Transformations

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Formatting the Senses of Touch
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It has become one of the commonplaces of recent media theoretical debates to state that digital media transform the frame of human experience. It is not difficult to find a consensus on this general level of diagnosis of a shift. It is easy, for example, to agree on the fact that digital media are changing our sense of time and space – the conditions of our bodily existence – in many ways. Distance and proximity – both in physical and mental sense – take new forms. The way in which Apple advertises for the FaceTime feature of iPhone 4 is an apt example of this: "With just a tap you can wave hello to your kids, share a smile from across the globe or watch your best friend laugh at your stories." [1] The articulation of the details and mechanisms of the transformation of experience that is at stake here is, however, a much more complicated matter and leads to numerous questions and debates.

In this article I address the role of media in the transformation of experience in terms of sensuous formatting. I will study the interplay between new media and sensory experience, focusing on the significance of touch, especially with regard to its sheltering/exposing function. In the experiential horizon of digital culture, the status of touch as a sense is unstable, as a great deal of what we consider real is anything but tangible, even when we find it touching. Therefore one of the key questions of the article will be how to relate mediated forms of tangibility to the conceptual, affective and social dimensions of touch or feel.

My thesis is that haptic appropriation of things and events that are made digitally accessible makes use of processes that can be explicated in terms of the psychic defense mechanisms that Freud calls "denial" ("Verneinung") and "isolation" ("Hemmung"). As I will indicate, touch plays here an ambivalent role, as it does in Freud's theory. I will also relate these processes of formatting and their ambivalence to what Cathryn Vasseleu calls "formalization of touch" ("Ticklish" 159) as well as to Samuel Weber's remarks on various forms of targeting that are deeply rooted in Western thinking (*Targets*). These analyses will find their place in the second half of the article.

In the first section I will prepare my analysis of sensuous formatting by outlining the multifacetedness of touch. My presentation here is informed by the pathic moment of touching, which offers a rich starting point for media theoretical reflection on sensuous formatting.

Senses of Touch

It seems obvious that today, as diverse sensations and faculties are combined in new ways with the aid of computers, the role of our sensorium and its inner hierarchies are, once again, undergoing various changes. Recent media technological phenomena, such as web 2.0, touch screen technologies as well as various mobile and ubiquitous media make this evident. But what kind of theoretical status do we give to the symptomatic "once again" of the diagnosed shift? As we know, there is a long history of such shifts. How radical are these alterations after all? Do new

media just modulate sensory experience or do they fundamentally reconfigure it? What is the role of formats and formatting as regards mediations of sensory experience?

The sense of touch offers a productive starting point for an inquiry into these questions. The highly ambivalent role that touching has in Western thinking is symptomatic of the tensional relation between physiological, mental and technical aspects of sentience. Touch twines together physical and psychical movements and intensifies them in pleasure and pain. Touch is sentience at the limits, and thus an exemplary figure of reconfiguration.

In contrast to other senses, the sense of touch makes, at least seemingly, the sensing and the sensed coincide. When I see a stone, it is "out there" and does not see me, but when I touch that stone, it is "right here" and touches me. This sense of concreteness and immediacy lends the sense of touch certain credibility. A seen stone can be made of plastic even if it looks just like a stone, but when I touch it I can feel the material. It is due to this fullness of touching that the tactile metaphor of "grasping" can stand for "fully understanding something." From this point of view the sense of touch appears as uncomplicated and immediate.

On a closer look, however, the sense of touch is rather difficult to grasp. Aristotle noted that it is not clear whether touch is one sense or a group of senses (*De Anima* 422b). He pointed to a series of difficulties that have accompanied conceptualisations of touch ever since. Touch has many objects, and has no clearly definable organ. Touch is, in many ways, more complex and comprehensive than other senses. It is indispensable to all animals and belongs inseparably to the living body, without, however, being the faculty of any particular body part. In contemporary phenomenology *De Anima* is considered a central work where the heterogeneity of touch is made into a far-reaching philosophical problem (Chretien 84). Modern neurophysiological research, in turn, has chopped the sense of touch into neurophysiological subsystems determined by different receptors and their neuronal connections (temperature, movement, pain, balance, etc.) (Ross 299-316; Ratcliffe 299-322; Stoffredge and Bardy 195-261). However, the philosophical difficulties of defining touch are repeated here. The sense of touch is not represented on the cortical level in a way that would be comparable to sight and hearing (Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien* 69). These difficulties not only show that touch cannot easily be defined as a clear-cut sense modality, they also indicate that the realm of touching is rather wide and complex, even ambivalent.

