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RESEARCH

Per-forming the *Sense of Touch*: A Spatio-Temporal Embodied Technology of Resistance

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How does resistance and struggle arise and from where?

What embodied mechanism and social conditions allow for thought to be thought and for action to emerge?

To what extent are movements and freedoms already 'choreographed' or pre-determined by regulatory bio(techno)systems and how can post-modern choreography *incorporate* the radical social shifts and conflicts of our times towards equally radical 'post-safe' ethics and practices?

A historical, philosophical and psychoanalytical study of the senses with a focus on the sense of touch will aim to reveal the unexpected tactile dynamics of biopolitics (Foucault, 1979) and insert touch into the relational workings of post-capitalistic struggle. Expanded beyond mere contact, touch is posited as a pivotal socio-political instrument of regulation and orientation, and by deduction, an equally powerful mean of resistance. Using historical and contemporary forms of activism, this paper will assert touch as precursor to action in an event arising from the body. The lived body via the senses – of which touch is posited as the mother of all (Montagu, 1971) – is reformulated as a technology bearing and reproducing sensory values and hierarchies structured by ideology (Howes, 2005), therefore as historical and subject to change and intervention rather than physiologically stable entity (Duden, 1991a). Here, the sensual body is boldly re-drawn as wilfully *trans-forming*, of itself and social relations at once.

Keywords: Body; touch; senses; biopolitics; technology; action; resistance; thought; knowledge

Introduction

Touch is not just a private act. It is a fundamental medium for the expression, experience and contestation of social values and hierarchies. The culture of touch involves all of culture. (Classen, 2005: 1)

Touch is intimate, erotic, affectionate, gentle, brutal and punitive. In the West, touch alludes to a basic physical contact – a ‘brute physicality’ (ibid: 5). A ‘lower’ sense, it stands in opposition to the processes of the mind and the intellect. The western dichotomy achieves to distinguish and divide people and their labours e.g. masculine versus feminine, intellectual versus manual labours (ibid). The hierarchy of the senses in turn creates a societal hierarchy that ultimately recognises and gives worth, visibility, voice and privilege to some groups and not others. Perhaps for this reason, marginalised sections of society have, throughout history, turned to the tactile practice of forming and maintaining actual bodily contact with others as a key strategy of resistance, and an overwhelming expression of solidarity in the face of political struggle e.g. the civil rights’ March from Selma to Montgomery (1965). Today, the Hong Kong protests see the human chain practised by both protestors and state forces to control the crowd (Hale and Graham-Harrison, 2019). Warfare is too inherently tactile e.g. the Falklands War in 1982 was fought on the ground with bayonets. Although contemporary warfare technologies reduce the physical contact, they dramatically increase casualties in collateral damage at the ‘touch’ of a button e.g. the Iraq War from 2003–2011.

In both East and West, resistance via bodily touch is a fundamental articulation of struggle. It is practised in martial arts, somatic and participatory dance (e.g. Steve Paxton’s Contact Improvisation) and social dancing (Furse, 2011). In the 1970s, the American post-modern movement, of which Paxton was a key figure,¹ develops the concept of ‘the choreographed body’ as a tool for resistance and transformation. The notion emerged in response to the context of social and political unrest in the 1960s and 1970s, namely the civil rights, anti-war and liberation movements (Furse 2011).

¹ Alongside Deborah Hay, Trisha Brown and Lisa Nelson to name a few.

'The choreographed body' is based on the idea that our bodies and movements in the everyday are expressions of learnt and imposed behaviour, and therefore of oppression (e.g. the way we walk). The post-modern dance movement achieved prominence by cohering timely philosophical and psychoanalytical studies, activism and physical practice as an artform. The reassessment of the body and its relational mode through 70s cutting edge research and theoretical work^{2,3} stimulated the development of new forms of embodiment in dance and beyond, embodiment that integrates anti-capitalist, anti-militaristic, anti-sexist ideologies (Furse, 2011).

This article does not relate to staged choreography *per se*, but the choreography and dance that structure our everyday lives – what Goffman would call the performance of everyday life (1956) – and on which we might reflect to bring about different ways of being in the world, alone and with. As a movement researcher and practitioner, my project knowingly builds upon post-modern dance radical and distinctively haptic innovations and methodologies. However, I deviate and leave such genealogies to reflect the major shifts in philosophical discourse since the 80s and our (post-)neoliberal technological context. The body and its relational play via the senses is deconstructed and denaturalised. It is no longer thought of as 'natural', 'biological' or ahistorical but as biotechnoplastic⁴ – malleable – that is intervened and intervenes upon and *reproduces*. The concept 'body', rooted in dominant representational practices (history, science, medicine, philosophy, art and global media), is reassessed to reveal an inherent relationship between idea and matter and how the two dynamically intertwine via the sense of touch, casting light on my use

² The American post-modern dance movement drew specifically upon psychoanalytical and physiological research in embryology and child development. They discerned cis mother-infant touch communication as innate and pre-cultural. They recognised its potential to neutralise gender and sexuality, flatten hierarchies and thereby reorganise the body away from hegemonic conditioning (Furse, 2011).

³ *The First Relationship: Infant and Mother* (1977) by Daniel Stern was a key influence on Paxton and the development of Contact Improvisation. The psychoanalyst describes the primary social interaction as 'dances' and 'biologically designed choreography' (1977: 9).

⁴ Biotechnoplastic: the term is indebted to Paul B. (formerly Beatriz) Preciado's writings including his lecture at the Wellcome Collection, as part of *Transitional States* programme of events in London in June 2018.

of the terminology 'per-form'. Here, the body is re-affirmed reflexive biotechplasticity of global-collective-individual dimension and reach, and the sense of touch, central to bio(techno)political modes of reproduction and expansion, and therefore strategies of resistance.

This paper aims to generate new knowledge about touch – that beyond the physical contact – and through touch, new knowledge about neoliberal oppression and struggle, the body and relationality. A fresh formulation is attempted by inserting *distance* into the act of touch and argue the inherently haptic character of biopolitics, qualified as the dynamic socio-geographic construction of bodies, their orientation, taxonomy, genealogies and family relations. Touch, particularly the relationship between the body, the environment, the sense of touch, thought, action and knowledge, is explored through contemporary and historical acts of resistance, and Didier Anzieu's psychoanalytical theory of Skin-ego (1989). Together, they enable us to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon and begin to draw or *flesh out a sense* of 'post-safe' ethics and practices anchored in 21st century forms and embodiments.

Preliminary investigation of touch

A primary exploration of the spatiality, temporality and dynamics of touch will inform the manner bodies and their senses are orientated and constructed over time. Although I concede, as Classen rightly emphasises, that 'attempts to explain tactile culture through scientific models are often more informative about the culture of science than about the scientific basis of culture' (2005: 4), a brief account of carefully selected scientific theories of touch might lay a useful foundation on which to build my philosophical argument.

