A Touch of Doubt

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by Giuseppe Veltri

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A Touch of Doubt

On Haptic Scepticism

Edited by
Rachel Aumiller

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Fig. 1: Mark Tansey, *Doubting Thomas,* 1986, oil on canvas, 65 x 54 inches (165.1 x 137.2 cm.) © Mark Tansey. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery, New York.

Rachel Aumiller

Sensation & Hesitation: Haptic Scepticism as an Ethics of Touching

It is said that seeing is believing. Typically, this adage is taken to mean that sight is the strongest empirical affirmation of what we believe to be true. And yet, as the adage also implies, although sight may strengthen one's belief, it does not guarantee certain knowledge. In opposition to sight, touch presents itself as proof for what is real. Touch can serve as a reality check that awakens an individual from her slumber. We pinch ourselves to confirm we are not dreaming. We slap a comrade across the cheek to bring him to his senses.[1]

This volume traces an alliance drawn throughout the history of Western philosophy and religion between belief and sight on one side and doubt/certainty and touch on the other. In everyday speech, the sceptic is often associated with the figure of "Doubting Thomas": the disbeliever with the compulsion to touch what others accept on appearance alone. Whereas the dogmatist may be satisfied with believing what she sees, the sceptic is not satisfied until she has thrust her finger into the very site of her uncertainty.

Although the sceptic has been framed as the doubter with the compulsion to touch and thus overcome doubt, the history of philosophical scepticism questions the reliability of the senses, giving particular attention to touch. We find sceptical accounts of touch in Pyrrho's modes, which describe the inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies of our tactile sensations (our pleasure and pain, our sense of coolness and warmth).[2] We may also consider René Descartes's suspicion of the parchment that he holds in his own hands (not to mention the existence of his own hands), which he performs as an exercise in scepticism.[3] Other classical sceptical arguments about touch abound: Perhaps I am dreaming (dreaming even of the sensation of pinching myself awake). Perhaps I am not the active knower—the one who touches—perhaps I am instead the one who is touched—by spirits, by an evil genius, by illness, by madness.[4]

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1 Throughout this chapter I alternate between different pronouns: she, he, they. My pronoun choice reflects both a critical and playful perspective on gender.

2 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, trans. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): haptic sensation as subjective and situational (I.56, 80–87, 109, 210–11; II.52); haptic sensation as contradictory or paradoxical (I.91–94; III.194–97).

3 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993).

4 Plato's *Theaetetus* addresses debates surrounding the reliability of sensation in connection to the characterization of knowledge itself as a dream (Plato, *Theaetetus*, in *Theaetetus and Sophist*, trans. Christopher Rowe [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015], 201d8–6c2). The sceptical trope of questioning sensation as a product of dreams, illness, or madness stretches from Platonism to mod-

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Sometimes, the sceptic openly confesses to her compulsion to touch or to be touched; at other times, this accusation is made against the insatiable sceptic who is not content with faith alone. This leads me to the questions that inspired the topic of this volume: How did the sceptic gain the reputation not only as the doubter, but also as the toucher? Has she been falsely framed? Or is there some truth to the characterisation of the sceptic as one who pokes holes in every dogma with which she comes into contact? Why does the sceptic get off on sticking her hands into the sticky cracks of reason itself? Does the sceptic get her hands dirty in order to overcome her doubt, or does touching only complicate the matter at hand further?

In order to pursue these questions, the Maimonides Centre's research team on Jewish Scepticism at the University of Hamburg joined powers with a research team oriented in the Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis called "The Language of Touch: Linguistic Perspectives in Haptic Studies." This most unusual collaboration gave rise to a series of workshops and lectures held in Germany, Slovenia, and the United States. It also inspired several unconventional research initiatives, such as an international project in philosophy and film called *Haptic Cinematography* and an interactive installation called *Hegel's Begriff*.

Our investigations led us to identify the prominent theme of touch throughout the history of philosophical scepticism and its intersections with religion, politics, art, and culture. We go so far as to claim that the theme of touch—shaped by shifting cultural attitudes towards touching—drives major shifts in the questions posed by philosophy. And yet, despite the persistent question of touch at each philosophical stage, this key aspect of scepticism had not yet been named or acknowledged in mainstream philosophical scholarship or in haptic studies.

I coin the term "haptic scepticism" to mark touch as a site of epistemic and ethical questioning and crisis. Haptic scepticism denotes experiences of touch that call touch itself into question and a possible response this experience. The study of haptic scepticism thus pursues two questions: What kinds of personal or shared haptic experiences throw us into crisis? What kinds of responses to the crisis of touch allow for transformation: the transformation of those who experience crisis, of those we touch, and of touch itself as a mediator between self and others?

In addition to "haptic scepticism," I introduce "haptic dogmatism" to identify unquestioned beliefs and practices involving touch. Haptic dogmatism is embedded in personal and cultural values, rituals, and habit. It is also expressed by those who cling to their "right" to touch or the rightness of their touch. Haptic scepticism disrupts haptic dogmatism, creating the opportunity for transformed ways of coming

ern psychoanalysis. Freud, notably, claims that our inability to draw a clear line between wakefulness and dream-states can yield excessive doubt akin to neurosis, while dogmatic certainty in what one senses to be true is a kind of psychosis. A classic case of doubt as obsessional neurosis is found in Freud's analysis of Rat Man: see *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume X (1909): Two Case Histories (Little Hans and the Rat Man)*, trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1962).

Fig. 2: Zack Sievers, film strip from *Haptic Cinematography*, 2018.
Haptic Cinematography explored the themes of "touching concepts" and "conceptualizing touch." Philosophers, students, and artists experimented with different stages of haptic experience and representation, translating haptic experiences into philosophical concepts, concepts into performance art, and haptic performance into film.

into touch with others and the world. But such transformation depends on our response to crisis. Whereas the dogmatic response to the question of touch closes the possibility for transformed relations, the sceptical practice of dwelling with the experience of uncertainty is where an ethics of touch begins.

The identification of "haptic scepticism" demanded that we go into experimental territory. In the context of this collection, my collaborators reflect the novelty of the content of our investigation in their formal approach. Some chapters take the form of poetic vignettes, while others draw heavily on the arts (literature, film, performance art, painting) to animate touch within the two-dimensional form of a philosophical text. This volume is packed with haptic puns and metaphors to unsettle philosophy's dependency on sight-oriented figures of speech, a dependency that tends to conceal the role of other senses and sensations within our thinking and being.

We initially approached haptic scepticism as an area of inquiry at the intersection of epistemology and psychoanalysis, exploring the desire to know what lies beyond one's reach. Drawing on aesthetics to illustrate our topic, haptic scepticism yielded an ethics of touching. *When we weren't looking, or when we were looking elsewhere, this ethics of touching snuck up behind us and tapped us on the shoulder.* This is not the first time that scepticism has surprised me with this move. I find this behaviour to be the delight and terror of scepticism. Despite scepticism's insistence on having nothing to offer ethics (Sextus Empiricus), the activity of probing the shortcomings of epistemology places us squarely within the difficult and delicate work of

ethics, which demands that we respond to the other without knowing how. Sextus had it backwards.[5] Our inability to know with certainty the best course of action does not prevent scepticism from having an ethical response to our social and political landscapes. Our uncertainty with regard to knowing how to act—and the moment of crisis that this uncertainty inspires—is where ethics begins. The object of our epistemic desire withdraws from the horizon of our vision and taps us from behind to request a different sort of engagement. In response to this ethical call, haptic scepticism does not seek to overcome the ambiguities of touch relations by stepping assuredly towards what is certain and shrinking away from risk. This ethics of touching instead identifies the combination of *erotic curiosity* and *erotic doubt*—*promiscuity* and *hesitation*—as two sides of sensation that allow for the mutual transformation of desiring subjects that come into touch, sometimes unexpectedly, sometimes without touching at all.

Framing the Sceptic as the Compulsive Toucher: The Origins of Haptic Scepticism

This collection engages the many nuanced varieties of haptic scepticism belonging to Platonism, German idealism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, structural linguistics, and postmodernism. For the purpose of introductions, however, I offer two provisional caricatures of the sceptic. The first model of the sceptic may be seen as one who takes a step back from the familiar or new to gain a critical stance; the second model is found in one who immediately takes an eager step forward, walking directedly into a new encounter. The first model can be located in early modern thought. This is the variety of scepticism that Descartes performs in the first books of his *Meditations*, when he employs a method driven by a hyperbolic doubt that casts everything under suspicion. When most people think of the sceptic, they may imagine someone with crossed arms and a furrowed brow, someone who approaches all subject matter with a hesitant reluctance even before a new proposal has been introduced. The second model, which we can find in ancient scepticism, however, arguably has little to do with doubt. The sceptic provisionally welcomes every new encounter, thoroughly following each new suggestion or experience to its own logical end: a dead end (*epochē* or suspension) that was implicit in the beginning. These dead ends, however, are not fruitless, but rather lead to the possibility of affective transformation. The experience of impasse (*aporia*) transforms the crisis of indiscernibility into tranquillity (*ataraxia*) in the face of the unknown.

5 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, III.168–279: without the capacity to know what is good or bad by nature (or if these categories exist in nature), we cannot arrive at an ethics. In the absence of ethical judgement, it is advisable to adhere to the customs and laws of one's land. See also Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Ethicists*, trans. Richard Bett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

It is possible to identify this second kind of scepticism with colourful figures like Socrates, Pyrrho, Apuleius, and the young Augustine: philosophers who wandered outside of the city walls, moving from town to town, enthusiastically entertaining the views of each new companion whom they encountered along the way to nowhere in particular.[6] From this perspective, the sceptic is someone who is willing to occupy an interlocutor's narrative for the length of their shared journey. I adopt this image of the sceptic as a temporary travelling companion from John Winkler's reading of Apuleius's protagonist Lucius.[7] Winkler reads the opening scene of *The Golden Ass* as a dialogue between a cynic and a sceptic. Continuing with my characterisation of two kinds of sceptics (the one who takes a step back and the one who takes a step forward), we may also read this scene as the tale of two sceptics who meet along the road: the incredulous sceptic and the curious sceptic. The second model of scepticism is found in our protagonist Lucius, whom Apuleius arguably models after himself. Lucius is travelling alone on the road to Thessaly when he comes upon two travellers. He quickens his pace in order to eavesdrop on their conversation. In Lucius's words: "I was just adding myself as a third party to two travellers who were a little ahead of me on the road. Just as I turned my ears to the subject of their discussion, one of them, with a jolt of loud laughter said, Stop! This is all impossible, outrageous lies!"[8] The incredulous traveller, reflecting the first model of scepticism, begs his companion to bring his narrative to an end. But the incredulous traveller's protest makes Lucius all the more interested. He continues, "When I heard this, I became thirstier. [...] I said, 'On the contrary, share your talk with me—not that I'm one to pry, but I am one who would like to know a little something about everything, or

6 Although Socrates preferred to engage his interlocutors in Athens, Plato offers one account of Socrates seducing his walking companion beyond the city walls (Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995]); some say that Pyrrho entertained every person who crossed his path for hours on hours (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Volume II: Books 6–10*, trans. R.D. Hicks [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925]). I read Apuleius, a student of Plutarch, as a sceptic, although he is too much of a sceptic to commit to any doctrine, even one that denies having a doctrine. Apuleius, much like his protagonist Lucius from *The Golden Ass*, was happy to adapt to the customs of the places that he passed through on his travels. He was accused of picking up some bad habits along the way (Apuleius, *Apologia; Florida; De deo Socratis*, trans. Christopher P. Jones [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017]). Augustine recounts his participation in the foreign ideas and customs of the groups of which he was a temporary member (Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Garry Wills [New York: Penguin, 2006]).

7 John J. Winkler, *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's* Golden Ass (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

8 Apuleius, *The Transformation of Lucius, Otherwise Known as the Golden Ass*, trans. Robert Graves (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), 1.2: I take up this same passage in several articles through which I develop these two sides of scepticism: see Rachel Aumiller, "*Epoché* as the Erotic Conversion of One into Two," *Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies 2017*, ed. Bill Rebiger (Berlin: De Gruyter: 2017), 3–13, and "The Virtue of Erotic Curiosity," *The Journal for Philosophy and Literature*, forthcoming.

at least a little something about most things."[9] The incredulous sceptic's command to stop is heard by the curious sceptic as an invitation to trespass. As Winkler argues, when this sceptic approaches a stop sign, she is compelled to take at least one step further.

Scepticism may be viewed as the process of keeping the other at an arm's length. However, scepticism can also be seen as the practice of provisionally giving oneself over to the other. The practice of yea-saying, without committing oneself to any one thing completely. Ironically, this second sceptic, who is marked by a refusal to assent to anything absolutely, is the most likely to say "yes" to the invitation of another (at least for the sake of experimentation). Her refusal to commit to anything in particular allows her to be open to the equal consideration of everything that happens to come her way.

Attending to the role of touch teases out a kind of promiscuity at the heart of scepticism. Robert Pfaller takes the accusation of the sceptic as a toucher one step further, claiming that there is something obscene about the relationship between touch and scepticism ("When to Touch and What to Doubt: Zeroing In on the Tactile Surplus," pp. 58–77). This obscenity, however, is not a result of the sceptic's imprudent judgement in touching. Rather, the obscenity is due to an excess inherent to touch itself. The excess of touch gives rise to doubt. The excess of touch is quite different from the excess of sight, he argues. With sight, we tend to add more than what meets the eye. We complete an image on our horizon by imagining the other side, what is more, by imagining what lies past the horizon. Sight, with the help of the imagination, offers the illusion of unity and wholeness to knowledge that is partial. *The sceptical takeaway is that we can only ever see one side of a position at a time.* Our imagination, which fills in the gaps, is the culprit of visual excess.

A greedy touch, however, allows us to grasp a body from all sides at once.[10] In this sense, touch would seem to be more certain, or at least more thorough, than sight. In contrast to sight, touch can leave very little to the imagination. And yet, touch gives us more than what we had bargained for. Every touch is a bit like poking a bear. Touch at your own risk. *The sceptical takeaway is that there is always more at hand than what meets the eye*. The excess is a result of how the touch of the other disrupts our fantasy of the other. Whether this disruption takes the form of a pleasant surprise or a disappointment, it nevertheless disrupts our projected image. As Pfaller writes, "Touching's surplus [...] does not contribute to completing such an image. Instead, it adds itself as an obscene supplement to what could otherwise have passed

9 Apuleius, *Transformation*, 1.2.

10 For a mythical reference to an omni-haptic being, we may consider the Hecatoncheires (Hundred-Handed Giants) from Hesiod's *Theogony* (in Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. M.L. West, repr. ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008]). For a philosophical reference to our own omni-haptic being, see Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Victor Lyle Dowden, rev. and ed. Hans H. Rudwick with introduction by Frederick P. Van De Pitte, new ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 41.

as a consistent image. Such a surplus causes us to question whether things were really as they previously seemed to be" (pp. 61–62). Whether we are in the role of the promiscuous toucher or in the position of the one who is touched, touch disrupts what we envision to be true. An image allows us to imagine what we desire to be true, for example, what we might desire to touch and how we might imagine it to feel. But touching disrupts our desire by offering us something more or less or otherwise than what we envisioned.

We are caught daydreaming while standing in line. As the line begins to move, a stranger nudges us from behind and without thinking, we take a step forward: "A funny little push sets things in motion. [...] A little touch thus again brings about an obscene surplus over acceptable knowledge; a surplus that puts this knowledge into question. [...] a sceptical triumph" (p. 62). The sceptic may be framed as the one who initiates touch. What is more, touch may be framed as an agent that nudges the process of perpetual inquiry into motion.

Our two models of the sceptic point to two general methodologies: scepticism as modes of suspension (reached by overstepping and encountering an impasse) and scepticism as modes of doubt (a backing away that opens up a space in between oneself and another). Although the latter is usually connected with forms of modern scepticism, we can find much earlier characterisations of the sceptic as the doubter. In the *City of God*, for example, Augustine addresses himself to the sceptics as doubters. In other texts, he equates the sceptics with the academics, who had no doubts about the limits of their knowledge, which is to say, they were quite certain of these limits.[11] But here, he uses scepticism more generally to refer to all disbelievers, especially those who doubt what cannot be tested: miracles and a world beyond. He challenges the sceptic to contemplate the earthly wonders, not only before her very eyes, but underneath her fingertips. He lists a handful of *haptic marvels* that travellers speak of. Take, for instance, he says,

> the salt of Agrigentum in Sicily, [which] when thrown into the fire, becomes fluid as if it were in water, but in water it crackles as if it were in fire. The Garamantae have a fountain so cold by day that no one can drink it, so hot by night no one can touch it. [...] Then there are the apples of Sodom which grow indeed to an appearance of ripeness, but, when you touch them with hand or tooth, the peel cracks, and they crumble into dust and ashes. The Persian stone pyrites burns the hand when it is held tightly and so is named after fire.[12]

Augustine attempts to challenge what he identifies as the sceptic's doubt in the beyond by shaking her certainty in her own experience of the here and now. And yet, this characterisation is strange since the ancient sceptics, as Augustine knew, did not

11 See, for example, Augustine, *Against the Academics*, trans. Michael P. Foley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019) and Augustine, *The Retractions*, trans. Sr. Mary Inez Bogan R.S.M., reprint ed. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999).

12 Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, ed. Gill Evans, trans. Henry Bettenson, new. ed. (London: Penguin, 2003), 21.9.

need to look to a world beyond to highlight the unexplainable. Paradox, for them, was something that could literally be found within one's grasp. If these "doubters" took a step back from the beyond, it was out of an eagerness to attend to the curiosities with which they came into immediate touch. The haptic experience of contradiction itself was the one thing of which the sceptics could be certain.

Scepticism not only questions the reliability of the sense of touch as a tool to test what we can know. It equally investigates how haptic encounters—experiences of coming into touch with other people, things, or ourselves—can cause us to radically question what we believe to be true (*doxa*). Pyrrhonian scepticism in particular describes the deeply personal crisis that can result when our sense experience comes into conflict with our cultural values. The experience of touch can lead us into the crisis of being split between two equally compelling but contradictory positions. The Pyrrhonian sceptics called this crisis "equipollence" (*isostheneia*), often referring to the experience of undecidability between two epistemological or metaphysical propositions. However, equipollence may also be bodily: the experience of two contrary sensations that are equally powerful.

In his writing on Pyrrho, Sextus attends to the paradox of pleasure and pain.[13] In *Phaedo*, Socrates observes that pleasure and pain are like a two-headed monster, one always at the heels of the other.[14] However Sextus takes this line of thought further. Touch can be both painful and pleasurable in the *same moment*.[15] Socrates finds relief from the removal of his chains while others find haptic pleasure in the discomfort of being bound; in the first case, pain chronologically engenders pleasure; in the second, pain engenders pleasure simultaneously without ceasing to be painful. Touch can split subjective experience into two equally powerful and contradictory sensations. The sceptics were indeed preoccupied with touch much more than with matters of the beyond. But this is not because that which can be touched is more believable than the intangible. Instead, touch shows us that we do not need to travel very far to experience *aporia*. Touch may be employed as an epistemological tool to test our initial suspicions by verifying the properties of an object at hand. The kind of scepticism we chase in this collection instead seeks to affirm the materiality of paradox and contradiction (even in the form of negation). In Augustine's attempt to challenge the doubter with curious experiences of touch, we find a stunning thesis for haptic scepticism: *Paradox is a haptic marvel. We can cup paradox in our palms, press paradox against our lips, dip our toes into its coolness, and, if we are not careful, we may even burn ourselves on its surface.*

At this point, one might protest that the sceptic has been falsely framed as the toucher. It is in fact the anti-sceptic, Augustine, who attempts to seduce the sceptic

13 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*.

14 Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), 57a–61c

15 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, III.194–97: it is not only the case that pain produces pleasure and pleasure produces pain. "Every pleasure is affixed with pain." A pleasurable experience (for example, overeating) can be painful and gratifying at the same time.

into touching, just as Christ attempts to seduce Thomas into touching his wound. Then again, *perhaps* Augustine's haptic lust is a symptom of his lingering attachment to scepticism, harking back to the days when he participated in his fair share of touching. *Perhaps* Augustine employs a sceptical method in order to shake scepticism to its haptic core, a common move employed long before Descartes. *Perhaps* Augustine employs a touch of doubt for the sake of invigorating faith with passion, another common move during his time.[16] Is touch on the side of dogma or doubt?

Bill Rebiger questions the relationship between doubt, dogma, and haptic marvels in the context of Jewish ritual and custom ("A Magic Touch: Performative Haptic Acts in Biblical and Medieval Jewish Magic," pp. 104–21). As he notes, prohibitions against touching as well as imperatives to touch give definition to a communal body. The Hebrew scriptures and Halakhah offer clear instructions regarding who may touch and who may not touch, what to touch and what not to touch, when to touch and when not to touch, and how to touch and how not to touch. To touch according to the law is an expression of fidelity to one's tradition and community, and to one's God. The law arguably leaves little room for doubt in touching. Rebiger considers biblical stories about acts of touch that offend the clear boundaries laid down by law and custom. Uzzah accidentally crosses this boundary when he impulsively reaches out to catch the Ark of the Covenant when the oxen stumble. He is struck dead the moment his common touch comes into contact with the holy object. Elisha boldly oversteps when he defies the prohibition against touching a corpse. As scripture reads, laying himself over the child's dead body, he "put his mouth on its mouth, his eyes on its eyes, and his hands on its hands, as he bent over it. And the body of the child became warm."[17] *Risky touching with uncertain outcomes can have the consequence of life or death.* In taking a risk, the sceptical gesture of overstepping/overreaching/overtouching has the potential to yield haptic marvels beyond our imagination.

When we defy cultural norms surrounding touch, we enter a risky zone. The consequence can be devastating when one's community—religious or secular—exercises its power to shame through tactics ranging from gossip to excommunication. Yet the consequence may be immensely rewarding when touch yields sensations so profound that they cause our deepest commitments to quiver. These two consequences often coincide, throwing an individual's relationship to her own touching—to the way she comes into touch with the world—into the crisis of equipollence, splitting her sense of self in two.

When a community decides that one of its members has touched out of turn, the toucher becomes the untouchable: the pervert, the player, the cheater, the slut. The

16 Nineteenth-century scholars retrospectively identify the appropriation of sceptical arguments by Christian theologians and leaders as "sceptical fideism." By challenging reason's grasp of our phenomenal experience, they defend divine revelation as a source of knowledge. Sceptical fideism has been attributed to figures ranging from Tertullian to Kant.

17 2 Kings 4:34 (New JPS Translation).

punishment of being marked untouchable, specifically for the way one has touched, places the untouchable out of reach of experiences of transformative touch, while often making her vulnerable to acts of violence. As we have noted, the excess of touch is inherently disruptive and even threatening. As Libera Pisano argues, this disruption is not only a personal experience, but a political disturbance ("Noli me tangere: The Profaning Touch That Challenges Authority," pp. 122–37). Touch might seem to be the sensation that we explore behind closed doors. It belongs to the most private and intimate crevasses of our life. But if touching is a personal matter, then why is it of interest to the law? Pisano situates touch as a medium of power relations that take place on the body, "a place of exchange between the I and the world" (p. 125). Following Edmund Husserl, Pisano argues that unlike the other senses that are one-directional, touch demands reciprocity: "It is possible to see without being seen and to hear without being heard, but not to touch without being touched" (p. 125). Touch is thus the site of intimacy and struggle. Society regulates touch in order to protect its vulnerable members from the abuse of power. However, society also regulates touch in order to protect its own abuse of power:

> It can be said that authority exercises its power through this injunction and that *noli me tangere* has nowadays become the prohibition *par excellence*. It deals with abuse, impurity, consumption, damage, offence, or simply with usage, pleasure, and enjoyment. There is an everyday use of this prohibition in which power, consumption, and usage are interwoven. This conjunction raises many questions: What does this untouchable represent? What does this register of warning mean? Why is it forbidden to touch? What is the grammar of this gesture? Could we interpret the act of touching as a radical calling into question of authority in general? Does touch involve a radical (a)political form of resistance? Is touch a temporary suspension of the apparatus of power? (p. 134)

The cultural revolutions of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries reveal the transformative power of defiant touching. Insofar as these movements shook the deepest social dogmas surrounding sexuality and gender, they may be understood as sceptical crises of national and global proportions. If touch is the medium through which power secures itself by inscribing the authority of society and law into our skin, it is also the site for resistance and revolution.

Untouchables may choose to demonstrate the revolutionary power of profane touching through parades and protests. But sometimes, the most disruptive act of the untouchable is simply to exist—to revel in the reciprocity of being in touch with a world that experiences your very being as an excess. To exist is to force the world to touch you back and to struggle with the insistence of your being.

Pisano adopts Jean-Luc Nancy's reading of the story of Doubting Thomas through a common medieval framework that marked Mary Magdalene, rather than Thomas, as the compulsive toucher. While Thomas's masculine desire to touch is connected to the epistemological pursuit of spiritual truth, Mary Magdalene's presence before Christ, whom she addresses as "teacher," is marked as contaminated by carnal desire.

Mary Magdalene was without a doubt one who worshipped through sensuous touching, anointing Christ's feet with oil and wiping them dry with her hair. But in her encounter with the resurrected Christ, in John's account, she stands at a distance. Mary Magdalene's "being-there"—without so much as a gesture towards touching—is in itself an excess of touch. Why is the potential touch of Mary Magdalene so threatening? It is as if her touch threatens to come out of the pages of scriptures and contaminate the religious desire for disembodied truth (ironically represented in the form of the resurrected body). What would have happened if Mary Magdalene *had* touched Christ? He who overcame death defeated by a woman's touch. Without lifting a finger, she causes the son of God to quiver in his flesh: don't touch me! The touch of the untouchable is powerful indeed.

Audre Lorde notes the cultural reduction of female sensuality under capitalism to a commercialised form of eroticism to be viewed and consumed.[18] To unleash *eros* in its richest sense would not only be empowering, but dangerous to the powers that be. Lorde writes, "In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, and self-denial."[19] Touch as an act of political rebellion begins with an autoerotic gesture. One comes into touch with her own heightened sense of pleasure and joy by embracing the disruptive power of her sensuous being. Feel yourself. Autoeroticism becomes revolutionary when emboldened sensuous beings come into touch. Lorde calls us

> to risk sharing the electrical charge without having to look away, and without distorting the enormously powerful and creative nature of that exchange. Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift in characters in the same weary drama.[20]

Following Lorde and Pisano, we can identify touch as a sceptical gesture that challenges the hierarchies that structure philosophy, religion, and politics (and all experience). An inner transformation of one's subjectivity occurs with the realisation that just being-there is an act of (a)political disturbance. A political transformation of society occurs with the communal realisation of the potential of this disturbance when untouchables come into erotic touch. Promiscuity is revolutionary.

There are great risks and rewards for challenging the social and political boundaries of touch. But does uncertainty and risk persist in the experience of individuals who touch according to the rules? We may return to Rebiger, who explores this question by highlighting the role of touch in medieval Jewish magic. A magic touch may involve handling enchanted objects, laying one's hands on another's body, or mak-

18 Audre Lorde. "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 55–59.

19 Lorde, 58.

20 Lorde, 59.

ing an inscription on the skin. In order to achieve the desired effect of a love spell or a curse, a practitioner of magic must not deviate from a spell's specific instructions, no matter how demanding or baffling. The aid of written or oral instruction would seem to clarify touch. But, as Rebiger points out, a touch of doubt nevertheless creeps in even when language provides clear direction. Did my touch achieve the effect I desired? Was my performance underwhelming? When a practitioner doubts the efficacy of his spell, he must repeat the haptic performance again and again until he gets it just right. But in many cases, it is difficult to know whether the transformative power of a magic touch has taken place. Is doubt a hindrance to the transformative potency of touching, or does doubt motivate touch? Adding a new dimension to J.L. Austin's speech act, Rebiger coins the term "performative haptic act" to discuss the transformative power of touch through repetition and singularity. He notes that repetition serves the function of overcoming doubt. For this reason, many rituals require regular repetition to strengthen our fidelity. However, we might also argue that the persistence of uncertainty drives the repetition of touch. *Doubt drives the toucher to repeat his touch, to adjust his touch, to perfect his touch, to reflect on his touch and try again.*

Let us repeat the question: Does touch belong to the sceptic or to the dogmatist? As with any rigorous and thorough sceptical investigation, the results are inconclusive. Apuleius would go to trial for touching too much (everything from forbidden magical objects to a wealthy widow, the mother of his best mate).[21] And yet, Socrates was accused of not touching enough. Of course, the accusation of touching too much or too little has a lot to do with the preferences of the other (one's community, religion, or lover). The accusations against the sceptics with regard to their inappropriate touching—whether too much or too little—reflect two different understandings of the relationship between fidelity and touch: one position demands faithfulness in the abstention of sensation; another position demands the other's touch all to himself. When Alcibiades walks in on Socrates cosying up with Agathon on a coach, we are offered an impassioned account of how erotic/epistemic promiscuity leads to the frustrated desire of the beloved who wants the lover all to himself in body and soul.[22] Plato devotes an entire dialogue to the frustration of touching. The *Symposium*'s question, "What is *eros?*", is layered with the question, "What is it that I want to touch when touching the other?" Apuleius, in response to being charged with compulsive touching, makes it clear that he would like to grasp a bit of everything. But Plato suggests that there is just one thing we want from touch: Oneness itself. Aristophanes's image of the flayed circle people desperately bumping "belly buttons" to reunite themselves points to the impossibility of achieving this one thing. As we have

21 Apuleius, *Apologia*.

22 Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 213b–22b.

suggested above, only sight and imagination can achieve the unity that touch longs for.

The fantasy of Diotima's ladder is to transcend the whole ordeal of touching: the messiness of other bodies and the complications of asymmetrical desire which plague *eros*.[23] In Diotima's vision, by climbing past touch, we achieve oneness and unity through sight as we gaze into the form of the Beautiful. Hence, we move from procreation between bodies to the creation of beautiful ideas. A sceptical interpretation of Diotima's ladder and Plato's forms, however, identifies the unity brought about by the gaze as wishful thinking. We are unable to transcend touch, either because the top of the ladder is impossibly out of reach or because no matter how high we climb we are always on our way. Instead of gazing into the pure form of Beauty in itself, we are left in the dark, clumsily groping each other's flesh.

The *Symposium* explores how the frustration of touch is a structural component of *eros:* a kind of fundamental drive, which cannot be satisfied, propelling us towards other bodies, activities, and ideas. Bara Kolenc attributes this frustration to the paradox of desire, which she names "the (un)touchable" ("The (Un)Touchable Touch of Pyramus and Thisbe: Doubt and Desire," pp. 78–103). If the desire of knowledge is to close the gap between subject and object, the desire of touch is to close the gap between bodies. In both cases, doubt and uncertainty are the result of a gap between two. The fulfilment of desire would be achieved by closing this gap. If two could become one, doubt could be overcome. But, as Kolenc argues, when doubt is extinguished, so is desire: the desire for knowledge, desire for the other. *Eros* desires unity, but the fulfilment of this desire is death. If the flayed circle people could have their way, they would suffocate each other in their embrace. Like a fight to the death, one side would eventually swallow up the other, snuffing out the animating force of desire—the difference between two, even in the case of two of the same—that had so attracted each to the other in the first place. In order to sustain itself, desire must desire too much and thus fend off its own fulfilment, maintaining the excruciating distance between two, maintaining the space for doubt and uncertainty. *As a function of desire, touch likewise must hold open a gap even as it seeks to draw another near.* In Kolenc's framework, the (un)touchable—the condition of touch—is found in the equipollence of these two contrary impulses: to cling to the other for all eternity (an eternity equivalent to death, the death of desire) and to hold the object of lust/knowledge at a distance, to preserve desire by sacrificing its fulfilment.

Kolenc demonstrates that the spatial paradox of touch is also temporal. Her analysis echoes Anne Carson's illustration of the temporal paradox of desirous touch through a fragment of Sophocles's poetry about ice.[24] A glistening icicle catches my eye. My impulse is to break off the icicle to cling to its beauty. But the warmth of my hands would cause it to melt away and slip through my fingers. The ice, in

23 Plato, *Symposium*, 210a–12a.

24 Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet: An Essay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 111–16.

turn, would surely sting my hands to exact its revenge. In ancient scepticism, the experience of crisis at the encounter of paradox sometimes results in a transformation that is one-sided: the transformation of the sceptic. Alternatively, the student of the sceptical master undergoes transformation by engaging in pedagogical dialectic. However, haptic scepticism shows us that the transformation that occurs when two (or more) come into touch, although asymmetrical, is mutual. Mutual transformation is not without risks. In order to be transformed, we must come into contact with and be fundamentally altered by the other. But how do we give ourselves over to the other's touching without losing ourselves? *Can we be transformed by touch while holding open a space for the integrity of our own desire—even without fully understanding the nature of our own desire which is itself conflicted?*

Augustine's image of the apple that turns to ash when pressed against one's lips is mirrored by Kolenc, who locates haptic scepticism in Ovid's image of lovers who press their lips against the stone wall that separates them. As Kolenc clarifies, the lovers press their lips not merely upon the cold stone, but against a deep crack in the wall. The crack rather than the wall both frustrates and mediates the impossible touch. The sceptic's interest in touch is also about grasping nothing: the crack between two, or the crack within one that is already divided. The ancient sceptics were content to describe the sensuous and affective experience of touching paradox, revealing that contradiction seems to lie in every touch. They did not go so far as to speculate why paradox appears to be directly beneath our fingertips.

Fig. 3: Zack Sievers, film strip from *Haptic Cinematography*, 2018.

The Haptic Marvels of Touching Oneself: Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Haptic Scepticism

As I noted earlier, many of the contributors to this volume, myself included, have our philosophical home in the Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis, which is most strongly associated with Mladen Dolar, Alenka Zupančič, and Slavoj Žižek. Thus, the number of references to G.W.F. Hegel per page (HPP) should not be surprising. As next generation scholars within this tradition, we stress the central role of scepticism in the connection between ancient philosophy, German idealism, and twentieth-century continental philosophy and psychoanalysis. We extend the scope of the Ljubljana School by building upon the philosophy of touch and language developed in late twentieth-century continental philosophy and psychoanalysis in the dialogues between figures such as Jacques Lacan, Didier Anzieu, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Emmanuel Levinas (see our collected volume devoted to this topic: *The Language of Touch: Philosophical Examinations in Linguistics and Haptic Studies* [New York: Bloomsbury, 2019]). Through haptic scepticism, we further elaborate the relationship between touch and language by tracing the indebtedness of continental philosophy of language and touch to methods and themes belonging to ancient scepticism. In my view, the trajectory of the Next Generation Ljubljana School into haptic scepticism has its stakes in an ethics that is aligned with aesthetics rather than epistemology: sensation rather than certainty. We reach for an ethics that reinvigorates desire and sensation with a touch of doubt.

Ancient scepticism finds new life in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European philosophy in two movements: 1) German idealism and 2) twentieth-century continental philosophy: phenomenology, psychoanalysis, structural linguistics, and postmodernism. In dialogue with ancient scepticism, the new expressions of scepticism within German idealism and continental philosophy explore the phenomenological experience of contradiction or paradox. German idealism offers scepticism two new thrilling elements: an introspective subject and a metaphysical framework, each deeply informing the other. As a result, the Platonic theme of *eros* in ancient scepticism becomes autoerotic in German idealism. Continental philosophy and psychoanalysis adopt the sceptical subject of German idealism, endowing this subject with a rich philosophy of touch and language. Scepticism takes a detour into the interiority of the self in order to reach back out into the world through these two vital modes of being in the world with others.

It might seem that a self-actualised modern subject—with the ability to reflect on and articulate her complex desires and preferences—would be able to clear up some of the troubles with touching (so long as the other respects her wonderous autonomy as she does his). However, the new waves of haptic scepticism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reveal that contradiction runs deep into the very substance of the

subject (so much so that some twentieth-century philosophers challenge the category of the subject altogether). Rather than mending the crack that constitutes the self, continental philosophy and psychoanalysis show that language only magnifies the frustrated desire for unity in both the experience of touching others and of touching oneself.

In the context of German idealism, scepticism does not shy away from making metaphysical claims as it once did. The sceptical description of contradiction and crisis instead serves as the foundation of metaphysics, whether this foundational crack is found within the world, between the subject and the world, or within the subject. As we witness in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, Being herself steps into the role of the sceptic in crisis.[25] Being attempts to grasp herself as such—as pure indeterminate Being—only to grasp a handful of nothing. We find that Being can only grasp herself by the crack between Being and Nothing, which mirror each other in their indeterminacy. Nothing can likewise only grasp himself by this same crack. This metaphysical impasse—the indecipherability of Being and Nothing—is not the impossibility of metaphysics, but the starting point. I read the opening of Hegel's *Science of Logic* as an origin story that grounds his ontology.[26] Existence is set in motion in this cosmic instance of self-touch/self-doubt. Being, pure Being, touches herself and doubts her own being. The repetition of Being's own sceptical crisis—the suspended equipollence between Being and Nothing—is the ongoing animating force of Becoming.

From this speculative origin story, I claim that metaphysical (self-)doubt precedes ontological existence. The world is not created through the word that asserts itself, but through a question: Let there be light? It is good. Is it though? (which at times seems to be a closer characterisation of God to his creation.) Moving from an objective register to a subjective register, we might further claim that self-doubt precedes the self. I doubt therefore I am. Am I? In the crisis of equipollence between "I am" and "am I?", we find the subject (for several formations of the subject in doubt, see Kolenc, Vranešević, and Louria Hayon).

Ancient haptic scepticism leans into an almost psychological analysis of the experience of *epochē*, describing the emotional stages of individuals when processing a sensational encounter that disrupts their basic assumptions. Ancient scepticism zeros in on subjective experience even while lacking the category of the subject. Hegel claims that scepticism concludes ancient Greek life, giving birth to the shadowy outline of the modern subject at the site where the old gods were burned to the ground.[27] German idealism adds to scepticism's analysis of the subjective expe-

25 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), §§21.68–21.69, 59–60.

26 For this account, see Rachel Aumiller, "Twice-Two: Hegel's Comic Redoubling of Being and Nothing," *Problemi International* 2, no. 2 (2018): 253–78.

27 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), §§745–47. I offer a detailed account of this moment in Hegel as well as in ancient Greek philosophy and art in "The Aborted Object of Comedy: Plato and Aristophanes'

rience of crisis, a metaphysics of the subject of crisis. Goran Vranešević demonstrates how the figure of the sceptic in crisis serves as the prototype for subjectivity as such as painted by modern philosophy, especially by Hegel ("An Atom of Touch: Scepticism from Hegel to Lacan," pp. 156–76): "Since Hegel, it has been practically self-explanatory that natural consciousness has a sceptical character. While this is an essential position of modern thought, it also illustrates a re-evaluated perspective on scepticism itself" (p. 166). Ancient haptic scepticism reveals the trouble with coming into touch with the phenomenal world. German idealism shows us the trouble of coming into touch with the self. It further shows that this trouble is at once the condition not only of self-knowledge, but also of any claim to knowledge. Vranešević continues, "[Hegel] paired the question, 'What can I know?' with the labour of conceptual unveiling and thereby grasped knowledge as the process of self-comprehension (*Selbsterfassen*), or, more directly expressed, the task of touching (*Fassen*) oneself (*Selbst*)" (p. 159). Scepticism challenges epistemology by demonstrating that anything we cling to as truth slips through our clenched fist. Hegel, however, identifies this fistful of nothing as the very structure of knowledge, since every appearance must realise its identity both in "what it is" and "what it is not" (the internal otherness of determinate negation). The subject likewise must grasp herself by the crack between both what she is and what she is not (which is also what she is): the haptic world.

Hegel is a natural companion for this study because of the haptic overtones of one of his driving concepts, which takes the form of both a noun and verb: *Begriff*/*begreifen*. As with the English "to grasp," *begreifen* also contains the double sense of a literal grasp (to grasp a handful of clay/bread/flesh) and a metaphorical grasp (to grasp a concept/idea/ideal). However, as Mirt Komel argues, Hegel's language of grasping when applied to a concept (*Begriff*) is more than mere metaphor ("Touching Doubt: Haptolinguistic Scepticism," pp. 138–55). Or, to put it differently, the structure of the metaphor is itself more than a mere metaphor. Metaphor is the sceptical engine driving spirit. Concepts have a haptic character just as touch has a conceptual character. We must grasp an idea by its material body. What is more, a concept must grasp itself by its material body, even if only by its crack. What appears from one perspective as *the grasp of the concept* appears from another perspective as *the concept of the grasp*. And yet, as dialectics would have it, these two sides cannot be collapsed, but remain in suspension. Komel illustrates how the metaphor that connects conceptual grasping with physical grasping reveals the sceptical structure of the concept itself: the speculative unity which both holds together and separates the touchable (our haptic experience of our own body, other bodies, and material world) and the untouchable (*logos*/language).

Alliance," in *The Object of Comedy*, ed. Gregor Moder and Jamila M.H. Mascat (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020): 75–92.

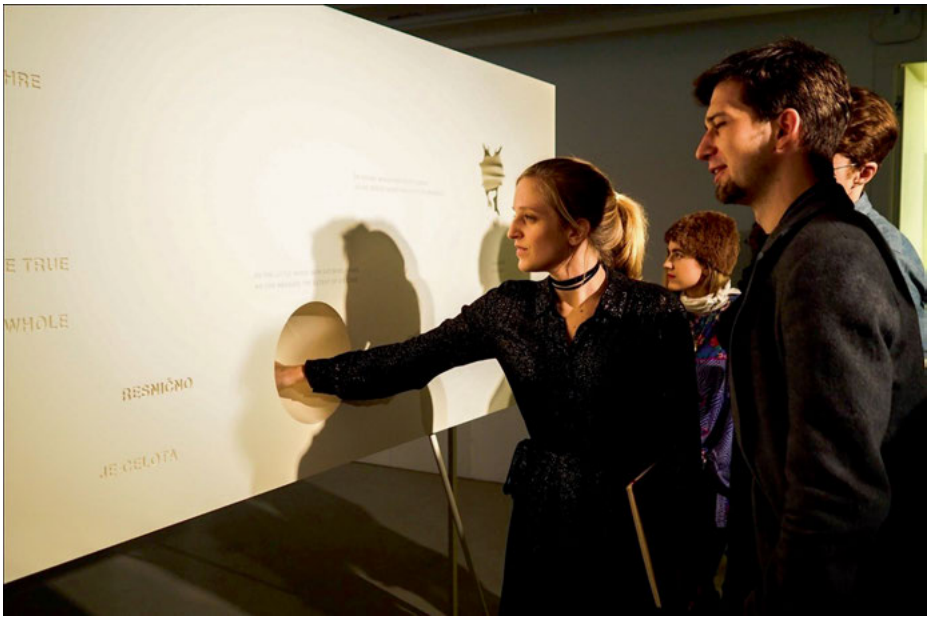

Fig. 4: Bara Kolenc, Mirt Komel and Atej Tutta, *Hegel's Begriff*, 2018, installation, mixed media. *Hegel's Begriff* is an interactive installation that explores the role of touch in grasping the negative and positive aspects of a concept. The black side of the wall displays convex objects that are hidden from view. The white side displays the corresponding concave side of each object. Through the use of touch-responsive technology, the wall records and projects the nature of each stroke or prod onto the ceiling.

In previous investigations, Komel and his team laid the foundation for haptolinguistics, the study of touch as a fundamental component of language.[28] In the framework of structural linguistics, "phoneme" denotes a single unit of sound, while "grapheme" denotes a single unit of writing. Komel and his team coin the term "hapteme" to denote a single unit of touch within language. A straightforward example of the hapteme is a single stroke of an index finger over a bump within Braille. In our present collection on haptic scepticism, Komel makes a critical move by identifying the place of doubt within haptolinguistics. In response to his contribution, I question whether a more elementary unit of touch is not found in a touch of doubt.

Ancient scepticism shows us how any line of philosophical reflection eventually leads us to a dead end (*epochē*). And yet, the repeated failure of philosophy to hold onto any single truth, from a sceptical perspective, is what propels philosophy forward as a dynamic and ongoing process of perpetual inquiry. Hegel applies the paradox of movement generated by impasse not only to the work of the philosopher, but

28 Mirt Komel, ed. *The Language of Touch: Philosophical Examinations in Linguistics and Haptic Studies*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.

to *everything*, exchanging the Greek *epochē* for the German *Aufhebung* (which can be translated as "suspension" as much as "sublation"). Spirit's activity of repetitive grasping is played out on a metaphysical stage in the *Logic*, on a historical stage in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which history repeatedly attempts to grasp itself by its own cracks, on a linguistic stage in the *Aesthetics*, and on a subjective stage when the substance of the subject is revealed to be negative. Being, history, language, and the subject are constituted by the same crack. All four registers are driven by what Hegel boldly identifies as the self-consuming scepticism belonging to spirit itself (*sich vollbringende Skeptizismus*).

Our philosophical examination of grasping oneself (as self) does little to defend continental philosophy and psychoanalysis against the accusation of its masturbatory character. By tracing the inheritance of ancient and modern skepticism in twentieth-century philosophy, our study probes touch as the contested sight of certainty and doubt for both epistemology and ethics. We analyse the manifestations of haptic autoeroticism within twentieth-century European thought, while also marking autoerotic doubt within this tradition as an ethical force. Jacob Levi investigates the autoeroticism of haptic scepticism by taking on the great masturbator himself (this is to say, Martin Heidegger; see Levi's commentary on Derrida's well-placed jab at Heidegger's monstrous hand, "'Es wird Leib, es empfindet': Auto-Affection, Doubt, and the Philosopher's Hands," pp. 30–57). Levi claims that the motif of the philosopher's hand within the history of Western philosophy is at the centre of sceptical and anti-sceptical debates, embodied by Ludwig Wittgenstein's sceptical refutation of G.E. Moore's proof of the external world based on the self-evidence of his (other) hand. Levi argues that the reduction of the hands to their epistemic value—with regard to both doubt and certainty—evades the ethical dimensions of coming into touch with another (an argument also made by Pfaller and Kolenc).

We have discussed different kinds of relationships to touch: the compulsive toucher who wants to grasp a bit of everything from all sides, the one who overtouches without lifting a finger, the defiant toucher, and the one who touches by the book. We explored how each example of touch can produce a disruption that shakes dogmas ranging from our own expectations to the deep-seated values of society. By highlighting the relationship between touch and doubt, haptic scepticism limits the reach of the epistemologist who attempts to master the world through an all-knowing conceptual/haptic grasp. In this spirit, the phenomenological tradition initially brackets the epistemological debate about what we can prove with our hands, to offer a description of the existential experience of touching. However, as Levi notes, haptic scepticism within the phenomenological tradition may hide its own dogmatic assumptions. Even while abandoning the epistemological project of defining the world through touch, the phenomenological method nevertheless privileges a handsy approach to encountering other beings. Take, for instance, Heidegger's vocabulary to describe the world as "presence-at-hand" (*vor-handenheit*) and "readiness-to-hand" (*zu-handenheit*). Derrida identifies this philosophical treatment of "the hand" as anthropocentric in his critique of Heidegger's claim that the ape does

not have hands.[29] Levi writes, "[D]oubting the hands of others enables a form of haptic scepticism where the hands become a proxy for the value of other beings. [...] According to this view, the hand is more than a prehensile appendage: it is the embodied form of thinking, reasoning, and ultimately writing" (p. 39). The motif of the philosopher's hand reflects the ancient alliance between touch and language in Western philosophy. Those who "have hands" also "have language," and thus claim the power to dictate what violence can be done to those deemed without the power of human touch and language.

Those who "have hands" have the power to draw a line between those they identify as having a rich relationship to existence and those who lack the ability to grapple with their own being. As opposed to beasts, according to this view, only those who "have hands" are able to doubt, to question, to struggle with their existence: the sceptical activity which Heidegger identifies as the metaphysical vocation of the German people in his 1935 lectures *Introduction to Metaphysics*.[30] Levi makes a powerful connection between Heidegger's haptic scepticism/dogmatism and his politics. When Karl Jaspers questions, "How can such an uneducated (*ungebildet*) man like Hitler govern Germany?", Heidegger replies, "It is not a question of education, just look at his marvellous hands!". In Levi's analysis, "The exclusionary logic governing Heidegger's monstrous hand, its unarticulated mode of fleshiness, and its apparent disinterest in the desiring touch or caress are emblematic of the solipsistic thinking that failed to grapple with the monstrosity of Nazism" (p. 42). The autoerotic thinking of dogmatic haptic scepticism, which cannot see past its own hand, justifies very real violence.

Levi traces the consequences of haptic scepticism/dogmatism from its epistemological determinations through its political symptoms. However, he also identifies a deeper sense of haptic scepticism that runs parallel to and disrupts the strand of dogmatic haptic scepticism at the service of anti-Semitism and fascism. Although we have connected fascist thinking with the masturbatory touch, the subversive counter position is also born from a philosophical discourse about the haptic marvels of touching oneself. Husserl notes the unique quality of auto-affective touch, in which one experiences the double sensation of touching the "other" and of being

29 Jacques Derrida, "*Geschlecht* II: Heidegger's Hand," trans. John P. Leavey Jr., in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, ed. John Sallis, paperback ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 174.

30 Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). In his lectures on metaphysics, Heidegger identifies the German people as having a metaphysical vocation (42–43), going on to characterise metaphysics as the process of perpetually questioning Being to the end of disrupting our unreflective modes of production. However, as we explore in this volume, those who are marked with the privileged "ability to question" are given the power to dominate. Scepticism presented as a privileged standpoint has a dogmatic underbelly. For an insightful commentary on the double nature of questioning in these lectures, see Jan Voelker, "Heidegger's Movies: National Socialism and the End of Philosophy," *Problemi International* 1, no. 1 (2017): 181–215.

touched by "another" in the same stroke.[31] He frames self-touch as the strongest instance of the grasp-ability of paradox. When an individual touches herself, she occupies the position of both subject and object, without collapsing the distinction between the two. To put it differently, she grasps herself by the slit between her subjective and objective sides.

In Husserl's analysis, auto-affective touch contains a hetero-affective sensation, since when I touch myself, I grasp an alterity that is inherent to the self. Merleau-Ponty reads the reverse formulation in Husserl.[32] When I touch the flesh of another, I empathetically sense what my touch must feel like against the other's skin. Flesh senses flesh. Hetero-affective (we might add heteroerotic to denote both sensation and desire) touch contains an auto-affective/erotic sensation. However, Levi draws on both Derrida and Levinas to recognise the danger of imagining another's body as an extension of one's own flesh. The imagination slips back into an epistemological framework when an individual bases her touch on the imagined knowledge of the other's sensation and desire. Levinas turns to the model of the caress as a kind of touch that is guided by perpetual questioning rather than certainty. As Levi explains,

> Whereas touch seeks to master knowledge in the hand's grasp, the caress is an encounter with the unknown *otherness* of the other's touch. [...] The caress is a touch beyond touch: it reveals the transcendence that arises out of the immanence of tactile impressions. It is precisely this unknown incalculable quality of the other's touch that is responsible for its allure, as the locus of desire or ethics. The caress is marked by its incalculability. (p. 51)

Haptic scepticism within late twentieth-century philosophy, represented by Levinas's caress, places sensation and hesitation at the heart of ethics by frustrating the dominance of epistemology over questions of touch (and what is more, the question belonging to touch). The fascist's touch is not sensual enough. We stumble across a surprising claim that erotic curiosity and sensuality towards the unknown lies at the heart of ethics. *The experience of caressing in the dark is not only a model for an ethics of touching, but for all ethics.*

Adi Louria Hayon explores the impact of haptic scepticism within the American art world ("The Weak Relations of Touch and Sight through the Passage of Lapsed Time," pp. 178–206), focusing on artistic practices through which the concept of touch seeks to grasp itself by its material body. She gives particular attention to Robert Morris's performative series *Blind Time Drawings*. Morris made hundreds of drawings by following a disciplined procedure in which he blindfolded himself and set a timer to a predetermined increment. He would dip his fingers in black ink and press

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31 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), § 36, 144–45.

32 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 168.

them against the canvas following a set of instructions (a score), which he composed ahead of time. In opposition to the heavy hand of the philosopher that we find in the work of Heidegger, Louria Hayon offers a meditation on the delicate fingertips of the artist's blind touch:

> The artist activates the body in withdrawal. He suggests a base materialism that adheres to nothing but the proximities of skins and surfaces and blindly touching their exposed externality. His finger movements, their weight, pressure, velocity, and cadence, perpetually desire an image that can only be achieved in discreteness, in delay, posed in externality. This excessive movement requires some consideration. (p. 185)

By blindfolding himself, Morris distances himself from what we earlier discussed as the excess of sight, which projects an imagined unity. Morris frustrates the epistemological dominance of sight and foresight over a traditionally visual medium and instead searches for something unknown under his fingertips. Playing the canvas like a piano, Morris muddies the surface with his fingerprints, the deepest representation of an individual's singularity. And yet, as Louria Hayon describes it, the artist's touch is a process of allowing himself to be undone:

> With his eyes closed, Morris begins his withdrawal. The first withdrawal is from mimesis; from forms that were not projected in advance. The second withdrawal is from self-imitation. The score and materials serve to set the conditions for the activity. A model is suspended in thought at the time of performing the act of drawing, in the moment of its coming-into-form. (p. 182)

Louria Hayon highlights the haptic paradox of the artist's sceptical practice. By obscuring sight, Morris sets himself up for failure. In the suspension of his score—the vision he had planned in advance—the artist's touch is guided by two contrary impulses found in the excess of touch: he backs away, holding open a space for something unforeseen to take place, even as he presses the weight of his fingers against the canvas. Louria Hayon questions what comes into presence as touching creates a disjunction between two kinds of time that belong to touch: the calculated minutes of the timer and the organic haptic intervals that emerge through the rhythm of touching. We have claimed that touch gives us more than we could have imagined. Louria Hayon concludes our volume by answering that the unforeseen presence that takes form in the temporal friction of touching is the mutually transformative experience of *aporia*.

