# Performing Touch

## The Politics and Economics of Kin and Transmission in Somatics and Beyond

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# Declaration of Authorship

**I, Maud Lannen, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated. Signed: ____Maud Lannen_____ Date: 13/09/24**

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my two successive supervisors, Professor Anna Furse and Professor Clare Finburgh Delijani: Furse for sharing her extensive knowledge and her investment in my project; Finburgh Delijani for her support and encouragements during the lengthy and arduous revision stage of this thesis, especially with regards to developing my writing skills and clarifying my ideas. A big thank you too to Simon Robson, Royal Literary Fellow at Goldsmiths (2022/23), for providing additional writing support and helping me reflect on the reader's experience; and to my friend, Chris Reynolds, for reviewing my grammar and the formal presentation of this document. My wholehearted thanks go to my amazing collaborators: Amaia, Jae and Chloe. I am grateful and humbled by your generosity and trust in me, and for our continuing friendship. I also want to thank Antonija Livingstone for demonstrating such brilliance, humour and warmth, and spurring my project on. I am grateful to Royona Mitra, Arabella Stanger, Simon Ellis and Cristina Fernandes Rosa and their pioneering 'Anti-Racist Dance Practices' workshop (2019), for they gave me the confidence to ask difficult question of myself and of the somatic discipline. This research project has been a long time coming. It emerges from a line of inquiry that began during my academic training (BA Fine Art, University of Nottingham and MA in Performance Making, Goldsmiths). I want, therefore, to thank all my teachers and, importantly, my peers who have inspired and challenged me along the way: a few names I recall instantly, Dahlia Li, Natalie B. Wong, Mafalda Jacinto, Cori Williams, Ghida Hachicho, Ana Vincente, Lia Smaragda and Beatrice Benedek. My thesis embodies those early conversations. My unbounded gratitude goes to my partner Dave and my boys, Jack and George, who have championed me during this project and allowed for my absence in body and often in mind; and to my close friends, Andrea, Eve, Emma and Clare who have listened and engaged with it with humour and lightness. My PhD is made possible by lots of people, lots of chance encounters and conversations. Because I can never list them fully, I invite you, through this document, to invoke, even summon, their presence with me.

# Abstract

Postmodern dance and somatics have foregrounded the sense of touch via the skin as a subject of inquiry and a catalyst for change, nowhere more so than in Paxton's Contact Improvisation (CI). Touch continues to be explored choreographically, beyond CI, in contemporary dance, staging increasingly more daring, excessive sensuality and erotics between performers and performers/audience in mainstream theatre. Such tactile strategies and displays coexist, not without tension, with widespread issues of consent and exclusion. The fact that this remains largely understudied within the field raises timely questions about the performance of touch: what does touch constitute? Specifically, what are the latent politics, economics and hierarchies that structure it and might account for the power relation reported by leading anti-racist performance scholar Royona Mitra? My research examines these questions, taking inspiration from one of Paxton's lesser-known theoretical influences that spurred the development of CI: his research into mother-child touch communication. Here, however, I turn to forms of Othermothering, that is, non-normative maternal embodiments, to look for alternative performances of touch. For this, I recruit three collaborators with unconventional maternal touch practices, with whom I enter into dialogue – into *contact* (touch): Amaia, a nanny; Jae, at the time of completion, a non-binary cis gay man who longs to gestate; and Chloe, a trans woman with a maternal practice towards her trans community. For my analysis, I take the lead from the distinct science-inflected tradition of somatics, understood to inform movement, in which CI is grounded, drawing from a range of disciplines including feminist and queer theory, social sciences, neurosciences, anthropology, phenomenology, psychoanalysis and the history of reproductive medicine. Through my collaborators' creative writing and our sustained interaction over six months, I work to weave new and provocative narratives about touch and what touch communicates when located in the alternatively defined maternal, in a bid to nourish somatics/my own performance of touch and, it is hoped, move the discipline towards more inclusive and consensual tactile practices. Little did I suspect that the question of touch would have huge implications for the performance of the body, not least my own identity and sense of kinship, that is, my sense of connection to people and the world.

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# Introduction

## 1. TOUCH IN CONTEMPORARY DANCE AND CONTACT IMPROVISATION: ISSUES, GAPS AND OMISSIONS LEADING TO MY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the legacy of the American postmodern movement, and Steve Paxton's Contact Improvisation (CI), I contend that physical touch is too readily assumed a 'truth' sense which gives insight into the truth about the body or the 'real' because it is grounded in the irrefutable reality of the physical body in mass, weight and energy (Rainer, 1974: 69, 71 in Burt, 2006).[1] Today, touch is mostly drawn on choreographically to experiment with subversive forms of contact, intimacy and connection, therefore, heightened forms of presence and liveness: that of the performers, and that of the audience as performers interact with them. Such tactile discourse and offerings unmistakably rehearse dance and theatre's enduring quest since the 1960s of transgressing personal boundaries and the thresholds of performance spaces (Novack, 1990; Burt, 2006). In French choreographer Boris Charmatz' *10,000 Gestures* (Sadlers Wells and Tate Modern, 2018) performers, quasi nude and dripping in sweat, crawl in and amongst the audience, climbing on, pushing and pulling single individuals, shoving feet and genitals in their faces, sometimes lifting them out of their seats, and generally treating unsuspecting bodies as if they were mere fabric of the space and not without backlash.[2] In Berlin-based US choreographer Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods' *Until our Hearts Stop* (2017), performers engage in childlike games. They explore each other's bodies with mouth, hands and other body parts. They taste, lick, bite, prod, twist (nipples), sniff (each other's genitals) and take part in an eye-watering smacking contest. In *Sketches/Notebook* (2013/2018), Stuart brings to the fore audience participation and contact both face-to-face and skin-to-skin. Along an onslaught of demands over an epic four hours made on the audience to interact, follow prompts, mimic and give themselves up to the next proposition, she also features a human 'pile' (2018) – a living organism, made-up of several intertwined bodies, which crawls, stretches, swallows, engulfs, digests, bursts and spits performers, objects, fabric and members of the audience alike (2018, HAU).[3] In Xavier Le Roy's *Temporary Title* (2015), naked performers enact a pride of lions. They move around, rub their heads and necks on each other, strike poses, collapse into sleeping piles bunched up together, and occasionally break out to converse with members of the audience (see also *low pieces*, 2011). In Livingstone's *Male Breast Feeding* (2008 to date) (presented as part of Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods' HAU take over, 2018), bare chested performers, performers-

[1] The American postmodern movement includes the influence of such seminal figures as Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, Deborah Hay, Trisha Brown, Simone Forti, David Gordon and Lisa Nelson, to name a few.
[2] The backlash to the daring performance is captured in dancemagazine.com (Wingenroth, 11 October 2018).
[3] In the documentary on the show (2018), Stuart states that she always inserts a human pile in all her pieces; she has a desire for things to merge in order to explore how fragile, messy and intimate it is to collaborate.

members of the public, organised in duets, take turns to hold one another and suckle or nurse on each other's nipples.[4]

In its requirement for (hyper-)*presence* via choreographed touch, the discipline of somatic practice could be said to showcase an overwhelming anguish about *disappearance*. Setting aside the well-trodden discourse 'presence-absence' (Phelan, 1996 and Lepecki, 2006), I emphasise in its place the intervention of the hand in acts and logics of erasure (the etymology of which is to scrape out) or attrition (to rub) revealing tactility, and in tactility, inherent movement. In other words, what dance continues to be mostly preoccupied by, and rightly so in my opinion, is a discourse about the intricate entanglement of the social, therefore, the dynamic relational and dialogical field unfolding on stage and in everyday life – that which makes negotiating the self and the other difficult, threatens the ego, and is mediated by the sense of touch. However, by strategically collapsing physical distances to develop and promote sensual counter-cultures and aesthetics affective of presence, liveness and intimacy, it is my view that the discipline widely underestimates and unwittingly neutralises, indeed erases, or *disappears*, touch's complexity: its life beyond physical contact, its connection to consent and propensity to exclude – although I note that the #Metoo (2017) and the Black Lives Matter (2020) movements have opened-up these conversations (Beaulieux, 2019; Auberville *et al.*, 2020; Bachrach, 2018; Mitra *et al.*, 2019; Kampe, 2020; Tjersland and Borovica, 2021). In my thesis, I argue that both issues of consent and exclusion are manifestations of touch because they are anchored in human relations. Lack of consent is typically associated with non-permitted physical touch or sexual relations, a touch that is forced upon a person against their will. I associate exclusion with a lack of consent as far as exclusion, by definition, means ultimately being shut out without consensus and with coercion (the opposite definition of consent). It is therefore suggestive of a type of uninvited, discriminatory touch that unfolds haptically, across distance, rather than via skin-to-skin (this is developed further in Chapter 1 of this thesis).[5]

The much celebrated and legendary status of CI (Furse, 2011: 59), however, also means that social tensions and their associated anxiety in choreographies of touch remain neglected as an area of research and are only sparsely explored. Discussing the dynamics

[4] MBF emerged from a collaboration between Antonija Livingstone (CA) and Heather Kravas (US) with Brynjar Bandlien (N) in 2008 (interview with the artist, 2018). Livingstone describes MBF as a queer healing practice (ibid). Although it is not the context in which it was performed when I attended the performance in Berlin, Livingstone explains that 'over the life span of the work […] many colleagues that [she] ha[s] been closed with whom have transitioned gender have been participants in the form and it has been a very important thing for them to experience as a personal healing journey pre-surgery, post-surgery, pre-hormones and post-hormones' (ibid). Other tactile performances include Jared Gradinger and Angela Shubot's *What they are instead of* 2012, this is not an exhaustive list.

[5] Haptics is a mechanism or technology that stimulates the sense of touch and motion across distance.

of exclusion based on sexuality inherent to CI spaces, Olaya and Skrzypczak write, tentatively it seems because in parentheses at the end of a paragraph:

> If mainstream CI spaces are being set as 'pure' spaces without reference to sexuality, they are, in fact, sex-negative, causing taboos and abuse. We need an understanding of sexual expression as something that is somatically basic and inalienable, happening everywhere all the time, which cannot be confined. This means changing our understanding of sexuality altogether. (A deeper conceptual research on this change of perspective about sexuality is […] needed.) (2019)

Echoing Olaya and Skrypczak, *Male Breast Feeding* choreographer, Antonija Livingstone remarks that:

> [though it is not how the form emerged originally,] the way that [CI] exists today is extremely exclusive and almost totally exclusive to queer individuals in as much as you can pretty much guarantee that someone will be in a situation where they feel unsafe because of sexual advances from straight men who have a certain codified way of behaving. (Interview of the artist, 2018)

Their comment on sexuality and gender readily applies to issues of exclusion and consent based on race, ethnicity, class and disability. Indeed, in 2018, dance and performance cultures scholar Royona Mitra interviews Paxton and asks him why CI is predominantly white.[6] Paxton replies generously:

> I've been thinking about this question for a very long time […] As the recent Black Lives Matter movement signals to us, what we once considered was institutionalized racism as practiced by the police is in fact systemic in our society, our culture. So, it might well be that rubbing skins with your oppressors is not an appealing prospect within contact. […] It warns us that something might be up, and has been, for the whole time that contact has been around (2018: 13).

More recently, Mitra, who is a South-Asian dancer classically trained in India, reflects on her first encounter with the form while studying in the UK. She builds upon Paxton's 2018 suppositions around the experience of 'rubbing skins with your oppressors' not being particularly 'appealing' and introduces the idea that the touch of CI animates, even exacerbates, pre-existing power differentials between performers. In other words, they are imbued and manifest 'in and through' (2021: 10) touch and the CI context is no exception, noting that:

> being instructed and able to improvise spontaneously within CI signals its deeply privilege-wielding white foundations. In reality, therefore, not everyone can improvise freely without the fear of *how* power might enact on and harm our bodies in and through our CI partner's relational social-positionings. (ibid)

[6] See also Keith Hennessy, a queer artist and long-time practitioner of CI within an interdisciplinary performance practice, who raises the issue of racial exclusion and white supremacy within the form (*Contact Quarterly*, 2019).

Extending these findings, I propose that social tensions (connected with lack of consent and exclusion) are unextractable from the tactile relational modes practised in dance/somatics, even CI's utopian ones, that look to skin as neutral surface (Furse, 2011: 60). I also reflect upon Mitra's own assertion of the 'deeply privilege-wielding white foundations' (Mitra, 2021) of CI and hypothesise that the discipline's reportedly fraught performance of touch is deeply entangled with the performance of white hegemonic identity and kinship, perhaps going some way towards explaining why many performers of colour and/or of non-heteronormative sexuality or gender do not feel *at home* nor welcome within the form. In section 3 of this Introduction, I point specifically to mainstream maternal feminism in light of its defining influence on somatics/CI.

My thesis seeks to address the research gaps within two, surprisingly connected, disciplines: somatics/CI and maternal performance. I will ask:

- What is touch?
- What are the politics, economics and power dynamics that touch communicates when located in the maternal?
- Can a new feminist formulation of touch inform more inclusive and consensual performance of touch in CI and somatics?

As Paxton proved 50 years ago, I will argue that new narratives about maternal touch present a rich, generative and exciting territory that might, once again, ignite alternative questions, embodiments, movement aesthetics and ethics. Little did I know that my supposition would throw into question the performance of my own dominant feminist touch, identity and sense of kinship.

## 2. KEY TERMINOLOGIES

I use the term 'postmodern dance' while understanding its Global North, white, middle-class, hegemonic categorisation and epistemologies as critiqued by Global Majority dance scholars Brenda Dixon Gottschild (1996), Ananya Chatterjea (2004) and Yutian Wong (2002).[7] My project addresses, problematises and works to unsettle these by resisting the traditional Western minimalist and biased curation of lineage and genealogy of the movement. For example, while the traditional Asian influence on the postmodern dancer is well documented, and the connections are made clear in the studio, little is said of the movement's borrowing

[7] See also non-Global Majority dance scholars Chaleff, 2018; Burt, 2006: 117, 120, 126.

of African aesthetics and forms – their 'perversive […] presence' (Gottschild, 1996: xiv). In effect, it could be argued that minimalism, namely, the mechanisms of abstraction, subtraction and erasure which postmodern dance embodies and enacts, washes off and distances the problematic *contact* with African aesthetics. It makes it disappear. My project endeavours to disrupt this orientation by complicating hegemonic maternal kin and lineage.

In the 1970s, Paxton described Contact Improvisation (CI) as 'an […] 'improvised dance form', also 'spontaneous physical dialogues' 'based on the communication between two moving bodies that are in physical contact and their combined relationship to the physical laws that govern their motion'; it is a 'free play with balance […] bringing forth a physical/emotional truth about a shared moment of movement that leaves the participants informed, centered, and enlivened'. (*Contact Quarterly*, 2022)[8] In 2020, Daniel Lepkoff, a key player in CI's development, called it 'movement research', a definition with which I identify, and adopt in my thesis. CI investigates 'the deeply reflexive body's responses to gravity and touch'; it demands '[i]ntense observation [and 'attention'] of how the body functions at the level of the reflexes'. Lepkoff explains: '[t]he effort was […] to access the body's innate intelligence to respond to new physical situations'; to 'cultivat[e] ever more detailed curiosity and questioning' and, in a manner of speaking, 'to get out of the way so [one's] pre-thought reflexive knowledge could flourish, unhampered by […] conventions, habits, or rules.' (CQ Contact Improvisation Newsletter, 2020)

CI's focus on touch and the body's natural reflexivity for the enhancement of both movement and awareness emerges from the somatic field.[9] Martha Eddie writes that 'somatic work is often referred to as bodywork, body therapies, hands-on work, body-mind integration, body-mind disciplines, movement therapy, somatic therapy, movement awareness, movement education […] and/or somatic education' (2002: 47). Thomas Hanna, an American movement theorist, educator and practitioner, first introduced the term in 1970 with the book *Bodies in Revolt: A Primer in Somatic Thinking* (Eddy, 2002: 47; Claid, 2021: 3). He 'brought attention to the "soma" by emphasising the soma's alive and changing status, replete with cellular intelligence and capability of perceiving itself.' (Hanna 1985-86: 4-9) Emilyn Claid, choreographer, movement practitioner and scholar, adds that 'for Hanna, soma refers to an experiencing body, rather than a body objectified.' (2021: 3) As such, '[s]omatic movement practices are grounded in sensation – feeling in every sense – as experienced by body and mind in response to internal and external environments […] behaviour, emotions, the sense,

[8] By communication, I mean the exchanging (sending and receiving) and transmission (passing on) of information (its definition).
[9] In reflexivity, somatics understand movement and awareness to be interconnected: movement via touch brings awareness, and, in turn, awareness affects movement/action (the definition of reflexivity).

movements and psychology are all integrated as psycho-physical or mind-body wholeness.' (2021: 3)

Somatic thinking is related to the notion of embodiment and phenomenology – its close associates. Vida Midgelow, dance scholar and practitioner, refers to embodiment as the 'dancer's bodily knowledge' and 'a bodily ontology in which experiencing, conceptual ideas, and physical practices are embedded and embodied, existing in and emanating from movement practices in reflexive and critical ways.' (2015: 110) It is the 'meeting of knowing and being' (ibid) which lends itself so well to phenomenology: 'the study of conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view.' (*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2018) In effect, somatics is the study of 'the phenomenal body, the living-lived body, which participates and is inextricably entangled with the world.' (Midgelow, 2015: 112) The interconnected nature of being and human relations brings to the fore perhaps the most foundational and overarching interest of somatics understood to stimulate awareness: the field of relationality. I define the latter for the purpose of my thesis as the interplay of fantasy, meaning (emission of signs and reading of signs), singular biography, the patterns of relating to others, and of a wide variety of discourses about self and identity which inform the living, breathing, feeling, thinking body (definition elaborated from Baraitser, 2009: 19). And the discipline, as Paxton's CI suggests, has clearly identified touch as its medium because touch always already speaks of contact (with/together touch, its etymology) and connection; being contiguous with (its etymology). For this reason, I use the terms touch and contact interchangeably in my thesis. I also elaborate the connection/contiguity between touch and kin: family, race, kind, sort (the etymology of kin); and kinship: the sense or state of being related by kindred affinity or other alliances (the etymology of kinship); also lineage, in other words members of a person's family who are directly related to that person and who lived in the past; filiation, the kinship between a person and their parents or line of descent (the synonym of lineage); and genealogy, the study of one's lineage or family tree. Touch in kinship, lineage, filiation and genealogy also extends beyond blood relations to other kindred groups or tribes one adopts later in life, in the same way that I have adopted mainstream feminism and the movement research community of somatics. As such, touch in my thesis becomes a manifestation of both kin and identity.[10]

[10] Peter Wade, a scholar in anthropology, notes the 'connections between 'race' and 'kinship'. Both are realms in which identities, individual and collective, are constituted.' (2012: 79) I extend Wade's assertion to other identity characteristics such as class, sexuality, gender, ethnicity and disability.

