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**SENSE  
TECHNICS  
BODY**

**MIKA ELO & MIIKA LUOTO eds.**

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MIKA ELO & MIIKA LUOTO eds.

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# Preface

MIKA ELO AND MIIKA LUOTO

“Provided that no one asks me, I know. If I want to explain it to an inquirer, I do not know.”<sup>1</sup> This phrase of Saint Augustine’s concerning time is fit to describe touch as well. Touch, not unlike time, is something seemingly self-evident but hard to put into words, something most familiar and yet strange. As the texts of the present volume show, each approach to touch is one way to engage with such a challenging difficulty.

We could approach touch as a sense among others. However, when we encounter the peculiarities of touch, we must admit that it is a sense unlike all the others. Lacking an organ of its own and being spread out over the whole body, touch is intimately connected to one’s feeling of life or corporeal existence. As we perceive, in the act of touch, the tactual properties of the object, we are at once bodily engaged with it and exposed to it. Touch is, then, a way of

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1 Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Book XI, chapter xiv.

estimating the sense of a presence, that is, a way of sensing the very sense of a contact. We may say, generally, that to be in tactual contact means to defend oneself against the threats of the world as well as to enjoy its blessings.

From here follows a major difficulty: the delimitation of the phenomena of touch is anything but obvious. Clearly, we are tactually sensitive to various objective qualities (e.g., smoothness, sharpness, weight, heat) as we are also, in the presence of such qualities, sensitive to our respective subjective states (sliding, being stung, having to withstand pressure, being burned). However, since the sensitivity of touch is relative to a mode of behaviour (e.g., grasping, fondling, hitting, kissing), the tactual contact with the object immediately takes part in a more general, socially shared significance (effectivity, sensuality, aggressiveness, eroticism). Finally, through touch we enter the world of bodies that come close to us by remaining in distance, that show themselves to us from out of their own, hidden depth. The contact between bodies, bordering on something un-touchable, brings with it the requirement of sensitivity to what is proper and appropriate: the demand of tact. Hence, with the possibility of enjoyment and suffering, of respect and harassment, the bodily existence's vulnerability and strength becomes the inevitable context for questions about touch.

This complex field of phenomena gives rise to questions with decisive methodical implications. How should we approach the relation between the physical and the psychical dimensions of touch? How should we consider the contact at issue in touch with respect to immediacy and mediacy? And how should we think about the materiality of touch in relation to language or some other kind of ideational distance? The challenge of the topic, as well as its promise, lies in the fact that the phenomena of touch are located at intermediary points between the mind and the

body, the close and the distant, the surface and the depth, the one and the other.

Further challenges follow when we enter the hidden dynamics of touch: to touch means to be touched by what one touches. In the very act of touching, something happens to me, so that I find myself as dependent on another body, another quality, another locality. The bodily subject of touch is a "self" not by relating to itself, but by sensing itself sensing; that is, it opens to itself by being exposed to what is foreign to it. Here, touch proves to constitute a kind of a prototype of experience, so that its significance extends far beyond the limits of one sense modality. Regardless of how one studies the structural dynamics of touch, it certainly calls for a re-consideration of the basic relations between the subject and the object, the self and the other, activity and passivity.

The phenomena of touch and, more generally, of the sensible experience at large, can be addressed in terms of the *pathic* (from the Greek *pathos*: sensitivity, affectability, suffering). As pathic, the experience of touch is neither subjective nor objective; it is an event that surpasses my activities as it befalls on me, but only insofar as I contribute to it by my response. In its surprise character, the pathic moment of touch comes too early for us to be ready for it, and our response comes too late to reach the experience at its peak. Therefore, a touching gesture – be it physical, ideational or social – never coincides with itself. It finds its manner only amid pressing matters. Designating far more than just a dependency on sensibility, the pathic refers to what according to Bernhard Waldenfels constitutes the structure of experience, namely, the susceptibility to ruptures conditioning the very horizon of our abilities.

The question of the pathic moment runs through the texts of the present volume, which take us to different dimensions of touch. Some of the texts venture out to the obscure borderlands of the

phenomenal world where knowledge-oriented approaches encounter their limits. Some of them dissect specific issues, while others address something we could call generative patterns, or, as the title of this volume suggests, “figures of touch”.<sup>2</sup>

Introductions of academic books often try to give an overview of their contents. Here, such an attempt feels irrelevant, since the present volume consists of a very selective and non-systematic collection of texts approaching the peculiar ensemble of the differing senses of touch. Let us however note one key element, a kind of background figure of the volume, which easily slips unnoticed through one’s fingers. It is the question of *addressing* that plays a central role in Jean-Luc Nancy’s text. As his “Body-Theatre” suggests, touching can only take place on the risky stage of life. There is no touch without a turning toward the world of the others, and this implies bodies that in some way address one another, that is, that are exposed to one another at their limits. Most importantly, such addressing is not reducible to mere consciousness, not even to capacities attributed to individual bodies. It is something that takes place in-between. In similar vein, this compilation of texts lives off punctual interferences rather than topical convergence. Its polyphonic outcome is an interference pattern, a multifaceted complication of the senses of touch – senses in plural, in all the senses of the word “sense”.

*Mika Elo and Miika Luoto*

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2 “Figures of Touch” was the title of a research project funded by the Academy of Finland (2009–2012, project number 127847). This volume is a late fruit of that project.

# Body-Theatre

JEAN-LUC NANCY<sup>1</sup>

Each time I come into the world, that is to say every day, the curtain of my eyelids is lifted on something that cannot be called a spectacle, for I am already caught by it, mixed into it, carried along it by all the forces of my body which moves forward towards this world, incorporates its space, its directions, its resistances, its openings, and moves within this perception; my body is only the viewpoint from which this perceiving, which is also an action, can be organized. Like all points, the viewpoint is without dimensions. And we know that it is the blind spot around which are disposed all the perspectives, relations, the close and the distant. It is the obscure vanishing point which stays back of myself, but “back” in the sense of “at the back of the room”, at a backside that I could represent to myself as being a point, or so to say a non-space situated just behind the space which develops as my head, my skull, my back, that is, as everything this side of myself from where my perceiving and acting body knows itself to be carried and projected.

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1 The text is originally a lecture delivered by Jean-Luc Nancy in French, with a consecutive English interpretation by Susanna Lindberg, on 14.4.2010 at the Kiasma-Theatre, Helsinki.

From this point, then, no spectacle is possible, only engagement and mix-up with the world, attractions and repulsions, crossings and obstructions, captures and losses, seizures and relinquishments. Being in the world is the very contrary of being in front of a spectacle. It is being within, not in front. Besides, what we, even outside the philosophic circles, are used to calling “being-in-the-world”, is the translation of the German *in der Welt sein*, by which Heidegger tries to signify an *in* which is precisely not an *in* of inclusion – of a subject in a pre-existing world – but an *in* of belonging together of the two in the mode of what he calls “thrownness”, *Geworfensein*. In it, we should hear at the same time the gesture of throwing and projecting into the very fall that makes us “find ourselves here”, and the sketch, *Entwurf*, the projection of a possible gesture and bearing of existing – for existence itself is nothing else than the unceasing putting into play of one’s own sketches.

I make this small detour via Heidegger only in order to mark that when one insists most strongly on the priority of the “being-in” – of being insofar as it is abandoned, thrown, destined, mobilized in its being by the very fact of being – one is as little concerned as possible by the phenomena of representation: representation requires a “subject” to which it could happen, although in regard to the existent itself the subject can only be perfectly secondary, derived and limited (for instance the subject of knowledge, the subject of a conception or a vision). Insofar as it is a question of separating as firmly as possible the order of existence from the orders of knowing, representing, figuring and also of measuring and evaluating, in order to bring them all back to the condition of existing – the point is not to deny them but to show their ultimate condition – it is necessary to take heed of something that has irrevocably started: in our age, the “subject” has become “unmoored” like Rimbaud’s peninsulas, its moorings untied it has broken away from its “ancient

parapets”, and it has been thrown and projected towards another moment of its very singular destiny, the infinite destination of which we – we and the world – are.

On the other hand, the sending without reserve or return does not prevent us from noting that this description of existing lacks something. Nothing prevents us from pointing out this lack; on the contrary, we are very precisely and insistently driven to do that. We can put it very simply: existence also wants to put itself on stage. This is a part of its project, of its projection or of its thrownness. This is a part of its being-in-the-world.

No doubt, Heidegger does not ignore this – it would be too easy to attribute such short-sightedness to him. Nevertheless, he never thematises the necessity of staging as such. No doubt it is implied in the attention he gives to art in general and to poetry in particular; but this attention never touches theatre. This was underlined by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, who in this very point wanted to take his distance from Heidegger within his proximity to him. He noted particularly that theatre did not play any role in Heidegger’s reflections on Hölderlin, while it is self-evident that theatre was very important for the translator of Sophocles and the author of the tragedy *The Death of Empedocles*.

I will not pursue this line of questioning any further; they belong to Lacoue-Labarthe. They remain his. But they give me an indication: the existent wants to put itself on stage, and this will (desire, drive, as you like) belongs to existence itself. Later, if we can, we will try to justify the second proposition. For the time being, we will examine the first one.

Let us go back to the scene of my coming into the world. Each time it happens, that is to say every day, my eyelids do not open only onto the non-spectacle of the perceived, experienced, acted world. At the same time, they also open onto the obscurity that I

first called a blind spot at the back of myself or behind myself: they do not open in this way for me, for my look, but for the possible look of another, of a multitude of others. It is a possible and, no doubt, indisputable look, because even in my deepest solitude I belong to this multitude of others. I belong to it at least as the one who knows that it is not possible for me to see the thing that comes out when the small double curtain rises: my own look. In this way, I am like a spectator who has not been able to get a place in the theatre and who nevertheless knows what s/he misses: inside the closed space, the back leaning against the obscurity of the rest of the city, the curtain rises on a scene, in other words, in the proper space of a coming to presence. Never mind how many characters, how intense a lighting, what kind of a scenery: the only thing that matters is the coming to presence and *representation* in this sense, that is to say an intensification of presence.

When this other is not myself but another self, him-or-herself leaning against the same obscurity within him-or-herself – knowing that s/he is bound to the same impossibility of seeing him/herself and of knowing whether s/he is “same”, except by the vanishing point of his/her blind spot – when such another sees and hears me, s/he knows that s/he is looking at a spectacle. Not at what is called the “spectacle of the world”, which normally denotes a kind of a panorama of perception spread out before a subject and which, when analysed, belongs to his/her own being in the world, but really at a spectacle in the theatrical sense of the word: s/he sees how a presence puts itself on stage and presents itself to him/her. S/he receives, rather than perceives, the intensification of this presence, in other words, its staging.

It is not necessary to refer to the most laden sense of these words – “spectacle”, “staging” – nor to think about all the possible ways of assuming different roles, of showing off and boasting, of ex-

hibiting oneself and appearing to advantage, of ostentation and posing. It is enough to experience very simply and very discreetly that the so-called “subject” is coming to presence – that is to say, once more, to “representation”, according to the intensive and actually originary sense of the word. And in this sense, a subject is a body.

\* \* \*

Should we specify? The subject, albeit thrown into the world and engaged with it, is still not a presence. It can be other than a subject of knowledge, but it is still an immaterial point, a viewpoint or a point in which acts, conducts and thoughts are being decided, divided and joined. In this sense, the “da” of Heidegger’s *Dasein*, the “there” of existing, remains ambiguous: no doubt, it is openness and spatiality, in the sense of ex-position according to which it ex-ists, but simultaneously it is also, and notwithstanding Heidegger’s own aspiration, punctual and somehow held back within the subjectivity of its “each time mine” (*Jemeinigkeit*). In this case, “subjectivity” does not mean the relativity and the interiority of a point of view, but only and first – and once again notwithstanding Heidegger’s own effort of putting it – the immateriality of “my” position, which is punctual, the summit of the angle or of the articulation of a decision of existence. In a word, it is not a body. It does not reach its own body.

Therefore, it is not any more theatrical than the subjects of representation in the ordinary sense of the word (*i.e.* the representation of an idea, an image, or a signification) or the subjects of knowledge, action, judgment, or the subjects of relation and affect.

In reality, as long as one thinks in terms of the “subject”, one thinks, whether one likes it or not, in terms of an intangible substance – even when this substance really becomes a subject, as

Hegel wanted it, that is to say a relation to self in which the self alienates and extraneates itself in view of returning back onto itself. With Hegel, we do not really deal with theatre, and maybe we never deal with it in philosophy (except maybe with Aristotle, but that is another story, and I will not start it here). We remain on the contrary always more or less within the intangible configuration of a point of projection (which is also a projection of a self) connected to significations, which are by definition intangible.

In this sense, the one is all there is; by the way, this is also why the question of the other imposes itself in such a complex manner when one asks how a subject can recognize another subject or how an *ego* can relate to an *alter ego*. The problem is that when we start from the one it becomes impossible to reach the other. Heidegger knows it, when he objects to all the other ways of introducing the other except through the originarily given *Mitdasein*, a being-there-with or a being-with-another-there. But this “with” – to which I grant the greatest importance, and which is the form of *common* that the modernity no doubt finds most difficult to think – this “with” still risks being nothing but a simple side by side of subjects. I am also far from denying the importance of contiguity, co-presence and common appearing or compearance. Nor do I deny the other dimension, which is somehow orthogonal in the sense that it consists in facing the other, and which refers to the tradition of “I and you” (Buber) and of “the face of the other” (Lévinas).

What matters here belongs to another order, which is so to say anterior and exterior to all forms of common appearing, whether side by side or face to face. What matters is the very condition of there being presence at all. Of course, the presence is in the world – but the world is nothing but a disposition of presences, to the extent that “disposition” has both the topological sense of simple spacing and the dynamic sense of coming and withdrawing, ar-

iving and departing; for presence never consists in the simple position, in a situation with given coordinates, but in the exposition, in the presentation, in coming, approaching and moving away. The word “presence” is constructed on the “pre” of proximity and not on the “pre” of anteriority. The present is neither before nor in front but near. Therefore, it is temporal as well as spatial: neither before nor after, but near, coming close, and the spatiality of “nearness” is a temporal spatiality of coming and approaching.

\* \* \*

This is where we encounter the order of the body and theatre. The body is what comes, approaches on a scene – and theatre is what gives the place for the approach of a body.

This is what happens when I come to the world – every day, each time. “I” do not come as the eternally intangible punctuality of a subject of enunciation, nor of any subject whatsoever. We could even say: “I” never *come*. The I remains situated in the absolute anteriority of its punctuality. On the other hand, its eyes open as well as its mouth and ears, and its body extends itself, diverts itself, disposes itself. Of course, we could say that “I” comes out of the mouth, out of “its” mouth, and this is absolutely true. But what of the other comes, approaches, touches us is the mouth, the voice, and in the same way the other’s eyes approach us, their look and their way of staring and viewing come closer.

This is like Creation according to Artaud – him of course, how could we avoid being in his company? According to at least one of his trajectories, Artaud deduces (if I can say so) the theatre from the Creation (with a capital C). I will not stop here to examine the alchemical symbolism that precedes this consideration but I simply note the following: he first states that theatre forms the Double “not

of this immediate everyday reality which has been slowly truncated to a mere lifeless copy”<sup>2</sup> but rather of “another, archetypal and dangerous reality [which is] not human but inhuman”.

He then discovers that this other reality is precisely the reality of the Creation, insofar as it makes its work in two phases. The first one is the act of “one general – *unconflicting* – Will”. It is followed by the second one, “the time of obstacles and the Double, of matter and dulling of ideas [*épaississement de l'idée*; lit. “thickening of the idea”; trans.]”

Clearly these two phases are logical rather than chronological. There is the moment of unity without conflict, which is finally just the “idea”, or let us say the principle and the decision of the existence of the world, and there is the moment of effectivity, which comes less like another stage and more like the real opening of the world – of the “Cosmos in turmoil”, as the text specifies. The Cosmos is traversed by conflicts. This means that reality is full of conflicts, and a careful reading of the text would show that it is so precisely because of the matter, that is to say of the “dulling of ideas”, which can also be understood as “the expression of light, rarity and intransmutability in a solid, impenetrable manner”. This is the material gold of the alchemical transformation, which is itself the symbol of the spiritual gold.

But – and this is the essential point – it is a necessary symbol. I will not study the reasons of this necessity, because my aim is not to penetrate Artaud’s logic. I simply pose with him that there is a material opacity and dullness which is indispensable for the presentation of the stakes of the Creation or of the Cosmos – as crea-

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2 Antonin Artaud: “Le théâtre alchimique”, *Le théâtre et son double*, in *Œuvres*, Gallimard – Quarto 2004, 532. Trans. Victor Corti: Antonin Artaud, *Collected Works*, volume four, *The Theatre and its Double*, Calder & Boyars, London 1974, 34. The following quotations are from pp. 532–534, trans. 35–36.

tion and cosmos – insofar as the conflict belongs to that which is at stake there. The cosmical (elsewhere he says metaphysical) conflict needs to be presented as a “*drama*”. Why does it have to be presented? Because by itself it is or it makes the demand of presentation.

A body is not simply a particular concretion, local accumulation, dulling or thickening: Artaud is manifestly speaking about a thickening that also implies the distinction and the multiplicity of bodies. The idea may seem to be one; the reality, of which it is the idea, can only be plural. (I venture to think that this is precisely what Artaud formulates intuitively when he is speaking about the two phases of the creation.) A body is what comes, what approaches on a scene – and theatre is what gives the place for such an approach. In truth, the idea of cosmos is the idea of plurality, and there is no creation that would not be first distinction, separation, spacing.

But spacing itself is not an inert interval. It is exposition. To put it crudely, the void between bodies is not a negative thickness – and nor are the other forms of spacing and immateriality. Here I refer to the Stoic theory of the incorporeals: according to the Stoics, there are four incorporeals, namely the void, the time, the place and the *lekton* (the sayable or the expressible). The spacing that I am speaking about is a combination of the void and the place; the void permits the distinction of places, and time is nothing else but the spacing of sense, the extension by which it stretches towards itself (or if you prefer, by which the signifier stretches towards the signified).

This is how the bodies are essentially and not accidentally exposed. Dis-position is the nature of their position in being, and the *dis-* implies the *ex-*: the bodies are disposed *partes extra partes*, as in Descartes’ definition of extension. Once again, exteriority is not simply a lack of interiority or of self-presence: it is the very condition of the co-presence of bodies, or of their common appearing, which is simply the rule and the effect of creation.

If I dared, I would say that theatre has already started in the interstellar spaces or in the infinitesimal spacings of particles, because what Artaud calls *drama* has already started there, first of all as action – the act of accomplishment responding to an expectation (service, cult, responsibility). The expectation is in fact already the expectation of a sense: of “the sayable” of the common appearing of things that is called “cosmos”.

But it is enough that I say that the speaking body comes among bodies as the manifestation of this expectation. And that this time, with the speaking body, theatre is already given or sketched.

Such a body presents itself by opening itself: this is called “the senses”. At the same time as the senses receive sensorial information, they also emit it, if I can say so. One again, the eye sees, but it looks, too. While looking, it exposes, it projects in front of itself something of its own way of seeing and of being seen, but also of its knowledge of not being able to see itself seeing. All of this is given with a look of its eyes in which, as Proust says, “flesh becomes mirror and, more than any other part of the body, gives us the illusion of letting us approach the soul”.

Overall, Proust’s phrase is strange, for even though it is possible that I see myself in the eyes of another, this optical mirror function does not justify the phrase. The phrase rather says that in the eyes of another I see myself looking and consequently being looked at – always following the same fundamental extra-version which makes it impossible for me to see myself seeing, and which for that very reason exposes me absolutely.

But “the other parts of the body”, as Proust puts it, also present us with approaches of the soul. My hands, my legs, my throat, my postures, my bearing, my gestures, my expressions, my airs, the timber of my voice, the whole pragmatics of the body, as one might call it, without exception everything on the surface of my skin and

of what I can cover or decorate it with, all this exposes, announces, declares, addresses something: ways of coming near or going away, forces of attraction and repulsion, tensions for taking or leaving, for swallowing or rejecting.

Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine writes: “This is how my skin becomes its own theatre”, and he continues: “This explains why the actor or the simple speaker is moved by pulsations, the original signification of which is unknown to him or her”.<sup>3</sup>

In all its ways of opening and closing, of placing and displacing itself, of disposing and imposing itself, and of fleeing, the body engages a drama which is not at all “personal” or “subjective” but each time a singular dramatization of its singular detachment among other bodies – as it is projected with them in the cosmos.

Affects (love, hate, power, betrayal, rivalry...) are secondary here, or rather they are merely modulations and transcriptions of the great primordial tension between bodies: how they are pressed against one another, how they reject one another, how they catch and free one another. That is, how they relate to one another: not “through” the incorporeal that distinguishes them, but as the incorporeal itself. Place, time, sense and void (by “void” we can understand the absence of bodies that are dead or not yet born) are the matter and the force of relation. (It goes without saying that I do not distinguish here between the relation between bodies and the relation of each body to itself: each relation passes through another, this is the logic of common appearing and (re)presentation).

What we name stage is the place in which the proper time of a presentation (of bodies: this complement could be elided) emerges in the form of thrusts of sense between the voids of the bodies’ fortuitous existences; it is a place in which fortuitousness itself be-

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<sup>3</sup> Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine: *Soleil arachnide*, Paris, Gallimard 2009, 120.

comes the necessity of a drama and in which the void acquires the consistency of a gathering of sense.

We know that in the beginning, *skéné* was a light makeshift shelter in which one could retire to sleep, drink, or have a party with friends, for instance on a boat. It was a place of intimacy, which later meant the obscure background of the theatre, the reverse side of the scene: the actors will present themselves in front of this place, on the *proskènon*, on which they enter through one of the doors put on the scenery. (I will not stop to discuss the word “obscene”, the etymology of which has been discussed too much to permit anything else than foreseeable resonances. Nevertheless, it is a fact that independently of semantics every exposition tends to obscenity.)

In front of the intimate shelter, which somehow falls outside of space, into the blind spot, opens the space in which one is supposed to step forward, in which the body pushes itself before itself – for its entire presence is here, in this outside of oneself which is not detached from an “inside” but which evokes it only as an impossibility, as a void outside of space, time and sense. This is how a “self” becomes: a character, a role, a mask, a way or an air, an exhibition, a presentation – in other words, a singular variation of the dehiscence and distinction by which there is a body, a presence.

In the poem entitled the “Theatre of Cruelty”, Artaud writes:

*There where there is metaphysics,  
mysticism,  
irreducible dialectics,  
I hear the huge  
colon of my  
hunger writhe  
and under the impulses of its somber life  
I dictate to my hands*

*their dance,  
to my feet*<sup>4</sup>

“My hunger” is my appetite, my desire, my drive; it triggers the impulses of the intimate, internal “dismal life” which transmits the rhythm, the pace, the whole “dance” that responds to the deep – “metaphysical, mystical” – beat or to the “twist” that responds in its turn to nothing else – “irreducible dialectics” – than to the very birth to the world, to the creation in its dulling, coagulation, condensation, distinction.

This is not the place to stop to examine the fact that this dance is not only physical but also belongs to the text, to the theatrical speech and particularly to the exchange of words, and this determines the ownmost features of theatrical literature. What matters is that in theatre, text is bodily, is a body. By the way, therefore it is possible to say that in theatre “something really happens”, as Claudel makes of one of his characters (an actress) say: “It’s worth your while to go to the theatre to see something happen. You hear me! Something that really happens! That begins and ends!”<sup>5</sup>

What “really happens”, what begins and ends, is something that never happens to the subject, for whom birth and death, provenance and flight are interruptions. Instead, it happens to the bodies which indeed arrive, come to detach and singularize themselves, and then disappear in the totality or in the nothingness. What arrives and goes away in this way – but this going-away is also an arrival – is a presence. That is to say a sense. One could say: a “subject” is a frantic aiming at a sense, a “body” is a sense

4 Antonin Artaud: Œuvres, p. 1662. Trans. *Watchfiends & Rack Screams. Works from the Final Period of Antonin Artaud*, ed. and trans. Clayton Eshleman with Bernard Bador, Exact Change 2004, 321.

5 Claudel, *L'Echange*, Paris, Mercure de France 1964, 166.

in action. In the action of passing, between creation and discreation [*décréation*].

Such a passage presents itself by presenting its arrival and departure, by presenting the beginning and the end of a sense. Consequently, such a sense cannot accomplish a signification, but it is the sense of passage, of the act of passing. It is the sense of the entire duration of a presence, sense as this duration articulated by the rising and the falling of the curtain, that is to say of the non-thickness of the truth that falls on the sense.

What we therefore ignore, the appearing-disappearing, arrives there, in the space-time of the place in which sense is announced between bodies – for sense can only happen “between” one and the other; it can only be felt from one to the other. This space-time is what we call “scene”, it is the *proskènon* on which bodies advance to present what each body does as a body: it presents itself in its appearing and disappearing, it presents the action – the “drama” – of the sharing of sense.

There is beginning and end - the stage itself opens and closes – and this is the proper time of this (re)presentation. It is not the time of succession but of passage, of the quick distension of an instant that has been withdrawn from the course of time (this is how one can see in the classical rule of three unities something less formal than it would seem).

Jean Magnan puts the following words in the mouth of a character marked out as a “creature of the theatre”:

*Here, between three walls,  
without a mirror that would make me believe  
in a fourth one,*

*time. The time. The time.*

*Fictional time. Personal time. A sensible mixture  
of the two. Fifty per cent Arabica.  
Theatre time. At the purest state.*

*Insomniac.*

*And sugar-free.*<sup>6</sup>

Like in Proust, from whom the expression has been borrowed, the “pure time” is the time of the (re)presentation, that is to say of the presentation in truth. Time removed from the course of time, insomnia in the night that surrounds the theatre and into which the actors, the scene and the spectator fall together with the curtain.

Bodies address words in the precise – and instantaneous-like – duration of this time. Actors exchange words to address to us, spectators, precisely the fact that it is a matter of addresses here. It cannot be anything else. Heiner Müller writes: “What is not addressed cannot be put on stage”.<sup>7</sup>

Addressed speech is bodily speech. It is not so much a matter of signification, but of voice, and with the voice – or silence – of the gesture, the posture and the bearing of the body. Speaking bodies make a bodily speech. This is how they present themselves for what they are: presences whose spacings open tensions – Artaud calls them “conflicts” – the play of which conducts the drama.

The play: here, the word means at the same time the articulation, the joining of the addresses, and the fact that they are interpreted. The double sense of play corresponds to the duality actually put

6 Jean Magnan: *Un peu de temps à l'état pur*, Philippe Macasdar Editeur, Genève 198, 71.

7 Heiner Müller: “Adieu à la pièce dialectique”, *Hamlet-machine*, trans. Jean Jourdeuil et Heinz Schwarzingler, Minuit, Paris 1985, 67.

in play: the presence must be presented because it is not simply given: it gives itself. In other words, it *is* not if it does not enter the intensity – tension, intention – of the address. There is no neutral presence that could be intensified here and there. Presence wants intensity – a body is an intensity.

Representation in the theatrical sense of the word and in the – historically first – sense of a putting to presence is an intensive play of presence. My body is straight away a theatre because its very presence is double – it is outside or in front, I am inside or behind (actually nowhere). Each presence doubles itself to present itself, and theatre is as ancient and no doubt practically as common as the speaking body.

Whether one says it with Artaud and his Double, with Lacoue-Labarthe and his “originary mimesis”, or with François Regnault affirming in a Lacanian way that “the Theatre presents the discourse of the Other”<sup>8</sup>, theatre is the duplication of presences as a putting in presence of presents, or as a presentation of their being present. The body itself is already a presentation: indeed, a body does not consist simply of a “being” – whatever one wants to say by this word – but it articulates this being as an appearing or indexes it to a being-*there* which implies a compresence – distance, proximity, interaction – with other bodies. Theatricality proceeds from a declaration of existence – and existence itself is being that is declared, presented and not kept in itself. It is being that signals itself; it gives itself to be felt not only in a simple perception but as a thickness and as a tension.

Therefore, Hamlet can say: “the players cannot keep counsel [*secret*]; they’ll tell all” (act 3, scene 2). The particular sense this sentence has in the theatrical plot of the Prince of Denmark can

8 François Regnault: *Petite éthique pour le comédien*, les Conférences du Perroquet n° 34, Paris, mars 1992.

only enhance its general import. Theatre is the suspension of the secret – provided the secret concerns being-in-itself or belongs to a soul that has retired into an intimacy. On the contrary, the in-itself itself or the intimacy as such come out and expose themselves. Nothing less than the “world as theatre” that we know so well since Calderon and Shakespeare and that our tradition in fact repeats ever since Plato’s Cavern, but the “world as theatre” *as truth*, quite like and because the body turns out to be the truth of the soul: it is truth pushing itself onto the scene, or more exactly truth that makes a scene.

Having come to this point, it is not possible to avoid going back to something that underlies and supports theatre in all its forms: that is, something like a cult.

Brecht said that tragedy was born when it left the cult to underline the decisive nature of this “departure”.<sup>9</sup> But this is also how he shut his eyes to something that every departure takes with it. A cult is not simply a ritual in the sense of formalism and observance. First of all, it is a behaviour that has been adapted to an encounter with something like a mystery, a secret, a reserved part that the cult makes it possible to approach (in the cult, it approaches us and we approach it). It is the coming to presence of something that otherwise remains withdrawn.

9 Florence Dupont insists on the origin of the Latin comedy in cult – in the rituals of the *ludi*. According to her, this comedy follows a genuine ritual, which is celebrated by putting into play – in all senses of the expression – the circumstances and the codes of the seriousness of the ordinary life. From her point of view, Aristotle is the one who, by breaking entirely loose from the Dionysian ritual, obliges himself to put the theatre under the spell of *muthos*, that is to say of the story that plays the function of theatre by *mimesis* and *catharsis* (see *Aristote ou le vampire du théâtre occidental*, Flammarion 2007). I will not enter into this debate: I only note that *mimesis* and *catharsis* undoubtedly represent transformations and extensions of the ritual celebration in Aristotle, too, but without him knowing it.

A cult is always organized around the expectation that something arrives, something happens, something takes place and comes from the background of an essential non-appearing. This is called “sacrifice”: sanctifying, making sacred. A theatrical body is a body that sanctifies its own presence – that is to say, if you like it, its soul, or also its creation, its cosmic inscription, its glory, its delight, its suffering, its failure, in a word, its common appearing as a sign among signs.

Every cult has a theatrical side, even though theatre becomes what it is only when it leaves all cults (including its own cult and cults, that it incessantly fabricates). What still belongs to cult in theatre and what in a very precise sense is sacrificed in it (or *ludified*, to refer once again to roman comedy) is the speaking body – a speech become body, not the story but the address, the signals of bodies and therefore also the gestures and everything that is physical, or physiological, energetic, dynamic – “biomechanical”, to play with a word of Meyerhold – these *make* the scene.

Therefore, one should not say that the cult precedes and engenders the theatre, but that the body-theatre precedes all cults and all theatres. Theatricality is neither artistic nor religious – although art and religion proceed from it. It is the condition of the body, and the body is the condition of the world, which is the space of the common appearing of bodies, of their attractions and repulsions. Yves Lorelle writes at the beginning of his study on the body and the stage: “Every culture has given to itself the spectacle of the highest summits of the mastery over the moving body”<sup>10</sup>. One must pay attention to the fact that a “culture” is precisely a possibility of putting together and of forming a mode of spectacle, in other words, of presenting and signifying this: as soon as there is a world, there

are bodies who encounter one another, who move away, attract and reject one another, who show themselves to one another while at the same time showing behind and around themselves the incorporeal night of their origin.

*English translation by Susanna Lindberg with Miika Luoto*

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10 Yves Lorelle: *Le corps, les rites et la scène des origines au XXème siècle*, Les Éditions de l’Amandier, Paris 2003, p. 19.

# Light Touches: A Media Aesthetic Mapping of Touch

MIKA ELO

It is often helpful to start an academic essay with some comments on the title. Unpacking the key terms that appear in the title is an economical way of preparing the ground for a discourse that necessarily takes place within a limited frame. This kind of gesture is very much needed here as well.

My title consists of two parts that both, more or less, say the same – albeit in different modes. Whereas the first part “Light Touches” is rather elliptic, the second part “A Media Aesthetic Mapping of Touch” fulfills the standard form of an academic subtitle by offering additional information concerning the focus and approach. Together they suggest that the topic of this essay will be “touch”, and that the topic will be touched upon “lightly” in terms of a “mapping” which has “media aesthetic” motivations.

I would claim, however, that the double structure of my title says also something else. A certain tension, or a fundamental complication, that a discourse *on* touching needs to deal with is inscribed in it. “A mapping” is simply not enough on its own, since “touch” as a

peculiar topic challenges – or should I say contaminates – the discourse to such a degree that the approach becomes part of the issue. A discourse that in any pertinent sense is touching upon “touch” becomes also touched by its topic.<sup>1</sup> The expression “pertinent sense” marks here the challenge of developing a discourse in an area where the criteria for making distinctions between the proper and metaphorical senses of touch are anything but clear. In a pertinent discourse on touch, the “what” and the “how” become entangled, even inseparable. All kinds of exploration, assorting, dissecting, demarcating, defining – and mapping – presuppose contact or, at the very least, anticipation of a limit, which always means taking risks; trying, testing and contesting the limits of control as well. The “mapping” that I attempt here consists of “light touches” in this sense.

But there is still another twist: “Light” can also be understood as the subject – or perhaps more aptly: agent – of touch. Insofar as the phrase “A Media Aesthetic Mapping of Touch” specifies the chosen theoretical *view* on the topic – the *point of view* of the essay – it effectively performs a visual logic that in accordance with a long history of “hegemony of vision”<sup>2</sup> in Western thinking tends to format the discourse on touch. In short, the title hints at the fact that my discourse *on* touch, insofar as it is a “mapping” that aims at outlining the topic entitled “touch”, is itself necessarily *touched by light*, invested with visual forces that tend to organize the discourse into a visually motivated knowledge production.

In order to gain new knowledge, a researcher has to make use of some kind of tactics when sorting out whatever is under scruti-

1 This is one of the key issues in Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry, California, Stanford University Press, 2005 [2000].

2 See e.g. David Michael Levin (ed.), *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993; Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes – The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993.

ny. Usually we speak of this in terms of a method or an approach and focus on assessing its viability. It is worth noting, however, that the medium of research consists of culturally determined variables that change over time. A discourse on touching touched by light becomes a meeting place of at least two divergent logics (in shorthand I call them “visual” and “tactile”), and as such, it touches upon the cultural status of the differing modalities of sense and the roles of sense modalities in a knowledge-oriented discursive setting.

It is here that the “media aesthetic” motivations of my essay come into picture. In my use of the term “media aesthetics” I attach myself to the heterogeneous tradition that combines media theoretical questions with theories of perception and embodied experience. Its key questions revolve around the rise of new modes of representation, perceptual habits and bodily techniques enabled or enhanced by new technical apparatuses, such as photography and film, and more recently a whole array of electronic and digital media. Media aesthetics studies, from a variety of perspectives, the framing conditions of our seemingly natural sense perception against the backdrop of all these “media”. How to relate our sense experience to the technological processes that significantly contribute to our sense of reality? How does touch figure in these processes?

Walter Benjamin’s remarks concerning the historicity of the “medium of perception”<sup>3</sup> and Marshall McLuhan’s “sense ratio hypothesis”<sup>4</sup> still function as key points of reference in contem-

3 “Just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their mode of perception. The way in which human perception is organized – the medium in which it occurs – is conditioned not only by nature but by history.” Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* vol. 3, ed. Michael W. Jennings et al., various translators, Cambridge Massachusetts and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002, 104.

4 Cf. David Parisi in this volume.

porary media aesthetic discussions, especially with regard to the contexts of media theoretical research and sensory anthropology. As W.J.T. Mitchell notes, media aesthetic discussions often show a rather conservative tendency to return to questions of remediation of older media forms in the midst of rapidly changing new media landscape.<sup>5</sup> Here, the basic conceptual settings – such as Roland Barthes’ image / music / text or Friedrich Kittler’s gramophone / film / typewriter – build, in one way or another, on demarcation of sense modalities, echoing the classical division of the “media” of drama in Aristotle (*melos, opsis, lexis*).<sup>6</sup>

In recent media aesthetic discussions, increasing attention has been paid to the questions of environmental mediations instead of the senses and their mediation. Transcendental subjectivity that for a long time figured as the key philosophical point of reference and, in phenomenologies of corporeality, as one of the main targets of criticism, has lost its key role as the discussions have shifted their focus to questions of relationality, non-human actors and environmentality. A proponent of this shift, Eric Hörl announces an “emergence of a general ecology” and highlights multiple cybernetic processes that lead to bypassing the subject of perception and urge us to focus on relational and technical aspects of being in the world.<sup>7</sup> Questions of touch, however, introduce in this setting a new angle and open up alternative paths for reconceptualizing mediativity with regard to environmental and relational issues with-

5 W.J.T. Mitchell, “Media Aesthetics”, *Thinking Media Aesthetics. Media Studies, Film Studies and the Arts*, ed. Liv Hausken, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2013, 23.

6 Ibid.

7 Eric Hörl, “A Thousand Ecologies: The Process of Cyberneticization and General Ecology,” trans. James Burton et al., *The Whole Earth. California and the Disappearance of the Outside*, eds. Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Francke, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013, 121–130.

out cutting the discourse off from questions of sense experience. A closer look at the senses of touch is needed – and an appropriate touch to the topic.

## SENSES OF TOUCH

First, a gesture of general mapping: In Western culture, touch as a sense modality has been both over- and undervalued. Beside vision – considered the noblest of senses – touch has been regarded as vague, vulgar, drive-related, and thus even impure. Partly due to these very same – potentially subversive – qualities touch has been invested with various emancipatory expectations. At the same time, it has been seen both as the basis of sense certainty and rather normative support to the theoretical gaze. This ambivalence implies that the sense of touch – or more precisely: the *sense* of it – is over-determined.<sup>8</sup> It is no wonder, then, that over the past few decades lively debates concerning the cultural implications of touch as a sense modality have emerged in many areas of research.<sup>9</sup>

Touch interconnects existential, aesthetic, cognitive and practical aspects of reality in an inconspicuous but intensive way, traversing both bodily and discursive practices.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the range of contexts where touching figures, in one way or another, is over-

8 Bernhard Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung. Phänomenologie, Psychoanalyse, Phänomenotechnik*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2002, 64.

9 See for example Laura Marks *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2002; Constance Classen (ed.), *The Book of Touch*, New York and Oxford, Berg Publishers, 2005; Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch. Haptics, Affects and Technologies*, New York and Oxford, Berg Publishers, 2007; David P. Parisi, *Archaeologies of Touch: Interfacing with Haptics from Electricity to Computing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [forthcoming 2018].

10 Cf. Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, passim; Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne A. Davenport, New York, Fordham University Press, 2004 [1992]; Classen, *Book of Touch*, 2005.

whelming: perception, interface design, consumer culture, sexuality, the arts, social relations, war, religion, spirituality, and so on. I will address only a few.

Touch and its cultural meanings have often been associated with the skin. An interface between the own and the foreign, skin constitutes a sensitive realm open to various interpretations.<sup>11</sup> One of the nineteenth-century pioneers of physiology, Ernst Heinrich Weber, determined and mapped the sensitivity of human tactile system and thus laid the foundation for neuro-physiological harnessing of touch.<sup>12</sup> Ashley Montagu's pioneering experiments on chimpanzees in the 1970s demonstrated that the tactile sense plays a crucial role in the early psychophysiological development of mammals.<sup>13</sup> In the 1980s, Didier Anzieu added a new layer to these discussions by analysing various patterns of skin-related mental imagery that are momentous for the formation of the ego. He argued that the skin is a coordinative and cohesive factor behind the whole system of the senses, one that organizes the human experiential horizon in its entirety, including the structures of space, time and language.<sup>14</sup> During the past few decades, the cultural strata of the skin, such as clothing, make-up, and tattoos, have aroused great interest.<sup>15</sup> The digital media technologies of our times, on their part, invite us to consider something like “techno skin”, or the technological consti-

11 See e.g. Claudia Benthien, *Skin. The Cultural Border of Self and the World*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2002; Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin*, London, Reaktion Books, 2004; Dave Boothroyd, “Touch, Time and Technics: Levinas and the Ethics of Haptic Communications.” *Theory, Culture and Society* 26 (2-3), 2009, 330–345.

12 Cf. Parisi in this volume.

13 See e.g. Classen, *The Book of Touch*, 46–47.

14 Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, trans. Naomi Segal, London, Karnac, 2016 [1995].

15 Cf. Benthien, *Skin*; Classen, *The Book of Touch*.

tution of the contacting surfaces that define our bodily being.<sup>16</sup> Skin is not only a physiological site, it is also an existential structure.

The sense of touch as a topic clearly hints at the fact that “sense” is one of those fateful words, where language as the historically layered resource of thinking comes to the fore. Sense involves signification and sensing, but it is not reducible to the domain of meanings or clear-cut sense modalities, not even to causal relations.<sup>17</sup> Sense has a peculiar role in verbal discourse: it doesn't exist outside the proposition that expresses it, but, at the same time, it doesn't merge with its expression since discourse needs to touch upon something beyond itself in order to make sense.<sup>18</sup> Sense – in all senses of the word “sense” – plays a multifaceted role in a discourse without being fully captured in its operations. Outlining the *sense of* touch as a topic presupposes something like *sense for* touch in the arrangement of the outlining gestures. On the level of discourse, touch is distributed, in an ambiguous way, across the divide of the supposedly proper and metaphorical senses of “touch”.

16 Since recently biotechnologies enable the development of artificial skin by means of which prostheses and robots can “feel” touch, <https://www.seeker.com/artificial-skin-offers-robots-amputees-sense-of-touch-discovery-news-1767180961.html> [accessed 4 June 2017].

17 See for example Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas, Mark Lester and Charles J. Stivale, London, Bloomsbury, 2015 [1969]; Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1988 [1972]; Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1997 [1993]; *Sens en tout sens. Autour des travaux de Jean-Luc Nancy*, ed. Francis Guibal and Jean-Clet Martin, Paris, Éditions Galilée, 2004.

18 Deleuze notes, with reference to Stoic philosophy, that sense “is an incorporeal complex, and irreducible entity, at the surface of things, a pure event which inheres or subsists in the proposition”. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 19.

The difficulties encountered when trying to define the sense of touch were highlighted already in Aristotle's *De Anima*.<sup>19</sup> He noted that the objects of touch are many, and that touch has no clearly definable organ. Touch is in many ways more complex and comprehensive than the other sensory forms. It is indispensable to all animals and belongs inseparably to the living body without, however, being the faculty of any particular body part – not even the skin. In short, it is difficult to define touch as a sense modality, since it is not, in any simple way, an organ-related *mode* of sensing. What can be felt as touch are not only certain sensuous qualities; we are in touch with anything and everything that can be felt and sensed by the body. Following Bernhard Waldenfels, we can say that touch is a prototype of sense experience *per se*.<sup>20</sup> Light touches the eye, heartbeat touches the palpating finger, sound waves touch the eardrum...

Even if these examples hint at the ways in which physical contact is part of all forms of perception, it would be too simplistic to reduce touching to some kind of prototypical tactility of sense experience. From an experiential perspective touch involves also mental and social, sometimes even spiritual processes. Instead of speaking of *the* sense of touch, it seems more appropriate to speak in plural of *senses* of touch.<sup>21</sup> In another vocabulary one could also speak of feeling and being affected.<sup>22</sup> Still another angle is introduced through the vocabulary of faculties, abilities and skills,

19 Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. J. A. Smith, in *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross, vol. III, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1931. See also Mika Elo, "Digital finger. Beyond phenomenological figures of touch", *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* vol. 4, 2012, DOI: 10.3402/jac.v4i0.14982.

20 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 71.

21 Cf. Paterson, *The Senses of Touch*, 1–5.

22 Cf. Mika Elo, "Formatting the Senses of Touch", *Transformations* 22, 2012. [http://www.transformationsjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Elo\\_Trans22.pdf](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Elo_Trans22.pdf)

especially in the arts where the skills and capabilities are pushed to their limits.<sup>23</sup>

In a strict sense, touching always takes place at a limit. The figure of limit could even be considered the common denominator of the ensemble of senses of touch that is at stake in this essay. It is important to note, however, that the limit in this sense is not a physical border. "The limit" names the ultimate point of vulnerability that forces and allows a touching gesture to get into touch with itself, to find its measure and proper mode, its tact. It is more of a demand than a categorical delimitation. This demand is enjoyably and painfully present in all modes of aiming at pertinence, here in the space of lined-up words as well as in any kind of intercourse with pressing matters. This demanding structure is not entirely reflexive, since touching is always also transitive, as Jean-Luc Nancy's paradoxical formulation "to self-touch you" (*se toucher toi*) presses.<sup>24</sup>

Touching involves a gap; it goes across a distance without any guarantee of a securing return. Tact is thus not a matter of volitional attentiveness or artfulness. It is *heterotrophic sensitivity*, that is, a response to the untouchable encountered in touching. Another name for this sensibility towards something that lies beyond ones own capabilities is *passibility*.<sup>25</sup> This pathic moment of touching shows that tact is over-determined and is thus not reducible to a skill. Already before it can turn into a social matter between two or more parties, it is answering to a singular otherness. In other words, tact is not to be understood as psychophysical discretion,

23 Cf. Mika Elo, "Notes on media sensitivity in artistic research", *Exposition of Artistic Research: Publishing Art in Academia*, eds. Michael Schwab and Henk Borgdorff, Leiden, Leiden University Press, 2014, 25–38.

24 Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, 34, *passim*.

25 See for example the thematic issue "Pathos / Passibilität", *Internationales Jahrbuch für Medienphilosophie* Band 3, eds. Jörg Sternagel and Michael Mayer, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2017.

but as a name for taking it upon oneself to “touch *without* touching, without touching *too much*, where touching is already too much”, as Derrida puts it.<sup>26</sup>

The “law of tact”<sup>27</sup> that applies to touch in its all dimensions is revealing of the fact that touch is always in danger of turning into either an appropriating grip, which aims at overcoming the unbridgeable difference between the touching and the touched, or into simple avoidance of contact, which means leaving the differences encountered as they are. The twist of this law lies in the fact that tactful contact never is quite in phase with itself: a distance is inherent in even the most intimate of contacts. Tact is exposure to this difference.

#### AMBIGUOUS DEMARCATIONS

In order to gain further insight into the various senses of touch – and into the ambiguity of demarcations between proper and metaphorical senses of “touch” – we must search in familiar analyses of sensibility for breaking points of the conventional schematization of touch as a species of the genus sensation.<sup>28</sup> Cathryn Vasseleu has highlighted one this kind of breaking point in Immanuel Kant’s *Anthropology*. The ambivalent position that *Berührung* (referring both to tactility and affectivity) takes there with regard to the distinction between the so-called objective and subjective senses is symptomatic of the difficulties of subsuming touch under the category of sense modality, a clear-cut domain of sensory experience.<sup>29</sup>

26 Derrida, *On Touching*, 67.

27 Ibid., passim.

28 Edith Wyschogrod, “Doing Before Hearing: On the Primacy of Touch”, *Textes pour Emmanuel Lévinas*, ed. François Laruelle, Paris, Éditions Jean-Michel Place, 1980, 193.

29 Cathryn Vasseleu, “Touch, Digital Communication and the Ticklish”, *Angelaki* 4.2, 1999, 155.

For Kant, touch is, on the one hand, a sense of differentiation vital to our physical relation with external objects. On the other hand, as feeling, it is a sense by means of which we partake of things affectively.<sup>30</sup>

Another breaking point can be found in the extensive philosophical debate concerning the relations between touch and vision, which is known as “Molyneux’s problem”. The problem, formulated by the Irish philosopher William Molyneux, is the following: *if a man born blind regains his sight, is he able to recognize, by means of visual perception only, objects he has learned to know through mere touch?*<sup>31</sup>

Behind this problem concerning the connection between visual and tactile perception lies the mind-body dualism characteristic of René Descartes’ thought, and the ambivalent interplay of the mind and the body in their “lived union” articulated in it.<sup>32</sup> The problem concerns the tensional relation between what we might call “mind’s eye” and “comprehensive grasp” and its conceptual implications. On the basis of what do we think of the so-called contact between the sensing and the sensed and between the different modes of sensing? Descartes’ contemporary, Nicolas Malebranche and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who further developed Malebranche’s ideas in the phenomenological context, have both seen in the tension at the core of the Cartesian dualism an incentive to analysing the relation of the mind and the body precisely as a question of touch.<sup>33</sup>

Third breaking point that I would like to touch upon here can be found in Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical thinking. In Freud’s view, namely, it is touch, or, “palpating impetus”, that structurally

30 Ibid.

31 Janet Levin, “Molyneux’s Problem and the Individuation of Perceptual Concepts”, *Philosophical Studies* 139, 2008, 1–28. DOI 10.1007/s11098-007-9072-5.

32 Juho Hotanen, “Merleau-Ponty ja Malebranchen subjekti”, *Kosketuksen figureja*, ed. Mika Elo, Helsinki, Tutkijaliitto, 2014, 24–43.

33 Ibid.

links together bodily being, perception and thinking, and thus forms an essential feature of what he called “extensionality” (*Ausdehnung*) of the psyche.<sup>34</sup>

The multifaceted theme of psychic extensionality can be illuminated with help of a note of Freud’s published posthumously: “Psyche is extended; knows nothing about it”.<sup>35</sup> Even though the processes of knowledge formation and cognition always involve fumbling and feeling about, psychic touch is not reducible to a matter of knowledge and consciousness, *tastender Vorstoß* is not reducible to a rudiment of theory formation supported by visuality. Freud’s remark hints at the fact that psychic events take their place in a space the extensionality (*Ausdehnung*) of which escapes physical dimensionality and the cognitive framework grounded on it. What makes things even more complex is that the extensionality of the psyche is not the inner psychological horizon of conscious affects, either. Rather, the psyche is articulated as a feeling of the tension between these dimensions, and the sorting out of their relations takes place through a complex machinery of defence mechanisms and processes of rationalization.<sup>36</sup>

#### FIGURES OF TOUCH

Further breaking points can be traced in the metaphoric patterns of languages. An alert reader has already paid attention to the ways in which visual metaphors tend to slide into my argumenta-

34 Sigmund Freud, “Negation”, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIX, ed. James Strachey, trans. James Strachey et al., 238. (As the English rendering of *tastender Vorstoß* by “tentative advance” here misses the tactile connotations of the original, I have used the more literal “palpating impetus”)

35 Freud, “Findings, Ideas, Problems”, in *The Standard Edition*, vol. XXIII, 300; Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand, New York, Fordham University Press, 2008 [2006], 21.

36 Cf. Elo, “Formatting the Senses of Touch”.

tion as if they were unavoidable steps in it. As Hans Blumenberg notes, light-related metaphors function as “absolute metaphors” in Western knowledge-oriented discourse.<sup>37</sup> This means that their figurality has become naturalized to such degree that it goes unnoticed; they have become, well, “transparent”.

If I would allow the visual logic to take the lead, I would introduce here a clear-cut demarcation between visual metaphors and figures of touch. This would probably lead me to reaffirming the kind of figures that Derrida calls “haptocentric”, that is, conceptual tropes that present the sense of touch as the ultimate guarantee of tangible reality and its visual mastery.<sup>38</sup> Typical substrate for this kind of figures is the human hand. Derrida highlights this in many ways in *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*. He even structures his discussion in a critical relation to the figure of the hand in five Tangents: “five, like the five fingers of one hand, like the five senses”.<sup>39</sup> Based on this haptocentric setting I could focus on some tangible examples of tactile figuration. But if I stick to the setting unfolded in the previous pages where touch is presented as something that subsists also beyond the tangible world, I need to take another path and consider whether and how touch might figure in a discourse also *beyond* figures – insofar as “figure” refers to something that has a clear shape, to something that can be mastered visually – like the hand or a pointing finger.

In order to track the effects of touch in the discourse beyond figures we need to redirect our attention to questions of rhythm, punctuation and intensity. Here, the figures of touch are not only shapeless, they are also weightless. Or, more precisely, they are

37 Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1999, 10–12.

38 Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, passim.

39 Derrida, *On Touching*, 182.

weightless *in themselves* like the fulcrum between the scales. They gain weight and become concrete only in a particular relation. This complicates the question as to where to draw the dividing line between the metaphorical and proper senses of touch – and whether this line can be drawn at all.

In order to counterbalance the tendency in international discussions to tracing concepts back to their Greek and Latin roots, I will make a detour to the Finnish language and to the semantic network of a couple of words that play a local but crucial role in the conceptual arrangement of senses of touch. I am not making this detour in order to establish more solid conceptual proof. Instead, I want to highlight the fact that language is a rich and multi-layered archive of displaced similarities and connections that contribute to the sense-order we tend to take for granted.<sup>40</sup>

The first word I would like to single out as a point of contact with the ways in which senses of touch operate in the Finnish language is the verb *tuntea*. It aptly collates the meanings of “feeling” and “knowing”. It suggests that when you know, you also feel, and when you feel, knowing is already implied. The weight of this word in any particular idiom demonstrates how obscure the boundaries between the bodily and mental aspects of touch are from the viewpoint of embodied experience. The Finnish expression *tuntea nahhoissaan* (literally: “to feel in one’s skins”), for example, expresses a concrete state of knowing by bodily experience. Touch, feeling, and recognition are entangled, and their ensemble implicates a sentence that can be articulated both as cognitive apprehension and affective tone. Especially evocative is also the Finnish version of the classical imperative “know thyself” (*gnothi seauton*), *tunne itsesi*.

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40 I am referring here to the mimetic dimension of language that plays an important role in Benjamin’s philosophy of language. See for example “On the Mimetic Faculty”, *Selected Writings* vol. 2/2, 722.

The second word that contributes to the conceptual arrangement of the senses of touch is the Finnish verb *tarttua* (“to grasp”, “to catch”, “to apprehend”, “to seize”). It points towards the multiple intertwined aspects of touch in a slightly different way. The word refers both to grabbing or holding firmly and to being exposed to the possibility of contamination. A hand, dirt, disease, laughter and various fancies may be caught and catching in different ways. The semantic network of this word suggests that every contact, whether mental or bodily, is potentially contagious.

The question whether these entanglements are just metaphoric, or do they have something more concrete, or “proper”, about them, brings me to the third word I want to ponder here: the Finnish word for “concrete”, “palpable” or “tangible”, *kouriintuntuva*, which literally means “what makes itself felt/known to the hands”. It hints at the fact that not only the physical contact of the appropriating hand but also the heterotrophic feel are involved in what we normally conceive as “concrete contact”. Physical contact is suggestive in its seeming immediacy, and it obviously serves linking comprehensive grasp and mind’s eye, as for example when we confirm the correctness of a visual impression by palpating the object seen. What is less obvious is the fact that the experiential fullness established through such coordination of the hand and the eye always ultimately relies on alterity. The physical and mental contact never fully coincide. In experiential terms, every concrete contact has two sides: the self that feels and something felt. The latter, as precisely *this* something that is felt, always escapes the control of the self. It is close by, but at the same time it remains at a distance, it remains something other, something that cannot be fully appropriated. With touch, thinking faces the paradoxical challenge of concreteness: What is most tangible is the foreignness at the heart of the familiar.

The verbal entanglements that I highlighted through the selection of these three Finnish words hint at the ways in which the theme of touch interlinks the physical, biological, psychophysical, social, mental and affective dimensions of contact. Their operative logic – linking, connecting, intertwining – reflects the intimate connection between affective and tactile aspects of touch and the vulnerability of embodied existence. Here we encounter the fact that besides the historical lines of conceptual filiation and discursive tropism, sheer moments of juxtaposition, idiomatic dispositions, and horizontal relations contribute to sense – in every sense of the word “sense”. We all know how this logic of contiguity is enacted in jokes and in word games that reveal how words constitute a “cavernous network” with hidden interconnections.<sup>41</sup>

Whereas sight upholds metaphors of light that outline the phenomenal world cognitively, thus creating the basis for a uniform discourse on truth, touch tends to complicate metaphoric patterns and even decompose them. While metaphors of light produce continuity and uniformity, that is, *homeostasis*, the effects of touch represent furthermore a *diastasis* (*dia*–“separate”, *stasis*–“localisation”) of language.<sup>42</sup> Here, we are literally dealing with a spatiotemporal dislocation of the processes of signification in the structures, ac-

41 Walter Benjamin, “Denkbilder”, *Gesammelte Schriften* IV/1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser in cooperation with Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem, Frankfurt am Main Suhrkamp, 1991, 432. With regard to the mimetic dimension of language that is at stake here, one of the key texts is Werner Hamacher’s “The Word Wolke – If It Is One”, *Benjamin’s Ground – New Readings of Walter Benjamin*, ed. Rainer Nägele, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988.

42 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 78.

cents and rhythms of language.<sup>43</sup> On a linguistic level, at stake is the unstable relation between the supposedly proper and metaphoric senses of touch. In existential or experiential terms, this reflects the intimate connection between affective and tactile aspects of touch and the vulnerability of embodied existence.

Against this background, touch appears as a sense of being in the world, of being exposed. This is to say that touch exceeds the tactile world – and not only metaphorically. “Touch” as the topic I am touching upon, is more than the sense of touch, more than a sense modality; more than “a species of the genus sensation”.<sup>44</sup> This implies that theoretical attempts at upholding a clear-cut distinction between an “immediate” and a “deep” touch is insufficient.<sup>45</sup> It is true that touch is not only a matter of contacting surfaces, it also has, at the same time, affective depth, touch is inevitably ambivalent, since exactly the same kind of physical contact can strike one in different ways depending on the situation. As Edith Wyschogrod remarks, the ordinary language reveals that “to be touched” is to be moved in the whole of one’s being.<sup>46</sup> Coming into touch, or being in touch – actually, I am tempted to say even “being *touch*” – involves an *exposure*. With the word “exposure” we encounter again the double bind between vision and touch: whatever is exposed in terms of touch, is exposed to light as well, insofar as it is recognized in its appearance, that is, insofar as it becomes phenomenal.