Restoring Doubt within an Ethics of Touching: Haptic Scepticism for Today's World

I opened this introduction with a discussion of two kinds of scepticism. The first model is represented by the figure who immediately takes a step back, who resists the temptation of giving herself over fully to another, who holds the object in ques-

tion at an arm's length. The second model is represented by the figure who oversteps, who crosses the line, who offends the law, who takes her line of questioning too far, who insists on getting her hands dirty. What I initially described as two models of the sceptic, I now reconsider as a single moment of suspension in haptic scepticism. When scepticism becomes one-sided—embodied by only one of these two kinds—it falls back into dogmatism. In the true equipollence of sensuous desire, I am equally compelled to step forward and to step back: to leap towards another in eager desire and to pause to question my own impulse to touch. *Haptic scepticism marks this crisis of indecision between erotic sensation and hesitation as that which fuels both desire and ethics.*

This research collaboration took place against the backdrop of the social crisis of #MeToo. My own engagement with haptic scepticism offered me a lens to process this crisis, through a new ethical framework. The crisis of course is not new but has recently pushed its way to the surface of our social existence, making itself felt as a global crisis to be grappled with by all. The figure of "the second sceptic," who hears the demand to stop as an invitation to take a step further, seems to be the obvious source of this crisis. But what is at stake when a culture instils certain populations with dogmatic certainty in their right to overstep? And what kinds of experience or action are required to shake the certainty of a touch that does not question itself?

A common response to this crisis has been to call for greater clarity by calling on language to rescue touching from ambiguity. On one side, there has been a renewed dialogue that emphasises the importance of clear consent. On the other, those who are violated by touch are cast under suspicion under this same logic: Did they make their desire or lack of desire known beyond a shadow of a doubt? Our accounts of our own desire and body must count, both in private relations and before the law. And yet, even when desire is able to be clearly articulated and respected, does perpetual questioning continue to serve a role in touching? Should doubt persist even in the presence of consent? In what way can we see autoerotic doubt as fuelling, rather than inhibiting, relationships of touch?

When individuals adopt the one-sided role of "the sceptic" who crosses boundaries set by another, those who are affected by this action are forced into the one-sided role of "the sceptic" who must hold others (strangers, friends, colleagues) at an arm's length. The suggestion of the other's touch must be cast into suspicion even before there is a gesture towards touching. From the perspective of the self-certain toucher, the other who immediately takes a step back without consideration of his advances seems to oppose touch, sensuality, and sex. What he fails to see is that the activity of pushing the other away is a last attempt to hold open a space for her own desire and sensuality that has been denied to her. Sexual harassment and assault are not only acts against another's body or another's ability to feel at ease in her embodiment. The dogmatic touch destroys the space of another's autoerotic questioning. An individual is forced to preserve the integrity of her desire by denying herself touch, fall-

ing out of touch with the world itself (since her experience shows her that touching tends to be on another's terms). Desire can only preserve itself in a negative form.

A culture of sexual harassment and assault deprives all of us of genuine moments of sceptical crisis in touch relations. On one hand, those who unreflectively act on their impulse will not experience the excess of touch, which is found in what cannot be known or mastered in the touch and desire of another. This one-sided touch only serves to reinforce their assumptions about what they hold to be true. On the other hand, those who are violated are denied their own moment of autoerotic questioning, the experience of oscillating between considerations of how they desire to be in touch with others and the world. Pfaller suggests that we live in "a postmodern culture that is obsessed with harassment of all kinds" and that haptic scepticism can teach us that "not every touch must necessarily be experienced as a nuisance" (pp. 67–68). I see my generation's obsession with identifying harassment of all kinds as such as being motivated by a determination to recover rich relationships of transformative touch. This goal can only be achieved through the transformation of a world-historical stage that is constituted by asymmetrical power relations that alienate us from sensuous relations with our selves, others, and our environment. The global protest against harassment and assault of all kinds is the uprising of a revolutionary *eros* that crushes the self-certain touch of the dogmatist in the name of an ethics that acts for the sake of sensuality. Haptic scepticism as a philosophical and political movement exposes the dogmatist's self-certain touch, out of a desire for touch relationships that are capable of achieving mind-blowing haptic marvels.

The authors in this volume do not always speak in one voice, but we come together on critical points that are found in the relationship between sensation and hesitation. Haptic scepticism frames ethics as the ongoing activity of developing a heightened sensitivity to sensation and desire. This practice simultaneously develops a heightened sensation of the unknown. The unknown side of the needs and desires of both oneself and other makes touching risky and thrilling. Becoming responsive and responsible to the sensation of the unknown is where epistemology ends and the real work and pleasure of ethical relationships begin. The act of overpowering another is often attributed to an excess of desire. However, we recover erotic desire as an ethical force that is fuelled by autoerotic doubt and that holds open a space for the other's own sceptical transformation. Haptic scepticism is the practice of moving with and for the sake of another in the form of a touch that perpetually questions.

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Fig. 5: *A Hand,* fragment of the colossal statue of Emperor Constantine the Great from his basilica, Ca. 315–330 CE., Marble © Musei Capitolini, Rome /Art Resource, New York.

Jacob Levi

"Es wird Leib, es empfindet": Auto-Affection, Doubt, and the Philosopher's Hands

"Ta main sur ma main,
tiède épaisseur de l'ombre"
Edmond Jabès[1]

Doubt and belief are all too often an affair of the hands. The hand's touch can confirm what we believe to be true, just as it can rattle what we had taken as certain. Two scenes in the book of John offer a lucid illustration of the dual possibility of the hand's touch either instilling belief or raising doubt. When the resurrected Christ rebuffs Mary Magdalene's extended hand with the famous remark *noli me tangere*,[2] he suggests that faith is borne precisely in the absence of touch; in this case, based on sight alone. By contrast, the figure of "doubting Thomas," iconically depicted in Caravaggio's baroque masterpiece *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, insists on touching Christ's wounds to confirm what his eyes cannot; in this case, it is only touching the body of the risen Christ that validates Saint Thomas's faith, at which point he exclaims, "My Lord and my God."[3] These scenes present manifestly different empirical standards for faith in the resurrection, hinging on the certainty proffered by touch. Mary Magdalene is asked to have faith despite Christ's refusal of her touch, clearing a higher bar than Saint Thomas, whose incredulity is seemingly validated when Christ allows him to touch the wound. To touch or not to touch—these divergent standards for belief in the resurrection are never completely reconciled in the Gospel, in contrast to the strict interdiction of sensible representations of the divine in the Hebrew Bible. Whether sight, touch, or another modality of sensibility can adequately satisfy belief is a decisive question pertaining to God's modes of revelation in the Abrahamic religions.[4]

1 Edmond Jabès, "Main douce à la blessure même ...," in *Le seuil, le sable: poésies complètes 1943–1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 379.

2 Jn. 20:17.

3 Jn. 20:28.

4 In contrast to these Christian notions of faith validated by touch or sight, and following the second commandment's interdiction of graven images or representations of God, in the Jewish tradition, the modes of God's revelation do not include sight or touch and only include sound in exceptional cases. When God reveals himself to the Hebrew prophets, it is always mediated by either an angel, a miraculous event, or a symbol. It is forbidden to speak the name of the God of the Hebrew Bible, just as it is forbidden to represent his sensible appearance. In the book of Exodus, the Israelites trembled in awe at the foot of Mount Sinai as they miraculously "saw the sounds" (Ex. 20:18) of the commandments, a sort of synesthetic experience of *seeing* the words of the commandments that God pronounces to Moses. However, in contrast to the disciples of the risen Christ, in the Jewish tradition, seeing God is out of the question. As Kant famously describes the interdiction of sensible representations of God in the *Critique of Judgment:* "Perhaps there is no more sublime passage in the Jewish Book of

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The questions of touch and belief that emerge from these biblical narratives directly relate to philosophical debates concerning the veracity of sensible impressions. Modern philosophy's obsession with external world scepticism is often expressed as a challenge to the hands, the appendages which effectively mediate between the subjective experience of the mind and the body's interactions with objects in the world. To what extent can we put our faith in the certainty of the hand's touch? What can and cannot be known from touch, and what are its epistemological limitations? Touch may confirm what is merely apparent in sight, but it is also subject to illusion and deception, which threaten to undercut its epistemological authority. That the hand's touch may inspire belief *or* doubt has made it a critical battleground in philosophical debates regarding the reliability of the senses regarding knowledge claims, which we might call the question of *haptic scepticism*. Haptic scepticism refers to both the existential questions concerning the faculty of touch —*whether* to touch or not, *can* one touch, *how* the sense of touch relates to other senses such as sight or hearing—and the experience of touch, its qualia, which pertains to what touching something is *like*. Even when the existence of objects is bracketed, notably in the phenomenological tradition, the qualitative experience of touch is nonetheless evaluated through the lens of haptic scepticism. Touch identifies the boundaries separating the subject from external objects, tracing the limits of the body; touch is the frontier of alterity that mediates between one's own flesh and that of others. The hand has the potential to distinguish self from other, subject from object, living being from mere thing. The ability to make these qualitative distinctions calls upon both the existential and the epistemological modes of haptic scepticism, questioning the existence of the hands as well as their qualitative experience of touch.

Before the qualitative determinations of touch are subject to sceptical challenges concerning the possibility of deception, they are implicated in a pre-theoretical analytic notion of what, in fact, it means to have hands. Despite its apparent self-evidence, the criterion for "having" hands is not primarily biological; rather, it is essentially a socio-cultural determination. The hands are the site of tactile impressions, but they are also an embodied metaphor for the human capacity for reason, language, or ethics. The requirements for "having" hands demand more than the motor faculties enabled by the prehensile organ; having hands also involves interactions with our surroundings, and specifically our treatment of the other living beings we encounter. In this chapter, I will discuss the hand's ability to distinguish between

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the Law than the commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, nor any likeness either of that which is in heaven, or on the earth, or yet under the earth, etc." (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 5:274). The lawgiver can only be presented negatively, as a "pure, elevating, merely negative presentation of morality," because the sublime origin of the law is not derived from a sensible object of this world, but can only be understood via the higher faculty of intellectual imagination.

different classes of tactile impressions, against the backdrop of doubt. My argument is that the hand's touch is not only the site of epistemological contestation, it further calls upon a series of metaphors that describe what it means to be human, and how humans should treat other beings they encounter. When philosophers consider the hand's touch exclusively in terms of sensible perception, hiding behind sceptical challenges to sense-certainty, they obscure or sidestep the ethical dimension of the hands. The reduction of touch to a question of sense-certainty fails to acknowledge the generative role of the hands in our ethical lives as human beings. The hands are the site of what Emmanuel Levinas calls the "excendence" of sensibility by the infinite, "the overflowing of thought by its content,"[5] which Jacques Derrida describes as *epekeina tēs ousias*, that which is "beyond being."[6] As we will see, the ethical dimension of the hands emerges from the ongoing haptic sceptical challenges to the certainty of touch.

I will introduce the topic by briefly surveying how the hands are rendered the essential site of doubt in modern philosophy. From Descartes's doubt and Kant's "scandal of philosophy" to Moore's "here is one hand" proof of the external world, the hands are the philosopher's vital instrument for dispelling doubt. In the second part of the chapter, I will discuss the existential conditions for "having" hands and whether the hands are an essentially human characteristic; namely, I will analyse Martin Heidegger's "monstrous" hand and Derrida's critical reading of the philosophical anthropomorphisms born of the hand. We will see that this existential notion of "having" hands occludes the ethical demands encountered in the other's touch. The third part of the chapter will highlight the experience of touching different classes of objects, beginning with Edmund Husserl's description of auto-affection and the experience of the "double sensation" of one hand touching the other. Here, it is a question of what it is *like* to touch one's own flesh, and in what sense the touch of flesh sets itself off as a distinct category from mere objects. This leads to the purported analogy between the auto-affective touch of one's own hands and the hetero-affective touch of another. Does auto-affection inform the touch of *autrui*, or does it reinforce the otherness of the other? In the following section, I will analyse Maurice Merleau-Ponty's and Emmanuel Levinas's divergent readings of Husserl, relating the hand's touch to the notion of intersubjectivity. Whereas Merleau-Ponty sketches a haptic ontological framework that he calls the "flesh of the world," Levinas describes a haptic relation between self and other that exceeds epistemological questions of sense-certainty and introduces the possibility of transcendence in immanence. I will highlight Levinas's notion of the "caress," which seeks neither domination nor mastery, as a modality of touch that remains open to the excendence of haptic doubt by the ethical.

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5 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 197. Translation modified.

6 Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001), 105.

The Hands of Doubt

Modern philosophy is haunted by the possibility that sensible perception may be subject to deception. Whereas the visible field may produce certain illusions, touch purportedly affirms a thing's concrete reality, as if holding something in one's hand offers certainty. But even touch cannot dispel the possibility of deception. The example of the ball of wax in Descartes's second *Meditation* questions Aristotelean hylomorphism, which identifies the being of all objects in the unity of their substance and form. The solid ball of wax "is hard, cold, easily handled," but when it is heated, "it becomes liquid, it heats, scarcely can one handle it."[7] Descartes's ball of wax is paradigmatic of the endless fluctuations in the appearance of substances, and it suggests that touch can also deceive us regarding their true nature. Even when we believe that we grasp its true nature, like the ball of wax, an object may slip right through our fingers. This variety of doubt is a subspecies of the sceptical challenge to the existence of external objects. In the preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant laments the "scandal of philosophy" that "the existence of things outside us [...] should have to be assumed merely on faith," rather than with "a satisfactory proof."[8] Such a proof cannot be based on evidence that we could hold in the palm of our hand. Sensible impressions of objects are insufficient to deduce their rational character because "intuitions without concepts are blind."[9] Touch is no less prone to deception than the other senses. Kant highlights the correspondence between sensible intuition and conceptual reasoning that is required to make epistemological claims: the hand's tactile impressions are only reliable to the extent that they can be conceptually understood.

Some philosophers have reasoned that if the true nature of external objects is subject to doubt, then perhaps certainty lies in the existence of the hands themselves. This philosophical deduction-by-the-hands reaches its apex in G.E. Moore's 1939 "here is one hand" proof of the external world. Responding to Kant's "scandal" of philosophy, Moore contends that the affirmation of the existence of a person's two hands is necessary and sufficient proof of the external world: "By holding up my two hands, and saying, as I make a certain gesture with the right hand, 'Here is one hand,' and adding, as I make a certain gesture with the left, 'and here is another' [...] I have proved *ipso facto* the existence of external things."[10] For Moore, recognising the mere existence of the hands in extended space obviates the scandal that so concerned Kant. Whether we find Moore's anti-sceptical proof convincing or com-

7 René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald Cress, 3rd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 21–23.

8 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Bxxxix.

9 Kant, A51/B76.

10 G.E. Moore, "Proof of an External World," in *G.E. Moore: Selected Writings*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 166.

pletely absurd, it acknowledges that the sceptical challenges regarding external objects can also be applied to the hands themselves. Surely his proof is unsatisfying or unconvincing for many, but its elegance lies in its forthrightness. Moore strips the trimmings from external world scepticism and reduces it to the essential question: Can the existence of our hands alone overcome doubt? Of course, Moore's answer to this question is resoundingly affirmative, and he excludes himself from the haptic sceptical tradition. Nonetheless, his proof identifies the crux of external world scepticism as a challenge issued to the hands.

What conditions allow Moore to be certain that his hands exist? Ludwig Wittgenstein, an ally in Moore's quest against scepticism, offers a probing commentary on the "here is one hand" proof in *On Certainty*, a posthumously compiled text based on a draft written shortly before his death in 1951. Wittgenstein identifies Moore's first premise as decisive: "If you do know that *here is one hand*, we'll grant you all the rest."[11] Given the first premise, Moore's conclusion follows rather easily. However, Wittgenstein emphasises, we must actually *know* that the first premise is true, rather than simply believing it to be the case—this is the pivotal epistemological question. "From its *seeming* to me—or to everyone—to be so, it doesn't follow that it *is* so," Wittgenstein cautions, "What we can ask is whether it can make sense to doubt it." To understand what makes the hands' existence appear certain, we must identify the necessary conditions which would make it possible to doubt this premise. It surely *seems* that my hands are present in extended space, this perception is easily confirmed by others, and typically I have no reason to think otherwise. Perhaps it is possible to imagine a context in which someone has no hands but falsely believes that he or she does, but in ordinary experience, the conditions for doubting the existence of one's hands are not meaningfully present. In short, the validation of Moore's assertion of "here is one hand" is built into the context of the claim, and it is asserted precisely because ordinarily it seems self-evident. As Wittgenstein writes, "This possibility of satisfying oneself is part of the language game. Is one of its essential features."[12] Because the conditions for doubting the existence of the hands are not present, Moore's anti-sceptical conclusion is programmed into his framing of the problem.

Wittgenstein highlights the codependence of knowledge and doubt in context-driven language games. The conditions for doubt do not arise absolutely; rather, they must be occasioned by a surrounding set of facts taken as certain. Doubt functions like a door that turns on a set of fixed hinges: the door can only swing open if the hinges stay in place. The grounds for doubt can only arise in the specific ways permitted by the context of the situation. Wittgenstein writes, "(My) doubts form a system."[13] This system of doubt is the negative image of the world of certainty. Con-

11 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), 2.

12 Wittgenstein, 2.

13 Wittgenstein, 19.

sequently, just as one proves a claim by demonstrating its necessary conditions in a specific context, inversely, "one doubts on specific grounds."[14] Indeed, a host of circumstances could arise that would create a context in which to doubt the existence of one's hands, such as blindness, paralysis, phantom limb syndrome, or perhaps the influence of a psychotropic drug. Moore's proof is performative to the extent that the speaker must truly believe the assertion that the hands exist, and in a sense, it is only reciting the proof that speaks them into existence as an epistemological fact. However, under ordinary circumstances, the speaker has little reason to doubt the existence of the hands, and the conclusion of Moore's proof essentially follows from the language game built into its first premise. The certainty of the premise "here is one hand" depends on its context, but the near-constant use of the hands in ordinary life shields them from many forms of doubt. For Wittgenstein, the existence of the hand is no more the ultimate site of doubt than context allows: if Moore's argument is sound, it is only because it is precisely *when we are looking for certainty* that we look to our own hands. The "here is one hand" proof does not eliminate doubt: it simply displaces the "scandal" of philosophy to the hands.

We might ask why philosophers have privileged the hands over the rest of the body's capacity to touch. Of course, human beings are oriented towards the hands by force of evolutionary biology, and the hands are central to most fundamental human practices. The acute sensitivity, opposable thumbs, and nimble prehensility of human hands offer evolutionary advantages that allow us to fashion tools and harness the power of nature. Akin to the elephant's trunk, the snake's tongue, or the bat's echolocation, a human being's hands are the predominant mediators of his or her interactions with the external world. Nonetheless, we may wonder with Derrida in *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy* why the philosophical analysis of touch always reverts to an affair of the hands, as if they were the only locus of touch:

> Why only the hand and the finger? Why not my foot and toes? Can they not touch another part of my body and touch one another? What about the lips, especially? All of the lips on the lips? And the tongue on the lips? And the tongue on the palate and many other parts of "my body"? How could one speak without this? [...] And the eyelids in the blink of an eye? And, if we take sexual differences into account, the sides of the anal or genital opening?[15]

If the entire body is capable of touch, and in a multitude of different ways, why do philosophers almost exclusively refer to the hand in order to evaluate whether touch can overcome doubt? Why not evaluate doubt with our elbows? The privileging of the hands is a product of both human evolution and contingent cultural practices, but where would we even begin to delineate which of the hands' activities arise from "nature" and which are the artifices of "culture"? The impossibility of fixing the

14 Wittgenstein, 60.

15 Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 164.

limit between the hand's natural and socio-cultural activities illustrates its central place in human forms of life, which is irreducible to that of a mere corporeal appendage.

Heidegger's "Monstrous" Hand

Given their centrality in ordinary human activities, a culturally specific definition of the hands can be used as a wedge to exclude or invalidate others. This is readily apparent in Martin Heidegger's reflections on the hand as the essence of the human being. In his 1927 opus *Being and Time*, the hands primarily serve to mediate between *Dasein* and its surrounding world of equipment. Heidegger makes generous use of metaphors of the hands in his descriptions of *Dasein* interacting with things in the world through the basic "attitudes" of *vor-handenheit* (presence-at-hand) and *zu-handenheit* (readiness-to-hand).[16] When a hammer is used according to its equipmental being in the activity of hammering something, it is seized in its pre-theoretical mode as ready-to-hand, and the hand of *Dasein* and the hammer seamlessly interact in the act of hammering. By contrast, *Dasein* apprehends those things that are perceived as present-at-hand as defective, and they stand out as objects rather than as equipment. A broken or defunct hammer is no longer equipment, it is reduced to a mere object. The same can be said of the hands themselves: when the hands interact with things in the world in the mode of ready-to-hand, they are seized as equipment working in tandem with the tool, but if the hands are broken or otherwise ineffectual, then for Heidegger, they would be reduced to objects that are present-at-hand, quite literally, on the body. Heidegger sketches a robust role for the hands in mediating *Dasein*'s interactions with the world: the hands are essentially equipment, like the hammer.

Beyond the metaphors involving the hands in *Being and Time*, Heidegger suggests that "das Werk der Hand" goes well beyond grasping and touching, and even beyond related forms of *technē*. "The hand is a peculiar thing," Heidegger remarks in his 1951–52 lecture course *What Is Called Thinking?* "The hand's essence can never be determined, or explained, by its being an organ which can grasp."[17] In addition to its ordinary activities including touching, grasping, or holding, the essence of the hand also involves that which "reaches and extends, receives and welcomes—and not just things: the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hand of the other."[18] For Heidegger, the hand is more than simply a prehensile

16 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, repr. ed. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008). For the discussion of the world of equipment and the distinction between *vor-* and *zu-handenheit*, see §16 in chapter 3 of Division One.

17 Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 16.

18 Heidegger, 16.

organ, it is also an essential opening to alterity and the gift. The hand can grip and take, but it can also carry, rescue, or give: "The hand holds (*hält*). The hand carries (*trägt*)."[19] The hand is the very nexus of intersubjectivity where individuals encounter the flesh of others: one may extend the so-called helping hand, or the hands can be used to possess and dominate the other. In his 1942–43 *Parmenides* lectures, Heidegger suggests that the dual possibility of the hand can be deployed for "both prayer and murder, greeting and thanks, oath and signal, and also the 'work' of the hand, the 'hand-work' and the tool." Beyond its use as equipment, the extended hand can help or harm the other: "The handshake seals the covenant. The hand brings about the 'work' of destruction."[20]

This definition of the hands identifies them with distinctly *human* practices. Heidegger rather brazenly declares in the *Parmenides* course, "No animal has a hand, and a hand never originates from a paw or a claw or a talon."[21] He makes a similar claim in *What Is Called Thinking?* where he quips, "Apes, for example, have organs that can grasp, but they have no hand."[22] If the hand is the primary organ for all of these advanced human activities—giving, taking, sharing, building, embracing—then while human and animal alike are equipped with the prehensile organs to hold and grasp, Heidegger considers that the essence of the hand lies in these higher-order functions that are limited to humans. This definition would exclude non-human animals who only possess prehensile organs for touching and grasping, as well as those humans whose hands cannot carry out what Heidegger considers their critical functions.

Heidegger is not bothered by external world scepticism, identified in Kant's "scandal" of philosophy and refuted by Moore's "here is one hand" proof. *Dasein* is not cut off from the world or even independent of it; rather, it is characterised in Division One of *Being and Time* by its "existentiales": "being-in-the-world"[23] and "being-with-others."[24] *Dasein* is irrevocably "thrown" into the world,[25] and there is no question of whether the external world exists—there is no "external" of which to speak.[26] Nonetheless, there is a different sort of scepticism at work in Heidegger's notion of the hands. He doubts that the ape has hands not because of a lack of visual or biological evidence that such is the case, but because he changes the

19 Heidegger, 16.

20 Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 80.

21 Heidegger, 80.

22 Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 16.

23 Heidegger's preliminary discussion of *Dasein*'s Being-in-the-world is found in chapter 2 of Division One of *Being and Time*.

24 The description of *Dasein*'s existentiales, Being-in-the-world and Being-with-others, is found in chapter 4 of Division One of *Being and Time*, where Heidegger introduces "certain structures of Dasein which are equiprimordial with Being-in-the-world: *Being-with* and *Dasein-with*" (114).

25 For the explanation of being-thrown, *Geworfenheit*, see *Being and Time*, §38.

26 For Heidegger's refutation of the external world problem, see *Being and Time*, §43.

conventional meaning of the word. Indeed, his definition of "handiwork" retraces the ontological difference dividing human and animal, echoing his characterisation of animals as "poor in world" in his 1929–30 course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.[27] Heidegger's comment about the ape's hands is indicative of a troubling pattern: doubting the hands of others enables a form of haptic scepticism where the hands become a proxy for the value of other beings.

In his 1987 text "*Geschlecht* II: Heidegger's Hand," Derrida forcefully elucidates the consequences of this delineation of the handed and the handless. First, he states that Heidegger's comment concerning the ape's hands illustrates that he knows nothing about these animals, and Derrida chides him for having "no doubt studied neither the zoologists (even were it to criticize them) nor the apes in the Black Forest."[28] Indeed, Heidegger's characterisation of animals is not correct even on his own terms. From primates that use their hands to fashion tools to others that have learnt sign language, there are numerous ways that non-human animals undermine the restrictive standards that Heidegger sets forth for "having" hands. Nonetheless, his comment about apes takes on an outsized significance because, as Derrida explains, the exclusionary logic governing this definition extends to "trace a system of limits within which everything he says of man's hand takes on sense and value." This is a defining feature of Heidegger's philosophical anthropocentrism. His characterisation equates "having" a hand with the *Geschlecht* of the human being, which, Derrida writes, "names what has the hand, and so thinking, speech or language, and openness to the gift."[29] According to this view, the hand is more than a prehensile appendage: it is the embodied form of thinking, reasoning, and ultimately writing. Heidegger's definition of the hands according to higher faculties of thought and language delineates this distinctly human feature from the activities reserved for the prehensile limbs with which animals are endowed. The difference between human hands and animal limbs is unbridgeable because, as Derrida remarks, "this abyss is speech and thought."[30] Heidegger's notion of the hand stands in for the capacity for rational thought and language itself.

When he identifies the essential functions of the hands as uniquely human capacities, Heidegger extends the tradition of philosophical anthropocentrism, following Descartes, Kant, and even Moore. In the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes considers animals mere automata who are incapable of genuine thought or reason, rendering the question of animal consciousness superfluous; a being that cannot

27 Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1995).

28 Jacques Derrida, "*Geschlecht* II: Heidegger's Hand," in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, trans. John P. Leavey Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), 174. The famously untranslatable German term *Geschlecht* most closely resembles the English notions of gender or sex, even if these terms fall short of capturing the manifold senses of this complex term.

29 Derrida, 174.

30 Derrida, 174.

think cannot doubt. If animals are thoughtless automata, they are certainly not capable of having hands in Heidegger's strong sense. Kant makes a similar argument in the *Anthropology* when he writes: "Nature seems to have endowed man alone with this organ [the hand], so that he is enabled to form a concept of a body by touching it on all sides. The antennae of insects seem merely to show the presence of an object; they are not designed to explore its form."[31] Kant delineates between the prehensile tactile organs of insects and the human hand's unique ability to form concepts from its tactile exploration of objects. Maine de Biran is only slightly more generous when he writes, "The elephant's trunk fulfills approximately the same functions as the hand of man."[32] The notion that human hands are endowed with the unique qualities of higher reason which are lacking in other animals is a common feature of philosophical anthropology, from Descartes's hands of doubt to Heidegger's denial of the ape's hands.

Heidegger considers the ability to write as the ultimate expression of the hand, entrenching the gulf separating human from animal. If, as he famously proclaimed, "language is the house of being"[33] and the essence of the human being is the capacity for language, then the hand's most important function is the ability to write. In his *Parmenides* course, Heidegger identifies the codetermination of the hand and the activity of writing:

> The hand sprang forth only out of the word and together with the word. Man does not "have" hands, but the hand holds the essence of man (*Der Mensch "hat" nicht Hände, sondern die Hand hat des Wesen das Menschen inne*), because the word as the essential realm of the hand is the ground of the essence of man. The word as what is inscribed and what appears to the regard is the written word, i.e., script. And the word as script is handwriting.[34]

Heidegger connects the very existence of the hands with the specifically human ability to write. Yet, as Derrida observes, Heidegger's curious phrasing is symptomatic of his discussion of the hand: it is almost always "the hand" in the singular, "as if man did not have two hands but, this monster, one single hand," as if human beings had a "single organ in the middle of the body, just as the Cyclops has one single eye in the middle of the forehead."[35] There is something awkward, unnatural, or even *monstrous* about Heidegger's discussion of the hand. "The man of the typewriter and of technics in general uses two hands," Derrida remarks, "but the man that speaks and the man that writes with the hand, as one says; isn't he the monster with a single

31 Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Victor Lyle Dowden, rev. and ed. Hans H. Rudnik with introduction by Frederick P. Van De Pitte, new ed. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 41.

32 Maine de Biran, cited in Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, 153.

33 Martin Heidegger, "Letter Concerning Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 217.

34 Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 80.

35 Derrida, "*Geschlecht* II: Heidegger's Hand," 182.

hand?" The singular hand of thought and language is detached from the manifold ways that humans use their hands, effectively reducing the quality of having hands to the singular ability to write. The only time Heidegger speaks of the two hands in *What Is Called Thinking?* is in a reference to hands clasped in prayer: "The hand designs and signs (*zeichnet*), presumably because man is a (monstrous) sign (*ein Zeichen*). Two hands fold into one, a gesture meant to carry man into the great simplicity."[36] Playing off the German *Zeichen* and the Latin *monstrare*, Derrida reveals the *monstrous* element of the being that points, *zeichnet*.[37] Heidegger's description of "the hand [that] holds the essence of man" is divorced from the ordinary experience of having hands. Ironically, where Heidegger's concept of the hand draws a line to exclude animals, it ultimately describes a *monstrous* human hand.

Beyond the existential question of who "has" hands, Heidegger has little to say about the experience of touching. Specifically, he ignores the hand's desiring touch, as if affective and erotic modes of touch were philosophically irrelevant. "Nothing is ever said of the caress or of desire," Derrida provocatively writes, "Does one make love, does man make love, with the hand or with the hands? And what about sexual differences in this regard?"[38] This omission echoes the criticism that Heidegger's concept of *Mit-sein* fails to offer a robust, fleshed-out structure of inter-subjectivity. Questions of flesh, desire, and nourishment are absent from the existential analytic in *Being and Time*, leading Levinas to write in *Totality and Infinity*, "*Dasein* in Heidegger is never hungry."[39] Indeed, Heidegger's monstrous hand is troublingly disincarnated. Didier Franck explores this perspective by suggesting that flesh is the unarticulated mode of *Dasein*'s givenness in *Being and Time*. Franck explains, "If flesh is absent from the existential analytic, is this not because flesh poses a threat to the privilege of temporality, and everything that derives from it?"[40] Whereas Heidegger considers *Dasein*'s temporal *ek-stasis* to constitute the horizon of its fundamental ontological structure, Franck argues that the unarticulated mode of *Dasein*'s embodiment as flesh reveals a lacuna in Heidegger's existential analytic. Indeed, rather than temporality orienting the transcendental horizon of *Dasein*'s ek-static Being, Franck argues that it is in fact *Dasein*'s *flesh* which makes its temporal constitution possible. This novel inversion turns the existential analytic on its head and suggests that Heidegger's monstrous hand is a symptom of *Dasein*'s unarticulated modes of embodiment.

36 Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 16–17.

37 Derrida applauds the decision in Gérard Granel's French translation of *Was heisst denken?* (*Qu'appelle-t-on penser?* [Paris: PUF, 2014]) to maintain the resonance of the Latin and Germanic registers between the German *zeigen* and the French *monstre*. While the translation may initially appear strange—Derrida confesses that it "first seemed to me a bit mannered and gallicizing"—it reveals a deeper sense of monstrosity in Heidegger's work, which offers "occasion for thought" ("*Geschlecht* II: Heidegger's Hand," 166).

38 Derrida, "*Geschlecht* II: Heidegger's Hand," 182.

39 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 134.

40 Didier Franck, *Flesh and Body: On the Phenomenology of Husserl*, trans. Joseph Rivera and Scott Davidson (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 147.

Yet Heidegger's most troubling invocation of the hands highlights the philosopher at his most inglorious. In his *Philosophical Autobiography*, Karl Jaspers recounts that in May 1933, he invited his longtime friend Martin Heidegger to his home in Heidelberg for dinner with him and his wife Gertrud. Days before, Heidegger had been named the rector of the University of Freiburg, and he had travelled to Heidelberg to give a public lecture about the "renewal" of the university under National Socialism. Gertrud and Karl Jaspers were understandably distraught. In the intimacy of a dinner between old friends, Jaspers confronted Heidegger about his baffling public support for the ascendant Nazi regime. He asked, "How can such an uneducated (*ungebildet*) man like Hitler govern Germany?" Heidegger replied, "It is not a question of education, just look at his marvelous hands!"[41] His comment precipitated the end of both the dinner and their friendship. Heidegger's baffling comment suggests something far more nefarious than blind naiveté; it reflects a kind of political tribalism that endorses the sort of unthinking, spectacular brutishness that seems so foreign to his poetic mode of philosophy. Considering the importance that Heidegger assigns to human hands, his comments about Hitler's "marvelous hands" are even more troubling. One cannot help but speculate about the connection between Heidegger's exclusionary notion of the hands and his disastrous political affiliations, made all too explicit at the dinner in the Jaspers' home in Heidelberg. The exclusionary logic governing Heidegger's monstrous hand, its unarticulated mode of fleshiness, and its apparent disinterest in the desiring touch or caress are emblematic of the solipsistic thinking that failed to grapple with the monstrosity of Nazism.

Auto-Affection and Double Sensation

Edmund Husserl's *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy II* investigates the embodied projection of the self through the hand's tactile impressions of the world. Unlike Descartes's or Kant's engagement with haptic scepticism, Husserl is not interested in using touch to prove the existence of external objects, nor is he invested in Heidegger's existential qualifiers for what it means to "have" hands. Rather, Husserl brackets these questions and instead analyses the different forms of embodiment that account for the structure of experience. The hand's touch offers hyletic data, Husserl's term for the sensible content of intentional experiences, and highlights the constitutive role of the body in the structure of psychic reality. Husserl describes what it is like to touch different kinds of things and how touch can qualitatively distinguish between inanimate objects, one's own body, and the bodies of others. This new valence of haptic scepticism asks what touch can determine about our own bodies and those of others. Does touch affirm our in-

41 Karl Jaspers, *Philosophische Autobiographie: Erweiterte Neuausgabe* (Munich: Piper, 1984), 101: "Bildung ist ganz gleichgültig, sehen Sie nur seine wunderbaren Hände an!"

tersubjective relation to others—their proximity and likeness, our ethical obligation to others—or does it extend the sceptical disposition towards others? These doubts concerning the qualitative experience of touch emerge from Husserl's text, and they form a salient point of disagreement between Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

In *Ideas II*, Husserl describes touching different classes of things. When one touches an inanimate object, a "mere thing," the sensation is felt as interior to the person who is doing the touching, and the object is sensed as external to the body, which is confirmed when that object is seen. When my hand touches a table, for example, I can evaluate *how* it feels—smooth, rough, cold, etc.—as a sensation which is felt by my body, but provoked by my contact with an external object. In these ordinary encounters with mere things, touch traces the phenomenological limits of the body relative to the external world of sensed objects. For Husserl, there is an intuitive understanding when we touch an inanimate object that it is merely a thing, whereas something distinct occurs when touching one's own body. Husserl famously identifies the auto-affective experience of the left hand touching the right as a qualitatively unique kind of touch, set off from the touch of mere objects:

> 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. 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. But when I touch the left hand I also find in it, too, series of touch-sensations, which are "*localized*" in it, though these are not constitutive of properties (such as roughness or smoothness of the hand, of this physical thing). 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* (*es wird Leib, es empfindet*).[42]

Distinguishing the experiences of touching *Leib*, the living Body, from *bloße Sache*, a mere thing, Husserl explains that in the case of one hand touching the other, the body has a double sensation which unfold on two levels of experience. While the left hand is touching the right, it receives hyletic data on the feel (and appearance) of the right hand as an object—its texture, what it feels like, etc.—but the sensation is double because the left hand simultaneously feels itself being touched by the right hand, and it is thereby also the *subject* of the sensation. As Dan Zahavi explains, "Husserl is anxious to emphasize the peculiar two-sidedness of the body," as both the interiority of sensing and the exteriority of something which is also visually and tactically external. The reversibility of the double sensation—that I can intention-

42 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), §36, 144–45.

ally alternate between the left hand sensing the right hand and the right hand sensing the left hand—"demonstrates that the interiority and the exteriority are different manifestations of the same."[43] Touch is the only sense that allows for double sensation: I can no more taste myself taste, or hear myself hear, than I can see myself see.[44] The double sensation of one's own flesh is a kind of bodily reflection which uniquely allows the body to sense its own exteriority and its peculiar status as both subject and object. This experience is qualitatively different from touching mere things. In the critical moment when one hand touches the other, the sensed object transforms into the body and gains sensation; as Husserl writes, "es wird Leib, es empfindet." This transformation of mere objects via touch suggests that the body can intuitively recognise the uniqueness of its own flesh and that self-touching is a qualitatively different experience from touching mere things. Auto-affective touch comes close to the certainty that Descartes discovers in the *cogito,* but even this singular kind of touch cannot foreclose the possibility of illusion, highlighted by the haptic sceptical tradition.

Is it possible for auto-affective touch to deceive? Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 1945 *Phenomenology of Perception* investigates certain limit cases of embodied phenomenology where the psychic projection of embodiment does not correspond to the actual body. The most famous of these phenomena are phantom limb syndrome, when a subject has a conscious representation of a non-existent limb, and anosognosia, in which a person has no conscious representation of an existing but paralysed limb. These symptoms follow from traumatic injuries often experienced during war, and they present as a false visual projection of the body that can be accompanied by intense pain in the afflicted limb, whether real or imaginary. Even when the patient is conscious of the projection, the symptoms can continue. These phenomena exhibit a perplexing etiology that originates neither exclusively in the body nor in the mind. Merleau-Ponty rejects the physiological explanation for phantom limb syndrome and anosognosia, which takes the false projection of a (non-)existent limb to be the product of a functional absence in the body's mechanics; he also rejects the psychological explanation, which explains the phantom limb or anosognosia as the product of a repressed memory of trauma. While these limit phenomena exhibit both physiological and psychological effects, Merleau-Ponty suggests there is an underlying *existential* explanation for these lags between the body and its phenomenological projection. He describes a kind of traumatic alteration to our embodied

43 Dan Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 104.

44 Of course, we can see ourselves seeing in a mirror and we can hear our own voice speaking in an echo, but these phenomena do not allow for what Husserl calls double sensation. Even if I look at myself in the mirror, I cannot alternate my perspective from my body to the mirrored image as I can with the left and right hand. If I hear the echo of my own voice, I cannot then reverse the sensation, take the perspective of the echo, and hear my actual voice as the echo. Touch is unique amongst the senses in this regard.

reality, "understood in the perspective of being-in-the-world." The existential root of these phenomena gives rise to their physiological and psychological effects:

> What it is in us which refuses mutilation and disablement is an *I* committed to a certain physical and inter-human world, who continues to tend towards his world despite handicaps and amputations and who, to this extent, does not recognize them *de jure*. The refusal of the deficiency is only the obverse of our inherence in a world, the implicit negation of what runs counter to the natural momentum which throws us into our tasks, our cares, our situation, our familiar horizons. To have a phantom arm is to remain open to all the actions of which the arm alone is capable; it is to retain the practical field which one enjoyed before mutilation. The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be intervolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them.[45]

Merleau-Ponty's analysis is couched in the distinctly Heideggerian rhetoric of being-in-the-world, and he analyses phantom limb syndrome in terms of the loss of the body's ordinary ways of inhabiting its world. Phantom limb syndrome and anosognosia stem from the dislodgment of the body from its ordinary commitments to practical activities involving the lost or paralysed limb, changing the human "vehicle of being in the world," like driving a car without knowing it is only equipped with three wheels. These limit cases reveal consciousness's stubborn refusal to confront loss and its incredible ability to compensate for loss through the projection of a phantom limb, or, in the case of anosognosia, the projection of absence where there is in fact a limb. Nonetheless, phantom limbs present mainly as objects of sight and pain, and it is unlikely that a phantom hand could produce the double sensation that Husserl describes in his experience of touching his own hands. Merleau-Ponty does not address the modalities of touch experienced by patients afflicted with a phantom limb, but the presence of pain suggests that even the hand's ghostly presence poses questions for the haptic sceptic: the subject of the phantom limb could recite Moore's "here is one hand" proof and believe it to be true and yet, in this exceptional case, the hand's auto-affective perception would be illusory, and the first premise of the proof would be demonstrably false. Inversely, a patient suffering from anosognosia might disbelieve Moore's proof, even if his or her hands are visible to everyone else. The possibility for self-deception in auto-affection indicates that even when the existential question of "having" hands is bracketed, the haptic sceptic can always challenge the purported certainty of tactile impressions.

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45 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, repr. ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 94.

Touch and the Flesh of the World

Husserl's distinction between the touch of the living body, *Leib*, and that of mere things, *bloße Sache*, serves as an instructive analytical framework for thinking about the touch of others. Whereas the "double sensation" revealed in auto-affective touch offers some semblance of certainty regarding the limits of the embodied self, the hetero-affective touch of another's flesh reveals a set of intractable questions for the haptic sceptic. If we readily identify the double sensation of our own flesh and we are relatively adept at identifying the touch of inert objects, then what can the touch of another's flesh reveal about intersubjectivity? Can flesh intuitively identify flesh, or does the possibility of deception endure? Surely there is no double sensation when one touches someone else's flesh, but touching another's flesh is nonetheless intuitively distinct from touching a table. The critical question is whether there is an aura of flesh which distinguishes it as a living body as opposed to a mere object, and how the hand's touch navigates this qualitative difference. The passage on the auto-affective hands in *Ideas II* has become a touchstone for theories of embodied phenomenology, and Husserl's readers have debated the peculiar touch of *Leib* and its implications for an intersubjective ethics of touch beyond sense-certainty. Specifically, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty highlight Husserl's discussion of the auto-affective hands as the generative source for an intersubjective ethics, but they draw opposing conclusions from the analogy between auto-affective and hetero-affective touch.

In the essay "The Philosopher and His Shadow," published in *Signs* in 1960, Merleau-Ponty argues that auto-affective touch is in fact analogous to the hetero-affective touch of another's flesh, suggesting an intuitive recognition of the distinction between *Leib* and inanimate matter. In other words, he asserts a parallelism between one's own flesh and the flesh of others encountered in touch. Despite the manifold possibilities for deception involved in the touch of another, Merleau-Ponty stakes the claim that the embodied flesh of the self is in fact contingent on the flesh of others in an interconnected matrix which he calls "intercorporeality":

> In learning that my body is a "perceiving thing," that it is able to be stimulated (*reizbar*)—it, and not just my "consciousness"—I prepared myself for understanding that there are other *animalia* and possibly other men. It is imperative to recognize that we have here neither comparison, nor analogy, nor projection or "introjection." The reason why I have evidence of the other man's being-there when I shake his hand is that his hand is substituted for my left hand, and my body annexes the body of another person in that "sort of reflection" it is paradoxically the seat of. My two hands "coexist" or are "compresent" because they are one single body's hands. The other person appears through an extension of that compresence; he and I are like organs of one single intercorporeality.[46]

46 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and His Shadow," in *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 168.

For Merleau-Ponty, when I understand the potential for my flesh to be stimulated, I recognise that same potential in others. The assertion that flesh intuitively recognises the touch of another's flesh overcomes the sceptical challenge to the existence of other minds, and it gives rise to an intersubjective ethics based on a shared network of flesh. He insists that intercorporeality does not function by projection or analogy, but rather that the other's flesh offers the same sort of "reflection of the body" that occurs when the left hand touches the right. Merleau-Ponty asserts that there exists an intuitive recognition of flesh even in hetero-affective touch, which precedes the division of flesh into solipsistic individual minds and bodies.

In "The Intertwining—The Chiasm," published posthumously in 1964 in *The Visible and the Invisible,* Merleau-Ponty radicalises these reflections on intercorporeality. He extends the notion of shared flesh beyond self and other to the very composition of the world itself, which he calls "the flesh of the world." Beyond a simple parallelism of auto-affective and hetero-affective touch, this concept asserts the fully-fledged contingency of one's own body, others' bodies, and the surrounding world itself. This raises the stakes of the analogy between one's own flesh and that of others and obliterates the category of inanimate matter through the chiasm connecting the flesh of *Leib* to the material and phenomenal world. Merleau-Ponty describes how "the flesh (of the world or my own) is not contingency, chaos, but a texture that returns to itself and conforms to itself."[47] The self and the other's flesh are connected through the chiasm of the corporality of the self and the materiality of the world, a touch which extends beyond one's own hand and into the other's flesh. He carries Husserl's analysis of auto-affective hands beyond the limits of the solipsistic individual body by disconnecting double sensation from its origin in a singular consciousness. Merleau-Ponty writes, "If my left hand can touch my right hand while it palpates the tangibles, can touch it touching, can turn its palpation back upon it, why, when touching the hand of another, would I not touch in it the same power to espouse the things that I have touched in my own?"[48] Rather than determining the limits of *Leib* against the backdrop of mere objects, touch reveals the contingency of the subject and its surrounding world, in what he calls the chiasm. The ontological character of this connection of flesh precedes the dualist separation of body and mind. Merleau-Ponty urges us to think about the original unity of bodies and the world they inhabit: "We must not think the flesh starting from substances, from body and spirit—for then it would be the union of contradictories—but we must think it, as we said, as an element, as the concrete emblem of a general manner of being."[49] This does not mean that all distinctions between self and other disappear in the touch of another's flesh; rather, the flesh of the self and that of the world are

47 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining—The Chiasm," in *The Visible and the Invisible; Working Notes*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 146.

48 Merleau-Ponty, 141.

49 Merleau-Ponty, 147.

intertwined. For Merleau-Ponty reveals "a new type of being, a being by porosity, pregnancy, or generality" whose body, this is connected to its worldly horizon: "His body and the distances participate in one same corporeity or visibility in general, which reigns between them and it, and even beyond the horizon, beneath his skin, unto the depths of being."[50] The chiasm of the visible and the tactile binds the ontological tissue of the self, others, and world.

The flesh of the world is bound together as a totality whose being precedes the dualist separation of minds and bodies. Merleau-Ponty writes that the other's touch offers "evidence of the other man's *being-there*," its *Dasein:* his notion of intercorporeality resembles Heidegger's *Mit-sein* to the extent that it sketches an ontological framework for understanding the presence of other human beings in terms of a shared world, *Mit-Welt*, of touching. However, Heidegger has little to say about the experience of touch, so *Dasein*'s recognition of others is merely implied or suggested. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty adds a layer of flesh to *Dasein*'s otherwise ghostly form of embodiment. According to Merleau-Ponty, I recognise the other's flesh as *Leib* because it is like my own flesh: together, they are co-constitutive of the flesh of the world. Touch connects us to others, it expands our sensitivity beyond our own atomistic bodies to the shared world of flesh, and it ultimately reveals the chiasm between the visual and tactile fields that tie an individual's flesh to the world. This reworking of Husserl's notions of touch extends the analogy between auto-affection and hetero-affection to an all-encompassing notion of flesh which treats the world as an organic totality with the living beings that inhabit it.

There are important objections to raise against Merleau-Ponty's extension of Husserl's analysis of auto-affection to the hetero-affective touch of another's body. Merleau-Ponty's intersubjective flesh of the world asserts a parallelism between touching one's own flesh and touching the flesh of others, which is a radical departure from Husserl's description of the limits of the living body demarcated by touching external objects. Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the body's interconnectedness with its surroundings as the flesh of the world is in a certain sense analogous to Heidegger's description of the formal existential character of *Dasein* as being-with-others and being-in-the-world. Just as *Dasein* is a constitutive element of the shared world it inhabits along with others (rather than a Cartesian subject cut off from the world of other minds and external objects), Merleau-Ponty extends the *Leib* of the self to the intersubjective flesh of the world. Yet barring the invention of some sort of collective nervous system that would break through the hard problem of consciousness and allow us to literally feel what other people feel, even the most intimate touch of another could not replicate Husserl's double sensation of one's own body as subject and object. In *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy,* Derrida sharply rebukes Merleau-Ponty for misreading Husserl on this point: Merleau-Ponty "puts the shoe on the wrong foot, literally, turning upside down, short of completely misreading, the

50 Merleau-Ponty, 148.

sense of Husserl's text"[51] regarding the distinction between hetero- and auto-affective touch. Merleau-Ponty asserts an intersubjective connection between the flesh of the self and that of others, but, as Derrida observes, "the page in question clearly says that I can never have access to the body (*Leib*) of the other except in an indirect fashion, through appresentation, comparison, analogy, projection, and introjection." The flesh of the world exceeds the strict limits of phenomenological observation that Husserl establishes in *Ideas II*. In fidelity to Husserl's method, which strictly conscribes the sensible limits of *Leib*, Emmanuel Levinas also objects to Merleau-Ponty's parallelism between auto-affection and hetero-affection. Rather than revealing the flesh of the world, according to Levinas, the other's touch discloses precisely the *otherness* of the other's flesh. In a 1984 text entitled "In Memory of Alphonse de Waelhens," Levinas offers the counter-example of a handshake between two people, which neatly juxtaposes with Husserl's auto-affective hands: "Is the handshake a 'taking cognizance,' and a sort of coinciding of two thoughts in the mutual knowledge of one by the other? Is it not in the *difference*, proximity to one's neighbor?"[52] Far from being a melding of minds, shaking another's hand reveals the unbridgeable gap between the impressions of my body and others. The hetero-affective touch of the other does not present the same phenomenon as the double sensation specific to auto-affective touch. Rather, it is the *difference* between the other's touch and the touch of my own flesh that is constitutive of the embodied self.

The Caress and the Excendence of Sensibility

The touch of the other's flesh introduces further questions for the haptic sceptic. How does the hand's touch distinguish between the auto-affective touch of the self and the hetero-affective touch of another? Can flesh intuitively identify the flesh of others? Or does the possibility of deception continue to loom over any distinction of this sort? In contrast to Merleau-Ponty, Levinas outlines a crucial distinction between a notion of touch that seeks mastery over objects as an epistemological mode of knowing and his concept of the "caress," which illuminates a mode of contact between flesh which respects the alterity of the other. Beginning in his 1947 *Time and the Other* and further developed in his seminal 1961 text *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas articulates this distinction in the modes of tactile interactions with the other. In contradistinction to touch, the caress is an opening to otherness because, Levinas explains, "if one could possess, grasp, and know the other, it would not be other."[53]The question that arises for the haptic sceptic is whether the touch of the

51 Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, 190.

52 Emmanuel Levinas, "In Memory of Alphonse de Waelhens," in *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 111–12.

53 Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 89.

other's flesh can respect her alterity without trying to master or objectify her as a possession. The caress, as a touch beyond touch, reveals the "excendence" of immanence in the other's touch, giving rise to the possibility of both ethics and Eros.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas describes touch as a means of appropriation and mastery. Highlighting the linguistic connection between grasping and understanding, he explains, "La main prend et comprend," "The hand takes and comprehends."[54] This connection between touch and understanding is made explicit in German, between grasping, *begreifen*, and the concept, *Begriff*. Grasping is a form of taking possession that transforms the subject's mode of interacting with the world from existing to possessing, rendering objects knowable. When the hand extends to touch something, to grasp and "comprehend" it, the hand "is no longer a sense-organ, pure enjoyment, pure sensibility, but is mastery, domination, disposition—which do not belong to the order of sensibility."[55] The qualitative feel of an object is set aside when the hand seizes it in its grasp. Drawing a parallel between the senses of vision and touch and the activities of representation and labour, Levinas states that "vision moves into grasp":

> Vision opens upon a perspective, upon a horizon, and describes a traversable distance, invites the hand to movement and to contact, and ensures them. Socrates made fun of Glaucon who wished to take the vision of the starlit sky for an experience of height. The forms of objects call for the hand and the grasp. By the hand the object is in the end comprehended, touched, taken, borne and referred to other objects, clothed with a signification, by reference to other objects.[56]

The hand's touch is its attempt to master the object, to neutralise its alterity and appropriate it for itself. Merleau-Ponty's notion of intercorporeality is in fact evidence for Levinas's claim that touch overwhelms alterity, insofar as the former describes flesh as extending the zone of familiarity and sameness beyond the self to the flesh of others. In his guide to Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* entitled *Levinas and the Night of Being*, Raoul Moati explains that touching an object renders it a possession, domesticating its otherness and incorporating it into the realm of sameness or ipseity. "Things delimit being insofar as they are possessed," he writes, "in possession, being is no longer something that escapes me, but rather something that I comprehend—that is, something whose alterity has been neutralized." Possession changes an object's existential modality: it is "a being (*être*) transformed into a having (*avoir*)."[57] If touch is used to appropriate and dominate, it cannot be the source of ethics; for Levinas, ethics springs from the encounter with the infinite otherness of the other.

