always already ready to dislocate from the self, always such that to touch on it shifts the toucher to the outside, as all touch must come from without. Yet this revelation emerges in change. Hammers break occasionally, and we are left holding this thing that both is and isn't the hammer we had held. Bodies break all the time. Toothache, stubbed toes, headaches, paper cuts, pins and needles... In all these minor fluctuations our embodied selves are re-embodied in these brief glimpses of the previously absent presence of our corporeal forms. Unlike Nancy's extended ordeal of embodiedness, these flashes are brief, and soon lapse back

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<sup>323</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 154 (index no. 33).

down into forgetful obliviousness. Menstruation is discussed here partly for its societal associations with intimacy, but primarily for its middle ground in embodied reminders of embodiedness. The period is a ubiquitous experience of the body's disruption, a routine pathology. Like the stubbed toe, it can be forgotten; like medical knowledge, it can be understood. The period can be predicted, can be prepared for: the body, in its normal operation, would seem to promise the period. Yet the promise is as elusive as the body. My knowledge of the normal body promises me a few days every month of pain, nausea, sleeplessness and inconvenience; nothing, however, in my normal bodiliness makes the same promise. The period is, every time, a disruption; no matter how familiar, no matter how natural and healthy, it breaks through and into my natural being with a seemingly pathological presence of disruption.<sup>324</sup>

#### *4.2bi Resistance to body – separation from self*

Menstrual cramps are partly local. This specificity of the region of pain has increased for me since the implanting of an IUD; there is a sensation, every so often, of a clamping round, a pain one can point to. I can demarcate the region; moreover, I identify to myself the site of this foreign body in relation to this pain. I cannot literally

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<sup>324</sup> The term “pathology” is here employed after careful deliberation, and with acknowledgement of the tension in its limits of applicability. The “pathological” is a deviation from the body's norms, but this deviation, can, broadly, be constructed upon two different bases. Pathology as the study of disease indicates a deviation based on externality, on the invasion of what is integral and proper to one by something not only malign but foreign. Alternatively, today we may refer to pathologies of a person's mental condition, where the pathological is not merely abnormal but with the potential to be maliciously so. Nancy's construction of intrusion in 'L'Intrus' exposes tensions in these terms: the disease from which Nancy suffers comes not from outside but from the internal breakdown and wear of his heart. As he remarks, it is his survival that 'is inscribed in a complex process woven through with strangers and strangeness' (p. 5). His means of survival, the belief, indeed, that he should survive, come from beyond the biological determiner of life which we would typically take the body to be. The heart he is to receive is foreign to his body, the apparatuses of the procedures are external interventions that modify that natural life of the base biological model. So too is the recommendation of survival: dying, Nancy remarks, 'at the age of fifty was in no way scandalous only two or three centuries ago' (p. 5). The pathology that exposes Nancy's heart is an abnormality that contrasts with his life up to that point, but also one that is marked abnormal by the contingencies of his body's situation in history.

Applying the term “pathology” to menstruation seems, by contrast excessively trivial, if not problematic. In only rare (*truly* pathological) cases, do periods subject either body or self to great strain or risk. Indeed, it is a risk in itself to exaggerate or “pathologise” menstruation in a world where some societies and individuals still respond differently to menstruating women, or are guided by their beliefs about menstruation to perpetuate gender inequalities. However, in using the term I nonetheless wish to expose the process of disruption and abnormality that allows menstruation, even in fairly harmless ways, to both moderate their behaviours or employ technologies not used at other times, and to find themselves in new relationships to the spacing and potentials of the material body that forms their physical substrate of all touch and being in a world.

Nancy, 'L'Intrus', p. 5.



feel this small piece of wire and plastic, do not picture its shape and form to myself, tucked up within the fleshiness of the uterus. However, the pain demarcates a region which calls up to awareness uterus and technology alike.

