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A Palintropic Genealogy of the Diaphanous Exactitude of Pe(n)ser

PALINTROPES

On 2 October 1994, Derrida participated in a discussion to mark the opening of a new doctoral programme in the philosophy department at the University of Villanova. On two occasions he tells his audience that the next day his latest work, *Politics of Friendship*, will be published in Paris: it is the day *before* the politics of friendship. Derrida goes on to say that his new work is ‘mainly a book on Plato and Aristotle’ and adds, ‘I think we need to read them again and again and I feel that, however old I am, I am on the threshold of reading Plato and Aristotle. I love them and I feel I have to start again and again and again. It is a task which is in front of me, before me’. Derrida reiterates not once but five times that when it comes to Plato and Aristotle one must *start again* – and again and again. At the same time, in *Of Spirit* Derrida had also insisted that ‘it is already too late, always too late’. One cannot, and must not, be beguiled by the possibility of a pure ‘recommencement’, by a ‘return’ that would ‘signify a new departure ... or some degree zero’. It is always *too late* to start again.

The gesture of starting again is itself already part of the tradition of metaphysics: metaphysics always starts again – *and always with itself*, with Plato and Aristotle.

Some thirty years earlier in ‘Cogito and the History of Madness’, Derrida had already alluded to a turning back, to a backwards turn, that can be described *neither* simply as a starting again *nor* merely as a starting too late. From the start, he writes, we are presented with ‘the choice and division between the two ways separated by Parmenides in his poem, the way of the logos and the non-way, the labyrinth, the “palintrope” in which the *logos* is lost’. To start with *and without* Parmenides, with *and without* ontology, Derrida suggests, one must start with, be startled by, a *palintrope*, with a turning back that turns once more *and* always more than once – and loses the *logos*. It is this palintropic movement that Derrida evokes in ‘Force and Signification’ when he argues that phenomenology ‘leads Husserl back to Plato’, and in ‘The Pit and the Pyramid’, when he writes that Hegel ‘takes us back ... to Aristotle’.

In *On Touching* there is perhaps an unavoidable *history* of palintropes, as ‘the history of the departures from totality’, in Derrida’s reading of Aristotle’s *De Anima, On the Soul*. These histories of ‘tropological play’, as he calls them, these improprieties of the proper sense, these meetings or duels, these *rencontres* between the senses, are unavoidable in trying to reach (*toucher*) *On Touching* – Jean-Luc Nancy (205). As if one could avoid the ‘images, phantasms, and spectres, that is, figures, tropes, allegories, or metonymies opening a path to *technics*’ (52). Derrida writes in the opening pages that the *aporias* of *De Anima* leave us ‘without any hope of stepping across them, or coming out on top, on the bottom, or by sidestepping – and even less stepping back, or running to safety before them’ (4). As the twists and turns and returns of the remarkable eight-year span of *On Touching* suggests, it is perhaps already *impossible* to start again always too late. One can only turn again *and* always more than once. As Derrida writes of Nancy’s ‘Psyche’: ‘He starts off, then begins again, more than once, compulsively’ (11).

As Derrida argues at the end of *On Touching*, one must attend to both the *logic* and the *rhetoric*, ‘which would be more than a rhetoric’, of touching on touch (299). Reading Lévinas on the equivocal caress, he writes: ‘This does not forbid the promise but makes us call into question again, once more, all the analyses of the promise and its performative value’ (83). And later, still in the first part of the work: ‘I therefore return – I turn around, toward Jean-Luc Nancy’ (93); or, ‘we turn ... from one “turn” towards other “turns” ’ (130). ‘“May I”, he asks at the opening of the *first* part, ‘even before starting out *again*, be permitted the space and the freedom of a long parenthesis’ (20, my emphasis). A hundred and twenty pages later, at the opening of the second part, Derrida writes: ‘Let us start again’ (160). And again in *Tangent V*: ‘Let us start over again’ (244). And perhaps most of all in the third part, ‘Punctuations: “And you” ’, when he pleads: ‘Make believe I’m starting over again, since I obviously and avowedly have the feeling I can never get to it, to the truth, and I can never touch the point of departure, not to mention the end’ (277).

