

# Being Corpus

## The Tourist Body as Place, Touch and Departure

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CHAPTER 4

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# Being Corpus: The Tourist Body as Place, Touch and Departure

*AyA Autrui*

<b>Staying proximate with:</b>	Body, texts, technology, friendship, and Jean-Luc Nancy's <i>Corpus</i> .
<b>Methodological approach:</b>	Philosophising tourism, proximating through reading and writing, friendship as methodology.
<b>Main concepts:</b>	Corpus, ontology of the body, being-with, place, touch, departure.
<b>Tips for future research:</b>	Being touched by a philosophical work, reimagining the body and the world of bodies, friendship as a way of knowing.

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What could feel more proximate than the body? These hands moving across the keyboard, your eyes touching the text, right this moment, here. These hands—gloves of skin, folded, marked, decorated, crossroads of veins and ancestry, decay and love. Hands that hold, caress, care and embrace, write and create, human chain hands linked in solidarity, hands that punch and pull triggers, sanitised hands that also pick blueberries. Bodies as a multispecies materiality, skin, mass, weight and also a vibrant tone, extension and spacing. The expansiveness of a body, of all bodies, countless and immeasurable. What could be more proximate than *these* hands, *this* body?

It is with a sense of proximity that we touch and are touched by Jean-Luc Nancy's (2008a) book *Corpus*,<sup>1</sup> moving through its pages, marking it here and there, keeping it safe in our travel bags, displaying it on a table and making space for it in the place of our bodies. The physical proximity of the book is only one of the many ways in which Nancy ideas and words touch us. They enter dreams and mouths. We sense the thinking and imagination of his writing as moods and experiences that trespass us, surprise us, hold us, embrace us, challenge us and push us. A proximity of writing that touches, a proximate writing so close and intimate that it opens, exposes and extends bodies as much as thought, where thinking, body and book touch one another.

Inspired by Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy of the body in *Corpus*, in this chapter we offer an exposition of proximating tourism methodologies. We write with and through Nancy's ontology of the body to open new ways of engaging with proximity in relation to three common tourism themes: *place, touch and departure*. The philosophical reflections

<sup>1</sup> The book we refer to in this chapter is the volume *Corpus* by Jean-Luc Nancy published by Fordham University Press, translated by Richard A. Rand, and published in English in 2008. The book is a compilation of works of different style and character. Our reflections center on the title essay and largest text of the book, 'Corpus' (C, 2–121), which was written between 1990 and 1992. The other six works included in the volume (122–170) revisit and expand some of the main questions raised in the 'Corpus' essay. We introduce some of the perspectives of these other works such as 'On the soul' (OS, 122–135), a lecture given by Nancy in 1994 after a colloquium on 'The Body' at the Regional School of the Fine Arts in Le Mans. To avoid confusion between the volume and its essays we use the initials of the essays' titles in the citation and include the full reference to the essays/works in the bibliography.

on these themes evolve in conversation with the experiences of travelling bodies walking the Kumano Kodo Pilgrimage Trail and visiting Kyoto and Wakayama University, Japan, in January 2023. While this trip included relationships to a larger group of academics, tourist professionals and students, the expressive collage of experiences shared in this chapter relate mainly to our being-with Emily Höckert (Emmi) and Nancy's book *Corpus*. Emmi's scholarship is the main inspiration for our engagement with proximity tourism (Grimwood and Höckert 2022; Höckert 2023). We (Adam Doering and Ana María Munar) and Emmi work in different countries and met through the Critical Tourism Studies network. Our encounter with Jean-Luc Nancy is different; Adam had been studying and writing with Nancy's philosophy for many years, since his PhD, while Ana met Nancy in 2020 thanks to Adam's work (Doering 2016; Doering and Zhang 2018).

Methodology asks questions about how we go about researching something. What tools do we use to know? How do we go about knowing what we 'know'? We see these questions of methodology as inextricably proximate to ontology, which asks questions of reality, being and becoming. Any knowing relates to being. Proximatising methodologies are for us an invitation to engage with philosophical writing as a *proximate* being-with the text, in this case *Corpus*. Rather than offering a close reading, an application of theory or a curated collection of concepts or ideas, proximatising methodologies asks us to consider new kinds of sense-making. Philosophising *as* bodies that touch (ours, Nancy's, the many that inspired him and us, the many that we share this with...a population stretching across time and space), as hands stretching towards, selves exposed and extending, living, sensing, making sense with/as bodies, in other words writing a *corpus* of proximity.

