

The Fissured Meaning(fulness) of Touch

Although it can be stated that touch has been an issue in literary theory for a long time, especially when it is related to the concept of *emovere*, more recently it is also studied in literary works as a haptic endeavor of the hand or the eyes, linked to affectivity and thought, and depicted as a relational figure of *grasping*.¹

- 1 See, for example, Garrington (2013); Sarah Jackson's *Tactile Poetics* (2017) more explicitly overrides hitherto perceptions on touch. In considering the work of Cixous, Nancy, and Derrida, Jackson attaches touch to the body and the body of texts (and the text as body). Following Robert Steppard, Jackson also relates touch to the text(-ure) of text(-uality) coming close to an understanding of non-knowledge; see also, on touch, Erwig/Fluhrer (2019); Erwig/Ungelenk (2021); and Sohns/Ungelenk (2021). Thus, while the haptic in a more explicit sense of the tactile still receives prominent attention, in recent years scholars from various fields (natural sciences as well as philosophy) speak of a sixth sense (one of the first to problematize this is Maurice Perleau-Ponty). This sixth sense is not to be understood as a sense of prescience; rather the sixth sense, called proprioception or kinesthesia, refers to the interrelated, configurative conglomeration of bodily motion within space. When we place something somewhere, we do that by activating this sense (which is not far removed from prescience, by the way?), that helps to place an object by a specific bodily movement: to put the coffee-mug on the table, I stretch out my arm, and at the same time, by ›automatically‹ considering the forces of gravity I can locate the table or other surface on which I want to place it in a very precise way. As ›normal‹ as it may sound, it is not that obvious, but requires this other sense in order to be done. See for example, Garrington (2010). In this discussion, it is not so much an understanding of the haptic that is revised; rather the haptic as related to tactile-touch (translated into the body as ›skin‹) is supplemented with this other ›sense‹, although it seems more appropriate to me to speak of ›sensing‹ in a more general form, which can be explicitly or implicitly linked to touch. Garrington's text goes in the same direction but speaks of the ›haptic sense‹, emphasizing the haptic rather than the touch (815). Garrington shows how literary texts *use* the haptic in a much broader sense. The question remains, though, whether in these discussions, including Deleuze's and Guattari's approaches that are mentioned here, the (diasporic, ›nomadic‹) *other* is not appropriated as a resource for finding an *other* understanding that once again makes the seeing and writing (*white* or, in genereal, *dominant*) subject (of speaking-writing) transparent and reaffirming othering on a high-theoretical level – although, in these discussions, the importance of the *body* and the *skin* as a surface of meaning(-production) is emphasized (811). What often remains underdiscussed is a historization of touch within a more subject-related analysis that is politically informed and historically situated and that would also discuss writing about it in a ›disinterested style‹. Contrary to these approaches, Sara Ahmed, for example, begins with

In this study, touch is approached in three different ways: it is seen as an entry to a certain matter, as a carving out of space in-between words and meanings, and as an opening up of a space in which the possibility of ›dialogicity‹ sets in, allowing for spectral and material reflectivity within language and discourse, within thought as well as within interrelational understandings of self and other. It is, furthermore, understood as a *movement of orientation*. It orients the self from within itself towards othernesses – often at the margins of (con-)texts, which is seen as anchored in the transformative dynamic and processual becoming (and falling apart of) the self.

The touch of *affective humor* thus is regarded as setting into work a double movement from within and without that has at least two floating points of orientation, an ›inward‹ and an ›outward‹. This ability of *affective humor* to touch is problematized as creating two forms of spaces: As opening up a space of encounter in which a touch occurs, and as opening up, within this touch, a spacing where meanings, and ›selfhood‹ and ›otherhood‹ are negotiated.

This threefold movement of touch that I regard as bound to *affective humor*, with its deconstructive traits, is thoroughly explored in the works of Jacques Derrida, especially and distinctively so in his treatment of the touch, which is central to this study and remains centralized in this chapter.

Derrida's access to touch links, in subtle ways, deconstruction with affect theory and aligns both with what could be called ›cognitive sensuality‹. Although, as noted above, there are some works in literary studies that pay attention to touch by picking up some of the traits mentioned by Derrida, these approaches predominantly deal with the haptic touch and the touch of bodily organs like the skin, the eyes, and the hands. Derrida, though, while also considering this long history of touch, especially in philosophy, unlinks touch from however conceived ›physical‹ experiences in a narrow sense or rather extends the meaning of the physical to also encompass cognitive, psychical, almost spiritual sides and insights. Without denying the different possibilities of the haptic touch in a narrower sense, Derrida translates touch as a bodily, material, but also epistemological experience. He places touch within a web of language-thinking-sensuality entwined in *affectivity-auto-bio-graphy*, as an experience of *performativity* and in(ter)vention that ensues from and in language, as well as the senses (in all their possible meanings),

how the very ›touch‹, ›the laws‹ of touch, which Derrida, too, as we shall see, depicts, are linked to images and an imagery of racialized and ›norm-alized‹ ›national‹ subjectivity; see Ahmed ([2004] 2014). In *Strange Encounters*, Ahmed discusses racisms in relation to touch, using it in a more explicitly haptic sense; it becomes clear, however, that more than the haptic is involved in the staging of the other, but this discussion of touch shows the liminal place of epistemology that is bound to the body as a written texture and the concept of ›race‹ that underlies it. Ahmed speaks of the encounter as the ›relived‹ moment of ›metonymic slides‹ that have a history and are already inscribed on bodies. Cf. Ahmed (2000, 38 ff.). See also Steppard (2008). Steppard links touch to literature by theorizing it as an essential form of poetics, understood as the praxis and theory of epistemology and literary (sensual?) writing. This approach moves in the direction of Achim Geisenhanslüke's work, see Geisenhanslüke (2018, 2021). Here, especially in the latter, Geisenhanslüke seems to perform this poetological conjunction of theory and poetry, as a poetic, *sensual* endeavor – a poetics of making *sense* in the different meanings of the word.

coming somehow from an other, without necessarily any direct involvement of hapticity in a conventionalized understanding. Derrida's touch shifts the (quite postcolonial) claim of historical attention, in as much as, by evoking *auto-bio-graphy*, it also prefigures and considers the singularity of subjects and of subject-formation despite a historically driven, given sociopolitical context,² it thus asserts and fissures subjectivity simultaneously. Derrida's attempt is a critical stance that, a little perplexed and maybe a bit fatherly and *infant terrible* at the same time, maybe out of the memories and remembrances of »a little black and very Arab Jew who understood nothing« (Derrida 1993, 58), looks at presumed parameters of the discourse on touch *after* deconstruction, but with an urge to deconstruct them (to understand), coming back to deconstruction and subtly proclaiming its ›beginning‹ or ›never ending‹, as a procedure of reading that cannot come to an end and cannot be *post*-ed as such. Derrida's critical stance, then, can be described as a move towards an invocation of the meaning and value of what criticism and analysis

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- 2 Derrida historicizes his work, as it were, by alluding to *auto-bio-graphical* moments, the inventions, interventions, and inscriptions of the self; in this way, he *disentangles* history as well as rigid understandings of postcoloniality, subjectivity, and epistemology from universalist or generalizing stances and maybe tries to protect his work from easy, consumptive gestures of categorization along ›history‹ or ›identity‹, while looking at the atrocities of history and power that establish margins, which are reflected and mirrored in language and thinking and can (only?) be altered from there. As an effect ›Derrida‹ as a figure of thought and of dislocating-thought remains open to the world within always fissured ›identities‹, which may also explain why a kind of struggle seems to remain in scholarly works devoted to Derrida's oeuvre to lovingly (and sometimes not so lovingly) position him either as ›European‹ or ›Jewish‹ or ›Arab‹, or ›Middle Eastern‹, ›African‹, ›Algerian‹ or ›French‹ ›intellectual‹, a ›Marrano‹, another kind (or rather caliber?) of ›philosopher‹, or even as an author of ›literary works‹, and so on (I like to think of him as an Afghan*, which signals unruly subjecthood and also an infinite kaleidoscope of fractured combinations and im/possibilities of free floating subjectivity and interspersed ›ethnicity‹ – which he perhaps may not have minded, hopefully with a laugh). This shows that Derrida's work remains a form of thinking at the borders of things, always considering different forms of marginalization, be it in philosophy, literature, or politics. Derrida accomplishes this by paying attention to language, where these movements reside and reveal themselves. He opens up all these borders for thinking, but in doing so, he also combines and unites them anew, a trait that may not belong to his work and may not be its effect, but that marks his *auto-bio-graphy* in historical as well as experiential, and epistemological ways – he seems to have literally *lived* (through) these seemingly impossible lines and *extendable unifications*. As Jane Hiddleston states: »In this context, Derrida is not simply continuing long-standing debates on the interaction between the individual and the community, but refiguring the resistance of the singular as a stain on the universal that has no position of its own. In his own words, then, the singular autobiographical subject is endlessly elusive, and the apparent self-exposure of autobiography is ›l'exposé de ce qui aura fait obstacle, pour moi, à cette auto-exposition‹. Furthermore, the merging of philosophy with autobiography conveys a reservation towards rationality and argument and shows the contingency of philosophical genesis. Memories and affects that rational language tried to exclude, invade and displace that original pretension. [...] Autobiography here is precisely a genre where the subject's slippery relationship with language becomes visible. It sets up a confusing and ambiguous relation between the experiences recounted and the writer's voice. While it appears at the outset to construct and define the self in language, autobiography finishes by splitting or dividing that self in its very imposition of an artificial representational framework. It is this unsettled and dual subject that serves to disturb the assertive, rational voice of the philosopher« or any thinker, even any humanimal, it may be added. Cf. Hiddleston (2005, 296).

(should) imply. It resembles the echo of Edward W. Said's essay *Roads Taken and Not Taken in Contemporary Criticism* ([1976] 1983). Said writes: »How do authors imagine for themselves the ›archive‹ of their time into which they propose to put their text? What are the centers of diffusion by which texts circulate? [...] An earlier tradition, which lasted until the middle of the eighteenth century, was for scholars or critics to consider their life as having exemplary value; scholarly biography was a recognized genre. [...] I draw notice to these historical aspects of critical practice in order to approve their value for the future of critical discourse. Pedagogically, there is every good reason for regarding the choice of a subject and its formulation as being not only the beginning of a critical project but also the critical project itself« (Said 19983, 153). Derrida, too, formulates a warning with regard to approaches to touch – touching, (re)orienting the discourse on touch and, at the same time, emphasizing their main philosophical critique, which lies in the abilities and enablement of deconstruction as a praxis of reading against power-normatives. Derrida, thereby, places touch, paleonymically, within a net of tangency with other terms, the embodiment (of discourse) and its material worldliness, and with the question of power (asymmetries), (*auto-bio-graphical*) history, and the idea of the self and the other, within which an author/critic writes and enables the discourse. Derrida's approach to touch in this sense criticizes along, against, and with Jean-Luc Nancy a coming-back of ontological tendencies within thinking, and, in this sense, ironizes the idea of a *post-deconstruction* epoch that he evokes, but only to assert that it is impossible if things are seen as relational ties of differentiation rather than, in the more usual ontophilosophical tradition, ›for themselves‹. Derrida's approach to touch therefore confirms the ethical relation that is part of deconstruction and that seeks to carve out space for a relationality of a selfhood that is always already bound to an otherhood, to alterity. As Simon Critchley writes: »[O]ntology is the movement of comprehension which takes possession of entities through the activity of labour; it is the movement of the hand, the organ of grasping (as in the linguistic chain *greifen*, *Griff*, *begreifen*, *Begriff*), which takes hold of (*prend*) and comprehends (*comprend*) entities in the virility of its acquisition and digestion of alterity« (Critchley 2014, 6). Touch seems not (only) a form of sense as well as of sense-making but in the first place, as a reminder of the other and a negation of ontology. It could be stated from the way Derrida approaches touch that touch, not ontology, enables the possibility of meaning. Touch always comes already within a space in which time, as well as the self, and the other are differently enmeshed. Touch can therefore be regarded as the *a priori* ground from where orientations as well as the desire for the production of meanings takes place. Already Derrida's approach to touch also performs it. As will be seen, rather than to define and categorize touch as such, Derrida establishes a (private and political) relation to it via the name of ›Nancy‹, a friend and fellow philosopher (of *Christian* decent).

Derrida discusses touch in his typical meandering style and within an invocation of affectivity that also encompasses sensuality in language, whereby he uses the terms almost metonymically. In this section, I will thus first linger on the meanings that Derrida considers and opens up in touch. In the final, more focused part, I will discuss Derrida's attention to the image of ›laughter‹ that evokes humor.

Throughout the texts, Derrida uses an affective humorous tone on touch, which gives a specific flavor to the deconstructive angle from which he approaches it and which will also be looked at.

Derrida addresses the question of touch explicitly, first in an article with regard to Jean-Luc Nancy's work (Derrida/Kamuff 1993), and later in a book that is an extension of the article and a more encompassing elaboration on touch (Derrida [2000] 2005). Although in both texts the name and work of Jean-Luc Nancy are explicitly mentioned in the title and to an extent determine Derrida's approach, both works, his 1993 article as well as the book, originally published in French in 2000, are not about Nancy as such, but rather are a critical engagement with and reflection on the concept of touch. Rather than determining a definite meaning of what touch or its (sensual or psychological) affective senses may be, this movement unfolds around a spectrum of other signifiers to which the idea/act/concept/corporeal and psychic enactment/sociopolitical discourse and geopolitical scope of the term are metonymically, metaphorically, philosophically, and ethically attached. Derrida's elaborations thus fan out, opening up a web of possibilities of the meanings of touch and the structures that make these (and other) meanings possible within (infinite) specters of sociopolitical, historically conditioned con-textualities, crocheted in the processes of writing and materiality. This unfolding refers not only to quasi-definitions of what touch is, but also to its limits and borders, and to what borders it. The elaboration touches on its own aporias as well as on what it cannot be, thus also touching on the question of the untouchable and that which cannot be touched (which presupposes the im/possibility of touch and makes it possible at all).

Touch, being touched and the reverse, can, in this way, be understood as a (sensual) act or event that seems to precede affectivity; affectivity is not invoked unless you are touched by an other's touch) which makes you enter into a haunted search for meaning, for a sense, within an endless chain of signifiers. Touch is thus understood as an *ur*-phenomenon, and at the same time, as always already with its own traces, so that it is neither a beginning nor an act that can be experienced by the self alone. Touch always already requires an other to be one. Touch in fact appears to be Derrida's *a priori* concept, entailing all other terms which play a decisive role in his thought: touch is about the trace, about friendship, hospitality, heritage, the rogue, about ›the law‹, about justice, the other, the third, messianism, the secret, the quest/ion of ethics, and about the rupture inherent in a deconstructive reading – which all seem to follow from one another and emerge, folded together, all at the same time, in touch.

Not surprisingly, Derrida first links this movement of and in touch (and in being touched) to the signifying field of language, which unlike its algebraic figures make belief, indicates an infinity rather than a finitude:

»But one certainly feels (as will be verified, and verified precisely by testing the very senses of the word ›sense‹, of the French *sens* or *sentir*, which tend to come down, though not reductively, to the word ›touch‹) that from Aristotle to Nancy, aporias (originally Aristotle's word), as aporias of touch, lead us to think the essence of touch only through language that paradoxical, more than contradictory and hyperdialectical

(x without x, x = noun – x, x = conjunction and/or disjunction of x plus and minus x, and so on).« (Derrida 2005, 68)

Derrida's approach thus lends itself obviously to the theorization and the analysis of written texts (novels). He sees touch within the layers of language. Touch for Derrida is already part of beginnings and lines of flight that are evoked here by the ›hyperdialectical‹ and geometric signs, but he also relates it to an outside, to a sensing and sense-making other, and thus makes it possible to situate the (literary) work outside of its text, within a larger textuality. The touch of and in language, in the above sense, is also imbued with otherness. His approach also subtly evokes material and discursive forms and limits that texts entail up to their margins where readers are implicated in what the text utters and where it is hoped, they hear its echoes, touched in numerous x-w/rays.

The explicit name of Nancy in the title of Derrida's work on touch already indicates these doublings and layers of touch and its affective and sensual effects through language. On the one hand, it shows a form of indebtedness to Nancy and his work. On the other hand, it is a beginning of a search for this paradoxical (un-)touching of touch: Derrida also shows where in Nancy's work touch is not explicitly mentioned but is still part of it and drives it. At the same time, the text, within its paradoxical, witty incongruity that, as it seems, endlessly radiates within philosophical texts, touches back and forth on different meanings that are attached to touch. Derrida's rhetoric, therefore, sometimes bears an almost unnerved tone, sometimes a humorous twinkle at the corner of the eye; it is full of affectivity. This rhetorical tonality and engagement, which transports a taunting as well as serious critical engagement of Derrida with Nancy throughout the book, comes through as quite impatient humorous allusions as well as self-questioning, reflexive formulations, deconstructing the self, at the limit and border of touching the words of the other. In this case the other (in the figuration of ›Nancy‹) is both, a friend, *almost* outside of discourse, an inner invocation. And it symbolizes a figure on the fringes of dominant discourses (*white, Western, Christian* heritage?), and may also be thought of as Other with a capital O that denies touch its qualities, diminishing it, excluding others to formulate ›proper‹ ones.

Derrida's Touch

Derrida begins his consideration of touch by invoking and describing a scene represented by an epigraph. This epigraph, his response and entry point to Nancy's *touch*, as it were, is illustrated in the form of a (very poetic) question at the beginning of both of his two texts:

»When our eyes touch, is it day or is it night?[*Quand nos yeux se touchent, fait-il jour ou fait-il nuit?*].« (Derrida 1993, 122; Derrida 2005, 2)

This question that Derrida puts at the beginning of his own reading of touch, alongside and counter-intuitive to Nancy's approach, already encompasses different entanglements of touch that he ponders upon and at their limits, in the epilogue and throughout

the book, reproaching in a way Nancy for trying to seek ›exactitude‹ regarding the question of the touch, and confronting Nancy's apparent desire for ›exactitude‹ with a trail of traces that fissure any stable, exact ›knowledge‹ of touch (Derrida 2005, 15). This delicate question encompasses an affective trail, it evokes affection and is also about affection and sensuality. At the same time, it seems to be the question of *bare life*, of birth, of encountering pure, the question pure of philosophy *as* bare life in the face/in the presence, *im Angesicht*, of the other.

With this question, Derrida implicitly disentangles and queries the relation between touch, the haptic, and the sensual as acts of physical senses, but also between philosophy literature, and philosophy and politics, philosophy and its politics, philosophy's texts and philosophy as a text, as written and read signs.

He also seems to ask whether a touch *must be* a haptic endeavor, whether it *is/must be felt* through the skin or the eyes, and what else it might come to mean. Derrida formulates this question not merely as a philosophical question (at the threshold of literature). Rather he invents a story around this question. The other is presumed through their trace: Derrida *finds* the question – or rather the question maybe finds Derrida. The question, this epigraph, is written on the surface of a Parisian wall and crosses Derrida's path. It is thus itself a trace without an origin, since as a trace, it is already marked, touched by the trace of an other's touch. The written question is then itself a mark of touch, of being touched, that touches (an other), by facing Derrida, who faces it. ›Derrida‹ *lets it* face him; he is open to being faced by it. There must be, therefore, also an openness and a reciprocity in this movement of touch that the scene invokes.

Interestingly, one of bell hooks publications, *All about love – New Visions* (2001), begins similarly, with a sentence from graffiti on a wall that also spawned a book. Had it not been in New York – or if we could think of time and space in a way that is non-geographical (which it is, too) – it would be possible to imagine her standing on the other side of Derrida's wall with the inscription. The wall may thereby mark the figure of translation. On the other side of this wall – in New York – the inscription for bell hooks – perhaps an English translation of the same French sentence, then – reads:

»The search for love continues even in the face of great odds.« (hooks 1993, xv)

Unlike Derrida, bell hooks writes about her affective state and her inner circumstances when she came across this inscription just by chance one morning, at a time when she was »overwhelmed by grief so profound it seemed as though an immense sea of pain was washing my heart and soul away« (hooks 2001, xv). As she explains, it is a grief from experiencing a major loss. At the beginning of this introductory chapter with the graffiti is a citation on an otherwise blank page, like an inscription. This time we have an author named below the citation. The quote is from Jack Kornfield, a psychologist, author, and Theravada Buddhist of Jewish descent. The quote takes up a word – an organ, in fact – that, as we will see, also has a central place in Derrida's book on touch:

»It is possible to speak with our heart directly. Most ancient cultures know this. We can actually converse with our heart as if it were a good friend. In modern life we have

become so busy with our daily affairs and thoughts that we have lost this essential art of taking time to converse with our heart.« (Kornfeld quoted after hooks 2001, xii)

bell hooks titled this quotation offering a specific analysis and reading of it. She titled it »Grace: Touched by Love« (hooks 2001, xii). It is almost comical how, in her honest, sensible, and dry way, hooks speaks of how, when she began to speak of the need for ›love‹ people around her eventually told her to go and seek a therapist (hooks 2001, xvii ff.). So, in this beginning of this encounter with an inscription that takes place randomly within an urban space, grief, ›love‹, friendship, and the heart are evoked – and bell hooks brings these words into a line, suggesting that they mean ›grace‹. hooks defines ›grace‹ as »a touch of ›love‹« – a definition that engenders almost religious, mystical traits, and a word to which we will return later. While the words that Derrida and hooks engage with across the wall differ, there are some parallels in their writings. Whatever ›love‹ or touch may mean, both seem to evoke an other, maybe an otherness beyond ourselves, knotted deep within our inner selves, somewhere at the threshold between body and mind. In any case, in both Parisian and New York inscriptions, others and their words are invoked.

Thus touch also presupposes a willingness, an openness, or maybe a capacity, the faculty, to let oneself sense it, and an openness to what it might trigger in one. While hooks continues to muse on the meanings of ›love‹ in New York, we will follow Derrida's search for touch in the streets of Paris. The question about touch on the Parisian wall obstructs Derrida's way, crossing his path. Derrida happens to see and to read it and let himself be touched by it, impregnated by it, touching now (and therefore?) the question of the touch. The touch of the other, it could be argued, *orients* Derrida *towards* thinking, with an other (in mind) about touch. Derrida's self is marked by the trace of the touched other who has sent out this question on the wall. Touch appears as an impress of the other,³ placing itself in (an other) self within a random everyday moment in which a *space* of encounter is initialized. Derrida at the same time performs this (hypothetic?) possibility of the sentence on the wall that crosses his way, making it ›reak‹ in the sense of reeling it eidetically within the frame of a narrative episode.

The question, based on the linguistic fact that, in French, it has a feminine article, *la question*, is personified as a ›she‹. And she* faces, confronts Derrida, while Derrida is about to read and explore her* touch.

3 In *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, [2004] 2014, Sara Ahmed, taking David Hume's term ›impression‹ as a starting point for an understanding of ›contact‹, links affectivity to ›impression‹ as well as to its more violent verbal form ›to press‹. She writes: »We need to remember the ›press‹ in an impression. It allows us to associate the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace. So not only do I have an impression of others, but they also leave me with an impression; they impress me, and impress upon me. I will use the idea of ›impression‹ as it allows me to avoid making analytical distinctions between bodily sensation, emotion and thought as if they could be ›experienced‹ as distinct realms of human ›experience‹«; Ahmed further relegates affectivity to ›orientation‹. This can be extended to include touch as an experience of impression, expression, pressing, as it includes bodily as well as psychic involvement and has the potential to angle and orient one toward something or someone else (6 ff.).

The story of this encounter, whether it is an invention, or a true, ›real‹ event, we do not know (as a text, it is already ›real‹ – and as such blurs the distinction between *happening*, narrating, remembering, telling, writing, and ›reality‹), plays at the limits of humor and sobriety as well as at the limits of reality and fiction, and finally, at the limits of philosophy and literature, as it were, and plays within the ideas of the transphenomenal.⁴

The question involves an other, is in fact a story that comes from the other, as if it were awaiting Derrida's entrance. This *Angesicht* of the other, here, is not a face, it is a text on a wall. It can be read as a historical trace that raises the question of responsibility regarding history as well as regarding former texts. It can also mean one's ancestry and *auto-bio-graphy* and *geo.graphy* – the traces (and spaces) of O/others in oneself, and in the architecture of one's wor(l)d.