Touch via the skin organ is understood to give access to and establish a relationship between bodily awareness and external reality (de Vignemont and Massin, 2013: 4). Touch holds a privileged position, a presupposed objectivity, in that touch is the only sense that let us know that the object or physical world exists independently from us due to the feeling of physical effort and resistance (ibid: 10). As such the experience of tension and pressure is always tactile in nature. Touch

is too inescapably inter-relational or bi-polar (Katz, 1925): 'every instance of tactile perception presents us not only with external objects, but also with our body' (de Vignemont and Massin, 2013: 12). Touch is spatial and temporal: the temporal dimension of tactile perception is necessary to explore spatial dimensions, namely the exploration of three-dimensional space and objects. Information about shape and texture are picked up by the movement of the hand around the object and sensed vibrations on the skin (O'Shaughnessy, 2003: 629, 656–680; Martin, 1992, 1993; Katz, 1925), a process that necessitates time. Information must be understood as coded in both spatial and temporal dimension of touch: the longer we spend running our hands over a space or object, the more information and knowledge of the three-dimensional space/object we gather. Concomitantly, tactile perception gives data about the body's own spatial localisation through accessing our body image. Body image is a long-term body map, defined as a mental topological and geometric representation, which plays a structural role in spatially shaping tactile sensations (O'Shaughnessy, 1980, 1995). A mental map or representation is by its very nature prosthetic, constructed and technological (Preciado, 2018: 8, 25, 27–28, 48). The internalisation of the material and immaterial demonstrates the body's capacity to stretch beyond its corporeal biological envelope or skin – likewise the skin's capacity to extend – to absorb and embed non-physical extensions like body image or phantom limb alongside physical-mechanical bodily extensions like tools and artificial body parts (Schilder, 1935; Vesey, 1961; O'Shaughnessy, 1980; Martin, 1995). Today, the question of the body's tactile boundaries and its relationship to materiality and immateriality finds, of course, new timeliness in the context of new media and electro-digital devices.⁵

'[T]actile sensations immediately cries to us "I am here"' (de Vignemont and Massin, 2013: 16). This suggests that they are inescapably twofold: they attend to the space the body inhabits and the bodily relation/position to it (localisation), and they are simultaneously existential, the "I am here" echoing "I exist" or "I feel myself

⁵ Benthien refers to 'the [...] world-spanning web that media prophets today are calling the "new skin" of humanity (2002: 234).

feeling”.⁶ The twofold spatio-temporal existential and reflexive character of touch is captured by Kierkegaard:

Just as one discovers which land one is in by sticking a finger into the soil and smelling it: I stick my finger into life – it smells of nothing. Where am I? “The World.” What does that mean? (1972: 67)

‘Where am I?’ is ambiguous and calls for the ontological question ‘What am I?’, suggesting that one informs the other and *vice versa*, and an open circular system of communication between the two. The pressure theory of touch developed by Weber in 1846 is of particular interest as it points to the dynamic character of touch:

[Touch] is essentially a *sense of force*. Our concepts of force would be very much less developed were we unable to feel pressure or to sense competing forces in which an equilibrium is established so that no movements are produced, yet in which the forces can still be felt. (Weber, 1846: 196)⁷

Through Weber’s pressure theory, the notion of touch can be rethought and expanded to include the dynamic interplay of several entities, namely directionality, mass, energy and gravity operating within the field of distance and proximity, rather than direct contact. In order to be perceived, force must be met or counteracted by another force, that exerted by the body – the case of two forces pressing against each other (de Vignemont and Massin, 2013: 7). In addition, the more spatially determinate the sensation of pressure is (thereby activating the sequence of ‘feeling it’ followed by ‘seeing it’) the less it takes time to experience pressure (Tipper et al., 2001). Equally, the less spatially determinate the sensation is, the more it takes time to become aware of it (de Vignemont and Massin, 2013: 15). Following the logic, to know it depends on localising it visually. This, in turn, suggests a discordance

⁶ see Merleau-Ponty’s concept of ‘double sensations’ i.e. one hand touching another (1962), although I argue against Merleau-Ponty that both hands must be understood as both ‘active’ in sensing (Irigaray, 2011).

⁷ Weber’s proposal was confirmed by the discovery of pressure spots on the skin (Blix, 1884; Goldscheider 1884; Donaldson, 1885).

between visual and proprioceptive information (Folegatti et al. 2009; Moseley et al 2008).

My project draws from such discordance and Weber's pressure theory to begin to insert touch to the fundamental relational workings of the post-capitalist machine and argue the insidious tactile character of orientation and taxonomy that plays against and through bodies, exerted by global neoliberalist politics and economics. It will allow us to expand the Western understanding of touch beyond mere physical contact to encompass the haptic dynamics of biopolitics as defined by Foucault, which mechanism relies on sensed proximities – a constant presence and surveillance (1979) – and which I align here to tension and pressure. Weber's theory enables us to argue that touch is not only an instrument of regulation, orientation and oppression but within the neoliberal economy, it operates predominantly within the realm of distance. The theory also brings to the fore that touch is bipolar and dynamic: 'we not only are impinged upon by external reality; we also impinge [...] Touch, unlike the other senses, modifies its objects. It reminds us that we are not only observers of the world but actors in it.' (Yi-Fu Tuan in Classen, 2005: 78–9). Touch, redefined as a tool of oppression and pressing against, is thereby re-orientable for purposes of resistance and revolution. In this schema, I would like to posit touch as the contact of two/multiple forces or directionalities extending across space and time (as opposed to skin to skin) and precursor to action in an event arising from the body.

Touch and Neoliberalism

Paradoxically, in a Western world dominated by the gaze, sight-based technologies and panoptic surveillance (Foucault, 1979), modernity and postmodernity emerge as the spatio-temporal and tactile site of pressure, resistance, distraction (Chidester in Classen, 2005: 61), and relentless negotiation. Chidester writes:

By paying so much attention to the dominance of sight in Western culture, we forget that our principal theorists of modernity, Marx and Freud, were theorists of tactility – capitalist oppression, psychological repression – in touch with resistance. (in Classen, 2005: 61)

In his essay *The American Touch: Tactile Imagery in American Religion and Politics*, Chidester describes the ‘binding’⁸ – inherently haptic – character of American religion and politics⁹ (ibid: 49–65). Indeed, they both function to ‘bind’ relations ideologically to create a distinct and coherent social collective and order (ibid: 49). Rhetoric and discursive representation cement a ‘unified system of beliefs and practices’ (ibid: 54). Such a system notably dispenses from and erases race, class and gender difference (ibid: 53). It therefore invites what Chidester refers to as ‘the haptic dynamics of the unseen [and unheard] forces of modernity’ pervading contemporary culture (ibid: 53, *my own addition in brackets*).