Despite the experiential fullness and immediacy associated with physical contact, touch has been considered too obscure to be able to offer a clear model for cognitive classifications. I can only touch things that are nearby, and not too many at a time, whereas sight offers me a wider range and a better overview of complex relations. This is why visual metaphors and structures dominate Western conceptions of knowledge. Building up general knowledge presupposes coordination of different points of view, and accordingly, a view from a distance, that is, theory. The idea of touching as an appropriating contact has, nevertheless, become consolidated in Western tradition. To a great extent this is due to the conceptual frame offered by the clear set of five senses where the sense of touch has its organic place like the thumb in the hand. This "full hand" of the five senses has been apt to tame the structural heterogeneity of touch that threatens cognitive discourse. It has made it possible to present touch as a sense that can serve cognitive interests by guaranteeing an immediate, hands-on touch with reality. This has led to the most primitive of the senses being regarded as the guarantor of optical intuition, promise of immediate experience and support of conscious thought (Derrida 159-82). This scheme of haptic appropriation, or "haptocentrism," has made up the endoskeleton of Western philosophy of touch since Plato (161).

The relation between vision and touch is, in other words, conceived traditionally both in terms of a clear hierarchy and an intimate cooperation. In the accustomed conceptual settings of specular economy touch serves vision; tangibility is implicated in vision as a desire for contiguity. Also new tactile technologies, such as the already mentioned iPhone 4, often clearly make use of that

kind of interplay between vision and touch where visual information motivates tactile operations.

The matter is further complicated because touch is not just a matter of sensuous contact. Its scope covers mental, social and spiritual as well as corporeal processes. Instead of speaking of *the* sense of touch, it seems more appropriate to speak in plural of *senses* of touch, as Mark Paterson reminds us (1-5). In order to gain an insight into the various senses of touch we must, as Edith Wyschogorod has suggested, "search in familiar analyses of sensibility for the trace, for the break with the conventional schematization of tactility as a species of the genus sensation" (193). One point to look for this kind of break, as for example Vasseleu rightly notes, is Immanuel Kant's *Anthropology* and the ambivalent position *Berührung* (referring both to tactility and affectivity) takes there with regard to the distinction between objective and subjective senses (155). For Kant, touch is on the one hand a sense of differentiation vital to our relation with external objects. On the other hand, as feeling, touch is a sense by means of which we partake of things. What comes to the fore here is the unique connection between touch and the vulnerability of embodied existence, exposedness to "alteration without reference to any fixed entity or formal schema," as Vasseleu puts it (155). Based on her reading of Aristotle and Emmanuel Levinas, Wyschogorod, for her part, concludes that touch is not a sense at all. According to her analysis, touch is "a metaphor for the impingement of the world as a whole on subjectivity" (198).

Against this background touch appears as a sense of being in the world, of being exposed. This is to say that touch exceeds the tactile world; touch is more than the sense of touch, more than "a species of the genus sensation" (Wyschogorod 193). Without delving here into the question of whether the way in which touch exceeds the tactile world is metaphoric in character or not, we can hold onto Wyschogorod's insight that tactility offers too narrow a format for touch. [2] Touch is not only a matter of contacting surfaces, it also has depth: something can be so touching that a human being or an animal is thoroughly moved. In regard to this depth, touch is inevitably ambivalent, since exactly the same kind of physical contact can strike one in different ways depending on the context. "As ordinary language reveals, 'to be touched' is to be moved in the whole of one's being," Wyschogorod sums up (199). It is an exposure to something excessive and unexpected, which may leave a painful mark.