'This interconnection with the world' (Midgelow, 2015: 112), which is the effect of touch, I propose, and which is made literal via physical contact in the studio, 'offers insights of how I come to "know" (my/our) dancing selves and how we connect with others' (ibid). So somatics understands touch to be dynamic. Touch communicates: it spurs an exchange of information and transmits (the definition of communication) and, through its tactile phenomenon, enhances and shifts both perception and movement. Touch performs: it is an action (the definition of performance) that emphasises the body's inescapable relational, therefore dialogical condition and limit (based on the etymology of the prefix 'per', meaning through, before, toward, near, around, against); and its inherent potential to bring into existence (the etymology of '-formance'), shape or mould itself and its environment, likewise, be shaped by it. Touch, too, is performative: its 'performativity' (Butler, 1990) interacts with and renders visible 'the entire regulatory system that produces gendered subjects [at the intersection of race, class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality] through a series of normative behaviors and […] the possibility of response' (Taylor, 2016: 123). Performance relates, in gender theorist Judith Butler's sense, to the body reproducing and making real, via 'ritual' or 'repetition' (1990: xv), ideological '*fabrications*' (ibid: 185, original italics); and 'the possibility' (Taylor, 2016: 123) of subversion, by inserting 'dissonance' or '*imitat[ion]*' (Butler, 1990: 187, original italics) in the repetition. My thesis builds upon these definitions and somatic principles to complicate the discipline's notion of touch, question its performance, and investigate the politics and economics that touch communicates.

## 3. BRIEF HISTORIZATION OF CONTACT IMPROVISATION: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DISTINCT MAINSTREAM FEMINIST MATERNAL TOUCH

The American postmodern movement, of which Steve Paxton was a key figure, arose in the context of social and political unrest in the 1960s and 1970s, namely the civil rights, anti-war and feminist and gay liberation movements (Furse, 2011: 51; 59-60). The movement achieved prominence by cohering theoretical studies and physical practices with activism as an artform. American culture's fascination with Zen Buddhism, European philosophies and the pedestrian/the everyday, which began in the late 1950s, would acquire a new political dimension with the young, hip, postmodern dancers (Novack, 1990: 54) and their renewed aspiration towards 'more immediacy, more "presentness," more concrete experience.' (Banes, 1993: xvi)[11] The movement famously rejected ballet and modern dance hierarchies (choreographer-performer) and aesthetics (its artifice and gender-specific roles), and questioned the nature of dance performance (Perron, 2020; Banes, 1993; Novack, 1990;

[11] The focus on the everyday is an influence from the Bauhaus movement via Cage, Halprin, Kaprow, Rauschenberg (Perron, 2020: 2, 19, 245) and the teachings of Merce Cunningham, who believed that any movement could be dance (Novack, 1990: 53).

Burt, 2006; Furse, 2011: 51).[12] Their dance interventions were 'part of social experiments in egalitarianism and communality' typical of the era (Novack, 1990: 3). They articulated the group's 'commitment to democratic and collective process' (Banes, 1993: xvii) and 'a desire to be closer to nature' (ibid). For the postmodern dancers, this involved a reassessment of the body/self and its mode of relating, meshing and wilfully blurring art, life, theory and disciplines (Perron, 2020; Burt, 2006; Banes, 1993; Novack, 1990).[13] Concerns with survival (Paxton, 1972 in Nelson, 2004) and group dynamics, in a post-war landscape where hope coexisted with trauma, would lead to a conceptualisation of movement which saw choreography and dancers, it is said, incorporate democratic principles: anti-capitalist, anti-militaristic and anti-sexist (Banes, 1993; Furse, 2011: 59-60).[14]

Before a clear form emerged, postmodern dancers drew on improvisation to re-engage the body, reawaken the senses, reinvigorate the act of looking, 'abandon old habits and find new ways of moving' (Interview of Judith Dunn, Anderson, 1967: 51). Improvisation came to stand for freedom, for it emphasised choreographic choice (Banes, 1993, xvii) and the intelligence of the body – its intuition and untapped knowing; its concrete, physical reality and natural aesthetics (as opposed to ballet); its supposed truth and authenticity (Novack, 1990; Banes, 1993; Burt, 2006; Perron, 2020; Furse, 2011: 52).[15] This research informed the development of distinct somatic practices that engage with perception through touch: Anna Halprin, pioneer of touch and somatics in the context of self-expression and healing (Eddy, 2002: 49), Emilie Conrad's Continuum (ibid: 55), Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's Body-Mind Centering (BMC) (Giotaki, 2016: 122; Eddie, 2002); Joan Skinner's Skinner Release Technique (SRT); Steve Paxton's Contact Improvisation (CI); Deborah Hay, Yvonne Rainer and Lisa Nelson's respective and overlapping practices.[16] Perron notes that CI's gender-defying characteristic, which would consecrate the form, owes much to Nancy Stark Smith's feminist vision for it (Perron, 2022: 150). Indeed, the first rendition of CI (before it was given a name) in *Magnesium* (1972) arose from a men-only workshop which Paxton led as part of

[12] Dance means 'a technique for socializing' and 'in itself a socialisation' (Lepecki, 2006: 27).
[13] The extent of resources, materials and practices that influenced the American postmodern movement is rich and far reaching. Across different scholarships, I have gathered a long list (discrepancies lead me to assume that it is by no mean exhaustive): Tai Chi, Aikido, Zen Buddhism, Taoism, existentialism and phenomenology (Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre), scientism, kinesiology, Antonin Artaud's theatre, Gutai movement; Dada; Duchamp; Bauhaus (John Cage was taught by Josef Albers at Black Mountain College); Pop Art; Happenings; New Realism. Important figures of dance and performance influenced the postmodern dancers: John Cage and Merce Cunningham; Anna Halprin, Erick Hawkin, including scientific and therapeutically based movement training (e.g., the Alexander technique, Feldenkrais); various forms of yoga and meditation techniques originating in India (in Furse, 2011; Novack, 1990; Banes, 1993; Perron, 2020; Burt; 2006). Little known to contemporary CI practitioners is the fact that the form was also influenced by Lindy Hop (Adebayo, 2020), an African American dance (1920s and 30s, Harlem, NY) for its contact-led acrobatics and 'gender democratic concept of partnering' (Gottschild, 1996: 56); and by research into mother-child communication despite Paxton reportedly acknowledging both (conversation with Furse, 2021).
[14] Hope was inspired by the Kennedy administration's focus on youth, art and culture (Banes, 1993: xv); trauma had been provoked by the Cold War and the Vietnam War (Rainer, 1974: 71 in Burt, 2006), and violence against the Civil Rights movement (Bloody Sunday, 1965). By choreography, I understand the writing, structuring or recording of dance.
[15] Todd's *The Thinking Body* (1937, 1968) was a key influence on postmodern dancers (Furse, 2011: 52).
[16] Nelson met Paxton in 1972 and became a life-long friend and close collaborator of his (Perron, 2020: 153-5).

the Grand Union residency at Oberlin College in January 1972. It was Stark Smith, then a student at Oberlin who, after seeing the piece, encouraged Paxton to open the practice to women (Perron, 2020: 150-1). Certainly, woman-led innovation, activism and feminism (if not by name, by nature) runs deep through the somatic discipline. Somatic movement therapist, Martha Eddy talks of '[f]eminist paradigms' and 'matriarchal power and its transfer' (2002: 50; see also Perron, 2022: 140), the latter clearly emphasising the figure of the cis mother-leader (the etymology of matriarchy).[17]

Yet other latent feminist, maternal inflections can be found in CI. In the early 1970s, Paxton drew from the research of American psychoanalyst Daniel Stern, who explored mother-baby movement interaction using a high-speed camera and slow-motion technique to capture microreflexive shifts (Papadelli, 2013: 81; Papadelli in Sarco-Thomas, 2020: 191-2).[18] Stern coins the term 'affect attunement' (Stern, 2010) to describe the 'matching of dynamics' in intersubjective exchange (Papadelli, 2013: 82). Stern also uses the term 'vitality affects' to mean the 'psychological, subjective phenomena that emerge from the encounter with dynamic events' (2010: 7), that which, he qualifies, is 'the most fundamental of all felt experience when dealing with other humans in motion' (2010: 8). The phenomenon 'jumps out in high relief' (2010: 40) in the non-verbal exchange between primary carer-infant, although they are not exclusive to that territory alone (2010: 53). Stern describes the primary social interaction as uninterrupted 'dances' and 'biologically designed choreography' (1977: 9), a framing that particularly appealed to Paxton (Papadelli, 2013: 82). The latter discerned mother-infant touch communication as natural and precultural: a 'reflex co-operative movement' (Papadelli's email correspondence with Paxton in 2013: 82).[19] Paxton and his feminist followers recognised its potential to neutralise gender and sexuality, flatten hierarchies, thereby 're-ord[er] [the self/body] from normal Western social conditioning.' (Paxton, in Furse, 2011: 61) With CI, Paxton radically reframes the body in terms of physics: mass, weight, force and energy. Skin becomes a neutral, information-giving and responsive surface (Novack, 1990; Furse, 2011: 59-60); and touch 'a perception of flux' (Perron, 2020: 274), a 'pro-physical sensation' (Paxton, 1975 in Novack, 1990: 81-2) and radical 'mutual form' (Perron, 2020: 276). Doing so, he created new powerful narratives about touch that captured the zeitgeist of the day – a new lens through which to practise touch in and out of the studio.

[17] I cannot say with any certitude whether the women artists listed consider themselves to be feminists.
[18] Reflex represents an action that is performed without conscious thoughts as a response to a stimulus.
[19] Paxton may have connected the new notion of a 'reflex co-operative movement' elaborated from Stern's research into mother-child touch communication to the anarchist philosophy of Kropotkin and his concept of mutual aid, inspired by biology, which is also noted to have informed the group dynamics of CI (Perron, 2020: 258).

## 4. TOUCH IN MATERNAL PERFORMANCE

### 4.a Mainstream maternal touch

The quiet feminist and matriarchal strand of CI and somatics, with its focus on touch, leads me to look towards the maternal performance discipline in order to ascertain whether the field is afflicted with similar power-related issues of consent and exclusion. Eventually, a bridge between the two disciplines appears. Indeed, during Underwood-Lee and Šimić's 'ENGAGE…' series of events (6 October 2020) I met two mature, female students from Loughborough University who stated that they practised CI as a maternal practice. And while they did not say whether they practised with other adults or children, the organisation ContaKids, established in 2011, speaks of the enduring, albeit subdued, legacy of Paxton's research into mother-child communication and its link with mainstream feminist maternal performance, which is seldom talked about in CI classes. Although originally founded and developed by CI practitioner and father Itay Yatuv (with his daughter) in 2011 and intended for parents and their children, ContaKids reportedly attracts predominantly cis mothers with very few exceptions (email correspondence with Yatuv, 19 September 2022). During a telephone interview, UK ContaKids teacher, Alessandra Liguori stressed that the gendering of the practice is certainly an issue within the form (7 September 2022).

Back in 2017 spurred by Paxton's own research into mother-child touch communication and CI's feminist thread, I looked to the research outputs of feminist performance scholars and practitioners Underwood-Lee and Šimić who have, since 2016, successfully carved out a space for maternal performance research. Building upon the works of such artists and theorists as Bobby Baker, Lea Lublin, Mary Kelly, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Laura Mulvey, Susan Hiller, the Mother Art Collective and the Magdalena Project network (Underwood-Lee and Šimić, 2017), they have collected the diverse artistic practices and voices of artist-mothers today (*Live Art and Motherhood*, 2016; 'On the maternal' *Performance Research*, 2017 and its launch event at LADA; 'ENGAGE…', a series of online events, 2020; *Maternal Performance*, 2021). Many networks and art/performance platforms dedicated to motherhood and maternal experience have also sprung up in recent years: *Oxytocin* (2017, 2019 and 2023, part of *Procreate Project* founded by cultural producer, artist and curator, Dyana Gravina in 2013); *Birth Rites* Collection (London, since 2009); MaMSIE (Mapping Maternal Subjectivities, Identities and Ethics, Birkbeck University) (date unknown); *Maternal Journal* workshops and community (since 2017, founded by artist, midwife and birth activist Laura Godfrey-Isaacs); Maternal Art (Gallery) (date unknown); Spilt Milk (Gallery) (since

2018); Cultural ReProducers network (Chicago) (2012); Maternal Studies Scholars Network (2014); Artist/Mother Society (2014); Mother Artist Forum (2015), etc.[20]

These maternal-centred performance outlets, research activities and curatorial practices have worked, with varying degrees of success, to become inclusive of marginalised experiences and voices. Although they have extended their membership to gender-diverse and non-biological primary carers, they have by their own admission struggled to mediate against the hegemonic voice of the predominantly white, middle-class, heterosexual, cis biological mother and meaningfully address issues around racial exclusion and the new phenomenon of trans identity (Underwood-Lee and Šimić, 2021: 14-5). I suggest that their difficulty stems from the fact they have resisted repositioning themselves in relation to what the heightened trans and race discourse of today unsettles and indeed challenges about traditional maternal narrative – its fixed, essentialist framework, encapsulated by the iconography of an abstracted single, predominantly white, figure with child who alone exist (Fig. 1 and 2).

Fig. 1
*Maternal Performance* (Underwood-Lee and Šimić, 2021).
Front cover: featured work by Grace Surman, *Motherload*, 2016.
Image removed due to copyright

Fig. 2
*The Madonna Litta*, Leonardo da Vinci, fifteenth century (Hermitage Museum, 2024).

[20] MaMSIE platform includes *Studies in the Maternal*, an international, peer-reviewed, scholarly online journal, co-edited by Lisa Baraitser.

In addition, non-consensual touch is often observed in the discipline's involvement of children. For example, in a collaboration with Gravina for 'ENGAGE…' (6 October 2020), artist Lynn Lu livestreamed to a public audience – an audience of non-vetted strangers of which I was one – her daughter (about 5 years old) going about her bedtime routine in her own bedroom. When I challenged Underwood-Lee on this matter, she wrote: 'we take on board your concerns regarding allowing the audience to enter the child's bedroom […] Of course there is an important debate to be had around consent and ethics when working with children' (email correspondence with Underwood-Lee, 9 October 2020). The debate, however, never materialised. During the conference 'Resistance is Fertile' (Goldsmiths, 2019, *Kin and Maternal Collectivities* panel), Magdalena Kallenberger (co-founder of MATERNAL FANTASIES), revealed, when I pressed her during the Q&A, to tensions between adults and children in the group when they were shooting. She and her colleague briefly shared the doubt and anguish that they felt as artist-mothers documenting these in their artwork. For example, the collective recounted one occasion when a frustrated child pulled their mother's hair and smeared her face with food in anger which they opt to leave out. While I admire and respect the aesthetics, ingenuity and talent of artist-mothers, I worry about a discourse that works so hard at remaining palatable and cosy, and, inadvertently, conceals power dynamics and the absence of consent on the part of the children.

Fig. 3
*Suspended Time, On Caring (2020).* Film still.
MATERNAL FANTASIES (Feminist Art Collective). Image removed due to copyright.

Fig. 4
*Suspended Time, On Caring (2020).* Film still.
MATERNAL FANTASIES (Feminist Art Collective). Image removed due to copyright.

I have also noted an often presumptuous merging of the category 'woman' and care labour towards child, and by extension the future of society and the environment (*Performance and the Maternal*, 'Climate & gender', 20 October 2020). As an audience member at the event, I asked: 'are mothers free not to care? Not to care for either their children or the planet? Who is allowed to take part in the climate and social justice journey?' (ibid). In addition, faint traces of the stigmatisation of men's touch on children can be detected within the discipline. During their performative 'My Mum is on Strike' event on International Women's Day 2019, Claire English and Rosa Campbell, mother-activists and scholars, arranged for a group of gay men to care for their children and decided to set camp in the same room as them. 'Why stay in the same room?' I asked. 'I'm not going to leave my children with a stranger!', one

responded. But why chose strangers in the first place? And why particularly seek gay men? Is the gendered division of labour not exacerbated by cis mothers ringfencing all childcare to themselves, even while on strike? I wondered (*Resistance is Fertile* Conference, Goldsmiths, 2019). The prejudice against men and assigned-male-at-birth (AMAB) is brought to the fore by the dance and theatre company Fevered Sleep and their thought-provoking piece *Men and Girls Dance* (2015 to present) through which they ask '[w]hy don't we trust men to be with Children?' (Fevered Sleep's website, date of publication unknown). I discuss the issue in-depth as part of my collaboration with Jae (Chapter 4).

### 4.b Touch and maternity through IVF

Feminist theatre makers like Anna Furse have pioneered giving form and visibility to Artificial Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) and the experience of 'sub-fertility' (Komporaly, 2006: 150) on stage and in literature. In *Yerma's Eggs* (2003), Furse challenges taboos and traditional family structure (Komporaly, 2006). In her book *Your Essential Infertility Companion* (1997), she makes accessible to the lay person the complicated process of In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF).[21] Platforms such as *Fertility Fest* (2016-2019, London) have followed in her steps.[22] While the festival was crucial to further extend maternal discourse and establish a timely home for the marginalised experience of individuals with reduced fertility, by focusing so ardently on the desiring parent, predominantly cis women's experience, its curation leaves out of representation the many partnerships that IVF often depends upon and the fraught power dynamics within ARTs very economy. I refer to the many bodies whose genetic contribution and connection to the child is neutralised in the process: surrogate mothers, egg donors, sperm donors, etc. I was keen to explore and integrate into the discourse, bodies who fulfil work traditionally associated with the mother, and which are currently excluded from maternal narratives: bodies whose presence and Othermothering practices disturb Western iconography and mythology.[23] In my thesis, Othermothering means any individuals (rather than solely women) who look after children who are not biologically their own. It also extends to individuals who view adult members of their community (usually based on race, gender and/or sexuality) as kin, that is, family and who actively care for them. It includes the people mothers might employ: cleaners, nannies like Amaia, after school educators, grocery delivery people; and individuals whose identities contrast with the fixed image of the mother; men and LGBTQ individuals, like Jae and Chloe,

[21] During IVF, an egg is removed from the woman's ovaries and fertilised with sperm in a laboratory. The embryo is then returned to the woman's womb or that of a surrogate. It can be carried out using the couple's eggs and sperm, or eggs and sperm from donors.
[22] I attended the festival on 26 April 2019, Barbican, London.
[23] I have used the terms 'West' and 'Global North' interchangeably. Neither term refers to strict geographical regions, rather a world order based on political and economic power (Braff and Nelson, 2022), particularly, those countries, 'European nations and United States […] that benefited from the exploits of colonialism' (ibid); 'the hegemony that [they] ha[ve] cultivated over the Rest' (Khan, *et al.*, 2022); and the 'whiteness' of [their] wealth' (ibid: 2, Table 1).

who have a desire to perform maternal labour, or who already perform a type of maternal labour towards their friends and community.