The experience, however, is not simply one of a regional wounding. The trauma of the period is also an experience of a body trying and failing to reject, to eject itself. In my first decade of menstruation, it was an achievement if I got through the experience without nausea. In Nancy's account, he writes of a sensation of his heart as 'somewhere near my lips or on my tongue, like an improper food... a sort of mild indigestion'.<sup>325</sup> There is an experience of a kind of nausea, an experience of the body's encounter with itself and, in doing so, encountering that which cannot be (transparently) assimilated. The response is a sensation of rejection, incomplete, an unfulfilled movement of expulsion that responds to what is foreign, but which cannot dispel the strangeness. The body raises to awareness not so much the foreign object itself, but a body suddenly hostile, and trapped in hostility. The attempt to defeat the foreigner is incomplete, and in the attempt, the body itself is rendered foreign, is rendered a foreign landscape of the incomplete encounter, incomplete battle, with a stranger who does not depart, but who prevents the landscape from lapsing down into transparent peace.

More so than Nancy's experience, menstruation is founded upon expulsion. That which was previously natural, previously good, proper, and invisible must now be purged. Previously part of the status quo – just as Nancy's heart previously functioned essentially but invisibly – previously part of the balance of the body, the uterine lining becomes a potential threat that must be stripped away for the body's balance to be sustained. Yet the sensation of expulsion expands. Just as with Nancy's indigestion, menstruation need not be limited to the slipping away of a bodily fluid. The contractions of the uterus trying to shed a part of itself echo in the digestive system. At times, I experience the period as a broader illness, feel it render my body hostile to an element it ought to be capable of simply removing. Indigestion, vomiting, temperatures, sweating.... My body purging itself becomes a site of conflict without a clear target, and it is not merely the locality of the reproductive organs that become foreign.

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<sup>325</sup> Nancy, 'L'Intrus', p. 3.

4.2bii – *Reassimilation and the Transparency of the Body in Use: The Tampon and the IUD*

As stated above, periods are, in essence, expulsion of waste. The intimacy surrounding these issues of menstruation and contraception is in part an intimacy of closeness and contact, and in part an intimacy of secrecy and taboo. In reproduction, the Other – and only a select other – is invited into intimate contact with the previously hidden spaces of the body. In menstruation, the intimacy is the boundary that is not to be crossed, that seeks to deter the touch of the other rather than invite entry. The expulsion of waste from the body is natural, yet also rendered unnatural in our resistance to standard patterns of touch from and upon the body. Just as Nancy's heart arises up within himself, detaching itself, revealing itself as strange, the body's waste products enact a similar uprising and detaching. Waste products cross a threshold from transparent, assimilated elements that are not elements, not parts; they are nothing but transparency and absence. Yet they become objects, and imagining, for example, the faecal matter lying inside one's intestine, the volume of urine in the bladder, is an encounter with something even stranger than the encounter enacted by imagining the bladder or the intestine themselves as parts within the whole that is *my body*. These belong. Although the possibility of their divisions is permanent, their uprising is temporary. They can lapse back down into absence and transparency as the touch of our awareness turns away. Waste products, however, resist this subsidence; their eventual end is the completion of this detachment.

Nancy describes his failing heart, his strange awareness of his own strangeness, as something that exceeds his capacity to represent it. The body's waste products, in contrast, exceed the body's capacity to reclaim them. They become its excess:

The body's exteriority and alterity include the unbearable: dejection, filth, the ignoble waste that is still part of it, still belongs to its substance and especially its activity, since it has to expel it, which is not one of its lesser functions. From excrement to the outgrowth of nails, hairs, or every kind of wart or purulent malignity, it has to put aside, and separate from itself, the residue or excess of its assimilatory processes, the excess of its own life. The body doesn't want to say, see, or smell this. It feels shame about it, and all kinds of daily distress and embarrassment. The soul enjoins itself to silence concerning a whole part of the body whose own form it is.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 157 (index no. 47).

These excess products invite an excessive intimacy. They invite the touch on the body's internal motions, and they insist on its constant differings and self-divisions. Moreover, they insist upon the body's materiality, on the ties between it and the material world. The self does not merely relate to the world, engage in human activity that recognises and manipulates it. Beneath the subject-object relationships between self and world is a material body of the same materiality as this world, as objects. The body in the medical textbook is cleansed. There is no mucus in the nose, no saliva in the mouth; no flecks of food cling to the teeth, and no dirt lies under the fingernails. The colon and the bladder are empty spaces, their potential demarcated without being drawn as enacted. The body so drawn is a body that does not belong to a world. Elsewhere in *Corpus*, Nancy observes that 'bodies are all somewhat deformed. A perfectly formed body is a disturbing, indiscreet body in the world of bodies, unacceptable. It's a diagram, not a body.'<sup>327</sup> Particularity is materialised in difference, and the textbook body abstains from particularity. It's a diagram. The body there does not live, does not eat or drink, does not touch the world, and is thus always already emptied of any excess.<sup>328</sup>