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54 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 161.

55 Levinas, 161.

56 Levinas, 191.

57 Raoul Moati, *Levinas and the Night of Being: A Guide to* Totality and Infinity, trans. Daniel Wyche (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 96.

In contrast to the touch which obliterates difference by co-opting objects as possessions, Levinas's notion of the caress is a distinct modality of tactile impression geared towards respecting the alterity of the other. Whereas touch seeks to master knowledge in the hand's grasp, the caress is an encounter with the unknown *otherness* of the other's touch. Contra Merleau-Ponty's "flesh of the world," which is a predicate that emerges from the domain of the sameness or ipseity of all beings, the caress is an expression of the infinite relation to the other, precisely in her irreducible otherness. The caress is a touch beyond touch: it reveals the transcendence that arises out of the immanence of tactile impressions. It is precisely this unknown and unknowable quality of the other's touch that is responsible for its allure, as the locus of desire or ethics. The caress is marked by its incalculability. Levinas explains in *Time and the Other:*

> The caress is a mode of the subject's being, where the subject who is in contact with another goes beyond this contact. Contact as sensation is part of the world of light. But what is caressed is not touched, properly speaking. It is not the softness or warmth of the hand given in contact that the caress seeks. The seeking of the caress constitutes its essence by the fact that the caress does not know what it seeks. This "not knowing," this fundamental disorder, is the essential. It is like a game with something slipping away, a game absolutely without project or plan, not with what can become ours or us, but with something other, always other, always inaccessible, and always still to come [*à venir*]. The caress is the anticipation of this pure future [*avenir*], without content. It is made up of this increase of hunger, of ever richer promises, opening new perspectives onto the ungraspable. It feeds on countless hungers.[58]

Touch arises from the domain of sameness or ipseity: one's own flesh is comparable with the flesh of others, and together it forms a unified totality which Merleau-Ponty calls the "flesh of the world." For Levinas, this is indicative of the tendency in philosophy to seek totality rather than infinity: it suggests aligning everything in the domain of sameness. Levinas "contest[s] the idea that the relationship with the other is fusion," and instead he insists, "the relationship with the Other is the absence of the other," which is "an absence that is time."[59] The horizon of the caress opens to a future, *avenir*, to be fulfilled in a time "to come," *à-venir*. The caress exceeds the plenitude of being and opens possibilities that derive from the infinite order of alterity. As Raoul Moati explains, "The caress discovers that which remains essentially resistant to any inscription within being: the pure future that is not available in any case in the mode of a being toward the future, which is to say of a possibility. The caress leads to an adventure."[60] The meaning of the caress goes beyond the immediacy of sense perception, beyond being, and calls out to the future. Levinas explains in *Totality and Infinity*, "anticipation grasps possibles," and the deferral of the caress into the future maintains a constant reflection on the otherness of the other, who is never fully mas-

58 Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 89.
59 Levinas, 90.
60 Moati, *Levinas and the Night of Being*, 168.

tered: "What the caress seeks is not situated in a perspective and in the light of the graspable."[61] Levinas's caress does not involve a method for testing the veracity of epistemic claims; rather, it embraces the mystery of the other's flesh which reveals the excendence of totality. The caress goes beyond being, it exceeds the limits of sensibility, and it reveals the always-already deferred fulfilment of the ethical responsibility to the other.[62]

The caress' engagement with alterity extends beyond the thinking of totality and stems from the domain of what Levinas describes as infinity. In his 1964 essay "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida describes Levinas's thinking of the ethical as transcending the immanent limits of being. He writes: "For Levinas the sun of the *epekeina tēs ousias* (beyond being) will always illuminate the pure awakening and inexhaustible source of thought," which is the overcoming of totality by a thinking of infinity; it is "the instrument of destruction for the phenomenology and ontology subjected to the neutral totality of the Same as Being or as Ego."[63] The immanent tactile impressions exceed the epistemological register of sense perception and instead derive from something beyond the totality of being, from the infinity of alterity. This transcendence of the caress at the heart of the immanent field of touch reveals what lies beyond being. For Levinas, this is the origin of the erotic touch as well as a potential source for an intersubjective ethics. Derrida continues: "In *Totality and Infinity* the 'Phenomenology of Eros' describes the movement of the *epekeina tēs ousias* in the very experience of the caress."[64] The caress always has "a foothold in being," but Levinas describes its movement as "the exceeding of being,"[65] a departure

61 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 258.

62 It certainly bears mentioning that Levinas would later revise his views on the caress, and in later texts, including his landmark 1974 text *Otherwise Than Being*, he would revise many of the views that he presents in *Time and the Other* and *Totality and Infinity*. In his later work, Levinas suggests that the other's touch reveals the otherness contained within oneself, like a wound which reveals the nudity of the self before the other, and leads to a hyperbolic, sacrificial ethics. A longer discussion of Levinas's evolution regarding these views is beyond the purview of this paper, but Jacob Rogozinski offers an insightful critical reading of Levinas's evolution regarding the caress and the touch of the other. He explains: "In the view of *Otherwise Than Being*, the caress always proves to a vulnerability, but it is no longer that of the Other, of the Beloved: it is that of the I in its devotion, its 'immolation' of the Other. While caressing the body of the Other, I hurt myself, I cut myself on his contact; I let myself be lacerated by this body that I caress, be torn apart by it up to the point where I 'sacrifice my skin.' In reality, this being skinned precedes all caressing, all external contact with the Other, since I have him in my skin, he has always perforated me, torn me away from myself. We are faced here with an 'exaggeration of tangency,' where the motifs slip from hyperbole to hyperbole [...] If one is to accept this postulate, one has to conclude that contact is necessarily altered, disconnected from the self by the alterity of the foreign flesh." Jacob Rogozinski, "From the Caress to the Wound: Levinas's *Outrageousness*," trans. Sofie Verraest, *Sophia Philosophical Review* 3, no. 2 (2009): 47–48.

63 Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," 105.

64 Derrida, 106.

65 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 113.

from the totality of being that gives rise to "ethical excendence":[66] the caress calls upon the ethical, but nonetheless steps beyond its limits in the transgressive activity of Eros.

The caress is a touch which transcends touch, a form of sensibility that, by its essence, exceeds the limits of the sensible. Hence, the caress is unperturbed by sceptical challenges to epistemological claims based on sensible impressions. The excendence of being discloses the possibility of an infinite responsibility to the other, as well as what Levinas calls the "phenomenology of Eros":

> The caress, like contact, is sensibility. But the caress transcends the sensible. It is not that it would feel beyond the felt, further than the senses, that it would seize upon a sublime food while maintaining, within its relation with this ultimate felt, an intention of hunger that goes unto the food promised, and given to, and deepening this hunger, as though the caress would be fed by its own hunger. The caress consists in seizing upon nothing, in soliciting what ceaselessly escapes its form toward a future never future enough, in soliciting what slips away as though it *were not yet*. It *searches*, it forages. It is not an intentionality of disclosure but of search: a movement unto the invisible.[67]

The caress ventures into the unknown; it is hands grasping in the dark, an encounter with alterity. For Levinas, the hand's caress implies curiosity, uncertainty, and intimacy: they are both the hands of doubt and the hands of desire. Whereas touch grasps and manipulates, the caress maintains a timidity and gentleness indicative of an encounter with the unknown.[68] Yet the phenomenology of Eros explored in

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66 Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," 106.

67 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 257–58.

68 It is important to note that Levinas's phenomenology of Eros is explicitly framed in the gendered, heteronormative terms of an encounter between a man and a woman, and he has been criticised for his depiction of the feminine as the source of alterity. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir fiercely attacks Levinas's notion of the feminine for its objectification of women: "I suppose Mr. Levinas is not forgetting that woman also is consciousness for herself. But it is striking that he deliberately adopts a man's point of view, disregarding the reciprocity of the subject and the object. When he writes that woman is a mystery, he assumes that she is mystery for man. So this apparently objective description is in fact an affirmation of masculine privilege" (Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier, new ed. [New York: Vintage Books, 2011], xxii n. 3). Levinas certainly describes his phenomenology of Eros from the perspective of the masculine philosopher's encounter with the female beloved, but it is questionable whether this perspective allows for reciprocity between male and female subjects. De Beauvoir's claim that Levinas exclusively describes women as an object of mystery for man runs contrary to his assiduous delineation of the touch from the caress. The caress refuses to master or objectify the feminine; it rejects the modality of possession for the erotic or ethical excendence of the unknown other. Levinas explains that the caress refuses domination or mastery over an object and that the feminine is the very source of alterity, which refuses objectification: "Erotic alterity is not restricted either to that which, between comparable beings, is due to different attributes which distinguish them. The feminine is other for a masculine being not only because of a different nature but also inasmuch as alterity is in some way its nature. In the erotic relation is it not a matter of another attribute in the Other, but of an attribute of alterity in the Other. [...] The feminine is described as the *of itself other,* as the origin of the very concept of al-

the caress is also a profanation of the ethical insofar as it does not proceed from the infinite responsibility glimpsed in the face of the other. As Moati explains, the erotic caress "consists in the transgression of a limit"; it "profanes that which it carries beyond the ethical presence of the Other and the face" and thus "transgresses the frankness of the face that deploys itself in the ethical injunction, in the prohibition against murder, and in signification."[69] The caress exhibits the sublime ambivalence of sensibility that exceeds the bounds of sensibility. It is connected to being but nonetheless destined to exceed it; it holds the potential for ethical activity, and yet it constantly transgresses the ethical responsibility to the other derived from the face. In the ambivalence of the caress, the hand is irreducible to an instrument for evaluating epistemological claims. The ethical and erotic excendence of the hand holds the possibility of transcendence as well as transgression.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted the crucial role of the hands in the philosopher's interactions with the world and other living beings, and the ubiquity of sceptical challenges to tactile impressions. From the external world scepticism that gives rise to Kant's "scandal of philosophy" to Levinas's insistence on the absolute otherness of the Other's flesh, the question of haptic scepticism proves indelible and even inescapable. Even Moore's anti-sceptical "here is one hand" proof of the existence of the external world only displaces the site of doubt from the existence of the external world to the existence of the hands. Haptic sceptical doubt can challenge the existential question of "having" hands, as well as the qualitative experience of what it is like to touch different classes of things. We have seen that Heidegger's obsession with the existential delineation of the handed from the handless comes at the expense of a rigorous analysis of embodiment and the peculiar experience of touching the flesh of another. This form of haptic scepticism occludes the ethical dimension of the hands in favour of its existential qualifiers, and it leads to Heidegger's solipsistic, disembodied notion of *Dasein*.

When we turn to the qualitative experience of touching different classes of objects, new iterations of haptic scepticism emerge. Husserl's analysis of auto-affection

terity" (Emmanuel Levinas and Philippe Nemo, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard A. Cohen [Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985], 65–66). There are clearly problems that arise from the explicitly gendered, heteronormative perspective from which Levinas analyses the phenomenology of Eros, but he assures us that there is nothing intrinsically irreversible in his analysis of the caress. What is ultimately important for Levinas in the erotic caress is not that it is a man's encounter with the feminine, but that it is an encounter with the radical alterity of the other: "The pathos of the erotic relationship is the fact of being two, and that the other is absolutely other" (Levinas and Nemo, 66).

69 Moati, *Levinas and the Night of Being*, 164.

suggests that the experience of touching one's own hands is unique because of the "double sensation" in which the body perceives itself as both subject and object. Levinas and Merleau-Ponty's dispute over the analogy between auto-affective and hetero-affective touch implies that the hands can offer certainty, just as they can plunge the veracity of tactile impressions into doubt. Whereas Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "flesh of the world" articulates a parallelism between the flesh of the self and the flesh of others, Levinas convincingly argues that this effort to relegate all flesh to sameness ostensibly neutralises the other's alterity, and that this kind of touch is used to assert mastery and domination over the other. The caress is not immune to doubt, but instead is committed to the otherness of the other's flesh. Even as the haptic sceptic continues to question the veracity of tactile impressions, the caress admits and embraces the mystery of the other.

Sceptical challenges to the hands' tactile impressions will inevitably continue to raise doubts regarding the epistemological certainty of touch, but such challenges are only part of the question. Reducing the hands to the preeminent appendage for epistemological squabbles occludes their significant role in ethical life. The hands are not merely the site of doubt and certainty; further, they mediate our interactions with others, and form a crucial locus for action in our ethical lives. Unperturbed and even nourished by the challenge of haptic scepticism, the ethical dimension of the hands exceeds the epistemological limits of sensibility. The "ethical excendence" of the hands constantly overflows the limits imposed by epistemological doubt.

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Fig. 6: Valie Export, *Tapp und Tastkino* (*TAP and TOUCH Cinema)*, 1968/1989, video © Valie Export / Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Robert Pfaller

When to Touch and What to Doubt: Zeroing In on the Tactile Surplus

Touching as Doubting: Against the Visual Surplus

Touching as an act of doubt begins when one ceases to believe one's eyes. Yet this does not imply that the tactile organs will be any more accurate than the eyes were. For Epicurus and Lucretius, the senses are always right, and no sense is entitled to criticise another.[1] If, for them, touching possesses any superiority over vision at all,[2] this is due to vision's tendency towards totalisation and teleology—as, for example, expressed in the ancient Roman formula "*videant* consules (ne quid detrimenti res publica capiat)."[3] Seeing seems to trigger the imagination, dragging it towards meaning, towards foreseeing and *providence*—that is, towards the Stoic gods. Touching, on the contrary, appears to perceive one's being pushed from behind by the meaningless collisions of atoms.[4]

If there is a sceptical power specific to touching, this power is not so much directed against the visual *image*, but against the mind's contribution to it—against one's *imagination*. Therefore, Lucretius emphasises that one should not blame the eyes for the mistakes of the mind.[5] It is the mind that intervenes in seeing and makes it deceptive, while touching proves to be more robust and less susceptible to such interventions.[6] Thus, touching affirms *being* against, for example, *wishing*,

1 See Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 4.490–500.

2 For this problem, see Jakob Moser, "Manifest gegen die Evidenz. Tastsinn und Gewissheit bei Lukrez," in *Auf die Wirklichkeit zeigen. Zum Problem der Evidenz in den Kulturwissenschaften. Ein Reader*, ed. Helmuth Lethen, Ludwig Jäger, and Albrecht Koschorke (Frankfurt: Campus, 2015), 98–99.

3 Literally translated, this means "the consuls shall see that the republic does not take any harm."

4 See, for example, Marcus Aurelius's concise formula "the atoms, or the Gods" (*Selbstbetrachtungen*, trans. Wilhelm Capelle [Stuttgart: Kröner, 1948], 107), which refers to the fact that the Stoic technique of consolation consisted in considering current inconvenience to have some higher meaning, whereas Epicurean consolation consisted in reducing it to meaningless atomic collisions (see Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 8.15, accessed 19/09/2018, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2680/2680-h/2680-h.htm#link2H_4_0243).

5 Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 4.380–90.

6 However, this should not lead to the assumption that touching would only provide reliable "primary qualities," whereas seeing would, beyond questionable "secondary qualities," also imply notions of an external object. Also, touching allows for more than just sensations. For this, see the perspicuous remarks in Ernst H. Weber, *Tastsinn und Gemeingefühl*, ed. Ewald Hering (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1905) 6 f., which analyses Gustav Fechner's examples of how one can feel the solidity of an external object like a table by pressing a pen against it. One then does not only feel a slight pain in one's finger, but also the quality of the table, even through a non-sensitive medium. We can feel ex-

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or *hoping*; it recalls what things *are* instead of what we *want to see* in them, or what we hope them to be or to become, or what we make out of them. It is significant that it is possible to speak of "*what one wants to see* in something," yet not of "*what one wants to touch* in something."

To put this in Aristotelian terms, one could say that seeing is the method of the "dialectician," who sees in the house the purpose of protection from wind, rain, and heat, whereas touching is the method of the "physicist," who describes a house as something composed of stones, bricks, and wood.[7] Whereas the dialectician heads for the meaning of a thing, the physicist returns to its matter. Seeing concerns final causes; touching concerns material causes. The problem with the visual sense is that images are always mixed with imagination. This is the reason why *blindness*, already in Lucretius and later in Diderot, is a formula for a disillusioned attitude.[8] Sight often finds it difficult to abstain from imputing an interpretation or a supposition of finality into what it sees. Seeing thus regularly produces a surplus. This was wittily observed by Friedrich Nietzsche when he stated:

> People are much more artistic than they think.—In the middle of a lively conversation I will often see the other person's face expressing his thoughts (or the thoughts I attribute to him) with a degree of clarity and detail that far exceeds the power of my visual ability:—such subtlety of muscle movement and ocular expression *must* have come from my own imagination. In all likelihood the person had an entirely different expression, or none at all.[9]

If seeing regularly produces such a surplus beyond available facts, touching may help to shed this baggage. This follows the principle of philosophical materialism, as Louis Althusser formulated it, "Not to tell oneself any stories."[10] The idea of our freedom, for example, can be such a story. What we regard as our freedom may just be a fabrication, a "screen idea" that prevents us from acknowledging the coincidences and meaningless collisions of atoms that actually caused our actions. By removing the visual surplus, touching lays bare the meaninglessness that seeing falsely turned into meaning. Now, discerning meaninglessness behind apparent meaning is comedy's key move. This may explain why only a writer and director of comedy could be attributed with the notion of the "Lubitsch *touch*."[11]

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ternal objects even through extensions of our tactile organs, just as we can feel (phantom) pain through absent organs.

7 See Aristotle, *De anima*, trans. R.D. Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), 8 f.

8 For this, see Moser, "Manifest gegen die Evidenz." A late echo of this idea may reverberate in Marcel Duchamp's choice of "The Blind Man" for the title of his journal.

9 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 82.

10 "Ne pas se raconter d'histoire": Louis Althusser, *L'avenir dure longtemps, suivi de Les faits*, ed. Olivier Cooper and Yann Mulier Boutang, 2nd augmented ed. (Paris: STOCK/IMEC, 1994), 247.

11 For this term, see Billy Wilder's lovely explanation in "The Lubitsch Touch," presented at the AFI Harold Lloyd Master Seminar in 1976, accessed 20/08/2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?

The Touch and Its Surplus: Comic Success

Comedy often starts when things receive a little "push"; when, due to some unintended impulse, things cease to go their planned or predicted way. Comedy starts with an Epicurean "clinamen."[12] This is the case, for example, when a mechanical doll that is supposed to represent the bride at the staged marriage of a stubborn young bachelor is accidently knocked over and broken (in Lubitsch's 1919 *Die Puppe*) and when, therefore, a real young woman must represent the doll that was previously supposed to represent a real young woman. Comedy's typical push thus produces two outcomes: first, something different happens from what had been foreseen, and second, this different event ultimately proves to be much better than the foreseen one. Comedy's push creates undeserved success and unexpected happiness—surplus happiness, as it were.

Thus, also, touch, as it is proper to comedy, produces a surplus, yet an entirely different surplus from that pertaining to the visual sense. Whereas seeing's surplus rests in the *foreseen*, touching's surplus resides in the *unforeseen*. Significantly, and especially in Lubitsch, this deviation (and its surplus), caused by the "push," concerns planned marriages and would-be couples: a real woman may thus replace a doll, or a *ménage à trois* a couple (as in *Design for Living*, or, amounting even to a *ménage à quatre*, in *To Be or Not to Be*). There is always something that comically exceeds the heterosexual monogamous matrix. Lubitsch's touch seems to regularly create a kind of funny surplus love.[13]

Whereas a foreseen surplus of the sort produced by seeing attempts to pass unacknowledged, the unforeseen surplus of touching reliably sticks out.[14] What seeing adds to visual facts always appears to already belong to the image and does not appear to alter it. In this way, as Walter Benjamin remarked, history as seen (i.e., made up) by its current ruling powers always appears to be "how things once were."[15]

Touching's surplus, on the contrary, does not contribute to completing such an image. Instead, it adds itself as an obscene supplement to what could otherwise have

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v=7jOVRKzwURY. For the comedy of materialism, see Robert Pfaller, "Materialism's Comedy," *Bedeutung* 1 (2008): 20–28, and Robert Pfaller, *The Pleasure Principle in Culture: Illusions without Owners*, trans. Lisa Rosenblatt with Charlotte Eckler and Camilla Nielsen (London: Verso, 2014), 166–69.

12 For this notion, see Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus* 43, in Epicurus, *Briefe, Sprüche, Werkfragmente: Griechisch/Deutsch*, ed. and trans. Hans-Wolfgang Krautz (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005), 10. See also Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 2.219; see Ernst A. Schmidt, *Clinamen: Eine Studie zum dynamischen Atomismus der Antike* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2007); Mladen Dolar, "Tyche, Clinamen, Den," *Continental Philosophy Review* 46, no. 2 (2013): 223–39.

13 For this, see Pfaller, *The Pleasure Principle in Culture*.

14 For this, see Alenka Zupančič's beautiful considerations on what she calls "the odd one in" as the basic structuring element of comedy (*The Odd One In: On Comedy* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008]).

15 See Walter Benjamin, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte," in *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 1/2: Abhandlungen*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhaüser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), 691–704.

passed as a consistent image.[16] Such a surplus causes us to question whether things were really as they previously seemed to be. For example, the emergence of surplus value may question the apparent fairness of a contract between a worker and an employer. Similarly, in Heinrich Heine's witty formula, "love, truth, freedom, and shrimp soup,"[17] the last element, as a strange, slightly obscene surplus, questions the whole meaning and seriousness of the sequence formed by the three previous elements. As can be seen again here, this sceptical power of the touch surplus—especially with regard to what was planned or foreseen—is often not without humour.

I Touch, and You Know

If touching leads to knowledge, however, the knowing person still need not be the touching one. They can also be the *touched* one. When, in Sigmund Freud's early psychoanalytic treatments, patients found themselves unable to remember a given thing, a little "pressure" from the analyst's hand helped them to regain their memories. Touching apparently functioned here as a trigger for transference: apparently, it allows the object—namely, the analyst—to replace one's ego-ideal and thus relieves the censorship exerted by it.

Again, a funny little push sets things in motion. Yet it is anything but easy to tell who is supposed to believe in the efficacy of this astonishingly efficient touch from the analyst: can we seriously say that it is the analysand who believes that it works? Rather, here, the touch seems to escape any belief and any possible vision: "I do not see how this shall work" seems to be the formula that describes the efficiency at work here. It is probable that the touch only works here insofar as nobody believes in it. Both sides may secretly think the same thing, namely: "Perhaps you believe in this silly trick, but I don't."

However, the scepticism at work in this situation is not limited to this mutual non-belief. By doing something in which neither agent believes, the analyst permits the analysand to think, "I am no longer responsible for what happens now." And this is precisely what permits something to happen. The analysand is then able to recall and relate his memories. Yet what he tells us, if this succeeds, is more than what he knows. As Freud remarks: "What we want to hear from our patient is not only what he

16 To put this in Jacques Lacan's terminology, one can say that seeing produces *master-signifiers*, whereas touching produces *objets a*.

17 Heinrich Heine, *Ideen. Das Buch Le Grand*, ed. Dierk Möller (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1972), 19. For a brilliant analysis of these kinds of paradoxical classifications, see Mladen Dolar, "Officers, Maids, and Chimneysweepers," in *Sex and Nothing: Bridges from Psychoanalysis to Philosophy*, ed. Alejandro Cerda-Rueda (London: Karnac, 2016), 19–36.

knows and conceals from other people; he is to tell us too what he does *not* know."[18] A little touch thus again brings about an obscene surplus over acceptable knowledge; a surplus that puts this knowledge into question. We could call this a sceptical triumph, since a person now becomes able to tell us what he does not know.

Touching What Is Not There

Mark Tansey's painting "Doubting Thomas"—well chosen by Rachel Aumiller for the invitation to the conference that led to this anthology—as well as the Doubting Thomas episode in St. John's Gospel could be read in a way that leads to a surprising point: we touch not when our knowledge is doubtful or inconsistent, but rather when an object itself is inconsistent. What we touch is precisely the inconsistency of the object. We are mostly putting our finger into a hole. If touching assures us of anything at all, it thus assures us of a lack in the Other. (One could say, according to Jean Laplanche's general theory of seduction, that this is what we hope to find, since we try to "seduce" the other by creating a little dimple as an erogenous zone.[19])

It is difficult to tell, therefore, precisely what illusion St. Thomas wanted to dissipate by touching: That it was only an image of Jesus in front of him, and not a real person? A ghost? Or a Jesus lookalike, but lacking wounds? How did Thomas know that this was not just another, less seriously wounded man? And what truth did he find instead? A wounded God?

Brought to Touch

Valie Export's famous 1968 performance "Tapp- und Tastkino" is an almost uncanny reminder of Caravaggio's depiction of "The Incredulity of Saint Thomas" (1601–1602) —not only due to the striking similarity between the compositions of the famous photograph and the famous painting, but also in one specific aspect. Sceptics are here not only touching, but actually invited (Export) or even forced (Jesus) to touch some of the other's most delicate parts. This reverses the usual pattern of curiosity and desire according to which we (sometimes) dare to touch what interests us.

In both of these cases, touching therefore appears to be a quite dubious privilege. Entertainingly, Jesus explains to Thomas, "Because you have *seen* me, you have believed; blessed are those who have *not seen* and yet have believed" (John 20:29; emphasis mine). Export places a greater comparative emphasis on the tactile

18 Sigmund Freud, "An Outline of Psychoanalysis," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 23 (1937–1939): Moses and Monotheism, An Outline of Psychoanalysis and Other Works*, ed. James Strachey et al. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), 174.

19 See Jean Laplanche, *Le primat de l'autre en psychanalyse: Travaux 1967–1992* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997).

character of the event by not permitting the spectator to see at all, but only to touch. Whereas in the arts, as well as in practices such as belly dance or striptease, spectators are usually allowed to see, but not to touch, here, the opposite rule applies. Such a touch may appear quite uncanny, obscene, or almost traumatic to the touching person: not because some "naked truth" has entered, but because of the surplus of touch over (non-)seeing. Only due to this help from its visual accomplice does touching appear to gain the dignity of "touching the Real."

The crucial point here is the fact that the touchers are prompted to touch more than they want to touch, and/or more than they can see. Seeing here takes on the meaning of wanting to see, and perhaps also of wanting to touch. It thus opens up a logic of desire. Due to seeing, things acquire a place that is proper to them, and they may thus induce a curiosity to also touch them. We may haptically want to check whether they are really there, whether they really feel the way they look, and so on. Here, seeing seems to work like a library catalogue, whereas touching corresponds to the attempt to find out whether the book promised by the catalogue is really there. In its role as desire, seeing thus creates a kind of assurance: we can be sure that everything we may touch has its proper place; there is nothing unforeseen upon which we could stumble. Even if some things should turn out not to feel the way they looked, or if they should not be where we had thought we would see them, this is only a minor disappointment—they are then just lacking in their proper place, like a missing book in a library. If desire works as a defence, as Jacques Lacan pointed out,[20] the same goes here for seeing. Seeing provides a kind of screen that is located between us and our experiences—an "a priori," or, in other words, a prejudice—preparing us for any possible experience by giving it the character of an *expected* experience. Even if it may not appear likely or probable that things actually are there, or that they actually are how they appear to be (or that one is really allowed to touch them), they are still expected in the sense that their visual place, their possibility, precedes their haptic actuality.

On the other hand, being forced to touch, or seduced to touch what one cannot see, thus takes on the character of an experience outside of its screen, just like a book in a library that is not listed in the catalogue.[21] What one encounters, then, is something which is not foreseen as a possible experience, something for which one cannot be prepared. This matches Sigmund Freud's explanation of what renders

20 "Desire is a defence (*défense*), a prohibition (*défense*) against going beyond a certain limit in *jouissance*": Jaques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), 322; see Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, repr. ed. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 34.

21 Uncanniness regularly arises as a kind of surplus. To illustrate this with an example from my personal experience: I once wanted to open a door for which I thought I had a key. However, the key turned out not to work in that the door. I did not have the key for that door: this was a minor disappointment. Yet the next moment brought an awareness of the fact that I now had a key without knowing what door it could open. This was rather uncanny.

an experience traumatic.[22] A traumatic experience always arises as a surplus beyond a given screen or pattern (or catalogue) of possible experiences; as something that has no proper place within a given system of possible places; something that was not just unexpected, but that was impossible to expect. Only under these conditions does the haptic experience take on the unpleasant dignity of unlimited enjoyment (*jouissance*) in the Lacanian sense. Touching what one could not see, or what one did not want to touch before one got to touch it, means encountering something without being protected by one's defensive screen of desire.

Yet the unpleasant, traumatic character of the unprepared touch only emerges when such a protective visual screen exists at all. In order to be struck (or touched, as it were) by an unprotected haptic impression, one has to have such a protective screen. For something to be outside of a screen, there must be a screen in the first place.[23] As Denis Diderot concluded, for a blind person, the haptic experience of Saint Thomas, just like that of the unknown man with his hands in Valie Export's box, would not have been traumatic, obscene, or uncanny. Blind people cannot be struck by something outside a protective visual screen, because they do not have such a screen. This—questionable—assumption is the reason why Diderot could paradoxically present the *blind* man as a hero of *enlightenment*, because he appeared to be a person free from cultural prejudices and therefore free from any sense of obscenity.[24] Children are other candidates for this structural position in philosophical reasoning. In this sense, Sigmund Freud pointed out that children are not susceptible to

22 See Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 18 (1920–1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works*, ed. James Strachey et al. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 12.

23 The same goes, of course, for the fetishist in Freud's explanation: in order to experience the view of the female genitals as "traumatic," one has to be "prepared" by an infantile sexual theory that assumes the omnipresence of the penis. Only under such an a priori would the absence of a penis be classified as "castration." The "realist" attitude (which, in the fetishist splitting, separates itself from the "wishful" attitude) is one whose "reality" is outlined by an infantile sexual theory. See Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 21 (1927–1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and Its Discontents and Other Works*, ed. James Strachey et al. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961).

24 See Denis Diderot, "The Letter on the Blind," in *Diderot's Early Philosophical Works*, ed. and trans. Margaret Jourdain (Chicago and London: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1916), 81: "Though living in an age when philosophy has rid us of a great number of prejudices, I do not think we shall ever arrive at such complete insensibility to the prerogatives of modesty as this blind man. Diogenes would not have been a philosopher in his account." Obviously, Diderot is not interested in the actual reality of blind people's perception here. Instead, he tries to conceive the blind man as an embodiment of the aspirations of enlightenment: freedom from moral and aesthetic prejudices. Diderot reflects on and concedes to the contemporary criticism of his "utopian" concept of blindness made by the blind lady Mélanie de Salginac, especially concerning his idea of blind people's alleged lack of pity, in his "Addition to the Letter on the Blind," in *Diderot's Early Philosophical Works*, 142–57. I am indebted here to José María Sánchez de León Serrano for his most inspiring comments on these passages in Diderot presented at the "A Touch of Doubt: On Haptic Scepticism" conference held in Hamburg on 27 March 2018.

the experience of the uncanny.[25] If one lacks a protective cultural shield of desire, then nothing appears as an unprotected intrusion of *jouissance*. In order to be struck defenceless, one has to have some defences. The obscene, the uncanny, and the undesired enjoyment thus reveal their dependency on a cultural a priori. These experiences do not come under the mere absence of a protective screen, but under its determinate lack.[26] The prefixes "ob-" and "un-" in the notions of "obscene" and "uncanny" designate a "determinate negation": it is culture—or perhaps only certain cultures—that constructs certain screens or "scenes" and, by the same move, posits something as being outside this screen, as uncanny or obscene. These excluded entities are cultural "constructs"—yet in the precise sense that they are "constructed" as the determinate outside of cultural construction, as "non-objects" or *Undinge* of a specific culture.

This is the reason why materialist philosophers such as Ludwig Marcuse have insisted on the idea that there is actually no such thing as the obscene.[27] By similar reasoning, ancient philosophers, especially those from the Cynic school, such as Diogenes of Sinope, Crates, and Hipparchia, attempted to demonstrate the disadvantages of cultural education, of a prioris and prejudices, such as (according to them), for example, the feeling of shame. Attempting to "learn from the dogs" from whom they took their name,[28] the Cynics staged shameless "obscene" performances in public spaces by living, eating, and even making love in the streets of Athens. Thus, they wanted to convince people that their cultural formation was a superfluous defence that unnecessarily designated some human experiences as obscene; something without which these things could be experienced as entirely ordinary and lived more happily. The Cynics' scepticism consisted in methodical doubt regarding the necessity of cultural patterns that designate certain experiences as uncanny or obscene. The late heirs of these ancient sceptics are, in the twentieth century, performance artists like Valie Export—a reference that is even more explicit in her performance with Peter Weibel, "Aus der Mappe der Hundigkeit" ("From the Portfolio of Doggedness," 1968), in which she dragged him through Vienna's most elegant shopping street on a dog lead, than in "Tapp und Tastkino."[29] The appearances of the Rus-

25 See Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 17 (1917–1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, ed. James Strachey et al. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 250.

26 This is precisely why Lacan described anxiety as what occurs when the lack (i.e., the protective screen) is *lacking* (*Le Séminaire, livre X: L'angoisse, 1962–63,* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller [Paris: Seuil, 2004], 53).

27 See Ludwig Marcuse, *Obszön: Geschichte einer Entrüstung* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1984).

28 *Kuōn* is the Greek word for "dog"; *kunikos* thus literally means "doggish." A beautiful account of this philosophical tradition is to be found in Georg Luck, ed. and trans., *Die Weisheit der Hunde: Texte der antiken Kyniker in deutscher Übersetzung mit Erläuterungen* (Stuttgart, Kröner: 1997).

29 See Valie Export and Peter Weibel, "Aus der Mappe der Hundigkeit", accessed 31/08/2018, http://peter-weibel.at/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=27%3Aaus-der-mappe-der-hundig-

sian performance artist Oleg Kulik as an (often quite angry) dog also belong to this philosophical tradition.[30] The aggressive monkey-artist whose performance comprised an impressive part of the recent film *The Square* (directed by Ruben Östlund, 2017) can probably be counted as a fellow-traveller of this "animalistic" criticism of human culture by the ancient Cynics.

While the philosophical Cynics and their late followers in performance art raised doubts regarding cultural conventions and pointed towards the idea of a culture free of prejudices and constructions—a culture that would produce no feeling of shame, no uncanny or obscene outsides—Sigmund Freud did the opposite. Freud pessimistically doubted the possibility of such a "liberated" culture. It may be true that some cultures have found a more placable way of dealing with difficult matters such as sex than, for example, modern bourgeois Western culture.[31] Yet this does not stem from the fact that these cultures have avoided excluding certain matters from their cultural "screen." Repression, as Freud suspects, is "organic";[32] it comes as a consequence of the development and hierarchisation of partial drives during sexual development, and culture only "superstructures" this condition, thereby, as it were, innocently taking the guilt upon itself. Yet what some cultures achieve, as opposed to others, is a way of celebrating the "accursed shares"—a practice that allows for the ambivalent, sacred issues to be transformed into sublime ones. Other cultures, like ours, that—perhaps following a late 1968 spirit which naively declares such issues to be mere cultural constructs; that is, actually non-existent—avoid celebrating these things and see their most noble task to be subjecting them to "negative cults" of abstinence, inevitably transforming them into something appalling. Our former gods that we have ceased to celebrate thus turn into our most horrible demons, as Freud (referring to Heinrich Heine's novella "Gods in Exile") remarks.[33]

At this point, doubt could become a means for re-evaluating touch: Freud's scepticism could help a postmodern culture that is obsessed with harassment of all kinds to find its way back to practices by which not every touch must necessarily be expe-

keit-1968&catid=2%3Amixed-media&lang=de&Itemid=11 and http://foundation.generali.at/sammlung/artist/export-valiepeter-weibel/artwork/aus-der-mappe-der-hundigkeit-5.html#.W4qV8i35zNM.

30 For this, see Anselm Wagner, "Der Künstler als Hund. Kynische Strategien der Körperkunst," *Noema art journal* 43 (1996): 52–60.

31 "The most striking distinction between the erotic life of antiquity and our own no doubt lies in the fact that the ancients laid the stress upon the instinct itself, whereas we emphasize its object. The ancients glorified the instinct and were prepared on its account to honour even an inferior object; while we despise the instinctual activity in itself, and find excuses for it only in the merits of the object": Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 7 (1901–1905): A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works*, ed. James Strachey et al. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), 149 (footnote added in 1910).

32 Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 21*, 100.

33 Freud, "The Uncanny," 235f.

rienced as a nuisance. The practices of celebration turn excluded and forbidden things into obligatory, sublime ones. Whereas one may shamefully avoid touching anybody else in ordinary, profane life, in sacred situations, such as, for example, in ritual dances, it becomes an obligatory, joyful exercise. What contemporary culture sadly lacks is not more prohibitions, rules, and regulations for avoiding bodily or psychic contact, but the opposite, the art of temporarily suspending profane life in such a way that people know when to touch and how their contact can be experienced as sublime.

Being Touched by What One Sees

The opposition between seeing and touching in the sense of a screen and its off-screen transgression, as we just have encountered it, can also occur within the visual field itself. There can be elements within a picture that form a kind of surface, a plain, coherent meaningful order of visual signs, while some other elements stick out from—or rather pierce through—this surface, thus taking on a righteous tactile quality. In his book *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes coined the notions of *studium* and *punctum* for these two different sources of visual experience. The first element, the *studium*, can be described as a surface of expectable meanings:

> The first, obviously, is an extent, it has the extension of a field, which I perceive quite familiarly as a consequence of my knowledge, my culture; this field [...] always refers to a classical body of information.[34]

The *punctum*, on the contrary, opposes itself to this predictable field:

> The second element will break (or punctuate) the *studium*. This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the *studium* with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me.[35]

Even if Barthes, in his role as the observer, is now pierced by this element as though by a kind of arrow, as opposed to Doubting Thomas, who (forcedly) pierces his Lord's lance-wound, the shattering quality of the experience appears to be quite the same. Just like Saint Thomas, who ventures for the hole in the other, Barthes experiences the *punctum* in the picture as "a little hole."[36] And the *punctum* is, for Barthes, just as for Thomas, a "wound":

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34 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1988), 25 f.

35 Barthes, 26.

36 Barthes, 27.

> And because the photographs I am speaking of are in effect punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points; precisely, these marks, these wounds are so many points.[37]

In this constellation between *studium* and *punctum*, despite the fact that both belong to the visual field, the *punctum* takes on a *tactile* quality, with all the implications and consequences explained above: the *punctum* comes from outside the field of the visually expectable, as a "supplement,"[38] as something slightly uncanny or obscene, something "disturbing"[39]; it is, just like the more or less "forced" touches discussed above, an "involuntary feature";[40] it comes unexpectedly and shakes and shatters a given certainty of "knowledge" or "culture," thus assuming a sceptical power.

What Lucretius attributed to visual images in general—that they are material and are emitted from the objects just like smells—is, in Barthes's account, only true for a certain type of visual element: the *punctum*. The *studium* appears to remain calm, yet the *punctum* emerges from the picture. While one looks for what the *studium* contains with "sovereign consciousness," the *punctum* is not "sought out" by the observer, but rather strikes him. The *punctum*, as it were, actively attacks the observer; it "pricks" and "bruises" him[41] and jumps into his eye,[42] whereas the *studium* remains "inert":

> Many photographs are, alas, inert under my gaze. But even among those which have some existence in my eyes, most provoke only a general and, so to speak, polite interest: they have no *punctum* in them: they please or displease me without pricking me: they are invested with no more than *studium*. The *studium* is the very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: I like/I don't like. The *studium* is of the order of liking, not of loving; it mobilizes a half desire, a demi-volition; it is the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes one finds "all right."[43]

The fact that the *punctum* appears to actively engage and strike the observer implies that the latter is unable to reach the picture through the moderating filters of his moral and political culture, as is the case with the *studium:*

> Thousands of photographs consist of this field, and in these photographs I can, of course, take a kind of general interest, one that is even stirred sometimes, but in regard to them my emotion requires the rational intermediary of an ethical and political culture. What I feel about these photographs derives from an *average* affect, almost from a certain training.[44]

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37 Barthes, 26.
38 "Le punctum: c'est un supplement": Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma/Galimard/Seuil, 1996), 89.
39 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.
40 Barthes, 47.
41 Barthes, 27.
42 See Barthes, 43.
43 Barthes, 27.
44 Barthes, 26.

The filtered experience of what the *studium* permits us to expect only creates a predictable medium amount of affect that is willfully expended.[45] The unprotected encounter with the *punctum*, on the contrary, "touches" and "moves" the observer.[46] He is brought not just to "like," but to "love."[47] The *punctum* creates an unpredictable amount of affect, an unwilling expenditure.

To sum this up, it can be said that through the *punctum*, the observer is brought beyond what he knows (the filter of his "moral and political education"), beyond what he intentionally and willfully seeks and accepts, and beyond his usual economy of affect. The sceptical power of the *punctum*'s touch thus does not only question what a person knows about an object; rather, it questions the very position of the subject.

It is at this point that scepticism acquires a new direction; a new goal or object. Doubting now does not only mean questioning some presumed knowledge about an object. Instead, it tackles the subject position; that is, the unacknowledged assumptions, education, and opinions of the person in question. The touching doubt is not about an a posteriori; it is about the a prioris. It does not check questionable knowledge in order to gain certainty; it questions certainty itself —the unquestioned assumptions that form the general coordinates within which every particular item of knowledge is located. Such a "touching" doubt concerns the "lived world" of the subject; that is, the set of unacknowledged and taken for granted presuppositions that invisibly function for us, just like water for the fish that swim in it, as nicely explained by David Foster Wallace.[48] Being touched by a *punctum* means to be struck in one's pre-conscious world-view, in the way one wishfully places oneself within the world as it is experienced—that is, in the terms of Louis Althusser, one's ideology,[49] or, in the terms of the ancient philosophers, one's "opinion" or *doxa*. The fact that not only knowledge, but also the lived certainty that surrounds one's knowledge (as well as one's error and ignorance) is attacked by the touching doubt of the *punctum* explains why this arouses such a high amount of affect: for it is, as ancient philosophers such as the Stoic philosopher Epictetus taught, not facts, but people's "opinions" that arouse their passions.[50]

45 Barthes, 28: "According to my will as *spectator*."

46 Barthes, 43.

47 Barthes, 27; see Barthes, 43: "This particular *punctum* arouses great sympathy in me, almost a kind of tenderness."

48 David Foster Wallace, "This Is Water," commencement speech delivered at Pomona College, California, accessed 18/09/2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CrOL-ydFMI.

49 See Louis Althusser, *On Ideology*, trans. Ben Brewster, new ed. (New York: Verso, 2008).

50 Epictetus, *Handbüchlein der Moral: Griechisch/Deutsch*, ed. and trans. Kurt Steinmann (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2004) 10 f. (§ 5); see also Epictetus, *The Enchiridion*, trans. Elizabeth Carter, accessed 19/09/2018, http://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicench.html.

Affirmative and Transformative Doubting

The history of philosophy features two prominent sceptical positions of relevance to this question that must be distinguished here. On the one hand, there is the modern, Cartesian doubt. This is a "cognitive" or "epistemological" doubt, whose aim is to establish certainty in the sense of reliable knowledge. This doubt only concerns objects of knowledge (the subject, on the contrary, is what is seen as beyond any doubt). On the other, we find the ancient Pyrrhonean scepticism (named after its founder, Pyrrho of Elis). This is an "ethical" scepticism. The aim of doubting here is not knowledge or certainty, but, on the contrary, "untroubledness" (*ataraxia*) by fixed ideas. Pyrrhonean doubt concerns the subject position. This scepticism does not care whether certain ideas are true or not, but only whether treating them as true may lead the subject into unpleasant excitement. Therefore, Michel de Montaigne, a late heir of this ancient tradition, would ask himself the question "What do I know?" whenever he found himself in a critical situation, an exercise by which he managed to abstain from any dogmatism or fanatic partisanship and to remain in a subject position of benevolent, serene curiosity.

Valie Export's touching performance obviously belongs to the Pyrrhonean tradition of "ethical" doubt. Touching here does not aim at a "reality check" or knowledge at all; it entirely concerns the position of the subject, his (or her) "moral and political education," the limits of good manners, taste, obscenity, and so on. This performance may therefore shed light even on the act performed by Jesus according to St. John's Gospel. Is the aim of touching in Doubting Thomas's case not also far more ethical than epistemological? Was Thomas's error not precisely his assumption that religious faith was a matter of knowledge? Did Jesus not shatter this assumption in a similarly shocking way, just as Valie Export called into question all assumptions about good manners, respect between genders, and respect between individual persons?

Can the whole "conversion" of St. Thomas not simply be described precisely by saying that Jesus prompted his transformation from a Cartesian sceptic into a Pyrrhonean one? Is the whole point of the biblical story not precisely that *even the most certain knowledge does not help at all in matters of faith*, since religion is not a cognitive, but an ethical issue? Thomas wants to replace *doxa* with reliable knowledge. Yet Jesus then provides him with reliable knowledge, but also with the insight that this knowledge is not of decisive help. He demonstrates to Thomas that even after having obtained reliable knowledge, the problem of *doxa*, in the sense of faith, persists. Jesus's action actually allows Thomas to replace one *doxa* (the opinion that knowledge helps) with another—a subjective commitment that, as it were, plays in a different register from objective knowledge. Just as Jesus is, in Caravaggio's ingenious depiction, actually the one who exerts the touch (by forcing Thomas to touch), he can also be seen as the actual sceptic in the scene, for it is Jesus who questions Thomas's assumption about the helpfulness of knowledge in religious matters. The

"conversion" of St. Thomas that takes place in this scene can thus also be formulated as "Dear Thomas, I will show you which of us is the real sceptic."

Jesus's action thus provided "sceptical" Thomas not with knowledge, but actually with the most profound challenge to his ethical position. On the epistemological, Cartesian level of doubt, on the contrary, nothing has been clarified at all: since touching, as Descartes pointed out, does not escape the potential for illusion. If the apostles actually only dreamed of meeting Jesus, as St. Thomas may have suspected, why couldn't the impression of touching his wound also be merely a dream? If there was any efficiency to this action, it clearly did not consist in an epistemological gain of either knowledge or certainty. To frame it in Roland Barthes's terms, Jesus did not allow Thomas to verify an element of his *studium*, but rather confronted him with a *punctum*. He did not communicate with the sceptic on the level of expectations and willfully sought knowledge, but on the level of both the unexpected and the unwilling encounter. Instead of providing Thomas with evidence or proof, Jesus gave him something to think and to doubt. Just like a wise teacher of a Far Eastern religion, Jesus confronted the other with a small, enigmatic action that forced him to question his own assumptions; as Barthes would have called it, Jesus enacted a little "*satori*, the passage of a void."[51]

The Sceptical Touch of Art

This is what aligns the action ascribed to Jesus with those of performance artists like Valie Export. It was probably Caravaggio's genius to single out this artistic dimension of Jesus's intervention—of Jesus the performance artist, as it were, the *punctum* in Caravaggio's depiction being precisely the strong hand of Jesus that *forces* Thomas's finger to do what one may expect, according to moral education and biblical *studium:* to get into the wound.

If there is a proper concise description of what performance does, as opposed to theatre, one can say that it does not *represent* matters, but *presents* them; or, in Ludwig Wittgenstein's terms, it does not *say* things, but *shows* them.[52] Here, the terms used by J.L. Austin allow a kind of etymology or nominal explanation: performance is not "constative," but "performative."[53] By letting Thomas touch the truth, Jesus *showed* him at the same time that the question of truth is completely irrelevant to what is at stake here—the issue of religious commitment. Thomas's "treatment" can thus easily be compared to certain actions in psychodrama where crucial situa-

51 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 49.

52 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus. Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*, 14th ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), sentences 4.022, 4.121, 5.62, and 6.522. Compare Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51: "What I can name cannot really prick me."

53 See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, ed. J.O. Urmson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

tions are not merely discussed, but enacted "live." For example, a patient who has always wanted to beat her stepfather is given a stick made of rubber foam (the so-called "Battuta") and is allowed to hit a person playing her stepfather's role.[54] The key issue in this "wish-fulfilment" seems to be the fact that the person with the irresistible wish is thus brought to the point where the wish no longer protects her from encountering the question: "And what now?" In other words, the person has to face and live the situation *after* the resolution of her presumed life problem. In many cases, it turns out that this new situation is the real problem and that the formula "If only I had had the chance to..." only serves as a screen that permits one to avoid confronting life with all its small concerns. The "life problem" can thus be experienced as a clever solution to a failure to face the actual difficulties of life. In the same way, Thomas's wish, "If only I had the chance to touch Jesus's wounds in order to gain certain knowledge," is revealed in its function as a screen for the still-remaining problem of religious faith. Thomas's "epistemological" doubt serves as a comfortable screen against facing the ethical problem of religious life. The touch from the dramatic *punctum* provided by Jesus allows Thomas to question his defensive; that is, to doubt his defence made up of "epistemological" doubt.

Only the "lived" or "shown" experience of the performance, the *satori* or psychodramatic enactment, allows us to tackle the lived certainty of the other. Only in this way can a subject's comfort zone be touched. Against a communication on the "visual" level of the *studium*, where the subject willfully and wishfully sees itself, a communication on a different, haptic level takes place. If one felt entitled, due to Barthes's own various references to psychoanalytic theory,[55] to render his account in Lacanian terms, one would have to state that the shift from *studium* to *punctum* is a shift from the "imaginary" to the "symbolic" axis of communication. It is precisely along this axis that a communication can take place in which a person reveals more than he or she knows. Whereas from the imaginary position, a person tells us what he knows, as well as what he wants to know and how he wants to see himself, from the symbolic position, the unconscious can speak and the actual condition of the subject can be revealed.

Barthes touches this point when he notes that on the level of the *studium*, he only encounters what the photographer wants to say.[56] On the level of the *punctum*, however, the photograph says something else, something different or more than what they originally intended—and this allows the *spectator* to be "touched." Only along

54 For the methods of psychodramatic role-playing, see Lewis Yablonsky, *Psychodrama: Resolving Emotional Problems through Role-Playing* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

55 For example, Barthes calls the *punctum* a "partial object" (*Camera Lucida*, 43).

56 "To recognize the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intentions, to enter in harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them" (*Camera Lucida*, 27 f.). For a most precise account of the relation between Barthes's concept of the *punctum* and Lacan's notions of the "Real," "tyche," the "gaze," etc., see Jennifer Friedlander, *Feminine Look: Sexuation, Spectatorship, Subversion* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008), 11 ff.

this axis of communication can a shift of opinion, or *doxa*, actually be effected —just as in the case of St. Thomas. This is of particular importance when it comes to the issue of the political efficiency of art. Barthes is perfectly clear on this point: on the level of the *studium*, a photograph cannot make its spectators critical or sceptical, for it can only convince those who are already convinced: "No critique except among those who are already capable of criticism."[57]

On the level of the *studium*, art always functions only as an affirmative, assuring force. It confirms what a subject already wants to see in herself and reinforces the opinions a subject already finds suitable to himself. On the level of the *studium*, art cannot do anything else, to put it in biblical terms, than to preach to the already converted (like the non-doubting apostles). Only on the level of the *punctum* can someone actually be touched in such a way that a sceptical, "pensive" stance can be taken; that some flexibility of the subject position is induced so that a different opinion can be adopted.

Barthes's finding is of particular relevance today, at a moment when art is hoping to become more "political" by increasingly promoting social and political issues at the level of the *studium*, thus investing most of its effort in its content while neglecting issues of form; namely, when it concerns itself only with *what* to communicate instead of *how* to communicate with the *spectator*. This tendency is recently often reinforced by art's becoming academic and by the predominant contemporary understanding of the notion of "artistic research." In many cases, artistic research is understood as scientific research undertaken by artists that may help their work to become more scholarly and richer in well-founded scientific content.[58] Yet again, such an understanding only contributes to the *studium*. It contributes, as Barthes would put it, to what one can name, but not to by what one can be pricked.[59]

A cleverer—and more epistemologically accurate—understanding would instead describe artistic research as what leads to the result's being *art* and not science, or investigative journalism, or anything else that belongs to the field of knowledge, information, or content. Such an understanding that connects artistic research to the specificity of artistic practice would shift the focus onto the specific ways in which art can speak: its form. With a stronger focus on this aspect, a researching art could refine its methods of how to reach other people than the already convinced; of how to make spectators pensive and *sceptical*, and how to *touch* and tackle them in their most treasured opinions. For only by telling *what it does not know*

57 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 36.

58 The misunderstanding here is obvious: the character of research is judged by who undertakes it, not by what its method is. Yet when artists conduct scientific research, this is just as "artistic" as music can be said to be "dental" due to the fact that dentists play the cello. The artistic research is not the scientific part, i. e., the raw material that is used for artistic production, but the very methodical process by which this (or any other) raw material is transformed into an art product.

59 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51.

can art put the observers' fingers into a wound: by producing a "passage of the void," it ceases to complete their knowledge, but starts to supplement their beliefs.

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Fig. 7: John William Waterhouse, *Thisbe or the Listener*, 1909, oil on canvas, 97 x 59 cm. Image Source: Fine Art Photographic Library, London.

Bara Kolenc

The (Un)Touchable Touch of Pyramus and Thisbe: Doubt and Desire

> "There was a fissure, a thin split, in the shared wall between their houses, which traced back to when it was built. No one had discovered the flaw in all those years—but what can love not detect?—You lovers saw it first, and made it a path for your voices. Your endearments passed that way, in safety, in the gentlest of murmurs."[1]

In the ancient Greek story of Pyramus and Thisbe, masterfully rewritten by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*,[2] the two lovers in the city of Babylon occupy connected houses, but are forbidden to marry because of their parents' rivalry. Every day, they whisper their love for each other through a crack in one of the walls, planting on each side of the wall the kisses they are prevented from giving each other.