Sarah Ahmed asserts that capitalism is fundamentally based on the prejudices of sexism and racism (2017: 6). I would argue that global neoliberal reliance on the ever-increasing (re)production of a cheap workforce in the cheap labour of women making up half the population is further compounded by a reliance on and expectation of cheap labour across segregated groups across the world (in the UK, people of colour, immigrants, migrants, asylum seekers, refugees legal or otherwise, and trafficked population). I suggest that within such economy, low pay and exploitative conditions come to be justified and naturalised under sustained patriarchal and colonial prejudices. For example, women’s reproductive/maternal function¹⁰ and skin colour means that women with children (those predominantly white middle class) are forced to concede to the apparently altruistic neoliberal ‘work-life balance’ narrative which slashes and caps their potential to earn, ultimately their autonomy and re-institutes women’s economic dependence on another and precarity. In contrast, the woman

⁸ The etymology of religion in latin is religare, meaning to tie or bind. It is worth noting too that etymologically in latin, ‘to exert’ is made of both “serere”, meaning “to bind” and “ex”, meaning “out”, which turn into ‘to perform or practise’ by the mid seventeenth century.

⁹ Chidester’s analysis pays particular attention to Bill Clinton’s campaign rhetoric of the ‘New Covenant’ in the early 90s (2005: 52).

¹⁰ Men who perform the role of primary carer are equally affected, especially since the recent reforms in same-sex marriage (2013) and adoption (2002). Here, I am not contesting that heterosexual men have also fulfilled the role of primary carer – this is obviously not a comment on sexual orientation but the multiplicity of genders performing traditionally maternal reproductive labours. This argument is also relevant to any individuals primary responsible and caring for another, for example an elderly or a sibling – the majority of which remains performed by women and girls, although not exclusively.

of colour suffers a triple blow of racism, sexism and classism. Her employer(s)' colonial prejudices about excessive fertility, 'natural' maternal body and capacity to endure¹¹ means that she is assumed ideally suited to having children and domestic, manual and childcare works. It also means that she is expected to work without respite and is therefore unable to look after her own children (Roberts, 2017: 13–15) for she, as subject, is simultaneously 'mis-value[d] and devalue[d] (ibid: 278) by her employer(s), required to be both present (fulfil her 'function') and absent (defaced, loss of personhood). Low pay and exploitative conditions, including modern day slavery is normalised and naturalised by the worker's skin colour and/or foreignness and/or illegal status (absence of official papers) or homelessness – conditions, I argue, fuelled by the Home Office's stringent right-wing immigration policies and cuts to social care since 2010 under Conservative government.

Behind the neo-liberal tenets of 'healthy' free-market capitalism creating economic opportunities for all globally, evidence shows that the 90s global trade reforms have instead intensified poverty and widened inequalities. While consumption became the embodiment of freedom, power and happiness, and the individual's access to choice, powers to buy and accumulate, a fundamental human and democratic right (Gabriel and Lang, 1995), the privatisation of public services (first introduced under Thatcher and Regan in the 80s), including health, means that successive governments have systematically cut their provisions to public services, neglecting the poor and most vulnerable groups (Pfeffer, 2011). In this context, it becomes imperative to redefine what we call touch or violence not just as physical contact or aggression but to encompass the legislations that cut services people need to sustain (Federici, 2019). Water, food, work, education, healthcare and youth services are all tools of reproduction (Benjamin, 2019). Austerity measures,¹² cuts, policies that claim to tackle poverty and climate change, coercive healthcare

¹¹ I refer to a capacity to endure hard manual work and physical pain.

¹² Dr Jenny Douglas stresses that black women have been disproportionately hit by austerity measures in the UK. If they have more than two children, they no longer receive benefit for example (Midwifery Conversations, 2019).

initiatives¹³ and welfare reforms,¹⁴ are all an assault on reproduction and kinship, that of the most marginalised populations. They point to a systemic racial order in the West (ibid). Power shaped by colonial histories including slavery comes to maintain the daily diffused violence of exploitation, oppression and political exclusion under capitalism. Insidious violence also plays out through ‘the militarisation of everyday life’ (Federici, 2019) in both public and private sectors – a culture of surveillance, protection and defence (security guards, surveillance systems). Federici stresses a constant interchange between the violence of governments and institutions, and private violence (ibid). Racism is too embedded in all our (white) conventions, etiquettes and civilities like everyday ‘niceness’ (DiAngelo, 2019)¹⁵ or comments about a black person’s hair. They act as a kind of touch on the other.¹⁶ They are everyday diffused ‘microaggressions’ (Dr Jenny Douglas, *Midwifery Conversations*, 2019). They *work* to repeat and cement violent power asymmetries between people along the

¹³ An example of which is *Pause* project: a private initiative launched in 2013 and purchased by thirty-four local authorities in the United Kingdom. The programme gives women comprehensive healthcare cover and provision, on the condition that they consent to being injected a long-term contraceptive. The launch of the programme coincided with cuts to public funded healthcare resources in the UK. This initiative demonstrates that racialised bodies continue to be targeted through new forms of regulations and interventions in women’s fertility. Neo-Malthusian and eugenics continue to undermine women’s health and autonomy over their body. Although the programme fails to save the state any money, in fact costing the state a disproportionate amount more, the initiative is successful in projecting ideologies and the narrative of ‘improved’ population control (Kumar and Wilson, 2019).

¹⁴ Prof Dorothy Roberts identifies that under President Bill Clinton in 1986 the US welfare system is restructured. Welfare ceases being a constitutional right and becomes a ‘discipline and behaviour modulator’ e.g. the ‘family cap’ adopted steadily across the US since 1992 which finds its British equivalent in the ‘Two-children policy’ introduced in 2017 (*Midwifery Conversations*, 2019).

¹⁵ Robin DiAngelo (2019) writes: ‘it becomes essential for white people to quickly and eagerly telegraph their niceness to people of color. Niceness in these instances is conveyed through tone of voice (light), eye contact accompanied by smiling and the conjuring of affinities (shared enjoyment of a music genre, compliments on hair or style, statements about having travelled to the country the “other” is perceived to have come from or knowing people from the other’s community) [...] Niceness, [in contrast to kindness] is fleeting, hollow and performative.’ (2019, *my own addition in brackets*).

¹⁶ I would like to thank Royona Mitra, Cristina Fernandes Rosa, Arabella Stanger and Simon Ellis for bringing their pioneering workshop ‘anti-racist dance practices’ to *Independent Dance* (2019, London) and making space for the most challenging (and ego shattering) conversations yet about race and whiteness. For more information about their research project, please visit www.danceandwhiteness.coventry.ac.uk.

common axes of race, class, sex, gender, sexuality and disability. Federici states that violence (diffused or otherwise) occurs because there is inherent human resistance and struggle. Violence, she continues, needs to be understood as a weak response to a known incapacity to ever totally enforce one's will on another (2019). For this reason, 'austerity and privatisation go hand in hand with increase in punishment, that in order to contain the very people who are the most *touched*, suffering the most.' (Prof Roberts, *Midwifery Conversations*, 2019).

