Elsewhere I have called for an object-oriented philosophy, a project inspired by the phenomenological tradition. In Husserl, we have intentional objects: apples or mailboxes that form integral units for perception even though their sensual profiles shift wildly from one moment to the next. In Heidegger, with a bit of finesse, we have real objects: unified tool-beings that withdraw not only from theoretical description and pragmatic interaction, but from any form of causal relation at all. This dual interplay between intentional objects and their accidents, and real objects and their relations, offers a fourfold alternative to the stale Kantian rift (and equally stale post-Kantian marriage) between human and world, whose interplay is now dismally cemented as the sole topic of philosophy. Taken as a pair, Husserl and Heidegger enable a new, weird realism, in which the relation between palm trees and raindrops is no less a philosophical problem than the gap between speakers and signifieds.

Against the endless reign of humans and their written texts, object-oriented philosophy argues for a fresh return to the things themselves. A handful of partial allies is easily found in the Husserl/Heidegger tradition, in a group of thinkers I have termed the “carnal phenomenologists”: Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, and Alphonso Lingis. These authors are linked through their vivid attention to concrete entities such as bread, haunted houses, and parrots, and by the rare stylistic gifts through which they depict such objects to the reader. Yet there is another line of heirs descending from the school of Husserl, one not always on my personal list of heroes. Two of the most
prominent figures of this alternate lineage are Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy. My objections are worth noting at the outset because they make my admiration for Nancy's "Corpus" an interesting surprise. The subject matter of Derrida and Nancy is rarely the field of specific objects such as trees and radio towers, but often is restricted to famous books. Instead of giving crisp evocations of the life of sailboats or zebras, they prefer to enact in prose all the deferrals and impossibilities that they revel in describing. Here the poetry of the carnal phenomenologists gives way to a thicker of self-references, a mass of parentheses and puns, and an inflationary universe of footnotes. In many respects, it is the opposite of the style and content of philosophy I have endorsed.

Nevertheless, the two approaches share an obvious bond in their phenomenological heritage. In terms of intellectual DNA, object-oriented philosophy surely has more in common with Derrida and Nancy than it does with Deleuze, Badiou, Žižek, and cognitive science. Hence, the usual failure of Derrida and Nancy to take an object-oriented turn should be viewed as generously as possible, like the unfamiliar mannerisms of visiting cousins. There must be a clear point of divergence where they depart from phenomenology by an alternate exit. The problem is less about how to escape the textual labyrinths of Derrida and Nancy than about how to enter them in the first place. Luckily, there is a striking passage at the close of Nancy's "Corpus" that verges on object-oriented thinking. Instead of making Nancy, we find an opposite stylistic excess. This is the practice (of which I have justly been accused myself) of occasionally producing random lists of intriguing objects in the hope of jolting the reader into a field of concrete entities where neon lights and wild dogs have the same philosophical rights as the human subject and all its decentered, deconstructed, post-human stand-ins. In the final sentence of "Corpus," Nancy's object-oriented turn reaches a startling extreme:

Ribs, skulls, pelvises, irritations, shells, diamonds, drops, foams, mosaics, excavations, fingernail moons, minerals, acids, feathers, thoughts, claws, slates, pollens, sweat, shoulders, dones, suns, anuses, eyelashes, dribbles, liqueurs, slits, blocks, slicing, squeezing, removing, bellowing, smashing, burrowing, spoiling, piling up, sliding, exhaling, leaving, flowing.— (BP, 207)

Other than the stylized shift from nouns to verbs near the end, this passage would be fully at home in the works of Lingis, although Derrida would never have written it. Here is a point of entry, then. By the end of "Corpus," Nancy sounds like a carnal phenomenologist—like Lingis charting some Pacific island landscape. Yet this is the same Nancy who began the essay in his more customary style:
A corpus is not a discourse: however, what we need here is a corpus. We need a corpus, a catalog, the recitation of an empirical logos that, without transcendental reason, would be a gleaned list, random in its order or in its degree of completion, a corpus of the body's entries: dictionary entries, entries into language, body registers, registers of bodies. (BP, 189)