In recounting the scene, Derrida emphasizes the other as an *a priori*, as the one who has been there before him and »has henceforth the right to watch over« ›the story‹ (Derrida 2005, 1). Derrida not only recounts the incidence of an *ur*-encountering and of an *ur*-touch as well; he also gives the right to conceive of this touch, to define it, to the other, instead of ruling over it:

»And I would have even lost the right to say, *sensu stricto*, that ›she‹ came to or from *me* – as if I assumed that a question come to me thus came *from* me. This question could not happen to me except being said as much as touched upon – by the other – belonging first to the other, come to me from the other, who was already addressing it to the other. First, ›she‹ beholds and is beholden to, the other.« (Derrida 2005, 2)

There are five aspects related to touch that arise from the encounter. First, in Derrida's story, the encounter happens between two unequal entities, between the other's trace, a gendered question, allegorized as a ›she*‹ and the wa/ondering and reading Derrida. This intertwinement thus does not happen strictly between two subjects or two surfaces or things of the same or different material. It emerges between the mark of an other, a

4 Derrida does not exclude what he calls, for example, telepathy from his philosophic endeavor; he in fact places it at the heart of psychoanalysis. He thereby not only invites to rethink psychoanalysis from another standpoint, which may be indeed necessary, but discloses another space, the space of the ›colonial other‹, of ›woman‹, of ›witches‹ of ›magic‹, of ›death‹, of another form of psychic encountering and touch from any kind of ›distance‹ that may be subtle and yet ›deeper‹, more immediate and intimate than what can be grasped from the surfaces of bodily and psychic processes. Alas, along the path of this discovery, his style of looking out for the secret, it seems, leads him onto a rather cis-masculinist track, perhaps confusing something that could be called ›affectionate enchantment‹ with the sign of ›woman‹ as a metaphor for (telepathic?) ›seduction‹ per se – out of a desire to be seduced maybe, confining her* to another (witchy) ›kitchen‹, as it were, which at times makes it difficult to read the text without becoming impatient. This could be the famous ›seduction‹ – so often noticed by ›women*‹, although not always written out, since they (continue to) have no access to writing in the narrow sense, everywhere and in the same way and space as their cis-male counterparts. Derrida has laid out his reflections on telepathy, for example, in a text explicitly called *Telepathy* (trans. by Nicholas Royle). Cf. Derrida ([2003] 2007, 226–261); see also Sartiliot (1989). Nicholas Royle links telepathy to literature as a form of second sight and regards literature, in the sense of power-less not-knowing and not-addressing, as a ›metaphor for reading‹. Cf. Royle (1990). See also Marc Redfield's distinguished review (1992) of the book.

question on the wall, that orients Derrida to itself, and to ›Derrida‹ as an animated subject, and a homodiegetic narrator. Yet, through the narrative form, ›Derrida‹ as well as ›the question on the wall‹ become both figurations as well as abstract signs within the pages of the book. The difference between animated and unanimated, ›real‹ and fiction, material and imaginary or mental is erased in and through language and writing (and not to forget: the question comes also as a *written* question on a wall). Derrida places this touch between himself and the question, in-between an open space, a road that conditions its im/possibility, and emphasizes, in this way, its political trait: For Derrida touch takes place within an open space between the question on the wall and his (astonished) reading, within a certain distance. It is a public space in a metropolitan (central European and postColonial) street.

This historically conditioned *ur*-story of touch of the other has affinity with the concept of chiasm that Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his phenomenological work invokes as an intertwining. Merleau-Ponty's metaphoric notion of chiasm is embedded in what he calls *the flesh* (*chair*) (Thomas-Fogiel 2014), a concept that he uses for the texture, which binds and relates ›existence‹ and the day-to-day-world in its material and immaterial senses as a single substratum. For Merleau-Ponty, touch takes place in the folds of the flesh, in its intertwining, where it touches (itself) reciprocally in an (at least momentary) unity. Derrida reorganizes Merleau-Ponty's rather lumpy and lifeless metaphor of *the flesh* by placing touch into the ›worldliness‹ of the experientiality of everyday life, albeit he does so, or so it seems, within a poetically invoked contemplative (philosophical?) narrative. Derrida, probably unintentionally, thereby not only deconstructs his own categorization as an abstract, nihilistic thinker as well as Merleau-Ponty's classification as a phenomenological philosopher bound to experience. He also deconstructs, or *touches*, the limits of literature and philosophy and their functionality with regard to ›understanding‹, making it a question of touch, of *be-greifen* without fingers and a hand, or thoughts that *first* reflects what is to be understood. Touch appears in a performative way as a linguistic, literary, as well as philosophic *grasping* without a visible and actual touch or thought. It is *performed* in the text as well as in the textuality of the everyday experience, without an apparent form of touch, just in the process of writing and reading. Although an organ, the eyes, seeing, is involved in the epigraph, it is not the eyes that come to this perception of the encounter and that hold (on to) the question. Derrida binds these silent instances of touch to an ›inwardness‹ that takes place in the self, and he places them in the political *auto-bio-graphic* subjectivity of the narrating character who he has become in telling the story. But he also places touch, first of all, within the call of the other, as the other's trace. The touch of the other thus is not to be confounded *with* the other. The opening space that emerges in the encounter comes with an orientating movement, which sets the self and the other in a relation to each other; at the same time, in this fleeting encounter an empty space in-between the two entities is opened up as an effect of this liminal touch: While enmeshed in a touch, the other and the self, remain different entities and are not and do not become the same⁵ or an inseparable unity, although something, a touch, seems to have united them in ways unforeseen with regard to their past

5 For a discussion of Merleau-Ponty's rather totalizing idea of relationality in alterity and the sensible, see Mickey (2018).

as well as the future. Derrida depicts the touch, furthermore, out of a written text that he reads (the question on the Parisian wall), thus within the process of reading a text (in a given context). In doing so, he subtly situates touch and responsivity to the touch as phenomena of writing and reading.

Second, the question evokes touch, on the one hand, as a sense of sight, as *seeing*. On the other hand, it interrogates the meaning of sight, vision, seeing, and thus also enquires what touch with regard to eye contact means and where and how it happens. In another related passage Derrida disassembles these, not at all *apparent*, meanings of an eye contact and of sight:

»Now, in the first place, this presupposes that these eyes see *each other*. – These eyes of these gazes? You're going from one to the other. For two gazes, more than two eyes are often needed. And then there are eyes that no longer see, and eyes that have never seen. Aren't you also forgetting those living without eyes? All the same, they don't always live without any light. – Where we are – this night – seems even darker then. Don't we have to make a choice between looking or exchanging glances or meeting gazes and seeing, very simply seeing? For if our eyes see what is *seeing* rather than *visible*, if they believe that they are seeing a gaze rather than eyes, at least to that extent, to that extent as such, they are seeing nothing, then, nothing that can be seen, nothing *visible*.« (Derrida 2005, 2)

Not only are the borders of dis/ability made porous here; the metaphysical dualism between light and darkness, *literally*, power and powerlessness, is also destabilized. In doing so, this question of seeing, as well as of bodily touch and of grasping, in the sense of *be-greifen*, also refutes any dualism between light and darkness and Enlightenment and ignorance, and, in this way, also questions knowing and notknowing as determining, apparent, and conceivable. Here, a play may also be at work with a passage in Plato's *Republic*, where Socrates, in a straightforward dualistic manner binds light to ›knowledge‹ and the sight to seeing and power, in a quite clearcut, corporeal understanding and darkness to notknowing, blindness, and being powerless. It is also a passage where Socrates makes use of ›laughter‹ to gauge the capacity and thus power of knowing, and the powerlessness of notknowing⁶ (Plato 1980, 517 a–b). According to this passage, ›laughter‹ is milder when it comes from a state of knowing, and thus power, it is right – and right out of control, leaving one powerless when it does not know. But this ›knowledge‹ that

6 Here is the whole passage of the dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon from the *Republic*, Socrates is speaking: »Now if he should be required to contend with these perpetual prisoners in ›evaluating‹ these shadows while his vision was still dim and before his eyes were accustomed to the dark – and this time required for habituation would not be very short – would he not provoke laughter, and would it not be said of him that he had returned from his journey aloft with his eyes ruined and that it was not worthwhile even to attempt the ascent? And if it were possible to lay hands on and to kill the man who tried to release them and lead them up, would they not kill him? They certainly would, he said. This image then, dear Glaucon we must apply as a whole to all that has been said, likening the region revealed through sight to the habitation of the prison, and the light of the fire in it to the power of the sun. And if you assume that the ascent and the contemplation of the things above is the soul's ascension to the intelligible region, you will not miss my surmise, since that is what you desire to hear.«

Socrates employs here, is the ›knowledge‹ of an allegedly ›knowing‹ subject, and its mild form and ›laughter‹ indicates, therefore, a position of superiority. Interestingly, Socrates does not bind ›knowledge‹ to a state of not-knowing and wonder – in front of which he would be powerless. Plato's Socratic dialogue remains, in so far, an imprisonment within the logic of a subjectivity that claims and *firmly believes* to have not only sought ›truth‹ but to *speak* ›truth‹ as well. The interlocutor always stays in a position of inferiority towards that presumably fake-questioning allegedly, knowing subject. Platonic dialogicity, thus, seems like a master's mask and not the space of convivial exchange on equal grounds, or one that is interested to hear the other, presumably inferior side, listen to them, or in order to *stay in touch* (for a dialogue maybe), but rather to refute.

Derrida's above cited passage, in contrast, rather unfolds as the sensitive trace of not-knowing; it shows itself in an in-betweenness, an empty space of an endless dialogic negotiation. In differentiating various terms of and for the visual, the un-seeing touch of the eyes becomes a complex metonym as well as a metaphor for the haptic that, however, is neither based on the faculty of seeing nor on the logic of ›reason‹, but rather on the singularity of contact between two entities who (are) read/ing someone/something/each other within the interruptive moment of an encounter, in an affective spectra, sensual space (and historical context) that is opened up in a touch; and not only that. Derrida also prompts to think about the *quality* of touch that lies in the gaze of un-seeing:

»If two gazes look into each other's eyes, can one then say that they are touching? Are they coming into contact – the one with the other? [...] If two gazes come into contact, the one with the other, the question will always be whether they are stroking or striking each other – and where the difference would lie. A benediction bordering on the very worst, as always?« (Derrida 2005, 2)

It can be argued that Derrida stays at the threshold of a rhetorical question that seems to know more than it is willing to disclose. Platonic dialogicity appears as part of the desire that unwittingly shows itself in language. But there is more in the passage. Although the passage implies a sensual affectivity within the encounter and its touch, these ›affects‹ amount not only to ›good‹ ones of ›love‹, friendship, and hospitality, but also imply ›bad‹ ones of disgust, contempt, hostility, and violence. Circumcision as a religious rite but also as a corporeal enactment and metaphor/mark of censorship that comes with the gift of being an accepted entity, also seems to be evoked. It is one of Derrida's central *auto-bio-graphical*-philosophical concepts: ›love/acceptance and circumcision/pruning, a metaphor that is at the heart of a ›loving/violent, corporeal, conceptual, philosophical, religious, sociopolitical, historical, and also psychic touch, between the self as other and the Other. It entails an aporetic affective ray – thoughts, enactments – and one that is inscribed on the (male) body (often also enacted by women).⁷ It is a violent and an

7 Derrida refers to the act of circumcision with reference to his mother and the ›love‹ that he feels for her, where this instance of circumcision has inscribed itself in his memory, just like the ancient texts. Circumcision seems to become a metaphor that entails not only Freud's famous male castration-angst, referred to above. It may also stand for sociopolitical castration and hinderance from within the very same society to which one belongs, and which nurtures one, a *motherland's* confinements in which one is (made) the other, violated against, for the sake of some common good.

abusive rite, and yet one that is done with great care and out of ›love‹, two paradoxical approaches, which are interwoven in one another. This contradictory affective knot is evoked here by the distinction between ›stroking‹ and ›striking‹ that becomes almost indistinguishable in the same act, and yet may also be experienced conversely – what for one party may be stroking, for the other might be striking, and vice versa. The image of the borders of ›benediction‹, emphasizes the aporetic experience of touch. ›Benediction‹ not only evokes religion and religiosity, which can go wrong in its well-intentionality when the spirit of the text, the spirit of textuality, is transformed into profane, confining authority, serving specific interests and readings, enforcing itself on others, and thus a form of power-imposition, which, then, has to try hard to maintain itself and, therefore, dominate, even eliminate, others. It also can be connoted as *doxa*, as any form of fixity and the proclamation of an end, of ›truth‹ (in this sense in fact, becoming blasphemy, its other, as textual ›truth‹ is replaced by a specific reading that must potentially remain ›untruth‹). Derrida in this way releases touch from an essentialist and romanticized ›touchy-feely‹ approach. The chiasm of touch rather encompasses simultaneously the chiasm of different, aporetic meanings of ›love‹ and violence, the violence of ›love‹, of a specific ›love‹, in the name of an Other, that paradoxically others, and thus reveals its falsity when the gates of and towards the dialogic – the closest one gets to textual ›truth‹ – are shut, silenced. In this way, as paradoxical as it may seem, neither ›love‹ nor violence are separated and seen as contradictory. Both concepts are rather considered as two sides of the same will/desire, movements in closeness, intimacy – reading. In a more general sense, this relation evokes Derrida's reading of the pharmakon as medicine and poison within the sociopolitical realm. It is thus at the heart of any idea of togetherness, neighborliness, and earthboundness, and therefore worth exploring – and thinking through how, on which basis we can, we are allowed, to give form to being and living together, with such precautions and affective frames in mind – when at any point ›good‹ can change into ›bad‹ – to remain in dialogue, in reparative rather than hurting ways.

Third, as mentioned above, Derrida envisions his response (to touch, to being touched, and to touching) in and as writing and reading; the encounter takes place between the self and a sentence, a question written on the surface of a Parisian wall, a public space that has written itself into Derrida's book on touch. Derrida places touch

It may also stand for a state of coming of age and disillusionment, out of (historically) experienced (life-)events that leave their mark on the body and (discursively) inscribe the body by injuring it. Derrida uses the term ›recircumcision‹ to refer to the process of (*auto-bio-graphical*) writing in which one castrates oneself, but also as an aporetic process of a complex, laborious affectivity through which the writing emerges, or that rather gives birth to writing. See Derrida (1999 a, 215 ff.). The figure of the mother appears, thus, as ambivalent, with reference to the male*-gender; as the voice of the super-ego that is archived in the self, the mother-figure is also seen as a powerful and in this sense violent/violating and indicatory site of curtailment and ›culturing‹ in specific affective, sensual, corporeal, as well as cognitive ways. Circumcision, thus, and paradoxically, stands for the powerful site of the mother-figure – who becomes an excutive party, without decisional power, a weapon, and protective shield of patri-lineal symbolic orders that hurts her* the most and hinders her* becoming, – as well as, it could be argued, the reverse and (male*, masculinist*) revenge site of sociopolitical and discursive gender-roles that mirror themselves in the symbolic order when power shifts from the mother to the son/man.

not only in writing and reading. He also show its contamination by the spheres of the public and the private that are subverted by it. In this way, writing and reading are shown as enmeshed in an inner and an outer world. This stresses the ›liveliness‹, the sensuality of discourse and ›philosophy‹ and their link to and in the process of writing and reading. It configures touch through writing as an encounter within the text itself – but also as a sociopolitical process: The inscription is written on the wall, while the text, in the narrow sense of writing, is written on pages. The senses of touch, its abstract, absent and immaterial sense, as well as its sociopolitical sense, are taken up in one stroke as the trace of the other's inscription in the self, and interlinked with the material worlding. Touch, its sensuality and affectivity, moves from the meaning proper to the realm of discourse, to the (lived experience and *written*, told, abstract, supplementary) realm of language in the conglomeration of different, contradictory other meanings within the frame of a (her*-)story. This also anticipates the paradox of fiction (Redford/Weston 1975; Feagin 2007) always already as ›fiction‹ as well as ›paradox‹, as any touch, affectivity, maybe even sensuality, is further explored, positioned, in an afterwardsness (*Nachträglichkeit*), in the haunting that follows, and is sometimes expressed (or is poured) into language, while in its *immediate* momentum – the presence of taking place – a touch with all its attendant sensual-affectivity is as such always already almost undetectable, gone. Touch is sensible only as a trace and orientation that is evoked by the relational movement that ensues from an encounter, in lived experience, as within writing/reading. From both ends it appears woven within a texture that is sociopolitical as well as textual.

This indeed is one of the premises with which Derrida approaches Nancy's work as well as the topos of the touch generally. Writing in parenthesis, interrupting his analysis in an interval, Derrida opens up a space in the encounter with Nancy's texts, in which he places his motivation for the book, interlaced with a spectra of affectivity, his reciprocal touch, touching Nancy, being touched by him. This intertwining of touch, is a performance of the trace of touch in the texture of a (private) life (friendship), in the texture of thinking (philosophy), as well as in the texture of (historically driven, sociopolitical) discourse that indicates, *calls* for a different futurity to think, touch as the beginning for an other approach to worldliness and becoming –:

»(Metonymies are in mourning, at least, for a proper sense or name. And we shall see that this book is also about the metonymies of touch. It started out as an offering for Jean-Luc Nancy, for him alone, quite uniquely for him, and by running the risk of publication, it is already exposing itself to so many other metonymies. Hence the worrying in this unsteady gesture, in its tonalities and affect.)« (Derrida 2005, 17)

This ›worrying‹ metonymizes the complex entanglement of different sociopolitical, private, as well as affective effects that are attached to discourse, the discourse of touch, and the touch of the other and the touch upon a subject-matter. What Derrida calls an ›unsteady gesture‹, in fact, may be what accompanies the parergon-discursivity of touch as well. This is not a casual, *parenthetical* remark that Derrida makes, but an awareness that he draws from *addressing the question of touch* (in both its discursive, as well as its figurative, senses).

Fourth, Derrida envisions this tangible response in the form of the personification of the question as a ›she‹. ›She*‹ signifies not only the feminine pronoun but also the marginalized other that arises, as if from the self's indefinite unconscious. ›She*‹, however, is not only the human (or dehumanized) other. ›She*‹ also is a question, an other, who is, not always presumably human, ›she*‹ is also and above everything, a written as well as inscribed sign, ›she*‹ is part of language and discourse, and, therefore, a specter of meanings. She* knocks on Derrida's door reminding him of herself*:

»She‹ didn't come to pay me a *visit*. In other words, ›she‹ didn't *alight* to *see* me, as if I had *invited* her. No, as I said, ›she‹ took hold of me, ›she‹ invaded me even before I had seen ›her‹ coming: ›she‹ touched me before letting ›herself‹ be seen.« (Derrida 2005, 1)

The question, the call for a (re)orientation comes from the other who seems absent but has left a question at the doorstep of the one approached, as a sign and reminder of her* absent-presence. With this invocation of the other at one's doorsteps, of the self and the wall, the self's (inward and outward) architecture, Derrida also implements touch as a trace that has no detectable other end. It already comes from the unknowable before it *somehow* enters the self, knocking, sometimes violently, questioning (the gendered) subjectivity of the self.

Derrida alludes in this way also to the exclusion and silencing of the other in the meta-physical organization of language and discourse. This other is also the always already gendered, excluded stranger who comes as ›an event‹ to the Other (power), challenging it – and Derrida lets her* in to take part in the discourse (on touch). He does not disbar her* from the discourses of touch, critically pointing to the (Western?) anthropocentric as well as cis-masculinist, »teleological hierarchy« (Derrida 2005, 152). In staging the question as the excluded, gendered other, Derrida also carves out the submerged space for the other to speak for herself* within the topos of touch. ›She*‹, thus, is set as an agent, as an *agens* and not as an object of touch that is spoken about.

Derrida nonetheless enables a double approach to touch that, on the one hand, binds the other to the still unresolved and ongoing question of gender, and that, at the same time, liberates it from any essentialization of gender as well as otherness by evoking the other as a question (of the psyche? Of consciousness? Of an inanimate thing? Of humanimals?), as a sign that the (muted) other has left in the face of the (dominant) self?

Fifth, Derrida's story *around* this question, this epigraph, is told within a humorous and self-ironizing rhetoric that distorts not only any ›truth‹ about the incident, but also about the borderlines of factual and fictional writing while exposing the irrelevance of such a distinction in writing and the (possible) value/virtue of the effects of writing about an (im/possible) incident of touch. It also undermines any authoritative approach that Derrida may have inadvertently implied in writing and announcing the episode. The (phallogocentric) logic of *what is* is shifted to the logic of *what is un/said, saying* something else in depicting the enmeshment of historically determined (biased) meanings and their systematization within language. The humorous tone plays on the borders of meaning, deconstructing the question of factuality and ›truth‹ that feels obliged to itself, as irrelevant in the face of a (possibly) hypothetical ›truth‹ that takes into account surrendering to the words of the other:

»I barely dared sign such a question, not to mention its gloss [...] and for a moment I thought of inventing a history, or, in fact, since we have said goodbye to history, of pretending to *invent* a true story. This one: unlikely though it may seem, I thought I deciphered this anonymous inscription on a wall in Paris, as if it had journeyed there from the shores of another language.« (Derrida 2005 4)

Derrida intervenes in the discourse of the touch, paving the way for a space and time related, (future) intersectional approach within and beyond the human perception of what touch (might) mean(s) in the context of ›life‹, of history, of writing, restoring the subjectivity of the (unknown) other. In presuming that the question might come from ›the shores of another language‹, this subjectivity of the other is not only considered within gendered sociopolitical bias, but also within racialized and underprivileged colonial ones. The other speaks (out) on the wall of metropolitan Paris, queering the question of touch, queering the certainty of the self – and through writing on the wall, queering the space as well as reclaiming space for itself, in a quite timid form of a (wild or rather free) inscription of a memory or reminder. The wall, and writing on the wall, not only invokes the (excluded) other (of ›Europe‹); it also reinvokes ›revolution‹, not only ›the French Revolution‹, but the 1968 ›revolution‹ when the walls of Paris were used to propagate a revolution by the inscription of (philosophical) slogans on the walls of the city, the polis.⁸ The trace of the other is, thus, also their double form of agency – the trace of their exploitation and the trace of injustice that accompanies it, in which the architecture of writing is written. It comes with a historically conditioned sociopolitical context, and *here*, on the walls, in the architecture of power, domination is always connected to its other, in unseen ways, in the bones and *skin* of its polis, on the surface of the metropolitan cities that are built and kept with the (psychic and physical) capacities of the other(-ed).

In Derrida's encounter, touch becomes an elusive trans-sensual event that comes from the past-present of a history of dominance, which Derrida has himself experienced all too vividly from different directions within his bones and skin. In reading the inscription on the wall, Derrida is moved (as if reminded?), touched, (inwardly) (possibly) going into another direction, reaching out into the future (of a book) and its possible disseminations. ›From the shores of another language‹ in a Parisian context – can mean Arabic, or Algerian, or the Jewish-Arabo-French, or the *banlieue*-kids, or Caribbean French. It may also depict in a subtle, imaginative fashion, the figure of Hegel's sister, Christiane Luise Hegel, as a street-child, the one Hegel sister, who, in another im/possible constellation, would have had ended up on the streets of Paris, crying maybe mournfully, and writing her philosophy on the surfaces of the city walls.⁹ A wall also indicates a non-passage,

8 Robert Young at least argues that the 68s movement had a specific place in Paris, which was the streets of the Latin Quarter, »which at that time was a little third-world itself, full of Vietnamese, Algerians, and West Africans, and their lively cafés and restaurants. Into this mix, the political and theoretical ferment of May '68 was animated by the populist politics of the contemporary Cultural Revolution in China: »nous sommes le pouvoir« (*we are power*), as the slogan put it«, and which also had their place: the wall. Cf. Young (2021, 433, 446).

