

## *A Strange Topology*

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### 0.0 << introduction >>

This text was commissioned by James Batchelor and Collaborators to work alongside Hyperspace. The text is a 3 part rumination on strategies of touch within the performance Hyperspace. The text stems from ongoing conversations that James and I have had over the past years. It is indebted to the brilliant feminist philosophers and writers through whose ideas my body and world are rendered altogether different.

This 3 part text is an experiment with narrative. It's a poem, a letter, an essay. These texts take the hand, the eye and the world as protagonists to expand on ideas of touch and a choreography of relation. They question situation, territory and edges through the lens of choreography and performance. To imagine new possible orientations to ourselves and others.

From hyperspace to hyperlinks *we* enter a textual multiplicity; "there is no word here that you wont also find elsewhere."<sup>1</sup>

### 0.1 << the hand >>

There is an infinity of touch in each encounter, as two surfaces approach a field opens between them, the contact at minimum is two and unfolds endless potential points. The hands are skilful sensitive creatures who mediate our utility with others of all kinds. Their surfaces produce a complicated map, skin wrapping and folding. They offer an articulate approach to touch. With twenty-seven delicate bones they extend, fold, and twist, providing an intelligence that keeps my pen in pace with my thinking.

But, the hand's gestural capacity far exceeds its utility. It is possible to think the hand as a metaphor for craftsmanship and the presence of *the author*. The hands, when reconciled with the body they attach to, can sign a world by their expressive contact. But what happens when they move of their own accord, navigating a world not on behalf of a body but as their own muscular pentapedal forms?

"Through touch  
We sense  
differential speeds  
to come"<sup>2</sup>

The hands have an immediacy with otherness, to touch is to make contact with an outside. In touch there is an undeniable multiplying of self: between two hands the touched and touching. "When two hands touch there is a sensuality of the flesh[...] a feeling of pressure or presence, a proximity of otherness that brings the other nearly as close as ones self."<sup>3</sup> In this apparently simple encounter the body resists itself. We are dispersed into the plurality of the I and the alterity that composes it.

With eyes closed bring your two hands into contact, place *yourself* in one hand, identify with it and let the *You* of the second hand slowly disappear. What is it you are holding? Afterwards place the hand, no longer felt as *You*, on your face. Let the face feel the surface of the hand, the

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<sup>1</sup> Chignell, Chloe "a speech on language", text unpublished, performed at a.pass Brussels 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Greenspan, Suzanne Livingston, and Luciana Parisi, "Amphibious Maidens," Ccru, Abstract Culture, vol. 3, no. 1 (1998).

<sup>3</sup> Barad, Karen. "On Touching – The Inhuman That Therefore I Am", in differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies, 2012 pg.1

landscape of skin enclosed flesh. Press your face into the surface of the hand and feel its elastic resistance of your own flesh.

Could we imagine a hand, no longer as a hand, but as a winding folding surface, a landscape of peaks, valleys and fields? As our sense of scale shifts units of the body dissolve, through sensuality, into their fleshy composition. Once hand, now elastic terrain. Heat, texture and porosity are the nature of this touch. The hands become agents of their own exploration. Where skin is a landscape that through touch we can come to know again. A map of body, as body, made one to one with its terrain.

“Always when a world comes to an end  
and a new is initiated, is the time of the map.  
Map-times stand for the transformation  
from one order (of space) toward another.”<sup>4</sup>

## 0.2 << the eye/x >>

We begin from situation.<sup>5</sup> From the understanding that it is necessary that *here* includes a body, a self and the complex articulations of such a self in a world. From this situation we enter *into* situation: <sup>6</sup> the eye/x<sup>7</sup>, an oblique slash to at once bring together and separate.<sup>8</sup> The eye/x is imagined here as intra-active<sup>9</sup>, both a position and a perspective, a co-constituted agency.

The eye/x is often the metaphor and even mechanism of perspective. It is a position from where we look out upon the world and look upon our own body. The eye/x with its new incision (the slash) produces a crack in order to imagine a possible reorientation towards another kind of perspective. To think I have only seen myself through my own eye/x is at once true and unbelievable. The eye/x brings forth the conditions for otherness and the unknown. It holds an alterity that makes it possible to feel the eye itself: the eye/x, our interior otherness.

The eye/x in hyperspace is in exploration, a venture out and into. The eye/x cannot compose a world without its wondrously fleshy innervated positioning. There has, for a while now, been an understanding of such situated-ness. The fiction of objectivity has been unveiled.<sup>10</sup> In this strange topology the eye/x moves between receiving and producing perspective. They reach out, sight touching world and what is seen enters the body as if to let the world look back. The eyes

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<sup>4</sup> Schlögel, *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit*, p. 87.

<sup>5</sup> Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575. In this essay Haraway brings forth the notion of context and conditionality in research. Challenging the esteemed objectivity of the sciences as "an external, disembodied point of view." Situated knowledges argues for a form of knowledge production where perspective is brought forth as a way to meet difference.

<sup>6</sup> The word situation performs as both as event (a set of circumstances) and a position (a location or surrounding). Thus this sentence can be read: *from position we enter into event...* and... *from event we enter into positioning*.

<sup>7</sup> The eye/x came about through conversations with Sven Dehens: an artist, writer and curator. The eye/x was a poetic provocation he made to my initial formulation of eye/I. The x was an exciting object with which to produce a juncture. The x is an internal otherness. In its presence we find a cipher, a point, a plurality and an intersection.