43 Here we encounter processes that Julia Kristeva famously has termed *significance*. See e.g. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora and Alice Jardine, Oxford, Blackwell, 1980 [1969].

44 Wyschogrod, “Doing Before Hearing”, 193.

45 Cf. Paterson, *The Senses of Touch*, 1–14. I see the definite article in the title of Paterson’s book as a symptom of a theoretical inclination for clear-cut definitions that sets the tone to Paterson’s approach.

46 Wyschogrod, 199.

### THE PATHIC MOMENT OF TOUCH

If I was asked to highlight one point of major importance in the series of “light touches” that I am presenting here on the peculiar topic of “touch”, I would point with my finger at – if you allow me to use this figure of a gesture that is absolutely impotent in this case – I would *point with my finger at* the pathic dimension of touch. This theme figuring in many ways in the phenomenological tradition – most prominently in the thinking of Erwin Strauss, Henri Maldiney, Jean-Luc Nancy and Bernhard Waldenfels – takes us to the obscure borderlands of the phenomenal world and beyond the domain of visually structured representations.<sup>47</sup>

The term “pathic” is derived from the Greek *pathos*, which refers to sensitivity, sentience, affectability, and suffering. As is well known, this kind of sensibility functions as a protective mechanism and in this way serves the life processes. It is also well known that *pathos* is a necessary aspect to every theoretical engagement with a subject matter not yet known. Transformation in and through contact is one of the basic concerns of hermeneutics, for example.<sup>48</sup> But there is still another concrete, though usually ignored, signification to *pathos*: exposure to something excessive and unexpected that may leave painful marks, wounds even. Accordingly, the pathic aspect of touch is a matter not only of active sentience, but also, and more generally, of *susceptibility to ruptures in the horizon of abilities*. As Bernhard Waldenfels has shown in *Bruchlinien der*

47 Cf. Sami Santanen in this volume.

48 Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode – Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik. Gesammelte Werke, Band 1*, Tübingen, J.C.B.Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1990 [1960].

*Erfahrung* in great detail, such ruptures characterize the structure of experience at large.<sup>49</sup>

The fractured horizon of pathic experience pre-exists all psychological and social settings of tactile and affective behaviour. In this terrain touch appears as a “sense for foreignness” (*Fremdheitssinn* as Waldenfels puts it – Derrida’s related term is “tact”)<sup>50</sup>. Touch is “sense for foreignness” in two senses: Firstly, insofar as touching is an ability, it is an ability to touch something foreign, something other. It is impossible to touch the same. We do not feel the same, we feel only differences – or, in the extreme case, the lack of them. Secondly, insofar as the pathic moment of touching marks the rupture of all forms of being able, it implies that touching relies on a foreign element, which necessarily remains beyond reach, untouchable, not as “the untouchable” in general but as something that a singular touch encounters at – or as – its own limit. The pathic moment cannot be pointed at, it needs to be felt. In discourse, this implies engagement in presentation.

The figure of rupture, the “fracture-lines” (*Bruchlinien*), in Waldenfels’ delicate attempt of describing the pathic reality of experience hints at the extreme difficulties of overcoming the deep-rooted conceptual setting where continuities, coherences and abilities are privileged, whereas interruptions, gaps and inabilities are denigrated. In this setting, the pathic tends to be the underdog. As Dieter Kliche suggests, we can historically speak even of *pathologization* of pathos.<sup>51</sup> He shows how the origins of modern

49 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 71.

50 Ibid., 64.

51 Dieter Kliche “Ästhetische Pathologie: Ein Kapitel aus der Begriffsgeschichte der Ästhetik”, *Archiv der Begriffsgeschichte* Band 42, Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, 2001, 197–229. See also Kathrin Busch, “Ästhetiken radikalisieter Passivität”, *Internationales Jahrbuch für Medienphilosophie* Band 3, eds. Jörg Sternagel and Michael Mayer, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2017, 52–54.

aesthetics is marked by a shift from Baroque rhetorics that combines the knowledge of the passions with ethics and medicine to a separation of aesthetics from anthropology that involves a devaluation of the concept “pathological”. In Kliche’s diagnosis, the philosophical skepticism towards affectivity gaining a systematical shape in the critical philosophy of Kant marked the point where *pathos* was subordinated to active mental capacities. This shift in conceptual framing – not Kant’s philosophy as such – contributed to the fact that *pathos* came to be seen as something pathological, morbid, a lesser capacity of the senses that belongs to the concerns of anthropology rather than those of aesthetics.<sup>52</sup> This shift led to a diffusion of the concept of aesthetics; and it seems to be haunting the discourse on touching as well. In philosophical debates, the hierachization of abilities implied in the pathologization of pathos has been contested in many ways. Various gestures of rehabilitating *pathos* can be discerned in the writings of Nietzsche, Artaud, Blanchot, Deleuze and Agamben, and others.<sup>53</sup> All these gestures, in their peculiar ways, address the ways in which the pathic is constitutive of experience at large. In knowledge-oriented discursive settings, however, the pathic moment tends to become subordinated to knowledge production.

#### TOUCH AND MEDIA

What can be gained from this schematic account of the multiple senses of touch with regard to contemporary media technologies that in one way or another involve touching?

I would like to end this essay by outlining some media aesthetic implications of my take on the topic “touch” culminating in highlighting the pathic dimension of touching.

52 Kliche “Ästhetische Pathologie”, 201.

53 Busch, “Ästhetiken radikalisieter Passivität”, 51–62.

Firstly, we need to take into account the fact that the enabling limits of human experience are constantly being displaced – both on individual and phylogenetic levels – through the very movement of experience. This movement requires and presupposes sensitivity to the boundaries between the proper and the improper, between the familiar and the foreign. On this elemental level, new media technologies do not introduce any radical break into the structure of experience, but they can function as catalysts of transformation.

Secondly, in these sensitive areas – at the enabling limits of human experience – we are invited to think in terms of immunity, contamination and responsibility, which should make us aware of the high relevance of the overdetermined theme of touch in this context. Insofar as media technologies touch upon these boundaries and contribute to shifting them by introducing new practices, new conceptualizations, and new sensibilities, they have effects on our existential integrity. New media do not only introduce new social mediations in our lives, they also reshape our subjectivity. This means that the goings-on of the media technological operations that touch upon the enabling limits of experience become an ethical question in terms of “production of ethical subjectivity”.<sup>54</sup> Touch as the “sense for foreignness” prototypical of pathic experience plays here a crucial role.

We live in a world where the imperative of making present constitutes one of the key issues of contemporary media technologies. One could even speak of a media technological megatrend, that is, the aspiration to eliminate the effect of spatial-temporal distances, to bring things right to our fingertips “in real time”. In this sense, the mainstream of media technology of our times consists of techniques of making present. Within this megatrend, touch is under-

54 Boothroyd, “Touch, Time and Technics”, 333.

stood from a point of view that Derrida calls “haptocentric”: the sense of touch is seen as the guarantee of tangible reality and the ultimate support for optical intuitionism.<sup>55</sup> The haptocentric ideal is a seamless co-operation between vision and touch, and a clear-cut distinction between the different senses of touch.<sup>56</sup> This is attempted at through representational harnessing of the sense of touch. With Cathryn Vasseleu we could also speak of *formalization of touch* that involves a reduction of the ambiguity of touching through technical and conceptual processes that aim at separating the affective and tactile dimensions of touch from each other in order to make them manageable and programmable within digital systems.<sup>57</sup>

Modern neurophysiological research has, in this vein, chopped the sense of touch into neurophysiological subsystems determined by different receptors (temperature, movement, pain, balance, etc.).<sup>58</sup> However, the difficulties of defining touch are also appearing in neurophysiology: efforts to locate the subsystems as clearly defined representations in the cortex that would be comparable with the centres of sight and hearing, have so far failed.<sup>59</sup>

55 Cf. Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, passim.

56 On the critique of “haptocentrism” put forward by Derrida, see Elo “Digital Finger”, 2012.

57 According to Vasseleu, this leads to prioritization of tactility over affectivity. Cathryn Vasseleu, “Touch, Digital Communication and the Ticklish”, passim. In other words: tactility is programmed to *serve* affectivity, which in turn is *formatted* by tactile mediations. Cf. Elo “Formatting”

58 See e.g. Matthew Ratcliffe, ‘Touch and Situatedness’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 16, no.3, 2007, 299–322; Peter W. Ross, ‘Common sense about qualities and senses’, *Philosophical Studies* 138, 2008, 299–316; Thomas A. Stoffregen and Benoit G. Bardy, ‘On specification of the senses’, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 24, 2001, 195–261.

59 Waldenfels makes this observation in 2002. Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 69.

From a neuroscientific point of view, the senses of touch seem to be embedded in a distributed network of brain regions.<sup>60</sup>

Today, “haptocentric” rhetoric is used to prop up the idea of fullness of presence. Media operations are designed and programmed so as to enhance this fullness. Analysing the pathic moment of touch offers us an occasion to as well as matter for a critical investigation of the various formatting processes active in the background of the megatrend of making present. It helps us trace the ways in which conceptual, sensuous, discursive, affective and technological formats are intertwined in interface technologies.<sup>61</sup> Against this background, contemporary touchscreen technologies, for example, appear as sites where not only the multiple aspects and ambivalent tendencies of touch but also the enabling limits of experience at large are negotiated – on the level of our fingertips.

As soon as touch is articulated as a technological application field, as soon as it is harnessed<sup>62</sup> and formalized<sup>63</sup>, the approach to it is by definition haptocentric, since the very idea of applying knowledge of touch is based on and motivated by representations of touch (as a sense modality). Interface design is typically motivated by operative structures that can best be described in terms of a feedback that affirms sensory and mental recognition and forms in

60 Cf. Sjoerd J. H. Ebisch et al., “Differential Involvement of Somatosensory and Interoceptive Cortices during the Observation of Affective Touch”, *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, Volume 23, Issue 7, 2011, 1808–1822.

61 Elo, “Formatting the Senses of Touch”, 2012.

62 Cf. David P. Parisi, “Tactile Modernity: On the Rationalization of Touch in the Nineteenth Century”, *Literature and Media in the Nineteenth Century: Image, Sound, and Touch*, eds. Colette Colligan and Margaret Linley, Farnham, Ashgate, 2011, 189–213.

63 Cf. Vasseleu, “Touch, Digital Communication and the Ticklish”, passim.

its functionality a circle that feeds the sense of selfpower.<sup>64</sup> Within this haptocentric mainstream, the pathic moment of touch and the ethical dimensions of feedback remain in a dead angle. As noted already above, the ethical implications of “sensory enhancement” are not restricted to the level of practices and attitudes (in other words, the mediations of an ethical relationship), at stake are also the mechanisms of the constitution of an ethical subject.<sup>65</sup>

To sum up, the harnessing of touch can be seen as an effect of the intricate interplay between technological, sensuous, discursive and affective aspects of formatting. Insofar as the implicit or explicit aim is to functionalize touch and to integrate it into a system of digital mediations, these processes of formatting tend to represent touch as a sense that works in synchrony with vision and offers a support for optical intuitionism. They enhance the role of touch as the guarantee of sensory certainty.

The logic of main stream interface design in digital culture is that of multiple targeting: it singles out functional gestures; builds up selected patterns of social behaviour; prioritises certain ways of making contact and staying in contact. Functionality of active touch and tactility is privileged. Haptocentric processes of formatting contribute to upholding the image of tangibility as the epitome of touching as well as the conception of the sense of touch as the guarantee of sensory certainty. All kinds of dysfunctions tend to be excluded as something pathological, as not belonging to a “healthy” communication, which in light of the casual imperative “let’s keep in touch” appears as a strange deferral of any kind of pathic event.

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64 Robert Pfaller has highlighted the constitutive role of this kind of circuit in contemporary Western culture at large in *Die Illusionen der anderen, Über das Lustprinzip in der Kultur*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2002.

65 Boothroyd, “Touch, Time and Technics”, 333–335.

## COLON

I began this essay by reflecting on its title. Even if I discussed various aspects of it in great detail, one element remained untouched: the colon separating and connecting the two parts of the title. Now, when focused on, this punctuation mark suddenly gains significant weight. It gives the impression of being the point around which most of the articulations of the whole essay are organized. It appears as the fulcrum of the essay. But “colon”, being also the name of the main part of the large intestine passing from the *caecum* to the *rectum*, also hints at the limits of the organic whole of the essay. It hints at the ways in which, at the limits of writing, the sense is “exscribed”, as Nancy might put it.<sup>66</sup> The moment of pertinence marked by the colon makes a point that cannot be a full stop.

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66 Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy: “Exscription”, trans. Katherine Lydon, *Yale French Studies*, No. 78, 1990, 63–65.

# Fingerbombing, or 'Touching is Good': The Cultural Construction of Technologized Touch<sup>1</sup>

DAVID PARISI

*A compromise between engineers and salespeople regulates how poor the sound from a TV set can be, how fuzzy movie images can be, or how much a beloved voice on the telephone can be filtered. Our sense perceptions are the dependent variable of this compromise.*

--Friedrich Kittler,  
Gramophone, Film, Typewriter

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## INTRODUCTION

Recent studies in the history of perception contextualize the development of our contemporary perceptual models by showing the specific cultural moments from which they emerged.<sup>2</sup> These studies view perception not as a physiological given, but rather as a learned behavior—as technique rather than biology. It has become common practice in these studies to point to Karl Marx’s claim in “The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844” that “the forming of the five senses is a labor of all of history down to the present,”<sup>3</sup> which suggests that the five-sense model of perception is itself ideological, providing a framework for the way we bring our bodies into contact with the world around us. In short, what is meant by “seeing,” “hearing,” “tasting,” “smelling,” and “touching” changes over time and across cultures. What follows springboards off from these studies, working under the assumption that perceptual technologies themselves do not recondition practices of perceiving, but rather, the discursive construction and framing of these technologies reshapes the habits involved in the perceptual act. Friedrich Kittler, in his suggestion that sense perception is a “dependent variable” in a vital compromise between engineers and marketers, directs us to the converging point of two separate processes, highlighting the human actors involved in the construction of sensory experience. In the engineering process, assumptions about the way we use our senses may be written into media

technologies, as Jonathan Sterne’s recent work on the development of the Mp3 compression filter demonstrates.<sup>4</sup> In the processes of marketing perceptual technologies, consumer expectations are set through the framing of their initial and intended uses, as marketers attempt to impart a set of preferred meanings for their new machines. This latter process also involves a reframing, recollection, and renegotiation of older communication technologies, as they are displaced and complemented by emerging interfaces. For example, Marshall McLuhan’s “reach out and touch someone” slogan for AT&T’s decade-long campaign to encourage long-distance telephone calls linked the telephony to touch, mobilizing a longstanding relationship between touch and emotion. This chapter examines touch’s discursive production in the process of marketing the Nintendo Dual Screen (DS) portable gaming system, showing how the ad campaign for the DS allows it to be cast as a technology that reconfigures touch, despite the lack of any tactile feedback components in the system.<sup>5</sup> Throughout my analysis, I treat representations of interface technology in the DS ads, rather the device’s subsequent use; though this approach may constrain the scope of my conclusions, it has the advantage of isolating and bringing to light marketers’ imagined uses for the new interface.

2 Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1999; Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993; Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1990; Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2003; David Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory*, Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press, 2003

3 Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, R. Tucker, ed., Norton, New York, 1972, 89.

4 Jonathan Sterne, ‘Recalibrating the Sound of Music: Perceptual Coding and the Making of the MP3,’ New York University Music Department Colloquium Series, February 2, 2006.

5 Nintendo later released a “Rumble Pack” peripheral device for the DS. Using the same name the accessory it first used to add force feedback to its Nintendo 64 gaming system in 1997, the DS’s Rumble Pack provides very rudimentary force feedback, with onscreen events generating tactile sensations in the user’s hands via a spinning motor.

## MEDIA AS BODILY HABIT

*My suggestion is that cultural ecology has a reasonably stable base in the human sensorium, and that any extension of the sensorium by technological dilation has quite an appreciable effect in setting up new ratios or proportions among the senses.<sup>6</sup>*

To briefly revisit McLuhan's sense ratio hypothesis, the significance of media as "extensions of man" does not lie in their ability to extend the sense organs into the external world, but rather, in the reconfiguration of the sensorium brought about by this technological conditioning of bodily habits. It is the reforming of the perceptual act accomplished by technological extension that is significant, instead of the material extension itself. However, in positing a theory of sense ratios, McLuhan reinforced and perpetuated the separation of the senses that he claimed began with their "outering" in language. Though McLuhan identified a liberatory power in electronic media's potential to restore balance to the senses—to undo the fragmentation of the senses initiated by communication technologies—that project remains unfinished. To better understand the processes involved in the traumatic fragmenting of perceptual acts, it is necessary to consider the interface between the body and the technology that extends it:

*To behold, use or perceive any extension of ourselves in technological form is necessarily to embrace it. To listen to radio or to read the printed page is to accept these extensions of ourselves into our personal system and to undergo the "closure" or displacement of perception that follows automatically [...] By continuously embracing*

6 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1962, 35.

*our technologies, we relate ourselves to them as servomechanisms. That is why we must, to use them at all, serve these objects, these extensions of ourselves, as gods or minor religions. An Indian is a servomechanism of his canoe, a cowboy of his horse or the executive of his clock.<sup>7</sup>*

The three examples McLuhan provides here are significant for the way that they illustrate his orientation to technology not as a disembodied thing, but rather, as a set of usage techniques imprinted on tool users through their repeated interaction with a given technology. Accordingly, we can think of communication technology as informing and shaping what French sociologist Marcel Mauss understood as "techniques of the body," techniques which are largely inherited from culture and learned through repeated body motion, involving not just cerebral but also muscular memory:

*The body is man's first and most natural instrument [...] The constant adaptation to a physical, mechanical or chemical aim (e.g. when we drink) is pursued in a series of assembled actions, and assembled for the individual not by himself alone but by all his education, by the whole society to which he belongs, in the place he occupies in it.<sup>8</sup>*

Such an understanding collapses the divide between psychology and physiology—between nature and—culture and directs us to consider the way discourse prescribes practice. A synthesis of McLuhan and Mauss can recast McLuhan's sense ratios as discour-

7 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1994 [1964], 46.

8 Marcel Mauss, 'Techniques of the Body,' *Economy and Society* vol. 2, no. 1, 1973, 75–76.

sively informed bodily practices of perceptual use, learned through participation in a system of cultural education. When considering the history of the senses, and the perpetual technological reconditioning of the senses, it is therefore important to be attentive to new discursive models of perception generated in the cultural deployment of technology. In what follows, I will explore the model of touch being advanced in the advertisements for Nintendo's Dual Screen (DS) portable gaming system, comparing it to previous models of touch advanced in psychophysics and psychology.<sup>9</sup>

Through all of this, I will attempt to avoid asserting a "naturalized" model of perception or a mythologized "pre-technological" sensorium (such as that of the "tribal man" valorized in McLuhan's theories), recognizing that, as tool users, humans have a long history of extending their perceptual systems. In the final years of the twentieth century, this treatment of the senses as markers of cultural change that exist within rather than outside history gained increased traction, with anthropologists initially focusing their attention on the various ways that non-Western cultures organize and classify the senses.<sup>10</sup> More recent work in the field of sensory anthropology has turned this lens on the Western sensorium itself, uncovering the nuanced trajectories of what were once thought to be static modes of perception.<sup>11</sup>

9 The research here was carried out before the US release of Nintendo's DS Lite, a smaller version of the original system that was released in June of 2006. The ads for the DS Lite don't use the "touching is good" theme that is discussed in this paper, instead opting to call attention to some design revisions made in response to problems with the original system.

10 See David Howes, *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1991; Nadia C. Seremetakis, ed., *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, Westview, Boulder, CO, 1994.

11 Robert Jütte, *A History of the Senses From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005; D. Howes, 2003; David Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, Berg, New York, 2004. Specific to touch, see Constance Classen, ed., *The Book of Touch* Berg, New York, 2005.

### WHAT IS THE DS?

The DS was developed by Japan's Nintendo Entertainment Corporation and hit the shelves of US stores on November 21, 2004, just in time for the annual post-Thanksgiving, pre-Christmas US shopping ritual known as Black Friday. Two weeks later it was released in Japan and, subsequently, in Australia, Korea and China and throughout Europe, with the DS meeting or exceeding the sales expectations for each region. The system has been extremely popular thus far, selling in excess of 13 million units globally as of January 2006.<sup>12</sup> The DS interface is a compelling object of study due to the way it is marketed as a significant break from traditional video game interfaces. Of course, marketing technological commodities based on their purported novelty is typical in an economic system that depends on the production of need through strategies of planned obsolescence, involving the addition of new features that render last year's models inadequate. Even giving in to the logic of technological evolution, these additional features often serve no functional purpose other than to produce obsolescence, what the Critical Art Ensemble terms "technologies of uselessness."<sup>13</sup> Even taking this charge into consideration, Nintendo's decision to market the DS on its mode of interface signaled a shift in the way game consoles were marketed, and prefigured Nintendo's wildly successful choice to eschew

12 See Rob Fahey, 'Nintendo Europe Reports 3.5m DS Sales; Worldwide Sales Top 13m,' *Gamesindustry.biz*, 2006.

The print and TV ads cited in this paper are all available online from Nintendo.com at <http://www.nintendo.com/newsarticle?articleid=62c5e8ca-165e-4259-a391-844b3ca8cdab&page=newsmain>.

13 Critical Art Ensemble, 'The Technology of Uselessness' *CTheory*, July 9, 1994, <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=59>.

high-definition graphics in favor of a novel interfacing scheme with its Wii console in 2006.<sup>14</sup>

Before unpacking the marketing campaign, let me first detail the components of the interface that Nintendo claims set the DS apart from other hand-held video game devices (see Figure 1). First and most significant for our concerns, the DS has two screens. Other game systems, portable and platform-based, had previously divided the single screen up into frames. The DS features two distinct physical screens, providing twice the screen area of previous Nintendo portable systems. Second, the lower screen is touch-sensitive and functions as an input device, similar to more familiar handheld computer screens such as those found in Personal Data Assistants, which Heidi Cooley has described as “Mobile Screenic Devices.”<sup>15</sup> Since the DS’s release, touch screens in mobile devices have grown increasingly popular, notably with the iPhone and iPod in 2007. Third, the DS houses a microphone that allows voice commands, transforming the player’s mouth into a game input device. Finally, the DS has wireless capability that enables players to interact with one another using the game device. In late 2005, Nintendo launched a WiFi network for the DS across North and South America, Europe and Asia. Since the launch, Nintendo boasts that over 1 million players have logged on to the network.<sup>16</sup> Selling the DS involved producing ads that would call attention to these features. On October 25, 2004, a month ahead of the DS’s US release, Nintendo began airing minimalist and sexually charged fif-

14 For an analysis, see David Parisi, ‘Game Interfaces as Bodily Techniques,’ in *Handbook of Research on Effective Electronic Gaming in Education*, IGI Publishing, New York, 2009.

15 Heidi Rae Cooley, ‘It’s All About the Fit: The Hand, the Mobile Screenic Device and Tactile Vision,’ *Journal of Visual Culture* vol. 3, no. 2, 2004, 133–55.

16 WIRED.com Staff, ‘Nintendo’s Wi-Fi Connection Hits One Million Players,’ *WIRED*, March 8, 2006, [https://www.wired.com/2006/03/nintendo\\_wifi\\_c/](https://www.wired.com/2006/03/nintendo_wifi_c/).

teen-second trailers in over 6,000 movie theaters, and during television shows targeted toward an older demographic than Nintendo had traditionally taken as its core audience, buying airtime during *Late Night with Conan O’Brien*, *The OC*, *Family Guy*, and *South Park*. They also launched a print ad campaign in “guy” magazines such as *Maxim*, *Blender*, and *Stuff*. Nintendo launched [www.touchingisgood.com](http://www.touchingisgood.com) as a guerilla marketing site for the DS, using the website as the main portal for a contest where they sent out mannequin hands to fans across the country, encouraging them to make movies using the hand around the theme “touching is good.” [Touchingisgood.com](http://www.touchingisgood.com) received higher traffic than the console’s official site at [www.nintendo.com/channel.ds](http://www.nintendo.com/channel.ds). The campaign, produced by Chicago marketing firm Leo Burnett USA, cost Nintendo over \$40 million and signaled a significant shift in its recent strategy of being the most conservative and youth-oriented of the three major console manufacturers.<sup>17</sup>

In the following pages, I detail and analyze the ads with the aim of showing how they worked in concert to accomplish three related ends: (1) a retraining of the body to learn novel interface habits, (2) explicitly identifying and satisfying a sensory deficiency symptomatic of late modern Western society, and (3) an implicit refashioning of the category of touch so that it meets the conditions of Nintendo’s new touchscreen interfacing technology in particular, and modern media systems more generally.

17 As Nintendo’s Senior Vice President of Marketing and Corporate Communications explained: “The campaign for Nintendo DS marks a different, bolder approach for Nintendo[...]We think such a radically different and creative device like Nintendo DS deserves the backing of an equally innovative and provocative marketing campaign.” Nintendo, “Nintendo Launches Massive Media Blitz for Debut of Nintendo DS: “Touching is Good” Campaign Features Provocative Spots,” October 25, 2004 <http://www.nintendo.com/newsarticle?articleid=62c5e8ca-165e-4259-a391-844b3ca8cdab&page=newsmain> (accessed March 15, 2006).



The Nintendo DS Portable Gaming System

The three aforementioned TV ads are seductively simple. Each of them opens with a liquid blue wire, fading into a rainbow test-pattern that dissolves into a static-dotted black screen with one unnaturally blue rectangle positioned in the center. A second blue rectangle unfolds above the first. Then a crackling noise, followed by a whispering female voice imploring: “Touch the bottom rectangle . . . please. Go ahead, touch it.” The DS materializes around the rectangles and the voice continues: “you might like it.” In the second trailer, the voice coos again: “See the bottom rectangle? Draw or write something in it. Don’t worry, this isn’t a test or anything . . . it’s just good *practice*” (my emphasis). In the third trailer, the sexual overtones ooze: “Touch the screen. Someone . . . somewhere . . . wants to play with you.” The DS boasts WiFi capabilities, meaning that it uses wireless communication to interact with other consoles. Nintendo promises to allow distanced touch through a screen. “Someone, somewhere” indicates the possibility of using the DS as an intimate space of interpersonal contact, recalling McLuhan’s framing of the telephone as a technology that allows emotional contact. The screen

in these ads ceases to be visual, becoming instead the promise of tactile contact, no longer a window for the eye but for the hand as well.<sup>18</sup> The DS purports to allow the possibility of manipulating a remote body, but also, the promise of being remotely manipulated by another body, becoming the touching object and the touched object. The screen is sexualized, not as a scopophilic interface that allows pleasure through remote viewing, but rather as an interface that allows for pleasurable mutual manipulation. Although the DS contains no feedback mechanism to simulate tactile contact between remote subjects, the ads conjure the *fantasy* of a networked, computer-mediated touching in order to create a desire for the interface-as-commodity.

#### FAMILIARIZING THE INTERFACE

These commercials, beyond signaling Nintendo’s aforementioned shift in marketing away from its normal target youth demographic

18 I am putting aside a discussion of optical tactility, which suggests that the eye can become an organ of touch. The model of optical tactility only emerges with the technological augmentation and fetishization of the eye. In acquiring its new range of powers technology also enabled the eye to function as a hand. For Walter Benjamin, writing shortly after the advent of cinema, film became a means of opening up the skin of reality, allowing the hand to feel around “like a surgeon” beneath its surface, a means of shattering the spectrality of the commodity form through optical-tactile contact. Touching the spectral commodity reveals its non-existence, as we are able only to touch its component parts. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, New York, 1969, 233. For further exploration of Benjamin’s theories on tactility, see Michael Taussig “Tactility and Distraction” in *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*, Routledge, New York, 1993; Mark Hansen, *Embodying Technesis: Technology Beyond Writing*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2000. Laura Marks goes so far as to separate cinematic visuality into “haptic” and “optical,” where haptic visuality is activated by intensely blurred or textured images. See *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*, Durham: Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2000; *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2002.

toward an older and more “hip” audience,<sup>19</sup> also function as an attempt to simultaneously mystify and familiarize the new touchscreen interface. They signal a deliberate effort to train the user to the touch screen, to construct it as a space of sexual contact, to seduce the viewer into fingering a feminized screen. They ask the user to engage in a new behavior – touching the normally unresponsive screen on the “bottom rectangle,” the space corresponding with the DS’s touch screen, establishing a direct link between bodily action with the finger collapsing on to the eye. It is not my argument here that Nintendo succeeds in or even expects to succeed in the task of re-training perception simply by showing viewers a series of fifteen-second commercials. Rather, the short and ambiguous teasers were designed to pique the viewer’s interest in touch, and to highlight both the deficiencies of the television screen and the promises of the DS. The ads asked the viewer to become physically interactive with the glass screen, but then immediately reminded them that such an interaction is useless: the finger can’t penetrate the glass to touch/manipulate the image behind it. The Dual Screen becomes a promise of bodily engagement – of penetration – flagged as being absent from the screens of cinema and television. Where much of the writing on new media has focused rather myopically on vision—on what happens on the screen—the DS asks us to learn a new habit of inter-

19 Before the release of the DS, Nintendo marketed its systems primarily to children. For the most part, it stayed away from the late-teen and adult gamer market. Compared to Sony’s PlayStation and Microsoft’s X-Box, Nintendo opted for a lower price point on its systems and games, cartoonish graphics over photorealistic ones, fantastical themes and storylines instead of more mature ones. Consider the signature games, PlayStation’s notoriously controversial *Grand Theft Auto*, X-Box’s grim first-person shooter *Halo* in comparison with Nintendo’s Mario franchise, in which players control a range of lovable characters such as the Italian-American stereotype brothers Mario and Luigi and anthropomorphized fungi. To further illustrate this shift, consider the placement of print ads for the DS in aforementioned “guy” magazines.

facing in which the body occupies a central role.<sup>20</sup> The interactive screen promises a new relationship between the hand and the eye, one in which they achieve synergistic mastery over the image.<sup>21</sup> We might generously read this as evidence of McLuhan’s claim that the rise of electronic media will rebalance a cultural sensorium that has, since the rise of typography, emphasized a detached form of linear seeing against other perceptual configurations. But does the DS accomplish such a rebalancing? The DS ads position it as a device that allows interpersonal touch – intersubjective contact – mediated by the sensing, eroticized screen. No longer a space of pure visuality, the DS ads teach us to reconsider our relationship to the screen, not to treat it as something touch contaminates but rather as a surface meant to be fondled, poked and caressed. Touch is introduced into the image; the finger (functioning as an icon for touch) is pressed into a space normally reserved for the eye, but in the process touch as a category of experience is fundamentally transformed as our expectations for the experience of touch are recalibrated to fit the capacities of its technological extension. Rather than disrupting the logic of the image, touch is brought under the control of a visual logic by pretending that touch’s technological reintegration under the eye’s mastery is sufficient to reproduce it.

20 For examples of interfacing being reduced to a purely visual/cognitive process see Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1995 and Lev Manovich *The Language of New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2001.

21 Of course, touch screens have a history that predates their use in video games. The first touch sensors for computer screens were originally developed between 1971 and 1974. See Mary Bellis, ‘Touch Screen,’ TheInventors.org, <http://theinventors.org/library/inventors/bltouch.htm>. Additionally, touch screens that provide haptic or force feedback are currently in development and have been deployed in a very limited scope. See Shigeaki Maruyama and Ivan Poupyrev, ‘Tactile Interfaces for Small Touch Screens,’ Proceedings of the 16th annual ACM symposium on User interface software and technology, November 2–5, 2003, 217–220.

## TOUCLUST: THE POVERTY OF TOUCH IN MODERN MEDIA

The print and internet ads tell a different, though related, part of the story. Here, we see touch explicitly framed as repressed mode of knowing, now liberated by the DS. The following text appears on the main page of [touchingisgood.com](http://touchingisgood.com):

*Touching is . . . thrilling, exciting, fun, weird, interesting. Sometimes a bit taboo. It's how we connect – with each other, the stuff around us and now, our games. Here, we celebrate the most under appreciated of your five senses. We make contact. We get in touch with touching. Because with the Nintendo DS, touching is good.*

Touch as underappreciated, as taboo, as weird and thrilling, mobilizes a narrative of marginalization—a bodily practice that is culturally repressed. By claiming to “make contact” and “get in touch with touch,” the ad implies that in the culture of late modernity, which has often been hailed or demonized as a culture of the image, we are out of touch with our sense of touch. Touch has become an alienated form of experience, one that exists only in the imagination of a pretechnological past. A prominent print ad for the DS employs a similar positioning, showing black fingerprints chaotically scattered across the page as the backdrop for the ad’s copy (see Figure 2). The fingerprint itself contains two layers of meaning; in the first, it stands for a technology of identification and surveillance, but the second, implied by their disordered littering, recalls childhood fieldtrips to the police station, fingerprinting for fun, a playful encounter with the state’s identification apparatus. Fingerprints are touch made visible, the materialization of an evidentiary and contaminating touch. The text laid over the fingerprints begins by conjuring a tactile childhood, before quickly moving to a concept of touch as mastery:

**Touching is not good.**  
Or so we're told. Please do not touch...  
yourself, your nose, wet paint, that zit,  
grandma's best china. You name it,  
you can't touch it. We think that's wrong.  
Why shouldn't you touch what you want?  
What if you could touch the games you  
play? What if you could make something  
jump or shoot or run just by touching it?  
Let's face it, touching the game means  
controlling the game. And when we say  
control, we mean precision control.  
One right touch and you're master of the  
universe. One wrong touch and you're toast.  
Forget everything you've ever been told  
and repeat after us. Touching is good.

**Touching is good.**

**NINTENDO DS.**  
touch control • wireless chat • voice control • wireless play

Touching is Good ad

**Touching is not good.** *Or so we're told. Please do not touch...yourself, your nose, wet paint, that zit, grandma's best china. You name it, you can't touch it. We think that's wrong. Why shouldn't you touch what you want? What if you could touch the games you play? What if you could make something jump or shoot or run just by touching it? Let's face it, touching the game means controlling the game. And when we say control, we mean precision control. One right touch and you're master of the universe. One wrong touch and you're*

*toast. Forget everything you've ever been told and repeat after us. Touching is good. Touching is good.*<sup>22</sup>

I will revisit some of these themes later in the essay. For now, I want to continue to press on Nintendo's construction of touch as a culturally regulated practice. The initial list provided in the ad presents a litany of restricted surfaces, sensations deemed contaminating to either the touching subject or the touched object. Since the publication of humanist anthropologist Ashley Montagu's *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin* in 1971, literature on the psychology of touch has levied a similar charge at Western culture. Montagu highlights the importance of touch in reaching several stages of psychological maturity, but because it is not understood as a central to cognition, he claims that this vital sense is not given the attention it warrants.<sup>23</sup> In "Touch as a Communicative Sense," Carl Sherrick claims that the rise of modernity, what McLuhan understood as the rise of print logic, entailed the banishing of touch to the realm of the "non-intellectual," confined to the domain of emotion and no longer allowed to make truth claims.<sup>24</sup> This denigration of touch has a history that stretches back to the Greeks and recurs in medieval Christian theology, but I will not retrace it here.<sup>25</sup> One hundred and thirty years after the phonograph recorded sound and one hundred years after cinema replicated the eye, the technological extension

<sup>22</sup> Nintendo.com, "Nintendo Launches Massive Media Blitz." Emphasis original.

<sup>23</sup> Ashley Montagu, *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*, Perennial Library, New York, 1971.

<sup>24</sup> Carl Sherrick, 'Touch as a Communicative Sense: Introduction,' *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, vol. 77, no. 1, 1984, pp. 218–19.

<sup>25</sup> For an expanded discussion, see A. Synott, 'Tomb, Temple Machine and Self: The Social Construction of the Body,' *The British Journal of Sociology* vol. 43, no. 1, 1992, 79–110; Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, Barrie & Jenkins, London, 1978; Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 1993; and Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 1990.

of touch remains a nascent project. But the fact that we have such an explosion of interest in tactile technologies can itself be read as symptomatic of a kind of cultural reality deficiency; the culture industry consistently falls short in its attempts to deliver a "data of experience" capable of substituting for experience in its nonmediated form.<sup>26</sup> As technologies of visualization are shown to be incapable of satisfying the demand for novelty and reality that emerge in response to the passage of the whole world "through the filter of the culture industry"—as increased polygon counts and photorealistic graphics are shown to be incapable of bringing reality into our hungry grasp—technologized tactility provides us with a renewed faith in our power to lay hold of reality through its technological reproduction. Once marginalized by Enlightenment paradigms of knowledge,<sup>27</sup> touch is given new life by the quest to reproduce reality in commodity form. With its tactile components absent, the image remains an unfaithful copy, revealed to our senses as a shatterable illusion. To produce a more faithful copy, technology must fill touch's empty and dormant sensory channels, attempting to satisfy this reality-lust through the addition of quantitatively more information.

These ads explicitly reframe the DS as a technology capable of satisfying our lust to touch, using a discursive repositioning of interfaces to restore the auratic components to reality that its mechanical reproduction stripped away. In short, Nintendo's claim that "we want to be touched" appears particularly valid when considered against a mass-mediated landscape that has produced desire through its consistent neglect of tactility. By replacing touch

<sup>26</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, Continuum, New York, 1997 [1947], 124.

<sup>27</sup> Günter Getzinger, 'Technology and the Loss of the Tactile,' in A. Bammé, G. Getzinger and B. Wieser, eds., *Yearbook 2002 of the Institute for Advanced Studies on Science, Technology & Society*, Profil, S., München, 2002, 228–229.

rather than replicating it, the tactility produced to meet this desire is doomed from the start to be another technique passed through the culture industry's filter, one that promises contact with an alienated reality, while only serving to further distance us from it.

Considered from another perspective, the debate over touch can be framed as a debate over the priority of the senses in the epistemological order. In short, this discussion is linked to the paradigm of vision as the path to knowledge that emerged during the Enlightenment. Prior to this period, many of the debates over ways of knowing were linked to the composition of the perceiving subject. The very nature of the senses was in question. The relations between seeing and hearing, and between touch and vision, were in the process of gaining articulation in eighteenth-century British empiricism. Arguments for the priority of experiential knowledge, *a posteriori*, were embraced, while *a priori* knowledge, gained through the use of reason, was abandoned. But if experience produced knowledge, then what sort of sensate experience provided the ground for truth claims? What experiences would be given credence and what would be disregarded, marginalized, or rendered irrelevant? The emergence of techniques for transcribing and mechanically producing a form of sensory experience that could serve as the ground for truth claims worked to elevate vision's status as the master sense, with image-making practices such as photographic profiling quickly deployed in service of institutional observation.<sup>28</sup> During the eighteenth century, the relationship between touch and vision had been a central concern in debates about sensory episte-

28 See especially John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1993; Jay, *Downcast Eyes*; Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1st American edn.), Pantheon Books New York, 1973.

mology, as vision's grounding in the tactile materiality of the body frequently raised questions about the mutual translatability of the two perceptual modes. However, by the end of nineteenth century, the conflict between these two senses was, in Jonathan Crary's narrative, resolved by the image-making technique of the stereoscope, which yielded "a tangibility [...] transformed into a purely visual experience."<sup>29</sup> New technologies of perception, then, participated in a rearranging of sensory hierarchies, closely tied to changes in the organization of consumption, governance, and knowledge-production.

Curiously, the Nintendo campaign calls attention to the shift from abstract to embodied knowledge, in a video that plays automatically upon loading [touchingisgood.com](http://touchingisgood.com). As the video begins, a sampled authoritarian voice lectures on the transition from rationalism to empiricism, explaining how "*a priori* knowledge was staunchly disavowed in favor of sight, smell, hearing, taste and of course, touch." The voice fractures, a record scratches, and the voice resumes, eerily declaring that "we want to be touched." Nintendo identifies the rise to dominance of sensory experience, recalling and mythologizing a moment in cultural history where tactile knowledge was valorized and celebrated. The text above the video, referenced above, dubs touch the most "under appreciated of our senses," with the DS providing a means of ameliorating touch's neglect by allowing us to "get in touch with touch."

Nintendo's clear attempt to activate a nostalgia for the purportedly-lost and marginalized sense of touch warrants further attention. This two-stage strategy, of first arguing that touch has an inherent but currently unrecognized value, and second, recalling a past in where this value was widely acknowledged and celebrated, summons apart where the sensorium existed in a perfect

29 Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 124.

state, only undone by a process of modernization. Here we can draw on Nadia Seremetakis's discussion of nostalgia in her description of "the Breast of Aphrodite," a breed of peach from her childhood lost with the increasingly transnational flow of goods in the EEC. Seremetakis raises the issue of sensation and memory, of the senses as the storehouse of a material yet subjective history. Changes in the common-sense experience of a community "occur microscopically through everyday accretion; so that which shifts the material culture of perception is itself imperceptible and only reappears after the fact in fairy tales, myths, and memories that hover at the margins of speech."<sup>30</sup> The global flow of goods evidenced in the loss of Aphrodite's Breast is, for Seremetakis, the lived sensory experience of macropolitical dynamics. Narratives of loss and nostalgia are the result of bodily interfaces with an increasingly structured material culture, and point to the inability of new commodities to replicate the sensory experience of the old. Loss is experienced through absence, through the inability of an object to trigger the expected sensory experience. Memory, for Seremetakis, acts as a "meta-sense" that involuntarily bridges the senses, bonding them while leaving their individuated contents undisturbed. In being involuntary, sense experience and memory are encompassed "by a trans-individual and somatic landscape."<sup>31</sup> Modernity, for the senses, entails their detachment from each other, their externalization, and, perhaps most importantly, their transformation into pathways for profit extraction. The modern world—the individual process of moving from childhood to adulthood alluded to in the DS print

30 Nadia C. Seremetakis, "The Memory of the Senses, Part I: Marks of the Transitory," in Seremetakis, ed., *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, Westview, Boulder, CO, 1994, 3.

31 *Ibid.*, 9.

ads—robs us of our contact with this mode of knowing.<sup>32</sup> The narrative of sensory conflict, which played out in the eighteenth century as vision 'denigrated' the other senses and resonated in counter-Enlightenment diatribes, now reemerges in Nintendo's propaganda for the DS.<sup>33</sup>

#### RECONSTITUTING THE TOUCHING SUBJECT

Here, we arrive at the third aim of "touching is good": an implicit reframing of what touch is and what it means to touch. The assertion that "touching is good" tacitly distinguishes between the active process of touching and the passive process of being touched, between touch as something that the subject *does to* an object and touch as something *done to* the subject. This bifurcation of touch recalls two different tactile modalities posited by psychophysics. The first model, that of *passive touch*, developed out of Ernst Heinrich Weber's (1795–1878) nineteenth-century experiments in which he attempted to determine the sensitivity of the subject's tactile system as different objects passed over different regions of his or her skin.<sup>34</sup> Weber's research produced a model where the active touching object stimulated sensations in the skin of the passive touched subject. These sensations were transmitted directly to the brain,

32 For a detailed discussion on the cultural forgetting of touch, see Mark Paterson, "The Forgetting of Touch: Re-memorizing Geometry with Eyes and Hands." *Angelaki*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2005, 115–32. Paterson argues that since the Enlightenment touch has been written out of practices of measurement, and tries to reintroduce an embodied measuring based on bodily movement, proportion, and haptic spatiality.

33 Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 404.

34 It is important to note that Weber did very explicitly discuss the benefits of active touch. However, he focused primarily on the articulation of "sensory circles," using passive touch to keep the body inert and thus claiming that his experiments would yield repeatable results. Ernst Heinrich Weber, *E. H. Weber on The Sense of Touch*, trans. H. Ross and D. Murray, Academic Press for Experimental Psychology Society, New York, 1978, 29–30.

but they were received differently depending on the sensitivity of the area stimulated and the intensity of the stimuli. By varying the intensity of the stimuli and soliciting his subjects' experience of them, Weber aimed to uncover the smallest change needed to produce in the subject a "just-noticeable difference" as the unit of tactile experience. David Katz, a phenomenologist who studied under Edmund Husserl, argued against Weber's passive model, demonstrating, also through lab experiment, that touch worked best not when the subject was passive, but rather, when the subject actively pressed against and manipulated objects.<sup>35</sup> Whereas Weber had considered the skin's whole surface as the organ of touch, Katz argued that the sense of touch could be confined to the hands because of their unique ability to recognize objects through active manipulation. Whereas Weber claimed that touch could be fooled because of the skin's varying capacities for sensation, and theorized the idea of the "tactile illusion," Katz claimed that the active hand was difficult to deceive. Psychophysics thus leaves us with two models of touch: the passive model, in which an active object rubbed against a passive subject, and the active model, where the active subject moves over a passive object. It is important to note that both Weber and Katz were very deliberate in their attempts to isolate the information received through touch from information received through the other sense organs. This involved, for Katz, either testing on subjects who were already deficient in one of their senses, such as the blind, or artificially limiting input from the other senses by using blindfolds or stuffing the subject's ears with wax. The significance of this component of the experiments is that it involves a sensory separation, detachment, and isolation like that which is accomplished by the technological extension of

the other senses (for example, in the detachment of the eye from the body accomplished by photography). This rationalization of the perceptual process had already been used to understand and perfect techniques of seeing, but had not yet been applied to the more intricate process of touch.

The DS ads seem to be advancing a model of active touch. The subject implied by 'touching is good' is one who must be acting on the world rather than being acted on by it. But upon closer examination, we can see that Nintendo's model does not fit with either of these. Katz's model of active touch assumes a bidirectional flow of information, where the hand takes in information as it moves over an object. Instead, with the DS, we see touch framed as a means of control, as a method of manipulation where the flow of information is unidirectional and the sensations provided by textured, multifarious objects are reduced to the uniformity of a glass screen. The hand functions only as a sender and not as a receiver of information. Recalling the DS print ad quoted above, "touching the game means controlling the game . . . one right touch and you're master of the universe;" touch becomes a means of mastery and control, achieved through body rhythms (that is, routine movements of the stylus or finger across the glass screen, or a precise tapping sequence required to navigate through the game), but not through the exchange of sensations with the touched object that was so important for both Weber and Katz. The promise to touch the game's world is never fulfilled – the finger never reaches through the screen to touch what is on the other side. Rather, the narrative of control—where the interface enables mastery over the gaming experience—defines what we might understand, following Alex Galloway's for-

35 David Katz, *The World of Touch*, trans. Lester E. Krueger, L. Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, 1989.

mulation of “gamic action,” as the paradigm of *gamic touch*.<sup>36</sup> The hand manipulates without feeling. Instead of putting us “in touch” with the world, where touch involves a process of mutual exchange between perceiver and perceived, the DS advances a model of touch absent of feeling, one in which the perceiver is only a manipulator and a controller. The technologically extended hand takes on the same characteristics of the technologically extended eye; it is abstracted from the body and rationalized. It becomes an instrument of manipulation rather than an organ of perception. It is through this process of explicitly telling us what touch is that Nintendo attempts to redefine the practice of touching. Though I have only sketched out two countervailing models, many more remain. Touch as a category of experience (the social history of touching) has a complex history that has only recently been explored.<sup>37</sup> I choose to contextualize Nintendo’s model through Weber and Katz because they are taken to be central figures in the creation of the modern science of touch, a science that has informed the design of contemporary touch-based interfaces. Other models may link the discourse in the DS ads to different histories of touch, revealing gendered or racial constructions of practices of touching. For my immediate purposes, it is sufficient to link the construction of technologized

36 Galloway argues that there is a discontinuity between the styles of visual presentation used in film and those used in video games. As Galloway points out, the first-person camera, so dominant a perspective in video games that it has spawned its own genre, is rarely used in film. A. Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2006.

37 For example, in Elisabeth D. Harvey, ed., *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia; Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry. Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2005; Paterson, “The Forgetting of Touch”, 2005; Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 2000; Marks, *Touch*, 2002; Malcolm McCullough, *Abstracting Craft: The Practiced Digital Hand*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1996; Cathryn Vasseleu, *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas, and Merleau-Ponty*, Routledge, New York, 1998.

touch back to the process of scientifically rendering the physiological mechanisms involved in the touching experience.

#### THE FINGERBOMBER

All this culminates in a very provocative ad that I will refer to as “Fingerbombing” (see Figure 3). Fingerbombing is a print ad that ran in scores of video game magazines and comic books for the military strategy game *Advanced Wars: Dual Strike*. The ad features a camouflaged hand with the index finger extending across the page, resembling a B-52 bomber. A series of small bombs falls from the finger, and the words “touching is good” appear in small white text next to the image. One of several similarly-styled print ads for DS games (others include *Need for Speed 2*, *Super Mario 64*, and *Pokemon Dash*) that merge the outstretched index finger with the gameworld, Fingerbombing is the most jarring and captivating of the campaign for its overt linkage of militarized touching—touch as distanced, detached, and destructive—to the vaguely-defined concept of “the good” discussed above. In the context of the present political situation, where the US military explicitly uses video games for recruitment and training purposes, this ad, even if it does so playfully, summons the long relationship between war, technology, and perception.<sup>38</sup> Again, my goal here is to show how the discursive positioning of interfaces by marketers aims to acclimate their users to new perceptual configurations. Projecting militarized imagery onto the hand and finger advances a model of touch as domination, continuing Nintendo’s equation of touch with mastery. I

38 *America’s Army* has rightly attracted a significant amount of attention from academics. But it is not so much anomalous as it is emblematic of a trend towards more accurate depictions of military experience that serve to acclimate gamers to battlefield conditions. Other examples include Tom Clancy’s *Ghost Recon* series and urban combat simulation *Full Spectrum Warrior*.



am not attempting to mobilize a humanistic or naturalistic model of touch against the one presented by Fingerbombing, but rather, trying to highlight the distinctive features underpinning the model of touch put forth by the advertisement. Touch, in this image, is the ability to manipulate from a distance; the interface here functions to insulate the gamer from danger while still allowing remote action, even if that action is only a crude form of destructive touching. Paul Virilio's claim that "the history of battle is primarily the history of radically changing fields of perception"<sup>39</sup> directs us to consider the ways in which mastering new techniques of representing and rendering of the enemy's perceptual landscape prefigures the domination of that sensory environment. Virilio continues, "war consists not so much in scoring territorial, economic or other material victories as in appropriating the 'immateriality' of perceptual fields."<sup>40</sup> The perceptual field that Virilio tracks in *War and Cinema* is treated as a primarily visual one (with some exceptions, notably the tactic of using screeching planes to disrupt ground troops). "Fingerbombing" directs our attention to both (1) the role of touch as an instrument for dominating the perceptual field, and (2) the shielding of the tactile field as a necessary precondition for this domination. Though the eye and its instruments survey the field, mastery over that field requires a tactile intervention, mediated in this instance by a series of what we can only assume are "dumb bombs." The act of bombing accomplished through the manipulation of the instrument panel folds into the image of the iconic finger. By touching, the finger destroys. But despite the claim made by the copy, the finger never touches; its pointed gesture implies that it is about to touch the edge of the frame, a space we may assume represents the flat frame of the DS's touch screen. The only touch

39 Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, Verso, London, 1989, 7.

40 Ibid.

represented in the ad is a distanced and detached touch mediated by the fingerbombs. This leads us to another prestigious absence in the frame: just as in distanced warfare the enemy is missing from the pilot's tactile field, the ground presumably laid to waste by the fingerbombs is not contained within the ad's visual field. The shielding of touch is represented by the shielding of vision.

This militarization brings with it a form of anesthetization consistent with that accomplished by the military technology represented in the ad. The woman painted on the 'nose' of the finger serves as a marker of the fingerbomber's sensory isolation. As Virilio notes, whereas in 1914 pilots' sensory systems were almost fully exposed to the wind, noises of the aircraft and battlefield (we can imagine this exposure impacted senses of smell and taste as well, though Virilio neglects to consider these), the technique of controlling the immediate perceptual field of bomber developed by the end of World War II was not without complications:

*the pressurized cockpits of US Superfortress bombers had become artificial synthesizers that shut out the world of the senses to a quite extraordinary degree. However, the effects of technological isolation were so severe and long-lasting that Strategic Air Command decided to lighten the dangerous passage of its armadas over Europe by painting brightly colored cartoon heroes or giant pin-ups with evocative names on top of the camouflage.<sup>41</sup>*

Much like the pressurized cockpit, the DS interface acts as a form of sensory armor that normalizes, regulates, and filters out feeling to allow detached, careful and precise manipulation. To manage the harsh and impossible sensory stresses of aerial combat, the

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 24.

body was shielded within an artificial environment. Any information allowed to penetrate this bubble was thoroughly controlled and instrumentalized, aimed at domination rather than copenetration; even the seemingly innocuous cartoon figure on the nose of the plane served to strategically humanize the harsh and foreign environment that loomed dangerously outside the windows of this controlled space. Recalling McLuhan's claims in *Understanding Media*, technologically extended senses become numb as a survival tactic in response to the electronic environment, an environment where awareness has become total, instantaneous, and—most significantly—beyond the subject's control.<sup>42</sup>

What McLuhan terms "autoamputation" occurs in response to this chaotic environment; technology anesthetizes the senses by shielding them from further stimulus, refusing their perfect extension. A militarized tactility shields the touching subject from feeling the touched object; electrification here does not involve total but rather a strategically incomplete sensory awareness designed to allow manipulation without fear of an uncontrolled and unregulated tactility contaminating the sanitized tactile field. 'Touching is good,' but only insofar as it is a touch that eliminates the possibility of reciprocal exchange and provides the technological framework for distanced manipulation.

## CONCLUSION

The Dual Screen ads illustrate the process through which our ideas about the senses are formed. By asserting a model of touch that is simultaneously new and nostalgic, they show how technologies of perception re-form our senses both by our material interactions

<sup>42</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 46–47.

with them, but also through the discursive frameworks that stage these material interactions. In mobilizing touch as the paradigmatic mode of interfacing, Nintendo brings modern gaming technology into dialogue with centuries-old debates about the primacy of perceptual modes in producing reliable and verifiable information. At the same time, this romanticized notion of touch described in the ads becomes possible only through the embracing of modern interface practices. Nintendo promises to liberate and restore the touching subject, but only if the subject submits to the radical altering of touch that occurs in the process of technologizing it. The subject that emerges can touch but is unable to feel; the technologically extended finger has no nerve endings, and everything becomes glass. The hand that Nintendo promises to liberate in its narrative of sensory conflict becomes, rather, the further servant of the eye: the hand that once gripped the textured joystick, along with the fingers that previously moved across the contours of buttons, now register no difference. On a broader scale, this line of inquiry orients us to the bodily practices of interfacing that accompany new information technologies. Ludwig Pfeiffer, in “From the Materiality of Communication to an Anthropology of Media,” traces the neglected history of materiality in Media Studies, pointing to several false starts that foregrounded the emerging attentiveness to materiality in contemporary approaches to media.<sup>43</sup> Reading Pfeiffer alongside Kittler’s assertion that our sense perceptions are ‘dependent variables’ in a compromise between marketers and engineers, we should attend to the way design processes encode assumptions about users’ perceptual limits and capacities into the materiality of digital

interfaces. Finally, we must consider the role interface technologies play in setting the parameters of sensory experience with the external world—in configuring the sense ratios that shape our experience with reality. From what I’ve presented here, it is obvious that technology alone does not determine the sense ratios of mediated experience. Rather, the extent to which we treat a particular sense modality as active or dormant is shaped, at least in part, by the discursive framing of interfacing practices. Through this orientation to media interfaces as forces that govern the constitution of perceptual experience, we can confront the complex relationship between technology, the senses, and ideology.

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43 Ludwig Pfeiffer, “From the Materiality of Communication to an Anthropology of Media,” in *New Media Conference: New Media are Cultural Techniques*, ed. XX, Bergen, Norway, 2004.

# Approaching the Untouchable: From Husserl to Merleau-Ponty

MIIKA LUOTO

Touch is a delicate matter, a matter of delicacy itself. What does its delicacy consist of? As we know, the sense of touch allows us to perceive objects as smooth or rough, as warm or cold, as light or heavy. However, touch is constituted by something that is not simply of perceptual order: to touch objects and grasp their properties, we must feel the way we are ourselves touched by the same objects. The sensitivity of touch regarding objects is dependent on our complex sensitivity of our own bodies. I find an object sticky or slippery as I feel how it resists or permits my movements, I grasp it as firm or unstable as I feel how it sustains or gives in to my posture, and I discover its sharpness or dullness as I carefully test its power to hurt my skin. Furthermore, the tactile sensitivity seems to exceed all “sensations”, “qualities” and “objects” as it concerns an immediate feeling of life or of corporeal existence. In the act of touching, I contact something as enjoyable or repulsive, as beneficial or adverse, as vital or fatal. Hence, to touch means to estimate:

is the new shoe properly supportive, is the sunshine too hot, is the embrace appropriate? As we can see, the question about the delicacy of touch refers us to a dynamic, in which tactual perception joins the sensitivity for being affected, and in which the touching of something or somebody means at once the estimation of the very mode of contact.