9 In *The Phenomenology of the Mind* Hegel refers to the interrelatedness of dark and light as well as the possible meanings and understandings of the sensual. Hegel refers here not only to the sensuality of ›seeing‹ and ›blindness‹ and their limitations and intertwinements; his argument evolves

a border. A wall can be seen by everyone and yet, is so mundane, it is regularly overlooked and overread, a neglected place and borderline of not belonging. A wall also indicates an aporia that questioningly speaks to the reader/viewer/counter-part as (an asymmetrical) face-to-face encounter, also touching (on) the question of an ethics of encounter. It begs the subsequent question of an ethics of touch, implying touch as an ethics of openness to the other. This speculative de/liberation on touch also encompasses the language of the othered other(-s), and the language of marginality, the language of violence, and the violence of the encounter of colonization and its discontinuities, respectively, which are also part of language and discourse and which from within, like the question of the wall, implicate the ethics of memory and remembrance. This is also about where to place touch, how to scrutinize touch when it comes to historically entrenched forms of exclusion and violence that have shaped language and discourse, the city walls and the walls within the city, which are fraught with obstacles and conspicuous absences.¹⁰

Elsewhere, Derrida speaks of this space of an absolute (other) encounter with the other, of this touch, in an almost mystical way, defining it as an *affirmative* »act of messianic faith – irreligious and without messianism« (Derrida [2003] 2005a: xiv), a quasi-religious or super-religious act, a *trans-cendentality pure*, one might say, that seems to open up religion so it can be religious at all. And here, again, Derrida is critical of an Enlightenment that remains within the confines of »Christianity« and thus is incapable of advancing an understanding of »knowledge« that also embraces – not oppresses – the other(-ed). Derrida imagines this act within a *place* that he calls *khôra* »which means a *locality* in general, spacing, interval«. He describes *khôra* as that which *gives place without actually giving*, and which allows that something (like an encounter?) *takes place*; even such an incidental encounter (with the wall) thus must be located in an act with an (unknown) o/Other, which comes with the possibility of *khôra*. *Khôra* appears as a kind of *ur-space* of touch of the (unknown, unseen) o/Other, a third maybe that is neither a subjectivity that

into a reflection about the supersensible (*das Übersinnliche*). *Das Übersinnliche*, in Hegel's vocabulary, in fact becomes the inner truth (*innere Wahrheit*), which is inconceivable within the narrowness of the mind (*Verstand*). Maybe Hegel will be and can be read in the future with regard to such forms of the (*über*-)sensual and what they may mean. Cf. Hegel 2015, 60 ff. and 85 ff. Derrida's allusion to the shores of another language, might thus also mean Hegel (or unconsciously Hegel's sister, whose lyrical work is missing). »Hegel« appears here as the forerunner of the sublation of dichotomic understandings per se, as well as one of the earliest thinkers of poststructuralist thought in European modernity (whatever – or whoever? – (not-European) might have triggered these thoughts in him?). Also, with regard to sensuality, Hegel still remains interesting, as he considers the *Übersinnliche* as a form of appearance, if not the purest form of it. The shores of another language may therefore also refer to German and may encompass not only Hegel but also Nietzsche and the rift, which the latter further examines in the analysis and critique of the dictates of the Enlightenment and the regime of »reason«. The role of the other, especially in the invocation of the figures of the »Jew« or the »Black« as the other(-ed) par excellence (which are to be thought and analyzed by considering gender, class, and sexuality), in European philosophy, and their role and function, still need to be uncovered in European texts – the way Toni Morrison, e. g., has outlined the figure of the African American for the establishment of the imaginary of the (white) U.S.-American novel/literature in *Playing in the Dark* (1992). See also Sander L. Gilman (1980).

10 For a discussion of Derrida's approach to touch and the colonial concept of »race« and racism, see Shirley A. Tate (2016).

can become a superior self nor a subjectivity that can rule. The two entities face each other on equal grounds in (the) *khôra* (and thus must come to terms with each other, on equal grounds, no matter how ›unequal‹ they may seem, it could be concluded); at the same time, Derrida ensures that this thought is not sublated into another form of *theology* or ideologization, and that it remains *untouched* and *free*:

»No politics, no ethics, and no law can be, as it were, deduced from this thought. To be sure, nothing can be done [*faire*] with it. [...] On it, perhaps, on what here receives the name *khôra*, a call might thus be taken up and take hold: the call for a thinking of the event to come, of the democracy to come, of the reason to come. This call bears every hope, to be sure, although it remains in itself without hope. Not hopeless, in despair, but foreign to the teleology, the hopefulness [...], not foreign to justice, but nonetheless heterogenous and rebellious, irreducible, to law, to power, and to the economy of redemption.« (Derrida [2003] 2005a: xiv-xv)

It is, as if Derrida here, in a quite poetic form that in fact tries to express a philosophical, almost utopian, *trans*-cendental vision, would circumscribe ›literary writing‹, the literary form, literariness, itself as a *khôra*, a place for a quiet encounter, dialogue and pensiveness. Literature or the literariness of the text, even in the sense of social textures of the everyday, of the materiality of the world, appear enmeshed in writing and as writing, and can provide such a fleeting *khôra*, such a place for the possibility of encounter that might touch passersby, readers, you and me, in this almost ethical, quasi *trans*-cendental sense, where a touch of reorientations can take place, without any explicit intentions or directions, by just *coming into being*, *being there* (from out of historic and perhaps not-historic entanglements), and *occur* (or take shelter?). The scene of reading in which Derrida sees the epigraph on the wall comes close to a narrated literary depiction of such a *khôra*. *Khôra* may then be the place where an enactment of touch is invoked. It is a place that cannot be made, but one that unexpectedly appears – is given without being there. *Khôra* seems like the heterotopic place that the literary imagination can evoke and that is always invoked differently in the reading process, which makes reading, within its simulacrum and repetitions, always anew a singular moment, even within the always same text(-uality), and thus always open, a chance for ever new beginnings. *Khôra* thus may be the aesthetic value of literature, literariness, its ever anew possibility of touch. This singularity of the reading process is chiasmic; it also enables the possibility that a *khôra* arises, that a touch ensues within a reading process. *Khôra* can also be conceived as the place of non-knowledge and power-lessness that derives from (literary) writing, as a potential possibility of *there is* (Derrida 2005 a: xv), this »place without age«, »another ›taking-place‹«, a »desert in the desert« (Derrida 2005 a: xiv-xv).

Khôra, thus, appears as the interlinking place between (the literariness of) ›writing‹ and non-knowledge and power-lessness, and one that ensues, takes place in the texture of the text, not only the literary one, but in the text we are written in, the historically determined, sociopolitical, material one, which Derrida evokes by the image of the sentence on the wall.

Literature does not thereby annul the everyday-text, nor does it superimpose itself on it or is a form of mimesis, but rather may constitute a parallel engravement, echoing

an other voice. The everyday-text, like the literary one, are two different pages, out of two different materialities that are in constant *contact* with each other that constantly touch each other, like a crochet loop stitch. As the (literary) text is not limited to one scene of writing but is, like Derrida's book on the touch itself, a constant reprography in different ways, of words and signs, those *khôras* that are there in the text and which one can (potentially) come across in the text, hook into each other and extend into a fabric of (possible and infinite) production of meanings and possibilities (of reading, of rendering, of agency, of not-knowing, of power-lessness). *Khôra* thus seems part of, enmeshed in, the texture of our texts in both their senses, of the everyday as well as in narrated, written texts in a narrower sense, philosophical as well as literary ones. This becomes even more evident, with regard to another passage in *Rogue* where Derrida explicitly takes up this niche, the *khôra*, this ›there is‹, »es gibt« (Derrida 2005 a: xv), this place in the space of a materialized space. *Khôra* shows itself, or rather can be seen, grasped, in the ›city‹, the mundane everyday-space, not just in Plato's cave and abstract sophisticated philosophical thinking. *Khôra*, thereby, is not just any space, or rather spacing; it is one that makes the encounter with an excluded other, the other even within what is called democracy – a goal rather than an accomplishment – possible. It is the place of the encounter with the one who is deemed (by someone, by the superior self) a ›rogue‹. In *Rogues* thus, in the figure of *voyou*, where Derrida's emphasis is on the idea and critique of an understanding of democracy, and, coming from the French background against which he speaks in the first place, of assumptions that foreground it, imbued in expressions like ›the French Revolution‹ with its mottos, one of which is »brotherhood«, ›the rouge‹ is a male figure. Remaining with this conclusion, in *Rogue* Derrida problematizes inclusions and exclusions within the rhetoric of democracy that makes different people *alike*, but that also produces trajectories of notbelonging (Derrida 2005 a: 63). In *On Touching*, all the central concept-metaphors¹¹ with which Derrida engages himself seem to be repeated in related

11 It seems slippery to speak of ›terms‹, ›concepts‹ or ›metaphors‹ when it comes to the work of Derrida and what he tries to (un-)fix in negotiating a point; I think, though, that in the end he has a point: Even a metaphor is within a chain of metaphoricity, and not confinable to a specific shift, as meaning is dependent on so many different aspects. It is, therefore, not controllable as such, (which does not mean that there is no ›right‹ or ›wrong‹ or only not-understanding); Derrida tries to bind this evaluative strain that goes against any arbitrary relativism and simulacrum in meaning production to the idea of ›the third‹, to alterity and the question of the other, and to what seems to be two ends, two poles of argumentation: the conditional, context bound question, where a decision has to be made; and the virtual contextless, infinite context in which the pristine meaning of a ›value‹ has to be released again as unconditional. The ›unconditional‹, though is also bound to the idea of the third, to alterity and thus, remains a question of the ethical. While this boundless, unfixability of meaning-production, nevertheless, seems tedious and appears nihilistic at first glance, and might evoke frustration and some kind of intellectual rage – Derrida's always opposing, and therefore, in its alluring illuminations always somehow dominating thinking, often has aroused different forms of resistance, exemplary are in this regard Searle's and Ricœur's rejection of parts of his work (in Ricœur's case especially with regard to the understanding of metaphor) – it also is a liberating and empowering way of setting new ideas, approaches, and (marginalized) understandings into work. At the same time, Derrida's thought has a regulatory function in terms of the machinery of power and dominance that, too, reside in the creation of all, however confined and carefully established ›truths‹ of any kind. His own work is therefore not an exception to this rule, which may be why Derrida's work and language often touch the shores of the literary (as the

ways, and this is also the case with the term ›repetition‹ as such. This relation can be seen within three aspects that refer to the issue of exclusion and alterity, and they are conjoined here as the question of touch. Firstly, the other, the rogue, here appears as the (pronoun and) figure ›she‹. It seems to be the gendered question of the rogue that he thematizes: ›Here, finally, is the first question: can one and/or must one speak democratically of democracy?‹ (Derrida 2005 a: 71). Secondly, it is the *context* that he evokes, the space. It is the place of an imperial city (and the polis, right at the heart of (Western) philosophizing) in which he places the question of the other and, in doing so, also makes it a (socio-)political question, when he for example says:

›The word *voyou* has an essential relation with the *voie*, the way, with the urban roadways [*voirie*], the roadways of the city or the *polis*, and thus with the street [*rue*], the waywardness [*dévoiment*] of the *voyou* consisting in making ill use of the street, in corrupting the street or loitering in the streets, in ›roaming the streets‹, as we say in a strangely transitive formulation. This transitivity is in fact never very far from the one that leads to ›walking the streets‹.« (Derrida 2005 a: 65)

Transitivity sometimes seems to hide both subjects, the one who speaks as well as the one who is looked at – and who cannot speak themselves, although both are generated in this way – with the in/accessibility to the performativity of language and the ordering of discourse. (This does not mean, of course, that other(-ed) subjects are not speaking with humorous tonalities, with or without the transitivity that is trying to denote and generate the wor(l)d in specific ways.) And this, *walking the streets*, in fact, following Derrida, could it not also be understood as the possibility of another (future, heterotopic) form of (democratic) ›freedom‹, from which we seem very far away?

Thirdly, finally, Derrida problematizes language as another realm of alterity, exclusion, and spacing, and at the same time, as the realm that speaks (with) power:

›Between power as force and power as right or law, between law and justice, between *kratos* and principle [*le droit*], between the constative, the prescriptive, the normative,

legitimate open space of all unconfined possibilities), while he seems to courageously resist to surrender to it, and, rather, to hold his foot on the surface area of ›philosophy‹, in theorizing it anew; this, too, can be read as another form of resistance (from a marginalized space) as he has to fight in order not to be othered as ›the Jew‹ who is more into ›literature‹. His not letting go of philosophy might not only have something to do with a desire for change (and a desire for the powerful that also always looms in there), but may also be a strategy that this change still requires, in order to be made – (while it sustains an open end beyond the strict configurations of what philosophy and what literature are). This approach, though, is not and should not be confined to literature (and literature should, therefore, not be confined to a thingness, to ›itself‹). This seems only the case and possible (and appears ›logical‹) as ›the laws‹, and boundaries of disciplinary separation are guarded jealously (especially by ›philosophers‹ who would have something to lose (power?)); if these ›the laws‹ should (one day) be suspended, and one could enter the sphere of sublation then we might end up one (other) day without having any boundaries whatsoever, globally, and only a *Geschwisterhood* within the vast field of literariness with all its reflections, sensualities, affectivity, and embrace of the *future* – a task and inclination that still awaits its future realization (and hopefully not just in the confinements of the digital).

and the performative, a whole panoply of differences and nuances unfolds and then folds back in on itself.« (Derrida 2005 a: 72)

The *rogue*, the *voyou*, in the city, thus also implies classed and racialized subjectivity. The question on the wall repeats the question of the *rogue*, of forms of exclusions within the frame of ›democracy‹ by also indicating ›race‹, gender, queerness, and femininity as forms of otherness (transcending an assumed ›brotherhood‹). The question on the wall is not only one that depicts and interrogates the meaning of (romantic) ›love‹, of genuine closeness, but can also be regarded as *the* quintessential question of an ethical relationship that is part and parcel of and lies at the heart of power and *polis*. It also implicitly renders power as a relationship, which is not necessarily only bound to forms of exploitation and labor, but also within a relationship that is through and through shaped by the sensual and by affectivity. In this way, power is problematized in a way that goes marrow-deep into the body-mind substance of (the humanimal) *being in the wo(rl)d*, in complex, aporetic, chiasmic ways, one that lies in the economy of non-knowledge and power-lessness, where power and ›knowledge‹ are indeed questioned.

In fact, in *Adieu to Levinas* (Derrida 1999), Derrida defines the question as *the third*, and the (necessary) *question of justice*. *The third* is a necessity that comes ›as early as the epiphany of the face in the face to face‹ (Derrida 1999, 32). Without the third, violence would threaten the fragile encounter of the face to face (Derrida 1999, 32). However, despite the third, the encounter enters into a double bind, as the third, in the sense of justice/ethics, signals an ›initial perjury‹ that has been committed to the face-to-face encounter. The desire for justice thus rests on a violation that has already been perpetrated. Justice can only be conceived as a contingent moment; it is limited by ›the law‹, which has to decide and, and thus returns to the circle of ›perjury‹. Justice and ›the law‹, for Derrida, link the conditioned and the unconditioned, which nevertheless, make ethics, the question of ethics, possible. The ethics of touch entails both, the possibility of striking as well as of stroking, while both can turn into possibilities of ›love‹ or perjury, of parts of a ruse. *Justice*, then, must, always be separated anew from ›the law‹ as such, in order not to be corrupted in this economy:

»It is necessary that this threshold not be at the disposal of a general knowledge or a regulated technique. It is necessary that it exceeds every regulated procedure in order to open itself to what always risks being perverted (the Good, Justice, Love, Faith – and perfectibility, etc.). This is necessary, this possible hospitality to the worst is necessary so that good hospitality can have a chance, the chance of letting the other come, the yes of the other no less than the yes to the other.« (Derrida 1999, 35)

This ethics of touch, this letting in of the other, independent of the *quality of the touch* that may result from the encounter, speaks to bell hooks' call for humor within ›meaningful revolutions‹, as discussed in the beginning. (*Affective*) humor, as laughing at oneself and one's discourses, reveals the porous limits of the historically conditioned language and discourse, of the texture, of our entanglements, of the perjuries and ›the law‹, and is, in this sense, also an entry point to *justice*, to touch as the im/possibility of ethics within this textural, material, and immaterial encounter. The question, the mark of the other

on one's doorsteps, does not guarantee a *just* process, some revelation of ›truth‹. But its touch can lead to an orienting and formative search. And that alone seems to be the value attached to it, which makes it worthwhile; Derrida's encounter with the question and the trace of the other within one's reach is an engagement with the call of the other from where the self enters a dialogue within itself as well as within discourse in an attempt to carve out space for the other's question without the possibility of (ever) having access to it as such. With her* entry, ›she*‹ just leaves a mark within the self, questioning the (cis-male?) self.

The insertion of Derrida about the shores of another language is not found in the 1993 article on touch, but it completes the question of the other with respect to the touch of history, the question that comes *from* and *as* the historically formed, marginalized other. ›She*‹ is queering any understanding of a self-sufficient subjectivity that ponders upon touch without imagining *himself* as touchable/seeable by the other. Derrida asserts that (colonial) discourse and its gaze are violent when he speaks of the touch of the eyes. Touch always already entails an ambiguous instance and an unstable space. It is threatened by the undecidable liminality of the gaze that can be »stroking or striking« and the question »where the difference would lie« (Derrida 2005, 2). The violence of touch also maintains an eroticized accent and is implicitly also evoked as part of loving/rejecting, longing, and desire in history and discourse, in relationalities within the self as well as outside of it.

The ›anonymous inscription‹ in the above passage also implies untouchability as a form of (epistemic) violence in the sense of ›sanctioned ignorance‹ (Spivak 1999, 2). To ignore the other's call and thus silence it within discourse is to turn away from the other's touch¹²: The sentence written by an unknown other (not part of the established discourse), is not on a page, but on a wall, as the excluded and unmentioned space and trace of philosophy, history, language, and power in the ›polis‹. The wall is used as a page-surface and a (counter-)archive of the naïve (wilderness-)street philosophy of the excluded, from the outside-within. Spivak's term ›sanctioned ignorance‹ reveals a structure of walls in U.S.-dominated academic discourse that forecloses the possibility of an ethics¹³ that would remain open to otherness, and that prevents discourse from adhering to the inclusive possibilities of language and thought. Touch always involves reciprocity and responsiveness. This, then, allows for the possibility of an ethics of responsibility. The wall, with its question, must be thought of as a *mise en abyme* that always depicts an other. Otherness does not coincide with or signify the metropolitan other or the ›native informant‹, but must always be rethought within different, often overlapping structures of exclusion.

12 Within the discourse of colonialism and Blackness, Shirley A. Tate calls this, citing Derrida's expression ›touching without being touched‹, the ›refusal of touch‹. Cf. Tate (2016, 71).

13 Spivak uses the term *floreclosure* from Lacanian psychoanalytic terminology. Lacan links the father's entry into the mother-child relationship to the child's development within the symbolic order and the subject's ability to connect the imaginary, the real, and the symbolic. When the father is excluded (*verworfen*) from this relationship, the subject allegedly cannot develop this conjuncture and enters into a psychotic, delusional relationship with ›the world‹, which it cannot read (in the constituted manner and order of the symbolic?) (And which may also have its good sides?). See Spivak (1999, 4).

Psyche's Touch 'n the Self

Derrida's personified and gendered question comes with an insisting violence ›at its fingertips‹; it can be regarded as an oscillating figure in-between the other of history as well as the (unconscious) other of the self: »One day, yes, one day, once upon a time, a terrific time, a time terrifically addressed, with as much violence as tact at its fingertips, a certain question took hold of me – as if it or ›she‹ [*la question*], came of me, to me« (Derrida 2005, 1). ›She*‹ may not demand a response, but ›she*‹ hammers a question on the wall of the public space that enters the inner space of the thinking philosophy. It is these ›fingertips‹ that apparently have led to the book and its different tangents laid out in the book chapters on touch.

Derrida hears, *senses* ›the question‹ *from* and *of* the other, her* uncanny absence-presence, punching on the door of the discourse of touch (within himself?). ›She*‹ poses herself* in-between the production of ›knowledge‹ and its absences and silences.

Derrida's ›she*‹ may have emerged in response to another ›she*‹ in a text by Nancy, *Psyche* (1993), a text that Derrida ponders upon in this book. In Nancy's text, *Psyche* becomes a personified ›she*‹-figure and a ›story‹ – a story that might have more in common with a traditional eroticized cis-masculinist imagery of ›feminine passivity‹ than with ›psyche‹ as the place-holder of the immeasurable, uncanny unconscious, or with Apuleius' *Psyche and Eros*. Nancy's *Psyche* is based on a late equivocal sentence of Freud: »The psyche is extended, knows nothing about it« (›*Psyche ist ausgedehnt, weiss nichts davon*‹; Freud quoted in Derrida 2005, 12).¹⁴ While Freud's phrase can be understood as the unintentional, all-encompassing structure or energy (throughout space and time?) of something called *psyche*, which indeed echoes a state of not-knowing and power-lessness, Nancy tries to figure out what this extension may exactly mean. *Extension*, then, is a word that Nancy uses on the basis of this Freudian expression and that Derrida continues to engage with, along with other prefixes of the ex- in Nancy's work. Derrida seems to warn against structures of silencing that constantly overlook and exclude the other, prefiguring ex- as a prefix of exclusion and emphasizing that a fixation of meaning as a quasi ›final end‹ only describes a structure of exceptions [which is why it inevitably remains open to deconstruction]; ultimately, it could be said, that no form of totalitarianism can be total and that it inheres its own failure; Derrida's reading therefore also seems to be a warning against the desire to fix ›knowledge‹ and the knowable more generally, and one that conveys ›knowledge‹ to the shores of non-knowledge, to another language – that then must also be perceived as power-less, inhabiting power and not inhabiting it at the same time.

14 The phrase is taken from some late notes of Freud's that were written as disconnected paragraphs and that he had headed »Findings, Ideas, Problems« in 1938: »August 22. Space may be the projection of the extension of the psychical apparatus. No other derivation is probable. Instead of Kant's *a priori* determinants of our psychical apparatus. Psyche is extended; knows nothing about it.« (Freud 2024.23, 275). Maybe this psyche can be thought of as telepathy; an unanimated entity that synoptically interlinks itself with its other ›parts‹; psyche as an outstretched material in-between matter, conglutinating it together. A form of intimacy that is infinite and that can be activated, that can tug itself by itself in its many parts like Merleau-Ponty's *chair*.

In contrast to the ›she*‹ that pays Derrida a ›visitation‹ at the beginning and actively takes hold of him with her* insistent fingertips, reminding him of herself* (and *himself*), Nancy's *Psyche* is presented as an unknowing, unconscious female figure. (This seems an oxymoron – for *Psyche* may simply not know how much ›she*‹ knows at the shores of another language, which is not the same as unknowing). In contrast to the pervasive Freudian understanding of unconsciousness, as the driving signifying system of an other within the self, Nancy's *Psyche* is a passive and vulnerable, stretched out female body rather than a motor and drive of and in life and thought. Her* (apparently dead) body is exposed to the gazes of those surrounding her* (apparently cis-male figures?). One of these gazers is Eros, who seemingly contemplates *Psyche*. Citing this scene from Nancy's text, Derrida notes and wonders how Eros can contemplate *Psyche*'s stretched out dead body »[a]pparently *without touching her*« (Derrida 2005, 13; emphasis in the text). The others, »those around her, peripheral to her«, are »not *touching* her while gazing at her all the same«, Derrida asserts (Derrida 2005, 15). Derrida thus has a close look at those surrounding (the discourse on) *Psyche* and wonders about their touch that bears some (striking) violence in its (stroking) mourning, as *Psyche* is gazed at while ›she*‹ seems defenseless and unconscious about herself* and her* supposed defenselessness. Derrida also implicates the possibility of contemplation, which encompasses thinking as well as looking and analysis, as a form of touch. This form of touch, Derrida implicitly claims, requires that the other be given the space for agency – and he makes out this space for agency in Nancy's terminology, in discourse, and in contemplation itself. *Extension*, Derrida concludes, refers to touch/ability. It is a sign of the possibility of touching the other, *because* ›she*‹ is extended (encompassing) and in her* extension, touches the (porous) limits and texture of the selves and things around her*; rather than to be the »submissive subject (extended object), the support or subjectile of their knowledge [those around her*] but not of her own« (Derrida 2005, 16 ff.). Even in death thus *Psyche*, in this way, can be considered as an agent that can touch a self and set something (thoughts, affectivity) into work.

With this reading of Nancy's *Psyche*, Derrida turns to three questions at once. Firstly, he understands mourning, gazing, and being around an other as forms of touch. Especially so, when this other is named *Psyche* and when ›she*‹ is the (extended, adjacent) subject(-matter) around whom thinking and mourning takes place. As a figuration of *Psyche*, ›she*‹ is thus gendered and ungendered at the same time, and the question of gender as well as the unconscious are seen in related ways, against dominant, phallogocentric representations that proclaim some form of ›truth‹ by using a ›realistic‹ rhetoric as a tone of reference. Furthermore, Derrida implicates death as an active rather than passive (and passé) form of touch, blurring the distinction between the animated and the inanimate. In this way, Derrida introduces other forms of touch that do not derive, *sensu stricto*, from the senses (though not entirely detached from them as well) and as haptic understandings. He implies, moreover, that affectivity (mourning) as well as *acts* that accomplish this affectivity (looking, standing around (someone), contemplating) presuppose a transitive relation to an other as forms of touch. Furthermore, Derrida develops an understanding of touch that seems to reach out almost beyond death and is related to futurity, by including imagination as a form of touch:

»Can we imagine an extension [an outstretched body] that is untouchable? Imagining is neither thinking nor knowing, to be sure, but it is in no way a complete absence of thought or knowledge.« (Derrida 2005, 16)

Secondly, and following from this, *in relation* to also indicates a reciprocal touch from which affectivity and activity emerge, even when this other seems absent or dead. A dead body, a (seemingly) absent body is regarded as a *touching* entity, a ›subject‹ with (an outstretched) self that may (choose to?) stay in touch or touch one. If *Psyche* as other is outstretched, ›she*‹ may touch the self through her* (bodily, material) extension and/or by her* absent-mindedness and/or her* exposition, which means the whole plethora of meanings that are *attouched* to her*, and what ›she*‹ herself* may (silently?) want to signify, touch upon, in response to that. The touch of *Psyche* is thus dialogically placed at the threshold of a self and of transcendence, as the unknown (touching and touchable?) ›beyond‹ the known and immediacy of sense. And it also implies transcendence as *feminine**, and thus as othered. It is not a rejection of transcendence as such, but of how it is perceived within a phallogocentric framework. (And one wonders *what, whether* and *how female* transcendence* could be imagined, and whether it would make any *difference* to the imagination, and to how we would structure (around) language, and how it would materialize itself around us).

