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## The touch of words: obscure spatial encounters

### ABSTRACT

This article addresses the touch of words on corporeality in reading, performing, and writing in an artistic research project. Here, touch refers to forms of listening, perceiving, moving, and writing triggered by Finnish people's written memories and experiences concerning mental hospitals. The article, which forms part of the outcome of a multidisciplinary research project titled *Engraved in the body*, is based on the effects on the researcher of reading these written accounts. Through their inexplicable touch, their obscurity, these memories have haunted, fascinated, and driven the artist-researcher to perform and write in a way which, while not 'knowing' anything, nevertheless acknowledges the unpredictable affective touch of memories. This has led the writer and performer to experience infinite spatialities in which conscious acts are replaced by the resonance of memories, generating in turn a kind of non-personal corporeality for transmitting something in them that is hidden or inexpressible through traces of their touch on corporeality. Throughout the process of reading these memories, the continuous

practice of a somatic movement technique, the Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT), with its poetic vocabulary and notion of the spatiality of corporeality enabled exposure and attunement to the quality of the written memories of others and to the silence beyond them. Alongside SRT, this article draws specifically on the insights of Maurice Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy to articulate the lived relation between corporeality, language, and writing.

“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.” (Nancy 1993, 190)

This article contemplates and wanders around words, language, an unknown corporeality, and the way these move in and through different spaces. It is about movement in reading, writing, and performing in and through words as spiraling, waiting, erasing, tuning in, immersing, breathing and being still. It is about the spatiality of corporeality, such as the space in between the vertebrae or the valleys of the hips, cultivated by the practice of a somatic movement method, the Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT),<sup>1</sup> and the space in between and within words. Here, I dive into words and movement, and through writing ponder how the touch of words has surprised, affected, and haunted me, resonating in the spatiality of corporeality, and opening the senses beyond signification, beyond meaning in the acts of reading, performing and writing. The quotation from Jean-Luc Nancy spotlights the relation between words and corporeality that I explore by tracing a lived corporeal experience in the context

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth SRT.

of an artistic research project.

The words and sentences that have touched my corporeality derive from research material gathered in connection with a multidisciplinary research project titled *Engraved in the body: Finnish people's memories of mental hospitals*.<sup>2</sup> The content of these written memories has been studied in detail and the results presented in several publications in different disciplines (e.g., Jäntti et. al 2021; Kuuva 2018; Maanmieli 2019). In the artistic research project presented here, the focus is on the nature of the touch of these memories and their impact on my corporeality as cultivated by SRT. This dance technique, created by the dancer Joan Skinner in the 1960s and since further developed by her together with her practitioners, is a movement method that not only enhances the alignment of corporeality and effortless movement but also connects physicality with imagination and acts as a conduit to transformation. Here, aside from the notion of touching and being touched, touch is discussed as listening, perceiving, moving, and writing as informed by these memories. What, then, can be said about the touch of words in reading, performing, and writing, and what does it do?

In this project, approaching words and language through corporeal attunement and listening has been an exploratory process in which each step has been grounded in lived experience. This approach is in line with the practice of phenomenology delineated by Max van Manen (2014, 15) as “for

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<sup>2</sup> Finnish people's memories and experiences of mental hospitals have been collected and archived in the Finnish Literary Society. The multidisciplinary project, with its five researchers, has been funded by the Kone Foundation. See <https://muistoihinkaivertuneet.wordpress.com/english/>

practice and of practice”. He further specifies the practice of phenomenological research as an approach which “reflects on and in practice, and prepares for practice” as well as “fosters and strengthens an embodied ontology, epistemology and axiology of thoughtful and tactful action” (ibid. 2014, 15). Here, the acts of reading, performing, and writing are discussed in relation to the notion of touch through the embedded and ongoing practice of SRT. Moreover, it is only through the act of writing, in the creation of the text, that I can know something of what I think, something about how the touch of words affects, and is transmitted through, corporeality and how the lived yet unsayable influences the system of language in writing. Hence, writing is far from signification, “but a gesture toward touching upon sense” (Nancy 2008,17), a shifting condition in the journey of writing without arriving anywhere and without any particular meaning. Language meanders and resonates beyond individual experience (Pylkkö 1998) without reaching stasis. This understanding of language has influenced a way of writing that spirals and returns repeatedly to the same topic.