One night, they arrange a hidden meeting outside the city walls near Ninus's tomb, under the shade of a mulberry tree. Thisbe arrives first, with her face well veiled, but as she is waiting for Pyramus, she hears a lioness roaring and escapes to a nearby cavern, leaving her veil behind. The lioness quenches her thirst in the nearby spring and comes upon the veil, tearing it with her jaws, which are bloodied from a recent kill. When Pyramus arrives just a moment later, he is horrified by the sight of the lioness and Thisbe's veil, assuming that the wild beast has killed her. In terrible anguish, he plunges his sword into his side, then immediately draws it out of the wound and falls onto the ground. When Thisbe comes out from her hiding place, she finds Pyramus lying under the tree, dying. Pyramus sees her in his last moments and then passes away. Then, Thisbe cries out a plea to the gods for them to be laid together in one tomb and for the mulberry tree to retain the emblems of their death in the colour of its fruit. Having said this, she takes the sword from Pyramus's grip and stabs herself in the chest, falling dead onto Pyramus's body. A still image of the two lovers lying under the mulberry tree, finally joined in an embrace that they had never

1 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.S. Kline (Luxembourg: PiT, 2000), 109. In this article, I am using A.S. Kline's English prose translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* because it uses contemporary language that corresponds well to the question of modern subjectivity, which I would like to bring forth in my analysis.

2 Ovid's account, published in 8 CE, is the oldest surviving version of the story, although he was adapting an existing etiological myth. While Pyramus and Thisbe lived in Babylon in Ovid's tale and Ctesias had also placed the tomb of his imagined king Ninus near that city, the myth probably originated in Cilicia (part of Ninus's Babylonian empire), as Pyramos is the historical Greek name of the local Ceyhan River. The metamorphosis in the primary story involves Pyramus changing into this river and Thisbe changing into a nearby spring. Shakespeare adapted this story for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s play-within-a-play, which is performed by a group of craftsmen in the final act. Ovid's *Pyramus and Thisbe* was also one of the templates for Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. See the translation by A.S. Kline referenced above and also Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. David Raeburn (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

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managed while alive, draws the love story of Pyramus and Thisbe to a close. All is silent and inert; the only moving thing is the stream of blood pouring from the lovers' wounds, sinking into the soil and irrigating the roots of the tree. The myth says that the gods hear Thisbe's lament and permanently change the colour of mulberries in order to honour their forbidden love.

In this article, I will analyse the story of Pyramus and Thisbe through the framework of *haptic scepticism*. Haptic scepticism is an emergent area of philosophical inquiry which explores the specific relation between touch and doubt that is, as I will argue, fundamentally perforated by desire. In the following pages, I would like to put forth two main things: first, I would like to demonstrate how touch as a structural (rather than empirical) phenomenon is intrinsically connected to both doubt and desire, and thereby show how it underlies the configuration of subjectivity, and second, I would like to indicate that beyond doubt as a rational procedure, which is the basic principle of the line of modern scepticism stemming from the Cartesian tradition, there is a more fundamental mechanism of doubt at work which is intertwined with the function of desire in the unconscious.

The line of my first argument makes use of the concept of the *(un)touchable* that I developed in my previous work, especially in relation to language and to the question of the materiality of touch.[3] In the present article, I will focus on the correlation of the category of the (un)touchable and the mechanisms of doubt and desire. I will

3 In my article "The Category of the (Un)Touchable in Haptic Materialism: Touch, Repetition and Language," in *The Language of Touch: Philosophical Examinations in Linguistics and Haptic Studies*, ed. Mirt Komel (London: Bloomsbury, 2019): 91–106, I establish the category of the *(un)touchable* as the core concept of *haptic materialism*, which addresses the question of touch within the structures of language. On the one hand, the article shows how the idea of haptic materialism refers to a certain twist in the notion of materiality brought about by the institution of modern science, pointing out the consequent shift in the conception of touch that gives way to the category of the (un)touchable; on the other, it demonstrates how the structural analogy between the category of the (un)touchable and the process of repetition can help us to understand the mechanism of touch within the structures of language. Through a reference to Roman Jakobson's 1956 essay "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987): 95–114, I argue that from the perspective of language, the idea of touch could be understood on two different levels: the metonymical and the metaphorical. On the metonymical level, touch is perceived as a direct connection, as proximity without mediation, while on the metaphorical level, it is considered to be always already mediated. The metonymical touch touches so much that it becomes one with the touched, while the metaphorical touch does not touch at all—there is always a vast distance between *the touching* and *the touched* that prevents the touch proper from ever happening. I demonstrate how both dimensions of touch, the metonymical and the metaphorical, come across a certain impasse at some point—therefore, the main argument of this paper lies in the proposition that touch as such can only exist in view of its impossibility. This argument is further elaborated through the analysis of the relation between touch and repetition within Saussure's concept of the linguistic sign, comparing it to the relation between touch and repetition within Marx's theory of value. The category of the (un)touchable was further elaborated within the "Language of Touch" research project conducted by Mirt Komel at the University of Ljubljana from 2016 to 2018. See Kolenc, "The Category of the (Un)Touchable in Haptic Materialism."

demonstrate, on the one hand, how the category of the (un)touchable can help us to understand the intrinsic connection between touch and desire, and, on the other hand, how the category of the (un)touchable is at work in the very procedure of doubt.

The overall line of my second argument leans on Lacan's development of the Cartesian concept of subjectivity, based upon the suspension of the conscious "I" and the relocation of *cogito* to the realm of the unconscious. By bringing together Lacan's statement that Cartesian subjectivity arises in the moment when doubt recognises itself as certainty, Freud's elaboration of doubt as an unconscious procedure in his analysis of obsessive neurosis, and the concept of the undecidability of equipollence (*isostheneia*) that was central to Pyrrhonian scepticism, I will demonstrate how doubt as a rational operation or a tool of thought inevitably stems from uncertainty and hesitation, which accompany the mechanism of desire. Further on, I will argue that it is precisely this hesitation, a paralysis not only within the realm of thought, but within the realm of desire in the first place, that echoes in the spatio-temporal paradox of touch, which inhabits the category of the (un)touchable. I will also claim that the real opposite of certainty is not uncertainty and doubt, but rather belief; a plain, undoubtful conviction. Uncertainty and doubt are, on the contrary, the very flip side of certainty, which empowers decision-making and action. I will come to the conclusion that uncertainty and doubt are the necessary and productive forces —not only of every rational procedure—but also of the very constitution of subjectivity.

The two lines of my argument lead to the elaboration of haptic scepticism, where touch is not engaged as an experiential examiner of truth or reality—that is, as a tool of methodical doubt—but rather proves to be a structural operator of a more fundamental *skepsis* that precedes and conditions any rational operation. In dealing with the abovementioned questions, this article undertakes a structural rather than phenomenological or experiential approach.

The Category of the *(Un)Touchable*

I consider touch to be a paradoxical entity that lingers between the two walls of impossibility: the impossibility of distance on the one hand and the impossibility of proximity on the other. In both cases, touch itself is, so to say, condemned to failure. In order to give a name to this inner tension that draws the inconceivable line between the two, I coined the term *(un)touchable* in my abovementioned previous work. However, it is through its very failure that it somehow nevertheless works: it succeeds exactly in its non-success, in its falling through, in its coming to nothing.

To picture the paradoxical core of touch, we can imagine the category of the (un) touchable as a spatio-temporal paradox. In a spatial sense, we can imagine touch as a tangent to a circle, following Derrida: "A tangent touches a line or a surface but without crossing it, without a true intersection, thus in a kind of impertinent perti-

nence. It touches only one point, but a point is nothing, that is, a limit without depth or surface, untouchable even by way of a figure."[4] Further on, we can imagine distance as a passant in relation to a circle and proximity as a secant to a circle. The basic idea of the category of the (un)touchable is that one can define neither the point where the passant turns into a tangent nor the point where the tangent turns into a secant.

If we think in terms of two units touching each other, the paradox of touch lies in the fact that in order to establish touch, we need to have two separate units, which are shrinking the distance that separates them and proceeding towards each other until they reach the point of close proximity. However, once touch is established, we no longer have two units, but rather a single unit. If we have two units, touch has not yet taken place, because the units are still separated, but as soon as they connect, then touch has already expired, because the two units have now merged into one. It is impossible to say exactly where touch has occurred in the transition from *the two* to *the one*. It is impossible to mark the point of touch within this transition. There is no space for touch. Hence, touch occurs on the very borderline between the two and the one, within a gap or a leap between these two stages. This means that the event of touch demands an impossible state of being connected and separated at the same time, of being at once the two and the one. Touch is where it is not. In terms of the classical ontology of being, this state is paradoxical, because it declares that something *is* while *it is not*.

However, it is precisely paradox as a logical tool that opens up the ontology of difference as a counterpart to the ontology of being: while for the ontology of being, something either *is* or *is not*, for the ontology of difference, something both *is* and *is not*. Something can occur as its very absence. Therein lies the core idea of Nancy's concept of "touching the limit" (*toucher la limite*):[5] the presence of touch has to be understood in view of its absence. The ontology of difference installs the idea of possible impossibility, of impossibility as possibility, that forms the conceptual core of the category of the (un)touchable.

Temporality enters the spatial aspect of the paradox of touch through the idea of the time that is needed to proceed from distance to close proximity (or in the opposite direction), from separation to connection, from the two to the one. Transition is a movement that demands both a spatial and a temporal dimension of coming from a point A (distance, two units) to a point B (proximity, one unit) or from a point B to a point A. Touch happens sometime during the temporal transition between the two points. Therefore, in the sense of time, the paradoxical core of touch displays itself through the fact that the event of touch never really occurs: just before the two units connect, we are still expecting it, but once they are connected, it has already

4 See Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

5 Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'expérience de la liberté* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), 47.

gone, leaving us in a state of only remembering it. We are always only asymptotically getting closer to the moment of touch, whether we are moving in the direction of overcoming the distance or in the opposite direction of unlocking the too-close proximity. As a temporal event, touch stretches between the temporal provisions of the *not yet* and the *always already:* touch has never yet happened, but at the same time, it has always already expired.

One can discern two elementary agents of touch, the active and the passive, the subject and the object, *the touching* and *the touched*.[6] If the two agents of touch are separated, then touch is perceived as something that has not yet happened, relentlessly sticking to the point where it is just about to occur, while if they are perceived as inseparable, the touch is never really there because it has always already happened. Either the touching touches so much that it becomes one with the touched, or it does not touch at all: there is either a vast distance between the touching and the touched that prevents the touch proper from ever happening or a too-close proximity between them that cannot prevent the touching from spreading into the touched and from becoming too much of a touch, so much so that touch as such immediately disappears. In both senses, a spatial as well as a temporal sense, the object of touch, the touched, is something that is at the same time touchable and untouchable. Moreover, it is touchable only under the condition of its untouchability, and vice versa. The category of the (un)touchable therefore means: what can be touched is always already untouchable, but it is only through its untouchability that something can be touched at all. The inherent impossibility of touch is its very condition of possibility.

Another important thing to add here is that the category of the (un)touchable functions on two levels: what is (un)touchable within this mechanism is not only the elusive object of touch, *the touched*, but also touch itself as a structural phenomenon, marking an impossible borderline between distance and proximity.

Pyramus and Thisbe are caught in both the spatial and the temporal aspects of the paradox of touch. Their touch has been endlessly postponed, one obstacle followed by another (the wall, the lioness, the bloodied veil, Pyramus's death), and they are relentlessly pushed into the temporality of the *not yet*, until the moment

6 It has often been argued that the two are reversible, that *the touching* has always already turned into *the touched* and vice versa: as soon as we touch it, it inevitably touches us in return. The reversibility of touch was most notably explained by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (see *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes [New York: Routledge, 2012]). Even if the dividing line between the touching and the touched seems vague because of the unavoidable reversibility of touch, it can never be entirely obliterated: it is impossible that *the touching* could simultaneously also be *the touched*. The positions never collide—rather, they are in a constant process of exchange. This is precisely what Merleau-Ponty wants to stress with his famous example of self-touching. Merleau-Ponty's argument was further elaborated by Jean-Luc Nancy in *Corpus* (Paris: Métailié, 1992) and *Noli me tangere: essai sur la levée du corps* (Paris: Bayard, 2003), Jacques Derrida, *Le toucher: Jean-Luc Nancy* (see Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*), and Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, repr. ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998).

when they both drop dead, at once finding themselves in a state of being *always already:* what has never been there is suddenly lost forever. The distance between the two lovers is maintained until the point where it is directly transformed into a too-close proximity, somehow meticulously (using the elusive inter-space between life and death) jumping over the point of their touch. There they are, *the two* of them still alive, but a moment before they finally manage to touch each other, Pyramus passes away. What follows immediately after this is *one* single unit of an undefined clump of human flesh.

Touch and Desire

Through the category of the (un)touchable, touch engages the function of desire. What empowers one's desire is precisely the structural impossibility of grasping its object: what we eventually touch is never what we have desired. The object of touch, the object of our desire, is always transposed. It is never in its place. It slips between our fingers just before we touch it. The fact that we cannot touch the object, the impossibility of touch, structures the subject, the object, and the entire mechanism of desire. However, what we do touch, in a way, is the very impossibility of touch, its very absence. Hence, the object of our desire is untouchable, yet touchable. Moreover, it is touchable only under the condition of its untouchability: it is accessible precisely through the prism of its inaccessibility. Hence, we can touch the object of our desire only because we cannot touch it.

Pyramus and Thisbe crave closeness, but are only able to touch each other with their whispering words through a tiny crack in the wall. Their lips encounter the wall once again and they imprint their kisses upon it instead, "touching the wall with kisses that could not reach the other side."[7] "Let our whole bodies meet," they beg the wall, "or if that is too much perhaps, to open to the kisses"?[8] What they ask of the wall is indeed too much, because this is the very structure of desire: to desire is to desire too much, to always desire more. In contrast to a need, desire is insatiable: "Thus desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*)."[9]

7 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 109.

8 "Often, when they were in place, Thisbe here, and Pyramus there, and they had each caught the sound of the other's breath, they said 'Unfriendly wall, why do you hinder lovers? How hard would it be for you to let our whole bodies meet, or if that is too much perhaps, to open to the kisses we give each other? Not that we are not grateful. We confess that we owe it to you that words are allowed to pass to loving ears.' So they talked, hopelessly, sitting opposite, saying, as night fell, 'Farewell', each touching the wall with kisses that could not reach the other side" (Ovid, 111).

9 Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), 275.

Once they finally manage to arrange an assignation outside the city walls, the unexpected course of events prevents them from finally fulfilling their longing with a touch, a hug, a kiss, a conjugation. Their meeting only happens when it is already too late. When Thisbe comes out of the cavern, Pyramus is dying. She takes him in her arms, "cradling the beloved body" and bathing his wounds with tears, "mingling their drops with blood."[10] Planting kisses on his cold face, she cries out: "Pyramus, what misfortune has robbed me of you? Pyramus, answer me! Your dearest Thisbe calls to you: obey me, lift your fallen head!"[11] At Thisbe's name, Pyramus raises his eyes, darkening with death, and "having looked at her, [buries] them again in darkness."[12] In a strange interplay of facts and assumptions, presence and absence, life and death, the so-much-desired touch is fatally missed and therefore it tragically turns into a double suicide. The two loving creatures never manage to enjoy the pleasure of the trembling event of touch: just as the moment of touch is wishfully expected, it has already passed away (without ever really occurring), and the two corpses lying one on top of the other are suddenly touching too much, as a single indistinct pile of flesh.

However, what the lovers demand from the wall is indeed too much to ask: they are asking for the impossible event of touch. For they are not aware of the fact that the moment their whole bodies met would never be the desired event of touch, but would, on the contrary, always turn out to be the deadly event of the too much of a touch that would kill it all, instantly putting an end to both touch and desire.

How to Touch the Concept of Touch?

In numerous paintings throughout the history of art, Pyramus and Thisbe are depicted either while whispering through a crack in the wall or in the moment when Pyramus is lying on the floor and Thisbe is leaning over him, stabbing herself with the same sword that Pyramus used a few minutes earlier. The sharp end of the sword is touching her chest a mere moment before it penetrates her skin, while the handle of the sword is touching Pyramus's body, from which life is quickly draining and will soon fade away.

In both depictions, an object is set *in-between* the two lovers: first a wall, then a sword. It has often been argued that the object positioned between them is a metaphor for forbidden love. Instead, I will claim that the composition with a disturbing object is not a metaphor, but rather a (beautiful) visual representation of the category of the (un)touchable. According to my argument, both the wall and the sword between Pyramus and Thisbe function as *mediators of touch:* they both connect and

10 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 111.
11 Ovid, 111.
12 Ovid, 111.

separate the subject and the object of touch. They maintain the distance, but at the same time, they also establish proximity between the two agents of touch, the touching and the touched. In doing so, they render touch possible, but they do so precisely through its very impossibility. In that sense, any other mediating object could be used as a visual representation of the concept of the (un)touchable: a stick, an umbrella, a rope, a piece of furniture. We are not touching, yet we are touching: this is the elusive structure of touch.

A fissure in a wall, however, introduces a certain conceptual twist that intervenes in the idea of a wall as a simple visual representation of the category of the (un)touchable and brings it to another level: a level where *the very representation of the (un)touchable posits itself as (un)touchable*. We can conceptually grasp the idea of a wall as a mediator between distance and proximity, but—and here is the key—there is a fissure within this very idea. And it is precisely through this fissure that our conceptual grasp of the idea of touch becomes present: the very concept of the category of the (un)touchable is something that is touchable, yet untouchable.

In a similar way, a sword, too, contains an additional turn of the simple visual representation of the category of the (un)touchable. Why? Because in this case, the mediator is not just any object (a wall, a stick, a rope), but a sword, *an object posing a threat*. Here, the threat is first and foremost a structural and temporal category. What is inscribed in the threatening object is the inevitable future of the course of events: sooner or later, a sword will pierce the body. It will not stay in-between, separating yet connecting the two bodies; sooner or later, it will abandon its benevolent mediating function (we touch it in a way that we do not touch it) and violently proceed towards *the too much of a touch*. It will sooner or later destroy the fragile constellation of the (un)touchable and inevitably turn the impossible possibility of touch, maintained by desire, into a raw impossibility, into a point zero. It will turn Thisbe, who is now holding it as a mediator of touch and is thereby touching Pyramus through her desire to touch him, into a corpse falling onto another corpse, ultimately changing them into one indistinct pile of flesh. Therefore, a sword is certainly a suggestive visual representation of the concept of the (un)touchable, but at the same time, it is also a kind of a reminder of the irreparable and deadly discrepancy between our desire to grasp the object (in representation) and our inability to fulfill this desire.

The function of the mediator of touch could, at first glance, be related to the idea of a *connecting distance*, which echoes in Plato's concept of *metaxy* (*metaxu*) presented in the *Symposium* via the character of the priestess Diotima.[13] Tutoring Socrates, Diotima uses the term to show how oral tradition can be perceived by different people in different ways, depicting Eros not as an extreme or purity, but rather as a *daemon*, a child of Penia (Poverty) and Poros (Possession), set between the divine gods

13 Plato, *Symposium*, tr. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John S. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 457–505 (198a–212c).

and mankind. The notion of *metaxy* as the "in-between" or "middle ground" was later used by Plotinus to express the ontological placement of humans between God and animals, and it was brought to modern thought by several thinkers, most notably by Simone Weil. "Every separation is a link,"[14] Weil claims, using the example of a wall: "Two prisoners whose cells adjoin communicate with each other by knocking on the wall. The wall is the thing which separates them but it is also their means of communication."[15]

The concept of *metaxy* could well be related to the idea of a wall or a sword as a visual representation of the concept of the (un)touchable,[16] but if we take a closer look at the two concepts, we can trace an important difference between them. While the idea of a connecting distance is an idea of something that is set in-between two agents, realms, or events, and is there to connect them through their separation, the idea of the (un)touchable is actually exactly the opposite: there is nothing set in-between the two agents of touch, no third agent to help them solve the impossible situation of always being either separated or connected, but never experiencing the impossible moment of touching each other. The real problem here is not that they *cannot* touch, that they cannot become connected and that they therefore use the third element to help them, as in the idea of a connecting distance; on the contrary, what is at stake here is that they *can* touch; there is no outer obstacle to prevent their connection, yet the moment of touch is always missed, because in itself, it is structurally impossible. Within the idea of the mediator of touch as a simple visual representation of the concept of the (un)touchable, the mediating object does not represent the presence of the third agent, installing the positive aspect of connecting distance and thereby establishing the (mediated) touch, but it rather represents the very gap between distance and proximity, the missing link between *the one* and *the two*, where touch is present only in its absence.

In case of *metaxy*, we are talking about touch that ontologically exists, that possesses a certain reality, a certain being in the world, even if the two agents are using a mediator to help them to bring it into existence, while (un)touchable touch as such has no existence in itself, because it is ontologically set in-between being and non-being and is therefore something that can only happen in its absence. But at the same time, and this is the core idea of the concept of the (un)touchable, it is the

14 Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 145.

15 Weil, 145.

16 An inverse illustration can be found in Teresa of Avila's vision in which an angel pierced a golden spear so deeply through her heart that it grabbed hold of her entrails, which he forcefully pulled out. While the blow should have been fatal, she did not describe the episode in the manner of a threat, but as an encounter with an object of desire. The only thing she felt was the great love of God. A "remainder that God is able to touch by being untouchable," or, more precisely, (un)touchable. His presence is thus felt only as an "absent existence, inscribed into the community through tireless declarations and testimonials." Goran Vranešević, "Anatomical Aporia," in *The Language of Touch: Philosophical Examinations in Linguistics and Haptic Studies*, Ed. Mirt Komel (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 85.

very impossibility of touch that is the condition of its possibility: the touch is precisely where it is not; it happens in the time-lapse between the moment when it is just about to occur and the moment when it has already gone. In this disposition, distance and connection are not, as is the case with the concept of *metaxy*, set in a benevolent and all-resolving cooperation; they are, on the contrary, set in a paradoxical scheme of an always impossible encounter between them—either there is distance and no proximity, or there is a too-close proximity and no distance. However, to maintain desire is not to decide for either of the two options, but rather to linger in-between, to nurture the gap between distance and proximity and thereby maintain the impossible possibility of touch.

What is of crucial importance here is that the choice set by the category of the (un)touchable is not functioning on the level of deciding for either distance or proximity (this situation is resolved by the idea of *metaxy*), but on the level of choosing either the constant lingering between distance or proximity or the decision for either distance or proximity. If we take the first choice, we choose touch, but a touch that is always already lost. If we take the second choice, we initially resign from the possibility of touch. Thereby, the category of the (un)touchable sets the mechanism of *forced choice:* either we touch it in such a way that we cannot touch it or we do not touch it at all. Lacan calls this mechanism the *vel* of alienation, which is "defined by a choice whose properties depend on this, that there is, in the joining, one element that, whatever the choice operating may be, has as its consequence a neither one, nor the other."[17] The choice is, then, "a matter of knowing whether one wishes to preserve one of the parts, the other disappearing in any case."[18]

None of these options is optimal, but we have no other choice: of course, we will go for the first option, which is still better than the second one. Better something than nothing; better a sparrow in the hand than a pigeon on a roof. However, is this really the case? The mechanism of forced choice defines the Hegelian relationship between a master and a slave. A person who is attacked is confronted with the following choice: *your money or your life!* If you choose your money, you will instantly lose both. If you choose your life, you have saved yourself, but what is left for you is a life without money. A master would go for all or nothing, while a slave would choose to adapt to his or her circumstances in order to stay alive. A master would choose unconditional freedom or sacrifice everything, while a slave would choose life under any conditions, even at the price of losing his freedom. The forced choice trapping Pyramus and Thisbe (although they do not realise it) is the following: either they choose the deficiency of touch in infinite overcoming the distance, but maintain desire, or they go for the fantasmatic melting of the two entities into one, where they will lose both—not only touch, but also desire.

17 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 211.
18 Lacan, 211.

The two levels of the representation of the concept of the (un)touchable discussed in this section match the abovementioned two levels of untouchability within the mechanism of touch: on the one hand, it is the object of touch, the touched, that is un-touchable for the subject of touch, the touching, while on another level, it is touch itself, the very idea of touch, that is (un)touchable, inasmuch as it is conceptually graspable only through its ungraspability. The idea of the mediator of touch (a wall, a rope, a stick) as a simple visual representation of the concept of the (un) touchable matches the first level of the representation of the concept of the (un) touchable: it represents the (un)touchability of the object of touch, the touched. I then analysed two examples that represent the concept of the (un)touchable even more precisely, not letting them be confused with the idea of a connecting distance: a fissure in a wall and a threatening object. Through these two examples, I have subjected the very mechanism of representation to the category of the (un)touchable, attempting to point out that on the second level, touch as a concept can only be conceptually graspable through its ungraspability.

In both cases (the fissure in a wall and the sword), the representation not only has its *metaphorical* dimension—it is not only a (beautiful) visual representation of the category of the (un)touchable (i.e., representing the category of the (un)touchable as the duality of distance and proximity of touch)—but it also brings in the *metonymical* dimension where the mechanism of representation is itself subjected to the category of the (un)touchable. This means that through the very act of reception, we as spectators are caught in the paradox of touch: we can grasp what is represented only in such a way that we cannot grasp it. In contrast to the metaphor of forbidden love, which keeps the recipient at a safe distance from the object (i.e., this picture represents forbidden love), the representation of the (un)touchable sets him directly into the kernel of the paradox: it offers him a metaphorical distance (i.e., this picture represents the paradox of touch), but at the same time binds him with metonymical proximity (when watching it, I am directly involved in the paradox of touch: I can grasp the idea of the (un)touchable in this picture only in such a way that I cannot really grasp it). Therefore, in both compositions with a disturbing object, the category of the (un)touchable is not only represented, but embraces the entire mechanism of representation through the impossible encounter between metaphorical distance and metonymical proximity.

In the next section, I will attempt to demonstrate how the materialist turn of Aristophanes's vision of love suspends the fantasy and thereby removes the veil that covers the brute materiality of the mechanism of forced choice, elaborating also on the master's choice versus that of the slave. I will connect the master's choice to Aristophanes's fantasmal vision of love, in which the myth of Pyramus and Thisbe is trapped, and connect the slave's choice to the emergence of modern subjectivity: the Cartesian subject of the unconscious.

The Suspension of Fantasy and the Slave's Choice

Once the sword between Pyramus and Thisbe strikes a blow, once Thisbe collapses onto Pyramus, the touch is gone, the desire is gone, and the two lovers fall into a warped embrace: the embrace of death. Through the category of the (un)touchable, the story of Pyramus and Thisbe embodies the ultimate materialist turn of Aristophanes's[19] fantasy of love as described in the *Symposium*,[20] the fantasy of two lost halves finally finding each other and becoming one. This becoming one is not a structure of love; rather, it is a structure of death.

In a way, Thisbe is well aware of this, or at least this is the core part of her fantasy: "He, who could only be removed from me by death, death cannot remove."[21] However, this fantasy has, so to say, two components: a materialist one and an idealist one. The *materialist component* brings in the idea of an *ultimate touch* through the image of the two lovers lying together in the same grave. Thisbe speaks about the impossible event of touch that will finally be realised once they are both dead: "Do not deny us the right to be laid in one tomb."[22] However, she does not know that in the very moment that the touch she is wishfully expecting is executed, it will have already passed away—along with the desiring subject.

The *idealist component*, on the other hand, further develops the corporeal image of the two bodies in one tomb into the idea of an *emblem*. Pyramus and Thisbe are joined in "the strangest hour," in the moment when time ceases to exist and streams into eternity and brings love to its fulfilment in the eternal memory: "And you, the tree, that now covers the one poor body with your branches, and soon will cover two, retain the emblems of our death, and always carry your fruit darkened in mourning, a remembrance of the blood of us both."[23] First we have death, and then we have the emblems of this death. First we have blood, and then we have the remembrance of the blood: the mulberries, darkened in mourning. The materialist idea of an ultimate touch is further developed into the idealist vision of the emblem of an *ultimate love*.

However, we should not forget that here, both the materialist idea and the idealist vision are components of a fantasy. Both the image of the two lovers lying together in one tomb and the development of this corporeal image into the idea of an emblem are equally fantasmatic. In fact, we can see that the entire plot of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe is set between two fantasies: the lovers' initial fantasy of removing all earthly obstacles (both physical and social) in order to finally fulfill their long-

19 The fantasy of love as two people becoming one is commonly referenced as Plato's ideal of love, which is not quite accurate. In the *Symposium*, this fantasy represents Aristophanes's point of view and his understanding of Eros.

20 See Plato, *Symposium*, 189c–93e

21 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 111.

22 Ovid, 111.

23 Ovid, 111.

ing in corporeal love, and, after the tragic course of events which prevents the realisation of the so much desired touch of the other, the final fantasy of love, which, splitting itself into a corporeal and an emblematic component, transposes its realisation into the perspective of death.[24]

In Ovid, Thisbe's fantasy is heard by the gods and is thereby transformed into a myth. However, the fantasy nevertheless remains what it is: a fantasy. It is maintained in the *not-yet-not-anymore* temporality of desire and as such, it is structurally non-realisable. For Lacan, the fantasy is both that which enables the subject to sustain his desire and that by which the subject sustains himself at the level of his vanishing desire.[25] By offering a resolution or a sort of reconciliation of a fantasy, a myth often functions in the direction of wish-fulfilment, which is, according to Freud, one of the main tasks of dream-work, and thereby institutes a fantasy on a cultural level: it institutes the plot of a collective dream, which, inscribed in the symbolic order, perpetually engages desire.[26]

What Thisbe desires when stabbing herself is not what she ultimately gets. She desires touch, but gets *the too much of a touch*, where touch is no more. She desires unification, but gets death, where love is no more. The fulfilment of desire is impossible, but it is precisely this impossibility that establishes modern subjectivity.[27] For desire, Lacan claims, is nothing but a relation of being to lack[28] and therefore it is a constitutive force of subjectivity.

In the constitution of the human psychic apparatus, Lacan claims, there are two overlapping lacks: *the symbolic lack*, which emerges in the dialectics of a subject's access to its own being in relation to the Other, and *the real lack*, which refers to something real: to the fact that within the realm of sexual reproduction, a living creature will be struck down by individual death. The overlapping of the two lacks forms a complex mechanism of alienation, which, for Lacan, is a fundamental mode of human "being in the world." Through the idea of the two lacks, Lacan puts forward

24 The fantasy of becoming one within the horizon of death echoes throughout the Western tradition of *l'amour-passion*, which was meticulously analysed by Denis de Rougement in his book *L'amour et l'occident* (Paris: Éditions 10/18, 2001).

25 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 185.

26 This was the brilliant insight of Edward Bernays, the father of creating modern mythology by means of advertising.

27 Aaron Schuster proposes a sketch of a "speculative history of pleasure" where he elaborates on the relation between desire and its fulfilment through three historical stages: ancient Greek hedonism, Christian erotic culture, and modernity through psychoanalysis**.** Modernity creates a subject of a neurotic symptom—a disjunctive relation between the structurally unfulfilled desire and a fulfilment that does not bring pleasure. See Aaron Schuster, "Being and Enjoyment in Plato's *Philebus:* A Lacanian Perspective," *College Literature* 45, no. 2 (2018): 246–77.

28 "Desire is a relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn't the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists." Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book II. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–1955*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Cambridge University Press, 1988), 223.

a criticism of idealism (accompanied by his argument as to why psychoanalysis is not idealism) which suspends any aspect of the foundation of human subjectivity in the entirety of self-awareness on the one hand and relates this suspension to a rejection of any harmonic vision of love on the other.

From this perspective, Lacan criticises the common idealist interpretation of Aristophanes's myth:

> Aristophanes' myth pictures the pursuit of the complement for us in a moving, and misleading, way, by articulating that it is the other, one's sexual other half, that the living being seeks in love. To this mythical representation of the mystery of love, analytic experience substitutes the research by the subject, not of the sexual complement, but of the part of himself, lost forever, that is constituted by the fact that he is only a sexed living being, and that he is no longer immortal.[29]

The becoming one is not a structure of love: it is a structure of death. This is a suspension of fantasy. For Lacan, the role of fantasy is defensive: it is to veil the lack of the Other, to veil castration. To suspend a fantasy is therefore to tear the veil, to face the fact that the subjectivity does not rest upon any sort of identity or unity, but rather emerges from a lack. However, we should not confuse the materialist turn of Aristophanes's fantasy of love with the materialist aspect of Thisbe's desire: the point here is that the materialist turn simultaneously suspends both the materialist and the idealist aspects of Thisbe's fantasy of love as an eternal unity. The materialist turn sets death not within the horizon of eternity, as Thisbe's fantasy does (both in its material and in its idealist aspect), but reveals it to be a brutal fact of an individual's finality. However—and this is the key point here—it is precisely this brutal reality that empowers the dynamics of desire and sustains the structure of subjectivity.

Pyramus and Thisbe are caught in the mechanism of forced choice set by the category of the (un)touchable, but they do not manage to realise it because of the fantasmatic constitution of a myth. They do not manage to sustain the deficiency of touch that would maintain desire and keep love in its status of not-all. Rather, they follow the fantasy of the melting of the two entities into one, the nebulous idea of a totality, as Lacan would put it, for which they lose everything: touch, desire, and life. The fantasy that leads Pyramus and Thisbe to choose the too much of a touch brings them not love, but death.

The materialist turn of Aristophanes's vision of love suspends the fantasy and thereby removes the veil that covers the brutality (or brute materiality) of the mechanism of forced choice: we are not choosing between the unfulfilment of love in life and its fulfilment after death, we are choosing between the unfulfilment of love in life and death. We are not choosing between not-all and all, we are choosing between not-all (which is unbearable) and nothing. From this angle, the master's choice —*all*

29 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 205. See Alenka Zupančič, *The Odd One In: On Comedy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

or nothing!—turns out to be naive and vain; just as it is, for Lacan, the idea of an absolute, driving the history of philosophy from Plato to Hegel. For it is not about all or nothing: it is about not-all. Therefore, from the perspective of desire driving the category of the (un)touchable, the only choice is the slave's choice: to choose to touch it in such a way that we cannot touch it. Pyramus and Thisbe's choice is, on the contrary, the naive choice of the master: all or nothing, led by the fantasmatic idea of totality (the two united into one) and absolute love. It is only the emergence of the Cartesian subject that penetrates the self-sufficient discourse of the master brought about by the history of philosophy and opens a space for not-all. It opens a space for the choice of the barred subject: the choice of the slave.

The Cartesian Subject and the Unconscious Doubt

The subject of the unconscious is neither a living person nor a substance nor a cognising being, but, according to Lacan, "the Cartesian subject, who appears at the moment when doubt is recognized as certainty,"[30] with one difference: that in psychoanalysis, the base of this subject turns out to be "wider, but, at the same time much more amenable to the certainty that eludes it."[31] The wider base of the Cartesian subject of psychoanalysis is the unconscious, which is defined by Lacan as "the sum of the effects of speech on a subject."[32] "*Desidero* is the Freudian *cogito*,"[33] Lacan claims: anything that seems to issue from a conscious reason is always in function of an unconscious desire.

The key issue here is the idea of the moment when doubt recognises itself as certainty—this is the moment of the emergence of the subject within the signifying chain. Of course, this supposition is paradoxical: how can doubt ever recognise itself as certainty? For in the moment in which it recognises itself as certainty, there is no more doubt. However, albeit impossible, this constellation is not a closure, but rather an opening. Paradox as a mental tool turns the impasse into the stem cell of thought. In both *Repetition* and *Philosophical Crumbs*, Kierkegaard does not consider paradox to be a hindrance to thought, but rather a revelation of the only legitimate field of thought: a paradox is nothing but the very liveliness of thought; it is only in a paradox that thought actually comes across itself (but precisely in coming apart):

> One should not think ill though of paradoxes, because the paradox is the passion of thought and a thinker without a paradox is like a lover without passion: a poor model. But the highest power of every passion is to will its own annihilation. Thus it is also the highest passion of the under-

30 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 126.
31 Lacan, 126.
32 Lacan, 126.
33 Lacan, 154.

> standing to desire an obstacle, despite the fact that the obstacle in one way or another may be its downfall. This is the highest paradox of thought, to want to discover something it cannot think.[34]

"What truth then is left? Perhaps this alone, that nothing is certain."[35] In his *Meditations*, Descartes's methodical doubt, which begins by attacking sense-perception, radically questioning it through the argument from dreaming, and undermining knowledge and all rational operations through the introduction of the deceptive evil demon, ends up at the point when doubt recognises itself as certainty: "Beyond doubt then, I also exist, if he is deceiving me; and he can deceive me all he likes, but he will never bring it about that I should be nothing as long as I think I am something."[36] As this recognition is a rational and conscious operation, it serves as a firm starting point for building an argument for the existence of thought, knowledge, the physical world, and God. It is precisely through the self-recognition of doubt as a rational operation that doubt can be set as certainty: I doubt, therefore I think (and therefore I am)—I can be certain of that.[37]

Lacan goes a step further in setting up the point of emergence of the Cartesian subject. Emerging in the unconscious, the subject of psychoanalysis cannot establish itself through the self-recognition of doubt as a rational operation and thereby turn doubt into the self-certainty of the conscious "I." For the conscious "I" is no point of reference for the Cartesian subject of psychoanalysis (there is no "I think," it is always "it thinks instead of us"). The emergence of the psychoanalytical subject is defined by Lacan as a *missed encounter:* by definition, the subject cannot meet itself, it can never recognise itself as it is. It only exists in a slip of signification, in a failure of every assertion and enthronement on a fixed place. For Lacan, the moment when doubt recognises itself as certainty must be taken as it is: as a paradoxical, impossible constellation. In the moment of the self-recognition as certainty, doubt is no more. This is exactly the moment of the missed encounter of the subject: in the moment of its self-recognition, the subject is no more. Certainty is based on the function of the impossible.

The constitution of the psychoanalytic subject is essentially determined by a certain leap of causality. It is precisely this inherent impossibility, which does not allow things to combine in a causal chain, but also does not allow them to surrender to coincidence, that determines the function of the *limping cause* operating in the unconscious. The limping cause is a lost cause, but not a cause that was lost—as a loss, it is essentially at work. It grounds the subject, but it grounds it by way of undermin-

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34 Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, trans. M.G. Piety (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 111.

35 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from Objections and Replies*, trans. Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18.

36 Descartes, 18.

37 Descartes's famous phrase *cogito ergo sum* originally appeared in French in his *Discourse on the Method* and later in Latin in his *Principles of Philosophy*.

ing the ground itself. It grounds it in the gap that always establishes a certain delay between cause and effect and thereby prevents the subject from arising as an effect of a causal series structuring its history.[38] The function of the impossible, this is the unconscious cause:

> At this point, I should define unconscious cause, neither as an existent, nor as a *ouk on,* a non-existent—as, I believe Henri Ey does, a non-existent of possibility. It is a *mē on* of the prohibition that brings to being an existent in spite of its non-advent, it is a function of the impossible on which a certainty is based.[39]

In psychoanalysis, the moment when doubt recognises itself as certainty is the birthplace of desire. Doubt as a rational operation is only a consequence of a doubt that concerns a slip in the institution of a subject in the locus of *desidero*. In his analysis of obsessive neurosis in *Rat Man*, Freud describes doubt as the patient's "internal perception of his own indecision, which, in consequence of the inhibition of his love by his hatred, takes possession of him in the face of every intended action."[40] This doubt, Freud claims, is actually a doubt in one's own (capability of) love: love, "which ought to be the most certain thing in his whole mind."[41] Something that should be intimately most certain becomes the target of doubt—Freud's formula exactly matches Descartes's formula, with one important difference: there is a shift from *cogito* to *desidero*. From the certainty of the conscious "I," the Cartesian subject of psychoanalysis moves to the certainty of unconscious desire. And only here, in the non-localisable locus of desire, does the Cartesian subject truly meet itself, in a meeting that is always missed. And precisely here, in this misrecognition, doubt recognises itself as a certainty: the only certainty is uncertainty. We are where we are no more. In the moment of *aphanisis*, of its own disappearance, a subject emerges.

Only by finding itself in this unenviable situation can the Cartesian subject of the unconscious become the doubtful subjectivity of the conscious "I": "A man who doubts in his own love may, or rather *must*, doubt every lesser thing."[42] And, Freud continues, when a neurotic patient reveals "the weak spot in the security of our mental life," the untrustworthiness of memory, can, with its help, "extend his doubt over everything, even over actions which have already been performed".[43]

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38 See Bara Kolenc, "Paradoxes of the Limping Cause in Kierkegaard, Hegel and Lacan," *S: Journal of the Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique* 11 (2018): 90–108.

39 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 128.

40 Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume X, Two Case Histories: "Little Hans" and the "Rat Man"*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 241.

41 Freud, 241.

42 Freud, 241

43 Freud, 243.

The Installment of *Haptic Scepticism*

From the aspect of the foundation of the Cartesian subject in the locus of *desidero*, we can consider doubt as a rational procedure or a tool of thought that (inevitably) stems from uncertainty and hesitation, which accompany the mechanism of desire. In this sense, the "if" does not really stand for the good of knowledge, but for the good of maintaining the desire.

Lacan's criticism of Aristophanes's myth somehow retroactively echoes in the classical sceptical reading of the *Symposium*. Aristophanes asks: "If we could be reunited with our other half, wouldn't this be the happiest moment?"[44] Diotima later echoes his question: "If someone could gaze directly into the form of Beauty, wouldn't this be the most amazing experience?[45] Dogmatic readings of Plato are grounded in these passages, which are used to reinforce Plato's theory of the forms. However, a sceptical reading of the *Symposium* would stress the "if" in Aristophanes's and Diotima's questions. The "if" introduces uncertainty to the goal of wholeness.

Pyrrhonian scepticism emphasised the undecidability of equipollence (*isostheneia*) that calls for the suspension of judgement (*epochē*). *Isostheneia* is the experience of paralysis between two equally appealing but contradictory experiences. Out of this paralysis comes the suspension of judgement. Pyrrhonian sceptics refused to take the dogmatic position of Academic scepticism (the position that knowledge was not possible) on any issue, including scepticism itself. If the dogmatic position that knowledge is not possible is suspended, this means that exactly in the suspension of this judgement, knowledge as such is possible: not in the form of a judgement, but in the form of *skepsis* as investigation. The paralysis should therefore not be seen as destructive, but rather as the constitutive moment of thought. It paralyses the subject, but precisely in doing so, it also pushes him forward.

Following the Cartesian subject of psychoanalysis, we can deploy *isostheneia* towards the function of desire as such: in this case, we can claim that the undecidability of equipollence is not only a tool of a rational thought, but that it is also present in a subject's unconscious structure. In the sceptical reading of the *Symposium*, stressing the moment of uncertainty in Aristophanes's and Diotima's questions, we can therefore trace the moment of doubt which is not only inscribed in the realm of knowledge, but rather stems from the function of desire in the unconscious. From this perspective, a sceptical reading of the *Symposium* would not only concern the rational objection to Aristophanes's myth—What if, in case we could be reunited with our other half, this wouldn't be the happiest moment?—but it would lead to a more radical proposition: that the becoming one is not the structure of love, but it is rather the structure of death.

44 Plato, *Symposium*, 56.
45 Plato, 56.

The suspension of judgement would thereby be extended to the suspension of any form of cognition that tends to establish itself as something fixed and self-identical; that is, to the suspension of any form of closed oneness into which no otherness can penetrate. Hence, the moment of paralysis would not only be considered a tool of *skepsis* as investigation, but rather a necessary consequence of a more fundamental *skepsis* that drives the constitution of subjectivity on the level that is prior to the self-recognition of this subjectivity within a conscious thought. In this sense, the paralysis marks exactly the moment when doubt recognises itself as certainty.

Following that, *skepsis* can be compared to what Freud called a *predilection for uncertainty:* the phenomenon that he particularly addressed in his investigation of obsessional neurosis. In hesitation as an unconscious procedure, Freud claims, the obsessive is paralysed by ambivalence, immobilised by two instinctual impulses directed at the same object.[46] Following the proposition of a more fundamental *skepsis* that drives the constitution of subjectivity in the unconscious, we can not only deploy the predilection for uncertainty in the particular case of obsessive neurosis, but we can rather take it as the structure of desire as such.

It is precisely this hesitation, a paralysis not only within the realm of thought, but within the realm of desire in the first place, that echoes in the spatio-temporal paradox of touch, which inhabits the category of the (un)touchable. As we have seen in the second section of this chapter, the function of desire always already engages touch: a desire is a desire for the object. It is a desire to touch the object, to possess the object, to become (one with) the object. It is a desire to shrink the distance and turn it into oneness. But at the same time, desire can only sustain itself through the impossibility of grasping the object, the impossibility of ever overcoming the distance between the desiring subject and its object: in the function of sustaining desire (and thereby sustaining the Cartesian subjectivity as *desidero*), the object always turns out to be the elusive *object a*, always lacking in its place. Paralysis freezes the desiring subject, who is fatally caught in the equipollence between the urge to touch and fulfill desire (and thus put desire itself to death) on the one hand and the urge to withhold touch and perpetuate desire in its unfulfilment on the other.

Moreover, we can argue that the category of the (un)touchable is inscribed in the very procedure of doubt. Let us take the moment when doubt recognises itself as certainty as a certain kind of a conceptual grasping, as a kind of touch that is between doubt and certainty. As we have seen in the previous section, this moment marks a missed encounter: as long as there is doubt, there is no certainty, but as soon as doubt recognises itself as certainty, doubt is no more. In the terms of classical logic, doubt and certainty are considered to be in direct opposition, which means that touch between them would nullify one of them: either they are separated as *the two*, or one of them will disappear within the other. However, even if their connection requires the nullification of one of them, it nevertheless brings a state of one-

46 See Freud, "Rat Man."

ness: even if one is eaten by the other, they technically still become *one*. This means that structurally (from the perspective of the category of the (un)touchable), it makes no difference whether the two agents of touch are logically considered to be in opposition or not. The spatio-temporal paradox of touch stays the same, stuck within the temporality of the *not yet* and the *always already* and the spatiality of the in-between distance and proximity, separation and connection.

However, exactly within this paradox, there is a certain trace of possibility inscribed in this very impossibility: the impossible touch between doubt and certainty is precisely the condition of possibility of their encounter. For paradox is, to paraphrase Kierkegaard again, a situation where *thought comes across itself in going apart* and realises the moment when doubt recognises itself as certainty. Doubt and certainty can touch each other precisely through their untouchability—and it is therein, within their (un)touchability, that the birthplace of both subjectivity and desire, and the point of emergence of both *cogito* and *desidero*, or, to be more precise, of *cogito as desidero*, may be found.

For Descartes, touch is the first of the senses to be subjected to the rational operation of methodical doubt. After reaching the point when doubt recognises itself as certainty, the realm of the senses is built up again as belonging to the *res extensa*, where touch (again) engages the function of the experiential guarantor (or examiner) of truth and of human existence (and, hence, the existence of the world). Taking into account *desidero* as Lacanian *cogito*, which raises the supposition that certainty is based on the function of the impossible, we should suppose that the category of the (un)touchable, where touch engages the function of desire, itself operates within the constitution of certainty as impossible—not being (rationally) certain of that impossibility, but being only possible in its own impossibility.

This brings us to the core idea of haptic scepticism, where touch does not function as an experiential examiner of truth (pinch me so that I know I am not dreaming)—that is, as a tool of methodical doubt (senses are deceptive)—but rather as a structural operator of a more fundamental doubt that is at work in the unconscious. Being intrinsically connected to the function of desire (desire is a desire to grasp the object), touch stems from uncertainty not as a state of weakness—which needs to be repaired and overcome by certainties such as evidence, proofs, justifications, general truths, beliefs, or habits—but from uncertainty as a necessary openness and non-wholeness of mind processes, as a fundamental *skepsis*, which is a pre-condition of any rational thought and decision-making, including doubt as a rational procedure, and is as such the very constitutive process of subjectivity. In the approach of haptic scepticism, touch will therefore not help to constitute the world of certainty and experiential reality, but will, quite the opposite, help to deconstruct any certainty in order to proceed towards uncertainties and hesitations which drive our thoughts and desires in the unconscious.

Beyond Fantasy: Uncertainty and Hesitation as the Condition of Love

The final dramatic twist in the story of Pyramus and Thisbe revolves around *a fatal mistake:* Pyramus kills himself because he wrongly supposes Thisbe to be dead. This mistake is certainly fatal, but it is also stupid. The dramatic highlight of the entire plot is based upon the very naive assumption that the bloodied veil is firm proof of Thisbe's death. Pyramus is certain of this. But, as we have seen before, if there is no moment of doubt, then there is no space for certainty, for doubt is the very locus where certainty recognises itself as certainty; doubt is the necessary condition of certainty, of its self-recognition. Moreover, as an inevitable counterpart of certainty, doubt is a necessary condition of cognition as such: exactly therein lies the core idea of Cartesian subjectivity.

Pyramus's conviction of Thisbe's death should therefore not be called certainty, but rather a plain unquestioned *belief*. Pyramus is not certain of Thisbe's death; rather, he simply believes that she has been torn apart by the beast. A belief is a state without doubt, which is not an apparent totality of certainty, but rather its direct opposite, an absolute absence of certainty. Hence, the true opposite of certainty is not uncertainty, but belief, a plain, undoubtful conviction. On the contrary, however, uncertainty, inscribed in the operation of doubt, is the inner gap within the constitution of certainty, which is its positive condition of possibility.

Moreover, if we take into account the Cartesian subject of psychoanalysis, the apparent totality of certainty (i. e., a plain belief) can only be possible not just as an absence of recognition, but also as an absence of desire. And what, in this constellation, is the absence of desire? It is an absolute, unquestioned belief in one's own love. Pyramus is too convinced of his love (and thereby also Thisbe's love, as the nature of desire is the desire of the other), and this is what is truly fatal. It is not a course of events or a fatal mistake that kills Thisbe: it is Pyramus's unquestioned conviction of their love. Because he does not doubt their love, he does not allow himself to doubt the evidence of Thisbe's death. There is no single moment of doubt—Wait a minute, what *if* Thisbe is just being unfaithful to me? What *if* this is a trap? What *if* she wants me to see her bloodied veil to make me think she is dead? Why would she do that? For I know she loves me unconditionally. But … What *if*, nevertheless …? Or, what *if* the veil is not hers, what *if* there was another woman here, who unluckily became an unexpected victim of the lioness? What *if* another woman was waiting here for me? What *if* I actually wanted another woman to be waiting here for me? What *if* I do not want Thisbe at all? Or perhaps the scenario is completely different: What *if* somebody prevented Thisbe from coming here, took her veil, and coloured it red to make me think that she is dead and eventually cause me to kill myself? What *if*—uncertainty has no end. This endless doubt is acted out, performed as *hesitation*, which, as Freud would put it, serves to delay action indefinitely. Perhaps a single moment of hesitation would be just enough to save the lovers' lives, one brief

moment of paralysis that would stall Pyramus's hand and allow Thisbe to appear before him just before he stabs himself. A moment of their encounter, at last. A moment of their temptation that would finally be loaded upon their shoulders, without any physical obstacle to serve as an excuse not to face doubt, inscribed in their desire.

Pyramus and Thisbe's love is certainly fatal, but it is not so because of the hindrances to it, as it is commonly interpreted. On the contrary, it is fatal exactly because of the *absence of an inner hindrance, an impossibility intrinsic to love*. The outer hindrances—the families' ban, the wall, the beast, the unhappy course of events—are there not to prevent love, but to veil the fact that that there is no love, that there is no inner hindrance, no uncertainty that would empower the two young people's desire. Instead of the two lovers facing the moment of doubt once they leave the wall, the wall is replaced by a new obstacle, the lioness, and this again is replaced by a new one, the death of Pyramus. It is fatal because it is totally unquestioned. In the entirety of Ovid's sequence, there is not a single "if" clause. *If* we remove the wall, will we still love each other? *If* we avoid the outer obstacle, will we still want to touch?

The love of Pyramus and Thisbe is not impossible because they do not manage to touch each other. It is impossible because they do not doubt. Their love is impossible because it is just too possible. There is no hesitation and uncertainty that would maintain desire and keep their relationship within the dialectics of the *(un)touchable*. A series of physical obstacles is not there to represent an absolute love which could not be realised because of their unhappy circumstances; it is there to veil the very fact that there is no absolute love, that love is always on the side of a non-whole, that it is always traversed by a gap. It is there to veil the fact that *the absolute* is not on the side of love, but on the side of death: death not as a fantasy of an eternal unity of the two souls, but as a radical objectification of the two corpses, falling one on top of the other and turning into a single indistinct pile of flesh.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I aimed to ground haptic scepticism on two conceptual pillars. The first pillar is the idea that touch as a structural (rather than empirical) phenomenon underlies the configuration of subjectivity. This idea was supported by the installment of doubt as a function of desire that drives modern subjectivity (i.e., the Cartesian subject of the unconscious) on the one hand and a demonstration of the intrinsic relation between touch and desire on the other. As a structural phenomenon, touch is therefore always related to doubt. The second pillar is the argument about the fundamental mechanism of doubt (as *skepsis*) which, intertwined with the function of desire and the mechanism of touch in the unconscious, precedes doubt as a rational procedure, which is the basic principle of the line of modern scepticism stemming from the Cartesian tradition. From this perspective, I conclude that uncer-

tainty and hesitation should not be seen as destructive to thought, but rather as constitutive of it.