And this is a sentence that might have come from the pen of Derrida, but that Lingis would never dream of writing. Somehow, during the few dozen pages of "Corpus," a strange alchemy occurs that brings Nancy closer to the carnal phenomenologists than Derrida ever was. This makes his essay an ideal point of comparison with the object-oriented approach. It needs to be seen what Nancy has to say about objects, even though he rejects this word no less than Heidegger does. Nancy's term of choice is in fact corpus, a name for specific entities ranging from shells, minerals, feathers, and suns to items of more prurient interest.

THE CORPUS

The most refreshing aspect of Nancy's essay stems from his recurring catalogs of things. It is not typical of recent French thought to appeal to ribs, skulls, diamonds, and mosses. Or at least it is not typical to speak of them as actual bodies, rather than as figures of speech quoted from Valéry or Artaud. Although Nancy holds that literature does more justice to bodies than philosophy does (BP, 193), he is still concerned with these bodies themselves, not with some famous writer's passing mention of them. Although it remains to be seen what Nancy means by the bodies themselves, he has already set up shop in the most sensual zone of phenomenology. Those who label Husserl an idealist do so with justice, despite his mantra that consciousness always aims at something beyond itself. But Husserl is not just any idealist. Whereas Fichte and Hegel could only remain mute before all diamonds and moss, Husserl might easily spend a semester analyzing their appearance in consciousness. He is not just an idealist, but an object-oriented one. Plenty of action unfolds in Husserl's intentional objects, which stand obstinately before us despite every movement of negation. Husserl's field of consciousness flickers with impenetrable icons. Against all odds, Jean-Luc Nancy now joins him amidst the things themselves.

Although the opening style of Nancy's essay is overly mannered, the news here is already good. In the first two pages he asserts that bodies are nonlinguistic, autonomous, determinate, and inaccessible. As we have seen, bodies are not language: "a corpus is not a discourse: however, what we need
here is a corpus” (BP, 189). What we need, stylistically, is “a gleaned list, random in its order or in its degree of completion... a passive recording, as by a seismograph of bodies, of senses, and again of the entries of these bodies... We need to recite, to blazon, body after body, place after place, entry by entry” (BP, 189). Nancy’s seismograph seems to be in good working order: “foot, belly, mouth, nail, wound, beating, spew, breast, tattoo, eating, nerve, touching, knee, fatigue...” (BP, 190). What is surprising here is that bodies are initially treated as so many independent units. The usual move in recent French thought is to undercut a body’s presence by saying that it is contaminated from within, intertwined in a web of signs that cannot be reduced to mere indications, such that bodies are deprived of independence. Although Nancy will not entirely renounce this procedure, his random seismograms do register a certain autonomy to bodies. And this autonomy goes hand in hand with determinacy: “Two bodies cannot occupy the same space simultaneously” (BP, 189). Though mixing will occur, not everything mixes with everything. The blender has its limits; bodies are not completely contaminated.

Furthermore, Nancy concedes that we do not have access to these bodies. Or rather, we do and do not have access to them. As he puts it, the previous catalogue of bodies “would be possible only if we had access to bodies, only if they were not impenetrable, as physics defines them. Bodies impenetrable to language, and languages impenetrable to bodies, bodies themselves” (BP, 189). And because we do not have such access, “failure is given at the outset, and intentionally so” (BP, 190). But paradoxically, “a double failure is given: a failure to produce a discourse on the body, also the failure not to produce a discourse on it. A double bind, a psychosis” (BP, 190; my emphasis). Yet this is less a psychosis than a simple return to Socrates, despite the recent habit of using Plato’s dialogues as a mascot for naïve classicism. Nancy’s “psychosis” is no different from Socrates’ struggle with virtue in the Meno: a virtue that recedes from all definition, but never entirely so. Socrates fails to produce a discourse on virtue, and also fails not to produce it. There is no shame in endorsing this classical gesture, which is the founding insight of philosophy in a sense that no one has succeeded in dismantling. Wisdom is not achieved, but wisdom is sought, even as it eludes us. Philosophia is still what we do, despite Heidegger and Derrida’s endless claims to the contrary.

