

JYU DISSERTATIONS 761

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Joni Puranen

# Attention and Bodily Experience

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UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND  
SOCIAL SCIENCES

JYU DISSERTATIONS 761

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**Joni Puranen**

# **Attention and Bodily Experience**

Esitetään Jyväskylän yliopiston humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellisen tiedekunnan suostumuksella  
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## ABSTRACT

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The key objective of this dissertation is to study how “my” bodily being determines, conditions or structures “my” attentive experiences. I explore this attentive bodily being by turning to, and by expanding from, philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy’s (1940–2021) analysis of corporeal ek-sistence<sup>1</sup> determined as *being-to-the-world* (*être-au-monde*) and his analyses into the tension between thought and extension. I show how we can elucidate the corporeal and worldly nature of attention, awareness and attentiveness with the help of Nancy’s philosophical figure of *corpus ego* (“bodily I”), which I elaborate further in terms of the fractality of the world and in terms of ecstatic *desire* (*desir*). By analysing attentive reading, tending to bodily resonances and the agony of bodily obsessions, I demonstrate how exactly “I”, conjoined with this strange body that is not properly “mine” nor “me”, experience myself, others and the world. By doing so, I demonstrate how “my” attentive and desirous *toward* is not preceded, guaranteed or decided by any sovereign, self-apparent or self-given attentional “self” or subjectivity, which would subsist or exist beyond or outside each punctual time of being-*to* any thing.

Keywords: corporeality, attention, experience.

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<sup>1</sup> From Latin, *ex + sistere*, “standing outside”, “taking place outside”.

## TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

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Attention and bodily experience

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Tämän väitöskirjan keskeisenä tavoitteena on selvittää miten “minun oman” olemiseni ruumiillisuus rajaa, määrää tai muovaa tarkkaavaisia kokemuksiani. Tutkin tätä kääntymällä kohti, ja kehittämällä eteenpäin, filosofi Jean-Luc Nancyn (1940-2021) analyysiä *ek-sistenssistä olemisena-kohti-maailmaa* (*être-au-monde*) ja hänen analyysejään ajattelun ja ulottumisen välisestä jännitteestä. Osoitan, kuinka voimme selvittää huomion ja tarkkaavaisuuden ruumiillista ja maailmallista luonnetta Nancyn filosofisella käsitteellä *corpus ego* (“ruumiillinen itse”), jota myös kehitän hivenen eteenpäin maailman fraktaalisuuden ja *halun* (*desir*) ekstaattisuuden avulla. Analysoimalla tarkkaavaista lukemista, ruumiinsisäisten värähtelyjen tuntemisen ja kuulemisen välisen suhteen jännitettä ja ruumiillisten obsessioiden inhottavuutta, osoitan kuinka “minä”, liittyen tai suhteutuen tähän kummalliseen ruumiiseen joka ei ole varsinaisesti “minä” tai minun”, koen itseni, muut ja maailman. Analyysilläni osoitan, ettei “minun” haluavaa ja ruumiillista *kohtioloani* edellä, perusta tai valikoi mikään itsenäinen, itseriittoinen, immanentti, erillinen tai suvereeni tarkkaavainen minuus tai itsetietoisuus, joka perustaisi tai eksistoi jokaisen jotakin *kohtiolevan* hetken ulkopuolella tai sivulla.

Keywords: ruumiillisuus, huomio, kokemus.

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Helsinki 28.2.2024  
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ABSTRACT

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

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## ABBREVIATIONS OF KEY WORKS OF JEAN-LUC NANCY

C - *Corpus*

CII - *Corpus II: writings on sexuality*

M - *The Muses*

S - *Sexistence*

SW - *The Sense of The World*

# 1 OBJECTIVES, METHODS AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

In this dissertation, I explore how “my” bodily existence – the fact that I am essentially an exposed, sensitive and fragile bodily being – determines, conditions and structures “my” attentive experiences. I delve into attentive experiences through a philosophical investigation, drawing from philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy’s (1940–2021) conceptual framework referred to as the “ontology of the body”<sup>2</sup> in his *Corpus*. I deconstructively engage the “ownness” of the attentive “self”, “I” or “me” in three specific experiences: when reading a text out loud or in silence; when listening and tactilely feeling visceral resonances within my body; and when obsessively controlling my lungs, my eyelids or feeling my heartbeat.

I investigate how the absolute corporeality of “my” being conditions “my” curious, intrigued, surprised, suffering and caring experiences,<sup>3</sup> which take place always, each time and constantly *toward, to, unto* or *into* (*être-a*) things “I” find intriguing, surprising or frightening. Or, to depict the purpose of this dissertation in slightly more detail: in this work I investigate how “I” experience “myself” and “my body” conjoined together, when “I” run the sensitive exteriority of “my” pulpy, bony, warm and dry fingers across a ragged and warm surface of a granite boulder that “I” reach out to grab; how “I” “self-experience” “myself” and “my body” as closely united or conjoined – as one suffering whole – when a jolt of pain cuts through the intimate silence that makes up the health of “my” visceral, fascial or respiratory depths; and how “I” advance – silently or aloud – through a textual body, when I move “my” gaze through the dots, shapes, commas, letters, spaces and words that make up (more or less) meaningful sentences I grasp as spread across a fragile skin of a paper.

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<sup>2</sup> Nancy depicts his thinking of corporal existence in *Corpus* as follows: “...the *ontology of the body* is ontology itself: being’s in no way prior or subjacent to the phenomenon here. The body *is* the being of existence.” (C, 15) and a page later adds: “Perhaps we shouldn’t think the ‘ontological body’ except where thinking *touches* on the hard strangeness of this *body*, on its un-thinking, unthinkable, exteriority. But such touching, or such a touch, is the sole condition for true thought.” (17).

<sup>3</sup> From *ex* + the PIE root *per-*, “to risk, try” and “forward”.

In essence, this dissertation presents a deconstructive analysis of the worldly corporeality and corporeal sensitivity that, I propose, determine all of “my” experiences as an attentive “self”.

## 1.1 Research objectives and the structure of the dissertation

This dissertation consists of three original investigations undertaken in my research articles. It also includes a section that explores and clarifies the philosophical framework employed in my dissertation (section 2. below) and my concluding remarks, which I have drawn from the outcomes of my research (section 3. Below). As was said above, my objective is to examine how my bodily existence – the fact that I am, essentially, an exposed, singular, tangible, resonant, suffering and desiring existent – determines “me” and “my experiences” as curious, fascinated, surprised, obsessed and fearful. To express this in more precise ontological terms, I employ Nancy’s deconstructive analyses of the world, being, bodies, the self and, most of all, his analyses into the corporeality of existence in order to articulate and expound how “I” *ecstatically*<sup>4</sup> (ex-) *tend* to some singular (or plurally singular) things rather than others. I accomplish this by investigating how “I” (self-) experience “myself”, others and the world closely conjoined or united with “my” sensitive, tangible, soft, sweaty, sonorous, smelly, salty, fragile, pleased, suffering, living and dying body, which defines and supports each of “my” experiences, yet stays ultimately strange and unavailable for “me” to know, understand or penetrate with intellect. In order to illuminate and clarify my research objectives, and the methods I use to promote them, I offer next an account of the structure of my dissertation.

The philosophical results of my dissertation are worked out and presented in my research articles, which each focus on a distinct attentional or attentive experience. In my articles, I show how the singular plurality of corporeal being determines and conditions “my” attentive experiences, by philosophically engaging the role of bodily being, bodily senses and bodily sensitivity in the following experiences:

- (i) I investigate how I, as a reader, advance through bodies of letters, words and sentences, when engaging with a text, whether reading it aloud or silently.
- (ii) I demonstrate how I experience sounds that penetrate, cut through and resonate within my visceral body, most notably in the senses of tactile and sonorous directionality. I do this by studying how specific types of bodily resonances termed “somatic sounds” (e.g., sounds of breathing, tinnitus, or heartbeat) resonate within my visceral depths.

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<sup>4</sup> From Latin, *ex + sistere*, “standing outside” or “taking place outside”, which in the context of my dissertation indicates that attentive experiences are irreducibly worldly and structured as being-to, into or toward worldly things.

- (iii) I provide a new interpretation of “bodily obsessions”, which are characteristic of certain forms of obsessive-compulsive disorder. I explore the experiences that emerge when I obsessively tend to my own breathing, heartbeats, or blinks.

The overarching objective of my three research articles is to demonstrate, through thematically specific yet methodologically interconnected analyses, how bodily existence shapes my diverse ways of tending to things. In essence, while my articles explore distinct themes, they collectively contribute to my overarching goal of deconstructively examining the “first-person” trait of the attentive “self” – the “I,” “self,” or “me” that encompasses all of “my” attentive experiences.

Therefore, the primary aim of my articles, or this dissertation, is not to offer an exegetical study of Nancy's corporeal ontology, critique his ideas, or to reconstruct Nancy's philosophy of attention from the periphery of his works. Instead, my three articles operate within a methodological framework that I have constructed on the foundation of Nancy's philosophy and resources. This framework encompasses experiential interpretation, critical reflection, and deconstructive analysis. This approach is significantly different from the main line of continental research on attention in recent decades, which predominantly draws on Husserlian resources and concepts while largely neglecting the pivotal role of the body and bodily sensibility that I consider essential components in attentive experiences.

In the section titled “The philosophical framework of my dissertation” (section 2., below) I clarify the conceptual and methodological framework of my research articles by explaining the philosophical concepts, analytical results and arguments that I employ in this dissertation. I elaborate my philosophical standpoint by offering my interpretation of the following themes that I identify in Nancy's work and use in my own experiential analyses of attentive experiences in my research articles:

- (i) In section 2.1., I explain how I understand Nancy's thinking of the world, bodies, thought and being by looking into his analysis of the worldliness of being-*to*, which he suggests is determinative of all singularly plural beings exposed *to* one another.
- (ii) In section 2.2., I give an account of my interpretation of Nancy's deconstructive analysis into the “substantiality” of the “first-person” ego, subject or subjectivity. I do this by looking into his analysis of *experience* as the conjoinment (or union, confusion) between the non-extended soul and the unthinking body. This analysis is undertaken in his *Ego Sum* and it is iterated further along with the notion of *corpus ego* in *Corpus*, where Nancy puts an emphasis on how bodies weigh on and unto one another. In order to think how “I” turn to things, I continue from *corpus ego* to Nancy's analyses concerning the bodily senses and the *zoned fractality* of bodies, which he undertakes most prominently in his essays *The Muses*, *The Sense of The World*, *Corpus* and *Listening*. Through these discussions, I aim to illustrate how I can conceptualise corporeal sensitivity, sensuality, and bodily senses and deconstructively engaged the first-person “attentive self.”

As I have briefly explained, my philosophical exploration of attention places a strong emphasis on Nancy's reiteration of ontological thinking, undertaken in the opening chapters of his *The Sense of The World*, where he proposes that we attempt to think of the world and being in terms of *being-to*, *-into* or *-toward* of all existents. I demonstrate the significance of Nancy's concept of *being-to* to my inquiries by discussing his *The Sense of the World* and *Corpus*. In the former, the concept of "being-to" is explicitly and comprehensively analysed. In the latter, it remains primarily implicit yet still underpins Nancy's foundational analysis of the *haecceity* of "this body here". The *haecceity* of the body allow us to understand what Nancy means by the resistance, weighing and touch between body and thought, which he analyses with his notion of *corpus ego*.

I build upon and extend Nancy's notion of *corpus ego* to think how "I" (at-) tend to things as an exposed and worldly existent. Nancy introduces the notion of the *corpus ego* – the "corporeal I" or "bodily self" – in his seminal 1992 essay *Corpus*. In this work, he presented it as a re-interpretation of his deconstructive analysis into the incomplete, unstable yet necessary union between the thinking soul and the extending body. In order to further conceptualise and elucidate how bodily being structures the attentional traits determinant of "my" worldly experiences, I turn to Nancy's analyses of how I am weighed upon (*pensee*) and how I, by weighing upon things across "my" body, exist to, into and toward things, others and myself. I suggest that the corporeality of "my" being-toward is the selective or attentive trait that determines "my" bodily being.

In order to further illuminate how I tend to some things over others in light of the results presented in my articles, I culminate my dissertation with a succinct explication of attention thematised as desirous (in section 3., below). For this purpose, I turn to Nancy's analysis of *desire* (*désir*), which is worked out most prominently in his later works such as *Corpus II: Writings on Sexuality and Sexistence*. I bring up Nancy's analysis as it enables me to draw conclusive insights regarding how I, as a *corpus ego*, experience myself each time I tend into, unto, to or toward any intriguing, surprising and frightening thing over something else. I rely on my own interpretation of Nancy's *desire* to explain how I understand attentive experiences as being corporeally determined and thoroughly worldly.

The main objective of my dissertation is to demonstrate that through a deconstructively undertaken ontological exploration of my ecstatic, ex-tensive and ex-tending *desirous* (being-) to things, we can rethink how I – as a curious, surprised and thoroughly corporeal being – experience the world, others and myself. By delving into these dimensions of my bodily being with my analyses of three distinct attentive experiences, I demonstrate that my (at-)tentional and bodily existence is not conditioned, constituted, preceded, guaranteed nor decided by any sovereign, transcendent, self-apparent or self-given attentional act of a *self*, *ego*, *ipseity* or *subjectivity* – an ego who would either precede or transcend her "own" bodily being, her "own" *each time*, her "own" *hic et nunc*, her "own" corporeal existence, other bodies, the world and the spacing of bodies exposed to one another.

In contrast to the idea of such an ego, my dissertation demonstrates how "I" "egoically" establish "myself" by binding together and drawing from *each* of "my" experiences of *desiring* something (or away from something) distinct from the infinite plurality of other things. In simpler terms, I argue that we can think of "my" desire *of, toward, into* or *to* things as being a necessary determinant of the thoroughly corporeal "I", the captivating figure of *corpus ego* originally discussed by Nancy in his *Corpus*. This implies that "my" *desirous being-to* is a relation that tightens the impenetrable and indivisible "lace of the self" around the experience that the body *is*. To put my experiential-ontological claim in most general terms: "I" experience myself as tightly conjoined with "my" strange and resisting body and "I" experience the world and others solely because I *desire* some things.

## 1.2 Current discussions engaged in by the dissertation

Why am I philosophically interested and invested in investigating the corporeality of being-*to, into* or *toward* things, thoughts, persons and ourselves? This interest arises from the realisation that while "attention" has received a huge deal of attention in clinical,<sup>5</sup> cognitive,<sup>6</sup> behavioural<sup>7</sup> and therapeutical disciplines for over the past century, philosophical inquiries into the traits, relations and structures determinative of or essential to "attention" have only begun to emerge during the last few decades within the field of continental philosophy. This specifically refers to philosophical dialogues that build upon and critically engage with the insights of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. These studies can be broadly categorised as "phenomenological," "ontological," "genealogical," or "deconstructive."<sup>8</sup> However, within these discussions, attention has primarily been treated as a purely internal or mental state, a consciously intentional or egoic act, and/or a volitional relationship. As a result, the corporeal and ecstatic dimensions and traits of attention have largely

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<sup>5</sup> For the concurrent clinical discussions of *attention*, see: Styles (2006); Carrasco (2011); Tsuchiya & Van Boxtel (2013).

<sup>6</sup> For seminal texts on *attention* undertaken in cognitive sciences, see: Broadbent (1958); Treisman (1960); Eriksen & Eriksen (1974); Treisman & Gelade (1980); Kahneman & Treisman (1984); Yantis & Jonides (1990); Posner & Petersen (1990); Lavie (1995); Desimone & Duncan (1995); Corbetta & Shulman (2002); Theeuwes (2010); Buschman & Miller (2010); Carrasco (2011); Corbetta & Shulman (2011); Awh, Belopolsky & Theeuwes (2012); Husain & Rorden (2012); Wolfe & Horowitz (2017); Gazzaniga, Ivry, & Mangun (2018); Theeuwes (2018); Nobre & Stokes (2019).

<sup>7</sup> And between, as we can see from the recent interest into trans-disciplinary discussions undertaken under the monikers of "medical humanities" or "health humanities"

<sup>8</sup> For key continental-philosophical studies into attention, attentiveness, attending and becoming aware, see, Arvidson (1996); Depraz (2004); Steinbock (2004); Vermersch (2004); Waldenfels (2004); Martell (2010); (2011); Marder (2011); Schlicht (2012); Depraz (2013); Raby (2014); Depraz (2016); Jacobs (2016); Luft (2017); D Angelo (2020); Byrne (2022); Copelj (2022); D Angelo (2022); Fredriksson (2022); Jacobs (2022).

been overlooked.<sup>9</sup> This might seem somewhat surprising, particularly considering that the concept of "embodied cognition" has held a central position in cognitive sciences over the last few decades, allowing these sciences to collaborate with contemporary phenomenology.<sup>10</sup> My dissertation aims at balancing this one-sided focus on the mental aspects of attention. I turn to Nancy's ontological analyses precisely for this purpose: to explore and rethink attentive experiences by putting an emphasis on their corporeal, tangible, ek-static and sensitive aspects.

My dissertation presents a deconstructive investigation into the corporeality of the "attentive self". My approach is both novel and original in enriching and broadening our philosophical comprehension of attention. The three research articles I present not only contribute to the ongoing continental-philosophical discourse on attention, but they also challenge the underlying tendency that is prevalent in most of these discussions – assumptions that tend to lean towards the mental and egoic aspects. My dissertation adopts a dual strategy to achieve its objectives. I will proceed along the lines of Nancy's philosophy of the body and its reception, his dialogue with his contemporaries and his deconstructive interpretations of Heidegger and Descartes. However, it is important to note that I will not offer an exegesis or an interpretation. Instead, I develop a series of original investigations into three specific types of attentive experiences, drawing from Nancyan sources.

Nancy's works on bodies do not extensively analyse attention; rather, they contain fragmentary or scattered remarks on the subject.<sup>11</sup> I treat these remarks as valuable clues and integrate them with Nancy's thinking of being that is worldly, singularly plural and exposed. This approach allows me to demonstrate how Nancy's philosophy can be used to shed light on how I tend to things.

My research articles offer three investigations into the corporeal traits and features that, as I claim, determine our attentive experiences. Each of my articles, independently and in unison, contributes to my overall aim of demonstrating how our bodily being determines and conditions our attentive experiences. Beyond their contribution to the central objective of my dissertation, these articles also provide distinct insights that contribute to ongoing conversations that are not solely limited to the specific theme of attention.

My first article, "Recitative voice: reading silently and aloud, with Jean-Luc Nancy",<sup>12</sup> investigates how our bodily being determines and conditions our attentive experiences of reading. At the same time, it takes part in (i) continental-philosophical discussions concerning the character of literary experience, and (ii)

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<sup>9</sup> D'Angelo (2020) is an exception due to the fact that it investigates the phenomenology of embodied attention and argues for an intimate connection between attention and bodily movements.

<sup>10</sup> For key works in cognitive sciences on "embodied cognition", see especially Varela, Thompson, Rosch (1992); Glenberg (1997); Clark (1997); Barsalou (1999); Lakoff & Johnson (1999); Wilson (2002); Anderson (2003).

<sup>11</sup> CII, 100-1; SW, 73-4;

<sup>12</sup> Puranen, J. (2023). "Recitative Voice: Reading Silently and Aloud, With Jean-Luc Nancy" in SATS. <https://doi.org/10.1515/sats-2022-0008>

Nancyan discussions concerning literature, poetry, writing and reading,<sup>13</sup> including Nancy's notions of *exscription*<sup>14</sup> and *recitative voice* and continental-philosophical discussions concerning Nancy's philosophical figure of the mouth (*la bouche*) and its voice.<sup>15</sup>

The main task of my second article, "Noisy bodies: on the tactility and sonority of our visceral depths",<sup>16</sup> is to study how we tactilely and sonorously (at-) tend to resonances within our visceral bodies and to show how we listen and feel our "own" visceral composition within the resonance of our "own" bodily sounds – breathing, heartbeat, tinnitus. At the same time, the article also takes part in the ongoing continental-philosophical discussions concerning (i) the ontology of sounds and sonority, sonorous materiality, resonance, on the experiences of hearing and listening<sup>17</sup> and also (ii) in the more specific Nancyan discussions concerning the manners in which my visceral resonance conditions "me" as a "listening self".<sup>18</sup>

My third article, "Bodily obsessions: intrusiveness of organs in somatic obsessive-compulsive disorder",<sup>19</sup> offers my original analysis and interpretation of the manners in which we experience "ourselves" and the processes of our "own" bodies in the mental disorder labelled as "somatic" obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).<sup>20</sup> The article offers a novel analysis of how we, at times, experience our "own" bodily processes as intrusive in somatic OCD, but it also takes part in (i) philosophical debates concerning the pathologies and abnormalities of attention and bodily awareness,<sup>21</sup> (ii) discussions regarding the role of the body and bodily experiences in mental suffering, and (iii) interpretative exchanges regarding Nancy's notion of the *intruder* (*l'intrus*).<sup>22</sup> In

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<sup>13</sup> For recent texts engaging with Nancy's studies of writing, reading, poetry and literature, see: Van Rooden (2009), (2015), (2021); Syrotinski (2013); McLaughlin (2015); Goh (2019); Deketelaere (2020, 2021); Van der Heiden (2020), (2021); Ricco (2021).

<sup>14</sup> For recent key studies elucidating Nancy's portmanteau notion *exscription*, see Nancy (1990, 1992); James (2006); Landes (2015); Giunta & Janus (2016); Opperman (2017); Goh (2019, 2021); Ricco (2021).

<sup>15</sup> For recent studies concerning the figure of the mouth, see. Dolar (2006); on Nancy as a thinker of the mouth, see Gyenge (2023).

<sup>16</sup> Currently unpublished manuscript.

<sup>17</sup> For key continental-philosophical studies of sonority, resonance, sonorous materiality and sonorous sensibility, see: Cage (1961); Larcher (1971); Barthes (1972); Ronell (1989); Schafer (1993); Böhme (1993); Nancy (2007); Szendy (2008), (2016); Kim-Cohen (2009); Toop (2010), (2017); Derrida (2011); Bonne (2016); Waltham-Smith, (2016), (2018), (2020); Ganitsky (2020).

<sup>18</sup> For recent texts engaging with Nancy's deconstructive investigation of the corporeal resonance and the "listening self" undertaken in and around his 2007 collection of essays titled *Listening*, see: Janus (2011), (2013); Kane (2012); Walrup (2013); Gritten (2014), (2017); Hickmott (2015); Davies (2017).

<sup>19</sup> Puranen, J. (2022) "Bodily obsessions: intrusiveness of organs in somatic obsessive-compulsive disorder" in *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 25, 439–48.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11019-022-10090-3>

<sup>20</sup> As far as I know, my article is the first peer-reviewed investigation into bodily obsessions at times present in obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

<sup>21</sup> For recent studies of bodily awareness, disappearance and dysappearance, see Zeiler (2013); Groven et al (2013); Slatman (2016).

<sup>22</sup> For Francisco J. Varela's study of the experiential dimensions of receiving and living with a grafted liver, which is written in a dialogue with Nancy's *intruder*, see Varela (2001).



the next subchapter, I will offer a closer account of the contents of my three articles in terms of their aims, structures, resources, methods and results.

### 1.3 Original research articles constituting my dissertation

In this dissertation I offer three original inquiries into the corporeal structures, conditions and disturbances of “my” caring, intrigued, desirous, frightened and fleeting existence. Each analysis studies one particular attentive experience and they all rely mainly on my own interpretative work on Nancy’s thinking.

In the subsequent three subsections, I will summarise and draw together the manners in which my research articles investigate my curious and thoroughly corporeal being. I will explicate their theoretical and thematic starting points, outline the structures of their arguments and explain their results. In each case, I will reflect on and explain how the article contributes to my overall aim of investigating how my corporeal existence determines my attentive experiences.

#### 1.3.1 Attentive reading

In my article titled “Recitative voice: reading silently and aloud, with Jean-Luc Nancy”<sup>23</sup> I investigate how an attentive reader experiences “herself” vocally while reading through a text. I accomplish this by investigating how a reader advances through a textual body composed of drawn textual shapes, letters, words, sentences and sections. In my article, I build up and expand on Nancy’s argument of a “recitative voice”, which he presents as being at the heart of each experience of advancing through a textual body. I explore how I experience “myself” with my text, by advancing through words, lines and pages *with* my mouth, tongue, breath, lips and my voice, with my eyes and my gaze, with my fingers running through the lines and pages and with my ears listening to my text arriving and departing as folds of warm and humid air.

My article builds upon Nancy’s argument that there is, each time I read, a *recitative voice* within the heart of my advancement through a textual body. I examine the corporeality of what Nancy calls “the recitative voice,” and the conjoinment of such a voice with the advancement of one’s gaze, ears and fingers. I do this by comparing two very different variations of reading, namely reading aloud and reading silently, which both, I claim, are experientially worldly and thoroughly corporeal. My article shows how Nancy’s figure of a *recitative voice*, which offers us an insight into our sonorous, resonant, oral, buccal and vocal existence, can help us rethink how our weighty bodies, sensitive organs and bodily processes condition our literary experiences.

The theoretical background of this article is in the continental-philosophical discussions concerning the material corporeality of speech, literature, reading

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<sup>23</sup> Puranen, J. (2023). “Recitative Voice: Reading Silently and Aloud, With Jean-Luc Nancy” in SATS. <https://doi.org/10.1515/sats-2022-0008>

and writing. These discussions are centred around the themes of *writing* (*écriture, écrire*), literature, text, the speaking body (*corps parlant*) and the voice (*voix*) by a number of 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers, most notably Derrida,<sup>24</sup> Blanchot, Mallarmé, Lacoue-Labarthe,<sup>25</sup> Merleau-Ponty,<sup>26</sup> Nancy and Ponge<sup>27</sup>. As already specified, my article offers my interpretative reading of Nancy's argument of there being a *recitative voice* in each experience of reading, which he develops in his essays, "The Only Reading", "To Open the Book", "Responding for Sense" and "Narrative, Narration, Recitative", published in his *Expectation: Philosophy, Literature* (2016). In these essays Nancy builds on his interpretation of *logos* as being supported solely by our absolutely decentered bodily voices, as he already suggested in his early essay "Sharing Voices". Whereas Nancy explicates his concept of *recitative voice* in his essays, he does not offer an extensive account of what reading feels like in his *Expectation*.

I argue that I can explicate and elucidate my literary experiences and, consequently, the bodily weight implicit to each experience of reading, if I pay attention to the corporeal intricacies determining my recitative or enunciative acts. In effect, I propose that when I read aloud, my experience (of a text) consists of the advancement of my conjoined gaze, fingers, ears and voice through the letters, words and sentences making up the text. And when I read silently, my closed and silent mouth is still conjoined with my advancing gaze, which still advances as *desirous* for speech, with sentences already grasped, even when no enunciated words are folded in (or with) exhaled warm air.

I begin my analysis with a short comparison of Nancy's notion of *exscription*, which has received far more attention in research, to his notion of *recitative voice* and I argue that latter allows us to pay attention to the weight of each letter, word, sentence and line that we advance through in reading. I advance by elucidating exactly what makes up a textual body: drawn shapes, phonemes, letters, words and sentences and the spacing, the *extra*, between them. I continue discussing the manners in which I advance through a text when I read it out loud. I do this by looking into Nancy's essay "The Only Reading", where he elaborates reading aloud as the most sensitive type of reading – a type that confines the advancement of a text to the movements of my lips, throat, mouth, voice, and ears constitutive of my enunciative acts of reciting a text. I argue that my reading organs, with their weight, their singular direction and their finite speed, give recitation its bodily weight and its shared worldly resonance. This means, I claim, that when a text is read aloud, the bodily weight which is implicit

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<sup>24</sup> Derrida (1973).

<sup>25</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe (1998), (2000).

<sup>26</sup> "[T]he sense of words must be ultimately be induced by the words themselves, or more precisely their conceptual signification must be formed by drawing from *gestural signification*, which itself is immanent in speech." Merleau-Ponty 2013, 182.

<sup>27</sup> "Not only any poem at all, but any text at all – whatever it is – carries (in the full sense of the word), carries, I say, its speaking [diction]. For my part – if I examine myself writing – I never come to write the slightest phrase without my writing being accompanied by a mental speaking and listening, and even, rather, without it being preceded by those things (although indeed just barely)." Francois Ponge in *Le grand recueil*, 220–21, translated by Mandell in Nancy 2008b, 35.

in and constitutive for reading and “literary sense”, is audible in the rhythmic advancement of a *recitative voice* enunciating each word as warm and humid folds of air, which carry over the sense of the text to my ears.

I continue by studying how reading silently compares to reading aloud, by thematising my silent advancement in terms of the notion of the *recitative voice*. I argue that silent reading is in many ways similar to reading aloud: each experience of reading silently has a finite pace, singular direction and a rhythm. And not only does the activity of silent reading take up time, but my literary experience still owns its structure to the rhythmicity and the pace of my advancement through the text. In my article, I argue that in silent reading, a reader experiences herself as being driven by her *desire*<sup>28</sup> to read. She desires to advance through and devour the letters and words that make up her text. As Nancy puts it in *Sexistence*: when I read, I find pleasure in “the passage from one word into another, from one phrase to the other, escaping itself and trembling to meet itself” (2021, 32). This means that I desire to advance through words which I do not know yet, and I know “myself”, as a reader, in or with words I have already read through, which may (or may not) surprise or delight me. I advance with my eyes and with my silent throat, with my closed mouth and un-parted lips. I experience myself with meaningfully articulated words, one following another. Silent reading makes its sense as a “silent recitative”, if it is understood as a desire to advance and as speech already grasped, already devoured, already gone, already making sense and undone. In terms of my sensual reading organs, a text read in silence is confined to an advancing gaze and a closed silent mouth.

In my article, I theorise and investigate how we can think of attentive reading in terms of the absolute corporeality of worldly existence. My analysis relies on my reading of Nancy’s analyses, which I use in my thematisation of our advancement through a textual body. Ultimately, my article offers an original investigation into the corporeality of reading by thinking how I *tend to* letters, words, sentences, sections and texts – either out loud or in silence.

### 1.3.2 Tending to visceral resonances

In my unpublished manuscript titled “Noisy bodies: on the tactility and sonority of visceral depths” I examine how I tend or heed to resonances within my “own” body, most notably (i) in terms of how I experience, feel or perceive parts, sides and areas tactilely as they resonate and (ii) in terms of how I listen to sounds that traverse, cut through and penetrate me. I investigate my sensibility to visceral resonances by explicating, and by expanding on, Nancy’s ontological analysis of resonant bodies, which he undertakes most prominently in his *Listening* (2007, in French *À l’écoute*, 2002). I examine how I listen to and feel (and to a lesser extent taste, smell and see) the so-called “somatic sounds”, e.g. sounds of breathing, tinnitus and heartbeat, as they resonate within my visceral depths. I investigate how they penetrate throughout our bodily depths and cut into our sensitive and

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<sup>28</sup> For Nancy’s analysis of bodies, desire existence and drive, see Nancy 2021. Also, on drive and desire, see Bernet 2020.

resonant ears, simultaneously as resonating sounds and as tactilely felt vibrations, and also how they weigh in and resonate with one another, between the regions of sonority and tactility. Ultimately, I argue that the visceral sonorous space of each listening “self” does not – neither sonorously or tactilely – have the character of a hollow, reverberative, void yet vibrant cavern, as suggested at times by Nancy in his *Listening*, but that a resonant and listening “self” is, rather, sonorously and tactilely extended, exposed, directional, vibrant and resonant.

The theoretical background of my article is in the ontological analyses of bodies and resonance, incorporation of sonority and materiality of listening, which are undertaken by Nancy in his *Corpus*, *Listening* and *The Muses* and by Peter Szendy in his *Listen* (2008, in French *Écoute* 2001) and *Phantom Limbs* (2016, in French *Membres fantômes* 2002). These works partake in the ongoing philosophical discussions concerning sonority and resonance, undertaken by thinkers such as Derrida (2011), Larcher (1971), Barthes (1972), Ronell (1989), Agamben (1991), Schafer (1993), Dolar (2006), Kim-Cohen (2009), Lacoue-Labarthe (1989), Szendy (2009; 2016), Toop (2010; 2017), Bonnet (2016), Van der Heiden (2020), Walham-Smith (2018; 2019; 2020).

My article, “Noisy bodies”, is split into three sections. It begins with my elucidation of Nancy’s analysis of the intricate circularity “between” resonant bodies and sonorous experiences. I introduce Nancy’s deconstructive treatment of the “listening self” in *Listening*, where he demonstrates how our sonorous experiences, our experiences of listening, are determined by the fact that our bodies *re-sonate* sounds that cut into and penetrate us. In other words, for Nancy’s sonorous corporeal ontology, an experience of a sound is not a “doubling” or a “conversion” of a mechanical event or an audible and sonorous object from the physical world into the sensible or sensuous realm of immanent subjectivity. Rather, our sensed, sonorous and resonant world is already our shared world where we listen, touch, see, hear, taste, smell, suffer, imagine, think, speak and enjoy – conjoined with “our” re-sonant, fragrant, noisy and tangible bodies.

In my article, I analyse how I listen *to* my body by looking into two intriguing passages from *Listening*, where Nancy is undecided on how to think and treat the visceral space of resounding bodies. In these passages, he suggests that we treat the resonant body “before any distinction of places and functions of resonance, as being wholly (and ‘without organs’) a resonance chamber or column of beyond-meaning” (2007, 31) and represent it as “a hollow column over which a skin is stretched [...] skin stretched over its own sonorous cavity, this belly that listens to itself and strays away in itself while listening to the world and while straying in all directions” (2007, 42–3). Instead of leaving the visceral intricacies of resonance untreated, I suggest that by paying attention to how somatic sounds resonate, we can (i) elucidate the visceral composition of sonorised bodies, (ii) think of the in-between of touching and listening and also (iii) think of sonority in terms of the viscosity of our sensitive ears.

I conclude by taking as my leading clue Peter Szendy's concept of *arealization*<sup>29</sup> (*Phantom Limbs: On Musical Bodies*) and, with its guidance, extend Nancy's sonorous ontology into the visceral realm of somatic sounds. In *Phantom Limbs*, Szendy argues that when someone uses her own body as a musical instrument, she tactilely feels and listens as a part or an area that detaches itself from the rest of her resonant body, which stays silent.<sup>30</sup> However, Szendy remains silent on how our sensitive and resonant ears determine such a detachment and, also, on how exactly touch and sound resonate with (and weigh upon) one another, in experiences of sonorous visceral detachment. I argue that I tactilely and sonorously self-sense my "own" visceral depth in my ventilation: I listen to and feel weighed upon by my breath, which resonates in and from my airways, through and throughout my skull and into my ears. We can think of our visceral resonant bodies and listening by thinking how somatic sounds of breathing, heart beat or tinnitus, resonate, penetrate, traverse and weigh upon visceral tissues and areas, surfaces and organs within our bodies, and how they tactilely and sonorously weigh upon or unto our resonant ears.

My article theorises and investigates how the resonance of the visceral body allows us to think how we tend *to, into* or *toward* our "own" bodies and how visceral resonance conditions sonorous experiences in terms of their spatiality, directionality sonority and their tactility. My article offers a clear explication of how Nancy (and Szendy) deconstructively engage with the notion of "listening self" and how its novelty is in the way it expands Nancy's analysis by thinking how the visceral body resonates in or within sounds.

### 1.3.3 Bodily obsessions

In my article, "Bodily obsessions: intrusiveness of organs in somatic obsessive-compulsive disorder"<sup>31</sup>, I offer an analysis of how I experience my own bodily processes as intrusive in somatic obsessive-compulsive disorder. My article proceeds to compare two different types of bodily obsessions often reported in

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<sup>29</sup> Which he interprets from Nancy's *areality*, depicting how each experience of one's own body implies the gap or the impenetrable limit that the extended body is to the indivisible "ego".

<sup>30</sup> Szendy describes the experiential trait he refers to as *arealization* in *Phantom Limbs* as follows:

"Perhaps 'man' becomes sonorous only by becoming instrumental himself, in other words by becoming a spatial distribution of himself to himself. [...] We would, therefore, need to say that it is a general and original instrumentality that disposes the human to the sonorous. That puts him outside himself in order to *make sound*. For no doubt 'my' body does not become sonorous, properly sonorous (in other words resonant) until it goes through the experience of a kind of disarticulation of self through which a member or an area 'detaches' itself to become the space of resonance of others. When I produce 'corporeal music' by beating my chest, my body is already not entirely *my* body. It is already at a distance from itself. It has *arealized* itself. In other words, it has distributed itself into *areas* and disjointed surfaces. It has already split into clappers and resonating cavities. Even the voice finds its origin in the echo of all the different kinds of tubes and hollows where my body subtracts in part from itself to come and resonate there as a 'sonorous body'." (135–6).