Building on Bernhard Waldenfels's incisive analyses of phenomenology and its tensional relation to psychoanalysis and deconstruction, we can note that experience in all its forms is, in fact, marked by such a rupture or *pathic moment* (*Bruchlinien* 14-22). [3] As a pathic sense, touching is sentience at the limits and, as such, as Waldenfels indicates, a prototype of experience in general (71). Although touching might aim at haptic appropriation, something inaccessible and withdrawing, even the untouchable remains inherent to the touched. This foreign element constitutes a limit to every grasp by making the touched "touching." Touching is over-determined by otherness, and it turns out to manifest traits of a "foreign-sense," with respective ethical significance (64). This implies that there is a demand for tact that links the pathic moment of touching to ethical questions. In short, touch yields beyond contact and puts integrity into play.

Touching is over-determined by otherness to such a degree that we can even speak of a "law of tact" inherent to touching (Derrida 66-67). This law that governs touching tells us what is peculiar to the senses of touch on sensuous, mental, and social levels: touch is always at the risk of abolishing the difference between touching and the touched at the same time as it exposes this difference as such. As Derrida remarks, one should not understand tact in the common sense of the tactile, but in the sense of "knowing how to touch without touching, without touching too much, where touching is already too much" (67).

As the central characteristic of touch as a foreign sense, tact signifies answering to and for singular otherness. Tact is never simply a question of a situational skill, since it implies sensitivity to the untouchable in the other. We could speak here of a *horizon of encounterings* that exposes the

parties involved both to each other and to themselves. This horizon pre-exists all psychological and social settings of tactful behaviour. When explicating the ethical dimension of the pathic moment of touching, Waldenfels uses the apt German word *Widerfahrnis*, which is free from the psychological negativity of its English equivalents "adversity" and "misfortune" (*Bruchlinien* 444). "Encountering" is my choice of translation. Psychological connotations are misleading here, since encounterings constitute the self. In other words, it is only the pathic exposures that make the self turn to itself as sentient. It is worth noticing that this is not merely a reflexive structure, as exposure always involves the transitive formation of the self. Derrida uses Jean-Luc Nancy's paradoxical idiom *se toucher toi* ("to self-touch you") to describe this (34). The elemental asymmetry of touching marked by this paradoxical term tends to be ruled out when touching is studied in terms of immediacy and symmetry, that is, as a mutual contact. With regard to the pathic character of touching, non-tactile tact, rather than contact, turns out to be the common denominator of the different senses of touch. In short, the sense of touch implies a sense for tact.

The reconceptualisation of touching as a pathic sense outlined above opens up new perspectives on the role of digital media in reconfiguration of sensory experience. As I have indicated, touch cannot be reduced to tactility. In the last instance it is *existential integrity* that is at stake in the senses of touch. This implies that reflection on the new tactile technologies should include questions concerning this dimension of touching. The sheltering/exposing limits of human experience are constantly being displaced through the very movement of experience. This movement requires and presupposes sensitivity to the boundaries between the proper and the improper, between the familiar and the foreign. In these sensitive areas we are invited to think in terms of immunity, contamination and responsibility. It is therefore not all the same in what kind of frames we make sensuous distinctions. The forms imposed on touching have effects on our existential integrity as sentient beings.

In the phenomenological vocabulary of Waldenfels we could also speak here of formatting of "response-registers" (*Aufmerksamkeit* 118). In his analyses concerning attention and embodiment, Waldenfels treats technicity as a necessary constituent of our bodily experience. One of his central claims is that "logos of phenomena" is never free from a simultaneous "logos of *techné*" (120). He presents mediatisation of experience as a process of establishing "intermediary instances" (*Zwischeninstanzen*) that contribute to the consolidation of certain forms of experience (113). In his view, media cannot be reduced to technical instruments that enable some specific acts or processes. They are, furthermore, intermediary instances that constitute *Antwortbereitschaften*, "readinesses-to-response," that is, dispositions that under suitable circumstances become activated and consolidated into "response registers" (*Antwortregister*) (118). The decisive point here is to understand intermediary instances as factors that contribute to shaping the Husserlian *Als-Struktur* that formats phenomena and lets something appear *as* something (114-20). [4] In other words, they contribute to the constitution of the very frame in which something can appear *as something*; they contribute to shaping the *horizon of encounterings*, as I would like to put it.