<sup>8</sup> The slash is a literary form found in many feminist texts, used to complicate a pronoun or subvert a verb. The slash has been used by Luce Irigaray in *I love to you* for the subjects I/you and by Monique Wittig in *The Lesbian Body* for similar purposes. Karen Barad also uses the slash for un/doing and in/determinacy amongst other variations in her essay *On touch: the inhuman that therefore I am*. I am borrowing this performative incision here to undo the consolidation of a subject.

<sup>9</sup> Intra-action is a concept by Karen Barad. It is the idea that individuals emerge through intra-actions. That the ability to act emerges from within a relationship, not outside of it. Thinking with intra-action means giving up cause and effect relationships, individual agency and subject/object dichotomy. More details can be found in this interview: [https://www.academia.edu/1857617/\\_Intra-actions\\_Interview\\_of\\_Karen\\_Barad\\_by\\_Adam\\_Kleinmann\\_](https://www.academia.edu/1857617/_Intra-actions_Interview_of_Karen_Barad_by_Adam_Kleinmann_)

<sup>10</sup> *ibid* 5.

orient toward an outside and let that outside come pouring back in. It is this doubling of the gaze that necessitates the slash of the eye/x, a proximity without assimilation. The eye/x performs as both subject and object of study.

The eyes move attentively with an indifference to what is seen that suggests another register of recognition. The eyes move for sensation, brushing across the light, their sight does not capture what they know; another body, a wall, a floor, chairs, nor flecks of dust. Rather, the eyes wander persistently across the terrain of materials, colours and textures. They are interested in another scale, one that slips off the edges of inside and outside, this and that, to compose and print in the eye/x a world as yet unknown.

I stop writing and look at myself, looking at the eyes in a mirror, I close them and roll the balls backward, still feeling my own reflection. I imagine my eyes in reserve, lines of light sending pulsing images of my own deep interior, utterly unrecognisable as self, the eye/x. They open again, I stare at the glassy surface and tiny red veins, looking at and with there is something a little irreconcilable, I leave the reflection.

### 0.3 << *the world* >>

I begin in laughter, stumped by my choice to write with the world as protagonist. I inhale, filling my body to the size it must have been when it thought this was a good idea. I persist. To write as the world asks for a perspective of extreme alterity, it asks for a narration whose voice speaks from outside, as *that*. I write in naivety and with fiction, trying to understand my body as unbound.

I must admit I do not know what a body is from the perspective of the world. This is, I guess, the condition of writing in alterity. However from naivety I posit: It could be that from the perspective of the world the body is not bound up as one, the world might not recognize what we recognize as a body. And what can we learn about our bodies from a world who might not recognise us as such?

I will begin with the shadow, an imprint or trace of a body printed on the world by an absence of light. The shadow doubles the body it corresponds to, its edge gives a precise shape to what we could call the body. It is at this border of what is and what is apparently not our body, that we can begin to quiver and question. It is in these edges, seen sharply in the shadow, that we can find a sensibility for alterity. We can begin to touch an otherness, for a moment suspending the border, in order to open the line that separates into a field.

I ask: “have we ever really known in what territory a body ends?”<sup>11</sup>

“Like our human skin, gives the illusion of impermeability,  
we still perspire, urinate, ingest, ejaculate, menstruate, lactate, breathe, cry.  
We take in the world, selectively, and send it flooding back out again.”<sup>12</sup>

I want to imagine an ecotone between a body and the world as if their distinction could just be a difference of environment. An ecotone is a liminal zone between two ecosystems, it is the transitional space where different environments meet.<sup>13</sup> I imagine a wet zone and dry zone transitioning somewhere around the layer of our skin. An intermediary space opens for “all the

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<sup>11</sup> Chignell, Chloe. *The-girl-with-her-tongue-out*. 2019, accessible online. Audio version published by Montez Press NYC.

<sup>12</sup> Neimanis, Astrida. Hydrofeminism: Or on becoming a body of water. *Undutiful Daughters: Mobilizing Future Concepts, Bodies and Subjectivities in Feminist Thought and Practice*, eds. Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni and Fanny Söderbäck. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Pg. 104.

<sup>13</sup> Basics on Ecotons: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecotone>

ways a world could meet a body.”<sup>14</sup> We can take this encounter as a dance, a movement to meet the body via its world. And how would we do such a dance?<sup>15</sup> This dance happens regardless of our trying to do it. It is the dance our bodies do in order to be in the world in each moment. It is a particular sensitivity and attention made available in the time of the theatre that can make visible this dance.

In the space of the theatre the world can be anything. It can be temporary and minute, severed off from what comes before or after, or it could be a world so vastly distributed that the theatre dissolves into its own fiction. This world however, the world of undifferentiated sensuality is precisely *here*. As touch is the means for relation, this world is an event. A situation that appears in the time of attentive intra-action. Following the composition of the body/world ecotone— through smelling, hearing, gazing, touching— the infinitesimally small become agents of much surprise. In this space we can disappear as vastly into a body as we could into the world.

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid* 1.

<sup>15</sup> This question is a rephrasing of a question that came up in a skype conversation between James Batchelor and myself. James told me he often receives the question “but how do you do that with dance?” when talking through the concept and research of his work. I thought it was a great question. Why dance? Or why choreography? This question makes us articulate a concept through practice, and it makes visible the intelligences and discursive strategies to be found within choreography and the body. The question “How is this” rather than “what is this?” opens another conversation.