### READING: PERCEIVING THE IMPERCEIVABLE THROUGH THE SPATIALITY OF CORPOREALITY

Immersing myself in about 600 pages of handwritten or typed memories by patients, relatives, staff and their children was a turning point, a core experience that informed all the artistic acts generated in this project. Surrendering to those memories, especially those of patients, drew me towards them, and offering them space and time has meant

crossing a threshold of possible actions that are characterized by hunches and fractures. The following citation from my working notes ponders the encounter between those memories and this unknown corporeality experienced during the process:

In the bright morning the tension between lightness of the day and darkness of this corporeality is heavy, drawing me somewhere to the edge where unseen views unfold and shadows meander gently like whispers. Silences and noises grow and erupt from the texts of others that fill the room. Witnessing these, this lump of flesh sitting at the table is moved by powers overshadowing my own previous ghosts. Drugs, locked doors, sleepless nights, whiteness, gloomy corridors, and windowsills arrive and intermingle uninvited. They are impossible to grasp. There is no escape. The opacity of my corporeality grows and a feeling of alienation with it, of being displaced and entering a foreign corporeality. In the gap between being lost and found, just breathing this touch, which enters by corporeality, cleans and clears it from that which was previously known. Drifting in and through the spatialities of this foreign corporeality, through the events and locations written about and through this room where reading happens. Spaces overlap and intersect; am I sliding between the spatio-temporality of these memories of the past and that of the always disappearing present moment? Clusters of spatial densities keep on moving in their contingent pace; I am awake and perceiving. Through the imprint of words on my corporeality something engraves, hides, transgresses, erases, occasionally flickering, only to recede into the distance beyond apprehension. That something does not leave me in peace.

In reading those memories, the touch of language has affected and reverberated throughout my corporeality, and rather than remaining an abstract notion, it is lived as an alien one. Although I have been practising SRT for 18 years<sup>3</sup> and been exposed to many other movement and somatic techniques, such as the Klein Technique and the Feldenkrais Method, becoming embodied and written by them, the impact on my corporeality when reading these memories took me by surprise, something which continues to puzzle me. Certain fragments of these memories searched for dwelling sites in my corporeality while calling up the sense of spatiality and textuality cultivated by the practice of SRT. It was as if the words had touched my corporeality first and it was only later that I became cognizant of this. Moreover, as part of the overall impression, the act of reading was interwoven with my surroundings rendering me foreign to myself, both separate from and attached to these memories and the physical location where the reading was being done.

Practising SRT has led me to experience a particular kind of attunement, a way of being in the world, in which notions like shifting awareness or availability all increase the sense of spatiality. Its porousness blurs the contours between the space inside and outside of corporeality, creating indistinctness: air and breath move easily through them. Furthermore, multidirectional alignment, maintaining a watchful state, effortless effort, suppleness, and gradually letting go become embedded in corporeality and guide one's perceptions (Dempster 1996; Lepkoff 1999). Hence, I have become so captured by the principles and features of SRT that my corporeality remembers them – I only become conscious of this

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<sup>3</sup> From 2004 onwards and qualifying as a teacher of SRT in 2017.

afterwards – and the impact of SRT extends to all my actions in everyday life, in the present instance to reading. The main principle of the technique, letting go, allows the spaciousness of corporeality to unfold itself for memories without the rationalising self, enabling me to let go of both stiff muscles and thinking patterns which would otherwise prevent me from perceiving how each moment discloses itself.

The vocabulary of SRT has a crucial role in its practice, since its imagery has led me into both misty and crystal-clear realms that have made my corporeality spacious, spongy, alert, and ready for instantly changing situations. The words used in SRT, through their texture and spatiality, like an image of bones transforming into soft shadows and inner landscape and becoming “a lacy lattice of shadow and space [in which] the breath can move into the lattice as white mist” (Skinner 2005, class 13), perpetually unfold the layers of one’s corporeality for potential ways of sensing and perceiving. In addition to the resonance of words or images in SRT, this lump of flesh has also been exposed to a variety of physical touches by a movement partner like tapping, brushing, combing, nudging or holding. The intention of such touches is to hint, to offer possible ways to be freely aligned in the world rather than seeking to change the one to conform to a given ideal. All this has also had a strong impact on the corporeal experience of reading these memories; the resonance of words and sentences along with the silence they carry in and beyond them have become meaningful through their enigmatic touch on corporeality.

The immensity of the words in the SRT vocabulary has, like the vast spaces opening in corporeality, aided the disappearance of the self-contained subject. Altogether, the

SRT process has made it possible to detach oneself from one's characteristics and preferences and become a kind of "empty place where impersonal affirmation emerges" (Blanchot 1982/1955, 55). While Blanchot speaks of loss in relation to the emptiness in which one places oneself, in my own experiences of SRT, the loss of the former I has been transformed into relatedness, a state of becoming human and more-than-human. Impersonal or non-personal corporeality has been opened up to make connections, to breathe with the environment, to be available for touching and being touched. Exposing oneself to others' memories has been about moving and looking *with* those memories, not *at* them (cf. Harpin 2018, 12–13), and, to live and breathe with them and their contents through corporeality over a period of several years. SRT is directed for moving, yet it contains theory which unfolds through experiencing. Here, SRT is put in conversation with some of the writings of Nancy and Blanchot that resonate with such notions of SRT as multi-directionality and the various temporalities of corporeality that offer a frame for those memories.

