

TOUCHING GROUND

MLADEN DOLAR*

The title relates to a quip by Lacan, notoriously a man of many quips. When debating the question ‘what does one think with’, he maintains that he thinks above all with his feet, since it is with the feet that one touches ground. Touching ground, however, as we will see, is no easy feat, it doesn’t come naturally, if we are to conceive it as the locus of both thought and touch.

Tactility, touching, the sense of touch, all appear to be the firmest thing there is. What one can touch is, tautologically, the most palpable and the most tangible, not only in relation to the hazy realm of concepts, ideas, names and thought, all those ‘untouchables’ by definition, but also in relation to other senses, reputedly five of them, if we are to trust a long and venerable tradition. What we can touch is closer to us, closer to the bosom, more ‘real’, to adopt this naïve parlance for the moment, than what we can see or hear or smell, while taste, the ‘closest contender’ of touch, seems to present a special case of touching, special by its strict localization and by its endowment with an additional quality (‘touching plus’). Touching is singled out by its immediacy, while other senses are subject to a certain deferral in various ways, and by its spatial proximity, indeed the collapse of any spatial distance, the zero distance, the zero space. It is further singled out as the seemingly first and originary sense, being there most prominently from the outset, what one can most massively feel to start with, and by extension a prenatal experience, before one can sense anything else, for as far back as one can imagine a living creature with a surface, a membrane, a skin, there must also be a touching involved, the surface being affected by another element touching it, surrounding it, infringing upon it, pressing it. There is an inside and there is an outside, in the most elementary sense, only insofar as we can conceive a

* Filozofska fakulteta, Univerza v Ljubljani, Aškerčeva 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenija.

limit of touching, of a surface rubbing against another surface, bumping into something else, into the first other. To touch is to limit, it happens at the limit and it constitutes a limit – one cannot conceive of a limit without it touching what is supposedly beyond the limit. So touching is a difference, it implies the possibly first notion of a difference, the difference of an entity to its other touching it. It takes two to touch. It takes a split to render touching possible. Hence an entity that touches itself, like the human body constantly does, is thereby turned into a split entity, doubling itself. There is a ‘philosophy of the two’ implied in the very notion of the touch.¹

To put it in those very abstract and the roughest of terms, one can already sense the vastness of the problem. What seems to be the most firm and palpable, solid and plain, starts to get ridden with speculation, we find ourselves immediately involved in the scene of philosophy, indeed a metaphysics, we cannot be spared the speculative concepts not even for a moment. Even to use a very rough and approximate description – and I am not trying to be accurate or subtle in this first approach – one has to engage a set of concepts, rather spectacular and decisive concepts which bear heavy consequences, such as the limit, the difference, the inside and the outside, the nutshell of a self, the body, affecting and being affected, materiality, the other, otherness, immediacy, mediation, distance, reciprocity, split, the very notion of space, of contiguity, of contact, of the limited and the unlimited. Touching immediately materializes and palpably presentifies some basic concepts and elementary speculative decisions, it touches upon metaphysics at its most physical, as it were. One could say, not without irony, that touching is the *touchstone* of philosophy.

There is, on the one hand, an old image of *lapis philosophorum*, the philosophers’ stone, and the search for it epitomized the philosophical endeavour as such in some periods, the force of its wisdom epitomized by a stone: a stone which could supposedly possess the force of turning all baser metals to gold (and with the current collapse of economy there seems to be a renewal of the old demand put again to philosophers, when the economists have come to their wits’ end, namely to come up with some new version of philosophers’ stone and meet the greatest need of the hour).² This old image implies a cer-

¹ I make this reference to the subtitle of a book by Alenka Zupančič (*The Shortest Shadow. Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two*, Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, 2003), to which this paper is indebted, although in an oblique way.

² The modern counterpart to the mythical philosophers’ stone is the notorious ‘invisible hand’, namely the invisible hand of the market, reputed to perform the same sort of miracles. Anything it touches is liable to turn into gold. Our Adam, the Adam of market economy, i. e. Adam Smith (the joke frequently made by Marx) used this

tain notion of touch, namely the magical touch which would, by mere touch, bestow value, the highest value on the worthless (one could say ‘the value-added touch’, VAT). The imagery of touch involves the capacity for magical transformation. The obverse side of this is the equally wide-spread imagery of touch as perpetrating the very opposite: its capacity to soil and spoil, to tarnish and sully whatever it touches, to stain and to taint, that is, to take away all value, to devalue; the touch as the instrument of degradation and debasement, of destruction of worth. So the touch appears to be the agent of a maximum transformation in opposite directions (but is it ‘the same’ touch? what is the identity of a touch? can one step into the same touch twice?): it can bestow highest value or bring about a maximum loss of value – and there is no shortage of evidence in the cultural history for both. What soils has the capacity to purify, and vice versa. Could one say, a propos of touch: *Die Wunde schliesst der Speer nur der sie schlug?* The touch has all the makings of *pharmakon*, of Plato’s poison and cure in one, that Derrida has magisterially singled out.

As opposed to the magical philosophers’ stone, the dream of the alchemists, the touchstone was a very real device, going back to antiquity,³ a probing stone with which one could prove or disprove the worth of a metal, by the streak made on it, to tell gold and silver from the worthless stuff. Its purpose was, most philosophically, to go beyond the appearance, to tell the real thing from its counterfeit. The touchstone should be the prerequisite of true philosophy, of its ability to sift and sort out the appearances, and more poignantly, to probe the truth or falsity of the word by touching, by streaking the word against the stone, as it were. The alleged claims of value are to be tested against the stone. It appears that probing can most convincingly be done by touch, not by sight or hearing or smell or taste. Touching seems to be the least deceiving of them all, the least prone to trickery and ruse, and the stone the

formula only once in *The Wealth of Nations*, but it justly came to epitomize the whole. One could say that the present predicament displays another wonder, namely how one can be harshly and most palpably touched by the invisible hand. Indeed knocked out.

³ It was a dark, flinty schist, jasper or basanite. Its mythical source in Antiquity is the story of Battus (Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, II, 11), who saw Mercury (Hermes) steal Apollo’s oxen, and Mercury offered him a cow as a bribe to keep silent. But Mercury then decided to probe the man, he disguised himself and offered him a cow plus an ox if he would be willing to tell where he got the cow. Battus couldn’t resist the temptation and divulged the secret, and Mercury changed him into a touchstone. – Touchstone is also the name of the clown character in Shakespeare’s *As you like it*, the fool – as many Shakespearean fools (cf. *King Lear*) – being the natural touchstone of wisdom. “For always the dullness of the fool is the whetstone of the wits.” (I, 2).

least volatile of all substances. – If the philosophers' stone has everything to inflame imagination, then the touchstone points towards the empirical and the material as the discriminating criterion of validity. But there is no easy way to separate the two in touching, its empirical side is constantly intertwined with the imaginary, its literality with metaphor, its groundedness with the elusive; and furthermore, the physiological in touch is interwoven with the social, since the first social command is the injunction: don't touch. The society begins with a severed touch, a gap introduced into touching. We will come back to this.