I. THE DIAPHANOUS

It is appropriate that Derrida’s first quotation of Aristotle, in his introduction to *The Origin of Geometry*, is from *De Anima*. It is crucial to phenomenology, Derrida argues, that Husserl *excludes* the ‘Idea in the Kantian sense’ *itself* from the phenomenological analysis. Phenomenology is concerned both with what *appears* and with ‘the *possibility* of its appearing’. The ‘Idea in the Kantian sense’ – ‘the regulative possibility of appearing’ – is the standard and guarantee of phenomenology. What interests Derrida is that, as the “origin” of phenomenology, the Idea itself ‘can never appear as such’. It is to illustrate this point that Derrida first turns to *De Anima*. He writes:

It is not by chance that there is no phenomenology of the Idea. The latter cannot be given in person, nor determined in an evidence, for it is only the possibility of evidence and the openness of “seeing” itself; it is only *determinability* as the horizon for every intuition in general, the invisible milieu of seeing analogous to the diaphaneity of the Aristotelian Diaphanous, an elemental third, but the one source of the seen and the visible.

The ‘diaphanousness of pure ideality’, Derrida goes on to say, is for Husserl the invisible origin of the visible as a pure objective ideality, of a visible that has liberated itself from the sensible and the imaginary. A year later in ‘Force and Signification’, Derrida argues that ‘diaphanousness is the supreme value’ of phenomenology.

In the opening of *On Touching*, of ‘Signing a question – from Aristotle’, Derrida turns back once more and more than once to many ghosts in asking about the place, space or interval of ‘the day’s phenomenality and its diaphanous visibility’ (3). There is the apparent choice, the phenomenological choice *par excellence*, that has to be made *between* seeing and the visible which leads Derrida to gesture – without the hand, if such a thing is possible – to both seeing *and* the visible, to ‘*both your gaze and your eyes*’: always somewhere in between (2-3).

In the opening pages of *On Touching*, there is also perhaps a fragmentary echo of Derrida’s unpublished 1967 seminar on sensible certitude in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (61-2). In responding to the unavoidable hospitality of the question from Aristotle ‘is it daytime or are we already inhabiting our night?’, Derrida evokes Hegel’s trial in which writing is used in the attempt to preserve the truth, like a night storage, to keep language safe from the oscillations of sensible certainty. There is also perhaps a distant blow or caress, somewhere always in between, from what Hegel had called Thales’ ‘clever saying’. According to Diogenes, when someone asked Thales ‘which came first, day or night, he

answered, “Night came first – by a day”’. What comes first, day or night, x or y? *Y comes first – after x*. In other words, what comes *first* has already been *preceded*. It still comes first, but ‘first’ is something that cannot be distinguished from what it follows, as in a Nietzschean genealogy. It is perhaps with these palintropes that Derrida begins *On Touching*, with a question from Aristotle. Derrida takes us back to Aristotle.

After having examined the previous and inadequate theories of the soul in *De Anima*, Aristotle doesn’t so much say what the soul is, as describe the perfect operation of the seamless *concept*. The soul is actuality working *with* potentiality, form working *with* matter. The soul is ‘the cause or source’ of sensation (415b). It is only by starting *from* the soul, that one can then turn to the dependence of sensation ‘on a process of movement or affection from without’ (416b). Sensation is reliant on the ‘stimulation of external objects’, and this demonstrates that ‘what is sensitive is so only potentially, not actually’ (417a). ‘The power of sense’, Aristotle insists, ‘never ignites *itself*, but requires an agent’. But because it is only a living body, a body with a soul in it, that can be sensitive, the precedence of what is *inside* is in no way diminished by the dependence on what is *outside*. The soul (actuality working on potentiality) is the possibility of sensation (potentiality in need of an external agent).

It is from this basic architecture that Aristotle turns to the ‘objects of sense’ and the visible as the object of sight (418a). Defining the relationship between light and colour as the origin of the visible Aristotle turns to the diaphanous, the transparent, to a *seeing through*. ‘By diaphanous’, he writes, ‘I mean what is visible, and yet not visible, and not yet visible in itself, but rather owing its visibility to the colour of something else’ (418b). Light, Aristotle argues, ‘exists whenever the potentially transparent is excited by actuality’ and, as a mirror of the soul, it reflects what Derrida had called in the *Introduction* ‘the invisible milieu of seeing’, the unseen Idea as the origin of phenomenology, and the soul – non-sensibility *par*

excellence – as the origin of the senses. The diaphanous: the profound and enduring structure of the *not x but the possibility of x*.