## CORPUS: THE BODY AS PROXIMITY AND DISTANCE

Nancy's (2008a) *Corpus* is a philosophy dedicated to renewing our thinking of 'the body.' Through corpus, he attempts to problematise the distinction between understanding a body as the site of unity, integrity, embodiment and a body as dislocation, exposition and space (Morin 2016). He does this through his play with the word corpus. Corpus is Latin for 'body' and comprises the etymological root for several words pertaining to the materiality/physicality of the body: *corps* (French for body), corporeal and corpse. But corpus also refers to a collection, or a

*body* of knowledge, comprising all the writings of a particular author or subject. With one meaning of corpus touching the other, as a singular unified body and a collective plurality of bodies, in his fragmented ‘Fifty-eight Indices on the Body’ Nancy (2008c, 151) writes, ‘Corpus: a body is a collection of pieces, bits, members, zones, states, functions. (...) It’s a collection of collections, *a corpus corporum*, whose unity remains a question for itself.’ In a similar way, Nancy’s corpus traverses several classical dualisms—proximity and distance, place and space, singular and plural, individual and mass, return and departure, coming and going, interiority and exteriority and thought and body—by emphasising the relational, the crossing and the *touch* of one into/with each other.

Instead of thinking these binaries through dialectics (either/or) or sublimating/synthesising/concentrating them through the fusion of difference into sameness (an integration into one/singular), Nancy’s *Corpus* is an expression of his central philosophical proposition, that being is always *being-with*, existence is essentially co-existence, that there is no self-autonomous ‘I’ before ‘we,’ but in a way that we are together but never fully united (see *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy 2000). *Corpus* invites us to consider this *being-with* ontology alongside contemporary discussions of the body. How is a body shared? How to think through a body not conceived as enclosure, but as a sharing in exposure, the body as a being-together? These questions ask us to think not only how proximate a body may or may not be to the material world, the non-human world or the worlds of other bodies, but instead inspires us to consider proximity as an ontology of the body, an anatomy of exposing and the sharing in *being* exposed.

Corpus helps us to reconsider these classical divisions by reminding us that ‘body’ itself is not a self-enclosed singularity or essence, that the skin does not enclose a body but marks a limit where touch between self and other, self and world, is happening. Nancy exposes us to a corporeal existence both as discreteness and continuous discontinuity (C, 25), a corpus where ‘a body is an image offered to other bodies, a whole corpus of images stretched from body to body’ (C, 121), a corpus ‘making room for the community of our bodies, opening the space that is ours’ (C, 55). Nancy does not eliminate or substitute the word ‘body’ with ‘corpus’ or replace the singular body with a collective one. One touches upon the other in creative combinations that inspire new ways of thinking the body and proximity differently, and ‘it does so by affirming that the human

remains to be discovered' (Nancy 2000, xi). Let's begin this human rediscovery by exploring the possibility of the toured and touring bodies—all bodies—as place.

### ‘FINLAND, FINLAND, FINLAND’: TOURIST BODIES AS PLACE

‘And did I already mention that we have the sauna? And Santa Claus?...’ The warmth of Emmi’s smile expands our hearts. ‘Mmmm, yes, you did,’ we answer leaning into her soft self-irony. ‘And I do not sweat...’ she exclaims. The steep climbing makes our breathing deep and unstable. A mist of silence and peace stretch over the Kii Mountain Range, ‘You sleep like a cat...’ Ana tells Emmi in the sweet intimacy of the morning. The sound waves of Monty Python (1980) singing ‘Finland, Finland, Finland...You’re so near to Russia, so far from Japan’ travelling out of Simon’s mobile, spreading out and expanding (Fig. 4.1). We sing along, ‘Finland, Finland, Finland,’ the taste of beer mixing with laughter. It is freezing by the river at night. Adam playfully touches Emmi’s back, ‘That must be sweating?’—an event.