If touching could thus serve as the touchstone of philosophy, this already implies a number of presuppositions. There is a certain metaphoricity of touching which puts it in close kinship with sense certainty (cf. Saint Thomas, no doubt the patron-saint of touching), and thus at the same time the most basic and the most remote from the proper philosophical endeavour. For if one takes the more elevated senses of sight and hearing, the gaze and the voice, as the guiding metaphors of philosophy, one has already operated a certain disentanglement, a separation, an extrication, a detachment from the lower senses, one has taken a distance to touch and the sort of sense certainty it implies. Sight and hearing operate by interposition, mediation and distancing, they function at a distance through a medium, one has already separated the subject and the object from their contiguity, their contingency (contingence, from *con-tango*, co-touch, implies a haphazard contact, as opposed to necessity). And to be sure the guiding metaphors were taken from sight – theory, speculation, insight, reflection, mind's eye, *eidos*, form, *phainomenon*; and there was a hidden metaphorical connection with the presence of the voice, including the voice of conscience, voice as presence, which Derrida has taught us to unravel as the history of phonocentrism. To establish philosophy one has to take distance from the mere touch, one has to detach oneself from the immediacy (one has to de-touch), from the contamination of the most immediate and enveloping of senses. Conceptuality and ideality depend on being 'out of touch' – if I leave aside here the utter chaotic volatility of smell, the nightmare of philosophers, supposedly the basest and the most inchoate of all senses, a telltale streak of animality, and the very special case of taste (which eventually got its metaphorical credentials and social promotion as the standard of judgment at the point where all universal and conceptual standards fail, cf. Kant). So touching is the touchstone, being both the most basic and the most remote from concepts – but concept, as well as *Begriff*, stem from *con-capio*, *begreifen*, i. e. to seize, to grab, to capture, so the conceptual edifice has to be probed by touching, it has to test its validity with the contiguous and the contingent, with something that presents its counterpart,

something too firm to be liquefied by ideas and concepts, and yet not simply something outside them, but presenting precisely their boundary, the line where concepts and ideas touch upon their other – their real?

Aristotle, on the classical spot about touching in *De anima*, as classical as they come, took the boundary very seriously. Many basic philosophical questions are immediately touched upon: to start with the question of the One, of the unity of touch – can one speak of one sense at all? Isn't the touch from the outset ridden with multiplicity and the heterogeneous, so that one cannot quite bring it to a common denominator? It seems to imply a multiplicity of senses and a multiplicity of objects. And then the *hypokeimenon* – what is the substance of what one touches? Is there one substance of touching? But I am in particular concerned with the question of the limit, the boundary which is involved in the very notion of touch. How can one conceive it? A simple externality of two bodies, or objects, touching each other? Is the touch as such inner or outer? What do we touch with? For “if the experiment is made of making a web and stretching it tight over the flesh, as soon as this web is touched the sensation is reported in the same manner as before, yet it is clear that the organ is not in this membrane” (423a).⁴ So one can interpose a membrane, a very thin foil, one can redouble the limit, redouble the skin, but the touch doesn't reside there. It is as if, to conceive the touch, the touching surface would have to redouble itself. The surfaces touch, but the touch recedes, it is an inner faculty of the surface. The membrane stretched over the surface of the body redoubles the limit into the outer and the inner, so the experiment is on the one hand useless, but at the same time it testifies to a necessity of complication the moment we start conceiving the limit. It involves both adding another skin and peeling the skin, the limit is an addition and a subtraction, for the organ of touching lies beneath.

On top of that there is an interposition also on the outer side: “If two bodies touch one another under water, their touching surfaces cannot be dry, but must have water between, namely the water which wets their bounding surfaces; from all this it follows that in water two bodies cannot be in contact with one another. The same holds of two bodies in air – air being to bodies in air precisely what water is to bodies in water – but the facts are not so evident to our observation, because we live in air [...] For we perceive everything through a medium; but in these cases (of touch) the fact escapes us.” (423a-b). So there is a contact and not a contact, one has to suppose an ever so thin a layer of water or air between the surfaces, making the touch impossible, or

⁴I am using the translation by J. A. Smith in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, New York, The Modern Library Classics, 2001.

mediating the touch. We live in a bubble, yet the touch nevertheless pierces the bubble, it is the most elementary sense for Aristotle, something that enables life – everything else is dispensable, except the touch. “For without touch it is impossible to have any other sense; for every body that has soul in it must [...] be capable of touch.” (435b) Touch is necessary to animals for their being, while all the other senses are necessary merely “for their well-being”. Touch pertains to being, to live being, to being alive, the rest is luxury and sophistication, a bonus, an extra.

Minimal medium is still a medium – the medium is the message? –, and it is just the question of distance and scale: with hearing, sight and smell we perceive “over a greater distance”. The collapse of a medium would entail the sameness, the coincidence, but perception is distinction, the distinction of the inner and the outer, and the distinction of the limit and the medium, if we are to get to tactile distinctions at all. And ultimately the distinction of the tangible and the intangible: “Touch has for its object both what is tangible and what is intangible. Here by ‘intangible’ is meant (a) what like air possesses some quality of tangible things in a very slight degree and (b) what possesses it in an excessive degree, as destructive things do.” (424a) There is a threshold of touch, of too little or too much touch, beyond which there is the intangible, the collapse of touch, but which is also the collapse of a living creature, its death.

So what follows from Aristotle’s rough description could be summed up by a slogan that the elementary difference, implied by the touch, needs a third – the two cannot touch without a third. *It takes three to be two*, it takes three to make a difference, both as the reduplication of the surface, the additional membrane, the split into inner/outer, and the intervention of a medium – the bottom-line is: it takes a medium, but the medium keeps shifting. And this is, in a general way, where I want to get: to the object implied in the touch which is a surplus in relation to the two touching surfaces. The difference plus the object – not as a medium of the difference, not as its encompassing cover, but as its surplus, or its cut in the midst of the difference, the object emerging in the cut, and which strictly speaking can’t be quite counted as a third, for the cut with its object is not quite an element to be counted. There is ‘two plus’. Admittedly, Aristotle points to it in a way which is both rough and convoluted.