Following from this, thirdly, the passage implies that understanding the other as a dead subject(-matter) and absent-minded, and to touch (upon) her*, while imagining her* as senseless, amounts to a rejection of her* agency and is a form of othering »[...] on her own she knows nothing of herself [...]. In other words, those around her, peripheral to her, who are touching her while gazing at her all the same – they know something about her« (Derrida 2005, 15). The seemingly untouchable and unknowing, outstretched *Psyche*, the object of the allegedly knowing gazes, Derrida concludes at the end of his musings on Nancy's *Psyche*, can at least be *imagined* as seeing herself*/the scene/the ones' looking at her* exposed body. To think the other without imagining her* to know it and to touch (back), to think her* without an agency of touch, and if ›only‹ through her* absentminded extension, becomes metonymic to the point of expropriation:

»Now, Nancy's *Psyche* sees herself treated like a dead woman. This will have consequences, both close and distant ones [...]. The principle or drive to expropriation introduced there forthwith by death, the other or time, is certainly hard to tolerate, but, as we shall see, it's less resistant to thought than what complicates an *incarnation* even more, which is to say, the prothesis, the metonymic substitute, the autoimmune process, and *technical* survival.« (Derrida 2005, 19; emphasis in the original)

Derrida thus steps back from looking at the outstretched *Psyche* to turn around and face her* (incarnation) questioning the scene. One of Derrida's well-known (outstretched as it were) seminal works, *Psyche – Inventions of the Other* published in 1987 (2003) and in a second extended edition in 1998 (2007), explicitly discusses ›Psyche‹ as traces of the other that speak out of the self. *Invention* in this line of thinking is also always a structure of the work of both O/others within the self. The O/other is Derrida's implication and intervention in and within deconstruction. Derrida's defense of *Psyche* is also a defense

of inexactitude in its inclusiveness that maintains the possibility of dialogue *per se* open, that always speaks in anticipation of a *possible* response. Exactitude makes a post-deconstruction which – again – claims to oversee its exclusions, a strange endeavor. This strangeness is not so much affective and humorous, but *komisch*: it marks the liminal threshold to the uncanny where power resides (right next to the power of non-power). With this allusion Derrida also ironizes the promise of a post-deconstruction that means to be deconstructive and to go even beyond deconstruction while, in doing so, foregrounds its own return to structures of exclusion. In Derrida's approach, *Psyche* encompasses different meanings; it entails the dynamics of touch upon the self, the work of touch within the self in relation to an O/other, as well as the feminine* figure of an ancient narrative that still haunts (philosophical, psychoanalytical, and literary) discourse. In French, furthermore, *psyche* is the homonym of a large cheval mirror (*psyché*); this meaning of *psyche*, finally, echoes Lacan's mirror stage and the construction of the self through its reflection in the O/other and the reflection of what this other sees in (her*)-self (Derrida 2007, 18).¹⁵ In exploring *Psyche* and her* inventiveness upon as well as intervention within the self, Derrida touches upon the other's touch as he feels touched by her* without making this reciprocal touch explicit; a gesture that he discerns in Nancy's text. In fact, a major thread of Derrida's argument in *On Touching* is to demonstrate how this process of touch constitutes Nancy's earlier texts, without Nancy's conscious awareness – as if Nancy were touched by *Psyche*. In this way touch becomes an unconscious structure of that which one welcomes, that which speaks to one and that which directs one (to themselves).

Along a critical reading of two of Nancy's texts, *Psyche* (1978) and *Ego Sum* (1979), Derrida conceptualizes a locus for the incommensurable extension of *Psyche* or thinking, on the one hand, and the extension of the body on the other hand, which he depicts as ›spacing‹,¹⁶ a process of opening (the porous, permeable passages, perforations, within text(-

15 In none of these meanings is *psyche* a synonym for passivity or absence; on the contrary, *psyche* is an autonomous site, the other that operates within the acts, thoughts, and language of the self; and as such, it is an entity in its own right. However, in this passage, while appreciating Paul de Man, Derrida (re-)uses the image of *psyche* as a metaphor for ›woman‹, connoting it furthermore with ›beauty‹, ›looking at oneself‹ and, with regard to Paul de Man's reading of Wordsworth's *Lucy Gray*, as a (negative) image that encompasses the resigned ›man‹, which is discomforting rather than consoling. In this respect, Derrida's language seems, at least for a moment, to brush aside concerns about anti-foundationalism and linguistic fixity, where it appreciates a (cis-male) friend's text. Interestingly, this essay (*Psyche – inventions of the Other*) (Derrida 2007) is dedicated to the memory of Paul de Man. For a discussion of deconstruction, feminism, and the other, see for example: Spivak (1983) and Jarratt (1990).

16 Spacing is one of Derrida's earliest terms. In *Of Grammatology* (1967), he uses the term as an effect of the trace within writing in the sense of arche-writing that encompasses all chains of signification. Arche-writing is the a priori written trace of signification *per se*; it is a trace of signification in a ›sensible‹ and ›spatial‹ form that Derrida calls the ›exterior‹ of philosophy that by which philosophy, as it were, is girdled. He describes this trace as an opening ›of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside‹ (Derrida [1967] 1997, 70). Derrida distinguishes this exteriority from the ›outside, ›spatial‹ and ›objective‹ exteriority which we believe we know as the most familiar thing in the world, as familiarity itself, [which] would not appear without the grammé, without différance as temporalization, without

ures)?). He thus relegates *extension* to an in-betweenness of an encounter. An ›extension‹, corporeal or of the psyche/thought, needs a place,

»a locus, that is reduced neither to objective extension nor to objective space. This place must be a spacing before it is space; it must open an opening, as it were, an interval, which is to say an apparently incorporeal, though not intelligible, extension – thus neither sensible nor intelligible.« (Derrida 2005, 24)

This ›spacing‹, this *khora*, is the (processual, setting-into-work of a) locus where the possibility of touch can take place. Derrida, thus, reads the idea of touch in Nancy as he traces deconstruction in his reading of Rousseau within a double gesture:

»As always Derrida reads with two hands, following assiduously and defatigably the unstable limit that divides what we might call the logic of a text – its fundamentally aporetic or undecidable basic concepts and distinctions – from the intentions that attempt to govern that text, the authority that tries [to] dissolve or control those aporias. As is so often the case, Derrida focuses this double gesture in the ambivalent usage of a specific word by the author he is considering.« (Critchley 1999, 145)¹⁷

Here, however, this is done with a difference. Here, Derrida *post*-deconstructs Nancy in that he opens up the *possibility* of the touch in Nancy's work within and beyond the text itself. This reading of Nancy or along Nancy differs from Derrida's previous double gestures of reading in the sense that it does not follow a ›pure negativity‹ of reading of not-there, not-this. It is a reading that *positively attaches* Nancy's text to touch, even though the concept as such is not *sought*, not mentioned, not written out in these earlier texts of Nancy. In this way, Derrida, in fact, *makes* Nancy the ›philosopher of touch‹ for what he has *not* written on touch per se, but by which his work is starkly influenced; Derrida rather reads the moved, touched trace that Nancy's text relies on to acquire meaning. In a beautiful newspaper interview with the German *taz* published on May 25th 2020, Nancy in fact hints at this Derridean move (Nancy 2020); he speaks of being ›baptized‹ by Derrida as the philosopher of touch. In this characterization a manifold specter of affectivity, affectionate humor and counter-reproach reverberates and takes (its) place – making room for a space of addressing Derrida and bringing him back to discourse. Nancy's address interlaces humor, pain, friendship, and critique. In this sense, it could be seen as the most accomplished form of what is called ›love‹, whose corporeality lies somewhere deep and hidden, and secretively in-between the folds that the utterance as an address of *touch*, as well as an *attouchment* to Derrida, seems to imply. Derrida not only has made Nancy the *philosopher of touch*. He also made Nancy the heir and guardian of his thought and of his philosophic enterprise and empire. This is Derrida's handover, a *gift*, a handshake and a plea, a heavy burden, and a limit where the German and English meanings of

the nonpresence of the other inscribed within the sense of the present, without the relationship with death, as the concrete structure of the living present« (Derrida 1997, 70).

17 On Derrida's double gesture, see also Kakoliris (2004) and Wise (2009).

the word *G/gift* touch each other and only by this (stroking-striking) touch acquire their full, undecidable meanings.¹⁸

This (quasi retrospective) movement of Derrida can be called post-deconstructivist because, on the one hand, Derrida deconstructs Nancy's text by reading out the marks of ›touch‹ in his text, where Nancy had not seen or wished to detach it in his own text. What James M. Edie says with regard to Derrida's reading and criticism (deconstruction) of Husserl's texts is also applicable to Derrida's reading and deconstruction of Nancy's texts (and maybe of his form of reading in general), in as much as it reads out specific important aspects of the other's text that are not the texts' unconsciously ›intended‹, explicit meaning: »Sometimes in reading what Jacques Derrida is setting up as a serious criticism we learn something very instructive about Husserl's real intentions« (Edie 1990, 111). In Nancy's case this appreciative tone seems to be expressed in an even more positive (and positivist?), explicate, and straightforward way: Derrida shows how Nancy's text has been pregnant with the touch all along – a philosophical ›gesture‹ that could be described as a tenderly humorous appreciation of Nancy – a stroking form of touching Nancy, and a reversal of Nancy's touch upon Derrida. On the other hand, Derrida's reading is post-deconstructivist because, within this *positivity* rather than negativity of a deconstructivist reading, which Derrida in turn borrows from Nancy (reading Derrida's deconstruction), he (re-)opens (up) the topic of touch in opening Nancy's text, again, by first honoring his ›touch‹ and *then, afterwards*, in a third step, alluding to its (metonymic, psychic as well as corporeal) *trace* rather than to a ready-made concept of what his understanding of touch is (Derrida 2005, 25 ff.), striking Nancy with (›the law‹) of his touch. Derrida thus deconstructs post-deconstruction. It is this third ›gesture‹ that could be described as a (postponed and differentiated) (affectionate and well-intended humorous) reproach of Nancy. For Derrida, Nancy's approach to touch is still too metaphysical, too determinative – yet, at the same time, in this positive, affirmative, triple gesture of reading, he *acknowledges* the touch that came *from* Nancy as the other and that has oriented Derrida, that *moved* him in different ways. Derrida also *performs* this triple movement of touch in his own text and through it. He inscribes it into the discourse and into Nancy's text, and presents it performatively in the very act of philosophical reasoning as an act of reading and writing, of thought and sensing. Touch becomes a constative and performative utterance and act, and thus haptic in a non-physical way within writing, within thought, within the texture of the materiality of the text, in-between the convivial mundanity of friendship and the formality of (professionalized) philosophical dialogue.

And fourthly, one further meaning can be drawn from Derrida's critical reading of Nancy: The ›outstretched‹ *Psyche* evokes a double meaning as a movement of the unconscious. An extended *Psyche* whose touch is not ignored can orient the self through her* extension. By ›orient‹, I am not only alluding to the movement inherent in touch; I am proposing a consideration of the touch of the ›Orient‹, this imagined place, the touch of the other, which signifies the constructed and concealed other of (Western?) thought (and philosophy), through which its self is established by various forms of structural exclusion of ›knowledge‹ and corporeality, as well as the devaluation of other(-ed) ›knowledges‹

18 Now that Nancy too seems absent, gone, the question remains as to how this legacy of the two philosopher friends can and will be carried on. Nancy, in his quiet way, did not name any heirs.

and ›knowledge‹-systems based on concepts of ›race‹ or geo-*graphic* imaginery and its effects and implications. The other of Western thought is also enmeshed in the mapping and inscription of psychic as well as geographical spaces as othered and fantasized spaces. ›Derrida‹, coming from somewhere else, (›the (colonized) African-Orient‹ (with connections and connotations to ›Latin America‹, itself a liminal space), signifies not only through his multiply interrupted biography, but also through his interrupting, deconstructing reading, a trace of the other in Western thought, touching upon and moving at its borders and thereby alluding to its constructedness and alterability. And yet, this *gesture* remains generizable in relation to dominant discourses everywhere and at all times. It is a Derridean touch from within the amalgamation of these spaces, ›Africa‹-›Europe‹-›Orient‹ (and in an extended sense also – ›Latin America‹ –), which are not thought of as ›ex-clusive‹ to each other. This is a form of (feminist and deconstructivist and (Jewish-)postcolonial) phenomenological ›existentialism‹ whose *subjectivity* and *experience* do not exist per se and for themselves. Rather this form of (deconstructive) subjectivity and experience of the self and the other(-ed) are enmeshed in the historical and sociopolitical texture and are not only temporal but also spatial; it is within its structure as well as in its parts, its lived moments of singularity, where the possibility of an encounter, of the self and the other, within a change of directions, may ensue. This possibility, triggered by the subjectivity and experience of the othered, an extension of this other that, in Derrida's terms, is not ›intelligible‹, ›apparently incorporeal‹ and thus ›insensible‹, speaks in the momentum of the touch, symbolized in Derrida's reading of the epigraph, a text; but it also implies that the self is seized by the other's touch, is filled with it, whether or not the self allows this touch within its borders and allows themselves to feel it. It is a relation that constitutes not only the historically conditioned sociopolitical relation of the (Western, *white*) self to the other, but also and at the same time the relation of this self to itself. Derrida indicates here the splitting or a doubleness of the self in the touch, the ›I‹ that also belongs to a ›you‹, is of the other, and that in a reciprocal sense, self and other are enmeshed in an encounter in which the absolute Other,¹⁹ the third, must also remain as an other possibility. The space of touch thus opens up the possibility of an epistemological *reorientation* that dislocates the other as well as the self within a momentum spacing in which historically structured sociopolitical conditions as well as their performatives within a material ›everyday life‹ can come into contact and can undergo a transformation.

19 This Other, here, might be considered in a sociopolitical sense as the fundament of language (acquisition & the symbolic order), but also in the Levinasian sense of the sacred, as the ›almighty‹ ›energy‹, in a catachrestic sense, that energizes and witnesses everything everywhere. Such an approach does not suspend religiosity from affectivity, thought, the sensual and is inclusive; the Other, furthermore, also refers to an openness, to the potential of thinking beyond the known and the imaginable. It thus gives a *khôra*, a space, and a timeliness to this potentiality, which makes it appear attainable, graspable as a possibility.

The *Untouching*, *UnHaptic Touch* 'n the *Leib*

By considering different terms that depict liminal spaces and signify the body and the mind, Derrida also discusses touch as a *crossing* effect, as a transference of bodily, psychic, singular-*bio-graphical* as well as historically driven (sociopolitical) movements that take place in the self as a *crossing space*. Touch can thereby be conceived of as a term under erasure; it is used in a crossed out and yet necessary catachrestic sense. This entangled temporal and spatial meaning of touch is well conceivable when Derrida speaks of ›memory‹ as a form of touch; touch appears in this way as a repetition, as an inscription within *biography*, the various inscriptions of experience in life as well as in history. *Memory* allows for an understanding of touch that can be considered as a singularity and a collectivity, and it also leaves space for a non-experience, for lack, on which it is necessarily built and which renders it also flexible and connective to further, to other, to future shifts. This lack or absence in memory is a displaced mark of something remembered or absent (which also will have its meanings). As so often in this book, Derrida alludes here to the heart-transplant of Nancy and to memory as a property of thinking, remembering, and appreciating. Heart/memory is thereby used as a signifier for *protheses* and, more generally, for metonymy, but also for affectivity and its effects in the form of friendships or ›love‹ that indicate the relational ties of the self to an other within a texture. It can also signify the formation of ›identity‹ as something not only unstable and arbitrary, but as fundamentally indebted to an other and otherness beyond itself – that would also mean an inherent debt of responsibility, of attentiveness towards *any form* of otherness in *any* encounter that inevitably constitutes life (and death).

In this sense and instance, Derrida also acknowledges his indebtedness, as well as the indebtedness of the philosophical discourse, to the work of Edmund Husserl, placing him at the heart of such an insight, at the heart of modern thought, at the heart of touch:

»Il se tutoie‹ signifies that he is saying *you* to himself or itself, or he or it is being addressed in this way – he is *tutoyable*, addressable with *tu* (by any other whatsoever). He is already, as ›I‹, like ›I‹ the other's muted, still ›you‹, and his properly own still you. ›Se toucher toi‹ ›to self-touch you‹, Nancy will write. Later. The syncopated convulsion, this contradiction of the inside and the outside, is also this (still and spoken [*tu et dit*] discourse, a difference at the heart of the I, the articulation that can be disarticulated of an ego, an ego capable of touching it to the heart in touching its heart. Isn't the heart memory? Isn't it thinking of memory? Thinking *as* memory? We shall safeguard the recollection, the cardiogram of this cardio-logy from one end of this book to the other – as it also writes itself or is written on the heart – especially when we lend an ear to a certain heart sensation in Husserl, his *Herzgefühl*, in the haptological moment of *Ideas II*.« (Derrida 2005, 34)

Reminiscent of the discourse of touch in Husserl's phenomenological work, Derrida complicates touch by linking it to a (phenomenological) antecedent question of Husserl at the border between the haptic and an organ that cannot touch – the *heart* – and the sensation of the heart. This *heart sensation*, *Herzgefühl*, indeed binds affectivity to an inner place in the body as well as to *psyche* as the other in the self that has a no-place

in the body, that marks as such a displacement, that represents an invisible regulating and orienting effect on the self, or so it might be imagined. The *heart sensation* is *sensed*, always translated into a ›sense‹. Husserl's *Herzgefühl*, the touch of and in the body (*Leib*), ›understood as the organ of intentional perception that has its source in the soul‹ cannot be traced; *Herzgefühl* feels by itself and feels itself (Bernet 2013, 48).

Husserl connects this displaced mark of touch sensibility (*Empfindnis*) – as a form of maybe unintelligible, not-knowing and power-less ›understanding‹ of affectivity. He regards this instance of touch that takes place in the self as the most innate locus within the sensual bodily layers, which extend into a larger non-space of the inner body, and which he attributes in its most intense form to the intersection of body and mind, the *Leib*, understood as an inwardly intimate place of *unorganicity*, metaphorically associating it with *the heart* – an organ that is neither touchable nor one that can physically touch. Here, too, thus a form of touch is envisioned that is ethical, insightful, and relational, but it is one that happens without an apparent touch. Nevertheless, as Derrida critically notes, Husserl, still and contrary to his own observations, ties this form of touch to the haptic, especially the hand and/or the eyes, as a compresence (of the other's touch), felt within the body. The other's touch is linked to the immediacy of appresentation and is *then* perceived as a bodily touch. Only then, according to Husserl, after the appresented touch of the other, *Herzgefühl* sets in as an *auto-affection* within the self (Turnheim 2003, 226). Derrida wonders how, on the one hand, the other can be ›there‹ in an imagined and appresented way, and, how, on the other hand, Husserl constitutes *Herzgefühl* as an *auto-affection*. Reading Husserl's text deconstructively, Derrida concludes that the other must already be present in the self in some form, some trace of an earlier touch, in order for this (the new experience of) touch to be felt at all. In this way, the phenomenological appresentation of a counterpart is circumvented. According to Derrida, *Herzgefühl*, although it is an extended, but intense and immediate inward bodily touch, *felt* in the self, it is not *auto-affective*, but the mark of an earlier form of touch, bodily felt within and beyond organs, a touch that is itself not touchable,²⁰ but is the mark, the (always already, maybe even existential) opening of a space, triggered and left behind within the self by an other. Derrida thus points out that in touch there is no pure, immediate experience of the body proper to be felt. Rather, the self is already ›constitutively haunted, by some hetero-affectation related to spacing‹ that comes from the other ›and then to visible spatiality‹ in which the other, in one of its forms, enters. The encounter with the other thus rests on an already past contact with some form of O/otherness.

In this argumentative manner, Derrida emphasizes that a touch, even as *auto-affectation*, (always) requires a prior touch, maybe the experience of touch, to be perceived. The faculty of sensation ›does not sense *itself*, it does not auto-affect itself without the motion of an exterior object‹ (Derrida 2005, 6). The other can be an intruder, ›a host, wished and unwished for, a spare and auxiliary other, or a parasite to be rejected, a *pharmakon* that already having at its disposal a dwelling in this place inhabits one's heart of hearts (*tout for intérieur*) as a ghost‹ (Derrida 2005, 179 f.); the other's touch can thus be ›good‹ or

20 Derrida discusses this *Herzgefühl* in more detail in the chapter dedicated to Husserl – (ibid., 177–179).

›evil‹, it has a pharmakon quality (depending also on how one *wants* to perceive it, perhaps?), but *there* is an a priori mark of an other in the self, as a place of anchorage for any touch. Once the self is marked by it, it is haunted by its *ghostly* presence, traversing and pervading its corridors.

Touch thus marks the ghostly trace of an intrusion, the mark of the other in the self, as a heart sensation. It is a relational phenomenon of unconscious memory and signifies that the other has already been at work in the self (Derrida 2005, 179; Thurnheim 2003, 226). In this sense, touch cannot be perceived as a question or phenomenon of the senses in the ›proper‹ sense, but rather as ›the outside itself, the other, the inanimate, ›material nature‹, as well as death, the nonliving, the nonpsychical in general, *language, rhetoric, technics* [...]« (Derrida 2005, 180; emphasis mine).

Understood in this way, touch can be perceived as a metonym for language as well as rhetoric: fleeting and vague utterances that trigger an emptiness in the self, the *spacing* of a ghost-intruder, as a site for the possibility of repositionings and reorientations. Touch in this sense can be actuated by language and rhetoric. *Language, rhetoric, – poetics* – appear as the dialogic, overlapping, intersection of exterior and interior crossroads between the other and the self. The *quality* of the movement of touch is thus a trigger, a performing repetition. Only in this sense can touch take place as a renewed touch in the traits of former O/others (Derrida 2005, 179 ff.). Citing Aristotle, according to whom ›[t]ouch may well exist apart from the other senses« but ›without it, no other sense would exist« (Derrida 2005, 24), Derrida places touch, with all its complexity, entanglements and dynamism, in a relation within and outside the body and its psychic and linguistic machinery, rather than within a specific organ or sense. This description of touch embraces Husserl's *Herzgefühl* as a metonymy for memory and remembrance as forms of prior (striking and stroking) touches that unleash affectivity as well as thought and access to language. *Herzgefühl* is, in this way, a (historically conditioned) enmeshment of the sociopolitical within the *auto-bio-graphy* and corporeality of the self, both inwardly as well as outwardly.

The M/Other's Artificial Organity – Lips – Mouth – Tongue

Derrida, in this way, also binds touch to the antecedent touch of the mother-figure and to the giving of birth as the site of this spacing where touch is initialized. This quasi *ur-touch* is not only a space of chiasm, but also the place of separation within touch, through which the self emerges from the mOther, ›a noun a name Nancy never pronounces«, as Derrida reproachfully notes (Derrida 2005, 28). Along Nancy's non-reading, Derrida traces back this image of the opening in touch, first, figuratively, to the mOther-figure. But not the figure of the mOther as such stands here as the place of spacing in Derrida's consideration; instead the mOther as the artificialized machine-figure of reproduction and care seems to be evoked, configured in bodily organs, as ›the lips« that open up in giving birth as well as the child's lips that open at the mOther's breast. Derrida calls this figure of ›lips‹, ›mouth‹, and ›breast‹ where touch happens in binding and separating forms of touch, as a ›place and non-place« and the ›locus of dis-location, the gaping place of the ›quasi permixtio‹ between soul and body, which is to say the incommensu-

nable extension between them and common to both, since the mouth – any mouth, before any orality – opens an opening« (Derrida 2005, 29). ›The mouth‹ is thus the space of the outward-bodily ›organity‹ that Derrida attaches to touch, sensualizing touch without invoking a specific sense, and materializing *khora* in the body without solidifying it into a stable form. Both remain *attouched* to each other in the movements of openings.