In my corporeality, words bearing the weight of patients' experiences of mental hospitals have palpated, pierced, attacked, caressed, and questioned me. And they have vanished, fallen apart, dissolved, and faded only to reappear in a slightly different way. All this movement has created space between words and sentences, making it possible to listen to their rhythms, silences, jumps, so that in reading these pages my corporeality has been in a state of tremor, reverberations from which have spilled over into my performances and writing. To give just one example, related to the effect of a memory of medications, that has become en-



graved on my corporeality, generating a sense of vertigo: “it makes your heart race and drains all your energy. You had to hurry to bed, because otherwise it was hard to stay upright” (SKS 256). The difference between verticality and horizontality is enormous: the touch of the bed extending from the heels to the back of the skull compared with the contact felt through the bottom of the feet. Also, the contrast between releasing oneself on one’s bed and trying to control one’s balance while standing is obvious: they are two distinct modes of being. Moreover, notions related to isolation cells, locked doors, straightjackets or medications have caused me to feel a wound-like piercing through my skin, rendering me even more vulnerable to words. Perhaps my way of reading memories containing suffering and pain resembles that described by Blanchot (1992/1973, 86): “Listening, not to the words, but to the suffering that endlessly, from one word to the next, runs through words.” These wounds in my skin have borne and strengthened an ethical demand: to value and respect the experiences of others as such; there is no way to ‘know’ them.

In corporeal attunement, reading memories is also accompanied by and interacts with the location, time, and events to which they are linked as well as to spatiality beyond the signification of words. Memories often include a specific season, time of day or a unique quality attached to their site or event, while the qualities attached to walls, corridors or inpatients’ rooms are suffused with gloominess and bleakness or a sense of separation, as in the following quote; “I was forgotten about, all alone in a timeless space” (SKS 390). This sentence resonated immediately in my sternum, creating a hollow crater with lacerated edges that led me to experience a void. That situation so described eliminates the touch of life,

its richness of its odors, colors, sounds and textures, prompting the question, how is recovery possible?

Alongside the bleak descriptions of patients, notions of the mental hospital as “a sort of refuge” or having “the most beautiful garden in its grounds” demonstrate something of the caring side of words in these memories. The following fragment from *The Enchanted Way* by Oscar Parland describing a situation where a little boy tries to understand when his grandmother reads the bible aloud to him offers an illuminating example of touch as conveyed by words:

“The only thing I understand is that love is in your tongue (...) it also sounds quite right when you think about the animals in the Garden of Eden, because it was with their tongues they tasted the fruits they gave each other, and it was with their tongues they licked each other’s faces and necks when they wanted to show how much they liked each other, and it was with their tongues they whispered endearments into each other’s ears.” (Parland 1991: 51–52)

Perhaps something of that sensuous quality, a similar kind of tasting of words, an embodiment of them, is present in one fragment of memory. In it, the writer plays with the compound word for a mental hospital, “mielisairaala,” [mental hospital] reminding one of another meaning of the Finnish word “mieli-”, which is something loved or dear (SKS 369). Making a space in between the two words creates a surprising effect and induces a reappraisal of one’s memories.

Writings that have overwhelmed my corporeality when reading them comprise in part suffering, anxiety, and fear and in part feelings like being safe. To be taken captive by

the memories of others, whose meanings blur, unsettle, and require a pause, allows them to affect the spatiality of corporeality without the control or will of the subject. As already mentioned, the notion of self as an unknown porous entity developed during the practice of SRT has facilitated the occurrence of these odd encounters with their perplexing touch. The touch of words and language have enabled subjectivity to disperse, to be touched by the inconceivable, which belongs to an endless process of transformation. The way in which these memories are read by my corporeality, where the practice of SRT forms a kind of non-ground on which to perceive and dwell in the world, remains obscure. In somatic practice, touch is often understood as listening, as an exchange and modality for increasing awareness of habits of movement and the potential for movement. It can also be viewed as an opening up of space (Longley 2016). Thus, reading this material has not been solely an ordeal; it has also disclosed something significant, and I am grateful to the writers for enabling this. The lived sense of tactility embedded in their words and language has had an impact on me and continues to communicate with me in unexpected ways.