Formalisation of Touch

What can be gained from this schematic account of the multiple senses of touch, is the insight that formatting of touch needs to be understood in a wide sense as a set of processes taking place in regard to both the physical and mental senses of touch. Consequently, in addition to technological formats, we should take into account conceptual, affective and sensuous processes of formatting. The multiple ways in which these processes are intertwined makes the cultural significance of formatting into a highly ambivalent historical variable.

In her article "Touch, Digital Communication and the Ticklish," Vasseleu presents an interesting reading of the role of touch in digital culture that sheds some light on this ambivalence. She critically considers the way in which a promise of immediacy is built into mediations of touch. It would seem that digital media technology brings diverse media contents right to our fingertips:

from day to day, we finger various media devices, and small movements of the finger have as good as limitless possibilities of creating a multitude of things – even "in real time," that is, from a distance beyond the bodily horizon without any significant delay. These taps, pushes and sweeps challenge the familiar concretia of the world; virtually nothing seems to be beyond reach. Vasseleu asks, however, "whether touch actually does operate in digital technology as a sense that supplants vision and eliminates distance and intensifies a sense of closeness" (153).

Vasseleu develops her conceptual metaphor of "ticklishness" in dialogue with Freud's theory of sexuality and characterises it as "non-sensical touching" that "arouses pleasurable or exited feelings" and elicits "the sensation of touch affecting itself uncontrollably" (158). As her media theoretical points of reference, she uses Paul Virilio's dromology and Sadie Plant's cyberfeminism in order to highlight two very different sentiments prevailing in media theoretical debates as concerns the significance of touch in digital culture. Plant invests touch with emancipatory potential in the name of the proximity associated with it; whereas Virilio sees digital tactility contributing to processes that ultimately disconnect the human sensorium from any other measures except the speed of digital circuits (Vasseleu 157-59).

Vasseleu argues for a more differentiated view on technologically formatted tactility. She sees that there is a linkage between valorisation of touching, differentiation of tactile qualities and the ways in which touch is conveyed through digital media. Therefore, her central question concerns the terms under which touch is admitted into the cybernetic telecommunications networks. If the status given to touch, as the sense that "supplants vision," is linked with prioritisation of certain modes of tactile differentiation, it is obvious that touch does not simply replace and supersede vision by *eliminating* distance. Rather, the promise of immediacy builds on "*new tactilities which are produced* in digital technologies" (153). We should, in other words, hear in the word "elimination" the *limen*, the threshold, since "elimination" here is more a question of pushing the limits than that of getting rid of something. New tactile technologies do not make distance disappear; they transform it. The question remains how.

Vasseleu ends up claiming that digital technology leads to "formalisation of touch" by instituting touch as an objective sense – with the objective of making contact and staying in touch (159). Digital formats tend to prioritise haptic appropriation and grasping by detaching the objective side of touching from its affective qualities. The result is an enhanced polarity between two interacting modes of touching: hypersensitive "ticklishness" that is detached from all functional object relations and "haptic touch" exemplified by the omnipotence of the finger with regard to the horizon of real time telecommunication (159). Insofar as ticklishness is a domain of tactile experience that is beyond self-control, it cannot have any pre-programmed function in digital telecommunication networks. These are built on the idea that being in contact equals the perception that one is in touch with someone or something. They function in accordance with the logic of subject/object relation. Even if ticklishness is not in this sense object-oriented, it nevertheless plays an important role in digital tactility.