From the reduplication, the complication of the limit Aristotle wants to get to the proper medium of the touch, which is for him the flesh, *sarx* (as opposed to *soma*, the body). The addition of another layer of skin and of another layer of air has to lead to subtraction: we do not touch and feel with the surface and at the surface, we touch and feel with the flesh which redoubles

the surface. The complication of the limit makes the touch recede into the flesh as the medium. The proper medium of touch is not detached from the body as in other senses, but is part of the body itself, the flesh which connects the surface, the skin, with interiority, with the inner sense, the seat of sense, its heart, which is precisely the heart (for Aristotle as well as in antiquity in general). One touches with the heart, ultimately, but only through the medium of the flesh. So the flesh is the distance of the body to itself, its inner distance, the distance between the skin and the heart. Other senses, seeing, hearing, need an outer medium, they are like touching at a distance, they are out of touch, yet there seems to be more the question of scale, the stretching of the medium.

Aristotle's book is called *De anima*, 'On the soul', so the question lying at the bottom and framing the discussion of the senses would appear to be the question of the soul and its touching the body, the interface of the body and the soul. Yet this is not a good way of putting it, this is not a version of the mind-body problem in any modern sense; rather, the soul, for Aristotle, is the very principle of life, it is what informs life and drives it, it is the very form of the body, not a disconnected entity which would then seek connection to its other. It is in touch with the body (*De anima* is indeed mostly *De corpore*), it inhabits all senses, and there is a question of gradation, of graduation, graduality: from the vegetative soul to the animal and sensing soul, to finally the *nous*, the seat of reason, the only part of the soul which can pretend to immortality – there is like a ladder to immortality (and the question of the way to conceive the immortality of the soul in Aristotle is a traditionally disputed one). So the basic distinction is not between the physical and the psychic, but between the lower and the higher, and the soul, in the graduality of its forms, inhabits both.

It is not quite so with Plato, who is far more adamant in severing the graduality, severing the tie of touch and of all other senses, for the benefit of a pure gaze. Plato is not in touch with touch, one has to be out of touch in order to see with the eyes of the soul alone. Soul has an eye and no touch, and the gaze is not touching at a distance. In order to touch the thing itself one has to desist from touching. No doubt one can say that there is denigration of the touch, but also, at the same time, there is the question of what is the proper touch. How can one properly touch the thing itself? Can one? Under what conditions? Being out of touch also means taking the touch most seriously – and a whole line of metaphysical (haptocentric?) tradition follows from there.

There is already in these ancient texts an outline of something one could call the basic predicament of touch. On the one hand touching is ubiquitous,

omnipresent, unavoidable, one cannot escape being touched and touching, at every moment, from the outset. The world, the other, keeps in touch, whether we want it or not. Yet, at the same time there is also the impossibility to touch, the inability to touch properly, which accompanies touching as its shadow. While being constantly in touch, there is also a pervasive sense of being out of touch, of not being able to reach out, and to be reached. But this basic dilemma is rather a description of a very modern predicament, which can be described as an overwhelming and increasing flow of perception, of a constant amplification of perception, accompanied by a diminishing capacity to perceive; an overwhelming tide of contacts increasingly deprived of a possibility of making a contact. We are both more in touch and more out of touch than ever, and what we touch most is the keyboard, and what is most appropriately called the touch-screen.

With the notion of the flesh, one can get in one deceptively simple step from Aristotle to Merleau-Ponty (whose centenary is celebrated this year). Merleau-Ponty's notion of *la chair*, the flesh, as opposed to the body, is a very Aristotelian move to start with, although Aristotle is never quoted, and rarely mentioned, in *Phenomenology of Perception* or *The Visible and the Invisible*, where the 'idea' of the flesh is expounded – a singular omission? Merleau-Ponty is, after a long out-of-touch era of philosophy, perhaps the most prominent philosopher of the touch, until the recent surge spurred by Jean-Luc Nancy. Not quite of the touch as a separate problem, for touching is implicated in perception as one of its facets, and none of its facets can be, at least *de iure*, quite singled out as the basic or the primary.⁵ Perception, to put it simply, is precisely the problem, not of how to conceive the boundary, but rather of how it is impossible to posit a boundary: the 'body' extends itself into the world and the world extends itself into the 'body', and this is why it is inappropriate to speak of either the body or the world as given, already constituted in themselves prior to perception. The body has to turn into flesh, which is not something simply pertaining to the body, but is at the same time the flesh of the world itself, *la chair du monde*. Having a flesh as the 'medium' of perception is but another side of the world itself being endowed with flesh. It is the interface, or rather the interlace, which has to be the starting point of the renewal of philosophy: the point where we are not dealing with the constituted subject and object, the self and the world, but the very area of their overlap-

⁵ For the criticism of the tacit hierarchies in Merleau-Ponty cf. Jacques Derrida, *Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, Paris, Galilée, 2000, p. 233, 235 etc. There is an underlying primacy of vision and a hidden primacy of the hand, according to Derrida. Cf. *Phénoménologie*, p. 270.

ping, a pre-subjective and a pre-objective area, *a touching without a subject and an object*. “Nothing determines me from the outside,” says Merleau-Ponty in a famous statement on the last page of *The Phenomenology of Perception*, “not that nothing solicits me, but on the contrary, because I am from the outset outside myself and open to the world” (p. 520).⁶

In this view, seeing and being seen are not divided as subject and object, but reversible, and so is touching and being touched (and furthermore, an insertion of touching into seeing and vice versa). There is a fundamental reversibility, yet a reversibility with a hiatus, a lag, a non-coincidence in the coincidence, a gap constantly recuperated but never bridged or sublated, never *aufgehoben*.⁷ The perceiving and the perceived, the touching and the touched are like on a Moebius strip,⁸ they are parts of the same surface – not surface, but depth and surface in one, there is no simple surface for Merleau-Ponty⁹ – but with a gap in their very indistinction.¹⁰ Through me, in me, the world sees itself and touches itself. “I ought to say that one perceives in me [*on perçoit en moi*] and not that I perceive” (*ibid.*, p. 249), there is a dimension of anonymity of perception that has to be rescued and rehabilitated, as opposed to all philosophical subjectivism and empiricism, idealism and materialism, intellectualism and sensualism. Flesh is not matter, but neither is it an ideality – Merleau-Ponty insists on this at length in *The Visible and the Invisible*; it is rather the point of their indistinction and distinctivity in one. It is not a positive given, it is both tangible and intangible, its intangibility resides in its tangibility, not opposed to it but internal to it.