**5. MY OWN BACKGROUND AND PERSONAL STIMULUS FOR THE PROJECT**

My inquiry stems from my direct knowledge of both somatics/CI and maternal performance though I do not locate my own practice within maternal performance per se nor do I practise CI. I come to this research rather as a transdisciplinary artist (my training is originally in Fine Art) and movement researcher, which accounts for my long-standing interest in somatics. I am also a white, middle-class, able-bodied, cis woman (my gender identity matches the sex I was assigned at birth), biological mother, feminist and, here, a PhD scholar which situates me necessarily within a mainstream feminist, maternal and gender performance discourse – attributes that dominate somatic discourse as I have discussed. I am in a heterosexual relationship and married. We have two children which we conceived without medical help. I am a French-European and immigrant living and working in the UK. I exiled myself from my native country when I was 18, to escape poor family relations and settled in the UK which I made my home. I came to Further Education as a mature student (reluctantly, because I am dyslexic) when my children were small, combining part-time studies, part-time work and raising a family. As well as being a mother, I have worked in many underpaid and undervalued jobs, traditionally female: as an au-pair, cleaner, care assistant for the elderly and the disabled, administrator and foster carer. I realise that those experiences have fed into my research in ways that I did not anticipate. Certainly, my background as a foster carer and positive relationship with the mother of the children my partner and I cared for, was profound. It allowed me to consider for the first time a mother's right to refuse to mother and forms of Othermothering which, in this instance, I performed. They represent some of the many marginalised maternal narratives about touch which, I suggest, have not yet acquired visibility within dominant discourse either in maternal performance research or in CI/somatics, and which I would pursue in this thesis.

It is also important to note that the tensions and omissions across CI/somatics and maternal performance lived amidst a newly divided and hostile social and political landscape which, as an immigrant, did not leave me unaffected: the xenophobic and racist backlash of the Brexit campaign and referendum (2016), Teresa May and Boris Johnson's anti-immigration policies and aggressive spending cuts; the Windrush scandal (2018); the rise of extreme right movements across Europe; the elections of Trump (2016 and 2024) and Bolsonaro (2018); the demonisation of Muslims; violent polemics around trans access to women-only spaces led by mainstream feminists; the murder of George Floyd (USA) in 2020, which forced the UK to confront its own track record of institutional racism; the Russian-Ukraine

war (2022-present) and intensified Israel-Palestinian conflicts (2023-present) which have more recently revived a wave of antisemitic, anti-Muslim, racist and xenophobic attacks and sentiment; and the growing collapse of our ecosystem, which the Covid pandemic exposed all too clearly. Meanwhile, the distinct somatic introspective and sensorial orientation today proved to erase this social and political grounding which I have just outlined, leading to widespread inequalities, non-consensual practices and exclusion (Kampe *et al.,* 'Call for Papers and Contributions', Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices, issue 13.2, 2020).[24] This trend was noted across theatre and performance studies as well as in the studio and on stage (Mitra *et al.*, 2019; Revolution or Nothing network's Open Letter 'White Colleague Listen!', 2020).[25]

The different facets of my identity together with this new social and political context certainly shape the orientation (inclination, disposition and urge; position, direction of thought and interest, its brute definition; 'the way [I am] facing' in Ahmed, 2006: 7), engagement and fresh notions of touch that I develop in my project.

[24] The call-out states: '[s]omatic practices are traditionally concerned with heightening sensorial introspection. Such foregrounding can unwittingly exclude' (Kampe *et al.*, 2020).
[25] I attended, as a participant, the pioneering dance research workshop 'Anti-Racist Dance Practices' (Mitra *et al.*, 2019).

# Methodology

My research project is emphatically located in the field of performance. It addresses the performance of touch in CI and somatics, specifically the subdued power relation imbued within touch that excludes and generates non-consensual practices in the studio and at its margins as reported by Mitra, Livingstone, Hennessy and Olaya and Skrypczak. I turn to collaboration and Othermothering practices to renew understandings of touch and its performance in CI and somatics. Meshing dialogue with my collaborators, interviews with somatic practitioners, somatic practice and critical theory, as I discover, it is the performance of my own touch and identity that will be thrown into question and extended. As such, my thesis adopts an auto-ethnographic (Poulos, 2021) epistemology of auto-deconstruction which, I argue, is grounded in somatic inquiry and performance (I explain the terminologies in sections 1 and 2 of this chapter). This approach coheres with an equally deconstructive and performative theoretical underpinning via Paul B. Preciado, a Spanish gender and transfeminist scholar, Lisa Baraitser, a British scholar in psychosocial and maternal studies, and Sara Ahmed, a British-Pakistani scholar in feminist, queer and critical race theory, which, as I suggest, speaks of and to distinct experimental somatic and performative feminist textual traditions. My thesis must be understood as a politically and aesthetically grounded self-inquiry/self-manipulation or self-touch unequivocally attached to the performance of self (across race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity) that unite, and evidence the unity of both mind and body: the intelligent, sensual, feeling, thinking, reflective and reflexive fleshy body. I locate my project within the field of movement research and somatics. However, I move away from postmodern dance's release techniques (Claid, 2021: 5) and the studio/stage culture. I focus instead on the discipline's rigorous investigation of movement, specifically, its attention to the realm of the almost imperceptible, inspired by Paxton and Hay's own interests into micro-movements (Paxton in relation to maternal touch and *Small Dance*, and Hay in relation to cultivating a noticing practice in dance) aided by Preciado and Baraitser's own theories of the micro.

> This is standing.
> Let your butt be heavy,
> relax the internal organs
> down into the bowl of the pelvis.
> Breathe easy.
> Feel the weight of your arms.
> Feel the spine rising through the shoulders
> and up to support the skull.
> At the center of standing,
> you observe some small movements.
> I call this The Small Dance.

*[Repeat]*
Can it be smaller?

*[Repeat]*
Can it be smaller?

*[Repeat]*
Can it be smaller? (Paxton, excerpts from *Small Dance*, 2018: 35-37)

Seminal American choreographer and somatic practitioner, Hay asserts that the 'work' of 'the dancer is to notice the experiment unfolding; how the arousal stimulated by the [somatic] question changes and informs you' (2016: 31), to 'perceive how [your] whole body is in a constant state or reorganization in relation to itself, in space, as time passes, in relation to [others]' (ibid: 85). In other words, there is no need for broad gestures to manifest performance because the very nature of noticing already means that '[t]here is an infinite source of movement material already happening in my body' (ibid: 104).

**1. AUTHO-ETHNOGRAPHY**

Christopher Poulos, scholar in communication studies, asserts that 'autoethnography is designed to tap into the resources of participation, observation, introspection, dialogue and story to build a narrative line that evokes the lived realities of being human.' (2021) Performance scholars Katja Hilevaara and Emily Orley in *The Creative Critic: Writing as/about Practice Performance writing* (2018) align auto-ethnography to performance writing, also sometimes referred to as performative writing, creative writing, art writing, critical writing and new nature writing (ibid: 8). Auto-ethnography is alive in the fieldwork of my thesis, namely, my dialogue with Amaia (Chapter 3), Jae (Chapter 4) and Chloe (Chapter 5). Amaia is a Spanish nanny who works for middle-class families in London. Jae is also an immigrant. They come to the project as a non-binary, cis gay man who longs to gestate their own child. Jae would like the reader to note that, since participating, her gender identity and modes of identification have changed. Today, she identifies as a non-binary trans woman and uses the pronoun 'she'. Given that the creative writing she kindly contributed was written from the perspective of a cis gay man enduring homophobia, I have, with Jae's consent, maintained the pronoun 'they' when referring to her, in order to reflect her identity at the time of our dialogue, while endeavouring to remain sensitive to her present identity as a woman. My third and final collaborator is Chloe, a British woman of Chinese heritage 'marked' trans by society, a distinction that she wishes to emphasise. Chloe contemplates becoming a mother in the future and already has a maternal practice towards her trans friends/community. All three are arts educators and artists engaged differently in performance: Amaia and Jae in theatre, and Chloe in visual arts. All report being on a low and precarious income. None have any children of their own. Both Amaia and Chloe have agreed to me using their real

first name in acknowledgement of the important discourse that they know to be contributing to this project, which they see as an extension of their own respective practice and activism. Though this is also true of my third collaborator, she retrospectively opted for anonymity due to her recent gender transition and her wish to protect her privacy. I have used the gender-neutral pseudonym 'Jae' in my thesis to represent her.

## 2. DECONSTRUCTION AS SOMATIC EMBODIED PRACTICE

The term 'deconstruction' widely used in gender theory and somatics is indebted to the concept of 'deconstructivism', a form of analysis developed by French philosopher Jacques Derrida (dating back to 1967). It challenges the conventional male-centred viewpoint of writing and language which the scholar names phallogocentrism; and was adopted by many feminist theorists (Gamble, 2008: 182-3) to develop new provocative frameworks in which to locate female experience (ibid: 46-53). Auto-deconstruction encapsulates the orientation and 'self-hacking' technique typical of somatics (Paxton, 2018: 19; *End Notes*): it is a method and process that seeks to uncover '[w]hat […] my body [is] doing when I am not conscious of it' (2018: 18). Paxton's inquiry is focussed on the most mundane and micro forms of movement: walking (2018: 17) and standing (2018: 35-39), the latter which will become part of *Small Dance* (1967) then *Material for the Spine* from 1986 (2018: *End Notes*). His interest stems from two intrinsic beliefs that run through the somatic discipline. One, that '[d]ancers must hack their basic movement programs […] to adapt to new movements'. (Paxton, 2018: 21) Two, that '[c]onsciousness – the habitual, the personal and subjective and evidently ever-steady part of ourselves [which is informed by our senses] – […] can be formed and reformed.' (2018: 28) Similarly, Hay's workshop 'A Continuity of Discontinuity or a way to practice dance', which I attended in 2018, teaches the practice of 'dis-attach[ment] (2018; 2016: 105): she instigates the experience of continual interruptions, continually 'dis-attach[ing] from [one's] pattern of seeing' to 'reorganiz[e]' the senses (Hay, 2016: 105). This, she states, 'provides avenues for experimentation that lead to personal insight impossible to realize without risk-taking.' (2016: 6) 'A Continuity of Discontinuity' is a close associate of one of Hay's perhaps most daring somatic invitations: 'Turn Your Fucking Head' (2016: 103-5), from thereon TYFH. Hay recounts:

> TYFH came like a shot out of hell as I watched myself on video […] I was dancing as if I could control all the elements of my performance if I just held my head still enough. It was painful to observe but it became a turning point […] the regal head is endemic to dance and theatre practitioners. As artists [our] need to assert our value in society lodges the head like a fortress, unwilling to surrender. (2016: 103-4)

Via Hay, orientation – the direction towards which my head points, its capacity to unfix itself, turn and reorientate – constitutes a means to counter traditional dance and theatre

aesthetics (the conception of beauty and art by definition). Claid goes further still, when she links ballet aesthetics and Western ideology: the dancer's disciplined body becomes the embodiment of 'morality', 'goodness' and ascendance via 'linearity', 'verticality' and 'defying gravity' (2006: 19-21). So TYFH, likewise her invitation to 'enlarge one's seeing'/one's horizon (2018) is a form of auto-deconstruction: it could be said to aim constantly to undo and challenge '[the] choreographed body' (Hay: 2016: 106), precisely Western conditionings at the level of orientation lodged beneath the level of consciousness. Like Paxton, Hay teaches us to enhance movement by enhancing self-awareness, however she makes orientation, insight and the power of choice (2016: 6) the cornerstones of her performance practice. I harness these, together with Paxton's auto-deconstructive technique, in my methodology: namely, my choice to seek the maternal non-normative, in order to reorientate the discipline's paradigms and my own dominant seeing – a decision which will lead to a series of unexpected reflexive shifts, which I trace over the course of my chapters.

My thesis sees me bringing to somatics two unlikely theoretical allies, namely traditional feminist maternal studies in Lisa Baraitser's *Maternal Encounters* (2009) and queer philosophy in Paul B. Preciado's *Testo Junkie* (2013); as well as queer and critical race feminist theorist Sara Ahmed 's *Queer Phenomenology* (2006). Somatic orientation meets the philosophical and psychoanalytical, no less performative, project of 'disruption' (Baraitser, 2009: 75-80), 'disjunction' (ibid: 17) and 'interruption' (ibid: 66, 68) in Baraitser's *Maternal Encounters* (2009); 'disorientation' (Ahmed, 2006: 157), and 'crisis' in Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* (ibid: 157; also in Baraitser, 2009: 52); 'auto-vivisection', 'auto-decapitation', 'derecognition' and 'disidentification' in Preciado's *Testo Junkie* (2013: 359; 424; 397). They are somatic phenomena – sensorial experiences – brought on by the deconstructive process, which are posited as generative and transformative (Ahmed, 2006: 158; Baraitser, 2009: 18; Preciado, 2013: 397).[26]

> The point is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do – whether they can offer us the hope of new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope. (Ahmed, 2006: 158)
>
> [T]his book [is] about […] how disruption by the other shifts our internal psychic structures, […] and therefore how it accounts for the emergence of the new, the unexpected, the surprising or the generative. (Baraitser, 2009: 18)
>
> [P]olitical subjectivity emerges precisely when the subject does not recognize itself in its representation. It is fundamental not to recognize oneself. Derecognition, disidentification is a condition for the emergence of the political as the possibility of transforming reality. (Preciado, 2013: 397)

[26] Preciado was a student of Derrida, the father of deconstructivism.

My cohering of dance/somatics and radical queer feminist philosophy may appear unorthodox.[27] However, it finds lineage with Preciado, a Spanish trans scholar born Beatriz, who began his trans journey mentored by Drag King artist Diane Torr, a former student of Paxton in CI at Dartington College in the 1970s.[28] Torr, in fact, taught Preciado 'masculinity performance' (2018: 59). Somatics and the performative pervade Preciado's auto experimental *Countersexual Manifesto* (2018, originally published in Spanish in 2000) and *Testo Junkie* (2013). Through them, the scholar traverses genders and gender norms, hijacking (homing in on somatic orientation and reorientation) the regime's very tools of oppression that serve to control gender and sexuality: synthetic hormones and the prerogative of heterosexual coitus. The first offers the reader touch-led tasks and theory to deconstruct gender, heteronormative desire and its performance (Butler, 1990). The provocative essay would inspire Livingstone's *Male Breast Feeding* (*MBF*) score, a twenty-first century offspring of CI (interview with the artist, 2018). Preciado's call for the democratisation of the anus as resistant practice and CI's foregrounding of mother-child touch communication as counterculture in the 1970s leads in 2008 to *MBF*: the queering and democratisation of a fiercely protected territory, traditionally ringfenced to the female, maternal body and organs, its practice of intimacy and aesthetic language.

*Testo Junkie* (2013) pushes somatics further still, branding itself a 'body-essay' (ibid: 11), also 'somato-political fiction, a theory of the self, or self-theory' (ibid). The 'political experiment' (ibid: 12) follows Preciado's application of 'a testosterone-based' gel on his skin (ibid: 16) for a period of '236 days and nights' (ibid). He declares himself a 'gender pirat[e],' or 'gender hack[er]' (2013: 55) – in Paxton's words, a 'self-hack[er]' (2018: 19). Preciado engages with a *'somato political* analysis of "world-economy"' (2013: 25) in a practice that, not unlike that of the postmodern dancers, meshes art (performative text/journal entries and sketches), life (lived experience and the realm of sensations), global economics and modes of oppression to deconstruct gender (Butler, 1990) – theirs and ours (ibid: 398).[29]
Touch/haptics are abundant in this daring sensual, molecular and intimate performance of subjectivity: from his understanding of the regime's haptic modes of subjugation that penetrate and become the body itself (ibid: 78-79; 159) to his equally haptic response to it, in his own words:

[27] Radical Feminism is a term that 'has been used by different groups with different ideologies at different times; in general, [it] implies that adherents believe that the ideology and strategies of their particular group will ultimately lead to revolution and reconstruction' (Rudy, 2001: 193).
[28] Preciado mistakenly cites Cunningham as Torr's influence (2013: 373). I thank my former supervisor Anna Furse, who trained with Paxton in the late 1970s, for sharing this insight.
[29] '*[S]omato political*': Preciado refers to Foucault, 1975: 33-6; 1977: 4-6; '*world-economy'*: Preciado refers to Wallerstein (2004).

> I'm talking about a tactile perception […] crawling on a viscous mass […] feeling around in the dark. I'm talking about discovering the surface of an interiority with your skin […] a matter of […] tasting the electrically viscous truth of being, with small strokes of your tongue […] We have no other solution than to lick at being. Suck it, as the sole mode of knowledge and apprehension. (254)

Touch and its performance are located front and centre in processes of deconstruction. Though Preciado does not attribute his somatic 'self-hacking' orientation to Paxton, he, nonetheless, contextualises his writing experiment within the performance field of 'somatic conversions' (Paxton, 2018: 34), evoking the work of performance art heavyweights, Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens, Ron Athey and Bob Flanagan, to name a few (ibid: 34-5). '[S]omatic conversions' (ibid) align with Hay's notion of somatic 'feedback' and 'translation' (2016: 3). It homes in on the 'sensual' relationship and tactile 'stimulat[ion]' (ibid) between 'language' (ibid), more broadly discourse/somatic framings, and somatic affects and effects which produce and reproduce the body: organise and reorganise the senses, and shape action. I study this phenomenon emanating from touch in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Fig. 5
*Male Breast Feeding* performance, part of *Culture, Administration & Trembling* by Antonija Livingstone, Jennifer Lacey, Stephen Thompson and Dominique Pétrin. A durational performance installation of a collection of medicine dances of which *Male Breast Feeding* is one. Biennale d'art performatif, Rouyn Noranda, Québec, 2016. Copyright permission by A. Livingstone and photographer Maryse Boyce.

Fig. 6
*Male Breast Feeding* practice workshop for KEM Queer Collective, Museum of Modern Art Warsaw, Department of Care Exhibition, 2018. Photograph courtesy of A. Livingstone. Image removed due to copyright.

Equally, in *Maternal Encounters* (2009), auto-deconstruction, performative writing and the performance of touch continue to be central as Baraitser traces anew the multi-faceted dimension of maternal experience and relationality, orientated towards the child and the many objects utilised to attend to its care. She writes:

> I take as my starting point some rather mundane and usually overlooked moments of maternal experience that appear to trip us up, […] moments of undoing […] thinking through these experiences, something we might call maternal subjectivity may emerge – characterized not by fluidity, hybridity or flow, but by physical viscosity, heightened sentience, a renewed awareness […] and […] sense of oneself as a speaking subject.