As a term for our dual access and non-access to bodies, Nancy selects the excellent name of touch. To touch something is to make contact with it even while remaining separate from it because the entities that touch do not fuse together. To touch is to caress a surface that belongs to something else, but never to master or consume it. It requires a certain space between beings, but also an interface where they meet. How can we touch something
without touching it? Every Socratic definition of the undefinable faces the same problem. So, too, do the Islamic and French occasionalist traditions (only God can touch anything), and their upside-down heirs in the skeptical and Kantian traditions (only human habit, custom, or categories can make things touch). "How does one touch? ... Comment toucher?" This may be the central problem in the history of philosophy because it governs all Socratic quests. "What does a word touch, if not a body? But there you have it: How can one get hold of the body? I am already speechless" (BP, 190). Far from it, Nancy goes on to say a good deal more, from which I choose just a few key points.

**MASS AND WEIGHT**

Two basic features of Nancy's notion of bodies immediately stand out. First, they are not images of some deeper original model because this would repeat the unwanted denigration of bodies found in Plato's cave, where "the body first was thought ... as buried darkness into which light only penetrates in the form of reflections, and reality only in the form of shadows" (BP, 191). The corpus is not just the surface of some cryptic underlying reality; Nancy's world is not one that honors the dimension of depth, of reality copied by derivative surface. The obvious risk associated with this step is that bodies might be reduced to their currently accessible features, thereby allowing them no excess beyond their presentation here and now. For Nancy, the ontology of the self-sufficient surface is no less dangerous than that of a hidden real world. But "bodies resist" (BP, 197). How can they resist without being hidden, real things that lie deeper than secondary cave-shadows? Nancy's attempted solution lies in his appeal to a process (my term) in which bodies are perpetually still-to-come, a constant emergence. This appeal to ongoing dynamism sets out to prevent bodies from being identified with any particular represented configuration.

The appeal is neither to presence nor to absence, but to a "birth to presence." In his preface to the English-language collection of the same name, Nancy makes this clear: "presence in its entirety is coming: which means, not 'having come' (past participle) but a coming (the action of coming, arriving). Presence is what is born, and does not cease being born. Of it and to it there is birth, and only birth" (BP, 2). And on the same page we read, "what is born has no form, nor is it the fundament that is born. To be born' means rather to transform, transport, and entrance all determinations ... It is the same with all verbs" (BP, 2). And finally, "nothing will have preexisted birth, and nothing will have succeeded it. It always 'is,' it never 'is.' To be born is the name of being" (BP, 3). Everything that occurs
is immanent in the world we know, not hailing from some depth underneath. Yet this immanent world is always a verb: churning, transforming, and birthing rather than sitting in stasis as a frozen form.

Second, bodies are not entirely isolated from one another. In an admirable pairing of terms, Nancy contrasts the weight that bodies exert on other bodies with the mass through which they concentrate in themselves. All bodies weigh against one another: celestial bodies and callous bodies, vitreous bodies, and all others. . . . Their weight is the rising of their mass to the surface" (BP, 199). This might give the impression that Nancy is skillfully balancing the internal and external lives of bodies, letting them harbor a private mass that rises to view while not reducing them to their mutual weight. But the weight of mutual relations takes clear precedence; mass serves primarily as an alibi against the charge of reducing things to their interactions, which if pressed too far would dissolve them as discrete bodies. Nancy had already spoken as follows: "a body always weighs; it lets itself weigh, be weighed. A body does not have a weight, it is a weight" (BP, 198–199; my emphasis). And, "it is by touching the other that the body is a body, absolutely separated and shared" (BP, 204). But how can touching be responsible both for the interaction of bodies and for their separation? The answer is that bodies have no individual character outside their mutual touching and weighing. Nancy contends that even though bodies are "interlaced" (BP, 195) and mutually "engrammed" (BP, 202), they do not dissolve into one another (BP, 203). They are prevented from doing so by their mass, and thus have not yet risen to the surface. Yet this mass of bodies turns out to be little more than a traditional conception of matter: nothing determinate in itself, yet capable of becoming anything. As he puts it in "The Heart of Things," there is "the same heart for all things, for every thing . . ." (BP, 167). Stated more frankly,