<sup>31</sup> Puranen, J. (2022) "Bodily obsessions: intrusiveness of organs in somatic obsessive-compulsive disorder" in *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 25, 439–48.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11019-022-10090-3>

descriptions of OCD disorders (Hersfield Cowboy 2013, 181). These two obsessions differ from one another both in terms of their volitional character and in terms of their innervation: on the one hand, there are obsessions focused on heartbeat; on the other hand, there are obsessions focused on breathing and the volitional (yet necessary) movement of one's lungs. I contrast the manners in which I experience these, my own organs in both types of obsessions to the manner in which I do not experience my liver: whereas the heart and the lungs can obsessively draw our attention, the liver is constantly and irrecoverably absent from my tactile and motile awareness. I introduce the contrastive concepts *tactility obsession* and *motility obsession* and make a distinction between the manners in which I can tactilely experience my organs and volitionally move "from" or "with" them, for example, when I walk "with" my feet, breathe with my lungs or blink with my eyelids. Ultimately, I claim that these obsessive experiences, which are focused on the areas, parts, and processes of my body, should not only be discussed in terms of "intruding" and "distorted thoughts" about such bodily processes but must also, and can better, be understood as concerning the manners in which these organs and their processes intrude into my existence - my being-to the world, others and myself.

The theoretical background of my article is in the analyses of the normality and abnormalities of the visceral body, developed by Nancy and by Drew Leder. The most important theoretical works for this particular investigation are Nancy's *The Intruder (L'intrus, 2000)* and Leder's *The Absent Body (1990)*. Most crucial for my article is Nancy's analysis of how I, in times of distress and suffering, experience areas, parts, organs and processes of our bodies as intrusive and intruding. In such situations, these organs weigh on me as sensitive surfaces or areas drawn out with various intensities (gentle, sharp, burning, throbbing...) of pain, tension, movement or discomfort. Nancy argues that such experiences allow the suffering "empty I" to differentiate itself solely from these sensations. In his analysis, the *intruder* is, first, his own deteriorating heart and, then after a heart operation, the transplanted heart. His two immunological identities battle with one another and with doses of heavy immunosuppressant treatments (including the treatment of his cancer). The analyses of these experiences constitute an integral part of Nancy's ontological study of bodily existence, sense and the world. In Nancy's account, bodies exist in the following sense: they provide the basis for the articulation of space and time, they operate as both the resisting force and the objectification of thoughts as well as of one another. They resist, push and encroach one another due to their essential spatiality, they are impenetrable and fragile at the risk of breaking apart. Intruding organs and their processes are tactilely distinguished areas of our bodies, brought to our consciousness by movement, tension, discomfort, pulsation and pain, and we feel them as detached and intrusive parts or adjuncts.

Drew Leder explicates his concept of "visceral inability" in an analysis of *I can / I cannot*: I cannot act "from" most of my visceral organs in the manner that I can act "from" my surface musculature and also learn to use some of my visceral muscles (e.g., diaphragm). I use Leder's concept of visceral inability (*I cannot*) in my article to argue that even if autonomic bodily processes are beyond our

volitional control they are not alien to us in the manner in which environing things and events are. The difference is not merely in their location “in” our organic bodies but, more crucially, in their capacity to intrude in our experiences. Moreover, I also make a conceptual distinction on this basis, between autonomic (e.g. circulatory actions) and automatic (e.g. ventilatory actions) bodily processes.

My organs and bodily processes can intrude upon us as areas and surfaces tactilely felt as movements, pressures, tensions, discomfort, pulsation and/or pain. I feel them as my adjuncts, that is, as distinct, detached and more or less intrusive parts of my own body. In the somatic obsessive-compulsive disorder, I am abnormally aware of some of these adjuncts. In this condition, a bodily process or a bodily function – for example heartbeat, blinking, breathing or swallowing of saliva – becomes something that I cannot *not* attend to in terms of its tactility and movement. In the case of bodily processes innervated by the somatic nervous system, for example, breathing and blinking, I feel trapped in obsessively and volitionally engaging in those processes, in addition to feeling their tactile presence.

My argument in my article advances as follows: I begin by arguing that most people have experienced transient episodes of unwanted awareness of their own bodily processes. These are not pathological experiences or phenomena, since such episodes rarely last long or cause continual or excessive impairment. This, I argue, suggests that an experiential-philosophical study of bodily awareness, undertaken with a focus on the experiences of bodily intrusiveness in their tactile and motile dimensions, is able to explicate structural features common to somatic obsessive-compulsive disorder. I then proceed to analyse reported experiences of an inhibiting awareness of heartbeat and breathing on the basis of discussion of Nancy’s *intruder* and Leder’s discussion of *visceral inability* (and ability).

I argue, on the basis of Nancy’s concept of *intruder*, that we can understand and clarify the bodily dimension of somatic obsessions in terms of how we all, occasionally, can experience our “own” bodies, our organs and their processes as intrusive and intruding. I continue by making a distinction based on the motility of own organs experienced in such processes, by analysing the movement of the lungs in breathing and the movement of the heart in pulse. Both are reported at times as intrusive tactile experiences. We can make a further distinction on the basis of whether or not we are able to voluntarily influence such movements, for example to pause, enhance, maintain or, as Leder formulates, “act from them”. Leder explicitly argues that I can act from my lungs but not from my heart. So, our internal organs fall into two different categories on the basis of our capacity to voluntarily influence their movements. This, my article argues, allows us to distinguish between two different types of obsession, which may be mutually related but are conceptually distinct: “tactility obsessions” and “motility obsessions”.

My article, thus, illuminates and clarifies the experiential and felt dimensions of somatic obsessions in obsessive-compulsive disorder. It thematises the experiential character and structures of this condition. At the same time, it offers a novel way of understanding the corporeality of obsessions and

compulsions and problematises and criticises intellectualist assumptions implicit in the concept of “intruding thoughts”. This offers new and richer conceptual and methodological starting points for future research on *somatic compulsions*.

## 1.4 Research methods, practices and resources

My dissertation tackles the following question: how am “I” curious of certain things? I study this “attentive self” by demonstrating how we can philosophically engage with and investigate various corporeal traits determining our singularly plural and sensuously fractal (sonorous, visual, tactile...) experiences of approaching, choosing, valuing and caring. More generally, from an ontological perspective, I investigate how “I” experience being-*to* (or away from) some singulars over others. In this subchapter, I offer an explication of my research methodology by elucidating how I approach and investigate the corporeality of being-*to* in my articles.

In this dissertation, I employ the following methods to investigate what I consider essential and determining traits in attentive experiences: (i) interpretative, (ii) comparative, (iii) descriptive, and (iv) critical philosophical approaches. The primary theoretical and philosophical foundations of my dissertation stem from the deconstructive and ontological analyses of the world, sense, bodies and the “self” undertaken by Nancy and other philosophers who engage with his works. Within my articles, I analyse attentive experiences using philosophical concepts, tools, and analyses drawn from Nancy, Leder, and Szendy. I interpret, explain, and also build upon their ideas in order to develop my own investigations into attentive experiences.

In addition to my interpretative work focused on the philosophical resources provided by Nancy and others, my study also makes use of comparisons between contrasting views and analyses between different philosophers, all of which I use to elucidate how “I” tend *to*, into, toward and away from things. Through these comparisons, I aim to articulate the insights gained from diverse analyses and philosophical approaches. This exploration aims to explicate why and how attention can be explored in terms of its “corporeality.” Furthermore, it aims to reveal how varying analyses of my thoroughly corporeal existence can enhance and broaden our philosophical comprehension of how the absolute corporeality of existence determines “me” as attentive, curious, fearful, and surprised.

At their heart, each of my articles also offers an original descriptive analysis of a specific attentive experience. These descriptive analyses delve into what I suggest are essential and determining structures in “my” worldly and corporeal existence. They draw upon my interpretative exploration of the notions, concepts, findings and analyses pertaining to bodily existence and its thorough worldliness, as discussed by Nancy, Szendy and Leder. Additionally, I present my findings through comparisons with differing analyses and alternative



interpretations. I source these comparisons from other thinkers, medical literature, and therapeutic references.

Therefore, my work introduces various critical and innovative perspectives to contemporary philosophy. The overarching critical perspective challenges the prevalent tendency in contemporary thought to conceptualise attention as a mental, spiritual, or ego-driven activity, often metaphorically<sup>32</sup> depicted as a beam of light moving from one object to another, illuminating them in the brilliance of egoic presence.

Another, more thematically focused series of critical insights are targeted at mentalistic or cognitive analyses of reading, which, in my view, do not provide sufficient understanding of the corporeal nature of reading or of the vocality of written words. A second thematically focused set of critical insights targets analyses of listening that inadequately address the bodily resonance intrinsic to auditory experiences. Similarly, a third series of critical insights targets the mentalistic or cognitive analyses of obsessions, which overlook the extent in which bodily experiences play a key role in somatic obsessions. Based on these critical insights and interventions, I present my own alternative and complementary analyses of these questions, as detailed in section 1.3. above.

I employ these philosophical methods in conversation with pertinent empirical sciences, particularly cognitive sciences, psychiatry, and qualitative research methodologies focused on attention and its disorders. Nonetheless, my study retains a purely philosophical approach in its argumentation. While engaging in dialogue with specialised sciences, I do not ground my analyses in their findings. Instead, I closely follow their conceptualisations and theories, allowing myself to be both informed by and open to questioning from them. However, I then take a step back to pose critical inquiries pertaining to the formation of meaning and the boundaries of our philosophical contemplation.

## 1.5 Nancy's corporeal thought

Studies, overviews, critiques and presentations of Nancy's thought conducted in English have increased rapidly in the past few decades, following the translations of his major works. His analyses of being-to, being-with, community, visual arts, poetry, literature and his thinking of bodies are particularly prominent in numerous ongoing philosophical discussions.<sup>33</sup> However, this dissertation is not structured as a comprehensive study of Nancy's philosophy. Above all, it offers a deconstructively crafted and experientially directed ontological exploration into how "my" thoroughly corporeal existence shapes up each of "my" attentive experiences. It is undertaken with the help of Nancy's analyses of the world, bodies, being and thought, which I consider as shedding light on these themes.

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<sup>32</sup> On the metaphoric ray of light, see D'Angelo (2020); Cave & Bichot (1999).

<sup>33</sup> For an overview of Nancy as a thinker of touch and tact, see: Derrida 2005; for an overview of Nancy's thinking and in comparison to Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, see James 2006; on Nancy and the arts, see Heikkilä 2007.

Explicitly, this means that the intention of this dissertation is not to provide an exhaustive or comprehensive overview of Nancy's philosophy as a whole nor a comprehensive critique of his thinking of bodies, the self, sense or the world. Instead, I utilise and expand upon Nancy's observations of corporeal existence, as I understand it, to elucidate the corporeal traits and intricacies at play within my attentive experiences. When Nancy's contributions are insufficient or inadequate for my systematic objectives, for instance when Nancy's analyses omit specific questions and themes, I turn to other sources and I introduce my own distinctions and critical insights.

Nancy's extensive philosophical corpus encompasses over fifty books and hundreds of essays spanning a wide array of themes, including (but not limited to) subjectivity, selfhood, art, literature, poetry, community, technology, law and ontology. His earlier philosophical works, spanning from the early 70s to the late 80s, can be broadly categorised as intricate philosophical commentaries centred around the notions of self, subject and subjectivity as examined by prominent philosophical figures, most notably Descartes<sup>34</sup>, Kant,<sup>35</sup> Hegel<sup>36</sup>, and Heidegger.<sup>37</sup>

From the late 80s onwards, Nancy's works allow his own unique philosophical voice to resonate with increased clarity. Now the main themes include the body, sense, touch, the world, being-with, community, art, finitude, Christianity and monotheism, poetry, literature, writing and technology.

The most important philosophical sources providing me with the analytical tools and notions I employ in my research are Nancy's works *Corpus*, written between the years 1990 and 1992 (and translated into English in 2008 by Richard Rand), and *The Sense of the World*, following right in its footsteps in 1993. Both of these works offer meticulous and insightful analyses of being, world, bodies and sense. Additionally, I draw upon relevant passages from Nancy's other works, most notably *The Muses*, published in 1994, and *Being Singular Plural*, published in 1996, whenever they supply additional resources for my analyses or further clarify my philosophical standpoint.

In my dissertation, I draw upon and expand on Nancy's intricate ontological examinations of corporeal existence in order to think of how "I" attend to others, "myself" and the world by desiring (-to or -toward) things. In the subsequent sections of this introductory essay, I explain how I read and interpret Nancy's analyses of the world and bodies, as well as his analysis of the uneasy yet necessary union – the unum quid or "one whole" – between the thinking soul and the extending body. I achieve this by closely examining key elements in Nancy's dialogues with René Descartes and Martin Heidegger and I demonstrate how Nancy deconstructs numerous fundamental philosophical insights from these thinkers in his pivotal works from the 1990s.

While my analyses are rooted in my own interpretive endeavours, allowing me to speak with my own, yet "Nancyan", philosophical voice, I also draw upon

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<sup>34</sup> See chapter 2.2. below.

<sup>35</sup> See Nancy's *The Discourse of the Syncope: Logodaedalus*.

<sup>36</sup> See Nancy's *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*.

<sup>37</sup> See Nancy's *The Experience of Freedom*.

the contributions of numerous thinkers who engage with Nancy's ideas. Foremost among these are Ian James and Marie-Eve Morin. Additionally, I incorporate insights from various scholars including Marcia Cavalcante Schuback, Jacques Derrida, Ian Goh, Anthony Gritten, Martta Heikkilä, Sarah Hickmott, Adrienne Janus, Brian Kane, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Susanna Lindberg, Ian Maclachlan, John Paul Ricco, Peter Szendy, Michael Syrotinski, Gert-Jan Van der Heiden, Aukje Van Rooden, Naomi Waltham-Smith and Erik Wallrup.

Before I begin, I would like to elucidate a few essential aspects of Nancy's philosophical style, which I understand as structurally tied to his thinking of bodies, thought, sense and the world. I commence with a passage from Ian James's *A Fragmentary Demand*, where he describes Nancy's philosophical technique or style. James explicates the irreducible dependency between the "material" worldly existence and thought, which fundamentally shapes all of philosophical thought as follows:

Nancy's bodily ontology of space obeys a strange logic whereby his philosophical writing poses sense as an ontological foundation, but rethinks the very notion of the foundational itself, not as ground (or ab-ground/abyss), but as a dispersal or sharing of sense which cannot be reduced to any signification writing can pose. It is in this sense that his writing does not ground itself upon the origin or foundation of sense, rather it *exposes* itself to, or, in another important term used by Nancy, it touches (*touche à*) that origin. The singular-plural passage of sense, as being or being-to, is not gatherable into words, signification, or logos, but, at its very limit, signification opens onto or touches the movement of sense. [...] Nancy's "materialist" ontology of sense is, more properly speaking, a "quasi ontology" (or as Derrida has put it a "quasi-transcendental ontology"), since the being of sense which he seeks to think or to make signify is irreducible to thought or signification as such. (James 2006, 108–9).

As we can discern, Nancy's philosophy can be read as a hermeneutical endeavour to explicate and articulate how "my" thought (and thought written down, as in this dissertation) is "exposed to" or "touching" its own "origin", which is "my" body. This means that at its core, this dissertation is an attempt in articulating how "I" am exposed to "my" body, which is not a container for "my" soul, but...

its *body*: the space of this extension and opening in which and as which it excribes itself, that is, lets itself be transformed into the concreteness or *praxis* of sense. (SW, 10).

This implies that worldly bodies are not mere objects, content or inert matter floating below thought, because neither is thought nor "its" body clearly or distinctly cut apart from one another. As a result, Nancyan thinking of bodies incessantly, repeatedly, and almost obsessively revisits, reexamines and rethematizes the notions of thought, extension, being and the world. Ultimately, this signifies that Nancy's "corporeal ontology" can be read as a complex deconstructive engagement with the notion of "experience", which he proceeds to describe as follows:

[T]here is *nothing other* than experience of sense (and this is the world) if "experience" says that sense precedes all appropriation or succeeds on and exceeds it. (SW, 11).

Without any additional delay, I now turn to Nancy's philosophical writings to think of "my" attentive experiences of things, others and myself.

## 2 THE PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK OF MY RESEARCH

In this section, I introduce and explore the philosophical framework underpinning my research. I achieve this by elucidating the analyses, notions and philosophical figures drawn from Nancy's thinking of bodies. Furthermore, I explain how I utilise his texts to investigate how my attentive experiences are shaped by the corporeal nature of my worldly existence.

The following presentation of Nancy's thinking of bodies is essential not only for exploring the theoretical framework that operates within my research, but also because the field of philosophically oriented research into "attention" is largely dominated either by phenomenological accounts of egoic intentionality or by post-analytical variants of naturalistic, physicalistic, enactivistic and emergentistic analyses. In the upcoming sections, I explain how I understand Nancy's thinking of the world, thought, and bodies (detailed in sections 2.1–2.1.2.) and how I understand one of his intricate deconstructive analyses of *experience*, an inquiry undertaken through his notion of "corporeal I", *corpus ego*, which establishes a connection between his corporeal ontology and Descartes' renowned *Meditations* (covered in sections 2.2–2.2.3). By shedding light on Nancy's analyses, I aim to illustrate how I can philosophically engage with "my" thoroughly corporeal and worldly being and how "being a body" determines "me" attentively: how I (self-) experience "myself", others and the world each time I *tend to* anything. I present Nancy's deconstructive analyses by advancing through key passages from his works *Ego Sum*, *Corpus* and *The Sense of the World* and by highlighting his interaction with key passages from Descartes's *Meditations*.

In section 2.1, titled "Worldly being", I demonstrate how we can think of the world, and worldly being, in terms of the "factual totality of fragments"<sup>38</sup> that are exposed *to* one another. This perspective allows us to think of world, being, beings and sense decoupled from any subjective, egoic, intentional, heedful or practical "access" to the world. I achieve this by delving into one of Nancy's

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<sup>38</sup> SW, 57.

critical interpretations of Heidegger, as presented in his *The Sense of the World*. My presentation unfolds across three sub-sections, exploring the following themes:

- the circularity between the world and being (2.1.),
- the worldliness of thought (2.1.1.), and
- the exposition of worldly bodies (2.1.2.).

I begin by explaining how Nancy's reformulation of being as being-*to* results in his original "corporeal ontology". This philosophical perspective emphasises exposition and exposure of *all* existents or entities – their being-*to* one another and themselves – shifting the focus away from speaking animals at the centre of the analysis. I then explore how Nancy's relational being-*to* can be understood as shaping and conditioning all thinking, including philosophical analysis itself, due to thought's thoroughly worldly nature. The section concludes with an exploration of how Nancy understands bodies as exposed, worldly, positional and relational entities. This philosophical perspective determines *existence* outside the span, boundary, expanse and skin of each singular and distinct entity, all of which are material bodies related *to* one another. With the first half of my exposition of the philosophical framework operative in my research (section 2.1.), I present my interpretation of Nancy's "corporeal ontology" or what might be termed as his "first philosophy". I tie my presentation to the analyses primarily found in Nancy's works, *The Sense of the World* and *Corpus*, and by drawing support from literature that discusses his thinking in and around these works – particularly the contributions of Marie-Eve Morin and Ian James. Through this exploration, I clarify how I understand the world as the spacing of existents exposed-*to* one another.

In section 2.2. I proceed by presenting my interpretation of two interconnected deconstructive analyses of the "self" (*soi*) conducted by Nancy, because these analyses are fundamental for my analysis of attentive experiences. By expanding upon the philosophical groundwork laid out in the previous section, I transition from exploring the world, sense, and worldly existents to examining "my" experiences of tending to things, others, the world, and "myself". By explaining how Nancy reevaluates the notion of *experience* through his deconstructive analyses of *ego cogito* and *corpus ego*, I demonstrate how "my" attentive experiences are determined by the fact that "I" am *exposed-to* others and myself. This section unfolds as follows.

In the subsection titled "Unum quid" (2.2.1.) I demonstrate how Nancy's deconstructive exploration of the uneasy, incompatible, yet necessary *union* between the unextending, doubting, thinking and feeling soul with "her" unthinking body results in his notion of *corpus ego*. I delve into this notion further in the next subsection, titled "Corpus Ego" (2.2.2.), which addresses three of its key aspects.

Firstly, I demonstrate how Nancy's exploration of the constitutive insubstantiality of *ego cogito* continues in *Corpus*, when he introduces the notion of *corpus ego* to think of *experience* as enunciative and thoroughly corporeal in nature. Secondly, I show how each (enunciatively determined) experience allows "me" to experience "myself" as spanning from *each* punctually distinct *time* to

another. Third, I demonstrate how and why Nancy's enunciatively distinguished "I" lacks any kind of first-person substantiality, "mineness", egoity, ipseity or self-reflective presence, which would allow "me" to transcend, succeed or precede any of "my" times of tending-to anything, any thought or, more broadly, any experience.

I conclude section 2.2. by exploring how the *egoic vacuity* of *corpus ego*, which determines the punctuality of the "me" as corporeal and worldly in each of "my" experiences, extends "me" along the infinitely finite displacement of "my" bodily span. Correspondingly, I demonstrate how this necessitates that we consider the *sensuous fractality* of worldly things. Finally, at the end of this presentation (in section 2.2.3.), I briefly explore how worldly things are sensuously fragmented. My analysis is presented as my own interpretation of the various senses of Nancy's notions of *touching* and *weighing upon*.

Nancy's key essays on bodies, being and the world, from which I draw conceptual tools for my analysis of the corporeality of attention, I read as intricate deconstructive reinterpretations of critical philosophical breakthroughs established by Martin Heidegger and René Descartes. Moving forward, I want to begin my foray into Nancy's corporeal and worldly ontological explorations by advancing through a compelling passage from one of his presentations, titled "On the Soul", which is included in the second French edition of his seminal analysis of bodies, titled *Corpus*.<sup>39</sup> The passage I want to focus on concerns the uneasy yet necessary conjunction of thinking and extension. It is their intricate intermixing that permits Nancy to engage in a deconstructive examination of the corporeal wordiness that determines "me" in each of "my" experiences.<sup>40</sup> To be more specific, in mentioned the passage, Nancy shows how the intermixing of thinking and extending, a tension that is constantly and "each time" *experienced* as a "state" of *being-outside-oneself-toward-the-world*, can be understood ecstatically<sup>41</sup> and fundamentally as *tending to*. In other words, in the passage to be discussed, Nancy elucidates how the very nature of "being a body" – the undeniable fact that I exist as a bodily being – shapes each of my "self"-experiences. In other words, his deconstructive analysis of the union between thinking and (bodily) extensiveness explores how *each* and *every* one of "my" experiences is structured as *being-outside-myself* and as *tending-to things*, which

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<sup>39</sup> Published in French originally in 1992. Also included in its English translation published in 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Nancy's analysis of the Cartesian union in his *Ego Sum*, see chapter 2.2. in this dissertation.

<sup>41</sup> Heidegger's influence on Nancy's thinking of the *ex-*, his emphasis on thinking of *existence* in terms of *ex-tended* and *ex-posed* bodies cannot be overemphasised. In *The Experience of Freedom*, Nancy summarises the weight Heidegger exerts on the thought that follows after him, which obviously includes Nancy's own thinking. He writes: "once existence clearly offers itself (this clarity dazzles us) no longer as an empiricity that would need to be related to its conditions of possibility, or sublated in a transcendence beyond itself, but instead offers itself as a factuality that contains in itself and as such, *hic et nunc*, the reason for its presence and the presence of its reason, we must – whatever the modes of this 'presence' and of this 'reason' – think its 'fact' as 'freedom.' This means that we must think what gives existence back to itself and only to itself, or what makes it available as an *existence* that is neither an essence nor a sheer given." (1993, 10).

allows me to think how bodily beings exist toward other bodily beings. This passage not only brings us thematically closer to our evasive and oblivious yet strangely familiar and obvious notion of *tending-to* or *-toward* things, but it also clears up a systematic path to Nancy's ontological exploration of bodies – a theme that is prevalent in the majority of his key works written from the early 1990s onwards. The passage in question propels us thematically and systematically close to the corporeality of attentive experiences by making explicit Nancy's philosophical roots in early modern philosophy and its essential ontological critique, drawing from the groundbreaking insights of René Descartes and the de(con)structive analyses of Martin Heidegger. Nancy argues:

The body is the unity of a being outside itself. Here, I abandon the word *dualism*, and I also don't say that this is the unity of a duality. The provocative recourse to the word *dualism* lasts only for a second. After that, it becomes instead a question of thinking the unity of being outside the self, the unity of the coming to self as a "self-sensing," a "self-touching" that necessarily passes through the outside – which is why I can't sense myself without sensing otherness and without being sensed by the other. [...] Then what we were calling "soul" (and we can perhaps try to dispense with this word, which is all very heavy anyway) is exactly what makes this *being outside*, not this being on the outside, but this *being outside without inside that completely forms the inside* – or all *being to self*. The soul is the extension or the expanse of the body. Therefore one has to give it back its rights to extension, even Cartesian extension, even *partes extra partes*, not necessarily as a way to reduce it to the simple position of geometrical points one outside the other, but to give every right to the *extra*, the being outside of, and to extension. And after having insisted on the "ex" of extension, we should think *tension* as such. What makes for an extension? Tension does. But an extension is also an intension, in the sense of an intensity. And it's perhaps precisely here that the subject of an intention disappears, in the phenomenological sense of that word, in the sense of an intentional aiming at an object – an aiming that, charged with sense, will endow my perception of an object with sense. For that kind of intentionality, we should substitute intensity, extension in the sense of a tension of the outside as such. [...] Being a body is being a certain *tone*, a certain tension. I'd also even say that a tension is also a *tending*. (C, 134).

To put it shortly and at the risk of simplifying: Nancy's decision to deconstruct the uneasy conjoinment of the thinking soul – the "I" who doubts, but also thinks, feels, imagines, suffers and hopes, as Descartes reminds us – with its "own" body, which I elaborate in terms of Nancy's notion of *corpus ego*, introduced in *Corpus*, and in terms of the uneasy yet necessary *union* of the soul and the body he analysed earlier in *Ego Sum*, offers an opportunity for thought to critically engage and veer off from the well maintained analytical trajectories established in and after Heidegger's *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*, 1927). This critical divergence is achieved, as I demonstrate in the sections below, through two philosophical movements:

- (i) by thinking of the world as the spacing of plural beings exposed *to* one another (and *to* themselves);
- (ii) by thinking of the substantial instability that is necessary for the *unity* that makes up the *experience* that the body *is* and which the soul names.

Before delving any further, it is important to note that my presentation of what I consider some of the key aspects in Nancy's corporeal thinking – his suggestion of thinking of the world as the being-*to* of all existents and his deconstructive



analysis of the Cartesian *unum quid* – is guided by my interpretative decisions that stem from my philosophical desires.

It is necessary to acknowledge that I have had to omit several intriguing analyses and discussions that remain outside the scope of my presentation simply due to the temporal and spatial constraints limiting all philosophical writing and thought. I could have also looked into Nancy's analyses concerning the *singular plurality* of being,<sup>42</sup> into his analyses of being as being-*with*, into how being is *positional* or relational<sup>43</sup> or how being *is* the exposition, exposure or *ekstasis* of existents each to another. However, I have made interpretative decisions based on my conviction that the *élan* of ecstatic *tending to, into* or *toward* captures the thrust, direction and movement essential to each experience of *desiring* things (or away from things). These interpretative choices serve as the basis for the investigations done in my research articles: how I desire to advance through bodies of letters; how I suffer when I feel intruded by my lungs; and, how I resonate when I tend to my vibrating throat.

## 2.1 Worldly being

In this section, I explain how I philosophically engage with the inherent circularity of (or “between”) the world and being, which is the minimal ontological premise in my research articles. I establish their intricate relation by explaining how I read and interpret one of Nancy's analyses into the worldly and corporeal nature of being. Nancy presents this analysis in what I consider to be one of his most systematically lucid texts: *The Sense of the World*. Published in 1993,<sup>44</sup> it follows in the footsteps of *Corpus* and serves as a systematic exploration of many themes introduced in this earlier text.

By looking into Nancy's determination of all beings as worldly and, more specifically, by exploring his departure from Heidegger's initial analysis of the worldliness of being in *Being and Time* – where Heidegger approaches the worldliness of being through one's engagement with things in her unreflected “average everydayness” – I illustrate how and why Nancy argues that we can think of the world in terms of how many beings, things, entities or the-*there* (of-the-world) exist as singularly plural existents, with each one determined in terms

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<sup>42</sup> In his *Being Singular Plural* (2000; *Etre singulier pluriel* 1996), Nancy demonstrates how relational being-*to* can be thematised in terms of singularly plural being-*with*. In my analysis below, I include some key passages from Nancy's *Being Singular Plural*, wherever they explicate and expand upon my presentation of Nancy's thought and my own analysis of attentiveness.

<sup>43</sup> Marie-Eve Morin, in her article “An Ontology for Our Time”, presents Nancy's ontological thought by starting from *positionality* as determining beings, which is thematised by, and after, Heidegger in terms of *existence*: “In the simplest terms, Being, for Nancy, means *Setzung*, position or positioning. [...] An essence doesn't exist, or rather its existence consists in its taking place, its arrival or coming to presence 'here and now.'” (2021, 141–2).

<sup>44</sup> Translated as *The Sense of The World* in 1997; *Le sens du Monde*, 1993.

of *being-exposed-to*, *-into*, *-unto* or *-toward* one another and *-to* themselves.<sup>45</sup> In short, Nancy no longer thinks of the world as being opened or disclosed around one being, the *Dasein*, but instead thinks of the world as the spacing between plural beings. This change effectively spans *be-ing* across the expanse of each finite entity – across each tangible, colorful, smelly, greasy, wet, warm, resonant, noisy and rigid body. By briefly comparing these two distinct yet intricately related approaches to the world and worldly existence, I demonstrate how Nancy’s reiteration of the world allows a philosophical engagement with being, the world, bodies and sense that is irrespective and decoupled “not only from intentional consciousness, but more generally from the interiority or unity of sentient life”, as it is described by Morin.<sup>46</sup>

I begin by examining a passage from Nancy’s *The Sense of the World*, where he proposes a departure from Heidegger’s analysis. Nancy accomplishes this by proposing a shift in how we understand worldliness of being: by changing our focus from one being, the *Dasein*, to plural beings. More specifically, he suggests that we can think “what” or “how” the world is, in most essential or minimal terms, by thinking how plurally singular existents, entities or things exist-as-exposed, sent, addressed, relating, presented or present-*to* or *-toward* one another.

As I demonstrate throughout my dissertation, Nancy’s proposal introduces profound changes to philosophical thought. First and foremost, not only does he suggest that the *world* could be thought as the relational or positional<sup>47</sup> spacing of finite things, entities or existents *exposed* (*exposé*) *to* one another, but he also posits that *being* could, correspondingly, be determined as the relational being-*to* (or “being-with”)<sup>48</sup> of each singularly plural existent in respect *to* one another. Furthermore, this means that worldly *existence* – a transitively determined *be-ing* that is fundamentally spaced out as “worldly” – is no longer thought in terms of one specific and exceptionally prominent being among all entities, who would be analysed in terms of disclosing the world around her. And lastly, Nancy’s suggestion also determines how every existent exists in relation to itself: as *exposed-to* itself or as-relating-*with* itself. In other words, this means that the being of each “self” (*soi*) can and must be understood as a relational *to-self* (*à soi*), rather

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<sup>45</sup> As portrayed by Morin: “[E]xistence is always in common and always implicates more than one thing in their mutual ex-position, com-position, and dis-position. [...] Each thing, each one, or each singularity, insofar as it exists, does not have the structure of substantial presence, but is offered, abandoned, exposed.” (2021, 143).

<sup>46</sup> Morin 2021, 148.

<sup>47</sup> As Morin notes (2021, 141) this aspect of Nancy’s ontological thinking can be read as a reiteration of Heidegger’s positive formulation of the Kantian thesis stating that “Being is absolute position of a thing.” Cf. Kant A592/B620–A603/B631.

<sup>48</sup> W can also think of Nancy’s reiteration of *being* in terms of being-*with*, as he does in his *Being Singular Plural*, when he emphasises the co-essentiality of *Mitsein* (“being-with”) in the originary constitution of *Dasein* and argues as follows: “[I]f the sense of Being indicates itself principally by the putting into play of Being in *Dasein* and as *Dasein*, then, precisely as *sense*, this putting into play (the ‘there will be’ of Being) can only attest to itself or expose itself in the mode of being-with: because as relates to sense it is never for just one, but always for one another, always between one another. [...]”

*Being is put into play as the ‘with’ that is absolutely indisputable. From now on, this is the minimal ontological premise. Being is put into play among us; it does not have any other sense except the dis-position of this ‘between.’”* (27).

than defined as being substantial and self-present to herself. (I will explore this in greater detail by looking into Nancy's deconstructive analysis of the *ego cogito*, and his further thematisation of the *corpus ego*, in section 2.2.). Let us take a closer look into Nancy's text to advance further into these ideas.

In his *The Sense of the World*, Nancy argues that we can philosophically engage the *world* by thinking of the *being* of entities, things or existents in the following way:

*World* means at least *being-to* or *being-toward* [*être-à*]; it means rapport, relation, address, sending, donation, presentation *to* – if only of entities or existents *to* each other. We have known how to categorize *being-in*, *being-for*, or *being-by*, but it still remains for us to think *being-to*, or the *to* of being, its ontologically worldly or worldwide trait. (SW, 8).

In addition to the aforementioned systematic changes in ontological analysis, by suggesting that we think of the world in terms of a positional or relational *being-to*, *-into*, *-unto*, or *-toward* (*être-à*), which Nancy determines as encompassing the plurality of worldly things, entities, singularly plural beings,<sup>49</sup> local bodies or particular existents, he explicitly distances himself from thinking of the world, and the worldliness of being, in terms of ecstatic structures that are portrayed as essential to Heideggerian *Dasein*, whose worldly being Heidegger analyses in terms of (i) *being-in* (-the-world), in terms of the (ii) *being-for* of tools or equipment familiar and relevant to her and, also, in terms of (iii) *being-by* things that she cares for, knows and heeds toward. Henceforth, in order to grasp what Nancy is proposing – what it means to think of the world as the *being-to* of all entities, beings or existents and, later on, to think of the “I” or the “self” (*soi*) in terms of *being-to* (*à-soi*) herself<sup>50</sup> – I recommend that we move forward by comparing Nancy's treatment of the world and being to the one that is provided by Heidegger, who is present as Nancy's obvious interlocutor above. Nancy's thinking of a worldly *to* – a practice that thinks of *being-to*, *-into* or *-toward* in its ontologically worldly or worldwide trait – allows us to think of the world in a way that extends beyond the Heideggerian inclination of portraying the world, being and sense as belonging, harking or referring exclusively to an exceptional, disclosive and “world-forming” one being. This prevalent way of understanding being, where we think of being only in terms of “disclosing” or “accessing” her “own”, singular and worldly (being-) “here”, subdues the world, worldly being and sense exclusively inside the realm of human exceptionality, leaving most of the worldly entities either as thoroughly “wordless” or “poor” in terms of their worldliness.

In his 1927 work, *Being and Time*, Heidegger approaches the world and the worldliness of being by exploring how the *facticity* (*Faktizität*) of my *average everydayness* (*Durchschnittlich, Alltäglichkeit*) enables me to ask what exactly

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<sup>49</sup> We can also think of *being* in terms of the worldly *spacing* between all existents, as Nancy does in *Being Singular Plural*: “[T]he origin is the punctual and discrete spacing *between us*, as *between us* and the rest of the world, as *between all beings*.” (19).

<sup>50</sup> Nancy's thinking of the “self” (*soi*), is examine in section 2.2, when I offer my reading of Nancy's analyses of *ego cogito* and *corpus ego*, which determines “me” as exposed to “myself”.

“being” is or means. This means that his thinking of the worldliness of being proceeds initially as an analysis of how “I” encounter and engage with things in my average, temporal, familiar, meaningful and practical existence. Heidegger notably addresses this through his compound term *Dasein*, often translated as “being-here.” In the opening chapters of *Being and Time*, being that is particular to an entity depicted as “being-here” is determined as thoroughly worldly and thematised as *being-in-the-world* (*In-Der-Welt-Sein*).

As Heidegger’s analysis gains momentum, *Dasein*’s worldly being-*in* is further explored in terms of nearing things that are handy and significant in the disclosure of the world around the Heideggerian *Dasein*. The being of “handy” things – their way of being that Heidegger thematises as being-*for* – is fundamentally bound in their “relevance” for *Dasein*’s needs, projects and, ultimately, for her (being-) “here”. Later on in *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s analytical journey culminates in his analyses of *being-toward-death*, *finitude* and, ultimately, *temporality*, which he portrays as being *essential*<sup>51</sup> structures that determine my worldly existence as a curious, caring, worldly and mortal being.<sup>52</sup> However, in this concise and general presentation aimed at explicating what is original in Nancy’s reiteration of the worldliness of being, as developed in his essay *The Sense of the World*, I will maintain a sharp focus on the initial analyses of *Dasein*’s worldliness presented in the opening chapters of *Being and Time*.