Emmi is a researcher from Lapland (Finland), and we are together walking the Nakahechi Route of the Kumano Kodo Pilgrimage Trail in Wakayama, Japan. In tourism studies, we commonly speak of the purpose for travel with little reflection—what is the main reason behind our decision to travel: business, visiting friends and relatives, leisure. Regardless of motivational categories, Emmi and Ana travelled to Japan to be with Adam (alongside many others). Adam is not just the *reason*, but also the *place* of visit. A body *as* place, which as we will see is quite different from other common uses of the word as something particular, a point or area in space. Rather we want to invite an open, displacing and spacious concept of the body for tourism to consider. Sure some activities are planned for the visit: to walk Kumano Kodo together with other researchers and students, teach, present research on Critical Tourism Studies at Wakayama University, explore potential collaborations, but the inspiration to travel is also a form of proximity tourism, a moving towards what is already closest to our hearts; the longing, admiration and love that is in friendship fostering the desire to visit each other. This proximity tourism is the visiting body, bodies dispersed from distant locations and also bodies being *placed* together. Importantly, this ‘being placed together’ is neither the ‘lived body’ or ‘body proper’ of phenomenology nor the performative



**Fig. 4.1** Bodies taking-place. Simon Wearne playing ‘Finland, Finland, Finland,’ showing it to Emmi along the Hiki River. Chikatsuyu Town, Japan. January 8, 2023. Photo by Ana

tourist body common to tourism scholarship (Edensor 2001; Veijola and Jokinen 1994). Rather for Nancy the body is a localised *place* of existence.

The statement that ‘bodies are place’ can appear surprising or invite some strange connotations, for example, of medical or sexual exploration. However, in one of the most extraordinary and lucid passages of ‘Corpus,’ Nancy (2008b) invites us to think of body as the place of existence:

Bodies aren’t some kind of fullness or filled space (space is filled everywhere): They are open space, implying, in some sense, a space more

properly spacious than spatial, what could be called a place. Bodies are places of existence, and nothing exists without a place, a *there*, a 'here', a 'here is,' for a *this*. The body-place isn't full or empty, since it doesn't have an outside or an inside, any more than it has parts, a totality, functions, or finality...it is a skin, variously folded, refolded, unfolded, multiplied, invaginated, exogastrulated, orificed, evasive, invaded, stretched, relaxed, excited, distressed, tied, untied. In these and thousands other ways, the body *makes room* for existence (no 'a priory forms of intuition' here, no 'table of categories': the transcendental resides in an indefinite modification and spacious modulation of skin). More precisely, it makes room for the fact that the essence of existence is to be without any essence. That's why the *ontology of the body* is ontology itself: being's in no way prior or subjacent to the phenomenon here. The body is the being of existence...basically an ontology where the body = the place of existence, or *local existence*. (C, 15)

In the passage above, Nancy's presents an ontology of the body that provokes a reimagining of our ways of approaching or understanding what it means to visit some-*one*, to visit some-*body*. What does it mean to think Adam's body *as* place, a destination, when bodies themselves are a place of existence, a being-with body that in thousands of ways makes room for existence? What does it mean to think of Emmi's and Ana's bodies as such, all the bodies of the world as such? How can we get to know or think about *corpus*, about these multiple ways of making room for existence that bodies are? What hospitality manifests as making room for existence? What forms of proximity take place in and with a world of bodies as places?

In this edited volume, we are asked to reflect on the space of the Arctic. Emmi's arrival is also the spacing and taking place of the Arctic, being visited by the Arctic, but not metaphorically, emblematically or representationally. 'Emmi' *as* touring and toured body is neither a representative of a geographical category or an embodiment of an Arctic identity. Being-with Emmi next to the Hiki River, to walk beside one another on the pilgrimage trail—all together, human and non-human—is to be a body taking-place: this is what *places* are. Returning to the opening scene of this section, we sense what Nancy (2008b, 17) means when he suggests, '[t]he body is a place that opens, displaces and spaces...*making room for them* to create an event.' Without bodies, there is no taking-place, no coming into existence, no arrival of the Arctic coming into existence either here or there. Emmi's body—all bodies—is the open, exposed, vibrant body



*as* taking-place. A body as place is necessarily a corpus, an exposition of bodies that in a multitude of ways, invites, speaks, thinks and exposes us to the Arctic; through jokes, smiles, rhythms, chocolates, breath, mittens, Finnish and Icelandic wool, Rovaniemi, Santa Claus, tears...a body space that exposes and extends the Arctic existence into (our) existence, now as our looks, thoughts, dreams, moods, memories, new intensities (Fig. 4.2).

It is through the uncontrolled of the multitudes of ways in which research collaboration can unfold when bodies of friends meet that the contribution to this book appeared as an invitation. This is one of the ways in which research and knowledge *takes place*. Friendship is a proximatising methodology—the open existing of bodies reading, laughing, thinking, eyes, shoulders, nails, lungs, shivers, hugs...a praxis of being-with each other. Visiting friends makes room for knowing and emphasises what's



**Fig. 4.2** Three pairs of travelling mittens knitted with care and gifted by Emmi during the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage. Emily Höckert, Facebook Post, January 11, 2023

most incomparable and irreplaceable in bodies, the incommensurability of us existing together in the world.