In contrast, the personal experience of menstruation cannot be contained by the anatomical description, because both the foreignness and discomfort of the body and the management of its wastes and excesses intrude upon my dwelling in a world. Menstrual blood cannot evacuate the body and, as in the text book, simply mark itself as no longer body and remove itself from those clean pages. No longer body, it still enacts a demand on my attention, as do the pains and nausea which reconstitute my own relationship to my body, and my body's capacity for activity and engagement. The menstruating body is not wholly alien, nor wholly pathological, but its differences cannot be ignored, and cannot be effaced without an intervention capable of restoring such effacement. The techniques and strategies available for such management are a matter of historical contingency, just as Nancy's heart transplant and treatment occur in the contingent intersection between his body and medical knowledge. In its encounters with fertility and menstruation, the relationship I bear to my body is mediated by available technology, and its high degree of success in allowing the body's disruption to be

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<sup>327</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 152.

<sup>328</sup> In this, then, is the difference between the diagram and the corpse. The body differs from other bodies, but also from itself. The diagram is different only in a perfection that renders it only a diagram. The corpse retains its particularity, and is frozen within it. It is deformed, distinct, distinguishable. Moreover, it bears the elements assimilated from its life *in* the world, and the process of assimilation and expulsion. Yet it is not a living body. It differs from other corpses, yet no longer differs from itself.

almost wholly mitigated, and its mild pathology to be diminished. My personal experience of contraception and menstruation relies for the most part on two forms of technology. The first are sanitary products, with tampons in particular being the technology most suitable for discussion here. The second is the IUD; implanted in my uterus, it falls somewhere between transplant and prosthetic.

Even more so than Freud's shoes from Chapter Three, these technologies function as a means to transparency and effacement. They are not intended to remain present-at-hand, but to slip back behind, under, transparent to the touch that is to be aimed elsewhere. They are not technologies with which the world is to be perceived. Nor, too, are they technologies aimed at activity. The tampon has a clear end: its role is to absorb the uterine lining as it is expelled from the body. More deeply than this, however, the tampon is inserted to cancel out that which demands this end. One does not actively wear one, wielding it as one seeks to achieve this end. The end that is absorption is in itself the means to an end of forgetting. In the flow of blood from the body, the anxiety and knowledge of stains that draw the visual touches of others, the touches upon oneself of the expelled lining as it moves through and along the body's surfaces, the body begins to gape open. It gapes open to the world that might thus touch the body in a new, unwanted way. It gapes open upon itself, as these touches repattern the skin of touch, folding the body upon itself, claiming the touch of awareness. The period risks resituating the body in its relation to the touch of others, and risks respacing the body in its own awareness of touch, of the world and of itself.

David Palumbo-Liu notes that 'L'Intrus' 'leads us once again to question whether techné is intrusive or alongside' and suggests the possibility of 'demarkating two realms – the instrumental, and the ontological'. On one reading, 'the heart is an instrumental object incorporated into the subject's body, and its alterity is erased in the process'. Palumbo-Liu continues: '[t]he alternative to this reading of the transplant as instrumentalizing the other, of attempting to render it continuous, is a reading that maintains its contiguous status alongside, with, the receiving body'.<sup>329</sup> As with the discussion of transparent technologies in my previous chapter, the tampon is designed to be incorporated and its alterity banished. It is physically proximate to the body; indeed, its functionality would be comprised were it not situated in close physical contact with the walls of the vagina. Yet, this touching is physical only; it is not designed to be felt

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<sup>329</sup> Palumbo-Liu, 'The Operative Heart', pp. 103-4.

but instead to be ignorable. Moreover, the tampon is designed not only to be untouched, but to erase the body's self-touch. Not only is the presence of the tampon to be forgotten, but also the presence of the menstrual blood, and the channel of the vagina in which its movements can be felt. Whereas the sanitary towel is designed for a similar technological effacement, it does not close up and negate the space of the vagina to quite the same extent. This area of the body remains open, occasionally revealed through a touch on (and revelation of) the blood and uterine waste that intermittently passes through.