Neoliberal haptic control, regulation and orientation of bodies is further articulated in the construction of gender and sexual difference. Through a feminist phenomenological perspective, Ahmed develops the notion of 'gender fatalism' (Ahmed, 2017: 25). She describes it as a form of 'sequencing' (ibid): from sex assigned at birth comes gender, defined as behaviour and likeness under nature and time (ibid). Taking example from the popular expression 'boys will be boys', Ahmed notes that 'what "will be" is decided by "what is"' (ibid). As such, behaviour and likeness to the corresponding cis sex stands for an 'explanation', but also marks an 'expectation' (ibid). Ahmed writes that '[t]he "will be" in "boys will be boys" acquires the force of prediction' that acts as a 'command' (ibid) to fulfil, to live up to, even a 'debt' (ibid: 52). She asserts: '[t]o be assigned a sex in this binary system is a way of being directed toward a future' (ibid: 26).¹⁷ Irigaray points to Darwinian models of biology, and cultural processes of normalisation, that demand conformation to existing systems and *press* the subject 'to *do* like, to *be* like' (1993: 31, *emphasis in original*).

The insidious tactile reach and influence of the regime under the capitalisation and normalisation of the living',¹⁸ as Foucault suspected in the 70s, goes far beyond the state apparatus and is today accelerated through 'new dynamics of advanced

¹⁷ Judith Butler develops the notion of 'girling' as a social mechanism whereby the future of the yet unborn is invested in by the parents and already predicted based on its sex and within a phallogentric model (1993).

¹⁸ From the eighteenth into the twentieth century, American-European practices were guided and legitimised by the systematic classification and division of the demographic based on the 'capitalisation of the living' (Foucault): the insertion of the population into systems of utility. The 'population' required to be managed, administered and the full potential of the collective required to be maximised and harnessed (Foucault, 1998: 24–25).

technocapitalism, global media and biotechnologies' (Preciado, 2013: 25) meshed with

... administrative systems [...] that sort and manage the access and use of [...] technologies, distributing life chances according to class, race, ability, gender, or sexuality [...] [A] normative regime for segregated distribution [...] coexists with the process of "becoming common" of technologies of the production of body, gender, sex, race, and sexuality. (2013: 126–127)

Per-formance: the art of touch

Sense is imbued with multiple meanings. The French translation 'sens' helps us to widen its definition to encompass orientation ('le sens de l'orientation': the ability to navigate or find your way intuitively through space); common sense ('sense commun' which facilitates one's ability to orient themselves in the world); 'sens' as direction; 'sens' as meaning and by default an appraisal of meaningfulness and meaninglessness and their extent (Barker, 2009). Senses are 'ways' of perceiving (Howes, 2005: 9) and knowing. They are related etymologically to aesthetics, originally standing for sensory experience: perception via the senses and the mind, the felt. From the mid-18th to early 19th century, the term is appropriated by philosophical discourse on the nature of art and beauty. Today, it refers to the formal study of art and continues to be discursive. Barker, in his essay *Threshold (pro-)positions: Touch, Techné, Technics*, notes that Derrida and Nancy's language shifts 'sense' (the sense of touch) into 'art' (the art of touch), re-connecting art to its Greek etymology *tékhnē* (2009: 45). The concept of a technology of the senses is therein introduced, and, importantly, its historicity: 'the historicity that produces-human-beings-and-technics' as ways of perceiving (Derrida, 2005: 243) – an assertion unmistakably recalling Marx's own: 'the forming of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present' (1967: 141).

Senses are not ahistorical. They are a cultural and historical phenomenon (Howes, 2005: 59). Ideologies structure, regulate and naturalise sensory values and practices (ibid: 4) and science (biology and medicine endorsed by law) plays a key

role in naturalising their economy, thereby naturalising the body's transformed and transforming relation to the social world (ibid: 62). Howes writes:

Both the structure and content of what we take to be science depend on a particular ideological orientation and on a particular selection and development of technological aids, including the sensuous technologies of the human body. (ibid: 123–4)

It is therefore critical to analyse ideologies imbricated in sensory values and practices, and the process by which 'history [is] turned into nature' (Bourdieu cited in Geurts, 2002: 195), for if we begin to understand sensory values as purely social constructions, we can begin to consider and imagine cultural alternatives (Howes, 2005: 11). Such an endeavour, I stress, should be understood not as mere proposition but as consequential and risky, for it puts into question the very nature of reality. This alone carries monumental ramifications. It challenges and discontinues both the culturally agreed nature of reality and reality of nature – the covenant which fundamentally binds us to each other and on which nations (including cross-national alliances), communities, family relations, kinship, friendships and one's own *sense* of self, identity and belonging are built. Binding or belonging, effects emerging from the sense of touch I argue, is made 'real' and 'natural' via the *lived* body which bears, cultivates and reproduces sensory values and hierarchies. Howes writes:

This system of sensory values is never entirely articulated through language, but it is practised and experienced (and sometimes challenged), by humans as culture bearers. The sensory order in fact, is not just something one sees or hears about; it is something one *lives*... (ibid: 3)

Howes' assertion of the *lived* body¹⁹ saturated by ideologies recalls the famous slogan of the second-wave feminists 'The personal is political' in the late 1960s. Indeed, feminism understood that if the body is the indispensable medium through which

¹⁹ The lived body or lived flesh is a concept that originates with Merleau-Ponty (1962).

gender inequalities live on and multiply, the body could also be a powerful site of agency, equally capable of interrupting and discontinuing hegemonic values and power asymmetries. In this article, my intention is to move beyond a traditional essentialist and exclusionary frame of political struggles, like that of mainstream feminism since the 70s,²⁰ and situate my research firmly within a 21st century biotechnoplastic social, economic and political field. Here, I argue for the urgent imperative to challenge social sciences' (biology, medicine, psychoanalysis etc.) prejudices in their construction of concept 'body' as physiological stable entity (Duden, 1991a, vii), and their interpretation of body image and conception of self as an ahistorical process (Benthien, 2002: 9) for sciences continue to play an elemental role in justifying, institutionalising and naturalising hierarchies.^{21,22} Feher in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body* writes: 'the history of the human body is not so much the history of its representations as of its modes of construction' (1989: 11).

Knowledge is unmistakably synonym of progress, directly engaging with the futurity of humankind and the foundation of that future. In Western science and philosophy, structure (also referred in this article as architecture, construction and grammar) is connected to knowledge and its acquisition. Structure is understood to be generative of knowledge and modes of being within frames of specific ethics or

²⁰ Since the 70s, feminism has been afflicted with deep divisions because the movement has been dominated by the voice of white, middle-class, heterosexual cis female. Black and lesbian Americans and Third World theorists argued that feminist scholars failed to integrate aspects of difference based on race, class, sexual orientation, gender, disability and geography (Lorde, 1984; Spivak, 1993; Butler, 1990).

²¹ In the seventeenth century, the French physician and naturalist Francois Bernier 'first eschewed the prevailing geographical classificatory system of human beings by locating skin as the single characteristic on which human organization would depend.' (Wiegman, 1995: 27–28).

²² This is most evident in the 21st century reproductive practice of cross-racial surrogacy.