In his account of sound, hearing and the voice in *De Anima* Aristotle attempts to resolve a problem that arises in the senses *between* matter and form, and as Derrida suggests, it is only when he turns to touch that Aristotle will appear to solve this problem. For Aristotle, actual sound *requires* that there is always *more than one* body: ‘it is impossible for one body only to generate a sound. There must be ‘an impact’, something ‘striking against something else’. A thing ‘must be struck with a sudden sharp blow, if it is to sound’ (419b). For Aristotle, hearing *contains* this violence, but it in no way diminishes it. The ‘air chamber’ inside the ear *retains* the ‘sudden sharp blow’ that has come from outside (420a). But hearing remains *reliant* on that fact that there must always be something ‘striking against something else’, something outside. Aristotle attempts to counteract this reliance through the voice. Voice is ‘the impact of the inbreathed air against the windpipe’ and the soul is ‘the agent that produces the impact’. In other words, the soul is the *author* of an *internal* violence that makes the voice possible. This violence of the soul must guarantee that the necessary violence of ‘something else’, of something outside, can lead only to an *articulate* voice, to a voice with *meaning*: ‘what produces the impact must have soul in it and must be accompanied by an act of imagination, for voice is a sound with meaning’ (420b).

As is well known, in the 1960s and early 1970s Derrida challenged this Aristotelian legacy. Lévinas, he argued, treats ‘the sound of thought as intelligible speech’ and hearing as an ideality that surpasses the sensibility of sound, while Hegel perpetuates the logic of ‘the invisible ideality of a *logos* which-hears-itself-speak’. The diaphanous will always privilege the ear over the eye. From Aristotle to Hegel and beyond, Derrida argued, the eardrum is at once an internal buffer that regulates and orders the sudden sharp blows of the outside on the inside, *and* a membrane that *cannot stop* vibrating and registering something – always more

than one body – ‘striking against something else’, something outside. The Aristotelian ear, that fabulous Greek machine designed ‘to balance internal pressures and external pressures’, *cannot stop* registering ‘the blows from the outside’ (*les coups du dehors*).

II. EXACTITUDE

As Derrida suggests, long before it became a ‘master word’ for Nancy, the elusive balance of the ear and the authority of the diaphanous is founded on the immaculate birth of *exactness*, and it is *touch* that gives the highest exactness to humans: ‘While in respect of all the other senses we fall below many species of animals’, Aristotle writes, ‘in respect of touch we far excel all other species in exactness of discrimination. This is why man is the most intelligent of animals’ (421a). Touch is a sign of intelligence, it accounts for the human capacity for ‘exactness of discrimination’. First and foremost, touch describes the capacity to arrive at an exact – an ideal and pure – difference.

For Aristotle, the sense of touch is founded on a fundamental and exact distinction between form and matter. ‘A sense’, he writes ‘is what has the power of receiving into itself the sensible forms of things *without the matter*’ (424a). Unlike plants, which cannot make a *distinction* between the form and matter of sensible objects, from the start *we* have made an exact discrimination, and not only separated but also excluded matter from the senses (424b). The five senses in general, Aristotle argues, form a *unified* apparatus of exact discrimination. Each sense is a ratio, a balancing mechanism that avoids the extremes (the too bright or too dark, the too loud or too quiet, the too hot or too cold) that leave one senseless. The senses are a unity that ‘discriminates the differences’ and avoids excess (426b). This wondrous machine, this five-in-one, is the work of the soul, the psyche.

For Aristotle, this need for the *form* of a *medium* or *media* is inherent in each sense. Poised between extremes (too bright, too loud) seeing and hearing require that there is *no*

‘immediate contact’ with an object. If something is lying on the eye or ear it cannot be seen or heard. For the senses to work, there must be ‘*something* in between’ (419a). ‘The same, in spite of all appearances’, Aristotle argues, ‘applies also to touch and taste’ (419a).