She leans on her background in feminist theatre (ibid: 2) and performance artist Bobby Baker's *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* (1980) (ibid: 1-3) with which she begins her essay, to introduce her distinctive performative and experimental approach to writing.[30] She states that Baker's 'performance took the form of a series of anecdotes about mothering' (ibid: 1) and that '[her] piece was presented as a form of research. She was dressed in a scientist's white coat and her action-painting-in-the-making [with food] was performed as a semi-illustrated lecture.' (ibid: 1-2)[31] Following in her footsteps, Baraitser leads with personal 'anecdote[s]' (ibid: 3; 12-13), ingeniously weaving them with 'theoretical investigation' (ibid: 13) and phenomenology (ibid: 17) in a bid to touch upon or give form to an elusive something also present in Baker's staged piece: 'a pervasive traumatic quality evading representation' (ibid: 2), an 'attemp[t]' and 'fail[ure] to catch the tail of what really happened' (ibid), '[t]he impossibility of representation' (ibid). In 'recounting' (ibid: 13), Baraitser observes, she inevitably reconstructs her 'lived experience' (ibid: 12), and doing so, engages with the field of performance (ibid: 3), specifically the performance and re/writing of self; also, storytelling. She refers to a 'notion of writing "marked with one's markings", a praxis that does not explore or illustrate the personal, but through which the personal takes place' (ibid: 14), in the same way as 'the emergence of maternal subjectivity occurs through the details of maternal praxis.' (ibid)

I trace Preciado and Baraitser's respective writing orientation beyond somatics to the French feminist tradition of *écriture féminine* (Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva) and of radical feminist performance (Carolee Schneemann, Annie Sprinkle, Karen Finley to name a few) – a connection that both Preciado and Baraitser make themselves to an extent (Preciado, 2018: 34-5; Baraitser, 2009: 13).[32] *Écriture féminine* is a form of embodied writing

[30] She qualifies '[her] method for an investigation into the maternal' as 'a little odd' (2009: 11). It does not constitute a clean, well-defined 'quasi-methodology' (ibid: 17) but 'uses whatever it has to hand' (ibid) to pursue its line of inquiry. This form of writing is reminiscent of the approach to performance making which I practised under Furse (Goldsmiths 2015-17): the use of found, everyday objects.
[31] She also refers to novelist and dramatist Samuel Beckett (1953: 16).
[32] Preciado makes the connection with radical feminist performance and Baraitser, feminist writing.

in which writing and the feminine experience are ‘intertwined’ (Horne, 2020: 984-1006) ‘to the extent that the female body is seen as a direct source of female writing,’ (Jones, 1981: 252). Likewise, text becomes a direct embodiment of the female dissident, anti-patriarchal body and distinct experience (Horne, 2020: 984-1006). This gives the genre its performativity because it ‘respon[ds]’ to and counters a dominant ideology and ‘regulatory system’ (Taylor, 2016: 123). Cixous famously writes: ‘Woman must write her self’ (1976: 875-893). The notion is revisited by French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy in *Corpus* (1992), when he asserts, ‘writing the body: writing not about the body, but rather writing the body […] Not the signs, images, codes of the body, but rather, again, the body.’ (Komel, 2023) And Nancy is clear that writing the body implicates touch (ibid). My project adopts Preciado and Baraitser’s hyper-tactile lens, feminist writerly approach, intimate relational frame (Baraitser with child and objects; Preciado with testo gel; in my project, collaboration and dialogue) and rigorous theoretical analysis to attempt to grasp the slippery, perhaps never fully graspable, invisible something that escapes somatics and mainstream feminist discourse about touch, and which might give form to different embodiments in and out of the studio.

## 3. EXTENDING DECONSTRUCTION TO EMBED A SOMATIC AND INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO FIELDWORK

Intersectionality is a feminist, legal framework of analysis and ‘tool’ (Crenshaw *et al.,* 2024: 1) coined by American civil rights advocate and scholar in African American critical race theory and Black feminist legal theory, Kimberley Crenshaw (1989). The term offers an understanding of how discrimination and forms of oppression occur based on more than one identity characteristic, at the intersection of race, gender, class and sexuality simultaneously. I acknowledge that bringing together intersectionality and somatics, the latter a white hegemonic field of practice, runs the risk of decontextualising Crenshaw’s concept, specifically, its roots in law and ‘the struggles and experiences of African American women’ (Crenshaw *et al.,* 2024: 1), ‘therefore […] in a specific historical trajectory’ (ibid) where ‘racism is a permanent feature of societ[al]’ oppression (6). ‘[R]acism [is] the system’ (ibid), as the Jim Crow laws of the late nineteenth century which enforced racial segregation exemplify. Amaia, Jae and Chloe are not representative of this tradition and the ties to race in my analysis could be said to be loose as I connect, for example, the alienation of Amaia’s physical and emotional labours as a white, Spanish nanny working in London to that of an Indian surrogate whose womb is hired by affluent, white Westerners (Chapter 2 and 3). It is therefore important for me to consider the indelible power relation, indeed, the tension (leaning on touch’s definition in Chapter 1) between these two frames (intersectionality and somatics). My project, while being innovative in its methodology, could be said, to an extent,

also to ‘misus[e]’ (1), and ‘erase the foundation of the concept whilst appropriating its articulation’ (2024: 4) – a ‘widespread […] tendency’ (ibid: 4) noted by Crenshaw *et. al* across disciplines and institutions (ibid: 1-14). For this reason, I explain more clearly my intentions presently.

Anthropologist Cynthia Novack highlights that the concept of ‘nature’ in CI is grounded in the ideology of ‘nature in the [white, middle-class] American home – powerful, truthful connected to feelings of love and sharing with others which result from listening to and obeying the natural order of things. Within this “safe” context, wild, spontaneous events can occur’ (1990: 180). Novack asserts, however, that ‘[t]hese views are both historically and culturally specific.’ (ibid) As such, my choice to apply an intersectional lens to somatics holds the potential to debunk and reorientate the, hegemonically grounded, discipline’s utopian notion of ‘interconnection’ (Midgelow, 2015: 112); and, doing so, its problematic ideals around kinship, which CI’s natural pre-cultural conception of touch via the maternal manifests, contributing, I argue, to widespread issues of consent and exclusion within the form. So, departing from Amaia, Jae and Chloe’s creative writing, I draw on intersectionality and the reflexive sense of somatics to bring to light how different, mutually constituent aspects of my identity interact with those of my collaborators, and might unwittingly, magnify a pre-existing power relation between us that makes itself known through our contact, as Mitra suggests in relation to CI. This is with a view to exploring the complexity of touch that emanates in and at the margins of CI. My framework compels me to consider that my identity and privilege are necessarily connected with and, perhaps in some respects even dependent upon Amaia, Jae and Chloe’s marginalisations and exclusions from maternal narratives. This somatic intersectional approach which our encounter sets in motion demands a refined awareness of the manner in which my own experience of oppression might simultaneously intersect with and differ from my collaborators.

It will certainly test my capacity to reorientate (Hay’s TYFH), that is, to repetitively choose (Hay, 2016: 6) to interrupt (Hay, 2018) and ‘dis-attach’ (Hay, 2016: 105) from my own largely unconscious, hegemonic ‘pattern of seeing’ (ibid). I refer to the centrality and power that I unwittingly draw from as a white biological mother, feminist, movement researcher and PhD candidate; and the privileged position or ‘point from which the world unfolds’ (Ahmed, 2006: 8) which informs a mainstream lens and perpetuates the status quo. This aspect of my methodology is influenced by the pioneering ‘Anti-Racist Dance Practices’ workshop, significantly, also the brainchild of Mitra (Mitra *et al.*, 2019) and the question extended to its white and white-passing participants: ‘what are you going to give up?’ However, it would not come without struggle, resistance as well as surprises and delight. In fact, my project has

proved to be far more reaching and encompassing than I could ever have anticipated as I come to realise that I also represent the dominant paradigm which is marginalising Amaia, Jae and Chloe, and the power differential that I exert upon them manifests not abstractly but in our direct dialogue, not least between Chloe and me (Chapter 5).

My first and perhaps most determining intersectional and reflexive act, besides giving visibility to unconventional maternal practices that remain excluded from discourse in order to renew CI touch, would be the decision to revise my very methodology. Indeed, the individuals who responded to the call-out immediately voiced their predicament. This resonated with me because throughout my study of performance, I have experienced barriers due to not being London-based, namely additional travel costs and having to juggle the care of two young dependents with my partner, alongside work and studies commitments. Geography, economics and the scarcity of time became significant considerations in devising my methodology. Before Covid-19 and Zoom consciousness, I forwent the studio as a laboratory for research and the requirement for physical meetings. Instead, I moved to a remote, digital email dialogue format and designed a series of tasks that could be completed autonomously and at my collaborators' convenience. In turn, my collaborators would orientate the output of this project towards creative writing, accompanied by photos and found images. By displacing the centrality and prerogative of the studio, writing became the temporal and spatial laboratory where participation could be democratic: the medium through which the notion of touch could be extended. In other words, the accessibility of email enabled my participants to overcome the economic precarity that prevented them from travelling and the exclusion inherent in the studio experience. This early choice, in and of itself, would be critical: it would change the trajectory of the project and its understanding of touch by being in contact with individuals whom I might have never encountered in the studio and because digital email dialogue already, by its very nature, integrates distance and differences within our contact on the most basic level: geographic and temporal. These principles not only laid the foundations for the inclusive ethics I sought to promote; but it would also reorientate my attention towards the more elusive and subdued aspect of touch and relationality which escapes somatics. I conduct a preliminary theoretical investigation into this in Chapter 1.

## 4. OTHER ASPECTS OF METHODOLOGY THAT DEFINE THE DISTINCT ETHICS OF THE PROJECT

### 4.a Terminology: collaborators

My terminology 'collaborator' engages actively with its etymology: 'working' (labour) 'with, together, besides, near, by' (co-). I use the term in recognition of Amaia, Jae and Chloe

deep, encompassing and challenging material and immaterial investment in my project across six months which, I suggest, sets it apart from the 'superficial' character (Bell, 2017: 73-83) and fast-impact/fast-temporality of participatory studio-based work. Choreographer-artist Antonija Livingstone, discussing her own piece *Male Breast Feeding* (2008-present), which brings together performers, non-performers and members of the public, makes a similar distinction, also noting the instant 'consummatory […] gesture' of participatory art *(*interview with the artist, 15 March 2018*).* So, my term collaboration reflects an approach to with-ness, which is perhaps not felicitous and not always enthusiastic but whose touch might be consequential and enduring. In this frame, the capitalist economy of rapid consumption and immediate gratification is turned on its head, favouring instead slow and at times uncomfortable work.

Collaboration, however, differs from co-authorship. It foregrounds the labour of co-creation, namely the 'creativity of exchange' (Bell, 2017: 73-83) and transmission (both the definition of communication) that our shared and sustained contact propels. As such, my collaborators are and are not per se the 'object' of investigation and scrutiny in my project. Rather, it is *touch*, our human interaction, our contact and what it communicates – what is unfolding within and across us and the 'agency' and 'self-reflection' (Bell, 2017: 73-83) that we each perform – that is explored. The touch inherent in collaboration 'leads to the emergence of dissensual experiences that already exist within the social fabric and the collaborative production of knowledge from these experiences' (Bell, 2017: 73-83). This is what sets my project apart from participatory art and moves it into the realm of collaboration because it so vividly and intimately implicates my collaborators and me throwing into question the nature of our contact on a structural and personal level, leaving us changed (see testimonies in Appendix 1).

**4.b Verbatim**

Our email dialogue is relayed verbatim in this thesis in order to preserve my collaborators' self-representation and separate their voices from my analysis, leaving space for the reader's own interpretation. I have taken the liberty to reduce the emails in the interests of the thesis word count, and to correct grammar/typo errors when encountered, in the interests of clarity. Their writings are presented in the form of extracts and lead the discussion. There are a few exceptions where complementary writing materials have been integrated to my analysis but do not feature in the extract. I highlight the discrepancy when it occurs.

**4.c Focus of analysis**

My fieldwork analysis focusses on my collaborators' creative/auto-ethnographic writing alone along with our dialogue, rather than their artwork or staged performance. This is because their writing tells the story of our touch/contact, the object of my thesis, providing rich and unexpected material. Nevertheless, I have included photographs to describe elements of their practice that add compelling visuals to the narrative of their predicament and to underline the significance of my argument. It is worth noting that I have attended their respective shows and some of the photographs are my own.

**4.d Pre-collaboration movement: summoning of touch via the summoning of the body**

The blind call-out (Appendix 2) was circulated predominantly through the Artsadmin *eDigest* during July/August 2019. The call sought the 'unconventional', 'marginalised', non-conformist (in body, gender and practice) maternal, as well as the maternal 'imaginary', therefore drawing on the individual's singular mode of self-identification. Similarly, the personal details questionnaire (Appendix 3) and the tasks (Appendices 7, 8, 9, 10, 11) continue deliberately to invite unique interpretations, for example with respect to nationality, gender and maternal experience, thereby working to embed different ethics. The implication is that my role is not to judge or measure individuals' answers, but to assume their validity and connection to the project, and to enter in dialogue with them. From the onset, my holding emails began to draw the body in through a distinctive haptic and transdisciplinary palette. For example, I inserted French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu's hyper tactile and performative quotation (Appendix 5) linking uniquely to the afterwar body and gestural aesthetics of Gutai (Fig. 7) and Fluxus (Fig. 8) as well as to the everyday movements of postmodern dance. I also used a rhetorical question about the 'colours, tones, forms, gestures and sounds' of my collaborators' embodiment (Appendix 6).

Fig. 7
*Murakami Saburo, Passing Through*, *2nd Gutai Art exhibition* (1956). Photograph by Kiyoji Otsuji (print, 2012) (Tate.org.uk, year of publication unknown). Image removed due to copyright.

Fig. 8
*Sky Piece to Jesus Christ* by Yoko Ono, Fluxus Festival, Carnegie Recital Hall (1965). Photograph by Truman Moore/Getty Images. Image removed due to copyright.

The call-out and subsequent emails work to activate the body of the collaborator (and my own). They aim to direct their attention onto what it needs, onto bodily sensations and the maternal imagination. Digital exchange offers its own tactile stimulation and signs of intra-stimulations already permeate the collaborators' responses. The sense of touch performed

across emails arouses the organ of the skin. For example, Jae writes that 'Anzieu's words really gave [them] the goose bumps'; that they feel 'excited', 'intrigued' (email dated 1 September 2019). Touch, performed across the digital field, is therein found to awaken desire and curiosity which, in turn, excites the skin and opens the body. The sense of touch draws us to one another and creates its own imaginary binding material between us: I explore this in Chapter 1 of this thesis. The dialogical frame combining 'reality', 'imaginary and playfulness', 'allying poetry and fiction' is established from the start (Appendix 4).

**5. FIVE TASKS**

I devised five tasks to stimulate the dialogue and exchange between us. The tasks take inspiration from the article 'Times of Dispossession and (Re)Possession: An Interview with Silvia Federici' (2018) by scholars in Modern Culture and Media, Arlen Austin, Beth Capper and Rebecca Schneider in conversation with Silvia Federici, Italian feminist scholar and activist best known for co-founding *Wages for Housework* (1972). They use Fedirici's theoretical deconstruction and denaturalisation of the workings of capitalism in *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004) to think through performance. Federici asserts that the usurpation of women's autonomy and autonomous practices during the Middle Ages, she uncovered, was instituted with the birth of capitalism. She argues that the construction of the 'witch' figure served to annihilate women's alternative organisation of knowledge and collective life. Essentially, capitalism enforced a new conception of the body as 'laboring machine' (2018: 133 citing 2004: 142); and a reorganisation of the concepts of time, space and community to regulate the labour process (ibid). Austin *et al.* hypothesize that capitalism and performance share the same raw constituents: both rely on the manipulation of the body, time, space and modes of relating (ibid). Driven by the question "what happens if?" (Hay, 2016: 11; Hay, 2018; Furse, 2011: 62) which had fuelled my somatic and performance-making practice, in fieldwork I harnessed Austin *et al.*'s proposition and designed a series of experimental tasks or invitations (leaning on somatics) that made distinctive each of capitalism's and performance's supposedly core and entangled – and knowingly fundamentally inextricable – materials. Giving performers admittedly 'absurd' or impossible tasks contributes yet another node to Deborah Hay's practice and teachings (2016; 2018).[33]

They include:

[33] For example, she tells her students: 'What if every cell in your body at once has the potential to perceive all of space moving as you move through it?' (2018; also in 2016: 14)

1. The Maternal Body (Appendix 8)
2. Maternal Time (Appendix 9)
3. Maternal Space (Appendix 10)
4. Maternal Being With (Appendix 11)
5. Maternal Manifesto (Appendix 12)[34]

By focussing on each element of performance (body, time, space, collective rules), which are deemed key to capitalist politics and economics, I derive an experimental framework for somatic engagement/writing – mine and that of my collaborators – orientated towards 'hacking' (Paxton, 2018: 19) invisible materials imbued in touch alongside dominant mechanisms of invisibilisation, which I name haptics.

Tasks were circulated one at a time, approximately four weeks apart. They were accompanied by short guidelines offering tools or techniques widely used in somatics, which I encountered during my training with Anna Furse, Deborah Hay, Lisa Nelson, Patricia Bardi, Martin Hargreaves, Rick Nodine and Seke Chimutengwende (among others) (Appendix 7). In addition, the guidelines establish the tactile parameters for our dialogue. For example, I remind my collaborators to start with no plan nor expectations, to engage with the task for a short period of time (20 minutes), to follow where their attention guides them without judgment, to be kind to themselves and, importantly, that incoherence is welcome (ibid). The series of emails, tasks and guidelines aimed to arouse the senses and desire. I hoped that once stimulated desire would awaken curiosity which, like an itch, the collaborator's body would respond to, scratch and tease further of their own ideas and, more importantly, to whatever extent they wished, in a bid to alleviate possible issues of consent and a sense of exploitation.

[34] This task takes inspiration from Yvonne Rainer's 'No Manifesto' (1965).