Cross-racial surrogacy illustrates how science, through the invocation of biology, nature, genetics, comes to narrate the racialised reproductive labour of women of colour; and how genetic determinism is called upon to normalise and deemphasise, even distance, the cross racial contact (Harrison, 2016: 3). Harrison points out that science's use of genetic determinism in artificial reproductive technologies (ARTs) acts to reinforce and reproduce misconstrued popular beliefs about the existence of distinct biological races, rather than work to dissipate it (ibid: 3, 13).

ideologies, where, as Derrida tells us, 'being' is 'from the very beginning at stake in the game' (1997), both how to be and visibility versus invisibility. In the West, knowledge epistemological production weaves the senses (visual prosthetic), forms (language-image) and meaning-making via a singular fixed position, orientation and ultimately horizon (out-look) – that of power. Knowledge under form or representation must therefore be understood as interpretations, translations (Parker, 2012: 95)^{23,24} and manipulations (from the etymology: hand and measure) reflecting a predominantly white and masculine essentialism that would dominate (and afflict) all spheres of knowledge production and aesthetics, including acts of political struggles.

I would like to assert that knowledge is tactile. Knowledge – as law of understanding – inevitably emerges within an already inter and transsubjective field. Inter/transsubjectivity therefore precedes and directs knowledge at the same time as knowledge as representation emerges necessarily before, for, around and through others; its very design and purpose is knowingly to dynamically interact with, influence and shape human perception and action, one's sense of self and location in the world, affecting one's orientation. Knowledge not only showcases expertise about a particular subject, it also simultaneously erects, I assert, a conceptual model, plan or blueprint of them. The blueprint comes to stand for the architecture or grammar that is designed with the body in mind and precedes it (Ahmed's 'force of prediction'), emitting tactile forces that press against (Ahmed's 'expectation' and 'debt') and haptically orientate bodies towards fixed futures, certain labours and embodiments and not others. Derrida writes of (philosophical) translation as the 'fixation of a certain concept and project' (1985: 119–120). Translation *works* to

²³ In *The Theorist's Mother* (2012), Parker writes: 'Marxism and psychoanalysis are each bound intrinsically to translation: indeed, their very possibility and fates can be said to depend on it [...] translation into what is now a vast multitude of print languages – North and South, East and West – has itself become evidence in support of their universalizing truth claims [...] Even more crucially, translation is fundamental to Marxism and psychoanalysis in that both imagine themselves inherently as *philosophies* of translation.' (2012: 95).

²⁴ Derrida writes: '[...] the philosophical operation, if it has an originality and specificity, defines itself as a project of translation. More precisely, it defines itself as the fixation of a certain concept and project of translation[...] What matters is truth and meaning, and since meaning is before and beyond language, it follows that it is translatable [...] There is no philosophy unless translation.' (Derrida, 1985: 119–20).

lock and fix bodies and meaning within equally fixed frames of understanding and interpretation.

Here, I would like to argue that representation 'per-forms'²⁵ through the art or technology of touch. It is both reproducible and reproductive (designed for dissemination and practice *ad infinitum*) as well as binding, in a process that places first and foremost the body as an instrument for involvement with others and its modes of perception, its senses – the repetition and practice of the law – as technology of production and reproduction²⁶: a 'technology for producing [and reproducing] the material [the flesh] and semiotic [signs] effect of natural [and] shared kind' (Haraway, 1997: 53, *my own additions in brackets*). Under such apparatus, I assert, knowledge per-forms a violence of perpetual dimension (sustained across time and space) that obstructs and assaults bodies' freedom of movement. Bodies, a material re-asserted as local/global reflexive biotechno-plastic, plural, open, connected, dynamic and resistant, therefore get *worked* by and are in constant negotiation with the very material that is the structure. Preciado writes:

if architecture is a political technology for fabricating social space, then bodies, too, can be understood in architectural terms... as design, prosthetic and bioarchitectural technologies... inscribed to our material bodies and our perception of space, time, and reality (2018: 3).

Butler's performativity²⁷ can begin to be expanded to 'per-formance' and re-thought as process of manipulation, design and construction, playing out through the very materiality of the body, its flesh and organs and their local memory for 'there is no perception that is not full of memories' (Bergson, 1988: 3). Memory at once informs and limits our awareness of the now which remains selective and pre-determined

²⁵ Performance is made up of two elements: 'per' and 'formance'. 'Per' means through, before, toward, near, around, against; while 'formance' means to bring into existence.

²⁶ This is evidenced for example in athlete training, whereby the technological production (the measurement of movement and performance through technology) in turn, informs the nature of training, the very 'making' of athletes.

²⁷ 'Gender performativity' is a term coined by Judith Butler (1990).

(ibid: 40). Memory facilitated the shift from architecture designed to discipline the body (Foucault, 1979) to disciplinary systems internalised by the subject and modes of self-regulation and modification (Preciado, 2013: 211; Grosz, 1994: 115; Classen, 2005: 120–131). The nature of the neoliberal regime means that discipline now intervenes within the interiority of the subject and can no longer be distinguished from the body e.g. the web and pharmacotechnologies which are swallowed or applied to skin (Preciado, 2013). My use of the terminology 'per-formance' therefore refers to the far-reaching dynamic tactile process of construction which unfolds across space and time, itself determined by the encounter and subsequent friction between biotechnopolitics (the socio-cultural apparatus) and the body's innate modes of compliance and noncompliance or resistance. The two forces push against, lick and erode each other, exerting physical effort in a tactile interplay. The event or flux is continuous and indefinite. There, the body is engaged in a constant negotiation, expansion and re-assertion of its becoming, what Preciado asserts as 'une traversée' (2019): a crossing, a moving or passing through, towards and into an unknown.

Per-forming acts

As a response to a profound embodied felt sense of threat, activists have adopted in turn distinctively tactile strategies engaging with the field of distance. Recent global climate change marches have sprung all around the world since 2018, notably the youth movement *school strike for climate* led by Greta Thunberg. The marches play out a haptic democratisation of the streets. The mass physical claiming and occupation of the space directly subvert key bio-legal regulatory and regulating spaces of the post-capitalist regime namely school for children and work for adults. The movement in its local-global/connected-separate unity of bodies standing side by side or 'shoulder to shoulder' adorns an unmistakable tactile character in its play of proximity across distance. Thunberg is a teenager with Asperger, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and selective mutism. She explains the latter means that she only spoke when she needed to and that 'now is one of those moments' (2018). Thunberg, who began protesting outside the Swedish parliament alone, age 15, during school hours, reports: 'I feel like I am dying inside if I don't protest' (Crouch,

2018). Such statement highlights, I argue, the intricate, multi-layered system cohering environment, senses, perception, thought and action arising from the body and mediated by touch. Thunberg's felt sense of fatal decline or disappearance (tactile effects) compels her, in a creative motion towards life, to respond by testing the limits of her own 'being' – a being conceived under a legal socio-political frame of representation and regulation. In real physical space and time, Thunberg probes the extent of her rights and value as human being and citizen by testing the very extent of her freedom of movement to voice, demonstrate, intervene, challenge, confront, *participate* (from the etymology: a part and to grasp). Here, we observe that Thunberg's perception via the sense of touch coheres with a sense of place and vice versa: the known decline of the planet is imbricated with and mirrored by her own sense of physical-psychological decline. Simultaneously, her determination, persistence and commitment to action and taking space establishes a constant – an enduring force – which, I argue, cunningly mimics, for purpose of resistance, the haptic strategies of the neoliberal regime discussed earlier in this paper. Thunberg intuitively applies distance and makes use of proximities to create a field (local-global) of tension and pressure, a field of pressing enquiry and revolt. Indeed, her act questions, at the same time that it re-asserts anew, her indelible humanity and worth (and that of all humans) and her/our indelible role, place, part in the world – two effects corresponding and intimately *intertwined* – this in order to make sense, to uncover, to know, to *grasp* it.