The enhanced polarity between the two modes of touching that Vasseleu discerns can be seen as a symptom of a transformation of tactile experience articulated in the new tactile technologies. This enhanced polarity becomes tangible in situations where the feedback structure of an interface is pleasurable to the user in an ambiguous way. This is the case when it engages the user through its well-developed functionality at the same time as it turns the lability of the mediated contact into a vehicle for intensity. At this borderline of functionality and dysfunctionality, digital tactility shows little tolerance for frustration. This is why device developers, such as Microsoft, invest a great deal of their resource in refining the sense of instantaneity, for example, by trying to reduce touchscreen lag. [5] In this kind of investment, the pleasure that the user is supposed to experience is searched for in the realm of functionality. Typically, the developers of multimodal interfaces set as their goal not only the richness and realism of sense feedback but also the pleasure that the user can experience (Ratti et al. 410). Following Vasseleu we could argue,

however, that despite the polarised setting, the two modes of touching in fact co-operate. Even if ticklishness, as "nonsensical touching," is the excessive other of haptic control, it nevertheless facilitates computational tele-contiquity. It is exactly due to its uncontrollable auto-affective character that ticklishness makes tele-contiquity touching. Uncontrollable vulnerability, or, pathic moment, lurks beneath the surface of haptic control.

To sum up, the formalisation of touch can be seen as an effect of the intricate interplay between technological, sensuous and affective aspects of formatting. Insofar as the implicit or explicit aim is to functionalise touch and to integrate it into a system of digital mediations, these processes of formatting tend to represent touch as a sense that works in synchrony with vision and offer a support for optical intuitionism. They enhance the role of touch as the guarantor of sensory certainty. As I already indicated in the first part of this article, this scheme of haptocentrism has made up the mainstream of Western philosophy of touch. Interface design that builds on this scheme tends to focus on feedback that affirms recognition and underlines the idea of human body as an autonomous functional unit. This could be called *narsissistic feedback*, because it forms in its functionality a circle that feeds the sense of self-power. The idea is to have everything related to the system smoothly to hand. When this happens, the pathic nature of touch and the ethical dimensions of feedback remain concealed.

Aesthetic Horizon of Digital Culture

The promise of infinite communicability and seamless functionality, combined with the relative independence of the physical environment, have, through digital media, become part of our everyday experience. Computer-aided human multitasking, which amounts to a kind of phantom presence, puts into question the principle of containment that has governed Western thinking about the body. According to this principle, first articulated in systematic terms in Aristole's *Physica*, the body is seen as a self-contained unit that takes its place by excluding other bodies from that place, thereby offering a clear frame for presence (208b-210b). Recent media technological developments, especially various forms of telepresence enabled by electronic and digital media, have, however, turned the principle of containment into an increasingly untenable starting point for a discourse on the lived body. In fact, the very notion of place in its relation to body has become something that requires a differential approach.

Weber has pointed this out in clear terms with regards to television. In his analysis, television "overcomes spatial distance but only by *splitting the unity of place* and with it the unity of everything that defines its identity with respect to place: events, bodies, subjects" (*Massmediauras* 117). Television overcomes distance by becoming separation, which, at the same time, camouflages itself by taking the form of a visible image on the screen (120).

The prefix "tele-" in telescope, telephone, television, etc. implies that distance is conceived of as an obstacle that these media aim at eliminating. [6] This elimination is, however, as I already have noted, a question of pushing the limits and transforming rather than eradication. If electronic media such as television push the limits of sensory experience by enabling live transmission, digital media tend to go a step further by enabling real time computation to yield accessibility here and now. In both cases the unity of place is compromised on the level of the processes that involve the lived body. On the level of affects, however, both types of mediation rely on a corporeal frame. Both liveness and accessibility can take place only insofar as there is some*body* to experience them as such. These processes blur the corporeal frame of experience at the same time as their effects are imposed on the body in a way that reaffirms its position as the center of orientation.

Today, as different sensations and faculties are digitally reconfigured, some have even begun to talk about "a new language of haptic sensations" (Paterson 139). It is new in the sense that is technologically constructed: interface designers polish the structure and tones of it by means of

user studies exploiting virtual prototypes. In the context of these studies, touch is associated with the promise of immediacy. The technological ideal of the new haptic language is that of transparency. This feeds the kind of haptic realism that attempts to fade out the part played by technology: virtual objects are expected to "feel real" (139). It is here that the sheltering/exposing function of touch comes into play. Touch-based devices, such as touchscreens, literally *screen* the vulnerability of the corporeal frame of experience: they both show and conceal it. When these screens are operated by a limited set of gestures, such as simple taps and sweeps of the finger, the aim is obviously not an experience of immersion. Rather, the haptic language of these interfaces aims at functionality with regard to the body in physical space. The body is not carried away or repressed as one could say in the case of immersion; rather, it is engaged in the system through isolation of functional units and gestures. The touchscreen provides tactile mastery of media contents that are systematically sorted out. At the same time the interface contributes to sorting out the body as a functional unit. Media contents are brought to the fingertips in a form that meets the finger.