The tampon's end, therefore, is to seal this opening, and to smooth out the skin of touch from this self-contact. Moreover, as with Freud's shoes, it smooths out the site of potential contact in a way that nullifies or reduces the potential for contact. In its normal, daily life, the body is rarely invaginated. The design of the tampon itself reveals this combined goal of self-effacement and bodily closure. The emergence of the applicator tampon is not merely an increase in convenience. The touch of the hand on the body during insertion is permitted to remain along the outside surface of the body, the surface the tampon works to reinstate. Increased ease of insertion minimises the time required, and the smoothness of plastic and reliability of result allow the technology's use to lapse back into transparency. The activity of insertion moves to the outside of the body, and is no longer required to either penetrate it or to touch on (or open up to touch) that which is normally concealed. The gesture itself is translated into a movement of the hand that bears little further resemblance to what is occurring on this inside, and thus the sealing over of the normal skin of the body is more readily achieved, and less readily disturbed.<sup>330</sup>

'It is as revealing [...]', Heidegger writes, 'that technē is a bringing-forth'. 'Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *alētheia*, truth, happens.' With the tampon, what is revealed is the unobtrusiveness of the body; it is the revelation of the uterus, of its lining, and of the

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<sup>330</sup> 'Togetherness and being-together are not equivalent', Nancy writes 'the word "with," seems to oscillate indefinitely between two meanings, without ever coming to a point of equilibrium: it is either the "together" of juxtaposition *partes extra partes*, isolated and unrelated parts, or the "together" of gathering *totum intra totum*, a unified totality where the relation surpasses itself in being pure.' The tampon sits together with the space of the body which menstruation has the capacity to reveal, it touches both sides of this opening. And yet, in doing so it neutralises touch and gathers this zone of the body back into unity with itself, and with the rest of the body.

Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p. 60.

vagina through which waste is expelled, that the technology is called into use. As with the peasant shoes, that efface themselves in use, and allow the body, too, to slip into the transparency of its daily orientation beyond itself, the tampon enacts an effacement. As Heidegger also notes, *technē* is also a form of knowledge: it means ‘to be entirely at home in something, to understand and be expert in it’.<sup>331</sup> The shoes permit the peasant to dwell in her world; the tampon permits my oblivious immersion in my body, the cessation of that which intrudes. Yet it is perhaps in this cessation that this technology reveals itself. The body, as a home capable of intrusion, is revealed as this only in the intrusion, and in the act of restoration that returns it to me. The tampon is a minor technology, but perfected. It flickers at the edges of body only to efface these edges in its movement along them. It reveals the edges even as it reveals their return to concealment, and the restoration of my transparent, undifferentiated unity which permits my body, too, to efface itself in my touches upon and engagements with the world.

To make another brief technological detour, I wish quickly to draw out the parallels to be drawn between hormonal methods of regulating fertility and the challenges posed by Nancy’s compromised immune system. In selecting a copper IUD, I was motivated by a desire to avoid hormonal methods of contraception; in so doing, my aim was to avoid any revision to my physiological substrate. The immune system works to sustain the body’s comparative stasis by neutralising potential intrusions, ideally before they are even detectable by the conscious self. As Nancy writes, by regulating the body through clear distinctions as to what is proper to it and what is other, the immune system acts as one guide to self-identity. However, in order for his new heart to be integrated into his own body, its status as other had to be recognised. To prevent rejection by his body’s immune system, Nancy was required to take immunosuppressants. Successful restoration of the body’s healthy state (prior to disease, approximating a time when his body operated successfully and invisibly) and to the accompanying aspects of wholeness and integrity, was only possible by a radical alteration of the mechanism which policed the identity of this whole. Moreover, this policing was dependent on differentiation and exclusion. Accepting the heart in order to restore wholeness and self-identity required a competing suppression of one biological

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<sup>331</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ in *The Question Concerning Technology: and Other Essays*, Martin Heidegger, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Perennials, [1977] 2013), pp. 3-35 (p. 13).

boundary between self and other. Allowing the body to receive the heart depended on an equal potential (albeit one not intended to be fulfilled) to receive other foreign bodies without rejection.<sup>332</sup>