insofar as it is posited, exposed, insofar as it is the thing itself, every thing is whatever. The whatever of the "there is," or the anonymity of being, is being itself in the withdrawal through which it is the being of the thing . . . "Whatever" is the indeterminateness of being in what is posited and exposed within the strict, determined concretion of a singular thing, and the indeterminateness of its singular existence. (BP, 174; my emphasis)

And more candidly still: "What marks the community of things? As whatever sort of things, they are interchangeable with one another. . . . One could say [that] . . . some thing is free to be a stone, a tree, a ball, Pierre, a nail, salt, Jacques, a number, a trace, a lioness, a marguerite" (BP, 166). There is no Pierre, no salt, and no lioness before they touch one another. The in-itself
is a unified whatever, although occasional attempts are made to make each “whatever” unique, as in Nancy’s unworkable attempt to draw on Leibniz without paying the price: “No thing here is the same as another thing here; such is Leibniz’s principle” (BP, 181). Yet Leibniz pays for this principle of the identity of indiscernibles by injecting qualities directly into island-like monads. By contrast, Nancy’s monad-free vision is one in which things gain determinacy only through mutual touch. What precedes this touch is merely “whatever,” and two whatevers would have nothing to distinguish them. Hence, there cannot really be “whatevers” in the plural.

This seems to return us to the ancient pre-Socratic model of an indeterminate apeiron (just as with the Levinasian il y a, hypothesized into pieces only by human consciousness). Nancy makes a failed preemptive strike against this charge: *hen panta*, the One-All, does not designate the ‘one and the same thing’ of all things but, on the contrary, the ‘being the spacing of all things’ of the One, which is not a thing” (BP, 187). Yet this does not strike at the heart of the accusation. It merely asserts that there is no shapeless One apart from the spacing between specific bodies; it does not provide for any spacing within the One itself. We are still left with a unified whatever and a determinate spacing of touching and resisting bodies. No form or determination is provided for anything outside the relational kingdom of mutual weights. Take an imagined glimpse behind the realm where bodies touch, weigh, and transform one another and you will find that they are no longer those bodies: they are merely “whatever.” They are simply unformed matter.

To summarize, Nancy wants to account for the paradoxical sufficiency and insufficiency of bodies. They are self-sufficient insofar as they do not copy a real model in the manner of cave-shadows, but they are insufficient because they must be more than their current configuration in the world, under penalty of being exhausted by their presentation. His two-pronged strategy for addressing this paradox is as follows:

1. Bodies are not fixed, stable moments, but a perpetual coming-into-birth.

2. Bodies are not fully determined through their mutual contact, but each is a “whatever” capable of becoming anything else, which is precisely what prime matter means for Aristotle.

In short, process and matter are the keys to Nancy’s corpus-based ontology. The common link between the two terms is clear enough. We know that Nancy does not hold that bodies can be reduced to their specific articulations here and now. Something must lie in reserve, unformatted in any
sort of presence. Otherwise, bodies would always already be exhausted in the present and lose their resistance. Yet he makes the fateful assumption that whatever is withheld from representation cannot have a form. What he fears most is the two-tiered world of cave and sky, and allowing for hidden bodies already formed would reduce the mutually caressing bodies that we encounter to flickering simulacra in a cavern.