Bringing these two pillars together, I aimed to demonstrate how, through the aspect of haptic scepticism, touch is not engaged as a tool of methodical doubt, but is rather employed as a structural operator of a more fundamental doubt that is at work in the unconscious. Through this approach, touch proves not to be a function of a constitution of the world of certainties, but rather a function of an insistence on uncertainties and hesitations, which drive our thoughts and desires in the unconscious and are essential for the constitution of subjectivity.

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Fig. 8: Frederick Leighton, *Elisha Raising the Son of the Shunammite*, 1881, oil on canvas, 127 x 174 cm., Leighton House Museum, Royal Borrow of Kensington and Chelsea, London. Image Source: Bridgeman Images.

Bill Rebiger

A Magic Touch: Performative Haptic Acts in Biblical and Medieval Jewish Magic

"The sense of touch [...] is a disgrace to us."
Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 2.36

Shaking hands, the laying on of hands, embracing with the arms, and kissing with the lips are some modes of touching which do not only establish physical contact between different persons, but can also have symbolic significance in the fields of human communication and ritual, or, more generally, in culture and religion.[1] Thus, it is not surprising that bodily contact and touching persons, objects, and places is also an extremely important issue in Judaism. At first in a negative way, detailed instructions found in biblical and also halakhic literature concern restrictions or even prohibitions on direct bodily contact with persons, objects, and places. These instructions aim to define and cover crucial concepts such as sanctity/profanity and purity/impurity. Yet there are many customs or practices involving touch that are undeniably evident in the Jewish religion; for example, the Jewish worshiper kisses the Torah scroll before reciting it in the synagogue or kisses or touches the *mezuzah* on the doorposts before entering or leaving a room or house. In fact, from a phenomenological perspective these practices can be interpreted as magical. In the following, I would like to focus on a couple of Hebrew texts related to magical acts and rituals with an emphasis on the meaning of touching.

In general, when we define Judaism as an orthopractical religion, this means that doing the right thing is more critical than merely placing one's belief in certain dogmas. Concerning Jewish magic, J.L. Austin's definition of performative speech acts—"how to do things with words"—is an excellent description of the essential characteristic.[2] According to Austin, a performative utterance refers to a performative doing; that is, it can make something happen just by the right words and formulas being spoken by the right person in the right setting. If we adapt this concept to the field of magic, for instance, saying the self-referential phrase "I adjure you..." is a performative speech act implying an adjuration of supernatural powers in order to

1 See, e. g., Geoffrey Parrinder, "Touching," in *Encyclopedia of Religion, Second Edition*, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 13:9255–60; Frederick Mathewson Denny, "Hands," in *Encyclopedia of Religion, Second Edition*, 6:3769–71.

2 See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University*, ed. J.O. Urmson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); see also the important contribution by John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). For the vast scholarly discussion of rituals and performance, see, e. g., the well-selected anthologies in Andréa Belliger and David J. Krieger, eds., *Ritualtheorien: Ein einführendes Handbuch* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998) and Uwe Wirth, ed., *Performanz: Zwischen Sprachphilosophie und Kulturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002).

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coerce them to be subservient. Thus, according to Yuval Harari, adjurations seem to be an essential and decisive part of ancient Jewish magic.[3] However, these powers are not only evoked by uttering words, but also by writing adjurations, magical names, and signs. Accordingly, writing these magical words, names, or signs induces the intended result—such as, for example, binding demons—in the very moment of the writing act itself.

In addition to the performative speech or writing act, I would like to introduce another concept: the *performative haptic act*. The broader background of this performance is the assumed efficacy of touching someone, for instance, with the hands, as can be seen in different performative haptic acts such as blessing, ordaining, protecting, healing, or cursing. In most cases, the performative haptic act is combined with a performative speech or writing act. For instance, a priest blesses someone by touching her head with his hands and simultaneously saying, "I bless you." Accordingly, in specific cases, the efficacy of ritual and magical power also demands performative haptic acts. By touching a person or an object, the magical practitioner intends to make something happen, such as, for example, healing or harm. In the insider's view, the physical contact enables the flow of supernatural power from one entity to the other. In the very moment in which someone touches someone or something in a ritual act, an essential change is believed to be taking place.

In this regard, James G. Frazer's concept of contagious magic as published in his famous book *The Golden Bough* can still help us to understand what is happening here.[4] According to Frazer, two main principles of magic can be distinguished: the Law of Similarity and the Law of Contagion. The main idea behind the Law of Similarity is "that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause."[5] In contrast, the Law of Contagion follows the idea "that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed."[6] However, both principles can be subordinated under the Law of Sympathy, because they presuppose "that things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy."[7] The deeper meaning of the concept of contagious magic is the idea that touching or other forms of direct contact enables the transfer of effective agencies including healing or aggressive powers between the toucher and the touched. Thus, touching with the hands, lips, or other body parts is one specific

3 See Yuval Harari, "What Is a Magical Text? Methodological Reflections Aimed at Redefining Early Jewish Magic," in *Officina Magica: Essays on the Practice of Magic in Antiquity*, ed. Shaul Shaked (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 91–124.

4 See James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion. A New Abridgement from the Second and Third Editions*, ed. Robert Fraser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 37–45. On Frazer's definition of magic, see, e. g., Bernd-Christian Otto, *Magie: Rezeptions- und diskursgeschichtliche Analysen von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 45–60.

5 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 11.

6 Frazer, ibidem.

7 Frazer, 12.

possibility for establishing this kind of contact. Other forms of direct contact with supernatural powers might include other senses as well, such as sight, hearing, taste, and smell.

On the other hand, the prohibition or caveat concerning touching can define the boundary between different religious, cultic, or even ontological spheres. Thus, one of the usual preconditions for the performance of magical or ritual acts is the prohibition of sexual intercourse; that is, being forbidden to touch another body. Additional preparatory instructions concern dietetic limitations; that is, being forbidden to touch specific food or alcohol. Concepts of purity regarding the regulation of touch are obviously intertwined in religion, ritual, and magic.[8]

In order for magical acts to be effective, a practitioner of magic must not question or deviate from the given instructions. Of course, the same general precondition for a ritual is also true for performative haptic acts. Yet in instances when magic does not work—that is, when the intended purpose is not achieved—it is only natural for the practitioner or the client to begin to doubt the efficacy of the act. Another result would be that failure produces doubts concerning whether the magical act has been properly performed or whether the practitioner is capable of performing it. A typical explanation for failure from inside the system of magical concepts would be that there was something wrong with the preparation and/or performance of the magical act and thus it has to be repeated in the correct way.[9] The pragmatic response to those challenges would be to reattempt the performative act until it achieves the desired result. So, repetition is one strategy for overcoming failure and doubt. Another pragmatic approach would be to try an alternative set of instructions or recipe promising the same effect. What has to be touched and what must not be touched can be crucial in this respect. In some cases, touching can be interpreted as another attempt to ensure that the transfer of magical power between one thing or person and the other does indeed take place. Thus, touching could be another strategy for overcoming doubts concerning the efficacy of a magical act.

Throughout the Jewish tradition, there is ample evidence of magic.[10] Unlike anthropologists of contemporary cultures, the scholar of ancient Jewish magic is usually not in the comfortable situation of being able to do fieldwork; that is, to study the performance of magical acts in real time and place.[11] Most of the material to

8 See Rebecca Macy Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power: Angels, Incantations, and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 117–60.

9 See the numerous examples collected in Ute Hüsken, ed., *When Rituals Go Wrong: Mistakes, Failure, and the Dynamics of Ritual* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

10 See the surveys in Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Yuval Harari, *Jewish Magic before the Rise of Kabbalah*, trans. Batya Stein (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017); Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Atheneum, 1970).

11 On pragmatic interpretations of magical texts, see Bill Rebiger, "Unterweisung, Überlieferung und Aktualisierung von magischem Wissen im Judentum: Ansätze zu einer Textpragmatik," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 36 (2010): 31–55.

be studied in Jewish magic is only textual.[12] However, one of the greatest peculiarities of Jewish magic is this textual character and its references to other works such as biblical and liturgical texts. Quotations, adaptations, and allusions are common methods in the use of these canonical texts.[13] Another essential characteristic of Jewish magic is the obsession with divine, angelic, demonic, or other magical names and signs and the supposed efficacy of their use in magical acts.[14]

Besides the textual character of Jewish magic, I also want to emphasise another aspect of it, which is the material and haptic character of its magical objects and acts. Therefore, it is useful to distinguish between two categories: 1) finished products or applied texts and 2) instructions or recipes.[15] Finished products or applied texts include, for example, amulets, magic bowls, rings, gems, seals, and even skulls.[16] One essential feature of finished products defining their haptic dimension is that

12 See Gershom Scholem, "*Havdala De-Rabbi ʻAqiva:* A Source for the Tradition of Jewish Magic during the Geonic Period" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 50 (1980/81): 243–81 (reprinted in Gershom Scholem, *Devils, Demons and Souls: Essays on Demonology*, ed. Esther Liebes [Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, 2004], 145–82); Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985); Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1993); Lawrence H. Schiffman and Michael D. Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts from the Cairo Geniza: Selected Texts from Taylor-Schechter Box K1* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked, *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, 3 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994–99); Yuval Harari, *Ḥarba de–Moshe: New Edition and Study* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Academon Press, 1997); Judah B. Segal, *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaic Incantation Bowls in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 2000); Dan Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls: Incantation Texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity* (London: Kegan Paul, 2003); Irina Wandrey, *"Das Buch des Gewandes" und "Das Buch des Aufrechten": Dokumente eines magischen spätantiken Rituals* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); Christa Müller-Kessler, *Die Zauberschalentexte in der Hilprecht-Sammlung, Jena, und weitere Nippur-Texte anderer Sammlungen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005); Bill Rebiger and Peter Schäfer, *Sefer ha-Razim I und II: Das Buch der Geheimnisse I und II*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009); Bill Rebiger, *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim: Buch vom magischen Gebrauch der Psalmen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); Shaul Shaked, James Nathan Ford, and Siam Bhayro, *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls, Volume One* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Dan Levene, *Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts from Late-Antique Mesopotamia: May These Curses Go Out and Flee* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Gideon Bohak, ed., *A Fifteenth-Century Manuscript of Jewish Magic: MS New York Public Library, Heb. 190 (Formerly Sassoon 56). Introduction, Annotated Edition and Facsimile* [Hebrew], 2 vols. (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2014); Emma Abate, *Sigillare il mondo. Amuleti e ricette dalla Genizah: Manoscritti magici ebraici della biblioteca della Alliance Israelite Universelle di Parigi* (Palermo: Officina di Studi Medievali, 2015); Oded Porat, ed., *Sefer Brit ha-Menuḥah: Book of Covenant of Serenity* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2016).

13 See Dorothea Salzer, *Die Magie der Anspielung: Form und Funktion der biblischen Anspielungen in den magischen Texten der Kairoer Geniza* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

14 See Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 78–103; Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 305–7.

15 See Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 144–48.

16 On the use of writing materials in Jewish magic, see Bill Rebiger, "'Write on Three Ribs of a Sheep': Writing Materials in Ancient and Mediaeval Jewish Magic," in *Jewish Manuscript Cultures: New Perspectives*, ed. Irina Wandrey (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 339–59.

they can be grasped, worn, or touched. On the other hand, instructions or recipes describing the production of finished products and/or the performance of a magical act or ritual are usually found in manuscripts such as the fragments from the Cairo Genizah (see below) or printed manuals. The goals of these instructions are familiar ones, such as, for instance, healing, protection, love charms, dream questions, "opening the heart" (i.e., improving learning and memory), and aggressive magic. Concerning this second category of instructional texts, the imperative to touch or to avoid touching defines the haptic character of the magical acts.

In order to understand the haptic dimension of ancient and medieval Jewish magic, it may be useful to present and discuss some sample texts in what follows. It must be emphasised that only a very limited selection of texts can be given here. First, I would like to begin with two significant narratives from the Hebrew Bible and one from the New Testament. In these biblical texts, touching defines the boundary between the sacred and the profane or between charismatic wonder-workers and the common people. Following the biblical examples, I would like to focus on medieval instructional texts of Jewish magic and the meaning of human touching and other forms of direct contact for the performance of magical acts. As we will see, a significant difference concerning human touching can be observed from comparing biblical stories of wonder-workers with texts giving instructions for how to perform magical acts.

Sample Texts

1) 2 Samuel 6:2–7

The first text is about the lethal boundary between the sacred and the profane realms, or between the initiated people—that is, the priests—on the one side and the laymen on the other. Here, the numinous and frightening character of the incident is telling: not only for the present reader, but also for the people in the story itself. The text deals with a sacred object, the Ark of the Covenant, and the danger of touching it:

> 2 Then David and all the troops that were with him set out from Baalim of Judah to bring up from there the Ark of God to which the Name was attached, the name LORD of Hosts Enthroned on the Cherubim.
>
> 3 They loaded the Ark of God onto a new cart and conveyed it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Abinadab's sons, Uzzah and Ahio, guided the new cart.
>
> 4 They conveyed it from Abinadab's house on the hill, [Uzzah walking] alongside the Ark of God and Ahio walking in front of the Ark.
>
> 5 Meanwhile, David and all the House of Israel danced before the LORD to [the sound of] all kinds of cypress wood [instruments], with lyres, harps, timbrels, sistrums, and cymbals.

> 6 But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out for the Ark of God and grasped it, for the oxen had stumbled.
>
> 7 The LORD was incensed at Uzzah. And God struck him down on the spot for his indiscretion, and he died there beside the Ark of God.[17]

The bitter irony of this story is that Uzzah, whose only goal in touching the ark is to prevent it from falling, is fatally punished by God for doing so.[18] Touching the sacred object is lethal to him simply because he does not belong to the priestly caste, whose members are the only people who are allowed to approach it. Thus, this story, like others in the Hebrew Bible,[19] emphasises that for anyone who does not belong to the initiated people, there is a caveat and a prohibition against touching sacred objects which are supposed to be charged with supernatural and, more specifically, aggressive power. So, it is no wonder that these allegedly powerful objects were not only venerated, but also used for magical purposes. Throughout the history of Judaism—as in that of other religions as well—we find a great deal of evidence for the magical use of Holy Scriptures[20] and cultic doorposts or *mezuzot*[21] with regard to their materiality. In contrast to the biblical account, touching the objects is one of the commonest and most well-established practices.

2) 2 Kings 4:29–35

In the Hebrew Bible—as in the Holy Scriptures of other religions—there are many stories of holy or charismatic men performing wondrous deeds and miracles. In general, these miracles bend or abrogate natural laws with the help of divine power. Among the wonder-working men of God mentioned in the Hebrew Bible are the prophet Elijah and his disciple and successor Elisha.[22] On the simple narrative level, the events are dated to the ninth century BCE, although the literary account was certainly composed much later. The following story of one of the miracles performed by Elisha is

17 2 Sam 6:2–7 (New JPS Translation).

18 See Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 28.

19 See, e. g., Exod 19:12, where the Israelites are exhorted not to touch Mount Sinai, or Lev 10:1–2, where Aaron's sons die after entering the sanctuary. See also the well-known Latin phrase *noli me tangere* ("touch me not") translated from the Greek in John 20:17, which Jesus says to Mary Magdalene.

20 See, e. g., Peter Ganz, ed., *Das Buch als magisches und als Repräsentationsobjekt* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992); Shalom Sabar, "Torah and Magic: The Torah Scroll and Its Accessories in Jewish Culture in Europe and in Muslim Countries" [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 85 (2000): 149–79.

21 See Yuval Harari, "Leadership, Authority, and the 'Other' in the Debate over Magic from the Karaites to Maimonides," *The Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry* 1, no. 2 (2007): 97.

22 On the biblical prophet as a channel for God's power when performing miracles, see Ann Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 81–95. On Elijah and Elisha as wonder-workers, see Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 20–27.

divided into two parts. The first is about the delegation of magical power involving the use of a magic wand and the failure of the magical act. The second, in contrast, describes the success of a different magical act performed by the prophet himself. Prior to this event, Elisha prophesied to a childless woman that she would give birth to a son. However, when the child dies at an early age, Elisha takes action:

> 29 He [i.e., Elisha] said to [his servant] Gehazi, "Tie up your skirts, take my staff in your hand, and go. If you meet anyone, do not greet him; and if anyone greets you, do not answer him. And place my staff on the face of the boy." [...]
>
> 31 Gehazi had gone on before them and had placed the staff on the boy's face; but there was no sound or response. He turned back to meet him [i.e., Elisha] and told him, "The boy has not awakened."
>
> 32 Elisha came into the house, and there was the boy, laid out dead on his couch.
>
> 33 He went in, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the LORD.
>
> 34 Then he mounted [the bed] and placed himself over the child. He put his mouth on its mouth, his eyes on its eyes, and his hands on its hands, as he bent over it. And the body of the child became warm.
>
> 35 He stepped down, walked once up and down the room, then mounted and bent over him. Thereupon, the boy sneezed seven times, and the boy opened his eyes.[23]

In the first part of the story quoted above, Elisha's servant Gehazi fails despite having done exactly what his master instructed him to do. As Elisha's servant, he is very close to his master and is thus somewhat elevated. Therefore, he is even allowed to use Elisha's own staff for the performance of the ritual act. However, his attempt to resurrect the dead boy fails. Despite the general idea of an almost mechanical causality in magic, there is in fact no certainty or guarantee of success in the performance of ritual or magical acts. Failure is always possible and each failed attempt evokes further doubts concerning the correctness of the instructions and their execution. In this story, two ways of overcoming this scepticism are presented. First, only the prophet Elisha himself, who has been chosen by God, can succeed in performing miracles. Elisha's prayer does not merely emphasise this close relationship between God and his prophet; rather, it is already part of the ritual performance. Second, it is only Elisha's double execution of the performative haptic act of bodily touching that enables his magical power to flow directly into the boy's body.[24] In doing so, Elisha

23 2 Kgs 4:29–35 (New JPS Translation). For a discussion of this passage, see, e.g., Rüdiger Schmitt, *Magie im Alten Testament* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004), 237–50; Michael Pietsch, "Der Prophet als Magier: Magie und Ritual in den Elischaerzählungen," in *Zauber und Magie im antiken Palästina und in seiner Umwelt: Kolloquium des Deutschen Vereins zur Erforschung Palästinas vom 14. bis 16. November 2014 in Mainz*, ed. Jens Kamlah, Rolf Schäfer, and Markus Witte (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017), 359–67. Elisha's action is very similar to that of his master Elijah in 1 Kings 17:19–23.

24 Compare also Naaman's plea to Elisha to heal his leprosy by laying his hands over the afflicted area in 2 Kgs 5:11.

transgresses the biblical prohibition on touching dead bodies.[25] Instead, he interconnects those sensory organs or limbs which are immediately indicative of a living being; namely, the boy's mouth, eyes, and hands. The boy's sneezing involves the other two sensory organs; that is, the nose and the ears. The sevenfold occurrence of sneezing is a common motif from magical tales that emphasises the exceptional character of the events. Finally, the opening of the boy's eyes and the increase in his body temperature indicate the success of the resurrection.

Similar to the New Testament story of the Doubting Thomas in John 20:24-29, only a magical touch can dispel scepticism in the end. In other words, the use of a magical technique or item is important, but not sufficient. In line with this, the story of Elisha and Gehazi can be interpreted as a polemic against the layman or non-professional practitioner who believes that it is sufficient to simply execute an instruction in order to achieve a goal. In contrast, only God's holy men are able to perform wonderful deeds with the help of the supernatural power they were given by God.

3) Matthew 8:1–3

The third example is from the New Testament and presents Jesus as a wonder-working man of God in line, at least to a certain degree, with Elijah and Elisha. This is not the right place to discuss the interpretation that Jesus was merely a magician like many others of his time found in late antique anti-Christian polemics[26] as well as in modern scholarship.[27] Matthew 8:1-3 tells the story of Jesus cleansing a leper:

> 1 When he [i.e., Jesus] came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.
>
> 2 And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."

25 See Num 19:10–22 and, concerning priests, Lev 21:1–3.

26 See Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 52–62.

27 See Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978). For criticism of Smith, see, e.g., Jan A. Bühner, "Jesus und die antike Magie: Bemerkungen zu M. Smith, *Jesus der Magier*," *Evangelische Theologie* 43 (1983): 156–75; Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 190–207; Bernd Kollmann, *Jesus und die Christen als Wundertäter: Studien zu Magie, Medizin und Schamanismus in Antike und Christentum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 130–32; Michael Becker, *Wunder und Wundertäter im frührabbinischen Judentum: Studien zum Phänomen und seiner Überlieferung im Horizont von Magie und Dämonismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 421–42; Marco Frenschkowski, *Mysterien des Urchristentums: Eine kritische Sichtung spekulativer Theorien zum frühen Christentum* (Wiesbaden: Marix Verlag, 2007), 211–27.

> 3 And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.[28]

The practice of palm healing is well attested in ancient literature.[29] The broader background of this practice is the assumed symbolic power of the hand, as can be seen in its different functions such as blessing, ordaining, protecting, healing, or cursing. Similar to the story here, Jesus also heals with the touch of his hand in Mark 5:21–43[30] and Luke 4:40. Until modern times, leprosy was interpreted as a contagious disease that involved cultic impurity and therefore required strict separation between the leper and other people. Touching the leper had to be strictly avoided, and any accidental touch was suspicious. Thus, Jesus touching the sick person with his hand is an abnormal or subversive behaviour with regard to the social and cultic standards of his culture. This kind of inversion is one of the general characteristics of magic. As explicitly mentioned in the story, the healing is dependent on the intention of the healer. The combination of touching and speaking in Jesus's healing of the leper brings the haptic act and the speech act together. The importance of Jesus's miracles for Christianity may have caused a certain aloofness towards the supernatural powers of wonder-workers and the importance of direct bodily contact in medieval Judaism. However, biblical charismatic wonder-workers like Elijah and Elisha eventually became a kind of role model for later magicians, who were called "Master of the Name" or *ba'al shem* by their followers and admirers in the Jewish tradition.[31]

Besides the stories about of these exceptional men, there is additional evidence of a widespread magical praxis in Judaism which can be found in thousands of instructional texts in manuscripts and printed editions from the Middle Ages onwards. In these texts, the personality of the practitioner is much less important than the correct performance of a magical act. Here, it is more important to follow the instructions for a magical ritual or the recipe for the preparation of a magical ingredient. The rituals involved in descriptions of (biblical) miracles and in medieval magical instructions are indeed very similar in many cases. Nevertheless, one difference is that the medieval Jewish practitioners addressed by these instructions usually do not claim that they are on a mission from God. Another difference is that in contrast to many medieval instructions, the holy men of the Bible do not perform erotic charms. In general, unlike the biblical wonder-workers, the medieval instructions are not concerned with the resuscitation of the dead or rain-making. However, the most important difference is that the medieval Jewish practitioners rely on an ac-

28 Matt 8:1–3 (English Standard Version); compare the synoptic parallels in Mark 1:40–44 and Luke 5:12–14.

29 See, e.g., the *Genesis Apocryphon* from Qumran, 1QapGen 20:28–29, where Abraham heals the Pharaoh by laying his hands on his head.

30 Compare the synoptic parallels in Matt 9:18–26 and Luke 8:40–56.

31 See Karl E. Grözinger, *Tausend Jahre Ba'al[e] Schem. Jüdische Heiler, Helfer, Magier: Ein Spiegel europäischer Geistesgeschichte* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017).

quired body of technical knowledge and the use of magical material objects and spoken or written words. Therefore, knowledge of the techniques and practices is more important than simply belonging to an elite of God's chosen men. Holy men are defined by election or vocation. In contrast, practitioners of magic attempt to follow instructions. At the same time, magic becomes a knowledge, skill, or technique rather than a gift elevating charismatic individuals.

4) *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim* ("Book of the Magical Use of Psalms")

The *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim* or "Book of the Magical Use of Psalms" is the most popular manual of Jewish magic.[32] In this book, each biblical psalm is combined with instructions for a magical act intended for a specific purpose. The origins of this book can be dated back to the ninth or tenth century CE. The earliest manuscript evidence can be found in medieval fragments from the Cairo Genizah (see below). After a long and complicated history of compilation and redactions, the first printed edition was published in the small town of Sabbioneta in Northern Italy in 1551.[33] Since then and to this day, it has been reprinted many times. One very typical instruction in this manual is designed to heal an unhealthy spleen:

> Write [the verses of Psalm 119:49–56] on the side of the spleen.[34]

In fact, writing the relevant text of the eight verses from Psalm 119 on the unhealthy person's body is a kind of magical tattooing.[35] In analogy to the alleged divine origin of the Torah, the five books of Moses, the supposed Davidic authorship of the psalms guarantees their magical power. The direct contact between the magical writing and the bodily location of the disease is a wonderful example of Frazer's concept of contagious magic. This contact enables the transmission of the magical power and thus replaces the magical touch of a charismatic healer or wonder-worker. The haptic act of human touching is mediated by another haptic act: the physical contact between the effective Bible verses and the specific part of the body. Here, the combination of a performative writing act and a haptic act guarantees the efficacy of the healing spell. The key element is the idea that the spleen will inevitably be affected by the magical writing. Other very common techniques for establishing direct contact between mag-

32 See Rebiger, *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim*; Rebiger, "Die magische Verwendung von Psalmen im Judentum," in *Ritual und Poesie: Formen und Orte religiöser Dichtung im Alten Orient, im Judentum und im Christentum*, ed. Erich Zenger (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2003), 265–81.

33 See Bill Rebiger, "The *editio princeps* of *Sefer Šimmuš Tehillim*, Sabbioneta 1551," in *L'Eredità di Salomone. La magia ebraica in Italia e nel Mediterraneo*, ed. Emma Abate (Florence: Giuntina, 2019), 169–84.

34 Rebiger, *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim*, 88*–89*: section 135.

35 See Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 118–19.

ical writing and the transmission of magical agency include eating inscribed food such as cakes or eggs or dissolving the writing in a liquid and drinking it.[36]

5) A Genizah fragment

The fragments from the so-called Cairo Genizah have provided the scholarly world with a huge amount of material. A Genizah is a kind of synagogue storehouse in which unused manuscripts containing the name of God are collected. The most famous of these is the Cairo Genizah, which was discovered in the late nineteenth century by the Cambridge scholar Solomon Schechter and which contained more than 400,000 fragments spanning from the ninth to the nineteenth century, most of which are medieval. These fragments are now held in collections in Cambridge, Oxford, New York, and elsewhere.[37] The following Genizah fragment contains, among many others, a very typical set of instructions for healing magic:

For the sting of a scorpion, write [the following magical names] over the pain[ful spot]:
'qrws
Qrws
Rws
Ws
s.[38]

Here again, as in the sample text from the *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim* quoted above, the ideas of magical tattooing and of direct contact between the effective writing and the location of the pain are essential for understanding the magical act. However, one difference between these two examples is that in the second case, the problem has a cause that is external to the body. In both cases, it is not the touch of a wonder-worker that guarantees the healing, but rather a magical act that can be performed by anyone. Or, in other words: it is not the charisma of an elite man chosen by God that provides the magical agency, but rather magical names. In addition, the magical name used does not originate in the Bible, but belongs to a separate and genuine magical tradition. This name, consisting of the five Hebrew letters 'qrws (אקרוס) and probably of Greek origin (ἄκρος),[39] has no semantic meaning in the He-

36 See Bill Rebiger, "Wein in der jüdischen Magie des Mittelalters," in *Wein und Judentum*, ed. Andreas Lehnardt (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 2014), 103–7.

37 See Stefan C. Reif, *A Jewish Archive from Old Cairo: The History of Cambridge University's Genizah Collection* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000); Adina Hoffman and Peter Cole, *Sacred Trash: The Lost and Found World of the Cairo Geniza* (New York: Schocken, 2011).

38 CUL T.-S. K 1.117, page 5, lines 12–17, edited in Naveh and Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae*, 178–79 (Geniza 16).

39 The Greek word ἄκρος (*akros*) means "outermost" or "extreme," which is somewhat fitting given the sting of the scorpion.

brew language, but becomes a powerful name in these magical instructions. The graphic vanishing of the magical name, made up of five letters which disappear one by one in each successive line, symbolises the vanishing of the pain.

6) Another Genizah fragment

In another Genizah fragment, we find instructions for a treasure hunt:

> To make a candle in order to look for treasure with it, take new wax, a new vessel, sulphur, and the fingerbones of a corpse. Pound it well and mix all together. Take a hanged man's rope and make a wick [for the candle] with it. [...] When you reach the place where you should dig, the candle will extinguish.[40]

In the context of the instructions, the corpse's index finger is an indication that "points" the treasure seeker in the right direction. Both the corpse and the hanged man symbolise the underworld, which is also the location of the presumed treasure. Here, a finger symbolically touches the correct place. This magical act promises that a treasure will be found despite the practitioner having no prior knowledge of its location.

In the rabbinical magico-medical manual imbedded in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Gittin (bGit 68b–70b), we find a recipe for healing the spleen in which the hand of a corpse is used. This recipe explicitly mentions the sympathetic concept behind the practice: just as the corpse's hand is dry, so the spleen will also dry out.[41]

7) Ḥarba de-Moshe ("Sword of Moses")

A last sample text can be found in *Ḥarba de-Moshe* or "Sword of Moses." This magical text was written in Hebrew in the second half of the first millennium CE. In the main part of this book, numerous instructions using the so-called sword are compiled. The "Sword" contains long series of magical names, most of which are ineffable, and instructions involving these names. Many *nomina barbara*—that is, strange names—and technical terms found in this book appear to have a Greek origin. One of the instructions deals with catching thieves:

> For [catching] thieves, say: May thieves and robbers be bound and surrender in the name of MRGWHMHW'L until 'ṬṬHSHW'L, and while reciting [it] put your little finger in your ear

40 CUL T.-S. K 1.3, fol. 2b/15 – 3a/4, edited in Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, vol. 3, 93: no. 62 (my translation).

41 See Giuseppe Veltri, *Magie und Halakha: Ansätze zu einem empirischen Wissenschaftsbegriff im spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Judentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 247.

> [while reciting it]. And when you wish to release them, say from Y'WYHW and remove your hand from your ear.[42]

In these instructions for a performative speech act, there is an impressive demonstration of the efficacy of the magical spell. In order to be protected from the magical power, one has to avoid hearing the spell during the performance. Here, the touching of the ears serves as a prevention of sense perception; that is, the sense of hearing. Thus, in this case, touching interrupts the transmission of magical agency, which is completely different to the above-mentioned sample texts. The simultaneous performance of the haptic act of touching and the speech act of the adjuration channels the magical agency to the right addressees; that is, the thieves.

Conclusion

The knowledge of the meaning of touching and the acceptance of related instructions is in many cases vital for the performance of magical acts. The introduction of the concept of performative haptic acts emphasises the function of touching in these acts. The first sample text, the story of Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6:2-7 presents the lethal consequences for unauthorised persons when they transgress the prohibitions on touching sacred objects. Here, touching defines the border between sanctity/profanity and purity/impurity.

In cases where the intended purpose of a magical act did not appear to have been achieved, there was doubt as to whether the person who had performed it had done so correctly. In the story of Elisha's resurrection of the dead child in 2 Kings 4:29–35, the failure of the magical act performed by the servant Gehazi is repaired: firstly by the healing act being performed by the wonder-worker himself and secondly by introducing a performative haptic act in order to ensure the transmission of the effective power between the holy man of God and the dead person.

Similar to Elisha's account, the third sample text from the New Testament in which Jesus heals the leper again emphasises the function of the performative haptic act of bodily touching. Both Elisha and Jesus transgress the biblical prohibition by touching either a dead body or a leper.

A closer look at the biblical texts presented above raises the question of the subject of a magical act, or, to focus more on our topic, whether it is who is doing the touching that is important. The wonder-worker is interpreted as a kind of vessel for the supernatural power which comes from God. Thus, the flow of this power from God to the client or object can be guaranteed by touching during a performative haptic act.

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42 See Yuval Harari, "The Sword of Moses (*Ḥarba de-Moshe*): A New Translation and Introduction," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 7 (2012): 96, no. 132–33.

In contrast, Jewish magical instructions from the Middle Ages and early modern times suggest, at least at first sight, that anyone who knows the appropriate instructions and recipes is able to be effective and successful as long as he or she follows them correctly. Thus, in many cases, the mediated contact between magically effective verses or names and the addressee of the magical ritual replaces a human touch from a charismatic man. In these cases, the efficacy of contagious magic is in fact less dependent on the magical power transmitted by a holy man than on depersonalised forms of contact. Accordingly, in the (medieval) instructional texts intended for any practitioner, the performative haptic act is much less important than it is in the miracles performed by wonder-workers as described in the biblical stories. However, the two phenomena, the magic of the wonder-worker and that of the common practitioner, do not exclude each other. Thus, there were numerous charismatic wonder-workers in Judaism—such as, for example, in Lurianic Kabbalah and Hasidism—who were very familiar with the knowledge of how to perform a magical act as presented in instructional texts.[43]

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43 See Lawrence Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995).

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Fig. 9: Giovanni Battista Caracciolo (il Battistello), *Noli me tangere*, c. 1620, oil on canvas, 209 x 131 cm., Museo Civico, Palazzo Pretorio, Prato, Italy. Image Source: Heritage Images.

Libera Pisano

Noli me tangere: The Profaning Touch That Challenges Authority

If scepticism can be broadly defined as a method as well as an attitude that criticises dogmatic assumptions and leads to a suspension of judgement, then a sceptical gesture can be conceived as a non-verbal way of expressing doubts or challenging authorities. The shift from a sceptical argument to a sceptical praxis is the passage from a linguistic definition to a bodily dimension in an anarchic shape. As is well known, anarchy etymologically means "the absence of *arche*," which has a double meaning: on the one hand, it means "origin," "beginning," and "principle of action," while on the other, it means "power," "command," and "authorities." Anarchy can be interpreted as more than a mere overthrowing of the *arche*; rather, it starts with a process of doubting and calling into question the political and social order. Shifting from an epistemological to a corporeal-political perspective, the sense of touch can be interpreted as a sceptical gesture towards authorities, since it deals with the body interpreted as a site of power.[1]

In this chapter, I will sketch some provisional notes on the provocative and "anarchic" aspects of the sense of touch, which, in its indeterminacy and reversibility, exceeds the borders of a univocal definition and therefore needs to be more measured and disciplined than the other senses. Touch allows the first immediate contact with otherness and represents an escape route from the integrity of the self, but at the same time, it shows the vulnerability of the body and the danger of contamina-

1 The body as a site of power is one of the most discussed issues in contemporary philosophical debate. This is not the place to offer an overview of this huge issue, but I would like to quote the incipit of Judith Butler's famous article in which she criticises Foucault's idea of the body. In my opinion, Butler's arguments may shed light on the complicated intrigue of this philosophical issue. See Judith Butler, "Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions," *The Journal of Philosophy* 86 (1989): 601: "The position that the body is constructed is one that is surely, if not immediately, associated with Michel Foucault. The body is a site where regimes of discourse and power inscribe themselves, a nodal point or nexus for relations of juridical and productive power. And, yet, to speak in this way invariably suggests that there is a body that is in some sense there, pregiven, existentially available to become the site of its own ostensible construction. What is it that circumscribes this site called 'the body'? How is this delimitation made, and who makes it? Which body qualifies as 'the' body? What establishes the 'the,' the existential status of this body? Does the existential body in its anonymous universality have a gender, an unspoken one? [...] To claim that 'the body is culturally constructed' is, on the one hand, to assert that whatever meanings or attributes the body acquires are in fact culturally constituted and variable. But not that the very construction of the sentence confounds the meaning of 'construction' itself. Is 'the body' ontologically distinct from the process of construction it undergoes? [...] In other words, 'the body' would not be constructed, strictly considered, but would be the occasion, the site, or the condition of a process of construction only externally related to the body that is its object."

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tion. In its uncanny and erotic proximity, the sense of touch has a privileged relationship with the symbolic representations of power in its political, religious, or social articulations. However, this bodily contact with authority is at the same time a risk and a challenge to the authority itself, which can be questioned by a profanatory touch.

This chapter will be structured in three sections. In the first, I will consider the reciprocity and the uncanniness of touch from a philosophical perspective. Far from being something that can be relegated to mere perception, the sense of touch is not a neutral process, but rather a medium of power relationships. In this regard, the skin also becomes a metaphorical deconstruction of borders between the I and the Other, as well as an epiphenomenon of social status. In the second section, starting from the episode of the Gospel of John and the famous injunction *noli me tangere*, I will consider the difference between two (gendered) desires to touch, that of St. Thomas and that of Mary Magdalene. In the third section, I will shed light on the gesture of touch as a challenge to authority and a kind of profanation of established rules. In order to do this, following Giorgio Agamben, I will consider the so-called museification of our society in which the prohibition of touch—and, therefore, of use—can be interpreted as a consequence of the extreme phase of capitalism.

Sight and Touch/Pure and Impure

As is commonly assumed, the Western tradition privileges sight as the sole mode of access to both beings and philosophical truth.[2] Sight is the theoretical sense,[3] while touch is the practical one; if the first is connected to thought and requires distance in order to detach the observer from the observed, the second, by contrast, needs proximity to unite the toucher and the touched. If seeing is believing, touching starts when seeing is not enough. It can be said that touch is driven by a primordial sceptical impulse.

Recently, many attempts have also been made to propose a philosophical history of touch in order to move from a metaphysics of sight to a materialism of touch.[4] In particular, I am thinking here of Jean-Luc Nancy[5] and Daniel Heller-Roazen, who, in

2 See Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 66: "Most Indo-European terms for mental activity apparently derive from words for vision or the visible."

3 As is well known, theory is etymologically connected to sight: from Ancient Greek *theōria* ("contemplation, speculation, a looking at, things looked at"), *theōreō* ("I look at, view, consider, examine"), *theōros* ("spectator"), and *thea* ("a view") + *horaō* ("I see, look").

4 At the beginning of her brilliant work on touch, Classen asks: "If a history could be written of touch, what would it embrace?" See Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), xi.

5 See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me tangere: essai sur la levée du corps* (Paris: Bayard, 2003).

the last chapter of his work *The Inner Touch*, leaves his readers with the question: "What would it mean for touch to be the root of thinking and for thinking, in turn, to be the most elevated form of a kind of touch?"[6]

How can we define touch? According to the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*,

> the sense of touch is one of the central forms of perceptual experience. Thought to be the first sense to develop, touch occurs across the whole body using a variety of receptors in the skin. It often combines these signals with rich information made available by stretch receptors in the muscles and tendons as we actively move and explore the world.[7]

This scientific definition is partial, since it does not take into account the ambiguity of touch seen not only as a form of perception, but rather as a controversial philosophical and political threshold.

The Reciprocity of Touch: The Open Skin

Even if touch does not have a proper organ, since it is spread throughout the body, it can be said that the hand—the symbol of the *homo faber*—can be seen as the focus of touch, which is also the link between activities and thoughts, body and mind. As a peculiar property of human beings, the hand has been seen as a sign of human superiority. In the act of touching, activity and passivity are connected in the same process: it is possible to see without being seen and to hear without being heard, but not to touch without being touched.[8] The hand, the body, and the skin are borders in a constant dialogue with exteriority and otherness. It can be said that this reciprocity of touch may play a pivotal role from both a philosophical and a political perspective. For instance, in his essay entitled "Haut" (Skin), the philosopher Vilém Flusser described a dynamic representation of the skin as a fictive limit in which the external and internal worlds communicate with each other. Much more than a surface that constitutes the body, the skin is a place of exchange between the I and the world: "The skin lies between the future and the past, between freedom and work (*Werk*), whereby these skin horizons overlap one another."[9]

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6 Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 285.

7 Matthew Fulkerson, "Touch," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/touch/.

8 See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 152–59; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

9 Vilém Flusser, "Haut," *Flusser Studies* 2 (2006): 2, accessed 01/07/2020, http://www.flusserstudies.net/sites/www.flusserstudies.net/files/media/attachments/flusser-haut02.pdf.

This exchange with the external is a process of subjectivity. The reciprocity of the skin and the sense of touch allow this openness to the world and to the Other. Therefore, there is an intrigue of subject and object, as the contemporary philosopher Michel Serres underlines: "I caress your skin, I kiss your mouth. Who, I? Who, you? When I touch my hand with my lips, I feel the soul like a ball passing from one side to the other of the point of contact, the soul quickens when faced with such unpredictability."[10] Following his argumentation, we can say that touch works as a kind of medium or, to be more specific, as a mixture, since it has no specific object and tends towards fluidity:

> The skin is a variety of contingency: in it, through it, with it, the world and my body touch each other, the feeling and the felt, it defines their common edge. Contingency means common tangency: in it, the world and the body intersect and caress each other. I do not wish to call the place in which I live a medium, I prefer to say that things mingle with each other and that I am no exception to that, I mix with the world which mixes with me. Skin intervenes between several things in the world and makes them mingle.[11]

The map that touch provides is a mobile one in which the contours are smooth and flexible. It creates a form of commonality, which is a kind of mixture where each surface touches another in an unavoidable proximity.

The Uncanniness of Touch: A Matter of Life or Death

However, this proximity is related to a dangerous uncanniness. In his brilliant work *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, Derrida stated that the sense of touch is unclear, since it is unapparent, obscure, secret, and nocturnal. In fact, it has many aporetic elements: though the other senses have their proper sensible objects (colour for vision, sound for the sense of hearing, and flavour for taste), touch comprises several different qualities. While according to the common understanding of this sense, I can only touch some extended things (*res extensa*), it does not follow that every extension is touchable. The act of touching is always a threshold, in which a limit, a surface, a border is touched:

> It is touching that touches on the limit, its own "proper-improper" limit, that is to say on the untouchable whose border it touches. To touch on the limit is not, for contact, just any experi-

10 Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies (I)*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley (New York: Continuum, 2008), 26.

11 Serres, 80.

> ence among others or a particular figure: one never touches except by touching a limit *at the limit*.[12]

Aristotle—according to Derrida, the greatest thinker to ever discuss touch—stated in his *De anima* that without touch, there would be no other senses and animals could not exist. Touch has a unique place in his discourse on living beings, since the sense of touch alone is necessary for the survival of animals and men:

> It is evident, then, that of necessity animals deprived of this sense alone will die. For nothing having this can fail to be an animal, nor does what is an animal need any sense other than this.[13]

One can say that anthropopoiesis—the self-building process of human beings—is deeply connected to touch. However, since it deals with survival, it needs to be measured: animals would die without touch, but they would also die with a surplus of it. Touch should imply both contact and distance. Aristotle insisted that both the tangible and the intangible are the objects of touch.[14] There is an a priori untouchability since touching, as a question of life and death, concerns our *Da-sein*, our relations with the world. This ambiguity is the haunting of touch, which has something that exceeds itself, a surplus of touch that is untouchable. Since touching deals with its own limits, it is deeply related to transgression, sacrilege, and profanation. This "untouchability"[15] can be defined as a limit or a prohibition, which constitutes a dynamic of power in itself and its manifestations through religion and social relationships.

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12 Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 297.

13 Aristotle, *De anima*, translated with and introduction and commentary by C. Shields, (Oxford: Clarendon, 2016), 435b4–7.

14 Aristotle, 424a.

15 Concerning the notion of the "untouchable," see Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, 330 n. 17: "Since the untouchable here is neither mind nor consciousness but, verily, body proper and in the flesh, one has indeed to think the logic of an untouchable remaining right at, right on the touchable, if one may say so still. This touchable-untouchable [...] is not someone, nor is it what certain cultures term an 'untouchable.' But this 'untouchable' with its *prohibition* against being touched could not be announced, named, and identified in this way except inasmuch as—let me stress again—there is some touchable-untouchable in general, before any religion, cult, or prohibition. Any vow of abstinence—hence avowing both the touchable and the untouchable—experiments with the touchable *as* untouchable, in a betrayal that is originary and therefore unforgivable, or *imprescriptible*, as is said of crimes against humanity in France today: outside the statute of limitations."

Touch as Medium of the Divine

Touch can be interpreted from another perspective as a metaphor for the transmission of spiritual and religious power.[16] The touch of God is an all-powerful manifestation of his omnipotence and his supreme power over nature. Since touch is not possible without direct contact, it can be interpreted as the medium *par excellence* in which the divine passes through the human condition. Touch can bring direct contact with holiness and the body of Christ is touchable, but—despite this carnal representation—it cannot be possessed, even in the Eucharistic display of his body (*hoc est corpus meum*).

The aesthetic dimension of soteriology involves several theological issues. In the Old Testament, through his divine touch, God purifies people from sin and manifests his divine truth. Furthermore, touching is also connected to the regulation of laws and to the ceremonial cleanness, which prohibits contact with unclean things, such as certain foods and corpses.[17] The New Testament reformulates the theme of touch through the sensible figure of Jesus. All of the Gospels—which can be taken as a "general haptics,"[18] to quote Derrida—present the body of Christ not as a body of revelation, but as a suffering body: "as a body touching as much as touched, as flesh that is touched-touching."[19]

In the Bible, there is always a physical proximity to the body of Jesus, who lets himself be touched and heals with touch; through his hands, Jesus performs miracles and gives tangible signs of his supernatural power. He multiplies food with his hands, cures people of sickness, and restores them to life. His healing powers are shown through direct contact and his omnipotence passes through a physical manifestation.

The bodily aspect is also preserved in everyday practices: crossing oneself, giving the kiss of peace, placing one's hands together in prayer. On the one hand, the performance of these ritual gestures is a devotional touch; on the other, it is a way of disciplining bodies. In this context, it is worth mentioning the role of touch in the particular use of the body made by mystics. For instance, Bernard of Clairvaux considered touch as the perfect metaphor for faith—"Christ urges us: 'touch me with the

16 See David Morgan, "The Senses in Religion," in *A Cultural History of the Senses. Volume 5: In the Age of Empire*, ed. Constance Classen (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 95: "Seeing and tasting were powerful ways of seeking out religious authenticity, but so were touching and smelling. Touch was understood to be the ancient medium for the transmission of spiritual authority in the catholic tradition, beginning with the apostles' bodily embrace with Jesus, the apostolic practice of laying on hands by church elders, and descending over time through the consecrating blessing of a bishop's hand on a new priest."

17 See Lev 11:15 and Deut 14.

18 Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, 100.

19 Derrida, 100.

hand of faith, the finger of desire, the embrace of love'"[20]—while in the visionary mystical experience, the sense of touch played a crucial role: in the *Ancrene Wisse* (*Guide for Anchoresses*), a monastic rule written in the early thirteenth century, there is an invitation to touch Jesus in a visionary trance: "Touch him with as much love as you would a man."[21] In this regard, this sublimated touch is assumed to be a bridge to another (divine or sensual) sphere, through which the body is purified and transformed. However, on the other hand, since mystics and ascetics practise strict bodily discipline—including sexual abstinence, deprivation, self-castigation, and self-inflicted pain—the (carnal) surplus of the sense of touch has to be rigidly regulated.

Mary Magdalene and Thomas: Two Metaphors of Touch

Within this religious framework, I would like to discuss a particular episode from the Gospels, without dwelling on the issue of the saving touch of divine grace. "Touch me not!" is Jesus's admonition to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection, because he becomes momentarily untouchable.[22] This famous locution is a *hapax legomenon*

20 Quoted in Classen, *The Deepest Sense*, 30.

21 See Classen, 89.

22 See John 20:11–20, 24–29: "Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she said, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, 'Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?' Thinking he was the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary.' She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, 'Rabboni!' (which means 'Teacher'). Jesus said, 'Noli me tangere [touch me not], for I have not ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her. Jesus Appears to His Disciples. On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. [...] Jesus Appears to Thomas. Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So, the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.' A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.' Thomas said to him, 'My Lord and my God!' Then, Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"

in the Gospels. "*Noli me tangere* [touch me not], for I have not ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." On that evening, Jesus appears to his disciples, but Thomas Didymus is not among them and doubts their testimony: "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Eight days later, Jesus says to Thomas: "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas then recognises his lord and God, but Jesus says to him: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

One might say that here, there are two different desires to touch at stake: the woman touches because she recognises Jesus and believes in him, while the man wants to touch Jesus's body because he does not believe, or better, because he needs proof in order to believe. Mary Magdalene cannot touch; Thomas touches, but his touch aims at a confirmation. The first act is due to an overabundance of belief, the second to a lack of faith. Both gestures—that of Mary Magdalene attempting to lay her hands on Jesus and that of Thomas, who needs to put a finger in the wound—involve touching, but the former deals with an acknowledgement, while the latter deals with doubt.[23] It can be said that these two paradigmatic cases show the ambiguity of touch seen, on the one hand, as an act driven by desire and, on the other, as a proof of certainty. The flesh wants a proof of existence that exceeds mere faith, which is why it is a sin. However, believing without touching is in line with the whole of the Western philosophical tradition. This thread links Plato to the Christian belief, where the truth may be touched by giving up corporeal understanding.

These two episodes from the Gospel of John related to touch exerted a huge influence in the history of ideas. Intellectuals speculated on these two passages, in particular concerning the nature of the body of Christ and the reason why Mary Magdalene could not touch Christ's body while Thomas was invited to do so.[24] According to the medieval interpretation, Mary's touch was too carnal, since she wanted to touch the body of Christ as a mortal man.[25] The scandalous touch of the woman was a touch of desire, while Thomas's request—due to his masculine nature—was a "superior" kind of desire connected to a need for knowledge that was much more similar to

23 See the brilliant work by Glenn W. Most, *Doubting Thomas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), ix: "The figure of Doubting Thomas gives us an excellent opportunity to put our finger upon central questions of faith and doubt, scepticism and persuasion, along two dimensions through a variety of media."

24 See Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Senses of Touch: Human Dignity and Deformity from Michelangelo to Calvin* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity: 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Classen, *The Deepest Sense*, 27–46; Most, *Doubting Thomas*.

25 See Most, 39: "Evidently Mary's joy at discovering his beloved body once more in front of her is so great that, with a deeply human and immediately understandable gesture, her first instinct is to touch it lovingly."

sight.[26] It can be said that there is a kind of gendered connotation of senses, which is connected to a particular hierarchy: the lower senses—touch, taste, and smell—are usually linked to the lower (feminine) sex, while the higher senses of sight and hearing are associated with the higher (masculine) sex. If the feminine stereotypes relate to an intimate sensual and bodily experience, the distance of sight and hearing is associated with a (supposedly) masculine rationality. The woman's touch may be seen as a challenge to the rational masculine discipline of society.[27] The sensuality of Mary Magdalene has always been connected with carnal desire, which remains unsatisfied, while Thomas—who touched the body of Christ—has been interpreted as a "scientific" enquirer. The prohibition that engenders desire opposes the rational satisfaction of objective evidence.

From *Noli me tangere* to *Noli me credere*

The desire to touch does not only deal with sacred bodies, but also with sacred objects.[28] This is the case for saintly relics, the cults of which were astonishingly popular in the Middle Ages. Relics could usually be touched—or better kissed—either di-

26 See Most, 72: "The idea of touching Jesus' wounded body seems to exert far too strong a fascination upon most readers when they encounter it for them to be able later simply to forget it, or dismiss it, or explain it away—especially since what is involved is touching it not with a loving caress, like Mary Magdalene, but with a sceptical thrust (though translators often say that Thomas wants to 'place' his hand in Jesus' side, in fact the Greek verb used by John is much stronger and means basically to 'throw' or 'hurl')."

27 It is not by chance that there are two paradigmatic examples: the prostitute and the witch. These female bodies were exempt from the ordinary women's work on which the social order was based. The seductive and dangerous touch of the woman was exemplified in the aberrant touch that could bewitch ordinary men and enter into contact with demons. In both cases, the sense of touch plays an important role, since it is a symbol of what must be put on the edges of society.

28 There is also an interesting connection between touch and religious books; in fact, since the written texts could be interpreted as an impersonal medium, the human body—through speech and other senses—was commonly assumed to be a tactile and "embodied" one. It was no accident that not everyone was permitted to touch books in the Middle Ages and early modern period. See Classen, *The Deepest Sense*, 18–19: "One medieval scribe wrote of the toll writing took on his body: 'A man who knows not how to write may think this is no great feat. But only try to do it yourself and you will learn how arduous is the writer's task. It dims your eyes, makes your back ache, and knits your chest and belly together—it is a terrible ordeal for the whole body.' Reading, while perhaps not such an ordeal as writing, was no mere matter of gliding one's eyes over a page. Medieval readers had to deal with poor illumination, cramped script, uncomfortable seating, and temperature extremes. [...] In the semi-oral society of the Middle Ages, embodied memory might well be thought superior to, or at least an important adjunct to, written records." It is worth noting that this episode of Mary Magdalene had a huge influence on the imagination of thinkers and writers; for instance, the Victorian novelist Marie Corelli in her work "Electric Creed," published in 1886, depicted Jesus as an electric body who could not touch Mary Magdalene because of his dangerously high voltage after his resurrection.

rectly or through a shrine, but in any case, there were rules to protect them from insolent and inappropriate treatment:

> To understand the particular appeal the remains of the saints had in the Middle Ages one has to think of the saint's body not as a lifeless corpse, but as a supernatural force (called *virtus*) manifested in a personalized material form—a supernatural force that had the power to grant one good health, good fortune, and a good end—all through the medium of touch.[29]

Touching the relics was seen as the only effective way to transfer their holy power. However, many attempts were made to control this tactile access to the sacred and tactile proximity was substituted with visual distance. This was not only due to the Reformation; even during the Middle Ages, plagues and the fear of contagion led to a kind of tactophobia that played a crucial role in the substitution of touch with sight.