The psychodynamics of this operation of sorting out can be studied in terms of Freudian vocabulary. In his article on denial, Freud foregrounds parallels between thinking and perceiving by suggesting that they both are based on a "palpating impetus" (*tastender Vorstoß*), that is, a feeling and testing of the limits between inside and outside ("Verneinung" 12-15). This tactile process of demarcation offers a basis for psychic structures and various defense mechanisms, such as denial. Freud states that repressed representations can enter into the consciousness under the precondition that they are denied (12). Denial is a process of rationalisation that disconnects affectivity from representation. The integration of repressed representations into the consciousness takes place only on an intellectual level, and the affective implications of the repressed are cut off (12).

Denial depends on an intellectual judging function (*intellektuelle Urteilsfunktion*), which concerns questions of inclusion and exclusion (Freud, "Verneinung" 13). The ego decides if something is to be taken in or excluded. The reverse side of this intellectual decision is something Freud calls reality testing (*Realitätsprüfung*) (14). The ego tests if an intellectually accepted and thus internalised representation also reappears in perceived reality. What is at stake in both functions is a decision between the inside and outside. The subjective exists only inside, whereas everything that counts as objective must exist outside as well. This double operation of internalisation and reality testing makes sure that the relationship between the inner representations and their counterparts in outer reality can be mastered.

Against this background, the process characteristic of digital technology that Vasseleu calls "formalization of touch" can be understood as the denial of ambivalence of touch. It is an operation that secures the division between the inside and the outside by representing the affective and physical aspects of contact as relatively autonomous dimensions. Consequently, tactility is prioritised and made into the paradigm of touching. Further, as a form of denial in media technology, the "formalisation of touch" appears as a "reality test" that contributes to consolidating those patterns of communication and affective behavior that fit to its formats.

The pathic moment of touching invites us to go a step further. Just as "to touch" is always also "to become touched," the rationalisation process of denial, that is, the ego's effort to get hold of disturbing material, does not leave the ego untouched. As Weber points out, denial goes hand in hand with another form of psychic defense that Freud terms "isolation," since they are both mechanisms aiming at the clear-cut demarcation of figures and events (*Targets* 59). If in denial the affective implications of a repressed representation are cut off by rationalisation, in isolation, a similar effect is achieved by *spatiotemporal interruption* of affective associations of an event. The example Freud gives is a pause interjected in a chain of events ("Hemmung" 152), but other kinds of punctuation and ritualisation are also implicated. What is peculiar to all these forms of isolation is that they involve spatialisation and duration. Isolation, in other words, involves the

body (151). Freud sums up by saying that isolation deprives the unpleasant event any possibility of contact; it is "a means to withdraw a thing from every touch" (152). Just like taboos concerning touching, the work of isolation is directed against the inevitable ambivalence of touch.

It is noteworthy that according to Freud isolation, which is typical of compulsive neurosis, has the same structure as the normal process of focusing one's attention ("Hemmung" 151). To be attentive to something is to isolate this something from its surroundings. What is kept away or held apart is "not only what is irrelevant or unimportant, but above all, what is unsuitable because it is contradictory" (151). In Freud's account, the most contradictory and disturbing elements are those which once belonged together but which have been torn apart in the course of psychic development. These uncanny elements are decisive for formation of what I have above called "existential integrity." They need to be isolated otherwise it is not possible to build up the physical and psychical consistency of an individual.