Nancy (C, 53) suggests ‘We’d need a *corpus*: a catalogue instead of a logos,’ an ontology of the body instead of a geography. Corpus is not mapping out anything. We need a thinking that will not describe our travel as autonomous individual subjects, supposedly ‘singular’ (C, 91), placed in an Euclidian map of spatial distances, or as relations between people and place, but instead a thinking with proximity that can embrace what we are: a body/self as exposed, fragmented, pieced together and expansive (Munar and Doering 2022), a spacing and taking-place of bodies instead of the discourse of a ‘generic general humanity’ (C, 93), ‘bodies opening up their places’ (C, 99) being exposed together, at ‘once worldwide and local’ (C, 91), bodies ‘being laid bare, their manifold population, their multiplied swerves, their interlinked networks, their cross-breedings’ (C, 91), in other words bodies as the place of existence. Like the images and expressions that begin this section, walking the spiritual pilgrimage of Kumano Kodo and visiting a friend is *making room* for each other’s places, both there and here—the (t)here of each body as a singular *and* shared existence. But how does a body come into existence? Touch.

### EXISTENCE ARRIVING: CORPUS AND THE PROXIMITY OF TOUCH

In their article exploring the affective entanglements of travelling mittens, like ones travelling along the Kumano Kodo shown in Fig. 4.2, Kugapi and Höckert (2022) draw our attention to the importance of touch, asking what does it mean to touch or be touched? In Fig. 4.2, one can sense the warmth of hands entering the woollen travelling mittens, how they travel with us, affecting us while walking, offering a sense of comfort, inviting care and friendship, and with the snow, forest and northern light patterned felting, is also a spacing of Finland and the Arctic. We have been, and still are touched, by these travelling mittens. In a sense we agree that thinking with touch can ‘inspire a sense of connectedness and problematise dualistic divisions between subjects and objects, self and other, affects and facts’ (Kugapi and Höckert 2022, 468), to which we would add body and soul, body and mind, body and machine. Nancy’s ontology of the body pushes the idea of touch to its limit, to the edge of a body that is touched and touching, always, here and now.

If proximity is characterised as relative degrees of physical closeness and immediacy—of being-with and being-here—then touching something is as about as close/immediate as you can get. We often think of touch as one of the five senses, hands touching, skin touching and being touched. Tourism imaginations of touch seem to imply physical proximity—sensing the heat of the water at the onsen, the clapping of hands at the shrine ... holding, caressing, pushing, squeezing, high-fives, hugging. This common imagination of the proximity of touch (touching and being touched through hands, lips, skin) reflects an understanding of body as enclosed by its image; an I/self from the inside reaching towards and being reached by an outside. However, Nancy invites us to think touch differently and beyond simply one of the five senses when he writes touch ‘is not just a question of the hands, but basically concerns the sense of existence’ (OS, 132).

Touch is the *emotion* (being set in motion, affected, shaken, interrupted, surprised, breached) and *commotion* (being set in motion with) that touches (OS, 135). The body is always sensing, and therefore ontological speaking, bodies *are* touch. This touch of proximity is at once the felt sense of hands-in-mittens *and* the arrival of photos, scribbles and words sent through messenger conversations, bodies dispersed and extended across thousands of kilometres, from the coast of Wakayama in Japan to the coast of Copenhagen in Denmark in the autumn of 2022 (Fig. 4.3). This is proximity at a distance, an intimacy of bits, bytes and beats, flashing on the screen in our hands, an extension of expected joy as texts and images, a touch that arrives as Nancy describes it, ‘from the sense of words’ (C, 47). But a sense of words written in blood, shared through bodies.