As is well known, Heidegger’s philosophical figure of *Dasein* guides the readers of *Being and Time* throughout the entirety of its fundamental-ontological analysis into the “sense” or “meaning” of being. Heidegger’s *Da-Sein* is a compound term that describes how humans or humanity exists. It combines the German everyday expressions of *Da*, “here”, and *Sein*, “being”. What this indicates is that the activity, taking place, event or happening of *being* that Heidegger investigates is, as his compound term depicts with its two components, already and each time taking place *in* or *as* a directionally, temporally, historically and socially situated *place* or *site*. This means that “being” is always determined as disclosing one’s own *place*, which is always familiar, meaningful and situational. Basically, this means that “I am” always “here”; I *exist* always, already and each time *from* my own singular, singularising, situational and concrete (being-) “here”. What this means, for Heidegger, is that *being* is

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<sup>51</sup> James gives a clear explication of the overall trajectory of Heidegger’s analysis in *Being and Time* in his *A Fragmentary Demand* as follows: “[...] *Being and Time* as a whole could be said to be concerned with the adumbration of those essential structures of being-in-the-world, or existentials, that is, the constitutive features of human existence, which function, as it were, as conditions of possibility of any experience at all.” (83).

<sup>52</sup> As is well known, ultimately my very own *Being*, and with the trajectory of the entire ontological analysis, is determined by my finitude, which singularises “me” in “my” existence. My own death is absolutely my own to bear: I cannot die in (the) *place* of another and another one cannot die my very own death, which is near and unavoidable for each one of us. However, in this explicatory chapter aimed at elaborating the difference in thinking of *worldliness* by Heidegger and Nancy, we do not need to advance all the way to Heidegger’s analyses of temporality and finitude, which neither occupy the centre of the stage in Nancy’s various interpretations of Heideggerian ontology nor Nancy’s interest in Heidegger. Instead, we can begin by showing how Heidegger elaborates *Dasein*’s worldliness in terms of *being-in*, *-for* and *-by*, which Nancy critically engages in his *The Sense of The World*.

always determined in terms of one's own worldly place, time, situation and history: my own "here" is *from* where I act, move, project, fear, love and care for things, others and myself.<sup>53</sup>

Now that we have gained a preliminary understanding of both (i) the overarching trajectory of Heidegger's *Being and Time* and (ii) his method of approaching the world in terms of *Dasein*'s average everyday encounter with things, we can begin to explore how Heidegger defines the world in his analysis of the worldliness of *Dasein*'s (being-) "here". As previously illustrated, in the initial chapters of *Being and Time* Heidegger demonstrates how we can think of the world in terms of how I encounter things in my pre-theoretical and average everydayness. This perspective precedes any conception of the world construed as a collection of spatially distributed, extended objects spread out within a Cartesian space. Such a perspective, for Heidegger, is always a modified and theoretical apprehension of our everyday encounter with the world,<sup>54</sup> as it is for his teacher Husserl in *Thing and Space*, where Husserl argues for the primacy of lived experience.<sup>55</sup>

After establishing that any thinking of *Being (Sein)* should ponder being in terms of what is "ontically" closest and most familiar to "me" – be-ing that is in each case my "own"<sup>56</sup> in its average everydayness – Heidegger proceeds to

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<sup>53</sup> Also, each time I think of the sense or the meaning of being, or when I think of other essential traits of being such as finitude, understanding, speech, atmosphere, mood, the world or (being-with, *Mitsein*) others, my philosophical thought is determined by my being that is essentially (being-) "here". In other words, my "here" does not only determine the *facticity* of my average everyday dwelling among things and others, but it also determines or allows for the practice of philosophical thinking. This peculiar, and onto-ontologically essential, trait of essential singularity of being has consequences for the entirety of Heidegger's analysis, because it means that any time I think of the "sense" or "meaning" of the world or being – this practice Heidegger refers to in *Being and Time* as *Seinsfrage* – requires that we take into account the following: "each time" or "each instant" when I think, speak, reflect upon and write about – and according to – the sense of being (-here), I do so from the midst of my existence, my very own "being-here", which *already* takes place as historical, situational, finite and singular.

<sup>54</sup> According to Heidegger, our familiar encounter with the worldly things precedes any spatial distribution of worldly "objects": "Only on the basis of its ecstatico-temporality is it possible for *Dasein* to break into space. The world is not present-at-hand in space; yet only within a world does space let itself be discovered" (BT, 421; also quoted in James 2006, 84).

<sup>55</sup> As James describes (2006, 65–113), both Heidegger and Husserl offer their analyses of worldliness as critiques of the Cartesian comprehension of geometrical space occupied by extended bodies, *res extensa*. Whereas for Heidegger the world is initially encountered in practical engagements, for Husserl, it is our immediately given sense perception of the world, which precedes all scientific conceptions of world and space. In his *Thing and Space*, Husserl summarises his position as follows:

"All the reality judgements grounded by the natural scientist lead back to straight forward perceptions and memories, and they relate to the world which receives its first givenness in this straightforward experience. All mediate grounding, as carried out by science, rests precisely on immediate givenness, and the lived experiences in which reality comes to be given immediately are perception, memory, and, taken in a certain immediacy, also expectation and other acts similar to it." (3; also quoted in James 2006, 72).

<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, Heidegger's trajectory in *Being and Time* leads his readers to his well-known analysis of *Dasein*'s essential and ownmost finitude, which he thematises as being-toward-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*). In turn, Nancy's reinterpretation of *being-to* as *being-toward-the-world* (*être-à; être-au-monde*), as the translator of Nancy's *Sense of the World* Jeffrey Librett notes

explore how “my” everyday encounter and engagement with things in my *surrounding world* (*Umwelt*) is practical, engaged, purposeful, temporal and pragmatic. Heidegger’s famous analysis of an exemplary encounter with things, using a hammer, is undertaken early on in *Being and Time*. A hammer, in its being, is useful (*Wozu*) to me *for* installing a bearing into the head tube of my bicycle. And, for Heidegger, this kind of *handiness* determining each useful thing is isolated to specific tools: a hammer is useful only in its *relevance* (*Bewandtnis*) with other things that are useful for building or fixing things. And, more generally, a hammer’s *relevance* extends, in terms of greater generality, to cycling, to my worldly motility and, ultimately, to my being determined as “here”. Heidegger thematises all these interconnected relevances, collectively referring to them, as a whole, as *significance* (*Bedeutsamkeit*). His concept of significance illustrates how the world – encompassing things and others that are close, near, distant, and far from me – is always, already encountered as intelligible and meaningful. This is because the world is inherently (pre-)determined in my practical involvements – the world is there prior to any of my attempts to philosophically or theoretically comprehend or apprehend it.

I proceed by further exploring how I encounter things in Heidegger’s initial analysis of ecstatic worldliness. When I hammer, cook or ride a bike to the library, I heed and dwell by, to and among things *near* (*in der Nähe*) and dear to me. This means that I encounter things by bringing those I care about close or closer to me. Heidegger goes on to describe this temporally determined directionality, which determines my “here”, by introducing the terms *de-distancing* (*Entfernung*; “closing in”, “de-severing”, “approaching”, “nearing”) and *directionality* (*Ausrichtung*). By introducing to these notions, Heidegger describes the worldliness of Dasein as follows:

Dasein is “in” the world in the sense of a familiar and heedful dealing with the beings encountered within the world. Thus when spatiality is attributed to it in some way, this is possible only on the basis of this being-in. But the spatiality of being-in shows the character of de-distancing and directionality. [...] *An essential tendency toward nearness lies in Dasein.* (BT, 102–3).

As we can read, *in* my average everyday being-*in*-the-world, I am among, by and close to things that I know and care for. In other words, I exist in my *directional nearing*, which is always and already *temporal* in addition to being worldly as *directional*. Any kind of heedful or concerned *nearing* toward things I care about is possible only because I am *already* familiar with my surrounding world, with things I take up and with things I know and care for. My familiarity with the surrounding world allows me to desire and change things, to do things that are meaningful and to project into the future. (Nevertheless, Heidegger’s explicit analysis of spatial *temporality* must wait until later sections of *Being and Time*). Heidegger elaborates on Dasein’s ecstatic and essential *toward* as follows: I exist

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(SW, 172 n.8), alludes toward Heidegger’s being-*toward*-death. However, Nancy’s reformulation of an essential, shared, plural, singularising *-to*, which he understands as bodily spacing, instead of expressing the primordial solitude at the heart of each *Dasein*, portrays a key difference in their thinking. We discuss Nancy’s thematisation of being as *being-toward* extensively in chapters below.

in my *directionality*, which is determined from “there” to “here” and from “here” to “there”. He thematises this *ecstatic directionality* in *Being and Time* as follows:

In accordance with its spatiality, Dasein is initially never here, but over there. From this over there it comes back to its here, and it does this only by interpreting its heedful being toward something in terms of what is at hand over there. This becomes quite clear from a phenomenal peculiarity of being-in which has the structure of de-distancing. (BT, 105).

As we can recall, Dasein’s being was initially described in terms of being-*in-the-world* and characterised as disclosing her own “here” in terms of what is, each time, familiar, interesting and relevant. However, with Heidegger’s further analysis of Dasein’s ecstatic spatiality, as we can gather from the passage above, her ecstatic “here” is determined from “over there” to “here”. This means that I exist from “there” to “here” and I am worldly because I heedfully tend *to* things I aim to encounter “over there”.

However, my directional and heedful worldliness raises the following questions: how factual, bodily or worldly is the world that I encounter “over there”? Can we think of the world “over there” irrespective of any concerns, needs or heeds of any Dasein? In other words, if the worldliness of the world is determined in terms of my heedful approach to things, then what exactly makes up the world that is “over there”? Of what exactly is the “there” comprised, if “being-here” is determined *relationally* or *positionally* from “over there” to “here”? In the context of *Being and Time*, Heidegger does not attempt to explore Dasein’s worldly *directionality* in terms of her corporeality, as he makes evident in the subsequent passage:

[F]irm directions of right and left originate out of [Dasein’s] directionality. Dasein continually takes these directions along together with its de-distancing. The spatialisation of Dasein in its “corporeality,” which contains a problematic of its own not to be discussed here, is also marked out in accordance with these directions. (BT, 105–6, translation slightly edited).

Beyond the unexamined question of “corporeality”, Heidegger also clarifies that the *being-for* of the-*there* does not exhaust the being of worldly things beyond their usefulness, because *being-for* is an existential determination of Dasein’s temporal and attentive worldliness.<sup>57</sup> Nancy’s perspective, however, equips us with the means to ponder the worldly corporeality – the being of the-*there* – irrespective of any *Dasein*. As we do now have a general understanding of *Dasein*’s worldliness, we can proceed to ask how exactly Nancy approaches being and the world and what kind of ontology follows if we, instead of thinking of the

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<sup>57</sup> In *Being and Time*, Heidegger raises the concern of whether his approach subdues the being of worldly things under the ecstaticity of Dasein:

“If we thus define the being of what is at hand (relevance) and even worldliness itself as a referential context, are we not volatilizing the ‘substantial being’ of innerworldly beings into a system of relations, and, since relations are always ‘something thought,’ are we not dissolving the being of innerworldly beings into ‘pure thought?’” (BT, 86). He reacts to this worry on the same page by arguing that “relevance” of things at hand does not subdue their being as worldly things due to the fact that things are “there” irrespective of any Dasein – the analysis of “relevance” is concerned solely with *Dasein*’s existential constitution.

world and things in terms of how they are available, relevant and significant for a heedful human dwelling in her average everydayness, decide to think of the world in terms of the being-to of plural entities, things or existents.

In his *The Sense of the World*, as we can recall from the beginning of this section, Nancy suggests that we think of *being* as a relational or positional being-to, which encompasses the plurality of many beings. Thus, we can contend that Nancy's ontology begins and remains with exposed existents at its most primordial level of analysis. In order to get a better grasp of Nancy's reiteration of the world and being, which operates as the philosophical framework of my dissertation, let us advance through some of the key passages from *The Sense of the World*. Nancy explicitly challenges Heidegger's tendency to think of the world in terms of being-here, being-in, being-for and being-by by presenting the following argument:

[T]he world beyond humanity - animals, plants, and stones, oceans, atmospheres, sidereal spaces and bodies - is quite a bit more than the phenomenal correlative of a human taking-in-hand, taking into-account, or taking-care-of: it is the effective exteriority without which the very disposition of or to sense would not make... any sense. [...] For it is a question of understanding the world not as man's object or field of action, but as the spatial totality of the sense of existence, a totality that is itself *existent*, even if not in the mode of *Dasein*. (SW, 55-6).

As we can read, Nancy argues that the spatial totality of the world cannot be exhaustively reduced to the heedful and practical existence of a specific being, such as Heidegger's *Dasein*. In order to think of a world that allows for any kind of heedful dwelling, Nancy proceeds to explore how the *Dasein* is spaced out as worldly in Heidegger's analysis. To achieve this, he describes *Dasein* as follows:

*Dasein* - that ordinary German noun for existence, which Heidegger gives as a "title" to humanity and beneath which, for him, humanity and only humanity ex-ists - is the *being-the-there* of being itself. It is transitively the there, that is to say, it transits [*transit*, -JPP] - traverses and partitions - the taking-place of the sense of being as the event of being-there, the spacing of an arrival. In turn, the world in the sense of "external" or "circumambient" world is the *here* of this *there* (the *Hiersein* of *Dasein*). (SW, 56).

As we can read, staying closely aligned with the analysis presented in *Being and Time*, Nancy describes "being-here" as an experience that discloses the world "over there". In other words, *Dasein* is "here" by being-to the-there: she is toward things and others that she encounters in her average everydayness, as we have already discussed earlier. Hence, as we can read from Nancy's analysis, he does not dismiss the merits of Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein*. Rather, Nancy suggests that *Dasein*'s heedful and practical dwelling does not, exhaustively or thoroughly, determine the world or the being of things "over there".<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> We can also look at *Being Singular Plural* where Nancy thinks of *Dasein* in terms of her exposition and (quasi-)minerality, by arguing as follows: "The difference between humanity and the rest of being (which is not a concern to be denied, but the nature of which is, nevertheless, not a given), while itself being inseparable from other differences within being (since man is 'also' animal, 'also' living, 'also' physio-chemical), does not distinguish true existence from a sort of subexistence. Instead, this difference forms the concrete condition of singularity. We would not be 'humans' if there



In Nancy's analysis, we can think of the world and worldly being in terms of the *facticity* of the-*there*. This, in turn, also determines *Dasein*, because her directional "from over there to here" is always and already determined by the facticity of the world. Fundamentally, Nancy argues that even though *Dasein* is undoubtedly heedful in her worldly existence, she is also, irrespective of her heedful directionality, an exposed and worldly existent. This means that she is "here" amidst (the "there" of) the plurality of things, which means that she exists in relation to other existents. Hence, if we accept Nancy's proposal, we can think of the world without solely relying on *Dasein*'s (likely, although presumed) exceptional disclosive "access" to sense (significance, comprehension, articulation, thought and speech), as the bodily exposure of many things to one another. Nancy describes this as follows:

Even if one supposes that it is necessary to take sense to be exclusively a property of the existent that is *Dasein* (which at least seems to be true of sense as "articulated comprehension," although it is not certain that sense can be reduced to this), and even if one supposes correlatively that ex-istence belongs exclusively to *Dasein* or humanity (although this, too, is precisely less than certain), it nonetheless remains the case that, in the absence of the factual totality of fragments, this existent cannot exist, assuming (as Heidegger does) that its existence is indeed *factual* and that this factuality is indeed a "part of the world". Far from being a mere impoverished and inert objectivity offered up to the purposes and the manipulations of humanity, this factuality, or the world as being-here of all the *beings-here*, is itself also, qua simply being-thrown-here-of-things, an *existentiale* of *Dasein*: that is, in the Heideggerian lexicon, a transcendental/factual condition of possibility of ex-istence. In other words, the insurmountable fact of its *sense*. But it is therefore necessary that it be so without reservations, *materially*. (SW, 56-7, translation slightly edited).

As we can read, Nancy's reiteration of *being* as *being-to* enables us to think of worldly existence in material terms. This means that we can think of being in terms of the spacing of plural beings and we can explore how each being encounters other corporeal beings by thinking of the innumerable contacts between each one.<sup>59</sup>

Hence, owing to Nancy's reiteration of *being as being-to*, his ontological approach markedly differs from that of Heidegger. He articulates this difference explicitly with his following remark:

[...] [W]hy 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

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were not 'dogs' and 'stones.' A stone is the exteriority of singularity in what would have to be called its mineral or mechanical actuality [*littéralité*]. 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). [...] Existence, therefore, is not a property of *Dasein*; it is the original singularity of Being, which *Dasein* exposes for all being." (BSP, 18).

<sup>59</sup> We can turn to *Being Singular Plural*, where Nancy depicts worldliness of being as the dis-(tinctly-)positional spacing of plural beings: "Being absolutely does not *preexist*; nothing preexists; only what exists exists. Ever since Parmenides, one of philosophy's peculiarities has been that it has been unfolding this unique proposition, in all of its senses. This proposition proposes nothing but the placement [*la position*] and dis-position of existence. It is its plural singularity. Unfolding this proposition, then, is the only thing philosophy has to do." (BSP, 29).

in being-among, being-between, and being-against? In remoteness and contact without “access”? Or on the threshold of access? (And this *a priori* would be identically the *a posteriori* of the material world, the indefinite grouping of threshold with threshold, one thing with another, each on the border of the other, at the entrance yet not entering, before and against the singular signature exposed on the threshold.) (SW, 59–60).

As we can read, Nancy argues that we can think of the world as the spacing of plural, exposed and singular bodies and think of their being in terms how they interact, contact or *touch* one another – in terms of pushing, weighing on, pressing and pulling one another. In the next section (2.1.1.), I present my interpretation of the worldliness of thought that is briefly explored by Nancy in his *The Sense of the World*. I do this because this positioning enables me to contrast my dissertation with various phenomenological and post-phenomenological approaches to notions such as sense, the world, finitude, the self, and being. Why include a section on thought? This is necessary because any thinking of the body hinges on how exactly body and thought relate to one another. Nancy expresses this in *Corpus* as follows:

With thoughts about the body, the body always forces us to think farther, always too far: too far to carry on as thought, but never far enough to become a body.

Which is why it makes no sense to speak about body and thought apart from each other, as if each could somehow subsist on its own: they are only their touching each other, the touch of their breaking down, and into, each other. This touching is the limit and spacing of existence. (C, 37, translation slightly edited -JPP).

### 2.1.1 Worldliness of thought

In this section, I continue with my exploration of the philosophical framework that underpins my dissertation. I do so by thinking how each thought – whether it is an “each time”,<sup>60</sup> each instance or each instant<sup>61</sup> of methodological doubt I

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<sup>60</sup> In his *Corpus*, Nancy explicates how “each time” (or each instant) of thought amounts to each moment of existence, which is played out as the tension between thinking and extending. He writes:

“‘Ego’ makes sense only when it is declared, proffered (and when proffered, its sense is exactly identical to existence: *ego sum, ego existo*). Descartes keenly remarks that this declaration owes its truth to the circumstance, the “each time,” of its statement: ‘each time I declare it, or conceive it’ (where ‘conception,’ ‘in my mind,’ as Descartes specifies, clearly amounts to the act of proffering as one of its modes: it’s the same articulation). It needs *one time*, a discrete quantity providing articulation with a *space of time*, or a *place* (it’s not a contradiction, certainly, that this ‘once’ happens unceasingly, every time, in every space of time, in every moment of existing: this simply indicates that existing exists along with this discreteness, or continuous discontinuity, in other words, with its body).” (C, 25.) I analyse this passage extensively in section 2.2.1 below.

<sup>61</sup> In addition to Nancy’s reading of Descartes, operative in his notion of “each time”, we can also turn to *Being Singular Plural* for Nancy’s thematisation of each “instance” or “instant” of being, where he describes the punctuality of existence as follows: “Being in each instant [*au coup par coup*], which attests to the fact that Being only takes place in each instant.

The essence of Being is the shock of the instant [*le coup*]. Each time, ‘Being’ is always an instance [*un coup*] of Being (a lash, blow, beating, shock, knock, an encounter, an access). As a result, it is also always an instance of ‘with’: singulars singularly together, where the togetherness is neither the sum, nor the incorporation [*englobant*], nor the

encounter “in me” by remembering or reading through some of the key passages from Descartes’ Second Meditation, or a fleeting instance of desiring a succulent apple – is limited, structured and determined by the thorough worldliness of “my” corporeal existence. In order to explain what I mean by the thorough “worldliness” of thought, I briefly explain how I understand (i) Nancy’s key notion of *sense (sens)*, (ii) Nancy’s rationale and method for arguing that the world is structured *as* sense, by looking into key passages from his *The Sense of the World*, and (iii) how Nancy’s framing of the world structured as sense (*sens*) shapes, determines and conditions any thought, reflection, memory, dream, hope or idea due to the thorough worldliness of “my” being, which is no longer determined as heedful and practical; rather, it emerges as exposed, touching and touched-upon.

By exploring what I present as “thought’s corporeality”, I explain how my Nancyan exploration of attentive experiences remains within a touching distance – yet slightly separate – from the various phenomenological and post-phenomenological approaches to experience, embodiment, bodies, being, sense and the infinitely finite senses of the world. These methodological approaches function by basing their analyses and concepts on “my” egoically intentional lived experiences, my heedful dwelling, temporality, and finitude, or on other fundamental structures that determine the exceptional existence of speaking animals.

One of the key notions found throughout Nancy’s entire philosophical corpus is *sense (sens)*.<sup>62</sup> However, Nancy’s *sense* should not be read, understood nor thought as floating above or transcending matter, bodies or worldly things. Nor should it be regarded as something that is “accessible”, “meaningful” or “making sense” for a subject, an ego or a self. In essence, Nancy’s *sense* does not name an intentional, immanent, personal, subjective or intrinsically egoic structure constituted or conceived by a consciousness due to her “access” to the world – be that either intentionally egoic, sensuous, sensitive or ecstatically practical and heedful. Instead, Nancy’s *sense* refers or points to an external, positional, relational or worldly relation or contact. Nancy thematises this by asserting that the world *is* sense *from* or *as* itself.<sup>63</sup>

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‘society,’ nor the ‘community’ (where these words only give rise to problems). The togetherness of singulars is singularity ‘itself.’ It ‘assembles’ them insofar as it spaces them; they are ‘linked’ insofar as they are not unified.” (BSP, 33).

<sup>62</sup> Nancy’s notion of *sense (“sens”)* runs through his entire philosophical corpus. It compasses not only sense understood as “meaning” or “signification”, but also the sense of direction, the fractality of our bodily senses and, maybe most importantly in the context of this dissertation, *sense* determined by the relational worldliness of being-*to*. Nancy summarises this polysemy of *sens* in his *A finite thinking* as follows: “By ‘sense’ I mean sense in the singular sense taken absolutely: the sense of life, of Man, of the world, the sense of existence; the sense of existence which is or which makes sense, which without sense would not exist.” (2013, 3).

<sup>63</sup> And Nancy continues by reflecting how worldly sense determines all experience as follows: “[T]here is *nothing other* than experience of sense (and this is the world) if ‘experience’ says that sense precedes all appropriation or succeeds on and exceeds it.” (SW, 11).

In order to get a grasp of Nancy's *sense*, we can turn to one of the most lucid explanations he provides for his readers.<sup>64</sup> In the opening of *The Sense of the World*, Nancy describes how he understands *sense* by arguing that "there is no sense except in relation to some 'outside 'or 'elsewhere 'in the relation to which sense consists."<sup>65</sup> This assertion means that *sense* is always an orientation or relation *to*, *into*, *toward* or *unto* something singular, worldly and exposed – a distinct thing that exists. Therefore, this means that *sense* is always a matter of something relating *to* something or someone. In other words, Nancy's *sense* is indissociable from being determined as being-*to*, which means that being-*to* is always according to, or already caught up in, *sense*. Nancy describes this intricate correlation between *sense* and the world in the following manner:

"[B]eing-toward-the-world," if it takes place (and it does take place), is caught up in sense well before all signification. It makes, demands or proposes sense this side of or beyond all signification.[...] If we are *toward* the world, if there is being-toward-the-world in general, that is, if there is world, there is sense. The *there is* ["il y a" -JPP] makes sense by itself and as such. We no longer have to do with the question, "why there is something in general?" but with the answer "there is something, and that alone makes sense." (SW, 7-8, translation slightly edited; also partially quoted in James 2013, 16).

As we can read, Nancy's notions of *sense* and being-*to* are woven tightly together as the tangible, bodily, or material *there is* of the world. Stated differently, Nancy's *sense* is not grounded by a heedful dwelling among things one is familiar with, recalls or deems significant. Instead, his worldly things are spaced and spread out as exposed *to* one another. Nancy puts this explicitly in *The Sense of the World* as follows:

Sense belongs to the structure of the world, hollows out therein what it would be necessary to name better than by calling it the "transcendence" of its "immanence" - its *transimmanence*, or more simply and strongly, its existence and exposition. The out-of-place term of sense can thus be determined neither as a property brought from elsewhere into relation with the world, nor as a supplementary (and problematic or hypothetical) predicate, nor as an evanescent character "floating somewhere," but as the constitutive "signifyingness" or "significance" of the world itself. That is, as the constitutive *sense* of the fact that there is world.

There is something, there are some things, there is some there is – and that itself makes sense, and moreover nothing else does. It does not make sense only for, through, or in *Dasein*. (SW, 55).

By thinking how sense can be thought, Nancy proceeds to describe how philosophical thought, as discourse and writing, engages the fact that all existence is inherently worldly. He does this when he argues how "concrete" worldly *sense* allows and conditions any form of "significance", including how the world is intelligible and familiar to any heedful *Dasein*:

[S]ense comes before all significations, pre-vents and over-takes them, even as it makes them possible, forming the opening of the general significance (or the opening of the

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<sup>64</sup> Which is also taken up in Ian James' essay on the circularity between Nancy's notion of *sens* and his thinking of bodily senses. Cf. Ian James (2013) "Immanence and Technicity" in *The Senses and Society*, 8:1, 14-25

<sup>65</sup> SW, 7; also quoted in James 2013, 15.

world) in which and according to which it is first of all possible for significations to come to produce themselves.

It is not a matter of signification, but of the sense of the world as its very *concreteness*, that on which our existence *touches* and by which it is *touched*, in all possible senses. In other words... (...but it is a matter of nothing but that, *other words*...) ...it is not a matter of signification because it is a matter of labour of thought [...] – of discourse and writing – where thought uses itself to touch (to be touched by) that which is not for it a “content” but its *body*: the space of this extension and opening in which and as which it exscribes itself, that is, lets itself be transformed into the concreteness or *praxis* of sense. But one must understand “concrete” here not as designating the mere exteriority of the impenetrable thing or of its “lived” reality: “concrete” designates the consistence or resistance of which forms the necessary exteriority of a being-*toward*, hence of a being-according-to-sense. Sense is concrete: that is, it is tangible *and* impenetrable (these two attributes mutually imply each other). (SW, 10–11, translation edited).

From this passage, we can discern that thought can think of, and according to, the worldly spacing of being-*to*.<sup>66</sup> In effect, this means that none of “my” thought leaves, escapes or transcends the world. “I” can ponder being and the world by articulating, writing, thinking and elucidating how “I” am, as a plurally singular entity, exposed to “myself” and other beings. This means that “I” exist as exteriority exposed to “myself” and others – as “tangible and impenetrable”, as Nancy describes it above. In more concrete terms, this allows me to think how “I” am *touched* across “my” extension and how I *touch* “myself” across “my” extension, which means across the infinitely finite span and instances of “my” existence (which I examine in greater detail in section 2.2.3. and also in my research articles).

Thus, when “I” engage in “philosophical labour” and think of, to or according to “my” worldly being-*to* with concepts, analyses, notions, words and texts – which is to say to think *and* touch on “my” being-*to* – I sustain a methodological stance that Nancy refers to as a “suspended step.”<sup>67</sup> Nancy’s methodological “suspension” means that thinking undertaken as philosophical texts, engaging with worldly existence and the existentiality of bodies, remains firmly in *this* world – within the world of bodies that exist prior to any appropriation of sense through writing or thought. What is the intent behind Nancy’s methodological stance? He is explicitly and critically engaging the phenomenological maxim of tending, ascending or turning to the “things themselves”, in the sense that I would ground the sense of the world within my conscious or egoic structures. He does this by describing thought in the following manner:

[Thought] goes on to suffer a touch of sense that is at once its most proper concern (it is itself the sense, the sensible organ of such a touch) and the very place of its expropriation (it does not exhibit the signification of this touch). In both ways, it is *the thing itself*: the sense of the world. “To accede to the thing itself” can no longer mean

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<sup>66</sup> In his *Fragmentary Demand*, James describes (142) the corporeality of thought in Nancy as follows: “[...] however much thought abstracts, spiritualizes, or idealizes itself, it is always and only ever possible, and indeed only ever is, as finite embodied sense, sense which touches yet leaves intact the untouchable matter with which it is joined in the very moment of separation and distance.”

<sup>67</sup> The French term *pas* in Nancy’s *pas suspendu* refers to both “step” and “not”, cf. translators note in SW, 172, n. 9.

“to arrive at the constitution of an originary signification,” *but to hold the step of thought suspended over this sense that has already touched us.*

The experience in question is not a mystical experience. Rather, no doubt it is the experience of this, that there is no experience of sense if “experience” is supposed to imply the appropriation of a signification – but that there is *nothing other* than experience of sense (and this is the world) if “experience” says that sense precedes all appropriation or succeeds on and exceeds it. (SW, 11).

As we can discern, if thought and philosophical texts do indeed proceed to engage the “sense” of the world as something that precedes any of its appropriations in thought and, simultaneously, refrains from referring to any constituting principles beyond or transcending the world itself – such as the Husserlian ego or the Heideggerian Dasein – then Nancy’s philosophical methodology does indeed exhibit an irretrievable separation from the realm of classical phenomenological techniques and their conceptions of a constituting subject, whom we are familiar with and know how to examine within the framework of its egoic, monadic, intentional, practical, or heedful and caring self-temporalization. Nancy, explicitly and critically, challenges the phenomenological (as well as various post-phenomenological) approaches to *sense* and the world and he argues that such approaches do not

open us up to that which – in sense and consequently in the world – infinitely precedes consciousness and the signifying appropriation of sense, that is, to that which precedes and surprises the phenomenon in the phenomenon in itself, its coming or its coming up. In a sense, phenomenology speaks of nothing but that: appearing. But it still irresistibly convokes us to the pure presence of appearing, to *seeing*. For this reason, despite everything, it does not yet sufficiently touch on the *being* or the *sense* of appearing. This is why, for any phenomenology, that is, definitively for any philosophy that is articulated (expressly or not) around a “subject” of the vision of *phainein*, there remains a proper, immanent / transcendent point of origin for sense, a point with which, consequently, all sense is confounded. (SW, 17.)

As we can ascertain from the passage above, Nancy distinctly positions himself outside the realm of phenomenological thought. This distinction arises from his notion of *sense*, which neither originates from nor establishes an intentional ego, subject, self, or subjectivity. Rather, according to Nancy, *sense* is an external and worldly relation and it refers to how *all* existents are exposed-to one another – regardless of any exceptional disclosive access to the world. I continue by explaining below how Nancy thinks of sense as “material” in my brief examination of Nancyan bodies.

### 2.1.2 Worldliness of bodies

A brief explication of Nancyan bodies is essential before I can attempt to think of attentive experiences. This is due to the fact that my research into the corporeality of attentive experiences is structured as an exploration into how each *experience* is determined by the fact that attentive existents (humans, other animals, maybe even plants in terms of their movements, e.g. to face the sun) are exposed bodies. And how exactly am I an exposed body? Just like each and every worldly body: by being expansive, tangible and impenetrable (where penetration or a cut

merely distinguishes another tangible extent). In his *The Sense of the World*, Nancy outlines how each being, each singular existent, is a singular body as follows:

Singularity is material, whether one understands it as event or as unicity of existence, or as both at once, and still as sense. Reciprocally, matter is always singular or singularized. It is always *materia signata*, signed matter, that is, matter that is not signified but shown – or showing itself – to be singular.

The *there is* is signed or signs (itself): signature is not signification, but sense of singular coming. The signature is indissociable from a being-*there*, that is to say, a being-*here*, first of all, in and according to the general texture of being qua being-something-somewhere, being a “fragment” of a world whose matter is the very fraying or fractality of fragments, places, and takings-place. The outline of this signature is also always a *body*, a *res extensa* in the sense of extension – areality, tension, exposition – of its singularity. But such an exposed body is not the result of the placing-in-view of what, at first, had been hidden or shut away. Rather, exposition is here being itself. This is what we mean by existing. (SW, 58).

As we can read, the singular plurality of being is *exposed* by each extended and limited material body – by each *this*. In other words, each existent is determined by its limited, discreet and extensive span: by its own outline, surface, face or skin exposed to other bodies in its various contacts.<sup>68</sup> This means that each thing exists as relationally exposed-*to* every other worldly thing, just as each thing exists as exposed-*to* itself across its extension. To put it simply: with each of its surfaces, each thing supports, stops, limits and conditions any and every contact determined in terms of being-*to*,<sup>69</sup> any worldly *sense*, which means that its *existence* spans across its *expanse*.

We can describe Nancy’s bodily ontology in more sensuous terms as follows: each thing (constituting the-*there* of the world) is a tangible, visible, resonant, salty, acidic, smelly, wet and weighty body and each body *is* worldly

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<sup>68</sup> Nancy’s amalgamation of *ex-* and “skin” (*peau*) as *expeausition* does not translate into English easily (neither as “unhiding” or “skin-show(-ing)” (2007, xx)), but what he is after is to think how each singularly plural being is an extended body and, henceforth, *exposed* along its skin. Nancy’s *expeausition* serves to describe *how* finite bodies exist extending along their span, which makes up the world in terms of their *exposition*. Bodies are *exposed* across their outsides: their hides, skins, and across their mineral surfaces, be that “quasi” or actual.

<sup>69</sup> We can also look into Nancy’s *Being Singular Plural*, where he explicates how all existents are bodies by arguing as follows:

“[E]ach is originary (the springing forth of the springing forth itself), and each is original (incomparable, underivable). Nevertheless, all of them share originarity and originality; this sharing is *itself* the origin.

What is shared is nothing like a unique substance in which each being would participate; what is shared is also what shares, what is structurally constituted by sharing, and what we call ‘matter.’ The ontology of being-with can only be ‘materialist,’ in the sense that ‘matter’ does not designate a substance or a subject (or an anti-subject), but literally designates what is divided of itself, what is only as distinct from itself, *partes extra partes*, originarily impenetrable to the combining and sublimating penetration of a ‘spirit’ [or ‘mind’], understood as a dimensionless, indivisible point beyond the world. The ontology of being-with is an ontology of bodies, of every body, whether they be inanimate, animate, sentient, speaking, thinking, having weight, and so on. Above 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. Not only does a body go from one ‘self’ to an ‘other,’ it is *as itself* from the very first; it goes from itself to itself; whether made of stone, wood, plastic, or flesh, a body is the sharing of and the departure from self, the departure toward self, the nearby-to-self without which the ‘self’ would not even be ‘on its own’ [‘à part soi’].” (BSP, 83–4; also partially quoted in James 2006, 106).

(or “has” a world in Heideggerian terms). This characterisation of existents and existence stands in a stark contrast to Heidegger’s perspective, where only a Dasein has the capacity to disclose the world through her ecstatic modes of being-in and being-with, with the worldliness of other entities being subdued under their usefulness and significance *for* her.

Nancy proceeds with his analysis, employing the notion of *touch* (*toucher*) to explain how the world is, or takes place, as contact between distinct bodies:

[C]ircularity of reality and materiality, which is itself the condition of possibility of the distinction of something like a “form” or “articulation” in general – this circularity does not allow of being touched and presented as a material thing. Rather, it is the very condition of all *touching*, all *contact*, that is to say, of all composition of a world (neither pure continuity nor pure discontinuity: touching). If one can put it like this: the ideality of difference / *différance* is indissociable (if not indiscernible) from its materiality. And hence, *the ideality of sense is indissociable from its materiality*. [...] “Matter” is not above all an immanent density that is absolutely closed on itself. On the contrary, it is the first difference through which *something* is possible, as *thing* and as *some*: that is, other than as the indistinct inherence or hardening of a one that would not be *some one*. (SW, 58–9)

As we can read, Nancy proposes that there is a “circularity” between *sense* and materiality. To put it in simple and sensuous terms: every worldly thing is a body with its very own shape, texture, acidity, colour, smell, extension, rigidity, and sonorous resonance.

What this entails is that bodies are not, as Nancy argues above, absolutely cut off from one another or made of one continuous substance. Instead, their existence *is* founded upon singularly plural ways of relating to, against, away and through one another. One effective approach to capturing this fundamental element of Nancy’s bodily ontology involves paying heed to his utilisation of the Cartesian phrase *partes extra partes* (“*parts outside parts*”) to describe the world as the spacing of bodies.<sup>70</sup> James describes the circularity between bodily exposition and worldly being in his *Fragmentary Demand* as follows:

The structure of “parts outside parts” describes the way in which material bodies exist in a relation of exteriority each to the other, and the way in which the components or constitutive parts of material bodies likewise exist outside of each other, never occupying the same place, and are thus able to articulate themselves as bodies and come into relation or contact with other bodies. In this sense, for Nancy, matter or materiality is always an outside or an impenetrable element, since we know that objects are touched, seen, sensed and given sense only from the outside and from this relation of exteriority, of objects touching each other in a mutual distance or separation (if we open them up, dissect, X-ray, scan, or hugely magnify them we are simply creating another exterior surface or relation of contact-separation of sense). (2006, 143).