# Structure of the thesis

Spurred by the new trajectory of my remote collaborative project and the rich opportunity it offers, Chapter 1 aims to trouble the notion of touch as solely a skin-to-skin contact and as natural, authentic, pre-cultural and truthful as it has been practised in somatics. Here, I lay the foundations for the new narratives about maternal touch that I develop in collaboration with the three participants, which I propose might move the discipline towards more inclusive and consensual practices. This chapter constitutes a preliminary scientific, philosophical and psychoanalytical study of the sense of touch and its relationship to awareness and reflexivity, that is, seeing and movement/action. Reflecting the email format of my methodology, I work to integrate distance and intangibility to physical touch; likewise, touch in distance and the realm of the invisible. With physiologist Ernst Weber's theory of pressure, touch is a force: a sense of tension, pressure and movement. But it is also subject to discordance, because to become aware of it depends on localising it visually, suggesting forms of touch at play that escape consciousness. Touch is also no longer ahistorical, but historical: a technology bearing and reproducing sensory values structured by dominant culture and ideology, and not dissociated from them. Politics, too, are tactile: they are intangible forces, or haptics, that exert. They bind people into a field of sameness that does not account for differences between them, and which irreversibly excludes non-mainstream groups – both of these are haptic effects, as I explain in Chapter 1. With a psychoanalytical reassessment of mother-child touch relations and human development, distance is further inserted at a biological and psychic level, introducing the notion of invisible materials, exchanges and processes – that is, distance – within skin-to-skin and the symbiotic contact of gestation, which survive sensorially and metaphorically as the child's motor skills/world expand and the intense physical intimacy of early years lessens, and is no longer. Extending these findings, I propose that touch remains remarkably central to neoliberal politics and economics, as I will locate touch and tactile somatic processes at the core of capitalist labour relations. This chapter presents a dimension of touch that is slippery, complex and, as Mitra already asserts, a site of power relation which hinders touch's reflexive potential, therefore one's movement. It is the theoretical backdrop with which I attempt to understand my collaborators' experience and the subdued neoliberal forces that mediate our contact both within the frame of our dialogue and beyond it. Therein, I extend the understanding of touch and the tensions that touch might animate in the studio, making CI/somatics inhospitable for many.

In Chapter 2, the contextualisation of my collaborators' identities and unconventional maternal experience brings fieldwork and my project of auto-deconstruction to life as I aim to unravel the politics, economics and hierarchies imbued in hegemonic/my own touch. Inspired by Paxton's research into mother-child communication, as well as the feminist thread that, I argue, runs through somatics and makes up my identity, I look towards the feminist movement and maternal performance scholarship. I delve into first and second-wave feminism and investigate the construction of maternal kinship in Artificial Reproductive Technologies (ARTs), processes that are often multi-participants reliant.[35] These analyses serve to identify the contemporary, historical and ideological mainstream women-led forces and mechanisms that exclude my collaborators from maternal narrative and safeguard a fixed notion of the maternal and maternal touch to privilege the white, middle-class, female body with child, over other representations. I propose that the dominant, feminist orientation (position, the way one is directed which informs one's horizon, its definition) which is my own is tactile. Likewise, my touch communicates my hegemonic orientation. Orientation, I will argue, is the effect of kinship and its performance, that is, a manifestation of touch and connection ratified by law at birth and, in later life, that chosen and adopted for oneself, as I adopted feminism and the somatic discipline. Through one's sense of belonging, attachment to things, people and identity, one necessarily inherits an orientation. In the case of mainstream feminism, I will demonstrate a pre-determined, essentialist, Euro/US-centric inflected seeing that unwittingly reproduces my collaborators' exclusion, and the power relations between us within and without this project. Albeit remote and intangible, my orientation bears concrete physical implications for Amaia, Jae and Chloe, which I continue to explore in their individual chapters. Therefore, orientation has somatic implications on (my)self and implicates the other simultaneously. The chapter attempts, borrowing from Black British femininist scholar Lola Olufemi, to 'interrupt' (2020) mainstream feminism's orientation and its somatic performance. It puts forth that a reorientation, akin to Hay's perhaps most daring invitation, 'Turn Your Fucking Head' (2016: 103-5), might open up touch and its field of reflexivity in ways that can be brought back to CI and somatics.

Chapter 3 explores the unconventional maternal touch of Amaia, a Spanish cis woman who works as a nanny for middle/upper-class London families. Her account complicates the traditional narrative about maternal touch and connection because Amaia is merely a domestic worker and does not have any children of her own, as a result of which she finds herself stigmatised. Amaia's assertion of the maternal as an employee and woman without

[35] The first-wave feminist movement is understood to relate to the women's rights movement that occurred between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and sought to win women's suffrage. The second-wave movement is understood to span broadly from the 1960s to the 1970s and to focus on equality, campaigning against patriarchy and discrimination on the basis of gender.

children raises timely questions for feminism: what happens when maternal touch is disassociated from the legal figure 'mother'? Who, then, might claim it for themselves? What forces are preventing a nanny like Amaia and the many other low-paid workers who today fulfil roles traditionally performed by the mother, from ever be named 'mother'? Amaia's creative writing and our dialogue present for somatics and CI the complex nature of the contact that the nanny holds with the family and the child she cares for, and the creative frames that she has fashioned to negotiate an often-hostile environment. Here, her touch and connection to the family is highly ambiguous. It is also deemed problematic and dangerous. Indeed, the emotional and physical intimate labour of a maternal nature she is employed to perform does not come without conflict because Amaia's touch and presence has the potential to displace the legal mother and the lineage of the privileged, nuclear family. In response to the perceived threat that her intimate contact with the child poses, I set out to demonstrate how the nanny's touch is made distant and neutralised – pushed beyond the parents'/hegemonic horizon.

To do so, I build upon the feminist-led collective mechanisms discussed in Chapter 2, which I name haptics, extending them with a study of the cross-border commodification of maternal labours, to argue that the insertion of distance in Amaia's touch begins long before the two parties first set eyes on each other. It is inscribed in the temporal: a long history of migration from South to North, globally and across Europe which is further maintained via micro-interactions within the family cell and the general lack of care towards Amaia by the family, and, more broadly, British society. Led by Amaia's voice, I attempt to understand the forces exerted on Amaia, that shape the nature of her touch or connection to the family, and, implicitly, the nature of our contact in this project through a somatic and intersectional lens. For example, through Amaia's story I recall my own immigrant journey to the UK, working as an au-pair, which I did not expect and simply never explored. Some aspects of this experience intersect, to different degrees, with Amaia's story. Nevertheless, I am also reminded of our difference in class and status today, as a middle-class mother-scholar, and the power differential that concomitantly unfolds when we touch. I suggest that this entangled field of sameness and difference goes some way towards explaining some of the intricate tensions that touch, following Mitra, might present in the studio.

In Chapter 4, Jae's longing for a pregnancy in a male-constructed body confronts and challenges the notion of masculinity in the West. It reveals the politics by which male proximity to and touch in relation to children, especially girls, is stigmatised and perceived as dangerous in opposition to that of women, who are deemed natural carers and gestators/vessels. Heteronormativity is proven to be a force. It communicates and

safeguards the binaries that pre-determine genders – their performance, desire and distinctive roles in reproduction – and their hierarchies. It is fair to say that Jae's juxtaposition of maternity onto the male body blows apart mainstream narratives, bringing new questions to feminism: what happens when gestation is democratised and separated from sex, gender, sexuality and genetic reproduction? What would it mean to dismantle the cultural forces of conventions that presume and dictate? Jae's creative writing and sci-fi imaginings shows the sense of touch, via the body, to be central to resistance: to making and unmaking the self and social relations. The evidence of this is made clear in our contact because their unorthodox gender expression, which is so different from mine, I discover, performs upon me. It generates a kind of slipperiness between us that interrupts my sense of the familiar: tactile sensations which demand of me to adjust, recalibrate and to develop different reflexes. It is a process and game that I have encountered to an extent many times in somatic workshops, and which have filled me with both fear and delight.

However, Jae's account, like that of Amaia, is not all resistance and liberation. It also forces open reductive stereotypes against the homosexual body that find intersections with transphobia and the kind of oppression that cis women have long endured: misogyny and sexism. Jae's story is a story of marginalisation, violence, distress and confusion that belongs to the long history of the persecution of the LGBTQ community. Even their connection to their family – their kinship, the effect of touch – is proven unstable. Jae's tactile meanderings, their wish for a male maternity, leads me to explore the surprisingly ambiguous identity of the mother in the twenty first century. Can we assume her gender? Could we ever? I investigate the potent medico-legal narrative about the sexes and male touch that block the reproductive technological applications that Jae seeks. I suggest that mainstream feminism also exerts pressure, reproducing women's oppression and the stigmatisation of male touch despite claims of liberal, progressive thinking. And so, what I am pointing to in this chapter is that the performance of mainstream feminist touch – the performance of my own touch and through touch, my identity and sense of kinship – is a site of conflict, tensions and contradictions which, in turn, makes the collective force I belong to, itself ambiguous and confusing.

In Chapter 5, my dialogue with Chloe differs from previous collaborations. It takes an unexpected turn and doing so, pushes my performative project of auto-deconstruction to its limit. Unlike my other collaborators, the power relation between Chloe and me is explicit and bravely articulated, forcing me to reconsider the power differentials and tensions in my contact with Amaia and Jae. This chapter tells the story of our coming together and relationship breakdown. It traces our struggle and co-labour, made possible, I argue, by the

reciprocated sense of touch/contact between us across the remoteness of email. It brings to the fore the phenomena of mishaps and failures that contact/touch can propel and, I propose, might enrich the somatic discipline's performance and understanding of touch. Drawing on my fraught contact with Chloe, I ask if, and indeed what these arresting tactile happenings communicate and transmit. What do they reveal about touch, especially (my) hegemonic touch? And, in turn, what somatic processes does Chloe's resistance stimulate in me? Here, I zoom in on the invisible sensory residue that lingers when contact does not flow as somatics would often have its audiences presume, and the narratives imbued into my mainstream touch, which pre-determine and restrict my own field of reflexivity, therefore movement, in and out of the studio. Through my heteronormative lens, Chloe appears to bring a puzzle to the project and to perform, across our contact, paradoxical movements. I initially experience them as confusing, disorientating and frustrating, perhaps the manifestation of her internal conflicts. This suggests to me that Chloe's participation in this study might not be suitable, a view which I share with her.

In response, Chloe does something quite remarkable. She turns my lens on its head and confronts, as she experiences it, the absence of inclusivity in my self-proclaimed inclusive project; also my use of segregating language. Perhaps I ought to think about my own expectations and how they close down, rather than expand the potential for dialogue and contact, she puts forth. In other words, she tells me that my own touch/contact is ambiguous and conflictual. Of course, my previous analyses of mainstream feminism's orientation and the manner it so powerfully exerts to exclude my collaborators from maternal narratives about touch, always implied that my own touch was in question and being deconstructed. Nonetheless, Chloe brought the issue close to the bone and this moment was critical to the project. I could have dismissed it and even erased my interaction with Chloe from this thesis. I chose instead to do something that feels uncomfortable, unfamiliar, risky and, indeed, frightening, for which I believe the somatic discipline, to some extent, also prepared me. I stay with Chloe's comments, take up her invitation and attempt to engage with it reflexively. I try to hold on to the monumental complexity of our contact. For this, I lean on the psychoanalytical and philosophical foundations of my first chapter, which I extend with the French philosophies of Jacques Lacan and Jean-Luc Nancy in order to grapple with touch and its latent ideologies, that manifest through language – specifically, the gaps in language and their somatic affects and effects. There, I learn, for example, that misunderstandings are inescapable and opportunity rich. With anticolonial and anti-imperialist thinkers in Donna Haraway and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, I unravel the hegemonic, specifically colonialist and imperialist-inflected impulses that imbue and drive my sense of touch in my contact with Chloe and my other collaborators. I am speaking of the historical forces/haptics that play out

in this academic project and prove so incredibly difficult to reorientate, despite better intentions and willingness. Touch is indeed a tension. In the West, it makes its subjects appear and disappear. I look to queer feminist scholarship and mainstream culture better to understand its contradictions and the haptic mechanisms which I perform unknowingly.

# Chapter 1 A study of the sense of touch

> 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)

## INTRODUCTION

Touch can be intimate, erotic, affectionate, gentle, brutal and punitive (Furse, 2011). In the Global North, touch alludes to a basic physical contact – a 'brute physicality' (Classen, 2005: 5). A lower sense, it contrasts with the processes of the mind (ibid). The Western dichotomy distinguishes and divides people and their labours: intellectual versus manual (ibid), masculine versus feminine. Therein, the hierarchy of the senses creates a societal hierarchy that gives worth, visibility, voice and privilege to some groups and not to others. Perhaps for this reason, marginalised sections of society have, throughout history, turned to touch, interlocking arms with each other, to protest and manifest solidarity in the face of political struggle. An example is provided by the Civil Rights march from Selma to Montgomery (1965) (Fig. 9). More recently, in 2019, the Hong Kong protests saw a human chain performed by both protestors and state forces in order to control the crowds (*The Guardian*, 2019) (Fig. 10).[36] Indeed, touch can be a powerful social and political tool, instantly generating and showcasing kin, that is, a sense of unity and common purpose between people. Not least, the bond, the effect of interconnecting arms and hands, makes any group far more difficult to overpower and dismantle. I experienced this first-hand during the workshop 'Anti-racist Dance Practices' (2019), as half the participants were asked to interlock arms and stand in a line while the other half, of which I was one, had to try to make their way across to the other side. Those who, like me, did, used the pressure exerted collectively to climb over and/or exploit an impromptu opening. In contrast, contemporary warfare technologies operate at a distance. Although they reduce physical contact, they significantly increase casualties in collateral damage at the 'touch' of a button: the Iraq War (2003-2011), for example, differed from the Falklands War (1982), which was fought on the ground with bayonets.

Fig. 9
Martin Luther King Jr arrives in Montgomery, Alabama, on 25 March 1965, the culmination of the Selma to Montgomery march. Photograph by Morton Broffman/Getty Images. Image removed due to copyright

[36] I am not suggesting that such strategies are solely used by the Black population or for protesting. For example, *Hands Across America* (25 May 1986) was a fundraising event.

Fig. 10
'Hong Kong protesters form 30-mile human chain across city' (*The Guardian*, 2019). Image removed due to copyright

Across the world, touch is often central to struggle, resistance and cultural identity. It is practised in martial arts (the art of warfare), many forms belonging to East Asia (Judo, karate, kendo, kyūdō, iaidō, and aikido, etc.), South Asia (Indian Kalari), South America (capoeira in Brazil), Europe (French boxing/Savate), and Middle East (Israeli Krav Maga), to name but a few. Touch is also omnipresent in social dancing. Canadian cultural theorist, political philosopher and artist, Erin Manning (2007) recounts that tango embodies a complex history of immigration, 'the pain of disconnection and the desire for communication' (ibid: 2-3). Touch is, of course, the key medium and signifier of resistance and liberation in somatics and participatory dance, of which Paxton's Contact Improvisation (CI) is one instance (Fig. 11). However, while the science, philosophies, pedagogy and (to a degree) politics of touch, I note, are studied (Sarco-Thomas, 2020), the power relations that CI or somatic touch animates in the studio and at its margins, which Mitra brings to our attention (2021), and which make the form inhospitable to many, based on their sex, gender, sexuality, race, class and disability, remain by and large neglected as an area of research. Somatics have constructed a notion of touch as solely skin-to-skin contact, also as ahistorical, authentic, pre-cultural and truthful, as I explain in my Introduction. However, touch's grounding in skin-to-skin contact, the ahistorical, authentic, pre-cultural and truthful, I believe, has also limited its scrutiny and contributed to widespread issues of consent and exclusion within the form. My thesis, beginning with this chapter, therefore proposes to reorientate the discipline's understanding of touch.

The unexpected trajectory of my methodology, which my collaborators helped to shape in 2019 in light of their access needs, and which saw me convert our planned physical contact into an email dialogue, acts as a springboard. Specifically, it sensitizes me to a dimension of touch that evades somatic discourse: how touch might manifest across distance and the invisible materials and processes that it stimulates in my dialogue with my collaborators; and by correspondence, the unforeseen distance immanent to skin-to-skin touch and its relation to the invisible – the intangible. This subdued aspect of touch enables me to re-evaluate the power dynamics that exert and 'might enact' and 'harm […] in and through' (Mitra, 2021: 10) the hegemonic touch of CI and somatics. To do so, I take the lead from somatics and its long tradition of 'integrat[ing] science into movement practice' (Krasnow and Wilmerding 2015: 3); as well as its use of conceptual framings aimed at activating and reorganising the senses

(Hay, 2018).[37] I draw from neurosciences, physiology, metaphysics, philosophy, traditional and feminist psychoanalysis, and queer feminism to attempt to answer the humble and perhaps most overlooked question: what is touch? This chapter lays the foundations through which to apprehend my three collaborations: their predicament and the nature of our contact. The traditional somatic inquiry into the dynamic relationship between touch, awareness and reflexivity is extended to include the neoliberal politics and economics which might pervade CI spaces and, here, fieldwork.[38] The chapter aims to expose invisible processes grounded in relationality that emanate from touch, alongside biopolitical processes of invisibilisation (the effect of exclusion and marginalisation) to re-invigorate the somatic discipline and its performance of touch, and move it, it is hoped, towards more inclusive and consensual practices.

Fig. 11
Steve Paxton and Nancy Stark Smith, still from *Peripheral Vision* (1975). Video by Steve Christiansen. Videoda Contact Improvisation Archive: Collected Edition 1972–1983. Image removed due to copyright.

## 1. A PRELIMINARY SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION OF TOUCH

In this section, I turn to science to explore the spatiality, temporality and dynamics of touch and tactile sensations. Although I concede, as Classen suggests, 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 theories of touch might lay a useful foundation on which to build my philosophical argument.

Neuroscientist, Alberto Gallace, and Charles Spence, an experimental psychologist, write that touch's scientific name is 'somatosensation' (2014: 103) or 'somatosensorial system' (ibid: 19-35). It engages the nervous system, sensations, bones, joints, muscles and movement (ibid). '[N]eural pathways' (ibid: 28) or 'circuits' (ibid: 9) enable the transmission of information, giving rise to perception and action, that is, reflexivity (ibid). Touch is a sense of pressure, temperature, pain, an itch, joint position, muscle sensation, or movement (ibid: 19). Frédérique de Vignemont and Olivier Massin, whose philosophical research intersects with cognitive science, assert that touch gives access to and establishes a relation between bodily awareness and external reality (2015: 296). This gives it a privileged position: a

[37] Based on the many influences that fed postmodern dance, I understand science to include biology, physics and chemistry and also the field of Humanities (Introduction to my thesis).
[38] As I state in the Introduction, reflexivity, drawing on CI and somatics, refers to the body's capacity to develop different actions or movement reflexes through enhanced awareness.

presupposed ‘objectivity’ (ibid: 300-2). Touch is also ‘bipolar’ (ibid: 296 referring Katz, 1925): ‘every instance of tactile perception presents us not only with external objects, but also with our body.’ (ibid: 301)[39] Touch is the only sense that lets me know that the object or ‘physical world […] exist[s] independently from [me]’ (ibid: 301) due to ‘the feeling of physical effort (and of resistance)’ (ibid). As such, the feeling of tension and pressure is always tactile in nature (ibid). The Bible tale of Saint Thomas, who inserted his finger into Jesus’ wound to check that Christ had truly risen, so, to satisfy himself that he was not dreaming, hallucinating or being fooled, illustrates touch’s bipolarity, objectivity, touch as a feeling of tension and pressure, like the one Saint Thomas would have experienced on his finger; and its connection to awareness (Fig. 12).