To touch is to approach. Touching an object, we learn to know about its physical nature as well as about practical ways of handling it. However, even if it is aimed at knowledge, the tactual approach is itself conditioned by a not-knowing manifest in palpating and probing. Here again, the tactual approach remains dependent on the way the act of touching allows the object to touch us, that is, to approach us. And even if touching often becomes self-evident routine or mere grasping, like when handling a familiar tool, it is precisely the feeling about... intrinsic to touching that keeps up the sensitivity of the tactual approach. This essential aspect of all touching is perhaps most purely present in caress, where we approach the other by being wholly exposed to him or her, where we contact the other's skin in a way that opens to an unfathomable depth. But is not the aspect of feeling about and of being exposed to what remains other than me also present in greatest tactual mastery? Let us think about skills like surgery or archery, where the firm hand trained through long practice at once gathers the sensorimotor sensitivity of the whole body. Here again, it is the estimative nature of tactual approach by which we allow something to be there for us. As we know, one can immediately feel if a wine glass is unwieldy when one grasps it and brings it to one's lips, and an experienced sailor can easily feel if the yacht is in balance by simply taking the wheel and feeling its light pressure.

Touching is, of course, sensing, and touch is called a sense: the sense of touch. At the same time, what we encounter in touch, is

sense as sensible meaning. At stake in touching, in the sensible contact with something or somebody, is the very sense of that contact. Whether I am curiously exploring a strange material with my fingers, getting a friendly prod on my shoulder, or becoming aware of the strengthening of the wind on my face, each time the sensible contact makes me feel a sense. As touching is always of a kind and of a quality, such a sense is never wholly reducible to a signification or determinable meaning. In touching, there is always an aspect I do not know, because it is an aspect that, by making me feel a sense, evokes my capacity to estimate and so calls for further palpating and probing. The way another's words, a moving incident, or an art work may touch us, are familiar examples of the situation, where we are forced or even obliged to sense the very sense of the contact. As we can see, the problematic of touch is by itself extended beyond the confines of a sense.

Touching is also extended beyond the tangible presence. In touching, the touched is never *simply* there. It is close as distinct, so that the one touching and the thing touched are together as separate. As my fingers palpate the surface of a rock, the very feeling of its rocky character is present in the way it secludes itself from my grasp; and as my fingers caress the skin of the other, she is there precisely as the other with whom I will never be the same. It seems that in touch we contact something that withdraws from contact within the contact. Could it be, then, that the delicacy of touch is conditioned by the possibility of feeling a presence which is never simply present but, rather, a coming into presence marked by a depth? Would the delicacy of touch, then, be a sensitivity specific to a distance within proximity, or to an interval or a gap? This may sound paradoxical, since we are accustomed to conceiving of touch as physical contact. However, perhaps there is, within touch, something like the intouchable.

We can find such an idea of the untouchable within touch in contemporary philosophy, especially in currents of thought influenced by phenomenology. One of the first to develop such an idea was Maurice Merleau-Ponty. He reflected on the *sense of the sense of touch*, in the wake of Edmund Husserl, throughout his work, but proposed his perhaps most far-reaching developments on the topic in his late philosophy. In fact, the untouchable remains, as a rather undeveloped notion, one of the last of his most thought-provoking words. In the following, I will try to present some of the main ideas along the route that leads from Husserl's analysis of touch in the context of transcendental phenomenology to Merleau-Ponty's reflection on it in the context of an ontology of the flesh.

#### DOUBLE-APPREHENSION, DOUBLE-CONSTITUTION

Touch becomes a major issue for Husserl in his analysis of the constitution of the lived body. The sense of touch plays a most decisive role in §§ 36–40 of the *Book II* of the *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, where Husserl attempts to show how my body is originarily given to me, and only given to me, through the sense of touch. “The Body as such can be constituted originarily only in tactuality and in everything that is localized with the sensations of touch: for example, warmth, coldness, pain, etc.”<sup>1</sup>.

The context of this analysis is the clarification of the dimension of the body within the constitution of reality, which is as such a remarkable field of phenomena. Here, Husserl tries to account

1 Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Zweites Buch, Husserliana Band IV*, Nijhoff, Haag 1952, 150. / *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book, Collected Works, Volume III*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1989, 158.

for the fact that the consciousness of things making up the objective reality in space and time cannot be thought without the constitutive function of the body. In their perspectival appearing, in their movements and in their capacity to affect, all things refer to a body, which is not simply a physical thing among others. In its unity, which Husserl calls “psychical”, the body is not situated in space in the same way as a physical thing. Instead of appearing like a physical body (*Körper*: in the English translation “body”), that is, according to “adumbrations” and a “sensuous schema”, the psychical body (*Leib*, in the English translation “Body”) is there as the “zero-point” (*Null-Punkt*) of all orientation.<sup>2</sup> All appearing points back to this absolute “here” and sets itself within an orientation system with its elementary oppositions between here and there, up and down, right and left etc. “Provisionally”, Husserl says, we can describe the site of the body by saying that “I have all things over and against me; they are all ‘there’ – with the exception of one and only one, namely the Body, which is always ‘here’”.<sup>3</sup> Hence, my body is given to me as *my* body without an external perspective. In distinction to other things, in relation to which I can change my position and so vary the appearance in which they are given to me, I cannot distance myself from my body, and therefore the possibility to vary its appearances is limited. I can immediately see many of my body parts only from certain angles, and some of them not at all. My body remains, from the point of view of intuitive givenness, “a remarkably imperfectly constituted thing”.<sup>4</sup>

To account for the remarkable constitution of the lived body, that is, for the immediate experience of this body as mine, Husserl starts his phenomenological analysis of touch, in §36 of the *Ideas*

2 *Ibid.* 158 / 166.

3 *Ibid.* 159 / 166.

4 *Ibid.* 159 / 167.

*II*, from the double contact between two hands touching each other: “Touching my left hand, I have touch appearances, that is to say, I do not just sense, but I perceive and have appearances of a soft, smooth hand, with such a form.”<sup>5</sup> In tactual perception, the thing touched (in this case, my left hand) is apprehended as an object with such and such properties. However, I can tactually perceive my left hand with its properties only if I move my right hand along its surface with varying speed and press it with varying force and so become sensitive to touch-sensations, which remain relative to the movement of the hand. Hence, it is the sensation complex belonging to the touching right hand that in fact brings about the tactual perception of the object, the touched left hand. “The indicational sensations of movement and the representational sensations of touch, which are Objectified as features of the thing, ‘left hand’, belong in fact to my right hand.”<sup>6</sup>

Similar touch-sensations, which however do not serve the objectifying function of perception, are in turn noticed in my touched left hand: it has “in it” non-objectifying sensations, which make me aware of being touched at those places. “But when I touch the left hand I also find in it, too, a series of touch-sensations, which are ‘localized’ in it, though these are not constitutive of properties (such as roughness or smoothness of the hand, this physical thing)”.<sup>7</sup> The touch sensations we experience “in” our bodies, those which Husserl also calls “touch-effects”, and which must be distinguished from sensations interpreted as properties of the object (“indicational or presentational” sensations), he terms with the neologism *Empfindnisse* or “sensings”.

5 *Ibid.* 144 / 152.

6 *Ibid.* 144–5 / 152.

7 *Ibid.* 145 / 152.

My left hand is, then, constituted at once as an objective thing with sensible properties, and as an animate part of my body with the capacity to sense. How should we conceive of their relation? “If I speak of the physical thing, ‘left hand’, then I am abstracting from these sensations (a ball of lead has nothing like them and likewise for every “merely” physical thing, every thing that is not my Body). If I do include them, then it is not that the physical thing is now richer, but instead *it becomes Body, it senses*.”<sup>8</sup> To grasp the hand basically as an objective thing independent of touch sensations would be to abstract from its phenomenal givenness; and to add the touch sensations subsequently to the physical thing “left hand”, so as to make it richer in predicates, would not succeed in apprehending the hand as what it is, namely, my hand as both sensing and sensed. My left hand is given to me originally as both touching and touched. It is through this “double constitution” that it first becomes my own, lived body. According to Husserl, the double constitution of the body is only possible through the sense of touch, because only in touch do we find the “double apprehension” (*Doppelauffassung*), in which “the same touch-sensation is apprehended as a feature of the ‘external’ Object [*als Merkmal des ‘äusseren Objekts’*] and is apprehended as a sensation of the Body as Object [*als Empfindung des Leib-Objekts*]”.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, the double-apprehension is at work in all touching, not only when I touch myself. When I tactually perceive an object as cold (a real property), I have in my finger the sensation of cold. The latter is not a perception, as it does not provide me the objective state of my hand as a physical thing. Rather, it is a localized sensation, through which the hand is given to me as something “more

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.* 147 / 155.

than a material thing”<sup>10</sup>, namely, as my own hand. In distinction to real properties belonging to physical things, the sensations belong to me and constitute, in their co-appearing with the physical properties, my own body. The tactual perception of an object is then necessarily bound to the self-feeling of the perceiving, lived body, occurring with the sensation of being touched. It is a body which feels itself, that is, a body as subject. Hence, tactually perceiving an object, I tactually sense myself as the one who perceives.

It is characteristic of touch that it is the *same* sensation which functions both as “indicational” or “representational” with respect to the touched object, and as a “touch-effect” of the object within the perceiving body. The same sensation, then, is apprehended as the perception of the object, and, “with a different direction of attention”, as a localized sensation within the animated body. During tactual perception I can, at any moment, change the direction of my attention to the part of my body touching the object and find on it parallel sensations: the coldness of the object is connected to the feeling of cold in my fingertips, the solidity of the table is related to the firm pressure it exercises on my thigh, the weight of the object is linked to the sensation of bodily tension, and the delicacy of the edge of the paperweight associates with the kinaesthetic feeling of my hand’s movements. Hence, in touching a material thing I never experience merely a relation between an external, material body and my own body, but also an occurrence specific to my animated, sensing body.

Let us summarize: According to Husserl’s analysis in the §36 of the *Ideas II*, the significance of the sense of touch for the constitution of the lived body is due its nature as double-apprehension and correlative double-constitution. The sensation-complex of touch is

10 *Ibid.* 150 / 157.

necessarily apprehensible in two different ways, that is, as touching and being touched, and is necessarily connected to the simultaneous constitution of two objectivities, that is, a physical body and an animated body or “soul” (*Seele*).

#### THE SOUL IN A SPREAD-OUT BODY

Husserl introduces the example of the two hands touching each other, in fact, to emphasize a striking *difference* between touch and vision (and, in addition, hearing). “Double apprehension”, in which the same sensation is apprehended both as a perception of an external object and as a localized sensation in the lived body, as well “double sensation”, in which two body parts each have the double apprehension of a perceived object and a sentient body – so that the same thing is sensed both as a touching body and as a touched object – belong exclusively to touch.

According to Husserl, we cannot find anything similar in other senses, especially not in vision. In distinction to, for example, a touching hand, the eye does not appear visually in the act of seeing. Even though the eye can be watched in the act of seeing with the help of a mirror, it is not the eye as seeing except indirectly. “I see something, of which I judge indirectly, by way of ‘empathy [*Einfühlung*]’, that it is to be identical with my eye as a thing (the one constituted by touch, for example) in the same way that I see the eye of an other.”<sup>11</sup> And in distinction to having touch-sensations in the touching hand, the visual sensation of colour does not appear as a localized sensation in the eye. Even though the eye can become a field of localized sensations, this happens only in relation to touch (being touched or experienced kinetically), due to which it is experienced as a (tangible) part of the body. Most importantly, vision

11 *Ibid.* 148 / 155.

lacks the kind of sensible reflexivity, of touching-touched, found in the sense of touch: “What I call the seen Body is not something seeing which is seen, the way my Body as touched Body is something touching which is touched”.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Husserl claims, we cannot really speak about vision as a modality of touch, so as if the eye would, in glancing its object, be in touch with it.

Hence, the role of touch and the role of vision are, in the constitution of the body and the external things, very different. Without the sense of touch, we would not have a body at all: by simply seeing our body parts, even if we moved them, we would not experience them as belonging to our own bodies. “A subject whose only sense was the sense of vision could not at all have an appearing Body; in the play of kinesthetic motivations (which he could not apprehend Bodily) this subject would have appearances of things”.<sup>13</sup> The experience of the body part as one’s own is based on the double sensation peculiar to touch.

We can now ask, regarding this stage of Husserl’s analysis, what is the sense of having a body, and what is the sense of its being mine? The bodily occurrences at issue in touching are not properties of the body as a physical thing, and yet they are properties of the body as an animated thing; these occurrences specific to my lived body arise “when [wenn] the body is touched, pressed, stung, etc., and they arise where [da...wo] it is touched and at the time when [wann] it is touched”.<sup>14</sup> Hence, the question of touch brings with itself the questions of spatiality, temporality and causality; this is in fact most challenging, because they must now be addressed in relation to the difference between the physical and the non-physical, that is, “psychic”, in the lived body. The psychic, even though

Husserl calls it a “stratum” (*Schicht*), is not something added to a pre-existing body, but something that has a body as intimately lived and felt as one’s own. “The psychic subject has a material thing as his Body [*Leib*] because it is animated, i.e. because he has psychic lived experiences [*Erlebnisse*] which, in the sense of the apperception of the human, are one with the Body in a singularly intimate way”.<sup>15</sup> As we can see, Husserl does not accept the Cartesian distinction between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. Instead, he attempts to show how the psychic belongs to material reality: “It is in connection with the material that the psychic is given to us”.<sup>16</sup>

The psychic – or the soul – is always connected to a body; this body, however, is not simply a physical body characterized by spatial extension (*Ausdehnung*), but a lived body also characterized by another kind of “spatiality”, namely “spreading out” (*Ausbreitung*) and “spreading into” (*Hinbreitung*). In the same way that the tactually sensed real properties belong to the touched object in space, while the touch-sensations (localized sensings) belong to me, so the real properties of my body belong to it as a physical, extended thing (*Körper*), while the localized sensings constitute my body (*Leib*) as spread-out in a non-physical way, and so belong to the “soul”. Even though living beings are, as necessarily material entities, extended in space, they are, taken as unities, not material realities: “according to what is psychic, they are, however, not material, and, consequently, taken also as concrete totalities, they are not material realities in the proper sense”.<sup>17</sup> In distinction to material realities, which are divisible, humans and animals are indivisible unities; at once, however, they are characterized by the “spreading out” peculiar to localized sensing, where

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.* 151 / 158

14 *Ibid.* 146 / 154.

15 *Ibid.* 121 / 129.

16 *Ibid.* 91 / 97.

17 *Ibid.* 29 / 36.

“localization” means, tentatively, that the sensations are differentiated regarding their place in the body and are recognized as belonging phenomenally to it. As a spreading-out, the localization of sensings seems to give me the experience not only of the part of my body where I am touched, but its very *unity* as my own. Hence, to be a psychical entity and to have a body means, for Husserl, to be one soul constituted by a spread-out body.

Now what is, regarding such a spread-out unity, the sense of “being my own”? Husserl himself addresses the question in the Supplement VI of the *Ideas II*, when he asks about the presence of the ego (*Ich*), the non-ego (*Nichtich*), and the “foreign to me” (*ichfremd*). Here he seems to refer in passing to a serious and difficult problematic, something like one’s own strangeness to oneself, when he writes: “Even my Body (*Leib*) is over against me – as body (*Körper*) but not as Body (*Leib*).”<sup>18</sup> After that he characterizes the lived body (but only insofar it is also a physical body) as “an Object foreign to me” (*ichfremdes Objekt*). The topic is left rather undeveloped by Husserl, but it points toward the unsettling question, whether the constitution of one’s own body is conditioned by an alterity.

This topic has been addressed in detail by Jacques Derrida in his great book, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*. During a critical discussion of Husserl’s analysis of touch that attempts to clarify the possibility of a pure auto-affection in touching and of the concomitant immediate experience of one’s own body, Derrida tries to show that such a possibility and such an experience are constitutively haunted by an alterity and a hetero-affection.<sup>19</sup> According to his reading, the “principle of principles” of phenomenology, which

in its optically determined intuitionism at once calls for the immediate fulness of touch, encounters the strongest resistance, in the analysis of touch, with the questions of space, localization and extension.<sup>20</sup> Notwithstanding Husserl’s efforts to sharply distinguish between the physical and psychic, the “spreading out” of the localized sensations, which is decisive for the immediacy and directness of the touching-touched-relation, necessarily implies an exteriority of the extended, physical body. It is “necessary that the space of the material thing – like a difference, like the heterogeneity of the spacing – slip between the touching and the touched, since the two neither must nor can coincide if indeed there is to be a double apprehension”.<sup>21</sup> The double apprehension constitutive of touch would not be possible without an exteriority, an outside foreign to both touching and the touched. “This detour by way of the foreign outside [...] allows us to speak of a ‘double’ apprehension (otherwise there would be one thing only: only some touching and only some touched)”.<sup>22</sup> Instead of a pure auto-affection, touching is in fact characterized by spacing. The hierarchy between touch and vision, as developed by Husserl, cannot be sustained in its purity. It becomes necessary, then, to reconsider the relations between the senses as well as their own identity. At the same time, the constitution of the body as my own body requires the passage through the strange outside as well as through the other.

Let us again summarize: For Husserl, the lived body implies something other than the physical body, but this other than physical is inseparable from the physical. Being irreducible to physical determinations, the psychic or the soul exceeds the physical body, and yet is nothing external to it. In its capacity to touch, the soul

18 *Ibid.* 317 / 329.

19 *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry, Stanford U.P., Stanford 2005, 179.

20 *Ibid.* 173.

21 *Ibid.* 175.

22 *Ibid.*

is what is *in excess* of the tangible body *within* the tangible body. Here, Husserl's analysis of touch seems to approach its limits as it addresses the constitutive role of touch with the help of the distinction between the physical body (*Körper*) and the lived body (*Leib*), determined by the correlative distinction between the extended space and the internal spreading-out. Governed by the oppositions between an inside and an outside, between the ego and the other and between immediacy and mediacy, Husserl's analysis of touch seems to stop before the questions about divergence, alterity and distance.

Now, let us turn to Merleau-Ponty, who tirelessly worked on the possibilities of phenomenology at the very limits of phenomenology. For him, the question of touch presents us precisely the issues of divergence in coincidence, of alterity in identity, and of distance in proximity.

#### THE SENSE OF INCARNATION

In Merleau-Ponty's late work, we can find the topic of touch reappearing with a decisive philosophical significance. In a remarkable way, he both follows Husserl's analyses into the most peculiar aspects of touch, and at once transforms their results into something very different. In this way the topic of touch is disengaged from a phenomenology of consciousness and addressed within an "ontology of the flesh" that it itself helps to develop. Regarding the topic of touch, Merleau-Ponty enters a dialogue with Husserl in which he, here as elsewhere, attempts to address "an unthought-of element in his works, which is wholly his and yet opens out on something else".<sup>23</sup> Instead of repeating what Husserl had already said, the assumed "faithfulness" of such a reading of Husserl consist

in a wholly new thinking, which addresses the work of the previous philosopher as "made of certain articulations between things said".<sup>24</sup> According to Merleau-Ponty, there is in the dialogue of philosophers a middle-ground, on which it is *in principle* impossible to decide at a given moment, what comes from the philosopher who speaks and what from the philosopher one speaks about. To think is not to possess the thoughts – perhaps it is, rather, to be touched by them and to allow them touch.

In Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy, touch seems to grant resources – at once intra-phenomenological and pointing toward another kind of thought – that help him to disengage from the consciousness-world structure (which according to himself still governed his previous philosophy) and lead him to develop an ontology of the sensible world. In the posthumously published *The Visible and the Invisible* (which in its fragmentary character witnesses a work-in-progress, not a closed work) he declares that he wants to submit the previous results of his *Phenomenology of Perception* to an ontological re-elaboration in order to clarify the very sense of the sensible world and to further study it as the soil of all ideality. Here, touch proves to be not merely one sense among others: rather, it reveals an ontological structure – variously designated as "inter-twining", "chiasm" or "reversibility" – constitutive of the presence of the world. Merleau-Ponty approaches what he calls the "brute being" or the "wild essence", that is, the presence of the world as it is originarily given to us in "perceptual faith", with the help of a new conceptuality, which always remains closely related to the phenomenon of touch. Even if his philosophical inquiries seem to grant a significant privilege to vision (as can be already marked in his titles, *The Visible and the Invisible* and *The Eye and the Mind*),

23 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, Gallimard, Paris 1967, 202 / *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary, Northwestern U.P., Evanston 1998, 160.

24 *Ibid.*

the ontological re-elaboration of vision as “vision in act”, as well as the development of the idea of “the flesh”, conceived of as the visibility of the world, is decisively indebted to reflections on touch.<sup>25</sup>

Let us come briefly back to Husserl’s analysis of the two touching hands. Now when my right hand touches the left hand, I have at once two sensations, each of which may be apprehended in two different ways, so that touching becomes the touched, and the touched becomes touching. We cannot say, as Husserl points out, that we first perceive the left hand as a physical object, to which localized sensations are then added as new properties. On the contrary, the left hand is given originally as both touching and touched, so that the distinction between the sensed, physical body and the sensing, animated body is in fact an abstraction. Now when the hand “becomes Body [*Leib*]”,<sup>26</sup> as Husserl says, a physical body is not simply endowed with sensibility, so that it would become conscious of itself as both object and subject; rather, the distinction between subject and object is *blurred*. Since sensibility takes place as the body, which is tactually sentient only insofar it is tangible, it does not make sense to conceive of sensibility as a faculty of the mind. Instead, tactual sensibility is incarnation, the becoming-body of touch. The touching hand and the touched hand are not two separate dimensions; instead, each of them is the *reverse* of the other. For Merleau-Ponty, the incarnation of a sense is precisely this exteriority within interiority: the sensing hand, for example, as touching-touched.

Hence, my body is *my* body only insofar as it is incarnated sensibility, while, correlatively, the very nature of sensibility lies in its

25 For an admirable presentation of Merleau-Ponty’s late philosophy, including the question of touch, see Françoise Dastur, “Monde, chair, vision”, *Chair et langage*, Encre Marine, Le Versanne 2001. / “World, Flesh, Vision”, in Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (eds.), *Chiasms*, trans. Theodore A. Toadvine Jr., State University of New York Press, Albany 2000.

26 Husserl, *Ideen II*, 145 / 152.

incarnation. Furthermore, if sensibility necessarily has its body, then it is not so much that “I” tactually sense “my” body, but that I am given to myself as an “I” in the form of a tangible body.

When he returns to Husserl’s analyses of touch in his last writings, Merleau-Ponty is in fact not addressing merely the constitution of the body-subject; what is at stake for him there is, rather, the very sense of our incarnation, taken as the sole condition of our access to the world, to the others and to ourselves. He finds in touch a “sort of reflexion”, by which the body exceeds itself, within itself, toward things: it is “a relation of my body to itself which makes it the *vinculum* of the self and the things.”<sup>27</sup> The phrase “sort of reflexion”, used by Merleau-Ponty in quotation marks, refers to the French translation of Husserl’s *Cartesian meditations*. Although the phrase is lacking in the posthumously published German version of the text because of Husserl’s own omission of it, the very idea can still be found there. During a phenomenological analysis of the transcendental ego, purified from the objective world and the others, Husserl writes: “As *perceptively* active, I *experience* (or can experience) *all of Nature, including my own animate organism*, which therefore in the process is reflexively related to itself.”<sup>28</sup> According to Husserl, this is possible (as already stated in the *Ideas II*) because of the immediate reflection inherent to the sense of touch, which allows me to experience my body simultaneously as a tangible object of nature and as an animate body functioning as the organ of touch: “That becomes possible because I ‘can’ perceive one hand ‘by means of’ the other, an eye by means of the hand, and so forth – a procedure in which *the functioning organ must become*

27 Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, 166 / 210.

28 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Meiner, Hamburg 1995, 128. / *Cartesian Meditations. An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns, Nijhoff, The Haag 1982, 97.

*an Object and the Object a functioning organ.*"<sup>29</sup> Hence, already in Husserl the reflexivity accomplished by the touching-tangible body is related to a kind of "reversibility".

For Merleau-Ponty, however, reflexion and the idea of reversibility become something very different, especially as he restores, against Husserl's strict rejection, a certain parallelism of touching and seeing. Once the turning of touching into the touched hand and of the touched into touching is generalized to cover all sensibility and, moreover, extended to the relation of the body to the world and to itself, it becomes, as the "reversibility" of the sensing into the sensed and of the sensed into sensing, a veritable ontological principle. Most importantly, such a reversibility shows for Merleau-Ponty that the subject-object-distinction is blurred not only in my body (as one could have read from Husserl), but also between my body and the world. Namely, if the reversibility is without coincidence or fusion, that is, if touching is never exactly the touched and seeing never exactly the seen, so the vinculum of the self and the world is marked by a divergence, an *écart*, which is constitutive of the body's openness toward the world. The "interiority", sketched by the reversibility of the sensing-sensed body, is from the start conditioned by an exteriority and, therefore, essentially an open one: it is the very "openness" of the bodily ex-sistence, its "being-to" (*être-à*).

Extended to all sensibility, reversibility constitutes an ontological structure, for which one cannot account in terms of consciousness. Just like touching takes place according to the way the hand palpates the thing and so enters, as itself tangible, the world of tangible things, so vision takes place amid the visual world and according to the movements of the itself visible body. Therefore, it is not merely a metaphor when Merleau-Ponty writes that the "look

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

[...] envelops, *palpates, espouses* the visible things".<sup>30</sup> According to him, we can find in seeing the same kind of ontological kinship between the sensing and the sensed that we can feel in the tactile palpation, "of which, after all, the palpation of the eye is a remarkable variant".<sup>31</sup> In this way, Merleau-Ponty calls us to reflect on vision in terms of touch in order to reveal that the condition of vision, like the one of touch, lies in the incarnation of sensibility.

#### PALPATION IN DEPTH

What the sensing-sensed body reveals, is, in fact, an originary structure of the *world*. The reversibility of consciousness and its object in my body – of the touching and the touched, of the seeing and the visible – refers to the mode of being of the world Merleau-Ponty calls "flesh" (*chair*). Although the word *chair* was, first, a translation of the German *Leib*, designating the lived body in distinction to the physical body, in Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy it is extended to a basic notion of his ontology. It is neither matter, nor substance, nor spirit, but more like an "element", for which there is, according to Merleau-Ponty, no name in the previous history of philosophy.<sup>32</sup> Flesh designates the mode of being of the world for the incarnate existence. As the differential field of all sensible appearing, the world includes the body, and so it exceeds all consciousness and any meaning given to it by the latter; and yet, since the world is not constituted as an objectivity but remains a correlate of the bodily life, it also exceeds pure facticity and so presents sense.

<sup>30</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, Paris: Gallimard 1964, 175. / *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1968, 133.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 193 / 147; 183 / 137.

As a veritable philosophical problematic, the flesh implies all the major questions of Merleau-Ponty's ontology: the questions about the relation between the body and the world (addressed especially in terms of the "chiasm" or "intertwining") and between the sensible and the sense (addressed especially in terms of the visible and the invisible), as well as about the nature of the aforementioned correlation (addressed as one between being and "interrogation"). Let us however notice that Merleau-Ponty gives a priority to *vision* as he develops the notion of flesh as the visibility of the world. Therefore, we must attend to the relation between touch and vision, as well as to the relation between the various sense modalities within the whole of the sensible.

As Merleau-Ponty's reflection on touch shows, touching occurs only as immersed in the body: there is touch only as incarnation of sensibility. Now, the incarnation of touch corresponds to the mode of presence of the tactual object, which is there not clearly laid out in extension but, rather, in an obscure (even if delicate) presence, close as distinct. What presents itself in touch, as the tactile world, is a dimension which is not presentable by itself. In touching, then, we are exposed to a *depth*. To remain open, this obscure dimension of the tangible world must remain crystallized in the body, in the touching-touched.<sup>33</sup>

Vision, in contrast, seems to occur only as the surpassing of the body: there is vision only as a sensibility which tends to forget its incarnated condition. This corresponds to the mode of presence of the visible, which seems to be there in pure exteriority, present in front of us as spread out in extension. Depth, now immediately crossed

by the act of seeing, tends to become reduced to a third dimension along height and width. These basic traits of vision pave the way for the interpretation of seeing as an activity of thought, as well as for the interpretation of the visible world as the objective world.

In the theory of vision proposed by Descartes in his *Dioptrics*, seeing is an "action by contact", in which light particles touch the seeing eye. Seeing is therefore an action like those of the blind, who "see with their hands" as they touch things with a cane.<sup>34</sup> Here, touch stands for the immediate and direct physical contact, which tends to remain hidden in visual perception. Although Husserl's phenomenological approach to the sense of touch is irreducible to Descartes's mechanistic model, also for him the sense of touch may play such a decisive role because it is understood as an immediate and direct contact. For Merleau-Ponty, in contrast, touch does not refer basically to physical contact and is not marked by the values of immediacy and directness. Instead, touch leads us to a very different dynamic, in which we find a relation of distance and proximity within contact, and a relation of tangible and intangible within touching itself.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the ontological re-elaboration of the perceived world must proceed by way of a re-elaboration of seeing, because the world is essentially a world of vision: "one would not make a world out of scents or sounds". It is vision alone which gives me the "presence of what is not me, of what *is* simply and fully".<sup>35</sup> To account for the *ontological* sense of the visible world, we must break with those interpretations of seeing that make of

33 Renaud Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène*, Millon, Grenoble 2001, 229. / *The Being of the Phenomenon*, trans. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor, Indiana U.P., Bloomington, 2004, 199.

34 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit*, Gallimard, Paris 1964, 24–25. / "Eye and Mind", *Maurice Merleau-Ponty Reader*, eds. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor, orig. trans. Carleton Dallery, Northwestern U.P., Evanston 2007, 360.

35 *Ibid.*, 49 / 375.

it a “thought of seeing” (*pensée de voir*), a seeing detached from the bodily activity in which it takes place and from the “there is” (*il y a*) – the primordial presence of the world – it contains. Instead, we must engage with what Merleau-Ponty calls the “enigma of vision”, which concerns “vision in act” (*vision en acte*) behind the thought of vision familiar to the tradition of philosophy.<sup>36</sup> The vision in act, of which we have an idea only in its bodily exercise, is not an intentional relation between consciousness and its object but, rather, a relation of reversibility confirmed by touch.

Here, the study of touch accomplishes a kind of reduction of vision that shows the necessary inscription of all sensing in the sensed. To break with the thought of seeing and to liberate vision in act, we must learn to see in visual distance a proximity, in other words, to rediscover the tactile under the visual: we must learn to know, “within the vision itself, a sort of palpation of the things”.<sup>37</sup> Like touching, which only takes place in a tangible body, vision also only takes place in a visible body amid other visible bodies, which it encounters laterally, not frontally. I can see only on the basis of an ontological “kinship” between the visible object and my visible body, which implies that, in the act of seeing, vision and movement condition each other. “All my changes of place figure in principle in an area of my landscape; they are carried over onto the map of the visible. Everything I see is in principle within my reach, at least within the reach of my sight, and is marked upon the map of the ‘I can.’ Each of the two maps is complete. The visible world and the world of my motor projects are both total parts of the same Being.”<sup>38</sup> Here, seeing is originally not my own capacity: as *I see* things from amid things, their visible presence is like a crys-

36 *Ibid.* 34 / 366.

37 Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, 115 / 83.

38 Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit*, 12–13 / 354.

tallization in my body of a general *visibility of things*, which takes place relative to the movements of my visible body. Hence, my act of seeing is the reverse side of a deeper event, according to which things become visible.

Now the “things” of the visible world are principally not pure things, “identical to themselves and wholly positive”, as they seem to be given across the distance in vision. Rather, their presence also is one of distance in proximity, as experienced in touch. Because of the inscription of our bodies in the sensible world, and the correlative appearing of the things of the world in relation to our own bodies, the presence of the visible things is determined by an unsurpassable depth. Therefore, our relation to them is never one of transparency, but always one of ambiguity. Furthermore, since the sensible presence of all things expresses at once their inscription in the texture of the world, their appearing always takes place according to a singular form or style Merleau-Ponty calls “dimension”.

Now we can see the importance of touch for the explication of the flesh, of the visibility of the world. Vision must not be understood in the way it presents itself to us, namely, as an act which surpasses our bodily condition to enter pure exteriority, and which may then be subsequently interpreted in terms of the spectacle it has unfolded before our minds. Instead, it is necessary to understand the “thickness” of our bodily existence as our very access to the depth of the world, that is, to understand vision as a “palpation in thickness”. “We should have to return to this idea of proximity through distance, of intuition as auscultation or palpation in thickness, [...] a view of self [...] which calls ‘coincidence’ in question.”<sup>39</sup> So, the study of touch leads, in Merleau-Ponty’s late philosophy, toward the ideas of thickness and of depth within contact. As it is

39 Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, 170 / 128.

constitutive of all presence, this depth cannot be surmounted. It is a distance in proximity, an originary spacing.

#### THE UNTOUCHABLE

As we have seen, the body touches by remaining tangible in touch, so that there is no consciousness of touching beyond this body. At the same time, the body remains passive in its tactual activity, exposed to being-touched in its own tangibility. Tactual sensing, then, takes place on an *ontological* level preceding the subject: it is an advent of sensibility.<sup>40</sup> Most importantly, the two hands continually changing their roles as touching and touched do not, in fact, represent even in passing the two aspects of activity and passivity, of consciousness and object. Instead, their reversibility is such that they are *joined* by what *separates* them: the two “halves” of the touching-touched are not superimposable. There is, at the heart of touching, a *divergence* constitutive of it. “[I]t is a reversibility always imminent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization”.<sup>41</sup> The touching hand, then, never grasps the other as touching, but only as touched, that is, as its own reverse side. Far from being a failure, the impossibility of coincidence between touching and the touched is what prevents their fusion and so opens the body to the world. Just because touching and the touched are never exactly superimposable, the bodily reflexion is essentially an openness to the “there is” of the world, to its ungraspable depth: “the essential is the *reflected in offset* (*refléchi en bougé*), where the touching is always *on the verge* of apprehending itself as tangible, misses its grasp, and completes it only in a

40 Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène*, 283 / 245.

41 Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, 194 / 147.

*there is*”.<sup>42</sup> Hence, the bodily self-relation – touching-touched – is a *self-difference* opening it to the tangible world: the divergence of the reversibility corresponds to the unfolding of an exteriority in the advent of sensibility.

The divergent reversibility can, according to Merleau-Ponty, be generalized to all senses as well as to their relations to each other. Rejecting a “crude” delimitation of the senses,<sup>43</sup> according to which they differ in their respective ways of gathering information, Merleau-Ponty develops a notion of senses, in which each sense only exists as the difference of the sensibles in its domain, and sensibility itself only exists as the difference between senses.<sup>44</sup> Every sensible is in accord with every other only through its divergent reversibility. Even though I cannot see some of my body parts, like the back of my head or the seeing eye, while touch is spread out over my whole body, it is the “same thick reflection that makes me touch myself touching and [makes] the *same* in me be seen and seen: I do not even see myself seeing, but *by encroachment* I complete my visible body, I prolong my being-seen beyond my being-visible for myself.”<sup>45</sup> Because all senses are determined by divergent reversibility, or in other words, because there is an “overhanging that exists within each sense and makes of it ‘*eine Art der Reflexion*’”,<sup>46</sup> the different sense-registers are not closed into themselves but are openings to the world.

Merleau-Ponty call us to conceive of the sensible as an “initiation” into the world: each sensible exceeds itself, within itself, and so gives rise to a sensible universality constitutive of a “dimen-

42 *Ibid.* 311 / 260.

43 *Ibid.* 176 / 133.

44 Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène*, 230 / 199.

45 Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, 256 / 202.

46 *Ibid.* 309 / 256.

sion". Hence a yellow, for example, "at the same time gives itself as a *certain* being and as a *dimension*, the expression of *every possible being*".<sup>47</sup> As a sensible whole, which "suddenly opens unlimited dimensions", it becomes a "total part", which is "absolutely incommunicable" for other senses and yet structurally open to all other "total parts" of all other senses. As we can discern from experience, the movements of my tangible body, including the movements of my seeing eyes, are inscribed in the visible space, while every vision takes place in some corner of the tactile space. "There is double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not merge into one. The two parts are total parts and yet are not superposable."<sup>48</sup> Due to the encroachment of each sensible part, which "transgresses the frontiers of the others" upon the depth of the world, "the present does not stop at the limits of the visible (behind my back) [...] Perception is not first a perception of *things*, but a perception of *elements* (water, air . . .) of *rays of the world*, of things which are dimensions, which are worlds".<sup>49</sup> Hence, before opening us to *what* we perceive, perception in fact opens us to that *with which* or *according to which* we perceive.

Here, "perception" and the "sensible" do no more designate the relation between the incarnate subject and its world, but the presence of the world itself, which is given by an encroachment between parts and the whole, between a singular and a universal. Here, we cannot keep up the distinction (except by way of abstraction) between sensing, the subject of which is the body, and the appearing of the sensed, the agent of which is the world. In other words, we cannot really distinguish between the way sensing be-

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47 *Ibid.* 271 / 218.

48 *Ibid.* 177 / 134.

49 *Ibid.* 271 / 218.

comes body (sensibility as incarnation) and the way the world appears (phenomenon). It is a question of the one and same event, of a "dehiscence" which gives birth simultaneously to the sensed sensible and the sensing sensible. In this event, the sensing-sensed body marks a divergence in the power of appearing. It opens a distance between the phenomenon (a singular mode of appearing) and the world that appears in the phenomenon (the depth of the "there is" something), which, as distance, at once joins them together.

Let us return to touch, the analysis of which has oriented all Merleau-Ponty's insights discussed above. We must admit that the place where the tactual phenomenon is joined with the depth of the world by the divergent reversibility of the body can neither be found in the body, nor in consciousness. Rather, their junction lies in what Merleau-Ponty calls the "untouchable". At the verge of his unfinished work, he writes that it is the *untouchable* "of the other which I will never touch. But what I will never touch, he does not touch either, no privilege of oneself over the other here".<sup>50</sup> What matters here is not merely something factually inaccessible to touch, but something in principle *untouchable* implied in the reversible relation of touching-touched. It is a negativity within touch, Merleau-Ponty says, that is not an absent positivity, but "a true negative, i.e. an *Unverborgenheit* of the *Verborgenheit*, an *Urpräsentation* of the *Nichturpräsentierbar*, an original of the *elsewhere*, a *Selbst* that is an Other, a Hollow".<sup>51</sup>

With this dense description, Merleau-Ponty situates the *untouchable* in the core of the structural dynamic of the sensible world. Everything sensible is an original presentation of what cannot be presented, since being always manifests itself "without becoming

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50 *Ibid.* 308 / 254.

51 *Ibid.*

positivity, without ceasing to be ambiguous and transcendent”.<sup>52</sup> The sensible is already there like the *other*, who is close to me in his or her body as irreducible distant, without the possibility of an originary presentation as Husserl says, or is being un-concealed only in relation to a concealment, as Heidegger says. To be a sensing-sensed *self* means, then, to be also *other to oneself*, to be determined by an unsurpassable foreignness. As body, one shares this foreignness with other bodies in an “intercorporeity” which, according to Merleau-Ponty, precedes all consciousness of intersubjectivity.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, in distinction to the absolute *here* which for Husserl characterizes the spatiality of one’s own body, to be a body means, for Merleau-Ponty, to be always already somewhat *elsewhere* and never exactly present to oneself, that is, to be “there” rather than “here”. The body is the place of dislocation, of deviation, of divergence. “There is coincidence with the self only as divergence from the self, self-presence only as self-absence”.<sup>54</sup> And in distinction to the “localized sensings” that for Husserl open the interior spatiality of the lived body, the body is, for Merleau-Ponty, marked by a *hollow*, the place of the originary spacing of the sensible world. Hence, the untouchable belongs no more to the other than to myself, no more to consciousness (of touching) than to the body (touched); rather, it is the true negative as the divergence or the gap at the core of the event of phenomenalization, where a tangible is given for touch and, simultaneously, touching is opened to the world.

The untouchable, then, is not the opposite of the tangible or of touching but, rather, its very condition. It is the point at which I can never be present, but at which I am taken by the imminence of touching. It is a point I can never reach, because through it I will

always only find myself, belatedly, as being already touched and, reversibly, as being already engaged in touching. The untouchable is, very concretely and yet ungraspably, the distance within contact that keeps it up as contact, the withdrawal from coincidence that calls us to touch – delicately, with tact.

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52 *Ibid.* 267 / 214.

53 *Ibid.* 185 / 140 ; cf. Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène* 283ff / 244ff.

54 Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'invisible*, 246 / 192.

# A Little Distance, Please – On the Relationship Between Mediality and Touch<sup>1</sup>

MAIJU LOUKOLA

Questions concerning the relationship between media and the stage have become central in contemporary scenography. Through new media-technological possibilities, the practice of scenography has grown increasingly tightly bound to issues of perception and presence. In this essay, I sketch a framework of the relationships between the stage, mediality, and touch and their significance with regard to the study of scenography. I argue for approaching the intermedial stage with heightened sensitivity towards its medial setting in relation to bodily experience. My main points of reference are Aristotle's reflection on the senses and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ontology of vision and visibility. This opens up a path to considering scenography and its media-technological conditions from a phenomenological point of view.<sup>2</sup>

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1 An earlier version of this essay was published in *Kosketuksen figureja*, ed. Mika Elo, Helsinki: Tutkijaliitto, 2014, 44–71.

2 The argument presented in this essay is developed more in detail in my dissertation: Maiju Loukola, *Vähän väliä. Näyttämön mediaalisuus ja kosketuksen arkkitehtuuri*, Helsinki: Aalto ARTS Books, 2014 [Anywhere near. Media scenographies and the architectures of touch].

Central themes that arise here are sensory sensitivity and the reciprocity of sensing, which involves the eye's, the mind's, and the body's ways of touching and being touched. It is a matter of interplay between perception and the perceived. With help of this starting point, scenography comes to recognise the unified effect of seeing and corporality, which is, in a certain sense, experienced as excess within the sphere of the perceived – this is the sensory aspect of the architecture of touch. Gaze and touch become overlapping and parallel forms of perception. On this premise, the difference between the live and of mediated forms of stage presence delicately intertwine instead of building a coarse opposition.

One of the objectives of this essay is to outline the central concepts of my research concerning mediality on stage, and more specifically, video projections in a scenic context. I re-consider experiential structures produced by the optical tactics of scenography and the virtuality of the medial stage from the perspective of touch. This is done through transforming questions of visibility into questions of (the world's) visibility. This leads me to studying the *screen* as a multifaceted issue intimately related with video projections. This forms the key anchoring point on the media technological side of the structure I call *architecture of touch*. The shift from vision to visibility involves detailed analysis of the virtual dimension included in *performability*, and at the same time an attempt to grasp the conditions of stage as a place not located in certain physical space and time. This kind of endeavours were at the core of the artistic parts of my dissertation, where I developed ways of articulating the spatio-visual aspects of the medial stage from experiential point of view, while also mapping virtual structures of presentability.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## MEDIA AND MEDIALITY

Media are often thought as being various technical instruments, particularly instruments of communication and information technology. In this essay, I examine mediality as a structure located between sign, trace, and technological device.<sup>4</sup> In this conceptualisation, media are not conceived as technical instruments alone, but rather when examining them one must take into consideration their role as instances of distance and mediation. Media are linked both to processes of signification and perception. Mediality should, then, be thought of as a structure bound to the body – and, as I will attempt to clarify, also in relation to that "in-between" (*metaxy*), which Aristotle links to the mediation of the sense of touch and sensations.<sup>5</sup> The media-theoretical discussion for which Aristotle laid the groundwork must not stop at finding the interval, that is, the idea that a prerequisite for perception is some in-between, through which and through the mediation of which sense experience becomes possible. An approach of this sort is indicated by Aristotle's famous example of an ant on the vault of the sky, which he borrowed from Democritus.<sup>6</sup> As Samuel

<sup>4</sup> Mika Elo, *Valokuvan medium*, Helsinki, Tutkijaliitto, 2005, 37, 22–39; Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: understanding new media*, Cambridge Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1999, 65.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *On the soul*, II, 419a, trans., introduction and notes Hugh Lawson-Tancred, London, Penguin Books, 1968.

<sup>6</sup> "[...] If what has colour is placed in immediate contact with the eye, it cannot be seen. Colour sets in movement not the sense organ but what is transparent, e.g. the air, and that, extending continuously from the object to the organ, sets the latter in movement. Democritus misrepresents the facts when he expresses the opinion that if the interspace were empty, one could distinctly see an ant on the vault of the sky; that is an impossibility. Seeing is due to an affection or change of what has the perceptive faculty, and it cannot be affected by the seen colour itself; it remains that it must be affected by what comes between. Hence it is indispensable that there be *something* in between – if there were nothing, so far from seeing with greater distinctness, we should see nothing at all." (Aristotle, *On the soul*, II, 419a).

Weber has noted, we should also think of media in terms of a difference that unites.<sup>7</sup> With regard to theatre and scenography, this is an essential observation.

In *Benjamin's -abilities*, Weber presents a multifaceted analysis of mediality as “-ability structure” related to language. One of the key terms appearing in this framework, which is particularly fruitful from the perspective of my research, is the Benjaminian *impartability* of language (*Mittelbarkeit*).<sup>8</sup> The suffix appearing in the word, *-ability* (in German *-barkeit*), reveals Benjamin's typical way of virtualising his concepts. It is a thematics through which virtuality should be considered by relying on a dynamic in which the (virtual) dimension of ability is conceived as transformation, as becoming something else. According to Weber, the dimension of virtual ability articulated in Benjamin's thinking is not, however, defined by what it lacks or what it is not yet. Instead, virtuality – and, analogously, *performability* – can be understood in the sense of “radical alteration”.<sup>9</sup> It is not, then, a matter of realisation or actualisation.<sup>10</sup>

From this radical alteration, the medium forms into a simultaneity of space, time, and movement, and as a separation that binds but by means of transmission, transformation, and hence does not

7 Samuel Weber, “The Virtuality of the Media”, *Sites: The Journal of Twentieth-Century/Contemporary French Studies revue d'études français*, 2000, 4:2, 301; Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities*, Cambridge Massachusetts and London, Harvard University Press, 2008, 111.

8 *Ibid.*, 38–45, 117. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1: 1913–1926, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1996, 63–64.

9 Weber, “The Virtuality of the Media”, 306. According to Weber's interpretation, Deleuze, another thinker of virtuality who is here otherwise very close to Benjamin, formulates “structure as the reality of the virtual”, whereas for Benjamin the setup is the opposite: the virtual expresses “the reality of the structure” (*Ibid.*, 305–312).

10 On the relationships between the potential, real, actual, and virtual, see Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, London, The Athlone Press, 1994 [1968], 211; Weber, “The Virtuality of the Media”, 298–301.

result in producing definite meanings. It is a continuous re-positioning, which also poses the question of in relationship to what does this alteration take place. On the basis of the conceptions of the relationship between the actual and the virtual, stage as a medium can be thought of as a structure defined by the principle of distinctness and alteration. Consequently, the conception of the stage as a comprehensive field of meanings, one bounded within its own frames, is called into question. Virtuality as the reality of the structure of the stage makes manifest the potential to understand the stage as a *transformative space* characterised by continuous movement in terms of meaning formation.

As I will argue, both touch and mediality would appear, down to the level of their structure, to be marked by a certain tension of uniting difference between simultaneously effective intimacy and distance. This tension tunes the medial stage, and it also tunes the stage as a medium.

#### THE BOND BETWEEN SENSING AND THE SENSED

We often think of touch in terms of proximity and immediate contact, in which case it is conceived as a sense that supports sight. In terms of my questions regarding the mediality of the stage, it is worthwhile examining touch in light of Merleau-Ponty's ontological reflections on sense experience and his way of questioning the conceptions based on perceptual faith, based on which we seem to have direct access to things themselves. According to John Sallis, one of Merleau-Ponty's central premises is that the body forms a reflecting screen between perceiving and the perceived.<sup>11</sup> This does not mean that “thickness of flesh” would deny the access to things. On the contrary, it means that the body is the only means, or medi-

11 John Sallis, *Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Duquesne University Press, 2003, 76.

um, of this contact, which, consequently, involves mediation. The body is a mediator enabling perception. Sallis notes that this mediating instance between perceiving and the perceived constitutes a key question to Merleau-Ponty.<sup>12</sup>

Due to its distinguishing and self-distinguishing nature, the body seems to contain something foreign to itself.<sup>13</sup> It is inherently marked by otherness.<sup>14</sup> However, instead of being a matter of a mirror-like frontal reflection, the self-relation unfolds as reciprocal intertwining of the seer and the visible. The reflexivity of the body's relationship to itself inherently entails a certain interruption, a fracture. The reflection dips out of the reach of reflection and is, thus, grasped by its own unreflectability. As perceiving and perceived, the body always as if turns its back on itself: reflection becomes a blind spot in bodily consciousness.<sup>15</sup> Hence visibility always contains its opposite, invisibility, which I will be examining from the perspectives of the *screen* and *performability*.

Because the sensing is always also simultaneously the sensed, perception is not defined dualistically as a distinction between internal and external experience. It forms from premises of the lived, moving body's situation- and place-specificity, and this being the

12 Ibid.

13 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible. Followed by Working Notes*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1997 [1964], 141, 246, 263–265; Jaana Parviainen, *Meduusan liike. Mobiiliajan tiedonmuodostuksen filosofiaa*, Helsinki, Gaudeamus, 2006, 145.

14 The other is not (the) "he/she" (defined by me) but more "the other me". The conception of the other as seeing and visible forms in a tension between interior and exterior, connectedness and separation, or closeness and distance. For Merleau-Ponty, however, the reciprocity of experience is more an opportunity for transition and change than an unsurpassable threshold or conflict that requires resolution. (Juho Hotanen, *Lihan laskos. Merleau-Pontyn luonnos uudesta ontologiasta*, Helsinki, Tutkijaliitto, 113–115.)

15 Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 135–136; Sallis, *Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings*, 87–88; Hotanen, *Lihan laskos*, 84, 109–111.

case, only certain side of things ever becomes in the sensible at one time. As a person moves in space, her body, "the stage director of (her) perception" that is bound to the world, moves along within it.<sup>16</sup>

Touch entails certain in-betweenness – and is thus characterised by a certain element of withdrawal from immediacy. This has, however, for the most part remained unrecognised, as since its earliest days Western philosophy has mainly been focused on "sensing in general", the model of which has been vision.<sup>17</sup> In terms of my research, it is interesting that Merleau-Ponty does not posit vision and touch in opposition to each other. Rather, he attempts to demonstrate the connections between them by addressing the complex and chiasmatic relationship of the subject and the object.<sup>18</sup> The key terms here are *chiasm*, *reversibility*, and *flesh*.

*Chiasm* refers to the way in which the sensing and the sensible are constructed in an inverse relationship to each other, without, however, merging into each other.<sup>19</sup> Relying on the principle of reversibility (*reversibilité*) that characterises touch, the touching and the touched are not the same thing, even though they are related to each other through a reciprocal relationship.<sup>20</sup> The principle of reversibility expresses a linking between things that do not return to a cause-effect relationship. The asymmetry of reversibility is illustrated by Merleau-Ponty in terms of a glove, both sides of which one recognises as belonging to the same glove, even if one can see only either the interior or the exterior at a time; seeing the other

16 Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 8.

17 Weber, "A Touch of Translation: On Walter Benjamin's 'Task of the Translator'", in *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, eds. Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005, 67.

18 Cathryn Vasseleu, *Textures of Light. Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty*, London and New York, Routledge, 1998, 23. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 130–155, 259.

19 Ibid., 134.

20 Ibid., 263.

(side) returns the other to me, says Merleau-Ponty.<sup>21</sup> However, similarly as a right-handed glove alters to fit the left hand when turned inside out, the reverse sides of perception do not return to each other. For its part, the concept of *flesh* (*chair*) manifests for Merleau-Ponty the constitution of touch and seeing in terms of their divergence and unity. At the same time as the flesh shows us something, its density prevents us from seeing it completely bare.<sup>22</sup> This embodies the relationship between the invisible inherent in visibility and the absence inherent in presence; the "carnal mirror" shows us the separation in unity and the invisible in the visible.<sup>23</sup>

As chiasmatic, inverse, and corporeal, touch is not immediate, even though it often appears to be. The example provided by Aristotle of the apparent immediacy of touch is incisive: with touch, "we are affected not by but along with the medium; it is as if a man were struck through his shield".<sup>24</sup> Aristotle also points out that, unlike with the other senses, touch has no specific organ, rather it is in a certain sense "carnal", a walking of boundaries between one's self and the foreign in the midst of the sensible.<sup>25</sup> As Juho Hotanen notes, there is a connection between Aristotle's and Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of "flesh" – with the difference that, for the latter, the flesh is never a matter of simple mediation or in-betweenness, but a structure for existence or a principle of presence. To Merleau-Ponty, the flesh is a "prototype for Being".<sup>26</sup>

In the light of this, touch appears as non-appropriating contact in which the touching and the touched are in a relationship with

21 Ibid.

22 Hotanen, *Lihan laskos*, 84.

23 Ibid., 83–84, 149.

24 Aristotle, *On the soul*, II, 423b.

25 Ibid.

26 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Oxon and New York, Routledge 2012 [1945], 179.

each other but do not fuse into each other; an indispensable tension exists between them. This tension expresses the reversibility and chiasmatic nature of touch. In such contact, the distance between parties and the parties' own unique characteristics are preserved, and it is not a question of a symmetrical encounter. This kind of structure of distant closeness is illuminative in pondering on the relationship between mediality and touch. A corresponding tension of in-betweenness is, as well known, also one of theatre's key defining traits.

The conception of the body as a fundamental (and uniting) separation between the perceiving and the perceived frames touch as a contact that withdraws in the last instance, as a sensation that is caught at its own limit to process it over again. This reveals the heterotrophy of bodily existence, which we can, following Merleau-Ponty, call intercorporeality.<sup>27</sup> Further, it is erotic by nature, as it is about an attempt to unite with another body or other bodies – and at the same time with the (most familiar, most inherent, and most intimate) foreign folded within one's own body. This attempt is driven by desire and it is manifested in various gestures towards the other or others – movements, touches, looks.<sup>28</sup> In everyday contexts, gestures mostly express modes of behaviour without referring to anything beyond the immediate situation. One can for example open the door for someone with a considerate gesture. On the stage, however, the gestures contain aspiration more clearly distinct from themselves; they become something more than just an aspect of an intentional act. On stage, gestures and touch are framed and highlighted in their foreignness.

27 Sallis, *Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings*, 96; Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 412. It is always also a matter of the self-relationship and auto-affection.

28 Sallis, *Phenomenology and the Return to Beginnings*, 96.

Merleau-Ponty's and Aristotle's analyses of touch share the notion that touch is always marked by a certain foreignness. For both, touch is a question of a two-directional relationship whose parties approach a boundary that separates them. This demarcation is a prerequisite for the contact to take place, without it being a matter of merging into one. A connection to the medial stage can be understood this way; it appears as a space or perhaps more like a situation in which sensing does not take place only *through* the mediation of some in-between, but always *with it* and *in relationship to it*. Following Aristotle and Merleau-Ponty, we can approach the mediality of the stage from a perspective that emphasises the primacy of bodily mediation, that is, sensibility and perception, in which the sensing and the sensed overlap in an inter-affective relationship. The laws of direct causal relationships do not describe this with sufficient precision. As I will propose, this opens up a path for examining the mediality of the stage in the light of *performability* that is inherent to theatrical performing and virtuality.

If the in-between involved in the relationship between the sensing and the sensed is seen as a reciprocal separation and unity that simultaneously affects the internal and the external, then in what ways can this betweenness that underpins the architecture of touch be considered in terms of intermediality?

Mediality and intermediality lead us to think about the issue of betweenness more broadly than it appears as related to electronic media. The range of application of the notion of media has broadened into a field opening up in aesthetic, political, bodily, sense-related, and information technological directions. Questions of mediality involve interpretive, experience-based, and instrumental-material levels. In this multifaceted field, it is fruitful to consider the situation- and context-specific ways in which the connections mentioned are respectively articulated, and how they make sense.

## LIVING SENSIBILITY

Theatre has always been an art of magical transformations and diverse sleights of hand. "High-tech theatre" that makes use of computer technology, multimedia, and video as well as sound, light and image technologies can be seen as an apparatus that, with its pops and rattles, represents an updated, contemporary version in the chain of modern technical forms of media.<sup>29</sup> Reflections on the role and effects of electronic media and in relation to the stage's "living" elements often situate the "medial" in a category secondary to the living. According to Philip Auslander, several theories of performance are still marked by such prejudice, in which "live" and "mediatised" are placed in a hierarchical relationship.<sup>30</sup> Focusing on questions of intermediality highlights novel fusions and forms of interaction whose consideration requires a new type of sensitivity, a new sensibility. The particular quality of experience that arises in arts that combine various forms of media demands sensitive, media-sensitive examination, as Henk Oosterling suggests.<sup>31</sup>

The relationship between the living and the lifeless can be thought of in terms of technological extension, a prosthesis that surpasses the limitations of the body. Starting from the periscope

29 *High-tech theatre* is here used as a general term to refer to the usage of various forms of (electronic) media in the performing arts. Lehmann distinguishes from four different modes of the use of media in theatre: 1) occasional use (media employment), 2) media as source of inspiration for theatre and its aesthetics or form, 3) media as constitutive for certain forms of theatre, and 4) installation-like meeting points of theatre and media. Alongside with the term "media theatre" it is used as an umbrella concept referring to the very heterogenic field of performing arts, which covers both "radical performing arts" as well as the performance practices of "traditional theatres". See Lehmann *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby, Oxon and New York, Routledge [1999], 167–168.

30 Philip Auslander, *Liveness. Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Oxon and New York, Routledge, 2008, 43–63, 55.