Thus, each thing is itself due to its corporeal capacity to resist other things. Yet, if every existent is a body, what or how do “I” experience things and “myself”? How do “I” tend to things that surprise or intrigue *me*? In the next subsections, I

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<sup>70</sup> Nancy writes: “This is the world of world-wide departure: the spacing of *partes extra partes*, with nothing to oversee it or sustain it, no Subject for its destiny, taking place only as a prodigious *press* of bodies.

This world – already our own – is the world of bodies, because it has, because it *is*, the *very density of spacing*, or the density, intensity, of a *place*.” (C, 39–41; also quoted in James 2006, 143)



turn to Nancy's intriguing deconstructive analyses of *ego sum* and *corpus ego*, because they enable me to investigate how "my" experiences are shaped up by the corporeality of "my" existence.

## 2.2 Toward the corporeality of attentive experiences

In the next three sections, which continue to unfold the philosophical framework underpinning my research, I elaborate on my understanding of how "being a body" determines "my" experiences. I do this turning to Nancy's analyses concerned with the *unum quid*, the *corpus ego* and the fractal "zoning" of the world, which I present as a deconstructive analysis of a first-person perspective. Throughout various texts, both prior to and after *Corpus*, written between 1990 and 1992, Nancy develops and revisits a host of crucial traits, inquiries, and themes that form the core of his exploration of corporeal existence. Nonetheless, I propose that it is his dissection of the Cartesian *ego cogito*, undertaken in his earlier work *Ego Sum*, which paves the way for his contemplation of bodies and his scrutiny of the "corporeal I," *corpus ego* – an avenue I employ to explore the worldly corporeality inherent in "my" attentive experiences.

It is important to note that my dissertation will not furnish an all-encompassing, exhaustive depiction, interpretation, or evaluation of Nancy's complete body of work concerning bodies, existence, and the world; nor will it encompass an exhaustive survey of their reception or critique. Similarly, I do not aspire to furnish an exhaustive account of how Nancy's articulation of *corpus ego* evolves from one work to the next. Instead, my approach is both thematic and distinctly focused; I expound upon and amplify Nancy's analyses centred around the notion of *corpus ego* to facilitate an analysis of the corporeal traits I consider essential to attentive or attentional experiences.

In the preceding sections, I elucidated how Nancy's thinking of being as *being-to* allows an analysis of the world, thought and bodies in a manner that refrains from grounding all sense on a disclosive access of an exceptional existent. In effect, Nancy's shift in focus extends the notion of *existence* to all things, entities or beings and thinks of be-ing as exposed across the distinct bodily span of each. However, if one decides to think the world in terms of resistances, touches and forces of impenetrable bodies pushing, bumping, running and looking into and onto one another, an essential query remains: how should they envisage the "I," the "self," or the "me" that encompasses all of "my" experiences, yet which is *not* thought in terms of a substantial and self-present subject? At this juncture, one encounters a notably intricate challenge and imperative that confronts any philosophical practice utilising the insights unearthed in Nancy's thinking of the world: how am I to think, write, describe and depict the "I", "me" or "self" who desires, moves, attends, thinks, suffers, enjoys, cares and speaks, if worldly being is determined fundamentally or essentially as bodily exposition? Nancy articulates the delicacy of this undertaking in his late compilation of dialogues titled *Being With the Without*, as follows:

I would like to try to think without subjectivity as far as it is possible, or more precisely: to think a subjectivity without “sub-jectum”; but in the infinite tension and opening out of which is the “being” of “one” who as such is no-thing. But I know this is not possible in an absolute way. (BWW, 38)

Throughout his thinking, Nancy is occupied with deconstructively engaging this intricate tension, inherently present from a self *to* herself. Consequently, it is crucial that I exercise caution when I explicate the precise manner in which “I” encounter “myself” by being objected to by “my” strange body – *this* body that resists me and which is never properly “me” or “my own” and which does not allow me to position myself as a subject in terms of any first-person perspective. Nancy’s ontology, presented above, in its most fundamental “level”, aims at thinking according to the “consistence or resistance of which forms the necessary exteriority of a being-*to*, hence of being-according-to-sense” (SW, 11) and from this it follows that any of my experiences touches on “my” exposed exteriority, which is never properly “me” nor “mine”, but rather a singular body that is both tangible and impenetrable.

In the following sections, I present my interpretation of Nancy’s deconstructive examination of the Cartesian *ego cogito*, which furnishes me with the philosophical tools I employ to thematise and explore the corporeality of “my” attentive experiences in my research articles. At its core, Nancy’s understanding of “the self” or “I” within each of “my” experiences can be illuminated through his notion of “being-*to*”: the “self” is not something intimate, immanent, substantial and directly present to herself, but and instead, the “self” is relation, movement, difference<sup>71</sup> or a tension of a self exposed-*to*-herself. Morin describes the peculiar Nancyan “self” as follows:

The self is never merely itself as a pure point of presence but, insofar as it is or exists (transitively), is present to itself. Being “to-itself” or “toward-itself” (*à-soi*) denotes for Nancy the movement of existence so that there is no present self at the origin or end of this movement. Rather, the self is an effect of the movement toward an exteriority that the self can never fully reappropriate or reflect back into itself. This inappropriable exteriority is not some other thing out there, but the limit upon which the self is exposed – to itself and to others, to itself as an other – and which properly belongs neither to the inside nor to the outside[...].

Existence as exposition or exposure on the limit is a crucial feature of Nancy’s ontology. The limit is not only the place where I am exposed to others, to what lies outside of me. It is not only the place of the in-common. It is also the place where each existent feels itself existing because it feels itself from the outside and as an outside. (2021, 143).

In what follows, I explain how Nancy introduces and develops his notion of *corpus ego*, which I present as a development from his earlier interpretation of the Cartesian *unum quid*. I demonstrate how Nancy develops further the peculiarity of the Cartesian *quasi permixtio* by putting his emphasis on the almost-thorough corporeality of the *soul*; on the fact that “if we count as corporeal whatever belongs to a body, even though not of the same nature as body, then even the

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<sup>71</sup> Or *differance*, as Nancy’s analysis of a *self* operates with the Derridean motif of thinking of identity as being constituted as a relation of differing. Cf. Nancy’s “Identity and Trembling” in his *Birth to Presence*.

soul can be called corporeal, in so far as it is made to be united to the body[.]”<sup>72</sup> as is articulated by Descartes in his Letter to Arnaud.

In his foreword to the English translation of *Ego Sum*, Nancy summarises how substantially he is influenced by both Heidegger and Descartes in his thinking of bodies, being and the world and how their philosophical resources demand that we think of the “I” in each *experience* in terms of the tension between thought and extension. Nancy argues, explaining how a *corpus ego* senses herself in her exposition-to-herself as follows:

[T]he sense of ‘being’ is the act of speech, which acts within all of the mentioned attributions [doubting, affirming, negating, knowing, willing, imagining, sensing, loving, hating... – JPP], for even when I simply sense without saying anything, the ‘I’ of the ‘I sense’ is pronounced silently as the knowing-oneself-sensing (or sensing-oneself-sensing) of the existent that senses, and thus senses itself.

At this point, it becomes impossible not to consider the ‘I’ of every sensing existence, hence of plant and animal existence – at the very least, and without excluding a more extensive reflection on the mineral as exposed to actions outside and within itself. Of course, at this point we depart resolutely from Descartes and from Heidegger, but it is by plying the oars that they together have given us.” (ES, xi).

In what follows, I look into the analyses Nancy derives from Descartes and puts to use in his deconstructive exploration of *experience*. I do this by looking into his analysis of the uneasy yet necessary union of the soul with the body.

### 2.2.1 Unum quid

In *Corpus*, Nancy presents his readers an analysis of the following question: how exactly do “I”, as an extended and exposed *corpus ego* (which is Latin for “bodily I” or “corporeal me”), *experience* other bodies, the world and “myself”, as distinct from yet conjoined with *this* body that is never properly “me” or “mine”, but resistant to other bodies and to thought. Thus, Nancy’s philosophical figure of *corpus ego* explicates how “I” experience “myself” as extensive and exposed – speaking, thinking, sensing, hurt, delighted and suffering as “one whole” (*unum quid*), conjoined with “my” exposed body. My dissertation (and my research) is motivated by my conviction that I can gain a solid understanding of the corporeal dimensions of attentive experiences by clarifying this uneasy union at the core of the enunciating and enunciated *unum quid*, which leads Nancy to his peculiar figure of *corpus ego*. Thus, I proceed by exploring what constitutes the *quasi*, ultimately determining the *union* of thought and extension. In this section, I demonstrate that through a comprehensive examination of Nancy’s early explication of the *unum quid*, I can clarify, elucidate, and later on expand upon (in terms of attention and in terms of the zoned fractality of bodies) his contemplation of the corporeality of the *ego*, as presented in *Corpus*.

Multiple passages in *Corpus* explore how each *experience*, structured in terms of “I think, I feel, I sense, I experience...”, is punctually determined, wholly worldly and thoroughly corporeal. However, Nancy’s analysis in *Corpus*

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<sup>72</sup> AT V 223/III.358.

necessitates a deeper exploration of one of his earlier works. In this section, I explore Nancy's deconstructive analysis of *unum quid*, which he undertakes in his *Ego Sum*. I do this in order to explicate the analyses that make up his composite notion of *corpus ego*, which I rely upon in my own research into the corporeality of attentive experiences.

In *Corpus*, Nancy introduces his notion of *corpus ego* as follows. First, he explains how each of my worldly experiences stems from my corporeal being, which exposes and extends "me" as worldly. Subsequently, he expands upon how *this-body-here* resists, objects and exposes me (*soi*) *to, into* and *toward-myself* (*à-soi*), others and the world. His analysis unfolds, in these two steps, as follows:

It is from my body that *I have* my body as a stranger to me – expropriated. The body is the stranger "out there" (the place for all strange things) *because it is here*. Here, in the "there" of the here, the body opens, cuts, displaces the *out*-"there". (C, 19).

Not "my body," but: *corpus ego*. "Ego" makes sense only when it is declared, proffered (and when proffered, its sense is exactly identical to existence: *ego sum, ego existo*). Descartes keenly remarks that this declaration owes its truth to the circumstance, the "each time," of its statement: "each time I declare it, or conceive it" (where "conception," "in my mind," as Descartes specifies, clearly amounts to the act of proffering as one of its modes: it's the same articulation). It needs *one time*, a discrete quantity providing articulation with a *space of time*, or a *place* (it's not a contradiction, certainly, that this "once" happens unceasingly, every time, in every space of time, in every moment of existing: this simply indicates that existing exists along with this discreteness, or continuous discontinuity, in other words, with its body). In the Cartesian *ego*'s articulation, therefore, mouth and mind are the same: it's always the body. Not the body of the ego, but *corpus ego*, "ego" being "ego" only when articulated, articulating itself as spacing or flexion, even the inflection of a *site*. The enunciation of "ego" doesn't just *take* place. To the contrary, it *is* place. Unless localised, it is not: *ego = here*[.] (C, 25).

As we can read, Nancy's intriguing philosophical figure of *corpus ego* is tied to two movements within Descartes's seminal analyses of doubt, thought, the body, the union of the thinking soul with its unthinking and extensive body, and the "ownness" (*du propre*) of experience. Firstly, Nancy's *corpus ego* is tied to the inaugural act of unlimited doubt, leading thought to its own, necessary and indubitable limit, famously thematised and experienced as *ego sum, ego existo*. Secondly, to the peculiar *quasi* (the "almost") that determines the composite notion of *unio permixtio*: the conjoinment of the indivisible and thinking soul with her unthinking, impenetrable, tangible, resisting and unthinkable exteriority, which is her "own" and resisting body.<sup>73</sup> In the language of *Corpus* (19), Nancy's analysis revolves around "my" *expropriated* and strange body "out there", which continually, with the undeniable punctuality of *each* instance, thrusts my worldly, spatial, and temporal being that is essentially determined as *being-toward* each intriguing thing I encounter. Henceforth, in this section, I explore the visceral components that make up Nancy's *corpus ego*. I undertake this exploration in order to think how *this* strange body, which is never properly

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<sup>73</sup> In *Corpus*, Nancy elucidates the *praxis* of ontological thought by describing the tactily determined tension between the incommensurable components that make up his *corpus ego* as follows: "Perhaps we shouldn't think the 'ontological body' except where thinking *touches* on the hard strangeness of this *body*, on its un-thinking and unthinkable, exteriority. But such touching, or such a touch, *is* the sole condition for true thought." (C, 17).

“me” or “mine”, exposes “me” to “myself”, toward the world and to other beings.

In this section, I proceed by examining the final essay in Nancy’s *Ego Sum*, which was written over a decade before *Corpus* and published in 1979 (translated into English as late as 2016). This essay, titled “Unum Quid,” is the penultimate text in *Ego Sum* and it addresses the whole human being, named by the Latin phrase “unum quid,” that Descartes is engaging with. In this essay, Nancy explores the uneasy yet necessary union that conjoins, unites and intermixes the soul who thinks (and doubts, suffers, enjoys, remembers, feels, imagines, loves, hates...) with her extending, objecting, unthinking and resisting body. This body, however opaque and impenetrable it is for thought, forms the key of Nancy’s analysis due to its substantial, concrete and worldly being.<sup>74</sup> Nancy proceeds to explore their intricate intermixing by focusing on what he presents as the *substantial instability* of the *ego cogito*. He portrays this instability as determining *each time* an *ego* that enunciates herself *for herself* and by analysing *how* such an *ego* (un-) supports herself with each discreet enunciative act.

I begin by explaining how Nancy proceeds to deconstruct the “constant and standing”<sup>75</sup> Cartesian *ego cogito* – thematisation of a “self” determined in terms of being intimately clear, evident, available to herself, due to being able to represent herself to herself. I continue by elaborating on the *punctual indubitability* that Nancy agrees is established with the inaugural *ego sum, ego existo*, in three senses. First, I look into Nancy’s analysis of what is proven or distinguished by the “egoic” act of doubt, which Nancy argues is solely *each* discreet and singular enunciation or utterance of an *ego for herself*. Second, I explain how Nancy further determines his enunciatively distinguished *ego* according to two distinct yet interrelated distinctions: (i) the distinction of her thinking (doubting, feeling, enjoying, suffering, remembering, imagining...) soul from her unthinking body, and (ii) the distinction of the punctually indubitable *ego* from the soul-body distinction. Third, I present what Nancy argues as following from the *substantial instability* that determines such enunciatively distinguished *ego* in two senses: I explicate what Nancy’s substantial instability means (i) in terms of the inaugural *ego sum* and (ii) in terms of the *sensuous opacity* that in-distinguishes the *unum quid* that I am.

Nancy’s critical re-interpretation of *ego cogito*, which deconstructively engages the self-presence intrinsic to the Cartesian *ego*, follows the path already marked out by the analyses of Heidegger,<sup>76</sup> Foucault and Derrida.<sup>77</sup> He joins

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<sup>74</sup> Nancy thematises the intellectual opacity of my objecting, unthinking and extensive body in a various different ways throughout his thinking concerned with the tension between thought and the body. One of the most prevalent ones is his fascination with the quote from Freud: “*Psyche ist ausgedehnt: weiss nichts davon*. [The Psyche’s extended: knows nothing of it]”. Cf. Derrida 2005.

<sup>75</sup> Heidegger, “Metaphysics as History of Being,” in *The End of Philosophy*, 28. Also quoted in Nancy, *Ego Sum*, 99.

<sup>76</sup> For Heidegger’s reading of Descartes, see *Being and Time* and Heidegger’s essay “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” published in *On Time and Being*.

<sup>77</sup> Derrida’s interpretation of the self-temporalizing *cogito* and his notion of *differance*, see *Writing and Differance*.

them in demonstrating how our modern, wholly indubitable, self-apparent, self-standing and unquestionable ideal of egoic subjectivity is, rather, interrupted and structurally unfounded, thoroughly from within. What has often been taken as her purest moment of self-grounding self-certainty – her inaugural act of doubting every truth, thing, feeling, emotion, proposition, experience, memory and sensation – which leads thought to the necessary, indubitable and punctual *ego sum, ego existo*, is in the analyses of Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, and also Nancy, demonstrated as being structurally compromised and unstable.

However, this punctuality that determines the *ego sum* is pivotal for Nancy, just as it is for Descartes – it allows Nancy to put forth his own interpretation of the *unum quid*. Nancy does this by arguing that the punctuality of the *ego sum* determines the *ego* as substantially indetermined and unstable and by explaining how this insubstantiality determines the *ego's* conjoinment with its exposed body, which she never fully or comprehensively knows or grasps. Nancy's articulation of their incomplete, insubstantial, uneasy – yet necessary and indubitable – intermixing leads him to his enigmatic and forceful conclusion: to the collapse of reflective thought and to the visceral convulsion within the heart of the modern philosophical "I". In effect, the indistinct and indetermined vacuity of the insubstantial *corpus ego* pushes her outside her "own" *place*, which effectively means that she *is* outside "her" strange and objecting body and, therefore, exposed *to-the-world*. Ian James summarises the force of Nancy's interpretation in *Fragmentary Demand* as follows:

In the moment of grounding, the [Nancyan, -JPP] Cogito encounters only an absence of ground. The Cogito remains the crucial point of reference for Nancy as it is for Descartes. In Descartes's text it founds the subject after everything has been doubted, in Nancy's it un-founds the subject in the very moment of its foundation.

In *Ego Sum* the Cogito marks an extreme point where the Subject of metaphysics announces itself but in the very same gesture denounces itself and, with that, all possibility of posing a substance or ground. In the Cogito substance is not something which *is*, which underlies and acts as foundation, but something which, like the subject, announces or performs itself in a movement of figuration [...] (2006, 58).

In Nancy's deconstructive reinterpretation, the force of *ego sum* is described in terms of an enunciation or uttering that announces herself *for* herself. This means that an *ego* is an "act" of figuring, proffering, enunciating, uttering and imagining *ego* for *ego*: *each time* "I" conceive, experience, think or feel anything, "I" thrust "myself" outside "my" enunciation and alongside "my" extension – *this* strange and extended body that "I" am conjoined with, and which "I" never penetrate with my thought.

How exactly is "my" body a thing that supports yet resists "me" and "my" thoughts? How is my unextended *soul* distinct from, yet almost entirely conjoined with the extensive span of *this* body that I feel "myself" as entirely or wholly conjoined with? How am I intermixed with *this* body *here*, which extends, delights, suffers and feels, but which does not think by itself? For Nancy, as it is for numerous other commentators, the following passage from Descartes's *Meditations* offers the most explicit expression of the distinction and the conjoinment of the soul and the body (and allows Nancy to claim in his essay "On the Soul" (C, 134) that *soul* names the experience that the body *is*):

Nature also teaches me by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst, etc., that I am not only lodged in my body as a sailor in a vessel, but that I am very closely united to it, and so to speak so intermingled with it that I seem to compose with it one whole. For if that were not the case, when my body is hurt, I, who am merely a thinking thing, should not feel pain, for I should perceive this wound by the understanding only, just as the sailor perceives by sight when something is damaged in his vessel; and when my body has need of drink or food, I should clearly understand the fact without being warned of it by confused feelings of hunger and thirst. For all these sensations of hunger, thirst, pain, etc. are in truth none other than certain confused modes of thought which are produced by the union and apparent intermingling of mind and body. (*Meditations*, 93, translation slightly edited; quoted partially in ES, 89).

Nancy's interpretation of Descartes and the whole trajectory of his subsequent thinking of the body, undertaken in *Corpus* and after, remains in contact with this concise yet demanding passage. More specifically, he remains gripped by the figure of the two intermingling things that are by (for, in...)<sup>78</sup> themselves wholly incommensurable, yet necessarily conjoined as "one whole" ("*unum quid*"): thinking (sensing, feeling, remembering, doubting, suffering, loving...) and extension. Time and again, from one essay to another, he thinks according to, against and with their extreme closeness. And what does Nancy ask from their peculiar *union*, which is essentially determined according the incommensurability of the components that it joins together? In *Ego Sum*, Nancy contends that the inevitable questions prompted by the forceful passage from *Meditations* are as follows:

What about this unity of the soul and the body, what about this thing whose unity certainly does not precede the *compositio* that produced it, but whose being-one is given by opposition to the simple being-together or being-alongside – the *adesse* of the sailor – and hence according to the effect of a conjunction that implies a union, that is, in a certain way, a mixing, interpenetration, and reciprocity between the two components – *unio et quasi permixtio mentis cum corpore* [the union and, as it were, intermingling of the mind with the body], as the text says a couple of lines below? What about the *unum quid* whose *unum* seems well supported, but whose *quid* remains suspended upon its own unity as well as upon the interval of the *quasi*? (ES, 90).

Nancy argues as follows. Firstly, the unity (*unum*) of the composite whole (*quid*), the *union*, is determined by the *unio... permixtio*, as suggested<sup>79</sup> (yet not proven exhaustively or comprehensively) by the teachings of Nature: I suffer when my body is cut into, just as I dwell near things that are dear to me. Secondly, it is the *unum quid* that requires both the distinction *and* the union of its incommensurable or incompatible components. Their very close, yet persistent, interval is marked out by the notion of *quasi* in Descartes' text. They are, as he describes, almost entirely intermingled or conjoined, however not perfectly. This means that their union does not precede them, because their distinction is due to their inherent incommensurability, which is determined by the fact that the body extends whereas the soul does not and the soul thinks whereas the body does not.

<sup>78</sup> However, not in term of "as", because both are determined as touching one another.

<sup>79</sup> Here Nancy refers to Martial Gueroult's *Descartes Philosophy, Volume 2: The Soul and the Body*, which offers an insightful elaboration of the veracity the proof of the union in *Meditations*. See also Nancy's own interpretation of the differences in how the union is proven and how the distinction of the mind is proven in Nancy's "Extension of the Soul" (in *Corpus*), which deals with Descartes' letter to Elizabeth.

Nancy proceeds to clarify the peculiarity of the Cartesian *quasi* by explaining how he understands the Cartesian practice of systematic doubt, which forms the core of the entire analysis undertaken in *Meditations*. It is detailed and simultaneously performed in the Second Meditation. As Nancy points out, if doubting is progressively extended to each and every experience, emotion, feeling and thought – including whether or not one conceives or thinks of any thoughts at all when they doubt – then this practice ultimately reaches its structural limit. According to Nancy’s interpretation, in *Meditations* Descartes describes how each thought pushes against itself as its own indubitable and necessary limit and this limit is articulated within Descartes’s well-known sentence, which he determines as being necessarily true and indubitable whenever it is enunciated or conceived, whether out loud or in silence. Nancy describes and reformulates the force of systematic doubt as follows:

The fundamental movement of the *Meditations* is not that of a detour *through* a fiction from which we ought then to return (as from some demonstrative device) to reality. It is that of a doubt *as* the self-position of the I, a doubt that provides at the same time the endpoint and the source of every real demonstration. If it was a question of passing *through* a fiction, we would indeed be supposing for a time that I do not have a body. But in fact what is established is that I attest my existence all the more certainly if I doubt *not only* to lack a body *but also*, and just as much, to lack thought. What is established in this way is that I cannot doubt that I am not doubting: whereby, in effect, nothing has been said about the nature of the *I* that doubts, and it has not been said “whether the soul is distinct from the body.” The doubt has related to itself – and only to itself – as the indubitable being of the doubting subject, but the *being-doubt* of the subject does not imply in any way the “being-doubting” (the fictitiousness or the fictionality) of the nature of this being, and more specifically of its potential corporeal nature. (ES, 92–3, translation edited).

As this passage elucidates – a passage I have decided to quote in its entirety due to its significance for Nancy’s thinking of the body and its relevance to my dissertation – the Cartesian methodological doubt merely demonstrates the indubitable necessity of its “own” occurrence. This means that the indubitability of *ego sum* does not prove anything more than the *punctuality* of its (self-) utterance. Here, Nancy aligns with a longstanding tradition of critics. To be explicit, the core of the critical argument is that with *each* instance of doubt, “I” do not prove, establish, or determine that “I” am a substance or substantially distinct from a body that I either possess or lack. These interpretive steps are not singular within the reception of Descartes; quite the opposite, they boast numerous predecessors. The originality of Nancy’s interpretation, instead, lies in his innovative depiction of the *union*, and it is the *quasi permixtio* that affords us an insight into the intricate worldly corporeality which, according to Nancy, defines the *unum quid*. This subsequently informs Nancy’s exploration of the *corpus ego* in *Corpus*. To explicate the peculiarity of the *quasi*, Nancy advances from the Second to the Sixth Meditation, where the discussion centres on the incommensurability of my unextending soul – “I” to the extent that I am a thing



that doubts, thinks, enjoys, and suffers, attributes belonging to the indivisible *unity* of the *ego*<sup>80</sup> – from “my” extending body.

Nancy commences his analysis of the union by elaborating what he recognises as two conjoined distinctions that are both concurrently operational in the *unum quid*:

What *I am* – the whole and veritable being of what *I am* that affirmed itself as existing in the statement of this existence and without having to examine whether “the soul is distinct from the body” – must be distinguished from that *by which* I am what I am. And it is in the same movement that “I, that is, *my soul*” distinguishes itself from *my body*. Consequently, the distinction is well formed only if it is posited *simultaneously* between me and the body *and* between two things that are *mine* – two things that belong to me, and perhaps two things that are me, or in the in-between-two-things of me. (ES, 96, translation edited).

Nancy identifies not just one but two distinctions making up the core of Descartes’s argument in *Meditations*, with them of both taking place simultaneously and as conjoined with one another. And, for Nancy, these both determine how the distinction of my soul from my body, which is also the distinction of the soul that *I am* from the body that *I am*, must be distinguished from the inaugural (originary, primordial) distinction of the *ego sum*, which distinguishes myself *for* myself with the punctual indubitability of *each time*. He continues by explaining that when my unextended soul, by which *I am* only a thinking thing, is distinguished due to its incommensurability from *this* extending body, being “entirely different”<sup>81</sup> from it, this distinction must occur

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<sup>80</sup> As Descartes notes in the Second Meditation (54, emphasis mine), the soul not only thinks, but also suffers, loves, hates, enjoys, remembers, imagines, etc: “*But what then am I? A thing which thinks. What is a thing which thinks? It is a thing which doubts, understands, [conceives], affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels.*”

Certainly, it is no small matter if all these things pertain to my nature. But why should they not so pertain? Am I not that being who now doubts nearly everything, who nevertheless understands certain things, who affirms that one only is true, who denies all the others, who desires to know more, is averse from being deceived, who imagines many things, sometimes indeed despite his will, and who perceives many likewise, as by the intervention of the bodily organs? Is there nothing in all this which is as true as it is certain that I exist, even though I should always sleep and though he who has given me being employed all his ingenuity in deceiving me? Is there likewise any one of these attributes which can be distinguished from my thought, or which might be said to be separated from myself? For it is so evident of itself that it is I who doubts, who understands, and who desires, that there is no reason here to add anything to explain it. And I have certainly the power of imagining likewise; for although it may happen (as I formerly supposed) that none of the things which I imagine are true, nevertheless this power of imagining does not cease to be really in use, and it forms part of my thought. Finally, I am the same who feels, that is to say, who perceives certain things, as by the organs of sense, since in truth I see light, I hear noise, I feel heat. But it will be said that these phenomena are false and that I am dreaming. Let it be so; still it is at least quite certain that it seems to me that I see light, that I hear noise and that I feel heat. That cannot be false; properly speaking it is what is in me called feeling; and used in this precise sense that is no other thing than thinking.”

<sup>81</sup> The subtitle describing the trajectory of the Sixth Meditation is “Of the existence of material things, and of the real distinction between the soul and body of man”. Concerning the distinction (and the union) between one’s soul and their body, Descartes argues as follows:

“[W]hen I consider the soul, that is to say, myself inasmuch as I am only a thinking thing, I cannot distinguish in myself any parts, but apprehend myself to be clearly one and entire;

solely to support the indubitable distinction of the *ego sum, ego existo*, which was already affirmed beyond any doubt with each of its enunciations. Nancy proceeds by elaborating on the intricate connection, contact, or tension between these two distinct and necessary differentiations:

There is thus the distinction between substances, and the distinction between the subject and the distinction between substances.

No matter how strange it might seem, these two distinctions are nonetheless, in a certain way, the same. It is always a question of the distinction between the substance-subject and the extended substance. But it is precisely to the extent that we discern their identity that we also recognize the necessity of distinguishing them.

Their identity consists in the predominantly negative scope of the distinction between the soul and the body. This distinction posits that the soul *is not* of the order of the body, is not extended. The *ego* of the *cogito*, in a similar way, distinguishes itself negatively: It *is not* of the order in which it is necessary to distinguish between substances. (ES, 97).

What does Nancy mean when he states that the *ego* is negatively determined in two distinct senses? Why are both of these determinations deemed necessary? And how precisely do they represent the same distinction? Let us begin by examining Nancy's explication of the negative distinction of my soul from my body, which he presents as supporting the distinction of the *ego sum*. According to his assertion, whenever I doubt, sense, feel, or think, I am not exclusively within any specific (extended) portion of my body, for I am conjoined with its entire span. In simpler terms, I experience myself as conjoined with each part, organ, area or zone of my body as *one whole*. Why is the indivisibility of the soul crucial for Nancy's interpretation of the *ego*, just as it is for Descartes? The continuation of the text answers exactly this question as follows:

The unextension of the soul appears, therefore, both as that which the union requires and as that which the distinction guarantees. *What is both required and guaranteed in this way is the unity of the subject as his own truth.*

If the soul were extended – *partes extra partes* – it would not only be divisible, but always already divided. It would not be the unity of *ego*. The distinction between the soul and the body guarantees this unity, which in turn is required so that a total union be possible (and not a mere interlocking of parts), the logic of which can only be that of the distinction between the *ego* and the distinction between substances. (ES, 98, emphasis mine, translation edited).

Here, Nancy argues that the inaugural distinction of the *ego sum* requires the "supporting" distinction, as only that guarantees the indivisibility of the *unum quid* – the unity of being *one whole*, which shapes each of "my" experiences. However, precisely at this juncture we now encounter Nancy's second negative determination and the main contribution of his deconstructive interpretation.

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and although the whole soul seems to be united to the whole body, yet if a foot, or an arm, or some other part, is separated from my body, I am aware that nothing has been taken away from my soul. And the faculties of willing, feeling, conceiving, etc. cannot be properly speaking said to be its parts, for it is one and the same soul which employs itself in willing and in feeling and understanding. But it is quite otherwise with corporeal or extended objects, for there is not one of these imaginable by me which my soul cannot easily divide into parts, and which consequently I do not recognise as being divisible; this would be sufficient to teach me that the mind or soul of man is entirely different from the body, if I had not already learned it from other sources." (*Meditations*, 97, translation edited).

Not only is the soul distinguished negatively – distinguishing itself with its lack of extension – but also when I differentiate myself *for* myself, I lack any substantial stability that could transcend the indubitable punctuality that was determined by Descartes in terms of *ego sum*. In other words, the inaugural *ego sum* is not substantially distinct or guaranteed in any manner whatsoever; instead, it distinguishes things, others and herself solely through the punctuality of *each time*. This punctuality determines that she is both (i) “one whole” and (ii) a thing that thinks distinct from “her” extended body, which does not think, but instead extends, resists, feels and senses.

Nancy continues by exploring exactly how the inaugural *ego sum* distinguishes herself *for* herself: she *is* herself solely and exclusively *each time* she doubts, thinks, experiences, feels, suffers or enjoys. Nancy describes this “constitutive insubstantiality” of the *unum quid* as follows:

[The unity of the *ego*] does not mean that the ego has previously been constituted as an independent and available thing, structured according to a unity, or if one wants, as a reality with a unitary nature symmetrically opposed to plural extension. It does not mean that the ego has been predetermined as the unitary content of truth. It means, rather, that because “truth is essentially indivisible” (AT VII 548/II.374), it is through the exclusion (in doubt) of *all* truth-contents and of *all* real positions that the truth has been produced as utterance: *ego (sum)*. As such [...], the truth has not been produced as a substance that would have been brought to light and made known. It is rather substantiality that has been produced *only* as self-uttering “punctuality”: *ego* (since, as we see very well, and even if we do not *see* it, at least it *lets itself be listened to*, we cannot even speak of a self-uttering *of the ego*). (ES, 99, translation edited).

Owing to the *constitutive insubstantiality* of the *ego*, I do not discern myself, in any way, beyond “my” self-enunciation. In terms of the methodological doubt, this enunciation is exactly and identically “my” doubt. This means that “I” cannot decide or choose to enunciate, utter or distinguish “myself” as distinct from “my” body or as distinct from “my” doubt. Consequently, this means that “my” *each time* is not properly nor indubitably my own. This predicament arises, as Nancy asserts, due to the *ego*’s lack of substantiality, which means that the *ego* does not extend beyond the punctuality of *each time*. This lack undermines and dismantles any “I” that would be self-sustaining, self-transcending or accessible through reflection.

Nancy draws multiple conclusions from the *constitutive instability* of the *ego distingo*. Firstly, whereas my extended body can be conceived as being substantial – it takes up its own place and stands in its own “there” by relying solely on its own support – the same cannot be asserted of “me” as a thing that thinks. My soul, rather, is constitutively insubstantial, because it “supports itself only through the immediate and instantaneous grasp of a substantiality that consists in nothing else than this immediacy and instantaneity, and that, consequently, *does not take place*.” (ES, 101). (Nancy turns to the themes concerning the support, weight and weighing upon, the exposition and the tactile sensitivity of the extended body years later in *Corpus* and in the texts that follow after it.) Secondly, as Nancy points out, the inaugural *ego sum* is also determined as constitutively insubstantial. He writes:

[T]he [inaugural] distinction of *ego*, insofar as it is the distinction of what has, so to speak, no real substantial substantiality – but it is not a *what*, it is the *what* that is only *I*, that consists only in the *I* (who say *I*). This distinction, which is only the *distingo* of the *for*, raises (or, more precisely, does not raise) the question of the existential status that *I* bestows upon itself, that *I* as such (or the *for* as such) consists in bestowing upon itself. Therefore, it raises (or does not raise) the question of a nonsubstantial *status*, of a constitutive *instability*. In short, instability of the *sum* that grasps itself in the *for*. Yet, the status of this insubstantial substance is precisely identical to its apprehension: *ego sum* is true “whenever *I* pronounce it or whenever *I* conceive it in my mind” (it is *I* who underline *I*). This “status” – that of evidence – necessarily has the structure of immediacy as *self*-relation. To this extent, it is equivalent – with regard to its structure – to the immediate apprehension of the union of the soul and the body, as we will examine it in a moment. (ES, 102, translation edited slightly).

When “*I*” experience myself as *one whole* – even in my average unthematized everydayness – I (in-)distinguish myself with the same punctuality as when I enunciate myself *to* myself. How does Nancy understand the experience of the *union*? Is it apprehended or experienced? Is it an experience distinct from the punctual indubitability that defines the inaugural yet insubstantial *ego sum*? Nancy proceeds by describing how “*I*” am indistinguishable from my body in my average everydayness – how I experience myself as *unum quid*, as almost entirely conjoined with *this* body. He writes:

The proof of the union does not substitute a coarsely immediate sensuous or existential certainty for intellectual clarity. Rather, it transposes certainty and clarity to the level of the senses, but this transposition is barely one since everything is played out at the same extreme point of immediate evidence. Thus, the distinction of the *ego* – which is independent from the distinction between the substances and precedes it – does not forbid the evidence of the union, but it does not establish it either (but is it a question of *establishing* anything?). More simply and more radically, both are played out in the *same* point.

[...] What happens at this double and identical point, twice distinct from the distinction between substances – point of *ego* and point of union, point of *unum quid* – is that the evidential structure is introduced for the second time in this *same* that we believed to be of a purely intellectual nature, and is reintroduced as sensuous opacity (since it is the opacity of the senses – for the intellect – that provides us with clarity here...). How can evidence redouble itself into opacity in this way, and why must it do so, if not because what we believed was apprehending itself as intellectual evidence (without yet being guaranteed as distinct substance), and precisely because this evidence takes place without any shred of reflection, only consists in the obscurity that *constitutes* the instantaneity of clarity? (ES, 102–3).

The punctuality that Nancy attributes to the heart of Descartes’s *Meditations* is twice distinct from the supporting distinction of the substances. On one hand, in terms of how “*my*” (self-) experiences are punctual, which I have thematized in terms of *each time*. And on the other, in terms of how “*my*” sensuous, corporeal, extensive, painful, pleasurable conjoinment with *this* body does *not* allow me to distinguish myself as only a thinking thing, because I experience pain, hunger, sentences and words conjoined with “*my*” extension – *this* body. In other words, in terms of the *union*, “*I*” am never a thing that only thinks – “a sailor in my vessel” in Plato’s terms. I am, rather, as is repeated throughout this chapter, one whole or *unum quid*. This means that “*I*” am distinct from my body, but “*I*” am also indistinctly conjoined with it in my everyday life. However, “*I*” cannot intellectually establish, prove or know the *union* of my soul with my body, because “*my*” extended body is and stays opaque for the intellect of the soul.