Furthermore, in reading, in attuning to the words on the page and immersing oneself in them through the spaces created by corporeality is reminiscent of Nancy's description of listening to music. He states how listening is "pure resonance" and is an "opening up sense or beyond-sense or sense that goes beyond signification" (Nancy 2007, 31). In that act of listening, corporeality is "a resonance chamber or column of beyond-meaning" (ibid.). Thus, reading as listening to memories through one's corporeality can be viewed as opening up the undefined self and the possibilities for

movement as proposed by Nancy. He describes how listening means entering a space where he is penetrated: it opens up, in and around, from and toward him, and through these various openings a “self” can take place (Nancy 2007, 14.) In my corporeal listening, I have become a kind of non-site of resonance, which has given rise to actions – movement, writing and performing (Heimonen 2020a). Thus, listening entails space, it creates a singularity sensitive to “the sharing of an inside/outside, division and participation, de-connection and contagion” (Nancy 2007, 14). The notions of listening or reading have to do with the creation of attentive contact with music or language and how the unknown spatiality of corporeality acts in a continuous state of becoming.

As SRT is a poetic practice (Emslie 2021, 2), in which one immerses oneself in its vocabulary and images and is transformed by them (Dempster 1996; Skura 1990), some fragments of the read memories found dwelling sites in my corporeality, and their touch initiated artistic actions. Exposing myself to words and the fragments of memories by reading them has enabled me to enter unheard and imperceptible spheres and produce singular interpretations via writing and performing. Thus, I have become an other and language has become an other that is always new, its rhythm and tone creating unique spheres to enter. One term in the large dataset, namely the walking cage (Kävelyhäkki in Finnish), an enclosure for inpatients to exercise in the open air in the grounds of a mental hospital, generated a durational performance in a cage made of chicken-wire constructed in the grounds of a former mental hospital in Lapinlahti, Helsinki (Heimonen 2021). The script of a short film, *Here, Somehow*, which forms part of the project, is based on inpatients’ experiences which

are brought to life through movement. The spatio-temporal experience of making the film led to an article (Heimonen 2020b). Below, the focus is on performing to different audiences through and with fragments of memories.

### PERFORMING AS FLESHING OUT FRAGMENTS OF MEMORIES

The touch of words generated movement<sup>4</sup>; it was an indispensable act to flesh out selected fragments of memories in performance works in order to gain corporeal insights from them. I surrendered to those memories by letting movement emerge from my perception of the text, based on a script that I had created from selected memory fragments read aloud by my fellow researchers. In turn, this state generated another kind of speech, such as the repetition of certain words in the text or giving details about the performance site. This kind of performing as fleshing out fragments of a text through movement in different locations involved material thinking and thinking by doing. In it, thinking was understood “as a practice, as acting *with* the material, *in* materials, or *through* materials” (Mersch 2015, 9), and hence the sensuous interplay between materials – such as fragments of memories and the performance sites – and my corporeality in its movements coalesced to form a singular event each time. In this kind of interplay, the material elements also exercise agency in informing the acts of the artist, rendering it impossible to

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<sup>4</sup> For example, at the conference of Material Cultures of Psychiatry in Berlin 2.5.2018 and at International MindSpaces Theatre Festival as a part of Tampere Theatre Festival’s Off Tampere Event 7.8.2018.

determine who or what produces the work of art (Rouhiainen 2017). Thus, many writers of the memories, my research colleagues and the material and immaterial elements of the performance site were called upon in staging and acting out these events.

My performances took place in various settings, such as art events or conferences, in which the memories inscribed on my corporeality were fleshed out: something performs itself through the medium of the corporeal. In these situations, my conscious acts were replaced by the resonance of the memories generating a kind of non-personal corporeality for transmitting something hidden in the memories through traces of touches imprinted on or emerging from my corporeality. This state can be described as a kind of possession, in which I move yet am simultaneously able to witness how something moves me. I maintained the manifold role of transmitting the shifting touch of words and simultaneously acting as a witness as a kind of co-performer who follows the performance from the sidelines and is unable to (drastically) change its route. For example, in a performance at a conference, when the script was about the experience of a patient for whom watching snowflakes falling in the night brought calmness, I noticed how my breathing had become deeper, the boundaries of my corporeality had blurred, my speaking voice had softened, the tension of performing had dissipated, and I became aligned with the rows of chairs in the auditorium as well as with the whole event. The view from the window showing tall pine trees in spring was not in any contradiction with the snowflakes entering the spaces in and around my corporeality through words, or with sensing snowflakes touching my arms, hands and legs when pushing

them gently around me. The space and time of the performance and this memory fragment were overlapping, transparent and fleeting. It seemed that the image of slowly falling snowflakes and the space between them spread across the auditorium, and the stillness of the audience, its appreciation of a silent moment, enlarged and invited the perceptions of those present. And in an instant the situation changed: another fragment of memory in the script to which my corporeality was instantly alert and in tune had intervened, resulting in a sudden invisible cut.