31 Henk Oosterling, "Sens(a)ble Intermediality and *Interesse*. Towards an Ontology of the In-Between.", in *Intermedialités*, Vol. 1, 2003, 30.

and the radio transmitter, the perception technologies that have facilitated distant closeness in various forms have been seen as prosthetic “new media”.<sup>32</sup>

At its most concrete, the prosthetic nature of technology comes forth when technological appendages are added to the body or when implants are embedded in it. The interventions of Stelarc’s cybernetic body and Orlan’s critical plastic surgery took, at the turn of the 1980s, discussions of the relationship between the body and technology in the arts to a new level<sup>33</sup>. At the seam between the body and the prosthesis, the interior and exterior are not defined as simply “own” or “foreign”. Anyone with an artificial leg recognises the experience of the phantom limb and the blurring of the body’s boundaries. This illuminates in an interesting way the problematics of the juncture between the body and a device. The thematics of prosthesis can be compared to touch and mediality, which are marked by the obscurity of the boundaries between interior and exterior, although in a different way.

Touch between a lifeless and a living being construes on a different basis than touch between two living parties, when the sensing and the sensed, the touching and the touched are living entities. Prosthetic relations call this division into question in a very concrete way: a prosthesis is not a lifeless instrument of the living. It is important to pay attention to this in the discussions on supplementing and extending, especially when the technicality of technologies is examined as chains of cause-effect relationships where technologies appear as nothing more than technical instruments, means to an end.

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32 See for example Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992 [1964].

33 Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, affects and technologies*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2007, 114–117; Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 140.

Against this background it is clear that instead of setting up “live” and “mediatised” stage situations in opposition to each other one should pay attention to the ways in which senses and media arrange themselves in relation to each other. *Media sensitivity* demands the considering of sensory differences in a heterogeneous setting.

For Aristotle, who offers here a good starting point, sensing is exploration of the boundary between the own and the foreign and, as such, receptiveness to influences that are formed through sensory differences. For instance, the sensation of heat emerges only when the touching and the touched are of different temperatures.<sup>34</sup> Sense, then, can be conceptualized as a certain kind of in-between, in the sphere of which distinguishing between characteristics that diverge from one another becomes possible.<sup>35</sup> Sensing takes place through differences: only those elements that exceed the parities between the influencer and the influenced are perceived.

Following Merleau-Ponty, every attempt to localize a sensation at the boundary of that particular sensation makes that place (the boundary as a place) disappear.<sup>36</sup> The non-placability of touch can also be illustrated through the example of one’s hands touching each other: when two hands come into contact with each other, the touch seems to hit the fingertips of the hand oriented to touch the other hand. As I touch my left hand with my right, the right hand feels itself both touching and being touched by the left hand. This reciprocity keeps the experience of touch at a distance from itself; it is impossible to pinpoint which hand is touching and which is touched. A certain gap or distance at the core of contact is the precondition of touch.

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34 Aristotle, *On the soul*, II, 424a.

35 Ibid., 423a.

36 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 147–150, 215.

This implies that the body as sensing and sensed involves mediality in and of itself. This is the reason why, I consider it relevant to focus on the indirect, non-hierarchical, heterotrophic, reciprocal, in short, medial interplay that characterises both the “live” and “mediatised” rather than stressing the differences between them. In terms of the optical tactics of scenography, consideration of sensuous differences has led me to think about the imaginability of image from a perspective in which mediality is comparable to touch precisely in terms of the prerequisite of the in-between. A projected, mediatised image challenges the viewer to participate in an event the parties of which are both the viewer and the image.

#### STAGE AS THE SITE OF PERFORMANCE

When discussing ‘translatibility’ as one of Benjamin’s virtualised concepts, Weber demonstrates that the connection between medality and touch can also be approached through Benjamin’s theory of translation.<sup>37</sup> In this context it becomes clear that their connection is not a matter of transporting of meanings from one domain of articulation into another. It is a double-exposed *event* that entails both the singular specificity of articulation and language as such.<sup>38</sup> Here translation compares to touch, free of appropriative aims.<sup>39</sup> In light of Benjamin’s theory of translation, *medium* appears as a temporal and historical structure; it appears as a relationship of something that has already occurred to something that is expressed at

37 Weber, *Benjamin’s -abilities*, 84–93. Weber’s central points of reference here are Benjamin’s essay “Task of the Translator” and his research on the German Baroque tragic drama.

38 Cf. Weber, *Benjamin’s -abilities*, 38.

39 *Ibid.*, 84–88 and Weber, “A Touch of Translation”, 72–74.

the present moment.<sup>40</sup> Temporality or historicity is to be understood here as a relation between universal and particular, where each present moment appears as power to return to the past – as a continuously transforming event that contains both singular and repetitive dimension.<sup>41</sup>

This ambiguous relationship can be framed in an interesting way also in terms of rhythm. Medium opens a certain double-exposure of time and space, which on the one hand becomes recognisable as a continuous returning or being returned to, and on the other hand as fundamentally unclosed and incomplete structure.<sup>42</sup> The structure of the medium does not thus solely take shape as the creation of something new, but more as a future that *will always already have taken place* – and thus as if an already-past future.<sup>43</sup> The key challenge appears to be in considering virtuality involved in translation – its touch free of appropriative aims – instead of seeing it as an operation striving towards appropriation and mastery. Benjamin’s theory of translation suggests that the temporal and spatial multifacetedness of the medial structure liberates the virtual from its oft-presumed forced marriage with its expected actualisation. Even in its virtual state, virtuality is effective in reality.

40 Weber points out that the German past perfect tense, i.e. in (something/someone) “is arrived” or “is occurred”, captures much more clearly the core behind the dialectical nature of mediation. Namely, the dynamic of the medium also clarifies what something is not; “medium” and “mediation” do not “mediate” only outside of things (themselves) or between them, but also always as included in them. This dismantles the conception that the distance would be framed as a sense of “nothing”, empty or void, or as in and of itself. See for example Weber, *Benjamin’s -abilities*, 34–37.

41 Weber, “A Touch of Translation”, 73.

42 Cf. Weber, *Benjamin’s -abilities*, 88–89.

43 Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, London and New York, Verso, 2009, 45–46; Weber, *Benjamin’s -abilities*, 37 and “A Touch of Translation”, 72.

It would appear, then, that a medium consists structurally of at least the following factors: (1) in-betweenness; it is an interval, a mediation, and a mediator; (2) difference that unites, and (3) the bond between the already past and the present moment (and the future). Understanding the medium as a combination of these factors differs from the accustomed way of viewing it primarily as a message or message-carrier, in other words as a structure of mediation that allows change and as something that is tensed between two poles, such as the relationship between sending and receiving.<sup>44</sup> The non-communicative aspects of mediality turn our attention to the power of a medium to bring fore that which is not realised in the sphere of sense perception, but which as an ability and effect continues to still influence it. Instead of the realm of meanings, the process of becoming meaningful (that remains shadowed by meanings) is foregrounded as the central question.<sup>45</sup>

From the premises of media sensitivity the stage can be framed as a medium in which attention is drawn to *how* the performance forms as movement, situation, and relationships of effect, while *what* is performed remains in the background. How, then, does this "how" form; how is it seen and felt?

#### TRANSLUCENT VISIBILITY

The shift to the sphere of digital recording, information transfer, and global communication that took place at the turn of the millennium has been compared to the expansion of the conception of the performing arts that took place in the early 1960s.<sup>46</sup> With regard to scenographic work, this transformation constitutes a shift to an age

44 Weber, "The Virtuality of the media", 302.

45 Weber, "A Touch of Translation", 75.

46 Johannes Birringer, "Contemporary Technology/Performance", in *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 51:4, 1999, 366.

of *intermediality*.<sup>47</sup> Technological advances have affected our way of understanding corporality, perception and presentability, both in terms of metaphors and framing conditions of sense experience. With regard to contemporary ubiquitous media, we can say that seeing has been in many ways separated from the body.<sup>48</sup> Perceived reality is not limited to the sphere of the senses, and at the same time vision has become in a new way aware of itself.<sup>49</sup> We can think that, through the era of technical reproducibility, perceiving is already cinematic and seeing essentially takes the form of staging.<sup>50</sup>

Hans-Thies Lehmann notes that in "post-dramatic theatre" theatre's real law of motion – the inner logic of all theatricality, "performability" – is articulated *in the body*, unlike in "dramatic theatre", where the law of motion was "destiny" in terms of the story's and plot's movement.<sup>51</sup> Lehmann's description of a shift from the stage serving the plot to bodily stages frames the body in clear terms as the common denominator of the contemporary performing arts and fine arts in their theatrical modes. Body is the point of refer-

47 There have been extensive discussions regarding the visual arts and the *post-medium condition*. See for example Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: art in the age of the post-medium condition*, London, Thames & Hudson, 2000.

48 Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 16, 169–170. Terms describing this also include "cyborg vision" (Lev Manovich, "Visual Technologies as Cognitive Prostheses: A Short Story of the Externalization of Mind", in *The Prosthetic Impulse. From a Posthuman Present to a Biocultural Future*, ed. Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra, Cambridge Massachusetts and London, The MIT Press, 2006, 203–219) and "telescopic vision" (Don Ihde, *Bodies in Technology*, Minnesota, Minnesota University Press, 2002).

49 Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 171–172.

50 It would be worthwhile here to consider the relationship of the mediality of contemporary theatre to early monitor-centred video art, experimental and structuralist-materialist film and conceptions of so-called artists' cinema. Pinpointing these backdrops would be illuminating in terms of interventions of performing arts that are intermedial, body-centred, and often appearing as "new-experimental".

51 *Ibid.*, 173.

ence that structures the interrelations of these art forms. It is nevertheless worth keeping in mind that the body and corporeality appear equally as given emancipatory assumptions as vision, whose position of the dominance the so-called “bodily turn” has striven to question. If the reciprocity of experience – and its asymmetry – are not recognised, then in articulations of corporeality, for instance in terms of touch, we easily fall into the same, one-sided, totalising “centrism” (from opticentrism to haptocentrism) that was originally challenged as being insufficient.<sup>52</sup>

Discussions aimed at dismantling the predominance of the visual order have a long history. According to Jonathan Crary, the tendency to equate “perception” with “vision” indicating the predominance of the visual order began to weaken at the end of the 19th century.<sup>53</sup> Visuality began to be comprehended as a tension between the viewer and the world that (media)technologies, for their part, also sustain and reproduce. Questions concerning the structuring of the experience of space, time, and place in today’s visual and performing arts spring from this basis. In the era of electronic media, our sensory experience is always already bound to an (electronically) amplified, channelled, prosthetic, simulated, and stimulated medial structure.

I process these issues myself via artistic means. I tend to think of the stage as a medium that supports seeing; as a special type of optics, as a form of visibility that shows the multifacetedness and multisensoriness of the structure of vision and addresses the invisible in the visible. In short: the stage shows performativity as *performability*. Visibility opens up as a visual order that does not

52 On critique of haptocentrism, see Mika Elo *Digital Finger, Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, Vol. 4, 2012, DOI: 10.3402/jacv4i0.14982

53 Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of perception. Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, Cambridge Massachusetts and London, The MIT Press, 1999, 11–14.

touch the surface alone, but also passes through the facades, making visible the gaze, seeing, and being seen.

The visibility of the stage and projected images produced by electronic media is continuous becoming, repetition, and eternal return. In terms of experientiality of the imaginal reflections and video projections, the questions of whether and how the electronic images touch return to the showing visibility of the stage, to *performability*. Whenever I process performance video projections and installations or experiment with video projections, it is clear to me that the visibility of the projection is to be thought of concretely in relation to the reflecting surface and other particularities of the situation. Visibility demands some sort of reflective surface, a screen. I rarely use a movie screen, projection plastic, or other “proper” screen<sup>54</sup> made to serve frontal viewing position in an optimal way. I prefer to evaluate various visibilities and various ways of projecting so that the screen is light-permeable, moving, gapped, obscure, or formed of various levels in terms of depth – either constructed for the purpose at hand or found. Various three-dimensional installation solutions can also work as screens.<sup>55</sup> It is also perfectly possible to project into the air and allow a dust cloud, debris, or a living creature that happens to pass by to form a more or less random screen.

I personally find most interesting installation-like performance situations as well as settings where the performance place or space

54 I use the word ‘screen’ in contrast to the cinematic tradition that reiterates conceptions of image as a window to the world (Cf. Anne Friedberg *The Virtual Window. From Alberti to Microsoft*, Cambridge Massachusetts and London, The MIT Press, 2009, 4–5). Even more so relevant here is the genealogy of contemporary installation art. Cf. Tamara Trodd, *Screen/Space. The projected image in contemporary art*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011; Catherine Fowler, “Into the Light: re-considering off-frame and off-screen space in gallery films”, in Trodd, 2011.

55 Cf. Marjatta Oja, *Three-Dimensional Projection: Situation Sculpture Between the Artist and the Viewer*, Helsinki, The Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, 2011.

is in some way unusual.<sup>56</sup> It can be found, happened upon, temporary, momentary, or even accidentally or intentionally vanishing. Based on perspective, it can contribute to or disturb normative, organised everyday activity. Even though so-called *black box* theatre might strike a practitioner of contemporary theatre the same way *white cube* does an artist in the fine arts context. Every space – including a black box and a white cube – is unique and demands some sort of takeover, or formation of a relationship of settling in. In this sense, every performance is site-specific.

Visibility demands some sort of place for showing. This implies that visibility becomes a material and theoretical question in relation to the screen. As mentioned above, many kinds of installation elements can function as screens. But what is the operation a screen enables? The screen does not form solely as a one-sided, two-dimensional, flat surface, a window to the world. Rather, it structures relationships between frame and framing, foreground and background, visible and invisible as well as off-screen-thematizations formulated in the spirit of *trompe l'oeil* paintings.<sup>57</sup> The connection of the visible to theatricality and the stage is comparable to the question of the (world's) visibility, which conceals as it reveals.<sup>58</sup> The site of visibility also becomes problematised. Photography is

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56 Installation-ness is not in and of itself a matter of the comprehensiveness or immersiveness of the set's or performance situation's "stagability". In relation to a "traditional" stage work, the matter can be framed from the perspective of the performance event's corporality. In installation-like performances, the spectator can often move freely in the performance space and participate through his or her actions in shaping the performance situation. In the context of the visual arts, this sort of installation-ness has already long been more of a rule than an exception; the question of performativity remains, however, often in the background in the exhibition context. Cf., *ibid.*

57 Fowler, "Into the Light", 306.

58 Cf. Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, New York and London, Routledge, 1996, 131–134.

considered one of the key mechanisms for defining the locus of visibility. A photograph cuts into the world, interrupts it, produces distance and enables image-projecting on paper or screen.<sup>59</sup> An opaque screen stages visibility of the world and problematises the relation between the interior and exterior of the viewer and the image. The screen would, then, appear to be marked by the fact that at the same time as it shows the gaze, seeing and being seen, it also conceals something of their collusion.

One interesting perspective on the analysis of this structure is offered by Jacques Lacan, who understands the screen (*écran*) as a dynamics of not only visibility, but also of mediation, in other words, in terms of *regulation of visibility*; it formats various ways of seeing and being seen, distinguishing and appearing.<sup>60</sup> For Lacan, the screen is opaque.<sup>61</sup> It is not a window-like opening that opens up a view to the world; rather as it reveals, it also conceals, veils. In the terminology of my research, this means that the *cover/screen* in a certain way takes the role of a virtual stage of *performability*. The body is another such concealing screen. It is marked precisely by the ambiguity of the body's boundary. Merleau-Ponty's idea of the bond between touch and vision as a chiasmatic structure, which Lacan relies on, frames visibility of the world as an intimate relationship between the viewer's body and the world. The notion of the viewer's and the world's separateness here becomes problematised in a way that challenges us to think what I have previously addressed in terms of a distance that unites. When the contact between the viewer and the world is described in terms of a

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59 Joanna Lowry, "Projecting Symptoms", in Trodd 2011, 93.

60 Janne Seppänen, *The Power of the Gaze: an introduction to visual literacy*, trans. Aijaleena Ahonen and Kris Clarke, New York, Peter Lang, 2006, 79–80; Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, 131–135.

61 Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, Norton [1973], 96.

measurable distance, it is conceived as building on the opposition internal/external. It becomes an extensive otherness that stresses difference and at the same time the connection between the parties is marked by detachment. If the emphasis is put instead on the connection and the ambiguity of the mutual boundary is acknowledged, then the nature inherent to vision and touch is noted as an intense otherness and distant closeness. The boundary between vision and touch is a blind spot – or a stain, a screen, as understood in the sense of cover/screen.<sup>62</sup> The visibility of the gaze is opaque, perhaps even "corporeal".

#### THE SCREEN, BODY, AND PROCESS

The stage is a medium of continuous alteration and separation; it is a medium of a unifying difference. The continuousness of this differing carries with it the question as to in relation to what the difference or change should be measured. Does the human body constitute its ultimate measure? In performing arts, where the multisensory body is a central topic, the question of the corporality of visuality and perception is not unambiguous. In contemporary theatre, scenography, scenography training, and research, confrontation with the hegemony of a space-abstractism consistent with Euclidian geometry is still an issue. Theatrical practices reveal different approaches to the human body as a spatial entity. It can be treated as a physical unit in space or as the basis for embodied understanding of space.

My own research participates in this confrontation by focusing on the experientiality of the projected image. As argued above, this move makes questions of mediality of the body unavoidable. My study is positioned against the background of "post-" forms of the-

62 Ibid., 96; Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, 134; Pia Sivenius, "Silmän kääntö", *Tiedotustutkimus* 20:3, 1997, 49, 54–55.

atre, visual arts, and cinema in which lived, moving corporeal imaginability is one of the central premises. I conceive the "post-" forms of theatre and moving image-related arts that have been conceptualised in terms of "post-dramatic theatre" and "post-cinematic (condition)", as the backdrop of my projects combining video projection and live performance.<sup>63</sup>

As has already become apparent, the genealogy of the hybrid forms of contemporary installation, media, and video art have influenced the formation of these conceptions. Aside with the "cinematically conceptualised world"<sup>64</sup>, my work builds on process-centredness, open-endedness, and exploration. *Devising*<sup>65</sup> and *viewpoints*<sup>66</sup> are examples of processual methods and open code approaches applied by many practitioners of contemporary theatre. I have used these process-centred techniques in my artistic work, and found them beneficial at certain phases of processes. They serve as struc-

63 For instance Jean-Christophe Royoux frames contemporary forms of installation art in the terms of *post-cinematic medium* (Andrew Uroskie, "Windows in the White Cube", in Trodd, 2011, 146).

64 Ibid., 146.

65 According to Tim Etchells, *devising* is a process that refuses to know where it is headed. Any given element of a performance component can act as the starting point of the process, and no single element should rise to become overly dominant too early in the process. (Tim Etchells, *Certain fragments: Contemporary performance and Forced Entertainment*, Abingdon, Oxon and New York, Routledge, 2008, 17).

66 Originally developed as an improvisational technique for dance, *viewpoints* is the active recomposition of the language of theatre or a performance in relation to nine fundamental conceptions of space and time. Of these, the spatial ones are spatial relationship, shape, gesture, architecture, and topography. Those related to time are, on the other hand, tempo or rhythm, duration, kinesthetic response, and repetition. The grammar of the performance situation is additionally examined in terms of "dynamics" and "field". It also involves the languages inherent to one genre being turned in relation to the others, in the style of "What is the rhythm of a given movement?" or "How can I stage a *close-up* or a *tracking shot*?". See Anne Bogart & Tina Landau, *The Viewpoints book: a practical guide to viewpoints and composition*, New York, Theatre Communication Group, 2005.

tural, process-framing tools, and as such support the processual mode parallel to both artistic work and to the somewhat obstinate materiality of media technological apparatuses that I operate with. Both the process itself and the apparatuses used act partially under control and as expected, yet entail a great deal of untamed elements and unexpected outcomes, as if own will, which is rewarding in trialling the interplay between different kinds of materialities in media theatre context.

The thematics of visibility and the concealing screen, central to my research, helps in conceiving the ways in which a video-projected image can be understood in terms of bodily perception and material thinking. An illuminating point of reference here is offered by Freud's theory of "screen memories".<sup>67</sup>

According to Freud, screen memories contain elements of real memories, but they are always shaped by fantasies, repression, and transference. Freud speaks of how memories are always both covering veils and reflective surfaces – screens – on which the past is reflected, blended with the present.<sup>68</sup> A screen memory is a matter of both concealing and projecting. As Janne Seppänen proposes, on the one hand, the screen can be understood as a reflective surface that functions like a unidirectional reflecting surface and returns the gaze, and on the other hand, as a covering structure. When the screen is located between the viewer and the projector, it becomes a semi-transparent film and makes formation of a projected image possible. At the same time, it can cover the image or part of it. In this instance, the screen prevents us from being blinded by the excessive light while allowing the formation of the projected image.<sup>69</sup>

67 Sigmund Freud, *Screen Memories. Standard Edition, 3*, London, The Hogarth Press, 1950.

68 Cf. Seppänen, *The Power of the Gaze*, 78.

69 Ibid., 79.

A screen memory works according to the same principle. It both conceals the unconscious from the glare and allows some sort of image to form in the sphere of consciousness, which opens up a connection to Lacan's écran. The theme of Freud's screen memory brings with it the entire dynamics of the unconscious (slips, repressions and condensations) to Lacan's conception of gaze.<sup>70</sup>

These thematisations of screen and visibility have helped me to conceive video-projected images from the perspective of bodily perception and material thinking in a way characteristic to my own working method: I have simplified already almost-empty images to be even sparer, at times into barely perceptible, and made way for random glimpses of lights and shadows, and the viewer to complete as he or she wishes. In the end, the invisible that is concealed by a barely perceptible stain best shows each viewer his or own view. I wish to keep a possibility for those views open.

#### A SCATTERED IMAGINALITY OF THE BODY

The reality perceivable on a medial stage is not limited to the sphere of the senses, as a result of which vision becomes in a new way aware of looking at itself. According to Lehmann, media theatre should be thought from this perspective as also an aesthetic and an ethical issue that culminates in the question of responsibility.<sup>71</sup> Because simple perception-based presence is no longer a sufficient category, Lehmann speaks of "the broken thread between personal experience and perception".<sup>72</sup> From Lehmann's perspective, simple perception-based presence does not differ much from information processing if we do not heed the disjointedness inherent to it, in which dimensions of desire, responsibility, and duty entwined. The

70 Ibid.

71 Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 184–185.

72 Ibid., 186.

question of whether the perception apparatus is like an information machine appears nevertheless problematic in the sense that perception is always already a relationship that entails a certain in-between. The formulation used by Lehmann, "mere sense perception", would appear to refer to the pre-phenomenological conceptions that, from his perspective, influence in the background and naive perception-theory-based conceptions of the necessity of perception – that is, precisely to those conceptions that for instance Merleau-Ponty in his works consistently attempts to demonstrate are insufficient.

Where – in Heiner Müller's words – theatre is dependent on "the presence of the person who has the potential to die"<sup>73</sup>, the technologies of perception, for their part, strive to make time, place, and distances fade. Lehmann's interpretation is that the electronic images are un-fixed to time and place and thus ahistorical and without fate. Lehmann conceives the ontological position of the images of media theatre by and large in terms of the relationship between the living character (the performer) and the electronic image. He considers this relationship crucial specifically in terms of the *performer's* corporality. For Lehmann, theatre-bodies form "images" that are objects of the theatrical gaze: they are there "in the 'between-the-body' of live performance".<sup>74</sup> This oracle-like theatre figure is charged with the entirety of "theatre's real law of motion" – the virtual dimension of performativity, which in theatre is always in a state of arrival. In Lehmann's interpretation, the living figure on the stage represents *an image* of the impossibility of presenting death on the stage. And because the media images only show what they are *able* to show, they have no room for

73 Alexander Kluge, "Whoever Smokes Looks Cold-Blooded. It's a mistake to think that the dead are dead". An interview with Heiner Müller. <https://kluge.library.cornell.edu/conversations/mueller/film/121/transcript> (Accessed 19.1.2017)

74 Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 170–171.

the lack inherent to the theatrical gaze and the wish to see what cannot be seen. According to Lehmann, the question of *performability* returns to the "perspective of the 'gods'" articulated through ancient tragedy.<sup>75</sup> The theatrical gaze does not simply accept, but *demand*s this lack and the perspective unattainable for the mortal human. In this view, the video-projected image is understood as bodiless and perspectiveless. In Lehmann's view, the electronic image represents information and communication technologies' "mathematization that is in principle limitless"; it is an "euphemism of information" and a manifestation of a "lack of lack". In this perspective, the video image or video projection does not contain the virtual dimension of *performability*.<sup>76</sup>

#### THE UNDIVIDED SPECTACLE OF VISIBILITY

The emphasis of my reflections on the visibility and *performability* of the media image diverges from Lehmann's interpretation in the sense that I view video projections only partially from the perspective of the *performer's* corporality. It is useful to compare and measure the relationship and forms of dialogicality between a living performer and an "electronic performer". And yet I still feel that Lehmann's interpretation is overly bound to the previously discussed hierarchical positioning of "live" and "mediatised". On the other hand, the hierarchical positioning reveals the *illusion* of directness and direct contact often associated with "live", which was raised in the discussion of Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of touch.

The oracle-like nature of the theatrical gaze could also be conceptualised on the basis of Lacan's sardine can anecdote: In the same way as a tin can shimmering in the waves unexpectedly pricks

75 Ibid., 172–173.

76 Ibid., 170–172, 174.

its viewer as part of the view, the theatrical gaze reveals not only the viewer's participation in the spectacles, but also the undeniable contingency of this participation.<sup>77</sup> This anecdote illustrates the chiasmatic nature of seeing and the visible and suggests that visibility forms a screen, a field of sight, within world's visibility and visual order.

My reflections are oriented towards video projection's experientiality, on the one hand in terms of the non-figurativeness and non-narrativeness of image, and, on the other, through the visibility produced through various spatial screens. Performers do not have that central role in my imagistic premises. Non-presentational imaginability has offered me meaningful ways to experiment with spatial visibility and the cover/screen, touch and vision, as well as to explore *performability* and virtuality.

Lehmann's postulations regarding lack, and lack of desire, in relation to the electronic image are interesting. His way of negotiating the blurred boundaries between virtual and real in media theatrical context is timely, even if I find the hierarchical relationship that it implies between "media theatre" and the corporality and performativity of "live" problematic. Lehmann's concentration on the shift in focus from the body remains unexamined in conjunction with interpretations of the relationship between the media image and corporality. For Lehmann, a video-projected image is a ready, complete, closed image. Setting up the living, the potentially dying and the already "dead image lacking (the constitutive) lack" in opposition to each other challenges us to consider *performability* in light of translatability and virtuality.

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<sup>77</sup> According to the anecdote a fisherman was asking Lacan: "You can see that (sardine can)? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!" Lacan returned to this jab that disturbed him in his lectures on the gaze and seeing (Seppänen, *The Power of the Gaze*, 73).

The performance forms as an active field in which the performer, the spectator and every one participating in it co-creates the performance as an event. When the experientiality of video projection is viewed from the perspective of *performability*, then the roles of space and time – and thus also those of transformation, movement, and event-ness – are linked to a dynamics between the virtual and the actual in which the coordinates of place and time are on the move along with the perceiver. The place and experience of the image do not form solely in relation to the here and now, just as time does not form as pure present moment. The present moment has a reputation of being an unruly paradox – the always already-past future. In the threshold of a theatrical stage, we already know to expect a different kind of frame of experience, crystallised in Buster Keaton's famous revolving door scene that flings its viewer onto a virtual orbit of time and place.

As I noted earlier, in formulating the structure of the scene, we can lean on Benjamin's idea of language as a medium that is not merely an instrument, but which also has the ability to participate itself in the event of articulation. Scenographer's language is not only a bearer of meanings and an instrument of communication; it is communicative both in relationship to itself as well as to all other languages, both verbal and non-verbal. The theatrical medium (and theatricality) cannot be reduced to an instrument in the formation of self-sufficient fields of signification.

#### IN CONCLUSION

Since the 1960s, the visual arts have systematically questioned the autonomy of the artwork and authorship, as well as renegotiated the connections between new and existing genres and movements and their influences on each other. In "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" Rosalind Krauss highlighted the ways in which changes in

arts have taken place in terms of structural re-framing.<sup>78</sup> This is also interesting with regard to the recent changes in the field of scenography. Building on Krauss' analysis, we can think that the conventions of scenography, until recent decades burdened with the tradition of dramatic theatre, have shifted towards practices of "expanded scenography" by and large in relation to *what it has not* (traditionally) *been*. The premises that have traditionally been attached to scenography (for instance, drama-text-centredness, non-processual approach, bond to spaces specifically built for theatre) and performative activities opposite to these now rise to a central role: related fields, like performance art, installation art, environmental art, architecture, and new kinds of performative and media environments are examples of fields that scenography has been obliged to redefine itself in relationship to. When discussing the "breakthrough" in scenography or any other specialised field in the arts, this sort of distinguishing and transformation of mediums is worth keeping in mind.

I have addressed a set of interconnected aspects regarding the mediality of stage; at stake is the combined effect of the interpretive, experiential, and instrumental-material levels, the *translatability* of verbal and bodily elements, and intermediality. None of these levels affects separately from the others, they always exist in relation to the others. Mediality frames the foundation of a theatrical performance as an active, transformative, and nonlinear series of events and situations. When mediality of the stage is examined as a structure bound to the bodily perception of sign, trace and technical device, as I have proposed, we come to encounter with a sum of mediations linked to both theatrical *performability* and perception.

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78 Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", in *October*, Vol. 18, 1979, 38.

On this basis, theatricality can be examined as situation-specific structure that challenges fixed conceptions of truths, institutions and interpretations. On this basis, theatricality is comparable to conceptions of the stage as a place of bringing forth, of an inter-playground of visibility/invisibility, and as a space and dynamic of continuous, multifaceted navigation and heterotrophic intensity. The mediality of the stage, the mediality of media, intermediality, and media specificity should all be understood rather as *situations* than interpretations. It is, however, important to note that it is by no means an accomplished structure. When visibility is hampered, the senses tend to sharpen. The condition of the medial stage can be conceived as a medium of always-in-arrival, which is approaching it as visibility and *performability*.

# Scenography: Touches and Encounters<sup>1</sup>

LAURA GRÖNDAHL

In general terms, a theatrical performance is always a matter of touches. Actors and spectators encounter each other, and the drama touches its every participant. Theatre makers emphasize the importance of communality almost without exception, which is in no way surprising, since both the making and reception of theatre are collective experiences. A performance becomes meaningful for its participants not only because of the story told and the emotions, thoughts and cathartic climaxes involved there – after all, we could have a much easier access to all these things through other media. We gather to theatres because we want to feel the presence of actors and other spectators, and share together the experience of being touched. Yet we know that the sense of unison is an illusion: there are as many different receptions as there are individual participants having their own reactions, associations and interpretations.

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<sup>1</sup> This essay was first published in Finnish in *Kosketuksen figuureja*, ed. Mika Elo, Helsinki: Tutkijaliitto, 2014.

My special field is scenography, which in the traditional sense means the visual and spatial setting of a theatre play. In contemporary discussions connected to the much-debated postmodern and post-dramatic turns in theatre, scenography has predominantly been understood as a generation of multisensory bodily experiences and interactions in space.<sup>2</sup> In the following, I will take a historicizing approach to the recent development scenography as an artistic occupation. This means that I do not focus on particular scenic designs or performances but rather on the modes of practical encountering embedded in the working processes: we come into encountering with other artistic components of the performance, with fellow theatre makers, audiences and also with the materiality of theatrical spaces. Besides theatre-historical literature I base this essay on my previous research and my own experiences as scenographer and educator of the field.

As a tentative conclusion of my survey I suggest that the importance of encountering and touch has increasingly come to the fore in every aspect of scenography. They are generally regarded as positive phenomena associated with aspirations for togetherness, mutual understanding, and even fusion. Here I do not, however, intend to celebrate the joys of such joint creativity (even though the rare moments of such an experience are more than welcome). Rather, I will consider how communality, sharing, and the encountering of foreign elements can be understood through the idea of *pathic touch*.<sup>3</sup> Simply put it means that you never actually meet the otherness in its true being but only encounter your incapability to touch it. This experience is, however, the precondition for ethical interaction and communication with people who are different from us.

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2 Philip Butterworth and Joslin McKinney, *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 3.

3 See also Santanen in the present volume.

#### A SHORT HISTORY OF SCENOGRAPHY AS AN OCCUPATION

Historically, the modern comprehension of scenography can be dated back to the romantic-realistic theatre of the 19th century.<sup>4</sup> The naturalist drama of the 1880s addressed the stage space a new, significant function as a representation of the protagonists' material living conditions, which showed for instance in the detailed set-descriptions written by the playwrights. Instead of offering visual pleasure or pointing simply to the place and time of the play-events, the naturalistic scenery was supposed to give information of the social environment and personal past of the protagonists. It thus became an inherent part of a particular drama, a visual tool for offering relevant information and suggesting subtexts to written scenes.<sup>5</sup>

As usual, the production practices lagged behind the artistic aspirations and intentions. Until the early decades of the 1900s, theatre companies usually owned a set of so called type-coulisses representing typified basic sceneries that could be recycled in performances year after year. The set painters worked independently from singular productions, because same backdrops were used in different plays. The *mise-en-scène* was conceived of as an instrument for embodying the written drama-text, not as an original artwork as itself. The scenes were staged according to conventional patterns and the set painter knew how the space would be used. S/he did not have to worry about the actors suddenly wanting to enter the stage through a painted landscape or climb on a rock made of papier-mâché. The acting took mainly place on the

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4 See also Hans Öjmyr, *Kungliga teaterns scenografi under 1800-talet*, Eidos nr. 5. Skrifter från Konstvetenskapliga institutionen vid Stockholms universitet, 2002.

5 See for example Laura Gröndahl, *Experiences in Theatrical Spaces. Five Scenographies of Miss Julie in Finnish Theatre 1970-1999*, Helsinki, The University of Industrial Arts, 2004, 51-74.

forestage, because it was the only place that could be sufficiently lit by oil-lamps and candles. The actors were separated from the visual scenery, which could be developed into perfection as illusory machinery, within the established guidelines of visual stage conventions, of course. In other words, the painter could concentrate on his/her own work as craftsmen “dedicated to good work for its own sake”, borrowing Richard Sennett’s comprehension of the craftsmanship.<sup>6</sup>

When the set was understood as an integral part of the show in modern theatre, there emerged a tension between the “goodness” of a set measured by the internal values of the scenographic craftsmanship, and the requirements of modern drama and performance. This tension has labelled all discussions on scenography as art throughout the 20th century, and it still lurks behind the post-dramatic strategies of the new millennium.

It was a technical innovation that finally changed the spatial and visual order of the performance practices: electric lighting was adapted to theatres since 1879 and increased the luminosity on stage drastically. It enabled actors to move freely on the stage. The bright lighting destroyed the illusory effects of flat backdrops and they were soon replaced by three-dimensional, functional elements. Now the actors could use the setting as a part of their action: they could grasp the props, slam the doors or climb on the rocks. Modern theatre theorists wrote in unison that the designer should not be a painter but an architect, who should be involved with the dramatic action and anticipates the use of the space. When electric light sources could be regulated and controlled from the switchboard since the 1930s, the visual scenery could be used as a dramaturgical tool that told the story also in time, or as Scott Palmer puts

it: “The movement of light through a performance was becoming considered in the same terms as a musical score.”<sup>7</sup>

All these renewals made scenography into an elementary component of the performance, both as a visual extension of the drama, and as a constitutive component of the *mise-en-scène* defining the spatial limits and possibilities of acting. The professional identity of a scenographer turned from a craftsman to an artist, who worked not only with paintbrushes but also with his/her mind and intellect. Then again, s/he also became more dependent on the holistic composition of the particular performance. From now on, scenographers have had to co-operate closely with the director and increasingly with other members of the production team.

The question of artistic collaboration cannot be discussed without the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which can be translated to English as a complete or total work of art. Although Richard Wagner presented the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk* already in 1851, it has labeled all discussions of theatre ever since. Basically it means that the different components of a theatre performance are taken as artistic languages on their own terms. This liberated the visual and auditory aspects of stage from the subordination to written drama. Now the performance was seen as a synthesis of all art forms, and this harmonic whole became the new imperative for the scenographer. In other words, the “tyranny” of the verbal text was replaced by the monolithic unity of the composition of all aspects of the performance. This whole was orchestrated and mastered by the director, who became the most prominent artist of modern theatre in the 20th century.

On the one hand, this development granted a new, higher status and creative freedom for the scenographer as an artist responsible

<sup>6</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*, London, Penguin Books, 2008, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Scott Palmer, *Light*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 206.

for the visual language of the performance. On the other hand, it has often been noted that the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk* has totalitarian tendencies, because there is the desire to integrate all individual agents to the service of a utopian collective goal. On the practical level, the scenographer was now regarded as an independent artist, but s/he was supposed to somehow synchronize his/her process with the director. It goes without saying that this caused problems, as Peter Brook described symptomatically:

*I have worked with joy with many marvellous designers, but have at times been caught in strange traps – as when the designer reaches a compelling solution too fast, so that I found myself having to accept or refuse shapes before I had sensed what shapes seemed to be immanent in the text. [...] The best designer evolves step by step with the director, going back, changing, scrapping, as a conception of the whole gradually takes form.*<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, scenographers, and in their wake costume and lighting designers, have refused to accept a subordinated position. They have required for artistic autonomy and democratic teamwork where everybody's ideas would be equally considered. For them, the visual design should not only serve the needs of the performance but also be received as an artistic act that can produce its own reality. As the creative team has grown, this has become problematic, too. The lighting designer Simo Leinonen described the situation in 1993 lively:

*The costume designer wanted a brimmed hat. Then came the dramaturge and revised the text. After that came the choreographer, and*

*made the actor stand on one foot. There she stood, wearing the hat and speaking lines she could not understand, when the scenographer told that he had already last summer envisioned a field of tree stumps in the scene. And there were a damned lot of the stumps! Then came the sound designer, who made some incredible stuff blast in the background, and finally the lighting designer Leinonen added a giddy blue backlight on top of all that. Then in the evening we were sitting in [restaurant] Natalia and going: Goddamn, how come it's not working.*<sup>9</sup>

During the first decades of the 2000s, scenographic design has increasingly happened through teamwork, conversations and joint exercises instead of individual ideation at one's private desk. The modes of collaboration have become the most vital issue in the scenographic occupation, which shows very clearly in the education of the field.<sup>10</sup> In her doctoral thesis published in 2006, scenographer Liisa Ikonen ended up searching for possibilities of free and unconstrained collective interaction. What turned out to be of importance here was not the emphasizing of one's own subjective artistic identity, but the dialogical character of the process and the capacity for encountering the other, the ability to let the other come forth in its own being.

*The research work that had begun as a pursuit of the individual artist's independence and freedom came, in the end, to a surprising result. New scenography did not, after all, mean placing my own art to the fore. Rather, it meant a unity in which the differentiation be-*

<sup>8</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, London, Penguin Books, 2008 [1968], 113–114.

<sup>9</sup> Liisa Ikonen, "Visuaalisuuden pelko", *Teatteri* 8/1993.

<sup>10</sup> Laura Gröndahl, "Stage Design at the Crossroad of Different Operational Cultures. Mapping the History of Scenography Education in Finland", *Nordic Theatre Studies* Vol. 27/2, 2015.

*tween subject and object, the own and the common, as well as scenography and performance vanished.*<sup>11</sup>

By dialogue, Ikonen refers not only to the mutual exchange of views between team members. It is also a matter of dialogue with the developing work that cannot be known in advance. The setting is produced by coming into encountering with others, who for their part meet the designer and his/her work. In the suggested working method, the final performance emerges out of the series of encountering: it is something new that has not existed but comes into being as a consequence of the process. This means that scenography is in a constant state of transformation with new, unpredictable possibilities opening up, and the artistic product itself remains ultimately foreign to even those who have produced it.

Although the interest in collective working methods has increased, this kind of utopia has not come true in institutional theatres. Yet, the attitude has had a huge impact on the ways in which the artistic constitution of scenography has been comprehended in the new millennium. The relationship between form and content was now reversed compared to the established working methods, where the team should start from conceptual ideas existing 'a priori' to practical rehearsals. The contemporary theatre makers rather want to let unpredictable things happen and generate different materials to experiment with. There emerge new ideas that are developed further with no fixed vision about future outcomes. It is the collective process itself that should lead the work, and it should be controlled and mastered as little as possible. This gives room for something unexpected, uncalculated, strange to appear, but it can

11 Liisa Ikonen, *Dialogista skenografiaa. Vaihtoehtoisen työprosessin fenomenologista tulkintaa*, Helsinki, The University of Industrial Arts, 2006, 29.

also be seen as a display of new-liberalist systemic thinking, ruled by free markets and survival of the fittest.<sup>12</sup>

Something similar has happened in the suggested strategies for audience reception. Since the staging was no more based on previously given contents, the spectators were invited to develop their own ways of perceiving and making sense of the performance. This moved the focus from the closed world of drama-fiction to the process of semiosis and the instability and ambiguity of all meanings. Erika Fischer-Lichte writes about a performative turn that has taken place in performance strategies already since the 1960s.<sup>13</sup> Basically it means that theatre was understood as a two-way relation between audiences and performances instead of dramatic narratives or decodable sign-systems. The conventional division to performers and audiences; authors and receivers; viewers and the viewed was re-organized or even broken. The spectator was not only conceived as an active receiver who creatively interprets the texts. S/he became actually responsible for the performance experience in a new way. In practice, audiences were increasingly involved to the happening mentally or straightforward physically. For example, they have been invited to choose their viewpoint, move freely in the space, interact with performers or participate in the course of event. This again is a two-edged sword, inviting audiences to think independently and celebrating their heterogeneity, but also giving room for conservative consumerism, where everybody can just pick up what pleases him/her.

12 See for example Janne Tapper, "Jon McKenzien esityksen teorian tulkinnasta: käsitteet pölytytys, immanenssi ja hyve", in *Esitystutkimus*, ed. Annette Arlander, Helena Erkkilä, Taina Riikonen, Helena Saarikoski, Helsinki, Partuuna, 2015, 169–203; Janne Tapper, *Jouko Turkan Teatterikorkeakoulun kauden yhteiskunnallinen kontekstuaalisuus vuosina 1982–85*, Helsinki, University of Helsinki, 2012; Jon McKenzie, *Perform – or Else. From Discipline to Performance*, London and New York, Routledge, 2001.

13 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, London and New York, Routledge, 2008, 20–22.

## DESIGNING AND THINKING OF SPACES

The modern scenographer's primary instrument is space. It would thus seem logical that the scenographer's working methods can be related to different ways, in which the essence of space has theoretically been conceived. According to Edward S. Casey, there are basically two philosophical approaches that date back to Plato and Aristotle. To Plato, space (*khora*) was a passive receptacle; a matrix of appearance, on which all things manifest themselves, but which has no qualities of its own. As an idealist, Plato put primacy on the geometrical shapes that are projected onto earthly matter from the transcendental world of ideas. Aristotle, in turn, was an empiricist: for him the world could be known through perception. He stressed the materiality of the place (*topos*), which he compared to a vessel that can actively sculpt its contents. In other words, in his view place itself had inherent power.

Casey remarks that the polemic between Platonic "geometrisation" and Aristotelian "physicalism" runs through the history of Western philosophy and still affects our everyday notions on space.<sup>14</sup> Simply put, theoretical notions on space have historically developed from the medieval hierarchy of places, where everything belonged to its proper position, to the mathematically mastered universe of modern natural sciences. This can be seen as a move from Aristotelian to Platonic order, and according to Casey, the 'power of the place' was largely forgotten in modern thinking. The Newtonian and Galilean space was neutral and homogeneous: it had no absolute zero-point from which the order and directions could be derived. It was based on calculable relations between moving objects, and places had significance only as

14 Ibid.

'simple locations'.<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault has argued that space became subordinated to time and was treated as dead, fixed, immobile and non-dialectical.<sup>16</sup> Edward W. Soja has claimed that in modern geography space was considered either as a simple container for, or as a mere outcome of historical events, but not as a dynamic, active agent having an effect on what was going on inside of it. Up to the 1970's, positivist geography had contented itself with the classification and description of measurable data, cutting itself off from humanistic social sciences and history.<sup>17</sup>

How about theatre spaces? Today most stages in our theatre buildings are black, neutral boxes, looking everywhere the same. They are supposed to serve as a screen on which contents can be projected as freely as possible: the lack of a proper character should allow maximal flexibility for any artificial ambience. The established design practices take the existing stage space as a passive platform on which the creative scenographic design happens. Traditionally, the designer starts not by experiencing the physical space or experimenting with action on stage, but by imagining the performance by means of scale models, various sketching techniques and nowadays increasingly with 3D computer modeling programs. The creative design-process is separated from the bodily event on the material stage, which comes into being only afterwards as an implementation of the planned ideas.

One of the most famous theoreticians of modern scenography, Adolphe Appia (1862–1928) aspired for a universal stage that could host any singular performance; it would, in other words, function

15 Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place – A Philosophical History*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998, 142.

16 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Architecture / Mouvement / Continuité*, October, 1984 [1967].

17 Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies – The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, London and New York, Verso, 1989, 35–38.

like a Platonic receptacle in which the events could take place. The architect Walter Gropius developed a model for Total Theatre (1926), where the stage and auditorium could be spatially modified into any position as if the space would have no fixed form of its own. The theatre historian Christopher Baugh has very accurately noted that the “leitmotif” of modern scenography is the metaphor of stage as machine, “a physical construction that theatrically locates and enables the public act of performance”.<sup>18</sup> Like any machine, this kind of scenography serves some purpose beyond its own existence, but it is also constitutive of the production process and its outcome. The power of scenography is thus embedded in its instrumentality in a similar way as any technology that is falsely presumed as neutral.

In the field of visual and spatial design, the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk was most prominently developed by the Bauhaus Design School operative in Weimar Republic 1919–33. The artists there considered the building (das Bau) as the “ultimate goal of all art”, and the unity was to be achieved by combining arts, craftsmanship and modern technologies into a new synthesis.<sup>19</sup> The harmony was based on a belief in a uniting spiritual essence beyond the perceivable materiality of different artforms.<sup>20</sup> In other words, all artists were supposed to “discover” material forms that correspond to same ideas, but it was also vital that they understood the character of their own artistic languages as immanent sense perception.

Oskar Schlemmer, who led the experimental theatre of Bauhaus 1923–29, developed the idea of scenic machine by creating a visual

stage with dancing abstract figures. He claimed that the stage could be differentiated to three dimensions that obeyed different laws according to the inherently essential nature of their material. Firstly, there was the oral or sound stage of a literary or musical event, represented by the author; secondly, the play stage of a physical-mimetic event embodied by the actor; and thirdly the visual stage of an optical event created by the designer, who was the builder of form and colour.<sup>21</sup> In a theatre performance, one of these dimensions always takes the lead placing the others into its service.<sup>22</sup> Schlemmer, however, developed a bit mystical idea of *Man as Dancer (Tänzer Mensch)*, who was able to exceed the differentiation and follow “his sense of himself as well as his sense of embracing space”.<sup>23</sup> Although many commentators have specified Schlemmer as an essentialist, Melissa Trimmingham argues that he in fact worked as “a practical philosopher” in Husserlian terms, and anticipated postmodern tendencies in scenography by examining the tension between the transcendental and ‘real’.<sup>24</sup> In my understanding, the *Man as Dancer* can sense both his body and the space through his movement, and this binds the two aspects together in one bodily experience. This resonates strongly with the phenomenological view on spatiality, which Casey regards as a distant descendant of the Aristotelian power of the place.<sup>25</sup>

According to Casey, it was already Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) who breathed new life into the discussion on actively functioning place. Although Kant regarded space as an a priori given condition

18 Christopher Baugh, *Theatre, Performance and Technology*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, 46.

19 Manifesto of the Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar 1919.

20 Elaine S. Hochman, *Bauhaus – Crucible of Modernism*, New York, Fromm International, 1997; *Bauhaus*, ed. Jeanne Fiedler and Peter Feierabend, Cologne, Könemann, 2012; Vassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, ReadaClassic.com, 2010 [1911].

21 Oscar Schlemmer, “Man and Art Figure”, in *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, ed. Walter Gropius and Arthur S. Wensinger, Middletown, Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 1961, 19–20.

22 Ibid., 31.

23 Ibid., 25.

24 Melissa Trimmingham, *The Theatre of the Bauhaus – The Modern and Postmodern Stage of Oskar Schlemmer*, New York, Routledge, 2011, 46.

25 Ibid., 57.

for perception, he noted the importance of the lived corporeality in spatial experiences. The directions found in space are based on the structure of the human body. We perceive things as being left or right, front or back, up or down, in relation to our sensing body. Here the possibility opens up to understand space and place through a sensing body that takes an active part in processes of perception. We perceive and conceive the surrounding world by encountering it with our bodies. To quote Casey, place originates in this “being-with”: “Just as we are always with a body, so, being bodily, we are always within a place as well.”<sup>26</sup>

Referring to Casey’s historiography further, Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) continued on this path and regarded the participation of the lived body as the basis of the spatiality escaping geometric structures and measurements. For him, the moving body was a permanent zero-point in space, which could be exemplified by walking through a landscape: the lived body moves to new places while the walker is the center of his/her changing experience. Since this bodily “here” is in constant motion, the place around it is all the time formed anew.<sup>27</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61) considered the way in which we inhabit the spatial world as fundamental for our mode of being. When we enter a place, we do not merely adapt to the given space: the place opens up as an indefinite horizon of possible actions.<sup>28</sup> Casey crystallizes Merleau-Ponty’s idea: “the lived body is itself a place. [It] *constitutes place*, brings it into being.”<sup>29</sup> The kinesthetic, proprioceptive experience is, however, not reducible to the subject’s internal structure but is born in contact with the

given world that exists outside the subject.<sup>30</sup> We constitute spaces when we come into encountering with something outside ourselves. This notion can be traced in contemporary scenographic strategies, where the space comes into existence as the outcome of unpredictable mental and physical interaction, not as a given pre-condition for a representative theatre play.

#### THE PERFORMANCE

At a first glance, the idea of a “Platonic” neutral stage was most clearly put in words by Peter Brook, who gave his famous book the title *Empty Space* (1968). Following his footsteps, one of the most prominent Finnish theatre directors of the 1970s, Ralf Långbacka, wrote: “In an ideal world the theatre as a building would disappear and the only thing left would be I or we the audience and the performance.”<sup>31</sup> However, this is not yet the whole story. As we know, Brook made many of his most celebrated performances in very specific sites, and Långbacka went on claiming that the space disappears most easily outside institutional theatre buildings.<sup>32</sup> Like many other theatre makers he wanted to abandon the neutral, flexible stages and go to different “found spaces”<sup>33</sup> such as factories or deserted villas. But how could these spaces disappear in the spectators’ experience? Do they not have an exceptionally strong character, which is almost impossible to ignore? How could you not pay attention to their special atmosphere, the feel of the air, smell, and

26 Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 1998, 214.

27 Ibid., 226–228.

28 Ibid., 232.

29 Ibid., 235.

30 Ibid., 234.

31 Ralf Långbacka, “Not a question of theatre buildings”, in *Theatre in Space*, FONDI the Yearbook of Finnish Theatremuseum 3., trans. Tony Melville, Helsinki, Theatre Museum, 1988, 80.

32 Ibid.

33 *Found space* means any non-theatrical building or site that is used in performance. It has not been constructed for theatrical purposes, but ‘found’ by the artists in the world.

acoustics – things that tend to be forgotten in a familiar theatre building because they are familiar features of a conventional playhouse, taken as granted.

When a performance is staged in a “found space”, the audiences have to perceive and interpret the place differently from its normal purposes and connotations. They must somehow cancel their everyday mode of making sense of the environment and allow it to appear on new terms. This is a special state of mind, where we are on the threshold between two ways of seeing the stage: the actual place, and the imaginary one that emerges through the performance event. There is the sense of the material place, but it is contested by mental projections; phantasies, associations and new meanings induced by the performance. Occasionally, the physical place “gives up”, and turns into another space beyond the immanent appearances. Yet, this can happen only for short moments because we cannot help sensing and perceiving the actual environment. This kind of a stage cannot be explained as purely Aristotelian, nor Platonic, but rather as an oscillation between two modes of experience: the limiting power of the material environment and the freedom of imagination and reasoning. Due to this liminality, no meanings are fixed, which makes it possible to address any new meanings to the perception. In other words, anything can represent anything. This is the emptiness of the found spaces that actually are packed with sense stimuli and ready-made cultural meanings. This is also the magic of modern theatre, as Bert O. States has put it:

*The magic that Artaud and Grotowski talk about is that of transformation or alchemy; it is not only that the eye can be tricked into seeing almost any object as something else, but that an object that does not represent something in advance becomes a blank check, an open presence; it becomes the source of something not yet here, a*

*thing without history, or rather a thing whose history is about to be revised.*<sup>34</sup>

States notes that this kind of theatre solicits for “the willing suspension of our self-isolation”; in other words, it becomes an almost spiritual ritual that celebrates the death of the old language and the birth of a new one, created in the presence of the participatory community.<sup>35</sup> Modernist theatre is very much labelled by the desire for this kind of togetherness based on a sharable metaphorical language, the semantics and syntax of which are constructed in the here-and-now, before live audiences. By erasing the historical ballast of previous convention and existing cultural sign-systems, such performances try to start from the beginning, clean the table and create an empty stage.<sup>36</sup> The scenography of this kind of theatre is a matter of interaction between the participants and the performance, not by concrete architectural structures. Therefore it moves the focus of scenography to the situatedness and relationality of the event itself.

#### THE SPECTATOR IN SPACE

The scenography always positions the performer and the spectator in relation to each other. On the one hand, this means the very concrete spatial structuring of the performance event. On the other hand, it is a question of situating the spectator in a certain mental and physical position as a perceiving and interpreting subject. A good example is the traditional focal point perspective, where

34 Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987, 113.

35 *Ibid.*, 113–114.

36 See for example Davis Wiles, *The Short History of Western Performance Space*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 240–266.

the illusion only works when it is viewed from the exact right angle. It is a practical issue of seeing the painting correctly, but also a mental position indicating, how the perceptual and conceptualizing apparatus of the spectator is supposed to work. The focal point perspective creates not only a picture of the world but also of the viewer itself, because it is based on a geometric model imitating human three-dimensional sight. In other words, when we see a correct perspectival display, we also perceive ourselves as subjects that are capable of seeing the world according to then given model. Despite of the credible illusion, the perspective technique has some limitations: it works only, when one looks at scenery with one eye or takes a sufficient distance to it. It also ignores the dynamic character of vision as a sequence of fragmentary eye-movements and presents the spatial experience as a closed, stabile whole. This means that the seeing subject is situated outside the world represented and s/he is stripped from some aspects of his/her sight: the stereoscopic vision created by two eyes that constantly wander around in the field of vision.

Two-dimensional pictures generate thus spaces not only by representing an illusory depth, but also by creating a spatial relationship between the viewer and the image in the moment of viewing. This can be applied to all rhetorical acts.<sup>37</sup> Hans-Thies Lehmann equates perspective with the narrative of a drama, because it makes the totality possible by situating the spectator outside of the perceived world and the act of representation is separate from the object of representation.<sup>38</sup> Maaïke Bleeker uses the concept of *focali-*

*zation* to describe the relationship between the viewing subject and the object viewed within a particular construction that invites the spectator to take up a certain position.<sup>39</sup> The *focalization* is not restricted to realistic or illusory modes: it implies any attitude the audience is hoped to take in its approach to the work of art. According to Bleeker, the act of positioning passes unnoticed when the way of seeing it proposes coincides with the spectator's presuppositions, wishes, and desires. She notes that the attraction of realistic theatre is largely based on the feeling of the sign and its signification merging together, of not being able to tell the actor from the character.<sup>40</sup>

Various postmodern strategies for their part aim at deconstructing different concealed ways of directing the audience's experience. Instead of offering a fixed and comprehensible position for the viewer, the performance rather hampers the attempts of decoding and interpreting it according to any coherent frame. This is supposed to make the spectator aware of the act of *focalization* itself, and consequently also his/her own unconscious desires, needs, and expectations. Disturbance becomes content, confusion turns into an artistic experience.

According to Lehmann, the confusion is political, because it focuses the attention to the strategies of representation instead of the fictive story represented, but Bleeker makes there an important addition. According to her, the removal of a totalizing frame in fact is another framework, which allures to grant the spectator a more direct access to the things as they are in themselves:

-- the effect of the multiplication of frames would appear (at least in some respects) to equal the absence of frames. This turns Lehmann's

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37 On the concept of rhetorics in theatre and drama, see William B. Worthen, *Modern Drama and the Rhetoric of Theater*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992.

38 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Draaman jälkeinen teatteri*, trans. Riitta Virkkunen, Helsinki, Like, 2009 [1999], 144.

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39 Maaïke Bleeker, *Visuality in the Theatre - The Locus of Looking*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 27-28.

40 *Ibid.*, 84.

*account of perception on the post-dramatic stage into a paradox: the multiplication of frames manifests itself in the increased perceptibility of the thing itself. This paradox becomes no less paradoxical – yet somewhat less confusing – when understood as the effect or indicator of perspective at work, rather than as the effect of deconstruction or the absence of perspective. It is the paradox that is perspective.*<sup>41</sup>

Bleeker, in other words, reminds us that we are always situated in some position and relation to the perceived world. The only thing we can do is to be aware of the very act of positioning and understand that is constructed and can be altered. Nevertheless, this awareness is actually another frame that only expands the view to the next meta-level. In short, we never get rid of a perspectival position; it can only be deconstructed and we can be moved to another place of viewing. Yet, the desire for a fixed point of perception seems to persist: a point where one could experience a satisfactory harmony between one's mind and the encountering with something else; a point, from which could overcome the gap that makes us distinct from the world and from the collectively shared experience of it. But all attempts to fulfill this desire are bound to end in frustration because the distinction between the viewer and the viewed only reappears somewhere else. I suggest that through this notion, the postmodern performances have somehow internalized the theatrical event: we do not experience the drama as a representation of something else; we encounter in it our own mental processes of perceiving things and making sense of them. Does this mean that theatre becomes an individual, solitary experience like reading a book or watching a movie on the coach? That would in fact be the climax of the development starting from the 18th century bourgeois theatre.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 44.