But I don’t want to dwell on Merleau-Ponty at length, I just want to single out one aspect. If I started to describe the problem of touch as the problem

⁶ I refer to the French original, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris, Gallimard, 1945 (Tel, 1978).

⁷ “Reversibility is the ultimate truth,” states the last sentence of the famous paper “L’entrelacs – le chiasme”, “Intertwining – chiasmus” (*Le visible et l’invisible*, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p. 204), but a non-symmetrical and non-dialectical reversibility.

⁸ “[...] the sensing and the sensed body are like the top side and the underside, or two segments of the same circular course, which runs from left to right on the top side and right to left on the underside, yet it is in both phases one single movement.” (*Le visible et l’invisible*, p. 182)

⁹ Merleau-Ponty is not the man of the surface, as opposed to Deleuze, with whom he otherwise shares many features.

¹⁰ The circle of distinction and indistinction also applies to the distinction of (five) senses: “The senses translate each other with no need for an interpreter, they understand each other without the recourse to the idea.” (*Phénoménologie*, p. 271) Yet they constitute separate realms; the world is constituted in their contacts, through their ‘touching’ each other, infringing upon each other. What constitutes the world is ‘*la chose intersensorielle*’, the intersensory thing.

of the two, the problem of counting, of the proper count, then one can say that Merleau-Ponty very much insists on not counting. What he keeps saying is that one should never start with two – subject-object, body-world, materiality-ideality, senses-intellect, outside-inside, the One-the Other (one could economically say sense-sense, the sensual vs. meaning, this encapsulates his problem: the equivocation of the two senses of sense, the birth of sense out of sense). It is starting with two, with the split, the distinction, which got metaphysics into all the trouble, the two parts could then never quite meet and intersect – and the meeting of the two, the point of their indistinction, is for him the real of the human experience, its crux, its knot. But one cannot start with one either, there is no originary one, no underlying unitary principle, an *arché*, one substance, which would then split into two, divide itself, so that the difference and the distinction would be derived as a self-splitting of a single source. One should start with the uncountable, something that cannot be submitted to count, cannot be legitimately counted, something which is *neither one nor two*. Counting doesn't apply. Perception, sensation, flesh are the names variously given this area ("What we call the flesh [...] has no name in any philosophy," *Le visible*, p. 193). His prevailing rhetorical formula is neither-nor: neither subject nor object, neither matter nor spirit, neither inside nor outside. The unlimited and the uncountable can only be circumscribed by being delimited from the limited and the countable, they cannot avoid being defined *per negationem*.¹¹ If the area which 'counts' is uncountable, if it is neither one nor two, then it is the *constant becoming two*, but a becoming which cannot reach its end, the two sides can never quite become two, they cannot get loose from their tie, but their unity resides only in their split. Their common ground is not their common measure, but the incommensurate as such. They can never cut loose from each other, but they cannot coincide either. There is their coincidence and non-coincidence 'in one', their distinction and indistinction 'in one', but 'one' is precisely not the word. (That would lead us into the dialectical trap of the Hegelian 'identity of identity and non-identity'.)

The uncountable area of flesh – one could put it simply: bodies can be counted, flesh can't – is not an area of chaos. Merleau-Ponty insists on it: "The flesh (the flesh of the world or my flesh) is not contingency, chaos, but texture [...]" (*Le visible*, p. 192). It is a texture of minimal differences which

¹¹ But if it is uncountable, it has to account for counting – for where does this ubiquitous fallacy come from? Why are we so easily prey to the illusion of counting, to making illegitimate distinctions? Why does the intertwining so readily withdraw and disguise itself? Why does illegitimate counting start at all? Why is perception deceptive while being itself the very cure against its deception?

overlap and infringe upon each other, so they can neither be united nor separated. Perception is both lucid and obscure, it produces sense and remains enigmatic, withdrawing and revealing itself ‘in one’. The texture is not a structure, for structure implies difference (even more: this is all it is made of), the texture is a sub-difference, the neither-one-nor-two. One could sum up: there is touch, but there is no two. One should start by touch, but one cannot arrive either at its unity or a difference. *There is touch, but there is no cut.* For positing an emphatic difference would, for Merleau-Ponty, be tantamount to falling into the trap of the traditional differences which have haunted the history of metaphysics – but can one conceive of a difference which would avoid this pitfall? A difference which wouldn’t amount to the traditional duality nor to the self-split of One?

I have evoked the Moebius strip – it is a notorious Lacanian device, not something used by Merleau-Ponty. There is a top and a bottom, an upper side and an underside of a surface, but both find themselves on the same surface, they don’t touch, but they are nevertheless contiguous, they cannot be detached from each other (although one only finds oneself on one side at the time). But Lacan’s point, in his multiple uses of this device, is precisely that the Moebius strip implies a cut, it results from a cut, although it has no simple outside, both outside and inside are on the same strip. And it is the nature of this cut which implies the object – precisely the *objet a*, not on some separate location beyond the strip, but inhabiting its very margin, the edge of a cut. In the simplest terms one could say that what informs Merleau-Ponty’s endeavour is a *disavowal of the cut*, or a circumvention of the cut. Psychoanalysis would agree with everything else except for this: there is a cut.¹²

¹² I can add a brief footnote to Merleau-Ponty’s construction of perception. It is very curious and telling that, in the first part of the first part of *The Phenomenology of Perception* after the lengthy Introduction, he practically starts his analysis of the body not with the normal and common state of affairs, but with a strange peculiarity, an oddity: with the discussion of the phantom limb (*Phénoménologie*, p. 90). An amputated leg or an arm still ‘feels’, it is still endowed with perception, and he looks at some length at the medical evidence. The move is in a way ‘vintage Merleau-Ponty’: perception is not simply some closeness of contact (rather, it is *too close for contact*), but constantly haunted by phantoms, permeated by something pertaining to phantasy and endowed with a dreamlike quality (cf. “Each sensation contains a germ of a dream,” *ibid.*, p. 249), there is a streak of hallucination dwelling in it. He spends quite some time arguing that the phantom limb cannot be adequately accounted for either in physiological or in psychological terms, that the two strangely intersect in it, yet it is also irreducible to their simple intersection (that would already imply a separation of the inseparable). If Merleau-Ponty’s position could be summed up not only by ‘there is no cut’, but also by ‘there is no lack’, then it can appear astounding that he starts off precisely at the point of a lack and at the point of a rather spectacular cut – a cut-

For Freud, if I start with summing up rather than leaving it for the end, the touch *is* the cut. The touch and the cut coincide. This is at the core of *Totem and Taboo* (1912-13) where one can find his most extensive passages on the touch, and I propose to briefly comment on them.