In performance events, a multitude of touches co-existed: the original – yet continuously shifting – touch of words emanating from reading the memories, the tone of voice of my research colleagues when reading the selected fragments aloud, the materiality and immateriality of the performance site, its light and temperature conditions and the season. Layers of lived moments from reading the memories in my room and living with them also awoke and contributed to each unfolding situation. In addition, the gaze of members of the audience affected, touched my constantly changing corporeality, thereby becoming part of an evolving instant choreography. It was about trusting the lived words of others, perceiving their ambiguous touch and the situation, and letting movement emerge through all of these. While moving, the silent impact of the memories sometimes weighed heavily and at other times lightly on my corporeality. The knowledge that emerged from those touches in those situations exceeded rational, conscious experience.

And what effects do such touches have on the performer in these situations? The first rehearsals were exhausting. The script read aloud by my colleague while I was moving and

sketching the movement map for each fragment made my corporeality tired and heavy. It was as if I were inhaling all the pain and anxiety contained in the memories and traveling across the locations linked to them. To my surprise, in a performance at an art event held in a public library in Helsinki everything was otherwise: the-one-who-was-moving became light and playful to an extent that totally surprised me. An ethical dilemma emerged in the act of performing: was the tone of the performance insulting to those who had experienced mental health problems? However, the rationalising self could not subjugate the power of living those memories through movement in the rotunda, which interwove and spiralled in the performance as a spatio-temporal layer.

Afterwards, I talked with some of the spectators, who told me that the performance had caused the experiences of others to “powerfully permeate their skin” and move them. However, I remained puzzled about the event; what had lightness to do with suffering? Although it did not lessen the sense of it, even showing a glimpse of it in a circuitous way was clearly a hazard. In another performance, put on as part of a theatre festival, the reception was more one of wonderment, and my attention was paid to minute details of the performance site alongside those described in the memories. One spectator thought that everything, including the words I spoke had been planned and carefully rehearsed. Another wanted to talk to me in private and apologise for almost bursting into laughter, since “you were exactly like patients in a mental hospital, I’ve had experience of that”. Thus, the words I spoke resonated among and impacted audiences in various ways in these unexpected situations.

While performing and sharing these memories through



movement and speech, I was in a state of both separation and belonging. These moments akin to touch were characterised by nonlinear temporality and spatiality. Nancy speaks of something similar: “It is by touching the other that the body is a body, absolutely separated and absolutely shared [*partagé*]” (Nancy 1993, 204). In being present in others’ written memories, their sites and seasons, as well as in each performing location and moment, thereness and hereeness become intertwined, forming a nexus of resonances, sounds and shadows. Performing was like falling or surrendering to a passage of time where the spatiality of corporeality becomes inseparable from the timeless reality in which the intertwined present, past and future hang suspended. By giving myself over to others’ realities in mental hospitals and asylums across the decades and simultaneously perceiving human and more-than-human environments, I became fully absorbed and lost in time (Heimonen 2020b). All this was perplexing, yet consoling, since the self-contained subject disappeared during those moments, perhaps enabling me to share something inexplicable that is ingrained in the memories I had read.

The union of dance and writing has historically been strong; in fact, choreography contains both “dance” and “to write”. In the field of choreography, new experimental forms of writing have emerged, including drawings, letters and scores (Gansterer et al. 2017; Gaudreau 2020; Rouhiainen and Heimonen 2021). This linking of writing, choreography, and dancing is a robust one: as stated by André Lepecki (2004, 124), “dance cannot be imagined without writing”. In my work, the focus is on spacious unknown corporeality and a way of perceiving and processing language and location through performance as a mode of writing. As already

mentioned, this instant choreography transcended my intentions as a choreographer and performer, and it may also have exceeded the intentions of audiences, as Ric Allsop and Lepecki (2008, 7–8) suggest.

Perceiving spoken memories and the immediate situation as instant choreography entailed delivering selected fragments of memories through the porousness of corporeality, a way of addressing oneself “to the touch of something outside, hidden, displaced, spaced” as Nancy (2008, 17) delineates the act of writing. Trust in words and the realities they convey guided the route taken by both performing and writing with and through others’ memories. The process was about losing oneself yet allowing vestiges of the written memories to dwell in the spatiality of corporeality in which multi-directionality and different temporalities co-exist. It was about inhaling the absence of the presence of those reminiscences and allowing oneself as not-known to act through their spatiality and that of one’s own corporeality. The effect of the enigmatic touch of memories on corporeality questions, appears, and disappears in the rhythms of the performance situation.

To pin down the meaning of the performed fragments of memories is impossible. For Susan Leigh Foster, it is impossible to describe in words what is done in movement, since it is “too wild, too chaotic, too insignificant. Vanished, disappeared, evaporated into thinness air, the body’s habitats and idiosyncrasies, even the practices that codify and regiment it, leave only the most disparate residual traces” (Foster 1995, 4). While the linguistic sense in the memories choreographed here escape meaning, they have nonetheless thoroughly palpated and made a call on corporeality that through movement has, I hope, transmitted something of their intricate

nature. Something, perhaps, has ruptured, become unsettled, or reverberated.