It is worth noting that the issue of the reliability or authenticity of relics engendered a sceptical attitude towards the power of touch to transfer the holy power contained in the bones, clothes, or hair of a saint. There was an interesting passage from *noli me tangere* to *noli me credere*,[30] a slipping from the prohibition to touch to the prohibition to believe in the absence of empirical evidence of the body of God, from Mary Magdalene to Thomas. Religion became more and more intangible, while its sensible and bodily aspects had to be sublimated into an intangible holy sphere.

Touch as a Sceptical Challenge to Authority

This dichotomy between touchable and untouchable can be interpreted as the heart of darkness of every community. The practices of touching are always indicators of specific power relationships in which there is an oscillation between the imperative and the prohibition to touch. Both commands have to do with the regulation of touch by political or religious authorities. Purity and impurity and cleanliness and uncleanliness are philosophical, political, and religious concepts. The meaning of the Latin *sacro* was "set something aside" for the service of God or for the use of a divinity, while something *profanus* was something that could not be used in a religious sense, since it was dirty and contaminated.

Starting from the ancient period, touch was an important means of differentiating between social groups, since some sensory stereotypes also shaped the difference

29 Classen, *The Deepest Sense*, 40.

30 See Classen, 151: "When the sixteenth-century Franciscan François du Moulin visited the shrine of Mary Magdalene and was shown her skull with the supposed imprint of Jesus's fingers he noted that, while monks called the relic 'Noli me tangere,' 'Do not touch me' (in reference to Jesus's injunction to Mary Magdalene), he called it 'Noli me credere'—'Do not believe me.'"

between the elite and the masses, the rich and the poor. The skin was a kind of epiphenomenon of social position; imperfections, scars, and tattoos were a physical reminder of a lowly status. Therefore, the shape and use of the body corresponded to a specific idea of social order.

Hearing a voice or smelling a perfume is completely different from touching clothes or bodies, which is a much more invasive action. Since the act of touching —as pleasure or pain—can violate the (holy) inviolability of the body, it has to be regulated and ordered by a rigid discipline; in fact, it is not by chance that the regulation of touch—since it represents a challenge to the social order—involves religion and politics; moreover, it is not by chance that criminal behaviours are very often connected to the unlawful touching of property and persons.

In the communal sharing that was the foundation of society during the Middle Ages, shared bodily practices were at the heart of everyday life. The dirty connotations of touch even assumed a pivotal role in the modern and contemporary age; for instance, Canetti speaks of the "repugnance of being touched [...] in a busy street."[31] The transformation of the city into conglomerates of strangers, an anonymity combined with the sense of privacy and private property, has made the tactile experience—especially touching another body—a controversial way of communicating between people that has to be disciplined.

Contemporary Western society is a result of a deep "hygienic process" in which the common forms of social touching, as they existed before, have been banned. The root of this impulse of hygienisation may be traced back to the fear and risk of contamination, which reminds us of the old plagues such as leprosy or the Black Death. Lepers were the untouchable *par excellence* and they were obliged to wear special clothing and to carry a bell in order to warn others. The figure of the leper is paradigmatic because he is a person who cannot touch or be touched; therefore, he is cut off from everyday sociality, such as communal eating using the hands, sitting around the fire, and sleeping. Due to this process of hygienisation,[32] we are living in a permanent neutralisation of bodily relationships and the tactile impulse has to be controlled: "Look, but don't touch!"

Do Not Touch: The Museification of Society

As a clear example of this prohibition, we can examine the case of museums and then the so-called museification of our society. It is worth noting that the prohibition of touching objects is rather a new trend; in fact, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was possible to touch artworks in order to have an intimate connection

31 Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (London: Victor Gollancz, 1962), 15.

32 See Christopher E. Forth and Ivan Crozier, *Body Parts: Critical Explorations in Corporeality* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).

with and specific knowledge of the museum objects. In early museums—most of which were private collections—touching the collections was commonplace, since it was a popular and meaningful way of interacting with the artworks, which were supposed to be handled. Tactile interaction was not only a sign of hospitality, but also a real encounter and a medium of knowledge through which the form and content of the artefacts could be truly discovered in order to correct mistakes or misconceptions of the sight: "*palpando experiri potest*."[33]

When museums became more open to the public in the nineteenth century, they turned themselves into treasure hoards and—also due to the urgency of conservation—into spaces of prohibition. The public access to museums transformed them into places whose special features had to be justified through prohibitions. Among these prohibitions, the sense of touch had to be controlled and disciplined more often than the other senses.

However, learning not to touch in modern museums was a gradual process due to various phenomena. The elimination of touch implied that the collections had become inviolable through the specific techniques of museum display, and this element completely changed the visitors' attitude. Tactile experience gave way to visual contemplation, the bodily and sensual pleasure of art was gradually replaced with strict discipline, and the faculty of vision became predominant in the modern museum. The hands-off rule of museums is due to their transformation into public places where it is not possible to control the "vulgar" touch of the masses—and also the working class—who have access to them. In the new museum, artworks, artefacts, and sculpture became tools of a new disciplinary regime.

This untouchability is matched with the hygienisation of our contemporary society. It can be said that authority exercises its power through this injunction and that *noli me tangere* has nowadays become the prohibition *par excellence*. It deals with abuse, impurity, consumption, damage, offence, or simply with usage, pleasure, and enjoyment. There is an everyday use of this prohibition in which power, consumption, and usage are interwoven. This conjunction raises many questions: What does this untouchable represent? What does this register of warning mean? Why is it forbidden to touch? What is the grammar of this gesture? Could we interpret the act of touching as a radical calling into question of authority in general? Does touch involve a radical (a)political form of resistance? Is touch a temporary suspension of the apparatus of power?

In order to interpret the grammar of this phenomenon, I will briefly use Giorgio Agamben's idea of profanation as an act of resistance and a process whereby what has been given up in the sacred sphere is restored for another profane and human use.[34]

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33 See Constance Classen, "Museum Manners: The Sensory Life of the Early Museum," *Journal of Social History* 40 (2007): 901.

34 Giorgio Agamben, "In Praise of Profanation," in Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 73–92.

The Profanation of Touch

If we—along with Agamben—consider museification not as a physical space or place, but rather as a "pure form of separation" and a phenomenon which "designates the exhibition of an impossibility of using, of dwelling, of experiencing,"[35] then the connection between (the prohibition of) touch and (the prohibition of) profanation becomes clear.

In his famous essay entitled *In Praise of Profanation*, Agamben stated that "if 'to consecrate' (*sacrare*) was the term that indicated the removal of things from the sphere of human law, 'to profane' meant, conversely, to return them to the free use of man."[36] This meaning of profanation is deeply connected to the sphere of use and is antithetical to religion that is not understood as *religare* (to unify), but as *relegere*, "which indicates the stance of scrupulousness and attention that must be adopted in relations with the gods."[37] Separating between two different spheres is the essence of religion, while "to profane means to open the possibility of a special form of negligence, which ignore separation or, rather, puts it to a particular use."[38] The apparatus which regulates the passage from the profane to the sacred is the sacrifice that works as a ritual caesura. In this regard, Agamben mentions *contagione* as the simplest form of profanation:

> Thus, one of the simplest forms of profanation occurs through contact (*contagione*) during the same sacrifice that effects and regulates the passage of the victim from the human to the divine sphere. One part of the victim (the entrails, or *exta:* the liver, heart, gallbladder, lungs) is reserved for the gods, while the rest can be consumed by men. The participants in the rite need only touch these organs for them to become profane and edible. There is a profane contagion, a touch that disenchants and returns to use what the sacred had separated and petrified.[39]

The idea of a profanation through contact is deeply connected to an ancestral idea of power. It can be said that *contagione* through the act of touching is a political operation, since it acts as a deactivation of religious or political power and a restitution to common use. To continue Walter Benjamin's idea of capitalism as religion, Agamben stated that present-day capitalism has pushed the religious tendency of separating between the sacred and the profane to extremes: "In its extreme form, the capitalist religion realizes the pure form of separation, to the point that there is nothing left to separate."[40] According to Agamben, the capitalistic sphere of consumption engenders an absolute consecration, which is the same as a total profanation, meaning

35 Agamben, 84.
36 Agamben, 73.
37 Agamben, 74–75.
38 Agamben, 75.
39 Agamben, 74.
40 Agamben, 81.

that nothing is profanable: "The capitalist religion in its extreme phase aims at creating something absolutely unprofanable."[41] This happens because in the objects of consumption, use coincides with abuse, with a destruction of the objects themselves: "Consumption, which necessarily destroys the thing, is nothing but the impossibility or the negation of use, which presupposes that the substance of the thing remains intact."[42]

Since capitalism is the apotheosis of consumption, real use is not permitted. The prohibition of touch can be interpreted as an injunction, which manifests this impossibility of use. The loss of use is nothing but the loss of profaning, and therefore, the act of touch is a dangerous act of resistance, because it represents a profanation, seen as a restoration of the real human use that is nowadays forbidden. The prohibition of touching displays a capitalistic perspective according to which there is only the domain of exclusively (divine) use, where everything is sacred and hence off-limits for personal use. Since the omni-sacralisation of capitalism impedes use, touch has nowadays become a dangerous and sceptical challenge to authority. It can be said that at the core of this contrast, there is a pure and sacral capitalistic consumption opposing the dirty gesture of touch, the dogmatism of order facing the scepticism of the body.

Beyond a mere epistemological conception or scientific definition, touch can be interpreted as a way of bridging the gap between man and the Other, but on the other hand, it provokes a radical and uncanny proximity. This Apollonian-Dionysian duality emerges if one considers touch from another perspective; namely, as a medium of religious holiness, an epiphenomenon of social status as well as an act of profanation. In these frameworks, which I have tried to outline in this essay, touch fluctuates from an interdiction to a desire, from a prohibition to a resistance. If bodies are fields, in which power manifests itself and authorities exercise their control, touch can be seen as a possible provisional interruption of this dynamic and a suspension of the rules through bodily praxis. Due to this *haptic epochē* of authorities, the dirty, profane, and anarchic sense of touch becomes the sceptical gesture that radically calls into question the established order and sacred power.

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41 Agamben, 82.

42 Agamben, 82.

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Fig. 10: Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, 1601–1603, oil on canvas, 107 x 146 cm., Sanssouci Picture Gallery, Potsdam, Germany. Image Source: Heritage Images.

Mirt Komel

Touching Doubt: Haptolinguistic Scepticism

The purpose of this contribution is to address the problem of touch and doubt through a much broader question of the relation between touch and language. What I would like to do is to contrast touch with doubt as a conceptual and linguistic activity.

To illustrate this approach, let me first begin with two of the most intriguingly consecutive passages from the *New Testament*. In the first, the resurrected Jesus Christ stops his pupil Mary Magdalene from touching him with his famous command *noli me tangere*, while in the second, which is an almost perfect reversal of this scene, another of Christ's pupils, "Doubting" Thomas, places his finger inside the wounds of his resurrected body. Both scenes evoke contradictory tendencies with regard to touch that require further discussion. In the first passage, the desire to dissolve doubt through touch is stopped by a gesture that itself pertains to the domain of touch. The gesture is complemented by the sentence "do not touch me," which not only provides certainty, but also demonstrates the peculiar relationship between touch and language. In the second passage, the discursive doubt articulated by Thomas's questioning of the resurrected body of Christ is shattered through a silent, speechless, penetrating touch: certainty achieved at a fingertip.

Due to their dramatic nature, it is no coincidence that both scenes can be found in religious iconography, Renaissance paintings, and later even in popular culture (in the form of music, musicals, and films). They appear not only as paradigmatic representations of faith and doubt colliding with the realm of the senses, but also as allegorical representations of a certain fragility of sense-certainty. In both instances, we can see a linguistic implosion of the sense of touch, itself embodying, so to speak, a challenge to the traditional philosophical pairing of the more theoretical senses of sight and hearing. In this regard, it is telling that the first example has taken on a name of its own: contemporary usages of *noli me tangere* are similar to the Last Supper or the Crucifixion of Christ in the sense that it has acquired an almost independent secular currency, addressing certain tactile issues that were present long before—such as, for instance, and perhaps most famously, in Sophocles's *Oedipus in Colonus*, where Oedipus, just before his apotheosis, addresses his daughters Antigone and Ismene in the same vein in which Jesus addresses Mary Magdalene; namely, with the words "Follow me, but do not touch me."[1]

I will return to the *noli me tangere* scene with Mary Magdalene soon (contrasting it with the touch of Doubting Thomas), but for now, let me lay out the most general theoretical layout of my contribution: that the exploration of the mutual relation and interaction between the two triads of sight-hearing-touching and doubt-certainty-

1 Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays* (London: Penguin Classics, 2008).

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110627176-008

faith in these two scenes—as theoretically advanced by Jean-Luc Nancy in his own *Noli me tangere*[2]—allows us to move from a strictly phenomenological understanding of touch as a sensorial activity of the body, and the related understanding of doubt as a discursive activity of the mind, towards a linguistic conception of touch that is epistemologically grounded in Hegel's philosophy and further developed by Lacanian theoretical psychoanalysis.

In a different context, I proposed calling this approach "haptolinguistics,"[3] which can presently help us to navigate through the Scylla of Touch and the Charybdis of Doubt as follows. In the first part of this contribution, I will address the question of doubt through the age-old mind-and-body problem in Plato—by employing Saussurian linguistics as developed within the theoretical framework(s) of Lacan, Derrida, and Nancy—in order to tackle the metaphysical dimension of touch on the one hand and its metaphorical aspect on the other. In part 2, I will once more address the mind-and-body issue of doubt through linguistics, focusing on Aristotle's theory of the soul, through which I intend to introduce the metonymy of touch as opposed to its metaphor. In part 3, I will lean heavily on Hegel in order to develop the linguistic perspective even further, from touch understood as a bodily activity that can be the source of doubt, via the metaphor of touch, towards touch as concept, or *Begriff*, that operates on the same level as doubt. Finally, in part 4, I will employ Lacan's theory of knots in connection to his concept of *lalangue* in order to demonstrate how language, the site of doubt, possesses a certain tactile quality in itself. My thesis is, in short, that doubting touch and the touch of doubt are two sides of the same object and that doubt itself is a linguistic effect, which touches upon the subject—literally, materialistically—due to a certain haptic quality of language.

A Doubt of Sense-Certainty

Now, let me re-begin at the very beginning of philosophy, with Plato, whose main philosophical concern was to dismiss the realm of the senses and point—as depicted in the famous fresco *La Scuola di Atene* by Raphael—to the higher, transcendental, untouchable realm of ideas.

Despite the fact that Plato, among others, despised the senses as a source of erroneous falsehood, we could, in contrast, also list an entire array of Platonic metaphors that describe the abilities of the soul using images taken from the realm of bodily perception, from which one could discern that metaphors of the gaze and the voice are central in the metaphysical imagery that structured most post-Platonic

2 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me tangere: Essai sur la levée du corps* (Paris: Bayard, 2003).

3 See my chapter entitled "The Wave of the Sign: Pyramidal Sign, Haptic Hieroglyphs, and the Touch of Language," in *The Language of Touch: Philosophical Examinations in Linguistics and Haptic Studies*, ed. Mirt Komel (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 5–18.

philosophy.[4] The predominant metaphors still in use in present-day philosophy are optical; that is, related to sight and visuals ("theory," "gazing," "insight," "speculation," "reflection"). Closely following in frequency are acoustic metaphors related to the voice, hearing, and obedience in the sense of "listening to" (from the ethics of the Socratic *daimon* to the morality of the Christian conscience). Smell and taste have, curiously enough, for the most part been deemed unsuitable for expressing spirituality. Finally, the sense of touch appears both as a paradigm of the most basic sensual body and as the supreme metaphor of one's spiritual contact with metaphysical reality.[5]

If we focus on the sense of touch and its metaphorical equivalent on the level of the soul touching the realm of ideas, we can see that in Plato's *Phaedo*, there is a strict mutual exclusion between the two: if a soul wants to grasp ideas, it has to renounce the concept of bodily touch as a link to reality. To gain one kind of touch, we have to rid ourselves of the other (hence the stereotypical depiction of philosophers as wisdom-seekers who are, however, completely lacking a worldly-wise "grasp" of reality). This radical Platonic gesture makes touch, as the guarantee of empirical sense-certainty, something that needs to be renounced in order for it to function as the privileged metaphor of metaphysical knowledge. In this, we can see the foundations of what Jacques Derrida calls the "haptocentrism of the Western metaphysical tradition" in his *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, always already privileging the hands, palms, fingers—in short, touch—in order to affirm the presence of the subject: "Such a hierarchical arrangement is without any doubt part of the great tradition that accords an absolute privilege to touch and does not let itself be encroached upon by the possibility [...] of any vicariousness of the senses."[6] As we can see, this thesis largely concords with his other, earlier thesis on "phonocentrism" in linguistics and philosophy, and therefore, both should be read together: the voice on the one hand and touch on the other create or allow an illusion of a self-conscious presence of the subject.

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4 Numerous studies have dealt with the role of metaphor in metaphysics (see Stephen C. Pepper, *World Hypotheses* [Berkeley: California University Press, 1942]; Charles Morris, *Paths of Life: Preface to a World Religion* [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942]), which, however, assign it only a didactic, explanatory function, and merely an aesthetic one in literature. This is questionable on several counts; for one, it would be easy to demonstrate the didactic value of poetry, and, at the same time, the aesthetic value of philosophy. For perhaps the best examination of this issue, see Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University Press, 1982), 207–71.

5 The persistence of such a hierarchy of the senses can be followed as far as Hegel, who faithfully reproduces it on many occasions: for instance, in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, where the division of artforms into visual and acoustic categories is based on the distinction between sight and hearing as theoretical senses on the one hand and touch, smell, and taste as non-theoretical and non-artistic senses on the other (see Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, Volume One*, trans. T.M. Knox, paperback ed. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988], 622–23).

6 Jacques Derrida, *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy* (Paris: Galilée, 2000), 41.

Jean-Luc Nancy, to whom *On Touching* is dedicated, answered Derrida in a peculiar way with his own formulation of *noli me tangere*. It is here, Nancy argues, within the framework of his own project of a "deconstruction of Christianity," that such a tradition of haptocentrism is most illustratively expounded in the comparison between the two scenes from the New Testament mentioned above: on the one hand, there is the scene of the proverbial Doubting Thomas touching Jesus's wound in order to empirically verify the evidence provided by his eyes and ears, while on the other, there is the scene of the resurrection in which Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and does *not* permit her to touch him, but rather demands a leap of faith: "Faith consists in seeing and hearing where there is nothing exceptional for the ordinary eye and ear. It knows to see and to hear *without tampering*."[7] Faith demands belief without tactile corroboration, for it is precisely touch—with its direct tactility—that expunges the truth, which is by definition something intangible. The opposition here runs between the untouchable and the touchable, the realm of the intangible and the realm of the tangible, with touch itself marking the dividing line. This is why Nancy can say that *noli me tangere* expresses something that revolves around touch in general, something that "touches on the sensitive point of touching" (*elle touche au point sensible du toucher*), "on this sensitive point that touching constitutes par excellence" and "forms the sensitive point within it."[8] Sensibility from the realm of the touchable and sense from the regime of the untouchable coincide in touch as the sense of sensibility: in short, sensibility can make sense only if one presupposes the sense of tact, which is the condition *sine qua non* for a sensorial being—without touch, no other sense is possible. And that is why, in contrast and conversely at the same time, the sensibility of sense makes sense, or, in one French word, *sens*, which is Nancy's favorite play on words in which "sense" is in linguistic accordance with sensibility (since *sens* does not mean either/or, but rather both at the same time: the bodily activity of sensing and the thinking activity of making sense).

If we translate Nancy's language-based play into the modern linguistic Saussurian formula of the sign, S/s (signifier/signified),[9] then *noli me tangere* is precisely the bar (/) that separates the level of the untouchable signifier (S) from the level of the tangible to which the signified (s) refers on the one hand, while on the other, the signifier/signified compound enables the contact between the two levels insofar as it touches both.[10] The negative imperative "do not touch me" is something that impos-

7 Nancy, *Noli me tangere*, 22.

8 Nancy, 13.

9 See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Riedlinger, trans. Wade Baskin, 3rd ed. (New York, Toronto, and London: McGraw-Hill, 1966).

10 A further elaboration of such a haptolinguistic conception of the Saussurian sign through the concept of (un)touchability can be found in Bara Kolenc's "The Category of the (Un)touchable in Haptic Materialism: Touch, Repetition, and Language" in the above-mentioned *The Language of Touch*, 91–

es touch as such on both the signifier and signified ("touch" in this context meaning both the imperative phrase and the bodily activity), while, as a distinguishing bar (/) between signifier and signified, it touches both at the same time.

If we translate the Saussurian formula into the Lacanian categorial apparatus, we can see how the untouchable level of the signifier corresponds to the symbolic register, the tangible level of the signified to the imaginary, and the role of the bar to the real inasmuch it resists and defies any symbolic and/or imaginary appropriation.[11] Moreover, what enables the transition between the symbolic and the imaginary can be grasped via the Lacanian formula of the metaphor, according to which it is in the substitution of signifier for signifier—"one word for another," be it "poetic or creative"—that a "signification effect is produced," while the crossing of the bar has a "constitutive value [...] for the emergence of signification."[12] The "word for word" of the metaphor, the displacement of meaning that happens when we use a metaphor instead of the "proper" word, is, in our case, the replacement of the physical touch by the metaphysical touch of the soul; through the metaphor of the "touch of the soul," a certain crossing of the distinguishing bar (/) in the haptic division between the tangible and the intangible takes place. Or, to put it more simply, translating the Lacanian idiom back into the Platonic terms with which we began this section: the metaphor of touch allows a smooth transition between the republic of intangible ideas, identified with the linguistic "upper house" of signifiers, and that of tangible bodies, broadly coinciding with the "lower house" of the signified.

A Touch of Heart and Soul

In order to take a step forward, we need to make a step back: speaking in terms of the bodily senses and their metaphorical equivalents on the level of the soul presupposes an existing distinction between body and soul, the traditional bread and butter of philosophy from Plato to Hegel.

Seen from the ancient Greek perspective, the division between body and soul originates in the pre-Socratic Homeric imagery, in which *psychē* is used primarily as a synonym for *zōē*, "life" or "aliveness," after whose removal there remains

106: the elegance of the concept of (un)touchability lies in its speculative unity of touchability and untouchability, thus allowing us to think the very concept of sign as itself unmaterial, to be sure, but as capable of producing material effects on the body.

11 In Lacanian theoretical psychoanalysis, the three registers of symbolic, imaginary, and real encompass the whole of human existence through the experience of language (symbolic), the bodily senses and the empirical representations they provide (imaginary), and the real that defies both by being irreducible to either language or the senses and thus being exclusively graspable through science, understood as the science of the sign, or rather, the letter (Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre XXIII: Le sinthome, 1975–76*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller [Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 2005]; Jean-Claude Milner, *Le périple structural: Figures et paradigme* [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002]).

12 Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1966), 429.

only *sōma*, which in Ancient Greek does not mean "body," but "corpse" (whence the Homeric formula that *sōma* is *zōē* minus *psychē*);[13] only in the context of metaphor does *psychē* appear as a soul that wanders around in dreams and, in the afterworld, lives merely a reflection of its past life on earth (*psychē* as a soul living a life independently of the body).[14] The original incision separating spiritual intangibility from bodily tangibility is therefore metaphorical, which is also why it should come as no surprise that metaphors are omnipresent whenever and wherever there is talk of metaphysical entities as autonomous beings (soul, ideas, etc.).

This is perhaps why the resurrection of Christ invokes—to put it bluntly—so many doubts concerning his body. The body of Christ is simultaneously elevated and degraded in a curious paradox of touch and doubt, as best exemplified precisely in both scenes of interest to us here: in Mary Magdalene's *noli me tangere* scene, the body is inadequate, since it cannot provide the certainty that only faith can supply; in the Doubting Thomas scene, the same resurrected body functions as the ultimate confirmation of faith itself. However, as Hegel argued at the very beginning of his philosophical career, "Contradictio est regula veri, non contradictio falsi" ("Contradiction is the rule of truth, non-contradiction of error").[15] The paradox of the body of the resurrected Christ is a sign of truth, a certain truth of touch, since Christ's body is at the same time touchable and untouchable, as both scenes from the New Testament clearly show. And yet, the truth of the resurrected body cannot be grasped without the aid of its counterpart in the sphere of language: in the Mary Magdalene

13 At the beginning of *The Iliad*, we read: "The rage of Achilles—sing it now, goddess, sing through me the deadly rage that caused the Achaeans such grief and hurled down to Hades the souls of so many fighters, leaving their naked flesh to be eaten by dogs and carrion birds, as the will of Zeus was accomplished" (Homer, *The Iliad* [Clayton, DE: Prestwick House, 2011], 1 [verses 1–5]).

14 In *The Odyssey*, in the scene when Odysseus meets his mother during his journey to the realm of shades and back, we read: "Ah, my poor child, ill-fated above all mortals, this is no phantom Persephonē sent up to meet you; it is just what happens to mortals after they die. The sinews don't hold the flesh and the bones together. When fire consumes the body and burns it to ash, the spirit slips out and flutters away like a dream" (Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Stephen Mitchell [New York: Atria Books, 2013], 143 [verses 216–22]).

15 See Hegel's doctoral thesis from 1801: "1. Contradictio est regula veri, non contradictio falsi. 2. Syllogismus est principium Idealismi. 3. Quadratum est lex naturae, triangulum mentis. 4. In Arithmetica vera nec additioni nisi unitatis ad dyadem, nec subtractioni nisi dyadis a triade neque triadi ut summae, neque unitati ut differentiae est locus. 5. Ut magnes est vectis naturalis, ita gravitas planetarum in solem pendulum naturale. 6. Idea est synthesis infiniti et finiti et philosophia omnis est in ideis. 7. Philosophia critica caret ideis et imperfecta est Scepticismi forma. 8. Materia postulati rationis, quod philosophia critica exhibet, eam ipsam philosophiam destruit, et principium est Spinozismi. 9. Status naturae non est iniustus et eam ob causam ex illo exeundum. 10. Principium scientiae moralis est reverentia fato habenda. 11. Virtus innocentiam tum agendi tum patiendi excludit. 12. Moralitas omnibus numeris absoluta virtuti repugnant" (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Frühe Schriften*, vol. 1 of *Werke*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, new ed. [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986], 533).

scene, it can be discerned from the very phrase "do not touch me"; in the Doubting Thomas scene, from Jesus's invitation "touch me."

In this regard, I would like to advance another thesis that can now clarify the above-mentioned reference to Lacan's theory of metaphors via Plato; namely, that the connection between the metaphysical and natural worlds is metaphorical, which is why it is in the field of metaphors that one world unimpededly passes into the other. The metaphysical and physical worlds come into contact—in both the literal and the metaphorical sense of touch—insofar as touch is the bar that separates one level from the other and, at the same time, enables contact between them on condition that it begins to function as a metaphor.

Aristotle in *De anima* is the principal philosopher who, after Plato, attempted to reintegrate the soul into the body so that *psychē* would again become the principle expressing the life of the body (in contrast to the Homeric formula, Aristotle's goes like this: *zōē* is *sōma* plus *psychē*). Instead of metaphors of touch, what we come across in Aristotle is its metonymic function: by localising the sense of touch, the medium of touching extends from the heart to the flesh, from the body to the world. Every sense has its medium of perception: sight has light, sound and smell have air; only touch—including the haptic sense of taste—according to Aristotle, does not have its specific medium. The medium of touch remains "unnoticed, unclear, hidden."[16] More precisely, in the case of touch, the problem is that the sense and the medium are, on the one hand, joined in what he calls flesh, *sarx*. *Sarx* differs from the body as *sōma* precisely because the latter is a living body, something that relates to *zōē* through *psychē* as something that is animated.[17] On the other hand, *sarx* or flesh is merely a medium, while the real organ of touch, again, is located even further inward: "Flesh is 'the medium' of touch, the real organ being situated farther inward."[18] The one element which is more internal to the body than flesh, and actually most internal and intimate in the final analysis, proves to be the heart: "This explains why the sensory organ of both touch and taste is closely related to the heart. For the heart as being the hottest of all the bodily parts, is the counterpoise of the brain."[19] Thus, we do not touch with our hands or fingers, but rather with our hearts. This Aristotelian "touch of the heart" is just a step away from the Platonic "touch of the soul."

However, regarding both Plato's and Aristotle's metaphorical usages of "touch," it can also be argued that the "touch of the soul" and the "touch of the heart" are not metaphors at all, but rather something that we can infer by subsuming all the other senses under the sense of touch, insofar as all the senses are merely forms of touching at a distance, which makes the sense of touch the haptocentric paradigm of sensing in general, metonymically extending—quite literally—*from the heart and soul to*

16 Aristotle, *Complete Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984): 423b4.
17 Aristotle, 423b17.
18 Aristotle, 422b18.
19 Aristotle, 439a1–2.

the world. The best articulation in this regard can perhaps be found in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who developed *sarx* into *la chair du monde*, "the flesh of the world," which is at the same time "my flesh."[20] The expression indicates, in one stroke, the intertwinement of the internal and the external so that "nothing determines me from outside," but "not because nothing acts upon me, but, on the contrary, because I am from the start outside myself and open to the world."[21] The flesh of the world, which is at the same time my flesh, is presupposed by the a priori equation of the internal and the external, which is why, in Merleau-Ponty, the tangible–intangible pair is equated with the visible–invisible pair, yet the very concept of the "flesh" constantly refers to a specific tactile transitivity of touch itself.

On the one hand, we have the Aristotelian transitivity of touch extending from the internal heart to the outer world, where one could add that this "inner touch" has its counterpart in the metonymical sliding under the bar from one signified (the heart) to the other (the world), from the realm of the soul towards a soul-less, or at least heart-less world. On the other hand, as we have seen, we have the Platonic imagery of touch functioning as an incision establishing the borderline between the tangible and the intangible. As Mladen Dolar writes: "The touch includes both metaphor—basically the cut—and metonymy—basically endless transitivity."[22] Touch is thus an intersection of the metaphorical and the metonymical, both a metaphorical separating cut between the tangible and the intangible and, at the same time, a metonymic passing or sliding that operates on both levels.[23]

Thus, the Aristotelian metonymic touch slides along the axis of the signified as a reference to the realm of the tangible, while the Platonic metaphorical touch slides along the signifying axis into the regime of the intangible. We now need to consider both as two sides of the same "object–touch" that functions as a binding and splitting gap between the sensible order of the tangible and the transcendental order of the intangible world, since it is precisely here that doubt collides with *sense*-certainty —"sense" in both meanings of the word, noumenal and phenomenal.

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20 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible; Working Notes*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 250.

21 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, new ed. (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 530.

22 Mladen Dolar, "Touching Ground," *Filozofski vestnik* 29, no. 2 (2008): 95.

23 For a beautiful demonstration of one such operation in different terms—but in a not so different context from this one—see Rachel Aumiller's "The Lick of the Mother Tongue: Derrida's Fantasies of 'the Touch of Language' with Augustine and Marx," in *The Language of Touch*, 107–20: the "lick of the mother tongue" can be understood as the metaphorical "cut" that produces a schism in the subject by installing the intangible regime of the signifier as something different and opposed to the tangible body, while at the same time it metonymically allows the transition from one level to the other precisely by means of "touching" us—"licking us," in fact—thus producing real, material, tangible effects.

A *Begriff* of Touch and Language

Arguably, one of the best treatments of touch as a crossroads between the phenomenal and the noumenal is given by Hegel in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, which presents the idea of beauty as a self-development of the spirit in the sphere of freedom that is pertinent to the fine arts, or, in the more telling Italian version, *belle arti*.[24]

If touch is taken as the criterion of Hegel's self-development of the spirit, we could say that the idea in general is intangible, while its objectification and concretisation essentially constitute its tactilisation, a means of making an idea palpable. However, as Hegel himself says a little later on, at the end of the introduction to the chapter on "The Idea of the Beauty of Art or the Ideal," from the perspective of the finitude of the spirit, the absolute looks like "an infinite object standing against it." Yet when looked at "from the higher speculative way, [spirit] is the absolute spirit itself" that "makes these distinctions within itself" and thus establishes the "finitude of spirit, within which it becomes the absolute object of the knowledge of itself," which is why "the realm of fine art is the realm of the absolute spirit."[25] What looks like a distinction between touchable works of art and an untouchable idea of beauty as such—with the ideal being correspondence between the two—is actually (this is to say, speculatively) a distinction made within the absolute spirit itself.

The same logic applies to Hegel's "concept of concept," elegantly introduced at the beginning of the next chapter entitled "The Concept of Beauty in General." Hegel recapitulates his definition of "beauty as the idea of beauty," meaning that "beauty must be conceived as idea," and even more precisely, "as idea in a determined form, as ideal." He goes on to define "the idea in general" as nothing less than the "concept, the reality of the concept, and the unity of both."[26] Again, from the perspective of touch and doubt, the concept that is the means through which doubt drills into the certainty of the body would fall into the category of untouchable, while the reality to which it relates would fall into the category of the touchable and palpable: each finds its speculative unity in merely abstract definitions of the idea, which should, however, not be understood as neutralising the peculiarities of each of these aspects, of the concept and its reality, of the intangibility of the concept as the source of doubt and the palpability of bodily reality respectively. On the contrary, this unity

24 It is important to note that here, the *idea of the beauty of art* does not correspond to the *idea as such*, since the latter is apprehended as the absolute truth, universal, yet not yet objectified, while the former is defined as the beautiful objectification of the idea, "both essentially individual reality and also an individual configuration of reality destined essentially to embody and reveal the Idea"; implicitly present in such an understanding is a "demand that the Idea and its configuration as a concrete reality shall be made completely adequate to one another," which is precisely the definition of the *ideal* as the concordance between the very "concept of the idea" and its "reality" (Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 73–74).

25 Hegel, 93–94.

26 Hegel, 106.

is itself conceptual in the sense that the distinction is made within the concept itself, and its realisation is actually self-realisation.

The same Hegelian speculative turn can be applied to the concept of touch: the difference between the touchable and the untouchable is pertinent to the concept of touch itself, since it is the instance of touch that differentiates between the touchable and the untouchable (touch being the criterion according to which one can think in either/or touchable/untouchable terms). Although the consideration of the development of the idea of beauty from the perspective of touch is not pertinent to Hegel's own accounts, if we fast-forward a few hundred pages into his *Aesthetics*, we can see that touch eventually—and, I would like to add, both accidentally and inevitably—pops up in relation to the "concept of concept" in a very peculiar way.

In the section entitled "The Symbolic Form of Art," more precisely in the third chapter dedicated to the symbolism of the comparative art-form in which the question of metaphors is addressed, Hegel starts his discussion with a very general remark, saying: "Every language already contains a mass of metaphors. They arise from the fact that a word which originally signifies only something sensuous is carried over into the spiritual sphere."[27] The emphasis is on the "sensuous" element that is "carried over" and not simply discarded, but rather retained and preserved in the "spiritual sphere," which is of course Hegel's usual dialectical procedure of *Aufhebung*.[28]

The examples given in order to demonstrate that metaphors contain a certain sensorial element that is preserved in their spiritual meaning are *fassen* and *begreifen:* words that "relate to knowing, have in respect of their literal meaning a purely sensuous content, which is then lost and exchanged for a spiritual meaning, the original sense being sensuous, the second spiritual."[29] Then, a genealogy of metaphorical language is given as if the metaphorical element in the use of such words has slowly disappeared and the word has changed "from a metaphorical to a literal expression," thus forming a three-step development: first, we have plain words denoting mere sensuous content, then metaphors arise from this sensuous content pointing towards something other than their original meaning, and in the last instance, we have a literal expression that articulates a purely spiritual content without any sensorial meaning.[30]

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27 Hegel, 403.

28 Nancy points out in his *The Speculative Remark (One of Hegel's Bons Mots)*, trans. Céline Suprenant (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), that there is no distinctively Hegelian dialectics without the concept of *Aufhebung*, which means both "abolition" and "preservation," thus enabling the dialectical progression from content to content; however, despite the fact that in the last instance, anything can be *aufgehoben*, there is at least one concept that cannot be, and that is the concept of *Aufhebung* itself.

29 Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 404.

30 Hegel's procedure here is the same as at the very beginning of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold V. Miller with an analysis of the text by John N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 33–38 ("A. Consciousness. I. Certainty at the Level of Sense-Experience—The 'This,' and 'Meaning'"),

Our point of interest is the reason why the word changes from a metaphorical to a literal expression: because "owing to readiness to grasp in the image only the meaning, image and meaning are no longer distinguished and the image directly affords only the abstract meaning itself instead of a concrete picture." It is no coincidence that the verb used in the "readiness to grasp in the image only the meaning" is the same as in the example that follows; namely, *begreifen:* "If, for example, we are to take *begreifen* in a spiritual sense, then it does not occur to us at all to think of a perceptible grasping by the hand." It is as if by grasping the meaning inside the image, it is already employing an implicitly metaphorical use of the concept of *Begriff*.[31] Language as such, not just the language of metaphysics, therefore has an inherently dialectical tendency towards pure meaning, understood as a source of clarity and certainty. In order to purify itself from any physical residuum and the related doubtfulness of the senses, it needs metaphors as an intermediate step from the sensorial towards the spiritual. And this pertains not only to Hegel's own dialectical procedure, but also to metaphysical philosophy, from which doubt takes its ammunition, and, in the last instance, to language itself.

Thus, speaking in strict Hegelian terms, one could say that touch is *aufgehoben*, dismissed on a physical level as a sense among senses, and at the same time preserved as a metaphor inside the very core of *the* metaphysical concept *par excellence*, *Begriff*. *Begriff* paradoxically designates not only touch ("handling," "grasping"), but concept itself ("conception," "naming"). Hegel's dialectics therefore implicitly presupposes a specific and paradoxical way of classifying touch: as a sensory experience, it must not only be discarded as a source of doubt and falsehood, but additionally enshrined as the truth inherent to the very concept of conception—including doubt—thus implying a certain sensorial, even tactile quality of language that can, however, be grasped only speculatively through the two contradictory meanings of *Begriff*.

Begriff therefore allows us not only to think both the conceptual and bodily activity of touching at the same time, but also to speculatively elevate touch—previously understood only as a mere object of doubt—to the same level as doubt, which itself can now quite literally touch us.

A Knot of Touch and Doubt

After all these dialectical roundabouts, we can now relax and conclude with Lacan's seminar on the *sinthome*, where one can find the very concept of *Begriff* employed

where the sensorial is retroactively turned into the conceptual: the sensorial can be the basis for the metaphorical, and the metaphorical in turn for the conceptual, since the very origin is already contaminated with the conceptual.

31 Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 404–5.

twice in two fairly similar contexts that are both, as we shall see in a moment, connected to our topic of touch and doubt.

One occasion when Lacan employed *Begriff* was during a lecture in which he raised a particular doubt: Was Joyce mad? While introducing the concept of *objet petit a* ("object little a")—a hole in the symbolic order, a residuum of the real that cannot be represented in the register of the imaginary (or the register of bodily experiences, for that matter)[32]—Lacan explicitly states that it "is *ob*, an obstacle to the expansion of the concrete, namely, encompassing imaginary. Conceivable, namely, graspable by hand. This is the notion of *Begriff*, graspable in the way a weapon is," and this weapon is "far from being an extension of the arm," but rather "from the start a weapon for throwing"—"we did not wait for cannonballs to throw a boomerang."[33] As we can see, Lacan is well aware of the double meaning of *Begriff* with which Hegel also toyed; namely, that of simultaneously conceiving and grasping. Moreover, he employs *Begriff* as touch-concept in the context of discussing the *object a* as the border of the phenomenological imaginary, itself the primary topic of doubt. And if we know that the "object a" is defined as the object-reason-of-desire, then one is compelled to ask: What is the specific desire crawling behind doubt, and what kind of object motivates it?

For the answer, let us turn to Lacan's theory of knots. If understood as a visualisation of his famous RSI scheme (real-symbolic-imaginary), the theory of knots looks like a regression to the imaginary register that his earlier arithmetisations tried to undo precisely in order to provide scientific validity to the deceiving imaginary of the senses and their body, which is otherwise understood as the primal object of doubt.[34] On the other hand, as Milner brilliantly pointed out on more than one

32 The *object a* has a long conceptual history in psychoanalysis: its origins can be found in Freud's conception of the "lost object," which he discovered while writing his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and which was popularised by Karl Abraham under the title of "partial object"; the concept was then taken up by Melanie Klein, who put it at the very centre of her theory of sexuality, and through her by Donald Winnicott, who renamed it the "transitional object"; finally, Lacan rebaptised it as *objet petit a* in his seminars delivered as early as the late 1950s, and it underwent many redevelopments until the late 1960s (see Jacques-Alain Miller, "Microscopia: An Introduction to the Reading of *Television*," trans. Bruce Fink, in Jacques Lacan, *Television; A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, ed. Joan Copjec, trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, Annette Michelson, and Jeffrey Mehlman [New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990]: xi–xxxi).

33 Lacan, *Séminaire, livre XXIII: Le sinthome*, 86.

34 Lacan argued that it is the symbolic order that linguistically structures the imaginary as exemplified by the visual or scopic field in his *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, where the "object a" is identified with the gaze: the logic of the signifier, as developed in this stage, means that language necessarily has certain imaginary connotations—uttering "body," for instance, invokes the image of a body—while the imaginary itself is rooted in the subject's own body, or rather, in the image of the body, and that is why the intervention of the signifier is needed in order to displace the imaginary fixations of the subject to his or her own body, as well as the body of the other (see Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre XI: Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychoanalyse, 1964*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller [Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1973]).

occasion, Lacanian structural psychoanalysis is the scientific heir of the earlier modern Galilean revolution and its replacement of physical space with Euclidean geometric space, and therefore, the theory of knots should be regarded as the logical consequence of the development of Lacan's thought.[35] Similarly, touch as a bodily and physical experience, if it is to be conceived in the scientific milieu of structuralism, must be displaced into a geometric space and conceived accordingly—and one of the best ways to define touch geometrically is, at least to my mind, through the topology of knots. And now, to answer the question proposed above: the desire behind doubt is, at least in this case, the desire to shatter the bodily imaginary through a scientific geometricisation of space.

This could very well be understood as a continuation of Plato's project, as discussed above. In the very first lecture dedicated to the logical use of the sinthome, we find Lacan's second usage of *Begriff* precisely in the context of our old and age-old mind-and-body problem:

> *More geometrico*, due to the form so dear to Plato, the individual presents himself as [...] a body. And this body has a power of captivation which is such that to a certain extent it is the blind one should envy. How could a blind man, if he can manage braille, read Euclid? The astonishing thing is that form gives nothing but the sack, or, if you like, the bubble.[36]

To be sure, braille is a system of writing for the blind and visually impaired that itself already implies a certain haptolinguistic quality, since with braille, a tactile language can be distinguished that has no conceptual equivalent inside the traditional linguistic understanding of language in its spoken and written form.[37] Moreover, braille provides not only tactile certainty to counteract doubt that arises from blindness or impaired vision, but also the metaphysical certainty that is provided by language itself, thus, again, embodying *Begriff* to the letter (being at the same time linguistically conceptual, as language, and bodily tangible, as writing).

Lacan presents the body as a sack that inflates and deflates itself, moving in binary successions from 0 to 1, from the absence of a signifier to the presence of one. Accordingly, the signifier does not constitute one, but it indexes the body as an

35 See Milner, *Le périple structural*.

36 Lacan, *Séminaire, livre XXIII: Le sinthome*, 86.

37 As I have argued elsewhere where I proposed the coinage of *haptem* (see Komel, "The Wave of the Sign"), language is defined by Saussurian linguistics as a system of differences where a sign can have meaning only in relation to other signs, and this relational understanding of the sign is what is usually understood as *structure*. From this perspective, phonemes and graphemes function as minimal material differentiating units without meaning in themselves, but are nevertheless capable of producing meaning in their mutual interaction. The difference of the sign is, in short, analytically reducible to the difference between various phonemes and graphemes, and the *haptem* similarly functions as a minimal material differentiating unit in language that is, however, grounded neither in any acoustic nor in any visual representation, but rather in the tactility of language, which is best exemplified by braille.

empty sack that is unable to contain anything: "An empty sack is nonetheless a sack, albeit one which can only be imagined as a skin in terms of the existence and consistence of the body." Both the existence and the consistence of the body are "to be held as real," since it is the real that "holds them—thus the word *Begriff* which means precisely that."[38] Although Lacan does not mention Hegel, we can clearly see how he employs a similar logic by redoubling the French *tenir*, used to translate *Begriff: Cette existence et cette consistence, il faut les tenir pour réelles, puisque le réel, c'est de les tenir.* Thus, the existence and consistence of the body—its imaginary quality—should not be understood in the vulgar materialistic sense of anything substantial or carnal, but rather as a lack or sack, imagined as skin in terms of existence and consistence, both held to be real because it is the real that holds them. This tautological definition is already implied, if we recall, in Hegel's logic of the idea as concept and its realisation, a logic that we can now develop a step further: the idea is real because the real holds up or touches (*Begriff, tenir*) the reality of its own realisation.

However, in Lacan's dealing with the body as an empty sack, we are still moving within the register of the imaginary (the object of doubt *stricto senso*), which "demonstrates here its homogeneity with the real," and he adds that "this homogeneity only holds because the number is binary, 1 or 0; that is, it only figures 2 because 1 is not 0, because it exists at zero but does not consist in it," thus introducing a difference between existence and consistence (the 1 has existence in the 0, but is not consistent in it). Moreover, one can very well redouble the logic of 0 and 1 *ad infinitum*, thus making a set of such doubles, but in this case, the set makes a third, and this is why "the symbol falling back into the imaginary has the index 2," denoting any given battery of signifiers. And now that the logic of the signifier has been introduced, Lacan redefines the symbol, understood in antiquity as a broken fragment, through Saussure's conception of the sign that we dealt with earlier, implying "the unity and reciprocity of the signifier and the signified," further developing the consequence that "the original signified is without meaning, that it is a mere sign of the choice between two signifiers":

> There can be no umpire, as Joyce writes in English, without talking about empire, about the *imperium* over the body, of which all bear a mark from the beginning. Here the 1 confirms its detachment from the 2. 3 can only be reached by an imaginary compulsion, which imposes the idea that the one wishes to interfere with the other, without being linked to anything.[39]

The Borromean knot represents precisely the interrelation of the three rings of the RSI scheme introduced above, defining the three registers of the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary, where a break in any one of them sets the other two free. However, Lacan adds (again in a very Hegelian manner) that "it is not the break between symbolic, imaginary, and real which defines perversion, but the fact that they are al-

38 Lacan, *Séminaire, livre XXIII: Le sinthome*, 86–87.
39 Lacan, 19.

ready distinct, and therefore a fourth term must be supposed that happens to be the sinthome."[40] Perversion rests therefore not in the desire to break the Borromean knot, but rather in its very breakability, the fact of its being distinct in three separate rings and therefore the very distinction between the three registers themselves. Perversion, which at first glance appears to be a specificity of the human sexual being, is already inscribed in the theory of the RSI scheme itself; more precisely, in the very distinction between the three registers that implies a fourth, *sinthome*; sexuality and ontology go, speaking in terms of touch, hand in hand.[41]

In the context of our discussion of touch and doubt, a doubtful touch is perverse inasmuch as the object it is touching is itself a source of doubt, the perversity lying in the attribution of a certain truth to the object; namely, the truth of being false, or at least doubtful. Perversion as a Borromean knot in Lacan's account demonstrates a few more tactile qualities worth lingering on for just a little longer before proceeding to our conclusions. *First* and foremost, a knot is a knot, defined in mathematics as an embedding of a circle in three-dimensional Euclidean space (R3), a bending of the circle in such a way that it touches upon itself in every given crossing, self-touch of the circle that is, in itself, a non-knot, an unknot, a zero-degree touch. *Second*, the Borromean knot is, like any mathematical knot, closed, since there are no ends to tie or untie these kinds of knots and therefore they can only be untied if they are forcefullly broken, meaning that their touchability, the touch of their crossing, can be un-touched only through a not-touch. *Third*, if the Borromean knot embodies the RSI scheme where the perverse breaking of one of the rings is identified with the original distinction between them, implying the fourth element of the sinthome to tie and untie an otherwise closed knot, then touch can be conceived as a sinthome; namely, what ties and breaks the knot.

In short: touch is the tie and the break of the knot, similar to the way in which a line is bent into a circle in such a manner that it touches upon itself, and, at the same time, the break within the knot that sets it free from itself: thus touch, again, occupies both places at once, since it is the source of doubt (the tie) as well as the liberation from it (the break).

Conclusion

The road has been long and not without its pearls and pitfalls, the former provided mostly by the references employed, the latter by the author of this contribution himself, who has attempted to tie the topic of haptic scepticism—or haptoscepticism—to haptolinguistics, thus redoubling the applied conceptual apparatus in order to devel-

40 Lacan, 10.

41 See Alenka Zupančič's brilliant development of the link between ontology and sexuality as laid out in her book *What Is Sex?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).

op the main thesis that promised to provide a linguistic turn of the concepts of both touch and doubt.

The initial juxtaposition of the two scenes from the New Testament provided us with two apparently contradictive conceptions of touch and doubt: in the Mary Magdalene scene, touch is dismissed as a source of doubt, while language, embodied in *noli me tangere*, provided its counterpart, the certainty of faith, whereas in the Doubting Thomas scene, touch functions as a source of empirical certainty that has to supply not only what the subjects sees and hears—that is, the resurrected body of Christ—but also, and more importantly, the meaning of his words, with touch thus functioning as a supplement to language.

In order to answer the question of how is it possible that touch can play two such different roles, we turned first to Plato, who provided us—with conceptual help from Lacan, Derrida, Nancy, Saussure, and others—with a first approximation of an answer: touch as a metaphor, or the metaphor of touch, allows a free metonymical transitioning between the realm of intangible ideas, identified with the linguistic level of signifiers, and that of tangible bodies, broadly coinciding with the level of the signified. In the second stage, Hegel and his theory of metaphors and language provided us with the concept of *Begriff*, the concept of "concept" and "touch" in their speculative unity: as a sensory experience, touch must not only be discarded as a source of doubt, but also enthroned as the certain truth inherent in the very concept of conception, thus implying a certain sensorial, even tactile quality of language which, furthermore, also pertains to doubt, touching upon us at the same time that it relinquishes touch as a bodily experience. Last but not least, Lacan's theory of knots provided us with the appropriate conceptual apparatus for the task of further defining this specific haptolinguistic quality of doubt that was, in final analysis, defined as a sinthome, or the perverse moment inherent in any simple scientific attempt at a symbolic dissolution of the imaginary, bodily, sensory experience of touching.

Thus, following this thread that goes from Plato to Lacan, we can see that the real perversion lies not in any simple sexual touching that arouses the subject and raises doubt, but rather in the very fundamental ontological conception that tries to (un)tie touch as the real, doubt and language as the symbolic, and the body as the imaginary phenomenological experience.

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Fig. 11: Veronika Pausova, Midnight Jacuzzi, 2017, oil on Canvas, 15″ x 18″ (45.7 x 38.1 cm.) © Veronika Pausova / Subal Gallery, New York.

Goran Vranešević

An Atom of Touch: Scepticism from Hegel to Lacan

There is a myriad of topics that can illustrate the peculiar nature of scepticism, all worthy of a thorough commentary. However, it is by no means clear whether a sceptical endeavour is even suited to perform a delicate gesture needed to grasp a firm essence, considering that the sole positive assurance preserving such an endeavour is constant doubt. In the context of psychopathology, such a drive would undoubtedly be assessed as an addiction to doubt (*Zweifelsüchtigkeit*). This text will instead propose a different route: a Hegelian one, a questioning of the use of language when appropriating elements of knowledge. This might be a worthy aim, as the role of language is often disregarded when striving for certitude. Contrary to common usage, language should not be considered as a medium of adequation, precipitating a bond between things and words, but as a placeholder of contradiction (*Widerspruch*); speaking against itself through the medium of the nonsensical sound of words. Or, to put it more plainly, the task of language is not to offer the right words for the right things, but to arrange appropriate junctures between words themselves. Accordingly, the object of analysis must primarily be knowledge itself, while it is only on its heels that it is possible to discern the contours of language. Knowledge is not an explication of fundamental truths, as Aristotle argued, or an adequate articulation of a thing that one ponders about, not even the notion of wise ignorance, but a product of working on oneself and grasping such an errand. Hegel acknowledged this when he claimed, "What is familiar and well known (*Das Bekannte*) as such is not really known for the very reason that it is *familiar and well known*";[1] that is, there is a nuanced argument to be made regarding knowledge that usually favours the idea according to which knowledge ensures the path to truth, or at least certitude. However, it is *skepsis*, a retraction of truth, that enables knowledge to establish its footing through its otherness, through its negative facet, through its difference in itself. Meeting the other of oneself in oneself, however, is more appropriately expressed as a proposition that meets itself in separation from itself. And this rather speculative portrait of *skepsis*—an interjection of negativity/failure that causes a separation within statements and produces positive knowledge—is exemplarily presented through a simple gesture of touch induced by homophony: a pair of words that sound the same, but have a different spelling. Procuring a common bond for "Kant," "count," and even "cunt" might seem unfathomable were it not for a chance coincidence in their enunciation. By capturing different morphemes in a single sound, homophones literally enable disparate words to touch each

1 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. and trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 20.