The relation to the mO/other figure considers two different aspects, and thus the liminal space that it occupies. These are the figuration of mOther as an instance of authorization within the symbolic order and mother as women* and as the ghostly, enigmatic representation of otherness within discourse and the social order. In this bodily parting of the mO/other that also gives birth to the touch, the self is, too, forever bound to the mO/other's imprint of touch. The mO/other signifies not only the affectionate and singular relation between ›mother*‹ and child, but encompasses as well the relation of this mOther figure to a signifying order to which ›she*‹ also belongs and is created by, and which ›she*‹, to an extent at least, also represents and obeys. The mO/other figure in this way symbolizes not only the singularity of an ideal relationship but also ›the laws‹ of the (historically driven) (cis-›fatherly‹) symbolic order of language and of the sociopolitical to which this image of the mO/other and the mO/other-child relation thus belongs. Derrida, on the one hand, emphasizes the pivotal place of the mO/other-figure, revealing and acknowledging its trace of otherness. On the other hand, he approaches it in an almost mythical way, giving a quasi-female* touch to otherness treating it as a kind of ›originary‹ or eternity, yet it is not so much an idealization of femininity* or the figure of ›woman*‹ that he deploys. Instead, Derrida, places the mO/other as the allegorical, rather than symbolic, figuration of this ghostly otherness, of an *ur*-memory, at the beginning of the im/possibility of an ethical impulse that shows itself in the Levinasian encounter of ›the face‹, binding it to the experience of femininity* and otherness in this sense: ›If it is the mother, in any case, who opens the bordering edges as well as the lips of a mouth first described as an opening, then this happens before any figure – not before any identification, but before any ›identification with a face‹« (Derrida 2005, 28). The mO/other thus becomes a figural requisite for Derrida to read the imperative of ethics that precedes Levinas figuration of a ›face‹. It prefigures the face, alluding to an opening of ›the lips of a mouth‹ (Guyer 2007, 74), where touch appears in stroking as well as striking forms and gives way to an (embodied) subject from within another subjectivity that seems, however, almost artificial and subjectless as if it were a mark of something else.

In this quasi-originary spacing that foregrounds the mO/other's touch, Derrida, maybe in an attempt not to essentialize it, deals with the figure of the ›mOther‹ as almost separate bodily components. The mO/other becomes a somatic part and a locus for the possibility (of the (cis-male) self?) to experience a quasi ›originary‹ mO/otherness. The mO/other-figure remains thereby strangely othered as an empty, dislodged entity, as fragmented parts for the self-experience and the experience of touch, and seems detached from her* own personhood, bodily(-experience), from a subjectivity. ›She*‹ becomes a sign of a sign, without being a replacement. What gets lost in this image is that this parting, this spacing of birth-giving, is a becoming for the mO/other as well, and that this parting and becoming not only is a caressing, stroking, pleasurable form of touch, but can also be, and in fact, in the act of giving birth at least is an insicive, striking

form of touch as well. Both entities can become traumatized in the spacing that opens up onto the touch and that, to an extent, begins to structure their subjectivity as well as their relationship to themselves and to each other; joy and pain also co-reside in this touch that remains intersubjective in the however affectuated encounter. The always already presupposed touch of the mO/other within the self, or of becoming, can thus also be the mark of a strained relationality and, as an effect, it may also imply a strained relationship between the self and the other. Furthermore, if we confer the mO/other to the birth-giving that resides in the productivity of power, the MOther, what kind of subjectivity and ethics is it that would have to be considered within the striking and stroking touch of the MOther then?

Elsewhere, Derrida evokes (however respectfully) another quite mythicizing gesture towards ›femininity*‹, or so it could be read, by alluding to and evoking *the* organ that stands for it, the vagina, to make his point, thereby falling into the pitfall of centralizing ›Western‹ philosophy as if it were philosophy (and philosophizing) *per se*, and notwithstanding the fact that even within this philosophizing that he critiques (not only) the (feminine*) other also already matters as a (contaminated) mistress* (in all its meanings) – and as the secret center and the »unlisted traces« (Spivak 1999, 6), around whose marginality the center circles. Here, a figurative transgression of the limits of touching the mO/other (in writing) (well known to her*), arises:

»To touch is to touch a limit, a surface, a border, an outline. Even if one touches an inside, ›inside‹ of anything whatsoever, one does it following the point, the line of surface, the borderline of a spatiality exposed to the outside, offered – precisely – on its running border, offered to contact [...] and on the exposed, or exposing, edge of an abyss, a nothing, an ›unfounded‹: unfathomable, seeming still less touchable still more untouchable, if this were possible, than the limit itself of its exposition. Philosophy will have ›touched‹ [...] upon the untouchable twice, both on the limit and on the unfounded abyss opening beneath it, beyond it – under its skin, as it were.« (Derrida 2005, 104)

If this can be read, as suggested, as an allusion to a female* organ (which, by the way, is quite limited and assessable – but the *abyss*, despite all (feminist) discourses, seems to maintain its position), the question arises, why it is not possible to regard the (bodily) con-tact of (sexuality, erotic, ›love‹ – and philosophy, in their stroking and striking features) *as such* as an abyss, as an offering and exposition on *all sides* of the gendered, bodily and disciplinary (asymmetrically) structured divide? Why this repeated touch at the border (of the m/other) itself, overriding it? What kind of ›affect‹ is this desire driven by, and what ›affects‹ and (biased) meanings does it (re-)produce? Perhaps there is more (normalized) striking than stroking at work here, and more ›evil‹ than ›good‹? Although Derrida's work can be said to be informed by otherness (in both senses: as forms of historically conditioned experiences of antisemitism and othering, and as an openness to the other), Derrida's elaborations here become almost corporeal, invoking touch in hap-

tic senses that include skin contact; yet he does not mention Luce Irigaray's also quite body-essentializing metaphor of »lips« as female organs per se that »self-touch.«²¹

Nevertheless, with the figure of the mO/other, Derrida establishes an (intimate) connection of the self to an otherness outside the self, at the limit of the self and at the limit of subject-formation, within a sociopolitical context of becoming where subject formation develops in an already entangled wor(l)d. It is possible to render this stroking and striking birth-giving as a response and as an affirmative act that establishes an ambiguous basis for the emergence of subjectivity as well as for the meanings of touch. In *Adieu to Levinas*, Derrida describes this response as follows: »We must make the best of this aporia, into which we, finite and mortal, are thrown and without which there would be no promise of a path. It is necessary to begin by responding. Thus, at the beginning, there would be no first word. The call is called only from the response. The response comes ahead of or comes to encounter the call, which, before the response, is first only in order to await the response that makes it come« (Derrida 1999, 24). The thrownness and the response also presuppose a subjectivity behind the response, an unfinished but inscribed (embodied) subject who act upon the call within the texture, the given context. The call/response can thereby be seen as a metonymy for the other's touch. Touch, then, for Derrida, it seems, must be a required ethical mark, so that »the face« of the other can be envisaged at all. Only upon the already placed track of the touch within the self can the ethical encounter of »the face« set in.

But instead of the figure of the mOther, which seems too loaded with meaning to serve as the placeholder for the innocence of myth and »woman*/other«, it should nonetheless be possible to locate this other, this call of the other within the self as an a priori touch. Derrida, linking Husserl's *alter ego* to Levinas »paradox« of the enigma of »the face«, actually mentions this possibility, calling it »an interruption of the self by the self as other« (Derrida 1999, 52; emphasis mine).

The other, as an other of the self, a self that is called upon differently, and thus as a divided self is already infinitely othered within itself.²² Such a beginning opens up the possibility of identification far beyond one-dimensional and narrow biologist or political understandings to embrace the entwinement of historical encounters on different levels, religious as well as linguistic and »cultural« points of touch. What can be targeted, in this way, are the »values« we attach to things and thought in the mechanisms of power and domination. It is no longer »who« someone »is« that can be a decisive factor for understanding, but our openness to the O/others that we are in (different forms of) rela-

21 For a reading of Irigaray's idea of touch, cf. Ungelenk (2021, 39 ff.) and Sohns (2021, 77 ff.). Sohns, drawing on the work of Irigaray, drafts a subjectivity of touch/ing that does not only center upon gender but also upon sex and genitality, but that, seems also to construe a coherent (white middle class?) transparent form of female subjectivity (and body). Of importance remains in this regard Gayatri Spivak's critique on universalisms inherent in what she calls »French Feminism«; see Spivak (1988).

22 This idea is part of a psychoanalytical approach with the not very exciting (and maybe misleading) name – Internal Family Systems Modal and which deals with the psyche as a »relational milieu« populated with independent parts of the self that protect an internal system (often in conflict with itself) within the umbrella of a managing main-self-part who is always on the verge of a struggle to maintain its embattled position, to discuss, to hold its ground; see Schwartz/Sweezy (2020).

tions, beyond any logic of victimhood or victimization. This must not mean the erasure or replacement of ›identitarian‹ politics, which remain sometimes necessary against more immediate forms of oppression. But it may allow us to broaden our concepts and their scope, so that we can also perceive our ›selves‹ as figurations of both O/others in all possible kinds of relations and relations of dominance and underprivilege, and build bonds not only of *alliances* but also of *reliances*.

With Merleau-Ponty's notion of *chair* (flesh) and Derrida's poetics of touch as an experience of the everyday, it could be further argued that touch is already predestined in the texture of history/life/discourse/affectivity/thought. In this texture ›the same‹ is not alike, it is already divided into parts and molecules of its tissues. Such an understanding comes close to an image of language and its particles, like the pronouns, which are also from the same fabric but split within themselves. The ›I‹ already entails ›you‹, sameness and subjectivity are always already displaced, without a center or unification, yet within a structure of equity. The texture of this woven fabric is not ›smooth‹; it can be understood as what Nancy calls an *ectopic corpus* (Nancy 1993, 203; Landes 2007, 87) – it is already within itself an endless insameness, a divisiveness. Self and O/other, while sharing the same texture, the poetics of language, the poetics of life experiences in synchronic and/or diachronic ways, depending on the context of the spacing of the touch that takes place between them, are already infinitely split, divided within themselves. The other and the self in this sense share the quality of the poetics of this texture and its ectopic deferral. Such an ectopic, an ever transitioning material, although bound to the historically determined spatial-temporal context, and also able to react differently to any form of touch, of contact, remnants of the same dusty particles, the same substance – can still produce other forms of contact.

In this ectopic tissue of equity, the other, furthermore, is not only an other for the self, but also, by its own enterprise, a self, and also an entity capable (at least potentially) of othering, or already involved in processes of othering and compliance. Power is not centered, but rather diffuse – which also makes it, at least to an extent, powerless, assailable, notknowing. Within the poetics of such an ectopic corpus, then, a static relationship between self and other is suspended. It rather hints at the otherness of the self and, the selfness of the other and, with regard to Nancy's image of the ectopic, to an endless and infinite dynamic (temporal as well as spatial) field full of possibilities of *relations of reliance* in difference. The touch of the O/other thus can also be the touch of another part within the self that is never complete and monolithic, and not formed of a single large block. While the ectopic self/other has a subjectivity that arises within a historically specific context to which it is bound, its subjectivity also involves a ›free zone‹ of singularity through the emergence or/and involvement of specific self-parts that prompt the self/O/other to act in a specific way, which can be performative and destabilize the order within or outside the self/other, or act in stabilizing ways, discernible in its corroborating effects – that still remain ectopic.

Indeed, in a footnote in *On Touching*, Derrida refers to this incalculable relational act and substitution between the self and the other. Not only does he refer to the embodied self/other, but with reference to his understanding of dissemination, he returns to the idea of touch as the intertwinement within texture as *writing* – which can be understood as an ectopic dimension. Derrida thus connects and binds the embodied, material

texture of self/other, in which touch takes place in its discontinuous movement, to the sphere of the text in the narrower sense: Touch happens through the poetics of dissemination, through language/discourse – which also means through (*auto-bio-graphical*) experience:

»In [...] reading and writing and the very experience of text call on this interlacing of a woven web and what remains to be *touched* no less than seen: against a kind of criticism that is deluding itself in wanting to look at the text without touching it, without laying a hand on the ›object‹.« (Derrida 2005, 339; emphasis mine)

All reading and writing involves already a form of touch (Derrida 2005, 123–4) – Derrida extracts this idea from Hélène Cixous's essay *Savoir* in their autobiographically inspired joint publication, *Veils* (2001), that further spins and orients this text(-ure). ›Text‹ is here the very much Derridean sense of the infinite and intertwined fabric of ›world‹ as text: history, language, and context-dependent, *life-writing* subjectivities (also in authorship and readership), as well as the endless process of reading-writing and its effects and resonances, and materializations. This process, in which touch is involved, is *not* a smooth and immediate continuation. Rather, Derrida here demystifies touch, declaring that:

»[t]here is never any pure, immediate experience of the continuous, nor of closeness, nor of absolute proximity nor of pure indifferenciation – no more than of the ›smooth‹ [...]. Where has experience ever encountered (perceived, seen, touched, heard, tasted, *felt*) the purely smooth? [...] A ›deconstruction‹ begins in this very experience; it is, makes, and bears out the experience and experiment of this aporia. The concept of the smooth is not smooth [...].« (Derrida 2005, 125)

Touch is not an unruffled experience, even in its haptology of the hands and the eyes, which are centralized in the phenomenological as well as, to some extent, in Cixous' approach to not-seeing and the Nancyian post-deconstructivist concept (Derrida 2005, 26). Derrida points to the discourse and how it is imbued within anthropocentric, centered traces and threads of thought that obfuscates its (internal and external) other(s) in order to establish a (more or less gendered, stable, sleek) self:

»And so we at our own pace approach the place of a resemblance that we can already guess: a hand and especially a hand of ›flesh‹, *a hand of man*, hand always begun to resemble a *man's hand*, and thus a fatherly hand, and sometimes, more ›originarily‹, the hand of the merciful Father, which is to say his Son – the hand that the Son is, according to the Logos or Word of Incarnation.« (Derrida 2005, 182)

Coming ›from the past‹ of deconstruction, as it were, already othered by the post, in post-deconstruction, Derrida reiterates the question of the touch, touching on philosophy's reassurance with the name of ›Nancy‹ in a deconstructive way. Touch appears to be an orienting ethical interruption that cannot be configured in a ›smooth‹ way, and that, in its immediacy, develops its own tenor. Here, Derrida, critically, also refers to two things: Firstly, he refers to the quasi-*Christian*, back-to-normalcy ›gesture‹ of Western discourse that wants to abandon deconstruction once and for all, and secondly, he points out that

Nancy's texts are part of the very same tradition with the baggage of a (Western, at times, very antisemitic and racist) heritage. This also means that Derrida seems to be warning against a post-deconstructive philosophy and premises, which it may have forgotten or wishes to ignore. Such an effort would have to include the acknowledgment of an a priori touch as an orientation, and that it is this prior touch that influences the relation of the self to the other.

Thus, in this way Derrida's critique, reestablishes deconstruction itself as a prerequisite and indispensable form of touch, questioning the self as an autonomous entity.

Humorous Frames – The Debt of Touch out of *Tact*

Although Derrida regards Nancy as an important ›post-deconstructivist‹ thinker of touch (one can never be sure whether there is (not) a humorous mocking tone in this designation), his approach to Nancy and this way of approaching Nancy already indicates and angles his understanding of touch. Derrida's approach to Nancy is also determined by his critique of *Christianity* that he still sees at work in Nancy's distancing from it, which still reestablishes its centrality in another guise. Derrida, on the one hand, expresses his utmost admiration for his fellow philosopher. He more than once mentions that he regards Nancy, besides Aristotle, as *the* philosopher of touch. Whether this is meant seriously, teasingly or even with the slightly mocking attribute of a former teacher and (older) friend, or/and as an act of a philosopher who *nevertheless* wants to rescue ›the wor(l)d‹ from mis(-sed) perceptions, is not discernible. On the other hand, the tone of his admiration almost comes across a bit disgruntled – as if he would have expected Nancy to know better, as if Derrida somehow felt betrayed and hurt. In the preface to the book, Derrida explains that he hopes to ›touch someone in him, a stranger perhaps?‹ (Derrida 2005, ix). In this way, his praise at the same time also enables a complicated form of *tact* with which he wants to approach Nancy, and that accompanies his critical reading of Nancy's texts:

»It inspired me with the desire, pure and simple, to trot it out, to make it an epigraph to what I had long wanted to write for Jean-Luc Nancy, the greatest thinker about touching of all time, I tell myself. – Of all time, really? – Let's put it differently, to avoid sounding pathetic and excessive, even when speaking the truth – precisely for want of tact: not of all time, perhaps, but ever since Aristotle suddenly hit on the manifold aporia of touch [...] touch isn't clear ... it is adélon, inapparent, obscure, secret, nocturnal. [...] I dream that one day some statistics will reveal to me how often I made use of them publicly [meta-words, like soul, mind, body sense, world] and failed to confess that I was not only unsure of their *exact* meaning (and ›being!‹ I was forgetting the name of being! Yet along with touch, it is everywhere a question of ›being‹, of course, of beings, of the present, of its presence and its *presentation*, its *self-presentation*) but was fairly sure that this was the case with everybody – and increasingly with those who read me or listen to me [...].« (Derrida 2005, 4–7)

Derrida seems to be touched in all of these senses – not only in a pleasant way, but somehow also violently – by the approach of Jean Luc Nancy to touch and he (just(-ly)?) echoes

the movement, the affectivity of being touched in these different ways,²³ linking in this way tact and touch with affectivity as well as thinking, and tracing their mark in his reading and address. Although Derrida writes along the texts of Nancy, touched by him, as it were, he nevertheless moves along his own path in a segmented dialogue with Nancy. Derrida, thereby, molds the frame of his approach, his touch of Nancy and his touch of the touch, by expressing a number of concomitant effects that are a result of Nancy's impression on him, as well as an answer to the impact of Nancy's texts within an inner dialogue, and that have taken shape and now surface in his writing, in a labyrinth of (affective) thoughts. Derrida therefore speaks (self-critically) of his own desire to ›trot it out‹, an expression that refers to uncertainty but also diminishes the (negative) power of his approach to Nancy's work. On the one hand, he asserts an admiration for Jean-Luc Nancy, although opening a dialogue that is not quite on even grounds, and rather taunting. In this way, he also opens up in his writing a bundle of affective effects as responses to Nancy's touch that drive this desire. On the other hand, it is a strategic, performative approach within a sphere of *tact*, a sphere of (unwritten) ›laws‹, in the chamber of the threads of power within academic discourses, that shows the fringed undecidability that the economy of touch leaves behind in the self. It does not result in an even form of contact and responsiveness. Rather, it leaves behind multifarious facets of impressions and possibilities of response. Derrida therefore speaks of the uneven ›nature‹ of dealing with touch and the uneasiness to deal with it in an ›exact‹ way. Here, too, Derrida depicts the scientific idealization of what is understood as scientific ›knowledge‹ that he links to Nancy's desire for exact-ness, a word that he describes as Nancy's ›masterword‹, as ›his word‹, ›his thing‹, as the ›probity of his signature‹ (Derrida 2005, 8). For Derrida, such a search amounts to imprecision and reduction, to a monologue rather than the presumption of another living entity that one inevitably faces in speaking or writing. He critically points to ambiguity rather than precision. Derrida's seemingly mocking critique of Nancy's ›exactitude‹, though is not an instruction, he is not lecturing him (though perhaps on the verge of, although someone in *him* may have wanted to ;-)), but an enactment of exactness. Exactness leaves out so many other spots that call for exactness, in an endless texture, that coincides with Derrida's writing (this book), and thus ends in an exact chiasm with Nancy, while both deploy their own exactness, which is not the same. This touch, however, although it seems to fall into a precise fold, and as intense as it may be, engenders a new mesh, changing the texture of writing on touch.

One of the main points of Derrida's critique that he humorously and in a self-ironizing way characterizes as a ›murky, baroque essay, overloaded with telltale stories (wanting to spell trouble), an unimaginable scene that to a friend would resemble what has always been my relation to incredible words‹ (Derrida 2005, 7) is, as discussed above, around the metaphoricity of phallogocentrism and the metaphysics of presence that he sees reinvoked in Nancy's texts, but also about how to approach this critically and yet *tactful*, within the boundaries of ›the laws‹ of *tact*, ›the laws‹ of touchability. *Tact* itself is thus problematized as the figurative and shadowy unwritten jurisdiction of touch. Although there may sometimes be an almost aggressive tone in Derrida's humorous approach, as

23 For an understanding of Derrida's indebtedness to Merleau-Ponty's idea of chiasm and the touching of hands as well as his approach to Nancy's work, see Bennington (2010).

when he speaks of his relation to ›incredible words‹ that ›a friend‹ should know, with the implication that a friend (a word that in this passage strokes and strikes: It is, on the one hand, a confession of closeness and indebtedness, and, on the other hand, a reproachful apology in advance that ›a friend‹ will therefore pardon him for what seems to be offensive), there is also an affective chaperoned, self-critical framing implemented in his critique in this humorously masqueraded rhetoric, which contextualizes the critique, explains it, and at the same time, asks for forgiveness. Derrida in this way shows the reciprocal meaning of *tact* as touch in performance. This humorous, self-ironizing but also painful address, a statement that is both serious as well as (self-)comical, reframes the critique in a performative, deconstructive rhetoric. This allows Derrida to articulate his arguments affectively and situate them within the discourse and *tact* of the touch without overstating them or forcing his critique onto Nancy's text, which he has already put out of the way through his praise; Derrida, in this way, writes along the contours of Nancy's elaborations on touch and in view of them, *considering* them *within* his own self, his own thinking, which illuminates a track-path of the other's touch, of *Herzgefühl*, within a philosophical discourse.²⁴

The affective and humorous rhetoric of and in Derrida's approach thus carves out space for the *speakability* of this critique; it is in this spacing that he can show the mark of touch that Nancy has opened up and left behind in his self – as in his writing. The name ›Nancy‹ not only represents a ›friend‹ for Derrida (and also a kind of betrayal of friendship in deconstruction, as it were), it also seems to constitute a double representation: Of the dominant discourse in philosophy as well as of an aberrant move in deconstruction (back to the metaphysical roots/routes) that Derrida seems to resent and against which he writes. However, Derrida's resentment, his double touch between stroking and striking, also implies an ethical instance of debt to the very discourse he is criticizing; his critique can be described as a touch, an act of responsibility towards this inheritance. As Geoffrey Bennington points out, Derrida's ethical reflection on responsibility is a form of acknowledgment of the inheritance from others:

»Inheritance is never a given, it is always a task. It remains before us as contestably as the fact that, before even wanting it or refusing it, are inheritors, and inheritors in mourning, like all inheritors. [...] All questions about being or what one is to be (or not to be) are questions of inheritance. There is no backward-looking fervour involved in recalling this fact, no traditionalist flavour. Reaction, reactionary or reactive are only interpretations of the structure of inheritance. We are inheritors, which does not mean that we *have* or that we *receive* this or that, that a given inheritance enriches us one day with this or that, but that the *being* we are *is* first of all inheritance, like it or not, know it or not. [...] It follows from this situation that reading-as-inheritance is not only itself an ethical relation, but that it can be taken to exemplify the ethical relation as asymmetrical relation to an unmasterable and unassimilable other.« (Bennington 2000, 67)

24 This is especially the case with regard to Nancy as well as others whom, from Derrida's point of view, Nancy should have mentioned, who touched on touch, who touched Derrida, the thinkers Derrida mentions, critiques, and appreciates in this book along with Nancy: a performance of touch in stroking and striking ways.

Derrida's touch on touch thus means an orienting, dynamic, kinetic, contradictory and conflicting track of a (multi-layered) O/other in the (multi-layered) self. Quite at the beginning of his work Derrida already singles out Aristotle, in this sense, as the one who »hit on the manifold aporia of touch [...] ever since he foresaw all the obscurities of the tangible« (Derrida 2005, 4).

It is possible that Derrida mentions Aristotle, on the one hand, to use his name as a shield in his criticism of the Western discourse on touch, to legitimize his approach in general, his entry-ticket into the *tact* of Western philosophy. On the other hand, Derrida uses this name to offer it to Nancy, to justify his rebuke and to remind Nancy of a predecessor, of an inheritance. In addition to the functional and rhetorical weight of Aristotle's name that Derrida deploys, the former's considerations on touch are important points of departure for Derrida. With regard to Aristotle, Derrida asserts that touch is not to be understood as a ready-made transposable and consumable philosophical ›exact‹ ›concept-product‹, but that it should rather be seen in all its ambiguities and contradictions. With Aristotle, Derrida subsumes a number of traits to touch, which contradict and resist a definite and precise understanding. Within this Derridean/Aristotelian apprehension touch remains aporetic and ›nocturnal‹ (Derrida 2005, 4).

Along these lines, Derrida also dissociates touch from a specific sense or the experience of other senses. With reference to hearing, Derrida traces and places touch in the silence that comes with the *distance* and which leaves enough room to link (at least two) speakers to each other – a thought that could be theorized within a wider understanding of the multiverse, or even the relation of death and life; Derrida starts in a much more cautious, more immediate ›presence‹. He refers, for example, to the telephone that links people to each other (and the realm of digitality could be added to that, as another example, with other forms of silences and distances of its own). In the quietness and the hollow void of such a distance, touch can be felt even more intensively than in a sensory, direct form, he resumes (Derrida 2005, 112 f.). Drawing on Aristotle and with hindsight to this approach to silence, Derrida again questions direct contact in touch, and at the same time, emphasizes that the sense of contact extends beyond any immediate form (Derrida 2005, 5). Contact and touch are rather placed at the limits of imagination and the imaginative. In this way, Derrida locates ›the real organ‹ of touch ›farther inward‹ rather than in the faculty of sense-making, sensing, and perception. The materialization of touch between two disparate entities can thus occur without any material, and independent of time and space, as if in suspension.²⁵

Any form of touch thus happens within a reinvocation of a tacit dialogicity that it seems to represent. Like Bakhtin's understanding of the ›word‹ that is already dialogical and divided in itself, touch in Derrida's understanding, too, is exact only in its imprecisions and aporias.