#### ON ENCOUNTERS AND TOUCHES IN SCENOGRAPHY

It is characteristic of any artistic experience that it is felt to be at the same time deeply personal and collectively shareable or even universal. We can find this insight in Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics, according to which the ontology of art is based on repeatable experiential structures.<sup>42</sup> He compares these structures to theatre performances, where the same play comes into being night after night. The word play (*Spiel*) is here not restricted to theatre: we can talk about children's plays or about playing football. The word refers to any game that always has the same basic structure but exists only when being played out in particular situations. Similarly, the reception and interpretation of art are structured processes that construct the work into being time and time again as personal experiences. Although these experiences are always defined according to the mental horizons of individual players, the artwork itself is reducible neither to the particular cases of its being played, nor to subjective receivers. It only comes into being in the repetition of its incident structure independent of singular subjects. I think that in theatre we become especially aware of this hermeneutic dimension of the performance: I do not only have an artistic experience of my own; I also sense that my experience is a link in the chain of parallel and successive experiences of the same play-structure. I come into encountering with my own, subjective experience of the performance, but also with its difference to all other experiences that are implicitly present there.

According to Gadamer, a successful work of art also transforms its spectator.<sup>43</sup> When looking at a painting, for example, my own mental horizon sets the limits to my interpretation, and some of

<sup>42</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. William Glen-Doepel, London, Sheed and Ward, 1975 [1960], 99–108.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 115–118.

the painting's possibilities always exceed my understanding. If I learn to know the unfamiliar, it expands my understanding, or horizon as Gadamer puts it, and the foreign finds its place within my renewed mind. I can breathe a sigh of relief: the alien has been tamed, it has become familiar to me and my mind has grown. But sometimes there retains something forever unfamiliar, unexplainable, disturbing; something that does not settle even within the expanded horizon. It provokes me since it makes me aware of the limits of my own mental capability. This has to do with the aesthetic concept of sublime, as the word's Latin root *sublimis* (literally: "up to the limit") suggests. When striving to exceed my own comprehension, I become conscious of the limits of my imagination and understanding. This is why I think good art haunts the spectator, because it can never be exhaustively interpreted or explained: there evolves an uncanny experience of strangeness that touches us from inside. The alien has invaded my mind but does not unfold to me, and the only thing I can examine is the very experience of coming to the unbridgeable boundary between the other and myself. In this sense, illnesses and certain spiritual experiences can be understood in terms of being exposed to otherness; to something foreign that invades one's own body.<sup>44</sup> I see something similar in a deep-going aesthetic experience, as well in making as in receiving works of art. Something arises in me, something that remains foreign, strange, and uncontrollable; it is like an alien inside me. It is probably no coincidence Antonin Artaud compared theatre to the plague.<sup>45</sup>

In this indelible sense of strangeness lies also the core of the *pathic* moment of touch. The term *pathic* is derived from the Greek word *pathos*, meaning, among other things, sensitivity, sentience,

affectability, and suffering. The *pathic* moment of touch refers to sensitivity towards the existence of an untouchable, forever strange dimension involved in touch, a dimension to which the one who touches is exposed. It is a matter of handling with something different and alien without losing the respect to its otherness. Even in the closest contacts there always remains an alien element: something that withdraws from the reach of touch.<sup>46</sup> In fact, it is just this absolute untouchability, the uncompleted contact that touches us in every encounter. We touch something outside ourselves precisely through our inability to truly touch it. This does not mean that we should refrain from a close encountering and let the other be. I can experience my inability only when I make serious efforts to touch, when I push myself to the ultimate limit between the other and me. In order to feel the *pathic* touch I have to try hard and fail in my attempts to touch. What I actually experience there is the boundary that separates me from the other.

A *pathic* attitude towards scenography could mean accepting this strangeness involved in every encounter, the untouchability of the touched, as the basis of teamwork. This should not come down to a general chaos, everyone allowed to pursue their own ideas with no consideration for others. Rather, it means willingness to welcome phenomena that cannot immediately be understood and appropriated by habitual means. It implies a certain slowness of progression that permits of noticing unfamiliar elements breaking into one's own horizon, and encountering them, being exposed to them. It is a matter, too, of letting the other remain strange, of not trying, through some unifying gesture, to adapt the other to oneself. And vice versa, it is as important to protect one's own untouchability. On the level of everyday practice, this might mean

44 See also Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Intrus*, Paris, Éditions Galilée, 2000.

45 Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, trans. Victor Conti, London, John Calder, 1981 [1964], 20–22.

46 On the pathic dimension of touch, see Santanen in the present volume.

that working together is not necessarily always great fun. Artistic work might take such a strange direction that it leaves one altogether in the position of an outsider. The unfamiliar element may really appear hostile and frightening. One of the most important practical insights is to renounce of the false idealization of communality, the expectation of everyone coming together in a shared Eldorado. Acting together is necessary, and fundamental to human existence, but extremely difficult and painful as well. Instead of a utopian goal, perhaps it should be taken as a problem we have to learn to live with. Yet, this does not mean that we should give up the attempts of reaching a communion, of touching the untouchable, because the *pathic* moment takes place exactly in the necessary failure of these attempts.

In my view, human selfhood is always constituted in relation to the other – whether we are talking about disconcerting phenomena, social roles, mirror neurons, or Levinasian ethics. We cannot construct the comprehension of our own selves without being in contact with something outside of us. Then again, such a touch can only take place in an encounter between the other and I. Thus, touch is both constitutive of our subjective existence, and born out of our own actions. This is why we cannot rid of the necessity of togetherness and encountering others.

The encountering with other people is also an existential precondition of our social life as human beings. My sense of self can be constituted only when I am in contact with something outside me. The moment of *pathic* touch is therefore an instance where we actually come together: every borderline has the dual capacity of both dissociating and uniting things, as Hannah Arendt writes:

*To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it common, as a table is located*

*between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time. The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak.*<sup>47</sup>

What brings us together in the public realm is not so much a happy consensus but rather the threat of a conflict. The reason why we approach each other is the need to solve our dissonances and disagreements, to handle with our differences. As Arendt puts: “to be political, to live in a polis, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence.”<sup>48</sup> This makes the idea of *pathic* touch so important in contemporary world: it constitutes an encountering that recognizes the existence of the otherness and the need to respect its ultimate strangeness. This sensitivity is a precondition of ethical policies and public discussions. Arendt does not speak much of art but it is possible to think of theatre as a metaphoric display of the discussions in public realm. The stage is like the common table, around which we can gather in order to display and encounter our differences. This also constitutes the political dimension of theatre, which according to Denis Guénoun follows from the audience’s awareness of its own presence.<sup>49</sup> Thinking this way, I can apply to scenography what the geographer and social scientist Doreen Massey writes about space generally as “the condition of both the existence of difference and the meeting-up of the different”.<sup>50</sup>

47 Hannah Arendt, *Human Condition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958], 52.

48 Ibid., 26.

49 Denis Guénoun, “Sanojen näyttely”, in *Näyttämän filosofia* 13–56, trans. Kaisa Sivenius, Esa Kirkkopelto and Riina Maukola, Helsinki, Like, 2007.

50 Doreen Massey, *For Space*, London, SAGE, 2005, 180.

*[...] space is the dimension of the social. Space is constituted by our simultaneous existence and the relations between us. It does not, however, represent some kind of achieved holism that would allow of no gaps. I would rather describe space as ‘the simultaneity of our stories written thus far’. We produce space in our practices and interactive relations. This means that space is the object of continuous production. As a dimension of plurality, space thus raises the question of how are we (humans and non-humans) going to live together.<sup>51</sup>*

*Translation Kaisa Sivenius*

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51 Doreen Massey, *Samanaikainen tila*, ed. Mikko Lehtonen, Pekka Rantanen and Jarno Valkonen, trans. Janne Rovio, Tampere, Vastapaino, 2008, 15. (The citation is from the preface written for a compilation of Massey’s texts published in Finnish – transl. note.)

# Pressings

HARRI LAAKSO

In art, things often are out of place and sometimes not what they seem. Art creates worlds from this out-of-placeness and this seeming. But how does artistic research thrive in such created spaces? What forces act on artistic agency, matter and knowledge, what pressures are exerted on language, what imaginary and tropological figures emerge?

This essay takes as its departure points Pierre Huyghe's two site-specific works *Untilled* (2012) and *Roof Garden Commission* (2015) and Maurice Blanchot's texts, especially his novella *The One Who Was Standing Apart From Me* (1953). These works are here not so much as illustrations or examples of artistic research as they are reflective surfaces for another thought and a way of pacing. I do not want to "solve", interpret or analyse them, frankly not even to understand them. Their coexistence here is partly coincidental and intuitive. I encountered them and they touched me at an op-

portune time, and act here as reference points for – and in place of – something else.<sup>1</sup>

I'm also writing myself away from these works. I'm writing *about* them, *alongside* them and in a final manoeuvre losing touch with them, trying to find solace in a position *apart from them* and from my writing self. I notice that I might be suggesting, in effect, that artistic research is riddled with an innate inability to touch.

#### AREA

*Untilled* (2012) was the name of the artwork, or *place*, which Pierre Huyghe had built on the composting area of Kassel's Karlsaue Park. There on the small clearing in the woods one would confront a number of things, including piles of sand, dirt, asphalt, concrete tiles, anthills, an uprooted oak (which was originally planted for Joseph Beuys's project in 1982<sup>2</sup>), psychotropic plants and a female statue, whose head was obscured by an active beehive. In addition a man walked a dog around the site (with puppies, I am told, although I did not see any) like an automaton, day after day. The artwork was part of the dOCUMENTA (13) exhibition (work number 83 in the exhibition) and it placed the different elements at the forest clearing – the living, non-living and dead things alike, their interrelations, tensions and stings – onto the landscape of contemporary art. As such that was not unusual, as it has become more than customary that the borders between artistic meaning making and “the world

1 Parts of this text were published earlier in Finnish as “Pistoja” in Kosketuksen figureja, ed. Mika Elo, Helsinki, Tutkijaliitto. Other sections of this text were part of a performative “In absentia -lecture”, written by me and presented by Crystal Bennes at the *KuvA Research Days* 2016, University of the Arts Helsinki, on 9th December 2015.

2 The oaks were part of Joseph Beuys's project, which started in 1982 and which included planting 7000 trees in Kassel.

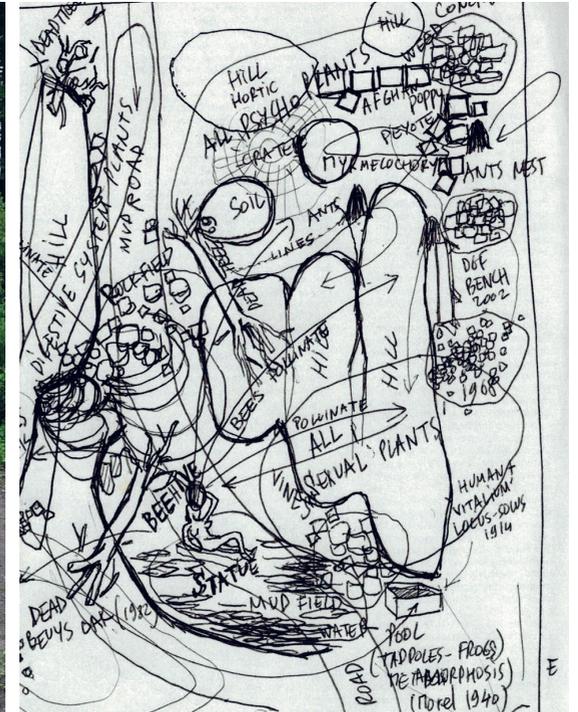
at large” are obscured, and that the artworks test their own limits and those of our world.

The name of Huyghe's work was *Untilled*, which many visitors quickly read as “Untitled” – a slip which undoubtedly speaks of the *parergonal* forces of expectation in our confrontation with the art world. The word refers to land, which is not prepared and cultivated for crops, a sort of wasteland, land that is not tilled. As such “Untilled” echoes the possibility of some anonymous reserve that is in waiting and still only remotely attached to culture and language. The park itself is “human nature” and the compost area within it a shrine of decay, somewhere at the border of life and death, or order and the formless, an incessant trade of entropy and negentropy. Things disintegrate, reassemble, are taken apart and find new places as building blocks of cells, or in the work of our thoughts. “The set of operations that occurs between [the different elements] has no script. There are antagonisms, associations, hospitality and hostility, corruption, separation and degeneration or collapse with no encounters.”<sup>3</sup> What becomes met is a condition with all the vibrant rhythms and metamorphoses, something like a system in all its instability, without a script and with no choreography.

In the short catalogue text Huyghe describes the work as follows: “The place is enclosed. Elements and spaces from different times in history lie next to each other with no chronological order or sign of origin. What is present are either physical adaptations of fictional and factual documents or existing things. In the compost of the Karlsaue park, artifacts, inanimate elements, and living organisms... plants, animals, humans, bacteria are left *without culture*.”<sup>4</sup>

3 Pierre Huyghe, *dOCUMENTA. Das Begleitbuch/The Guidebook*. Katalog 3/3, Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 2012, 262.

4 Ibid. Italics mine.



I'm letting this area composed by Huyghe, simultaneously active and dormant, where mental images (figures and figments of imagination)<sup>5</sup> and materials touch each other; also be the fertile ground and metaphor for discussing two central issues of artistic research, namely agency and materiality, and the connection between them. These concepts are central because artistic research explores, before anything else, how artworks, presentations and images *themselves* perform research gestures, separate from any intentions of their maker.<sup>6</sup> And because the status of an artwork as agency is still unclear, also the aims of artistic research often become obscured: Does artistic research open a pathway to another kind of knowledge after all or instead to the *other of knowledge*? Perhaps artistic research literally *does not know*?

Maybe artistic research should not be viewed in relation to, say the natural sciences or humanities, but as *imaginary activity* – not because it does not yet exist, or because it is only always yet to come, permanently *not yet*, but because it is basically the activity and interplay of mental and material images. Different kinds of tensions, research operations and gestures are formed between these two dimensions. They do not as such become the objects of research, but attest to things that happen (i.e. which are events), thereby opening new avenues for agency – where agency becomes defined as a capability or a force (pressure) that acts on an existing situation. This loads the material and the artefacts that make up artworks with new potency, while at the same time inviting one to reassess the nature of artistic agency and to approach theoretical thinking itself also as a material operation.

5 “Figment” and “figure” have the same etymology. Latin *figura* ‘shape, figure, form’; related to *ingere* ‘to form, to contrive’.

6 In Finnish artistic research is sometimes – in my view misleadingly – called “teki-jälähtöinen tutkimus” (“author-based research”) that would imply something opposite to what I’m proposing here.

## DECLARATION

Artistic research “in general” does not exist. Any act of artistic research necessarily includes some sort of explicit or implicit declaration of one’s stance on art – on its function, place and nature *for that individual researcher*. Sometimes, most often I imagine, this will go unnoticed, either because it is taken for granted that there exists a general consensus on what we mean by art, or for precisely the opposite reason: because there can never exist any consensus or adequate definition the whole enterprise can seem futile. For my own purposes, however, I find this most necessary and also pedagogically sound and even prefer to call it an active ‘declaration’ – rather like one declares that one holds certain cards in a card game. This is because what follows is wholly dependent on this declaration.

If, in the beginning, I mentioned that *artistic research does not know*, it is because, *for me*, any art that I am curious or passionate about *does not know*, does not exhibit those ideals that we place for knowledge, of an organized, stable, and coherent economy of meaning. Saying this I am fully aware of the non-conceptually based or embodied ‘forms’ of knowledge or skill, and do not doubt their existence or value, only their pertinence in this case. *For me* art is about something else.

I take my lead from the French thinker Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003). In his view an artwork is not an “accomplishment” or a production as such, a work of bringing to light, but has an imaginary centre that opens in what he calls “unworking” (*désœuvrement*), somewhere beyond being grasped by knowledge and naming.

For Blanchot literary language was not about communicating and interpreting messages, but is about being suspended in this annihilating disappearance of language, at a distance from things. For a true language to begin it is necessary for this nothingness to

have been felt, to endure the double absence of the thing and of the idea. Literature does not seek to name things, to grasp them by the use of language, but desires them prior to that naming.

”For the work is the very decision which dismisses him [the writer], cuts him off, makes of him a survivor, without work. He becomes the inert idler upon whom art does not depend.”<sup>7</sup> The writer belongs to what precedes the work, to its indecisiveness, as Blanchot writes, ”to the shadow of events, not their reality, to the image, not the object, to what allows words themselves to become images, appearances – not signs, values, the power of truth”.<sup>8</sup>

At the same time the work remains ”illegible, a secret”.<sup>9</sup> This is also the task for artistic research, to keep grasping towards what cannot be grasped, to encounter the *unknown as unknown*, where the unknown will not be revealed, but indicated.

This is the only possible relation to the work, not a proper relation at all.

#### APARTMENT

The feeling of being out of place or being apart can begin close to our very body at any unsuspecting instant. It can be accompanied by the feeling of something existing – human or not, alive or not – somewhere imminently close to us, and making an appearance only at a select moment.

The suggestion (or allusion?) here is not only that artworks too sometimes create the space and conditions for the appearance of such new voices, operating in close proximity, but that the investigation of those elusive voices and of how they could be approached

7 Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982 [1955], 24.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 23.

is a question for artistic research – if one is determined to open up the eroded space, the world where the event of the artwork takes place and listens to its own voice. This search takes us to a place where the work points to a figure radically outside and preceding itself, to its own precondition, towards the direction Michel Foucault saw Samuel Beckett leading us with his sentence: “What matter who’s speaking, someone said, what matter who’s speaking.”<sup>10</sup>

To tackle this task and to try to elucidate some suggestions concerning agency and implication, I will take recourse to Maurice Blanchot’s novella *The One Who Was Standing Apart From Me* from 1953. To call it a ‘novella’ is perhaps already a misapprehension because this feat of writing resists literary classification as much as it resists interpreting what actually happens in the text, what are the events that occur. The novella, then, is a first person narrative of someone in an apartment doing very little, except thinking: he’s sitting at a desk, looking out the window, becoming thirsty and getting a glass of water, and writing (possibly writing, because the unresolved question “is someone writing at this very moment” becomes the most disturbing question of them all). The narrator sees a figure outside the window, or in the house, and converses and negotiates with someone, is encouraged by someone (or perhaps that someone is himself). Yet it is ultimately debatable whether any of the seemingly trivial actions happen at all. Everything is veiled in a cloud of uncertainty, and it seems that the more trivial the task (like getting a glass of water) the more impotent the narrator becomes in completing it.

10 Michel Foucault quoting Beckett in “What is An Author?” [1969], trans. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Itacha, Cornell University Press, 1977, 115. The quote is from Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing*, trans. Beckett. London: Carder & Boyars, 1974, 16.

One can think of the text having an almost physical presence. In fact the translator of Blanchot, Lydia Davis, has written of her experience in the following way:

“The experience of translating the essays was one of the most difficult I ever had, in translating. As though the experience were in fact, a piece of fiction by Blanchot, the meaning of a difficult phrase or sentence would often become a physical entity that eluded me, my brain becoming both the pursuer and the arena in which the pursuit took place. Understanding became an intensely physical act.”<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, Blanchot’s text seems to resist not only interpretation but summary as well. Even if one is able to follow the argument from word to word and from sentence to sentence, it seems not to amount to a comprehensible whole. A short (but unsatisfactory) summary of the narrative, Davis writes, could be: “In a house in the southern part of some country, a man goes from room to room being asked the question ‘Are you writing now?’ by another character who may or may not exist.” In her view Blanchot’s novella’s difficulty rests in the way in which “paradox, and impossibility, are incorporated as perfectly natural elements of the action”, and in how it hinders any attempt to identify the actors and types of action (concrete or possible), and to separate out concrete actors from abstract ones, and from permutations of both.<sup>12</sup>

An excerpt from Blanchot’s actual text might illuminate the nature of these actions:

“A little later, I found myself back on the bed. Nothing was different: I still saw the table, it extended from one window to the oth-

11 <http://yaleunion.org/lydia-davis/> (Accessed 2.2.2017).

12 Lydia Davis describes these combinations at length. There are, for example, such concrete actors as the narrator, but also abstract ones, like the figure who is possibly invented by the narrator. Sometimes abstract qualities like desire or immobility perform as actors. And sometimes the actions are only possible (“I think I moved”), etc.

er, from west to east, as far as I could tell. What struck me, what I tried to bring out of my musings, was why, in this little room, the impression of life was so strong, a radiant life, not of another age, but of the present moment, and mine – I knew it with a clear, joyful knowledge – and yet that clarity was extraordinarily empty, that summer light gave the greatest feeling of distress and coldness. This is open space, I said to myself, the vast country: here I work. The idea that I lived here – that I worked here – meant, it is true, that at this moment I was only here as an image, the reflection of a solitary instant sliding through the immobility of time. A cold thought I could not break down, that pushed me back, threw me back against the wall, just as “here” changed into “far from here,” but that distance immediately became the radiance of the day, the soaring and the happiness of all of space burning, consuming itself to the transparency of a single point. What a vision! But, alas, only a vision. Yet I felt myself powerfully connected to that instant and in some sense under its domination, because of this my master; in the impression that here a sovereign event was taking place and that to live consisted for me in being eternally here and at the same time in revolving only around here, in an incessant voyage, without discovery, obedient to myself and equal to sovereignty.”<sup>13</sup>

What becomes enacted – I am tempted to say – is the space of writing: the writing I creating the voices and figures who exert their presence, but as image and at a distance. Are they the voices of characters and already those of the readers, echoing through the text? Or does the text spiral towards a mysterious origin of language itself, somewhere beyond its task as transmission of meanings?

13 Maurice Blanchot, *The One Who Was Standing Apart From Me*, in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader. Fiction and Literary Essays*, ed. George Quasha, trans. Lydia Davis, Barrytown, Station Hill Press, 1999 [1953], 285.

One more passage from Blanchot:

“To say that I understand these words would not be to explain to myself the dangerous peculiarity of my relations with them. Do I understand them? I do not understand them, properly speaking, and they too who partake of the depth of concealment remain without understanding. But they don’t need that understanding in order to be uttered, they do not speak, they are not interior, they are, on the contrary, without intimacy, being altogether outside, and what they designate engages me in this “outside” of all speech, apparently more secret and more interior than the speech of the innermost heart, but, here, the outside is empty, the secret is without depth, what is repeated is the emptiness of repetition, it doesn’t speak and yet it has always been said already. I couldn’t compare them to an echo, or rather, in this place, the echo repeated in advance: it was prophetic in the absence of time.”<sup>14</sup>

Is the secret companion, who is alluded to in the name of the novella and in these fragments, then, not an interlocutor at all but the limit of language itself, as Foucault has asserted? Foucault writes: “That limit, however, is in no way positive; it is instead the deep into which language is forever disappearing only to return identical to itself, the echo of a different discourse that says the same thing, of the same discourse saying something else”.<sup>15</sup> This companion is anonymous, and stays close to the writing I, but at the same time at an immeasurable distance, separated. “That is why he who says I must continually approach him in order finally to meet the companion who does not accompany him and who forms no bond with him that is positive enough to be manifested by being untied.” They are not bound – the I and the companion – but

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 321–322.

<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, “Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from the Outside”, trans. Brian Massumi in *Foucault / Blanchot*, New York, Zone Books, 1987, 51–52.

linked by the continuous questioning, creating a neutral space for language, a “placeless place that is outside all speech and writing”.<sup>16</sup>

The apartment is the space of writing, and the voices are companions and proxies for something hidden, for what language is in its being rather than in its meaning. In another vocabulary we could call this an ecology of writing, because what is described are the relationships evolving between the different ‘organisms’ (the living things) inhabiting the text, their ecosystem.

But I use the word ‘apartment’ here also to reactivate the word’s more ancient etymological sense of “a separated place” (from *ap-partere*), even to propose a neologism: ‘Apartment’ understood as a noun for the *feeling* of being separated from something, similar to ‘detachment’, and yet still remaining also *a part* (of). “*His not being here evoked a sense of apartment*,” one could say. The transformation in meaning from a concrete state of things to this feeling – within the realm of the same word – is the trope that lures me on. For me it is also evocative of the (pre)condition and space of artistic research.

#### IMAGINARY ACTORS

The artwork seems split to things accessible and things hidden – as does the figure of the author.<sup>17</sup> Who then speaks when we are engaged in artistic research (if it can be said that “we” are engaged in it). What happens when we try to de-activate artist as we know her and try to activate the artwork, paying attention to the full potential of its agencies and hidden parts?

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Derrida writes of “two paintings in painting”. *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1987 [1978], 155–156. Jean-Luc Nancy and Federico Ferrari write of two authors of a work, of which one is inscribed in the work, only encountered there. Federico Ferrari, Jean-Luc Nancy, *Iconographie de l’auteur*, Paris, Gallée, 2005, 2–9. See also Harri Laakso, “Valokuvan työmaa”, *Tiede & Edistys*, 2/06, 161–173.

Let us consider again the work by Pierre Huyghe. I'm drawn to its hidden logic of disarray, and to the insistent feeling that something is happening without my *knowing*, something imaginary.

Looking closely at the sketch provided by Huyghe and printed in the catalogue one notices that it is not only a geographical map, but points to fictional resources beyond the present material ones, its "site-specificity" extends beyond the physical place, to the domain of language and fiction.

In the bottom right corner one finds the text "Humana Vitalium" and Locus Solus 1914. The reference is to French poet and novelist Raymond Roussel's novel *Locus Solus* (Solitary Place), which is an odd story of a scientist inventor, who invites a group of colleagues to the park at his country estate. At that park the group witnesses one oddity after another. These include a hairless cat, a dancing girl in a diamond filled with water, the preserved head of Danton – a leading figure in the French Revolution – and a number of *tableau vivants* inside a huge glass gage, acted by dead people who have been resurrected using the scientist Martial Canterel's serum invention, the *humana vitalium*. The substance, when injected, causes the corpse to continually live the most important day of its past life.

Michel Foucault, in his book on Raymond Roussel<sup>18</sup> mentions that Roussel is "the artist that disappears behind his work; he is hidden by the ready-made, by the "found" conventions of language that he uses to create his work."<sup>19</sup> Foucault refers here to the principles by which Roussel wrote some of his works, including *Locus Solus*, using homonymic relations. With these rules the story extends from one word to another word that sounds similar, thereby always basing itself to the "already said", even if the word is taken

18 Michel Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth, The World of Raymond Roussel*, trans. Charles Ruas, London, New York, Continuum, 1986 [1963].

19 *Ibid.*, 177.

away from its ordinary setting and readopted into an absurd situation. This Foucault viewed as a kind of perversion of what happens in theater, where the "already spoken language" establishes a sense of "verisimilitude for what is seen on stage. The familiar language placed in the mouths of the actors makes the viewer forget the arbitrariness of the situation".<sup>20</sup> Roussel thus did quite the opposite when building from everyday sentences most absurd and unlikely situations.

Huyghe also seems fond of such homonymic puns, apparent for example, in the title of his work *Untilled*, as I mentioned before, where the title silently activates the name "Untitled" and with it a layer of the "already said" in contemporary art. And some of the individual curiosities of Huyghe's composting site appear to have found their form as if by similar invisible rules. (For example: We can consider the statue with the "beehive head" as evoking the domed beehive-hairstyle, which was popular in the 1960's).

The second dated reference in the catalogue – "Morel 1940" – refers to a similar story, to the book *The Invention of Morel* by Adolpho Bioy Casares. In this book a fugitive runs off to an island, where he sees a group of people, all oddly unresponsive, performing similar actions, day after day. Among these human-like figures is a woman named Faustine, with whom the fugitive falls in love. Faustine, however, remains cold and unresponsive, despite his efforts (which, incidentally, include making "a small garden for her down by the rocks, enlisting nature's help to gain her confidence"). It then turns out that she and the rest of the group are mere images, projected by the device that the scientist Morel had invented. Morel had recorded a week of their life and played it back over and over. The rays of the device were lethal, but *as projections* they were given

20 *Ibid.*, 180.

eternal life. Since an amorous relationship with an image is obviously doomed to be one-sided, and gives little hope for the fugitive, he decides to “put himself in the picture”, by re-photographing the entire week with Morel’s device, this time placing himself affectionately alongside Faustine, united in the image with such precision that a casual observer would not suspect that he was not part of the original scene.

Similar was also my unease at Huyghe’s work, unaware what is part of the “original” scene, and am I inside it with the man walking the dog (and possibly others I don’t even know about), or am I outside. Perhaps the fictional allusions also serve to illustrate – and simultaneously obfuscate in a suitable way – what the figure of the author could be. Huyghe’s *Untilled* is an area of parallel presents and of repetitions. Encountering it is like entering into the workings of a machine, into an image, a figment. The temporal dimensions of this image are open; it is an open event, between story and history. In this respect the work is a continuation of Huyghe’s long-term project, the *Association of Freed Time*, which is a way of looking into the possibility of new temporalities. Huyghe writes: “The open present is open to any and all incidences that might occur”<sup>21</sup>. His interest in historical temporality has been traced to Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, where the “old” methodologies available for historians (those of linkage and causal succession of different eras) are juxtaposed by the “new” methodologies, where gaps, ellipses, interruptions, series and lived duration overtake.<sup>22</sup>

Images and figments traverse through time, and settle themselves as if in a repository, charging a place, site or situation with force and power. At the same time as Amelia Barikin writes of

21 Amelia Barikin, *Parallel Presents. The Art of Pierre Huyghe*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2012, 3.

22 Ibid.

Huyghe’s work, “the open present is characterized by an aesthetic of the incomplete. It is most at home in unfinished structures or construction sites. It is not reconcilable with a single, fixed image, and it cannot be substituted for a caption. Like an organism, the open present requires context to survive.”<sup>23</sup>

#### OPERATIONS AND MATERIALITY

To me such temporalities are those of the photographic image in particular.<sup>24</sup> Looking at the composting site, its construction materials (stored there for future usage) and the plants, both uprooted and planted, I can easily say “*This will be* and *this has been*”, like Barthes famously said in front of the photograph of Lewis Payne, the assassin soon to be executed – noting that that was the temporal feature in all photographs.<sup>25</sup> Huyghe’s work then, has a very photographic time. (One might notice that there too, in that anterior future of the photograph the stake for the image was death like in *Locus Solus* and *The Invention of Morel*.)

Construction sites and photographs (looking at photographs) have a clandestine relation. Construction sites demonstrate, at the same time, the exacting ideals supported by invisible plans and the various unpredictable forms of their execution. Photographs too seem to survey a construction, that of sight itself, constantly at work in the act of seeking, anchoring and letting go. I would even say that photographs themselves *are* construction sites.<sup>26</sup> In each

23 Ibid.

24 *The photographic* is here understood similarly to Rosalind Krauss in its event nature, where something is photographic when it adheres to photographic operations (i.e. trace, metonymy, framing, exposure, indexicality...). See e.g. Rosalind Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Part 2” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1985, 210–219.

25 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections On Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, New York, Hill and Wang, 1981 [1980], 96.

26 See also Laakso, “Valokuvan työmaa”.

individual photograph one can feel the tearing weight of time, a passing of two different times, and two different times passing us. A photograph can prolong the life of its subject: In a picture a deceased relative continues “living on” as if “on stage” the life that in the real world has already passed. And on the other hand, a photograph freezes on its “stage” a moment, steals a moment that outside the “photographic stage” continues uninterrupted.<sup>27</sup>

A ruin is the inverse of a construction site, and one can see ruins as images in the same way as tools become images, when no longer in use and veiled by their utilitarian function.

In the book *Athens, Still Remains* Jacques Derrida writes of Jean-François Bonhomme’s photographs, taken to a large degree in the ruins of Athens, that they open up “categories or ‘genres of being’” or “things” (mineral, vegetal, divine, animal, human, technical, reflection, reflection of reflection.)<sup>28</sup> It is not only about what one can see in the photographs – the remains of ancient walls, a singular plant rising from the ruins, statues of gods, the look of a traveler or a salesman, a technical instrument. When photographed the ruins make visible the nature of photographic operations: framings, reflections, traces, out of focus, arrests, under- and over-exposures. At the ruins time slows down and so does looking. Photographs force something on us, “something about the world’s own deadness, its inert resistance to whatever it is we may hope or want.”<sup>29</sup> Even if photographs “promise the world” they only give objects in which “wrecked reminders of the world are lodged.”<sup>30</sup>

27 Thierry de Duve, “Time Exposure and Snapshot. The Photograph as Paradox”, in *Photography Theory*, ed. James Elkins, New York and London, Routledge, 2007, 110.

28 Jacques Derrida *Athens, Still Remains*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, New York, Fordhan University Press, 2010 [1996], 35–49.

29 James Elkins, *What Photography Is*, New York and London, Routledge, 2011, xi–xii.

30 *Ibid.*, 22.

The compost area that Huyghe had manipulated (simultaneously a construction site and a ruin) is photographic in its operations and gestures, and also full of life. More than that, Huyghe’s site is also a clearing, even if it is untilled at the moment. And such clearings are the places where culture begins, where culture takes place. In his book *Forests. The Shadow of Civilization* Robert Harrison, re-reading Giambattista Vico’s story on “the giants” in his magnum opus *The New Science* (1725) notes how the forest clearing was necessary for the institutions of humanity, with everything it enables; for example to be used as a meeting place or burial site (where the dead bodies would produce humus for the other humans). But above all the clearing provides a direct connection to the sky, to the heavens above. Because what would one see without the forest clearing? “Thunder rolls, lightning flashes, the giants raise their eyes and become aware of the sky. But what did the giants see when they raised their eyes? What does one see vertically or laterally in a dense forest? The mute closure of foliage. [...] They had to “picture the sky to themselves” in the aspect of a huge animated body: a body not *seen* but *imagined* as there beyond the treetops”.<sup>31</sup>

As a counterpart to this celestial connection Huyghe’s artwork also works the ground. In his study called “The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Actions of Worms with Observation on their Habits” (1881) Charles Darwin watched common English worms for hours on end, watched them making topsoil or “vegetable mould”, by continually bringing to the surface a refined layer of mold. But he ends his study, not with a conclusion or observation about biology or agronomy, but about history. He writes: “Worms have played a more important part in the history of the world than most persons

31 Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests. The Shadow of Civilization*, Chicago, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993, 4. (Vico, *New Science*, §377).

would at first assume.”<sup>32</sup> Why is this so? This is of course because they have made the earth hospitable to humans, in terms of making the ground fertile for agriculture, and thereby for the rituals and plans of human history. But more than that worms are responsible for preserving those human made artifacts not liable for decay for an indefinitely long time, by burying the artifact beneath their castings. “Archeologists ought to be grateful to worms”, Darwin says.<sup>33</sup> In Darwin’s view worms inaugurate human culture, not because they intend to, or because any divine intention is running through them. And yet they do, and Darwin calls them “small agencies” (of course one of many e.g. bacterial, human, chemical etc.), which have the big accumulated effect. So, the worms have participated in a heterogeneous process where agency has no single locus.

This idea of non-human and material agencies has recently gained new currency. Many of the theoretical insights are traceable to the work of Bruno Latour, who speaks of “actants” in place of actors. An ‘actant’ is a source of action, has efficacy and an ability to do things and alter the cause of events. While here the project is to give also the materiality of artworks and images a new vitality and a new sort of “respect”, the quest is actually one of tremendous political and social import. Following Jane Bennett, for example, one can think that seeing material as intrinsically inanimate could impede the emergence of more ecological and sustainable modes of production and thinking and keeps us enclosed in a view of the world where active human subjects are confronted with passive, inanimate objects and their actions are governed by laws of nature.<sup>34</sup>

32 Charles Darwin, *The Formation of Vegetable Mould through the Action of Worms with Observation on their Habits*, London, John Murray, 1881, 305. Quoted in Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*, Durhan and London, Duke University Press, 2010, 95–100.

33 Darwin, 308.

34 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, vii–xi, 94–95.

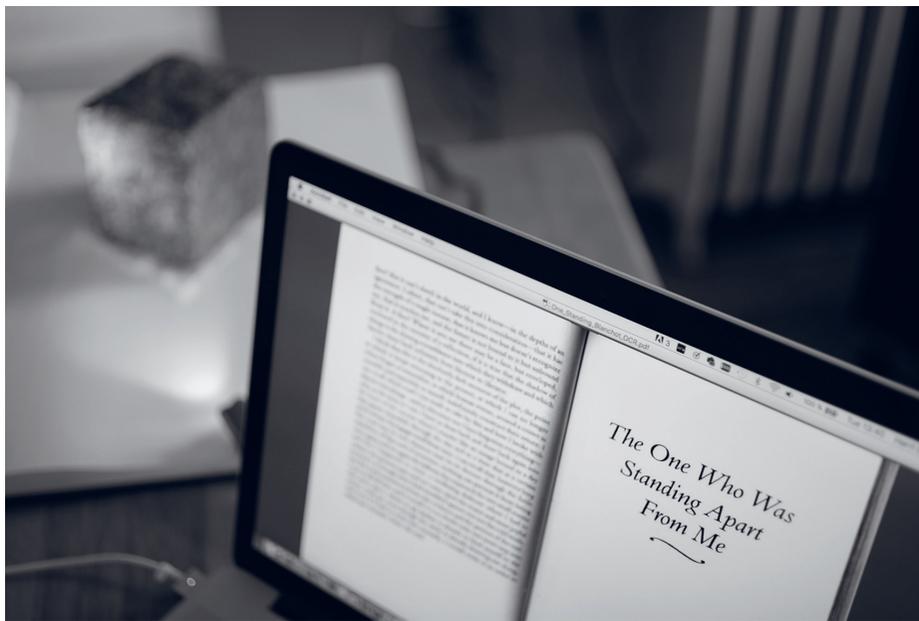
## GRAVITY

The second site-specific work by Pierre Huyghe that I want to address, a more recent one, takes us again close to the sky and elucidates similar tensions further. Like many of his other works the *Roof Garden Commission* (2015), which he had also named, early in the process as *Rite Passage*, can also be describe as an installation in which various objects and things, both living and non-living, interact with and brush against a culturally charged location and the activities that take place there.

This time that location was the roof garden of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where many museumgoers like to go to see the spectacular view of Central Park East. The main elements of the installation included: an aquarium complete with a large floating rock and live tadpole shrimp and lampreys, another large rock with four drilled holes (presumably used in transporting the stone to its place) lying on the paving, and a number of displaced paving stones, exposing the filling beneath. These ‘existents’ were complemented by several ‘actions’ that took place: the liquid in the tank periodically become opaque in a mysterious way, then just as unexpectedly becoming transparent again, water seemed to trickle from the tank, weeds sprouted from the dirt under the exposed paving.

The majestic view of the skyscrapers and the park, as well as the insistent knowledge that one is literally standing above the many floors of the museum, filled with artworks and cultural artefacts added to the experience. One also become conscious of the movement of the other museum visitors on the roof, who had interrupted their stroll in the museum’s halls and were now dividing their attention between the cityscape and the artwork.

Huyghe’s work was an installation becoming a constellation: elements were seeking and activating relations with each other and



beyond, to the surrounding site and environment as well as backwards and forwards in time. The work created horizons of expectation: waiting, for example, for the tank to become opaque again. One was also guided to look far back in time. The species living in the tank were ones that have presumably remained practically the same for millions of years, untouched by evolution. The fragile and fleeting existence of the actual live creatures in the aquarium was juxtaposed with the longevity of the species they represented. In a sense the artwork fascinated in the moment, with the elements that were placed on display, while simultaneously inviting to look away in space and time.

The artwork inspired a number of “keys” to assist in negotiating the relation between the elements of the experience (placed there or pre-existing), to assist in deciphering its laws of contiguity. One was tempted to think about *gravity*: the floating rock was aligned with the tall buildings reaching for the skies and juxtaposed with one’s own weight pulling down towards the galleries below. One was invited to think about *plasticity*: as the large boulder was made of the same material from which the paving stones were sculpted, the stones that now had come loose, had been reinvented as material. Some things are capable of adapting to change and have the ability to receive form and to give form, while on the other side of that plasticity there exists the capacity for annihilation.<sup>35</sup> Thirdly, the artwork ushered us towards an idea of *inclusion*: we, as the beholders, become implicated as the artwork seeped into our world, our leisurely time, everything we thought was ours to have. This area of sharing was coupled with an awareness of *visibility*, of seeing and of not seeing: there were transformations from transparent to opaque, and we came face to face with the artwork at a place of

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<sup>35</sup> Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do With Our Brain*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2008 [2004], 5. See Malabou’s definitions on ‘plasticity’.

prominence, placed on display and in front of a natural view, overlooking the city, under the skies. And lastly we were confronted with a vague idea of *mortality*: the limit of our species was indicated to us as the artwork charted a geological and paleontological timeline, and placed us inside a clock with no escape. The work placed us in the world; not its own world, not the art world, but the world from which we had been apart.

#### ADDRESS

The artworks I have addressed, working (and ‘unworking’) at their own limits, undoubtedly create effects concerning *agency* and *implication*, but more than that, self-reflectively, they seem to raise our awareness about the mode of *address*: Can we introduce these things as ‘objects of study’ – studying what the afore mentioned artworks bring to our attention – or should we move towards ‘performing them’, becoming somehow taken over by them? What is the mode of my address – am I addressing them in the sense of *writing about* them, or am I *writing to* them as much as I am writing to you now. Echoing Blanchot’s text “Am I reading and writing? Am I reading and writing at this very moment?”

Agency entails the idea of a force, thing or person that acts to create a particular effect. When we speak of agency we often take it at face value that agency is something to be coveted, granted that we are simultaneously aware of the power of such (non human) agents (like microbes or chemicals) that can be harmful to us in many ways. However, in the arts (and where art intersects with politics) the spectre of the Author is still so vividly in our minds that agency often becomes synonymous with empowerment, with letting us hear the voices previously unheard. Even after “the death of the author”, which seemed to liberate us from approaching an artwork through the identity of the maker of that artwork, we hold dear the

fact that artworks take place in the world, where it matters whose historical context and political views, *whose voice* is being represented. We are tempted to denounce the author's authority – when it suits us – only to restore it at the next instant.

To be sure the points of reference that I have described, involve different positions for their human 'authors', even if those positions are obscured in them. The well known absence of Maurice Blanchot, the man, from public life – which gives us the freedom not to use the man's life as a reference point – can help direct more than the usual amount of attention to the text and language itself. And although Pierre Huyghe is a prominent and visible contemporary artist, many of the events taking place in the artwork are beyond the scope of his control, when the different elements of the work play out their roles, sometimes in active opposition to each other, or exert their force as a mere presence of matter.

It could be said that these cues, inscribed both within the works themselves and in the circumstances of their making, point to (and indexically gesture at) the limits of authorial control – the 'authorial' here referring not only to particular live persons, but to the possibility of any fixed centre of interpretation. Instead, we are invited to listen to the artwork itself more closely. And this is a key question for artistic research: to imagine and to put on stage the voice – or the agency, if you prefer – of the artwork itself.

This proposition is at the same time necessary and highly problematic. It necessitates that we look at the *material* of the artworks (the language, the objects and constellations) in their being instead of in their meaning, – and look at how their material is informed, without at the same time reducing their "life" to matter. It means that we are provisionally encouraged to take a position that could be essentially described as *vitalist*, accepting that there exists some principle that animates matter, which exists in a relation-

ship with matter, but is not itself material in nature.<sup>36</sup> This means accepting – perhaps against our own better judgment and reasoning – a sort of *entelechy* that generates and "arranges" the life of an artwork from within. (Aside: Entelechy, which is a term originally coined by Aristotle, refers here to the non-mechanical – and non-psychical – agent responsible for the phenomena of life. It is something impersonal that animates and arranges living bodies without a precise plan, something that distinguishes me from my corpse and a live being from a machine.<sup>37</sup> And I realize that all this only makes sense if we accept that artworks are closer to living beings than to mechanical machines. Another detour would be to approach the force of materiality as an exposure to the power of the other (Derrida), or of the "outside" (Blanchot) or to treat it as an apparatus (*dispositivo*) which is "literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, interpret, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings".<sup>38</sup>)

But here I'm drawn especially to the vitalist approach as it is actually not very far from the way in which Pierre Huyghe describes his works as rituals "made out of the rhythmic of autoemergences, events with variations, accelerations" or as "organism, generating itself in a continuous, ever-changing transformation."<sup>39</sup> Huyghe's

36 Jane Bennett, "A Vitalist Stopover on the Way to a New Materialism", in *New Materialisms. Ontology, Agency and Politics*, ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2010, 48.

37 Bennett, 51 Bennett quotes Dries, "who borrows his term of art entelechy from Aristotle, retaining its sense of a self-moving and self-altering power but rejecting its peculiarly Aristotelian teleology".

38 Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2009, 14.

39 Interview of Huyghe in *Roof Garden Commission. Pierre Huyghe* (catalogue), Ian Alteveer, Meredith Brown, Sheena Wagstaff, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015, 33.

work admittedly also evokes a sense of equality and a lack of categorization for its elements, something that radiates to the realisation of a more general ecology “in the broadest sense of the word; [the] different states of life all around us”.<sup>40</sup> But these descriptions are not yet the speech of the artwork itself, but once again, words of someone else speaking in its place.

Now that I have got this far I become more and more conscious of something that I realize I had known all along in secret, but had dismissed: When yearning for the speech of the artwork I had only wanted to give it agency, forgetting Blanchot’s words that I myself quoted earlier, professing that I do not understand the words, that “they don’t need that understanding in order to be uttered, they do not speak, they are not interior, they are, on the contrary, without intimacy, [...] ‘outside’ of all speech”. I would therefore have to let go of my search for agency in any positive sense, accept to be dismissed, to be apart from and succumb to the passivity of the work, its inertia.

Yet this double bind immediately draws me back to agency, to re-search agency, as the “force that creates effects”. This is because I am aware that whatever else happens I am nevertheless somehow *implicated* in the event of these works, they orient me in a certain way. In these works I am taken to meet the clandestine companions that the works address – be it language itself, or a general ecology where all is connected.

If the question of authority led us away from the author’s control towards how the works themselves animate the elements involved, then the question of implication is all about how the works animate me, about how I am being taken into – or reimaged into – the im-

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40 Ibid.

age of the world that they have created.<sup>41</sup> The works implicate me by making me face the things I cannot escape. They introduce a *speculative art*: An art, which is not truly representative (of a situation), or prescriptive (of the *one* truth), nothing to understand or interpret, but speculative of a certain potential.

There is a sense of emancipation in this “letting things run their course”. What I here have called the viewers’, or audience’s, or beholders’ *implication* is not, in my view anything similar to the active position that is sometimes offered in so called interactive works of art. Because the works I have talked about don’t really offer active positions. Instead they ask to commit without knowing. They offer positions of shared passivity – but of a passivity that is not opposed to activity, but is something radical enough to be passive towards the whole active/passive distinction.

#### ENVOI

These thoughts have been an attempt to touch on some issues of artistic research, and to be touched by them. I have written about how (and if) works of art might have agency of their own, and about how they might implicate me. I have written *about* artworks. I have tried to introduce, summarise and describe them even against all the resistance that they – in their different ways – put up against such efforts. I have tried to be hospitable to that resistance and also to those obscurities that invite no clarification. Then I have tried to write *alongside* the works, manoeuvring in the spaces that they create, and necessarily feeling at the same time detached, encountering a state of “apartment”.

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41 I am reminded of the story *Invention of Morel* by Adolfo Bioy Casares, and how in that story the fugitive is rephotographed into the world that is already an image (‘photographes’ by Morel’s devilish machine).

But this text *itself* is not without form and void. The words I have written have animated me, and have implicated you in my speculation, trapping you within this event.

I feel that I have encountered an insurmountable but necessary distance, where language has adopted features of parables. And the parable, as Jean-Luc Nancy writes “does not go from the image to sense”, but from a figure or image to a seeing, that already pre-exists it – the parable only showing “to those who have already seen” and thus having no illustrative, mimetic or pedagogical function.<sup>42</sup>

This text has not been about trying to find truths or methods for artistic research but rather to investigate the possibility to partake in an “equal and empty” (and impossible?) position, where no one has privilege (artists and researches included, especially them, us). To me such a position could be a fecund one: senses, reflections and stagings would produce friction against truths, representations and tropes. (It is evident that this leaves little room for arts’ introspective aims.)

All the images, figures, literary references, lightning flashes, exposed skies and gravities are here piled as if in a compost, as remnants from some unknown system. Writing happens between imaginary layers of thinking and matter.

Maybe this even has to do with a more general feeling about the world we inhabit and where invisible and distant things have become forcefully present. Not only the alive and non-living things around and within us, but our whole imaginary culture, which also remains a culture of touch in various ways, of being in touch; where traveling and being away have created new needs for overcoming distance (with technology for example), our technologies of yearn-

ing. All this “touching” has become more and more imaginary – in all its metaphorical dimensions, in all the areas where images no longer are anything to be seen, anything visual. Maybe our world is becoming a huge touch screen, where the virtual is no longer anything remote, where distance is something we can touch.

But here I have limited my approach to considering if such thoughts could be more present when we, in the name of artistic research, approach and puncture the domain of artworks, or admire their space, or eclipse their suns. This here, nothing more, has been my pressing concern.

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42 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me tangere. On the Raising of the Body*, trans. Sarah Cliff, Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas, New York, Fordham University Press, 2008, 6–9.

# Dimensions of Touch<sup>1</sup>

SAMI SANTANEN

*Der Mensch ist ein Wesen der Ferne!*  
*The human being is a creature of distance!*

Martin Heidegger

Who would not have a feeling for touch? Nonetheless, there are aspects to touch that can be perplexing. We only need to awake to the familiar prohibition *Do not touch me!* and suddenly we have to think things through anew. For at the same time as it forbids touching, the prohibition in fact hits us and moves us, that is, touches us. Otherwise it would hardly have any effect. It could be thought, as Jean-Luc Nancy suggests, that the prohibition does this by hitting a sore point in touch: the demand of tact, which is a matter of maintaining distance in the contact, as against the temptation of

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<sup>1</sup> A Finnish version of the present essay, “Kosketuksen ulottuvuuksia” (Dimensions of Touch), was published in 2014 in Mika Elo (ed.), *Kosketuksen figureja*, Helsinki: Tutkijaliitto 2014. I have slightly modified and revised the text.

immediacy or fusion.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, this sensitive point of touch, difference in the very core of contact, may keep on troubling us. As we can see from the prohibition, the demand of tact comes from the other, and is not necessarily agreeable. As such, it gives us a feel of the heterogeneity of touch. This paradoxical aspect of touch, which remains obscure if contact is seen solely from the point of view of one's own intentions, merits attention. Touch is an extensible and tensional concept. In the following, I shall try to trace out its protean heterogeneity.

The prohibition of touch prompts us to consider whether the metaphorical use of the word "touch" can, in fact, be so clearly differentiated from its literal, or so called primary meaning. It is often thought that touch proper is the immediate, physical touch, whereas in mental, social or spiritual contexts touch can be spoken of chiefly in the metaphorical sense. Mark Paterson, for one, differentiates the literal and more obvious touch represented by immediate cutaneous contact from the more affective and metaphorical forms of "deep" touch.<sup>3</sup> But how could tact or discretion remain merely metaphorical?<sup>4</sup> Is not the prohibition of touch supposed to touch, precisely? And what about the touch of a work of art that unexpectedly moves

us?<sup>5</sup> In these cases touch is something concrete and real, though not in the conventional sense of tangible or physical. The "deep" touch that interests Paterson does not have to be reduced to a metaphor, to the opposite of "literal" touch: when it comes to touch, the literal and metaphorical usages may become intertwined.<sup>6</sup> As I see it, this has to do with the abovementioned heterogeneity.

The matter is no mere detail. To say that the present text will be *touching upon touch* may suggest that the word touch is used rhetorically, as a substitute for "treating" or "examining".<sup>7</sup> However, here we should note Bernhard Waldenfels's remark: a *Berührungspunkt*, a point of contact with something, is not equivalent to a *Standpunkt*, a standpoint, or a *Gesichtspunkt*, a viewpoint.<sup>8</sup> Of course, matters such as this are often put aside; considering touch, however, the remark is quite in order. For it could be thought that a point of contact – as distinct from a standpoint, which serves the analysis by providing it with a perspective – amounts to the possibility of exposition, indeed exposure to the foreign, the heterogenic (other). This means that touch is, to borrow Waldenfels's expression, *overde-*

2 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me tangere. Essai sur la levée du corps*, Paris: Bayard 2003, 25–26 / *Noli me tangere. On the Raising of the Body*, trans. Sarah Clift, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas, New York: Fordham University Press 2008, 13. Below, the first page numbers refer to the original, the latter to the English translation.

3 Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch. Haptics, Affects and Technologies*, Oxford and New York: Berg 2007, 6–7.

4 See Bernhard Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2002, 92.

5 Here we could also consider a sudden idea that inflames or troubles one. According to Waldenfels, the German word *Einfall* nicely sheds light on a remark of Nietzsche's on how ideas come when they find it convenient, not when I want them to (see Eliane Escoubas & Bernhard Waldenfels (eds.), *Phénoménologie française et phénoménologie allemande*, Paris: L'Harmattan 2000, 206). Besides a sudden idea or fancy, the word *Einfall* also means thought.

6 See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe & Jean-Luc Nancy, "Scène", *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, Vol. XLVI (1992), 85–86. See also Jacques Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, Paris: Galilée 2000, 303 / *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2005, 268. Derrida refers to Aristotle, according to whom it is difficult to say, "if touch is not one sense but more than one" (Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. Joe Sachs, Santa Fe: Green Lion Press 2001, 422b). He points this out while examining Nancy's language, the tactile character of which covers various registers.

7 "Touching upon" can of course be understood as a cursory or tentative approach that does not lead to a deeper analysis. This is not what I mean here.

8 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 17, n. 3.

*terminated*.<sup>9</sup> The risks inherent to this kind of contact have been admirably summarized by Jean-Louis Chrétien. According to him, there is no touch without letting oneself be touched by what one touches, in other words without experiencing one's own tangibility in touching.<sup>10</sup> Viewed in this light, touch seems to denote susceptibility to contact, that is, consent, even an inclination to feel the other and be felt by the other.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the sense of touch has been called the sense of consent<sup>12</sup> (to contact), as reciprocity of this kind is peculiar to it.<sup>13</sup> Be that as it may, Chrétien draws attention to the dissymmetry of the contact in question: by no means does the touched have to respond in the same way as it is touched. Let us consider, say, a tainting touch. Understandably such a possibility makes one cautious, as if one had become sensitive to touch, that is, sensitive to the possibility of contact or of being within the reach of something – and in this way touched by one's own tangibility. Is it not the case

9 See *ibid.*, 64, also 92.

10 Jean-Louis Chrétien, *L'appel et la réponse*, Paris: Minuit 1992, 103–104 / *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne A. Davenport, New York: Fordham University Press 2004, 85–86. See also Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 312 / 276; Jean-Luc Nancy, *Les Muses*, Paris Galilée 1994, 35 / *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996, 17; and Renaud Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène*, Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon 2001, 283.

11 I am referring to Jean-Luc Nancy (see *La Déclosion*, Paris: Galilée 2005, 187 / *Dis-Enclosure. The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith. New York: Fordham University Press 2008, 127).

12 Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 276 / 246. Here Derrida summarizes Chrétien's thoughts (see Chrétien, *L'appel et la réponse*, 145 / 123), but adds, citing Nancy, that consent may also be exasperated (Derrida, *ibid.*, 314–315 / 278; see Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, Paris: Éditions Métailié 2000, 36 / *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand, New York: Fordham University Press 2008, 39).

13 See Eugène Minkowski, *Vers une cosmologie*, Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages 1999, 179–185. It has been suggested that such reciprocity does not necessarily apply to the other senses, such as sight or hearing (Rémi Brague, *Aristote et la question du monde*, Paris: Cerf 2009, 370; Chrétien, *L'appel et la réponse*, 103 / 85). Derrida mentions Husserl in this context (*Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 312 / 276).

that sometimes the mere thought of contact is enough to touch us? Let us just consider the opening words of Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power*: "There is nothing that man fears more than the touch of the unknown."<sup>14</sup> We notice that heterogeneity brings with it an ambivalence that can affect the way one conducts oneself in a particular situation.

Thus, it turns out that touch cuts both ways. This being the case, closer differentiations come in handy. We find support in Aristotle, to whom touch is a faculty of discrimination that also has a protective function. "[T]ouch is of the tangible and the intangible."<sup>15</sup> Paradoxically, touch protects from the noxious, or the intangible, the better the more sensitive it becomes by way of exposition.<sup>16</sup>

Jacques Derrida has impressively shown how the paradoxical logic of touch infects the thinking of touch itself, including even its language.<sup>17</sup> From Aristotle on, attempts to examine touch have run into aporias. The history of the thinking of touch is burdened by various fundamental obscurities, the inscriptions of which can be found already in *On the Soul*.<sup>18</sup> Faced with these obscurities one has no choice but to resort to groping about, as Derrida puts it. He stresses nonetheless that even in these obscure borderlands, thinking should – in touching upon or investigating its theme, the *sense* of touch (*le sens du toucher*) – be as pertinent as possible.<sup>19</sup> The thinking of touch cannot be wholly differentiated from the *manner* it touches upon its topic, as it must proceed without all-round solu-

14 Elias Canetti, *Masse und Macht*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch 1980, 9 / *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart, New York: The Noonday Press 1991, 15.