Because there are a number of different kinds of tangible perceptions, as Derrida points out, (taste and touch, the tongue and the skin) and because of the human capacity for ‘exactness of discrimination’, the *source* of touching and of its ability to mediate is *more* than the flesh and is ‘situated farther inward’ (422b). Aristotle warns that we *cannot* use ‘contact with the flesh’ to reach – to touch – the internal origins of touching, and he illustrates this by noting that if a kind of prosthetic skin were attached or even grafted to the body it would still tell us little about the fine discriminations of touching (422b-423a). In other words, as Derrida implies, Aristotle takes account of, counts on *tekhne* in his treatment of touch.

‘We perceive everything through a medium’, Aristotle writes, but the medium of touch is distinctive (423b). When it comes to touching, ‘we are affected not *by* but along *with* the medium’ (423b). The medium is part of the message. Returning to the problem of the *unavoidable* sudden sharp blow from the outside in his account of seeing, hearing and speaking, Aristotle describes this unique inclusion of the medium in the sense as the violent reverberation of a shield being struck: ‘it is as if a man were struck through his shield, where the shock is not first given to the shield and passed on to the man, but the concussion of both is simultaneous’. When it comes to hearing, the ‘air chamber’ of the ear mediates the medium and the inside balances the force of the blow from the outside. When it comes to touch, however, there is it seems no time for such a natural homeostasis. Touching is what happens when the external blow hits the outside and the inside *simultaneously*. Touch is a simultaneous concussion of the external *and* the internal.

As Derrida suggests, Aristotle attempts to counteract the force of this argument by turning back to the soul. The flesh is the medium of touch, but the ‘power of perceiving the tangible

is seated inside' (423b). It is only this power that is 'seated inside' that can mediate, discern and confirm the form-matter, actual-potential dynamic: 'touch has for its object both what is tangible and what is intangible'. But as Derrida points out, in a passage that can also be seen as an oblique criticism of Agamben's celebration of the diaphanous self-sufficiency of potentiality, the fact that sensation 'is only *potential*' means that sense cannot 'sense *itself*': sense 'does not auto-affect itself without the motion of an exterior object' (6). The internal power of touch is, in itself and to itself, *insufficient*. It is always in *need* of the other – the other that is outside, and the other that *moves*.

For Derrida, when it comes to touch there is always the precedence of a gap that moves or, as Nancy suggests, a 'syncopated noncoincidence' (192). For there to be place or touch, there 'must be *spacing* before it is space', there must be 'an interval' that is 'neither sensible nor intelligible' (24). To touch, there must already be *gap of and* as contact (181, 229). This is even the case when we try to touch ourselves: 'the *I* self-touches spacing itself out, losing contact with itself, precisely in touching itself' (34). For Derrida, this irreducible gap, this gaping – as spacing, as the elusive *possibility* of touching another or oneself – should not be confused with the long tradition of touch as the idealization of the 'other *as* untouchable' (92). In failing to touch the *untouchable* other, whatever is reaching out to the other, ultimately, only 'touches *itself* *and* loses contact – with itself (104, 108-9). Touching, one is always touching the (moving gaps of the) other.

For Aristotle, the architecture of a soul filled touching rests on defining it as 'exactness of discrimination'. Since his early readings of Husserl, Derrida had associated exactitude with idealization – with an 'exact and nonsensible ideality' that arises *from* 'a sensible ideality'. In 'Le facteur de la vérité' (1971-1975), Derrida notes Lacan's evocation of an '*exactitude*' that treats literature as 'something that stages and makes visible, with no specific intervention of its own, like a transparent element, a general diaphanousness'. It is perhaps not fortuitous

that a few pages before this Derrida makes one of his earliest references to Nancy. For Derrida, Nancy seems to at once to echo the Aristotelian tradition of exactness *and* to exceed it: ‘Nancy is the thinker of the *exorbitant* and *exactitude* at the same time’. He is concerned with an ‘exorbitant exactitude’, an exactitude that remains ‘faithful to the excess of the exorbitant’. Derrida will later call this Nancy’s ‘exact hyperbole’ (26, 46).