25 In Derrida's allusion to the telephone, lovers sense their connection despite the distance, experiencing it in the silences of the call rather than in an actual conversation. This intertwining thus creates a void, a space, within the connection, as a touch, which may mean that touch also occurs in the ›blindness‹ of seeing and in the ›deafness‹ of hearing, which describes as well the processes of writing and reading that take place without ›direct contact‹.

In line with Aristotle's views, Derrida, moreover, stresses that it is not clear what *sense quality* could be attributable to touch (as the sound is to hearing and sight/image to seeing) (Derrida 2005, 4), but emphasizes the centrality of affectivity to touch per se, so that affectivity, the capacity of *sensibility*, becomes the sensory quality of touch: »Touch may well exist apart from the other senses, but Aristotle stresses, that without it, no other sense would exist« (Derrida 2005, 24). Understood in this way, touch appears to be the condition for perceiving affectivity, sensibility, or meaning. At the same time, Derrida emphasizes the multilayered sensuality of touch as it, on the one hand, can encompass different sense-organs (skin, eyes, ears, heart), and as, on the other hand, cause, sense, sensation, and organs are sometimes attached to each other within touch, or without any form of touch, within the silences and distances of non-sensing.

One such sensual texture is the tongue. If there were an organ to describe touch, from out of a Derridean plane, it would be this organ. The tongue appears as the ideal metaphor and metonymy for touch. It is an organ of touch in touch, it is an organ of taste, it touches and is touched, it senses and is sensed. The tongue embodies the perforated texture of touch. It can be visible as well as invisible, it takes place outwards as well as inwards. »Tongue« is also another name for language, which can touch in all possible senses and is un/touchable; it gives materiality to things, but can only be perceived in-between the lines, in the act of its contact, between the relations it implies, it is the trace of (in-)exactitude as well as the O/other. While »taste« in a narrow sense and touch in a narrow sense require direct contact, or as in the case of the eyes and of hearing also happen »over a distance« (Derrida 2005, 5), with reference to Aristotle Derrida perceives the tongue/language as the object as well as subject of touch per se, in tangible as well as intangible ways (Derrida 2005, 6), as accessible as well as inaccessible, regardless of its sensual circumstances and con-text. As a subject/object, the tongue/language can also trigger a heart-feeling, *ein Herzgefühl*, circumscribing the almost in/accessibility of the other in the self as well as the almost in/accessibility of touch. While tongue and heart denote the two, apparently contradictory organs of touch, language as an inorganic organ constitutes both and is constituted by both. The touch of language thereby also appeals to and requires *tact* with regard to the untouchability inherent in the touch that conditions it and makes it possible (Derrida 2005, 6).

These are the movements that Derrida not only points out, but also performs in his writing. In this sense, Derrida problematizes the limits of and in touch, as well as touch as a limit to what is knowable and what is unknowable, and its power-lessness that apparently lies in this undecideable oscillation at limits and borders.

The metaphor of the limit already occupies an end as well as a non-presence:

»We can only touch on a surface, which is to say the skin or thin peel of a limit (and the expression »to touch at the limit«, »to touch the limit« irresistibly come back as leitmotifs in many of Nancy's texts that we shall have to interpret). But by definition, limit, *limit itself*, seems deprived of a body. Limit is not to be touched and does not touch itself; it does not let itself be touched, and steals away at a touch, which either never attains it or trespasses on it forever.« (Derrida 2005, 6)

Touch in this manner appears as an intimate, critical and always singular engagement, and as another stitch within the texture of the net that opens up space for other, future stitches as the quilt grows longer and wider. In this texturing of touch, Derrida exerts a reversible, chiasmic touch by remembering and *thanking* different thinkers, establishing *thanking* as such as a form of touch at the limit of an other. By engaging with the other's words, with other languages, in an explicit as well as implicit, figurative sense, the other is constituted as constitutive for the formation of the thoughts of the self. As Christine Irizarry writes with reference to her translation of *On Touching*, this intertwining of touch is also a form of acknowledgment of the other's thoughts in the self, which lead to self-reflective movements and, ideally, to the self's internal displacement or opening to the other. It is a forked dialogue within the self as much as it is a dialogue with the O/other:

»How can you say thanks to a thank you? Perhaps you can't – or it becomes infinite thanking for the thanking for the thanks ... I thank you thanking me thanking you, endlessly. Or perhaps ›thanking‹ is really ›thinking‹, which has an affinity with it in English and German, Derrida tells us: ›For example, concerning thought, the affinity between *denken* and *danken*, and ›thinking‹ and ›thanking‹. And so, yes, by letting me translate ›mercí into ›thanks‹ and ›thanks‹ into ›thinks‹, Derrida has kept his promise to the translator, who thanks-and-thinks about this passage into philosophy.« (Irizarry 2008, 199)

Besides Nancy and Aristotle, other thinkers are also mentioned. These are, for example, Descartes, Kant and Husserl, who especially occupies a central space in the book (Irizarry 2008, 196). It is also a tender remembering of Emmanuel Levinas – the chapter that begins with and remembers Levinas is named *Tender* – a chapter that comes with the question of the other, a question that finds a continuity in this book. As Simone Critchley points out, there is a chiasm in Levinas' and Derrida's thinking, the chiasm of a touch that takes place between them or their thinking, but which ensures space for alterity (that both represent and *configure* to each other), and which leaves the other intact, that is, without digesting it into sameness. The chapter's subtitle »This is My Heart, ›the heart of another‹« not only reminds Nancy and philosophy more generally not to forget the depths of influence that come from the o/Other within the self, within thought and thinking, prefigured in Nancy's heart-plantation (– a delicate issue, which requires much delicate sensitivity at the fingertips; whether Derrida accomplishes that in and through this book remains undecided), but that also reinvokes the chiastic, entangled touch between Levinas and Derrida, where Levinas' words to Derrida in *Wholly Otherwise* ([1976] 1991) are evoked in Derrida's tender remembrance of Levinas as an imprint at the center of his philosophy of touch that echoes Levinas' words:

»Indeed the ridiculous ambition of ›improving‹ a true philosopher is not our intention. To meet him on his way is already very commendable and is probably the very modality of the philosophical encounter. In underlining the primordial importance of the ques-

tions posed by Derrida, we wished to express the pleasure of a contact made in the heart of a chiasmus.« (Levinas 1991, 8)²⁶

If reading and writing are considered as forms of touch and being touched as a permanent process of translation of the traces of the O/other in the self, and intimate, close readings that write themselves in the infinite relations of the self and the O/other, then reading as well as writing become a dynamic engagement of thinking and thanking, of remembering and of (ideally, self-reflecting) humor within dialogic traits and thoughts between the self and the O/other, almost traceless and not verifiable and yet there. Derrida shows that the process of thinking/reading/writing/self-reflecting is linked to processes of indebtedness, even when it generates contradictory outcomes, which nevertheless orient the (haunted) self in its pursue, which keeps the self angled to itself and, at the same time, at bay.

The name of Nancy in Derrida's two explicit works on touch thus seems to signify a past and a future relation towards thinking touch. Derrida remains indebted to Nancy, and issues this debt as a fundamental critique at the limits and limitations of this inheritance. ›Nancy‹ is, in this sense, the touchstone for and of the idea for the book that Derrida reconfigures from such a genealogical linearity by continuing to *perform* a philosophical touch. In choosing to title the book in English *On Touching – Jean Luc Nancy*, Derrida stages a welcoming of Nancy in the sense of a ›Salut!‹.²⁷ As Irizarry notes ›salut‹ is a form of greeting on the verge of a doubleness. Not unlike the *pharmakon*, it signifies a sending off that is both a good-bye as well as a welcoming, or the thanking for a long journey of companionship in parting and the cautious promise of the possibility of a reunion. This is especially touching as Derrida's first essay on the touch (1993) was written just before Nancy's heart-transplant, and as Nancy's eulogy for Derrida, enclosed in Derrida's *On Touching*, is titled ›Salut to you, salut to the blind we become‹, which thanks Derrida, and welcomes his critique and also says good-bye to him. ›Salut‹ touches on the idea of the touch and refers to the touch of the other being touched by it. It introduces touch as holding on to the other as well as letting go of the other, within an uncertain and *ungraspable* promise of a *reencounter*:

»Jacques Derrida gives a little bit of his heart to Jean-Luc Nancy and he gives him this ›salut‹ – and then Nancy in this eulogy gives Derrida a ›salut‹: a ›salut‹ that traverses death – as if ›salut‹ in French were the only passage not into philosophy but into life from death or death from life.« (Irizarry 2008, 198)

In this way, Derrida, rather than to discuss Nancy's work on touch *per se*, graphs, traces Nancy's *touch* within his self and in his thoughts and writing. The title of Derrida's first essay published in *Paragraph* (1993) ›Le toucher: touch/to touch him‹ makes this move more

26 For a nice discussion of the idea of tenderness as ›respect‹ within alterity and the thought of the other, see Critchley 2014, 4–13, where he addresses Levinas' and Derrida's respons(e)iveness to each other.

27 For a discussion of the genealogy and semblance of the term, see Irizarry (2008, 196–198).

apparent. As Peggy Kamuff points out in her translation in a footnote, *le toucher* encompasses not only the double meaning of *touching* and *touching him*. *Toucher* as shown above also touches upon other senses of the term, which encompasses touching on, tampering with, violating, having a word with someone, a passive understanding of being touched or a reflexive sense of touching oneself:

»As the author will point out several times in the course of what follows, ›le toucher‹ is not simply translatable, hence the doubled title, to be read throughout. The reader should also be aware, and here and there reminders will be inserted, that the verb *toucher* has an idiomatic extension in French which can only be approximated in another language. For example, *toucher à* can mean both to touch on, but also to tamper with, even to violate (cf. Mallarmé's famous exclamation: ›On a touché au vers‹). In another syntax, *toucher un mot à quelqu'un* has the sense of talking to someone, mentioning, saying a word to. Finally, however, the most recalcitrant syntactic formation is the pronominal form, *se toucher*, which can be either reflexive or reciprocal in the third person or the infinitive, but may also have the value of a passive voice (*cela se touche*, i. e., it is touched). To a very significant degree, the essay may be read as a putting into practice of these possibilities, while analyzing their implications as they have been made evident in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy.« (Kamuff 1993, 152)

In the foreword to the book Derrida extends these meanings and alludes to other terms that he connotes to touch. In this context, he also problematizes the title that he has chosen for the article as well as the book, *le toucher*, and his uneasiness with it. *Le* as a definite article indicates not only a fixed meaning of a word, it also is the masculine personal pronoun and thus refers back (not only to the praise of Nancy, but also) to (the praise of?) phallogocentrism. *Le toucher* thus sways between the meanings of ›to touch him‹ and ›on touching‹ forming, performing, and following critically phallogocentric traits – on the verge of repeating them, in a way. Derrida suggests interventionist deconstructions of these senses of the touch: For Derrida ›to touch‹ also encompasses critique, agency and the possibility ›to change, to displace, to call into question; thus, it is invariably a setting in motion, a kinetic experience« (Derrida 2005, 25).

To touch is, then, also a (rhetorical) form of *emovere* not only in an affective sense, but also within thought and epistemology. But Derrida's *le toucher* is also an act of singularity that approaches Nancy as well as Nancy's other:

»[I]t is easy to recognize [these] two indissociable gestures [but] was it not necessary also to touch him, and thus touch someone, address oneself to him *singularly* [...]. However, by thus privileging one perspective, let us even say one sense, one of the senses, don't we undertake to choose, to unfairly leave in the shadows everything excluded by that one sense, indeed, by the senses in general, in and of themselves?« (Derrida 2005, ix–x)

Derrida thus not only links touch to ›the beginning‹ in philosophical thought, he also sets an end to it. He not only frees touch from specific delimitations but also sets new limits to it and to thought generally; like the beginning of thought at the touch of the other, its limits are the boundaries at the touch of the other as well. These are the limits that

the other, which has to be faced within any utterance, poses because one has to await the other's reply to one's words, so that these take shape, become meaning, by their touch. Without touch, all remains meaningless, absolute nothingness. This seems to be Derrida's *categorical imperative* that constitutes the *a priori* relation of the self to the other, no matter who this O/other is. Nancy's efforts to expand on touch in order to seize and to fix it »at the risk (to me)«, he says, »of venturing with this toward the unpredictable or losing it there« (Derrida 2005, x), are explored differently by Derrida. It is a warning reminder of the unknown and *not-knowable* ›face‹ of the other, that which marks power as well as powerlessness. Derrida's consideration of *le toucher* thus develops along these lines as a touch, in a dynamic and endless process of closeness, separation and reconfigurations, which cannot be connoted with any sense-making in a proper sense; touch, he seems to propose instead, can rather only be seen within the configurations of its (historically conditioned sociopolitical) contexts, ›laws‹ and rhetoric in relation to the other and the other's call – and response.

By using the article *le* in the title of the text, Derrida sets these meanings of the word into work and ironizes his approach, not only with regard to the term and concept of touch, but also with regard to Nancy. This humorizing tonality and teasing tone in Derrida's choice of approach, rather than explaining the ›true‹ nature of touch, functions like a reminder of what remains missing; its *affective humor* opens a void; it is the deconstructive rhetoric within his approach, even before the operation of his arguments unfold. This teasing, critical reminder, on the one hand, dialogizes Derrida's approach to Nancy as well as to touch, showing its fissures, splitting it up. On the other hand, it takes out the sting of his reading and makes his own text a footnote to Nancy's work, a gesture of generosity – and of friendship (Derrida 2005, x) that allows Derrida, nevertheless, to utter his critique; this form of critique constitutes a double responsibility in ›the face‹ of Nancy and the discourse of touch – describing a form of *tact* in philosophical discursivity that is never only public but also private, referring to the complexity of affectivity and thought that are part of discourse, but mentioned or taken up as vital ingredients of thought.

The text thus also *performs* touch between ›the laws‹ of *tact* and *con-tact* (Derrida 2005, 45; 228–230; see also Bishop/Goh 2011). Derrida separates *con-tact* with a hyphen. In this way, he problematizes touch with reference to Husserl's phenomenological reflections, as a syncope that is conditioned by non-touch and non-contact.²⁸ Based on this consideration Derrida also reconfigures touch as ›the spacing of a distance‹, as a ›différance in the very ›inside‹ of haptics [...] Without this différence there would be no contact as such; contact would not appear« (Derrida 2005, 229).

Seen in this light, touch is conditioned by non-touch as by the untouchable, a double understanding of *con-tact*. In both senses though, non-touch refers to an other that is actively ignored. Even the intangible and the untouchable emphasize the irreducibility of the other and its relation to the self. Yet while touch happens at the limit of the other, it cannot penetrate or assess the other:

28 The syncope is based on Husserl's idea of *epokhé* that premises the exclusion of ›the real‹, of everything around a thing, a phenomenon; at the same time, in reflecting the thing as such, a distancing from this other/object and its immediate experience takes place, ›inscribing an anesthetic interruption into the heart of aesthetic phenomenality« Cf. Derrida (2005, 229).

»[T]his *différance* of the *between*, this elementary *différance* of inter-position or intervals between two surfaces is at the same time the condition of contact and the originally spaced openings that calls for technical prosthetics and makes it possible.« (Derrida 2005, 229)

Derrida emphasizes not only the independency of a meaning of touch from the senses in an explicit way, by way of introducing *con-tact*, a term that denotes tangency without touching in a proper sense. He also emphasizes the impossibility of touching the other. If the other would be touchable, touch, in any sense, could not be performed. Touch is a limit, at limits: »To touch on the limit is not, for contact, just any experience among others or a particular figure: one never touches except by touching a limit *at the limit*« (Derrida 2005, 297; punctuation as in the original).

Tact, then, also signifies a form of contact, a form of confronting one's friend, in the most immediate sense, by calling upon them, by calling their name. This also situates the critique within a specific spatial, temporal, and thus historically conditioned, sociopolitical context. At the same time, it depends on the singularity of these contexts – Derrida's critique of Nancy is an act of singularity in terms of reaching out to Nancy's thought as a friend and close, ›professional‹ philosopher, as it were. But his approach also occurs in more general terms. It is a critique of reading. It opens up the possibilities of reading (philosophical) texts and shows the pitfalls of tunneled readings against the backdrop of specific patterns of thought that ignore, or read in the habit of ignoring, and therefore exclude other connections that texts may also entail besides straightforward readings, besides readings that one can *see* and that pop up before one's eyes. It opens up the sense of reading, the sense of touching texts, beyond immediate sensualities.

Derrida's word for this form of *tact*, of restricted reading, that fixes the limits and conditions the possibility of touch, is ›the law‹ »which is [itself] the untouchable, before all the ritual prohibitions that this or that religion or culture may impose on touching« (Derrida 2005, 66). It is always a question of (sociopolitical) ›laws‹: how to pose a critique, how to touch upon things, upon an other. It is also ›the law‹ that determines who can touch whom and in which ways. The unwritten ›laws‹ of touch also determine what is not touchable within *con-tact*, what is not sayable (by whom to whom).

›The laws‹ of touch, it can be deduced from this approach, rule how it is regulated with regard to different subjectivities as well as subject-matters. The ›law‹ is not only ›the statue‹ of the symbolic order, but also the sociopolitical structures of power relations and dispositives. Derrida's use of the term ›law‹ also introduces his *concern* regarding the possibilities of touchability in the discourse of ›touch‹ when it is understood as a proper name. It is an intervention in discourse that questions the understanding and scope of other ›laws‹. *Tact*, in this sense, too, refers not only to this form of sociopolitically determined, binding of touch without touching, but also to unwritten ›laws‹, to what is allowed to say/to think/to perform, to what extent, and in what way: It »*confines* to the origin and the essence of ›law‹. And in the sense of knowing how to touch *without* touching, without touching *too much*, where touching is already too much« (Derrida 2005, 67). *Contact* that always happens within these ›laws‹ of *tact* is a form of reaching out to the other, a movement in touch that is not recognizable by a physical or sensual touch, and yet, in contrast to *tact*, can be measurable, countable. It is in this sense, discernible, and

always a singular touch, that may also go against, or beyond ›the laws‹ of *tact*, suspending, subverting or transforming them.

That this *con-tact* of touch with all its ›laws‹ is not only inscribed, in European philosophy/language but defines ›Europe‹ in its (biased) Self-understanding (and in its hierarchized distinction from *the Rest* as *other*), and might not be a global, universal spectrum of Self-understanding, can be exemplified from within Derrida's text itself. Derrida holds up a mirror somewhat fretfully (or painfully?) to the ›Western‹ historical framework of philosophy that has also colored and shaped his language in the first place:

»And what if this word [touch] did not keep any value, or sense, precisely, any *justification*, except where a *solely* ontophenomenological status – in an absolutely *empirical* fashion and ›in our eyes‹, *solely* loaded with verbal memory and logico-rhetorical culture – were what reassures us in the confident *use* of such a term? And so, it is our very old habit in this or that historical culture, ›at home‹ in the West, to make use of these terms (the ›logic‹ and ›arithmetic‹ of the five senses, and so forth) as to adjust them more or less well (and often not very well at all, as we are experiencing it here, and that is all of philosophy) to suit some pretended ontophenomenological evidence in ›our body‹. Empirical ontophenomenology + historical legacy + language of a culture: perhaps this makes a common habit, a way of being social, a praxis, a pragmatics, a consciousness, and so on forth.« (Derrida 2005, 106)

While criticizing this codified and canonized ›body‹ (of texts), Derrida again ironizes and humorizes, and in this way, deconstructs his own approach. The tone of his humorous inclination is somewhat frustrated (or painful?). It is a solemn yet definite, unyielding endeavor within this same philosophy, but at its margins that evokes North-Africa, but maybe also Jewishness, Islam, other religious backgrounds, as ›Europe's‹ and ›the West's‹ borders, which, reciprocally, in the words of Derrida and enveloped within his voice, extent themselves to touch, and to (*re*)define ›Europe‹ and its relation to ›the Rest‹ – ›the world‹ here once (again) – and for all?? – a critique that touches on the habituation of dominance and supremacist thinking *per se*:

»And in an aside you tell yourself: what a funny, admitting, and grateful salutation you're addressing to him, to Jean-Luc Nancy. What a peculiar way to pretend you're touching him while acting *as if* from now on you wanted to put his lexicon about touch out of service, or even banish it to the *Index librorum prohibitorum*. [...] Like the messiah. What a funny present, indeed! What an offering! Altogether as if at the moment of calling others so that they will become ecstatic before this great work and this immense philosophic treatise of touch, you whispered in his ear: ›Now, Jean-Luc, that's quite enough, stop touching and tampering with this word, it's prohibited, you hear. [...] And besides, if I may remind you of this again, haven't you yourself said ›there is no ›the‹ sense of touch? Therefore, don't keep pretending, [...] that there is something that one could call *the* touch, an understood ›thing itself‹ [...] Knowing you, I don't think this objection will stop you, I tell myself. No, you just go on, and so do I – thankfully in your steps.« (Derrida 2005, 107)

Derrida provides a reading of his own text and aporetic desire. It is a ›weak theory‹ in which he proposes his counter-reading. *Weak-theory*, in Sedgwick's sense, of not engulfing, of merely offering, on the edge of an affect-laden enforcement. Derrida uses the affective rhetoric of humor to declare his position as well as the strong and powerful advancement of and in philosophy to give impetus to this weak but effectively *weakening* movement from within philosophy, which he is not willing to let go once he has entered or rather has been given admission to its playfield; he also uses this humorous rhetoric to change the sober tone of the philosophical text that *pretends* to seek ›truth‹ into a joyous, playful (›literally‹?) one that reads itself against the grain of the philosophical text and remains truthful to itself (and thereby to ›truth‹, if there is any such thing). In his humorous underpinning Derrida alludes to ›the present‹ in a double conjuncture, offering his present, his gift, as (an explosive) sugar-bomb (›What an offering!‹), and at the same time pointing to the pettiness and yet pernicious effect of the phallogocentric habit of clinging to the mode and power of ›the presence‹, the ›it is‹, that nullifies other forms of ›being‹, but above all to its (repeated) *presentations*, destabilizing the code:

It is the relation of the other to ›the law‹ as well as to the trace that this other has left in ›the law‹, which determines its borders and at the same time makes them unstable. Derrida problematizes this touch also as thought, as the thought of the other. It is in thought that something/someone is touched. And again, it is the other whose thought first touches one, is there, before oneself begins to think. Thinking is resonating, echoing the other's touch. Thought, reluctantly [*a son corps défendant*],

›thinks only there where the counterweight of the other weighs enough so that it begins to think, that is, *in spite of* itself, when it touches or lets itself be touched *against its will*. That is why it will never think, it will never have begun to think *by itself*.« (Derrida 2005, 299)

Within this trajectory the possibility and *act* of not-touching also becomes graspable. The untouchable must not only allude to the impossibility of touching the other. It also alludes to exclusion in the sense of what is prohibited to be touched by ›the law‹, and thus that which ›weighs‹ ›not enough‹ for the self, to be touched by it. This allows to think touch as foreclosure and also as prohibition (brought about by the historically driven, sociopolitical order that determines ›the law‹ of touch), and *nevertheless* to leave out space for the possibility of being touched if ›the counterweight of the other weighs enough‹ when it touches or ›lets itself be touched *against its will*‹ in the instances of the singular and the performative. This consideration, furthermore, as it implicates singularity *in spite of* ›the law‹, as well as collective *acts* of the performative, allows to think touch beyond the confines of ›the law‹ on both sides of the spectrum. The self can thus be touched by the other *despite* the prohibition of ›the law‹ and its effects on the self, when the weight of the other's touch/thought ›is enough‹ for it to orient it to itself. Vice versa, the other can touch the limits of the ›law‹ and change it, when it has ›enough weight‹ on it. In this context, Derrida also mentions explicitly language and its effects as components of the kinetic of touch. Here, he again sees *rhetoric* at work as an integral part of touch ›which would be more than a rhetoric, when, with each figure, it crosses the limits between the sensible and the intelligible, the material and the spiritual – the carnal of the ›body proper‹ find-

ing itself by definition on both sides of the limit« (Derrida 2005, 299). These both sides of the limit do not only mean the self and the other. They also mean the contingent and yet infinite play of signification at the limit of the ›body proper‹ and ›the text‹, ›the material‹, the ›intelligible‹ as well as the ›spiritual‹. Touch thus conceived, permeates and pervades the border of all surfaces, limits, limitations, and ›laws‹ through thought, through writing, through the senses in its double sense, and through ›bodies proper‹ – without fully encompassing or fixing any of them. Touch is thus an orienting movement within the (historically conditioned) thick text(-ture) of language, discourse, and belief systems that comes from the other, sometimes the Other, with the potential to intervene, to *displace*, to *change*, and critique at the limits of materiality and the rhetoricality of con-tact, even beyond its ›laws‹.