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other while maintaining a definite separation between them. While the idea of touch is usually limited to the haptic interplay of bodily surfaces and sense reception, this article will argue, in contrast, that homophonic utterances do not only produce knowledge, but all the more so that they exhibit the essential form of touch, which comes about when the other of oneself is present in oneself. Although it was Jean-Claude Milner who recognised and explicated this specific characteristic in Lacan's later works and may have had explicated the significance of Lacan's linguistic turn towards homophones, he nevertheless omitted an essential ingredient: the presence of the right touch. However, before we put the whole weight of our tongue behind this argument, let us first unfold the sceptical framework that preconditions it.

On Knowledge

It is easy to portray an inquiry relating to the meaning of knowledge as banal, since it seems self-evident what we are talking about when we use such a notion. Even when pressed to further elaborate on the meaning of knowledge, the ideas are mostly reduced to the ability to remember certain facts and, with their aid, create definite truths. From the viewpoint of perception, every assurance stems from the comparison of ideas, but consequently, every judgement hangs on only a thin thread of certainty. Against common sense, Hegel structures knowledge by way of self-othering (*Sichanderswerden*) of the concept, not by finding a general logic, but by formally evacuating the content of knowledge. Any fixed sense becomes useless.[2] One must realise that a fact can be apprehended only when there is a forced shift of focus from the idea of a totalisation of self-identity to a propositional logic that anticipates certainty. If something can be defined only through its relation to the otherness, it fulfils its purpose by returning the concept to itself from a place of otherness. This "rigorous exertion of the concept upon oneself"[3] is a contradictory movement filled with coincidences (joyful wordplay), deficiencies (slips of the tongue), and disjunctions (jokes).

To alleviate the weight of the initial conceptual wager, let us take a more mundane, but fundamental conceptual approach to the subject at hand. While (positivistic) sciences approach the world with their eyes half shut, omitting the dynamic nature of knowledge, *Wissenschaft*, the German equivalent, is able to encompass its structural capacity to change. Let us be clear. Any phenomena can be knowable

2 Although Marx had another form of discourse in mind, he incidentally also articulated an indicative quality of knowledge: "All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify": Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore, introduction and notes by Gareth Stedman Jones (London: Penguin, 2002), 223.

3 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 36.

when it is given as an object of experience, which comes into being by way of arousing sensation. However, reducing knowledge to sense perception is only enough to explicate a bare positivity; even if this idea of knowledge enables one to become acquainted with the world of phenomena, it only poses a ready-at-hand entity to be appropriated. Knowledge (*Wissen*) is not merely handed down; it is additionally supplemented with the work of creation (*schaft* or *schöpfen*), a differentiation of oneself (*Selbstunderscheidung*) in order to establish the composition of science (*Wissenschaft*). Both variants of science build upon their precursor, the ancient *epistēmē*, which is characterised by eternal necessities and the idea of objects that cannot be different from what they are, but only *Wissenschaft* encompasses the negative aspect of knowledge via scepticism. It is a well-worn assumption that scepticism is unable to keep an opinion firmly in its hands, "only pure nothing";[4] however, Hegel came closest to establishing a convergence between these sceptical interventions and (eternal) truths. He paired the question "What can I know?" with the labour of conceptual unveiling and thereby grasped knowledge as the process of self-comprehension (*Selbsterfassen*), or, more directly expressed, the task of touching (*Fassen*) oneself (*Selbst*).

In comparison to the common idea that scepticism should be equated with doubt, Hegel recognised a more accurate motive behind its activity: "to dissolve all certainty, to show it in its nothingness."[5] Such is also the elementary sceptical demand that permeates Hegel's thought. In this respect, the dissolution of determinate content is not merely an idea for itself as it is intertwined with an elementary thesis regarding knowledge, according to which we cannot know whether our opinions are true. If scepticism were to retain only this negative aspect, then the only attainable certainty would be embedded in individual self-consciousness. Hegel was clearly aware of this when he compared the outcome of such sceptical affairs to a total paralysis of the limbs.[6] Although this was a legitimate standpoint, he clearly did not envision a paralysis of being, but rather an Elvis-like dance move. Even though this may appear to be a debilitating motion, an ordinary dance pose which suddenly turns into its opposite, this is the closest image of the idea of dialectics to have been presented in popular culture. While scepticism is merely a negative determination of a finite will that can grasp subjective knowledge, Hegel's positive speculative gesture

4 Hegel, 53.

5 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825–6. Volume 2: Greek Philosophy*, ed. Robert F. Brown, trans. Robert F. Brown and J.M. Stuart with the assistance of H.S. Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 302.

6 There is a tendency to simply yield to the radicalism of the sceptical negative stance; however, the respect thus gained is more often than not a solitary affair: "In fact, if one utterly desires to be a sceptic, one cannot be affected, or be brought to a positive philosophy—any more than one who is paralyzed in all his limbs can be made to stand. Such paralysis is indeed scepticism." A sceptic is content to "merely stand still in the negative, and in individual self-consciousness" (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie II. Werke, Band 19*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986], 359).

encompasses this negation in itself, but as an affirmative moment of truth. Thereby, knowledge is not sustained through the consciousness of objects, but is rather a result of a return to oneself from the place of otherness.

This otherness does not have to be defined, since it is not the content of the otherness that defines such a movement, but the act of intervention into something itself which enables this something to stand on its own volition. Otherness shifts from an external reference point to inhabiting the mantle of the identity of this something. However, this is not an invitation to consider the something and its other as one and the same entity; on the contrary, some form of difference needs to be preserved. A case can be made that a pupil must take on the practices that his teacher has prescribed to him as his own, while maintaining a distance from these practices and acting as if their presence is redundant, adopting the teacher's behaviour without simply imitating it and distinguishing himself by his effective adoption. There is no need for enchantment or passion, but merely a mechanical repetition of the subject presented for study. The otherness of the syllabus has to become the defining feature of the pupil. In a sense, there is nothing else to education.

The other elementary characteristic of scepticism is the act of declaring or *asserting:* to assert that things are changeable. The contemporary form of scepticism, which differs from the classical in that it fills the "negative movement" with certainty of thinking itself, referred to by Hegel as "the Calvary of the absolute spirit,"[7] would have a legitimate reason to express the latter as a doctrine of doubt. However, doubt is only capable of producing uncertainty and restlessness that bring forth a general negativity; it is not able to guarantee a criterion of validity. It is also possible to deduce that the above-mentioned assertion merely clarifies that things are established in their being as well as in their non-being. For example, when at a certain moment, we reasonably claim, "now is day-time" and a few moments later, "the now is the night,"[8] we are justified in speaking of the same thing—namely, this now—in its contradictory meaning, maintaining itself vis-à-vis its opposite. In this manner, it is possible to assign the moniker of a sceptic even to Homer, who breathes into Odysseus the spirit of contradiction. Captured in the Cyclops's cave, Odysseus gets the latter drunk and tells him his name: "Nobody (*Outis*)—that's my name."[9] During that same night, Odysseus and his companions blinds the Cyclops, which rouses his Cyclopean neighbours to cry out to him: "Is somebody (*mē tis*) trying to kill you now by fraud or force?" The Cyclops's spontaneous reaction is to reply: "*Nobody* friends, is killing me now, by fraud and not by force!"[10] The truth of the scene is

7 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 467 (translation modified).

8 Hegel, 65–66.

9 Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles, introduction and notes by Bernard Knox (New York: Penguin, 1996), 9.410 (223).

10 Homer, 9.454–55 (224).

structured as untruth. This cunning linguistic trick[11] chases the Cyclopes away, revealing the orientation of a sceptic—a one-sided negative determination against the positive. But this sceptical insight should, first and foremost, act as a confirmation that a negation determines all determinations. Since the main determination is not truth, but the certainty of untruth, the conclusion can be drawn that in the stubborn certitude of doubt, there is no inclination to reach any truth. Furthermore, probably even more importantly, the same should hold true for any word.

It would be convenient if Hegel could offer a well-rounded exposé of the sceptical assumption regarding the inscription of knowledge into the world. However, the extent of his understanding was still a reflection of the age in which he addressed this topic. After the ancient Greek period, when reasoning was moulded by aesthetics, and then the domination of the religious discourse that was prevalent in the greater part of the 19th century, the last matrix of reasoning was framed by science (*Wissenschaft*). While this may not be the consensus, it is nevertheless reasonable to argue that Hegel propagated the most consistent form of the scientific approach (*Wissenschaftliche Verfahrensweise*), identifying knowledge in the experience of its failure from the position of knowledge itself. The failure is not reflected in the inability to meet an intended objective, but is contained in the return to oneself from the place of otherness that retrospectively expresses the truth as the road to the truth. Such a successful lack of success represents a general feature of the modern world in which the ever-continuous pursuit of knowledge, where consciousness "can find no rest,"[12] is sacrificed in the name of knowledge as such. This knowledge does not derive from a scepticism that is solely directed towards the outside, but is a product of self-reflexive kind, a "self-consummating skepticism" (*sich vollbringende Skeptizismus*).[13]

The knowledge that Hegel brought to the forefront was knowledge attached to the logic of signification. It does not produce meaning, understanding, or comprehension, but overcomes the separation of subject and object, not by abolishing

11 "*Ou/mē tis*, not somebody, anything but somebody, nobody": Barbara Cassin, "Ab-sense, or Lacan from A to D," in Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin, *There's No Such Thing as a Sexual Relationship: Two Lessons on Lacan*, trans. Susan Spitzer and Kenneth Reinhard, introduction by Kenneth Reinhard (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 33.

12 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 54.

13 Hegel, 52. Different thinkers have expounded the gist of the impact of scepticism on Hegel's works. However, the sceptical imposition as such does not usually play a central role in the unfolding of his thought. For instance, Dieter Henrich argues that Hegel's speculative logic "seamlessly incorporates a theory of the construction (*Aufbau*) of all historical forms of metaphysics" (Henrich, 1991, 90), which also entails dogmatism, scepticism, etc. On the other hand, Markus Gabriel highlights the other aspect of scepticism; namely, how Hegel sought in it "a basic feature of metaphysical thinking" (Gabriel, 2011, 32) which would disclose the path to absolute knowledge. Both, in their own way, implicitly or outright, object to scepticism's failure to form a metaphysical basis for going beyond itself, while Hegel himself was adamant that such a beyond is merely an expression of the impossibility embedded in a phenomenal world.

their independence, but by understanding that the subject's other is nothing more than the subject in its opposite determination. Despite this incremental insight into knowledge, Hegel did not account for an aspect of modernity that seems fundamentally anti-sceptical: the ability to encompass any contingency and transfer it further untouched in its minimal form.

This is especially evident in modern science, where the natural phenomena become comprehensible only when they are "*translittérable*, transcribable into letters," as this makes knowledge universally available. The suitability of the letter form for asserting the self-identity and universality of knowledge follows from the circumstance that it embodies the smallest element of meaning, acting as an index of itself. This insight prompted Galileo to consider the great Book of Nature as an alphabet of nature and thus written using mathematical letters. Such an integral transference is the most basic form of understanding, an "atom of knowledge,"[14] knowledge that is indivisible, self-referring, and universal. Modern science, born with Galileo, brought about a (fundamental) modification of the scientific framework, an effective way of providing accuracy and transferability of this self-referential structure. The transfer of knowledge is entrusted to the written word, or more precisely, to the letter. Inspired by Koyre's reading of modern science as the practice of mathematisation and empiricism, Milner clarified that both of these functions can be reduced to a single letter, since "mathematics in science can letter everything empirical"[15] and since the letter "captures the difference in what is constantly different"[16] and should therefore not be viewed as a mere transcription of empirical facts. A precise description of this science would be "literalised science," having the capacity to incorporate contingent propositions by sewing together the unchangeable and the fleeting or the negative.

Although an essential account of this shift can already be discerned in the logic of Hegel's *Wissenschaft*,[17] it was more thoroughly outlined by Lacan, who leaned on signifying logic to delineate scientific theory, a stance that enables us to grasp how things differ from one another. That is, a signifier does not represent things or elicit meaning, as its function is, similar to Hegel's use of otherness, simply to refer to an-

14 Jean-Claude Milner, *Jasno delo: Lacan, znanost, filozofija*, trans. Peter Klepec and Ana Žerjav, introduction and notes by Jelica Šumič-Riha (Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, Založba SAZU, 2005), 126.

15 Milner, 59.

16 Milner, 60.

17 When elaborating on the relationship between language and alphabetical writing system, Hegel, almost in passing, highlighted the vital function of lettering; namely, that it is in the alphabet that we can find the word, "the most dignified way of expressing the ideas specific to intelligence, brought to consciousness, made to the object of reflection" (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse, 1830, Dritter Teil, Werke, Band 10* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986], 275). Moreover, only on the basis of these constituent few lettering elements, which act as a sort of "primal gestures of articulating," is it possible to bring forth "the sensuousness of speech to universality, which at the same time attains complete positivity and purity in this elementary mode" (Hegel, 275).

other signifier and thereby to allow us to comprehend things. The original character of any thought is not only to differentiate itself from some other thought, but also to mark how its object is different from all other objects. As Milner argues, "the theory of the signifier is the theory of thought as such."[18] Furthermore, in the framework of signification, knowledge offers insight into the mechanism of copulation, revealing the way in which the link between matter and form, male and female, or active and passive is structured and persists. In this context, the structure of two elements relies on a dependency of one on the other. However, a Lacanian reflection pushes this opposition even further. How can we grasp this minimal form of two? Regarding the relation of these pairs, there is only "the sole sense, one-sense, is un-sense":[19] there is no such thing as a relationship, only a contingency that is held together as a written formalisation. Confronting such irreconcilable pairs also formalises them. Lacan recognised the inability of the signifier to encompass a specific, contingent structure and therefore committed his attention to the theory of the letter, which enables the transferability of knowledge of contingency.

To recapitulate the argumentation so far: if we regard scepticism as the royal road to knowledge, we also have to take into account that the usual exposition of scepticism, premised on continuous doubting, does not offer a sufficient framework. The sceptic is preoccupied with an ever-present undecidability that paralyses him. Hegel clearly understood this and made appropriate adjustments. In his hands, scepticism as general form of uncertainty is left without the only remaining certitude; namely, that of uncertainty itself. To complete the final gesture of sceptical philosophy therefore means to insist on thinking the nothingness of certainty to the very end until every particularity is dissolved. An individual who performs such an act of self-renunciation is thereby returning to himself as nothing and ensuring identity with himself. The truth of the matter is that the universality of knowledge is maintained precisely in this self-othering. Lacan embraced this radical nature of nothingness and deduced the consequences in the field of language. He borrowed the conceptual apparatus from modern science, especially the principle of its necessity and empirical exactness, but most importantly, he posited formal entities as the exclusive material of reasoning. In this manner, he redefined the question of knowledge. Knowledge is not a task of acquiring facts and certainty, but rather something that we exercise and express.

18 Jean-Claude Milner, "Lacan and Modern Science," *European Journal of Psychoanalysis 3–4 (1996–97): 126, accessed 07/06/2019,* http://www.psychomedia.it/jep/number3-4/milner.htm.

19 Cassin, "Ab-sense, or Lacan from A to D," 9.

On Scepticism

What is the smallest measure of knowledge? Any assessment of knowledge has to pass through a certain criterion. It is necessary to understand what the criterion that justifies knowledge is. In Ancient Greek thought, *epistēmē* of an object discloses the characteristics that make it necessary and eternal, while modern empiricist science constantly revises knowledge according to new understandings. In this respect, scepticism practised by individual thinkers during the period of German idealism, especially Hegel, bypassed such a filter. They instead adapted to the aporia of the endless relegation of accountability, whereby every representation, or more precisely concept, is supported by another: whether it has a moral (Kant), linguistic (Herder), ethical (Fichte), or even historical structure (Schelling), it consistently forms a transcendental background, which affirms understanding. In order to nonetheless preserve a sort of coherence of this idealistic movement, such a system has to be structured around a fixing point, a letter, and not exclusively through the inter-subjective sphere of the spirit. While the final form of Spirit is expressed in the instant when the world comes to know itself in pure particularity (Napoleon as the World-Spirit on horseback), a letter constitutes a positivity that can be demonstrated (sensual support, referent, etc.). Milner argues that "letters include the difference in that which is constantly different."[20] The minimal inscription of the letter guarantees that contingent propositions are as they are, without there being a reason for it. At the same time, letters have no reason to be different from how they are and are thereby identical with themselves through their contingently gained qualities. This holds even truer for our contemporary times; just take into consideration the fact that modern biology is preconditioned on three simple letters: DNA.[21]

Since a sceptical outlook proves only what it presupposes, comprehending what is included in thought (mathematics or semantics), but never being able to depend on their application to the empirical sphere. There may be no absolute truths, but a sceptic nevertheless strives to establish some traces of truth, or rather certainty.[22]

20 Milner, *Jasno delo*, 60.

21 While Milner was perceptive enough to recognise this fundamental structure (Milner, *Jasno delo*, 96), there is an even more essential structure that is shaping our world. This was Marx's deduction of the self-valorising value of capital with only three letters, M–C–M, the formula that perpetuates the activity between money, commodity, and surplus-money that not only changed economic theory and logic, but restructured reality.

22 It is certainly impossible to determine a definitive description of scepticism as such, since there is an unbridgeable gap between the ancient notion of *skepsis* and the modern logic of scepticism. While Aenesidemus refuses any notion of truth, be it sensible, intelligible, or in another form, Descartes maintains his doubt about our capacity to know alterity or otherness. There were many other thinkers who could be or were identified as sceptics; however, the modern idea of a sceptic is best embodied by Schulze. Against Kant's insistence on disclosing the conditions of possibility of knowledge, Schulze rejected the possibility of a consistent conception of knowledge: "If what the Critique claims to know of the foundations of experience is real knowledge, the affirmation of the same Critique, ac-

Scepticism's most notable modern representative, Gottlob E. Schulze, argued that all attempts to find a general and permanent endorsement of a science as the "unconditioned causes of everything that is conditioned," ultimately fail. Schulze clarified that the reason for this failure was that the "bread of reason" had been viewed as unconditioned stone under our feet. Instead of this, he refurbishes the formalistic idea inherent to Kant—that is, the distinction between the object and subject—into a conditioned system in which certainty is based on the facts of consciousness alone. This led to Hegel's justified criticism of Kant's "spiritless letter of a spiritless spirit."[23]

While this criticism seems fatal to the sceptical method, it simultaneously constituted the principle according to which Hegel himself argued that consciousness negates its own position and thereby elevates itself to another, higher state of consciousness. One after another, the series of appearances fail, leaving behind only a memento of their contingency in the form of a letter, a written remainder.[24] It is in this movement that natural consciousness passes the test of reality and affirms the necessity that constitutes the law of knowledge, in which anybody is able to search for a univocal sense. As Hegel remarked, "the positive aspect of scepticism resides in that [...] it does not go beyond consciousness [...] and indeed, has the existence of that which is given in the periphery of our consciousness as undeniable

cording to which all true knowledge of our mind is exclusively limited to objects of experience, is absolutely false. If, on the contrary, this latter affirmation must be true, all knowledge of the sources of experience must be taken as a whole to be an empty appearance" (Gottlob Ernst Schulze, *Kritik der theoretischen Philosophie*, Vol. 2. [Reprint edition. Brussels: Culture et civilisation, 1973], 2:578 [17]).

23 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Verhältnis des Skeptizismus zur Philosophie. Darstellung seiner verschiedenen Modifikationen und Vergleichung des neuesten mit dem alten," in *Jenaer Schriften, 1801–1807. Werke, Band 2*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Meiner Verlag, 1970), 269.

24 There is an argument to be made that letters are interchangeable with signifiers. Even Lacan's paradigmatic text on this topic, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud," was ambiguous regarding their relationship. However, if we interpret it as a simple synonymy between these expressions, it would be necessary to establish a common definition. That was practically impossible until his late seminars, especially *Encore*, where the main differentiating elements became evident. Their function was precisely delimited. While the signifier resonates only within a relationship, "where it represents for and is what it represents" (Milner, *Jasno delo*, 131), a letter has a distinctively affirmative essence. Being a pure form of differentiating relation signifiers are the embodiment of negativity, existing only in relation to the other. Not having a reason to be as they are for themselves, someone else must speak for them. The opposite is true for the letter, which is attributed with positive features that enable it to be transferred, famously constituting the framework of the four fundamental types of discourse, and to have a self-referential relationship. Both qualities result from the compulsion to be declared: "What is written [...] it only subsists if I use it to present the language (*langue*) I use" (Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 20: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink [New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999], 119). This is also the defining characteristic that makes it a perfect vessel for knowledge.

certainty."[25] However, these appearances, which could have been completely different up to the point of their sublation, become unchangeable.

The usual way to understand letters is to consider them as an indication of a particular meaning;[26] however, here, they stand as formal entities, which are open to interpretation. The chain of refutations of natural consciousness is not merely relational, as it also produces these entities. By facilitating a positive existence, letters cause restlessness. Thus, instead of determining a precise field pertaining to knowledge, it is paramount to firstly identify with the letter. This is understandably a curious thesis, but it is not groundless. Before knowing language and before acquiring knowledge itself, there is the mark (the letter) of the impasse of formalisation. To put it differently, the letter enables a contingent characteristic to receive "an imaginary trait of that which cannot be different than it is," which is more commonly referred to as "the necessity of the laws of science."[27] Understanding scepticism as an affair of doubt is consequently even more difficult to defend:

> However, it does not have the meaning of scepticism, which has no other goal than doubting itself that one should stand still in this indecision of the spirit, which has its freedom therein. It has rather the sense that one must renounce any prejudice.[28]

Since Hegel, it has been practically self-explanatory that natural consciousness has a sceptical character. While this is an essential position of modern thought, it also illustrates a re-evaluated perspective on scepticism itself. Although the classical tradition of scepticism originates from a presupposed understanding that any aspiration for real knowledge has to be renounced, scepticism of the modern age is not opposed to "final" knowledge, but claims that philosophy has not provided a sufficient justification of knowledge. However, it is thereby not striving to undermine philosophy, but providing unconditional aid, working as an accomplice to philosophy, or a voice that martyrs for truth:

> As soon as true and universally conclusive principles are found and instituted in philosophy, by which it will be possible to determine what we can know and what not [...] scepticism will immediately reach its end.[29]

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25 Hegel, "Verhältnis des Skeptizismus zur Philosophie," 227.

26 The most obvious example is the Greek alphabet, since the word "alphabet" consists of the first two letters, alpha (α) and beta (β). Furthermore, the Greek alphabet borrowed its structure from the Phoenicians, who used *aleph*, which also meant "ox," and *bet*, which also meant "house."

27 Milner, *Jasno delo*, 72.

28 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III. Werke, Band 20*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 72.

29 Gottlob Ernst Schulze, *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie*, ed. Manfred Frank (Frankfurt am Main: Meiner Verlag, 1996).

In the same vein as foxhunters who understand themselves to be conservators of rural culture, sceptical thinkers act against philosophy in the name of philosophy. Despite scepticism's tendency towards self-termination, it is also based on the premise that human reason is directed towards perfection. It is a constant re-evaluation of this same position. The unappeasable drive of doubt, or rather *skepsis*, is hindered only by its own reliance on consciousness; namely, doubt itself persists only through the facts of consciousness, a stance that is problematic in its simplicity. Any fleeting experience, be it an exchange of glances on public transport, the depth of sunlit spring trails, or the rhyme of a midnight poem, is permeated with an inevitable volatility, a discrepancy between expectations and their manifestation, which can be reconciled, according to the sceptic, only by a rational principle. While certain a priori traces of truths are undeniable even for a sceptic—for instance, the notion that all bodies are heavy—the realm of hyperphysical phenomena is, without exception, suspect to such sceptical concerns. The sceptical eye thus perceives the objective world in discord. The sceptic must therefore always look over his own shoulder to catch a glimpse of an impending conceptual treason committed against the kingdom of objective reality. It is not ill-fitting to define such a demeanour as paranoid, going so far as to put into question every relation that entails the identity of thinking and being. Every single object with theoretical value becomes unjustified in the eyes of a sceptic. Insofar as reason is made out of conceptual building blocks, a sceptical critique is aimed at this fundament itself, an a priori that can be reconciled only under conditions set forth by the sceptic.

Even though the sceptical principle of functioning is generally based on non-identity (of thinking and being, object and subject), it also establishes the conditions under which such an identity is possible. When scepticism is consistent with its own determination, it inevitably exposes the contradictions inherent in rational categories and thereby transforms its own inner order into identity. However, a sceptical identity cannot achieve more than to mechanically unify the discrepancy embedded into the world. It repeatedly introduces external rational terms in order to sew up the tear in the world, which produces, at best, a patched-together conception of reality. It is, on the contrary, only possible to install a world that recognises the same identity, in its entirety and in its parts, by rejecting the choice of either/or.

The kernel of this thought form is present in Hegel's figure of knowledge as "the identity of identity and non-identity"[30] that was actually intended to be an elucidation of Schelling's idea of "identity of identity" or "duplicated identity."[31] Both of them were in agreement that identity and non-identity have the markings of the same whole, but differed in the elaboration of the said whole. Whereas Schelling does not recognise a method by which a difference between one and the other

30 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1977), 46.

31 Wilhelm Friedrich Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke: Band 6* (Munich: Beck, 1979), 117, 165.

can be determined and comprehended from the standpoint of the all-encompassing identity, Hegel sees it the other way around. One has to go with the flow of the object, surrender to the differences that it expresses. In this manner, it becomes clear that objects are not held together by identical provisions, but by differences. It is only when we see differences in things that we can assign a specific identity to them. If we follow the use of German idealistic vocabulary, identity is authentic when it is an identity of identity and non-identity, since the identity between the latter is realised through the fact that they are different.

In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel signifies such a stance as the already mentioned "self-consummating skepticism."[32] Stone has to become bread and not the other way around. Such a move should decisively bury the last corpses of ancient scepticism, but, even more damningly, should also deal an openhanded slap to Schulze's self-assurance. The position of self-consuming scepticism necessarily encompasses a sign of chance; something that is present in a certain form, but could also exist otherwise. This tension never reaches a satisfactory resolution or understanding. But as long as this condition is met, asserting uncertainty that concurrently discloses the contingency of certitude, the modern sceptic is working in a manner as if knowledge can be produced. The notion of identity that comes from Hegel's mouth is very precise in these matters.

This difference is constructed through identity,[33] or, as known in linguistics and constituting the purest form, through homophones, which are not merely identical-sounding words, but the formal conditions under which touch is enacted, and with it the need for interpretation. Homophones can touch you because they touch their other in themselves. Once heard, they cannot be left unattended. The indistinguishable sound between *sense* and *scents* calls for an intervention. Or take, for example, the famous witticism illustrated in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet:*

> SAMPSON: Gregory, on my word, we'll not carry coals.
> GREGORY: No, for then we should be *colliers*.
> SAMPSON: I mean, and we be in *choler*, we'll draw.
> GREGORY: Ay, while you live, draw your neck out of *collar*.[34]

It may seem that *collier* ("coal miner") coincidently corresponds to *choler* ("irritability"), or even by chance; however, the third element in the chain, *collar* ("neck apparel"), makes it clear that there is more at play. This parallelism of lexeme pronunciation is an expression of the way that an individual community "addresses its own

32 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 52.

33 Hegel points out that "difference in itself is the difference that refers itself to itself; thus it is the negativity of itself, the difference not from another but of itself from itself; it is not itself but its other. What is different from difference, however, is identity." Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic, ed. George di Giovanni* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 361.

34 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, updated ed. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.1.1–4 (emphases added).

unconscious experience."[35] There is an immanent positive quality to language. A similar structural principle is present in Marx's class antagonism, which does not simply distinguish a simple difference between incompatible social positions, but provides a fundament according to which it is possible to discern interests in the first place.

On Homophony

To comprehend such an incremental dimension[36] of knowledge, we need to discern more specifically the homophonic feature of language. Lacan's insights will guide us in clarifying this peculiar facet. What principle in language enables different words to be pronounced in the same manner while simultaneously conditioning the dehiscence in their meaning? The usual suspect is *homonymy*. One word, one sound, different meanings. However, the play of words that characterises *homophony* is expressed through a single pronunciation.[37] Even if homophony is usually regarded as a substratum[38] of homonymy, it has an undermining role. Their relationship has a rather fortunate similarity to the abovementioned difference that delimits signification from literalisation. The first introduces a logic where every signification always

35 Jacques Lacan, "La troisième," *La cause freudienne* 79 (2011): 11–33.

36 As is usual with Lacan, the use of words is a simple neutral endeavour, and in this case, the word "dimension" is not a stylistic choice, but refers to the homophonic dimension that is proper to knowledge. By writing "*dit-mension*," Lacan invokes two French words: firstly, *dit* ("what is said," but also "word") and secondly *mension*, which is related to *mensonge* ("lie"): "*Dit-mension* is *mension* of the said. This way of writing has an advantage, which is to allow *mension* to be extended into *mensionge*, which indicates that what is said is not at all necessarily true" (Jacques Lacan, *The Sinthome: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXII*, trans. A.R. Price (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 124–25.

37 If there is a Lacanian point to make here, it has to be expanded on: "Si le style, c'est l'*homme* [ɔm], le tracé du stylet c'est l'(at)*ome* [(a.t)ɔm]" (Cassin, "Ab-sense, or Lacan from A to D," 90). Atoms are not merely a representation of the smallest thing, but a materialisation of language, which is why Democritus *reads* atoms as letters. They are written down on a roll of paper or papyrus (*tomos*, [ˈtɔ.moːs]) and in this sense are an expression of a (wo)man's style. While the weight of the atoms is held upright by the physicality of letters, their actualisation is inscribed in the sound [ɔm].

38 "Homonym" is derived from the Greek *homōnymos*, "bearing the same name, and using the same denomination," which is a combination of *homos*, "same" (from which we get homo-) and *onoma*, "name." The effectiveness of homonyms relies on the accidental coincidence of words; that is, a homonymy is present whenever one word has several meanings. Aristotle had already distinguished the peculiar nature of homonyms. He insisted on a non-contradictory link between the order of being and the order of discourse, hence the role of the univocality of words and sentences: "For not to have one meaning is to have no meaning" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 4.4, 1006b7–8, in *Complete Works*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols., 6th ed. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995], 2:1589). Because homonyms violate the principle of non-contradiction, they were considered undesirable by Aristotle, who went so far as to call them a deep-rooted linguistic disease in that there are more things than there are words and we therefore have to use the same words for several things (*Sophistical Refutations* 1.164a4–19).

refers to another signification and thereby establishes an interconnected system where even a missing object has its proper place. Similarly, homonyms need to be attached to a particular context in order to produce an appropriate meaning. Take, for example, a *fair* lady, a lady who can be beautiful and equitable, but not necessarily both at once. Meanwhile, literalisation sidesteps the question of meaning by despiritualising the examined phenomena, making formal entities out of them. In this sense, they function as a localised event that has universal properties, just like homophones, which have their own unrelated existence and only encounter each other by mere chance. For instance, in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice herself is seduced by the mouse's long and sad *tale*, as she has been imagining all this time that he was referring to his *tail*.

Ever since the dawn of modern linguistics, inaugurated by Saussure, a sign has become detached from the corresponding thing. Take Saussure's famous example of a tree (*arbre*). It is improbable that an idea of a tree would simply connect with a word or sound designating a tree. Saussure drew the radical conclusion that "a linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern,"[39] or, respectively, between a signifier and a signified:

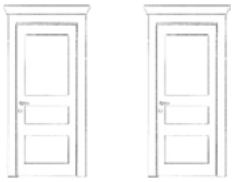
ARBRE

Moving further in the evolution of structural linguistics, such an explanation was still unsatisfactory in Lacan's eyes. He addressed it by constructing a simplified version of the sign, which "shows how the signifier actually enters the signified":[40] an image of two doors, both unmistakably leading a person to the expression of their natural needs, the only difference between them being a signifying inscription above them:

39 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 76.

40 Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink in collaboration with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 417.

HOMMES DAMES



There is no dialogue, no well-established meaning or copulation that distinguishes them. All of these are possible retroactively, since the "signifier alone guarantees the theoretical coherence of the whole as a whole."[41] In order to form a coherent essence, a signifier necessarily attaches itself to another signifier, forming a chain that is, in the last instance, the only graspable object. It is possible to discern such a mechanism in the children's game Red Rover, where the goal is to break one of the two chains of hands or arms linked together by one of the teams. If successful, the team acquires additional player-signifiers, thereby making it impossible to persist as a lone player. Even the final futile act of the game is to try to secure a new chain one last time. The chain itself has a negative existence, since each team is only able to endure by linking arms with another. Such an embodiment of negativity that relies on the absence of certainty can be viewed as the closest linguistic analogy to a sceptical work. We have already pointed out that in its purest form, scepticism opens and maintains a minimal gap, a negativity between a subject and an object. But because of its empty nature, it is unable to encompass the specificity of a given structure.

What the signifier is not able to achieve individually, a letter is. We have already pointed out that it is identical with itself and always ready at hand. In this view, a letter does not represent a quality or an attribute; it is instead a formal entity that lends itself to interpretation. Furthermore, the status of an entity enables it to be grasped, transformed, appropriated, and brought into contact or connection with another letter. Take, for instance, a line segment, which is bound by two distinct endpoints marked with a letter. The line is made visible, thinkable, and coherent when it is lettered and forms a rule. Conversely, take away a letter from DNA and the molecular double helix simply collapses. While a signifier can be missing, a letter has its own assured place and is thus present at hand and integrally transmissible, making it not just a suitable means of expressing knowledge, but also giving access to its purest form.

The structure of lettering is consequently supposed to offer an ideal form of knowledge accumulation and its further consumption. What holds this idea of knowledge together is supposed to be a twofold homonymic arrangement: univocity, giving it clear unified sense, and literalisation, which gives it coherence and repeat-

41 Lacan, 345.

ability. The product of word-for-word harmonic union is therefore clearly transferable elements of knowledge that are of practical use in language. The paradigmatic example of "the persistent sameness of a name is [...] *Aufhebung*,"[42] which simultaneously means to transcend, to preserve, and to cease. *Aufhebung* exhibits self-identity, while being caught in its own differentiation. Although Aristotle was aware that things can get tangled up in the same name, but not the same definition of being,[43] Alice in Wonderland was clearly not:

> *[Alice:] "You see the earth takes twenty-four hours to turn round on its axis—"*
> *"Talking of axes," said the Duchess, "chop off her head!"*[44]

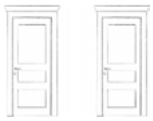
Who would encourage the idea to sever a head? Well, Alice. This reading of a letter, usually attributed to a homonymous copula, establishes a continuity of thought, an unconscious weaving of an idea. Alice is warned that "if everybody minded their own business," leaving the field of enunciation as it is, then "the world would go round a deal faster than it does."[45] Regardless, Alice intervenes with an elemental knowledge that should be self-evident. Letters are not just a medium of sameness, since they also need to "include difference in what is constantly other."[46] The possibility of being other is the measure of contingency. Whilst homonyms have a fundamental characteristic of knowledge in that they encompass identity in difference, they lack the ability to encompass contingency. Moreover, the distinguishing function of writing makes it possible to differentiate between meanings and thereby ignore any instance of homonymy. Homonyms may be subject to this objection, but it does not bind homophones.

The letter simultaneously functions as an inscription of an impasse of formalisation and as the instability of language itself. Linguistic principles are unable to interpret the antagonism embedded in the homophonic structure. Usually, homonymy is simply mapped onto homophony as one of its variants. Both are usually understood as something similar, but of a different nature. However, it is not without significance if we give primacy to speech or script. It is precisely here that homophones enter the frame. The hard kernel of homonyms is written in an identical form. To illustrate the nature of homonyms, we may turn to Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. The main character is introduced as neither earnest nor Ernest, but by the end of the play, he is both. Homophones, in contrast, are produced through an identical sound. The remarkable homophonic overlapping of oration and *ratio* allows us to hear the quality of *logos* in speech. The emphasis is on enunciation. There is an in-

42 Mladen Dolar, *Heglova fenomenologija duha* (Ljubljana: Analecta, 2017), 408.
43 cf. Aristotle, Categories 1a1–2, in *Complete Works*, Vol.1, ed. Jonathan Barnes [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995], 1:3.
44 Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 51 (emphases added).
45 Carroll, 50.
46 Milner, *Jasno delo*, 60.

coherence present in homophones, which can be seen as anti-linguistic, in the sense that something is resisting complete integration into the letter. Hearing a coinciding sound conveys that nothing can be deduced but their mere (singular) existence. As Milner puts it, the homophone has an "integrally positive and affirmative," yet "punctual"[47] quality. It is thus impossible to integrate a homophone into a linguistic structure as a whole. If homonymic structure is based on regularities that are unable to encompass contingency, homophones are themselves contingent solitary phenomena that produce a surplus. Indeed, homonyms wave *through* each other and homophones wave *to* each other. It is therefore essential to follow Saussure to the logical end that is in a way present in his analysis of anagrams.[48]

ARBRE HOMMES DAMES KNOW NO



nəʊ

A tree can harbour both a concept and sound, doors fixated to a minimal signifying pair, but an enunciation's encounter with itself offers a different perspective. For "know" and "no" to inhabit the same space, we must reject any affinity to transcendental postulates, but also to linguistics, and instead rely on singular craftsmanship whereby even words become something other than what they are. Homophones seem to induce uncertainty by circumventing any pretension to knowledge; however, we have seen that knowledge is premised on the identity of identity and non-identity. According to the law of identity, A = A, the pure identity inevitably undermines its own identity by presenting a difference that is in no way external to identity. Therefore, homophones are not an instance where two words coincide, but a singularity,[49] a minimum of an object, which is purged of all qualities, but stops shortly before abolishing the object itself and making it unknowable. At the same time, it is also

47 Jean-Claude Milner, "Back and Forth from Letter to Homophony," *Problemi International* 1, no. 1 (2017): 88.

48 Saussure's work in *Cahiers d'anagrammes* revolved around the widespread use of anagrams concealed in Latin poetry, specifically his preoccupation with Saturnian verse, but remained unresolved and unpublished. This research predated his famous *Cours de linguistique générale*. See Jean Starobinski, *Words upon Words: The Anagrams of Ferdinand de Saussure*, trans. Olivia Emmet (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979).

49 Alenka Zupančič interprets the figure of the double in an identical fashion: "The double is exactly not the figure of the two, it does not imply any duality, but is the privileged figure of singularity—we could say, it is singularity *par excellence* [...] a one, which is singularised until it is unrecognisable." Alenka Zupančič, *Seksualno in ontologoja* (Ljubljana: Analecta, 2011), 157.

not one, not even a simple negation, but a reoccurring parasite attached to enunciation that inhibits a symbolic space, an irreducible core of sameness that exists as an independent essence and haunts both words. Through repetition, the homophonic words introduce a contingency into knowledge, something that enables a particular word to be completely different, an impasse, which does not represent an exception, but the point of a specific articulation, a folding of knowledge onto itself.[50] An emancipation of words from the lexical foundation, but also semantic dependency.

If scepticism is capable of producing knowledge, it is in the form of such speculative homophonic enunciations, whereby the (guaranteed) position of knowledge is sacrificed at the behest of knowledge itself while withholding the answer of what this knowledge is. If the principal conundrum was how knowledge is conceived, it has been rearticulated as the problem of scepticism and further, the dilemma of establishing a relationship of two. In the end, it is the work of finding the minimal fundament of their cohabitation. And since there is no sexual relationship predicated on the two, in the sense of a successful copulation or joining together, it is only possible to know them as singular instances, a minimal object or, perhaps most appropriately, an atom. Contrary to common sense, atoms are not atoms because they are the smallest bodies, but because they are indivisible. While *tomos* is the cut, *atomos* is the uncuttable. Therefore, an atom can only be the undividable fundament. Naturally, Hegel takes a speculative step further and conceptualises the atom as a cut between the one and the emptiness that inhabits the same value. The logic is simple; everything can be cut except the cut itself. The fundament is thus split in itself, or is a split (*Unterbrechung*). If we make the final step, all these characteristics converge in a single gesture: a touch, not simply a touch of the hands, but a touch embodied in homophony. Hence, touch is not present in the interaction of two distinct entities, nor in the contact of sameness, but in the identity with otherness, an identity that meets the other of oneself in oneself. And after all, isn't "knowing the unity in the opposite and the opposition in unity"[51] one of the definitions of absolute knowledge?

50 In her work on repetition, Bara Kolenc developed the concept of constructive difference, driving on the idea of an exception being inscribed into the persistence of sameness: "As a function, constructive difference is defined through a certain ambiguity between integration and differentiation of the two terms between which it arises: at once, it both differentiates and connects the two terms of repetition. It is a cut that yet establishes the relation between the two. It launches the two terms of repetition as absolutely identical and radically different at once. This means that somehow paradoxically the difference between the two terms of repetition is established exactly by the fact that there is no difference between them. It is the very indiscernibility between the two terms of repetition that is the condition of possibility of their difference." Bara Kolenc. "The Category of the (Un)Touchable in Haptolinguistics: Touch, Repetition and Language," in *The Language of Touch: Philosophical Examinations in Linguistics and Haptic Studies*, ed. Mirt Komel (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 96–97.

51 Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III*, 460.

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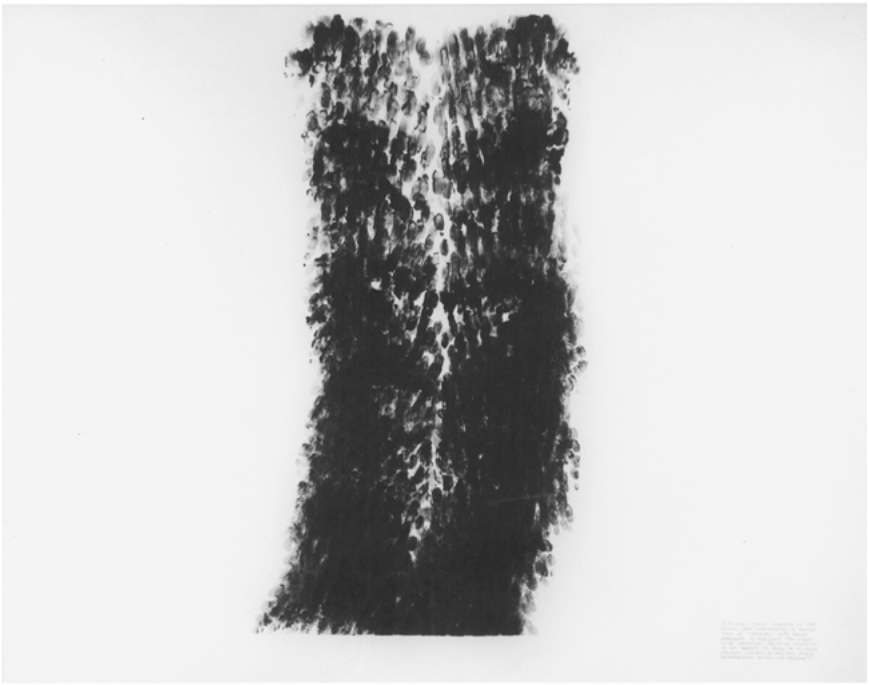

Fig. 12: Robert Morris, *Blind Time I*, 1973, graphite and paint oil on paper, 89 x 117 cm.

Adi Louria Hayon

The Weak Relations of Touch and Sight through the Passage of Lapsed Time

> Can one be ephectic otherwise than unawares? [...] I don't know. I think that's all, for the moment. I see nothing else (I see nothing whatever), for the time being.
>
> Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*

> For some, reality is not enough. Others, perhaps those whose anxieties have been deadened by lethargy and inactivity, find in the inert forms of reality a rare intoxication. The shapes of the physical world, once assimilated, become detached identities. The random dimensions of reality lose their subjectivity. Duration becomes a coefficient of weight.
>
> Mel Bochner and Robert Smithson, *The Domain of the* Great *Bear*

> Since, then, we are looking for the principles of perceptible body; and since perceptible is equivalent to tangible, and tangible is that of which the perception is touch, it is clear that not all the contrarieties constitute forms and principles of body, but only those which correspond to touch. For it is in accordance with a contrariety—a contrariety, moreover, of tangible qualities—that the primary bodies are differentiated.
>
> Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption* 329b7–10

In the introduction to *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Robert Morris reflected on the written compilation of his artistic practice, pondering the incredulous nature of his mind. "Perhaps," he wrote,

> a skeptical and speculative turn of mind has always presided over the work and the writing. I never set out to prove or demonstrate so much as to investigate. And I never set out to affirm so much as to negate (finding that the former flowed from the latter in any case). Change and not continuity has been the guide—Heraclitus not Anaximander lit the path. Paradox and the fugitive were always more attractive than assured style and stable position. Rupture and disruption, not any organic development, provided the dynamic. [...] One of the first things I set out to shatter for myself, was the unity of a subject—both with itself and with a monolithic, coherent style prescribed to flow from this ideological oppression.[1]

Morris's sceptical and speculative turn of mind rendered his artistic practice as a continuous investigation that employs the activity of *sképtomai*—that is, inquiry as

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On 28 November 2018, Robert Morris died. If this piece, written a few months prior to his passing, initially touched his work from a distance, it has now become a kind of reminiscent trace. This research was conducted at the *Maimonides Centre for Advances Studies – Jewish Scepticism* (DGF-FOR 2311) in Hamburg University. I thank Rachel Aumiller and the research fellows at the Centre for their illuminating responses to oral presentations of some of these ideas, especially to Prof. Giuseppe Veltri, Racheli Haliva and Stephan Schmid. My gratitude to the Castelli Gallery in New York for their generosity in granting the release rights for Robert Morris *Drawings*.

1 Robert Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), ix.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110627176-010

an ongoing activity—as a way of life that constantly opposes dogmatism. He allies his work with that of the sceptical philosopher forging sceptical tactics of examination and inquiry as modes posed in opposition to the rule of demonstration and affirmation in order to resist ideological oppression. However, unlike the sceptical philosopher's modes of mental exercise, which challenge perception and reasoning as sources of knowledge, Morris investigated the concepts of change, paradox, rupture, and disruption by engaging in embodied praxis. This kind of scepticism was risky. It was unsafe and uncertain; an example was his 1971 interactive installation at the Tate Gallery in London, which notoriously closed after visitors were injured when engaging with the sculptural apparatus. Another was his series *Blind Time Drawings*, which commenced in 1973 and was produced over several decades. This essay will concentrate on these drawings, in which the artist examines the pictorial practice through the paradoxical relations between perception and intelligibility; in particular, that of sight in proximity to touch. It will show that the drawings perform the pictorial manner by concentrating on the haptic movements of the artist's hands while working in blindness, thus posing the question of how sense perception relates to the attainability of knowledge. They also reveal Morris's concern with the process of creation and the measure of time. The drawings present two different temporal processes which tie the activity of painting to the creation of self. The artist's intention to shatter the unity of the subject is performed in his blind haptic activity as a mode for casting doubt on the fabrication of such unity. During an examination of several works in the series, two questions will be posed: If *Blind Time Drawings* traces the ongoing activity of touch, what temporal schemes does it engender? And what problematics does it reveal for the becoming of an image, and of a self, contingent upon the continuity of time?

The problem of the role of the senses and perception was prevalent among Morris's contemporaries. Artists seeking to withdraw from the clear relation between art and representation experimented with the displacement of the senses and the suspension of the gaze. While for artists, clear sight no longer denoted the validity of knowledge, the French deconstructive critique of logocentrism crossed the Atlantic and entered the American discourse. Art and philosophy could no longer denote truth in terms of signification. In conjunction with this shift, North American artists from the East Coast to the West experimented with media, performance, the body, the sensual organs, eyes, vision, gaze, hair, hands, fingertips, nails, cheeks, feet, gravity, brain, weight, ears, sound, nose, smells, mouth, voice, skin, and tactility—*technē*. These experimental artistic practices embraced contingency and indeterminacy as an unconventional *telos* bounded by materiality, the only means for creation without end. Morris's *Blind Time Drawings*, which casts doubt on the perceiving mind, critiques its ability to produce true knowledge while returning to the problem of the medium now placed within the performing body of the painter. In this series, Morris practises haptic drawing as a means of unhinging sense perception from intelligibility and the pictorial from visuality.

Alongside his contemporaries Robert Smithson, Mel Bochner, and Michael Snow, Morris scrutinised sight and visuality as they were laid bare and dissected, not for the sake of anchoring knowledge in certitude, but as a shearing of their strong connections to the sovereignty of forged knowledge, technology, information, media culture, and their dominant effect on the construction of clear perception. Akin to the sceptic's intervention that seeks to critique the manner we attain knowledge, they returned to the problem of sense. They examined perception by impeding and inundating the perceiving sensual organs, removing them from their habitual operations. In *Blind Time Drawings*, Morris coupled sight with touch as a mode of performing the weak relations of measured time. However, in order to understand his trajectory, I will begin by setting the stage of his generation.

The Quasitranscendental Blind Spot

In 1965, while working on the visual apparatus for *Enantiomorphic Chambers*, Robert Smithson suggested "Stopping of sight, not by brutal opposition but by lowering the 'head'—foam—top developed—hands in pockets. Imperfect flatness; one type of destitution that has fallen into disuse."[2] This aporetic statement exposed the incredulity of sight and its strong connection to thought. It appeared in *After Thought*, a photocollage composed around a photograph by artist Dan Graham. The collage depicted Smithson's torso from the back, bending with his head down and his hands in his pockets. The figure is concealed by an intersection of two diagonal lines drawn from two photographs of stereoscopic boxes clasping its sides. The overlaying material is a cancelling chiasmic sketch of a two-dimensional apparatus mimicking two eyes. The work comprises Smithson's investigation of sight for *Enantiomorphic Chambers*, where two metal constructions with mirrors mounted on a wall exposed a blind spot in the viewer's fixed visual field. In his statement for the *Art in Process* exhibition catalogue (1966) entitled "Interpolation of the Enantiomorphic Chambers," he explained that the installation examined seeing one's own sight, creating a split and reverse vanishing point that made blindness visible, in infinite myopia.[3] "It is a known fact," he wrote in a draft, "that we do not see with our eyes but rather with our brain. Thinking about one's sight enables one to build or invent a structure that sees *nothing*."[4] Myopic nothingness, in a "sense establishes a certain kind of

2 Cited from Robert Smithson's *Afterthought: Enantiomorphic Chambers*, 1965, photocollage, staples, coloured pencils, graph paper, Museu Fundação de Serralves, Portugal.

3 Robert Smithson, "Interpolation of the Enantiomorphic Chambers" [*Art in Process*, 1966], in *Robert Smithson: Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 39–40.

4 Robert Smithson, draft of "Interpolation of the Enantiomorphic Chambers," in Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt Papers, 1905–1987, AAA, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, reel 3834, frame 994. See also Eugenie Tsai and Cornelia Butler, eds., *Robert Smithson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 138–39.

point of departure not so much toward the idealistic notion of perception, but all the different breakdowns within perception. So that's what I'm interested in. I'm interested in zeroing in on those aspects of mental experience that somehow coincide with the physical world."[5] Smithson's quasi-transcendental study of perception, particularly the operation of the senses and the interval between mental images and the world, was positioned as a self-cancelling system in which logic is suspended. One way in which he could scrutinise sense perception, particularly sight, was to impede specific elements of the mechanics of sight while demonstrating these very operations through their art-medium correlates.

In 1967, Mel Bochner scrutinised the demonstrative certainty produced by visual evidence. He investigated the contraptions of visual perception from perspective and performance to photography. "Perspective," he wrote in *The Serial Attitude* (1967), "almost universally dismissed as a concern in recent art, is a fascinating example of the application of fabricated systems. In the works of artists like Uccello, Dürer, Piero, Saenredam, and Eakins (especially their drawings), it can be seen to exist entirely as a methodology. It demonstrates not how things appear but rather the workings of its own strict postulates."[6] In Bochner's review of art critic and curator Lawrence Alloway's exhibition *Systemic Painting* at the Guggenheim (*Arts Magazine*, 1966), he deemed pictorial seeing to be a convention that the new art was to expose as actually being a mode of fabricated vision: "Whatever else painting has been, it has been an art form which endured a number of radical shifts of intent. What originated and existed for a long period as a means of representation has in rapid succession become a means aware of itself, involved with itself and finally a thing-in-itself."[7] This awareness of the means of artistic production was to rewire the split of self-reflection not as a circular mode, but a chiasmic one. The rupture of self-reflection decreed a divide and a withdrawal from a return to an image of representation, for the coming-into-form of the image was now contingent on the exposition of the self-reflective medium. Hence, as Bochner implies, once painting was exposed as a medium, its self-reflective movement created a chiasmic intersection that weakened the hold of its own image. The difference between the exposition of the medium and its own image marks a knot, or a disturbance in the chiasmic order. Rendering apparent the conditions of knowing and being and those of the interval between representation and presence was a means of generating self-referentiality and autonomy (self-rule) contingent on the separation and suspension of mind and body, sense (as *logos*, articulation, signification) and sense (as sensual perception), as well as the

5 Reynolds, "Enantiomorphic Models," in *Robert Smithson*, 140, n. 18: Robert Smithson, interview with Denis Wheeler, reel 3833, frame 1124; Smithson, *Robert Smithson: Collected Writings*, 208.

6 Mel Bochner, "The Serial Attitude," in *Solar Systems & Rest Rooms: Writings and Interviews, 1965–2007* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), 45 (originally published in *Artforum* 6, no. 4 [1967]: 28–33).

7 Mel Bochner, "Systemic Painting", in *Solar Systems & Rest Rooms*, 14 (originally published in *Arts Magazine* 41, no. 1 [1966]: 57–58).

discontinuity of the perceiving senses. The analysis of perception led to the fragmentation of its operative organs, those sensory mediating gadgets and their technological extensions, to place them in suspension, un-synthesised and at times obstructed and thus degenerated (that is, *technē* as degenerated; unfunctional, unproductive, in stasis). Drawing became a speculative tool for experimentation with the conditions of visibility.