Consequently, “my” strange body, and my conjunction with it, remains objecting and unavailable for my intellect to penetrate.

Nancy’s examination of the indistinct nature of the union – encompassing (i) the opaqueness of the senses to intellect and (ii) the intellectual indistinctness of the union, coinciding with the initial *ego sum* – enables him to explore the notion of *experience*. The focus of his reflection is in the *ownness* (*du propre*) of experience<sup>82</sup> and, in *Ego Sum*, Nancy initiates his reconceptualisation of *experience* by referring to two intriguing passages in Descartes’s interaction with his critics. The first passage arises from his responses to Arnaud, while the second emerges from his renowned letter to Princess Elizabeth in 1643. I provide quotes from both relevant passages and briefly discuss their implications below. Descartes writes:

The fact that the soul is closely conjoined with the body, we experience constantly. (AT VII 227–228/II.160)

I would never have believed that there has ever existed anyone so dull that he had to be told what existence is before being able to conclude and assert that he exists. The same applies to doubt and thought. Furthermore, the only way we can learn such things is by ourselves: what convinces us of them is simply our own experience or awareness. (AT X 524/II.417–8)

Nancy analyses the ownness of experience, described by Descartes above, in two steps. He begins by pointing out how *each* of my experiences is determined by the union of two incompatible things, which are conjoined with one another. He presents the argument as follows, elucidating both of the passages quoted above:

*Our own experience*: it is a matter of the experience of *ownness* [*du propre*], and there is no other kind of experience for Descartes. And the experience of ownness, for the soul, is as much that of its pure distinction from the body than that of a certain corporeality: “if we count as corporeal whatever belongs to a body, even though not of the same nature as body, then even the soul can be called corporeal, in so far as it is made to be united to the body.”<sup>83</sup> The experience of ownness is ownness as experience; the soul is properly that which, in uttering itself, feels itself [*s’éprouve*] existing (an ordeal [*épreuve*] prior to any passion or affect, but that constitutes a proof [*fait preuve*]) and which, feeling itself existing in this way, experiences itself as properly united to the body. (ES, 106–7, translation edited).

As we can discern, it is with *each* of “my” experiences – encompassing each of my experiences (touch, sight, sound, smell...) of any other body, as well as of *this* strange body that “I am”, but which is not properly or exactly “mine” or “me” – that I distinguish myself as indivisible and as closely conjoined with each part of *this* body.

Nancy continues with his second step by arguing as follows: if the distinction between the substances is operational, functional yet also necessary for the inaugural *ego sum* – to the *ego* distinguished with no indubitable clarity regarding either its intellectuality or its corporeality – then the experience of being *one whole* must also be implied in the inaugural punctuality of *each time*. He

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<sup>82</sup> It would be illuminative to compare Nancy’s *corpus ego* to contemporary phenomenological thematisations of the *ego*, e.g. Dan Zahavi’s “minimal self”.

<sup>83</sup> Nancy quotes from Descartes’ Letter to Arnaud, July 29, 1648 (AT V 223/III.358).

explicates how the inaugural *ego sum* (which is indetermined in terms of its substantial “composition”) is determined in terms of the *unum quid* as follows:

Even though it is never said explicitly, the experience of the union must be implied – be it only obscurely – in that of the cogito. What I experience constantly, how would I not experience it also, and perhaps first and foremost, each time I say: I am, I exist. It is *unum quid* who pronounces *ego*. And it is this experience, single and double at the same time, that remains, at the moment where it takes place, impossible to *establish*. “Constantly,” “each time,” it is what happens immediately without being produced, constructed, or demonstrated. *Unum quid*, a something that is neither-soul-nor-body, opens its mouth and pronounces or conceives: *ego sum*. Besides, this is still saying too much. *Unum quid* does not *have* a mouth that it could manipulate and open, no more than it has an intellect that it could exert to reflect upon itself. But something – *unum quid* – opens (it would therefore have the appearance or shape of a mouth) and this opening articulates itself (it would therefore have the appearance of discourse, hence of thought), and this articulated opening, in an extreme contraction, forms: *I*. (ES, 107).

As a result, convulsed, it forms *itself* into an *I*, it feels itself *I*, it thinks itself *I*. *I* touches and fixes itself making – saying – *I*. [...] “You” undergo this experience constantly, each time you put forward or conceive in your mind *ego*, each time – it happens to you constantly – you form the *o* of the first person (*first*, before it there is nothing): *ego cogito existo*. An *O* forms the immediate loop of your experience. Truly, it is the experience of *that* – and it *makes* or *forms* it because it cannot *be* it. (ES, 107).

To put it in other words: due to the *union* of “my” soul with *this* body, there is no experience that would distinguish my soul and my body wholly apart from one another.<sup>84</sup> In other words, there is no experience, thought, feeling, memory, dream or wish that would precede, succeed, transcend, establish or guarantee the indubitable yet precariously unstable *each time*, which is always, with *each* of its *times*, wholly indivisible and thoroughly corporeal. As a consequence, the (attentive) “self” convulses, which means that she never grasps herself with the indubitable clarity often attributed to her – be that in terms of her “inaugural” moment of doubt or in terms of “sense certainty”. Nancy formulates his forceful conclusion as follows:

*Unum quid*: a something that makes up a One without reification, and hence without oneness. And something that, for this reason, gives itself twice: as ego, as union.

In giving itself twice, the subject always gives itself – each day, each time, each time I say *I* and each time that I *live* – and never gives *itself*, since there is nothing that can *itself* be posited and grasped. The subject is nothing but the experience of the *unum quid*, and this experience is without object, status, or procedure. The proof of the union of the soul and the body is there less to provide an account of the finalised functionings that I observe in the being that we call human than to point out the being *per se* of the subject as being *per se* of the human being – who supports himself only by supporting himself with nothing. At the outer extremity of doubt as well as in everyday life, Descartes perceived – in the instant of a stroke of diaphragm – that the human being is the Subject, and that within the human being, the Subject infinitely ruins itself and collapses into the abyss. (ES, 109, translation slightly edited).

This means that the “self” of attentive experiences, which I have examined here by looking into Nancy’s analysis of the insubstantiality of the *unum quid*, either distinguishes herself in outer extremities of doubt or remains indistinguishable

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<sup>84</sup> Nancy describes the necessity of the *union* in *Corpus* as follows: “[I]t makes no sense to talk about body and thought apart from each other, as if each could somehow subsist on its own: they *are* only their touching each other, the touch of their breaking down, and into, each other. This touching is the limit and spacing of existence.” (C, 37).

from “her” corporeality in each of her worldly experiences.<sup>85</sup> This means that my analyses into the corporeality of the attentive “self”, “ego” or “I” have nothing to do with traditional empiricism, materialism or with the supposedly immediate “sensibilities”, belonging to or possessed as properties by a “sensing body”. These approaches neglect to recognize and inquire into the fundamental instability inherent in the *corpus ego*, which unravels any self-contained and self-present philosophical subject. Next, I will offer my interpretation of how Nancy’s concept of the *corpus ego* advances his analysis of the *unum quid* slightly further.

### 2.2.2 Corpus ego

In this section, I elaborate on how I understand Nancy’s philosophical figure of *corpus ego*. I explain this in three steps, in order to further explicate the philosophical framework of my research. I advance as follows:

- (i) I explain how Nancy continues his deconstructive analysis of the *ego cogito* by introducing his notion of *corpus ego* in *Corpus*. I do this by exploring how “I”, as a *corpus ego* (“corporeal I”), enunciate, articulate, utter and distinguish myself to myself with my mouth, voice and thoughts conjoined together, in *each* of my experiences.
- (ii) I explore the “egoic durability” of the Nancyan *corpus ego* by explaining how “I” experience “myself” as ex-tending from *each* punctually discreet *time* to another.
- (iii) And finally, I demonstrate how and why Nancy’s enunciatively distinguished and thoroughly corporeal “I” lacks any substantiality, *egoity*, *ipseity* or self-reflective presence transcending, succeeding or preceding my “own” being-to, by turning to his analysis of *a-se(lf)ity* (*l’aséité*).

In other words, in this section I explore how Nancy’s corporeal “I” (*soi*) is determined in terms of (*being*)-to: according to the logic of *to-self* (*à-soi*). Towards the conclusion of this section, I also detail how the “insubstantial vacuity” that is essential to *corpus ego*, the fact that “I” distinguish “myself” solely with and from *each* enunciation, extends “me” into the infinitely finite displacement of “my” corporeal span. This, in turn, allows for a contemplation of (and according to) the *zoned fractality* of worldly bodies, which forms the focus of the concluding section that explores my philosophical framework in section 2.2.3.

Nancy’s analysis in *Corpus*, centred around his figure of *corpus ego*, concerns the intricate conjoinment of thought and extension in each experience, which I here analyse in terms of how “I” experience “myself” and “my” strange and resisting body in terms of their uneasy conjoinment. Both methodologically and thematically, the trajectory of his argument continues his deconstructive

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<sup>85</sup> Antonia Birnbaum describes these two poles in-between which “I” experience “myself” as follows:

“Either the soul is the auto-affection of itself, an immaterial substance without extension, and is, then, of all interior things the one that’s most exterior. Or else the soul transfers itself improperly in its union with a body and then ceases to be a relation to self, becoming a self exposed in accord with corporeal exteriority, and thus exposed to others, present to the world[.]” (C, 145).

exploration of the Cartesian *unum quid*, a process initiated in his 1979 work *Ego Sum*. In this earlier work, Nancy explored how “I” experience things *each time* I utter, proffer or enunciate myself *to myself*. Let us return to the passage where Nancy introduces the notion of *corpus ego*, which was already quoted in the beginning of the previous chapter. He writes, as we can remember:

Not “my body,” but: *corpus ego*. “Ego” makes sense only when it is declared, proffered (and when proffered, its sense is exactly identical to existence: *ego sum, ego existo*). Descartes keenly remarks that this declaration owes its truth to the circumstance, the “each time,” of its statement: “each time I declare it, or conceive it” (where “conception,” “in my mind,” as Descartes specifies, clearly amounts to the act of proffering as one of its modes: it’s the same articulation). It needs *one time*, a discrete quantity providing articulation with a *space of time*, or a *place* (it’s not a contradiction, certainly, that this “once” happens unceasingly, every time, in every space of time, in every moment of existing: this simply indicates that existing exists along with this discreteness, or continuous discontinuity, in other words, with its body). In the Cartesian *ego*’s articulation, therefore, mouth and mind are the same: it’s always the body. Not the body *of* the ego, but *corpus ego*, “ego” being “ego” only when articulated, articulating itself as spacing or flexion, even the inflection of a *site*. The enunciation of “ego” doesn’t just *take place*. To the contrary, it is *place*. Unless localised, it is not: *ego = here*[.] (C, 25).

In this passage, Nancy traverses the path he initially embarked upon in *Ego Sum*: even amid the outer reaches of Cartesian doubt, thematised with the indubitability of the *ego sum*, “I” experience the punctuality of “myself” only through enunciating, asserting, conceiving or articulating myself *to myself*. And, as Nancy argues, each instance of enunciation involves the conjoinment of my mouth with my thought – whether in silence, aloud, through reading, or through contemplation. Thus, *each time* I do so, I enunciate myself *to myself* from *this* body, which provides *each* distinct, punctual and discreet *time* – each of “my” experiences as a doubting “I” – its “space of time, or a *place*”. This means that *each* of such *times* owns its possibility and actuality to its place and time of articulation, necessitating *this* body and its bodily voice: “I” exist *to things*, because *I am* conjoined with *this* body. At this point, we encounter one of the most crucial innovations in Nancy’s analysis of the *corpus ego*: *each time*, each “here and now”, it is *this* body that provides each of “my” times of *being-to* or *tending-to* – each “engaged presence” that is determined as “I think of...”, “I conceive”, “I sense”, “I enjoy”, or “I suffer” – with its worldly place and its punctual temporal occurrence.

Thus, it is the thorough corporeality of inaugural *ego sum* that enables Nancy to further develop his analysis of the *unum quid* in *Corpus*. He proceeds by explaining how the haecceity of *this* singular body exposes “me” as follows:

*Hic et nunc, hoc est enim* [“here and now, this is” –JPP]... In other words, here and now, according to this space – this pulse, this breakthrough of substance that the existing body is, absolutely corporeal existence. *I am*, every time I am, the flexion of a place, a fold or motion through which it prof-fers (itself). *Ego sum* this local inflection, singularly, such and such each time [...], even this accent, or this *tone*.

Thus the *corpus ego*’s material axiom, or the absolute archi-tectonic, implies that there’s no “ego” in general, only the one *time*, the occurrence and occasion for a *tone*: a tension, vibration, modulation, color, cry or song. Always, in any case, a *voice*, and not *vox significativa*, not a signifying order, but *the timbre of the place where a body exposes and proffers itself*. (C, 27).



This means that “I” – distinguishing “myself” as distinct from, yet conjoined with, *this* body – do not precede, succeed or transcend any *time* “I” exist *to* anything. Rather, *each* experience, each confused (read: conjoined) thought, feeling or memory that I have or undergo (of any body or any thing) intermixes “me” (in terms of “my soul”) with the absolute corporeality of “my” existence, which Nancy also thematises as the “*corpus ego*’s material axiom” (C, 27) and which he further describes by arguing that “I” enunciate myself within the conjoinment speech and thought in a distinct “tone”. Already in *Ego Sum*, Nancy elaborated how I experience myself in the intermixing of my thought and speech, voiced out with my mouth, lips and tongue as follows:

I pronounce or I conceive, I move my tongue or I cogitate, I open my mouth or my mind, I speak *and* I think, I speak while thinking, I think while speaking. The *human being* is the subject of speaking thought, not in the sense of discourse but of the uttering. (ES, 105).

With each sentence “I” think, read, sing or say, my (self-) experience emerges from the silent or voiced resonance of my mouth. This means that I exist in the tension in-between “my” recitative mouth and “my” articulative thought. However, how exactly do I experience myself as *one whole* beyond instances of speech and thought? How do I experience myself spanning from each time to another?

If each of “my” experiences is corporeally determined and thoroughly worldly, then “I” experience “myself” extending through time, from *each time* to another, solely by binding together multiple yet distinct *times* of enunciating. Nancy addresses this aspect rather quickly, almost as if discussing a minor detail, by describing the temporal cohesion of the enunciatively distinguished *corpus ego* as follows:

*Corpus ego* has no propriety, no “egoity” [égoité, -JPP] (still less any “egotism”): Egoity is a (necessary) signification of *ego*: ego binding itself to itself, binding the unbinding of its proffering, binding the body, tightening the lace of the *self* around it. Egoity installs continuous space, the indistinctness of the *times* of existence (and with it, the horror of death...), the closure of sense, or sense as closed. (C, 27, translation edited).

Nancy proposes here that I do not precede, succeed or transcend *each time* I distinguish myself to myself. Building on this premise, he contends that I signify, relate and extend from myself *to* myself only and exclusively in *each* of “my” plurally singular *times*. This implies that I “have” no egoic substantiality or egoic durability outside *each time*, but rather “I” extend from *each* discreet *time* to another. In other words, “I” do not transcend the temporal punctuality of *each time*; “I” do not precede “my” birth nor succeed “my” own death; “I” know myself, remember “my” life and anticipate “my” death from *each* singular time to the singular plurality of other yet similarly singular times.

But how do “I” relate to “my” body? Building on the punctuality of *each time*, Nancy’s analysis in *Corpus* explicates how “I” tend *to* myself, along the exposed span of this body, in the following terms:

The body is *self* in departure, insofar as it parts – displaces itself right here from the *here*. The intimacy of the body *exposes* pure a-seity as the swerve and departure that it

is. Aseity – the *a-se(lf)*, the to-itself, the by-itself of the Subject – exist only as the swerve and departure of this *a* – (of this *a-part-self*), which is the place, the moment proper of its presence, its authenticity, its sense. The *a-part-self*, as *departure*, is what’s exposed.

“Exposition” doesn’t mean that intimacy is extracted from its withdrawal, and carried outside, put on display. Because then the body would be an ex-position of the “self,” in the sense of a translation, an interpretation, or a staging. “Exposition,” on the contrary, means that expression itself is an intimacy and a withdrawal. The *a-part-self* is not translated or incarnated into exposition, it is what it is there: this vertiginous withdrawal of the self from the self that is needed to open the infinity of that withdrawal all the way up to self. The body is this departure of self to self.

*Exposed*, therefore: but this does not mean putting something in view that would have previously been hidden or shut in. Exposition, here, is the very being (what’s called “existing”). Or better yet: where the being, as subject, has for its essence self-positing; self-positing here is exposition itself, in and of itself, in essence and structure. *Auto = ex = body*. The body is the being-exposed of being. (C, 33–5).

“I” do not exist immanently or intimately<sup>86</sup> within “my” body, as an *ipseity* or *ipseity*,<sup>87</sup> just as “I” am not substantially available or present to myself, as I already elaborated when I discussed the constitutive instability of the *ego cogito* in *Ego Sum* and the punctual self-binding of the *corpus ego*. This means that “I” am not immanent to the vacuity of “my” own *here*, which was already established by Heidegger’s analysis of *nearing* in *Being and Time* and is now reinforced with Nancy’s reinterpretation of being as *being-to*. Rather, “I” exist *from* “my” finite bodily span, which is also exposed *to* others and *to* myself. Nancy explicates this with his term *aseity* (*L’aséité*): “I” exist nowhere else except in the *towardness* of corporeal existence, which exteriorises “me” from *this* body *toward* worldly things in “my” *experiences*. In his appendix to *Corpus* titled “The Extension of the Soul”, Nancy explores *experience* by describing how “I” extend to things: how I in-distinguish “my” knowledge of things from worldly things “out there”. He describes *experience* as...

...knowledge that is not distinguished from its object and, for that very reason, is not at all distinguished, but in-distinguishes itself to the extent of its ex-perience. It is simultaneously and indistinctly emotive and extensive. Whenever I know myself in this way, I am moved by my knowledge, just as I extend this knowledge to the things in which it is invested, like the beating of my heart, the attachment of a nail, or the gray tint and granulated surface of a table on which my hand is resting. I know myself as a beating, nail, tint, and surface. Which is to say that I know all these extensions of ego, which is moved by this, and that I reciprocally know the egoity of these extensions: the latter is called a world, in the contemporary if not the Cartesian sense of the word. (C, 144).

This is how “I” experience things that I attend toward: “I” (self-) experience things that are exposed to me and to which I, as *unum quid*, ex-tend toward. And, as Nancy notes, the things “I” tend to are worldly: my lovely grey cat, a line I am reading, my resonating throat, the expression of *ego sum*, which all are “my”

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<sup>86</sup> In his “On The Soul” (C, 129), Nancy reflects the vacuity of bodily intimacy by referring to the (metaphorical) resonance of the visceral body (erroneously contributing Leriche’s idea to Bichat): “The only veritable intimacy of the body is in silence. This is Bichat’s definition of health: health is life in the silence of the organs, when I don’t sense my stomach, my heart, or my viscera. There’s an intimacy there, but an intimacy that is merely not there, not sensible, it’s of the order of the mass.” I engage this thought in my research article “Noisy bodies: on the tactility and sonority of our visceral depths”.

<sup>87</sup> “Ipse” is *self* in Latin.

experiences insofar as they are “self-experiences” of each thing. Birnbaum describes how Nancy’s analysis of the *union* results in his reiteration of *experience* as follows:

The soul’s not subordinated to the body; in being linked to it, it unites with something improper to it. In consequence, the soul conjoined to the body doesn’t know according to the clear and distinct evidence of reason: it accedes to things, to others, that are there with it[.] [...] Lived knowledge is paradoxical in that it coincides with its very confusion, and further, with a confusion tending to mix body and soul. This mixing is the criterion not of the erroneous character of such knowledge but of its very existence. This knowledge designates the conjunction in which the more a person’s relation to the self is effaced, the more he experiences himself “in himself,” and in which self-presence finally stops being identified with the essence of some thing – a substance – and just becomes the presence of “someone” who feels himself here among others, who is there, among them all. Someone for whom being inside the world is synonymous with being exposed outside himself. (C, 148).

And how do “I”, conjoined with this body, see, hear, touch, smell, and taste others or myself? Nancy’s singular plural beings, after all, are not colourless, tasteless, silent, temperature-less or odourless surfaces determined as material extensions. Instead, each body is exposed and strewn across its *local* disassembly into different sensuous zones or regions. This fractality can be thematised or named, for instance, as “my” five senses, but obviously there are different ways to distinguish the sensuous zones other than those five. In *Corpus*, Nancy describes the sensuous fractality of worldly things as follows:

“[E]xposition” is very far from simply taking place as the extension of a surface. This very extension exposes other kinds – such as, for instance, the *partes extra partes* that is the singular dis-assembly of the “five senses.” A body is a sensing body [*corps sentant*, -JPP] only in this displacement or division of senses, which is neither the phenomenon nor the residue of a deep “auto-aesthesia” but yields, on the contrary, the entire property belonging to that simple tautology, the *aesthetic body*. (C, 35, translation slightly edited).

Therefore, in order to think about what makes up *each* of “my” selective, discerning, desirous and fleeting experiences of intriguing or frightening things – e.g. a textual body,<sup>88</sup> visceral resonances in terms of their tactility and sonority,<sup>89</sup> my breath or my heart<sup>90</sup> – I want to elaborate one more theme: the fractality of worldly bodies. In the next section, which wraps up my presentation of the Nancyan themes and analyses I employ in my research, I explain how I interpret Nancy’s analyses concerned with the fractality of bodies.

### 2.2.3 Fractality of worldly bodies

In this section, I briefly explore some of Nancy’s key analyses concerning the fractality of the world, in order to elucidate how “I” experience intriguing written

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<sup>88</sup> Puranen, J. (2023). “Recitative Voice: Reading Silently and Aloud, With Jean-Luc Nancy” in *SATS*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/sats-2022-0008>

<sup>89</sup> My currently unpublished manuscript titled “Noisy bodies: on the tactility and sonority of our visceral depths”.

<sup>90</sup> Puranen, J. (2022) “Bodily obsessions: intrusiveness of organs in somatic obsessive-compulsive disorder” in *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 25, 439–48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11019-022-10090-3>

or articulated sentences, resonating sounds, pleasant views or delicious tastes. In other words, I elaborate how I – as a *corpus ego* – touch,<sup>91</sup> smell, see, listen to and taste things that I find intriguing, surprising, painful or terrifying. As I demonstrate in this section, Nancy examines this circularity between (i) the displacement of the “bodily senses” and (ii) the fractality of worldly things briefly in his essays *Corpus* and *The Sense of the World*, and in slightly greater detail in his essay “Why Are There Several Arts?”, which was published after the two others in his 1994 book, *The Muses* (*Les Muses*, translated into English in 1996). I begin by presenting two passages from *The Sense of the World* and *The Muses*, which offer an overview into the sensible fractality of bodies. Nancy writes:

The sensible or the aesthetic is the outside-of-itself through which and *as* which there is the relation to itself of a sense in general, or through which there is the *toward* of sense. But there is no sense “in general,” nor is there a generic sense. There is sense only in local difference and differing division. [...] The five senses are not the fragments of a transcendent or immanent sense. They are the fragmentation or the fractality of the sense *that is sense only as fragment*. (SW, 129).

There would be no world if there were no discreteness of zones (an extension more ancient than any origin): in fact, only this discreteness allows the thing to be what it is, that is, thing in itself, which does not mean “thing grasped in an essence that has retreated to the farthest point, behind appearance,” but *thing itself*, that is, still *right at itself* or *next to itself*. For a thing to have, potentially, “something” like an “interiority” or an “intimacy,” it must still first be itself, and thus laid out [*disposée*] right at itself, very precisely. (One could say: superimposed on itself, and thus touching itself, near / far, *distanted in itself*.)

This disposition implies a dis-position; it implicates itself as disposition, discreteness, plurality, and heterogeneity of “zones.” The latter are not at all merely diverse localisations in a homogeneous space. They are at the same time, by virtue of a spacing that is not first of all spatial but ontological (“space” is here the name of “Being”), the absolute difference of appearance or of being-to-the-world as such. (M, 19, translation edited).

In this section, I elaborate on this zoned fractality of worldly bodies<sup>92</sup> by offering my interpretation of Nancy’s analyses of *weighing upon*, *touching*, *pleasure* and *suffering*. I present these analyses by looking into his works *Corpus* and *The Muses*. Nancy’s analysis of *touching* (*toucher*), in particular, allows me to explain how “I”, as a *corpus ego*, (at-, ex-) tend to things – to singular bodies or to the-*there* that is the world, made of plural beings exposed to one another. I initiate this discussion by considering the tactility of “me” and “my” body, which Nancy undertakes through a brief reflection upon the classic example of “self-touch” and by critically engaging the idea of experiencing one’s “own” body immediately, clearly or evidently.

How do I, as a *corpus ego*, feel “myself” as touching-on and being-touched-upon, when I run fingers across my skull? In his *Corpus*, Nancy describes how “I” (self-) sense “myself”, when I touch “my” body as follows:

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<sup>91</sup> For recent texts on Nancy’s thinking of the bodily senses, see James (2016); Waltham-Smith (2016).

<sup>92</sup> An attentive experience analysed in terms of the fractality of the-*there* obviously differs between sensuous existents: e.g. bats, humans, cats and maybe even plants tend to things, each according to their own divisions of the senses, tact, sensuality and being.

*Feeling oneself touching you* (and not “oneself”) [*Se toucher toi* (et non “soi”), -JPP] – or else, identically, *feeling oneself touching skin* (and not “oneself”): the body is always forcing this thought farther forward, always too far. Thought itself, at this point, is really forcing itself, dislocating itself: because the whole weight, the gravity, of thought – in itself a *weighing* – amounts to nothing more than a *consenting to bodies*. (C, 39).

Each time “I” (self-) touch upon “my” skull, I feel “myself” as touching-and-being-touched-by “you” (*toi*) or “skin” (*peau*). Explicitly, this means that “I” do not experience “me” (*soi*), “myself” or “my own” body when I touch my bony skull with my fingers. What this means is that when “I” touch my skull (or any other body), “I” feel its opaque and resisting extensive span, (i) as impenetrable and solid, as impossible for my soul to penetrate with thought and (ii) as an impenetrable and tangible body that resists all other bodies including itself. In other words, when “I” touch (or look, smell, taste, listen, hear) “my” own body (or any other body), “I” do *not* penetrate, feel, experience or know “me” or “myself” throughout or comprehensively beyond *this* body that “I” touch upon. “I” do not surpass or reach over the tangible resistance of *this* body, which “dislocates” my confused thoughts of weighing upon exactly at its hard extensive face.<sup>93</sup> Instead, “I” feel “myself” touching-and-being-touched-upon exactly at its impenetrable exteriority; “I” experience *consenting* to “my” body and other bodies “I” am exposed to, which means that my “confused thoughts”<sup>94</sup> of touching and being-touched-upon in-distinguish “myself” from “my extension”. Nancy describes exactly this intricacy of touching in *The Muses*, drawing from Derrida’s approximation of Nancyan touching, as follows:

What makes for touch is “this interruption, which constitutes the touch of the *self-touching*, touch as *self-touching*.”<sup>95</sup> Touch is the interval and the heterogeneity of touch. Touch is proximate distance. It makes one sense what makes one sense (what it *is* to sense): the proximity of the distant, the approximation of the intimate. (M, 17, translation edited).

To put this in simple terms: each time I feel a cold wind, my soft cat or my lungs as I circulate air, “my” experiences are exclusively due to *this* body, which is “my” tangible, tactile and sensitive exteriority and which, at times of, for example, hunger or distress, also extends to the depths of my visceral body.

But how do smiles, textures, contours, colours, meows, words, smells, aches and tastes weigh upon “me”? In *Corpus*, Nancy makes use of the polysemic

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<sup>93</sup> As James notes (2006, 38), one finds an intriguing difference between Nancy and Merleau-Ponty in their thinking of the tension between the soul and the body, which differentiates how they understand the corporeality of worldly existence and the notion of *experience*. James describes their difference as follows:

“In [*Phenomenology of Perception*] it was shown that, for Merleau-Ponty, the incarnate sense of embodied existence ‘invests and deeply penetrates matter’ (PoP, 324). [For Nancy] matter is the impenetrable, that which, in its extension, is always outside or exterior to the world of phenomenal appearance. Yet through the touch or contact in which the two forms of extension, that of sense and that of matter, are exposed to each other, the world of phenomenal appearance is disclosed and the spatial-temporal event of being occurs.”

<sup>94</sup> Recall Descartes’s Second Meditation (93): “[A]ll these sensations of hunger, thirst, pain, etc. are in truth none other than certain confused modes of thought which are produced by the union and apparent intermingling of mind and body.”

<sup>95</sup> Here Nancy quotes Derrida’s approximation of Nancyan touch, presented in Derrida 1993, 127.

plurality intrinsic to *weighing upon*, when he elaborates how bodies *weigh* upon one another – how all things, in their innumerable ways, exist by being-in-contact-with one another. In essence, he delineates the fractality of bodies by explaining how worldly contact between bodies, in every conceivable sense, is fragmented, zoned, fractal and plural, by describing the corpus of con-tact as follows:

A corpus of tact: skimming, grazing, squeezing, thrusting, pressing, smoothing, scraping, rubbing, caressing, palpating, fingering, kneading, massaging, entwining, hugging, striking, pinching, biting, sucking, moistening, taking, releasing, licking, jerking off, looking, listening, smelling, tasting, ducking, fucking, rocking, balancing, carrying, weighing...

Even without a synthesis, everything ends up communicating with weighing. A body always weighs or lets itself be weighed, poised. A dense areality, zones en masse. A body doesn't have a weight: even in medicine, it *is* a weight. It weighs on, it presses against other bodies, right up against other bodies. Between it and itself, it's still weighing, counterweight, buttressing. Our world has inherited the world of gravity: all bodies weigh *on* one another, and *against* one another, heavenly bodies and callous bodies, vitreous bodies and corpuscles. (C, 93)

In addition to various tactile body-to-body contacts,<sup>96</sup> I would like to observe two things:<sup>97</sup> not only does Nancy encompass looking, listening, smelling and tasting within his *tactile* corpus, but he also includes the acts of balancing and releasing. The last two extend his tactile corpus to the minuscule and intricate organs within ears, responsible for the sensualities of balance, and to the spacing of the world, the intangible *extra* that allows for the variations of swerve, displacement, departure and gap between *partes*.

Returning to looking, listening smelling and tasting, how should I understand fractality of sensuous displacement in terms of “my” experiences, which Nancy elaborates above in terms of how bodies weigh *on* and *against* one another? I explore the displacement, fractality or zoning of “my” experiences in three senses: (i) as intrinsic to each of my bodily senses, (ii) in terms of the *extra* between them, and (iii) in terms of their contact. I suggest that we can get a grasp of the sensuous fractality of the-*there* by examining two passages from *The Muses*. Nancy writes:

[E]very *aisthesis* is pleasure, inasmuch as it is interested *aisthesis*, first of all interested in itself, inasmuch as “sensing-itself-sense” characterises *aisthesis* for Aristotle, rendering useless any supposition of a “common sense.” Pain, on the other hand, would be *aisthesis* that repels itself, in the sense that it senses itself repel itself. (M, 106–7 n. 26, translation slightly edited).

Touch is nothing other than the touch or stroke of sense altogether and of all the senses. It is their sensuality as such, sensed and sensing. But touch itself – inasmuch as it is a sense and consequently inasmuch as it senses itself sensing, inasmuch as it *senses itself sensing itself*, since it only touches by touching also itself, touched by what it touches *and* because it touches – touch presents the proper moment of sensuous exteriority; it presents it *as such and as sensuous*. (M, 17, translation edited).

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<sup>96</sup> Here I cannot delve into questions of ethics, responsibility, tact and tactfulness operative in, and demanded by, ontological thinking of bodies, Cf. Derrida, *On Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy* (2005).

<sup>97</sup> As also Derrida notes (2005).

In these passages, we can discern how each *experience* is fundamentally or structurally a “self-experience”, which Nancy explores by referring to the notion of *pleasure* and the analyses of *aisthesis* in Aristotle. To put his suggestion in simple terms: it is not only touch that relates “me” to the hard opacity of “my” body; every experience is structured as a self-experience of being weighed upon, given that the “self” is determined in terms of the constitutively insubstantial *corpus ego*. For instance, when “I” listen to a sound, “my” reverberant body resonates the sounds “I” am, and “my” ears are, penetrated by.<sup>98</sup> A few lines after the last quoted passage, Nancy continues by elaborating tactility and extension. He does this by explaining how touch, tangibility and extension relate and how the senses other than touching intermix with touch:

*Le toucher* – perhaps it would be better to say *la touche*, or else one would have to preserve the verbal value of the word, as when one speaks of “le sentir,” “sensing” – thus has no “primacy” or “privilege” except insofar as it subordinates nothing to it: it is or it gives but the general extension and particular extraposition of sensing. Touch *forms one body* with sensing, or it makes of the sensing faculties a body – it is but the corpus of the senses. (M, 17).

It is *this* tangible and impenetrable body extends “me” along each of my exposed part: I touch with and from each “particular extraposition of sensing”, spread out across “my” exposed, impenetrable and fragile body. In this passage, Nancy also points out that while my other senses are not subservient to or derived from tactility or tangibility, they are nonetheless integral parts of *this* extended body. This means that while my other senses are not derived from (nor reducible to) tactile experiences, due to the impenetrability of their sensuous boundaries, they are still bodily senses spread into parts of *this* extended body, with which “I” am conjoined. How exactly should we understand the contact between the senses? How does Nancy explicate the intriguing interplay between senses and what implications does his explication hold for my analysis of being-toward?

If we look into Nancy’s *Corpus* and *The Muses*, we encounter two slightly differing explorations into the fractality of the bodily senses. Nancy’s explorations aim to answer the following question: when I sense things, and when things *weigh upon* me across the sensuous fractality, do “I” experience their fragmented senses as touching upon one another and, if so, how exactly? With some years between his two texts, what he offers us are two somewhat contrasting responses. In *Corpus*, after elaborating on how each experience can be understood as self-interested-*pleasure*, he proceeds to argue in the section he places in parentheses (which already anticipates his analyses undertaken in *The Muses* by drawing broad outlines for his upcoming study) that our senses do not touch one another, but instead they keep to themselves within their own boundaries. Nonetheless, Nancy revisits this question soon after in *The Muses* (1994), asserting that the senses do indeed touch one another exactly at (and with) their impenetrable and intrinsic limits, when he explains how each experience (of

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<sup>98</sup> In my article on visceral resonances, I offer an analysis of how each of my sonorous experiences depends on the re-resonance of my vibrant body.

things in terms of their worldly fractality) relates “me” to “myself”. His two differing passages advance as follows:

The delighted body [*Le corps jouit*, -JPP] is extended in all its senses, making sense of all at once and of none. The delighted body is like a pure sign-of-self, subject to being neither sign nor self. Delight itself is a corpus of zones, masses, thicknesses extended, areolas offered, touch itself dispersed in all its senses, which do not communicate with each other (senses *don't touch each other*, there's no “common sense,” no sensing “in itself”: Aristotle knows it, saying that each sense senses *and* senses itself sensing, each on its own with no overarching control, each one withdrawn, as sight, as hearing, as taste, smell, touch, each delighted and knowing that it delights in the absolute apartness of its delight; all theory of art issues from this starting point.) (C, 118).

Sensing and the sensing-oneself-sense that *makes* for sensing itself consist always in sensing at the same time that there is some other (which one senses) and that there are other zones of sensing, overlooked by the zone that is sensing at this moment, or else on which this zone touches on all sides but only at the limit where it ceases being the zone that it is. Each sensing touches on the rest of sensing as that which it cannot sense. Sight does not see sound and does not hear it, even though it is also in itself, or *right at* itself, that it touches on this nonseeing and is touched by it... (M, 17).

As we can see, Nancy's perspective on the contact between the “zoned” senses alters as he advances from *Corpus* to *The Muses* (in addition to his understanding of how the fractality of the senses relates to the question of the art(s), which I cannot engage with here). In *The Muses*, each sense is no longer absolutely apart and wholly withdrawn, simply due to the fact that worldly things weigh upon one another, displaced across their fractality, which is not limited exclusively to tactility or touching. How are we to understand Nancy's position in *The Muses*? I suggest that by exploring an experience of a painful sound, I can arrive at a lucid comprehension of how “my” body *is* “the corpus of the senses”, as Nancy phrases it in *The Muses* (17).

To thematise such an experience of pain, I advocate returning once more to passages from Nancy's texts. In *Corpus*, he characterises pleasure and pain (*douleur*) as follows:

[I]t makes no sense to talk about body and thought apart from each other, as if each could somehow subsist on its own: they *are* only their touching each other, the touch of their breaking down, and into, each other. This touching is the limit and spacing of existence. But it has a name, it is called “joy” [*joie*; also *plaisir*, “pleasure”, “delight” in Nancy's texts -JPP] and “suffering” or “pain.” No doubt this name only signifies the limit of all signification – and the very edge, the approach, of spacing. It signifies nothing, exposing instead the combination of those four terms: body-thought-joy-pain. Their figures touch upon a swerve common to all four, which distributes them. (C, 37, translation slightly edited).