What defines the social as such, and hence the properly human dimension, is a cut in the touch. The core of the social injunctions, in a nutshell, can be seen as ‘don’t touch’. This is a zero-injunction which metaphorically (menotimically?) spreads to all others. This is at the core of taboo as the minimal ‘model’, implying the assumption that “certain persons and things are charged with a dangerous power, which can be transferred through contact with them, almost like an infection” (PFL 13, p. 75).¹³ This entails some basic division of the social, a formal dividing line which separates persons and things into two categories, the ones that can be touched and the ones that can’t – the divide embodied, in traditional societies, by the line between the sacred and the profane, the divide massively sanctioned by religious and political authority, which can in turn be seen as relying on it. But this will not concern us any further here. What Freud is trying to get to is a parallel between those traditional injunctions, old as mankind, with the behaviour of modern day neurotics (he announces in the subtitle of *Totem and Taboo* “Some points of agreement between the mental lives of savages and neurotics”, *Einige Übereinstimmungen im Seelenleben der Wilden und der Neurotiker*). The modern neurotics appear to be suffering from a re-enactment of the taboo in an era where the prohibition of touching has been divested of its religious underpinning. One could say, tentatively, that once upon a time, with the savages, it was possible to touch because it was prohibited to touch, and now, with the modern-day neurotics, *it is prohibited to touch because it is impossible to touch*. What Freud is after is the modern predicament of touching and its

off limb, and that he chooses the lack as the privileged vantage point. But what appears as a lack and a cut, as a paradox in the seeming continuity of perception, of the body-world continuum, as it were, doesn’t contradict his basic stance, but endorses it: his point can even be best made through the aspect of this gap which is precisely not a gap, but like an inner fold (to use this Deleuzian term) of perception itself, a lack which is not an absence, but a ‘feeling lack’, a ‘perceiving lack’, the simplest testimony to the fact that the body extends over its limits. – If Merleau-Ponty’s ‘example’ (or rather a ‘crown-case’) rather massively invokes castration, one could propose, simply, that *phallus is a phantom limb*, yet not a limb feeling anything (despite the seemingly massive evidence to the contrary, it figures as the apex of most intense feeling and enjoyment, its paramount embodiment), but something which, as a cut, a bodily cut, enables access to enjoyment, to human ‘feeling’, to what constitutes a surplus in human feeling, its ‘object’.

¹³ I refer to *The Pelican Freud Library* (PFL), 15 vols., Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972-86, and *Studienausgabe* (SA), 10 vols., Frankfurt/M, Fischer, 1969-75.

vicissitudes,¹⁴ not merely some surviving atavistic remainder of a prehistoric past. “As in the case of taboo, the principal prohibition, the nucleus of the neurosis, is against touching; and thence it is sometimes known as ‘touching phobia’ or ‘*délire de toucher*’. The prohibition does not merely apply to immediate physical contact but has an extent as wide as the metaphorical use of the phrase ‘to come in contact with’ [to be in touch with]. Anything that directs the patient’s thoughts to the forbidden object, anything that brings him into intellectual contact with it, is just as much prohibited as direct physical contact.” (p. 80)

As the touch is contagious, so is the prohibition: given the infinite possibilities of connectivity of things, the prohibition spreads along all these ways of possible connections, it is endowed with ‘an extreme liability to displacement’, new and new objects become ‘impossible’, “till at last the whole world lies under the embargo of impossibility” (p. 81). Things and people are imbued with a fatal tendency to connect, to be in contact, so the whole world has the fatal proclivity to become impossible. There is no way of containing contact, and there is no way of containing prohibition. One could say that the area of the untouchable, on which the prohibition bears, could be localized and circumscribed in traditional societies, whereas the modern predicament is rather that the boundless propagation of contact entails a boundless transitivity of prohibition – which is one of the ways to describe the mechanism of the superego, as opposed to the rule of the name of the father. Boundless profanation through contact has not done away with the sacred, but has in a paradoxical way reinstated it and made it intractable.¹⁵ – Freud sums up the nature of these prohibitions in four points: their lack of motivation; their internal necessity; their easily displaceable nature; and their imposition of ritualistic behaviour.

So how does this structure come about?

¹⁴As, in another context, Freud tries to debunk the father as the secret of all authority precisely in an era of the demise of the father. It is not that the dead father (of the primeval horde) is the hidden core of authority, but rather that the dead father himself has died, but this hasn’t terminated his rule. Everything can be allowed, but authority persists. The prohibition of touch has died along with the dead father, and yet remained in vigour.

¹⁵Here I must refer to the work of Giorgio Agamben on profanation. E. g.: “An absolute profanation without the slightest residue coincides henceforth with a consecration which is just as empty and total” (*Profanations*, Paris, Payot & Rivages, 2005, p. 102). One should carefully distinguish between secularization and profanation, secularization being “a form of repression, leaving intact the forces which it limits itself to displacing from one place to another” (p. 96). So the modern predicament, for Agamben, is that of an absolute impossibility of profanation.

“Right at the beginning, in very early childhood, the patient shows a strong *desire* to touch [*Berührungslust*; the word is utterly ambiguous: it can be the pleasure of touching, and this is how I am inclined to understand it, as opposed to Strachey, *Lust* like in *Lustprinzip*; curiously, Freud italicizes just the last part, *Berührungslust*; maybe one can propose a contingent homonymic English translation with *lust*, the touching lust], the aim of which is of a far more specialized kind that one would have been inclined to expect. This desire is promptly met by an *external* [*von aussen*] prohibition against carrying out that particular kind of touching.” [At this point Freud most curiously inserts a footnote: “Both the desire and the prohibition relate to the child’s touching his own genitals.” Nothing sexual is mentioned in the main text, sexuality appears relegated to the footnote, as if, self-referentially, repressed from the text to the bottom of the page, literally under the bar. The text merely hints at the very special kind of touching – but isn’t touching what makes a particular point special? Couldn’t one rather maintain that touching *sexualizes* the part of the body concerned? Is the sexual special before touching, without touching, apart from touching? Isn’t one of Freud’s main points, say in *Three essays*, that any part of the body could be sexualized and that there is an erroneous traditional assumption that sexuality resides in the genitals?] “The prohibition is accepted, since it finds support from powerful internal forces [here again a footnote is inserted: “That is, from the child’s loving relation to the authors of the prohibition.”], and proves stronger than the drive¹⁶ which is seeking to express itself in the touching. In consequence, however, of the child’s primitive psychical constitution, the prohibition does not succeed in abolishing the drive [*aufzuheben*, sublating, the notorious Hegelian term: there is no *Aufhebung* of the drive]. Its only result is to repress [*verdrängen*] the drive – the desire/pleasure to touch – and banish it into the unconscious. Both the prohibition and the drive persist: the drive because it has only been repressed and not abolished, and the prohibition because, if it ceased, the drive would force its way through into consciousness and into actual operation [*Ausführung*]. A situation is created which remains undealt with – a psychical fixation [*eine psychische Fixierung*] – and everything else follows from the continuing conflict between the prohibition and the drive.” (p. 82-3; SA IX, p. 321)