The negotiation of one's own sense of self or humanity via the negotiation of one's freedom of movement, and the centrality of the sensual body, is further illustrated in the historical events of December 1955: Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat to a white man and move to the back of the bus. Parks' single action marked a defining moment of the American civil rights movement. She later reported: 'The time had just come when I had been pushed as far as I could stand to be pushed, I suppose. I had decided that I would have to know, once and for all, what rights I had as a human being, and a citizen.' (1956). Parks' singular action, in the very moment, discontinues and breaks with the everyday – the known – prompting a reorganisation of spatial-temporal relations and bodies. I would like to assert that

Parks' action produces a gap, a break or crisis which carries within the potential to be generative (and indeed it was). Such reorganisation is the outcome of two directionalities pressing against: one (Jim Crow laws) directed at and exerting on another (the individual) who exerts back. Parks' own account gives us clues that the encounter of the two forces is mediated by time and the individual's own internal process of negotiation. Parks' urge²⁸ to sense and make 'sense', to know is turned outwards into a revolutionary, distinctively tactile,²⁹ act of resistance and defiance, which would go on to transform the political landscape.

While the character of biopolitics means that changing interpretation of the body is strategically promoted and embedded in response to economic necessities (e.g. Harrison, 2016: 89–128) therefore that intervention and change is stimulated from outside-in, here, we observe resistance arising from inside-out, pushing against mores and systems, and prising open fixed, pre-determined social order and meaning. Greta Thunberg and Rosa Parks' actions evidence the body's innate capacity to deconstruct and denaturalise, thereby *fracture*, 'the hegemonic racial [,] sexual [and exploitative] grammar of Western culture' (2013: 189, *my own additions in brackets*). They too reveal that the disruption of the concept/perception of 'body', simultaneously reorganises and restructures concepts/perception of 'time', 'space', and 'being with/community', qualified as the fundamental pillars of the global regime³⁰ (Federici, 2004). Through Parks and Thunberg, the body is redrawn as wilfully *trans-forming* – a forming that takes place via a moving across – of itself and social relations at once. In this project resonates the fiery words of choreographer

²⁸ Note the process of accumulation over time.

²⁹ I understand as unequivocally tactile the play of tension and pressure within the frame of proximities: Parks' physical claim of physical space establishing unlawful proximity with white bodies.

³⁰ Federici argues that the inception of capitalism in the 15th century in the West necessitated and continues to necessitate, as evidenced in the Global South, a violent re-conceptualisation of key concepts: body, space, time and the collective/community. The systematic systemic persecution and execution of women (in the figure of the witch which continues to prevail today, and in widespread rape practice) gives way to the mass displacements of populations. This works to annihilate alternative organisations of knowledge and collective life, together with a differential conception of the body and its powers into 'laboring machine'. It succeeds to reorganise concepts of time and space from qualitative conception, understood to be transformative, towards a regularisation of the labour process (2004: 142).

Boaz Barkan: 'the systems, the politics are inside my body, everything is inside my body, so the revolution must be inside my body!' (2015); and Paul B. Preciado's electrifying words of his *Counter-sexual Manifesto*:

This book starts with the jubilant and apparently antiscientific affirmation of the irreducible multiplicity of sexes, genders, and sexualities. It doesn't start with a call for revolution, but with the realization that we *are* the revolution that is already taking place. (2018: 4)

Didier Anzieu: The skin and its unified haptic system of thought

Contemporary theorists exploring the multiplicity of the senses and its unified system, have focussed on the sense of touch above all others (Segal, 2009: 2). Paterson writes that 'each of the other senses is a mode of touch' (2007: 4). Howes finds an account going even further stating that 'all five senses can be reduced to one – the sense of touch. The tongue and palate sense the food; the ear, sound waves; the nose, emanations; the eyes, rays of light.' (Anon. 1953: 163 in 2003: 12). Touch is the first sense that the human embryo develops in gestation (Rice, 2001; Montagu, 1986: 4). Touch remains crucial to infant development. '[C]hildren need touch for survival' (Field, 2003: 5). The holding, massage and breastfeeding are all 'reciprocal interstimulation' (Montagu, 1986: 3), a feedback loop between two, and touch, the primary mode of communication between primary caregiver and child. It is no surprise therein that Montagu describes touch as 'the mother of the senses' imbued in all others (ibid: 3).

If skin is the topography of touch (Furse, 2011: 48), 'topology is tactile' (Serres, 2008: 99): The sensorial apparatus which gives rise to perception is made of intricate relationships as contains, inside, covers, disjoint, crosses, covered by, touches, overlaps, intersects (Oracle, 2003; ESRI, 2005). The sense of touch exposes the body's depth and complexity and, importantly, its three-dimensionality. I am interested in Serres' description of the senses as interconnected knot (1985: 51–52) for the metaphor comes to stand in opposition to the reductionist tendencies of deconstructionist and

semiotic theories that 'read' the body and the world as text – neatly and in 2D (Howes, 2005: 9; Benthien, 2002: 12, 45). Extending further its three-dimensional character, Casey (1987) qualifies the body as place or 'emplacement' and its perception via the senses – the interconnected knot – as informing the very construction of place. He writes: '[the body's] local history is literally a history of locales [...] [its] [o]rientation in place cannot be continually effected *de novo* but arises within the ever-lengthening shadow of our bodily past [and of past places]' (1987: 194, *my own addition in brackets*), making the body an inherent *site* of ambiguities and paradoxes.

'[T]ouch is complicated [...] the entanglement of the somatic with the imaginative saturates touch' (Furse, 2011: 47). Chamfort in 1796 writes: '[L]ove, as it exists in society, is nothing more than the exchange of two fantasies and the contact of two epidermises.' (1923 cited and translated in Segal, 2009). For Chamfort, fantasies about love, touch and the other mediate the contact of skin. Segal goes further and asks: '[i]f pleasure is a tactical, tangential experience, is it also contagion? What are the limits of consent between bodies? Is love ever mutual?' (2009: 6) Rodaway describes touch as 'a kind of communication between person and world, a corporeal situation rather than a cognitive positioning [...] Touch is direct and intimate, and perhaps the most truthful sense' (1997: 44). Classen, in contrast, emphasises the connection between the sense of touch and thought: 'touch is the one sense that can provide us with a sensation of our mental processes [...] explain[ing] why so many words for thinking are tactile in basis.' (2005: 5).