For Aristotle, touch as discrimination, as mediation, as *life*, is predicated on resisting and refusing the destructive force of all ‘tangible excess’. ‘In the beginning’, Derrida argues, ‘there is abstinence’, but this abstinence is already founded on the *possibility* of touching the untouchable. Starting *with* Aristotle, touch cannot avoid the ‘hyperdialectical’ (touching without touching, contact without contact) *and*, beyond this, the disturbing hyperbole of touching (the blows *and* caresses) that exceed *both* the exact *and* the inexact (47, 67-9). Even in the midst of insisting on the life preserving mediation of the senses, of the unseen and unfelt work of the soul as the ‘exactness of discrimination’, Aristotle cannot avoid what Derrida had first called in 1972 ‘the blows from the outside’.

Taking up Aristotle’s admission that the tangible seems to entail a multiplicity of senses (422b), Derrida treats the tangible indeterminacy of the blow and the caress as a touch that is not ‘necessarily human’. The blow and the caress exceed the Aristotelian classifications. ‘A blow’, Derrida suggests, ‘is perhaps not a kind of destructive touching, indeed, of the excessive tangibility that, as Aristotle already noted, can have devastating effects.’ The caress is also ‘not only a species of soothing, beneficial, and pleasant touch, pleasure enjoyed by contact’. Beyond good and evil, beyond the exact and the inexact, ‘a caress may be a blow and *visa versa*’ (69).

For Derrida, the philosophies of touch, in particular those post-war French philosophies that responded to the work of Husserl, while never straying that far from the questions of Christianity, are always *starting again* and always too late with Aristotle. He writes:

But they already know that this thinking of touch, this thought of what “touching” means, must touch on the untouchable. Aristotle’s *Peri psuches* had already insisted on this: both the tangible and the intangible are the objects of touch. Once this incredible “truth” has been uttered, it will resonate down to the twentieth century, even within discourses apparently utterly foreign to any Aristotelianism (18).

What distinguishes Nancy, Derrida argues, is an emphasis on *prosthetics* that attempts to resist the ‘the pure life of the living’ and the ‘immediate continuity’ of intuition (19, 56, 127). At the same time, while Nancy links the possibility of exactitude to the spacing and *tekhne* of a prosthetics that exceeds the *phusis* of touch, he also associates it with a certain *starting again*, with a relaunching, a resurrection or salvation that Derrida treats as a *repetition* of Aristotelianism that is still prevalent – and perhaps most of all – in Nancy’s call for a ‘deconstruction of Christianity’ (8, 128-29)

The ‘deconstruction of Christianity’, Derrida argues, *begins with* ‘the Christian body’, a seemingly intact and unique body *to be* deconstructed (218-19). It also presupposes that there is an *outside* of Christianity, an outside or ‘passage beyond itself’ that, precisely, Christianity *par excellence* has always taken account of. Christianity has always had the ‘ability to part without parting’. This is an *exactitude* that always *takes account* of its *own* hyperbole: ‘For a certain Christianity will always take charge of the most exacting, the most *exact*, and the most eschatological hyperbole of deconstruction’ (59, 60, 54).

‘Aristotle has not left us for a moment’, Derrida insists (47). Aristotle’s *Peri psuches*, he notes, ‘begins by explaining to us, at the very outset, what one is to begin with’ (18). For Aristotle, the dynamic of matter as that which is always *ready* and form as that which is always *there* resolves any apparent problems of precedence. Passive matter can be *first*,

because it is always *potential* matter. What is always ready (potentiality) is *always* on its way to what is always there (actuality). As Aristotle observes, ‘in the individual, potential knowledge is in time prior to actual knowledge, but absolutely it is not prior even in time’ (430a). ‘All things’, he insists, ‘that come into being arise from what actually is’ (431a). Potential matter can be first, because to *be* potential, it must *already* start with and start from ‘what actually is’. This is the ontology of Aristotle. As Derrida remarks, ‘the fullness of immediate presence signifies above all the *actuality* of what gives itself effectively, energetically, *actually*’ (120). It is because potential knowledge is *not* prior ‘even in time’, Aristotle writes, to actual knowledge that ‘actual knowledge is identical with its object’ (430a). For Aristotle, *thought* – which is always of and from the soul – is always thinkable, always ‘becoming all things’, always ‘separable, impassible, unmixed’, always separable from matter, body and sensation, because ‘when separated it is alone just what it is’: ‘immortal and eternal’. It is the soul. This is where Hegel begins and ends: *with a thought that only thinks itself*.