This evident worry has the following consequences. For Nancy, if the determinate form of bodies takes shape in a relational interplay of bodies weighing on each other, this can be countered only by a formless mass belonging to each body, but one that is also the same for all of them. And if the form of bodies refers to their adequate expression through the presence of an individual body, this is undercut only by appeal to a coming-to-birth that subverts each presence from within. In other words, when Nancy says that a diamond has form through its interaction with the bodies it touches, he is careful to add that it also remains autonomous as a shapeless whatever that allows it to unleash surprise and resistance to its neighbors. And even when Nancy considers the diamond as a visible form in isolation from its neighbors, this transient configuration is eclipsed, not by a veiled being of the diamond, but by an endless process of emergence, a ceaseless coming that can never be pinned down in a determinate shape.

CORPUS VS. OBJECT

All of this places Nancy at odds with the object-oriented view for which I have argued. This would not bother him because the term “object” is not one of his favorites: “knowledge wants an object, but with bodies there is only subject. . . . The ‘body’ is ground for not having any object” (BP, 199). Although Nancy shares Heidegger’s disdain for the word, it is for the opposite reason. For Heidegger, “object” refers to things reduced to mere representations, and hence they are too superficial to be true. For Nancy, “object” refers to an objective reality deeper than the cave-shadows, and hence is too falsely deep to be true. In my view, “object” is too flexible a term to waste on pejorative missions of this sort. Hence, I employ it as a positive name for the sole subject matter of philosophy as understood by Socrates and ratified by Nancy himself—that which cannot be touched and also cannot not be touched. This untouchable touches deserving the name of “object.” What I mean by an object is a concrete reality that has specific determination or form quite apart from its relations with anything else, and quite apart from its purely accidental way of being on the stage at any moment. Nancy shares this wish to give bodies more than their here-and-now, but he does this by appeal to process and matter, to birth and “whatever.” He describes birth and what it is, of a coherence, the real that has been in the world, in the world, in the world.
and whatever in such a way that they are devoid of all determination, that is, of any specific form. As I see it, this is the downfall of his theory, but also of similar theories found in Bruno, Schelling, and Deleuze, although the remainder of this chapter focuses simply on Nancy.

Nancy’s return to specific bodies is refreshing when contrasted with most continental philosophy. Yet he immediately equates specificity with an overly determinate surface, and counteracts this surface with formless mass-matter and emergent birth. As we have already seen, the fact that the two always go together for Nancy, that there is no birth without something being born, and no formless “whatever” without a specific configuration of touching, does not address the real issue. It remains the case for Nancy that all determinacy of bodies is accessible, and that whatever that withholds itself from access must be indeterminate. Why is he so reluctant to allow for concealed forms? The reason seems to lie in a simultaneous rejection of Plato’s doubled world along with a full embrace of Kant’s.

That is to say, Nancy is appalled by any model that would oppose veiled hammers to openly embodied ones, since this would reduce the embodied hammer to second-rate status. Yet he still needs some current of reality to throb beneath the immanent world, such that things will not be exhaustively representable. By shying away from shoes-in-themselves and dogs-in-themselves, he has no alternative but to endorse a formless layer of reality able to volatilize the transient determinate weights of bodies. The formless One is opposed to the formatted many, even as we hear repeatedly that the One exists only through its upsurge into the many. This aligns Nancy with a fairly mainstream consensus that dismisses individual objects as insufficient. It is said that the actual needs potentiality, or virtuality, or disembodied laws that the actual will follow as it transmutes into new states of the actual. What all such models share is the notion that there can be no hidden actualities, no determinate individuals apart from their relations to others, no cryptic entities. On this view there can only be relational forms, not substantial forms. If someone objects that substantial forms belong to a classical model of Western ontology that has been overcome, my answer is that the alternatives belong to a modernist model of Western ontology that ought to be overcome—a basically Kantian vision in which things are granted form only when they are shaped by some other entity. Against this model, we should pursue the paradox by which objects are what touch without touching. This is a paradox that spreads well beyond the bounds of human access to the world and into the fibers of the world itself, as when fire burns cotton or earthquakes topple boulders. The dilemma of touching and not-touching must always be a question of objects versus objects, not objects versus humans, formed bodies versus formless matter, or individual bodies versus global birth. What makes objects so fascinating is that they
are determinate despite both separating and not separating themselves from the rest of the world.