Nancy refers to his *corpus ego*, to his “bodily I” determined as an *unum quid* of thought and extension, to think of pleasure and pain. Through their *union*, we can proceed to explain how each experience, extending “me” to the-*there* of the world, can be thought in terms of *pleasure* and *pain*. How do these two relate to one another? Are they symmetrically opposed, as one might easily assume? If we look into another section from *Corpus*, we find Nancy arguing that one can think of their relation as follows:

The body delights in being touched. It delights in being squeezed, weighed, thought by other bodies, and being the one that squeezes, weighs, and thinks other bodies.



*Bodies*, meaning areolas withdrawn, *partes extra partes*, from an undivided totality that doesn't exist. A body delectable [*jouis-sable*, -JPP] *because* withdrawn, extended to one side and thereby offered to touch.

Delight and pain are opposites unopposed to one another. A body is *also* enjoyed in pain (and this remains absolutely alien to what gets called masochism). It remains extended, exposed there – yes, to the point of unbearable rejection. (C, 117-9).

Nancy describes pain and suffering here as experiences of unbearable and rejectable pleasure – in terms of weighing on too much. In other words, “I” feel pain, conjoined with “my” body, when something weighs – presses, heats, cuts, pushes, slaps, pressures, holds or grabs – on “me” too intensely in any way. Thus, an experience of pain takes me toward the point of “unbearable rejection” of “myself” confused with *this* body, which “I” feel as hurting “me” extensively along its extent, as “one whole”. I suggest that by thinking, very briefly, how “I” experience such unbearable weighing upon in terms of sonorous (or luminous, olfactory, gustatory) pain, we can get a grasp of how the fragmented senses relate to one another. This, I argue, allows me to elaborate how *weighing* makes up “one body with sensing” (M, 17) and how *weighing* makes up my sensuous exposition to the world, and to myself (as a *corpus ego*).

I suggest that we turn our attention to the following: is a loud sound painful solely as a sonorous (or auditory) experience? I would disagree. I would describe a painful sonorous resonance as follows: when a sound is too loud, not only do I experience an excess of resonance, but such a resonance also tactilely weighs on me. I experience “sonorous” pain as a pressure, weighing or tension tactilely within my ears. Similarly, if I gaze directly into the sun, its excessive luminance not only blinds me, but it causes tactile discomfort in my eyes. I would argue the same for smells and tastes, which bear upon me not only within their intrinsic sensual complexities, but also along my tactilely exposed span and onto their specific “sense organs.” This implies that “my” senses indeed touch one another, exactly along their sensuous limits. When things weigh excessively upon me, I feel pain. I suggest that this approach offers a way to comprehend what Nancy means when he posits that “touch” or weighing upon constitutes one body *with* sensing: *weighing* extends “me” tactilely along my exposed span, across sensuous “zones” and along their “intrinsic” sensuous limits.

To conclude, I would like to advance through one more passage from Nancy’s essay “On the Soul”. In this passage, he explains how I, as a *corpus ego*, experience the weighing upon between the body and the soul, when I extend to the-*there* of the world. He writes:

If we’ve talked about the soul, if our entire tradition has spoken, and in various ways, about the soul, it’s because, for good or ill, and partly in spite of itself, it has thought, not in the soul alone but in the *difference* between body and soul, the difference that the body *is* in itself, for itself – this difference in tension, in extension, in a certain tone of the outside. And what’s been thought under the name of *soul* is nothing other than the experience of the body. It’s simple, and it’s on the textual surface of the whole tradition. What’s the soul, if not the experience of the body, not as an experience among others, but as the sole experience? The whole of experience is there, *in nuce*, in the experience of the body – in the experience that the body is. The soul is a name for the experience that the body *is*. *Experiri*, in Latin, is precisely going outside, leaving without a destination, crossing through something without knowing whether we will

return from it. A body is what pushes to the limit, blindly, while groping, hence while touching. (C, 134).

As a summary of this section, this is how I understand each of “my” *experiences* as being corporeally determined and thoroughly worldly: “I” experience other worldly bodies and “myself” only due to being conjoined with every part of *this* body, which is neither “me” nor “mine”. Each of “my” experiences, thoughts, feelings or memories is thoroughly corporeal, because “I” am, in terms of the “unity” of my soul, constitutively insubstantial and punctually determined only in terms of “my” exposure-*to-the-world* and *to-myself* due to *this* body. But how exactly do “I” find *some* things more intriguing than others? The last part of my dissertation summarises the results of my research: how the corporeality of existence determines “me” in each of “my” attentive experiences. I offer a summary of my results by offering an interpretation of how to think of each experience as *desirous*.

### 3 RESULT OF THIS DISSERTATION: “I” DESIRE THINGS

In this section, I summarise the results of my research with a condensed exploration of attentive experiences interpreted as *desirous*. By thinking how *desire* is driven solely by its own thrust, I demonstrate how we can think of attentive experiences without hinging upon a “self” who would precede and transcend her “own” attentive experiences. In order to think how “I” tend to things, I turn to Nancy’s analysis of *desire* (*désir*), which he elaborates most prominently in his later works, such as *Corpus II: Writings on Sexuality and Sexistence*. I bring up Nancy’s analysis because it enables me to draw conclusive remarks regarding how I, as a *corpus ego*, experience things *each time* I tend into, unto, to or toward anything that intrigues, surprises or frightens me. I rely on my own interpretation of Nancy’s analyses to explain how I understand attentive experiences as *desirous* – as corporeally determined and as thoroughly worldly. Utilising my interpretation, I explain how my analyses of attentive reading<sup>99</sup> and bodily obsessions<sup>100</sup> allow me to deconstructively engage the substantiality of the “I” in attentive experiences.

How does it feel when I turn toward an intriguing detail instead of something else? What transpires “in me”, when something bothers me? How exactly am “I” selective, caring, fearful, aroused or curious? In other words, how do I experience the *élan* of turning to and being-present-to something that was said or something I just thought, someone I cherish, or even someone who elicits fear? In one of his last published works, *Sexistence*,<sup>101</sup> Nancy develops an analysis of how “I” exist *toward* (and away from) things. Drawing from Nancy’s *Sexistence*, by exploring his analysis of *desire*, I demonstrate the following: if *each* of my attentive experiences is driven by no reason, cause, choice or decision made

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<sup>99</sup> Puranen, J. (2023). “Recitative Voice: Reading Silently and Aloud, With Jean-Luc Nancy” in *SATS*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/sats-2022-0008>

<sup>100</sup> Puranen, J. (2022) “Bodily obsessions: intrusiveness of organs in somatic obsessive-compulsive disorder” in *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 25, 439–48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11019-022-10090-3>

<sup>101</sup> Published originally in 2018 in French as *Sexistence* and translated into English under the same title in 2021 by Steven Miller.

outside its own drive – if *desire* is driven by nothing outside its own thrust – then no egoic or attentional “self” exists outside *each* experience of being-to. This implies that “I” bind myself “egoically” from *each* instance of *desire* to another. In other words, I *am* myself due to *each* desirous thought, each desirous engagement with things that matter to me, due to each memory I value, each experience that evokes fear or repulsion.

If I decide to think how I experience things and myself (as I have already and in detail examined above, by delving into Nancy’s analyses of the *unum quid*, *ego sum*, and the peculiar *quasi* that leads to his composite notion of *corpus ego*), particularly in terms of how I am driven,<sup>102</sup> thrust and desirous, I cannot avoid<sup>103</sup> ending up in the presence of figures and dialogues from the vast expanse of literature, philosophy and sciences. There is, first of all, the well mapped path traversed by the figure of Eros, whom we can recognise as traversing from Plato’s Socrates all the way to Freud and Lacan,<sup>104</sup> and whose familiar traits Nancy also identifies within Dasein’s *ek-sistence*.<sup>105</sup> There is, equally, the longstanding tradition of perceiving the practice of philosophical thought as desirous in, as and especially *for* itself, which means portraying philosophical thought as an experience of desire for knowledge or as a self-desire for self-knowledge, with its origins in Plato’s *phronesis* and a continuity that stretches to us through late modernity.<sup>106</sup> However, neither is Nancy in *Sexistence*, nor I in my study, after drive operative only in my desire of (and for) philosophical self-knowledge.

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<sup>102</sup> As Nancy notes (2021, 126, n. 32), there is an intriguing study of drive (*Trieb*, *pulsion*) in Heidegger undertaken by Christian Ciocan titled “Sur le concept de pulsion (*Trieb*) chez Heidegger”; on the question of *drive* also see Rudolf Bernet’s recent and impressive *Force, Drive, Desire*, Bernet 2018.

<sup>103</sup> As he makes explicitly clear throughout multiple sections of his essay (S, 11–6; 50–2).

<sup>104</sup> Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe offer an extensive critical analysis of the Lacanian “enunciative” subject in their *Le Titre de la lettre*.

<sup>105</sup> Nancy moves from Freud’s Eros to Dasein in *Sexistence* by making a connection between their *élan* as follows: “The Freudian enterprise is, in an essential manner, an energetics. What is determined as the drive, in at least two different forms (pleasure and destruction), derives its force from a ‘displaceable energy, which, neutral in itself, can be added to a qualitatively differentiated erotic or destructive impulse, and augment its total cathexis.’ [...]”

And later, he specifies that it can be supposed this energy proceeds from a ‘narcissistic store of libido,’ that is, ‘desexualized Eros.’ This singular Eros is only ‘desexualized’ to the extent that it hasn’t yet turned toward an outside. [...] Here we find ourselves at the origin or the principle, at the most ancient archaeology of what we gladly call ‘a subject,’ or of what Heidegger calls *Dasein*: the existent who opens its own ‘there,’ its world and its way of being in it.” (S, 12).

<sup>106</sup> Nancy portrays this tradition of thinking as follows: “From Plato to Hegel, from Nietzsche to us, desire has always shown itself to be the desire of desire. The fact that, for a long time, it was diverted into the desire for knowledge – a distinctive trait of our culture – should not make us ignore that in knowledge itself a desire abides: the desire for true knowledge is the desire for knowledge that knows itself knowing and that thus infinitely enjoys itself in the manner of Hegel’s ‘absolute knowledge.’ This knowledge, indeed, is similar in this respect to Spinoza’s ‘intellectual love’ as well as to the infinite self-overcoming of science in Husserl – only to cite two possible examples. There is no knowledge that does not desire self-knowledge: this is the regime of logos. ‘Know thyself’ does not command us to be self-conscious in the usual sense of this expression but rather to know oneself as knowing and consequently as able to relate to oneself as an object of one’s own knowledge, an object that, in turn, cannot be posited but must make itself the subject of the gap whereby it diverges from itself in order infinitely to return to itself.” (S, 50–1).

Instead, the philosophical figures Nancy decides and desires to engage with (as they are throughout most of the key sections in his thinking of bodies, spread across dozens of essays written over the last four decades) are those of *ego cogito* and *Dasein*. It is these figures that, as demonstrated in the previous chapters and throughout this dissertation, equip me with intricate and abundant resources to elaborate how, in each of my experiences, thought and extension weigh upon one another.

I commence with an articulated exposition of *desire* from Nancy's *Sexistence*, which maps out several of its traits, subsequently followed up by a more nuanced elaboration. Nancy's initial explication, which we will peruse briefly, is a response to a following passage from Gustave Flaubert's (1821 - 1880) *Correspondance Vol. III* (quoted and analysed by Nancy in S, 66-8), where Flaubert describes how the tension between the body and the soul unfolds within (or "as") each desirous experience:

I am convinced the most furious material appetites are formulated *unknowingly* [*insciémment*] by the élans of idealism in much the same way as the most unclean carnal extravagances are engendered by the pure desire for the impossible, the ethereal aspiration of sovereign joy. I do not know (and nobody knows) what these two words mean: body and soul, where the one ends, where the other begins. We feel forces and that is all. (Flaubert 1991, 16-7).

The last part of Flaubert's passage, his observation of unknowingly feeling the carnal, ethereal, aspirational forces of desire, serves as a catalyst for Nancy's contemplation: exactly how do I, *unknowingly*, feel desire, particularly if thematised in terms of my body weighing upon my soul? In an effort to comprehend such desirous experiences, aligning with Flaubert's perspective of the sensuous opacity of such forces, Nancy (re-) turns to his own interpretation of the *unum quid* and formulates his reply as follows:

The experience - ordeal, practice, usage, exercise - of such forces takes place between the body and the soul, without their distinction and yet as if by crossing an ungraspable limit. Nothing other than a passage toward an outside whereby an inside is figured: a passage that distinguishes body and soul - each, according to Descartes, providing matter for the other, a compact matter-extension, gathered in upon itself, and a subtle matter, united at every point to the body of the speaking animal. The senses have a very clear knowledge of this union of body and soul; but pure thought only knows how to distinguish them, such is its work. The senses know in a very certain and ultimately undeniable manner that this union is force expressing itself, in accord with its nature as force, with its thrust. (S, 68).

With or within *each* one of "my" desirous experiences, the opaque, sensuous, ecstatic thrust of "my" desire distinguishes the "intimacy" of my soul. In simpler terms, I experience "myself" in (or as) each forceful and driven passage *to* things that I find intriguing, surprising or hideous. This means that "I" distinguish "me" for myself in and with *each* of "my" ecstatically driven experiences. But *how* exactly do I experience myself as desirous? I turn to another passage from Nancy's *Sexistence* in order to offer a more nuanced answer.

In the next passage to be discussed, we find Nancy further elaborating desirous experiences, delving into aspects such as "my" (i) voice, gestures and gaze, (ii) tactility and expressivity, (iii) the focal, discreet or singular nature of

desire, and (iv) how desire advances *to* things as its own limit or end. Nancy accomplishes all of this by elaborating upon how the tension between sexual, cognitive, intellectual, artistic, or spiritual drives (as studied by Nietzsche and Freud) can be contemplated as an experience, which he analyses in terms of the conjunction of the body and the soul. He writes:

In one sense or another, it [being-driven, -JPP] is always precisely a matter of the body and the soul. The drive – desire, thrust, address – passes from one to the other. It makes and it forms this passage. Which is it, then? It is the passage from the inside to the outside, very exactly. The inside only occurs after the fact, as the retraction of the élan that opens the outside. The voice, the gesture, and the gaze carry out into the open in order to form – one might say, to perform – nothing other than this opening itself and with it a relation, a distance and a proximity with other openings.

[...]Desire in all its vicissitudes and energies is the desire of desire – that is, the expansion of being as the very essence of “being” or “existing.” How not to represent it, confusedly as one inevitably does, as a blind or brilliant thrust at every point of existence, at every place and every moment of the world (and also, just as well, spread over its totality)?

In the speaking animal, desire signals itself to itself. It carries itself tangibly and expressly to the extremity of its motion and its emotion – that is, to an excess that culminates in its own vanishing. Spasm and silence. (2021, 52-3, translation slightly edited).

I experience “myself” as one whole, *unum quid*, because I *desire* some things. To be more explicit, Nancy contends that “I” experience “myself” in, within or with “my” gaze, when I look at singular or singularly plural things I want to see. Similarly, I experience myself in my voice as I articulate, read, think, express, withhold or shout words and sentences that I desire to express or grasp. “I” experience “myself” in “my” gestures, thoughts and movements *to* or away from things that please, arouse, intrigue, frighten, disgust or displease “me”. “My” *desire* toward things, which is fragmented into the plurality of the sensuously fractal (or displaced) world, constitutes the corpus of “me”. This means that each experience of *desire* opens or discloses “me” to “myself” as an (self-) experience of tending *to* things that are over *there*.

When I gaze at something I wish to see or when I say something I want to say, I *desire* these singular things over the plurality of other things I do not look at, say, feel weighed upon by or, in other words, notice or pay attention to. This feature or trait – the singular and discreet directionality, focality or punctuality of *desire* – is highlighted by Nancy in the second portion of his passage. He does this by cautioning against representing attention, “confusedly”, as a chaotic, blind or totalising thrust. Instead, he encourages thinking of desire as directional and ecstatic nearing to singular things.

And finally, in the concluding section, he contends that *desire* carries “me” to things both “tangibly and expressly”.<sup>107</sup> This implies that *desire* characterises any experience of being-*to* anything singular, tangible, colourful, distinguishable and impenetrable – any singular thing I can tend towards, away from and against. This means any particular, extended, tangible, tasty or smelly body, or any body of thought I imagine or remember. *Desire*, thus, can be thought as the

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<sup>107</sup> On *desire* to hear, listen, express and say, see Van Der Heiden 2021 and also Nancy’s early essay (1990) on voice, speech, resonance and *logos* titled “Sharing Voices”.

directional thrust of being-*to* anything that “I” want to look at, push, touch, say or listen to. *Desire* names the *élan* that directs and drives “me” – drives my movement, my gaze, my expression, and my thought “to the extremity of its motion and emotion”, which is always some distinctly local and exemplary thing.

To provide a more tangible perspective on *desire*, I will briefly turn to the results presented in my articles. I initiate this exploration by elaborating upon attentive reading,<sup>108</sup> while also incorporating brief insights from my research into intruding bodily experiences and into experiences of visceral resonance. How can I understand attentive reading in terms of the *desirous corpus ego*? As I illustrate in my article, when “I” read, I experience myself with and within my advancement through my text, which I conceptualise with the help of Nancy’s notion of *recitative voice*. By utilising this notion, I explore how I experience my text *and* myself with the words that I have already read through – either silently or out loud – and as *desirous* to advance into and through words I have not yet encountered. In essence, each line makes sense as an advancing recitative voice *for* me and *as* me – as a desirous self-experience of words following one another. When I read, I constantly interrupt myself, if only ever so slightly, at or with each letter, word and sentence. Simultaneously, I continue to advance through my text. This means that my *recitative voice*, constituting “my” passage through my text, is suspended between the words that make their sense one after another. My text can read out as exhilarating, boring, obnoxious, terrible or excruciating, but *each* time I read, in *every* experience of reading, “my” experience requires that I *desire* to advance through its textual body *and* that I do advance through its textual body.

However, all of a sudden, I might succumb to daydreams that annoyingly, yet often entirely surreptitiously, pull me away from my text. I might also be disturbed by a loud noise or, if I suffer from somatic OCD, by a feeling of having to circulate air with the constant movement of lungs. In the case of daydreaming, I desire into dreams that interrupt me. On the other hand, when confronted with a sudden loud sound or by an experience of having to breathe, I (most often) desire to turn myself away from the things that impinge upon me and disrupt my reading. However, the most crucial aspect concerning the attentional “self” in *desire* lies in the fact that I do not consciously choose to be intruded upon, just as I do not precede or consciously decide upon my own desire. In other words, “I” do not precede “my” desirous inclination in any of “my” acts of desiring *to* or *away from* things. This implies that I cannot differentiate “myself” as distinct from “my” desire. Nancy addresses this lack of distinction as follows:

Ultimately, what’s at stake is the desire of the thing, no matter what it is. The desire for the thing and the desire that the thing “is” – which is to say, exposes, advances, and follows. The two desires are the same: nobody comes before the thing in order to desire it and the existence of the thing, whatever it is (the thing in itself), is its own desire. Needless to say, the nonliving – stone, electron, gas, and so on – cannot be

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<sup>108</sup> In my article on *recitative voice*, I offer a more nuanced analysis of the corporeality of attentive reading, which analyses reading in terms of “my” voice, gaze, and ears, and in terms of being *desirous* for words.

considered as a subject of desire: but at stake is precisely the opposite, desire as the thrust whereby it exists. [...]

An excess, an exceedance or transcendence. A thrust of being that has no sense (nor reason, nor cause, nor end) other than to be thrust by... its own excess. Which isn't its "own" because there is no property whatsoever that may be attributed to "being."

Short of any property, it happens and it exists. It gives itself because it is not given, it desires itself without being desired by anyone. (S, 59-60).

Thus, whether I gaze at beautiful clouds, engross myself in reading a text, drift into daydreams, become startled by unexpected sounds, feel stuck with maintaining the rhythmic flow of my own breath that I cannot easily turn away from, or even excruciating pain, "my" experiences are not propelled by a prior conscious decision to engage with these specific sentences, thoughts, auditory encounters, or painful experiences – not even my "own" *being*. This means that "I" do not, in any way, pre-exist "my" being determined as being-*to*. At *each* instance, there are various and conflicting things that I desire or desire-away-from, which surprise, detest, pull me in or interrupt me. These various tendencies often give rise to attentional struggles between things I find compelling and those I would prefer to avoid, yet find myself unable to do so, because "I" do not possess an "egoic" control over what surprises or captivates me as surprising or captivating.

In order to conclude, I wish to draw a few general outlines concerning the corporeality of tending to some things instead of other things. How do "I", in the broadest sense, desire some things throughout "my" finite, mortal and corporeal existence? In his essay "Strange Foreign Bodies"<sup>109</sup> Nancy describes the desirous *élan* of corporeal existence as follows:

Body is nothing other than the strangeness of being. But body is only the body of the desire that reaches toward it – without that it is just a local contraction of forces. But its form quickly escapes it. The form of a body, this form that it is, corresponds to a desire, an expectation, even a need or a want: the form of the fruit I want to eat, of the hand I hope to hold.

The strangeness of being is due to this desire. Nothing is except thanks to the desire that it be. This desire comes from nowhere, or from *being* itself. Better still, it comes from *being*, it is of *being* and it is *being*.

Sense of the being, sense of being: to desire to be, to be the desire to be. The stranger, therefore, since desire makes itself strange to itself. *Ontology* and creation were the classical terms for this. We say them differently now, albeit in a parallel way, with our foreign bodies. (CII, 90).

As is evident from this passage, *desire* holds great significance for both Nancy's later texts and my concurrent study regarding the corporeality of attending or tending toward things, others, the world and myself: *desire* emerges as an intriguing notion due to the fact that it can be used to explore how being-*to* any local, distinct, exemplary or singular thing feels like. This implies that *desire* offers a means to think of the *corpus* of (self-) experiences of "being a body," or more precisely, of being a curious and caring *corpus ego*. Furthermore, by thinking how "my" *desirous to* is punctually determined – by thinking how "I" exist to, unto, into or toward things *each time* I *desire* anything and how my *each time* is

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<sup>109</sup> CII, 82-92.



*pleasurable* and *painful* – we can think of this deconstructively thematised attentive “self” in most general terms.

Recall, as I argued above, that the absolute punctuality of *ego sum* means that “I” bind myself together with each time “I” experience something. I would like to conclude by thinking of *desire* in terms of this punctuality. And not only in terms of doubting, listening, seeing, tasting, smelling and touching things that I want to doubt, listen, see, taste or smell, but also in terms of unnoticing – of unknowing and unsensing – those other things that I do not think, doubt, touch, see, listen, smell or taste each time I tend to something else. I want to return to one of the highly potent passages from Nancy’s *Corpus* examined above (and already quoted in section 2.2.2). As a reminder, Nancy portrays his philosophical figure of *corpus ego* as follows:

*Corpus ego* is without propriety, without “egoity” [*égoïté*, -JPP] (still without any “egotism”): Egoity is a (necessary) signification of *ego*: ego binding itself to itself, binding the unbinding of its proffering, binding the body, tightening the lace of the *self* around it. Egoity installs continuous space, the indistinctness of the *times* of existence (and with it, the horror of death...), the closure of sense, or sense as closed. (C, 27, translation edited).

I propose that we re-read this passage in terms of the analysis of our *desirous toward* elaborated above. More specifically, let us reinterpret what and who binds herself together, from *each time* to *each time*, by thinking of the “egoity” of the *desirous corpus ego*. This means that we think of her as *desirous* not only in terms of *being-to* things she desires to proffer, think, distinguish and enunciate, nor only in terms of how she *desires* things she finds intriguing to see, touch, smell, taste and listen to, worth saying, worth thinking about, worth remembering, but also in term of desiring away from interrupting or intruding upon things. In essence, I suggest that we can understand our *desirous toward* as a necessary determination of the *corpus ego* – *desirous toward* is an aspect of experience that tightens the impenetrable and indivisible “lace of the self” around the experience that the body *is*. This means that “I” know myself as myself, as tightly conjoined with “my” resisting body, and I experience the world, others and myself because I *desire* some things over others. Consequently, as a result of my analysis of the *desirous corpus ego*, any figure of an attentional self or of attention “in general”, as something that is entirely up to me to control, is undone.

### 3.1 On the limits of this investigation

As is the case with every finite work of thought, this dissertation inevitably leaves some aspects and discussions related to attention entirely unexamined. Within this section, I wish to highlight two such themes that I find highly intriguing but which, for the most part, remain beyond the scope of this work: (i) inattention and (ii) the vast spectrum of “mental” suffering, beyond somatic OCD. By briefly discussing these themes, I also aim to outline potential avenues for future investigations that extend beyond the boundaries set by this study.

### 3.1.1 Inattention

The exploration of the various traits of “inattention” prompts one to consider the limits of experience,<sup>110</sup> thereby exposing the limits of philosophical inquiry itself. From the realm of philosophical research that follows the trajectories established by Husserl and Heidegger – along which my own research is situated and which conditions how I draw from Nancy’s analyses in this dissertation – two recent discussions revolving around inattention emerge. The first takes place between Nancy<sup>111</sup> and Nicholas de Warren<sup>112</sup> (and others),<sup>113</sup> whose dialogue spans topics such as dreamless sleep, insomnia, artificial light and work, dreaming, parasomnias,<sup>114</sup> the egoic constitution of the “sleeping self” and the various demands sleep forces on philosophical thought.

One theme in particular that piques my interest concerns the temporal dimensions of dreamless sleep; how exactly do I distinguish a temporal void, given that I do not wake up from an episode of dreamless sleep as if I just closed my eyes? I have no clear answer to provide at this point, but I would be intrigued to try to think what would it mean to dream of, or according to, an undifferentiated vacuity.

Another conversation pertaining to inattention, closely tied to the theme of dreamless sleep, revolves around the various nuances in “attentional oscillation”.<sup>115</sup> These span from (i) the dynamic between a thing I tend to in relation to all of “its” unattended “background”, to (ii) attentional struggles and deficiencies,<sup>116</sup> all the way to (iii) unexperienced swerves experienced each day, such as the famous “highway hypnosis”<sup>117</sup> that underscore the fragmentary nature of our worldly existence.

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<sup>110</sup> On the notion of “limit-experience” in phenomenological thought, see especially Steinbock, Anthony (2017). *Limit-Phenomena and Phenomenology in Husserl*. Rowman & Littlefield International.

<sup>111</sup> Nancy’s *The Fall of Sleep* (2009; *Tombe de sommeil*, 2007) offers his extensive exploration of various themes elemental to sleep, dreaming, dreamless sleep, the sleeping ego, the world of dreams and the sleeping body.

<sup>112</sup> De Warren’s 2011 text “The Inner Night: Towards a Phenomenology of (Dreamless) Sleep” offers his Husserlian take on how the temporal self-consciousness, if thematised in terms of “genetic phenomenology” worked out in Husserl’s manuscript D-14, “de-presentifies” herself by falling asleep.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Schwenger, Peter (2012). *At the borders of sleep: On liminal literature*. University of Minnesota Press; Rosen, M. (2021) “Dreaming of a stable world: vision and action in sleep.” in *Synthese* 198 (Suppl 17), 4107–42.

<sup>114</sup> Nightmares and night terrors, sleepwalking, hypnagogic jerks and insomnia. Cf. Levy, Patric (2022). “Terror at the Heart of Sleep – Night Terrors, Nancy, and Phenomenology” in *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 9:1, 47–63.

<sup>115</sup> The concept of “attentional oscillation” is introduced by Natalie Depraz in Depraz, Varela, Vermersch (2003), 18. Depraz introduces the concept by referring to the analysis of “modes of inattention” she reads from Eugène Minkowski’s *Vers une cosmologie* (1938), chapter 7, “L’attention, p. 88–96”, Paris: Aubier.

<sup>116</sup> There is a rich discussion on “mind-wandering” in the clinical sciences. cf. David Stawarczyk, Helena Cassol and Arnaud D’Argembeau. (2013). “Phenomenology of future-oriented mind-wandering episodes” in *Frontiers in Psychology*.

<sup>117</sup> The term is coined by Williams in Williams, G. W. (1963): “Highway Hypnosis”. *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* 103, 143–151.

### 3.1.2 The soul suffers

The second theme I want to briefly discuss, which is the disorders of the soul or “mental” suffering, extends from the giants of generalised anxiety disorder,<sup>118</sup> attention disorders,<sup>119</sup> or depression<sup>120</sup> to those that are not as well-known and studied, such as misophonia, chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), or somatic OCD. As mentioned earlier, these traits or dimensions of bodily existence have received a great deal of attention in philosophical studies in the last decades, especially in research that follows upon the discoveries made by Husserl and Heidegger. Analyses have focused, for example, on the egoic constitution of time-consciousness, embodiment, being and the world, which have been extensively engaged with in terms of their psychopathological variations.<sup>121</sup> As I demonstrate in my research into the corporeal dimensions of bodily obsessions, not only does “my” bodily being determine some of the key traits often portrayed solely as “disturbed thoughts”, but also, by thinking how exactly do “I” exist as conjoined with “my” body, we can deconstructively engage the often unexamined duality at the heart of “mental” disorders.

One topic that intrigues me is the nature of compulsions and compulsive behaviour, which I would like to examine by taking another look at the experiential dimensions of somatic obsessive-compulsive disorder. If I feel trapped in consciously controlling my breathing, as is often the case when people living with somatic obsessive-compulsive disorder describe their suffering, can I distinguish what is the obsessive trait and what is the compulsive trait in my experience of having to breathe? After all, given the fact that breathing itself is compulsory, is there even such a thing as a “compulsion” in somatic OCD?

Another topic that I find highly intriguing concerns an experiential distinction between sounds that are painful and sounds that are not painful but repulsive, for example when I hear a nail scraping across a chalkboard.<sup>122</sup> By delving into such experiences, in terms of how such sounds penetrate and resonate within “me” and my “ears”, it is possible to think of suffering that is quite evidently corporeal but not tangible or tactile.

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<sup>118</sup> From Latin *angere*, “to choke, suffocate”; it would be intriguing to expound on the experiential dimensions of anxiety and anxious episodes, by exploring how “I” experience “myself” as anxious, particularly in terms of tension and tightness around the airways, in my neck and my shoulders.

<sup>119</sup> Extending as a spectrum of topics from our uneasy relation with our smartphones to attention deficit disorder and beyond.

<sup>120</sup> From Latin *deprimere*, “to press down”; it would be interesting to examine the “corporeality” of depression in terms of how “I” experience “myself” as heavy and weighed upon, or how I feel it is difficult to initiate things due to feeling exhausted and sluggish.

<sup>121</sup> For recent phenomenologically oriented studies into anxiety and depression, see: Fuchs (2013); Svenaeus (2013); Aho (2014); Ratcliffe 2015; Tanaka 2021.

<sup>122</sup> I would like to thank Monica Meijsing for drawing out this distinction in a recent discussion that took place in Professor Jenny Slatman’s research seminar.

## SUMMARY IN FINNISH

Tässä väitöskirjassa selvitän kuinka olemiseni ruumiillisuus rajaa ja muovaa tarkkaavaisia kokemuksiani. Tutkin tarkkaavaisuutta hyödyntäen filosofi Jean-Luc Nancy (1940-2021) (i) ruumiinontologista analyysiä *eksistenssistä* ruumiillisena olemisena-kohti-maailmaa (*être-au-monde*) ja (ii) hänen analyysejään ajattelun ja ulottumisen välisestä jännitteestä kokemuksen ennakkoehtona. Väitöskirjani varsinainen filosofinen kontribuutio löytyy tutkimuarterikkeleistani. Artikkeleisani analysoin tarkkaavaista lukemisesta, ruumiinsisäisten värähtelyjen pariin kääntymistä ja ruumiintoimintojen obsessiivisuutta somaattisessa pakko-oireisessa häiriössä. Käyn nyt lopuksi lyhyesti läpi väitöstutkimukseni tulokset.

Millainen on tarkkaavainen kokemus tekstin läpi kulkemisesta, eli lukemisesta? Tällä hetkellä katseesi kulkee tätä lausetta pitkin, mutta et ehkä kuitenkaan lue näitä sanoja ääneen. Mikä muuttuu, jos päätätkin lausua tekstiäni, edeten eteenpäin sana sanalta ja lause toisensa jälkeen? Väitöskirjassani esitän analyysin tarkkaavaisesta lukemisesta. Tukeudun tulkinnassani Nancy'n käsitteeseen *resitatiivinen ääni*, jolla hän esittää tekstuaalisen kokemuksen rakentuvan puheena. Osoitan tekstissäni, kuinka tekstuaalisen kokemuksen ennakkoehtona on *resitoidun äänen*, kirjaimia seuraavan katseen (tai sormien) ja kuulevien korvien kulku kirjainten, sanojen ja rivien läpi. Argumentoin, Nancy'n ajatteluun tukeutuen, että tarkkaavainen lukeminen on pohjimmiltaan *suullinen* tai *oraalinen* teko, sillä kokemuksen ytimessä on tekstin artikuloiminen enemmän tai vähemmän mielekkäänä puheena – joko ääneen tai ääneti.

Mitä tapahtuu keskittyessäni ruumiissani värähtelevän äänen resonanssiin? Miten kuulen ruumiini värähtelyn (jokaisessa) äänessä? Väitöskirjassani osoitan – Nancy'n *kuulevan itsen* dekonstruktiivista analyysiä täydentäen – että ruumiinsisäisen värähtelyn kokemuksissa äänellinen ja kineettinen värähtely resonovat toistensa rajoilla sisässäni. Tekstissäni keskityn hengityksen äänen ruumiinsisäisen värähtelyn analyysiin. Osoitan, että kuulen ja tunnen hengitykseni äänen ruumiinsisäisen kudoksen ja luuston värähtelyssä ja että sillä on myös oma suuntansa.

Mitä ”minulle” tai ”minussa” tapahtuu, jos en pysty kääntymään pois ruumiintoimintojeni kokemuksista? Väitöskirjassani argumentoin, että somaattisessa pakko-oireisessa häiriössä ei ole pelkästään kyse ruumiintoimintojen tarkkailun pakonomaistumisesta, vaan obsessiiviset ruumiintoiminnot voidaan jakaa kahteen luokkaan sen mukaan, onko kyse autonomisista vai somaattisista toiminnoista. Tekstissäni vertailen keuhkojen, sydämen ja maksan toimintojen kokemuksia ja argumentoin, että somaattisen pakko-oireisen häiriön kokemuksen ytimessä on ruumiintoiminnon tunkeutuminen ”itseeni” ja arkipäivääni.

Kaikkienensa, analysoimalla tarkkaavaista lukemista, ruumiinsisäisten värähtelyjen kuulemisen ja tuntemisen välistä suhdetta ja ruumiillisten obsessioiden inhottavaa tunkeutumista arkipäiväiseen elämäni, osoitan kuinka ”tarkkaavainen minä”, liittyen tai suhteutuen tähän kummalliseen ruumiiseen joka ei ole varsinaisesti ”minä” tai minun”, koen ”itseni”, muut ja maailman tarkkaavaisissa

kokemuksissa. Analyysilläni osoitan, ettei "minun" haluavaa, yllättynyttä, kiinnostunutta ja ruumiillista *kohtioloani* edellä, perusta tai valikoi mikään itsenäinen, itseriittoinen, immanentti, erillinen tai suvereeni tarkkaavainen tietoisuus, minuus tai itseys, joka perustaisi tai eksistoisii jokaisen jotakin *kohti-olevan* hetken ulkopuolella tai sivulla.

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## ORIGINAL PAPERS

### I

#### RECITATIVE VOICE: READING SILENTLY AND ALOUD, WITH JEAN-LUC NANCY

by

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## Recitative Voice: Reading Silently and Aloud, With Jean-Luc Nancy

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Writing incises the shapeless mass in which, without it, neither mouth nor ear would be opened. Every written work is a mouth/ear that exchanges with itself, calls to itself, hears itself, and replies to itself: aoidos, Thea! (2018, 148)

**Abstract:** This text studies the corporeality of attentive reading. It relies and builds upon philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's suggestion that there is, each time, a *recitative voice* within the heart of our advancement through a textual body. This text examines the intriguing figure of recitative voice by paying attention to two bodily variations of reading: reading aloud and reading silently. Nancy's recitative voice, as a sonorous, resonant, oral, buccal and vocal notion, can help us in explicating how our bodies condition our experiences of reading, yet ultimately he remains rather implicit on how we advance through textual bodies. This short text argues that we can explicate the bodily weight implicit to reading, if we interpreted it as a recitative act. When we read aloud, our experience of a text consists of an advancement of our conjoined gaze and voice through the letters, words and sentences making up our text; when we read silently, our closed and silent mouth is still conjoined with our advancing gaze, advancing as desirous for speech and with words already grasped, even when no words are folded in (or with) exhaled warm air.