Of course, this is a more radical (not to mention life-threatening) rewriting of the body's identity and closure than in the example of the IUD. However, hormonal methods of controlling fertility involve a similar reorganisation and redefinition of physiological aspects of the body in order to prevent more substantial alteration. Female fertility is an openness to disruption. Avoiding this form of disruption through non-hormonal contraception leaves this physiological potential still in place. Stasis is achieved by interfering with something external or other and preventing it from integrating into the female body.<sup>333</sup> In contrast, hormonal contraception ensures the stasis of the body by changing the physiological substrate of this (comparatively) static body. Its continued identity as that which is unobtrusive and familiar is achieved only by change.

#### 4.2biii – *Intrusion of Spacing*

I have so far been advocating similarity between Nancy's heart transplant and my own encounters with my body in its reproductive functions. I wish, however, to point now to one difference. The void that Nancy remarks is opening in his chest is a void of sense, a

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<sup>332</sup> Even more so that with the initial cut into his chest, and the cuts across the hearts that sever them and allow reattachment, this self-alienation stands as the irresolvable 'dehiscence' Nancy describes as the contentious problem of identity. 'From one to the other, there is permanent contact and permanent dehiscence.' Unlike the manipulations or supplementations of the body that allow it to reseal itself, this surgical wound can only gape open, revealing a welling up of insideness to clamour for touch, and two surfaces, touching across this wound where contact is possible, touching but resisting the assimilation into a whole in which they both are effaced, and which can redirect its touch outside itself. In Nancy's experience of the heart transplant, it is not the scar nor the cuts that cannot heal, so much as it is the wounding done to his natural mechanism of separation from the other. By the suppression of his immune system, the scarring and line of severance where the foreign heart is attached is capable of surpassing dehiscence; this wound is prioritised so that it will not stay open. What diffuses in Nancy's account is an easy accounting of the severance that guarantees and permits identity. As with the broken pot, Nancy has particularity as a singularity existing along a severance from the other bodies against it which cannot be closed up, which cannot heal, without this loss of identity. 'L'Intrus' discusses an experience in which the body is radically cut into, cracked open and rearranged, yet the threat to identity that resides in the restructuring of Nancy's immunity is that in the attempt to heal and overcome these surgical wounds and severances, Nancy loses some of his essential capacity to be severed from the world, and rest against it along an open line of indissoluble contact.

Jean-Luc Nancy, *Identity: Fragments, Frankness*, trans. François Raffoul (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 22.

<sup>333</sup> The condom achieves this by denying access, for example. The copper IUD is a more complex distinction, in that it makes physiological alterations to the uterine environment that render it inhospitable. This is not, however, achieved by altering the body's own make-up, but rather by reacting with it and with the sperm.

void existing in a failure to bring the body back within sense. In contrast, the relationship between the uterus (and thus the reproductive body) and space is slightly different. This part of the body functions specifically in the creation of a space within the body, yet simultaneously creating a space other than the body, for the other to arrive both into and from. The space that opens in Nancy's body, at the heart of intimacy, is a space that was never meant to be open. The space of the uterus is a space with the potential to open, yet the openness of this space remains foreign to prior bodily experience founded on the always already closed nature of this space.

The uterus, more than any other region or part of the body, is space. That is not to claim other areas are full. The body is a constant movement, or at least in movement and is patterned with emptinesses that permit this. There are channels from every orifice, there are passages in and out of the body, holding places for foods and liquids in various stages and processes of digestion. The lungs are designed to empty and fill, and so too are the chambers of the heart. Veins and arteries are constantly full, but never with static blood, and capillaries lie in readiness to expand, to increase space, to generate temporary emptiness, emptiness to be filled.