Simple messages on a mobile like the ones in the images touch us and are us. To sense something like the mood of a message is a form of seeing and that form of seeing *is* touch (OS, 131). A corpus is touching—words in our mouths touching before being expressed, dream images touching the wavy neural pathways, colours as receptive signals touching our eyes, nerve systems touching, hands touching keyboards and eyes touching screens, intensities, affects, emotions as images, thoughts, sweat, pulse, heat...all touching. Being-body-touch, always ‘with’ and always in a ‘here,’ and always taking place ‘somewhere’:

it makes no sense to talk about body and thought apart from each other, as if each could somehow subsist on its own: They *are* only their touching

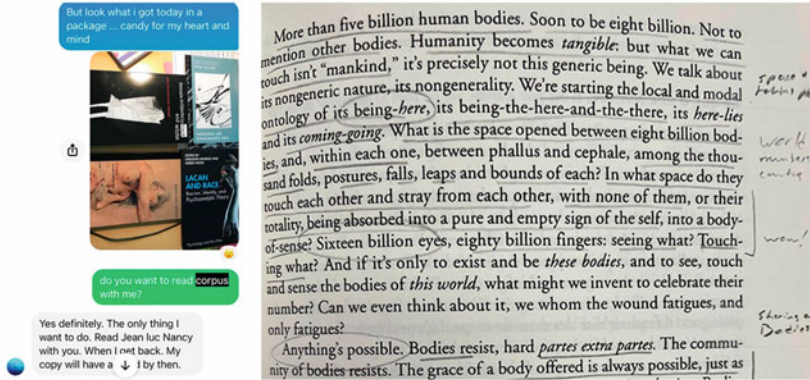


Fig. 4.3 *Corpus*, faraway so close. Photos sent to each other during winter 2022–2023 as part of our ongoing conversation and dialogue with the book. (C, 83)

each other, the touch of their breaking down, and into, each other. This touching is the limit and spacing of existence. (C, 37)

Bodies *are* a taking place of touch, and to touch is to say the body is shared, exposed and extended. ‘That’s the whole point,’ Nancy (OS, 124) exclaims, ‘the body’s a thing of extension.’ A body is a *being* exposed, and a body exposed is a body extended, the proximity of touch is extension.

When we think, share, read and write these images/messages we are either sitting together in Wakayama, at the university, at a cafe...or are thousands of kilometres away and yet through all, *there is* touch. And if then there is touch, are we then proximate? Because touch is not only a question of being there (i.e., as the proximity of two bodies as singular points in space), instead Nancy (2008d) puts forth the possibility that “being the there”—exactly in the sense that when a subject appears, when a baby is born, there is a new ‘there.’ Space, extension in general, is extended and opened’ (OS, 132–133). A body is always a *there* in a *here*, a local existence in the sense of a ‘*coming to presence*,’ and like the screen where these messages are written and read, is a body ‘coming from nowhere behind the screen, [but] *being* the spacing of this screen, existing as its extension...*right at my eyes* (my body)’ (C, 63). The arrival of existence taking-place through bodies *as* touch, which Nancy describes is always ‘local, necessarily local’ (C, 65). But a local that is not ‘a piece of

ground, a province' (C, 15), rather it is the opening and exposing of the singular intensity of a skin-event, a body, which is the place for an event of existence. A proximity and spacing that is always localised through the body.

Months passed with the coming-and-going-and-tasting of the reading of *Corpus*. A methodology of slowness, awe and delay expressed through fragmented writing, unsynchronised messages noticing the light touches of humour, irreverence, poetry, courage of the book. Months of proximate scribbling—underlining every sentence, drawing hearts, question marks, words hanging on the margins, colour coding rainbows...tattooing Nancy's thinking. Mobile phone photographing, zooming into paragraphs, digital flashes cutting sentences from the body of text as shown in Fig. 4.3. Spacious reading with place and as place, carrying Nancy and the weight of his words around: Corpus with sea, Corpus with cafes, Corpus with family, Corpus at work and on holidays, Corpus travelling from Denmark to meet Corpus in Japan. Nancy's writing having been sent to us, his being sending itself (C, 19) as an invitation to explore the possibility that writing and reading are also proximate and bodied, through touch. Writing proximity with corpus is therefore,

...less 'about' the body than *from the body*, subtracting it materially from its signifying imprints: and doing so *here, on the read and written page*. Bodies for good or for ill, are touching each other upon this page, or more precisely, the page itself is a touching (of my hand while it writes, and your hands while they hold the book). This touch is infinitely indirect, deferred – machines, vehicles, photocopies, eyes, still other hands are all interposed – but it continues as a slight, resistant, fine texture, the infinitesimal dust of a contact, everywhere interrupted and pursued. In the end, here and now, your own gaze touches the same traces of characters as mine, and you read me, and I write you. Somewhere, this takes place. (C, 51)

From this ontology a proximate methodology attends to how body and thought touch into each other. A methodology where *touch* problematises the dualisms and essentialisations already critiqued by Kugapi and Höckert, while also attuning us to the possibility that these mittens are *touching* us here, now, on this page. Material, technology, writing, reading, eyes, you and I... touching each other upon this page. The *there* itself of our bodies is an opening and exposition, not substance, not a geometrical/geographical point on a map. Touching is blood touching the veins, the air touching the lungs, cells touching in their

becoming, every one of your hairs touching another, millions of bacteria touching in and through the gut, blueberry touching the mucosa of the stomach, the neurons pulsing carrying touching...*and* emotion and commotion: dreaming, writing, reading, sensing, feeling, noticing...Us thinking, talking, messaging.