### WRITING: TRACKING (NON-)TRACEABLE TOUCHES ON CORPOREALITY

Corporeal attunement to writings about mental hospitals, allowing them to affect and resonate in reading, performing, and writing, resembles Blanchot's (1982/1955, 26–27) notion of writing as surrendering to the interminable, and the writer giving up saying "I". The continuous practice of SRT, using its words and poetic images, creates voids with a shifting volume and density in and around corporeality, which is also strongly present in writing. The feeling of being in the darkness, stripped of one's personality and inhaling something ungraspable also attends the act of writing. In this kind of spacious reality, certainties fade, enabling listening through corporeality, meaning listening as perceiving the touch of memories that have imprinted themselves on this foreign corporeality, and to trace that by writing.

In both moving and writing, although they belong to different realities, the lived spatiality of corporeality has blurred and questioned the distinctness of this subject, so that previous safe places from which to act have evaporated; relatedness with the world is enough. The feelings of being overwhelmed by memories, of being lost and disorientated, of being unable to write and waiting for words to arrive, have left me exhausted. And then, experiencing a pause, waiting without waiting, and lingering somewhere in all that spaciousness between activity and passivity, has brought relief.

The stillness felt when sitting at the table carries a potential for movement; and then, finally, words emerge that might convey some of the resonances generated by the memories without taking them over. In SRT classes, working with images containing the phrases “just being” or “just breathe” encourages a kind of inaction, a state of not doing but of pausing and perceiving. Perhaps it is waiting itself that prompts the attention needed in writing, attention which is not inwardly directed but which transports one to the endlessness of waiting, to “the extreme limit that does not allow itself to be reached” (Blanchot 1997/1962, 23). That which escapes or is hidden without ever being revealed becomes meaningful in the process of writing: a matter of the inexplicability of touch.

In the time spent waiting for writing to emerge, being attuned through the spaciousness of corporeality to memory fragments, with their different rhythms, silences and meaningful meaningless, called up spheres of writing that felt both airy and dense. And it is only through the act of writing, by following the movement of the hand, that one will know what one thinks during that moment. Processual writing of this kind is about writing and rewriting countless times as if one is continuously in a state of becoming and retreating, where something appears and then hides. The strange touch felt when reading the memories does not fade; its imprint remains while writing. And nevertheless, my relatedness to my surroundings, how this room in which I am writing is filled with memories, the light-coloured walls and window-sills that echo those in the memories, generates the action of writing. Within hands reach, selected books open on the table at times make their appeals: the thoughts of others in-

spire, question, and open new perspectives on the phenomenon. The textual spaces intertwine with those of the corporeal and physical sites. And yet perhaps after all, writing is not to inscribe, “but to erase, by traces, all traces, to disappear in the fragmentary space of writing.” (Blanchot 1992/1973, 50).

When writing, I approach the dark space of text that contains something of the unperceivable, unheard, unseen. The tension that darkness creates, the void that is stable and movable, permeates corporeality yet is unreachable. Blanchot (1999/1981, 442) describes how “one can only write if one arrives at the instant towards which one can only move through space opened by the movement of writing.” What then is writing? In *the Writing of Disaster*, he offers one (impossible) answer: “To write is perhaps to bring to the surface something like absent meaning, to welcome the passive pressure which is not yet what we can call thought, for it is already the disastrous ruin of thought” (Blanchot 1995, 41). My way of approaching language and writing is to let the movement of my fingers and the whole of my corporeality lead the way, while acknowledging there is also that which escapes and erases itself. And yet, where, as if they were conveying some meaning, did this pile of words come from? The need to write and rewrite, to obliterate and reiterate, this movement of writing spirals, passes through time and space as listening to, remembering, forgetting and palpating words. The repetition of words is needed to know, to gain a sense of how one acts with and through words. And yet, after writing, corporeality remains permeated by the traces of sentences; and that which has been written passes into oblivion.

Writing as way of addressing the touch of something hidden (cf. Nancy 2008, 17) is about being lost yet letting

memories, in this case written memories of mental hospitals, dwell and move through one's spacious corporeality. In this sense writing – and performing – is to expose oneself to “exscription” (Nancy 1993, 338), which Nancy characterizes as “to write from a body that we neither have nor are, but where being is exscribed” (Nancy 2008, 19). Jacques Derrida, the author of *On touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, discusses the need to wonder about the body and its force, and how the syllable ex- in the word ex-scribed sets in motion, and by its excess, pushes out and throws subjectivity into exteriority (Derrida 2005, 26–27). Movement, that of a hand or one's whole corporeality, is crucial as it generates thinking through one's (unknown) corporeality. Movement is an outcome of one's relational contact with the writings of others and the environment, even if by circulating around the notion of touch its explicable nature seems to strengthen the obscurity of the writing process. Moreover, SRT as a nonlinear and web-like process influences this exscription in ways that may be troublesome for the reader due to reiteration and the way of writing.