Everything else follows. All Freud is like encapsulated in this scene of touching: sexuality and prohibition, the internal and the external, drive and its repression, conflict and fixation, finally the unconscious. – The scene no

¹⁶ *Der Trieb*. I am replacing the unfortunate Strachey’s translation ‘instinct’ by ‘drive’.

doubt lends itself to commonsensical reading: the child touches his genitals, finds pleasure in it, wants some more, but the parents prohibit it, they step in in no uncertain terms, driven by the sense of common propriety and decency, if not by religious zeal. Enough to make anyone neurotic. Yet one can also see that the conflictual alliance which sustains the touch is far more complicated. The prohibition can never simply just come from the outside, it would never be effective if it was not sustained from the inside, if prohibition and pleasure didn't form a sort of pact. And also and above all, prohibition itself has to take the form of touching, it cannot be sustained by mere word, it has to be the word sustained by touch, the word touching flesh, imposed by the parental touch, this first language imposed on the infant, the mother's touch being the first mothertongue.¹⁷ There is the touch which imposes the cut, the cut of the touch, the cut of the self-touch – and this is where the supposed mythical first phase of auto-eroticism, the self-sufficiency and self-affection of self-touching, is cut short, the self-circuit is interrupted, in order to impose the step towards the object, *Objektwahl*, if we follow Freud's account of the sexual progress from the *Three essays*. But this primary auto-eroticism is rather itself a retro-active myth, it is rather something coinciding with the cut: the incidence of sexuality results from the cutting and the cut touch. And this is, rather than preventing simple pleasure, what creates it, or rather creates it as enjoyment: "He is constantly wishing to perform this act (the touching), and looks on it as his supreme enjoyment [*den höchsten Genuss*], but must not perform it and detests it as well." (p. 83) One can sum this up simply by saying that *the cut creates the touch as object*, the touch cutting touch, and it is there that enjoyment sneaks into the gap.

There is no neutral touch. To touch is to infringe, to trespass, to overstep, to invade, to go too far, to transgress, to violate. *To touch is to touch too much*. But this excessiveness of touch stems from the touch as the cut: it is the cut that exceeds the touch. For if there is infringement and transgression, there has to be a limit which is thus exceeded, and it is the cut which both imposes the limit and creates the touch as its trespassing. There is a supposed primary given of touching oneself, of discovering one's body by self-touch, but there is a touch which interrupts this self-circuit, and this 'second touch' is not simply external to the self, rather the self-touch, feeling oneself, is instated only through 'external' interruption, and the supposed primary self-eroticism

¹⁷ The loving mother's touch has its flipside in the inscription of the law into the skin, as it were. The law is a tattoo. A sinister and most palpable parable of this is Kafka's "In the penal colony", where law is literally inscribed on the skin surface, the invisible tattoo made visible by the lethal machine.

emerges at the same time with it. One touches one's body as the other touches it, in a movement which both produces, links and separates the two.¹⁸ It is through the cutting touch, the cut touch, that one relates to one's body at all, the body emerges through the prohibition of touch.

No doubt this coincidence of the touch and the cut is the point where the basic 'don't touch' occurs, where religion, politics, metaphysics, transcendence come bursting in, molding the difference it implies into the divide of the touchable and the untouchable, the sacred and the profane, and solidifying the object, endowing it with an aura, separating it. But the point is precisely to try to 'redeem' the object touch from this heavy burden, to hold on to the difficult touch and its cut structure, to reestablish it not in its immediacy and deceptively simple palpability and materiality, without a cut, but in its ability to touch through the very cut.

There is a double face to the touch: on the one hand it is constituted by the cut, on the other hand it creates a fixation. The touch not only fixes, *it transfixes*, so to say, it creates a mark of attachment, an anchorage point of enjoyment. It is like the first mark, the first signifier, written on the skin, and its elementary 'signifying' property stems from its double edge of being cut in the very gesture of touching. The way Freud spells it out, *fixation coincides with the unconscious*. The touch, the cut and the fixation are the flipsides of the advent of the unconscious. Although Freud immediately simplifies things, sorts them out in an unfortunate way by saying that "the prohibition is noisily [*laut*] conscious, while the persistent desire to touch [*Berührungslust*] is unconscious." (*ibid.*) It is rather that the prohibition is the very kernel of the unconscious, tending in the limit to make the world itself impossible, untouchable.¹⁹

¹⁸ Cf. Nancy: "[...] the unity of coming to oneself as 'feeling oneself', 'touching oneself', which necessarily passes by the outside – which effectuates that I cannot feel myself without feeling the other and without being felt by the other." (*Corpus*, Paris, Métailié, 2000, p. 125)

¹⁹ I am well aware that what Freud is describing is the basic mechanism of obsessional neurosis which, for him, can provide an insight into the origins of religion. Religious practices, with the institution of the sacred/profane divide, with the privileged handling of the untouchable, are for him ultimately all derivative of the obsessional neurotic elementary stance. It is the way that neurosis constitutes a social tie by codifying and sanctioning the untouchable. Hysteria rather functions by an opposite mechanism: to push towards the impossible touch, to try to touch too much, to touch properly, to exceed the imposed limit, and discovering that 'this is not it'. 'I cannot touch, however spectacularly I try.' The hysterical subject precipitates herself into the touch, while the obsessional fends off any touching. The obsessional cannot escape touching, however impossible the world is, and the hysterical cannot touch despite ever more transgressive gestures. They are two ways to deal with touch as cut,

The touch coinciding with the cut has the fatal tendency to spread. There is no way of containing the touch, it spreads not merely by contiguity, by contact and physical connection, so that things touching become contaminated, it also spreads by contiguity of something apparently not touching, disconnected, such as, by definition, the word. If disconnection is what seemingly defines the word as a signifier – having no common ground or similarity with the thing (*le meurtre de la chose*, as Lacan, following Kojève, used to say in early days) – then touching entails at the same time a disavowal of cut, a supposition, an underlying and pervasive belief, that words touch things. The word is treated as a property of a thing, on the same level, there is no disentangling words from things. Freud relates about a patient who wouldn't touch a gift bought by her husband on Hirschengasse, on the grounds that Hirsch was the married name of her childhood friend with whom she has fallen out. The friend may be living in a distant city, but her touch pollutes the objects purchased on the street contingently bearing her name (p. 81). The touch is an ubiquitous threat, the world is not big enough to prevent touching, everything touches, so nothing can be touched. The taboo concerning names evokes well-known traits of the 'primitive' societies, where the persons and objects which are taboo – kings, the dead, the enemies, the polluting substances etc. – also fall under the ban of using their names. Words are treated as objects touching other objects, they are tainted by objects they stand for, and one can inversely touch objects by mere words. The cut instigates a contiguity and a continuity without a cut – but this supposition is precisely based on a disavowal of the cut, and this is why, for Freud, it defines the magical world and the magical thinking. Which brings us to this new kind of magic, namely psychoanalysis, the art of touching the body with the word.