PE(N)SER

At one point, between two notches or gaps in the right-hand column of *Glas*, Derrida gestures to a reading of Heidegger’s *What is Called Thinking?*, that he turns back to in *On Touching* (297). We are still not thinking, Heidegger insists. Drawn towards what withdraws, we must learn to think, to answer and respond to what withdraws. Thinking begins with ‘an anticipatory *reaching* out for something that is *reached* by our call, through our calling’. It is an appeal to what ‘remains to be thought’, a call to what remains – and remains to respond, *to come*. As Heidegger had first suggested in *Being and Time*, the temporalization of temporality, ‘a future which makes present in the process of having been’,

opens the question of the future possibilities *of* the past: the past always has a future.

Thought is the thinking *of* the past *for* the future. Thinking is the gift – without present.

But, as Derrida suggests, it is already *too late* to stop, and for Heidegger ‘what remains to be thought about’ also arises out of ‘the gathering of thought’ (*die Versammlung des Denkens*), of a ‘thinking back’ or ‘recollection’. Thinking always re-calls, thinks back, re-collects and *centres* the past for the future. For Heidegger, thinking inexorably takes us back, first to Socrates and the *logos* until, finally, we must *start again* with Parmenides.

From at least his 1984 memorial lectures for Paul de Man to his 1989 paper marking the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Martin Heidegger, Derrida associated Heidegger’s emphasis on *die Versammlung des Denkens* with an originary gathering, a gathering *of* the start, a re-gathering back *to* the start. In ‘Heidegger’s Ear’, he writes: ‘At bottom logocentricism is perhaps not so much the gesture that consists in placing the *lógos* at the center as the interpretation of *lógos* as *Versammlung*, that is the gathering that precisely centers what it configures’. At the same time, since at least 1984, Derrida had also raised the *question* of a ‘non-architectonic *Versammlung*’ and in ‘Heidegger’s Ear’ he gestures to the *polemos* of an *Auseinandersetzung* (a debate) that opens not only ‘the joints or couplings’ of the *Versammlung*, but also the distances and disjunctions of ‘the faults, the intervals, the gaps’. In *On Touching*, which was written not so long after this, Derrida refers to an *Auseinandersetzung* (21, 36).

In the gaps in the columns of *Glas* devoted to *What is Called Thinking?* Derrida writes: ‘one can try to displace this necessity only by thinking the remain(s) outside the horizon of essence, outside the thought of being. The remain(s) does not come-to-essence’. The necessity here that ‘one can try to displace’ refers to the reading of Hegel between the gaps and notches on Heidegger. For Hegel, in the history of spirit the ‘content of spirit’ can only

be spiritual. When thought thinks itself thinking the truth, spirit has always already taken care of the content, of the *matter* or the *weight* of thought.

At the Last Supper, Jesus speaks to his disciples at the table, and Derrida asks in *Glas*, ‘What then is Jesus doing when he says while breaking the bread: take this, this is my body given for you, do this *in memory* of me? Why already memory in the present feeling? Why does he present himself, in the present, before the hour, as cut off from his very own body and following his obsequy?’. When difference is put to work by the *Aufhebung* in the name of the history of spirit, when copulation is destined for virginity and conception for the immaculate concept, Derrida suggests, thought thinking itself thinking the truth becomes thinking *as memory*. Derrida here, once again, returns to the problem of the proximity of *Erinnerung*, *Gedächtnis*, and *Denken*, remembering, memory and thought.