15 Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 424a. According to Aristotle, touch is a necessary and fundamental sense to any living being (see 435b).

16 Chrétien, *L'appel et la réponse*, 117–118, 121–122 / 97–98, 101–102.

17 See Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*.

18 See e.g. Aristotle, *On the Soul*, Book II, the beginning of Chapter Eleven.

19 See Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 157–158, 303–304 / 135–136, 268–269. Metalanguage, however, is of no avail here (see *ibid.*, 339 / 303).

tions and by weighing things case by case. The demand to touch *per- tinently* upon the theme is connected to the overdetermined character of the point of contact. This kind of thinking implies exposure.<sup>20</sup> Derrida's idea is, in my view, that understanding the nature of touch requires a feel of what is being touched upon (i.e., treated). That is to say, questioning the sense of touch paradoxically requires that we let ourselves be touched by it at the very moment – if not in advance – we touch it, or ask about its meaning. In other words, *there has to be touch* – one has to touch and be touched. Otherwise the inquiry would lack weight and remain in the grip of discourse, detached and hardly effective.<sup>21</sup>

I have hinted at the heterogenic, foreign moment touch entails as exposition. This moment permits discerning in touch a *pathic* dimension which usually, or at least in the field of knowledge, remains of secondary importance. Derived from the Greek *pathos*, the pathic is a matter of contact in the sense of “being-affected-by (something or someone)”, *Getroffensein-durch*, as Waldenfels puts it.<sup>22</sup> Contact is here structurally asymmetrical, as it has its origin in the other, that is, the foreign – or the alien, to use the word pre-

ferred by Waldenfels – preceding my sphere: I have been struck by something that affects, troubles or disturbs, moves, wounds, hurts or even overwhelms me. According to Henri Maldiney, this is precisely what the pathic is about: to experience, to *undergo*.<sup>23</sup> The pathic signifies exposure to something unpredictable, which exceeds or falls short of its possibilities, insofar as possibilities belong structurally to the sphere of the predictable. Waldenfels terms such a singular event *Widerfahrnis*. The German word can be translated as *af-fect* with a hyphen to suggest that *something is done to us (uns an-getan wird)* – something we do not ourselves initiate. *Widerfahrnis*, *af-fect*, thus denotes an event that affects the subject counter to its own expectations, intentions, and experiential possibilities.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, in Waldenfels's view experience should be conceived of on the basis of such *af-fects* of alien origin, or “ruptures in experience”. Regarding the present topic, it is significant that for him touch constitutes the prototype of pathic experience.<sup>25</sup> Below I shall take a closer look at the structure of this experience, so as to avoid the identification of the pathic with simple passivity as opposed to activity or intentionality.

Waldenfels compares the pathic experience to what Roland Barthes calls *punctum*, or the prick (of a photograph). *Punctum*

20 See *ibid.*, 312 / 276.

21 Derrida himself states that touch has to be touched upon in a manner that is at once moving and moved (see *Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, 312 / 276). Heidegger says something similar concerning philosophy itself. According to him, questions such as “what is it that we call ‘philosophizing?’” require that the questioner himself be touched (*berührt*) or gripped (*ergriffen*) by such questions. Otherwise the questioning remains theoretical and detached (see Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik, Gesamtausgabe Band 29/30*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 2004, 85–87 / *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1995, 56–57).

22 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 21. See also Erwin Straus, *Vom Sinn der Sinne*, Berlin/Göttingen/Heidelberg: Springer Verlag 1956, 394 / *The Primary World of Senses. A Vindication of Sensory Experience*, trans. Jacob Needleman, London: The Free Press of Glencoe 1963, 370.

23 Henri Maldiney, *Penser l'homme et la folie*, Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon 2007, 386. Here and below, I refer to the pagination of the first edition (1991).

24 Bernhard Waldenfels, *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2012, 73 / *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts*, trans. Alexander Kozin and Tanja Stähler. Evanston: Northwestern University Press 2011, 46; see also *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 60–63. The hyphenated form *af-fect* is intended to stress the fact that what is at stake here is something different from affects degraded to private states of feeling (Bernhard Waldenfels, *The Question of the Other, The Tang Chun-I Lecture for 2004*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2007, 45). The usual translation for the verb *widerfahren* is “to befall”, “to happen” (to something or someone).

25 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 93.

designates a strange element in the photograph, one that disturbs *studium*, or taste for photography and a detailed reading guided by cultural interest and liking.<sup>26</sup> The pathic character of *punctum* is revealed when it breaks or punctuates the *studium* organized by the spectator's sovereign consciousness and search for meaning: "This time it is not I who seek it out [as happens in *studium* – S. S.], it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me."<sup>27</sup> The question then arises, if the *punctum* thus bears upon me in the sense that piercing me, it also takes possession of me. And perhaps we could say more generally, following Edith Wyschogrod, that when something touches me, it singles me out in this singular fashion.<sup>28</sup> In any case, the prick that troubles Barthes is a surplus within the field of the photograph constituted discursively by the *studium*.<sup>29</sup> It thus offers an example of the excess of the pathic in relation to the quest for meaning – the existence of such a *pathic surplus* being one of Waldenfels's basic points as well.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the words 'feel' and 'feeling', we may listen for the pathic aspects of touch in 'sensitivity', 'sentience', 'sentiment', and 'sensitivity'. Then we have, of course, the word family of 'affect' and 'affectivity'.<sup>31</sup> The vocabulary evoking pathic aspects extends

26 See Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel*, 110.

27 Roland Barthes, *La chambre Claire*, Paris: Gallimard/Seuil 1980, 48–49 / *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard. London: Fontana Paperbacks 1984, 26.

28 Edith Wyschogrod crystallizes the idea as follows: "To be touched is to be singled out." See "Doing before Hearing", in François Laruelle (ed.), *Textes pour Emmanuel Lévinas*, Paris: Éditions Jean-Michel Place 1980, 199.

29 See Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 2001, 74.

30 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 54–55.

31 See Rudolf Bernet, "The Other in Myself", in Simon Critchley and Peter Dews (eds.), *Deconstructive Subjectivities*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1996, 180–181. According to Bernet, affectivity, as a capability to touch, implies an experience in which something befalls the subject that is beyond its control.

further to being 'moved', even to being 'influenced by contagion'. Moreover, having the sense of to 'bear upon' or to 'concern' (cf. the German *angehen*), the verb to 'touch' constitutes another variety of pathic vocabulary, in which we can discern a tinge of responsibility. We could easily find other examples, but focusing for the moment on sensibility, we note that it can be invested with the pathic to such an extent that it becomes receptivity to what hardly makes itself sensed at all.<sup>32</sup> Here sensibility borders on insensibility. Finally, I would like to point out that there is a special term for pathic sensibility, *passibility*, which, together with its derivatives, plays a central role not only in Nancy's but also in Maldiney's work.<sup>33</sup>

Let us note, however, that sensitivity may also turn into a (pathological) hypersensitivity. We can find an example in Freud: when he discusses, in the "Rat Man" case history, the patient's complex sensitive sensitiveness, he points out how mere speeches the patient had heard had, with serious consequences, "jarred upon", *unsanft berühren*,<sup>34</sup> "certain *hyperaesthetic spots* in his unconscious".<sup>35</sup>

32 See Jean-Luc Nancy, *La naissance des seins*, Valence: École Régionale des Beaux-Arts 1996, 57 / "The Birth of Breasts", *Corpus II. Writings on Sexuality*, trans. Anne O'Byrne, New York: Fordham University Press 2013, 59.

33 See e.g. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le Sens du monde*, Paris: Galilée 1993, 196 / *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press 1997, 128–129; Maldiney, *Penser l'homme et la folie*, 361–425. Maldiney develops a notion of *transpassibility*, that is, openness towards that which is nothing, *rien*. Let it be noted that the pathic dimension stands out in both authors' work. Maldiney speaks explicitly of the pathic, whereas Nancy prefers words such as affectability and exposition.

34 The German word *berühren* means "to touch".

35 Sigmund Freud, "Bemerkungen über einen Fall von Zwangsneurose", *Gesammelte Werke VII*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch 1999, 430 / "Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 10 (1909)*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis 1981, 210 (my emphasis).

Another example can be found in Nietzsche. With a cultural di-agnostic in view, *The Anti-Christ* presents the idea of a particular “physiological *habitus*” defined by a pathological over-sensitiveness of the sense of touch. In this condition, the sense of touch “recoils from all contact”. In its most extreme form, this *habitus* amounts to an “instinct of hatred for reality”, which, in Nietzsche’s view, constitutes the “physiological reality” of Christianity. The instinct of hatred is manifested by an aversion to everything solid, everything articulated, to every institution, and by a flight from the sphere of the concepts of space and time towards an internal, “true” world found in the Christian religion of love, in the bliss of the heart.<sup>36</sup>

One could of course note that Christianity is a religion of touch, precisely, as Derrida has emphasized.<sup>37</sup> But the Christianization

36 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist, Kritische Studienausgabe Band 6*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag / Walter de Gruyter Verlag 1999, 200–201 / “The Anti-Christ”, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005, 27. Conceived of in Freud’s terms, the instinct of hatred would seem like reaction formation triggered by the pathic dimension of touch. (Derrida might speak of autoimmunity, see *Foi et savoir*, Paris: Seuil 2001.) For “the instinct of hatred for reality” is, in Nietzsche’s words, “the consequence of an extreme over-sensitivity and capacity for suffering that does not want to be ‘touched’ at all because it feels every contact too acutely.” This causes an “instinctive exclusion of [...] all hostility, all boundaries and distances in feelings”, that is, it results in a life of love, which constitutes the sole reality of Christianity.

37 Derrida’s reading of the Bible (*Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 117–120 / 100–103) shows how Jesus both touches and is physically touchable. One can touch Jesus to be healed, to be saved or to attain immunity, thanks to the power emanating from him. But salvation depends on faith, of which the (physical) touching testifies. To this it could be added, as Calabrò remarks, that Jesus risen from the dead is corporeally untouchable, even though he is tangible. Mary Magdalene experiences this during the Easter morning scene known for Jesus’s words of prohibition, *Noli me tangere, Touch me not*. Then again, with the Words of Institution, “this is my body”, bread and wine – the body of Christ – are presented to be eaten and drunk, that is, offered to the human touch. Here Calabrò leans on Nancy’s analyses (Daniela Calabrò, *Dis-piegamenti*, Milano: Mimesis Edizioni 2006, 67; see also Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, and *Corpus*, 7–9 / 3–7).

of touch takes place through the Christian virtue of love, which is exactly what Nietzsche is commenting on.<sup>38</sup> Finite touch is transcended in the spiritual contact with the infinite.<sup>39</sup> Touch attains its truth in a divine and infinite touch, in the Word, which needs no mediation to touch the soul. Chrétien refers to a mystic who, through his ecstatic body, shows what it is to be touched by “the merciful hand of the Father”.<sup>40</sup> The whole body radiates in ecstasy, opening up to the excess of the Word that infinitely transcends it. In other words, the senses find their sense (*le sens des sens*) in the manifestation of a spirit that exceeds them.<sup>41</sup> The presence of the divine is authentic immediacy and plenitude. It should be kept in mind that the pathic is not about such limitlessness – it is not “of the order of the *infinite*”, to borrow Derrida’s crystallization of this kind of spiritual contact.<sup>42</sup>

One who has significantly contributed to the idea of the pathicity of touch is Erwin Straus. He has introduced a phenomenology of *aisthēsis*<sup>43</sup>, in which the atomistic terms of the empiricist tradition of sense psychology, such as ‘sense perception’, ‘sense stimulus’, and ‘sense data’, are superseded by the verb-like ‘sensing’ (*Empfinden*). On this basis, sensing is not only given the character of an event but also provided with a communicative dimension. Straus distinguishes between a “gnostic” and a “pathic” moment in sensing, the

38 In this context, Chrétien refers to Saint Bonaventure, who establishes a correspondence between the (theological) virtue of love and spiritual touch (*L’appel et la réponse*, 152 / 129).

39 See Chrétien, *L’appel et la réponse*, 151–154 / 128–131, and Derrida’s comments (*Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 277–293, esp. 285 / 247–262, esp. 254).

40 The mystic in question is Saint John of the Cross.

41 Chrétien, *L’appel et la réponse*, 101 / 83.

42 This is how Derrida describes the immediate and metaphysical plenitude of the spiritual touch (*Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 284 / 253).

43 Maldiney, *Regard, parole, espace*, Œuvres philosophiques, Paris: Cerf 2012, 188.

respective weight of which varies depending on sense modality.<sup>44</sup> The gnostic, or cognitive, moment of sensing refers to the *properties* of what is given in sense perception (*the object*), to *what* it is, in other words, to what is representable. The pathic moment, on the other hand, is a matter of sensibility to the *phenomenon*, of its *unpredictable way* of being given.<sup>45</sup> The former moment emphasizes the sensed in sensing: representational object orientation then gains in importance with the consequence that, say, seeing and the seer may be overshadowed by the seen. But too bright a light hurts the eyes and, in this disagreeable way, helps the pathic moment make itself known again. Naturally, such rigid alternatives do not do justice to the manifold aspects of the pathic. According to Maldiney, what is called sensibility (*sensibilité*) to colours, shapes, or sounds is constituted by the pathic moment through and through; and this holds true for the order of phenomena, to phenomenality, on a more general phenomenological level as well.<sup>46</sup> Waldenfels, however, warns against separating the gnostic and pathic moments from each other altogether. Indeed, the moments are interwoven, and particularly so in touch, which thus constitutes their juncture.<sup>47</sup>

Straus's doctrine of the senses has the merit of showing that the pathic constitutes a particular mode of communication. Sensibility to colours, sounds, and shapes stressed by Maldiney amounts to precisely this kind of pathic communication with phenomena in sensing. Thus, we find in Straus a pathic version of the sense of

the senses, as Maldiney puts it: openness to the world at the level of *aisthēsis*.<sup>48</sup> In sensing, the one who senses experiences “himself and the world, himself in the world, himself with the world”.<sup>49</sup> Thus what is at stake in sensing is a process of mutual becoming and intertwining of the self and the world.

After these introductory remarks, I shall address some nodal points in the philosophical literature on touch. Thus, I will try to outline in more detail the pathic dimension of touch in its different registers. The sections do not constitute a seamless whole, but rather overlap in the resulting composition. This is because different contexts allow us to see different aspects of touch: the terminology, for instance, is context-bound. Some light cross swell and swirls may be expected, but I hope that overall a passage will emerge, even if not a straightforward one. I want to emphasize that the following survey is not intended to be all-encompassing, as I mostly rely on certain resources found within the fields of phenomenology and deconstruction. The psychoanalytic tradition, for instance, would surely have something to say about touch, about the desire and fear of touch,

44 Erwin Straus, *Psychologie der menschlichen Welt*, Berlin/Göttingen/Heidelberg: Springer Verlag 1960, 150–151; see also *Vom Sinn der Sinne*, 391–403 / 368–379.

45 The sensibility in question is not a matter of sensory information.

46 See Henri Maldiney, *Regard parole espace*, 189–190.

47 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 65. Waldenfels also draws attention to a practical moment in addition to the gnostic and pathic ones; in its own particular way, the sense of touch unites all of these aspects in itself (Bernhard Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2010, 21).

48 Henri Maldiney, “Chair et verbe dans la philosophie de M.P.”, in Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (ed.) *Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Le psychique et le corporel*, Paris: Aubier 1988, 64 / “Flesh and Verb in the Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty”, in Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (eds.) *Chiasms. Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2000, 59; see also *Regard, parole, espace*, 190. Maldiney emphasizes the difference between Straus's pathic (i.e., aesthetic) communication and Hegel's notion of art, in which communication is, according to him, based on representation, and art understood as representation (see *Regard, parole, espace*, 175–200, and 323–399).

49 Straus, *Vom Sinn der Sinne*, 372 / 351.

and about the pathic dimension as well, at least in relation to imitation, object-cathexis, prohibition, association, and transference.<sup>50</sup>

## I

I shall begin with the hand, for it offers a possibility to outline the shift of emphasis from the gnostic to the pathic moment of touch. “The hand” has, of course, had such a tight hold on the thinking of touch throughout history, that it has even been termed the synecdoche of touch.<sup>51</sup> Here “the hand” shall, however, figure only to the extent it helps pursue the abovementioned shift of emphasis. Let us take as a starting point Immanuel Kant’s analysis of the sense of touch in his *Anthropology*, as it exemplifies, in its pragmatic orientation, the cognitive approach to touch.

Kant is interested in the unparalleled ability of the fingertips of the human hand to give an idea of the shape (*Gestalt*) of a solid body by touching all the sides of its surface. Kant’s interest in shape, i.e. form, is explained by his basic philosophical idea that the form-giving (in intuition) levers the object within the reach of objective knowledge and recognition. Touch is then reduced to an “outer” sense of touch, but it also remains rather coarse, insofar as the feeling of anything else besides the shape of the object – the softness, smoothness, warmth, or other material qualities of the surface, not to mention pleasure or subjective sentiments – is irrelevant. Unlike in the case of shape, it is not so

easy to reach an understanding about the latter.<sup>52</sup> The reduction appears all the more crude if we consider caressing touch, for instance, in which there is an intimate, singular dimension to the hand.<sup>53</sup> Be that as it may, touch plays an important role in Kant’s doctrine of the senses. According to him, touch is the only immediate sense of external perception, and therefore it is also our most reliable guide. Such palpating sense of touch exemplifies *exploratory* touch, in the epistemic sense of the word, which Derrida calls “theoretical” – “touching in order to know” – and which has, according to him, held a privileged position in the philosophy of touch.<sup>54</sup>

However, Kant qualifies his notion of touch in an important way with respect to the present discussion. He states that even though the tactile sense of the human hand is cognitively relevant, it nonetheless lags far behind the sense of sight in this regard. The reason for this is not only the fact that touch is confined to the status of a proximal sense, but, and above all, the purity characteristic of vision. According to Kant, sight is the noblest of the senses, because in its case the sense organ feels the least affected by sense impressions.<sup>55</sup> The advantage of sight is the translucency of its sense organ. (Subjective) sentiments have little chance of muddling its objective purpose, “mere seeing”, which *at its purest* is a matter of a direct

50 See e.g. Sigmund Freud, “Hemmung, Symptom, Angst”, *Gesammelte Werke XIV*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch 1999, esp. 152 / “Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety”, *The Standard Edition, Volume 20 (1925–1926)*, 121–122; *Totem und Tabu*, *Gesammelte Werke IX*, 35–46, 105 / *Totem and Taboo*, *The Standard Edition, Volume 13 (1913–1914)*, 26–35, 85.

51 Paterson, *The Senses of Touch*, 6. On the privileged position of the hand in the thinking of touch, see Derrida, *Le toucher*, *Jean-Luc Nancy*. Derrida mentions Aristotle and Nancy as exceptions to this general orientation.

52 Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht, Werkausgabe*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, *Band XII*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1987, B 47–48 / *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Mary J. Gregor, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1974, 33–34. We note that here Kant reserves the possibility of being communicated for the strictly objective (or, in Straus’s terms, gnostic) moment of sensation. However, in the *Critique of Judgment* Kant develops the communicative dimension of feeling (the feeling of the beautiful / the sublime), or the pathic moment.

53 See Luce Irigaray, *Éthique de la différence sexuelle*, Paris: Minuit 1984, 180 / *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill, London: The Athlone Press 1993, 193.

54 Derrida, *Le toucher*, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, 91 / 76.

55 Kant, *Anthropologie*, B 50 / 35.

or immediate representation of the given object seen. It is not difficult to figure out that the reduction of touch to its cognitive aspect finds its noble paragon in pure seeing – or, to put it more exactly, and more transcendently, in pure intuition, *reine Anschauung*.<sup>56</sup> It is worth mentioning that the notion – fundamentally reducible to ideal terms – of a pure (and immediate) intuition has been especially influential in the philosophy of consciousness represented by Kant. Within this tradition, its influence on both the analysis of seeing and the interpretation of knowledge has been prominent.

Kant's analysis of touch with its reservations gives a good picture of the traditional organization or determination of sensuousness in the order of knowledge. According to Martin Heidegger, seeing as described above has served as its model.<sup>57</sup> As an alternative, Emmanuel Levinas suggests an interpretation of the sensuous in

terms of touch: one would “see and hear as one touches”.<sup>58</sup> Luce Irigaray thinks along the same lines, noting that the tangible is primary and remains the *ground* available for all the other senses.<sup>59</sup> How to think about touch, then? Can it be – perhaps in the twilight zones of sight<sup>60</sup> – not appropriating,<sup>61</sup> something other than the explorative feeling about, or palpating, in the sense described above, which, according to Levinas, fits in with identifying and thematizing discourse?<sup>62</sup>

We can approach the question by extending our discussion on the hand with Kant's help. With the hand, we come upon handedness and, together with it, some critical aspects related to *space*. These aspects are relevant to touch; Claude Romano, for one, considers touch a sense of space.<sup>63</sup> However, it is important to note that the pathic requires, among other things, a reconsideration of

56 Here the word “intuition” must be understood according to its Latin root: *intueri*, to look at (attentively). The German word *Anschauung*, with which Kant translates the Latin *intuitus*, is also related to looking (*schauen*). “Pure intuition” belongs to the Kantian terminology of the transcendental aesthetic, and refers to the ideal, a priori form of sense perception.

Kant uses the term *Anschauung* in the empirical context as well, and with regard to all the senses. This is significant regarding the present discussion. (An outer) sensation of touch, for example, is for Kant an *empirische Anschauung*, an empirical intuition.

The important thing to notice is that what is common to pure and empirical *Anschauung* is the immediate presence of what is given in the *Anschauung*. It can thus be connected to the “theoretical approach” of representational thought.

57 Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen: Niemeyer 1979, 171 / *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, Albany: State University of New York Press 1996, 160 (see also 363, n. 1 / 332, n. 22); Françoise Dastur, “Monde, chair, vision”, *Chair et langage*, Le Versanne: Encre Marine 2001, 97 / “World, Flesh, Vision”, in Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (eds.), *Chiasms*, trans. Theodore A. Toadvine Jr. Albany: State University of New York Press 2000, 40. See also Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et Infini, Essai sur l'extériorité*, The Hague/Boston/Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff 1984, 162 / *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 1995, 188.

58 Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*, Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1988, 94, n. 1 / *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press 2004, 75, n. 9. See also “Langage et proximité”, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, Paris: Vrin 2006, 228 / “Language and Proximity”, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff 1987, 118. Here and below, I refer to the pagination of the second edition of *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger* (1967).

59 Irigaray, *Éthique de la différence sexuelle*, 152–153, 154 / 162, 164.

60 Here I want to bring up the Parisian piece of graffiti that so inspired Derrida: “When our eyes touch, is it day or is it night?” See Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 11–13 / 1–3.

61 The hand that grasps serves as a model for appropriating touch. Samuel Weber has drawn attention to the relation of the hand and the fingers. In its grasping role, the hand relies on the fingers, which are thus left a performing function, subordinated to the intention “embodied” in the hand. Here the finger constitutes an integral part of the hand. But the finger can also engage in a contact of another kind, in which it escapes the control of the grasping hand. (Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, New York: Fordham University Press 2004, 50.)

62 Levinas, “Langage et proximité”, 227–228 / 118.

63 Claude Romano, “L'unité de l'espace et la phénoménologie”, *Les Cahiers Philosophiques de Strasbourg* 1/1994, 128.

space, as I will try to show below by discussing the issue in different contexts. The normal, representational notion of space favours the cognitive moment of touch. We must, in contrast, make room for its pathic dimension, and here a detour through handedness may be helpful. At the same time, it directs the analysis of touch towards a more ontological and bodily approach.

We can find in Kant's work a couple of passages where he scrutinizes handedness,<sup>64</sup> and the difference between right and left manifested in it. Kant states, among other things, that handedness is based on a *feeling*, *ein Gefühl*, of a "difference within my own *subject*".<sup>65</sup> According to him, the phenomenon can be called more generally incongruence, that is, "inner difference".<sup>66</sup> What is more, in the early Kant we can find the idea that this subjective feeling is *corporeal*.<sup>67</sup> Edward S. Casey picks up the idea to demonstrate that handedness means orienting oneself on the basis of the bodily incongruence.<sup>68</sup> Kant did not return to this bodily aspect in his lat-

er work, but thanks to Casey we can nonetheless see – and this is relevant regarding what follows – how his idea of incongruence hints at a spatiality that differs from the abstract, isotropic, homogeneous, and measurable space of the natural sciences. Of course, Kant's conception of space (and time) proper is to be found in the transcendental aesthetic presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which there is no mention of corporeality – Kant does speak of handedness, though, but only in terms of representation that come down to the philosophy of consciousness. In the transcendental aesthetic, space (as well as time) is subjectified. Space is defined as an a priori form of sense perception organizing the external world, as a kind of framework that allows the phenomena of the sensible world to be perceptible, representable, and in this way finally objectively experienceable for the "I"-subject.<sup>69</sup> In Kant's work this transcendental organization is connected to Euclidean geometry, the space of which is extensional, homogenous, and measurable.

What happens to incongruence in this order? In this three-dimensional space, the inner difference revealed by the "feeling" of handedness is explicated as an outer, representational difference. Even though the right and the left hand are mirror images of each other, uniform in size and shape, they still cannot, according to Kant, be reduced to each other. For as he says, "one hand's glove cannot be used on the other".<sup>70</sup> But what if one turns the glove inside out? Or, if the gesture seems a trivial, there is another, more subversive option. Let us think about poetry, and more specifically the famous

64 Handedness is usually understood to refer to a functional dissymmetry, to the fact that one of the hands (the right one, for example) is stronger or more adroit than the other. Here, however, I use the term handedness to refer to the difference between right and left.

65 Immanuel Kant, "Was heißt: sich im Denken orientieren", *Werkausgabe*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, *Band V*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1997, A 307–308 / "What is orientation in thinking?", *Political Writings*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991, 238.

66 Immanuel Kant, "Von dem ersten Grunde des Unterschiedes der Gegenden im Raume", *Werkausgabe Band II*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1977, 998–999 / "Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Directions in Space", *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770*, trans. David Walford and Ralf Meerbote, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992, 370–371.

67 *Ibid.*, 997 / 369. Kant speaks of a distinct sensation of difference, of how the right and the left side feel different, which shows that the two halves of the human body are different enough, their considerable external similarity notwithstanding.

68 See Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1998, 203–210.

69 This a priori form of sense perception amounts to the abovementioned pure intuition, *reine Anschauung*.

70 Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik*, *Werkausgabe Band V*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1977, A 58 / *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science with Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Gary Hatfield, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004, 38.

first lines of Anna Akhmatova's "The Song of the Last Meeting": *Then helplessly my breast grew cold, / But my steps were light. / I pulled the glove for my left hand / Onto my right.*<sup>71</sup> In these lines, the elegance of the glove does not take one single step towards the realistic order Kant is imposing on common sense. The representational difference mentioned above, together with its clear-cut order, is now shaken by the encroachment performed by the (left hand's) glove. Perhaps this topsy-turvy glove gesture will lead us to approach handedness otherwise than within the strict framework of the Euclidean notion of space. Indeed, it has been noted that representational difference, to which Kant reduces handedness, originates in fact in a more primary, pre-extensional space,<sup>72</sup> or, as has also been suggested, in an intensive and heterogeneous space.<sup>73</sup> The trivial-seeming idea of turning the glove inside out, which came up above as a comment on Kant, now merits attention. Maurice Merleau-Ponty picks up the idea and links it with far-reaching ontological considerations, in which touch plays a central role.

## II

What interests Merleau-Ponty in the gesture of turning the glove inside out is the *fold* between the right and the wrong side, which he finds at the tip of the finger of the glove, at the turning point. The inverted finger of the glove indicates that the right and wrong sides, inside and outside, are reversible, although not reducible to each oth-

er.<sup>74</sup> Merleau-Ponty focuses his attention on this *reversibility*, because it can be developed into a more general principle of experience;<sup>75</sup> in this regard, the glove proves to be a weighty example.<sup>76</sup> The fold, the turning point at the tip of the finger, constitutes an axis the function of which is to *hold together* the two sides that differ in character. The sides are asymmetrical, with the result that their reversibility takes a certain, chiasmatic form. It is worth noting that it is the concept of chiasm, precisely, that prevents viewing inside and outside as detached or even separable. The sides turn about one another, but, due to being different in nature, are not exchangeable with each other.<sup>77</sup> On a more general note, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that in a chiasmatic relation the sides even encroach upon one another,<sup>78</sup> an idea that surely opens the conception of space towards something more primary. The Euclidean notion of space has its reverse side.

The idea of reversibility entails a phenomenology of touch. Merleau-Ponty links the reversing of the glove to Edmund Husserl's observation that a certain double sensation is characteristic of

71 Anna Akhmatova, *The Complete Poems, Volume I*, trans. Judith Hemscheyer, Somerville: Zephyr Press 1990.

72 Gérard Lebrun, *Kant et la fin de la métaphysique*, Paris: Le Livre de Poche 2003, 141–142.

73 Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, Paris: PUF 1989, 298 / *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, London: The Athlone Press 1994, 231.

74 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, Paris: Gallimard 1964, 317 / *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1968, 263–264.

75 See Maldiney, "Chair et verbe dans la philosophie de M.P.", 66 / 60.

76 See Antje Kapust, *Berührung ohne Berührung*, München: Wilhelm Fink 1999, 359.

77 Kapust, *ibid.*, 95. As for the sides differing in character, it is noteworthy that Merleau-Ponty connects reversibility with a notion of "total part" (see Maldiney, "Chair et verbe dans la philosophie de M.P.", 65–66 / 60). The incongruence between the right and the left side found in Kant functions as a stepping-stone for Merleau-Ponty's thoughts, but he radicalizes the idea, making the sides into total parts (*Le visible et l'invisible*, 270 / 216–217).

78 In this context, Merleau-Ponty refers to Kant's concept of "real opposition" (*Le visible et l'invisible*, 314 / 261).

touch.<sup>79</sup> A double sensation occurs when, for instance, the hands touch each other: each hand both touches and is touched at the same time. In other words, both hands prove to be touching as well as touched. Husserl describes the situation as follows. If I touch my left hand with my right, my right hand receives *sensations* (*Empfindungen*) from the hand it touches, and along with them perceives, say, a soft, smooth hand of such and such a shape. These “representations” or qualities constituted on the basis of the sensations the right hand receives when touching the left are objectified as features of the left hand, the “external object”.<sup>80</sup> The result is that the left hand is tactually constituted as a physical thing determined by particular properties. But at the same time, in the left hand there arise *sensings* (*Empfindnisse*) caused by the touch of the right hand, and localized in it corresponding to this touch. Husserl’s point is that these “sensings” render the hand bodily (*leiblich*), or a (lived) body (*Leib*), as distinguished from the hand as a physical body (*Körper*), with its abovementioned properties, to which the sensings do not belong. Thanks to these sensings, my left, physical hand is animated so that it becomes bodily and is able to sense my right hand.

But the same thing also happens with the right, touching hand. The relation between the touching and the touched is not unidirectional,<sup>81</sup> not even in the simpler situation in which what is touched

79 See Merleau-Ponty, *ibid.*, 317 / 263–264. On the term “double sensation”, see Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Zweites Buch, Husserliana Band IV*, Haag: Martinus Nijhoff 1952, 147–148 / *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book, Collected Works, Volume III*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer, Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1989, 155. Below abbreviated as *Ideen II*.

80 Here the external object is profiled more richly than in Kant’s analysis of the “outer sense of touch”, which confined itself to the shape of the object.

81 See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, Paris: Gallimard 1967, 210 / *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1998, 166.

is, instead of the (left) hand, an inanimate object. Indeed, the touch-sensation serves a double function.<sup>82</sup> When above we scrutinized the sensation the right hand receives from the left one, it was in view of the properties of the left hand, or the “external object”. “With a ‘different direction of attention’”, as Husserl puts it, the same sensation (of, say, smoothness) is localized to be experienced in the interior of the right hand as a touch-effect of the left hand and as a sensing (of smoothness).<sup>83</sup> The hand touched becomes touching, and the touching hand, in its turn, touched; the hands change roles. The relationship is reversed.<sup>84</sup> And the other way round again. Françoise Dastur pinpoints Merleau-Ponty’s notion of reversibility here.<sup>85</sup> It pays off, then, to consider the relation between the touching and the touched from the point of view of the axis activity–passivity, as well.

We note that Husserl excludes the contact of adjacent objects from his analysis of touch. An inanimate thing lacks sensing – it lacks the *bodily (leiblich) dimension*. This dimension proved to be crucial as Husserl distinguished sensings from the properties of the physical hand. He calls sensings “effect-properties” pertaining to the (lived) body (*Leib*), which provides them with an interesting pathic tone. The (lived) body constituted by them lies at the centre of Husserl’s notion of the body, because it is qualified by a self-rela-

82 Dastur stresses this aspect in Husserl’s analysis; “Monde, chair, vision”, 95 / 39. According to Husserl, when the hands touch each other, we have two sensations (a double sensation), because each hand has a sensation, and both sensations can, moreover, be experienced in two different ways (see Husserl, *Ideen II*, 146–147 / 153–155).

83 *Ibid.* It should be noted that the sensings in the right and left hands do not coincide.

84 Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, 210 / 166.

85 Dastur, “Monde, chair, vision”, 95, n. 4.

tion.<sup>86</sup> What the sensings – their localizations – reveal is precisely this self-relation. This differentiates the body experientially from other things, whether inanimate or animate (i.e., physical). The body is singled out amongst them as own and lived, that is to say, as an experiential basis, which cannot be examined detachedly.

Here the notion of the body and its status undergoes a transformation. The phenomenological body is not composed of a thing and something extra, namely sensings: to the contrary, the bodily dimension constitutes the condition of the customary “naturalistic”, objectifying way of understanding a thing, such as a material body or a physical object. In fact, when considered from the point of view of corporeality (*Leiblichkeit*), the double sensation is a matter of the *body's twofold tactual constitution*. The body is, from the very first, tactually constituted both as a physical thing, or a material body (*Körper*), and as one's own and lived body (*Leib*).<sup>87</sup> Above, it was the hand that constituted the “turning point”<sup>88</sup> and border zone between these aspects, but the idea of the double sensation

can be extended to cover other parts of the body as well.<sup>89</sup> The twofold constitution can be termed the self-doubling or self-differentiation of the body.<sup>90</sup>

Chrétien's conception of the reciprocity characteristic of touch was introduced above. Husserl now nuances it in an important way. What interests him in touch is its *self-relation*. True, the idea of a self-relation inherent in sensing can be found in Aristotle already, for according to him a sense not only senses, but at the same time senses itself sensing.<sup>91</sup> Husserl emphasizes this moment of self-relation, and sees in it “a sort of 'reflection'”, as he puts it.<sup>92</sup> However, he reserves the double sensation for touch only, as distinguished from sight and hearing, for according to him the latter lack the bodily localization of sensings characteristic of the double sensation.<sup>93</sup> Touch thus gains a privileged position among the senses, for it

86 See Bernhard Waldenfels, *Das leibliche Selbst*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2000, 36.

87 Husserl, *Ideen II*, 145 / 153.

88 The term ‘turning point’ (*Umschlagpunkt*) (*Ideen II*, 160, 161 / 168, 169) implicates the idea of a change of direction (Bernhard Waldenfels, *Ortsverschiebungen, Zeitverschiebungen*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2009, 228). Cf. Husserl's expression “with a ‘different direction of attention’”, above.

89 Husserl but mentions this in the present context (*Ideen II*, 147 / 155). His judging it unnecessary to examine the matter in detail inversely reminds us of the hand's status as the synecdoche of touch. Derrida is puzzled by Husserl's focusing on the hand (and fingers). Where are, say, the lips, or the tongue pressing against the palate, lips, or other parts of the body, and what about feet, toes, eyelids, and so on? He refers to Irigaray, who has, in many of her works, discussed the feminine touch of the lips. (Derrida, *Le toucher*, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, 188 and n. 1 / 163–164 and n. 5.) In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray interestingly discusses the touch of the hands pressed together. According to her, such a touch constitutes a very particular gesture, because the hands touch one another without taking hold of each other, adjoined “palms together, fingers outstretched”. The gesture “evokes, doubles, the *touching of the lips* silently applied upon one another”. (Irigaray, *Éthique de la différence sexuelle*, 151 / 161; see also Cathryn Vasseleu, *Textures of Light*, London and New York: Routledge 1998, 66.)

90 See Waldenfels, *Das leibliche Selbst*, 250–251.

91 Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 425b; see also *On Sleep and Sleeplessness, The Works of Aristotle, Volume III*, trans. J. I. Beare and G. R. T. Ross, Oxford: Clarendon Press. 455a.

92 The expression “*une espèce de 'réflexion'*” (translated here as “a sort of ‘reflection’”) appears in the § 44 of the French edition of *Cartesian Meditations*, where it refers to “my own body” that is “reflexively related to itself”.

93 Husserl, *Ideen II*, 147–149 / 155–157; Dastur, “Monde, chair, vision”, 96 / 39.

is tactually, and tactually only, that the body can originally be constituted.<sup>94</sup>

According to Derrida and Didier Franck, Husserl emphasizes the self-relation of touch at the expense of its heterogeneous, exterior moment.<sup>95</sup> The latter is of course involved, as expressions like *double* sensation implicate, but only in an effaced form. According to Derrida, Husserl focuses in the double sensation on the aspect of auto-affection, that is, on the fact that when touching my own hand, I feel both the touching and the touched hand immediately, “from the inside”.<sup>96</sup> The result is that the sensings gain in importance. A sensing is not some state of the physical hand, or the material thing, but, as Husserl says, the *hand itself*.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, according to Husserl the sensings pertain to the soul, which might seem strange, as above they were considered to belong to the (lived) body.<sup>98</sup> Here touch and its self-relation are, according to Derrida, viewed in the light of “ego-phenomenological reflection” – it is worth noting, though, that this is not the same thing as the “sort of ‘reflection’” mentioned above.<sup>99</sup> In Derrida’s view Husserl’s emphasis on auto-affection is due altogether to the “coincidence of the double sensation”. He notes that in Husserl’s description the sensations coincide, both on the part of the touching and on the part of the touched. According to him, in Husserl touch becomes an experience of intuitive plenitude and direct immediacy.<sup>100</sup>

94 Husserl, *Ideen II*, 150 / 158.

95 See Derrida, *Le toucher*, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, 183–208 / 159–182; Didier Franck, *Chair et corps*, Paris: Minuit 1981, 97.

96 Derrida, *Le toucher*, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, 196 / 171. See also Franck, *Chair et corps*, 97.

97 Husserl, *Ideen II*, 150 / 157.

98 Ibid. Kapust then regards the hand as a “souled body-thing”, or a “souled interior” (*Berührung ohne Berührung*, 318–319).

99 Derrida pays no attention to the “sort of ‘reflection’” in this context, although he does mention it while discussing Merleau-Ponty (see *Le toucher*, 213 / 186).

100 Derrida, *ibid.*, 196–197 / 171–172.

The coincidence of the double sensation in Husserl’s thought is, however, a debated issue. In Waldenfels’s view, for instance, the touching and the touched do not simply coincide in Husserl. Coincidence is impossible, as the hands take turns, and attention is always more focused on the specific feel of one or the other.<sup>101</sup> Here I also want to bring up a more general – and regarding what follows, quite important – remark of Waldenfels’s on the differentiation between the (lived) body (*Leib*) and the physical body (*Körper*). According to him, the differentiation does not conform to the division into the interior and the exterior, for paradoxically the exterior, or the alien (as he says), is to be found inside.<sup>102</sup> Of course we can still speak of a self-relation, only not as confined to the dimension of interiority.

Let us note, before returning to Merleau-Ponty, that Husserl distinguishes between different spaces, following the distinction between *Leib* and *Körper*. The localization of sensings implies a space that in principle differs from the space of the thing’s material or physical determinations. The latter is extensional space, whereas the former is termed by Husserl ‘spreading out’, ‘spreading into’ (*Ausbreitung*, *Hinbreitung*).<sup>103</sup> We note that questions of space come up along with the problem of touch as soon as the body enters the picture.

In his late philosophy, Merleau-Ponty developed Husserl’s analysis of touch in an ontological direction. In what follows, I will briefly outline his explications. Their principal stepping-stone is the above-mentioned idea of “a sort of ‘reflection’”. In Merleau-Ponty’s view,

101 Waldenfels, *Das leibliche Selbst*, 36. Cf. the varying point of view of observation Husserl emphasizes: “with a ‘different direction of attention’” (Husserl, *Ideen II*, 146 / 154).

102 Waldenfels, *Das leibliche Selbst*, 265–266.

103 Husserl, *Ideen II*, 149 / 157.

it indicates a reflection accomplished by the body. A case in point is the twofold touch<sup>104</sup> (of the hands), which he usually expresses by the formula “to touch oneself touching (say, a table)”.<sup>105</sup> But, in contrast to Husserl, Merleau-Ponty extends the double sensation to other spheres of sensing as well, and especially to that of vision. He speaks of a reflexivity of the sensible (world), and of an ontological rehabilitation of the sensible.<sup>106</sup>

The following remarks are limited to touch, however, for Merleau-Ponty finds in it an aspect that reminds us of the exposure described in the beginning of the present text but goes further still. It is a question of the tangibility of the one touching. What interests Merleau-Ponty is the fact that my hand, which I feel from within as I palpate or explore an object, is also accessible from without: it is tangible for my other hand, for example. The idea is that when palpating, one is exposed, and bodily so. What is more, the (right) hand actively touching is, in its tangibility, initiated into the tactile world. This is revealed when my other (left) hand touches it. Then the (right) hand takes its place among the things it touches, as one of them, and “opens upon a tactile being of which it is a part”.<sup>107</sup> According to Merleau-Ponty, through this experience, the “touching subject” passes over to the rank of the touched, descends into the things, such that the touch is formed in the midst of the world

and as it were in the things.”<sup>108</sup> We note that there is an ontological dimension to touch here.<sup>109</sup>

Touch, together with its reversibility, is here articulated in terms of activity and passivity. The intimate proximity of these moments in an explorative touch should be kept in mind. Otherwise we could hardly speak of the feel of a smooth and rough texture caused by touching a stone, for instance.

Let us take up the description of the touching hand being touched by the other hand one more time. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the twofold touch – which he, once again, words “to touch oneself touching” – is never completely realized. My left hand is, to be sure, on the verge of touching the right one touching things, but in reality, these experiences do not coincide. The coincidence escapes at the decisive moment, and is thus not quite realized.<sup>110</sup> My left hand gets “hold” of the right one as touched, not as touching. The right hand is marked with a rupture between touching and being touched.<sup>111</sup> This is to say that the two “halves” of the twofold touch cannot be superposed. The failure to coincide is needed, though, for touching to open upon the world.

The “reflection” accomplished by the body thus implicates a spread or divergence (*écart*), that is, a hiatus between the touching and the touched parts of the body.<sup>112</sup> Their reversibility proves

104 Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, 210 / 166. Waldenfels stresses that the “sort of ‘reflection’” found in Husserl is bodily (*leiblich*), as distinguished from reflection in the sense of thought. Thus, the double sensation does not mean that the sensing and the sensed be one, but that there is self-relation in sensuousness (*Das leibliche Selbst*, 36).

105 In French: *se toucher touchant*.

106 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'esprit*, Paris: Gallimard 1964, 33 / “Eye and Mind”, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader. Philosophy and Painting*, trans. and ed. Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1998, 129; *Signes*, 210 / 167.

107 See Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, 176 / 133–134.

108 *Ibid.*, 176 / 134.

109 See Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, 210 / 166–167.

110 Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, 194 / 147–148, see also 303 / 249.

111 *Ibid.*, 194 / 148.

112 See *ibid.*, 309 / 256.

troubled by this divergence.<sup>113</sup> The touching and the touched cannot be coupled together in the body. But on the other hand, their junction is not to be found in the mind or consciousness, either. The link between the touching and the touched paradoxically lies in the *untouchable*: their divergent reversibility indicates it as their invisible axis, as it were. Touch is structurally inhabited by such a negative element. In Merleau-Ponty's words, the untouchable is "[t]hat of the other which I will never touch" – but he adds right away that "what I will never touch, [the other] does not touch either".<sup>114</sup> Maldiney emphasizes this, noting that the untouchable is that of *myself*, too, which I will never touch.<sup>115</sup> The negativity in question is lodged in the fold of reversibility. It seems that it is in the very same place that the question of the 'self' raised by the relation of

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113 Reading Levinas's comments on Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the twofold touch, and the handshake as its extension, leaves the impression that Merleau-Ponty confines himself to the "gnosis" of touch (see *Hors sujet*, Paris: Le Livre de Poche 2006, 138–139, 154–155 / *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael B. Smith, London: The Athlone Press 1993, 100–101, 113–114). Levinas's interpretation has gained attention. According to Diprose, the notion that the handshake in Merleau-Ponty is of the order of knowledge misses the diverging reversibility, the difference between the touching and the touched. According to her, the standpoint of intercorporeality, from which she approaches the handshake, means that the hand can touch only because it is "accessible from without", that is, because it is already touched (by another body) (see Rosalyn Diprose, "The Ethics and Politics of the Handshake", in Asher Horowitz and Gad Horowitz (eds.), *Difficult Justice*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2006, 230–237). On the pathicity of sensibility in Merleau-Ponty, see also Enrica Lisciani Petrini, *La passione del mondo*, Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane 2002, 80–94. Let it be noted that for Levinas, the affectivity of the senses constitutes a concrete dimension of its own, and an enigma connected to the other's approach, and, among other things, caress.

114 See *Le visible et l'invisible*, 307–308 / 254. Here the untouchable must be understood structurally; it does not mean something tangible that I have not yet managed to touch, or that is *de facto* inaccessible to me.

115 The untouchable, then, does not close the contact but keeps it open; and simultaneously it maintains the possibility of 'self' (Maldiney, *Penser l'homme et la folie*, 189–190).

touch is to be found.<sup>116</sup> We first came across this place in the form of the turning point between the right and wrong sides of the finger of the glove. Dastur calls the negativity of the untouchable the blind spot of reversibility: it is due to it that there is, in the opening upon the world, something tangible to begin with – just as there is consciousness thanks to the blind spot of consciousness.<sup>117</sup> Owing to this negativity, the body gains ontological significance, and is not reducible to an empirical fact.<sup>118</sup>

### III

Next, we should take a closer look at Heidegger, for he regards the senses ontologically secondary. The fact that the senses can "be touched" (*rühren*) by anything at all has its origin in a more fundamental level of "being-in-the-world", as Heidegger stresses in *Being and Time*.<sup>119</sup> Whenever touch figures in his work, rather than denoting the tactile sense, it usually evokes the sense of "stirring", "affecting", or "moving" (cf. "rühren" in German).<sup>120</sup> Let us also keep in mind "touching" in the pathic sense of the German word *angehen*, "to bear upon", "to concern". In what follows, I try to show that this

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116 See Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, e.g. 308–309 / 254–256. According to Maldiney, the 'self' then is a matter of the abovementioned divergence, not of reflectivity in the usual sense of the word. He underlines that, for Merleau-Ponty, "to touch oneself" means being open to oneself (Maldiney, *Penser l'homme et la folie*, 190).

117 Dastur, "Monde, chair, vision", 101 / 42–43; see Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, 308–309 / 254–256.

118 *Ibid.*

119 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 137 / 129.

120 Jean-Luc Nancy, "L'éthique originaire' de Heidegger", *La pensée dérobée*, Paris: Galilée 2001, 101 / "Originary Ethics", *A Finite Thinking*, trans. Duncan Large, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2003, 186.

variety of the pathic vocabulary of touch delineated above is worth noting, at least when it comes to Heidegger.<sup>121</sup>

For Heidegger, being-in-the-world indicates an ontological disclosedness, which is a matter of a relation to “beings”, and of the way of *existing* of the being termed *Dasein* (i.e., each of us human beings), that is, existing with others.<sup>122</sup> The matter can be approached from the point of view of the pathic, but only if it is understood ontologically.<sup>123</sup> Our being-in-the-world is characterized by what Heidegger calls *Befindlichkeit*, attunement. It is interesting, regarding the present topic, that the German term carries with it an aspect of *affectability*<sup>124</sup>; according to Maldiney, for example, *Befindlichkeit* reveals the pathic dimension of *Dasein*.<sup>125</sup> Due to attunement (*Befindlichkeit*), we always find ourselves, as *Da-sein*, first and foremost in a certain mood (*Stimmung*), that is, affected in

one way or another.<sup>126</sup> Mood, then, has to be unconventionally understood as disclosedness that is existential in nature. If we compare attunement with Waldenfels’s characterization of the pathic, we note that attunement (i.e. affectability) constitutes the condition of possibility for *Dasein*’s being stirred by something given, or, in Heidegger’s terms, by an “innerworldly” being. It is solely on the condition of attunement that the senses can manifest sensitivity. Sensing (*Empfinden*) – understood, following Straus, as pathic openness to the world – is now replaced by *Dasein*’s attunement.<sup>127</sup> Paradoxically, attunement, taken existentially, denotes a disclosive submission to the world.

A kind of a light version of such dependence on the world is familiar to us from everyday life. Under everyday pressures, *Dasein* surrenders itself to the “world”, to its activities, and it also lets itself be concerned (*angehen*) by the world. This occurs, however, in such a way that in its experiences and attitudes, *Dasein* manages to conveniently evade the uncanny undertone of its being-in-the-world.<sup>128</sup> What is at stake here is the possibility of its finding itself as *Da-sein*, that is, devoid of any imaginable support – finding itself originally abandoned, resting on nothing but itself, “thrown” into its naked being, *Da*, which is nothing.<sup>129</sup> Heidegger calls this concrete

121 When, for instance, Heidegger in his later phase speaks of an experience with language, he approaches it in the pathic terms of *angehen*: “To undergo an experience with language [...] means to let ourselves be properly concerned [*angehen*] by the claim of language by entering into and submitting to it.” He then pursues the thought with words from which it can be explicitly seen that this experience is a question of touch: “[A]n experience we undergo with language will touch [*anrühren*] the innermost nexus of our existence.” (Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 2007, 159 / *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz, New York: Harper & Row 1982, 57.)

122 Heidegger’s ontology is not an ontology of entities, but a questioning of being (*Sein*) (or, the being of beings, *Sein des Seienden*). This way of thinking entails a terminology of its own. For instance, Heidegger does not scrutinize the human being, but *Dasein*, that is, a particular being (the human being) in its being (existing), or its modes of conduct and ways of action.

123 One thing Heidegger relies on is Aristotle’s examination of the *pathē* (emotions), or, as he says, affects.

124 See Christopher Fynsk, *Heidegger. Thought and Historicity*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1993, 36; see also Bernard Baas, *Le désir pur*, Louvain: Éditions Peeters 1992, 94–95.

125 Maldiney, *Penser l’homme et la folie*, 386–387.

126 The German *Befindlichkeit* is derived from the verb *sich befinden*, the meaning of which is equivocal. Literally it signifies “to find oneself (as situated or located)”. But *sich befinden* also refers to one’s condition or state, to “how one is feeling”. *Stimmung*, mood, is intertwined with this semantic because it makes manifest “how one is, and is coming along” (Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 134 / 126–127).

127 Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel*, 323.

128 See Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 139 / 131, also 136 / 128. On the uncanny character, *Unheimlichkeit*, of the original being-in-the-world, see 276–277 / 255–256.

129 The component *Da* in the compound *Dasein* brings a *spatial* aspect to existing, even though *da* is not, for Heidegger, an adverb of place, such as “there” or “here”, as one could expect. *Da* has to be understood as “the there” that being (transitively) is; it is “place” understood existentially. Depending on the context, I also use the expression “the there” for *da*.

fact of thrownness *Dasein's* facticity. Even though it might seem to denote marginalisation, it paradoxically indicates the opening of an ontological relation to the world, as we will see below. It is worth noting, though, that attunement discloses this dimension of thrownness mostly by evading it, or absorbing itself in the “inner-worldly” things.<sup>130</sup>

Attunement (affectability) qualifies the pathic in an important respect. Above the pathic was characterized as exposure, or passibility, and, more exactly, exposure to something unpredictable. According to Maldiney, passibility in Heidegger is not related to the unpredictable, but to *Dasein's* facticity.<sup>131</sup> The disclosure of facticity can, to be sure, be unexpected, because it occurs in a mood that seizes one.

With the terms attunement and mood – to be understood ontologically and not psychologically – Heidegger distances himself from the tradition that concentrates on sensation and divides it into subjective and objective moments.<sup>132</sup> In the case of touch, the dividing line is traditionally drawn between the outer tactile sensation and the inner feeling.<sup>133</sup> Mood does not adhere to this dichotomy. “It comes neither from without nor from within, but rises from being-in-the-world itself as a mode of that being.”<sup>134</sup> The same goes

for affect, as distinguished from its psychologized version. Anxiety, for instance, has to be examined as a phenomenon of being-in-the-world, as we will see later on. And nor is feeling (*Gefühl*) simply a matter of subjective interiority: conceived of in line with mood, that is, pathically, it is about opening to other beings and to one's own *Dasein* at the same time. Feeling is, according to Heidegger, “that basic mode of our *Dasein* by force of which and in accordance with which we are always already lifted beyond ourselves into being as a whole, which in this or that way matters to us or does not matter to us”.<sup>135</sup> Without going deeper into the issue here, we can note that this is where the link between mood and the world manifests itself.<sup>136</sup> *Dasein's* being attuned by another being is thinkable solely on this basis.<sup>137</sup>

As we can see, Heidegger emphasizes the disclosive character of mood. However, according to him, feeling or mood can also be of a contrary nature, so that it closes off, as its evasive function in ex-

130 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 135 / 127.

131 See Maldiney, *Penser l'homme et la folie*, 419; see also Jean-Luc Nancy, “La décision d'existence”, *Une pensée finie*, Paris: Galilée 1990, 142 / “The Decision of Existence”, *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993, 106.

132 See Françoise Dastur, *Heidegger. La question du logos*, Paris: Vrin 2007, 108–119. On “mood” in Heidegger's oeuvre, see Eliane Escoubas, “Heidegger: Topologies de la *Stimmung*”, in Eliane Escoubas and László Tengelyi (eds.), *Affect et affectivité dans la philosophie moderne et la phénoménologie*, Paris: L'Harmattan 2008.

133 According to Wyschogrod, the opposition inside/outside, “which founds all theories of sensation”, is built on touch (Wyschogrod, “Doing before Hearing”, 198).

134 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 136 / 129.

135 Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, Pfullingen: Neske 1961, 119 / *Nietzsche, Volume I. The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper and Row 1991, 99; see also 62–63, 118 / 50–51, 98. On the pathicity of feelings, see also Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel*, 318–336.

136 See Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, 410–412, 512–513 / 283–284, 352–353.

137 Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 1978, 164 / *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998, 128; Dastur, *Heidegger. La question du logos*, 117.

periences and attitudes makes clear.<sup>138</sup> Thus it closes itself off from disclosedness. But it is the disclosive function that constitutes the basic dimension of mood – this is why I have focused on it above. The traditional division between the interior and the exterior is replaced by the axis of disclosure – closing off.<sup>139</sup>

Thus, the primary discovery of the world rests on mood. Pure intuition discussed above is of no avail here, and the same holds for theoretical attitude.<sup>140</sup> Moods are no irrelevant, accompanying phenomena, but constitute, in Heidegger's words, the "presupposition" for, and the "medium" of thought and action.<sup>141</sup> For Waldenfels, however, this "ontological extension of feelings", as he calls it, also gives occasion to a critical comment. He compares it to his conception of the alien origin of the pathic, which was crystallized in the notion of affect above. The disclosure of the world by way of the "ontological extension of feelings" dilutes, in his view, the alienness characteristic of affect, the alienness (of that which) we encounter in it.<sup>142</sup>

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138 In this context Heidegger speaks of counter mood (*Sein und Zeit*, 136 / 128) and seems to be analysing mood and counter mood on the axis of disclosing – closing off. Later on (310 / 286) he suggests, however, that the two fundamental moods of anxiety and joy, which seem opposed to each other, can be united in a disclosive fashion. Later, in the 1930's, Heidegger comes to the conclusion that counter mood is inherent in the very essence of fundamental mood, and refers, among other things, to the tragedies of Sophocles, in which, as he reads in Hölderlin, the striving unity of grief and joy becomes manifest (see Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rein"*, Gesamtausgabe Band 39, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 1980; see also Sami Santanen, "Runouden pohjavirta. Heidegger ja Hölderlin" ["The Undercurrent of Poetry. Heidegger and Hölderlin"], in Jussi Backman and Miika Luoto (eds.) *Heidegger. Ajattelun aiheita*, Tampere: Eurooppalaisen filosofian seura ry. 2006). As I see it, this strife is articulated in the form of the above-mentioned disclosive submission to the world.

139 See Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, 63 / 51.

140 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 138 / 130.

141 Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, 102 / 68.

142 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 22.

Waldenfels's comment merits attention.<sup>143</sup> However, I shall not explicitly address it here, but concentrate on rapidly tracing out the primary discovery of the world, the uncanniness of which I hinted at above and which is precisely what is evaded. Indeed, being-in-the-world links touch to place in a peculiar way.