The touch involves both metaphor – basically the cut – and metonymy – basically the endless transitivity. It is the crossing of both. For Freud this recalls the two basic types of magic singled out by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, the great work which appeared just shortly before *Totem and Taboo* and still figures as the touchstone of anthropology. There is on the one hand the imita-

and they could both be seen as '*délire de toucher*'. – To round off the clinical picture, one could say that perversion, as the 'negative of neurosis', relies on the mechanism of domesticating the touch, trimming it into the quantum of pleasure that one can handle and play with, it 'cuts to size' the cut into a proper distance, while psychosis collapses the cut and makes the touch 'too possible', 'too successful', so it slides to coincidence. Their various ways of relating to touch, to follow Freud, are formative of basic patterns of culture: "It might be maintained that a case of hysteria is a caricature [*Zerrbild*, distortion] of a work of art, that an obsessional neurosis is a caricature of a religion and that a paranoiac delusion is a caricature of a philosophical system." (p. 130, SA p. 363)

tional magic, which operates by a metaphorical substitute – one sticks needles into dolls, one makes an effigy of the enemy and what befalls the effigy will befall the enemy, or one stages making rain to remind nature how to make one. What counts is similarity or analogy, while distance plays no role – this magic works across distances on the supposition that analogy provides sufficient ground to secure efficacy. On the other hand there is ‘contact magic’ which works by physical contiguity: one has to obtain some object belonging to the enemy, or his hair, something which has been ‘in touch’ with the person, so by affecting the contiguous one will affect what it has touched.²⁰ So in magical thinking we oddly find the very mechanisms which for Freud constituted the basic dreamwork, the work of the unconscious, condensation and displacement.²¹ “Similarity and contiguity are the two essential principles of process of association” (p. 140), says Freud, adding a bit later that they “are both included in the more comprehensive concept of *contact* [*Berührung*, touch]. Association by contiguity is contact in the literal sense; association by similarity is contact in the metaphorical sense. The use of the same word for the two kinds of relations is no doubt accounted for by some identity in the psychical processes concerned which we have not yet grasped [*eine von uns noch nicht erfasste Identität*].” (p. 143, SA, p. 374) So there is some basic fact of psychical processes which resides in the touch, *Berührung*, of metaphor and metonymy; two ways of touching touch each other. The cut and the touch both touch in something which eludes us. The two ways of touching, by analogy and by contiguity, touch upon, or circle around, an impossible point where the word would touch the thing, the impossible intersection of words and things.²² The magic is based on the belief that this works, that this can be simply effectuated, that it only takes an appropriate ritual. It is based on a disavowal of the cut and firmly trusts that there is nevertheless a secret

²⁰ Indeed, the paramount example of the contact magic would be *Die Wunde schliesst der Speer nur der sie schlug*. Freud in a disguised reference (?) to Wagner says: “The belief that there is a magical bond between a wound and the weapon which caused it may be traced unaltered for thousands of years.” (p. 139)

²¹ Jakobson’s famous paper on the two types of aphasia, which influenced Lacan so much (cf. “L’instance de la lettre”), singled out the core opposition metaphor/metonymy using at some point the examples from both Freud’s dreamwork and Frazer’s theory of magic. (*Essais de linguistique générale I*, Paris, Minuit, 1963, p. 65-6.)

²² There is, apart from that, but not quite apart, the problem of the symbolic ‘touching itself’, as it were, the words being contaminated by each other through their sound contacts, similarities, echoes, reverberations. This is what constitutes homonymy, the contingent sounding alike, which is at the basis of the mechanisms of the unconscious and which Lacan, in his later work, tried to pin down with *lalangue*. Cf. *A Voice and Nothing More*, MIT, Cambridge (Mass.), p. 139 ff.

touch which operates by occult ways. ‘I know very well, but nevertheless [...]’, the formula of disavowal made famous by Octave Mannoni (and admirably expounded by Robert Pfaller).²³ But this illusion, shared by both savages and neurotics, is ‘nevertheless’ not just an illusion to be simply dismissed, for words in some way do touch upon things, the symbolic does touch the real, and if there is a cut, it is not between the symbolic and the real, but they are both parts of ‘the same’ cut, they result from the same cut – though the cut is precisely what cannot be the same, but institutes the incommensurate. The cut intertwines both and embodies the absence of their common measure. So the supposition that words do touch upon things is at the basis, apart from magic, of psychoanalysis.

Freud, in his early days, didn’t shy away from touching his patients. In *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) he discusses at some point the problem of what to do when the flow of associations runs dry and the patient claims not to remember, resists remembering. “In these circumstances I make use in the first instance of a small technical device. I inform the patient that, a moment later, I shall apply pressure to his forehead, and I assure him that, all the time the pressure lasts, he will see before him a recollection in the form of a picture or will have it in his thoughts in the form of an idea occurring to him; and I pledge him to communicate this picture or idea to me, whatever it may be.” (PFL 3, p. 354)²⁴ So the touch should remedy the gap in the free associations, it should give a push to their freedom. The touch is called in at the point where the word fails, it is the relay of the missing word. And its point is to trick the defense, to catch it off guard: “The procedure by pressure is no more than a trick for temporarily taking unawares an ego which is eager for defense.” (p. 363) One touches to get around the ego, one touches to reach the unconscious. – So there is a point where psychoanalysis, in its infancy, relied on a magical touch at the point where the talking cure didn’t quite work out, the touching cure had to supplement the talking cure, and this is in line with what Freud would later describe as the magical touch of the person in authority, the ruler, the royal touch which could cure (thus Charles II alleg-

²³ Cf. “Je sais bien, mais quand même” in *Clefs pour l’Imaginaire*, Paris, Seuil, 1969; and *Die Illusionen der anderen*, Frankfurt/M, Suhrkamp, 2002, respectively.