Skin is of course our touch organ. Psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu is the prominent theorist of skin and containment. Building upon Freud's assertion that the ego is a 'body-ego' (1923: 31), Anzieu develops the concept of *The Skin-Ego (Le Moi-Peau)* placing the fleshy body, its skin and the senses at the very centre of psychic life, metaphors and psychoanalytical process:

The word 'sense' has a double meaning. 'Sense' means 'signification', which finds its most extensive organisation in language. 'The senses' are the body organs by which the human being makes contact with its surroundings and in the first place with its mother. The work by which the infant creates its

psychic apparatus, and by which the patient and analyst create interpretation, consists of articulating 'sense' with 'the senses'. Words have value and bear meaning through their weight of flesh. The unconscious is not language; it is the body ... the intelligence of the body. (2000: 268)

Anzieu names 'consensuality' the fifth function of the skin-ego, that which coheres the perception of all the senses in one place, on our skin (Segal, 2009: 5). The term 'consensuality' is of specific interest for it establishes both sense and consent as the 'intelligence of the body'. It thereby points towards human relations, particularly the ethics of practices based on the sense of touch (ibid:6). The organic body and its skin, in Anzieu's Skin-ego theory becomes the cradle of psychic life, 'both an organic and an imaginary reality' (Benthien, 2002: 8). Anzieu asserts a system of analogue 'term-by-term correspondence' between (elements of) the physical body and psychic metaphors (1993: 31). 'Psychic space and physical space constitute each other in reciprocal metaphors [...] the Skin-ego is one of these metaphors' (Anzieu, 1990: 58; 1995: 28).

Skin is the largest and heaviest organ of the body, and perhaps the most vulnerable because 'it cannot refuse an impression' (Segal, 2009: 44) and while we can live without the other sense-organs, we cannot live without the skin (ibid). It is the boundary site of contact, communication, negotiation and individuation or separation. Via the skin, we learn what is part of self and separate from self, where we begin and end. Embryology teaches us that skin and brain are formed from the same membrane, the ectoderm, linking the two organs in ways that advertently destabilise traditional Western dichotomy and binary construction of mind versus body. As the first sense-organ to develop in the human embryo, skin becomes 'the basic reference point for all the various sense data' (Anzieu, 1995: 83). Touch is asserted as 'the only reflexive sense [...] giv[ing] rise gradually to the reflexivity of thought' (Segal, 2009: 47). We can therefore deduce that the human 'centre is situated at the periphery' (Anzieu, 1995: 31). Skin is both surface and depth (ibid: 39). It is 'the depth of the surface' (Benthien, 2002: 1).

Anzieu's Skin-ego describes the psychic envelope that contains the Ego of the child and functions to both 'enwrap' and 'hold in control' (Segal, 2009: 10; 47–8)

– functions associated with the sense of touch. The psychic envelop develops from the child's necessary internalisation or introjection of external figures, 'an internalisation of what is, originally and logically, out-there space' (ibid: 17): internalisations that both contain and are contained, and come together 'in a system of thought' (ibid). These tactile spatial and psychic containers develop first from the symbiotic relationship between mother/primary carer³¹ and child in gestation and infancy, which Anzieu calls the 'common skin' (ibid: 31). It is a fantasy of 'mutual inclusion' also at play between lovers (Anzieu, 1995: 59). The mutual incorporation of multiple figures, establishes, rather than a flattening, a distinct 'unspecific[ity]'³² (Segal, 2009: 59) of gender difference³³ as well as a system of circularity and correspondence that challenges head-on the western concept of body and its sex as fixed, stable and ahistorical entity.

Anzieu draws a connection between haptic maternal practices (gestation and post-birth) and creativity. Through the maternal function emerges the Skin-ego, the very foundation for our faculty for thinking (1995: 62). (maternal) Touch stimulates the skin and the whole body's senses which give rise to perception. The unified system of thoughts (*pensées*), via the fleshy social body and its psychic apparatus gives way to

³¹ In this article, I have limited my terminologies to 'mother', 'primary carer' and 'maternal', however it is understood that today's reproductive technologies together with the recent same-sex adoption reforms mean that the roles traditionally fulfilled by a cis female (egg provision, gestation and social rearing practice) are now potentially divided across many diverse bodies. While 'primary carer' covers social rearing, it does not cover gestational practice, and the person gestating (and giving birth) is no longer systematically recognised by law as 'mother' e.g. surrogacy. Likewise, the law in the UK refuses to recognise as fathers trans men who have gestated and given birth to their own children via sperm donation, even if the individual self-identifies as dad. Kinship is thereby recorded controversially under 'mother' aligning the subject with their assigned birth sex rather than the sex or gender they identify with ('Transgender Man Loses Challenge to Be Named Father', bbc news, 25 Sept 2019). Here, the term 'maternal' is used to point to the undifferentiated sex and gendering of the subject performing reproductive labours.

³² This distinction between flattening and unspecific gender difference works to protect and preserve, rather than erase, aspects of difference with a particular focus on the body, its sexual attributes and gender identity. Flattening implies 'sameness' or 'neutrality' and perhaps suggests that bodies are no longer gendered or sexed, whether 'unspecific' implies that bodies retain their singular sex and gendering but their interaction is not sex or gender led, their interaction obeys different rules or order than those imposed by the West.

³³ Traditionally in psychoanalysis, the child is always masculine and the mother cis female.

our creative capacity for thinking (*penser*)³⁴ as knowledge production. The thinking body emerges from the child's internalisation of maternal care, containment and thoughts (Segal, 2009: 50), 'the assurance of constant, certain, basic well-being' (1995: 61). But the 'thinking' body, also importantly, requires a 'thinking' space, a space between the surface and the core: 'thinking requires exogenous stimuli (coming from other people) and endogenous stimuli (phantasies and affects) to leave in us and around us enough space to think' (Anzieu, 1994b: 43). I qualify this space as a *distance* within the organic-psychic envelope that finds correspondence in the 'space between' surrounding the body. I speak of *distance* as a kind of touch and point of ethics – undervalued and misconstrued in the West – that enables one (the child first) to carry a sense of safety and confidence in its motoric experimentation and processes of psychic (as well as physical) separation and individuation. Segal qualifies further Anzieu's assertion:

Thinking is difficult and takes energy; in order to make 'great discoveries' [...] We need something like the transitional space and transitional object of Winnicott: a thing or a place that is both 'me' and 'not-me', an element of psychic safety that we have internalized from good early care. (2009: 51)

Following Anzieu's physical-organic-metaphorical conceptualisation of 'thinking' space, I would like to propose that action (resistance), going back to Rosa Parks and Greta Thunberg, emerges from a tactile spatio-temporal *distance*: a transient and transitional in-between space contained within the psychic body meeting and cohering with equally transient and transitional real physical containers or places, 'out there', namely, the bus for Parks and the street for Thunberg. Such social conditions, I argue, give rise to the creative act of thinking/doing now reunited within

³⁴ Anzieu writes: '[t]houghts precede thinking. They need to be thought in order to be recognized as thoughts. They invoke the creation of an apparatus for thinking (the function creates the organ). Thinking is a part of the ego where it intersects with the mind seeking to know the object. The first object is the body; then, by analogy (in the fullest sense) with one's own body, the next is ideas.