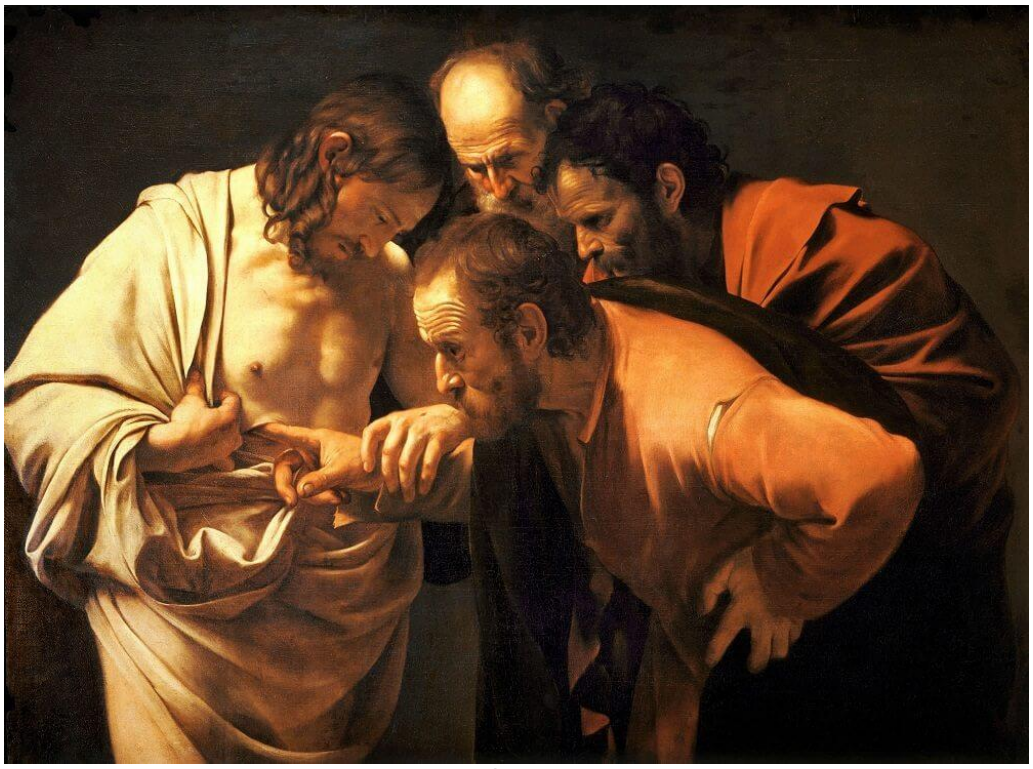


Fig. 12
*The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, circa 1602 (oil on canvas).

Touch is spatial and temporal. It may surprise the reader that time is essential to explore three-dimensional spaces and objects. For example, it takes time to move the hand around an object and the sensed vibrations on the skin to be picked up, giving data about its shape and texture (O’Shaughnessy, 2003: 629, 656-680; Martin,1992, 1993; Katz, 1925 in de Vignemont and Massin, 2015: 296, 299). Information must, therefore, be understood as coded in both the spatial and temporal dimensions of touch: the longer I spend running my hand over (and being attentive to) a space or object, the more knowledge of them I gather.

[39] Katz was an experimental psychologist.

Concomitantly, tactile perception gives data about the body's own spatial localisation: a process that involves accessing one's 'body image' (de Vignemont and Massin, 2015: 304-6), also referred to as 'body schema' (Gallace and Spence, 2014: 72). Body image is a mental 'map' of the body (de Vignemont and Massin, 2015: 304-6): an abstract representation of the body in space, which integrates and responds to tactile sensations in order to enable movement (Gallace and Spence, 2014: 72). The body map plays a key role in structuring 'tactile sensations' (de Vignemont and Massin, 2015: 304-6) and evolves continuously throughout one's lifetime (ibid). The internalisation of the material and immaterial speaks of the body's capacity to adapt and stretch beyond its corporeal biological envelope or skin – likewise the skin's capacity to extend – to absorb non-physical presence like body image or a phantom limb alongside physical-mechanical bodily extensions like tools and artificial body parts (Vesey, 1961; O'Shaughnessy, 1980; Martin, 1995 in de Vignemont and Massin, 2015: 305; see also Schilder, 1935).[40] Today, the question of the body's tactile boundaries and its relationship to materiality and immateriality finds new timeliness in the era of digital technologies, which I discuss presently.

'[T]actile sensations immediately cry to us "I am here"' (de Vignemont and Massin, 2015: 304 referring to James, 1890: 798). They are inescapably twofold: they attend to the space the body inhabits, including the bodily relation to it (localisation); and are simultaneously existential (2015: 300-1). The 'I am here' echoes 'I exist' or 'I feel myself feeling'.[41] The dual existential and reflexive character of touch is captured by Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard who writes: '[j]ust 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) The question of 'where am I?' calls for the ontological question 'what am I?' suggesting that one informs the other and vice versa, and an open exchange between the two. The pressure theory of touch developed in 1846 by Ernst Weber, a German anatomist and physiologist, is of particular interest, as it points to the dynamic character of touch. With Weber, touch as the sense of pressure and tension discussed earlier is, in fact, 'a *sense of force'*: a sensed energy which exerts and is counteracted by the body which exerts back – the case of two forces pressing against each other (Weber, 1846: 196; de Vignemont and Massin, 2015: 298). As force, the notion of touch can be expanded to include the dynamic interplay of several entities, namely orientation, directionality, mass, energy, magnetism and gravity. Significantly, these forces

[40] Phantom limb is 'a condition in which patients experience sensations, whether painful or otherwise, in a limb that has been amputated.' (Chahine and Kanazi, 2007: 345)
[41] See French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'double sensations', that is, one hand touching another (1962), although I argue that both hands must be understood as 'active' in sensing (Irigaray, 2011).

are potent enough to operate both across distance and not just, as presupposed, via direct contact, although, research finds that they affect awareness differently.

De Vignemont and Massin argue (engaging with Tipper *et al.*, 2001) that 'the more spatially determinate the sensation [of pressure] is', thereby activating the sequence of 'feeling it' followed by 'seeing' or localising it on the body, 'the less it takes time to experience pressure' (2015: 304). However, equally, 'the less spatially determinate the sensation is, the more it takes time to become aware of it.' (ibid) So, to perceive and feel touch depends on being able to localise it with one's eyes. This suggests a discordance 'between visual and proprioceptive information' (ibid, engaging with Folegatti *et al.* 2009; and Moseley *et al.* 2008). There may be, therefore, forms of touch or forces, particularly those that cannot be detected by sight or sound, that fail to be detected or do not enter one's bodily consciousness (de Vignemont and Massin, 2015: 298). Their 'causes and effects' nonetheless remain felt (ibid). Indeed, Gallace and Spence point to touch's capacity for 'distal attribution', that is, to sense something that is happening at a distance. (2014: 20) Tactile sensations, it would seem, can be experienced beyond skin to skin. Touch can be perceived across distance, though it may only be experienced subliminally or by way of cause and effect. In other words, touch is elusive.

**2. DISCOVERING TOUCH AS ART AND TECHNIQUE**

Sense is imbued with multiple meanings. The most basic one, which I have already discussed, refers to the organs that enable the experience of sensations and perception of external stimuli. The French translation 'sens' enables a widening of its definition to encompass orientation ('le sens de l'orientation': the ability to navigate or find one's way intuitively through space); common sense ('sens commun', that is, the logic, reason or intuition which informs action); 'sens' as meaning and by default an appraisal of 'meaningfulness' and 'meaninglessness' and their extent (Barker, 2009); 'sens' as a capacity or faculty one is endowed with or not ('le sens des affaires'/business acumen; 'le sens des réalités'/sense of reality; 'le sens de l'humour'/sense of humour). Homing in on movement in 'sens', Howes, a scholar in Anthropology, writes '[t]he senses are 'ways' of perceiving' (Howes, 2005: 9): they are a route, path, passage and direction as well as a method, means and ground along which motion takes place (the definition of 'way'). Indeed, the close relationship between touch and movement is noted by Gallace and Spencer (2014: 30). Sense is related etymologically to aesthetics, originally standing for sensory experience: perception via the senses and the mind, the realm of the felt. During the Enlightenment, the term was appropriated by philosophical discourses on the nature of art and beauty or taste. The period was marked by privilege, namely, '[w]ho has the right to judge' (Tsien and

Morizot, 2021) and the inception of epistemological modes of the universalisation and standardisation of beauty that would, and continue, to shape all areas of life, 'including visual arts, literature, [dance], music, human bodies, food, and manners' (Tsien and Morizot, 2021). Today, still, the question of 'who has the right to judge' lives on via the question of who has the right to *touch*, that is, who has the *right* touch. For example, while curators are allowed to, and do, touch works of art, members of the public are not, and are reprimanded when they do.[42]

Stephen Barker, in his essay *Threshold (pro-)positions: Touch, Techné, Technics*, notes that 'Derrida and Nancy's language', in trying to touch upon what escapes touch, 'shifts […] the 'sense' of touch into […] the 'art' of touch', re-connecting art to its Greek etymology tékhnē (2009: 45). The art of touch refers to the art of sensibility and tact (the etymology of touch). For example, Nancy writes that ''do not touch me' is a phrase that 'touches', and so, sensibility is 'the point where touch does not touch, must not touch in order to exercise its touch (its art, its tact, its grace).' (in Komel, 2023) In addition, Slovenian philosopher Mirt Komel stresses that touch as the sense of sensibility 'does not mean an either-or of body or mind, but rather both at the same time, namely, the bodily activity of making sense and the thinking activity of sensing' (ibid): the unity of the body and mind, 'the touchable' and 'the untouchable' (ibid) – body and culture, flesh and technique in sense, particularly the sense of touch. Tact locates the sense of touch in the relational and aesthetic field, for touch is a relation to the other, things and the world. In addition, tact locates the sense of touch in relation to ethics and measure. The touch that touches and does not touch exposes and is exposing. It reveals the body/the self and its moral grounding, or lack thereof. Tact moves touch into the realm of everyday social interactions and customs where physical contact is mostly absent, where touching and not touching are codified, regulated, and acquires cultural meaning.

The art of touch as an effect of culture introduces the notion of a technology of the senses and, importantly, its historicity: 'the historicity that *produces-human-beings-and-technics*, always in a prosthetic way' (Derrida, 2005: 243), to mean, by way of 'implementation, manifestation, manipulation (i.e., through the application of the hand, *manus*)' (Barker, 2009: 44). Derrida's assertion recalls Marx's own: '[t]he forming of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present.' (1967: 141) In other words, the senses – their organisation and the sensations they produce – are not ahistorical. They are a cultural and historical phenomenon (Howes, 2005:5), therefore, 'a situated practice' (Law in Howes,

[42] My assertion is based on having worked as a Gallery Assistant and in a condition-checking capacity during exhibition install at Nottingham Contemporary (2015-2022).

2005). As such, they are inflected by an ideology which structures and regulates them (Howes, 2005: 4). For this reason, it becomes critical, as my thesis proposes in light of Mitra's assertion of how power unfolds 'in and through' (2021: 10) CI touch, to analyse the politics and economics lodged deep in 'sensory values […] and the process by which 'history [is] turned into nature" (Bourdieu cited in Howes, 2005: 4).[43] The supposition is that if we begin to 'underst[and] sensory values as purely social constructions it is possible to imagine cultural alternatives.' (Howes, 2005: 11) Such an endeavour, though, is not mere theoretical experimentation. It is consequential because it challenges and interrupts both the culturally agreed 'nature of reality' (ibid: 11) and the reality of nature. To illustrate, my project to deconstruct and expand the sense of touch throws rapidly into question the very nature of my reality and the foundations upon which my sense of kinship/connection to others and place in the world are built by way of my nationality, community, family relations, friendship, peer group and through them, my sense of self, identity and belonging to others to whom I am bound by blood and/or shared passions, values, customs and heritage.

This is where touch takes a political and economic dimension, which I discuss in my critique of neoliberalism because binding or belonging, which is the affect and effect of touch in kinship, is made 'real' and 'natural via the *living* body' (ibid: 3). The latter is 'the 'beare[r] [of] culture' (ibid), and as such, it not only embodies but reproduces hegemonic culture's sensory values and hierarchies (ibid). Howes asserts that science, specifically its 'ideological orientation' (ibid: 124), plays a key role in naturalising the economy of the senses (ibid), thereby naturalising the body's ever-evolving perception and relationship with the world (ibid: 62-3). For example, historically, science has been instrumental in justifying, institutionalising and essentialising inequalities. In the seventeenth century, the French physician and naturalist François Bernier 'first eschewed the prevailing geographical classificatory system of human beings by locating skin [colour] as the single characteristic on which human organization would depend.' (Wiegman, 1995: 27-28) The global commodification of labour associated with maternity which I analyse in Chapters 2 and 3 testifies to the fact that science (ratified by law) continues to distinguish between people and to distribute rights and privilege based on the colour of their skin (Chapter 3). In fact, the focus on skin or race/ethnicity is one of the most common axes used to organise and divide people in the Global North, along with sex, gender, class, sexuality and disability (Preciado, 2013: 322; Segal, 2009: 45). This suggests, as philosophers Feher *et al.* argue, that '[t]he history of the human body is not so much the history of its representations as of its modes of construction' (1989: 11): the elaboration, enunciation and sedimentation into culture of historical,

[43] Howes found Bourdieu's citation in Geurts, 2002: 195.

ideologically biased theoretical thoughts or knowledge which are absorbed by the population and replayed in social contexts – everyday performance.

Knowledge holds a very special position in the West because it is synonymous with progress, directly engaging with the futurity of humankind and the foundation of that future. Derrida connects the knowledge of Western science with structure or the 'structurality of the structure' and the nature of its acquisition: 'epistémé' (1997: 115-20). Though its presence, he notes, is 'neutralized' (ibid), the structure serves 'to orient; balance, and organize' and 'above all' ensure that 'freeplay', that is, creative thinking/acts are 'limit[ed]' (ibid). The structure's role, he asserts, is to maintain and communicate 'a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude' (ibid).[44] Derrida puts forth that Western knowledge is always already predetermined because its underpinning, being strategically buried, cannot be questioned. Derrida's critique of phallogocentrism brings home that knowledge's epistemological mode of production weaves the senses (visual prosthetic), form (representation) and meaning-making via a singular fixed position, orientation and horizon (out-look) – that of power.[45] This means that throughout history, knowledge has communicated a predominantly white, masculine (though not necessarily solely from white people and men) and US-Eurocentric essentialism that would dominate and afflict all disciplines, including aesthetic practices and acts of political struggles. Some examples include: the civil rights movement, mainstream feminism, which I discuss in Chapter 2, somatics and CI; and, despite its best intentions and claims to inclusivity, even my own collaborations with Amaia, Jae and Chloe, as I discover (Chapters 3, 4 and 5).[46] For this reason, as Montaigne argues, '[w]e need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things.' (in Derrida, 1997: 115-20)

To 'interpret interpretations' means to extract the foundation of knowledge and to consider that touch and its hierarchies already pervade and are enacted through knowledge. As Nancy proposes in relation to the phrase 'do not touch', knowledge touches: it performs and exerts far and wide. However faintly, it dispenses sensory values and is orientated towards the body. Knowledge – as law of understanding – inevitably occurs within an already inter and transsubjective field: a field of relationships. Transsubjectivity therefore precedes and directs knowledge at the same time as knowledge begins necessarily before, for, around and through others (the etymology of 'per'). Its very design is to interact dynamically with,

[44] Derrida also writes that knowledge is 'the fixation of a certain concept and project' (1988: 119-120)
[45] Phallogocentrism is a term coined by Derrida as part of his deconstruction theory to describe a male-centred point of view expressed in and through language.
[46] Historian, Lucy Worsley recounts that: '[although] Martin Luther King emerged as a national hero, an icon of equality — […] his own dream had its limits and exclusions.' Indeed, '[during] the march on Washington, no women were allowed to speak […] Also, Coretta Scott King had accompanied Martin Luther King to the White House after JFK's invitation and King basically left her on the doorstep of the White House.' (2020)

influence and shape (the etymology of 'form') human perception and action, one's sense of self and location in the world – one's orientation and movement. In addition, knowledge not only showcases expertise about a particular subject, it also simultaneously erects a conceptual model, plan or blueprint of that knowledge. In Kirshner's unpublished thesis (2000), the plan and its relation to the sententious constitute the laying down of the law, that is, the double art of confusing art and nature, nature and garden, model (the living subject) and model (its replica/maquette).[47] The blueprint comes to stand for the architecture (Derrida's structure), that is designed with the body in mind, and precedes it. It extends across space and time, emitting forces – the manifestation of touch – that press against, penetrate and orientate bodies towards fixed futures and embodiments, and not others. Knowledge's tactile character lies in the fact that it is reproducible and reproductive (designed for dissemination and practice ad infinitum, Parker, 2012: 95). It is also binding, in a process that places first and foremost 'the body [as] an instrument for involvement with others' (Stryker, 2017: 159).[48] As such, the sense of touch, that is the relational field, is imbued in knowledge and knowledge is imbued in the sense of touch.

## 3. TOUCH, AWARENESS AND REFLEXIVITY: SOMATIC PROCESSES IN DIDIER ANZIEU'S PSYCHOANALYSIS

In this section, leaning on Paxton's own research into mother-child touch communication, I draw on French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu's theories around child development and the formation of self, in order to study early somatic processes, specifically the relationship and dynamics between touch, awareness, reflexivity and the world. Through Anzieu, Howes' presuppositions are further supported: through touch, humans absorb the space and figures that are external to them – first, the mother/primary-carer. This is how humans are said to relate and come to be able to think. As the child grows, so does its world. In internalising the surrounding world, it necessarily internalises the neoliberal prejudices and ideology which form part of its environment, even precede it. Anzieu's psychoanalysis, together with the next section on feminist psychoanalysis, continues to lay the foundation for the new understanding of touch which I propose. Here, the predominance of touch in early human development, and the somatic processes and exchanges that touch stimulates between primary carer and baby, is scaled up and connected to neoliberalism, its discreet modes of relating, its loop of communication and gratification – its haptics – which sustain it and inform the way the hegemony thinks: this time not through physical contact but across remoteness. I suggest that this innovative framing and narrative about touch might nourish an ever more

[47] Kirshner is an artist and scholar.
[48] *Wired* magazine, 1995, interview with Sandy Stone in Stryker, 2017.

grounded and interconnected hyper-awareness in my dialogue with my collaborators, and in somatics.