This becomes clear if we look at a paradoxical phenomenon Heidegger calls *In- Sein*, being-in. The notion implies a reconsideration of spatial questions, which being-in-the-world requires, and with which we are already acquainted, thanks to the concept of mood interfering in the opposition of inside and outside. The place at issue is not equal to a location normally expressed by the preposition "in" (an item is in the cupboard, not outside of it). By *In- Sein* Heidegger means "being familiar with", "being used to".<sup>144</sup> Thus the concept indicates, first of all, that *Dasein* is comfortable among what is familiar and trusted, and is at home in the world of everyday concerns and dealings, for this world proves significant. It is a matter of disclosedness; among the familiar and the trusted one is, to force conventional language, "outside inside".

As we see, 'being-in' differs from the habitual spatial concepts of 'inside' and 'outside', opposed to each other. The latter are *categories*, or in other words concepts pertaining to the grammar of the order of *entities*. The terms 'intuition' and 'representation', figuring in the philosophy of consciousness, belong to the same categorial order. 'Being-in', on the other hand, is, like mood and attunement, an *existentiale*, that is, a concept that articulates the structure of *existence* corresponding to being-in-the-world. The place it refers to is of existential character.<sup>145</sup>

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143 As far as I can see, the remark tackles the problem of being-with, *Mitsein*, in Heidegger.

144 See Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 53–59 / 49–55.

145 Françoise Dastur, "Réflexions sur l'espace, la métaphore et l'extériorité autour de la topo-logie heideggerienne", *Alter* 4 (1996), 162, n. 3.

According to Heidegger, however, being-in turns out to be double-edged when considered as a network of relations, one which we have so far encountered as something familiar and trusted. The network of bonds manifests itself as such when there is a disturbance.<sup>146</sup> When an interruption occurs, and the sphere of the trusted unsettlingly fails, bonds and dependences step forth and reveal a being-in in which one strangely is no more at home.<sup>147</sup> This phenomenon or event: the familiar being-in *turning* into not-being-at-home, or turning strange, as I would put it here, can be described by the German word *das Unheimliche*. It means “strange”, “terrifying”, “eerie” etc.; in this context, it is perhaps most accurately rendered by “uncanny”, indicating a sense of no-more-being-at-home, a sense of something uncomfortably strange or unfamiliar.<sup>148</sup> In fact, we can find in the

German word itself a peculiar link to the “familiar” or the “homely” if we write it with a hyphen: *das Un-heimliche*.<sup>149</sup>

We can now say that the double-edged character of being-in entails touch in the form of affect(ion). The experience of “not-being-at-home” is, for Heidegger, specifically linked with anxiety (*Angst*), which is an affection (*Affektion*), or perhaps more exactly, a fun-

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149 Here I am following Kharlamov, who uses the hyphenated form (Leonid Kharlamov, *Das Unheimliche: Heidegger et Freud*, Paris: Université Paris X – Nanterre 2004, 41–44).

The word *unheimlich*, uncanny, is composed of the word *heimlich*, familiar or homely, and its negation, *un-*. The spelling *un-heimlich* can thus be seen to bring forth the negation: un-familiar. But it can also be viewed as underlining the connection between the uncanny and the familiar. Freud emphasizes this peculiar connection (see Sigmund Freud, “Das Unheimliche”, *Gesammelte Werke XII*, 231–237 / “The ‘Uncanny’”, *Standard Edition, Volume 17 (1917–1919)*, 219–225). The phenomenon of *das Unheimliche* (“uncanny” in the Standard Edition) leads Freud to search for a supplement to the simple opposition familiar – unfamiliar. The supplement is found in the latter component of *unheimlich*, namely, *heimlich*, that is, “familiar”. The word proves ambivalent, as it also signifies “secret”, “kept from sight”, or otherwise repressed (*verdrängt*), so that it in fact coincides with the word *unheimlich* in this respect. Viewed in this light, the uncanny and the familiar are not to be strictly opposed; they are rather unavoidably intertwined. Indeed, I regard the function of the hyphen in *un-heimlich* as both separating and uniting. On this basis, Kharlamov interprets the phenomenon of the *Unheimliche* – or the *strange* (*étranger*), as he also calls it – in terms of the own and the foreign, and indeed in such a way that the reversibility of the familiar and the strange penetrates them both (see also Fabio Ciaramelli, *La distruzione del desiderio*, Bari: Edizioni Dedalo 2000, 132–133). The *unheimlich*, then, is *un-heimlich* to us, because it is, in its strangeness, our own, but then again, what is our own is strange to us in its familiarity. In the end, Kharlamov proposes that strangeness understood in this way is in a certain manner present: *it touches*. The reason for this is, in his view, that the strange falls outside the relation of the subject and the object, but does not pertain to the order of an absolute transcendence, or “the big Other”, as he says, either. (*Das Unheimliche: Heidegger et Freud*, 27, 43, 54.)

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146 See Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 74–75 / 69–71.

147 *Ibid.*, 189 / 176–177.

148 Dictionary definitions of the English word “uncanny” include meanings like “uncomfortably strange or unfamiliar” (see Nicholas Royle, *The uncanny*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 2003, 9–10).

damental attunement (*Grundbefindlichkeit*).<sup>150</sup> “In *Angst* one has an ‘uncanny’ feeling”, as *Being and Time* puts it.<sup>151</sup> Here we return to the existential undertone of thrownness; let us keep in mind that usually *Dasein* flees it by absorbing itself, in its everyday activities, in the familiarity of the “innerworldly” things. But in anxiety, familiarity loses its grip. Since anxiety can arise for some perfectly harmless reason, no external disturbance is needed. “Innerworldly beings” and their relations then become meaningless and withdraw in their insignificance. Their familiar presence turns strange in the sense described above. Anxiety, however, is devoid of object, because that by which one feels oppressed is *nothing* in particular, and *nowhere* in particular. Still there is something present in anxiety, and “so near that it is oppressive and stifles one’s breath”.<sup>152</sup> What is present is the withdrawal of beings as a whole, in other words, *nothing*, *Nichts*. It is precisely nothing that, in anxiety, presses from all the sides, leaving one no foothold whatsoever. This strange experience of the nothing is the experience of *being*. According to Heidegger, anxiety is an affection of being as such.<sup>153</sup> But what about the abovementioned *nothing* and *nowhere*? They tell of the *world as such* (which, just like being, is no being). It now becomes clear that what causes anxiety is, paradoxically, being-in-the-world. When *Dasein* is forced to let go of the familiar world, it will discover that

its being is devoted to the world.<sup>154</sup> Thus the primary disclosure of the world rests on anxiety.

Anxiety reveals that the experience of “not-being-at-home” involves a more primordial relation to the world than does familiarity.<sup>155</sup> In light of the double-edged character of being-in, the familiar turns out to be a mode of the uncanny. The uncanny keeps the familiar susceptible to disclosure, so that it would not be clung to.

The question now arises, to what extent the pathic dimension in general is organized in terms of the strange and the familiar. Could it be that the *un-heimlich* proves to be the spice of touch?

Let us, however, return to anxiety one more time, for we still have to consider the facticity of this phenomenon of being-in-the-world, or in other words, its paradoxical locality. In anxiety one feels uncanny, as has been noted. One becomes strange to oneself, for this is an unsettling experience felt to the marrow, under the sway of which there is nothing to hold on to.<sup>156</sup> One loses, then, one’s position as a subject.<sup>157</sup> What remains is a being that *is* (transitively) nothing but this *place of anxiety*: “pure *Da-sein*”, as Heidegger sums it up.<sup>158</sup> The facticity of *Dasein* is made up of this kind of concrete being the there. But this place, the there, is strange, and in this case even impossible, for as we just noted, the pressure exercised

150 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 184 / 172. In addition to “affection” (Martin Heidegger, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs. Gesamtausgabe Band 20*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 1994, 403 / *History of the Concept of Time. Prolegomena*, trans. Theodore Kisiel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1985, 291) and “fundamental attunement”, anxiety is, in Heidegger’s work, termed *Grundstimmung*, “fundamental mood” as well (*Wegmarken*, 110 / 88).

151 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 188 / 176.

152 Ibid., 186 / 174.

153 Heidegger, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*, 403 / 291.

154 On the experience of anxiety, see Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 186–187 / 174–175, and *Wegmarken*, 111 / 88–89. See also Françoise Dastur, *Heidegger et la question du temps*, Paris: PUF 1990, 50–52 / *Heidegger and the Question of Time*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew, New York: Humanity Books 1998, 24–25, and “Réflexions sur l’espace, la métaphore et l’extériorité autour de la topologie heideggérienne”, 163–164; Kharlamov, *Das Unheimliche: Heidegger et Freud*, 55–56; and Didier Franck, *Heidegger et le problème de l’espace*, Paris: Minuit 1986, 65–80.

155 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 189 / 234.

156 See *Wegmarken*, 111 / 88–89.

157 Losing the position of subject corresponds to the objectlessness of anxiety, described above.

158 See Heidegger, *ibid.*; see also Kharlamov, *Das Unheimliche: Heidegger et Freud*, 58–60.

by anxiety leaves one no room at all. Speaking of it is still plausible in an existential sense. For Heidegger's term *Befindlichkeit*, attunement (affectability), with which we are already acquainted, and the fundamental mode of which anxiety constitutes, (also) includes a notion of place, as Dastur has remarked.<sup>159</sup> Dastur herself regards *Dasein's* facticity, on a more general level, as an ordeal (*épreuve*), characterized by her as "the impossible 'localization' of the self".<sup>160</sup>

#### IV

Let us turn to Nancy, who discovers touch in the very core of Heidegger's thinking of being. With Nancy, we will have the opportunity to consider, among other things, the question of the self, a problem we already encountered in Husserl's analysis of touch (in which the main stress lies on the reflective side). Now it should also become clear that touch is not reducible to a mere problematic of a particular *sense*, as Derrida has soundly remarked.<sup>161</sup>

Nancy offers an apt starting point with his existential elaboration of a remark by Kant, formulated by the former as follows: "the I [...] is only sentiment of an existence".<sup>162</sup> It will turn out that, even if existence is something one cannot touch, as Antoine Roquentin finds out in Sartre's *Nausea*, it sure is a matter of touch, although

<sup>159</sup> As noted above, the word *Befindlichkeit* is derived from the verb *sich befinden*. Dastur observes that the verb not only indicates a state or condition, but also a place, *un lieu*. See "Réflexions sur l'espace, la métaphore et l'extériorité autour de la topo-logie heideggérienne", 163, esp. n. 6.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> According to Derrida, a potential general haptology could no longer depend on a particular sense named touch (*Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, 206 / 180).

<sup>162</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, 123 / 132 (translation modified). See Kant, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik*, A 136, note / 86, note. Here Kant is distancing himself from the notion that the 'I' be a substance or a concept.

The word "existence" in the citation translates the word "*Dasein*" in Kant's remark. It should be kept in mind that the term *Dasein* does not figure in Kant in the existential sense it acquires in Heidegger.

not in the physical sense. The touch of existence is about the sense of being. For Nancy, Kant's remark serves as a stepping-stone for developing the conception further.

Nancy understands the 'I' in Kant's remark to equal *sensing existence*.<sup>163</sup> This means *that existence senses itself as existence*. The remark does not, according to Nancy, refer to the "I" sensing the existence of, say, a table outside of itself. Thus, we come across the question of the "self" again: how should it be understood in this case?

The "self" is addressed here in terms of being, not in terms of, say, consciousness (cf. self-consciousness). As mentioned above, existence has – when it senses itself, *se sent* – a relation to itself as existence. Comparing the "self" outlined by Nancy with interiority, which is traditionally viewed as characteristic of the dimension of reflection and subjectivity, it can be said that as distinguished from the latter, "self-sensing" now denotes a *relation to the self as exterior*.<sup>164</sup> In my view, such a relation to the outside should be considered pathic, as I try to clarify in what follows. Here self-sensing does not indicate a return to the self – which the philosophy of the subject has conventionally seen as the condition of the 'I'. What is at issue is, rather, liberation. The sentiment of *existence* is about *sensing oneself as exterior*. This is what *being one's self* (*être soi*) is.<sup>165</sup> Nancy seems to be after a selfhood that is, paradoxically, a selfness or ipseity *of being outside of oneself*: singularity of existing, supported by no identity or any other fixed, essential ground. It is

<sup>163</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, 123 / 132 (instead of "sensing", the English translation speaks of "feeling" here).

<sup>164</sup> Here "exterior" is not opposed to "interior", but precedes this customary opposition.

<sup>165</sup> Nancy, *Corpus*, 123 / 132.

through such an ipseity that coming into the world takes place.<sup>166</sup> To summarize: being one's self (*l'être soi*) is being outside, being on the outside, or, as we can also say, being exposed (*être exposé*), being extended (*être étendu*). This is what Heidegger, in Nancy's view, tries to express with the term *Dasein*.<sup>167</sup> In the light of it, being one's self is concretized in a place, *da*.<sup>168</sup> As we can see, existence is defined more closely as *Dasein's* way of being.

The stress on exteriority in Nancy's thought is here connected to the notion of a *tension* peculiar to existing. One may ask, if this is what the sentiment tells of. In any case, the exposedness and extendedness mentioned above are thoroughly marked by this tension. Indeed, the terms *exposition* and *extension* can be recast as *ex-position* and *ex-tension*, to underscore the structurally tensional, exterior relation of ek-sistence.<sup>169</sup> This existential ex-tendedness differs from the normal, Cartesian extensionality, which defines a homogenous and measurable space, like the Euclidean space constituted

by the dimensions of length, breadth and depth.<sup>170</sup> The distinguishing feature is tension, and, together with it, intensity, which tension brings with it into this existential ex-tendedness.<sup>171</sup>

At the outset of my presentation, I noted that touch is an extensible and tensional concept. Now it can be said that "extensibility" refers to the *spacing* aspects of tension,<sup>172</sup> which is related to the *weight* of heterogeneity, to the weight of the other or the foreign in touch.

For Nancy, both tension and the "self" refer to a sensitive point in the structure of existence. What is in question is touching on being or *touching it*.<sup>173</sup> Beings are then restored their weight, or being, as Heidegger writes.<sup>174</sup> In a sense, we have already approached this idea by way of anxiety, but it is well worth a more general examination: here, weight does not come down to the weight of anxiety on one's shoulders. What it is about is the *relation of beings to (their) being*.

166 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel*, Paris: Galilée 1996, 119 / *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2000, 95.

167 Nancy, *Corpus*, 123 / 132.

168 The there (*da*) is, according to Nancy, the taking place of existence (Jean-Luc Nancy, "De l'être-en-commun", *La communauté désœuvrée*. Paris: Christian Bourgeois Éditeur 1990, 204 / "Of Being-in-Common", in Miami Theory Collective (ed.) *Community at Loose Ends*, trans. James Creech. Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press 1991, 2.) There is no existence without a place (*Corpus*, 16 / 15).

169 Emphasizing the prefix in this way is familiar to those who have read their Heidegger. The prefix *ex-*, or, as in ek-sistence, *ek-*, has its roots in the Latin preposition *ex* (in English, "out of"). The expression *étendu* Nancy uses for extension correspondingly connotes ex-tension.

170 I'm using the form *ex-tendedness* to differentiate this existential term from the Cartesian "extension". Nancy comments on Descartes' "extension" in numerous contexts. However, he interprets it unconventionally, with a view to ex-tension (see "Cartesio e l'esperienza indistinta dell'anima", *Indizi sul corpo*, ed. Marco Voza, Torino: Ananke edizioni 2009, e.g. 89; see also "The Extension of the Soul", *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand, New York: Fordham University Press 2008.). In question, then, is the union of the soul and the body, which Nancy deems is realized in Descartes as touch (*ibid.*; *Corpus*, 120–122 / 130–132).

171 Nancy includes in-tension in ex-tension (*Corpus*, 126).

172 Nancy develops a notion of space that extends itself (*s'étend*), or, spaces itself, and that he terms areality (Jean-Luc Nancy, *Ego sum*, Paris: Flammarion 1979, 37–38).

173 See Nancy, "L'éthique originaire" de Heidegger", 101 / 186. Nancy refers to Heidegger's "Letter on 'Humanism'", in which the latter, alluding to Aristotle's terminology (*thigain*), speaks of "touching upon Being, *an das Sein rühren*" (see Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, 329 / 253).

174 See Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*. Tübingen: Niemeyer 1987, 9 / *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim. New York: Anchor Books 1961, 9.

It is this relation that is at stake in *Dasein*. For *Dasein* is, according to Heidegger, a being for which “in its being, this very being is *at issue*”.<sup>175</sup> The formula is succinct, but perhaps becomes more readily understandable, if *Dasein*’s reality (cf. the expression “in its being”) is here taken in an active sense, that is, *as action and conduct*.<sup>176</sup> Moreover, the expression “is *at issue*” (*il s’agit de; es geht um*) refers, according to Nancy, to the sense of being<sup>177</sup>, so that *Dasein*’s relation to (its) being is articulated as a task, the stake of which is the sense of being, or, in other words, *being as sense*, as making sense, *faire sens*.<sup>178</sup> Let us note that, according to Nancy, this bringing into play of sense emphasizes *thinking* as the basic moment of the action and conduct at issue. Thinking is, then, conducting oneself.<sup>179</sup>

To get a more detailed picture, let us return to *Dasein*’s thrownness, which is concretized, as we saw, in the place of anxiety. Even though Nancy prefers surprise to anxiety,<sup>180</sup> both thinkers connect the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) to thrownness.

Thrownness means that *Dasein* finds itself delivered over to its being, brought before its being. The basis of this is *Dasein*’s attunement (affectability), the disclosive character of which we already addressed above. In Heidegger’s words: as it is thrown into

its there, *da*, the naked fact “that it is and has to be” is disclosed to *Dasein*, even though “the ‘whence’ and the ‘whither’ remain obscure”.<sup>181</sup> This place of being is strange in that, in addition to the obscurity of the “whence” and the “whither”, the *that* in question, in which *the fact of being* is disclosed to *Dasein*, is not perceptible in intuition.<sup>182</sup> It is, however, precisely the *that*, the disclosedness of the existential fact, which in a surprising manner constitutes the *offering of existence*, as Nancy puts it.<sup>183</sup> The offering is delivered to *Dasein* in the form of a fact bearing upon it, or facticity: “that it is and has to be”. Following a well-known differentiation, it can be said that the offering comes from beyond (or from the hither side of) *what is* (a being)<sup>184</sup>; the fact of being is disclosed in its nakedness. What is at stake, then, is *responding* to this offering. How should this be understood? What might be of help here is Dastur’s idea that *Dasein* is a being that has relations with being and that can conduct itself in a manner or another with respect to it.<sup>185</sup> *Dasein*’s relation to (its) being is an intricate matter, even though, following the guidelines laid out by Nancy, it turns out to

175 See Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 12 / 10. Here I have taken into account Nancy’s formulation, see “L’*éthique originaire*’ de Heidegger”, 89 / 175 (translation modified). In German, the words of Heidegger’s I’m quoting read as follows: “[*daß*] *es diesem Seienden in seinem Sein um dieses Sein selbst geht*”. The phrase plays an important role in Nancy’s reading, as we will see.

176 See Nancy “L’*éthique originaire*’ de Heidegger”, 89 / 175. Correspondingly, action (*praxis*) and conduct can be considered ontological issues; being is not a separate sphere of life.

177 According to Nancy, the sense of being indicates itself in the putting into play of being in *Dasein* and as *Dasein* (Être singulier pluriel, 46 / 27).

178 Nancy, “L’*éthique originaire*’ de Heidegger”, 89 / 175; Être singulier pluriel, 46–47 / 27.

179 Nancy, “L’*éthique originaire*’ de Heidegger”, 89–90, 106 / 175–176, 189.

180 See Nancy, Être singulier pluriel, 197 / 171.

181 See Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 134–135 / 126–127.

182 It is not a fact in the usual, empirical sense. Heidegger’s word rendered by “perceptible in intuition” here is *Anschauung*.

183 Nancy, “La décision d’existence”, 114 / 86. Being does not precede existence in the form of a (general) principle, but is what is at stake in it.

184 *What* (a being) is (Lat. *quid*) indicates its essential qualities; *that* (it) is (Lat. *quod*), on the other hand, denotes being, which precedes these qualities: the fact of being is naked. The uncanny character of thrownness mentioned above is, for Nancy, connected with this naked essencelessness. In his view, what an existent thrown into being, or into the uncanniness of the absence of essence, has to answer for, is this uncanniness as something of its very own. (Nancy, “La décision d’existence”, 140 / 105.) That reminds us of the *un-heimlich*.

185 Dastur, “Réflexions sur l’espace, la métaphore et l’extériorité autour de la topologie heideggerienne”, 162, n. 1. Dastur draws attention to the abovementioned Heideggerian formula, according to which *Dasein* is a being for which “in its being, this very being is *at issue*”, and notes that the German verb used by Heidegger, *umgehen* – “[*es geht um*]” – also signifies intercourse, *Umgang*.

be about something quite as straightforward as coming into presence, as we will see.

The situation described above is due to the fact that what is actively at stake in *Dasein's* comportment is a possibility of establishing a relation of being (*Seinsverhältnis*) to being, that is, to the fact of being.<sup>186</sup> This is of central importance with respect to “touching being”; in fact, according to Nancy, Heidegger’s notion that in *Dasein* “being is at issue” itself implicates the idea of touch, since being is “the nearest”.<sup>187</sup> As regards the relation of being, we should note that it is expressed in terms of existence. Existing is not some kind of simple being in general. It is a matter of the sense of being. Existing is now articulated in terms of a task, or a duty, for, as mentioned above, through its facticity, *Dasein* finds itself faced with a task: *that it has to be*. The connection between this task and sense can be found in the offering of being. What *Dasein* has to be is the offering of being, so that the fact of being is accomplished or unfolded as sense.<sup>188</sup> Responsibility for the sense of being thus falls upon *Dasein*.

A little digression might be in order here. The offering of being can also be examined “from the point of view” of the being (*Sein*) that is put into play in *Dasein* and as *Dasein*. The fact of being then tells of a *desire* peculiar to being that is directed towards the accomplishment of *being itself* – as sense, or as the “*that there is*” as *such*. Accomplishment, however, depends on *Dasein's* responding

186 See Nancy, “L’*éthique originaire*’ de Heidegger”, 89 / 175; and also “La *décision d’existence*”, 113 / 85. According to Heidegger, it is constitutive of the being of *Dasein* that it has in its being “a relation of being to this being.” (*Sein und Zeit*, 12 / 10) This is, then, a relation, which itself is one of being.

187 Nancy (“L’*éthique originaire*’ de Heidegger”, 101 / 186) alludes to the “Letter on Humanism”. Heidegger, however, notes that for the human being, the proximity of being nevertheless remains farthest, for “[h]uman beings at first cling always and only to beings”, which they imagine the nearest, even though they are but the next nearest. (Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, 328–329 / 252–253.)

188 See Nancy, “L’*éthique originaire*’ de Heidegger”, 90 / 176.

to the offering, on a “fitting gesture”, on “right conduct” towards being. A fitting gesture is one that touches on being or touches it, as we can read in Nancy.<sup>189</sup>

Let us return to *Dasein's* task. If we take a closer look at the offering of being, it proves to be a matter of existence, of its offering. Hamlet’s well-known question “to be or not to be” may help us to map out the issue. The offering of existence is a question of *existential possibilities*, or, to be more exact, a question of these possibilities – “to be” and “not to be” – presenting themselves.<sup>190</sup> This being the case, the existential fact of thrownness (“*that*”) turns out to correspond to the *equal* disclosedness of these factual possibilities. If we read Hamlet’s question in this way, it in fact crystallizes the *possibility of existence*. (We notice that the *possibility of existence* is constituted by the equal disclosedness of the existential possi-

189 Ibid., 90–92, 100–101 / 176–177, 185–186. The desire of or for sense (*désir du sens*) tells of the transitive nature of being: being *is* beings (*l’étant*), that is, “it ‘makes’ them be, makes them make-sense”.

190 Nancy examines the offering of existence with the help of Hamlet’s question (see “La *décision d’existence*”, 113–114 / 85–86). According to him, “to be or not to be” comprises a moment in which “to be” and “not to be” originally present themselves to the existent – in the form of an *undecidable* configuration. Through its facticity, the existent finds itself in suspense faced with a decision, which is about whether both “to be” and “not to be” will turn out to be *possibilities for an existence*, i.e. existential possibilities, *in equal measure*. The undecidability between “to be” and “not to be” offers itself to the existent as the place of an ontological decision to exist or not to exist. The *relation* to existential possibilities is structured as a tensional decisional setting, which comprises both the moments *and* and *or*. Thus, in the place of decision there is something undecidable on offer that is heterogeneous with regard to decision. To decide for existing means existence that affirms undecidability, or the offering of existential possibilities. (A negative decision closes itself off from the offering). This openedness of the decision ahead of itself, towards the undecidable, is of importance as regards sense, too. For it means a new round in the opening of existential possibilities, or a renewal of the offering of existence and the place of decision, time and again. Thus, the decision of existence includes being exposed to the offering of existence, and the other way round. In this tension, existing turns into ek-sisting.

bilities). The task of *Dasein* is to appropriate the existential possibilities, but this can only occur by way of (transitively) *existing* the possibilities *as* possibilities, that is, by bringing forth, by letting come forth, in advance of oneself, the offering, or the possibility, of existence – in other words, the question “to be or not to be” – reopened time and time again. The idea here is that of existing according to an offering of this kind. Here we come back to the question of the *exterior self-relation* of existence, for this is what the relation of existence to its possibility means.<sup>191</sup> I want to stress once again, however, that the task in question falls upon *Dasein* in the form of an obligation originating in the offering. That is to say, existing as described here is tinged by being subject to a duty that bears upon one, and thus by *otherness*.<sup>192</sup> In addition, I want to emphasize that appropriating, as it was outlined above, does not mean integrating the possibilities into one’s pre-given horizons, but establishing and maintaining a *relation* to their offering; above, I spoke about establishing a *relation of being* to being. Now, if existing these possibilities (in the transitive sense) is considered *an accomplishment* of existence, this relation can be understood as an ongoing *coming into presence*, with surprises and tensions of its own. I alluded to this above. The self-relation of existence thus must be understood

191 See Nancy, “La décision d’existence”, 113–114 / 85–86. The relation is a question of the essence of *Dasein*. *Dasein* has no pre-given essence, nor one that would follow it in the form of a ground, for its “essence [...] lies in its ‘to-be’ (*Zu-Sein*). [...] *The ‘essence’ of Dasein lies in its existence.*” Nancy cites here some of the central phrases of *Being and Time* (cf. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 42 / 39–40; Heidegger puts the first occurrence of “essence” in quotation marks as well). From here, Nancy goes on with words well worth noting: “The ‘essence’, here, is in the ‘possibility’, what is ‘each time possible’ for *Dasein*” (Nancy, *ibid.*). We notice that the terms ‘essence’, ‘possibility’ and ‘self-relation’ are connected with each other.

192 See Jean-Luc Nancy, “L’être-avec de l’être-là”, *Cahiers philosophiques* 111 (2007), 67; *L’expérience de la liberté*. Paris: Galilée 1988, 27–39 / *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993, 21–32.

as the relation of existence to its possibility, that is, as coming into presence.

The crucial point here is that the offering of existence is appropriated, or decided, in the peculiar form of an “intimate” difference or divergence (*écart*) proper to existence. The *relation* (to the offering) requires, paradoxically, such a self-relation. That is to say, existence is *accomplished* as an *ek-sisting* the offering, as the being towards itself (*être à soi*) of existence, as Nancy formulates the differential structure of self-relation. Coming into presence is effected by way of *ek-sisting*. The hyphen in ‘ek-sisting’ reveals the tensional *divergence*, or *spacing*, of existing the offered possibilities; we can also speak of affirming disclosedness by spacing it. Above I referred to existential ex-tendedness. The place of existence, the *Da*, is strangely concrete. Without entering more deeply into the problem I simply note that, for Nancy, the self-relation (that is, ipseity), spacing, and exposition at issue here originate in freedom. What matters in *ek-sisting* is the singular liberation of being.<sup>193</sup>

Nancy now comprehends this *ek-sisting* of the existential possibilities in terms of touch. It is a matter of touching being. Does this indicate that touch has something to do with coming into presence? In any case “existence touches itself”, as Nancy writes. More precisely, “[existence] ‘moves’ itself, sets itself moving outside itself and affects itself with its own *ek-*”, that is, with the disclosedness of the offered possibilities of being. Here the *ek-* brings to existence the distance that is, for Nancy, fundamental to touch;<sup>194</sup> touching is not merging, but contact. For him, “this action of ‘touching’ is what is at stake in [this very] being ‘that is *at issue*’”.<sup>195</sup> But what about

193 Nancy, *L’expérience de la liberté*, 96.

194 Jean-Luc Nancy, “Calcul du poète”, *Des lieux divins suivi de Calcul du poète*, Mauvezin: Trans-Europ-Repress 1997, 70.

195 Nancy, “L’‘éthique originaire’ de Heidegger”, 101 / 186.

sense, what becomes of it? Was it not, after all, supposed to constitute the stakes of the fact of being? Above I noted that the touch of existence is all about the sense of being. *Accomplishing the sense* of being is indeed what is at stake in ek-sisting, only now it is put into play as a *touch*.<sup>196</sup> For sense is nothing but the divergence (i.e., opening) in the self-relation of existence – which has proved to be constituted by touch. The tensional ex-tendedness of divergence opens a space for sense.<sup>197</sup> To put it succinctly: the sense of being is a matter of coming into presence – or *presentation*, as Nancy also says.<sup>198</sup>

But this is not all there is to coming into presence. For, taking into account Nancy's basic idea of sense as “the structure of disclosedness”<sup>199</sup>, we can see that there is a plural dimension to the sense of being. As noted above, the accomplishment of the sense of being

is a matter of *being itself*.<sup>200</sup> Moreover, being itself, or the sense of being, takes the form of being-with (*être-avec*). Thus, there is no ‘self’ except by virtue of a ‘with’, *avec*.<sup>201</sup> This brings a new dimension to coming into presence. According to Nancy, disclosedness presupposes the other (in its disclosedness); the spacing of existence (ek-sistence) is, first and foremost, exposition.<sup>202</sup> Due to this disclosedness, the other obviously carries a lot of weight with being-with. We note that in the light of sense, *sens*, being proves plural.<sup>203</sup> Being is, constitutively, singular and plural at the same time, as Nancy re-

196 See Nancy, “L’*éthique originaire*’ de Heidegger”, 101. For Nancy, sense (*sens*) equals existence touching (on) being, that is, the existent in its proximity to and its intimate distance from its own disclosedness – there where it is towards itself as well as the world.

197 See Jean-Luc Nancy, “Le poids d’une pensée”, *Le poids d’une pensée, l’approche*, Strasbourg: La Phocide 2008, 12 / “The Weight of a Thought”, *The Gravity of Thought*, trans. François Raffoul and Gregory Recco, New Jersey: Humanities Press 1997, 77; *L’expérience de la liberté*, 23 / 18. In fact, Nancy links sense with the divergent structure of *à*, which characterizes existing as well as being itself: *être-à*, being-towards.

“Selfness”, or “ipseity”, also has to be thought of according to the structure of *à*, that is, *as a relation to itself*. Ipseity means *à soi*, *towards itself*, it occurs as coming; Nancy characterizes the “self” as a present of the coming (see *Être singulier pluriel*, 119–120 / 95–96). Above we spoke of self-relation as a coming into presence.

198 To indicate this coming into presence, Nancy also uses the term *présentation*, presentation, which thus has to be taken in the ontological sense. He understands being as coming into presence, as presentation.

199 Nancy, “L’*éthique originaire*’ de Heidegger”, 96 / 181 (translation modified). Nancy refers to Heidegger (*Sein und Zeit*, 123 / 116).

200 “Being itself” means, according to Nancy, that being has a relation to itself (see *Être singulier pluriel*, 118–119 / 94–95). Here I would like to refer the reader to Heidegger’s idea of letting be (*sein lassen*), because it indicates an important aspect of making-sense, which is what the self-relation of being is about. Making-sense is, as Nancy sees it, making being be, or *letting* it be (Nancy, “L’*éthique originaire*’ de Heidegger”, 91 / 177). In my view, this means that being is withdrawn (i.e., liberated) from its normal categorial, or general, determinations, and above all from the haven of essence (i.e., immanence), understood metaphysically as a fundamental, onto-theological instance. Nancy’s point is that being relates to itself as *strangeness* (Jean-Luc Nancy, “Strange Foreign Bodies”, *Corpus II. Writings on Sexuality*, trans. Anne O’Byrne, New York: Fordham University Press 2013, 91); above I brought up uncanniness in connection with the fact of being. What is strange, then, is the *that there is* as such. This is a matter of being as such, of “[being’s] own ‘as being’”, or, in other words, of the accomplishment of the sense of being (see Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel*, 118 / 94).

201 Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel*, 118 / 94.

202 See Jean-Luc Nancy, “Body-Theatre”, trans. Susanna Lindberg, in this volume.

203 The word *sens*, one of Nancy’s key terms, is an ambiguous word (as is its English equivalent, ‘sense’). It means, among other things, (tactile, visual...) sense, reason, opinion, signification, judgment, meaningfulness, and direction. Nancy makes use of this spectrum of significations. In fact, he uses the term *sens* variably, without definitively fixing it to any one of its significations. I would even go as far as to say that in the dimension of *sens* outlined by Nancy, the grid, or order, of the various meanings of the word is dislocated. Thus far, I have operated with “sense”, not only because of the context (the sense of being), but also so as to avoid fixing the term *sens* on (any established) “signification”, which would fatally prune it, as for its ontological character at the very least. For *sens* is the element from which significations are derived.

marks.<sup>204</sup> According to him, it is nothing but being-with-one-another, which means reciprocally coming into con-tact, being in touch<sup>205</sup> – that is, yielding to alteration. This is what being-in-the-world is all about. But for Nancy, the world is a world of bodies.

This notion of sense merits attention, for it is no more thought of in terms of signification, but as a phenomenon pertaining to being, as a multifarious relation, in which touch plays an important role.<sup>206</sup> To get a clearer picture of the matter, a convenient example is offered by the joke, for it makes sense even though the habitual, communicative privilege of significations gives way.<sup>207</sup> The following features are, then, worth noticing.<sup>208</sup>

The joke breaks away from the communication of significations. Part and parcel of the joke is the listener's slight bewilderment at the senseless expression, and, simultaneously, an unexpected passage to a strange, unheard-of sense occurring in the form of laugh-

ter.<sup>209</sup> Such sense appears at the limits of signification, from out of nowhere, as it were, and alludes to a dimension preceding established and disposable significations. The criterion of a successful joke is an unanticipated, uncontrollable burst of laughter that seizes the listener, and thereby also the teller. The joke and its teller are left at the mercy of the listener, whereas what is expected from the listener is a readiness to take to an escapade somewhere out of the reach of consciousness and logico-linguistic control. The gap in significations renders communication a matter between the teller and the listener, but in such a way that both of them have precisely a feel of this in-between, the tension of the joke-situation, which both unites and separates them. The point of the joke hits sensuousness, as well. The same fit of laughter, which calls the privilege of established significations into question, also makes the order of sensuousness shake. The senses burst out in laughter and are bent into extreme positions with regard to each other, each into its peculiar form of enjoyment. In the best of cases, the listener guffaws uncontrollably, with tears in their eyes, body in convulsions. The

204 See Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel*, 48–61 / 28–41.

205 We are in touch with each other and with the rest of beings insofar as we exist (Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel*, 32 / 13, see also 120 / 96).

206 See Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel*, 20 / 2; *La Déclosion*, 187 / 127.

207 There are, of course, many more such cases, for instance, art, which Nancy examines on many occasions. In fact, any phenomenon that has the character of an (ontological) event could serve as an example here.

208 In addition to Freud, Weber, and Nancy, I have collected material for what follows from the work of Jacques Lacan, Alain Didier-Weill, and Bernard Baas.

209 Freud emphasizes the double-sided character of the joke, and its linguistic duplicity due to which we do not know what it is about the joke that we are laughing at: we are not able to decide at once, to distinguish between the joking form and the apt thought content. According to him, the motive for the formation of jokes lies in this non-knowledge linked to laughter (Sigmund Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten, Gesammelte Werke VI*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch 1999, 148 / *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious. The Standard Edition, Volume 8*, 132; Jean-Luc Nancy, "In Statu Nascendi", *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993, 222–223). Here I would like to add a thought of Nancy's, which links a moment of undecidability to laughter, for in my view the abovementioned "inability to decide" refers to the undecidability of the two-faced joke. According to Nancy, it is laughter – by its bursting out – that offers or presents (in)decision as such (see Jean-Luc Nancy "Le rire, la présence", *Une pensée finie*, 317 / "Laughter, Presence", *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1993, 386).

senses, then, are no longer organized to serve intelligible signification, as usual. Being-with proves bodily.

The listener's bewilderment, or the threshold in the expression constituted by the gap in significations, reveals that there is no given sense to serve as support. It is precisely this kind of *non-giveness*, or "obscurity",<sup>210</sup> that constitutes the essence of (the) sense (of being) also on a more general level. In Nancy's view, it is this essence of sense that – when one is exposed to it – touches most closely.<sup>211</sup> He speaks of a clear touch on the obscure threshold of sense, and of how, paradoxically, there is access any further only by way of touch, along this borderline of clearness and obscurity, in its enigmatic opening.<sup>212</sup> In its own manner, the joke grants access to this dimension. We note how the teller and the listener address one another, we note the contact and mutual exposition – that is, a reality distinguished by the tension involved, and one that remains open, unfinished and in suspense. These are the features that show that what sense amounts to is a specific, groundless way of being: our *addressing one another*.<sup>213</sup> The communicativity of being-with, as *making-sense-in-common*, obviously differs from the communication of significations.<sup>214</sup> And finally, *sens*, or being-with, is bodily. For instance, speech addressed to the

210 Above we saw that for Heidegger, "obscurity" constitutes an important moment of the experience of thrownness. I am referring to the expression "the 'whence' and the 'wither' remain obscure". It is from this "obscurity" that Nancy sees the question of sense arising. What is given there, i.e. in obscurity, is the fact that there is no given sense to being (the fact of being, i.e., "the *that*"). Not even within the horizon of expectations is there a given sense to rely on, contrary to what might be assumed. But the non-giveness of sense gives access to the radical dimension proper to sense, in which what is at stake are not current significations, nor fixing sense to signification in general, but having to make sense at the ontological level (See "L'éthique originaire' de Heidegger", 94 / 179).

211 See Nancy, "L'éthique originaire' de Heidegger", 102 / 186.

212 Nancy, *Le sens du monde*, 131–132 / 82–83. Nancy is discussing art here.

213 Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel*, 14 / xvi.

214 Nancy, "L'éthique originaire' de Heidegger", 112 / 195.

other<sup>215</sup> – as well as writing, or a gesture in general – must be considered bodily. In the background here lies Nancy's original notion of bodies as places of existence.<sup>216</sup> However, such being-body only occurs in the manner just described, when the order of sensuousness is dislocated: in our example, laughter bursts out of the points of contact between language and the senses fallen out of joint.<sup>217</sup> In any case, there is no bodily being-with without touch.<sup>218</sup> For the "with" is, according to Nancy, "the *ownmost power* of a body, the propriety of its *touching* another body (or of touching *itself*)".<sup>219</sup> I shall return to Nancy's thinking of the body further on.

## V

The idea of proximity seems to be self-evidently connected to touch. Let us consider, say, the traditional classification of the tactile sense as a proximal sense, or the promise of direct and immediate contact we are inclined to link with touch. However, there are features to proximity that make it a more complex phenomenon, and are significant as for the spatial aspects of touch. What these features call into question is the nature of contact.

Let us examine the belief in the immediacy of contact by taking up a few general points of Aristotle on sense perception. According to him, sensing is a matter of connection between the sensible (thing) and the sense (i.e. the sensing one), as they are simultaneously unit-

215 See Nancy, "Body-Theatre".

216 Nancy, *Corpus*, 16 / 15.

217 See Jean-Luc Nancy, "Le rire, la présence", 321–322 / 390. Nancy remarks that the senses and language are spaced by the mutual touches born of these bursts. Let it be noted that surely enjoyment does not have to be as evident or perceptible as the laughter provoked by the joke in our example.

218 Touch can also occur through the detour offered by technique, see Nancy, *Corpus*, 47 / 51.

219 Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel*, 116 / 92.

ed and separated.<sup>220</sup> Actual sensing, of which Aristotle talks about, is not a phenomenon confined to the (subjective) side of the senses, but equally comprehends the sensible. For Aristotle understands the sensible from the point of view of its actuality, as it is accomplished in the act of sensing. Thus, the sensible does not exist independently of the act of sensing, in which the sense (or the sensing) and the sensible are both *accomplished*. They then share the same reality (of the act).<sup>221</sup>

Now, focusing on touch on this basis, one is surely inclined to agree with Nancy that this is all that is needed to create an appearance of immediacy.<sup>222</sup> The association of immediacy with touch constitutes a central concern for Derrida.<sup>223</sup> It should be borne in mind that in touch the interval inherent in sensing the visible, the audible, and the olfactible, seems to be reduced to nil. In touch, distance is quickly forgotten, obscured by proximity. It passes unnoticed – or is, rather, veiled, as Chrétien aptly puts it.<sup>224</sup>

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220 This is how Nancy sums up Aristotle's conception (Jean-Luc Nancy, "Secondo seminario", in Tommaso Ariemma and Luca Cremonesi (eds.), *Le differenze parallele*, trans. and ed. by Andrea Potestà, Miriam Ronzoni, and Roberto Terzi [unauthorized], 2008, 37). Aristotle puts it as follows: The actuality "of the perceptible [i.e. sensible] thing and of the sense that perceives it are one and the same, though the being of them is not the same" (*On the Soul*, 425b). According to Aristotle, actual sensing requires a sense-object, or the sensible. For sensing "is a way of being acted upon" (ibid., 424a). The sensed can affect and move the sense faculty, but only in such a way that the actuality of this something that has the ability to affect is accomplished in the sense faculty that is being acted upon: the actuality of both the sensible and the sense faculty lies in the latter (ibid., 426a). As regards the sense faculty, then, it should be noted that it "is, in potency, such as the perceived thing [...]. So it is acted upon when it is not like the perceived thing, but when it is in the state that results from being acted upon, it has become likened to it, and is such as that is." (Ibid., 418a.)

221 See Wolfgang Welsch, *Aisthesis*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1987, 76–100. Welsch stresses that Aristotle considers sensing ontologically.

222 See Nancy, "Secondo seminario", 37.

223 See Derrida, *Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, *passim*.

224 Chrétien, *L'appel et la réponse*, 106, 108 / 88, 90.

Chrétien's choice of words implies that in this context, distance should not be thought of in terms of a physical, measurable interval. True, physical analysis reveals a minimal interval even in the most immediate of contacts; and as it is imperceptible, it is, from the objective point of view, possible that those involved are mistaken as to the "real" (i.e., physical) nature of the contact. According to Chrétien, there is a difference inherent in touch, but it is unlike the physical interval, which is concealed from those in contact but able to be pinned down by objective description.<sup>225</sup> The interval, then, is not the only thing veiled.

This becomes clear if we acknowledge a certain heterogeneous element in touch required by the contact: *the untouchable*. In Nancy's words, contact amounts to the fact that there is (something) untouchable.<sup>226</sup> Here the untouchable is not opposed to the touched, nor is it something "behind" the touched, something closed, substantial, or the like, even though it is a matter of distance and restraint. According to Waldenfels, the untouchable is that "aspect" of the *touched* that hollows it out by withdrawing from touch *in the touched*.<sup>227</sup> It is here that the untouchable, while withdrawing and in this way creating a fresh and enigmatic distance in the very core of contact, presents itself as constitutive of proximity, because it gives the touched (and itself) as *touching*. This is where the pathic enters the picture. As Nancy sums up the paradox, the *untouchable amounts to the fact of being moved*, or in

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225 Ibid., 107 / 88–89. As distinguished from such a description, in Chrétien's view "[t]o touch is to approach and to be approached".

226 Nancy, "Secondo seminario", 38. Nancy remarks, that what violence does not accept is the untouchable (ibid.). Here I want to remind the reader of the moment of the untouchable in Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the twofold touch addressed above.

227 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 88, 90, 140.

other words, of being affected one way or another.<sup>228</sup> Contact presupposes this sort of pathic overdetermination, which I addressed above in terms of a heterogeneous feel. Touchingness, though, also tends to veil the distance in contact, that is, that “aspect” of it off which proximity lives.<sup>229</sup> It is possible then that proximity gets mixed up with immediacy.

Thus, we have good reason to examine proximity more closely. Chrétien may guide us here, as he stresses a certain transition, which he finds already in Aristotle. The analysis of the senses based on the axis of immediate versus distant is replaced by a more phenomenological approach, in which the senses are considered in terms of the near and the far.<sup>230</sup> Still, this is not the same thing as the interval-based division of the senses into proximal and distal ones, because in that case proximity would be reduced to immediacy: as to this division, “we will be left with a nearness without a remoteness and *vice versa*”.<sup>231</sup>

More broadly, Chrétien’s idea is that when understood phenomenologically, the ‘near’ and the ‘far’ are not mutually exclusive, even though they are in a polar relation with each other. In fact, proximity presupposes distance, for without distance doing its share, prox-

imity would be indistinguishable from immediacy.<sup>232</sup> Proximity and distance are then interwoven in the contact, forming a tensional *distance in proximity*. This occurs in touch in a paradigmatic fashion.<sup>233</sup> The motif of distance in proximity is, in different forms, present in almost all the thinkers discussed here.<sup>234</sup>

The notion of distance in proximity brings the question of space to the fore again. The distinction drawn between proximity (or distance) and interval gave us a foretaste of the heterogeneity of the former in relation to any objective order. Interval amounts to a homogeneous space. This means that (lived) places are reduced to locations or positions, which do not differ in character, and which have a measurable interspace between them. In such an understanding of space, the “near” and the “far” are abstracted into intervals. Taking a broader look at the matter, it can be said that interval forms the initial stage of an abstractive process; on the second stage space is abstracted into Cartesian dimensionality, and, further,

228 “*L’intouchable, c’est que ça touche*” (Nancy, *Corpus*, 127 / 135). Waldenfels, too, locates the untouchable in being moved, *ein Unberührbares im Berührtwerden* (*Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 88; see also 90, where it is stated that “in touch we touch the untouchable”).

229 See also Chrétien, *L’appel et la réponse*, 108 / 89–90.

230 *Ibid.*, 107 / 89.

231 Straus, *Vom Sinn der Sinne*, 406 / 382; see also Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 81.

232 Straus stresses the share of distance in proximity (*Vom Sinn der Sinne*, 403–409 / 379–385). In his view, even a palpating touch presupposes the distant. As I see it, the notion constitutes an interesting comment on Kant’s analysis of the “outer” sense of touch, for it entails the object’s being discerned, that is, *circumscribed*. According to Straus, in the case of palpating, ‘distant’ has to be understood to indicate the *emptiness* from which the object is approached, and to which the palpating hand returns, gliding over the surface and the edges of the object. In other words, it is only possible to obtain an impression of the object by separating it from the adjacent emptiness. In Straus’s view, every tactile sensation involves distance as the emptiness against which the object stands out. (*Ibid.*, 406–407 / 382–383.) Levinas, too, understands exploring touch so that the thing or being comes to it as though from nothingness (*Totalité et infini*, 163–164 / 189).

233 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 194. Chrétien formulates the same idea on the level of the senses: “To show that touch involves a sense of proximity is to show that it involves a sense of distance” (*L’appel et la réponse*, 107 / 89).

234 Let it be mentioned in passing that in his reading of Benjamin, Didi-Huberman attributes a parallel idea to him (see Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, Paris: Minuit 1992, 103–123).

mathematized.<sup>235</sup> All the way through this process space appears as a parameter, as an unintermittent, consecutive continuum of its elements permitting measuring and calculating. The same thing tends to happen to time, as the linear conception of time reveals. If we take into account that the “close” and the “distant” also have a temporal meaning, we can see the fundamental significance of the heterogeneity of proximity, or nearness<sup>236</sup>, even though it usually remains in the dead zone of objectifying experience.<sup>237</sup>

235 On the abstraction process of space, see Martin Heidegger, “Bauen Wohnen Denken”, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 2009, 149–151 / “Building Dwelling Thinking”, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, New York: Harper & Row 1975, 155–156; Emil Kettering, *Nähe*, Pfullingen: Neske 1987, 260–261.

236 The term “nearness” (*Nähe*) is used by Heidegger, among others.

237 According to Heidegger, abstraction renders the essence of space and time unknown, especially as concerns their relation to the “nature of nearness (*Wesen der Nähe*)” I am outlining here. (For more details, see *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 209–213 / 102–106; also “Zeit und Sein”, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Tübingen: Niemeyer 1976, 15 / *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, New York: Harper & Row 1972, 14–15.) This relation is brought to the fore as regards time, too, when, in his later phase, Heidegger ponders the nature of time. Instead of the familiar, one-dimensional continuum of now-points, which permits the future, past, and present to be organized on a timeline, he now distinguishes three heterogeneous dimensions of time: futural approach, or arrival (*Ankunft*), the having-been (*Gewesenheit*), and the present (*Gegenwart*). Each one is a matter of presence (*Anwesenheit*) in the sense of coming into presence; this is what separates the present (*Gegenwart*) from the present in the sense of now. Presencing (*Anwesen*) is something that bears upon or concerns man (*angehen*) – only in this way is there, *es gibt*, presence in the first place, or it is “extended” (*reichen*), as Heidegger somewhat enigmatically says; due to it the human being, too, is singularly present (*Anwesende*) to everything present and absent. In each dimension presence is “extended” in a manner specific to it. *Gewesenheit* and *Ankunft* touch us in their absence, and are in this way present; they are not a matter of past or future now-points on a timeline. The dimension of *Gegenwart* also has a presence of its own that bears upon us. Heidegger now thinks the mutual relation of these dimensions, that is, the unity of time, in terms of “nearing nearness”. It brings the dimensions near to one another, but this is done by distancing them, by preventing and withholding their fusion. This is what keeps them open (see “Zeit und Sein”, 12–16 / 11–16; see also Dastur, *Heidegger et la question du temps*, 113–117 / 66–68).

What kind of space is this proximity, then? It has already become clear that this is a question of contact. Proximity means *bringing closer* – or *approaching*.<sup>238</sup> The consequence is that proximity gains features of motion – or proves to be, as in Levinas, a non-abatable restlessness, because it is always insufficient.<sup>239</sup>

If proximity amounts to bringing closer, the question then arises as to what exactly is it that is being brought closer. Heidegger’s answer is distance, or as he says, farness (*Ferne*). According to him, nearness brings farness near, or nears it (*nähern*), but in such a way that it is preserved as farness. For nearness is a bringing-near solely when it brings the far near *as* the far – and in this way conceals itself

238 Straus and Heidegger speak of bringing closer; Chrétien and Levinas rather of approach.

239 For Levinas, proximity means contact with the other. The touching and the touched do not merge together in their contact, but are separated from each other; the touched, which is always already other, moves off in contact. (See *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence*, 103, 109 / 82, 86; see also “Langage et proximité”, 230–231 / 120–121.) Let us note that Nancy speaks of separation as the law of touching (Être singulier pluriel, 23 / 5).

in this bringing-near, in which it can unfold.<sup>240</sup> Thus, what matters in proximity is distance, the enduring of it or persisting through it (*durchstehen*), not the abolishing of it.<sup>241</sup> But what is distance, then? Distantiation. Distance is not a stable condition, but something differential, evental. It should be considered in terms of a difference or a divergence – I am referring to the French word *écart* taken up above – that is, it should be understood as spacing.<sup>242</sup> Distance in

proximity does not conform to readymade patterns.<sup>243</sup> It is worth noting that differing and spacing also characterize place as understood existentially: it is in this sense that the *Da* is differential.

240 Heidegger links the nearing nearness with the event (*Ereignis*) (See *Unterwegs zur Sprache* 196 / 90).

241 Heidegger, “Bauen Wohnen Denken”, 151 / 156; “Das Ding”, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1975, 170 / “The Thing”, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row 1975, 177–178.

242 In Dastur’s view, what is characteristic of the far is precisely divergence (*Heidegger et la question du temps*, 112 / 65). In Nancy, the word *écart* and its (verbal) derivatives usually allude to spacing.

The advantage of the French word *écart* is that it makes the heterogeneity of spacing resonate with a swerve, or side step. What this comes down to is a digression or diversion from the normal, categorial, organization of space. Alluding to Valéry, Waldenfels notes that *écart* originally signifies ‘side step’. It can be understood, then, as a deviation (from the self), just as the side step in dance deviates from incessant progress. (Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel*, 215, n. 5; *Ortverschiebungen, Zeitverschiebungen*, 231.)

243 Derrida offers some illuminating remarks on distance in proximity in his reading of fragment 60, “Women and their action at a distance”, of Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science*.

In the fragment, Nietzsche describes how the woman magically appears in the midst of masculine noise in the form of a sailing ship silently gliding past, concluding with the following words (I quote from Derrida, *Spurs / Éperons*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1979, 47): “The enchantment and the most powerful effect of woman, is, to use the language of philosophers, an effect at a distance, an *actio in distans*: there belongs thereto, however, primarily and above all – *Distanz!*” I have left the last word of the citation in its original, German form, so as to better bring to light Derrida’s gesture of repeating it as *Dis-tanz!*

Derrida draws attention to the dash in front of the word *Distanz*, and to the exclamation mark behind it (see *Spurs / Éperons*, 46–51). To his mind, owing to them the expression gains the following meaning: it is necessary to keep one’s distance! This is an interpretation one would not necessarily expect, even though the dash hints that something unexpected is to follow. Be that as it may, in Derrida’s view the admonition concerns the feminine operation described in the quotation, which Nietzsche formulates by parodying the language of philosophers: an *actio in distans*, an effect at a distance. Thus, the expression warns us to keep our distance from distance – not only for protection against its seductive charm, but also to *experience its impact*. For as distant, the woman is indefinable as to her identity, and thus her spell might lie precisely in her distancing – and differing – from herself. Distance, then, “out-distances itself”, as Derrida puts it.

Derrida then moves on to Heidegger’s term *Ent-fernung* (the German *Entfernung* signifies distance). By the separation of the prefix *Ent-*, the term deconstructs the customary understanding of distance as something stable, but in this way it constitutes the distant as such, the distant in its distancing and differing – which then is nothing but the “veiled enigma of proximation”.

As I see it, Derrida’s way of writing Nietzsche’s “*Distanz*” with a hyphen analogously separates the word from itself: *Dis-tanz*. In the passage in question, he puts aside the latter component *-tanz* (the German *Tanz* means “dance”). But what if it is precisely dance that brings out distance in proximity, its rhythm and the touch of rhythm, with all its deviations, caprices, and side steps, all the (unsynchronized?) approaching and distancing? Rhythm would then beat spatially, in accordance with *écart* (see Eliane Escoubas, *Imago mundi*. Paris: Galilée 1986, esp. p 232, n. 1).

Here I would like to remind the reader of the notion of withdrawal, which above proved relevant regarding contact. Waldenfels stresses its link to distancing (*Sichentfernen*), for in this way the relationship gains features of asymmetry.<sup>244</sup> In addition to this, we can find an important specification of the concept of withdrawal at issue here in Heidegger. According to him, it is by its very withdrawal that the withdrawing bears upon (*angehen*), or claims (me); the withdrawing attracts one (*anziehen*) by its withdrawal, and in this way unfolds its nearness.<sup>245</sup> As we will see, Waldenfels entertains some parallel ideas.

The intertwining of the close and the distant finally brings us to the point from where the dimension of depth opens. It would merit a detailed examination, but I shall confine myself to a brief allusion here. Merleau-Ponty connects distance to the experience of depth in a compelling way. For him, depth is not the Cartesian third dimension, objectified depth, but a more originary space characterized by concealment and density.<sup>246</sup> We have already moved about this primordial dimension when hitting the blind spot, the hiatus in the reversibility of the touching and the touched, and their link in the untouchable. Looking at contact from the point of view of depth, I would say that the divergence (i.e., distance) inherent in contact now has to be conceived of as constituted by the other in relation to me

244 See Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 191.

245 See Martin Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken?*, *Gesamtausgabe Band 8*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 2002, 11–20 / *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray, New York: Harper & Row 1968, 9–18.

246 Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, 272–273 / 219–220; *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris: Gallimard 1945, 308 / *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1986, 266. In Merleau-Ponty's view, depth is the "first dimension", rather than the third one in addition to length and breadth, as the Cartesian outlook would have it (*L'Œil et l'esprit*, 65 / 140).

(i.e., the touching).<sup>247</sup> The same goes for the thing; it gains depth and resists my attempts at approach. With depth, space gives itself as distant, or, in other words, as distance.<sup>248</sup> The important thing here is that this makes it impossible for the contact to be closed. This is precisely what is in question in Levinas, too, even though he examines contact from the viewpoint of proximity, and with respect to time.<sup>249</sup> Levinas connects depth to proximity, to approach and touch, and articulates it in terms of a "diachrony", that is, with regard to the "immemorial past", which is what the Other of contact is.<sup>250</sup> Contact, then, is not wholly abreast of the times, it is prevented from being synchronized and integrated into the present, with the result that it is troubled by a fundamental arrhythmia. Antje Kapust calls the paradoxical "other space" of depth "touching without touching", for it permits separation in unity and unity in separation, simultaneously.<sup>251</sup>

## VI

The paradoxes of distance in proximity are not irrelevant as to understanding experience. Maldiney helps us to realize this as he

247 Here I am interpreting, and making use of, Dastur's analysis of the relation between I and the others, as well as that between I and things, in Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy (see "Monde, chair, vision", 91 / 36).

248 Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène*, 242; Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, 118–120.