Affectivity without Touch

Derrida's elaboration on touch and his approach to the work of Nancy also contains a specter of affectivity as traces of anxiety, anger, ›love‹, respect, care, and circumspection that are sometimes embedded in the tonality of a humorous rhetoric. While this affectivity can be seen as marks of touch, no explicit distinction is made between the terms touch, feeling, and ›affect‹; rather, they are used metonymically (Derrida 2005, 204; 209). Derrida's apparent indifference to the use of these terms becomes apprehensible when affectivity is considered as an emergence through language, and thus as a rather constructivist enablement without permanently fixed, determining meanings; yet there seems to reside a temporal order between touch and affectivity. The self grows out of affectivity, *after* being touched by an other.²⁹ As Judith Butler writes, echoing the phenomenological experience of ›feeling‹ touch that Derrida's approach, too, with Husserl and Merleau-Ponty is informed by: »I can feel only what touches me«. This succession sets into grammatical form a grammatical impossibility insofar as the touch precedes the possibility of my self-reporting, provides its condition, and constitutes that for which I can give no full or adequate report« (Butler 2015, 41). In this order that is in play between touch, affectivity and the formation of the subject, the meaning of touch, its effects in the subject takes shape and enters language. The ›I‹ that feels *touched* and »speaks its feelings« constitutes the meaning of touch via language and the affectivity that emanates from it as well as the relation to the O/other – the Other as power, and the other as the excluded other of the self, as well as the excluded senses within (dominant, centripetal) discourse.

For Derrida affectivity has the fragile character of processes of binding and bonding of the self and the other (Earlie 2017, 394), an other we have to think and assume as both O/others. This binding and bonding resonates well in Derrida's understanding of *without* (*sans*) (Hart 2007). In *Parergon*, an essay in *The Truth in Painting*

29 In this, Derrida seems to follow Merleau-Ponty's phenomenologically inspired apprehension in *The Visible and the Invisible* ([1964]1968). Following Nicolas Malebranche, however, Maurice Merleau-Ponty locates feelings as effects of being touched: »Malebranche writes: ›I can feel only what touches me. Merleau-Ponty cites these words to show that the ›I‹ who feels comes about only consequent to the formation of the feeling self« (Butler 2015, 42).

([1978]1987) for Derrida *without* seems to represent a conjunction that binds a thinking subject and thought to an O/other *without* which it would not have emerged. At the same time, *without* also signifies the absence, the trace of this O/other within *Leib/feeling/thought/language/discourse/term*. *Without* thus describes a *within*. It marks subjectivity and authorship in a conglomerate of relations and traces of the O/other in the self:

»And if you were to bide your time a while here in these pages, you would discover that I cannot dominate the situation, or translate it, or describe it. I cannot report what is going on in it, or narrate it or depict it, or pronounce it or mimic it, or offer it up to be read or formalized without remainder. I would always have to renew, reproduce, and reintroduce into the formalizing economy of my tale – overloaded each time with some supplement the very indecision which I was trying to reduce.« (Derrida 1987 a, 2)

Without is another name of the parergon, *in* writing and *within* writing and as such the mark and the trace of an O/other that ›I‹ touch (upon), and also the seam for how ›my‹ word blends in, in the texture of the text where it finds its positioning, while all the while leaving its mark in the fabric in entangled ways. The parergon, indicated by the small linguistic conjunction *without* that signals a presence as a *determining absence*, links thinking and writing to the undeterminable or inaccessible as the unmarked mark of an ›absolute interruption‹ (Derrida 1987 a, 87) that marks, in absence, critique:

»This showing of this pure interruption – the making of an edge – creates beauty, an event marked by the word ›without‹ [...]. Moreover, the ›without‹ is not the appearing of a phenomenon that could invite theoretical investigation but a starting point of transcendental critique, the determination of grounds and limits of judgement.« (Hart 2007, 420)

Without thus, in not-knowing and powerless ways, indicates the trace of an O/other as an immanent constitution as well as interruption of the self. It remains silent, and happens in silence in the shadows of a knowing self, questioning it, and questioning the power of its text. *Without* is the mark of the other's touch that marks *within*. It is the necessary thread *without* which no texturing, no encounter, and no dialogue (no word) would be possible. Derrida uses the expression *continuous variation* to signify the effect of this interventionist movement of touch within the text(-ure) that signifies rupture, an interruption, but also an addition to the very same text(-ure). Its ›orientation, landmarks, and linkages are in *continuous variation*; it operates step by step [*de proche en proche*]*»* (Derrida 2005, 125).

This step by step, *proche en proche*, allegorizes a temporal and spatial setting to work that is triggered by the touch and is at the same time the reinvocation of *différance* in Derrida's proposition and understanding of touch. But it also makes apparent vacancies, void spaces, in the text(-ure), spaces that, on the one hand, signify the uncanny absence of others from the (mainstream) discourse, and which, on the other hand, as open sites, welcome the possibility of the others' entrance. In this sense, texture can be configured as a mesh that, rather than to be a contingency or continuity, loses and binds its fabric at

the same time on the paths that are taken up. Touch thus would be the animating force of the (open) detours that inscribe the texture of life/writing. As the mark of the other's touch always leads to an opening in the mesh, to a question, in the unfinished fabric, to touching spaces that open up the texture (of inscription, thought, and writing) to unforeseeable spaces in the braiding of the mesh *within* and *without*.

Touching on Humor

Derrida evokes humor in different works, in different ways, and by using different terms like ›irony‹ and ›laughter‹.³⁰ Deciphering the humorous style in his oeuvre remains a worthwhile work of its own. As it would go beyond the scope of this study, I will deal here only with his evocation of humor regarding touch. By way of an example, though, I refer here to one such instance where I see humor at work in one of his texts, before I turn to touch and humor in a narrower sense.

The passage is from *The Post Card – From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* ([1980] 1987), a text that is seen as one of his most ›literary‹ and at the same time most humorous writings. Here, Derrida plays with a tonality of address. Quite at the beginning of the book he calls for readings that do not stay within the intelligible and instead question taken-for-granted assumptions:

»Accustomed as you are to the movement of the posts and to the psychoanalytic movement, to everything that they authorize as concerns falsehoods, fictions, pseudonyms, homonyms, oronyms, you will not be reassured, not will anything be the least bit attenuated, softened, familiarized, by the fact that I assume without detour the responsibility for these *envois*, for what remains, or no longer remains, of them, and that in order to make peace within you I am signing them here in my proper name, Jacques Derrida.« (Derrida 1987, 5)

The last sentence »[...] in order to make peace within you I am signing them here in my proper name, Jacques Derrida« is supplemented with a noteworthy footnote. The footnote plays, firstly, with the instability of verifiability of the ›scientific‹ supplement, and with signature as a sending off of texts that develop their own path. Secondly, the passage plays with the idea of signature as authorization, as well as, thirdly, with the *form* of scientific writing: The footnote is transformed into a publically retrievable, secret space of encounter held in a humorous, flirting address to a *you* as a possible ›real‹ and implicated (singular) reader of his text, after the nonchalant remark »to make peace within you« that sounds provocative and teasing. And it goes on:

»I regret that you [*tu*] do not very much trust my signature, on the pretext that we might be several. This is true, but I am not saying so in order to make myself more important by means of some supplementary authority. And even less in order to disquiet, I know

30 One such work remains *Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce* (Derrida/Attridge 1992, 253–309) and can be seen as a work in which Derrida deals with ›laughter‹ (and a literary text) and its unsettling internal and external meanings with ›yes‹, a word, accompanying both texts accompanied by it – that may be a quasi-translation of the other's touch brought to language.

what this costs. You are right, doubtless we are several, and I am not as alone as I sometimes say I am when the complaint escapes from me, or when I still put everything into seducing you.» (Derrida 1987, 6, footnote 1)

Humor is firstly engendered here through the form of the address, which is pronounced in a footnote – the first footnote of the book – that usually stands for scientific clarification and further insight. Derrida plays with its ›supplementary authority‹ – which here is altered into an aside, a rather intimate space of encountering that touches upon this function of the footnote with a twinkle of the eye. And it does so, on an other, *personal*, *private*, rather than ›objective‹ level. It is as if, in the footnote, someone is taken, drawn aside, an intimate gesture that is stressed by the use of the singular pronoun *you*. This someone – *you* – is told secretly, within a hall of public chatter and discourses going on, something of specific importance, or so it seems. The flirtatious and *personal* and *private* stance is, secondly, further stressed by what apparently is a *confession*, an attempt to seduce the addressee, *you*, the reader. An (old) question can be assumed behind this gesture, namely, whether writing the way it is presented to us and the way ›we‹ are accustomed to it is not a rhetoric of seduction rather than the production of scientific ›truths‹? It also can mean that this allusion in fact might be closer to ›truth‹ than a seduction ›proper‹ may indicate, as it implies that there might be some ›truth‹ in it, – and as there might also be some seduction in the attempt to speak (to) ›truth‹. ›Truth‹, it further indicates, is always spoken from *someone* to *somebody else* – and most probably in moments where instances of power within relations of affectivity flare up that do not reveal as such, in whose favor a dialogic instance will develop, but also how this competition of power, however tender, may end, and how the apparently *dynamic*, *affective distance* that emerges in this *space of touch without touch* between the interlocutors has to be *grasped*. A text, then, writing more generally in its inevitable address, addressing *you*, opens up a space of touch within indeterminable instances of not-knowing and power-lessness – that can go far beyond the moment of the encounter as such. *Confession*, another understanding of an aside, furthermore plays an important role in the writings of Derrida. It alludes not only to an old writing style in literary and religious as well as philosophic texts, but also constitutes an address to an *a priori* assumed absolute OTHER, as an other YOU, spoken in a state of notknowing and, at least internal powerlessness to an unknowable, who nevertheless presumably remains close to the self. In fact, is *within* the self *without* being there, *within* the text and texture of the self without being there, a touch away *within* and *without* touch, *within* its (textual) body *without* ›being‹ (there). A *confession* signals an unequal relation of power, at first sight, but while it is uttered, one wonders whether it does not shift in favor of the presumed confessing one? Is confession not only a form of critique of the very same O/other one confesses to because, one is made to confess, to rethink one's decision? In the moment of confessing the uttering subject confesses about transgressions that question those very limits set by ›the laws‹, showing their limitations, asking for commonly generating new ones? And the question also comes up whether this otherness to which we presumably remain angled in the text(-ure) of writing has to be corporeal, or whether the materiality and corporeality have to also be rethought as being *without* material immanence *within* materiality, as other ›materiality‹, within one's inner eyes *without a sense of seeing and sensing*, *within a touch*, *without touch*? A *confession* reveals an unequal re-

ciprocal encounter that aspires to something regarding the O/other who is, in one's own call, in one's voice and discourse, part of the self, part of the ›I‹, and yet wholly O/other, which may even be a hostile part of the self; the *confession* either seeks an apology or forgiveness (Schumm, Schönherr 2015, 729). It thereby is performative, and rather than to tell a ›truth‹, is ›doing truth‹ (Robbins 1995, 28, Kronick 2000). As a written text, a document within discourse, a text within a wider textuality surrounding it, it can also be understood as a form of *resistance* toward an authority and power (Vice 1997, 151) that called upon it, authorized it. A backchat with an O/other in the form of an aside. Derrida's aside also marks *you* figuratively as a singularity, an individual, as well as a singular moment and encounter between two different entities who have a common secret that is part of the performance of their encounter and opens up a space of intelligibility. It is an address and confirmation that affirms the (pre-given) other in its difference to the self and confirms *differance* even in spaces of intimacy, in spaces of touch. It furthermore produces an ›implied reader‹ as an absolute O/other (future) reader, whose counter-sign, whose response is asked for, so that the text (and the address) can be acknowledged and make sense at all. Bakhtin understands a confession also as a form of ambivalence and irresolution (Peterson 2000, 32) from which this resisting sense of humor can be understood to emerge. Thirdly, the humorous tone is produced by what the address seems to say: that an infinity of readings can still be deduced from this authorization by the signature because, although the ›real author‹ through their own invocation by addressing the O/other, *you*, and implicating *you* in the text, has signed the text with a name and authorized it, this does not stop the text or the reading from being understood differently from how the ›real‹ and ›implied author‹ ›Jacques Derrida‹ might have wanted it to be read, may even not be able to disclose the ›real meaning‹ and O/other behind it; the signature gives us no certainties about the name ›Jacques Derrida‹ nor about the meaning of his text, but rather leaves us, despite all due information, clueless, suspended. The humorous, fourthly, ensues from how the address multiplies and engenders the possibility of an unrest, as it also can be read as an address of a specific, secret, ›implied reader‹ that the ›implied author's‹ (wider, implicated) readership cannot be aware of, or of another secret ›implied reader‹ behind this secret ›implied reader‹, or of another ›Jacques Derrida‹ in dialogue with one of his selves at the threshold of a complicated O/otherness that it encounters *within* itself *without* encountering *within* the texture of his text and *without* it. As this address is held on a meta-discursive level, ›the implied reader‹ as well as the possibility of a ›real reader‹ seem to coincide in the pronoun *you* that depicts the other, the non-I, and splits the subject of enunciation and enunciating but refers back to both in the name of ›Jacques Derrida‹, and thereby already implicates a space of relationality and narrativity in a dialogic way within the discourse of the text as well as within the discourse outside of it that has found its way into the text via the enunciating of the subject of enunciation. Besides all this, no doubt, it may not be wrong to discern here some kind of a silken phallic-mafiosi-author-itative tone in the ›implied author's‹ words (does it declare and confess itself in the footnote?), who approaches *you* and takes *you* aside to have a word with *you*.³¹

31 For a flattering response to Derridean (compromised as a name of a father of/in philosophy?) phallogocentric-seductive work at play, see Spivak (1983). See also Gorsz (1997), and Kamuf (1997).

In the famous interview with Derek Attridge with the title *This Strange Institution Called Literature* ([1989] 1992), Derrida in fact acknowledges the deconstructive trait inherent in humor and he links it explicitly to the humorous work of ›literary‹ writing. Derrida uses here the term ›irony‹. As earlier discussed, ›irony‹ can be regarded as another term, a code name for humor that has acquired a sophisticated place in philosophy and literary theory, and that as such a term is in fact also questioned in Derrida's response. But Derrida, in any case, makes clear here that he considers the analysis of these rapturous humorous (literary) elements that go against ›metaphysics‹ and repressive formations of ›truths‹ as an important task of (literary) writing per se:

»Although I did not always, or in every respect, agree with him on this point, Paul de Man was not wrong in suggesting that ultimately all literary rhetoric in general is of itself deconstructive, practicing what you might call a sort of irony, an irony of detachment with regard to metaphysical belief or thesis, even when it apparently puts it forward. No doubt this should be made more complex, ›irony‹ is perhaps not the best category to designate this ›suspension‹, this *epochē*, but there is here, certainly, something irreducible in poetic or literary experience.« (Derrida 1992, 50)

If we translate this »more complex« that is in the poetic by alluding instead of ›irony‹ to humor as an affective rhetoric of deconstruction that gives way to a poetology of non-knowledge and power-lessness, we might create a snag through which it may be possible to state that (the work of) humor in fact may be a central pleasurable matter of concern for Derrida. In this sense, humor from a Derridean understanding, can be seen as an important element of his thought (and the work of deconstruction) per se.

A humorous undertone is also part of Derrida's elaborations on touch. In his allusions to Nancy, Derrida, following Nancy's reading of Charles Baudelaire's poem *The Desire to Paint*, also explicitly deals with the touch of humor by depicting ›laughter‹ as an effect (of whatever sort) that occupies a central space in this prosaic poem. Derrida thus deals with humor's rapturous touch in the texture of this poem, in the texture of art. In this discussion it is not ›laughter‹ or what causes it that is taken up, but rather touching *impressions* of ›laughter‹ and the alluring and haunting desire that it may invoke, albeit, from a cis-normative perspective upon a sexualized and racialized image of a laughing (Black?) woman (a woman of color?), the significantly absent-present other *par excellence* – in (only Western?) philosophy?

Humor in Touch

Nancy calls Baudelaire's poetic image of ›laughter‹ in *The Desire to Paint* (1869), the desire for the beautiful, »the philosophical eroticism of aesthetics, and the sublime aesthetics of eroticism« (Nancy 1993, 372). This image and discussion of the poem seems to be haunted by Hélène Cixous' decolonial, feminist elaborations of what (feminist) ›laughter‹ might mean (*The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1975), a text that neither Nancy nor Derrida take up here. ›The law‹ of reference, touch and *tact* here seems to follow a masculinist philosophical tradition where it does not matter (so) much whether feminist interventions are considered or not. This reveals once again a gendered discourse on touch and humor, which has its

own ›irony‹. It reveals itself as the reiterated *absence* of what Derrida bemoans, the absence of the other who occupies, *literally*,³² the center of philosophical discourse within a (cis-masculinist? and) cis-male dominated projection that also haunts the discourse on humor and touch, indicating the work of the *without* in its more immediate material effects, its legitimized exclusions. This other's absence is implicated in three ways. It is implicated by representation. It is implicated by the absence of any reference to gender or (male-masculinist) sexuality, and it is implicated by the very structure such an entry point may provide for the approach of the poem.

While Nancy's opening of the poem ponders on the sublation of the division of art and *technē*, and while he uses ›laughter‹, touch as well as philosophy's desire for the other to make his argument, he does not bring these loose ends together. Furthermore, and much to Derrida's dismay (Derrida 2005, 114 ff.), Nancy seems to reestablish a metaphysical approach to ›laughter‹ by seeing it as the ›bursting of presences‹ (Nancy 1993, 389). In his elaboration on the poem, Derrida opens up this approach by linking ›laughter‹ and touch to the other, to eroticism, to touch within the text, to touch and worldliness, in the arts as well as in philosophy (Derrida 2005, 111). Derrida interestingly brings together some of the different terms that he has already mentioned before regarding touch, and groups them around his discussion on the touch of ›laughter‹. These terms are: ›feeling‹, experience, self, other, and syncope (Derrida 2005, 111 f.).

But first the poem. Baudelaire's prosaic poem *The Desire to Paint* is the thirty-sixth poem of the collection *Le Spleen de Paris*, which was published posthumously in 1869, and which is often regarded as a modernist reflection of everyday-life, momentums of thoughts and sensory impressions. The text goes as follows:

»Unhappy perhaps is the man, but happy the artist, who is torn with this desire. I burn to paint a certain woman who has appeared to me so rarely, and so swiftly fled away, like some beautiful, regrettable thing the traveler must leave behind him in the night. It is already long since I saw her. She is beautiful, and more than beautiful: she is overpowering. The colour black preponderates in her; all that she inspires is nocturnal and profound. Her eyes are two caverns where mystery vaguely stirs and gleams; her glance illuminates like a ray of light; it is an explosion in the darkness. I would compare her to a black sun if one could conceive of a dark star overthrowing light and happiness. But it is the moon that she makes one dream of most readily; the moon, who has without doubt touched her with her own influence; not the white moon of the idylls, who resembles a cold bride, but the sinister and intoxicating moon suspended in the depths of a stormy night, among the driven clouds; not the discreet peaceful moon who visits the dreams of pure men, but the moon torn from the sky, conquered and revolted, that the witches of Thessaly hardly constrain to dance upon the terrified grass. Her small brow is the habitation of a tenacious will and the love of prey. And below this unquiet face, whose mobile nostrils breathe in the unknown and the impossible, glitters, with an unspeakable grace, the smile of a large mouth; white, red, and delicious; a mouth that

32 On the ambivalent and dialogic meaning of the ›literary‹ see Achim Geisenhanslüke (2020), raising questions about the dilemmas of literary meaning, which challenges its own agenda and broadens (and thus questions) the discourse on and the sense of *literariness* as a liminal, playful (or volatile) counter-sign to another meaning(-fulness).

makes one dream of the miracle of some superb flower unclosing in a volcanic land. There are women who inspire one with the desire to woo them and win them; but she makes one wish to die slowly beneath her steady gaze.» (Baudelaire 2020, 84)

This beautiful poem seems in synchrony with Derrida's unfolding of touch. Derrida's exposition has (at least) three dimensions. On the one hand, and in a more general (public) tone, Derrida ponders upon touch in philosophy and the philosophy of touch. On the other hand, and in a more specific (private) tone, he speaks about an other's touch, on Nancy's touch that has let him, more or less, to consider this touch of touch. On a third level, finally, he brings these two sites of his observation together by negotiating Nancy's understanding of touch, what it encompasses, what has fled Nancy's attention, why this may be the case and what this means for philosophizing and for deconstruction (*as philosophy (per se?)*). In all these dimensions of address, Derrida's elaboration, rather than to follow a typical, prescribed philosophical style of demonstration, has a performative character; it happens within the unfolding of his reading and his response to this reading, his language, and in his writing. Derrida shows in this performance the different layers and meanings of touch, its rules of tact and contact within the material outside and the material inside of the text and its texture. These are his friendship to Nancy as well as an implicit problematization of touch in philosophy. All these strokes and strikes are mirrored in the conglomerate of meanings that are evoked by the above poem: The poem is about touch while it also performs *and* prefigures it. This impression of a touch is expressed in language, touching on touch, like a tongue, but the poem is not the place where it takes place. The poem is just a reminder; it heralds the possibility of touch in a past horizon, as an echo in the presence of being read. This echo bears the imprint of a by-gone touch, which has occurred without an apparent, physical touch, and yet has turned the lyrical I towards itself, has influenced its futurity in affective, sensual, and epistemological ways, has formed its language, ending up in a caress with the speaking tongue embracing it. In evoking the remembrance of this touch, touching upon it, the poem reaches its own limits, must acknowledge its own insufficiency. It in fact exceeds its energies and possibilities to capture the touch. Rather, the poem relegates it to an other place of expressibility of the inexpressible, to painting; this deferral places any understanding of touch within the ungraspable, incomplete, and infinite epistemology of the arts, with their own peculiar forms of touch, and places the arts in the sphere, and at the limit of the experience of non-knowledge and power-lessness. It is in this oscillation, in-between the arts, it seems to suggest, where non-knowledge and power-lessness, as the echo of the touch of the other in the memory of the self, unremittingly take shape, however fleetingly. Touch thus is deferred to the otherness of another language, a transplanted *heart*, if you will, to painting as the poet finds their faculty almost exhausted for what they want to express, and they hope, the painter will find the capability to give a more accurate echo to this touch; all the while, however, it is the poet who has changed into a painter, painting their image with their words. The touch of ›laughter‹ thus has changed the speaking, the remembering, the grieving subject. The subject is transformed into another subject who speaks with painted words. Almost gone, evoked in its schematic outlines, it points to an uncertain future, to a search. The touch of *affective humor*, thus, is also imbued in the tragic abyss of loss that it too symbolizes. It is not only an experience of losing oneself,

and, at least for moments, one's orientation, but also a moment of capturing, of grasping something, grasped by it. The poem paints the mournful elusiveness of this touch. It, in turn, touches back what the other has left behind, within an uncountable and unreachable distance that is also a deep closeness, it happens simultaneously within the outward as well as inward space of the self. The poem with its laughing wide mouth folds in with Derrida's sentence on the wall that evokes and questions touch at the same time and gives orientation to his question, reorienting him towards itself.

It is not clear (to me) whether Derrida is tracing the poem, or the poem is tracing what Derrida has done within his discussion in this book. Derrida's pursuits, however, do resemble this poem in a way, in his circling around the importance and in/expressibility of the other's touch, of affectivity, and expression, which the open and vulnerable laughing mouth of the other holds together, while signaling (around) a void.

Derrida describes ›laughter‹ here accordingly as a *syncope*, »which is to say, a certain interruption in contact« (Derrida 2005, 111, 113) – an interruption in contact with the other as well as with the self, an absolute openness to the other. Three important elements that trigger touch and the space it opens up are emphasized thereby: The joyful, open mouth means an interruption within *contact*. While it remains all the same in contact, touching an other, it also surrenders to an other's touch, and in this surrendering, the laughing mouth, humor's most obvious bodily symbol, opens itself up. This openness also symbolizes an openness *to* the other, whom it invites *for* openness. Syncope means obliviousness as well as vulnerability. Thus, the touch of *affective humor* emerges out of an uneven but chiasmic impuissance. It takes its formation out of the acknowledgment, risk, and vulnerability of power-lessness (*OhnMacht*) and non-knowledge (*NichtWissen*) as the nexus of the most challenging, present-absent form of *syncope*. It indicates openness and, at the same time, triggers it in the other. It is intense, in chiasmic *contact*, and nevertheless detached, uncoupled. It symbolizes a joyful brokenness before the eyes of an other that this other has triggered, and is exposed within an other's *contact*. It thus must encompass and symbolize reliance and alliance while making vulnerable, letting the self lose itself. Its power thus lies in complete powerlessness and unknowing, which it opens up before an other's ›eyes‹, opening an other's ›heart‹, touching a most hidden *ur-space* there. *Affective humor*, thus, must involve at least two entities that touch each other without touching, within a space that induces distance as well as *contact*, molding a void, an in-between space where potentially anything can happen between violence and ›love‹, and both. *Affective humor's* touch thus means trusting in the power of vulnerability and surrendering to the not-knowing opening that an other triggers in the self. Its powerlessness is its power and notknowing its most possible and treasured ›knowledge‹.