Contemporary theorists who have explored the sensory system have focussed on the sense of touch above all others (Serres, 1985; Rodaway, 1997; Marks, 2002; and Heller and Schiff, 1991). Paterson writes that 'each of the other senses is a mode of touch' (2007: 4). Howes finds an anonymous account 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 to develop in gestation (Rice, 2001; Montagu, 1986: 4). 'A 6 week-old fetus (although completely blind and deaf) is already able to react to tactile stimuli' (Gallace and Spence, 2014: 3). And touch remains crucial to infant development. '[C]hildren need touch for survival' (Field, 2003: 5). Holding, massage and breastfeeding are all 'reciprocal interstimulation[s]' (Montagu, 1986: 43) and touch, the primary mode of communication between caregiver and child. Later, the intense tactile relationship is commonly transferred onto a soft blanket or teddy that acts as transitional object (Gallace and Spence, 2014: 17), allowing for separation or distance in touch. It is no surprise that Montagu describes touch as 'the mother of the senses' imbued in all others (Montagu, 1986: 3). Adults also need touch. Tactile sensations trigger the production of feel-good hormones, oxytocin, endorphins, dopamine and serotonin, essential for the body's well-being and survival. Oxytocin, particularly, is known to help people bond (Gallace and Spence, 2014: 12). Touch's connection to kinship is emphasised by the potency of touch to generate a sense of attachment and belonging to one another, likewise, perhaps the most basic human instinct, that is, to attach.

If '[s]kin is the topography of touch […] the first point [and surface] of touch' (Furse, 2011: 48), 'topology is tactile' (Serres, 2008: 99).[49] The sensorial apparatus which gives rise to perception is made of intricate relationships of a topological nature, such as contain[ing], cover[ing], [being] cover[ed] by, touch[ing] and overlap[ping] with boundaries intersecting.' (Oracle, 2003) Howes describes the sensory system as a 'multi-directional […] intersensoriality' (Howes, 2005: 9, 12). The sense of touch exposes the body's depth, complexity and, importantly, its three-dimensionality. I am interested in Serres' description of an interconnected 'knot' (1985: 51-52), for the metaphor contrasts with certain deconstructionist and semiotic theories that 'read' the body and the world as text – neatly and in two dimensions (Howes, 2005: 9; Benthien, 2002: 12; 45). Extending further its three-

[49] Topography is the study of the forms and features of (land) surfaces; topology is the way in which constituent parts are interrelated or organised.

dimensional character, Casey (1987) qualifies the body as 'emplace[ment]' (ibid: 194) and its perception via the senses – the knot – as informing the very construction of place. He writes, the body's '[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]' (ibid). This predicament makes the body, and its touch, an inherent site of ambiguities and paradoxes. Indeed, '[t]ouch is complicated', '[t]he entanglement of the somatic with the imaginative saturates touch with cultural meanings' (Furse, 2011: 47). Eighteenth-century French writer, Nicolas Chamfort writes: '[l]ove, as it exists in Society, is nothing more than the exchange of two fantasies and the contact of two epidermises.' (1923). For Chamfort, fantasies about love, touch and the other mediate the contact of skin. In *Consensuality: Didier Anzieu, gender and the sense of* touch (2009), Naomi Segal, scholar in culture, gender studies and language who studied extensively and translated the work of Didier Anzieu, 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) Segal's inquiry differs from traditional phenomenology which assumes touch as 'direct and intimate, and perhaps the most truthful sense' (Rodaway, 1997: 44), like that showcased in somatics. Following Segal's lead, I turn to Anzieu, the prominent psychoanalytic theorist of skin to explore the complexities of touch and its connection to consent.

Skin is of course our touch organ. It is '[t]he largest and heaviest organ of the body,' and perhaps the most vulnerable because 'it cannot refuse an impression' (Segal, 2009: 44). '[W]e can live without other senses, but not without our skin.' (ibid) It is also our 'most public organ' (Preciado, 2013: 322). On the skin are projected and affixed definitive and socially determining categories such as sex, gender, ethnicity, race, class and sexual orientation (ibid; Segal, 2009: 45) and, lying implicitly across those, moral character. Skin is the interface between me and the world, which gives it its transitional character. It is the boundary site of contact, communication, negotiation and individuation. Via the skin, it is said that humans learn what is part of self (sameness) and separate from self (difference), where one begins and the other ends (Gallace and Spence, 2014: 6). Building upon neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud's assertion that the ego is a 'body-ego' (1961: 31), Anzieu develops the theory of *The Skin-Ego* (*Le Moi-Peau*, 1995): the fleshy body and its skin therein become the cradle of psychic life and psychoanalytical process.[50] He names 'consensuality' one of the functions 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 connects both sense and consent to the

[50] Thereafter, following Segal (2009), I decapitalise 'skin-ego', unless in Anzieu's quotations.

‘intelligence of the body’ (Anzieu, 2000: 268). It points towards ‘human relations based on the sense of touch’ (Segal, 2009: 6), that is, the body’s capacity to think with, through and from its senses (the etymology of consensuality), which suggests a sense of ethics.

Classen also emphasises the connection between the sense of touch, and thought. She writes: ‘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. These include comprehend, cogitate, conceive, grasp, mull, ponder and ruminate.’ (2005: 5) Through embryology, we learn that skin and brain are formed from the same membrane, the ectoderm. In fact, the poet Paul Valéry went so far as to call the human being an ‘ectoderm’ (1957 in Anzieu, 1989: 60). The surprising link between the two organs makes a mockery of the Western binary construction of mind versus body, and the privileging of sight, since the enlightenment, over touch (Classen, 2005: 5). The first sense-organ to grow, the skin becomes ‘the basic reference point for all the various sense data’ (Anzieu, 1995: 83). The sense of touch generates a foundational grid of collated sensations, memories and meaning against which experience, in all its forms and via all its senses, is experienced and made sense of, and from which reflexivity/action arises. Segal asserts that ‘touch is the only reflexive sense’ and, therefore, it alone, ‘gives rise to the reflexivity of thought.’ (Segal, 2009: 47) We can deduce that the human ‘centre is [in fact] 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). The paradox of skin is clearly inferred in somatics. Hay tells her students: ‘there’s no time to go deep, the depth is on the surface’ (2018). Nelson, in contrast, directly stimulates the skin and brings the students’ attention to their appetite for pleasure and pain, therefore the depth of desire lying on the skin (2018).

Anzieu’s skin-ego must be understood as ‘both an organic and an imaginary reality’ (Benthien, 2002: 8). It is where bodily sensations converge with a rich world of metaphors and ‘cohere in a system of thought’ (Segal, 2009: 17). Anzieu’s theory traces a ‘term-by-term correspondence’ (1993: 31) between each of their elements: ‘psychic space and physical[/bodily] space’ (Anzieu, 1990: 58; 1995; 28); and between thoughts and the act of thinking (Anzieu *et al.*, 1993: 31). ‘They constitute each other in reciprocal metaphors […] the Skin-ego is one of these metaphors’ (Anzieu, 1990: 58; 1995; 28). Like ‘the skin [which] envelops the body’ (ibid), Anzieu’s skin-ego describes the psychic membrane that envelops and contains the psyche of the child (Anzieu *et al*., 1993: 31). The skin-ego emerges from the child’s ‘introject[ion]’ (Segal, 2009: 46) of external figures and objects, that is, ‘an internalisation of what is, originally and logically, out-there space’ (ibid: 17). It is a ‘reversible’ (ibid: 200) or ‘double-faced membrane’ that contains/gestates and is contained/is gestated

simultaneously (Anzieu, 1999a: 1-2). Skin sensations and proximity with people and things lead this process (ibid). Anzieu calls these tactile spatial and psychic containers 'common skin'. 'Common skin' develops first from the haptic sensations experienced in gestation and infancy (ibid: 31). It is a fantasy of 'mutual inclusion' (Anzieu, 1995: 59) or 'enwrapment' (Segal, 2009: 59), also called a 'fold' (Anzieu, 1995: 84).[51] It is 'revived in the experience of [adult sexual] love, in which each, holding the other in their arms, envelops the other while being enveloped by them' (ibid: 85). Maggie Nelson (2016), in an intimate account of her new relationship with baby Iggy, alludes to the phenomenon of common skin which I have also experienced with my children. She writes: 'I don't ever want to make the mistake of needing him as much or more than he needs me. But there's no denying that sometimes, when we sleep together […] Iggy's small body holds mine.' (2016: 55)

The thinking body, Anzieu asserts, arises from this event: the child's capacity to envelop and internalise maternal care, containment and thoughts (Segal, 2009: 50), 'the assurance of a constant, certain, basic well-being.' (Anzieu, 1995: 61) The theorist underlines that '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). As such, the skin-ego is to be understood as 'the foundation for the possibility of thinking' (1995: 62). However, the 'thinking' body, importantly, requires a 'thinking' space, a space between the surface and the core (Segal, 2009: 51): '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). Anzieu's space might be described as a *distance* within touch, that is, within the organic-psychic envelope that finds correspondence in the transitional space between the body and the world. It is a protected space of differentiation that enables the child to carry a sense of safety and confidence in its 'motoric experimentations', that is, in experimenting with both psychic and physical separation (Benthien, 2002: 8). To expand its movement/sense of self, the child must move away or separate from the primary carer's body. This early process constitutes 'the first playful abandonment of the original symbiosis with the mother' (ibid). Notoriously, it is marked by a great deal of ambivalence and internal conflict (Anzieu, 1989: 63) for both child and primary carer. So, the parent's capacity to respond to the needs and desires of their growing child and tolerate or embrace an ever-growing distance between them enables them, paradoxically, to continue to cultivate a physical and psychic intimacy and connection with them.

[51] 'Fold' is also found in the work of Deleuze (2006) and Merleau-Ponty (1968).

The space of differentiation (physical and psychic) necessary to human development is, nonetheless, a manifestation of touch along the continuum of skin-to-skin, proximity and distance, giving touch its remote and temporal dimension. It is within this space that ambivalence, conflict, ambiguities and paradoxes arise, troubling touch and its capacity for consent and ethics. I believe that my willingness and choice to acknowledge my collaborators' difference and lack of resources by moving my methodology to an email dialogue was also intended to establish a meaningful connection with them. In turn, perhaps because closeness is implied by the very personal nature of their contributions, our email contact will bring to life, to an extent that I could not have anticipated, the ambivalence and ambiguities immanent in touch/my own touch, which Mitra reports and associates with power (2021).

## 4. TOUCH, AWARENESS AND REFLEXIVITY: SOMATIC PROCESSES IN MATERNAL FEMINIST PSYCHOANALYTICAL NARRATIVE

In this section, I continue to build the fundamental structures on which to base my collaborations and a new notion of touch in somatics. I draw from feminist psychoanalysis in order to explore further the micro (physiological and metaphorical) somatic phenomena that touch animates between caregiver and child so as to try to understand what touch is and what it communicates. This study will help me to ascertain in the next section how the maternal template for exchange and transmission might extend to everyday life and relate to neoliberal economy. Equally, it offers a number of enlightening feminist framings which, I suggest, might be brought back to the studio, and interrupt the tactile economy in CI and somatics.

Baraitser in *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* (2009) argues that (maternal) contact with radical difference, in the child, can lead to a 'renewed configuration of self' (2009: 52) because, in Kristeva's words, it puts the 'subject-in-process/on-trial' (1975: 103). Playing on the double meaning in French of 'procès' (process, and trial), Kristeva paints a subject, at once, called into question, arrested and interrupted: made through the very process of being un-made (2009: 100-1). Baraitser writes that '[p]ractices that break down identity are in their very nature ethical because they force a reconsideration of the relations between self and other that can allow for difference, rather than being premised on recognition of sameness.' (ibid) The event – the somatic affects and effects of touch/contact with difference – throws the subject into '*psychic crisis*' (2009: 52). Baraitser turns to French philosopher, Catherine Clément's concept of 'syncope' (ibid: 81) to explore the event further. The latter describes it as a temporal 'faltering', a 'little suspension of being', an 'apparent death', 'absence of the self' (Clément, 1994: 1); an 'abrupt suspension', a 'loss of

consciousness', a 'fainting' (ibid: 5).[52] They are, Baraitser asserts, 'experiences of momentary disappearance in which the subject comes back *fundamentally changed*. They are therefore generative experiences, out of which newness can emerge.' (2009: 81) Leaning on somatics, the encounter could be said to interrupt the otherwise sleepy continuity of subjectivity, giving glimpses into distinctive moments of internal motion and process that bring about reflexivity.

What Baraitser foregrounds, I believe, is a micro movement, not dissimilar to those sought by Paxton's *Small Dance* or Hay's practice of noticing, which I discuss in my Methodology. It is a movement (physio-psychological) that may be missed entirely by the external eye, though it vibrates and emits from inside-out, engaging the whole nervous system, even at its most contained. The motion cracks something open and, should the person be willing, restructures their internal world, that is, the very foundation for their capacity to sense/perceive, think and act. It could be said to literally 'shift' – another motion – the subject (Clément, 1994: 126) and the 'fictions of who we once were, are, and would like to be.' (Baraitser, 2009: 52) The potential for such happening is by no mean limited to the maternal/mother-child experience as my collaborators' chapters evidence, and it will come into its own in my contact with Chloe. Baraitser's insertion of reflexivity in maternal touch (her inflection is on the mother rather than the child), is a powerful move because it frees the primary carer from the traditional, Western, subject(child)-object(mother) paradigm, and maternal touch from the Western dichotomy that opposes it to the mind. The mother not only escapes mindless objecthood, but she also escapes becoming the absurd, pathologized figure that psychoanalysis has historically reduced her to, and which women have absorbed as their own, and performatively repeat (Anzieu's process of the introjection of external space and discourse). Indeed, the discipline has long inscribed fatalism, determinism and lack in maternal desire: the 'desire for the missing penis, the longed-for union with the imaginary mother, or the desire for the 'father'' (Baraitser, 2009: 56); the unconscious 'desire to rework infantile issues' (ibid: 54), fulfil 'unfulfilled longings' (ibid). For Kristeva, all desires, including the desire to have children, and our investment in them, constitute a desire for the lost mother (1987b: 41), even though not everyone desires children.

In an inspired feat of reorientation, Baraitser points out that if lack is a pre-determined reaction to the desire emanating from maternal interaction with and longing for another (be it the child, the lost mother, father, or other), it is possible to conceive that lack can be spin[ed]-off' (2009: 54) and replaced by a capacity to respond differently (ibid: 55). While I

[52] Catherine Clément is a French philosopher and feminist.

feel in Baraitser's statement, her own desire to liberate the maternal subject – therefore herself and many others – I believe that what she emphasises mostly, a point on which I want to pause, is that the pull, itself a force, towards reproducing habitual and pre-learnt responses, conflicts with the pull towards the new (this dimension of contact comes to the fore in my fieldwork, most significantly in my dialogue with Chloe). This tension, and the deeply personal negotiation that ensues, makes the maternal subject the quintessential figure of ambivalence (2009) and her touch full of ambiguities. As Baraitser reminds the reader: '[w]e need to confront the possibility of the mother's right of refusal, of her retaliation or even her breakdown.' (ibid: 67) However, one way she does disrupt familiar patterns, expand the field of maternal reflexivity and inject the new, unexpected and surprising, is by introducing different frames about maternal touch in which to experience, as per the tradition of somatics. I build up on these in my fieldwork, in order to make the intangible in touch tangible. For example, Baraitser explores the gestator-foetal contact in the womb through a distinct feminist lens. Specifically, the scholar draws from Belgian-born French philosopher and psychoanalyst Irigaray's conversation with French biologist, Hélène Rouch (1993b) and the latter's research (1987). We learn that the placenta mediates the contact between maternal subject and foetus: its function is to both provide immunity against disease and to prevent the embryo from being rejected (Irigaray, 1993b; Rouch, 1987). In addition, Oliver (1994, 1998) and Hird (2007) note that the placenta activates a multitude of bodily exchanges, transfers and circulations (Fannin, 2014), already alluding to the depth and intricacies of the contact and dynamics between gestator and baby.

Rouch writes that 'the placenta is an exclusively foetal tissue' (1987, my translation). Its cells 'enter deep into the maternal blood cells', however, 'foetal blood never mixes with maternal blood. Exchange takes place *across* a multitude of cellular layers […] Even as they may constitute in totality no more than a layer of three to four micrometres, which may diminish to one micrometre by full term, the distance and separation between the two bloods remain [even as the cells' membranes touch]' (ibid). The organic-foetal-bodily-extension (the placenta) establishes a distinct contact practice and ethics between two subjects, marked by neither complete distance nor full contact (Baraitser, 2009: 62), neither sameness/total assimilation nor otherness with its assigned threat (Rouch, 1987). Placental forming, its mediating function that enables a dense circulatory system of communication between the two, and the cellular exchange unfolding across microscopic membranes, insert distance and separation into what is assumed to be the most symbiotic relation or symbiotic touch. It is not difficult to see how the mere contemplation effortlessly shifts perception: the severance of the umbilical cord after delivery no longer severs the baby from the maternal

body, generating an array of sensations which are deemed to be natural, for example melancholy, trauma and lack (Irigaray, 1993a) but severs the baby, in fact, from its very own material – from itself (Baraitser, 2009: 62). ‘So the foetus was always already other within the mother.’ (ibid)

Rouch’s placental and blood narrative displaces the traditional discourse that structures maternal subjectivity and complicates the notion of touch in CI and somatics. It also noticeably transposes seamlessly to the metaphorical and symbolic territory of psychoanalysis, evidencing the extent to which science has informed and continues to inform the many academic fields concerned with theorising human processes and experience, of which somatics and maternal performance are two. Israeli-French psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger, clearly inspired, like Irigaray, by biology, describes the psychic exchange in touch communication between gestator and the prenatal infant as a ‘bi-directional’ system that stimulates an ‘[a]symmetrical’ ‘transmiss[ion]’ of ‘[f]antasy’, ‘desire’, ‘trauma’ from maternal subject to child and from child to maternal subject; and ‘transform[s]’ them (1997: 381). The placenta, therefore, mediates the exchange of both material and immaterial ‘reciprocal [intra]stimulation’ (Montagu, 1986: 3) between two that survives beyond gestation through holding, massage and breastfeeding – practices more clearly mediated by touch. Baraitser turns to French psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche’s theory of seduction (1997) developed in relation to breastfeeding to investigate Ettinger’s assertion and the phenomenon of ‘asymmetrical transmission’ in touch in the womb and post-birth. Laplanche argues that through signs, the breastfeeding maternal subject transmits to the child, their sexual pleasure and unconscious fantasy. Although it cannot understand them, the gratification of being fed and cognizing the adult’s pleasure in turn stimulate the child’s own imaginary and delight, which is communicated back to the adult. This establishes a feedback loop, making both parties active, at once, arouser and aroused, toucher and touched.