And then there is the uterus. To some extent the vagina. Regions of the body oriented around offering a space that aspires to the other. The mouth, the anus, open to the outside, but as spaces of transition; they are permanently temporary openings, opening up the body as matter transitions through it. Breathing every few seconds, eating every few hours. We cringe from the child who eats with his mouth open, and wish to maintain the illusion, the non-illusory norm, of closure. Within this normal enclosure, the normal enclosing of the body, there is no model for assimilation with the opening of the body that opens it not to touch on the outside world but to touch on itself. Just as menstrual cramps and the sensation of the bodily expulsion of the uterine lining intrude upon me, the uterus as the source of these sensations is foreign. It is the stranger that touches me, that forces me to touch it with awareness, recognition, and naming. This touch dislocates it from me. The routine of menstruation has gradually become in some sense mine, but I only ever really experience the uterus itself – as a bodily component of, in, against me – as the foreigner, and in some sense as not mine, as not part of the *me*, the *I*, who is forged as a body against and amongst the world and objects of my normal existence. The fact of the uterus's additional purpose of growing and housing alterity – of preparing a being who is both of and against me – only serves to further dislocate it, to further exclude it from my sense of bodily- and self-possession.



#### 4.2c – The Mineness of ‘I’ and body

I wish to continue this question. To what extent is the uterus, my uterus, mine? This is not intended to engage more political questions of agency, authority, control and propriety. Even if the uterus is not *mine* in the sense to be elaborated below, it is more mine than it is anyone else’s.

A consistent reference only to the “uterus” is a product of my personal inclination to disavow possession of a womb – even the presence, possessed or not, of a womb – inside me, as part of me. The term claims this region of matter in a way that dislocates it from my experience. I have neither children nor, yet, have I experienced the desire for them. As with Nancy’s attempts to fully think about the heart transplant, attempts to genuinely imagine this region of my body as a site of real fertility, as occupied by a body with a growing self gradually dislocating and separating, these attempts encounter, for me, a blank. This may not be the object ‘foreign to thought’ with which Nancy’s essay is engaged, the object for which ‘there is nothing to know, nothing to understand, nothing to feel’, but it remains an object foreign to *my* thought.<sup>334</sup> I cannot think this, cannot imagine occupancy of this body, with this patterning, without dislocation from myself. It is a thought that carries away from the thinker. There is nothing in me which can know this, can feel this, even as the presence of this biological potential lies within me.

There, in this fluctuating mass of my body, is the potential for a womb that pre-exists my capacity to think “I”, to be “I”. A biological form, a biological encoding, to cycle through fertility. A cache of eggs, finite, placed within me before there is any gesture of self-possession. Even before the half-way stage of gestation, the ovaries of the foetus contain millions of oocytes, diminishing in number by birth. Following birth, no more develop. The images multiply and regress. I try to picture to myself *my* womb, try to place inside it a female foetus. Within that, within this gradually emerging *her*, is another uterus, another womb, another stock of eggs. It’s a different scenario to Nancy’s, and yet it is the same. ‘The thing exceeds my capacity to represent it.’<sup>335</sup>

The spaces in question are tiny compared to the fullness of my body, of the world. What is disconcerting is expansion. The micro-categorization, the micro-

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<sup>334</sup> Nancy, ‘L’Intrus’, p. 4.

<sup>335</sup> Nancy, ‘L’Intrus’, p. 7.

recognition the endlessly divisible anatomic body renders the body ever more opaque, until the obsession with the *as* all but cancels itself out. In contrast, the uterus swells in size, in potential, and in touch – opening the body, and suffusing its space, too, with the uncertainty of its *as*. A typical adult uterus is less than ten centimetres in length, about the size of a fist. This space swells during pregnancy to fit the growing foetus – to fit a developing *person*. And inside this foetus, if female, is another tiny uterus, a miniscule space, another possibility of future personhood. The spaces in this regression shrink down, but swell outwards. My body is a finite region; the coordinates of these spaces cannot exceed my body's capacity to contain them, but I feel them, imagine them, as expansion, as a void hollowing and growing.

It becomes a question of absence. Yet how does one possess an absence, and how does one possess something that in being revealed, reveals itself as a distortion of absence?

I don't have a womb; I concede I have a uterus. It is strange to speak of a foetus, a toddler, even an eight-year-old, as having either. My uterus has been revealed to me, reveals itself to me. I am familiar, albeit in a heavily qualified way, with its presence, and with its patterns of presence and absence. I am familiar with its pain and with its products. It has also been revealed to me by the intrusion of a medical knowledge, by a medical discourse overlapping my experience, by medical examination, medical instruments, and also by medical procedure. The vagina is similar. Perhaps even more so than a uterus, it is strange to imagine others as possessing them. Though that is inaccurate. I can imagine another's possession of her vagina, can imaginatively touch on that possession. I cannot, however, fully touch on her vagina itself, myself. That intimacy is denied; it is not opened to my touch. My sister will bear a child, a niece or nephew with whom I will interact. I will be shown the scans of her uterus. Her vagina, however, I leave to her, her husband and her doctor.