²⁴ One gets a graphic description in the case of Lucy R.: “I placed my hand on the patient’s forehead or took her head between my hands and said: ‘You will think of it under the pressure of my hand. At the moment at which I relax my pressure you will see something in front of you or something will come into your head. Catch hold of it. It will be what we are looking for. – Well, what have you seen or what has occurred to you?’” (PFL 3, p. 173-4) Oddly and tellingly, the triggering point is once described as the touch and once as the removal of the touch, the cut.

edly touched a hundred thousand persons in his life to cure them of scrofula, PFL 13, p. 96-7). And this was in line with suggestion and hypnosis, these other ways by which Freud hoped to touch directly upon the unconscious and retrieve a missing bit of the puzzle from it.

How to touch the unconscious? How to lay hands on it? This is where the basic tenet comes in that I have been insisting on: the touch is the cut, and the cut is what institutes the unconscious. The royal road to the unconscious is a roundabout, encircling it not as a piece of positive being, an information, a missing bit of the puzzle which would complete the picture, but precisely as a cut. Since we are concerned with the connection between words, those un-touchables, and things, the objects of the senses, there is a double injunction which institutes the psychoanalytic situation, this reduction of both personal and objectal relations to a minimal dispositive: on the one hand, there is the absence of any prohibition or restriction concerning words – its ground rule notoriously urges just to say freely whatever happens to fall into one's head without any restraints. In psychoanalysis there is no limit to the freedom of speech, it takes the freedom of speech a bit too seriously, to the extreme. On the other hand, its counterpart is a prohibition bearing upon senses, a real sense-deprivation: the analyst, this 'inhuman partner', *ein fremder Mensch*, is in principle not to be touched, not to be seen, not to be heard (with the notorious 'silence of the analyst'), and I suppose not to be tasted and not to be smelled (is there a smell of the analyst? is he the subject supposed to smell?). Well, Freud doesn't quite insist on the last two points. With the words, anything goes; with the senses, nothing goes. The analyst should be disconnected from the five senses, cut-off from senses, he is not a creature of senses, not a sense object, a non-sensual being. He undercuts any sense certainty. So psychoanalysis on the other hand takes traditional restrictions a bit too far as well, there is extreme permissivity and extreme restriction.

Is the analyst therefore an idea, a spirit, a ghost, a beyond, a deity, a supersensible entity? The point is precisely that this disconnection turns him into an object. He is constituted by a cut, and the cut *is* the object, the object emerges in the cut. There is the presence of the analyst, essential to the process of cure, the core of the cure, but this presence is there precisely by being cut-off, an alien presence, a surmised presence,²⁵ an unbearable presence, an intractable presence. The point is, in this cut-off presence, to make the object

²⁵ Of course the presence of the analyst is always surmised on the basis of some sensual vestiges and traces. One has seen the analyst to start with and his image and visual features may well linger on in what follows in various ways, one can e. g. glimpse his shadow; one has shaken his hand, there is indeed a smell of the analyst, and there is his rustling and breathing which informs his silence.

emerge as such.²⁶ The object of the senses *schlechthin*, the object thwarting the senses, bending the senses, transfixing the senses, haunting the senses.

To bring it to one simple formula: *there is no limit to the freedom of speech, except for the object* – the object which touches us, which finds itself not on the other side, as a reference or the addressee of speech, but on this side of my speech, too close. Or one could say, to exacerbate the paradox, that the analyst is my own body, the body invoked through my words, the body of the other which touches me. “The point of the untouchable is that it touches,”²⁷ (to quote Nancy, in a last minute homage, who has developed this point repeatedly by a very different way).

I argued, in my book on the voice, that the analyst, precisely through being silent, embodies the object voice as such.²⁸ The argument can be extended to other senses, not quite by claiming that he embodies five different objects, but rather that the structure of the object is something transversal, a cross-over, making the five senses overlap in the same structure. The list of the objects – the breast, the faeces, the voice, the gaze [...] – is both instructive and elusive, inconclusive, they overlap, take relay from each other, condition each other,²⁹ present a multiplicity of facets, precisely by not being firm and countable beings, but inhabiting only the edge, the cut, something which emerges as a surplus created by the cut.³⁰

The point of the analysis is to bring the two together, the word and the

²⁶ From the double injunction of free association of words and prohibition of the senses one can infer the double function of the analyst: as the addressee of speech, he is ‘the subject supposed to know’; in his presence cut-off from the sensual, he embodies the object. And one can say that the supposition of the subject supposed to know is a ‘necessary illusion’ which triggers off analysis and has to be dissipated by analysis, while the presence of the analyst is no illusion, no supposition – he is too much there and wouldn’t be dissipated. It has to be linked to the notion of subjective destitution and the drive.

²⁷ Cf. Nancy: “Le corps est l’unité d’un être hors de soi. [...] L’intouchable, c’est que ça touche.” (*Corpus*, p. 125, 127).

²⁸ *A Voice and Nothing More*, p. 123 f.

²⁹ The acousmatic voice – the voice whose origin cannot be seen or located – is a paradigmatic case where the voice assumes extraordinary power through its counterpoint to visibility, with the absence of visible framing.

³⁰ Cf. Lacan: “Observe that this mark of the cut is no less obviously present in the object described by analytic theory: the mammilla, faeces, the phallus (imaginary object), the urinary flow. (An unthinkable list, if one adds, as I do, the phoneme, the gaze, the voice – the nothing.” (*Écrits – A Selection*, trans. A. Sheridan, London, Routledge, 2001, p. 349). There is a ‘kinship’ which links the various objects *a* to the bodily apertures – the mouth, the anus, the voice, the gaze [...] – and the touch, although closely associated to openings, the mouth to start with, has the ability to affect any part of the body, one can touch the body all over, so one could say it has the

object, to effectuate their link. The body and the word intersect in the object, the body can only be touched by the word through the object, the object is their 'interface', and the point – insofar we are concerned with tactility – is to effectuate their impossible touch. To restore to the touch the transformative power through this mediation, by this roundabout way. To restore the cutting edge of experience, the sensual and bodily experience in its inextricable knot with speech, but which cannot be touched upon directly, no more than the unconscious can.

It is no doubt unusual and I suppose counterintuitive to conceive psychoanalysis as a reinvention of touch, a restoration of touch in an era which has anaesthetized and virtualized experience, made touching quasi impossible, but this is what I tried to propose.

capacity to turn any point of bodily surface into an opening. The touch bores a hole, and creates an edge.