249 Proximity plays a central role in Levinas's later thought; for him, it indicates an ethical encounter, and thus deviates from the order of rationality. Touch is an integral part of proximity: for Levinas, touch means approach, rather than explorative palpation. Touch thus ranges over sensuousness (understood as vulnerability), and, interestingly, over language and saying as well. In the light of approach, they prove to have characteristics of touch.

250 Emmanuel Levinas, "Énigme et phénomène", *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, Paris: Vrin 2006, 207 / "Phenomenon and Enigma", *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff 1987, 65; see also "Langage et proximité", 227 / 118.

251 For more details, see Kapust, *Berührung ohne Berührung*, 229–277.

lets the German verb *erfahren*<sup>252</sup> reveal, what experience in fact means. Conceived of in accordance with this word, experience is “a going across that blazes the lanes of a depth”.<sup>253</sup> Going across, then, is here again understood as an approach in which distancing is inherent.

We can find a similar idea of the depth of experience also in Waldenfels, an idea even of its “fertile depth”, as he says, citing Kant.<sup>254</sup> Waldenfels connects depth to his notion of the pathicity of experience, the prototype of which for him is touch. This gives rise to an idea of a “strong experience”, which transforms the one who undergoes it, as well as his or her world.<sup>255</sup> Such pathic experience differs from the “weak”, subject-centric normal variant of experience, which is directed by the subject’s presuppositions within the framework of experiential possibilities. In pathic experience, these presuppositions and expectations lose their structural advantage because, within the field of experience, the accent shifts from the horizon of such unifying possibilities towards the ruptures or fault lines (*Bruchlinien*) of experience, as Waldenfels puts it.<sup>256</sup> Strong experience is not reducible to one’s own sphere, for it originates elsewhere, *in the alien (in der Fremde)*.<sup>257</sup> This is what the expressions “affect” (*Widerfahrnis*) and “being-affected-by (something or some-

one)” (*Getroffensein-durch*) characterizing the pathic also hint at.<sup>258</sup> Depth can thus be considered to refer to the roots of experience, which are not in one’s power, but derive from elsewhere. Waldenfels also speaks of the pathic undergrounds and backgrounds of experience.<sup>259</sup> This brings a new aspect to the dimension of precedence revealed by the exposition characteristic of pathic experience; I described this precedence above, following Waldenfels, in terms of the unpredictable. I noted that the pathic structure of experience merits a more detailed analysis. In what follows, I will scrutinize the matter with Waldenfels acting as my guide; here again, touch will occupy a crucial position.

This is because the pathic brings with it the dimension of contact. The distinctive feature of touch is precisely the pathic surplus unveiled in this dimension.<sup>260</sup> For the deepening and transformative character of experience, this is a matter of central importance.

252 The normal signification of the word is “to experience”.

253 Maldiney, “Chair et verbe dans la philosophie de M.P.”, 63 / 58.

254 See e.g. Waldenfels, *Ortverschiebungen, Zeitverschiebungen*, 10.

255 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 30, and *passim*.

256 Waldenfels emphasizes this by the very title of a work of his: *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung* means “fault lines of experience”.

257 See e.g. Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel*, 325. The German word *Fremde* (and the whole word family: *fremd, Fremdheit* etc.) plays a central role in Waldenfels. In connection to his work, the established English translation has come to be *the alien (alien, alienness* etc.), which I am also using here. The German word refers to a complex phenomenon, and thus has frequently had to be rendered by different words (*foreign, strange* etc.) depending on the shade of meaning involved. For more detail, see Waldenfels, *The Question of the Other*, VIII, 1–19.

258 Heidegger speaks of the affecting character of experience along similar lines: experience is something that befalls us, and transforms us (see *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 159 / 57).

259 Waldenfels, *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, 72 / 46.

260 See Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 75–80. The surplus shows that there is more to touch than the tactile qualities perceived by the sense of touch: it goes beyond physical feeling or groping, (*tasten, betasten*) concentrating on these qualities – that is, it goes beyond the tactile world. According to Waldenfels, this surplus, which in touch not only offers itself to be shared, but also, as we can say, divides those sharing in it, finds its expression in the German word *berühren*. He also remarks on the ambiguity of the word. It has both the tactile signification, “to touch”, and the more pathic one, “to move”. The point of Waldenfels’s subtle distinctions is that one should not construct an opposition between these different “aspects” of touch. For the peculiarity of the sense of touch lies in an imperceptible slide from touching to moving / being moved and back. An example of this, and in my view an incontrovertible one, is offered by sensuality, the eroticization of touch. Feeling about can be eroticized, turning into enjoyable and exciting fondling (see Sigmund Freud, “Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie”, *Gesammelte Werke*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch 1999, 49, 55 / “Three essays on Sexuality”, *The Standard Edition, Volume 7 (1901–1905)*, 149–150, 156).

It is also essential that Waldenfels examines contact in terms of a distance in proximity.<sup>261</sup> The depth of experience then designates neither an abyss, nor fusion or immediate contact, but a relation that proves tensional. Such a relationship is exemplified by touch: owing to touch the relation is spaced and becomes an intimate distance of a particular kind.<sup>262</sup> In this process, touch is revealed to be a sense of alterity, a sense of alienness.<sup>263</sup>

All of this relates to the overdetermination of touch. I referred to this aspect when I first described the reciprocity peculiar to touch, that is, the fact that there is no touch without letting oneself be touched by what one touches. I noted that such exposition brings a heterogeneous moment of foreign origin to the contact. By now it has become clear, however, that the “self-touching” of the one who touches equally pertains to contact. Thus, we see more clearly now that touch comprises both a moment of the ‘self’ and that of the ‘other’ (or the ‘alien’, to use Waldenfels’s term). Their status with regard to each other – which one has the upper hand in contact – has been subject to a discussion, in which the privilege enjoyed by self-touching in, say, Husserl’s reflective interpretation of touch, has been challenged by a transitive interpretation of touch. According to the advocates of transitivity, Chrétien and Derrida, touching means first and foremost touching something else, something other. For as we can learn from Aristotle, a sense (i.e., touch) does not of itself sense itself.<sup>264</sup> Transitivity, or hetero-contact, is

261 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 194.

262 Waldenfels connects a “distance within the most intimate of proximities” to touch (ibid., 64, 194).

263 Romano, “L’unité de l’espace et la phénoménologie”, 128; Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 64.

264 Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 16 / 6. He reads in Aristotle that the faculty of sensation is only potential, not actual; this is why senses do not produce sensations independently of external objects (see Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 417a).

indispensable to auto-contact: this “is why I can’t sense myself without sensing the other and without being sensed by the other”, as Nancy puts it – “self-touching’ [...] necessarily passes through the outside”.<sup>265</sup>

Waldenfels’s notion of the overdetermination of touch unfolds along these lines. The moment of the ‘alien’ gains in importance, and is radicalized in pathic experience. This is to say that *contact*, which can be interpreted literally as a touching-with (*Mitberührung*)<sup>266</sup>, deepens as it unfolds in the direction of *dis-tact* – *Dis-takt* is Waldenfels’s somewhat foregrounded term for describing the pathic imbalance of touch.<sup>267</sup> The reason for this is the goad of alienness active in pathic experience that originates in affect and that lifts the ‘self’ of its mount. Thus, due to its pathicity, contact remains open or unfinished, but this is precisely how it proves to have the *nature of an event*, taking place *between* those sharing in it.<sup>268</sup> Affects create a time and space of their own.<sup>269</sup> The spelling con-tact can be considered to refer to this evental *betweenness*, or, in other words, to mutuality, if the hyphen is understood to be simultaneously uniting and separating.

Now we can better understand Waldenfels’s conception of pathic experience. It is important to note that for him it is an *alien ex-*

265 Nancy, *Corpus*, 125 / 133 (translation modified).

266 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 78. Romano finds a notion of reciprocity in the etymology of the (French) word *contact*: *con-tact* is *tact-avec*, or, literally, *toucher-avec*, touching-with (Romano, “L’unité de l’espace et la phénoménologie”, 127).

267 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 78. As I see it, the term *Dis-takt* comprises a notion of touch being out of time, for the German *Takt* refers, among other things, to time (rhythm, measure).

268 Here contact is not approached from the point of view of those involved in it, those who would, as distinct entities, enter into a relation, but as an event that constitutes the parties as heterogeneous.

269 Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel*, 369.

*perience (Fremderfahrung)*. The term is borrowed from Husserl; it opens on to paradoxes, such as the “accessibility of what is not originally accessible”, an expression that Waldenfels extracts from *Cartesian Meditations* to show that alien experience indicates an impossibility inherent in the experience itself.<sup>270</sup> It is precisely this kind of a *lived impossibility* of which the abovementioned paradox, “touching the untouchable”, tell us as well.<sup>271</sup> Indeed, we could say that if alien experience means an experience of the alien, it is not only about encountering the alien, but, more radically, about the *experience* itself becoming *alien*; the alien will not be kept at arm’s length, but rebounds on experience. Experience, then, is inhabited by the same uncanniness (*das Unheimliche*) which resides in the familiar domestic sphere.<sup>272</sup> To get a better picture of the heterogeneity of contact, we must examine this kind of experience more closely.

The experience of surprise nicely illustrates the alienness of experience, for it does not keep to the beaten track. Indeed, when we are struck by surprise, it is only when we can finally respond to what just happened that we notice being surprised. The surprise comes too early to be expected, whereas the response comes too late to measure up to the experience, to square it up.<sup>273</sup> This means

that the status of the one undergoing the experience is undermined. When I am surprised, I precede myself, but become aware of this falling out of myself only afterwards, when, forlorn, I am searching for a foothold again. The temporal shift (*Verschiebung*) surfacing here is worth noting, for it reveals a certain phase difference in alien experience. As we will see, the experience is constituted by its differentiation into the moments of previousness (*Vorgängigkeit*) and afterwardsness (*Nachträglichkeit*).

Let us first take up the methodical basis of Waldenfels’s analysis, for it is radical, and perhaps unexpected as well. It presents touch as the prototype of pathicity. Precisely touch can discreetly teach us something about the fold that indicates the *passage of experience to a level preceding* the sphere of normal experience. This transition is essential as regards alien experience (as well as the dimension of contact), and it *depends on the weight af-fect is assigned* in experience. As I have tried to show, it is precisely this question that presses touch, and at a sore spot at that. Consenting to af-fect means complying with the overdetermination and pathic surplus of touch (or experience). Nancy gives the idea a polished form: “[Touch] makes one sense what makes one sense.”<sup>274</sup> The matter is nuanced, but I would say that here “sensing”, or “feeling” (*sentir*), originates in hetero-affection, and is thus characterized by the pathic, not the cognitive dimension. Waldenfels also emphasizes the pathic, but as a phenomenologist, he delineates the pathicity of touch against intentionality. Due to its pathic surplus, the *experience of touch precedes intentionality: it precedes intending something as something*.<sup>275</sup> Taking pathicity into account, the touch (of something, “je-ne-sais-quoi”) is not reducible to understanding (this

270 See Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 1995, § 52, 117 / *Cartesian Meditations. An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns. The Hague/Boston/London: Martinus Nijhoff 1982, 114 (in German the expression reads: *Zugänglichkeit des original Unzugänglichen*). Waldenfels stresses the fact that such a paradox is a matter of an experience that runs counter to itself, of a lived impossibility (see *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, 115–116 / 74–75).

271 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 92.

272 Waldenfels, *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, 120 / 77; see also 8, 116 / 3, 75.

273 Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel*, 325; see also *Ortverschiebungen, Zeitverschiebungen*, 147.

274 Nancy, *Les Muses*, 35 / 17. Touch thus proves equal to proximate distance (ibid.).

275 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 60, 78.

something).<sup>276</sup> True, the heterogeneity of af-fect can be normalized and integrated into the existing order: it may be taken as no more than an impetus to an intentional or rule-guided meaning process, or classified as an anomaly, for instance<sup>277</sup>.

The primordial radicality of the pathic comes out if we consider the word *pathos* at the background of Waldenfels's thoughts. The Greek *pathos* signifies "af-fect" as described above, and in that respect, refers to a singular, surprising event – not to some pronounced tinge of emotion, or whatever else "pathos" is taken to mean in colloquial language. *Pathos* is an experience of *being affected* – devoid of awareness or a representation of that which affects.<sup>278</sup> This experience of being moved (that stems from the alien) forms Waldenfels's starting point. Here experience is not organized in terms of subjectivity; let us keep in mind how being moved is connected to distance in proximity, to the withdrawal of the un-touchable in the touched, as discussed above. Touch is now equated with being moved, being touched.<sup>279</sup> One is then, in a certain sense, owned by af-fect, singled out by it. When subjected to *pathos*, one is "outside", as Waldenfels notes.<sup>280</sup> In the form of af-fect, *pathos* then constitutes a radical experience of its own kind, the alienness of which is literally "ecstatic": being outside of oneself.<sup>281</sup> Being af-

fected and exposed in this way is not a matter of consciousness, but points back to the body.<sup>282</sup>

At this point, however, the question arises as to *what* is it that we are touched by when moved. Here we should proceed warily, though, for in pathic experience the "effect precedes its cause".<sup>283</sup> Pathic experience is radical in that even though it is overdetermined, and as such derives from elsewhere, nothing precedes it in the form of a pre-given instance.<sup>284</sup> The whole idea that there is a *something* that affects and that can be asked questions about only arises after the fact, when one returns to what has happened, and even then one should not think that the answer establishes the agent as something identifiable, say, empirical. According to Waldenfels, that which affects and the af-fect itself are, in a sense, one and the same – but in another sense, they are not, as the belated questioning in its own way shows.<sup>285</sup> Expressions such as "being moved", or the above discussed "being-affected-by", *Getroffensein-durch*,<sup>286</sup> reveal that the event itself has, as heterogeneous, withdrawn from the reach

276 I am referring to Barthes's description of the pathic surplus of the *punctum* with regard to the *studium* organized by the search for meaning.

277 See Waldenfels, *The Question of the Other*, 22–25.

278 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 124. Waldenfels remarks that there also is a pathic background to the event of af-fect, that is, a certain attunement or susceptibility to the surprising (Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel*, 324).

279 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 91.

280 Ibid., 188.

281 Ibid., 124, 205–206, 219; *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel*, 324–325.

282 Waldenfels, *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, 74 / 46–47. Waldenfels speaks of a bodily self who is "not a master in his own house". We cannot overemphasize the pathic characteristic, which this standpoint of the body and the bodily self brings into the *betweenness* of contact, mentioned above. Waldenfels refers to Merleau-Ponty, who replaced the term "intersubjectivity" with "intercorporeality" (ibid., 85 / 53).

283 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 58. Here 'cause' and 'effect' are not to be understood in the causal sense. The precedence of the effect is due to the fact that it exceeds its own possibility (ibid., 59).

284 Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel*, 323.

285 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 189, see also 100. Waldenfels refers to Aristotle's conception of the sensible and the sense / the sensing, discussed above at the beginning of chapter V.

286 According to Waldenfels, here the grammatical passive has to be understood as the archaic passive (*Urpassiv*) (*Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel*, 324; "L'assise corporelle des sentiments", in Eliane Escoubas and László Tengelyi (eds.) *Affect et affectivité dans la philosophie moderne et la phénoménologie*, trans. Ingeburg Lachaussee. Paris: L'Harmattan 2008, 207).

of questions which try to obtain a conscious hold of it. It is not for nothing that affect has been discussed in the past tense.<sup>287</sup> The alien is intrusive, but evasive at the same time.<sup>288</sup>

But the emphasis on afterwardsness was pertinent, too. For here we have good reason to conceive of questioning as a *responding* to affect, afterwards but not self-sufficiently. This reminds us of the working through of experience. Waldenfels's basic idea is to understand alien experience as a responding, and responding – even if it only occurs afterwards – again as strictly rooted in the affect, even though it distinguishes itself from the latter. What is in question is an effect that indirectly assumes its cause. Responding stems from *pathos*: it originates elsewhere, with the alien.<sup>289</sup> However, it is not capable of making away with the lag ensuing from this. *Pathos* and responding are thus temporally apart. Still, they must be thought of together,<sup>290</sup> as a double event, for without the supplement offered after the fact by responding, it would be impossible to speak about *alien* experience in the first place. But the difference between responding and the previous *pathos* does not come down to a different position on a time line. *Pathos* and response are not two distinct events but *one and the same experience shifted in relation to itself*<sup>291</sup>; we saw this above concerning the two-phased structure of the experience of surprise. I am referring here to Waldenfels's notion of the rupture of pathic experience.

But what is it that makes one respond, then? Let us return to Waldenfels's starting point, the pathic experience of *being-affected*.

He draws attention to the possibility that the affect *I* have met with *touches me*, bears upon *me*. It is as if the pathic surplus showed its singularizing edge. One may ask, in that case, if what has happened troubles me, or if I feel that I have been addressed. In any case, I am confronted with an appeal-like, alien *call* or *demand* (*fremde Anspruch*) aimed at myself, one that is revealing of the *ethical*, obligative dimension of the pathic.<sup>292</sup> We note how affection turns into a demand, which, however, still originates in the affect.<sup>293</sup> The potential response to the demand indicates a shift within experience: the affected becomes the respondent.<sup>294</sup> At any rate, the whole process up to the demand (and including the affect itself) is only thinkable thanks to the *fact that one responds*.<sup>295</sup> Here, responding means not only responding to the demand, but also taking it upon oneself to answer for the whole process, or in other words, for the alien experience itself. The alienness of the experience thus depends on responding.

The essential thing about the shift in experience is that *one's own* response and the *alien* affection *split* (*auseinandertreten*) in experience, but in such a way that through this gap they stay together, for as mentioned, one's own doings have their origin elsewhere. This stepping apart is marked by the overdetermination already familiar from touch. We come back to the question of the 'self' and the 'alien', their status with regard to each other, for when it comes to responding, instead of the "own", we can just as well talk about the "self".

287 Waldenfels characterizes *pathos* as a primary passion, *Urpassion* (see *The Question of the Other*, 45–47).

288 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 193. According to Waldenfels, a phenomenon like the alien is a kind of a *hyperphenomenon*, because it shows itself only by eluding us (*Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, 56 / 35).

289 Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel*, 325.

290 See e.g. Waldenfels, *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, 49–50 / 31.

291 Ibid.

292 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 11, see also 98–99; and *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, 56 / 35.

293 This demand is twofold: in it, an appeal directed at me is inseparably intertwined with a claim to something (in the sense that "something is being demanded from me"). Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 102–103; *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, 59 / 37.

294 This reminds one of Barthes and his absorption in the element of *punctum*.

295 For a more detailed analysis of the whole process, see Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 98–120.

Waldenfels addresses this juncture of splitting with his notions of con-tact and betweenness. For splitting, he uses the term *diastasis*, which very well describes its heterogeneous reality, the tension of the mutual juncture peculiar to betweenness. The tensional character of alien experience is due to the fundamental dissymmetry of the process of responding; above I remarked on *dis-tact*. What matters is the following: *that to which* one responds (i.e. the demand), is not identical to *that something* one was originally affected by, even though the demand has a pathic undertone owing to the surplus of af-fect.<sup>296</sup> These two do not converge – a hiatus remains between them – and thus it is impossible to work through the experience exhaustively. Furthermore, the hiatus is multiplied: *what* one responds differs from *what* one responds *to*. Because of its pathic tinge, the latter – that is, the demand – cannot be invented, but it sure is singular, with what it inherits from the af-fect. It is possible, then, for it to lend weight to *what* we respond, which again is allowed latitude, especially if the response is *inventive*.<sup>297</sup> In fact, in its heterogeneity the demand appears *as* a demand only when the response is creative, for paradoxically it is precisely such a response that can tackle the difference in question. To put it more generally: for *pathos* and the deferred response to be thinkable together in their mutual *split*, so that the hiatus is not closed, the *response* must be a *creative* or *inventive* gesture.<sup>298</sup>

These hiatuses merit attention, if responding is examined in terms of the ‘self’ and the ‘alien’. The self-relation is instituted when one returns to the af-fect, in other words when one *distinguishes*, or *separates*, oneself from what has happened, for instance

296 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 60.

297 Waldenfels, “Réponse à l’autre. Éléments d’une phénoménologie responsive”, 374; *The Question of the Other*, 24–25, 34.

298 Waldenfels, *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, 49 / 31.

by asking, “what is it that I was affected by?”. Through this separation an alien relation is established – its form is now that of the relation to the Other, to its otherness – that is to say, what is established is a relation to what one is affected by. Waldenfels’s introducing the Other here is worth noting, as it brings a useful extra differentiation into the analysis of the alien experience, as we will soon see. The point is that the Other, by whom I prove to be affected in separation, is not only somebody different from me, but *my alike* (*meinesgleichen, mon semblable*) – and yet at the same time *incomparable*, as Waldenfels puts it. The Other, its otherness, then, is not to be understood as, for example, the wholly other (*ganz Andere*) outside of any order.<sup>299</sup>

Waldenfels’s point regarding the establishing of a relation to the alien is that it inevitably passes through the priority afforded the ‘self’, or self-thematization. According to him, the separation is of a one-sided nature,<sup>300</sup> even if tinged with the pathic. Whom indeed would af-fect bear upon, if not the self? But there is a reverse side to self-separation, namely the withdrawal of the alien.<sup>301</sup> For, as the hiatuses described above show, the surplus of af-fect, or affectedness outside the self, i.e., the *ecstatic alienness*, cannot be exhaustively appropriated. It can be said that the self encounters the alien within itself, or, in other words, in its split (*Spaltung*); at its core, the self does not coincide with itself. But at the same time, the alien is encountered elsewhere, with the Other, by which one feels affect-

299 Waldenfels, *The Question of the Other*, 81–82; see also *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, 84–90 / 53–57.

300 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 203. True, it should be underlined that the constitution of the self-relation is of alien origin.

It should be noted that separating oneself from the alien differs from a distinction drawn between the self and the alien by an impartial spectator.

301 Waldenfels, *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, 26–27 / 15–16.

ed already in advance.<sup>302</sup> This is where the Other, as introduced by Waldenfels, enters the picture. Now, the idea is that the ecstatic alienness (of the self) “is reinforced by the *duplicative alienness* of the Other”.<sup>303</sup> Interestingly, Waldenfels here alludes to the motif of the double (*Doppelgänger*).<sup>304</sup> This reminds us of the uncanny. In any case, Waldenfels stresses that “the doubling of myself in and by the Other” is constitutive of the self-relation. We can see that distinguishing oneself from the Other occurs with the Other<sup>305</sup>, as the notion of an inventive response, and the previousness of the alien implicated by it, in my view reveal. – Waldenfels sums up the issue as follows: to put “into words *that by which* (*Wovon*) we are affected, and *that to which* (*Woraufhin*) we respond.”<sup>306</sup>

However, this whole process must be seen to occur afterwards, through responding. As noted, alienness in its previousness depends on responding and on the surplus arising from the latter, so it is not integrated into any past or future now moment, into any point on the time line. Conceived of in accordance with afterwards-

302 Waldenfels describes in detail (see *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 186–215), how the constitution of the self-relation is organized into a process of self-doubling (*Selbstverdoppelung*). The ‘self’ doubled at the junctures of separation is thematized as “affected”, “addressed”, “touched by the demand”, as a “respondent”. There is a pathic undertone to these selves, for they originate with the alienness of *pathos*. Thus, in the course of self-constitution, various “selves” are differentiated, but without self-unification (*Selbsteinigung*) as the hiatuses suggest. Here Waldenfels’s idea differs from notions adopted by the philosophy of reflection. To each self-thematization corresponds a (self-)withdrawal.

303 Waldenfels, *The Question of the Other*, 82; see also *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, 86 / 54.

304 Ibid. Waldenfels quotes Valéry, who in his *Cahiers* writes: “The Other, the like of me, or maybe my double, that is the most magnetic abyss – the most reviving question, the most malicious obstacle – something which alone prevents all that remains from being confused, from being altogether estranged. Rather ape than imitator – reflex which responds, precedes, amazes.”

305 Waldenfels uses the term ‘*Veränderung*’ (‘Othering’) to describe this process.

306 See Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel*, 335.

ness (*Nachträglichkeit*) time is not linear but diastatic. The previousness of the affect and the afterwardsness of the response concur in experience.<sup>307</sup> I am referring here to the double event discussed above, in which the moments of previousness and afterwardsness remain tensionally together in the temporal shift.<sup>308</sup> Contact in its dissymmetry adheres to this diastatic model of time. The relation unites the parties, but in a delivering manner: it makes up an *entbindende Band*.<sup>309</sup> The alien in contact is irrevocably archaic and, simultaneously, always located in a non-place, inaccessible, elsewhere. Judging by Waldenfels’s explications, he regards a relation of this kind as distance in proximity. And as noted, touch offers a paradigmatic example of it.<sup>310</sup>

## VII

In what follows, I shall set forth a few remarks connected to *touch and limit* to accompany the previous discussion of the pathic experience. The questions of limit and of drawing boundaries are, to be sure, present in Waldenfels in various ways, for according to him the alien is a limit phenomenon *par excellence*.<sup>311</sup> What I am concerned about here, however, is touch itself as a limit phenomenon or a threshold phenomenon.<sup>312</sup> I am referring to the analyses of Nancy and Derrida, which show that the *limit and touch constitute each other*.

307 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 103.

308 In my view, this amounts to the spacing of experience.

309 As regards the reciprocity discussed in the first part of the present essay, the dissymmetry of contact has to be taken into account. Waldenfels borrows the notion of a bond that delivers, *entbindende Band*, from Heidegger (*Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 262 / 131).

310 See Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel*, 325, and *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, 193–194.

311 Waldenfels, *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*, 15–33 / 8–20.

312 Derrida, referring to Nancy, speaks of the limit as a figure of touch (*Le toucher*, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, 121–123 / 103–105).

Above I have, in different contexts, touched upon the idea of limit without paying specific attention to the problematic. It is evident, for instance, that touch is a sensation of limit. The fault lines of pathic experience as described by Waldenfels are also easily associated with the idea of the limit of experience. Moreover, the tension of contact, as well as the hyphen applied to the spelling of the word (con-tact), are revealing of a borderline, although they have been discussed above mostly in terms of uniting and separating.<sup>313</sup> In addition to these, processes usually regarded as mental, such as thinking, are not immune to the impact of the problematic of the limit; according to Nancy, the decisive question thinking has to tackle is its experience of its own limits.<sup>314</sup> We note the interesting fact that the theme of the limit covers various registers, in a manner alike to Nancy's term *sens*.

Conceiving of touch as touching the limit is one of Nancy's key points.<sup>315</sup> At the background lies the notion of finitude, denoting exposition, not privation or incompleteness, as is customary. The concept of limit in fact supplements in a useful way my previous outline of the touch of existence. However, I shall not pursue the thought further here, but simply remind the reader of the radical starting point of Waldenfels's analysis of alien experience, that is, the being-affected. Now, this experience of being moved (i.e., hetero-affec-

tion) comes close to Nancy's conceptions, for he understands such being moved as an experience of the limit.<sup>316</sup> The experience of the limit resembles the "lived impossibility" described by Waldenfels: due to the touch of the impossible, or the incommensurable (the heterogeneous other), experience takes a step to the limit, ending up in the grip of affection – and in this way, feels its limits. As mentioned many times above, touching means letting oneself be touched by what one touches. Here being moved is understood as an emotion, or (e)motion, as a pleasure mixed with pain, a discordant feeling, or sentiment, in which pleasure and pain touch each other.<sup>317</sup>

313 According to Nancy, there is no tension except at the limit (Jean-Luc Nancy, "L'offrande sublime", *Une pensée finie*, 181 / "The Sublime Offering", *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks. Stanford: Stanford University Press 2003, 234). It should be noted that the threshold can, of course, be thought of as something that unites and separates.

314 In Nancy's view, thinking is not intellectuality, but the experience of its limits (*L'expérience de la liberté*, 158 / 122).

315 According to Nancy, touch is the limit and vice versa (*La communauté désœuvrée*, 96 / *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press 2012, 39; "L'offrande sublime", 182 / 235).

316 Nancy develops thoughts when scrutinizing Kant's analysis of the sublime (see "L'offrande sublime"). He notes that the Latin *sublimitas* (the corresponding adjective is *sublimis*, from which the word "sublime" is derived) can, as a word, be interpreted as what stays just below (*sub*) the limit (*limes* – or *limen*, threshold), as what touches the limit. It is a matter of reaching the limit, as it were, for within the tradition of the sublime, limit is conceived of in terms of (absolute) height (179 / 233).

Kant describes the limit experience of the sublime as an emotional effect, or being moved (*Rührung*), and also uses the word *bewegt*, denoting agitation (Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft, Werkausgabe Band X*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1977, B88, B98 / *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett 1987, 108, 115.) True, he analyses this limit experience with regard to the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*); according to Nancy, in the sublime imagination touches its limit, and this touch makes it feel *itself*, or, "its own powerlessness". But, as the imagination, from the Kantian point of view, plays a decisive part in the constitution of object-oriented, representational experience, it can be thought that the limit (of the imagination) traced out in the sublime radically intervenes in the conditions of possibility and constitution of representational experience. Derrida considers it possible that when speaking of the sublime, Nancy is in fact speaking of experience in general (see *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 129 / 111). It should be noted that the limit of experience, as described here, should be conceived of as that from which experience, paradoxically, springs.

317 Nancy, "L'offrande sublime", 183 / 235–236; see also Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, B88, B97 / 108–109, 114–115.

As I see it, Nancy interprets this discordant sentiment as being revealing of a specific sensibility (*sensibilité*).<sup>318</sup> Limit, then, must be thought of as being traced, or brought out, in the form of this sensibility. The limit is not given, not already there, for what it is all about is the event of being *moved*. Thus, the tension of the pleasure and pain touching each other indicates the sentiment of (the tracing out of) the limit. It is worth noting that such a limit of experience does not pertain to the subjective sphere of perception. Therefore, it is quite in order to switch to the vocabulary of touch.<sup>319</sup> Sensuousness, then, begins to be articulated otherwise. Among other things, the traditional, subjective basic form of sensuousness mentioned earlier, namely intuition (*Anschauung*), loses ground.

It is essential to note that neither is the sentiment, its intimacy notwithstanding, reducible to subjectivity here. For the sentiment of the limit is simultaneously the limit of sentiment. This means that sentiment borders on insensibility, *apatheia*<sup>320</sup>, which, paradoxically, is to be found in the intimate core of sensibility. What is at issue is the fact that pleasure and pain do not coincide in the discordant sentiment of being moved, but *touch* each other, each due to the *touch* of the other, so that an anaesthetic hiatus remains between them. This intimate hiatus or difference indicates that being moved by the touch of the heterogeneous, or experience taking to the limit, equals being exposed to insensibility. But at the same time such a reaching for the limit means being drawn towards the

self, as we will soon see. Instead of “insensibility”, we could just as well write the “untouchable”, for this is a matter of contact.<sup>321</sup> It could also be replaced by the “outside”, a term we already encountered in Nancy, who uses it in this very context. According to him, intimacy derives from this kind of exposition to the outside, and is linked to it. In Nancy’s analysis, the *pathos* familiar from Waldenfels turns out to be a *pathos* of *apatheia*, a sentiment of insensibility. Here sentiment presents itself under its pathic aspect. The link to the moment of the outside detaches it from subjectivity, and renders it singular.<sup>322</sup>

But how to understand the idea, that when reaching for the limit, experience is tensionally drawn towards the self? To clarify this, I will take up the body, to which Nancy already introduced us through the touch of existence. In that context, I hinted at the peculiarities of his ontological thinking of the body. One of these is constituted by the order of sensuousness falling out of joint, of which the bursts of laughter provoked by the joke already gave us a feel.<sup>323</sup> This dislocation can guide us when trying to see how sensuousness can be articulated otherwise. What I am getting at here is *sensuality*, or the eroticization of the senses, which constitutes a central dimension of Nancy’s thinking of the body. As we know,

318 See Nancy, “L’offrande sublime”, 183–184 / 235–236.

319 The limit does not come into view. According to Nancy, the mode of the presentation of a limit is its being touched. Thus, we have to “change *sense*, pass from sight to touch”. (“L’offrande sublime”, 179. The quoted passage is missing from the English translation – transl. note.)

320 Nancy (“L’offrande sublime”, 183 / 235) extracts the Greek word *apatheia* from Kant, for whom it means affectlessness, *Affektlosigkeit*. According to Kant, even affectlessness (*apatheia*, *phlegma in significatu bono*) is sublime (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, B121–122 / 132–133).

321 This moment of the “untouchable”, which, according to Nancy, lies in the heart of contact, gives him occasion to conceive of contact in terms of threshold, and to employ the formula the *sensing/sensed* (or: the feeling/felt, the touching/touched). The threshold of touch shows that interruption and spacing are inherent in contact, as Derrida underlines (*Le toucher*, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, 221 / 195). The idea here is that those sharing in contact share that which divides them.

322 Let it be noted that the dimension of sense (*sens*) opens up from the limit of insensibility. I am alluding to the “obscure threshold” of sense mentioned earlier. At the same time it should be noted that, in its incommensurability, this dimension precedes not only sentiment but also concept. (See Nancy, “L’*éthique originaire*’ de Heidegger”, 108 / 191.)

323 According to Derrida, the singularity of Nancy’s work lies in another thinking of the body (*Le toucher*, *Jean-Luc Nancy*, 140 / 122).

touching, for instance, can be eroticized into an enjoyably exciting stroke.<sup>324</sup> By sensuality, Nancy understands a sensibility that enjoys itself (*jouit d'elle-même*) instead of being content with providing sensorial information.<sup>325</sup> I remind the reader of the Aristotelian notion brought up earlier, according to which a sense senses, and at the same time senses itself sensing; a moment of self-relation is inherent in sensing.<sup>326</sup>

Sensuality modifies the settings of the discordant sentiment of pleasure and pain, for it is a matter of *sensual pleasure*. The starting point for the notion of sensual pleasure developed by Nancy here is Freud's idea of sexual *fore-pleasure* (*Vorlust*), which is localized in the erogenous zones of the body, and indicates the zoning of the erotic relation as well.<sup>327</sup> Fore-pleasure amounts to the excitation of an erogenous zone, that is, a feeling of *tension rising step by step*. Or, to put it more exactly, and with the help of Freud himself, what is in question is a zoned tension that increases gradually, a tension in which pleasure (*Lust*) caused by, say, touch, arouses a *desire for more pleasure*.<sup>328</sup> Indeed, excitation increasing stepwise simultaneously both produces a feeling of satisfaction (i.e., pleasure) of its own, and, in the form of desire, adds to the (unpleasantly) impel-

ling state of tension.<sup>329</sup> Now, diverging in this regard from Freud, Nancy conceives of pleasure in terms of the model of excitation, or tensional fore-pleasure.<sup>330</sup> The unpleasant, even painful feature brought into pleasure by tension pertains to it just as much as does the temporary phase of satisfaction.<sup>331</sup> With its moments of desire and satisfaction, the pleasure Nancy has in mind proves *ambiguous*, and is no more reducible to satisfaction as mere relaxation, differing in this from pleasure as traditionally understood.<sup>332</sup> This kind of

324 I am referring to Freud, who states that regarding touch, it is generally known what a source of pleasure and, together with it, an influx of a fresh excitation is afforded by the tactile sensations of the skin of the sexual object (*Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, 55 / 156, see also 49 / 149–150).

325 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le Plaisir au dessin*. Paris: Galilée 2009, 59 / *The Pleasure in Drawing*, trans. Philip Armstrong. New York: Fordham University Press 2013, p.46.

326 Nancy formulates the matter as follows: sensing “signifies [...] quite simply to relate to oneself the effect – and thus the affect – of a non-self or exteriority [*un dehors*]” (ibid., 103 / 83).

327 Pleasure in general is tied to a relation (ibid., 84 / 66).

328 See Freud, *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, 111 / 210. The term “desire”, used by Nancy, refers here to Freud's expression “a need for greater pleasure”. It is a matter of additional pleasure (*ein Mehr von Lust*) (ibid.; Nancy, *Les Muses*, 33 / 16).

329 Freud, *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, 114, and n. 1 / 212, and n. 1. Freud's basic notion of pleasure is economic, and complies with the pleasure principle coined by him. According to it, an increase in psychic tension, or intensity, amounts to an unpleasant, even painful, feeling of displeasure (*Unlust*), whereas a decrease in tension is felt as pleasure (*Lust*), and thus, as one would imagine, as something preferable. With regard to this model, sexual fore-pleasure is contradictory, for in it pleasure and pain are no longer mutually exclusive states.

330 Unlike Freud, Nancy does not think that the fore-pleasure produced by erogenous zones constitutes a preparatory phase of genital discharge, pleasure in the relaxation of tension.

331 In fact, according to Nancy it is tension that should be conceived of as implicating the moment of satisfaction (see *Le Plaisir au dessin*, 103 / 83).

332 Nancy brings up Freud's allusion to the German word *Lust*, which is equivocal. The word “has two meanings, and is used to describe the sensation of sexual tension (*‘Ich habe Lust’* = ‘I should like to’, ‘I feel an impulse to’) as well as the feeling of satisfaction”. (Freud, *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, 114, n. 1 / 212, n. 1.) On the ambiguity of pleasure, see Nancy, *Le Plaisir au dessin*, 61, 101–109 / 47, 81–88.

ambiguous *pleasure in tension*, or pleasure of desiring, is contrary to the *pleasure principle* and leads beyond it.<sup>333</sup>

But what about the question of self-relation that prompted these considerations on pleasure? It is worth noting that, according to Nancy, Aristotle's idea of the self-relation required by sensing – *se sentir sentir* – holds good not only for sensation, but also for feeling, or sentiment, and, consequently, for pleasure.<sup>334</sup> Above I stated that sensuality amounts to a sensibility that enjoys itself. Sensuality, then, can be linked to fore-pleasure, or excitation, in the manner described above<sup>335</sup>, but in what sense can one speak of a self-relation pertaining to such *sensual pleasure*? The answer is to be found “beyond the pleasure principle”.<sup>336</sup> But now this “beyond” should be understood as “internal” to the pleasure in tension, for, due to the gradually tightening tension of excitation, pleasure is

333 The pleasure principle gives priority, not to the pleasure in tension, but to the pleasure in satisfaction, or the discharge of tension, understood as the goal of the whole process. In the Freudian model, the fore-pleasure only serves this sort of “end-pleasure” (*Endlust*), which is “wholly a pleasure of satisfaction”, and is “brought about entirely by discharge”; with end-pleasure “all tension is removed” (see Freud, *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, 112, 114 / 210, 212). The ambiguous pleasure (*Lust*) Nancy has in mind is in this model divided, its two aspects corresponding to two pleasures of different origin.

On a more general note, Nancy remarks that it is actually impossible for pleasure to be realized as “wholly a pleasure of satisfaction”, as it, according to the pleasure principle, is supposed to. For what the pleasure principle ultimately comes down to is exhaustive satisfaction, or a final and generalized discharge of tension, its being levelled off. Such entropy of desire should, however, be felt as a relaxation, but such an experience is impossible, because of the liquidation of the relation to the self. (See Nancy, “In Statu Nascendi”, 228–229; “Système du plaisir (kantien) (avec post-scriptum freudien)”, *La pensée dérobée*, Paris: Galilée 2001, 79 / “System of (Kantian) Pleasure (With a Freudian Postscript)”. In Phil Rothfield (ed.) *Kant after Derrida*, ed. Phil Rothfield, trans. Céline Surprenant. Manchester: Clinamen Press 2003, p.138–139; *Le plaisir au dessin*, 103 / 83.)

334 Nancy, *Le Plaisir au dessin*, 103 / 83.

335 See *ibid.*, 59/46.

336 The expression “beyond the pleasure principle” is Freud's.

marked by a *difference* that is *not levelled out*<sup>337</sup>, as it should be, if pleasure were addressed in terms of finality. The difference in question, characteristic of sensual pleasure, is unequable, and cannot be evened out at the expense of either of the moments, satisfaction *or* tension. It can be said that the stakes of sensuality are to be found in the self-relation of pleasure rather than in the dissolving of its ambiguity – whether into a definitive form of pleasure (cf. exhaustive satisfaction) *or* beyond it.<sup>338</sup> For excitation is a matter of an intimate relation to the other.

Nancy now thinks of this *unequable difference as pleasure*.<sup>339</sup> Owing to it, sensual pleasure turns out to be a pleasure that is dislocated – and in such a way, moreover, that it is exactly in this manner that it becomes *localized: dis-location*.<sup>340</sup> In what follows, we will examine the zoning of the body. But the matter is of central importance regarding the question of the self-relation of pleasure, too, for the dislocation makes pleasure a limit phenomenon. Sensuality, which “takes pleasure in tension”,<sup>341</sup> follows the logic of limit and

337 See Nancy, “Système du plaisir (kantien) (avec post-scriptum freudien)”, 79–80 / 139.

338 The ambiguity of pleasure is not settled by satisfaction. And the same holds true for another possibility that represents just as one-sided an attempt by pleasure to realize itself, but this time beyond the pleasure principle, as it were. For tension does not attain an intensity such that it would surpass the opposition between tension and its abatement (that is, satisfaction) and permit – at the expense of the ambiguity in question – tension being fully present to itself (see *L'“il y a” du rapport sexuel*. Paris: Galilée 2001, 43 / “The ‘There Is’ of Sexual Relation”, *Corpus II. Writings on Sexuality*, trans. Anne O'Byrne. New York: Fordham University Press 2013, 17). As I see it, both the alternative attempts at realization approach pleasure in terms of identity (and those of finality). All in all, the difference of tension proves unequable (“Système du plaisir (kantien) (avec post-scriptum freudien)”, 79–80 / 139), and perhaps, as Nancy suggests, “rhythmic” (*Le Plaisir au dessin*, 65 / 49).

339 Nancy, “Système du plaisir (kantien) (avec post-scriptum freudien)”, 79–80 / 139.

340 See Nancy, *Les Muses*, 33–34 / 16; *Le sens du monde*, 205 / 133.

341 Nancy, *Le Plaisir au dessin*, 59 / 47.

touch.<sup>342</sup> Each step of excitation, progressing stepwise, is a fresh and singular step that takes excitation to its limit. Pleasure as dislocated, or dis-located, then proves to be pleasure at the limit or *limit pleasure*<sup>343</sup> that takes place through the touch of the other. Above we already got acquainted with the sentiment of limit.

In this limit pleasure, what is to be taken as a limit phenomenon, precisely, is the rhythmically<sup>344</sup> recurrent tension. According to Nancy, there is no tension except at the limit.<sup>345</sup> If we return to the self-relation of pleasure, we can find the “self” in this *tension*. The idea may seem peculiar, but, as already noted, according to Nancy the “self” is a relation to the self. I previously discussed the divergent self-relation of ek-sistence, which we came to know in the form “towards itself” (*à soi*). The “self” is now specified as the *tension* of this “towards itself”.<sup>346</sup> Taking into account the connection of tension with the limit and touch it can be said that here *pleasure (in tension) touches itself as a limit*. Let us recall here that, for Nancy, the self-relation is connected to coming into presence.

To summarize: The unequal difference indicates that the self-relation of pleasure is constituted solely by the *tension* of the “towards itself” of pleasure – or as a “[threshold] at which [excitation] properly touches the intimacy of its own being excited”,<sup>347</sup> We can see that when it comes to sensual pleasure, the self-relation should not

lead one to neglect the touch of the heterogeneous (other), “the proximity of the distant”, as Nancy puts it.<sup>348</sup> The step taken by sensuality to its limit – its self-relation – is, in fact, revealing of the fact that *due to its touchingness, the other weighs* on the core of sensual pleasure.<sup>349</sup>

The erogenous zone follows this logic of excitation. The topic would require closer scrutiny, but here I will confine myself to a couple of remarks. Sensuality indicates a zoning of the body, but this zoning is at the same time extended to the erotic relation that excitation is all about.<sup>350</sup> Let us keep in mind Nancy’s ontology of the body, of the being-with of bodies. Zoning amounts to the eroticization of the sense, or its dislocation into the divergence of its enjoyment. The zones are not physiological, but organs of pleasure-desire spaced by gradually growing tension, “mobile and fleeting circumscriptions”, as Nancy says.<sup>351</sup> Zoning, then, locally dislocates the normal order of sensuousness. Sensuousness is articulated anew, as I noted above; the body becomes differentiated and marked by tensional pleasure. What is more, in the local divergence of its enjoyment the body is ex-tended and touchable. For Nancy, the possibility of bodies to enjoy each other lies here. The body enjoys being touched by other bodies.<sup>352</sup>

342 As noted above, the limit and touch constitute each other.

343 See Nancy, *Le sens du monde*, 205 / 133.

344 See Nancy, *Le Plaisir au dessin*, 105 / 84.

345 Nancy, “L’offrande sublime”, 181 / 234.

346 Nancy, *Le Plaisir au dessin*, 103–104 / 83. Nancy stresses that the “self” is to be understood as “towards itself”. According to him, here the *self* is a matter of tension, for it cannot be fixed. It does not amount to interiority, nor is it a goal, but, as Nancy somewhat enigmatically puts it, the “tension’s extension” (*le tendu de la tension*) (ibid.). I want to remind the reader of how there is an *undecidable* ambiguity to the German word *Lust*.

347 Nancy, *L’“il y a” du rapport sexuel*, 41 / 16.

348 Touch only attains a relation to itself when touched by what it touches and because it touches it (see Nancy, *Les Muses*, 35 / 17). Here I want to take up once again the abovementioned remark of Nancy’s concerning self-touching “[that] necessarily passes through exteriority – this is why I cannot feel myself without feeling the other and being felt by the other” (*Corpus*, 125).

349 The self-relation is intertwined with consent to “an outside, to an other – to an alterity or alteration” (Nancy, *Le Plaisir au dessin*, 44 / 32; see also 86 / 67–68).

350 This relation as zoning is to be understood as the configuration of a body of relation (Nancy, *L’“il y a” du rapport sexuel*, 44 / 18).

351 Ibid., 42 / 16–17. As “mobile and fleeting circumscriptions”, the zones are “identical to the gestures that designate them as zones and excite or inflame them” (ibid.).

352 See Nancy, *Corpus*, 102–103 / 117.

It is noteworthy regarding the present topic that the logic of sensuality gives primacy to touch. Nancy remarks, for instance, that according to Freud visual stimulation ultimately derives from touching.<sup>353</sup> It could be added to this that being stimulated by what one sees – excitation that is, as such, kindled by the attraction of what is seen, by its touch<sup>354</sup> – gives rise to a sensual pleasure, the increasing tension of which is equally articulated in terms of touch, as we saw earlier. The primacy of touch among all the senses<sup>355</sup> results from the fact stressed by Nancy that even though every sense senses itself sensing, touch more than the other senses takes place only in touching itself, its own limit, or in other words, in touching itself as limit. And this is due to the touch of the heterogeneous.<sup>356</sup> Touch is, so to speak, confined to touching the limit. According to Derrida, however, the limit of touch simultaneously amounts to a certain kind of non-limitation. In his view, this can be seen from the fact that touch – precisely because of the feature of self-touching typical to it – “is the being of every sense in general” and thus constitutes the sense of the senses. It thus gains in Nancy a “quasi-transcendental” position in relation to the senses and sensibility.<sup>357</sup> In fact, according to Nancy, the impact of touch ranges even wid-

353 Nancy, *Les Muses*, 34 / 16–17 (see also Freud, *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, 55 / 156 and 111 / 209). According to Nancy, the point no doubt holds good for all the other senses, too.

354 Freud speaks of visual impressions (*optische Eindruck*), which most frequently are the cause of libidinal excitation (*ibid.*). But what I have in mind here is pathic touchingness, not an impression. I am alluding to Derrida, who adapts the logic of touch to the other senses as well. According to him, it is quite possible to be touched by what one sees or hears, but it is not at all necessary that one be seen by what one sees, or heard by what one hears (*Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 312 / 276). As I see it, such affectability is what sensibility amounts to.

355 See e.g. Nancy, *Les Muses*, 34 / 16.

356 Nancy, “L’offrande sublime”, 183 / 235.

357 Jacques Derrida, “*Le toucher – Touch / to touch him*”, trans. by Peggy Kamuf, *Paragraph*, vol. 16.2, 134; *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 309–311 / 274–275.

er within the sphere of the term *sens*, all the way to understanding and reason.<sup>358</sup> Indeed, it becomes the “‘transcendental’ of sense”.<sup>359</sup> It should be borne in mind, though, that due to the incommensurability of the untouchable it brings with it, touch is not a uniform concept. In this regard, speaking of a *quasi-transcendental*, or putting “transcendental” in quotation marks, is quite in order.<sup>360</sup>

### VIII

To conclude, I will return to some of the themes I started off with. In particular, I am thinking about Derrida and his willingness to draw attention to the *manner* in which touch should be examined, or *touched upon*.<sup>361</sup> Likewise, in relation to touch itself, we can pose the question of *how to touch*. But what I have in mind here is not some particular way of touching, such as caressing, hitting, stinging, or the like, but rather *tact* and a potential *measure for touch*.

Speaking of measure might seem odd in this context; have I not all down the line emphasized the heterogeneity and incommensurability of the pathic in relation to measurable space? Nancy, however, remarks that touch requires a measure.<sup>362</sup> Moreover, Derrida manages to track down a notion of measure in Aristotle as well.<sup>363</sup>

358 See Jean-Luc Nancy, “*Res ipsa et ultima*”, *La pensée dérobée*, Paris: Galilée 2001, 184 / “*Res ipsa et ultima*”, *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Steven Miller, Stanford: Stanford University Press 2003, 316.

359 Jean-Luc Nancy, “Sens elliptique”, *Une pensée finie*, 293 / “Elliptical Sense”, *A Finite Thinking*, 110. Nancy speaks of touch as the “limit of sense”, too, but straight away warns against assuming that we should in this way have found the essential sense of touch (*Corpus*, 40 / 43).

360 See Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 311 / 275. Conceptual condition of possibility, which is what transcendental means, here comprehends a moment of impossibility.

361 Let it be noted that according to Derrida, touch cannot be thematically dealt with before asking *who touches whom, and how* (*Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 84 / 68–69).

362 Nancy, “Calcul du poète”, 69.

363 Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, 61–62 / 47–48.

It should be kept in mind that according to Aristotle, also that which is not to be touched, that is, the intangible, constitutes an object of the tactile sense, for it is a matter of an excessive touch of the object to which touching might expose.<sup>364</sup> This demands restraint – “thou shalt not touch too much [nor] let yourself be touched too much”<sup>365</sup> – but of course does not do away with the desire for touching, as can be seen also from Derrida’s subtle analyses.<sup>366</sup> Here it is important to note that, on the basis of the intangible, Derrida suggests that Aristotle’s thinking of touch touches the untouchable; in this respect he finds in it a point in common with Nancy.<sup>367</sup> This merits attention when it comes to the potential measure for touch.

But to go further, let us recall the demand of tact we encountered at the very beginning of the essay. Nancy brings up a sensitive point residing in touch: it is one that calls for sensitivity, or tact, so that touch could – the temptations of immediacy notwithstanding – pursue its exposing subtlety.<sup>368</sup> Tact is likely to bring out something very much to the point about the heterogeneity of touch. However, we should also note the disturbingly apt words of Derrida: it is tactless to touch too much, but equally tactless not to touch enough.<sup>369</sup>

Focusing on tact itself, we come to realize that it is a question of something that *can* but *must not* be touched. This “can but must not” can, following Derrida, also be given the form: tangible, un-

touchable.<sup>370</sup> We note that *tact forces the thinking of touch to think the untouchable*, but in such a way that the latter is included in the tangible as an impossible and yet inevitable “aspect” of it.<sup>371</sup> Above I have addressed the untouchable in pathic terms, and presented it as the withdrawing “aspect” residing in the touched, thanks to which the touched is touching. In my view, tact is well suited to articulate such sensitivity. However, one should bear in mind Derrida’s central concern, namely the danger of immediacy lurking in touch, since it threatens to obscure the heterogeneity and overdeterminedness of touch. In Derrida’s view, tact breaks with this immediacy due to its untouchable “aspect”.<sup>372</sup> “To touch with tact is to touch without touching that which does not let itself be touched.”<sup>373</sup> We can see that here contact (and touch) is approached in terms of *interruption*. We could also speak of a hiatus, threshold, or limit, for Derrida considers them part of this lexicon of interruption constitutive of touch (and contact).<sup>374</sup> From this point of view, touching is possible solely by not touching. Earlier I spoke of distance in proximity.

364 Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 435b.

365 Derrida, *Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, 61–62 / 47.

366 Ibid., 82 / 66–67 (see also 62 / 47–48).

367 Ibid., 30 / 18.

368 See Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, 25 / 13.

369 Derrida, *Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, 91 / 75.

370 See *ibid.*, e.g. 79 / 65. See also 334 / 298, where Derrida makes a distinction between the *intangible*, i.e. the *cannot-touch*, and the *untouchable*, the *must-not-touch*: “Between the intangible and the untouchable, the *différance* of tact.”

371 See *ibid.*, 30 / 18, and also 334 / 297–298. Here Derrida connects tact with the limit of touch.

372 See *ibid.*, e.g. 328 / 293. The untouchable then presents itself as the limit of touch, it is inaccessible to tact itself; not even sensibility can reach it (see *ibid.*, 332 / 296).

373 *Ibid.*, 328 / 292.

374 According to Derrida, interruption constitutes touch as self-touching (*ibid.*, 129 / 111). In this context, he refers to experience as an experience of the limit (that is, as a touching the limit).

Now, if it is tact that gives the measure to touch, this measure of touch is the untouchable and withdrawing aspect inherent in the tangible.<sup>375</sup>

I want to return once more to Derrida's troubling words on tactlessness. It is not difficult to discern in its two versions – “to touch too much” and “not to touch enough” – two heterogeneous moments (“to touch”, “not to touch”), which we can see are put *in contact*<sup>376</sup> in the paradox of tact, formulated by Derrida as follows: “to touch without touching”. Tact shows that touch is properly a touch of its own limit.<sup>377</sup> But what is disturbing is the fact that when touching one's own limit, one, according to Derrida, ultimately touches too much, or too little (not enough). In other words, touch gains an *improper* tone from the touch of what is most *proper* to it. It seems that tact is not reducible to skill or know-how.<sup>378</sup> Let it be noted that for Derrida, tact is a matter of *law* rather than know-how. He speaks of a *law of tact*.<sup>379</sup> This essentially affects the framing of the question. On a more general level, Derrida emphasizes the hiatus or divergence in con-tact, or a non-contact at the heart of contact, for according to him it constitutes the condition of the experience of contact.<sup>380</sup>

375 At one point Nancy says that it is withdrawal that gives the measure of touch (see *Noli me tangere*, 28 / 15).

376 See Derrida, *Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, 83 / 67–68.

377 It should be noted that here the haptic and pathic notions of touch are not necessarily distinguished from one another.

378 I am forced to heavily simplify Derrida's subtle ideas here (for more details, see Derrida, *Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, e.g. 129 / 111).

379 See *ibid.*, e.g. 81–84 / 66–69.

380 See *ibid.*, 249 / 221. It is interesting that Derrida phenomenologically traces the *sense* of contact back to the interruption of contact. He also speaks of tact beyond contact (*ibid.*, 91 / 76). Hence, the sense of contact or contact as such does not manifest itself in contact (see *ibid.*, 257–258 / 228–229).

But finally, what about thinking? How does the touch of the untouchable affect the thinking of touch? Or, looking at the matter from a wider perspective, must thinking in general take into account the problematics of tact?<sup>381</sup> These questions are too extensive to be answered here. I shall confine myself to briefly remarking on an idea to be found in Nancy. He conceives of the untouchable as something that weighs, and that *weighs on* thinking (the thinking of touch). Above I discussed the untouchable in terms of impossibility, heterogeneity, and incommensurability, but in this context, one can also speak of its inappropriability. For the untouchable escapes the hold of thinking, even though it weighs on it. According to Nancy, it is the body in its ex-tendedness that in this way pushes thinking to its limits.

Early on in this essay I noted how touch demands a pathic mode of thinking that differs from discursivity and representativity. I alluded to the feel that that which is touched upon (i.e., examined) – in this case, touch, or the sense of touch – requires from thinking. Now the point of contact we sought after in the form of this “feel” is occupied by the weight of the untouchable. Nancy's idea is that at this limit thinking, *penser*, turns into weighing, *peser*.<sup>382</sup> Thinking then becomes a weighing of the unthinkable, or a measuring of the incommensurable, impossible, and unbearable that weighs on it.

*English translation by Anna Tuomikoski*

381 I refer here to Nancy's idea of thinking as conducting oneself. Let us also note that Heidegger, in his “Letter on ‘Humanism’”, outlines a *Gesetz der Schicklichkeit*, a “law of fittingness” concerning the thoughtful saying of the history of being (see *Wegmarken*, 359–360 / 276). Heidegger's sketch makes one wonder, if the German word *Schicklichkeit* is, in this context, tinged with tactfulness.

382 Nancy elaborates on these thoughts in “Le poids d'une pensée”. See also Derrida's comments in *Le toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy, 87–90 / 72–74, 329–335 / 293–299.

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As a sense modality, touch has been both over- and undervalued in Western culture. On the one hand, touch has been regarded as the basis of sense certainty and as a rather normative support to the theoretical gaze. On the other hand, it has been considered as vague, vulgar, drive-related or impure. Due to these contradictory and potentially subversive qualities, touch has been invested with various emancipatory expectations. In its ambivalence, the very *sense* of touch is essentially over-determined.

The texts of this volume address various dimensions of touch, where touch is not only a matter of sensory experience or bodily capacity, but also one of technics and vulnerability, of exposure and depth, of delicacy and tact. Some of the chapters venture out to the obscure borderlands of the phenomenal world where knowledge-oriented approaches encounter their limits, while others address something we could call generative patterns, or, as the title suggests, “figures of touch”.

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