In "Perverse Perspectives" (1967), art critic Lucy R. Lippard showed how artists of this period were engaging with the paradox of the visual via the exposition of its distorting nature.[8] What is interesting is that the problem posed by visuality was not restricted to painting, but was regarded as the crux of modes of knowing. What would happen if one were to knock, or to cut, an opening in the serial sequence of the proper order of perceiving gadgets or devices of production? A case in point is Michael Snow who constructed vision-impeding objects in sculpture, photographs, installations, and film. As Julia Kristeva observes, Snow's film *Wavelength* (1967) performs the violence of the camera's zoom, as a schizophrenic theatre: "the zoom becomes an agent of decay, as objects ebb until they suffer a lethal loss of identity, gradually transmuting the visual field into a final extinguishing darkness."[9] For his part, Snow stated: "I was thinking of, planning for, a time monument in which the beauty and sadness of equivalence would be celebrated, thinking of, trying to, make a definite statement of pure film space and time, a balancing of 'illusion' and 'fact,' all about seeing. The space starts at the camera's (spectator's) eye, is in the air, then is on the screen, then is within the screen, (the mind). The film is a continuous zoom [...] a sine wave."[10] Elizabeth Legge deemed the piece a "room zoom" that at times featured superimposed images in a slight double vision, as if the camera lens or projector were malfunctioning, as if our eyes were mis-seeing. Snow further related *Wavelength* to acid, like a drug forming states of consciousness in the mind-space.[11] Strobing visuals and aliasing white waves stressed misidentifications of signal frequencies, introducing distortions or errors that preformed a random distribution of frequency and amplitude.[12] Errors, interruptions, inconsistencies, and impediments to the senses by deprivation or excess led to blindness and mishearing. Gaps and intervals maintained a setting-apart of the senses, of sense. Synthetic coherency was discarded in favour of synthetic autism entrenched in the separation of

8 Lucy R. Lippard, "Perverse Perspectives," *Art International* 11, no. 3 (1967): 28–33.

9 Julia Kristeva, "Le Théâtre moderne n'a pas lieu," *34/44: Cahiers de recherche des sciences des textes et documents* 3 (1977): 13–16, quoted in Elizabeth M. Legge, *Michael Snow: Wavelength* (London: Afterall Books, 2009), 77.

10 Michael Snow, quoted in Legge, *Michael Snow*, 1–2.

11 Legge, 7, 25.

12 Legge associates the film with the acid guru Timothy Leary's crypto-visions of the "trip" described only a year earlier in *Playboy*, where Leary argued that they precede the sense of being alone in a dead impersonal world. Timothy Leary, "She Comes in Colors," *Playboy* 153 (September 1966), reprinted in Timothy Leary, *The Politics of Ecstasy*, repr. ed. (London: Paladin, 1972), 125.

the performing heterogeneous senses. And yet, as Thierry de Duve noted, the experience of a blind spot enhances reflexivity (a lapse to which we will return, for it might be the very syncopation upon which everything is contingent).[13] Snow's 45-minute room zoom preformed the systematic abstraction of a perspectival construction of psychophysiological space. The problem raised in the difference between the two had already been stressed in Erwin Panofsky's *Perspective as a Symbolic Form* (1924–25), where he strikingly notes: "Visual space and tactical space [*Tastraum*, i.e., touch room] are both anisotropic and unhomogeneous in contrast to the metric space of Euclidean geometry." He then turns to Ernst Cassirer, stating: "'The main directions of organization—before-behind, above-below, right-left—are dissimilar in both physiological spaces.'"[14] For Panofsky, the perception of space was contingent on sense perception. Tactile spaces were different from visual spaces since hapticity yields multi-directional aggregates that do not adhere to a unified oriented space. When the physiological sense—that is, the evidence of the eyes and ears, as seen in the cases above—was dislocated from its position of origin, or stressed under misalignment or excessive incitements, or posed between organised geometry and the world, blind spots and mishearing postponed the synthesis of this dissimilar physiological evidence, thus dispersing perception in suspension.

In what follows, I will focus on the weak relations between sight and touch dramatised in Robert Morris's series *Blind Time Drawings*. These works problematise our common understandings of perception by employing an aesthetic synthesis that grants primacy to the sense of touch while frustrating the clarity of vision as an organising mode of perception. They lure the spectator into the practice of the blind spot, the gaps between the separated senses, the fissures amidst the faculties and the erection of a quasi-transcendental apprehension. I will return to this uncanny phrase "quasi-transcendental" as it derives from sense perception and sensory production on the one hand, but is connected to the transcendence of the blind spot on the other. The drawings enact a gap between sightless touch, the pressing body, and the image to come. Morris begins by blindfolding his eyes. He then makes repetitive marks on a piece of paper. Each drawing is accompanied by or paired with an event score. His instructions, furthermore, furnish a temporal estimation for each performative drawing. He often calls this activity of timing—that is, the production of each work—"lapsed time" and "time error." The scores frame Morris's activity in relation

13 For Thierry de Duve, Snow marked the postmodern shattered trust in a unified self. He asked: "Given that the unity of experience is shattered, what can be done that is epistemologically enlightening and aesthetically stimulating?" The answer, he argued, is to identify the fragments that were once unified as the conditions of experience that must be freed. He suggests that Snow takes on this Modernist strategy of unconcealment and autonomy of parts to produce pleasure. See Thierry de Duve, "Michael Snow: The Deictics of Experience and Beyond," *Parachute* 78 (April–June, 1995): 28–29.

14 Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood, new ed. (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 30, 77.

to an estimated time (linear time, clock time). The activities accordingly lapse out of *chronos* (chronological time) to disclose inapt discords.

Blindfolded

The artist activates the body in withdrawal. He suggests a base materialism that adheres to nothing but the proximities of skins and surfaces blindly touching their exposed externalities. His finger movements, their weight, pressure, velocity, and cadence, perpetually desire an image that can only be achieved in discreteness, in delay, posed in externality. This excessive movement requires some consideration. How does the movement towards coming-into-form (sense) adhere to the separation of the senses, to the impediment of sight? When pressure touches upon a surface, does its mark trace a blind image of its own exposition? Does it make sense through synthesis, or does the blind operation maintain a delay? How does suspension play out between gathering (synthesis) and *aisthēsis?* In a sightless world, does art refer only to itself, to its sensible senses, to its own causation? In a world without images, does touch refer only to touch? Does it touch touch? The *technē* of the world? In *Anti Form*, Morris writes: "The focus on matter and gravity as means, results in forms that were not projected in advance" (Anti Form, *Artforum*, April 1968). The *Blind Time Drawings* maintain suspension, a blacked-out movement towards an uncertain vestige. They inquire about our relation to time performed as a discontinuous passage of the ongoing creative nature of pressure. They render time as a lapse, a proposition of syncopation in the heterogeneity of times. If this trajectory makes sense, how may we think about the image if it is nothing but a trace; a weak, passive form drifting amidst the effects of the touching senses?

Blind Time Drawings spans from 1973 to the present, amounting to approximately several hundred pieces, the series is divided into six sub-series and some additional works.[15] The first drawing, *Blind Time I* (Fig. 12) comprises a title, date, medium, paper size, collection, event score, and drawing. The drawing presents a vestige of Morris's graphite traces of finger marks springing from the bottom up. The movement of the fingers follows a singular framework of instructions that includes the suspension of the gaze, an estimated time for the activity, a score for haptic movement, and finally a measure of the activity of drawing in real time; that is, in numeral/chronological time. The first score instructs:

> With eyes closed, graphite on the hands and estimating a lapsed time of 3 minutes, both hands attempt to descend the page with identical touching motions in an effort to keep to an even vertical column of touches. Time estimation error: +8 seconds.

15 Jean-Pierre Criqui, "Drawing from the Heart of Darkness: Robert Morris' Blind Time," in *Blind Time Drawings, 1973–2000*, ed. Jean-Pierre Criqui (Prato: Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, 2005), 11.

Fig. 13: Albrecht Dürer, *Self-portrait, Study of a Hand and a Pillow* (recto), 1493, pen and brown ink, 27.8 x 20.2 cm. Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.862). Photographed by Schecter Lee, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, New York.

With his eyes closed, Morris begins in withdrawal. The first withdrawal is from mimesis; from forms that were not projected in advance. The second withdrawal is from self-imitation. The score and materials serve to set the conditions for the activ-

ity. A model is suspended in thought at the time of performing the act of drawing, in the moment of its coming-into-form. In each singular piece, Morris repeats the act of notation thrice: once in preforming his own instructions, then in the double performance of the hands "with identical touching motions," simultaneously pressing the surface, opening infinitesimal gaps in the cadence, weight, and vectors of each movement. Each time, each expression is different. The third is a withdrawal from painting. The drawing is not a painting. "I quit painting," Morris declared, "for a particular reason—certain problems I couldn't solve. There was a kind of ontological character to painting I could not accept. Because on the one hand you were involved in some activity, on the other hand you ended up with an object."[16] By hindering a coherent, significant object, Morris offers the remainder as the vestigial form of a withdrawal from the sense of painting; a passage of hand-gestures passing through the limits of the cutting frame. Devoid of object, pictorial activity retreats from the pregiven ground of painting, the skeleton support of symbolic order, to form inter-relations contingent upon haptic weight.

The fourth withdrawal is from the knowing, conscious hands of the painter. By painting with the palm of his hands, Morris makes a portrait of his hands. When painters paint hands, they usually depict the dorsum, their upper side: Leonardo's caressing hands, Michelangelo's signifying or concealing hands, Andrea del Sarto's entangled hands, Watteau's open hands, the hands of the transfiguration, Dürer's praying hands, the pointing hand, the hands of God the Father, of the Emperor, holding hands, fists. Dürer's *Self-portrait, Study of a Hand and a Pillow* (1493) depicts the artist's palm, his fingers at once touch themselves and point up to his signature monogram. This self-referentiality presents the artist as creator. Creator of his own image. The painter as creator. Dürer's self-portrait as the divine creator. Morris does not depict the hands in their mediated likeness, but instead captures the finger-prints, his distinct self in intimate flesh. His gestures are singular each time. One after another, they are painterly discrete events. For Morris, these imprints mark a way out of the pictorial object while maintaining temporal suspension.

Knowing/Pressing

Morris shifts from the order of knowledge, language and signification to the ontology of touch. Marking imprints contingent upon the event score is a performative act which is a touch at the very foundation of painting. By replacing sight with touch, Morris considers the problem of how to make a pictorial mark devoid of connection to a grounding referent, and with no expressive overtones. If the pictorial mark is but

16 Transcript of an interview conducted between Thomas Krens and Robert Morris dated 13 December 1978. See Thomas Krens, "The Triumph of Entropy," in *Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1994), xix. See also Criqui, "Drawing from the Heart of Darkness," 11–12.

an imprint contingent upon eyeless pressing palms, it differs from the diagrammatic face by inscribing an immediate surface-topography of the body. It is neither a representation, nor an inscription of a model or a face, but an ex-scription, that is, a becoming-other-than-itself in the event of an expressive gesture. The pressure of the weight of the body preexists the know-how of the practiced painter. The blind painter's gestures are expressive events that render their temporal traces as distancing-from-self in its absolute strangeness.[17] In *The Vestige of Art*, Nancy reminds us that "the word 'face' comes from the root that means "to pose, to set": to pose, present, expose without reference to anything. Here, without relation to anything that is an *a priori* substratum or an intelligible *subject* projecting forms. With the sole or the bottom of the foot [*la plante du pied*], we are in the domain of the flat, of the out-flat [*l'ordre du* plat *et de l'*à-plat], of horizontal extension without reference to vertical tension."[18] Nancy's footprint. Morris' palm. These transient imprints are not images of their creator's self-knowledge; they do not mark an identity but a transient event with an unnameable sense of the relations of physical organs.

When tending to the problem of the haptic body in Morris' work, Rosalind Krauss asks: "What is it *like* to be a body?"[19] She argues that the experience of impact is that of resistance to an external material and has a definite telos as it "creates an awareness of the body as sheathing, isolating it as a kind of boundary that can be peeled away from the self and presented as pure corporeality." Morris, influenced by Samuel Beckett, performs his transient self through pressure. Beckett's *Unnamable* (1953) is a score, a partitura, a play, posing a reflexive hapticity, a facticity, where touch touches upon the mind/body split, pressing bodily organs into self-awareness. "Of whom I know nothing... I know I am seated," says the stationary protagonist of *Unnamable:*

> My hands on my knees, because of the pressure against my rump, against the soles of my feet, against the palms of my hands, against my knees. (Against my palms, the pressure is of my knees, against my knees of my palms, but what is it that presses against my rump, against the soles of my feet? I don't know.) My spine is not supported.[20]

The passage is divided as a mirror image of itself. Beckett commences with questioning thought and his ability to know. He then positions his hands, his knees, his rump, the soles of his feet, the palms of his hands, and his knees. Now again, in rotation and inner-twists: palms, knees, knees palms, rump, feet. Note that Beckett

17 Jean-Luc Nancy, "Painting in the Grotto," *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 70.

18 Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Vestige of Art," *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 97.

19 Rosalind Krauss, "The Mind/Body Problem: Robert Morris in Series," *Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1994), 10.

20 Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 15.

opens with knowing while he ends with feet; from top to bottom, from mind to body, from a vertical to a horizontal disparity of heterogeneous organs:

[un]Knowing	
Knees	Palms
Rump	Knees
Feet	Knees
Palms	Palms
Knees	Rump
	Feet

Beckett does not know his body; he feels the heterogeneity of the organs of a body. Knowing is positioned over and on a par with a dismembered body. The dispersed body is not only the failure of expression bent on the debility of language and the production of meaning; it is also the atemporal zone conditioning the text right from the start: "Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses [...]. Keep going, going on."[21] Paul Davis related this decentred speaker to a "pre-Cartesian Unthinkable," a wonderer-self, an unnamable being who utters the Cartesian Cogito into self-annulment.[22] "I seem to speak (it is not I) about me (it is not me)," Beckett writes, "What am I to do (What shall I do, what should I do?) in my situation? How proceed? By aporia pure and simple? Or by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered [...]. (I should mention before going any further—any further on—that I say 'aporia' without knowing what it means)."[23] The unhinged relations of the anthropomorphic organs do not, and cannot, constitute a body; they are unhinged twice. To recall Mladen Dolar's "Kafka's Voices," there is first the anastomotic voice performing the indeterminate interconnection between the corporeal and the symbolic.[24] Dolar returns to Jacques Lacan's anastomosis in order to unhinge the voice from language. The chiasmic order of the separated organs now exists outside the known body. The undefinable relations posed by the dissected autonomous organs pose an aporia in the symbolic order. This aporia marks the paradoxical object of lack, the *objet petit a*, that manifests the drive of the incomplete symbolic order.[25] For Slavoj Žižek this lack unhinges a

21 Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 1.

22 Paul Davies, *Beckett and Eros: Death and Humanism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 48.

23 Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 1.

24 Mladen Dolar, "Kafka's Voices," in *Lacan: Silent Partners*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2003), 317.

25 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), 67–90.

subject without subjectivity.[26] The second unhinging is a materialisation of the Real, that is, of language, and the "literature of the unword" that creates a porous language. In Beckett's "German Letter" to Axel Kaun (July 1937), he suggests that the materiality of the word should be "dissolved [...], devoured by great black pauses [...], linking unfathomable abysses."[27]

The porous body is always plural; it performs itself through a perpetual coming together and falling apart that maintains the heterogeneity of organs, zones, names. In Beckett, such zoning marks the split of a body and a mind, and a further double split of the mind into zones and the body into autonomous corporeal organs. Murphy, Beckett's protagonist in the 1938 novel, performs the mind/body dichotomy as he "felt himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common. But he felt his mind to be bodytight and did not understand through what channel the intercourse was affected, nor how the experiences came to overlap."[28] Later on, Murphy's mind splits into three zones: the first is the zone of "light," the second is that of "half-light," and the third is the dark zone of a "flux of forms" that constantly materialise and dematerialise.[29]

The sexual nature of Beckett's mind/body split re-emerges in the passageways between the zoned organs of the mind and the body. They characterise the mental activity of self-reflection as the sensual contact of erogenous zones, those internal tactilities aroused in and in-between the limits of Didier Anzieu's psychoanalysis of the skin-ego. Although Anzieu is considered Lacan's greatest critic, his concepts of the skin-ego and the psychic envelope offer a non-dualistic and non-deterministic thinking of subjectivity as "completely psychic, utterly somatic, essentially intersubjective and intercorporeal, constantly changing."[30] He critiques Lacan's linguistic model of the unconscious, claiming that it produces an analysis of signifiers as an

26 Žižek returns to Jonathan Boulter's observation of Beckett's *Texts* splitting the voice and the body not only to dismantle the physical body, but to stage its comeback unhinged from subjectivity. See Slavoj Žižek, *Disparities* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 468–69; Jonathan Boulter, "Does Mourning Require a Subject?" *Modern Fiction Studies* 50, no. 2 (Summer 2004), 333–34.

27 Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 88–89.

28 Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, ed. J.C.C. Mays, new ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 70.

29 Beckett, 63–64.

30 Marc Lafrance, "Skin and the Self: Cultural Theory and the Anglo-American Psychoanalysis," *Body and Society* 15, no. 3 (2009): 19. Naomi Segal demonstrates the connections and closeness of interpretation in Didier Anzieu and Beckett, in particular through Anzieu's writings regarding self-analysis and creativity, *A Skin for Thought: Interviews with Gilbert Tarrab on Psychology and Psychoanalysis* (1990; see the translation by Daphne Nash Briggs [New York: Routledge, 2018]) and *The Skin-Ego* (1995; see the translation by Naomi Segal [London: Karnac, 2016]). See Naomi Segal, *Consensuality: Didier Anzieu, Gender and the Sense of Touch* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009). On Anzieu amidst his contemporary thinkers, see Marc Lafrance, "From the Skin Ego to the Psychic Envelope: An Introduction to the Work of Didier Anzieu," in *Skin, Culture and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Sheila L. Cavanagh, Angela Failler, and Rachel Alpha Johnston Hurst (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 16–17.

exercise in linguistic virtuosity determined by preconceived knowledge. Anzieu charges Lacan with a fanciful formal logic that is not only far removed from psychoanalytic therapeutic purposiveness, but also a dangerous practice that may result in the patient's collapse.[31] Seeing himself as profoundly Freudian, Anzieu rejected the hypothesis that the unconscious is structured like a language and instead claimed that the unconscious forms through the sensual experience of the body.[32] As early as 1911, Freud developed his model of "primary processes" as the biological and psychological activity of the pleasure principle which precedes thought, advancing a pre-ego phase that does not intuit space and time or differentiate the dialectic dualism between inside/outside, subject/object.[33] In fact, Anzieu argued that the body-ego is a skin-ego that functions both as a binding force and as a boundary touched by containment, protection, and inscription.[34] Here, the skin becomes the locus of a haptic intersensorial relation, which connects sensations and organises them such that they "stand out as figures against the original background formed by the tactile envelope: this is the Skin Ego's function of *intersensoriality*, which leads to the creation of 'common sense'... whose basic reference is always to the sense of touch."[35] The tactile nature of intersensoriality preceding any original background is propelled by desire and pleasure. Anzieu follows Freud's pleasure of the skin in the tangible play of erogenous zones facilitating auto-eroticism and sexualisation.[36] By replacing the already structured Lacanian linguistic model of self-reflection with a psychic-somatic one, the experience of the senses and their dialogic relations brings us back to Beckett's haptic *Unnamable* and Morris's *Blind Time Drawings*, delineated as a body/mind, organ/sense, relation carving paths amidst the separated senses, to now consider the principle of plurality contingent upon the facticity of the tangible.

31 Anzieu, *A Skin for Thought*, 35–37. See also Anzieu, "Contre Lacan" (1968), in Didier Anzieu, *Psychanalyser*, ed. René Kaës (Paris: Dunod, 2000), 179–85.

32 "I myself would oppose the formula: 'the unconscious is structured like a language' with a formulation that is implicit in Freud: 'the unconscious is the body.' The unconscious seems to me to be structured like the body [...] as a source of the first sensory-motor experiences, the first communications, and the oppositions that relate to the very basis of perception and thought." See, Anzieu, *A Skin for Thought*, 43.

33 Sigmund Freud, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume 12 (1911–1913): The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works*, ed. James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 218–26.

34 Didier Anzieu, "Functions of the Skin-Ego," in *Reading French Psychoanalysis*, ed. Dana Birksted-Breen, Sara Flanders, and Alain Gibeault (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 479.

35 Anzieu, "Functions of the Skin-Ego," 484.

36 Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 7 (1901–1905): A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works*, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), 125–245.

Somatic Actions

In 1991, Morris crystallised his inquiry of the haptic/cognitive relations. For the subseries *Blind Time IV*, he added excerpts from the writings of Donald Davidson, an American philosopher of the mind, language, and action, to his blind time event scores. *Blind Time IV* (*Drawing with Davidson*, 1991) is composed of two excerpts, the first staging the artist's cognitive activity and the movement of the hands, the second is a citation from Davidson's essay "Agency" (1971),[37] and a graphite drawing.

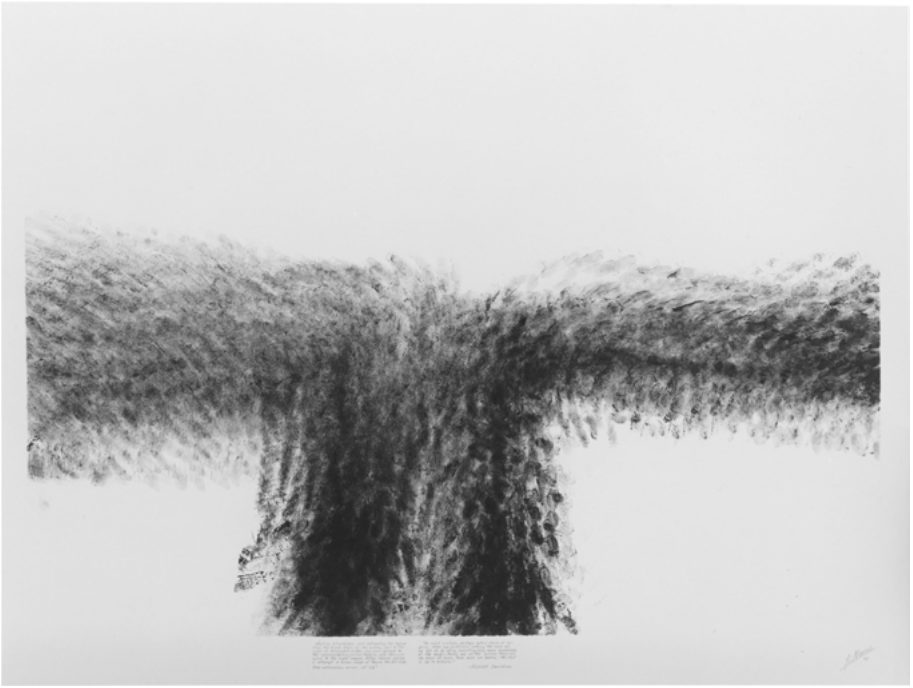

Fig. 14: Robert Morris, *Blind Time IV (Drawing with Davidson)*, 1991, graphite on paper, 96.5 x 127 cm. © Robert Morris / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York (Courtesy of Castelli Gallery).

> Working blindfolded and estimating the lapsed time the hands begin at the bottom, just to the right of estimated center and work upward to the estimated horizontal median and then outward to the right margin. After several passes I attempt a mirror image of this on the left side.
> Time estimation error:—2':08"
>
> We must conclude, perhaps with a shock of surprise, that our primitive actions, the ones we do not do by doing something else, mere movements of the body—these are all the actions there are. We never do more than move our bodies: the rest is up to nature.

37 Donald Davidson, "Agency," in *Donald Davidson: Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 51.

By 1993, he had published a text in which he contemplated his engagement with the scripts entitled "Writing with Davidson: Some Afterthoughts after Doing *Blind Time IV: Drawing with Davidson*."[38] Morris opens his commentary by asking: "What *were* Donald Davidson's writings doing in Morris's *Blind Time Drawings?*"[39] In order to unearth the reason for his engagement with Davidson, as Morris himself encourages us to do, we should consider his relationship to Davidson's ideas about intentions, actions, reasons, causes, beliefs, and desires. Kenneth Surin carefully illuminated these connections while adding a particular concern with proprioception and the haptic operation of Morris's nonrepresentational *Blind Time Drawings*. He follows Brian O'Shaughnessy's claim that the sense of touch depends on proprioception as a causal relation between the touched object and the sense perception of the touching body, hence integrating haptic perception with bodily awareness.[40] Surin sees Morris's use of his sense of touch as a proprioceptive mode contingent on bodily awareness as a kind of projective mapping that constitutes nonvisual analogue relations "that make up the ordered and intelligible experience of (visual) appearance."[41] For Surin, Morris's haptic procedures lead to a kind of visual understanding. While I agree with Surin's general trajectory of bypassing the rational agent, Morris's blind hapticity seems to show disdain for understandable auto-articulation. His experimentation with somatic knowledge abrogates visual and linguistic construal altogether. "Sightless repetitions echo a kind of laughter not permitted in light. Not every dark itch can be scratched in daylight," wrote Morris. "It would not be inconsistent to ascribe a certain bravado to method [...], not to mention a contempt for the ironclad primacy of the visual, that reification of the seen promoted to a self-serving ontology that the 'visual arts' never tires of asserting," and later on, "We always assume (theorize) a wholeness of the visual."[42] Hence, if Morris abrogated vision (as sensual sense and as knowledge), what was left was an agent of action stripped of reasoning, but one for whom there is no difference between action and cause. Davidson's "primitive actions" propose a mode of activity that includes all bodily movements. In *Agency*, Davidson proposes to interpret the idea of bodily movements as primitive actions. These movements cannot be analysed according to causal relations

38 In summer 1993, *Critical Inquiry* published two back-to-back articles concerned with *Blind Time Drawings:* Donald Davidson, "The Third Man," *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (1993): 607–16, and Robert Morris, "Writing with Davidson: Some Afterthoughts after Doing *Blind Time IV: Drawing with Davidson*," *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (1993): 617–27.

39 Morris, "Writing with Davidson," 617.

40 To bridge the gap between haptic perception and intelligible awareness, Surin turns to Michael Martin's assertion that touch utilises the body's sense-field through proprioception in order to incorporate the projective mapping of an object. See Kenneth Surin, "Getting the Picture: Donald Davidson on Robert Morris's *Blind Time Drawings IV* (Drawing with Davidson)," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (2002): 152–64, 168–69.

41 Surin, 155.

42 Morris, "Writing with Davidson," 620, 624.

or the first attribution of agency, nor do they require an intentional description.[43] If we do find such relations between agent and action, they will be of a descriptive nature, describing the consequences of the action. "Knowledge that an action *a* has a certain upshot allows us to describe the agent as the cause of that upshot, but this is merely a convenient way of redescribing *a*, [...]. Causality allows us to redescribe actions [...], but yields no analysis of agency."[44] Davidson concludes that the relation between a person and an event takes place only when it is *his* action that is independent of how the terms of relations are described. In fact, the relation between agent and action can only be described after-act, after-thought. In the real-time performative act, the relation between agent and action is a blind difference.

Within the philosophical labyrinth encompassing Morris's art, we stumble into blind and dark turning points that cannot be explained. Morris characterises the drawings as obsessive, sightless reiterations that reject vision in favour of somatic actions devoid of psychophysical law. In "Writing with Davidson," Morris asks: "Might it not be more profitable to regard the act of 'drawing blind' (as well as that of affixing Davidson's texts—perhaps as a kind of libretto that Morris sang as he worked blind) as operating in that economy of an excess [of transgression] which is the very ground of the metaphorical?"[45] The latter is the only mode we may find in Davidson that cannot be decoded or explained.

The Haptic Interval

What does Morris mean when he suggests that it would be more profitable to regard the act of "drawing blind" as operating in the economy of excess? In footnote 8 of "Writing with Davidson," Morris turns to Lacan's *objet a* as the unattainable image of desire. In fact, he specifically refers to Lacan's lecture entitled "Anamorphosis" to stress how the impossible image of drawing blind touches upon "a sort of ultimate limit of identification" that stirs "a self-portrait in which the subject will see himself as he cannot see himself [...] in which his own nullity appears to him."[46] Lacan's "Anamorphosis" shows how the emergence of the subject from the reflecting reflection of the structure of the gaze is contingent upon an internal split in the subject induced by *objet a*. Placing the unimaginable interval as the heart of the self-reflecting seeing subject, Lacan induces the framework of the fundamental drives through the movement of desire.[47] Stirring the function of lack, Morris's painterly actions dis-

43 Davidson, "Agency," 49.

44 Davidson, 60.

45 Morris, "Writing with Davidson," 627.

46 Morris, 622–23.

47 In 1964, Lacan gave a series of lectures at the École Normale Supérieure (Lectures 8 and 9, 26 February 1964) entitled "The Split Between the Eye and the Gaze" and "Anamorphosis," which addressed the question of how we can situate the conscious from the perspective of the unconscious.

charge their operative identity via blindness, thus making blindness a syncopated impediment at the centre of the creative act. The exposition of these self-relations is at once contingent on the disorder and delay of the sense of sight and on sense as meaning. Thereafter, a question is raised regarding the activity of the haptic painter. The order of the gaze now practised by hapticity may seem to offer an immediate solution to the problematic relations Morris finds between the activity of painting and its purpose in creating an object: "There was a kind of ontological character to painting I could not accept. Because on the one hand you were involved in some activity, on the other hand you ended up with an object."[48] Here, "object" refers first and foremost to the production of coherent concepts, and the material body designated as the painting is of a second order. How does haptic activity relate to the creativity of painting? How does it differ from the production of clear images or concepts? And how may we think of touch in relation to sightless activity?

In the opening chapter of *The Muses*, "Why Are There Several Arts, Not Just One?", Jean-Luc Nancy seeks to expose the manner of creation, or what he calls the sense of the world, through the suspended movement of touch. When attending to the question of the heterogeneity of the senses and the arts, Nancy presents the problem of sense, which on the one hand implies the somatic—that is, sensory—dimension of aesthetic experience and on the other relates to the sense of the world which for him is creation's manner of operation. The question of creation is the question exposing the manner, or mode, of the arts. Such exposition does not know its own becoming; therefore, Nancy stresses the characteristics of non-knowledge. He argues that "art disengages the senses from signification [...], and that is what we call [...] the sense of being external to signification [...] what one might just as correctly call the 'sense of the world' [...] as suspension of signification."[49] The withdrawal from signification includes untying the sensory apparatus from the production of meaning while maintaining their unhinged relation in suspension. In such a state, the senses are separated from the mind and therefore cannot comprehensively grasp an enunciated concept. The sense of creation is removed from signification in order to expose its own manner of self-relation. Suspension is again introduced

Both his question and his argument utilised a performance of pictorial geometrical perspective, splitting the eye from the gaze, playing with the triangular form, doubling it, turning it around, and overlapping its scheme, to create the chiasmic structure. Subdued to the function of desire within the operation of the gaze, the emergence of the subject was formed in the ungraspable, illusionary consciousness of *seeing itself seeing itself*; *I saw myself seeing myself*; *I see myself seeing myself*. This is a bipolar reflexive relation that no longer allows the appropriation of self by reflection; in fact, it annihilates the subject geometrical constitution in favor of the movement of lack and desire. See Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 67–90.

48 Krens, "The Triumph of Entropy," xix; see n. 17 above.

49 Jean-Luc Nancy, "Why Are There Several Arts, Not Just One?", in *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 22. On the problem of signification in Nancy, see Charles Shepherdson, "Aesthetic 'Sense' in Kant and Nancy," *New Literary History* 48, no. 2 (2017), 197–221.

as an unbridged interval maintaining the separation of the senses, as well as the separation of each sense from its own self-awareness.

Nancy then poses the exposition of self-relation as a haptic operation that adheres to the movement of a hyletic circle, which is an uncountable and raw haptic movement. Nancy's hyletic circle follows the order of self-relation we find in Lacan, Anzieu, but also in Freud. He seems to weave Anzieu's haptic motive with Lacan's formal mechanism, that is, his chiasmic screwing hyletic circle. If Lacan offers the relation of consciousness and representation by tending to the reflective order of "*I see myself seeing myself*," Nancy offers touch as it "*feels itself feeling itself*."[50] From Freud, Nancy imports the movement of the erotogenic zones as a haptic movement of desire—the *Verlust*. He elaborates on how such tactility touches itself. Sense senses itself by touching as touch touches touch. Touch touches on nothing but itself while it syncopates itself in material plurality. The suspended interval at the heart of the hyletic circle is the auto-heterology of touch. It is the spacing and the difference of zones and a relation-to-self:

> Touch itself—inasmuch as it is a sense and consequently inasmuch as it feels itself feeling, or more than that, inasmuch as it *feels itself feeling itself*, since it only touches by touching also itself, touched by what it touches *and* because it touches—touch presents the proper moment of sensuous exteriority; it presents it *as such and as sensuous*. What makes for touch is "this interruption, which constitutes the touch of the *self-touching*, touch *as self-touching*." Touch is the interval and the heterogeneity of touch. Touch is proximate distance. It makes one sense what makes one sense (what it *is* to sense): the proximity of the distant, the approximation of the intimate.[51]

Granting primacy to touch, Nancy returns to Aristotle's heterogeneity of the senses, and yet differs from him by offering touch not only as the sense that encompasses all the other senses (*sensus communis*/*koinē aisthēsis*), but as a condition for all sentient life. In Aristotle, touch occurs at the liminal difference between interior and exterior. Pascal Massie dwells on the double movement of the sense of touch, exhibiting the duality of a proper and common function by pointing simultaneously to the object of sensation and the sensing of the object.[52] Yet this beguiling sensual sense and a gathering synthetic sense appear simultaneously empirical and transcendental. Daniel Heller-Roazen argues that for Aristotle, "the significance of the primary sensation [...] lies not in its proximity to the modern notion of consciousness but in its removal from it."[53] What he offers as sense perception and self-awareness are not forms of

50 Lacan, "Anamorphosis," *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 80; Nancy, "Why Are There Several Arts, Not Just One?", 17.

51 Nancy, *The Muses*, 29.

52 Pascal Massie, "Touching, Thinking, Being: The Sense of Touch in Aristotle's *De anima* and Its Implications," *Minerva: An Internet Journal of Philosophy* 17 (2013): 90.

53 Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation*, paperback ed. (New York: Zone Books, 2009), 40. Pavel Gregoric maintains a similar sensual route, claiming that the common

cognition or awareness, but rather forms of sensation. Mark Shiffman and T.K. Johansen argue that the physical and the mental are an actualisation of sense perception and sensibility.[54]

For Aristotle, the common faculty sensing one's very feeling is most manifest in tactile sensations. Nancy carries out a double movement: first, the empirical putting-to-work and then the *logos* of sense pronouncing itself.[55] This is the tactile reflexivity of sensation whereby the senses disclose not only what they are sensing, but also *that* they are sensing.[56] Here, Nancy pays attention to the haptic interval, which he poses at the chiasmic intersection of the blind spot. The blind haptic interval is an undecidable syncopation which comprises and energises the hyletic circle. It is a cancelling out and a withdrawal on which everything is contingent because the movement of the chiasm requires an incommensurable desert, a deserted withdrawal, that maintains a spiral movement, an *élan*, which is perpetually the same, yet always in difference.

Nancy opens this impossible dialectic into a manner of withdrawing from representation, from absolute knowledge, which constitutes a syncopated synthesis of the undecided self: "It undoes itself," Nancy writes, "and it constitutes itself, fissures itself in the very gesture and instant in which it overcomes, fixes, and effaces its features."[57] As such, "it is the *art*."[58] That is, it is the art of uncovering the reciprocal

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sense, for example, is identified with the sense of touch as an empirical sense of perception; see Pavel Gregoric, *Aristotle on the Common Sense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

54 Aristotle, *De anima*, ed. Mark Shiffman (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2010), 22–23, and T.K. Johansen, *Aristotle on the Sense-Organs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 288–90. Although I will not address the empirical and transcendental split, this trajectory may be challenged, as seen in Aristotle: "While in respect of all the other senses we fall below many species of animals, in respect of touch we far excel all other species in exactness of discrimination. That is why man is the most intelligent (*phronimōtaton*) of all animals. This is confirmed by the fact that it is to differences in the organ of touch and to nothing else that the differences between man and man in respect of natural endowment are due;" see *On the Soul*, 421a20–25, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1:670.

55 For Aristotle, touch is conceived as the utmost essential sense among perceptive beings, since "without touch there can be no other sense." See *On the Soul* 435a4 (1:692). The senses are also interdependent on touch, since they "no doubt, perceive by contact." See 435a19 (1:691); however, touch is an independent sense: "There is one sense function, and the controlling sensory organ is one, though differing as a faculty of perception in relation to each genus, e. g., sounds or colour; and since this subsists with in association chiefly with the faculty of touch (for this can exist apart from all the other organs of sense, but none of them can exist apart from it—a subject of which we have treated in our speculations concerning the soul);" see Aristotle, *On Sleep* 455a20–25 (in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 1:723).

56 And again, but on a different order, "And thought thinks itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same." See *Metaphysics* 1072b20–21 (*The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2:1695).

57 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Discourse of the Syncope: Logodaedalus*, trans. Saul Anton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 10.

relations of understanding and imagination in a given presentation. Thus art, for Nancy, is the exposition of its accord and discord of appearance.

Lapsed Time

Morris's *Blind Time III* (1985) performs the following event score in iron oxide on paper:

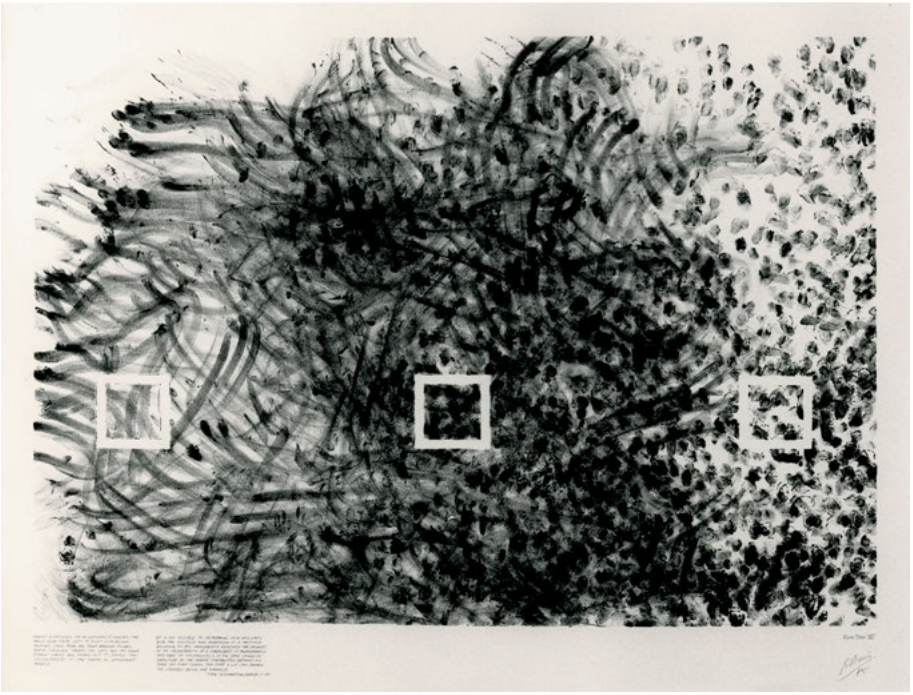

Fig. 15: Robert Morris, *Blind Time III*, 1985, iron oxide on paper, 96.5x127 cm. © Robert Morris / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York (Courtesy of Castelli Gallery).

> Working blindfolded for an estimated 5 minutes, the hands work from left to right with random motions. Then from the right random touches, which converge toward the left, are put down (three spaces are taped out to sample the discreetness of the marks in the different areas).
>
> It is not possible to determine with accuracy both the position and momentum of a particle. According to the uncertainty principle the producer of the uncertainty of a component of momentum as the Planck constant (h): ($\Delta p \times \Delta x \sim h$). Some say that during this time a lot can happen, the universe being one example.
> Time estimation error: +1'–39"

58 Nancy, 102.

The score and the drawing show two different schemes: random motions and three white cubic frames. The white frames conceal the traces of the artist's fingers in a horizontally ordered sequence. The overlay of the geometric series upon the chaotic background corresponds to Morris's conception of time introduced in what seem to be two different chronological sequences for the piece; that is, his estimated set of minutes for drawing and its prolonged actuality, which does not accord with the apt rule of time, but lapses out of the ordained chronology. The white cubic forms are measured squares, articulating their geometrical overlay of finite perfection. They stand in contrast to the unexpected momentum of black traces. Morris explains their undefined composition rendering Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in quantum mechanics (1927), according to which any of a variety of mathematical inequalities asserts a fundamental limit to the precision with which certain pairs of physical properties of a particle, known as complementary variables, position and momentum —as noted in the score—can be known. Heisenberg's principle reveals a double division. First, the separation of knowledge from the physical world. If knowledge of every quantum theoretical quantity is maintained and derived from a coordinate system, the latter fixes a partial observation. Therefore, "a definite experiment can never give exact information on all quantum-theoretical quantities. Rather, it divides physical quantities into 'known' and 'unknown' (or more or less accurately known quantities) in a way characteristic of the experiment in question."[59] The second division, which is derived from the first, is the division of position and momentum. In *Nuclear Physics* (1943), Heisenberg explains the problem of the principle of uncertainty "in its simplest form as follows: one can never know with perfect accuracy both of those two important factors which determine the movement of one of the smallest particles—its position and its velocity. It is impossible to determine accurately *both* the position and the direction and speed of a particle *at the same instant*."[60] In fact, accurate evaluation of one is contingent upon uncertain knowledge of the other, since "if we determine experimentally its exact position at any given moment, its movement is disturbed to such a degree by that very experiment that we shall then be unable to find it at all. And conversely, if we are able to measure exactly the velocity of a particle, the picture of its position becomes totally blurred."[61] In "The Physical Content of Quantum Kinematics and Mechanics," Heisenberg repeats this uncertainty as "the more precisely the position is determined, the less precisely the momentum is known, and conversely."[62] He maintains that the measurement of time does not only provide meaning to quantity, but also *creates* a particular value for this quan-

59 Werner Heisenberg, "The Physical Content of Quantum Kinematics and Mechanics," in *Quantum Theory and Measurement*, ed. John Archibald Wheeler and Wojciech Hubert Zurek (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 70.

60 Werner Heisenberg, *Nuclear Physics*, trans. Frank Gaynor and Amethe von Zeppelin (London: Methuen, 1953), 30.

61 Heisenberg, 30.

62 Heisenberg, "The Physical Content of Quantum Kinematics and Mechanics," 64.

tity. In fact, "measurement" here means that a momentum is physically real via observation alone. Nevertheless, this palpable reality is always partial, since measuring momentum means that a position will be measured with some inaccuracy.[63] Thus, we can only attribute discontinuous undecidability to the relations of position and momentum.

In *Physics and Philosophy*, Heisenberg claims there is no absolute universal time. In his thoughts about Kant, he refutes a priori forms of pure intuition and the law of causality.[64] The uncertainty principle cast doubt on the reliability of any partial observation presented in a diagrammatic form which includes measurement, language, and knowledge. "What happens," Heisenberg wrote, "depends on our way of observing it or on the fact that we observe it."[65] Morris's blind passage is a setting apart of both confident intervals and unmeasured intervals. They allude to several orders of time which are strictly concerned with the function of registering decisions. To return to Heisenberg, "the observer has only the function of registering decisions, i. e., processes in space and time, and it does not matter if the observer is an apparatus or a human being; but the registration, i. e., the transition from the 'possible' to the 'actual,' is absolutely necessary here."[66] Time is bound to the register of the observer, who creates a reality via observation. Morris's blind-time actions determine the drawings' reality as uncertain relations which limit the possibility of simultaneously measuring time and position in accuracy. "Present time" marks an interval between the observer and the event at the moment of observation:

> In the theory of relativity [...] future and past are separated by a finite time interval the length of which depends on the distance from the observer. [...] Therefore, an observer can at a given instant neither know of nor influence any event at a distant point which takes place between two characteristic times. The one time is the instant at which a light signal has to be given from the

63 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari allude to Heisenberg's observer position and the possibility of the subjective interference of the measure with the measured. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 129–30.

64 Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*, new ed. (New York: Harper, 1962), 49.

65 Heisenberg, 19. Heisenberg's use of the term *anschaulichen* is significant to understanding the role of perception in forming knowledge. Hilgevoord and Uffnik commentated *anschaulichen* as one of those German words that defy an unambiguous translation into other languages. In his biography of Heisenberg David C. Cassidy, refers to *anschaulichen* as "perceptual" (David C. Cassidy, *Uncertainty: The Life and Science of Werner Heisenberg* [New York: Freeman, 1992], 226). Literally, the closest translation of the term *anschaulich* is "visualisable." But, as in most languages, words that make reference to vision are not always intended literally. Seeing is widely used as a metaphor for understanding, especially for immediate understanding. Hence, *anschaulich* also means "intelligible" or "intuitive." See Jan Hilgevoord and Jos Uffink, "The Mathematical Expression of the Uncertainty Principle," in *Microphysical Reality and Quantum Formalism: Proceedings of the Conference "Microphysical Reality and Quantum Formalism," Urbino, Italy, Sept. 25th–Oct. 3rd, 1985*, ed. A. van der Merwe, F. Selleri, and G. Tarozzi (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1987): 911–14.

66 Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*, 89.

> point of the event in order to reach the observer at the instant of observation. The other time is the instant at which a light signal, given by the observer at the instant of the observation, reaches the point of the event. The whole *finite time interval* between these two instants may be said to belong to the "*present time*" for the observer at the instant of observation. Any event taking place between the two characteristic times may be called "simultaneous" with the act of observation.[67]

The Interval of Time Does Not See

The intervals of time, senses, position and momentum, and text and action all allude to cutting out irrational and blind time or syncopated rhythm while keeping presupposed time a numerical measure at the opening of each score. In contrast to presupposed time, blind haptic time effects measure since the relations signified in Morris's "time errors" are unstable. These *finite time intervals* mark and frame the limit of the interval in relation to the first estimation and yet, initiating the haptic drawing time, they touch upon lapsed time, that cut-out irrational time. Morris's cut-out time and blind actions compose an empirical quasi-transcendental proposition. First, it is empirical insomuch as it is a mode of an auto-experience in time. Second, this auto-experience is the work of art in its technique. It shows its sense by touching itself touching its own sense. Time becomes the form of the action of differentiation, a temporal interval amid zones. Nancy's touch is also the place of non-seeing, lack, and deprived sense. It is posited as the spacing of the chiasmic intersection where all is withdrawn. In *The Muses*, Nancy returns to Heidegger's 1969 essay "Art and Space" to declare the origin and sense of spacing as an act of creation and the difference between zones.[68] However, I will circumvent this move in order to concentrate on cut-out time. Morris's cut-out time is an instructive interval that as such touches upon itself, each time, again and again, in blind haptic spacing. It reverberates in Nancy's hyletic spiral as a temporal series indebted to the long tradition from Descartes to Freud via Lacan to Deleuze's split "I."

In order to understand Morris's interval of time, we must turn to Deleuze's critique of the temporal subject. Deleuze returns to Kant's critique of Descartes's think-

67 Heisenberg, 71.

68 The spatial nature of Nancy's heterogeneous haptic zones stems from his interpretation of Heidegger's construal of space as the absolute difference of appearance. In "Why Are There Several Arts?", Nancy cites Heidegger: "This is why Heidegger could write: 'We should learn to recognize that things themselves are places, and do not merely belong to place'"; see "Why Are There Several Arts?", 19. On the connection between place and space, Heidegger writes in "Art and Space" that a "clearing away (*Räumen*) is uttered therein. [...] Clearing away brings forth the free, the openness for man's settling and dwelling." See Martin Heidegger, "Art and Space," trans. Charles H. Seibert, *Man and World* 6 (1973): 5. See also Nancy's referral to Heidegger's *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 23, and his "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 75.

ing subject, claiming that it rests on a succession of anterior time, the progression of the time of the Idea, Platonic, divine time.[69] Plato and Aristotle thought of time as being cyclical and inseparable from the movement of physical bodies. Exposed to the externality of the outside, the *cogito* holds no innate ideas prior to the simultaneity of the soul. Kant critiques Descartes's move: if "I think" is a determination, then "I am/I exist" is an undeterminable determination; for we do not know how the indeterminate becomes determinate or the manner in which it will appear determinate. Hence, Kant rejects Descartes's claim that "I am a thinking substance." Kant adds a component to Descartes's *cogito:* interior time. It is only through time that the indeterminable self becomes determinate.[70] Pure and empty time cuts right through the consciousness of the subject. This fracture introduces a fundamental split in the subject: on one extreme, the active spontaneity of "I think" (towards unity/synthesis); on the other, the experiencing empirical self, effected by thought. The issue at hand is no longer succession, but a chiasm which is produced by a pure and empty form of time. I experience myself. The "I" effects itself in the form of time. This auto-affection is the interiorised difference between being and thought. It splits the subject into two: the empirico-transcendental doublet. The active synthesis of thought and the passive receptivity of effect; a touch, if you will, without synthesis.

Deleuze develops this cut, this interruption, in his third synthesis of time. No longer an a priori subjective "pure" form, time is rendered as a productive power constituted by a forceful, irrational cut. The cut draws together both before and after: thus, the totality of time. The cut thus determines the before and the after, which no longer rhyme:

> We can then distinguish a more or less extensive past and a future in inverse proportion, but the future and the past here are not empirical and dynamic determinations of time: they are formal and fixed characteristics which follow *a priori* from the order of time, as though they comprised a static synthesis of time. The synthesis is necessarily static, since time is no longer subordinated to movement; time is the most radical form of change, but the form of change does not change.[71]

Exteriority is thus determined as the past before and the future after the cut. The pure present is the process of becoming equal to the event of experiencing internal difference. In the fourth section of *Difference and Repetition*, entitled "Asymmetrical Synthesis of the Sensible," Deleuze turns to Richard Dedekind's concept of the limit in the theory of real numbers:

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69 Daniela Voss shows how for both Plato and Aristotle, time was defined as a "number of movement" counted by the celestial revolution of planets passing through certain "cardinal points." The uniform and circular motion of planets provided a means to mark off regular periods of time. Consequently, time was thought of as being cyclical and inseparable from the movement of physical bodies. See Daniela Voss, "Deleuze's Third Synthesis of Time," *Deleuze Studies* 7, no. 2 (2013):194–216.
70 Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 31–32.
71 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 89.

> In short, the limit must be conceived not as the limit of a function but as a genuine cut [*coupure*], a border between the changeable and the unchangeable within the function itself [...] close to the modern interpretation of calculus: the limit no longer presupposes the ideas of a continuous variable and infinite approximation. On the contrary, the notion of limit grounds a new, static and purely ideal [fictive, pure, passive] definition of continuity.[72]

Continuity, according to Dedekind, is composed of both rational and irrational numbers. The latter mark gaps that create discontinuity and incompleteness. He used a method of division, today known as the "Dedekind cuts," to divide a point in a line into two classes so that all the points in one class are always to the left of all the points in the other. Each cut determines one point, or alternatively, it can designate a gap between a rational number and an irrational quantity. Hence, cuts define irrational numbers. With these, he constructed an order of "real numbers" which included rational and irrational numbers. This order was devoid of the notions or intuitions of space and time and specifies an infinite and discrete multiplicity of elements.

In Dedekind's order, Deleuze saw a new, static, and purely ideal definition of continuity. He used this order to construct a time that is determined a priori and designates a static state of affairs. This is the Deleuzian a priori, a-subjective static synthesis of discrete elements (past and future moments) which are distributed by the cut. It may be characterised as a false infinity that includes an infinity of gaps, which are designated by the irrational cut; that is, the interstice between a series of rational numbers. They symbolise the irruption of the virtual event within the empirical continuum of space and the chronological succession of instants. These series of times bring together the past and future of becoming via contact with the outside.

A series of time is a cut; that is, difference-in-itself. In infinite repetition yet never the same, a series of time changes due to selections of desire or thought. Why desire? Morris's desire is dark, blind, and irrational. He returns to Lacan's drive as a force and a movement that strives towards completion and unity which, however, always remains incomplete. It moves and motivates the cyclic spiral.[73] Stemming from Freud's *Vorlust* and the energetic cycle of the erotogenic zones, desire is at once an internal and an external force. Why thought? The temporal cut constituting thought demands a desire for self each time, eternally falling into the blind spot of incoherence and dissolution. Hence, Morris is performing a passage of the divided self, passing towards the unity of the "I," towards an image yet to come. Morris's proposition of the haptic cut, his passage of lapsed time, takes place in the blind haptic movement of pressured imprints. Again and again, there are hundreds of drawings, unspoken, inarticulate fingerprints. They pose the fractured self as a passive blind spot which generates the pictorial act. They reveal the sense of painting not as a universal concept, but as the singular self-portrait of Morris's plural touch-

72 Deleuze, 172.

73 Morris, "Writing with Davidson," 622, 624.

ings, plural cuts. Formally, the cut-out time(s) are intervals in an "impersonal and pre-individual" transcendental field, in which the vestige of the acting artist—marking his pressured weight towards an image—produces empirical formations by active synthesis. Each drawing, each set, each series is moved at the heart by syncopation, a dead heart that preforms and performs in passivity. This is the weak, passive form drifting amidst the effects of the touching senses of sense.

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