[...] In sum, all thoughts are thoughts of the body: one's own body, other bodies; thinking seeks to bring thoughts together in a body of thoughts.' (1994b: 21).

a distinctively haptic system of thought. Resolute acts, like that of our protagonists, rip open and fracture the weighty and tightly meshed social fabric, courageously carving new spaces and orders. *Distance* generative of other *distance* is the *place* where bold thinking and actions emerge calling to reassess the unquestioned and unquestionable and wilfully test the limits of knowledge.

Conclusion: what's 'post-safe' about touch?

Anzieu's Skin-ego theory successfully breaks the cartesian binary and dichotomy mind/body. I argue that it too revokes (although it is not an argument that Anzieu makes himself) gender binarism by emphasizing the inherent undifferentiated multiplicities of internalised figures within one subject alongside the equally undifferentiated reversibility of the psychic envelope (one that simultaneously contains and is contained) (1999a: 108). I argue, along with Segal, that Anzieu's theory, which is not well known in the UK and US, holds immense potential for opening-up new ways of thinking about the body including formation of self, gender and genealogy. Anzieu's psychoanalysis, allied with equally reflexive and illuminating philosophies (like that of Paul B. Preciado) and singular individual acts, permits to further deconstruct and denaturalise key bioneoliberal concepts that regulate and orientate, revealing unrealised space and consciousness, and trans-forming ethics.

However, as a 'post-safe', post-modern choreographer, I would suggest that questioning one's own perception and beginning to imagine alternatives, going back to the intricacy and depth of the knot, is not a light process that can be achieved on a whim. It is a profound and difficult process of psychic embodied and relational reconfiguration and individuation that one unwittingly resists at the same time as it is yearned. For the socially constructed knot, to continue borrowing from Serres' metaphor, is an object of culture and society, but also of profound habits (the play of repetition and iteration) and attachment to habits, complicated by the unconscious impulse to reproduce 'likeness' and play out internalised mother/father, family values as evidence of connection, closeness, heritage, lineage, genealogy and ultimately intimacy and belonging. The bond of love itself is the (colonial) site and geography where identification meets self-reproduction (Anzieu, 1995: 85;

Ahmed, 2006: 123–5). Attachment to fabricated conceptions of identity, habits, and love allows us to expand the definition of touch as always inter/trans-sensorially (between and across) and inter/trans-rationally physical, abstract and affective simultaneously, and unfolding, not within the field of direct skin to skin contact, but, most surprisingly, within the field of distance.

Here, I want to qualify ‘post-safe’ touch and ethics today as a ‘movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place’ (Stryker, 2017: 159); a movement beyond naturalised social hierarchy, given position and horizon (taxonomy). I am speaking of an inquisitive and wilful decentering and of the reflexive embodied (plastic art³⁵) practice of *décollage* (translation from French: to unstick, unfix, shift, lift, take off, suspend) generating yet *untouched* spaces within self, others, social and political fabric, and places. I want to qualify such tactile intervention within the liberal (white) value system as ‘post-safe’ for the introjection of different experiences together with the reassessment of one’s very own participation in reproducing prejudice and hierarchies is a risky process that actively threatens the ego. It *fissures* one’s own conception of self (including one’s own sense of being a ‘good’ person) and shifts one’s internal order. The resulting state of ambivalence could even be said to *suspend* it (another tactile spatio-temporal psychic fracture) thereby exposing the nature and force of conventions together with the deep unthought prejudices that *form* our every action, ultimately our role in maintaining oppression.

This paper takes inspiration from black haptic strategies of resistance which, since slavery, extend the kin unit beyond biology e.g. ‘Caring for the dead’, ‘Othermothering’, ‘Cousins culture’ (Benjamin, 2019).³⁶ I propose that ‘post-safe’ action and ethics of resistance today, might find a new socio-political dimension and

³⁵ ‘Plastic arts are art forms which involve physical manipulation of a plastic medium [...] the term may be used broadly for all the visual arts’ (Wikipedia, 2019). Here, I am proposing to integrate plastic arts technique to embodied practice.

³⁶ Prof Benjamin states ‘[...] what is at stake in the idea that *Black Afterlives Matter* is the practice of making kin, not only *beyond* biological relatives, but also *with* the materially dead/spiritually alive ancestors in our midst.’ (Benjamin, 2019). To access to full lecture, please visit www.bostonreview.net/race/ruha-benjamin-black-afterlives-matter.

vitality in everyday life and our most intimate and shared practices by renegotiating and re-drawing anew lines of kinship. At a time, when the digital world is making us hungrier than ever for touch (Classen, 2005: 2)³⁷ and skin to skin has become synonymous of an (sexual) intimacy marked by anonymity and narcissism (Benthien, 2002: 221–234), it might just be radical, shocking and disorientating enough to begin our project by seeking and inserting and assuming *distance* – space, unknowing, point of difference – in all of our touch practices, that in order to see more, go deeper and touch *closer*. ‘Post-safe’ activism may, in turn, unite once more by manifesting a felt-sense of community or ‘common skin’ (Anzieu, 1989) while radically preserving difference to include individuals’ unique plural biographies. We can thereby succeed in wilfully discontinuing and reorganising the dominant exclusionary and essentialist character of politics.

In this article, I have argued that the tactile neoliberal reproductive mechanism and conception of laws of nature can be interrupted, arrested, intervened upon, detracted, diverted and even distracted through the technology of touch, for a depolarised conception of the 21st century body, experience and labours, including its creative modes of refusal, are yet to be realised. It is hoped that this paper in turn *per-forms* its own tactility through the sensual body of the reader and *works* to untangle and counter the deepest prejudices against marginalised bodies and identities in our society today.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

³⁷ Classen writes: ‘[...] we live in a society of the image, a markedly visual culture, in which, while there may be many representations of touch, there is often nothing actually there to feel. The attractions of advertising, television, or the Internet, are designed to be consumed by the eyes and the ears. The endless appeal to the sense of touch one finds in contemporary visual imagery, unaccompanied as it is by actual tactile gratification, may have helped make touch the hungriest sense of postmodernity. The inability to touch the subject matter of the images that surround us, even though these have a tremendous impact on our lives, produces a sense of alienation, the feeling of being out of touch with one’s society, one’s environment and one’s cosmos – an isolated fragment in an indifferent universe.’ (2005: 2).

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