Freud's way of making touch into the cornerstone of isolation and attention gives a hint of what is at stake in media technology's formatting of touch. Freud breaks down the clear-cut distinction between the psychical and physical by evoking touch and identifies touch as the common denominator of various forms of disturbance that the ego tries to cope with by isolation. At the same time, he indicates that isolation work itself, paradoxically enough, depends on touch. In order to hold things apart, the ego must take hold of them, that is, make some sort of initial contact (Weber, "Clouds"). This means that the ego must put its integrity into play when trying to sort things out and make them representable. Its position is ambivalent, as is the status of the demarcations it makes.

Against this background, digital technologies that engage the senses of touch in one way or another appear as sites where the ambivalent tendencies of touch are negotiated. Their interfaces, that is, their ways of facing the body, provide something like an "aesthetic horizon" for the experience of digital culture by engaging the contradictions of our time at the level of the senses. [7] Their logic is that of multiple targeting: they single out functional gestures; they are individually customisable; they build up selected patterns of social behaviour; they prioritise certain ways of making contact and staying in contact; and they make use of the searchability of various layers of metadata.

Even if touching is not necessarily target-oriented, it has something of targeting about it in the sense that it singles out. Touch, whether active or passive, intruding or tactful, always touches someone or something. When linked to the mechanisms of focusing one's attention, this singling out turns into isolation, or as Weber indicates, into targeting. In one of his remarks on Freud's notion of isolation, Weber notes that Freud describes isolation as a passage from a potentially disturbing and formless network of significant relations to objectification, which implies a unified ego and self-contained objects. Weber emphasises the tensional character of isolation as a process that seeks to identify and localise objects, or targets, in order to "do them away" (*Targets* 85). This kind of tensional logic of targeting seems to be characteristic of the aesthetic horizon for the experience of digital culture, whereas "doing away" or elimination should be understood here in terms of pushing the limits rather than as getting rid of something once and for all. Customers and user groups, for example, are targeted in order to collect data that could be used for identifying new groups with new needs. Similar patterns can be discerned with regard to targeting of gestures in interface design. Today, the operative gestures that individual users must rely on when using various interfaces are often patented products. We could thus say that media industry is, in a sense, formalising the haptic language and formatting it into a profitable vocabulary. This, in turn, tends to prioritise formatted speech.

If "verbal ability," which, according to Freud, is essential to the ability of the ego to establish stabile "cathexes," can be equated with the ability to isolate, as Weber suggests (*Targets* 87), then formatting of touch becomes, perhaps, a question of translation. Hereby, language must be

understood as the medium of transmission of touch, which is to acknowledge that all significant distinctions involve experience of contiguity. In short, language literally means by touching. This is to say that the formatting of the senses of touch has subtle effects on our thinking. And, if we take into account that touch might constitute a prototype of pathic experience, we start to recognise that the formatting of the senses of touch affects not only our aesthetic horizon but also that of pathic encounterings in general. The subtle effects of sensuous formatting reach well beyond representational thinking.

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Endnotes

1. See "Apple iPhone" on the Apple website.

2. Paterson emphasises, following Wyschogorod, the metaphoric character of what he calls "deep" touching in contrast to the "immediate" sense of touch (2-3). Jean-Luc Nancy, whose thinking revolves around multiple aspects of touch, insists, in turn, that the way in which touch exceeds the tactile world is not simply metaphoric; rather touch is nothing else than the touch or stroke of sense altogether, in all senses of the word "sense" (16-18).

3. The term "pathic" which derives from the Greek word *pathos* refers to sensitivity, affection, susceptibility, suffering and, more generally, exposure. For a more detailed study of the pathic character of touching see my article "Digital Finger" (Elo).

4. German *als* means "as." According to the logic of *Als-Sturktur* all that appears, appears *as something, als etwas*.

5. A group of Microsoft researchers recently announced that they are working on reducing touchscreen lag from 100ms to 1ms ("Applied Sciences Group").

6. The prefix "tele-" means "far off."

7. I borrow the very useful term of "aesthetic horizon" from Miriam Hansen. According to her analysis of the early twentieth century mainstream film culture, the so-called "classic cinema" "not only traded in the mass production of the senses but also provided an aesthetic horizon for the experience of industrial mass society." It "engaged the contradictions of modernity at the level of the senses" and contributed by "mainstreaming" to the emergence of mass culture (70).

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