## DEPARTURES: AN ONTOLOGY OF THE BODY

‘So if I change my ontology do I change myself? What if instead of the ontology of Levinas I was to take the one of Nancy?’ Emmi asks. Stuttering his way through a response Adam replies, ‘Ontology is ontology. You can’t just choose your own ontology, that doesn’t make any sense.’ ‘Why not? I am going to change my ontology!’ Insists Emmi with a mischievous smile that would make Little My<sup>2</sup> proud. Adam stops in the middle of the walkway of the Philosophers Path in Kyoto [*Tetsugaku no Michi*], his whole body silently exclaiming ‘Ahhh...I can’t explain!’ Our last day together has been full of passionate, playful conversation about *thinking being* and *being*, and now is very late, we are tired, and Emmi is leaving.

Re-reading *Corpus* the making sense of the memory portrayed above keeps expanding because we can’t explain, who can explain? We, as bodies, remain ex-posed, always ex-positioning. ‘The ontological body has yet to be thought’ says Nancy (C, 15). Our bodies are a *there* that are always a *here*, and a here that is *spacing, sensing, touch*. What is the leaving and departing of a body? How can a place of existence depart? What is the event of Emmi’s departure? Nancy (C, 33) explains that existentially speaking ‘Bodies are always about to leave, on the verge of a movement, a fall, a gap, a dislocation,’ but even the simplest *departure*, when *somebody* leaves:

is just this: the moment when some body’s no longer *there*, right *here* where he was. The moment he makes room for a lone gulf in the spacing

<sup>2</sup> Little My was part of our conversations during our Kumano Kodo pilgrimage. She is one of the characters of the Moomin book series (1954 and 1975) by the Finnish author and artist Tove Jansson. Rebellious and independent, Little My is known for her sharp intelligence. Years ago, Emmi gifted a pendant of Little My as the present to the examiner of her PhD examination, Kellee Caton. Mentioning Little My was touching a beloved friend, Kellee and Jansson, both brilliant examples of philosophical sensibility. <https://www.moomin.com/en/characters/little-my/>.

that he himself *is*. A departing body carries its spacing away, it gets carried away as spacing, and somehow it sets itself aside, withdraws into oneself—while leaving its very spacing ‘behind’—one says—in *its place* with this place remaining its own, at once absolutely intact and absolutely abandoned...this spacing, this departure, is its very intimacy...the body is *self* in departure...the *a-part-self*, *as departure*, is what’s exposed. (C, 33)

Saturday night standing outside the Wakayama JR train station we feel exhausted and yet we linger. We delight in Emmi’s proximity. Tomorrow she will return home carrying away her spacing, her taking-place, her body. There is a sense of delight and sadness, joy and pain, when friends depart, a reminder of the grace and finitude that we are as place of existence; a loss of the intimacy that exists when our bodies, light masses and vibrant sensing matter, are *placed* together. We will find solace in other proximities, the ones of our hearts, a corpus of memories, thoughts, materials where we can hold and touch the being of a friend. Fight melancholy with multiple touches through messages, photographs, us being sent to each other and into each other’s ‘here’ in different ways, tones and textures.

And now this writing departs. Departing without final destination and arriving only as an exposure and opening unto a proximatising methodology of philosophising tourism: an empathic engagement with philosophical reading and writing, philosophising bodies as place, touch and departure, and thereby making sense and getting to know through friendship. Here, now, as your gaze touches this page, we touch you and you touch us, and we are touched by Nancy, by what and who he was touched by: an unknown immensity of exscribed light and the immeasurable touch of ‘the world of bodies’ (C, 31). This *is* proximity, the *being* bodies in proximity, at once here *and* there, worldwide *and* local, touched *and* spaced, from body to body. With this proximity of corpus, a sense of gratefulness has perhaps never felt closer.

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