Imagine that diamonds and moss are both found in some odd situation, perhaps an "Orientalist" scenario involving smugglers, headhunters, elephants, and monkeys. Imagine now that Nancy and Husserl are both on the scene and are asked to assess it. Nancy would say that these bodies all touch one another without touching, massaging each other's contours and jostling each other while somehow remaining discrete. He would not go so far as to say that they are entirely exhausted by these relations (as my allies Latour and Whitehead would wrongly say). Nancy needs some principle of excess outside the touching, under penalty of reducing all bodies to adequate presence. Yet the excess he comes up with is merely a "whatever" at the heart of things. Monkey is only monkey thanks to its touchings; what is left over is—whatever. Diamond is diamond only in its touchings; the diamond-residue outside these touchings is—again, whatever. Moss without its neighbors is—once more, the same whatever. This recurring term reminds us uncomfortably of the jaded speech of my fellow members of Generation X, who came of age using this dismissive word to smear everything into the same cynical pulp: "A real world?... Whatever."

Now contrast Nancy's account with Husserl's. At each moment, Husserl sees the diamond sparkle in different ways as he circles the scene. The monkey screeches ever more heartily, increasing tension in the moods of the nearby smugglers. The headhunters and elephants are witnessed in ominous approach, appearing ever larger in Husserl's field of view. Now, if Husserl wants to describe what belongs to the diamond or monkey outside their specific configurations, he will not call them whatever. In fact, this would be an obvious mistake. For Husserl, there is a clear difference between diamond-in-this-specific-format and diamond. We know this in the simplest of ways: the diamond undergoes numerous surface variations even as we continue to think of it as the same thing. It is our own sincerity that makes a split between the diamond and each of its transient profiles. Conscious beings subtract the accidents from a thing and vaguely sense its determinate core, even when they are hallucinating or utterly wrong. What stands opposed to diamond-in-this-specific-format is not "whatever," but diamond. What stands opposed to monkey-in-this-specific-format is monkey, not a shapeless mass of matter. This conclusion requires no gullible realism metaphysics because the real world is not yet at issue. All that is needed is a quick look at the field of perception, where bodies are accepted as the same bodies through countless shifting variations. But Nancy loses all sense of Husserl's tension between intentional objects and their accidental variations. For Nancy, a body is either completely determinate in its relations to other things, or it is merely whatever. Contrast this with Husserl, for whom a body (i.e., an
ON INTERFACE

intentional object) constantly withstands shifts in the regime of touches and weights, unless it shifts so greatly that we no longer admit it to be the same anymore. Husserl’s object-oriented approach allows an intentional object to be form, not just matter, quite apart from its interactions with other perceived bodies.

Now imagine that Husserl departs, and Nancy is joined by Heidegger. It is nightfall. The humans and animals have fallen asleep, and the torchlight produces a fairly uniform glow on the diamonds. Nancy and Heidegger sit motionless in fairly stable moods, not circling the objects from various perspectives, but staring intently at one of the diamonds as an isolated individual. Both agree that the diamond cannot be reduced to its current manifestation; this would reduce it to mere presence without reserve. Yet their methods of escaping this predicament are entirely different. For Nancy, there can be no concealed diamond-in-itself, since this would reduce the present diamond to a mere shadow on a cave wall. Hence, he would speak only of an emergent process, a birth to presence that undercuts the claims of the diamond here-and-now without positing a withdrawn, determinately formed diamond. By contrast, Heidegger would rescue the diamond from exhaustive presence through the familiar route of the tool-analysis. For Heidegger, the diamond is irreducible to its presence-at-hand insofar as the diamond does not exhaust its reality. The diamond is always full of surprises. It may have absorbed so much heat from the torches that it will scald the hand of the next person who touches it. It may be so riddled with unknown internal flaws that it shatters at the next sound echoing through the jungle. Through these surprising failures of expectation, we come to see that the diamond is something other than what we thought. In short, what lies outside the current presence of the diamond is not merely a process or a perpetual coming-to-birth. Rather, this perpetual birthing is possible only if the presence of the diamond does not exhaust its diamond-reality, which must exist elsewhere.