**Keywords:** reading, body, writing, existence, Jean-Luc Nancy

## 1 Introduction

How do we read? How do texts *make sense* for us?<sup>1</sup> How are we, attentive readers, conditioned and limited by our absolutely corporeal existence – by “our” strange and

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<sup>1</sup> The Nancyan notion of *sense* (“*sens*”) runs through his entire philosophical corpus. It compasses not only sense understood as “meaning”, but also the sense of direction and the fractality of our bodily senses. He summarises the polysemy of *sens* in *A finite thinking* as follows: “By ‘sense’ I mean

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objecting bodies determining our being-*toward*-the-world? Which sensitive organs and which bodily processes take care of reading? This essay begins with a chapter comparing Nancy's tactile notion of *exscription* to his sonorous notion of *recitation*, which are both helpful for thinking how texts *weight* on us – how each letter, word and sentence make up their sense one following another, when and as a reader advances through them. The opening chapter is followed by two others, which study how texts make sense by analysing two variations in a recitative voice: reading aloud and reading silently.

It should be noted, however, that this short text focused on bodies and reading is limited in terms of its depictive potency: nuances between plural desires to read (to relax, evaluate, understand, fight off boredom ... ) as well as between plural techniques of reading (analytic, interpretative, deconstructive, evasive, selective, ironic ... there is no single reading, as Nancy reminds us in *Expectation* (196)) cannot be tackled here. Neither can we address reading in terms of technology or technics, reflect the question of creation in writing, study to any greater extent the force of pleasure driving reading, delve into questions central to pedagogics of speech and language nor into intrinsic or external frictions hindering reading. Methodologically and conceptually, this text is an attempt to think *with* Nancy; by elucidating how an attentive reader advances through a textual body, and what exactly makes up a textual body, I intend to explore the bodily weight of reading, which I suggest is implicitly and explicitly in play in Nancy's essays on bodies, reading, writing and literature.

There is a vast corpus of philosophical discussions extending as far back as to the Heraclitean fragments on the tension between speech (language, thought, words and sentences) understood as oratorical, buccal, spoken, recited, sonorous, sensual, sensible, vocal or dictated (*lexis*) and as signifying, intelligible, significative or meaningful (*logos*), but here we cannot engage in explicating their historical paths. Also, we cannot engage with the fascinating intellectual history of reading voices (*voix*, *vox*) from the dawn of thinking, from the practices of Pythagorean *akousmatikoi*, through the *voces paginarum* murmured aloud for centuries in monasteries<sup>2</sup> to Augustine's admiration of Ambrose's uncommon ability to read silently,<sup>3</sup> all the way to our fascination with the convenience of podcasts and audiobooks. The sonorous materiality of texts and speech, as opposed to reading being understood as a mostly aphonic, mute, atemporal and deaf phenomenon related solely to the rational

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sense in the singular sense taken absolutely: the sense of life, of Man, of the world, the sense of existence; the sense of existence which is or which makes sense, which without sense would not exist." (2013, 3). In the context of this text on reading, any "sense" or "meaning" of texts rests on our oral or vocal advancement through letters, words and sentences that make up each textual body.

2 Ingold (2007).

3 The practice of reading aloud. Latin for "voices of the page". Cf. Augustine (2006, 97–8).

“faculty” or imagination, is obviously not something I suggest as being my original philosophical contribution; it has been touched upon and examined in detail under the notions of, e.g., *writing* (*écriture, écrire*), literature, speaking body (*corps parlant*) and voice by the likes of Derrida,<sup>4</sup> Blanchot, Lacoue-Labarthe,<sup>5</sup> Merleau-Ponty,<sup>6</sup> Nancy and Ponge<sup>7</sup> in the last century.

In this text, I explore the corporeality of attentive reading by engaging Nancy’s collection of essays on literature, which was published recently as *Expectation: Philosophy, Literature* (Nancy 2018); published in French as *Demande: philosophie, littérature*, 2015). Nancy’s thinking of listening and resonant bodies,<sup>8</sup> contingency in reading,<sup>9</sup> our engagement with literature,<sup>10</sup> his tactile-ecstatic notion of *exscription*<sup>11</sup> and the hapticity of poetry<sup>12</sup> have all been studied with great interest in the recent years. However, the sonority and the bodily weight both implicit to reading, literature and texts, which I suggest as being operative in *Expectation* and thematised with the notion of *recitative voice*, have not yet been analysed to a great extent. This absence might even be seen as surprising, given how questions concerning the sonority of resonant voices, speech, thought and poetry are present in Nancy’s thinking all the way from his early essay “Sharing Voices” (Nancy 1990a), published in French as *Le partage des voix* in 1982). In “Sharing Voices”, Nancy offers his readers an analysis of how speech, if understood as absolutely singular instances of resonating voices, de-centres all hermeneutic models of understanding and interpretation. He does this by beginning with his explication of the nature of the rhapsodic voice in Plato’s *Ion*,<sup>13</sup> through Heidegger’s deconstruction of “hermeneutics” with the question of *Dasein*’s ecstatic (pre-)understanding in terms of its “circularity”, to his

4 Derrida (1973).

5 Lacoue-Labarthe (1998, 2000).

6 “[T]he sense of words must be ultimately be induced by the words themselves, or more precisely their conceptual signification must be formed by drawing from *gestural signification*, which itself is immanent in speech.” Merleau-Ponty (2013, 182).

7 “Not only any poem at all, but any text at all – whatever it is – carries (in the full sense of the word), carries, I say, its speaking [diction]. For my part – if I examine myself writing – I never come to write the slightest phrase without my writing being accompanied by a mental speaking and listening, and even, rather, without it being preceded by those things (although indeed just barely).” Ponge in *Le grand recueil*, 220–21, tr. Mandell in Nancy 2008b, 35.

8 For an excellent overview of Nancy on sonority, see Kane (2012); Gritten (2014); Hickmott (2015).

9 On Nancy, Derrida, Leiris and the question of hapticity of language and voice, see: Syrotinski (2013); On Nancy and Derrida on reading, see Maclachlan (2005).

10 Cf. Van Rooden (2015).

11 On Nancy’s notion of *exscription* and ecstatic bodies, see James (2006), 149–50, 204–5; Goh (2019); Ricco (2021).

12 Cf. Van Rooden (2009).

13 For an excellent presentation of Nancy and the rhapsodic voice in *Ion*, see Van Der Heiden (2020, 2021).



own interpretation of *logos* as the sharing of our singularly plural voices, which are conditioned and constituted solely in (and with) their worldly resonance. Ultimately, the most intriguing section of "Sharing Voices" in the context of reading is the last part, when Nancy explains how he understands the intricate co-dependency between the intelligibility and the sonorous or vocal sensibility of speech, language, poetry and, ultimately, thought itself. In the concluding analysis of his essay, Nancy depicts how the worldly resonance of speech determines *logos* as follows:

*Logos* is not *phone semantike* [signifying voice], it is not a voice endowed with signification, it is not sense, and it will not be able to be "interpreted". It is, on the other hand, the articulation before the voices, in which, nevertheless, the voices are conjoined already, and divided (separated). It is both the "anticipatory" and participating structure of the voice in general. "The" voice, always plural, is the sharing, the lot, the *theia moira* of *logos*: its fate and its destination are in the execution, in the singular interpretation of each voice. (1991, 243–4, translation edited).

As we can read, for Nancy, all sense, meaning or significance of speech and thought is absolutely spread out and abandoned. All sense of speech is divided and cut into infinitely finite instances of resonance. This means that sense "gives itself – it abandons itself" (1991, 244); sense is distributed (shared) solely among our absolutely singular voices, within finite and singular instances of articulated speech. However, what is still implicit to Nancy's thinking in his early essay concerns the corporeal resonance of these shared and resonant voices which I, in the context of how we attentively advance through texts, explicate in this short study. To that end, we can turn to Nancy's analysis of thought, mouth and speech in Nancy's *Corpus* (2008a). In the context of the enunciatively distinguished *ego cogito*, Nancy elaborates the intrinsic relation between speech, thought, voice and the figure of the mouth<sup>14</sup> as follows:

In the Cartesian *ego's* articulation, therefore, mouth and mind are the same: it's always the body. Not the body *of* the ego, but *corpus ego*, "ego" being "ego" only when articulated, articulating itself as spacing or flexion, even the inflection of a *site*. The enunciation of "ego" doesn't just *take* place. To the contrary, it *is place*. Unless localized, it is not: *ego = here* (...).

Thus the *corpus ego's* material axiom, or absolute archi-tectonic, implies that there's no "ego" in general, only the one *time*, the occurrence and occasion for a *tone*: a tension, vibration, modulation, color, cry, or song. Always, in any case, a *voice*, and not a *vox significativa*, not a signifying order, but *the timbre of a place where a body exposes and proffers itself*. (2008a, 25–7)

In what follows, I argue that Nancy's thinking of bodies in *Corpus* – thinking of singular bodies, how "my" strange and objecting, which is never properly "me" nor

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<sup>14</sup> Nancy on the cartesian mouth, see Nancy 2016.

“mine”, determines *each time* “I” exist toward anything – and his suggestion of how each “once” of reading of takes place as a *recitative act*, allows us to explicate how a *reader* (self-)experiences “herself” by advancing through letters with “her” eyes and ears, exposed skin and “her” closed or open mouth. A reading voice, therefore, always belongs to *someone* who reads; it belongs to a *reader* advancing through a textual body, which is made of impenetrable and weighty letters, words and sentences, as will be studied below.<sup>15</sup>

Nancy’s engagement with sonorous corporeality can be understood as a radicalisation of (and as a reaction towards) Derrida’s analysis of the auto-affective vacuity found at the heart of the “phenomenological voice” (1973, 76); by showing how we read, recite, dictate and advance our way through various skins, screens and surfaces carrying textual bodies made of letters, we can explicate how each reader constitutes “herself”, *each time*, when she advances through any text. In *Listening*, Nancy explicates the sonority of her voice, both as a speaking and as a reading voice, as follows:

*To say* is not always, or only, to speak, or else to speak is not only to signify, but it is also, always, to dictate, *dictare*, that is, at once to give saying its *tone*, or its *style* (its tonality, its color, its allure) and for that or in that, in that operation or in that *tenseness* of saying, *reciting* it, reciting it *to oneself* or letting itself recite *itself* (make itself sonorous, de-claim itself or ex-claim itself, and cite itself (set itself in motion, call itself, according to the first meaning of the word, incite itself), send back to its own echo and, by doing so, make itself. Writing is also, very literally and even in the sense of an *archi-écriture*, a voice that resounds. (2008b, 36).

Thus, an analysis of reading ought not only be concerned with the significance of words, sentences and language, but also with bodily masses allowing and conditioning each voice and each someone reading a text, be that aloud or in silence.

## 2 Reading: Exscription and Recitation

How can we get close to the corporeality of attentive reading? Before we examine Nancy’s *recitative voice* in terms of its corporeality, let us turn to Nancy’s passages from his essay *Corpus*, where he desires to touch on the activity of reading. Nancy describes how each text (and, indirectly, each writer of each text) touches upon a reader, her gaze and her fingers. Nancy writes:

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<sup>15</sup> There is also an intriguing difference between reading and speech: reading differs from “free” speech in the sense that a reader cannot decide *for* their text. A text needs to be followed “to the letter”, if a reader wishes to read her text. Every reader is free to stop at any letter or any point, but ultimately reading requires the reader’s submission.

[H]ere, on the read and written page. Bodies, for good or ill, are touching each other upon this page, or more precisely, the page itself is a touching (of my hand while it writes, and your hands while they hold the book). This touch is infinitely indirect, deferred – machines, vehicles, photocopies, eyes, still other hands are all interposed – but it continues as a slight, resistant, fine texture, the infinitesimal dust of a contact, everywhere interrupted and pursued. In the end, here and now, your own gaze touches the same traces of characters as mine, and you read me, and I write you. *Somewhere*, this takes place. [...] “somewhere” is technique – our discrete, potent, and disseminated *contact*. (2008a, 51).

As we can read, there is a *con-tact* between a text and a reader – just as there is one between Nancy and his readers. There is the spacing determined as “somewhere”: a *place* where Nancy (indirectly) touches his reader and where his reader touches him by advancing through his text – a place for a “breakthrough” (2008a, 25) of words read out loud or in silence. Reading, thus, is not anterior or posterior, exterior or interior to each text made of letters incised on a surface: it consists of an advancement of a reader alongside and through each word and sentence made of letters. An intriguing notion used by Nancy to further describe the bodily contact in reading is *exscription* (*excription*). With Nancy’s *exscription*, we can describe how a textual body, to put it plainly or crudely, both<sup>16</sup> *touches* and *leaves in-tact* each reader it weighs, presses and touches upon.<sup>17</sup> Nancy writes:

Writing: touching upon extremity. [...] Writing isn’t signifying. We ask: how are we to touch upon the body? Perhaps we can’t answer this “How?” as we’d answer upon a technical question. But, finally, it has to be said that touching upon the body, touching the body, *touching* – happens in writing all the time.

Maybe it doesn’t happen exactly *in* writing, if writing in fact has an “inside.” But along the border, at the limit, the tip, the furthest edge of writing nothing *but* that happens. Now, writing takes its place at the limit. So if anything happens to writing, nothing happens to it but *touch*. More precisely: touching the body (or some singular body) *with the incorporeality* of “sense”. And consequently, *to make the incorporeal touching*, to make of *sense* a touch. [...] Writing touches upon bodies *along the absolute limit* separating the sense of the one from the skin and nerves of the other. (2008a, 9–11, translation edited).

<sup>16</sup> Here I follow an interpretation of *exscription* provided by Ian James: “[S]ense in Nancy is always embodied, that is, is always in a relation of touch/separation to a material, concrete existence (or ek-sistence), any act of speaking or writing (and indeed drawing, painting, composing, and so on) can (and must) have a relation, itself one of touch/separation, to that embodied existence which is or makes sense.” (2006, 205).

<sup>17</sup> In Nancy’s *Sexistence* the tact of language and writing changes, when he ponders how words penetrate impenetrable bodies: “[Language] expresses – presses outside – the ideality of sense as sonorous materiality [...] Language penetrates the thing’s obscurity to itself, bringing it to be signified, that is, transported outside its concrete effectiveness, repeatable as idea.” (60).

The incorporeality of sensed “sense”, a “literary sense” of a text read out, weights upon a reader when she traverses through each letter, word and sentence. Later on, Nancy continues by describing how each text touches upon the masses of a reader: her eyes, mouth, lips, lungs, throat and ears. Nancy writes:

[W]e have to see reading as something that’s not deciphering: touching, rather, and being touched, involved with the body’s masses. Writing, reading, a matter of tact. But still – and this, too, has to be clear – under the condition that tact isn’t concentrated, doesn’t claim – as does Cartesian touch – the privilege of an immediacy that would fuse all senses and “sense.” Touching, to begin with, is also local, modal, fractal. (2008a, 87).

Reading a text, for Nancy in *Corpus*, is therefore not a conversion, translation or interpretation from worldly, material or bodily to internal, transcendental, cognitive, mental or spiritual. Reading does not fuse letters and words into something that would take its place beyond speech and outside resonant voices. Rather, reading consists of a weighty advancement through a textual body. A reader advances with her sensitive and sensual reading organs – with her “body’s masses” – alongside and through each word and sentence that makes up her text. However, if we choose to turn from Nancy’s *Corpus* to his *Expectation*, then we can extend our analysis beyond the figures of *touch* and *tact* that are prominent in the former. In fact, I suggest that Nancy’s figure of *recitative voice* put forth in *Expectation* helps us in explicating, in detail, *how* reading is involved with the “body’s masses,” because it allows us to pay attention to how each reader advances through each word making up her text of and how her advancement depends on “her” bodily masses. Let us continue by turning to Nancy’s *recitative voice*.

In *Expectation*, Nancy describes how any text, be it allo- or autographic, advances and announces itself as a sonorous, vocal and resonant *voice*. He depicts the arrival and the advancement of this voice in his essay “Narrative, Narration, Recitative” as follows:

There is always a “once upon a time” that conceals or is concealed by, that reveals or is revealed by a particular time, be it imaginary [...]. In this sense, recitation demands its subject, its narrator, its voice. In that “once” there resonates – musically, I’ll return to this – a vocal pronouncement or articulation [...].

What we refer to as *writing*, as the word is understood today, is merely the form in which is exemplified, while expanding – through the material inscription by which the movement, the path of pro-nouncement and pro-duction is retained and exposed – the facilitation of sense as it strives to escape. (2018, 44–6, translation edited).

As we can read, Nancy suggests that reading confines the advancement through each and every text to a recitative voice. In other words, all texts and all material forms of inscription – books, skins, hides, pages, tattoos, walls or screens – make (“produce”) their sense as sensible and sensed speech and that they do so *each time* they are

read through. In this text, I intend to explicate to what extent Nancy's *recitative voice*, if we do agree to interpret it as a vocal, sonorous, articulative, corporeal and resonant enunciation of a text, is a voice that resonates according to the weighty masses of attentive readers and "their" bodies – mouths, lungs, tongues, fingers, eyes and ears, which all, conjoined together, give each reading its singular tone, colour, intensity, tension, timbre and rhythm.

As we can read from our quote above, each "once" of each reading takes place just once. This means that each experience of reading takes place exactly *when* a text introduces itself as articulated, meaningful, sensed and sensible speech and exactly *as* that text is advanced through as letters, words and sentences that follow one another. Further on, Nancy clarifies how each text makes its sense as sensed, and as sensible, as follows:

[R]ecitation is not "saying" in terms of uttering, expressing or recounting events that have taken place. It makes them happen, it makes them *come to pass*. [...] This thrust is the work of speech. Speech is not a tool, it is itself – in its phonation, as in its phrasing, its syntax, its prosody – the thrust or drive of "sense". Sense is not added to or assumed by the facts, it is their *arrival*, it is their *coming*. In short, it is the fact of the fact, the thrust and the pulsation that *bring into the world* and that thereby *make* a "world," which is to say, a space for the circulation of sense. (2018, 51–2, translation edited).

As we can read, reading is an activity which allows or *makes* a reader experience each particular text: word after word and each sentence following after another. Recitation of each sentence allows for each event, emotion, idea and thought written down to be grasped by someone advancing through that very text. Recitation, therefore, brings into the world a *place* for the arrival of each "once" of reading. Each recitative act resonates *in* someone<sup>18</sup> (or in "us"<sup>19</sup>). Recitation is experienced by somebody *for* or *in* whom a sensed sense of a text arrives, resonates and departs. In short: a recitative voice brings forth a reader who experiences "herself" *in* reading *with* the words she reads through. Nancy describes this constitutive relation between the act of recitation and the experience named as reading, as follows:

*Citare* is to set on motion, to bring to the self (the Latin verb is related to the Greek *kinein*: there is cinema in every story). *Ex-citare*, is to awaken, *sus-citare*, to be raised (and *re-sus-citare* is not far), *in-citare*, to throw forward. All these motions and emotions are found in recitation, which excites, brings about, and incites a "saying", which is not just any saying but the saying that says an arrival and a departure, which says the tension of the fact that something is happening and that this something is, necessarily, a some "one" or becomes or calls ["for", "in", "as" – JPP] someone. (2018, 51, translation edited).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Chapter "Someone" in Nancy (1997, 67–78); also see analysis of *ipse* and *ipseity* in chapter "World" in Nancy (1997, 154–60).

<sup>19</sup> As a community of readers. Cf. "Literary communism" in Nancy (1990b, 71–81).

Textual experiences, as and when they make sense for readers advancing through the words of which they consist, do not transcend or depart beyond this world, where speech resonates and voices are shared. This means that texts are concerned with bodies, their situations, emotions, ideas and thoughts, with all kinds of things that make up the world. In other words, formulated in most general terms: texts are concerned with the world itself, which is made of bodies. Texts can tell (or “depict”) anything about anything, which means that texts are not limited by the particularities of the world: texts can be scientific, poetic, fictional, irrational, peer-reviewed, rejected, unethical, nonsensical, etc.<sup>20</sup> The significance of sensible, sensed, worldly things, of which the world consists, gives texts their “referentiality”, “meaning” or “significance” – their sense. An analysis of the recitative voice allows us to ponder questions such as the following: how should we understand the bodily weight implicit in the “sensible recitation of [literary] sense” (*le récit sensible du sens*) (2018, 52, translation edited), if every recitation arrives as articulated or silent speech? And what about other masses, e.g. eyes, fingers, ears, which are also very profoundly involved in each “once” of reading?

### 3 Reading Aloud

Does a reader need a mouth, lips and a tongue to read? She does, if she desires to read her text aloud. Nancy ponders reading aloud in his short essay titled “The Only Reading” (in *Expectation*), which comprises only a handful of sentences. Nancy begins by quickly advancing through multiple themes that are elemental to reading: there is no single sense of reading, because there is a plurality of desires and motivations to read, just as there is a plurality of techniques of reading. However, what is of greatest interest for our study of the recitative voice happens in the last paragraphs, when Nancy depicts how reading aloud takes place and what distinguishes it from reading silently. He writes:

[Reading aloud] keeps at a distance information, and identification, and interpretation. It confines the text to our lips, our throat, and our tongue: these take over from the head. Our voice takes over from the letter, that is, sense finds it pushed over aside, not suppressed but distracted, pushed to the margin, postponed until later, maybe never. Or sense becomes sensitive, sensual, which is one way of not ending up as intelligible sense. Reading aloud – not too loud, we need to carefully adjust the volume – is the only kind that directs the text from mouth to ear, even if it’s my own ear. The ear opens upon an interminable resonance, within me and without, from within me to without, from you to me. Nothing is closer to the essence of language: the echo of the murmur of things. (2018, 197).

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<sup>20</sup> This trait of literature has been coined as “de-realization of the real”. This discussion falls beyond the scope of my short text on the corporeality of the recitative voice. Cf. Van Rooden (2015, 61).

As we can read, Nancy describes reading aloud as the most sensual and sensitive<sup>21</sup> kind of reading. When one reads aloud, the sonorous materiality<sup>22</sup> of her recitative voice, conjoined with her gaze advancing through letters making up her text, nearly overwhelms our reader. Her text opens up an “interminable resonance” between her ears and her mouth. Her advancement through a textual corpus, which consists of hard and distinct letters and words, takes place in the interminable resonance between her lips, throat, tongue and ears. Nancy goes on to depict how the timbre of her voice hinders or delays her from hearing (*entendre*) what her text depicts, means or describes. However, as he also quickly notes, this trait of literary sense as “meaning” (the “intelligible sense” of the text, as Nancy puts it above) is merely sidelined and not entirely suppressed, because texts that are read aloud commonly do make sense, as meaningful words and as sentences that speak of things, for readers themselves and for their listeners gathered around. And finally, the gaze of our reader, her eyes advancing alongside each word her text consist of, is conspicuously absent in Nancy’s description. I suggest that we expand on Nancy’s short analysis. I intend to do this by placing an emphasis how the body of our reader both conditions and limits the advancement of her recitative voice through a textual body.

When a text is read aloud, I suggest that there is a plurality of distinct and fractal, yet conjoined movements taking place. These movements, which are all bodily movements of our reader, offer a place and occasion for her text to *make* (to “produce”) its sense as a sensed, sensible and meaningful. These movements trace their paths together, which means that they advance together as conjoined. They do not become fused into one “common” sensing or common sense: advancement of a gaze, fingers and voice are distinct, modal and fractal. Yet, they dependent on (and weight onto)<sup>23</sup> one another, when our reader reads aloud, because they advance along singular letters and words particular to the text one reads.

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21 As Nancy points out, there is an element of care, tact or tactfulness in reading. An analysis of this trace of *tact* in reading would open up a whole spectrum of questions concerning the *ethics* of reading, but in the context of this short essay on recitative bodies, I will only remark that a pleasant and audible volume are only two things (out of many) a reader needs to take care of. For an in-depth analysis of Nancy as a thinker of touch and tact, see Derrida (2005).

22 On the resonance of listening bodies, see Nancy (2008b).

23 In Nancy’s *Corpus*, bodily senses do not touch one another: “senses *don’t touch each other*, there’s no ‘common sense,’ no sensing ‘in itself’: Aristotle knows it, saying that each sense senses *and* senses itself sensing, each on its own with no overarching control, each one withdrawn, as sight, as hearing, as taste, smell, touch, each delighted and knowing that it delights in the absolute apartness of its delight; all theory of art issues from this starting point.” 2008a, 119, translation edited. In *The Muses* he re-iterates the tension between the senses: “Each sensing touches on the rest of sensing as that which it cannot sense. Sight does not see sound and does not hear it, even though it is also in itself, or *right at* itself, that it touches on this nonseeing and is touched by it” (1996, 17).

Firstly, yet in no particular order, our reader advances through her text with her exhalation, her breath, larynx, throat, tongue, teeth, lips and her mouth. She advances through her text by enunciating, dictating, or pronouncing the words that her text is made of. Secondly, and simultaneously, she advances through drawn, scribbled, incised or printed shapes that she grasps and recognises as letters, words and lines with her gaze<sup>24</sup> or with the tips of her fingers if she reads in Braille. (Now your eyes are advancing along this sentence, made of exactly these 31 words, which I have written down on the 11th of February for you to read, my dear reader.) And thirdly, when our reader reads aloud, she advances along her text with her ears. In other words, our reader reads by “enacting the letter” (2018, 73) or, as is described by Nancy above, by confining the text to her lips, throat and tongue. All in all, when a text is read aloud, she is also a speaking, gazing, hearing, touching and a listening body. These distinct, yet conjoined, movements of tending to the letters, words and sentences and enunciating those words make for her recitative voice, which allows her reader to experience the text she advances through. Recitation, therefore, creates something sensed and sensible:

[E]very recitative creates a new *muthos*: not that it fabricates more or less powerful, seductive, and credible figures, but that it opens speech itself to its own drive and pulsation. Speech, the voice, the sensible recitation of sense. (2018, 42, translation edited).

But what kind of a thing is her *recitative* in sensuous terms? What sort of features or traits does a recitative have? And how do body’s masses condition each reading – each sensible recitation of sense?

When a text is read aloud, it is confined to (or “involved with”, as Nancy puts it in *Corpus* (87)) the bodily masses of our reader. This means that from the opening of a reading mouth, recited words are carried out as “effluvia, emanations, weightless folds in the air escaping the lungs and warmed by the body” (*Corpus*, 151). Such folds of warm air can make sense for a listening body who might, or might not, be reciting her text for herself. Occasionally, such folds of air might be incomprehensible words formulated in an unknown, forgotten, or unheard of or yet-to-come language. Or they might merely be letters spoken in a nonsensical order. Nevertheless, such warm and humid aerial folds, words and sentences, are something a reader can *listen* to (*écouter*) and *understand* (*entendre*),<sup>25</sup> given the language is familiar to her in its phonetic, lingual, syntactic and semantic sense. Warm folds of air, warmed by her body and shaped by her reading mouth; make sense as words and sentences, one following another. These words and sentences might, or might not, make meaningful sense as

<sup>24</sup> I am well aware of the empirical research done on movement of the eyes while reading, but questions concerning its “saccadic” nature fall beyond the scope of this text. Cf. Drieghe et al. (2020).

<sup>25</sup> On Nancy’s ontology of resonant and sonorous bodies, see 2008b.



words that speak of bodies, ideas, situations and events, depending on whether she speaks the language in which they are written and hears them properly. But what makes up this proper? In order to see, hear, and be able to grasp recited words properly, parts of recited words, words themselves, and sentences made of those words must follow one another *partes extra partes* or, as Nancy formulates it in *Corpus* (57), as “*verba extra verba*, compact words impenetrable to one another and to things.” This means that words (and “visceral” parts of those words – letters and phonemes) cannot penetrate, overlap or run over one another, if they are to make sense as sensual, sensible and meaningful words. Recitation, therefore, advances each letter, vowel, consonant, phoneme, word, line, expression and sentence, one following another in a *rhythmic*<sup>26</sup> arrangement, by spanning over each “once” of reading. This means that each “once” of reading advances in its absolutely singular pace that is particular to that occasion of reading and to that reader.

In *Listening*, Nancy depicts how a reading mouth advances as follows:

In speaking [*diction*], starting with the speaking of a text, it is a question of two things together – and once again, of the unity and distinction of these two things: rhythm and timbre. (2008b, 36).

We can, therefore, suggest that there is a *span*<sup>27</sup> – a spacing, an *extra*, an expanse, a differing, *différance*, a gap, *l'écart*, between those elements (the letters, phonemes, words, sentences . . . ) that makes up a recitation in terms of its *timbre*, just as there are these elements (folds of warm air making up phonemes, words and sentences and sections) which have their distinct span between them. Recited words are, therefore, hard and impenetrable (recitative) bodies of sense.<sup>28</sup> Their singular arrangement – the rhythm in which they are read out loud – *is* or *makes up* their (sensed) sense; words or letters arranged, recited, read out in a random order most often would make no sense (or in other words “nonsense”), but such arrangements of letters could still be recited *and* grasped *as* nonsensical speech.

Written words make sense as word bodies, as textual bodies made of singular letters written one after one another, which are construed as incised, printed, scribbled or drawn on different kinds of surfaces and skins. Recited words make sense as hard and distinct letters and phonemes, which a tongue shapes up and ears listen to. All of our reading organs – our eyes, fingers and mouths and ears – advance conjoined together through textual bodies we desire to engage with. When our reader reads out loud, she advances a word after another, as *verba extra verba*.

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<sup>26</sup> For an intricate analysis of rhythm and the antecedence of the rhythmized “subject”, see Lacoue-Labarthe (1998).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. “Spanne” in Nancy (1997, 64–7).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Nancy (2008a, 57).

Neither her gaze, her ears, her fingers, nor her voice can advance through, and make sense of, multiple words or sentences simultaneously. Not a single reader can recite, listen, grasp, gaze or read through a whole section of sentences instantly, because reading eyes, ears, fingers and mouth each have their own weight. Her reading organs condition her pace of advancing through texts. Their weight conditions her (infinitely) finite pace and her rhythm. Reading organs, with their weight and their finite speed, give recitation its bodily weight and shared worldly resonance. When a text is read aloud, the bodily weight implicit in, and constitutive for, reading is audible in the rhythmic advancement of the recitative voice articulating each word. In other words, and to conclude this section, the bodily weight of literature is audible when readers read texts aloud, because all speech is abandoned and divided among singular and bodily voices.

## 4 Silent Recitative

How does silent reading differ from reading aloud?<sup>29</sup> How do we, as readers no longer limited by the technique of *voces paginarum*, read silently or in silence? A textual body is obviously the same, whether or not it is pronounced when it is advanced through. What changes in reading, when one changes her technique from that of enunciative to silent? In this section, I explore the corporeal traits determining our experiences of silent reading by continuing to engage Nancy's elaboration of the recitative voice, literature, writing (*écriture*) and reading in a number of his essays in *Expectation*. Then, I proceed to explore and develop Nancy's position further by elaborating the bodily weight implicit to silent reading. I do this by thinking of our *desire* to advance along a text and by thinking how words read out in silence make their sense.

In a lot of ways, silent reading is similar to reading aloud: an experience of silent reading still has a finite pace, singular direction and a rhythm. And not only does the activity of silent reading take up our time, but our literary experience still owns its structure to the rhythmicity and the pace of our advancement through our text. Words and sentences we advance through still make sense by taking up their own places: one after another – *verba extra verba*. We advance through our body of letters with our gaze, but what about our mouth and ears? Our mouth stays closed and silent. Our voice withholds from pronouncing the words that we read by staying silent from the first letter to the last dot. Our ears do not open into a worldly

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<sup>29</sup> There is intriguing empirical research done in neurosciences on the activity of (silent) reading, which suggest that certain vocal-associated neural structures are active when we read silently, cf. Perrone-Bertolotti et al. (2012).

resonance of our text and our “somewhere” is filled with silence. Words we reads might coincide and collide with other things we might be thinking of, which might (or might not) be inspired by our text. Other things often disturb us when we try to read, but we cannot delve into frictions internal or external to reading in this text. How does a silently read text make its sense, then?

As was demonstrated above, Nancy describes how reading takes place, and how texts make their sense, as recitative speech in multiple passages in *Expectation*. However, he remains rather implicit on how literally (how “corporeally”) we should understand the sonority of the recitative voice in said passages, especially if our reader decides to read silently. Let us visit some intriguing sections dealing with the orality of the recitative voice. Nancy’s essay “To Open the Book”, begins by describing silent reading metaphorically as “softly chanting the text somewhere in back of the *camera obscura* that films the text” (2018, 72). This “evocative” power of letters and words has to do with speech and our shared voices. He continues:

[L]iterature isn’t so called for nothing: it enacts the letter. The letter is articulation, the heart of speech and language. That is to say, not only the two articulations – semantic and phonetic – inherent to language but the pronunciation, emission, modulation, tone, style and what we have ended up calling writing.

[...] Literature is gestural to the extent that it is speech. But it is essentially oral, as Lacoue-Labarthe liked to remind us. This means addressed, sent, and discovering or providing its sense only when sent. (2018, 73, translation edited).

Here Nancy suggests that reading is a vocal advancement through the letters texts are made of: texts make sense when words they consist of are sent, cited, recited, enacted, addressed or pronounced. A few pages later, Nancy depicts the relation between reading and the vocality of literature even more explicitly, when he explicates how each text *resonates* as it is advanced through:

[L]iterature is oral: it opens up in a resonance that has no beginning and no end, in a glossolalia of presence without which everything would simply be absent.

But that is why it is written: the resonance has to return, has to be repeated, become an echo so that it might be heard and repeated. Literature is written in its very orality: it is recited, learned by heart, it is form and cadence [or it is timbre and rhythm – JPP]. (2018, 74, translation edited).

Here Nancy suggests that the resonance of speech conditions all of our literary experiences. Texts are, and make sense, as speech that has been written down. Texts make sense only when they are advanced through, recited, voiced out and repeated by somebody. Later on in *Expectation*, in his essay, “Responding for Sense”, Nancy echoes his preceding analyses by depicting the sonority of reading as follows:

[W]riting is the very resonance of the voice or the voice as resonance, to the extent that it is self-reference, through the distance of a “self” to the “sameness” that enables it to identify itself: absolutely singular each time for an indefinite number of encounters that are singular on every occasion. Writing “fixes,” as we say, the flow of speech (*verba volant, scripta manent*); this fixation is nothing other than recording, storage, or the residence of the capacity for resonance. (2018, 145.)

As we can read, for Nancy in *Expectation*, each single experience of reading takes place (is “identified”) in a distance between a reader and her text, which is a distance consisting of distinct words and sentences. But exactly how does a reader experience or “identify” words that she recites silently? How do they fill up this distance, this “somewhere” as it was described in *Corpus*, in-between a reader and her text? In other words, if the *timbre* of recitation is silent, then what kind of speech fills up the “glossolalia of presence” for our reader? In a silent reading, words are not shaped by a mouth in exhalation, yet read words make sense as sensible speech in the sense that our reader still advances through words that make sense for her. But exactly how?

Let us remain close to Nancy’s essay “Responding for Sense” for a little longer. In said essay, Nancy elucidates the sensuality of reading and helps in making sense of the silence of the recitative voice. He describes how texts make their sense as follows: “What happens to sense at each point or singular moment – in each writing [...] is the singular itself as the scansion of truth as sense” (2018, 149). Further on, he continues by clarifying how each singular arriving and passing moment of sense, each “scansion of truth” or, just plainly, each word, each sentence, each scene, each conversation or idea written down as a text, which provides its sense *in* reading, provides it *for* and *from* a reader and her mouth, as speech yet-to-come and as speech already voice out:

Truth arises from language already lost or yet to come. It comes from the voice that desires itself and seeks itself behind the voice – at the bottom of the throat, where the incision exposes an initial separation, which rises to the lips but which the lips have not yet known. (2018, 150).

In a silent reading, our reader is driven by her *desire*<sup>30</sup> to read. She desires to advance through and devour the letters and words her text consists of. As Nancy puts it in *Sexistence*: when she reads, she finds pleasure in “the passage from one word into another, from one phrase to the other, escaping itself and trembling to meet itself” (2021, 32). She desires to advance through words she does not know yet and she knows “herself”, as a reader, with words she has already read through, which might (or might not) surprise or delight her. She advances with her eyes and with her silent

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<sup>30</sup> For Nancy’s analysis of bodies, desire existence and drive, see Nancy (2021). Also, on drive and desire, see Bernet (2020).

throat – with her closed mouth and un-parted lips. She experiences herself, as a reader; with meaningful words one following another. Silent reading makes its sense as a “silent recitative”, if it is understood as a desire to advance and as speech already grasped, already devoured, already gone, already making sense and undone. In terms of sensual reading organs, a text read in silence is confined to an advancing gaze and a closed and silent mouth.

Thus, a silently read text is experienced as desire for words-still-to-come and as words already read, known and experienced. In *Expectation*, Nancy depicting these traits of *recitation* as follows:

[R]ecitative forms an *ethos*: a comportment, a behavior for language. Behavior that initially recognises in it a “before” and an “after,” which knows that it comes from further away and will go further than its linguistic constitution and phonetic utterance. The recitative awakens and maintains in language the *voice* that expresses it [...]. In this way, a story is told all of whose intrigue or adventure cannot be bound together without undoing, from moment to moment, its progress in a cadence, nor without bearing away its signification in a pulsation that incessantly questions the birth of speech: the disturbance of the echo through which a subject knows and feels itself – here, it’s the same thing – preceded and followed by itself in an infinite, eternal alterity. (56).