## **Towards (only towards) Conclusion – Are we Nearly Here**

### **Yet?**

#### **Patterning the Body's Space: Revision, Return and Reclaiming**

The womb threatens with its permanence, and with its permanent offering of my body to the touch of another from which I cannot fully disentangle myself. In contrast, I have a uterus once a month, or for a few days, several short but painful intervals, brief surges of presence that disappear almost as soon as they arrive...

What should be made of this body that calls itself into this arrangement of touch?

It is a cliché approximately as old as the biological occurrence to which it applies, but menstruation is a marker of a cyclical return. As with the pendulum in Chapter Two and the shuttling lacing of Chapter Three, the uterus is a touch on the body that elapses as it occurs, yet promises a return. In the opening stages of the fourth chapter, I addressed Nancy's recourse to the indices that reach towards a body that can never be wholly grasped.

*Are we nearly here yet?*

Each of the indices is an index, an indexical; each is an iteration of the ever on-going approach to here-ness that can never quite be touched. We reach towards *here*, and find (it) there... The *here*, as the parentheses indicate, slips aside, even as we make a fleeting contact on it. In my formulation in Chapter Two, I remarked that the *here* exists in the definition of the extremities of the pendulum's motion. Motion, reaching, touch all always carry us to the extremities, but the *here*, the *me*, the transparent substrate of being being-there is not that which lies under contact at the extremity, but that which constrains and permits this motion that always flows out beyond it. In addition, the pendulum is not just approach but retreat, yet the motion is an ongoing extremity of a movement that is always approaching and retreating, always approaching just to be turned away. The pendulum approaches *here*, but cannot rest there; *here* occurs at that uninhabitable point of the swing where approach transfers itself to retreat, impossibly close yet already backing away.

### Figures of Return: Infinite Divisibility and the Reliable Body

Nancy writes: ‘At work in the approach to the body that figures it both *here* and *there* is a ‘whole machinery of attraction and retreat’.<sup>336</sup> The text itself returns to this figure of return:

In the end, this means that approach carries within itself both advance and recoil, taking up the approach again and again. (Not only, therefore, in the rhythm of a sexual act, a rhythmic logic of the caress, of friction, of intensifying repetition, but also that of the beginning again of acts, without any definable program.)<sup>337</sup>

This thesis has demonstrated numerous figures of return. In each approach, each motion that retreats, regathers, returns, the indexical is approached, yet the motion, rather than inhabiting the indexical *here* must content itself instead with a vertex, with a turning. The vertex can be figured either way, as the arrow of the movement of approach and retreat, the light wave that reflects off a mirror or as the gathering to a point of a surface that can only be touched in a fleeting gesture that cannot rest there, and finds nothing there to touch but the bare impression of presence. The former enacts the same figure as the pendulum and the lacing: at the extremity of the movement one is drawn close to that which is sought, yet in the moment of achievement touch withdraws. It cannot rest *there* at the *here*.

*Here* may be inaccessible, but it is telling that Nancy’s accounts of approach to it not only get close, but each time approach it in a movement of repetition in which the *here*, the *I*, never slips too far away. *Corpus II* offers a similarly organic image of this repeating advance and retreat to that found in *The Fall of Sleep*:

Body in a rising and falling tide, flux and reflux, flow and ebb, the sea heaved up, welling up from a depth that is before all life, before the first cellular division of this very body, before the whole multiplication of bodies starting from the thick, dense *nihil*.

The stranger that occupies it and urges it on holds out its palms and lips, its forehead, its pulls, the rise and fall of all its limbs and members, its constraints and comforts, its ways, its shocks of hair, its edges, ridges, angles, nails. It advances and offers itself, ventures in the direction of lights and smells, towards speckles, roughnesses, stabilities and softnesses; it braves shrillness and growls, blows and vibrations.<sup>338</sup>

This natural swelling of a body that advances and retreats, that offers itself to the touch of the other even as it advances towards that which it may touch, combines the infinite

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<sup>336</sup> Nancy, *Corpus II*, p. 89.