Approaching writing in this way – as well as making art and practicing SRT– in all its strangeness and spatiality has led me to surrender to something insurmountable. The odd spatiality in SRT and the disappearance of the writing subject chime with the Blanchot's notion that to write is to be “a witness to the unencountered, answerable not only for the void in the subject, but for the subject as a void” (Blanchot 1995/1980, 121). However, in this void, darkness or night in which words move and disappear, language itself may speak, as Blanchot discusses in relation to the poetry of Mallarmé:

“Words, we know, have the power to make things disappear,

to make them appear as things that have vanished (...) But words, having the power to make things “arise” at the heart of their absence – words which are masters of this absence – also have the power to disappear in it themselves.” (Blanchot 1982/1955, 43)

This interplay between absence and presence as the power of words is relevant not only to the way of attuning to memories and writing described here, but also to experiences of movement considered in relation to the vocabulary of SRT. Thus, one becomes porous by surrendering to images like moss or mist and experiencing the blurring of the contours of corporeality. Could this kind of expansion or transformation of space in corporeality influence writing such that the proximity of signification would fade, and language offered a possibility to have its own effect?

Nevertheless, words have generated movement and other speech, words have gripped and woven their webs in and around corporeality. Words are overwhelming – hearing and becoming words by moving, by falling down onto the earth and being pushed into a corner with them, soaring with them, getting lost through them. Words continue their spirals, both merging with and never encountering one another.

### TRANSIENT VIGOROUS TOUCH

Touch in reading as listening through corporeality traverses the voids, gaps, finite and infinite spatialities in and around corporeality. And in performing, the vestiges of memories have moved and circled, even in non-localizable spaces, gen-

erating movement and other speech. In writing – as well as in reading and performing – being immersed in memories and being transported with and through spaces again chimes with the thoughts of Blanchot, who acknowledges the elemental feature of space in literature and writing: “Language can only begin with the void; no fullness, no certainty can ever speak; something essential is lacking in anyone who expresses himself.” (Blanchot 1995/1981, 324). Writing performs, taking its own course, and in all such actions the subject is displaced. It seems that by allowing oneself to be disorientated by memories or the practice of SRT has enabled the known “I” to disappear, at least momentarily. Yet, the “I” does not belong to itself, since it is “always already lost” (Blanchot 1995/ 1980, 64). This no-one who writes knowing nothing is left with a sense of alterity and bewilderment. Language breaths in and through spaces, offering opportunities to sense and be affected yet its touch prohibits any attempts to instrumentalise it.

This artistic research project was about dwelling with words, moving, writing, sleeping, eating, and breathing with them. The memories written by others have not left me; the process continues. The waves of the resonance engendered by reading those memories flow over other, different occasions, and affect my performing and writing. By perceiving language through corporeality, my attention and approach to it has become sensuous, and reading, like writing, is “a matter of tact” (Nancy 2008, 87). Words do matter: in reading one is haunted by imperceptible things through and beyond words whose touch on corporeality is constantly shifting as if tracing ghosts or in possession of (almost) unperceivable realms. Words scatter in space, lose their meanings, while becom-



ing momentarily sensuous, unattainable yet appealing. The intimacy of the touch felt when reading others' memories has stayed with me, and the features of bleakness, sadness or being safe remain firmly suspended in my corporeality. And perhaps this way of writing, which meanders around mistiness letting touches take place without the need to offer lucid explanations, maintains this intimacy with words. It is enough just to approach the impossible, to carve out something which is formless, unheard, untouched, yet powerfully affecting, demanding to be performed and written, and even saying nothing. However, leaving things unnamed exposes one to the danger of losing the ability to communicate.

The appearing and disappearing of traces in corporeality arising from actions taken with others' writings have left me with a yearning for the unsayable, as words fall apart in their writing. However, for the reader, has this search for words to say the unsayable (Mersch 2015, 10) been over-explicated or has it remained too obscure? Words may gather, linger, wander through corporeality and they may pass on something. Yet nothing is certain. Here, the focus has been on spatiality in which imperceptible touches have left their thrilling imprint. These touches have folded into and been enveloped by sensate thought that cannot be articulated. It can only be hoped that a subtle reverberation, a whisper, has emanated from my writing about the touches experienced in reading the precious writings of others. Can something of the weight of the memories embedded in my corporeality be sensed or imagined by the reader?