A reader experiences herself with unsaid words she desires to devour and with words she has already passed through. She begins by opening her book and keeping it open. She advances by reciting words one after another in her own cadence and rhythm, which are conditioned by her gaze and her mouth. When she reads aloud, her reading consists of an advancement of her conjoined gaze, sensitive fingers and articulative voice; when she reads silently, her silent mouth is still conjoined with her gaze as desirous for words still unread and as words she already read and grasped.

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## II

### **NOISY BODIES: ON THE TACTILITY AND SONORITY OF VISCERAL DEPTHS**

by

Joni P. Puranen

Unpublished manuscript.

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### III

## **BODILY OBSESSIONS: INTRUSIVENESS OF ORGANS IN SOMATIC OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER**

by

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# Bodily obsessions: intrusiveness of organs in somatic obsessive–compulsive disorder

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## Abstract

In this paper, I will provide a phenomenological analysis of somatic obsessions at times present in obsessive–compulsive disorder. I will compare two different types of bodily obsessions, which have a different neurological-physiological underpinning: anguishing awareness of one’s own heartbeat and of one’s own breathing. In addition, I will contrast these two with how one experiences one’s own liver. I will use the concepts “tactility obsessions” and “motility obsessions”, which I have coined for the purpose of this comparison. In other words, these are obsessions concerning the felt sense of one’s autonomous organs and obsessions concerning one’s ability to voluntarily move. Ultimately, I claim that the core lived experience in somatic obsessive–compulsive disorder should not only be understood as having to do with intruding and “distorted thoughts” concerning bodily processes, but could also be understood as having to do with a felt sense of our organs interrupting and intruding our daily lives.

**Keywords** Attention · Phenomenology · Obsessive–compulsive disorder · Somatic obsessions · Breathing

*How do you become a representation to yourself? And a montage of functions? And where, then, does it go, that potent, silent evidence that was holding things together so uneventfully?*  
(Nancy 2008, p. 163).

## Introduction

What happens to (or in) “me”, if “I” cannot trust the vegetative automaticity of my body? What happens, if I “get stuck” on breathing or blinking “consciously”? If such is the case and if I do feel trapped in paying attention to my breathing, blinking or to my heartbeat, then to what exactly am I attending to? Am I attending to the movement of some specific muscles? Am I attending to my attention or attentiveness itself as a process? Or to an experience of suffocation, if I do not consciously continue maintaining the circulation of air? Or, am I attending to my thoughts concerning these

particular bodily processes? How does it feel when a bodily process overtakes my whole life?

We can all recognise the phenomena of becoming annoyingly aware of our beating hearts or the slow and rhythmic movement of breathing, when, e.g., we are having a spell of transitional insomnia (or maybe when we read a paper such as this one on somatic obsessions in obsessive–compulsive disorder), but such an awareness of one’s own body usually does not last for long. For a few of us, however, such episodes can become increasingly frequent, time consuming, uncomfortable or even downright unbearable. In this paper, I provide an analysis of the experiential and “subjectively” lived bodily dimensions of a psycho-pathological condition called “somatic<sup>1</sup> obsessive–compulsive disorder”.<sup>2</sup> I provisionally describe this condition as an anguishing and inhibiting hyper-awareness<sup>3</sup> of one’s own body in its functions, but in addition to the emotive or practical dimensions of the condition my analysis also illuminates its temporal, spatial, sensory, and motor aspects. Somatic OCD, thus, can be understood as an abnormality of body awareness.

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<sup>1</sup> Or in other sources, “sensory”, “somatoform”, “hyperawareness”, or “sensorimotoral” obsessive–compulsive disorder.

<sup>2</sup> Hereinafter “somatic OCD”.

<sup>3</sup> Greek *hyper*: over, above, beyond, excessive, exceeding.

I will compare two different types of bodily obsessions, which have a different anatomical underpinning: anguishing awareness of one's own heartbeat and of one's own breathing. I will contrast these two types of abnormal experiences with our common condition of *not* experiencing our own inner organs, e.g., liver, kidneys or reproductive glands. I will use the concepts "tactility obsessions" and "motility obsessions" to refer to obsessive experiences one's autonomous organs and obsessions concerning one's ability to volitionally move one's body, which I have coined for this purpose. Ultimately, I claim that the core lived experience in somatic obsessive-compulsive disorder does not exclusively entail "distorted thoughts" (Wegner 1989) concerning bodily processes, as is proposed by Hershfield and Corboy in one of the few textual descriptions of somatic OCD (2013, p. 181), but can also, or better, be understood as concerning felt sense of our organs interrupting and intruding both our "here and now" and our future.

My following presentation of the current understanding of somatic OCD cannot be exhaustive concerning the whole literary corpus on obsessive-compulsive disorder,<sup>4</sup> but, as far as I am aware, up to this point there exists no research on the lived bodily experiences of somatic OCD and hardly any research on somatic OCD in general. Therefore, my analysis of the lived experience of somatic OCD and my suggestion of distinguishing between tactility and motility obsessions, will contribute to the effort to develop our understanding of this hidden, disinhibiting and intriguing disorder and could also prove to be useful for diagnostic and therapeutic practices.

## Background and methodology

Today, much attention is given to the possible health effects of practices that aim to *increase* one's awareness their own body, such as mindfulness (Didonna 2008; Alper 2016), cognitive behavioural therapy (Wells and Fisher 2015) or mindfulness-practices in medicine (Buchholz 2015; Chung 2015; Ludwig and Kabat-Zinn 2008). Attention itself is also studied in great detail in the clinical sciences (Tang and Posner 2013; Velden and Roepstorff 2015; Tang et al. 2015). Most of this literature and research points at possible health benefits from increased attention or awareness of one's own body and its processes. So far, however, little attention has been paid to phenomena or instances, such as described in the opening lines of this paper, in which increased attention

of one's body might be detrimental to one's health, and can even result in, or accompany, severe anxiety and prolonged suffering.

In my analysis, I look at the surprisingly sparse psychological (Keuler 2011) and therapeutic (Hershfield and Corboy 2013) literature on the symptoms, reports and descriptions of how somatic OCD is experienced and I critically engage the role of body in these descriptions. To do so, I draw from the analyses of the visceral body undertaken by philosophers Jean-Luc Nancy and Drew Leder in their pioneering works on the topic. More specifically, I utilise Nancy's concept of *intruder*, which is helpful for understanding the experience of intrusiveness felt and reported in somatic obsessions and Leder's conceptualisation of *visceral inability*, which sheds light on the nature of volitional motility (and immotility) of the viscera.

My paper offers an analysis of the structural elements constitutive to lived bodily experiences of somatic OCD. In the phenomenologically oriented research into how experiences of one's own body are structured, much attention has recently been paid to phenomena such as dysappearance (Groven et al. 2013; Slatman 2016) and disappearance (Zeiler 2010) of one's body in a variety of bodily changes. My analysis of somatic OCD ties to these discussions and more generally to experiential analyses of the body and corporeality. I add, however, a new line of analysis by discussing somatic OCD as an abnormal and inhibiting variation of body self-awareness. This is a novel contribution in the field of experiential philosophy of embodiment and brings completely new phenomena into theoretical discussions.

My study is broadly phenomenological in the sense that I analyse the appearance, disappearance and transparency of visceral organs and visceral processes in terms of how they are constituted *in* and *as* bodily experiences. More specifically, my methodological and conceptual starting points are in the philosophical exchange between Jean-Luc Nancy and Martin Heidegger, concerning existence and corporeality. I draw mainly from Nancy's philosophical analysis of how bodies open a *site*, a *here* or *this place* for existing. Bodies offer a *place* for sensing, moving, talking, thinking and, generally speaking, for all the singular ways of being in the world. Nancy describes his position on bodies in *Corpus* (15) as follows:

Bodies are places of existence, and nothing exists without a place, a *there*, a 'here,' a 'here is,' for a *this*.

The novelty of Nancy's *Corpus* is in how he allows us to think of existence and being in terms of sensing, sensitive and sensual bodies. In this paper, I examine somatic OCD as one particularly anguishing way of experiencing one's body, when parts or areas in one's "own" body become an intrusive and strange.

<sup>4</sup> See Bürgy (2019), for an excellent overview of developments in our understanding of obsessive-compulsive disorder organised according to a framework developed by Karl Jaspers through his seven different editions of "General Psychopathology".

## Obsessive–compulsive disorder in DSM-5

Obsessive–compulsive disorder (OCD) is a chronic and quite often debilitating disorder.<sup>5</sup> OCD is currently (according to F42 in DSM-5) diagnosed following four criteria. Firstly, there needs to be a presence of either “obsessions” or “compulsions” or of both.<sup>6</sup> “Obsessions” are defined as recurring and persistent thoughts, urges or images that are experienced as disturbing, intrusive or unwanted, and which the individual attempts to ignore, suppress or neutralise through performing acts that are called “compulsions”. “Compulsions” are defined as repetitive behaviours (e.g. hand washing, ordering, checking) or mental acts (e.g. counting, wishing, praying, repeating certain words, sentences or mantras), which the individual feels obliged to perform in response to their obsessions, in order to prevent or reduce their anxiety or mental anguish. Yet these behaviours are not causally connected “in a realistic way” with what they are supposed to neutralise or prevent, or are clearly excessive. Secondly, obsessions or compulsions are taken to be time consuming or to cause a clinically significant suffering, anguish or impairment, be that social, occupational or related to other important areas of life. Thirdly and fourthly, medical and physiological (substance or drug abuse, etc.) causes and other mental disorders need to be ruled out.

In the somatic dimension of OCD (or in the somatic “spectrum”, “type” or “subtype”),<sup>7</sup> one’s “awareness of” or their “attentiveness towards” their own bodily processes becomes something that bothers them significantly and causes them great anguish. Keuler (2011) describes the lived experience of somatic OCD as follows:

In a typical scenario, individuals begin to selectively attend to their swallowing, for example, and become anxious that they will become unable to *stop* thinking about their swallowing. Attempts to distract themselves fail, leading to higher levels of anxiety. This anxiety perpetuates the focus on swallowing, leaving them preoccupied and frustrated by their unsuccessful attempts to shift attention elsewhere.

The following bodily processes have been reported as being the most common *foci* for people suffering from somatic OCD: breathing, blinking, salivation and

swallowing, body positioning, tactile sensations such as the heartbeat or itching, tinnitus, “eye floaters” and other visual distractions (e.g. seeing the profile of one’s own nose in their peripheral vision).<sup>8</sup> Common compulsions in somatic OCD, as suggested by Keuler (2011) and Hershfield and Corboy (2013), consist mostly of failed attempts to turn one’s attention away from one’s obsessions, seeking help from medical professionals, seeking information regarding their condition, and ruminating on the fact that their abnormal awareness of their own bodies is ruining their lives. The question of how to clearly distinguish between obsessions and compulsions in the experiential dimensions of somatic OCD is beyond the scope of this paper.

## Experience of impairment in somatic OCD

The criterion of “significant impairment” reveals two details peculiar to the experience of somatic OCD. As Keuler (2011) notes, most people have experienced transient episodes of bodily hyper-awareness at some point, which would be classified as “non-significant” in terms of the diagnostic scale of suffering. This, I argue, has two important consequences for our analysis.

Firstly, if a diagnosis comes down to how impairing or intrusive one’s awareness of their own body is and if most of us have experienced transient episodes of excessive body-awareness, then the lived experience of the disorder should be available to philosophical reflection into structural features inherent to lived experience of one’s organs and their functions. In what follows, I examine breathing and heartbeat in terms of their tactile sensibility and volitional motility. Secondly, if such is the case—if most people recognise themselves as having experienced transient episodes identical in structure to those that are reported in instances of somatic OCD—then the condition might be far more common than what we expect and what our current understanding would lead us to believe.

This paper’s central claim is that the experience of somatic OCD is necessarily a tactile and on some occasions also a motile experience, in addition to being an experience concerning distorted thoughts, rumination or fears concerning particular bodily processes occurring in one’s own body. In the analysis that follows, I will focus on how the body is experienced in three bodily processes that have to do with the viscera. Two of these processes have been reported as being common *foci* in somatic OCD, whereas the third process does not appear in descriptions of the disorder and will be employed to provide contrast. These processes are: (i) breathing with lungs, (ii) a beating heart and (iii) a

<sup>5</sup> Concerning the dimensions of obsessions and compulsions in OCD, see: Abramowitz et al. (2010), Denys et al. (2004).

<sup>6</sup> The question concerning how clearly defined and separate are the dimensions labelled as “obsessions” and “compulsions” falls beyond the scope of this article. Cf. Bürgy (2019).

<sup>7</sup> I am aware of the discussion in clinical psychology concerning the question of “subtype vs spectrum” in OCD, but this discussion falls beyond the scope of this paper. Cf. Taylor (2010), Hollander et al. (2012).

<sup>8</sup> Keuler (2011), Hershfield and Corboy (2013).

metabolising liver. I have chosen these three exemplary processes because their differing experiential tactility and visceral motility allow me to examine the experience of somatic OCD in terms of differences regarding their innervation and, furthermore, to study it in as an experience structured by corporeal automaticity, volitional motility and tactile sensibility of the visceral organs.

In order to distinguish the different manners in which our intestinal organs may “appear” to us, I will start by looking into to Jean-Luc Nancy’s analysis of visceral *intrusiveness* (and concealment) in “The intruder” (found in *Corpus* 2008, pp. 161–170) followed by Drew Leder’s analysis of visceral *motility* in *The Absent Body* (1990).

### Tactility and motility of the visceral body

In this section, I explicate two ways that we experience our visceral organs. Firstly, visceral organs are experienced tactilely as “intrusive” surfaces, movements or areas and secondly, they are experienced in regards to whether or not their processes or movements are “available” for our volitional movement. In order to further develop these conceptualisations I will turn to philosophers Jean-Luc Nancy and Drew Leder and their analyses of the visceral body.

The main goal for Nancy in his “The Intruder” is to show how a “self”, one’s “own” body, various parts and areas of that body, various processes and organs in bodies, transplants and grafts, contracting muscles and titanium screws are all intrusive and intruding; they are intrusive to one another, to themselves and to thought that ponders bodies. Nancy’s analysis of “his own” deteriorating heart (and his subsequent heart transplant) follows right on the footsteps of his deconstructive, ontological or “post-phenomenological” work on the “ontology of the body” undertaken in his pivotal work *Corpus*. For Nancy’s bodies in *Corpus*, classical phenomenological concepts such as *body intentionality*, *care*, *consciousness*, *ego*, *operative intentionality*, *self*, *subject*, *subjectivity* are either inwardly projected representations or imprinted significations emanating outward from unexamined or bypassed bodies. For Nancy, aforementioned philosophical, psychological or theological interpretations, formulated in terms of interiority and exteriority, fail in granting bodies their weight, their extendedness, exposure, sensibility and their sensuality, because they examine bodies as subsequent to spirit or mind (2008, pp. 67–73). Rather, for Nancy (2008, p. 15), bodies are *places* of being; bodies open singular places of being in the world—of being *here*.

How should we understand experiences of an autonomous and automatic organs calling for our attention from the dark visceral depths of our bodies? In his essay “The Intruder” Nancy describes how he senses his own deteriorating heart—how it becomes “an intruder” in “his own” body. At

first, Nancy’s heart is intrusive, because it goes unnoticed.<sup>9</sup> It is concealed like the soles of one’s feet while walking or a liver secreting bile in one’s abdomen. Nancy writes: “[I]t was strange by virtue of not being even perceptible, not even being present.” (2008, p. 163). To be more specific: mostly his heart is strange because it does not “call” for his attention by being tactilely perceivable through palpitations, movement, pain or discomfort. Initially, Nancy’s heart is “silent”, if we remember René Leriche’s<sup>10</sup> famous definition of health as the silence of the organs.

But how should we understand organs in terms of their tactile availability? In his essay “On The Soul”, Nancy (2008, p. 129) writes:

[H]ealth is life in the silence of the organs, when I don’t sense my stomach, my heart, or my viscera. There’s an intimacy there, but an intimacy that is merely not there, not sensible, it’s of the order of the mass.

As we can read, Nancy describes the transparency or concealment of an unnoticed organ with the concept of “mass” (*masse*). And what is “mass” in this context of sensing bodies? Nancy defines “mass” in the following way: a sensing body feels its own extendedness and its exposure. This means that sensing bodies feel themselves as touching and as touched, whereas a mass does not extend, touch nor stand available for touch. In *Corpus* Nancy (124) writes: “What isn’t body is mass, or substance in the sense of mass, without extension, without exposition, a point.” Nancy’s definition of mass as non-extending, and thus as something that is not available “to” or “for” touch, is precisely how our internal organs are usually given to us: we do not notice them, because they do not appear as tactile, moving, painful areas, surfaces or organs. Their “felt” sense, their sensibility, is concentrated to (or beyond) an absolute minimum of a “point”. This means that, in effect, they disappear from our awareness and become part of the unavailable background of our bodily being.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, we have two descriptions of the visceral concealment and correspondingly of visceral intrusion. For Leriche, an unnoticed heart is metaphorically silent; Leriche describes how our organs (can potentially)

<sup>9</sup> For an excellent summary of corporeal transparency, see Fuchs (2005).

<sup>10</sup> As we may remember, René Leriche’s definition of health is life lived in the silence of the organs. Nancy attributes this definition to French surgeon Xavier Bichat in Nancy (2008) for unknown reasons. Leriche’s definition has intriguing implications for understanding sickness and pain metaphorically as sonorous phenomena. For an excellent overview of Leriche see Canguilhem (1991, p. 91–102).

<sup>11</sup> There is also a temporal aspect to the absence of one’s own heart, which Nancy does not analyse with the same rigour he warrants to the felt sense of intrusion. An absent organ does not turn us towards the withering of our finite bodies and organs. An unnoticed heart is a transparent and non-extending mass, but it also beats endlessly and infinitely.

call for us.<sup>12</sup> For Nancy, an unnoticed heart is without extension and exposition and therefore does not touch us nor appear available for touch. Nancy's account highlights the role of touch in how we notice our organs, whereas Leriche's description, if understood metaphorically, gives organs the ability to cry or shout in pain.

Nancy continues by describing (2008, p. 162) his slightly increasing distress: at times he feels palpitations, minor irregularities and breaks in the rhythm. Nevertheless, these concerns mainly live on the screen of a monitor or in the language spoken by doctors and between doctors. Later on, Nancy's failing heart begins to "defect" from him. In other words, the silence of his heart is about to change and his heart is becoming something he cannot ignore. Nancy describes (2008, p. 163) this change as follows:

It became strange to me, intruding by defection: almost by rejection, if not by dejection. I had this heart at the tip of my tongue, like improper food. Rather like heartburn [*un haut-le-coeur*], but gently.

When his heart turns against him, it becomes articulated by becoming an intrusive organ demarcated by pain. With this gentle pain he feels his heart touching him, which *is* himself touching himself. His heart becomes intrusive in a way similar to how one might describe acid regurgitation or a foreign object in one's mouth. Nancy continues by describing (2008, p. 163) a change in how he senses himself as a stranger in his own body, when his heart intrudes him:

[S]omething broke away from me, or this thing surged up inside me, where nothing had been before: nothing but the "proper" immersion inside me of a "myself" never identified as this body, still less as this heart, suddenly watching itself. [...] From now on it fails, and this strangeness binds me to myself.

Hitherto, his failing heart becomes an intruder, which binds himself to himself. It becomes an intruder occupying a cavern carved up inside his chest. And his intruder, his aching heart, does not merely stay there by itself. It drags him along to the depths of his own body, which was not a place he felt before—not an extended part of his body with tactilely sensed surfaces and areas made of (gently) aching tissues, muscles, organs, bones, tendons, veins and joints. When his heart was silent and concealed—an unnoticed mass—there was no tactilely felt visceral extension to his body, which he now feels as an area of numb or gentle pain. Nancy's (and Leriche's) description of the change from a null point to an aching extension captures two possible ways to experience

one's visceral organs tactilely as well as the sudden change between these two modalities: there is a sudden change inside one's body, which turns one's attention towards a new area, surface or a place drawn out by touch, movement, ache or pain. Thus, we can understand an intruding organ as a stranger inside one's own body drawn out by pain. But what (or "who") exactly is this intruder, "proper", suffering self?

Nancy's heart transplant leads to a number of medical procedures, intricate precautions and drugs. And also to cancer, lymphoma, following from necessary and heavy immunosuppressive treatment. All of this leads to experiences of bewilderment and confusion at the heart of how he experiences himself in (or "as") a relation to "his own" body. Nancy describes how these changes display the strangeness at the very core of the "suffering I". Nancy writes (2008, p. 169):

Very soon [after immunosuppressive treatment], you are just a wavering, a strangeness suspended between poorly identified states, between pains, between impotences, between failings. Relating to the self has become a problem, a difficulty or an opacity: it happens through evil or fear, no longer anything immediate—and the mediations are tiring.

The empty identity of the 'I' can no longer rely on its simple adequation (in its 'I = I') as enunciated: 'I suffer' implicates two I's, strangers to one another (but touching each other).

As Nancy argues, in suffering "he" becomes "his own" intruder. In suffering, he exists between (i) intimacy of an empty "I" and (ii) his own inescapable suffering and pain felt in distinct areas of his body. These two strange identities touch one another while remaining intrusive to one another. "He" remains stranded between these two facets of himself; he is an "I" who suffers while remaining slightly outside intruding areas demarcated with pain, confusion and discomfort. These painful areas become more clearly refined and distinguishable than his "proper" or "intimate", yet empty self. He writes (2008, p. 170):

*Corpus meum* ['my body'] and *interior intimo meo* ['my innermost inside'], the two being joined, in a complete configuration of the death of god, in order to say very precisely that the subject's truth is its exteriority and its excessiveness: its infinite exposition. The intruder exposes me to excess. It extrudes me, exports me, expropriates me.

This strange and conflicted "self"—Nancy's *intruder*—offers us a way to elucidate the excruciating experience of being stranded or stuck on sensing one's own pulsing heart or being stuck in "having to" control one's breath, when we consider them as intrusive, in the same way as Nancy's

<sup>12</sup> Questions concerning the "voice" of organs go beyond the scope of this text. The most obvious non-metaphorically noisy organ is a ringing ear.

gentle pain, which does not allow any moment to pass without intruding it. But how can we understand the “control”, the ecstatic motility, of organs?

An important aspect concerning the experience of the viscera (in the context of somatic OCD) concerns the nearly total involuntariness of visceral motility. Drew Leder coins this as *I cannot*. Leder’s philosophical position can be broadly described as phenomenological. Leder’s intricate analyses of the viscera (1990) traverse from Descartes, through Husserl and Heidegger to Merleau-Ponty and beyond.<sup>13</sup> However, a key term for our concurrent analysis of somatic OCD is *ecstasis*, which Leder derives (through Heidegger) from classical Greek. Leder elucidates *ecstatic motility* of living bodies as follows:

This word [*ecstasis*] includes within it the root *ek*, meaning ‘out’, and *stasis*, meaning ‘to stand.’ The ecstatic is that which stands out. This admirably describes the operations of the lived body. The body always has a determined stance—it is that whereby we are located and defined. But the very nature of the body is to project outward from its place of standing. (1990, pp. 21–22).

Leder’s living bodies are distinguished by their ability to move and “project outward”. They live and move *from* the situation and the place they find themselves in the world that they share with other bodies.<sup>14</sup> His analysis of viscera in the context of *ecstasis* is highly relevant for our discussion of somatic OCD, because his comparison of the viscera and the surface organs in terms of their *volitional motility* (whether or not bodies are able to “project outward” *with* their organs) allows us to distinguish (i) motility obsessions (e.g. breathing) from (ii) tactile obsessions concerning autonomous organs. Leder writes:

The foreignness of this inner body—the automaticity of the ‘it can’, the demanding character of the ‘I must’ [eat, breathe, drink, sleep, etc –JPP]—ultimately refers back to a structure of personal inability. I will term this ‘I cannot’. I cannot act from my inner organs in the way I do from my surface musculature. Though I can lift my arm without any problem, I cannot in the same way choose to secrete a little more bile or accelerate my digestion. (1990, p. 48).

Whereas I can volitionally act *from* or *with* my surface musculature (do things I want to do), I *cannot* volitionally act *from* my visceral body. A heart, stomach or liver lies beyond my volitional control, because I cannot volitionally move, project outward or act *in* the world *from* them or *with* them. Leder’s *visceral inability* seems to define most of our visceral organs: we cannot volitionally act from our hearts, livers or our spleens, which are innervated by the autonomic nervous system. Processes, actions and movements of a heart can be described with Leder’s conceptualisation of *it can* instead. Our lungs are an important exception to visceral inability and I will analyse this further below.

The visceral body is also intriguing, because it places demands on “my body” and on “me”; I must comply with the demands of my visceral body with actions that I perform *with* and through those parts or areas of my body, which I can move, flex or contract volitionally. For example, I must eat and my body reminds me of this need when I get hungry. I also need to breathe and this we will examine below.

## Tactility obsessions

Liver, heart and lungs all share the fact that they are visceral organs situated in the torso. These three organs also demonstrate three different ways we live with our visceral organs, in terms of sensed *tactility* (how we perceive them or with them) and in terms of volitional *motility* (how we can act *from* them or *with* them).

Of these three inner organs, the liver<sup>15</sup> is the most hidden in the sense that its operations are normally not felt at all. Except for medically well-informed palpations, or due to a numb pain felt in certain hepatic conditions, we do not tactilely<sup>16</sup> experience the organ in any manner. A liver, therefore, stays concealed; most of the time, we do not feel our livers. The functions of a (non-grafted)<sup>17</sup> liver are innervated by the autonomic nervous system, which means that the organ does its tasks by itself. Therefore, in Leder’s terms, I *cannot* regulate, manipulate or withhold the actions of my liver according to my wits or wants. Visceral organs innervated by the autonomic nervous system are what makes the

<sup>13</sup> Here we cannot delve into *The Absent Body* systematically nor extensively; in this short text I am focusing on Leder’s conceptualisation of the visceral inability as a conceptual addition to Nancy’s *intruder*.

<sup>14</sup> In other words, Leder’s bodies find themselves *thrown* in the world, which is an existential structure analysed extensively by Heidegger in *Being and Time*.

<sup>15</sup> For an intriguing account of an experience of liver abnormality and deterioration, see Varela (2001).

<sup>16</sup> In this text, I choose to exclude the realm of somatic sounds from my analysis. Heart and lungs are also sonorous organs.

<sup>17</sup> A grafted liver is neurally isolated from one’s body and it does (remarkably, if you ask me) its biddings by itself: “Following liver transplantation, all hepatic nerves are transected; thus, liver allografts are completely isolated from neural control of their hosts. Despite this absolute denervation, liver allograft function does not appear to be significantly impaired after successful transplantation”, Colle et al. (2004, p. 924).

automaticity (*it can* in Leder's vocabulary) of the body and which are unavailable for us in terms of volitional *motility*, unlike the surface musculature such as the arms, lips or toes.

Could we conceive of somatic obsessions concerning the actions, movements, sensations, pains, sounds or processes of the liver? It would be quite hard given the fact that under usual circumstances we neither feel it tactilely (but given a condition such as hypochondria one could feel pain<sup>18</sup> in the area of the organ) nor can act *from* it. A liver, as it turns out, is not reported in the scarce literature on somatic OCD as an organ with processes that people would become hyper-aware of (unless we include calls of nature as being an obsession concerning our livers). This can be interpreted as being the case due to the unavailability of a liver in terms of its tactility and its motility.

The heart is potentially more present in our awareness than a liver: if I run up a hill or engage in a mindfulness exercise, I can become attentive to the pulse of my heart. I can tactilely perceive my heart in the tissue surrounding it or surrounding my veins. My heart, like my liver, is innervated by the autonomic nervous system, but I can also indirectly affect the processes of my heart through my actions. For example, I can run up a hill or I meditate, which both have an effect on the rate of my pulse. Nevertheless, a heart is still its very own agent in terms of voluntary control; I *cannot* engage in a *direct*<sup>19</sup> control of my heart in its functions, just as I cannot regulate the operations or actions of my liver. I cannot (literally) act *from* my heart in terms of its functions that are integral to circulatory actions: I cannot volitionally withhold the circulation of my blood, change its direction, open or close various valves, veins, chambers or tubes. Rather, we ought to describe the functions of a heart with Leder's conceptualisation of *it can*. The anatomical reason for my visceral inability comes down to the fact that it is innervated by the autonomic nervous system.

Somatic obsessions concerning one's beating heart have been reported by Keuler (2011), and Hershfield and Corboy (2013, p. 177). In these cases, people describe an unbearable condition in which they cannot *not* attend to their pulse—to the extent that their constant experience of their pulse causes them to suffer. In such circumstances, somatic obsessions concerning one's heart seem to be centred on a temporally constituted felt sense of bodily rhythm, which is regulated by the autonomous neural systems and felt tactilely in the tissue surrounding the organ and one's veins (and, at times,

also in one's ears). The change from being an unnoticed corporeal feature to being an unbearable aspect of one's everyday life can be understood with Nancy's description of how visceral organs become *intrusive* with an experience of pain or movement: at first, a beating heart goes unnoticed. Then, it becomes an extended part of "me," which "I" touch and which touches "me" from the inside my own body, without letting go. When I suffer from somatic OCD focused on the movement of my heart "I" am, as a "suffering I"; not only ruminating about an intolerable future, but also tactilely stuck into my beating heart, which is intruding my everyday life with its movement.

## Motility obsessions

There is also another type of somatic obsessions, which concerns bodily processes that are partially and, at times, under volitional control. These processes are usually not attended to, but in somatic OCD they become something one is chronically and excruciatingly aware of. Some of the most common reported processes are as follows: breathing, blinking, swallowing of saliva, position of tongue against one's teeth, etc. In this subsection, I will focus on breathing as an exemplary somatic obsession, which, in addition to being felt *tactilely* in the body, also has to do with the *volitional motility* of bodies.

Leder's account of visceral automaticity holds true for almost all of the visceral organs, such as the liver, spleen, heart or kidneys: we cannot regulate or withhold their action, yet they place demands with which we must comply if we want to live. However, lungs and breathing seem to differ from other intestinal organs and their autonomy. Breathing usually happens without any conscious input, but such is not always the case, as we know from various therapeutic and non-therapeutic practices, such as mindfulness, yoga, pilates, free diving but also from reports of somatic OCD (Keuler 2011; Hershfield and Corboy 2013). Somatic innervation of lungs does not seem to comply to Leder's account of visceral inability. He seems to take for granted the automaticity of breathing and, accordingly, he does not question the peculiar status of lungs as non-autonomic visceral organs.

We circulate air with our lungs while we sleep, read or eat. Ventilation of air is an integral part of such a wide array of actions as speaking, singing, coughing or yawning, which are different ways of exhaling warmed air. We can consciously "override" the automaticity of breathing, if we attend to our breath. Some of us can volitionally withhold their breath until they pass out, but not all of us are capable of such a feat. When we breathe, we expand and contract the volume of our lungs, which moves air in and out due to atmospheric pressure.

<sup>18</sup> An analysis of the similarities between somatic obsessions, the felt sense of chronic pain and the experience of tinnitus would move beyond the scope of this article. For discussion of pain, see: Scarry (1985).

<sup>19</sup> Although indirect control of heart's beat through meditation, relaxation or breathing is possible, it does not change the fact that one cannot volitionally flex the muscles of their heart.

Leder (1990, p. 50) points out that the “actual” exchange of air in the lungs’ alveolar tissue remains beyond what we can tactilely feel or volitionally control. However, this does not indicate that the activity of breathing would be an autonomic or “vegetative” process; no exchange of air takes place in the alveolar tissue, if the continual and rhythmic movement of ventilation is withheld or interrupted, for whatever reasons. Conversely, breathing is closer to walking than the heartbeat in terms of its innervation (Mitchell et al. 2009). Thus, it seems that we can, in fact, act *from* our lungs in terms of volitional motility, even though our lungs are hidden inside<sup>20</sup> the chest and most often do their bidding without requiring our engagement at all. In other words, even though breathing is usually “automatic”, it is not an autonomic function. This difference allows us to understand how *motility obsessions* may differ from *tactility obsessions*, which are innervated by the autonomic nervous system. In what I coin as *motility obsessions*, we experience ourselves as attentively stuck in a volitionally innervated process in addition to being “intruded” tactilely by this process that we have volitional control of.

Let us visit two vivid literary descriptions of how we experience our visceral functions in terms of the volitionality of their motility. In *The Lives of a Cell*, Lewis Thomas writes<sup>21</sup> (1974, p. 78):

If I were informed tomorrow that I was in direct communication with my liver, and could now take over, I would become deeply depressed.

Lewis continues by explaining the reason for his substantial distress in this hypothetical situation: he cannot fathom any of the hepatic decisions made by his liver and prefers not having the slightest responsibility for them. I argue that this is one central aspect of the lived experience of *motility obsessions*: uncertainty regarding the adequate, necessary or optimal performance of a particular bodily process, in terms of what our bodies require. However, if we keep breathing as our exemplary obsessive phenomena, we do not need to merely imagine a “direct communication” with the specific organ(s), because we can, in fact, volitionally control our breath. In this regard, we can understand that one might be agitated about one’s manner of breathing: whether one breathes too fast (as reported by Keuler 2011), too slow, or whether one forgets to maintain one’s breath inadvertently, which might result in tissue damage due to insufficient ventilation. Such distressing experiences of uncertainty are an integral part of the experience of somatic

obsessive–compulsive disorder (Keuler 2011), but they do not exhaust the experiential dimensions of the phenomena.

I argue, that there are also other aspects central to the lived experience of motility obsessions. Leder (1990, pp. 47–48, emphasis mine) gives us a clue:

Because I can trust my vegetative body to manage the repetitive assimilations and excretions, I am freed to focus upon novel tasks. *If I had to remember to breathe or had to stage-manage each phase of my digestion, there would be little time left for other activities.* The surface body is liberated by such automaticities.

Indeed, if one has to maintain and manage their ventilation for extended periods of times, it can be deeply wearying due to the measure of the task. Such is the experience of somatic obsessive–compulsive disorder, if we look into descriptions of the disorder (Keuler 2011; Hershfield and Corboy 2013, pp. 177–185). I argue that here we have located another pivotal feature inherent to *motility obsessions*, which concerns the experience of being intruded on by one’s own body and no longer having the freedom to live as one pleases. Firstly, we have an experience of the disrupted automaticity of the “vegetative” body, which can be disrupted because breathing is not an autonomic process, we can volitionally breathe. Secondly, we have the inescapable necessity of the process, which manifests itself in the feeling of suffocation, if we fail in volitionally maintaining the process of breathing. In other words, we feel that if we do not consciously maintain the cycle of ventilation, then we are going to suffer, maybe even suffocate, pass out or die. And most of all, we feel discomfort in our lungs and throat. We feel our lungs striving or gasping for fresh air. In effect, the silent automaticity of the ventilation is gone, because we cannot consciously turn away from our ability to act *from* our lungs, in terms of Leder’s account of volitional motility.

Thus, our everyday life is interrupted and intruded by a volitional movement and we feel trapped by having to maintain it, because we can turn away neither from:

- (i) Being able to breathe volitionally;
- (ii) Having to breathe constantly.

This experience has previously been typified as “magnification of the thought” or as “catastrophizing about an intolerable future” (Hershfield and Corboy 2013, p. 181) in the previous analyses of the condition. However, if we consider the lived experience of constantly having to manage one’s breath in order not to experience the consequences of insufficient ventilation, the intrusion of one’s life is not limited to the region of thinking; it comes down to how we tactilely experience our lungs while we breathe, how it feels to move one’s abdomen in order to breathe and how it feels to suffocate when one does not continue breathing. Fearful thoughts,

<sup>20</sup> Although one could argue that bodily surface continues into cavernous lungs.

<sup>21</sup> Also cited by Leder in *The Absent Body*, 48.



critical rumination, and catastrophizing may follow from the experience of a disrupted automaticity of ventilation, but such cognitive aspects of OCD do not adequately describe the central role of the body in the experiential dimensions of motility obsessions. If I feel that I have to maintain my breathe, I suffer because I feel *intruded* by the volitional motility of my lungs.

## Conclusions

I have argued above that in both tactility obsessions and motility obsessions, we are not only ruminating or thinking about an intolerable future following from not being able to steer our attention away from our bodily processes. Rather than consisting merely in unusual thoughts, the intrusive experience has to do with how we tactilely feel our bodies and how it feels when we volitionally move with our bodies.

In the case of tactility obsessions, any rumination of an intolerable future follows from what we sense *in* and *with* our bodies. At first, an unnoticed organ, e.g. my heart, is absent or concealed. Then, it becomes an extended part of “me,” which “I” touch and which touches “me” from the inside my own body, without letting go. When I suffer from somatic OCD focused on the movement of my heart “I” am, as a “suffering I”, not only ruminating excessively about an intolerable future, but also feel tactilely stuck into my beating heart, which is intruding my life with its movement.

When I suffer from a motility obsession, I feel stuck on a necessary bodily process, which I have volitional control over. Fearful thoughts may follow from the experience of disrupted automaticity of such a bodily process, but cognitive aspects of OCD do not adequately describe the central role of the body in the experience of motility obsessions. If I feel that I have to maintain my breathe, I suffer because I feel intruded by the volitional motility of my own lungs.

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