Derrida, furthermore, speaks of a multiple opening: »The opening in question may be presently visible and significant in the burst of laughter, or it may not; it is indispensable. For laughter as for so many other things, more than one opening is needed« (Derrida 2005, 114). *Affective humor* is relational and thus is the poetology of its non-knowledge and power-lessness that indicates both forms of not-knowing and power-lessness, one that is conditioned by the encounter of the humorous touch, and one that comes into sight at its horizon as an endless opening. The interruption of *syncope* is the spacing that opens itself up in the (laughing) mouth as well as in language and the wide field of signification from where it may get its insights: The joyous, powerless, and in its powerlessness most

powerful, open mouth in ›laughter‹, symbolizing humorous inclination, not only touches the heart and is not only affective with regard to the spectral affectivity it triggers but it also opens up *the possibility* of non-knowledge *to know*, it indicates the wide field that the poetology of non-knowledge and power-lessness represent, as a *possible field of* insight, which opens up power, – reminding? –, to the immense sphere of powerlessness, echoing, touching, its limitation.

Derrida also refers to the erotic implications inherent in the meaning of self-touch, *se toucher*. This encompasses touching ›one's body as an experience of oneself as other‹, as a limit. Within the context of *affective humor*, *se toucher* comprises the touch of limits, touching a self as well as an other at their limits within an encounter. At the same time, this ›self-touch‹ is always also the touch of a limit and thus a giving over to an other at one's limits. Derrida calls this the experience of experience per se: »[...] feeling itself touching a limit, feeling touched by a limit, and its own limit« (Derrida 2005, 111). ›Touching oneself‹ thus is not a beginning, but an end insofar as, at the limit of the self, is an other. ›Laughter‹ here also symbolizes this limit that signifies the other's touch at the limits of oneself. ›Laughter's syncope, furthermore, hints not only to an interruption, but to an outage of the self; the self, for a short period of time (of interruption) disappears from its own memory and presence. When it comes back, the self is a slightly different and differed self, and may look ›at the world‹ in a slightly other way, touched by the other, by this limit that links both entities for the moment of the immediate touch, but that also engraves itself in the self as a memory. The image of an outage, of a syncope, also refers to the affective touch of that which the rhetoricality of humor invokes. This can be an expression of humor such as ›laughter‹ or a smile, a twist of the mouth, or it can be an impression, which shows itself in another form of ›opening‹ that may not be visible, but may be an insight or a shift in perception. Humor here, personalized, imagined, and at the same time, textualized with all its implicated affectivity, shows itself in the literariness of language and the desire that is evoked and shaped in the non-knowledge and power-less sphere of the arts. In this textualized image, the affectivity of ›laughter‹ remains a residue of a reciprocal touch and one that haunts the self. The spacing of the mouth in ›laughter‹ thus also signals the humorous, affective relationality through which the other and the self are linked to each other, oriented to specific directions in this syn-copated moment of total distance. Though they may not touch each other haptically and the space between them may be insurmountable, like a past time, different continents, or different languages and ›cultures‹, they seem to remain closest to each other in this instant. *Affective humor* symbolizes touch in both ways: It shows the powerless vulnerability of being touched (also while inhabiting power) and the power to touch (also while inhabiting positions of powerlessness). It also shows an ethical inclination, as that which the self longs for: Response as well as responsiveness, is triggered by the other's powerlessness. Not power but powerlessness thus merges the self and the other in *meaningful*, and yet *ungraspable*, undiscernible ways. *Affective humor* is thus liberating at both, all ends of the encounter. In its empathic and passionate touch, it interrelates (at least) two subjects without overriding their distance and difference. ›Laughter‹ as the possible after-effect of the touch that emerges from the *contact of affective humor* gives impetus to the movement and motivation of the ›reading‹, observing subject.

In this poem, however, three male thinkers problematize ›laughter‹ by depicting a potentially Black woman*, a woman* of color, in a rather vulnerable state. And here is where the politics that engulf the touch of *affective humor*, too, appears and is presented on a backstage.

The othered female ›laughter‹ may stand for other meanings as well that are not part of Derrida's, Nancy's or Baudelaire's contemplations. It may laugh at the image that is put up at her*, it may be a joyous as well as a pained ›laughter‹, a loving as well as sad ›laughter‹, one that may be full of different ›affects‹, and one that therefore must entail a sense of wit, and maybe good-hearted, nevertheless-humor. Perhaps ›she*‹ laughs at the non-knowledge of this O/other who confounds her* sight with happiness while ›she*‹ may be laughing at her* misery. ›She*‹ may also laugh, shyly, at the possibility of happiness that is triggered in the look of a loving admiration. But she* may also be laughing sadly at the limitedness of her* own desire. ›Laughter‹, as the utmost limits and image of humor, and humor as the limits of language, discourse, and thought, touches upon the open place at the liminal of affectivity and the production of meaning, at the borders of non-knowledge and power-lessness, where pleasure, desire, power, and resistance, the self and the other meet, and come into being and are set into work in (im/possible) infinite ways, instead of signaling ›ends‹. This is what *affective humor* may have in common with tragedy.

The poem seems to articulate in the image of ›laughter‹ a demonstration of Derrida's metonymic metaphoricity of the touch. It touches upon the division of the subject, its gender, and its relation to art, and as art, it touches upon the phenomenology of relationality, upon the arts as writing in painting and the painting in writing, and their function, to find some undetectable ›truth‹. At the same time, the poem may display the figuration of a Black woman* or a woman* of color, as the representation of the other's touch as a desire for affection, and as the humorous (loving? wondering? wondering-loving?) touch that moves the male, cis-normative self (?) to desire and to dream, and to paint, and to be restless in *writing*.

But this woman*-figure's ›laughter‹ may be another shade of Cixous's *The Laugh of the Medusa*. It laughs back from the mirror-image of a male dominated discourse. The painted poem, in gazing laughingly back from an exclusive but also excluded and marginalized other space, and the space of the other – which also is the space of the arts and of aesthetics – stands in a heterotopic non-place; it is a spacing in-between ›reality‹ and the unreal. From this place the other's ›laughter‹ ironizes discourse, while also ›loves‹ it for its alleged power/›knowledge‹ and naïve non-knowledge and powerlessness, and for a future where it could be unfolded differently. She* speaks and enters the sphere of the safeguarded supremacist power and ›knowledge‹, already touched by their limits, and replies, presumably as a racialized, classicized, and gendered other(-ed) through ›laughter‹, the arts, and more specifically through literature. Like *Psyche*, her* absence is the stencil, the subjectile, Derrida may say, for what constitutes the wor(l)d – and the possibility how it might be re-configured differently.

It seems to be Eros himself who willy-nilly learns to yearn for her* and tries, against his own will, to bring her* back to discourse and language by letting her* laugh at everything that he might symbolize or wish for. Read in this way, the touch of *affective humor* in and from this heterotopic non-place of the arts marks a freedom *from* as well as a freedom

to (Arendt 2017). It apparently stands for what the touch of *affective humor* with its ›laughter‹ does: it performs a poetology of non-knowledge and power-lessness that comes from its affective humorous signification, which seems to be at the margins of any serious and fixating construction of meaning, and whose seams already dissipate in the alluring bodily expression of a not-knowing, powerless mouth. The desire to cherish this ›laughter‹ in the painted poem also stands for and symbolizes the imprint of touch that the encounter has set in motion, and that indicates the possibilities of other ›knowledges‹ as an intertwined poetics of non-knowledge and power-lessness. What may be described, then, by all three thinkers is perhaps just an impression, a *touch*, of ›grace‹.

And here, again, bell hooks' encounter with the painting on the other side of the wall in New York comes to mind. The ›grace‹ she describes as ›a touch of love‹ resides in the aesthetic response of a painting that is at the same time a written sentence on a wall in a public space. Perhaps, then, touch in *affective humor* is the graceful sight and insight of the aesthetic – a silent, unknowing, power-less, and liberating affirmation – like Baubo's solace in the face of loss that triggers ›laughter‹, hope.

Literature, painting, the painted poetics of an other's ›laughter‹ appear as metonyms of a reflex that always already, not-knowingly and powerless, points to the dialogic, to the response of the other. It deconstructs and at the same time shows the hidden, affectionate desire *within power* as another part of it – a desire that the other may speak (for themselves) that the nexus power/knowledge also yearns to be freed from itself to (re)enter a stage of powerlessness not-knowing to create itself anew, differently. This is a ›selfish‹ as well as an ethical desire for an other that shows itself in the touch of *affective humor* and in the sphere of the arts where *affective humor* is not an abstract entity, but a molded, artful, poetical composition that is *willed* to touch in interruptive ways. Here, in the philosophic elaboration of Nancy as well as Derrida, it is the poem that stands for what they try to elaborate on, interrupting their thoughts by its otherwise poetic humorous touch.

In Baudelaire's text, it is not the grotesque that is depicted as the subversive power of ›laughter‹ as humor's maybe most subversive signature. It is ›laughter‹'s haunting powerlessness as the imprint of loss. The painter-poet-philosopher does not know why the woman* -figure is smiling. The humor behind her* smile remains a secret that only ›she*‹ herself* might know. *Affective humor*'s touch thus does not open the other to ›knowledge‹; it opens the self to unknowing and powerlessness, by leaving its imprint in their subject(ed), self, willing to surrender to the touch's power-lessness and not-knowing. For the reading subject, the smile may represent ›love‹, wonder, seduction, and haunting, but not necessarily for the subject who laughs (at her* self as much as the one looking at her*), while ›she*‹, too, remains surrendered to the call for her* to appear. The painted ›laughter‹ in words, the touch of *affective humor*, thus reinstates the arts, literature, and painting, in the middle, at the heart of philosophic sophistication, and in the melody of ›laughter‹, its music, from an objectified status, in which it turns itself into a (singular) subject through ›laughter‹, indicating as her* home the power-less sphere of non-knowledge, symbolizing the rich possibilities that lie in powerlessness and not-knowing. Not only do the arts, and literature, specifically regain a form of knowing-agency beyond the reading and beyond the artist, in this affective humorous touch, but also the other within her* touching, reciprocal ›laughter‹. Like Cixous' *Medusa*, this subject's laughing might, in fact, be out of the specter of affectivity, of a wondering pleasure and a wondering pain,

at the chasm of ›life‹, at the abysses of discourse, encounter, and mistranslation, at the striking touches of ›the laws‹, orders and gazes in which ›she*‹ is regarded as the object of (cis-male?) desire, enticement, and elusiveness – othered as if ›she*‹ could not speak (back), which ›she*‹ in fact may choose not to do, and instead to laugh at that all, wonderingly, and out of *tact*, in both its senses, not knowing how to react to this misery; the very act of ›laughter‹ thus conceived signifies an attempt of disarming as well as empowerment. Out of such a way of looking at ›life‹ with all its sorrows and fragile pleasures, *affective humor* emerges as (another) ›philosophy‹. Painted in language, this other's humor, itself othered, bursts conventionalized meanings, ›laws‹, orders, and colors (of gender, ›race‹, and class).³³ Medusa's ›laughter‹ as well as Baudelaire's poetic laughing *woman** can be conceived as the reparative sides of the other's (pained and yet healing) humor – with effects that might derange and destabilize dominant discourses/meanings, while simultaneously empowering a weak, unforceful search for meaning. Laughing at those who want to fix things and fix her* in their gaze, ›she*‹ senses that such an act is impossible and illusory. However, ›she*‹ does not centralize this ›knowledge‹ as some kind of ›truth‹ – instead, ›she*‹ just laughs, wonderingly.

This opening of the mouth does not only stand for deconstruction; as the mouth is also an organ, and as it is an organ that can be opened up (by oneself or others) it also signals exposure and vulnerability. Thus, it also stands for the vulnerability inherent in any opening, in speaking, in language, and in deconstruction. Language and discourse, while occupying the place of ›the law‹, of *tact*, and of centripetalism, also encompass a triple vulnerability: the vulnerability of power-lessness as well as the vulnerability of subversive and centrifugal forces inherent in the movement of *contact* (in-between which power-lessness resides), touching upon something that is part of language-related and discursive rhetoric, and lastly, the vulnerability and exposure of the body and the ethics that is bound to it. As Geisenhanslüke discusses with regard to Freud's dream work, the rhetoricality of humor or, to take up Geisenhanslüke's non-metaphorical metaphor, the poetology of humor's non-knowledge (and hence power-lessness), also functions as an opening to a dilemmatic experience of ›knowledge‹ that is non-knowledge. The vulnerability and exposure is implied in the rhetoric and literariness of the text and can be accepted, rejected or ignored. This is the forceless side of the poetic performativity of touch inherent in *affective humor* as a rhetoric of deconstruction and the lingering clang of its ethics, which always resides at the edge of withdrawal. There is a certain uncertainty about its existence and (its) (dizzying, possible) allusions, its *Aus-sagekraft*.

The figure of the mouth that Nancy depicts as the place and organ, as it were, that binds ›psychical thinking‹ with the body, the mouth, is the image and the place that interlinks thought, language, the body as well as the other and the self within an opening that is released by the humorous touch and that, at the same time, encompasses it. *The Desire to Paint* does not only refer to the mouth as the place of touch (of desire and the desire to speak) and to affection. It also is the place of the poem and of a joyful, humorous tonality. The poem in this regard also represents the tongue, the organ of touch that

33 Nancy, though, seems more critical in his (deconstructive) reading of Baudelaire's amorous, yearning text, ›lowering‹ it to prostitution and the ›vulgarity‹ of the senses (and sense-making?) (Nancy 1994, 390 ff.).

touches with language. *The Desire to Paint* stands in a metonymic counter-relation to discourse but nevertheless within the vast (not-knowing and power-less) field of (literary) language. From here, in the glaze of the poem, language, this self-touching tongue opens up a space, to enter another one, touching an other, participating (laughingly/lovingly?) in a dialogue, queering it.

The image of the ›mouth‹ links a bodily organ to touch and to an affective humorous tonality. It resides in the joy and pain of ›laughter‹ within a metaphoricity, which is abstract, poetically theorizing, philosophical. By centralizing the poem as the source to elaborate on this, the philosophic discussion is transformed. It becomes material, historical, political, and poetological. It links touch to time and to space, and, at the same time, frees it from the immediate event around which it has chosen to circle, by hinting at something more general that it entails as well. The poem touches upon an event in the past that haunts the present and that evokes, in the image, the future. It implicates in this process of remembrance, corporeality, an aporetic specter of affectivity, encompassing compassion as well as pain, subjectivity, resistance, unavailability, and unintelligibility, and above all, the inconclusive and ambiguous aesthetic epistemology of art – as (poetological) philosophy. The mouth, the opening touch of the poetic expression, can, in the process of reading and remembering, physically touch, but it must not do so to touch. It can remain ›language‹, an image, inaccessible, shut. It must not speak to everyone and does not enforce a meaning, but may only have something to say to those who (can) return its touch by responding to it in different, infinite ways; while it remains vulnerable all the same, its inaccessibility also makes it unavailable and thus untouchable to possible violence. In this way, the work of art, poetry, and its epistemology, always remains intact and keeps its almost other-worldly sovereignty. This is the protective coat of poetic language. A mouth in silence (like ›laughter‹) stands for ›dumbness‹ and ›silliness‹ as well as for ›intelligence‹ and ›wisdom‹. In its roundness, digesting, reproducing, echoing, depth, and surface, the mouth combines the whole circle of life – life, death, rebirth – and its im/possible nuances. As Nancy declares in his reading of the poem, ›laughter‹ ›completes without completing‹ (Nancy 1993, 383). The mouth thus combines different aporetic paradoxes (Derrida 2005, 114 ff.) that are part of language but that become conditioned, regulated and arrested in history, discourse and philosophy. These are set free in the poem and symbolize an act of response, liveliness, survival as well as eroding, which in ›laughter‹ bursts into parts, becomes fragmented, loses its meaning. Rather than to acquire immediately a new, arrested meaning, it indicates the possibility of other meanings that can be acquired if one cares to seek them. »Of course, even if it shakes up the whole body« Derrida insists,

›laughter is a thing of this mouth – and the open mouth, toward which the question of touch and self-touch incessantly leads us back. The mouth touches, touches itself is touched, not only because the lips touch, and not only because one would not speak – to have a word with a friend [se toucher] if this auto-affection of a mouth, this contact interrupted and repeated between the lips, the tongue, the palate, and so forth, did not impart speech. We must have a mouth for laughter and for laughing. Surely, we can laugh with our eyes, but it is difficult (even if it is not impossible) to imagine a liv-

ing being laughing without something like an opening other than the eyes.» (Derrida 2005, 113–114)

One can also laugh with one's eyes or with one's skin, which, too, in the act of reading and in the act of touch, execute the work of the tongue. These can become a ›language‹ in dialogue with an O/other. The eyes mirror and touch with delight, pain, and amusement and can be a bodily synecdoche for understanding as such, for *insight*, understood as an opening to something not known before, by the touch of an other entity or a space around themselves. The mouth's opening in ›laughter‹ signifies the opening of and the openness to an insight, to and through the other, the arts, the (literary) text, the image of oneself in the O/other, the other at the limits of oneself or within one's memory; this cognitive process is a bodily process rather than an abstracted understanding of *logos*, which is only a notch in the capability of the self's *eccentric positionality*. In this intertwined way of affectivity and cognition, *humor's touch*, its opening sets something into work within the (reading) self, within thought, discourse, and language, and maybe even in *herstory**. *Humor's syncope*, on the other hand, signifies a cognitive shut down in which all (known) meanings disappear. In this almost placid, figured attentive description, it is not the hands, the eyes or the skin but the mouth that functions as an organ of touch as well as of affectivity and cognition. It feeds, eats (away), swallows up, digests and replies. The mouth denotes affection, auto-affection as well as hetero-affection. The mouth also denotes self-touch, touching itself, in some form of unconscious consciousness, »the self feeling one's self touch« (Derrida 2005, 111). In the interruptive image of the laughing mouth, and most visibly so, touch is also, at the same time, a loss of consciousness, a disempowerment, complete uncertainty, but not in a ›bad way‹ or as a ›bad mood‹. It is a joyous and pleasurable uncertainty, one that might be aware of the prefix *un-* that is attached to it. It signifies a falling apart of meaning, which only *seemed* to belong together. It signals a letting go, a form of liberation and setting free. This loss of power, therefore, also signals empowerment because of the possibility of another insight that might be triggered by the falling apart of meanings and alleged certainties. It thus signifies the opening of a liminal space. If we regard ›laughter‹, furthermore, as a sign of an affective rhetoric of humor, as a tonality at the nexus of non-knowledge and power-lessness, we can acknowledge a specter of different affective senses and sensitivities that evoke and accompany thought and epistemology while these begin to form shape and contour.

This emotive, moving tonality and productivity of humor's laughing rhetoricality in the poetics of the text gives way to a kinetic understanding of ›knowledge‹ and power. It is an all-encompassing sensitive procedure that remains *attouched* – touched by and attached to – affectivity, and part of the nexus of non-knowledge and power-lessness within history and beyond it, within language and discourse.

The laughing mouth, touched by a humorous tonality, also disrupts and loses sight of itself, touching back laughingly while it simultaneously touches someone or something in itself, touching upon something within and without.

The touch of this self-multiplying, affective humorous tonality thus entails, three elements that Derrida connotes to touch: touch as a departure from something (known), touch as a spacing between the self and the other as well as within the self, and touch as separation, as a condition for the possibility of touch.

If we consider touch in humor, in the poetics of words, signs, and (intervening) effects of discourse, it is possible to think it not as in opposition to the intelligible but as an opening of the intelligible. In this sense touch comes close to the idea of *movere* as an impetus (of the other) that sets something in movement within the self, a movement that must not be effective immediately. The laughing mouth is just a possible, epitomic image that Baudelaire's poem offers. As the touch in the humorous poetics is accompanied by a timeout, by unconsciousness, it also is delayed and may set in another time within the affected self and in its outward and inner agency.

Baudelaire's desire for painting and Derrida's touch are in a sense *reinvoked*, animated, in bell hooks' understanding of humor as a welcome trait of language, so it can be ›meaningful‹. With her reference to the self-deconstructive work of humor, bell hooks touches on the possibilities of language, not-knowing and power-lessness as forms of power and (meaningful) empowerment that remain self-critical and open to not-knowing, to the O/other that the self has, to an extent at least, constructed for itself and also worships in different ways. They also touch on an ethics of encounter that is enmeshed in the wor(l)dliness of discourse. It is released in the laughing mouth/language towards an O/other, almost embracing it, where it touches ›the laws‹ of tact in stroking and striking ways, in careful, critical, smiling inward and outward gazes, and where it may open hearts, mouths, memories, opening them with the affective poetics of touch, through which other insights may be gained from the same text and texture ...

Humor – In-Between Touching Spaces and Affective Attouchments

Touch describes the inscription of relationalities in oscillating kaleidoscopic, inward and outward movements. Touch can be thought of in three different ways that supplement each other. All three meanings of touch are already part of language. Touch can be understood in an abstract sense of *touching upon*. It can be understood in a *tactile* sense of touching the materiality, the surface of an entity/an other. It can be understood in the sense of being touched within an *inner level of un/consciousness*. The poetics of *affective humor* involves these traces of touch in intertwined ways, evoking a process of epistemological movement and change that is also corporeal. Touch, then, is sensual as it is already a sensing, a form of recognition, a threshold form of not-knowing and power-lessness. Touch thus conceived is a pre-linguistic form of (not only bodily) *acknowledgments*. Its written or spoken meanings follow from an afterwardsness. Touch is a phenomenological sensing of the wor(l)d and the self in an *attouchment* to the other. This phenomenology (of experiencing) is also bound to what is already there, in the gaps within the strings of subjectivity, language, discourses, materiality, history, structures of power. At the same time, touch is also an experience of singularity. It links something from the outside to the inside of the self, it happens in a space at the limit of oneself and thus engenders the possibility of experiencing the self as an other as well as an other at one's limit in a relational, dialogic field, as a self. Although touch is a singular sense, it is also infinite and at work in a multiplicity of singular acts within the multifarious fields of the self and its outer wor(l)ds. Touch is a movement that turns and orients entities. It is a dialogic movement. It comes along in the process of ›reading‹ without making itself known in explicit ways, but rather unfolds in an afterwardsness in un/conscious ways. Touch sets a movement of

turning or of tournaments into work. It comes with an *auto-bio-graphical* space-time-related orbit, a rhythm of already historically marked traces. It is a form of movement that can best be understood as a centering on decentering, a dynamic hold in-between one's movements, a *returning*, a turning of the self as well as a turning to an other. This deconstructive movement of meaning production is set into work in the dynamics that the performative poetics of *affective humor* as a rhetoric of deconstruction releases and offers as a space as well as a stage for the touch to take place. The poetics of touch is relational and gracious.

Derrida disassembles this trace of the touch in such a fundamental way that he almost betrays his metaphor of the trace. What differentiates and ›rescues‹ his approach from a metaphysical placement of touch as a *ur-beginning* and *ur-origin* is the relational, moving movement that inscribes, first, the O/other's mark in the self. Touch signifies ›identity‹-formation as ›etiologically‹ *disidentitarian* movements within the very act of self-structuring that must therefore always fail for itself. Self and O/other remain inseparable from each other and in infinite ways. This is perhaps the ethics and hope inherent in touch.

It not only signals a physical movement but also a psychical one. Touch may be an impulse, a corporeal, cognitive as well as unconscious effect in an encounter. It is an enactment triggered by an other, which must not be immediately effective but may develop a dynamic beyond the encounter. The touching poetics of *affective humor* in its rhetorical performativity opens such a space in which a relationality (re-)appears and is (again) set into work. *Affective humor's* touching poetics is understood in this sense as an opening of a space and as an opening that is corporeal-sensual, psychic, material, and epistemological. It is synonymous with the mouth and the tongue, with language and a desire to speak, to offer a dialogue or take part in one. Its touch is affective within the complex and multifarious spectral of affectivity. In this triple ephemeral, fragile state that interrupts and can be interrupted, the touch of the poetics of *affective humor* is a tasseled deconstruction in multilayered guises within the passing passage of a (cont-)text. ›Passage‹ denotes not only a paragraph but also the passageway to another part of the text and to another meaning. The touching space of *affective humor* turns itself into an unwritten *para-graph* that inscribes the body and the psyche by offering them the intertwined poetics of non-knowledge and power-lessness as an entry point for dialogicity. *Affective humor* touches poetically in an interruptive way, it is a syncopic parabasis, the rapture that comes from an other wor(l)d, be it in the texture of ›life‹ or in the texture of the ›text‹, which it decently, endlessly, movingly connects to build ever new meshes.