Practice of the Skinner Releasing Technique, a somatic movement method, was vital in this corporeal approach. The incessant process of letting go eased control and made it

possible to be attentive and aligned with shifting situations and conditions. All these touches have continued their contingent impact on my corporeality, and changes have taken place in actions and thoughts without any conscious aim. The technique has likewise shown me its relatedness to the environment, to exist in a constant state of becoming it, be it a physical site or a fragment of memory, or both on the same occasion. In this process, one becomes a passage without a name through which something of the lived experiences of others may transmit forms of knowing that are non-linguistic. And yet, words have both unfolded uncharted sensitivities and offered insights into how corporeality acts.

Lastly, returning to the beginning of this article, to the inconceivable nature of corporeality and Nancy's question about the touch of words, to which he himself offers a plausible answer: "The body does not know; but it is not ignorant either. Quite simply, it is elsewhere. It is from elsewhere, another place, another regime, another register" (Nancy 1993, 200–201). In this account, existing elsewhere opens corporeality to spatiality and temporality, erasing the self-contained subject, and questioning that which can be known and mediated.

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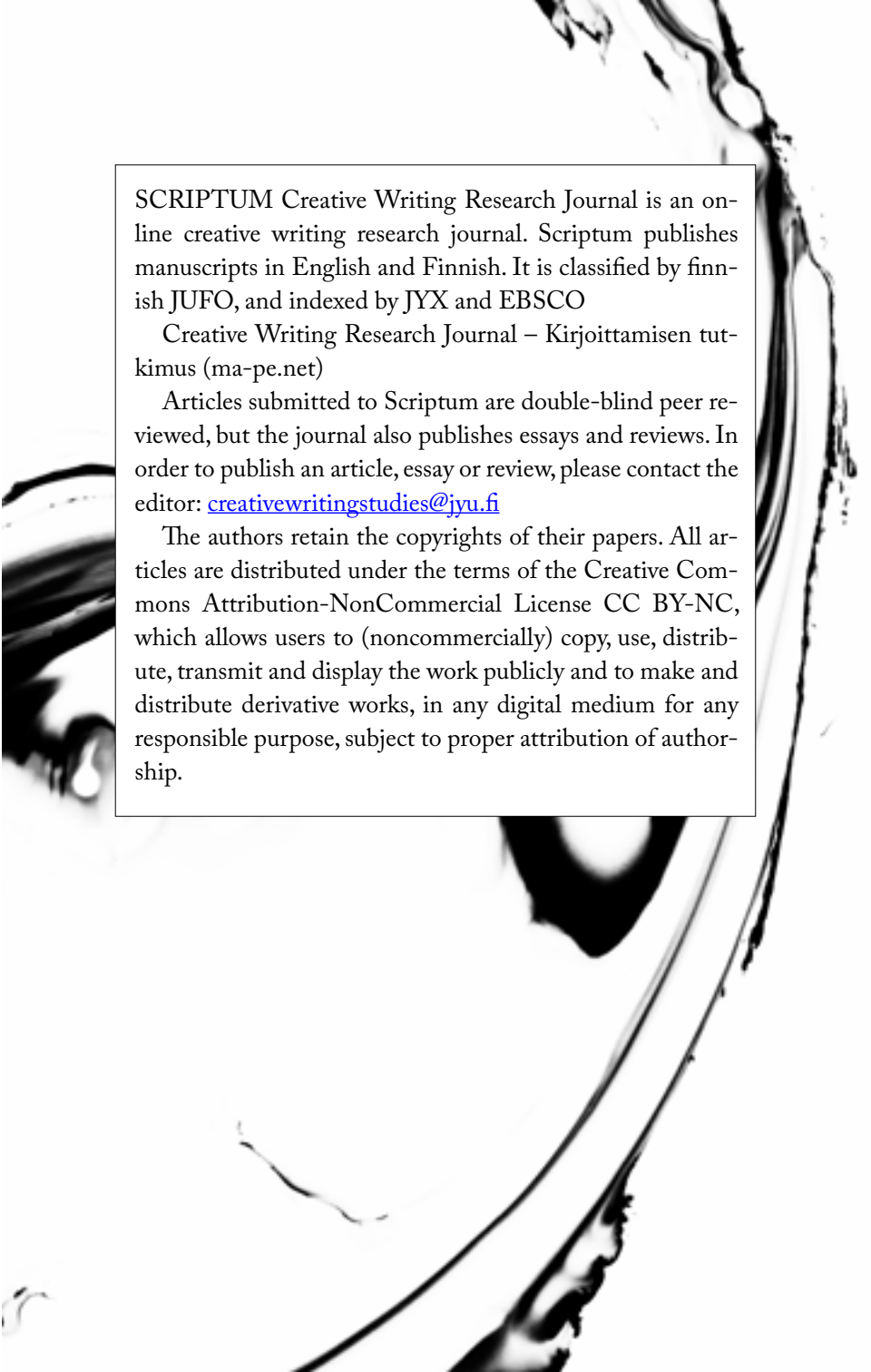
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