In his reading of the Last Supper in *Glas*, Derrida writes: ‘Think me [*pensez-moi*], Jesus says to his friends while burdening their arms, in advance, with a bloody corpse’. This is how it all starts for *thinking*: in advance, with the body of Christ as the *burden* of thought, as the weight of thought, of thinking *as* the interiorization, the idealization, the transubstantiation of the (dead) body, the weight (lessness) of thought: think me – *pensez moi*. One can see the legacy of this burden of thought and as thought, for example, in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*: ‘Then I saw in my Dream, That *Christian* asked him further, If he could not help him off with this burden that was upon his back; For as yet he had not got rid thereof, nor could he by any means get it off without help. He told him, As to the burden, be content to bear it, until thou comest to the place of Deliverance; for there it will fall from thy back itself’ (29).

For Derrida, in marking the strange and strained relation in French between *penser* (to think) and *peser* (to weigh), thinking seems to be *neither* simply a weighing up, spirit taking account of matter, *nor* merely a weighing down, matter taking account of spirit, but always

somewhere in between. *Pe(n)ser* – does not have the weight(lessness) for an idealising re-collection.

For Hegel, Derrida writes, ‘matter is not free. It weighs, it goes towards the bottom’. Matter is heavy and thinking has its weight. Obliquely recalling Heidegger’s emphasis on thinking as a turning *towards* what turns away or a calling *back* to what has been gathered, Derrida: ‘If the gravity and the dispersion of matter to the outside are analyzed, one should recognize there a tendency, an effort tending toward unity and the gathering of self’. As he suggests, for Hegel matter is ‘a tendency toward the center and unity’ and it can neither oppose nor follow this tendency without ceasing to be matter: ‘to be opposed to its own tendency, to itself, to matter, it must be spirit. And if it yields to this tendency it is still spirit’. In the Hegelian configuration, matter is somewhat like not-being for Parmenides: to not be being, it must *be* and there can be no opposite of being: matter can only *be* spirit. But at the same time, as Derrida had suggested in ‘Violence and Metaphysics’, in the *Sophist* the Stranger acknowledges that not-being has a *relative* (and not an absolute) difference in relation to being.

For Hegel, matter has no essence and this is why it can only tend *towards* spirit. For Derrida, it is only when the ‘weight or gravity’ (*pesanteur*) of matter is not taken *as* ‘the search for unity’ that one can perhaps think anything else than spirit thinking itself thinking the truth. In *Of Grammatology*, in other words long before Nancy’s *The Gravity of Thought*, Derrida had already alluded to this difficult inheritance of weighing and thinking: ‘*thought* is here for me a perfectly neutral name, the blank part of the text, the necessarily indeterminate index of a future epoch of *différance* ... This thought has no weight. It is, in the play of the system, the very thing which never has weight’.

In *On Touching*, Derrida returns (but has he ever left?) to this question of ‘thinking *as* memory’ and of ‘*the unthinkable and unweighable*’ (35, 62). Responding to Nancy’s

evocation of a discordant ‘co-appropriation of thinking and weighing’ that is indicative of a *sense*, a sense where existence precedes essence, a sense as ‘the without-essence’, Derrida suggests that this sense without essence tends to, is co-ordinated by, the exactitude of an *inaccessibility* which determines ‘the whole weight of thought’. Derrida, in contrast, proposes to define ‘weight as that which, in touch, is marked as tangible by the opposed resistance ... the place of alterity or absolute inappropriability’ (72-74, 295). He then turns from this marking or definition *through* the resistance *of* the other back to thinking: thought, he writes, ‘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*’ (299). Thinking is unthinkable, unweighable, startling even, perhaps because it is *already* a thinking *of* and *as* the senses, an *unavoidable* accessibility or hospitality even, an interlacing oscillation, a thinking that turns backwards, once more, always more than once, a thinking of *palintropes*.

In his fifty years of reading *On the Soul*, Derrida offered what amounts to a ‘new’ history of the senses (a history that is always *à venir*), tracing the gaps of and *in* each of the senses, *and* the gaps of and *between* each of the senses: *plus de cinq* – not only five, more than five, never five-in-one. Derrida’s reading of Aristotle in *On Touching* suggests that we still have yet to interpret ‘Bottom’s Dream’: ‘The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was’. ‘One day, yes, one day, once upon a time, a terrific time, a time terrifically addressed, with as much violence as tact at its finger tips, a certain question took hold of me’.