<sup>337</sup> Nancy, *Corpus II*, p. 100.

<sup>338</sup> Nancy, *Corpus II*, p. 88.

divisibility discussed at the beginning of this chapter (the edges, ridges, hair and nails) with a figure of repetition and return.

The body that is open, in its divisibility to infinite *re*-vision, is also *re*-liable. As with the *re*-pose of the second chapter of this thesis, the “*re*-” of this prefix need not connote repetition but instead a grammatical intensive. However, this impression of *re*-turn, and the body that returns, reliably, to meet the touch that turns to it, speaks to this harmony of repetition. And perhaps this is the most important truth of the body. The material, ever-divisible body is a truth of being-there in a world in which such physicality is a condition of encounter. Yet this body is only partially familiar. We each go through life with an understanding not just of the bodies of other, but of our own. It’s ability to be subsumed within our engagements arises from a reliability that is not dissimilar from that of the equipment discussed in Chapter Three. As discussed in that chapter, the body and the equipment that merges with and distinguishes itself from body in our patterns of relationship to our world, share a similarity in the effacement, the transparency, of their material availability for touch, beneath the active touches of the self on the world.

My body is closest to equipment in its reliable functioning, so close that it slips beneath the skin which the body is, integrating into the composite substrate of my being-engaged, my being-there in a world. Such equipment is integrated into the *here* from which my touch extends. Yet this closeness cannot withstand the touch that would measure it; by extension, I can only ever be *nearly* here. “Reliable” shares an etymological root with the ligature: it is a binding, a tying and a gathering. The body, however far it slips into its possibility for revision, is also largely reliable. That which we project forwards in our engagements is always a past which we exceed. And yet, we project this image of the body forwards with it, as the condition of its reliability. The body is not just that which is there, nor that which is discovered as *already* there. It is that which, always already there where we find it, is there when we arrive to touch it, there in our anticipations and projections. I have a body both because I found it when I looked, and also because I will find it when I look. Heidegger’s *Dasein* is always *there* rather than here, and as Nancy demonstrates, it is always there *with*. Yet Heidegger’s postulation of being also emphasises *Dasein*’s orientation ahead of itself. *Dasein* is engaged in the world, he (or she) dwells there in a space structured by the relationships of engagement and activity that *Dasein* conducts. My body maintains its transparency in my engaged, outward-oriented activity because it answers reliably to the expectations I

place upon it. Just as we need not attend to our shoes, or worry about their survival as they are from one use to the next, the body retains a similar reliability.

Against this reliability, however, is its constant potential for disruption, and its essential instability of surface that may always shift. In his account of skin, that which Nancy asserts the body to be, Steven Connor places emphasis on the disruptive presence of the itch:

Itching testifies to the variability of change or tension in the skin. [...] The experience of the skin is in great part this ceaseless fluctuation of excitations, the skin lived as a gusting curtain or aurora borealis of tickles, prickles and shimmers and quivers. Every time there is an itch, the skin presents itself as one pole of a energetic potential, to be completed by the scratching, or counter-irritation. [...] Itching and scratching involve a rising to the surface of ourselves, a centring of ourselves at the edges.<sup>339</sup>

The itch expresses the interruptive nature of a body that cannot be wholly subsumed within activity, and also the impossibility of a contact that can contain or fully grasp the body. Itches nearly always proliferate, nearly always shift; scratch one itch and the surface of the body, exposed in the itching, shifts, evades us. The close of the third chapter expressed the excess of a body against the attempts to enclose it; the image of the body becomes increasingly obsolete after the touch ceases. Lucian Freud, observing himself, painting himself, enclosing a body within a fixed image – a demarcation of a boundary and location – must at some point turn away. At that moment the body slips past. The itch expresses the unsatisfactory outcome of the touch on the body, the impossibility of neutralising it within a gesture that can not only align the hereness of touching with the there where it is touched, but also cannot adequately enclose it within a there, for the movements of touch that impose those boundaries will carry the *there* away with them in the mobility of touch and engagement which always carries itself forward.

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<sup>339</sup> Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), p. 230.

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