Returning to the more familiar case of the hammer from Being and Time, the tool does not surprise us with malfunction because of some formless natal principle, but because of the difference between our previous use of the hammer and the hammer in its own cryptic, veiled, subterranean reality. What undercuts the presence of an object is not some vague process, but a real object not fully exhausted by its previous incarnation in relation to others. And here is the first moment where we might be accused of “naïve realism,” although I would prefer to call it an inevitable realism, an unavoidable theory that objects have a specific structure whether we encounter them or not. As long as objects (Nancy’s “bodies”) are reduced to their fully determinate character here and now, there is no way to save their capacity for motion and change by appealing to a shapeless process
or a uniform material whatever. At bottom this is nothing but the old \textit{vis dominitia} maneuver: The sleeping potion causes sleep by virtue of a sleeping-power, and bodies change by virtue of a changing-power, or \textit{vis motio}, that we might call by the name of “matter.” But an appeal to matter does not solve the problem. The only way to account for dynamism in the world is to draw a distinction between real objects and the relational caricatures of them as encountered by other objects.

**CONCLUSION**

To summarize, Nancy recognizes no tension between objects and their accidents, or objects and their relations. Indeed, he does not recognize objects in my sense at all, meaning objects that are both determinate and concealed. For Nancy, bodies are fully constituted by their touching of other bodies, and are saved from this fate only by what is not itself already formatted: either natal process, or masses of whatever. His shift from the largely textual references of his colleagues to actual seashells, skulls, and balloons is a welcome step toward a philosophy of objects. But we cannot endorse his refusal to let a body have forms that are not produced in interaction with other bodies. For Nancy, anything outside the relational sphere of touching and weighing can only be a shapeless mass or a throbbing field of birth.

This weakens his otherwise fascinating treatment of touch. Recall that touch or tact were meant to address the paradoxical (and entirely classical) fact that we both grasp and fail to grasp bodies. But it now looks as though we grasp them a great deal more than we fail to grasp them. For what really escapes our grasp for Nancy is not bodies, but only the natal process or mass that escapes determinate configuration. But we have seen that matter or process themselves are always One, and are more than a One only insofar as they imply a spacing of discrete bodies that they themselves generate. In other words, the problem of touch is merely dissolved rather than solved. Instead of bodies that touch without touching, we have bodies that surge forth from the same unified One. Bodies are permitted to escape the genuine paradox of contact. Insofar as they are discrete bodies, they are already in contact \textit{qua} weights; insofar as they exceed contact \textit{qua} masses, they are not discrete bodies at all.

To repeat, what is missing in Nancy is all sensitivity to determinate objects that exist both in and out of contact. The problem of touch is the problem of finding an \textit{interface} where determinate objects touch without touching, link without entirely linking. Nancy begins “Corpus” wonderfully by raising the problem of touch. But the recourse to shapeless mass, matter, or coming-to-being softens the paradox to the point where it no longer exists. One horn of the bull is cleanly sawed away.
NOTES


2. See Part One of my Guerrilla Metaphysics.


4. This claim is somewhat controversial because at most times Heidegger does seem to think that reality has no determination until Dasein breaks it into chunks, just as the early Levinas holds. But a strong case can be made for a Heidegger who allows for individual objects in themselves—not just in the later lecture on “The Thing,” but already in the tool-analysis itself. I have made this case at length in Tool-Being, throughout.