Within this frame, touch does not deface: the maternal body escapes the asexualisation and objectification conventionally enforced upon it by culture. Maternal touch and experience remain vibrantly sexual, sensual and erotically engaged (Baraitser, 2009: 96). And touch encompasses, as Komel argues, the tangible and intangible at once: sustenance (nourishment, oxygen, filtering of waste material) and protection (immunisation) (Rouch) cohere with pleasure, pain, desire and imaginary (Ettinger). Touch also represents distance and asymmetry: it leaves within touch, the realm of the shared which Western culture too easily assimilates with oneness, a space of differentiation which supports Anzieu’s own assertion. Touch is nonetheless co-labour: it muddles the notion of the body’s clear organic

boundaries and separation from others. Instead, it opens both subjects to the new, in an intimate co-yet-separate-emergence (Baraitser, 2009). I draw on Baraitser's new conception of touch and relationality in my dialogue with Amaia, Jae and Chloe, to attempt to embed a different touch and mode of apprehension. I suggest, however, that Baraitser does not go far enough into the body to qualify 'what emerges in direct response to what the child stirs up in us' (ibid: 96). She alludes to it when she writes: 'the child calls something forth in the mother (the sucking experience affects the mother at physiological, psychological and unconscious fantasy levels)' (ibid). I want to focus on the somatic phenomenon: on the event of transformation that touch stimulates and which unfold across physiology (biology/hormonal), ego (psychoanalysis), perception, sensations and the imaginary.

For this, I go to feminist scholar Elizabeth Grosz on Freud (1905) and Laplanche (1976) where I learn that 'the [sexual] drives are attached to biological processes; they are autoerotic and regulated by an erotogenic zone.' (Grosz, 1994: 53) Biological instincts connected to feeding and sustenance turn the mouth, digestive organs and pathways into sensitive, receptive, erogenous sites. Laplanche names this mechanism 'propping': the propping of the sexual drive onto biological instincts, a 'new fantasy object in place of the object of need' (ibid: 53-4). The loop system across the two, from mouth to nipple, nipple to mouth and tongue, including the passing of thick warm milk from orifice into the body, generates new pathways on which the sexual drive attaches. Freud describes this phenomenon 'somatic compliance' (1905) which Grosz also names 'plasticity' (1994: 54). Touch therein performs 'a retracing, a psychical transcription of biological processes, organs and pathways. The body is quite literally rewritten, traced over, by desire. Desire is based on a veritable cartography of the body (one's own as well as that of the other).' (ibid: 56) Any part of the body, including the brain, any organ, limb, object and prosthesis can become an erogenous zone (ibid). Grosz' description ties with Ettinger's assertion of bi-directional, albeit unequal, 'transmissibility' (1997) which transforms both the primary carer and infant. Touch arouses – perhaps the very ontological motion of somatic inquiry and games.[53] What does touch arouse? Desire, and the imaginary which circulate, creating new networks, bodily connections and dynamics, and reconfigure the body/self (also in Hay, 2016: 105). Preciado could be said to put the concept to practice in his playfully daring and performative *Countersexual Manifesto* (2018), which calls for the reorganisation of erogenous zones through the democratisation of the anus.

[53] Stern writes: '[t]o be aroused is "to be put into motion" or "stirred up" or "excited into activity" physically, mentally, or emotionally. It is synonymous with "to animate"' (2010: 58).

Going deeper into the sensorial experience of what touch calls forth, Baraitser introduces the notion of viscosity, a derivative of touch, both tangible and intangible, that potentially transmits and which she argues is intrinsically part of maternal phenomenology. She writes that '[v]iscosity is a fluid's internal friction or resistance to flow' (2009: 129). It 'is engendered through a [maternal subject]'s interaction with things; small fiddly things, big heavy things, too many things' (ibid) that impede, 'encumb[er]' (2009: 130). Viscosity lies in the maternal subject's encounter with 'awkward' and 'rude' (ibid: 140) objects that 'resis[t]' the habitual 'flow' (ibid: 129) of pre-programmed touch and call forth the body to 'adjust' (ibid: 127): produce an atypical somatic response. The auto-manipulation is brought on by the condition of relationality/being-in-contact and an ethical investment in the relationship, both on the part of the object and subject (ibid: 140). I am interested in this sensed, yet invisible, viscosity within touch/tactile relations that takes hold and exerts itself, recalling Weber's distal sense of force and magnetism; and its potentially 'paradoxical' generative effects (ibid: 150). Although Baraitser is keen to rescue the maternal figure from abjection (ibid: 7-8) and ensure that her notion remains purely metaphor, I locate viscosity back into the fleshy body and align it with Irigaray's concept of mucous (1984) to investigate it further. The French psychoanalyst asserts that canonical male philosophy is indebted to femininity and maternity – the tangible, like all other senses, finding their origins in the womb (Irigaray, 1984).[54] Departing from biology, she develops the concept of mucous as a point of ethics between the two. She writes: 'the mucous membranes are the most sensitive parts affected by an erotic awakening and touching.' (2011: 137) Like the discreet fluids that the body produces when aroused, the implication of touch and its elusive materiality, she states, remain invisible because 'our culture is dominated by looking at.' (ibid) '[T]ouch [though] takes part in all our sensory perceptions, all our living relationships' (ibid).

Irigaray (2011) proposes that individuals start privileging carnal knowledge fostered through the sense of touch and the flesh, as opposed to mental knowledge (ibid: 138). A new sense of ethics might lie, she argues, in the cultivation of the sense of touch at skin level and beyond, that is, an awareness of touch and its biological derivative – mucous – within the realm of the perceptible, the barely perceptible and, even, the imperceptible. Irigaray's concept of mucous functions like its biological counterpart. It lives within and at the margins of bodies and things. It transmits (due to its water content, mucous is conductive of energy), draws various entities to each other, lubricates contact and enables sustained friction while simultaneously heightening and arousing sensory feedback (ibid). But touch and mucous are also present even further away. Like Rouch's blood cell membranes, Irigaray's mucous

[54] She refers specifically to Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'flesh' (1968).

constitutes within touch 'the indeterminacy of any distance between' (Grosz, 1994: 107 engaged with Irigaray, 1984). The notion of mucous (Irigaray) and viscosity (Baraitser) become the very tactile, yet invisible material of everyday relationality (between humans; humans and objects), sensory stimulation and imagination/fantasy. Both Irigaray and Baraitser, I believe, foreground the presence of this neglected, even shameful material, as the foundation for a new contact practice – one that remembers and protects distance (the presence of mucous, thresholds, membrane, fantasy, the mediating placenta, invisible materials) within the touch that we knowingly share; and remembers too that which is imperceptible and unfolds *across* distance. Pertinently, touch and the notion of 'sticky visco[sity]' (2013: 412) equally permeate Preciado's somatic writing and critical analysis of global economics. He writes: 'I'm talking about a tactile perception […] tasting the electrically viscous truth of being, with small strokes of your tongue.' (2013: 254; see also 253 and 412) I now explore this expanded notion of touch and haptics in the context of neoliberalism in order to investigate its politics and economics. This topic will subsequently be revisited in-depth in my collaborative chapters.

## 5. THE NEOLIBERAL ECONOMY OF TOUCH: PERFORMING REPRODUCTION

In this section I argue that touch, specifically somatic mechanisms and re/tracing, as well as the 'electri[c]' trans-subjective 'sticky' territory of 'visco[sity] (Preciado, 2013: 253-4, 412) of which Baraitser speaks, or the mucous (Irigaray), are integral to neoliberal economy and human relations. Neoliberalism refers to an ideology and policy that promote free market competition with little or no state intervention and regulation; economic growth is believed to be synonymous with human progress; it is also often supported by centre-left and centre-right politics. My analysis aims to demonstrate that, as contradictory as it may sound, though the Western world is dominated by the gaze, sight-based technologies and panoptic surveillance (Foucault, 1979), postmodernity is a site of 'tactility': of 'pressure', resistance, 'distraction' (Chidester in Classen, 2005: 61), and relentless negotiation. Taking the example of former USA president Bill Clinton's 'New Covenant' in the early 1990s (2005: 52), David Chidester, scholar in religious studies, describes the 'binding' – etymologically, to tie, with the implication of touch – character of American religion and politics (ibid: 49-65).[55] Ideology binds relations, to create a coherent social order (ibid: 51-53). 'Tactility, therefore, is the fundamental bond' between people (ibid: 51). In this frame, rhetoric and discourse are haptics: they cement a 'unified system of beliefs and practices' (ibid: 54) which notably dispenses with and erases race, class and gender differences (ibid: 53). Discourse therefore invites 'the haptic dynamics of the unseen [and silent] forces of modernity' pervading

[55] 'Religion' stems from the etymology religare: to tie or bind.

contemporary culture (ibid: 53; also, 49). Like Weber's pressure theory or the metaphorical presence of viscosity (Baraitser), though the tactile character of neoliberalism cannot be detected by sight or hearing, and may never enter one's consciousness, it is communicated by way of cause and effect, that is, by the manner that humans are affected and transformed by the new conditions brought on by changing political and economic contexts.

Today, we live in the age of global media, high-tech industries and virtual social environments that collapse more flagrantly than ever any distinction between nature and culture, public and private, micro and macro, inside and outside, including distinctions between disciplines. In this context, despite the visibly increasing scarcity of human physical touch (Classen 2005: 2; Gallace and Spence, 2014: 9), recently accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, I assert that the body is, paradoxically, saturated by touch: by refined and remote neoliberal techniques of control and the constant, excessive gush of communication, and the requirement for exchange and circulation, that seemingly penetrate the body, its flesh, its organs and liquid parts (referring back to maternal-foetal relations). Drawing from the body's capacity to integrate both the material and immaterial, scholar in German literature and cultural theory, Benthien refers to 'the […] world-spanning web that media prophets […] are calling the "new skin" of humanity' (2002: 234). In *Testo Junkie* (2013) Preciado turns to Haraway who argues that today 'embodiment is significant prosthesis' (1990: 195): artificial. The body emerges as a host-object through which the capitalist regime and its economy flow. Preciado advances that the encounter produces its own 'performative feedback', altering and reinscribing the body's erogenous pathways (Preciado 2013: 34–35). The process is best explained by my feminist psychoanalytical study of mother-infant touch communication, analysed in the previous section: Freud's (1905) concept of 'somatic compliance' or Grosz' 'plasticity' (1994: 54) and Laplanche's (1997) theory of seduction which, pertinently, align with the understanding provided by somatics of the body's malleability and processes of 'feedback' and 'translation' (Hay, 2016: 3), outlined in my thesis' Introduction. I note, however, that Preciado does not refer to Freud and only alludes in an inconclusive one-liner to Laplanche (2013: 321). Nonetheless, what Preciado describes are somatic phenomena that find correspondence and may even be rooted in early child development and a distal, no less potent, maternal template of exchange and transmission. Certainly, Freud's and Laplanche's hypotheses resonate with Foucault's enunciation of bio- or somapower: new, state-enforced modes of subjugation that 'operate [via] a mechanism of attraction' (1998; 2004). Seduction, magnetism and gratification are their tenets, and touch is clearly implicated.

The body's tactile boundary arises both compromised and extended by the twenty first century culture of media and mobile devices – laptops, tablets and smart phones. Touch is indeed an economic concern because 'feel-good' product design, with its hormonal inference, drives profit (Gallace and Spence, 2014: 245-76). Curved, shiny and endowed with an other-worldly smoothness, the light, portable machines are seductive tactile objects to feel and to look at. Vibration – otherwise known as 'haptics' – is another tactile feature designed to enhance skin stimulation (ibid). '[B]y adding tactile feedback' (ibid) the device becomes both active and responsive: touched and toucher. These technological objects, unlike any others, call for our physical touch – our attention. They compel us to touch and let ourselves be touched. Like the device, we become wide-open and receptive, 24/7. The high degree of human neural plasticity, evidenced by emergent, technologically induced neuroses like the 'phantom vibration' (ibid), means that human subjectivity is forever altered in the process. The body, therefore, its touch, is visibly no longer natural, authentic or ahistorical – if it ever was – as presupposed by science, the somatic discipline and maternal performance, but 'a technoliving, multiconnected entity incorporating technology' (Preciado 2013: 43).[56] It is a body plastic, disciplined (in Foucault's sense, 1979), reproduced en masse and consumed by mega-tech media networks and circuits. From thereon, everyday micro-movement, eating, sleeping, urinating, defecating, etc., the whole realm of emotions and sensations, is forever fused with the relentless transmissions and displays of human suffering and ecological catastrophes, punctuated by 'likes' notifications – another manifestation of the hand. Neoliberal haptics intervene and perform within the deepest membranes of the body and its psyche, pre-directing its orientation, habits, emotions, choices, its sexuality, desire and pleasure; in short: all of its movement and freedom of movement (Preciado 2013).

I posit that maternal touch communication outlined in section 4 offers a useful insight into the system of exchange, transmission and modes of gratification – the erotically based economics – between the regime and the body. Certainly, Sharma notes '[b]iopower is exceptionally high touch. The temporal infrastructure operates like a cradle' (2014: 44–46). It is a neotechno womb (Preciado, 2014), made up of nannies, cleaners, care workers, delivery people, Amazon's Alexa, sex workers, women, children, non-human animals, trafficked populations, legal and illegal migrants, from which power and pleasure unfold, thereby releasing those all-important 'feel-good' hormones. Concomitantly, low pay, high disposability, exploitation, including modern-day slavery, are justified and naturalised by the worker's skin colour, foreignness, illegal status or homelessness (this is developed further in

[56] Preciado is engaged with the text of Haraway (1990: 219).

the chapter on Amaia). The conservative government's aggressive right-wing immigration policies and cuts to social care and healthcare since 2010 fuel and further essentialise capitalist dynamics.[57] Neoliberal haptics reproduce and consolidate the Global North's hierarchies between people. It exposes a different value system, placed on the life of the worker who is turned into a mere and easily replaceable commodity – a different value system between who has a voice, visibility and can accumulate wealth; and who is kept in the most precarious conditions and actively blocked from accessing democratic rights (Preciado 2013: 312). Preciado asks his readership to consider that we are all imbricated in this economy through the everyday objects that furnish our experience and our most fundamental sense of self, which goes mostly unquestioned (ibid: 152–53). We are entangled in global economics and the histories of the technologies we today depend upon, including the dark protocols of their coming into existence (ibid): I put his assertion into context in my study of the women's right to vote and the contraceptive pill (Chapter 2). We get caught producing and reproducing the force, which Preciado names 'orgasmic' (2013: 41) of collective hegemony, meaning that everybody is to varying extents potentially involved in the economy of pleasure and its silent counterpart, the economy of violence.

While actual physical brutality is still visible in the West, most incisively across race relations between state police and the Global Majority community (notably in the United Kingdom, France and the United States) and reciprocal acts of terrorism between Global North and Global South, disciplinary systems that draw on actual physical contact have by and large been replaced with a touch that now operates across distance. Death is no longer by execution but a slow engineered death, the effect of unequal temporalities (Sharma, 2014) and the systemic attrition of certain populations that act as a kind of touch. Mbembe (2003) argues that Foucault's conception of modernity as the movement from a necropolitical system of ruling (power defined as power to give death) to a biopolitical management of the population, does not account for modern forms of subjugation: the persistence of necropolitical techniques within liberal democracies. For instance, Covid-19's highest death toll in the UK occurred within racialised and low-income groups (Independent SAGE Report, 2020). The pandemic could be said to have, in effect, sped up, exacerbated and, thereby, exposed pre-existing conditions and mechanisms that reduce life expectancy (ibid). Behind the neoliberal tenets of a 'healthy' free market creating economic opportunities for all globally, evidence shows that the 1990s global trade reforms have instead intensified poverty and widened inequalities (Pfeffer, 2011).[58] With neoliberalism, consumption has

[57] For example, Priti Patel's Clause 9 (2021) and the conservative government's partnership with Rwanda to deport asylum seekers and illegal immigrants (2022).
[58] Naomi Pfeffer is a scholar in human rights and social justice.

become the embodiment of freedom; and the individual's access to choice, to buying and accumulating, a fundamental human and democratic right (Gabriel and Lang, 1995). However, neo-consumerism also coincides with an acceleration towards the privatisation and deregulation of public services (under Thatcher and Reagan in the 1980s), healthcare being at the forefront (Pfeffer, 2011). By systematically cutting their provision, successive governments have neglected and devalued the most vulnerable demographics (ibid).

In this context, it becomes imperative to redefine what we call touch, or violence, not just as a physical contact, but encompassing the legislations that cut services which people need to sustain themselves (Federici, 2019). Water, food, work, education, healthcare and youth services are all tools of reproduction (Benjamin, 2019). Austerity measures, cuts, policies that claim to tackle poverty and climate change, coercive healthcare initiatives and welfare reforms are all an assault on the reproduction and kin of the most marginalised populations.[59] Federici stresses that insidious violence also plays out through 'the militarisation of everyday life' (Federici, 2019) – a culture of surveillance, protection and defence, and points to a constant interchange between institutional and domestic violence (ibid) (this is developed further in the chapter on Chloe).[60] Racism is too embedded in white-inflected conventions, etiquettes and civilities like everyday 'niceness' (DiAngelo, 2019) or comments about a Black person's hair, by way of just one example, which are everyday 'microaggressions' (Douglas, Midwifery Conversations, 2019). They repeat and cement violent power asymmetries between people along the axes of race, class, sex, gender, sexuality and disability, something I address in full in my fieldwork.

Western governments' reorientation towards decentralisation and deregulation, initiated after World War II and accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s, successfully generated *distance*, diluting and neutralising its complicity in maintaining inequalities, that is, the very haptic and reproductive mechanisms that precipitate death/reduce life expectancy. The insidiousness hinges, I propose, on the limited understanding of touch in the Global North and its expectation as solely a physical contact. Indeed, the lack of visible and direct connection between cause and effect feeds the popular perception that society's ills are by and large unaccountable, that demise, like success, is singular, the result of bad or good choices/character (the totem of individualism). It feeds and makes righteous our sense of

[59] Austerity measures include the two-child benefit cap which is reportedly hitting Black women disproportionally in the UK (Douglas, Midwifery Conversations, 2019). Coercive healthcare initiatives include the *Pause* project: the 2013 UK private initiative, purchased by thirty-four local authorities (LA's), offers women on Social Services' watch comprehensive healthcare cover against the injection of a long-term contraceptive. Although the programme fails to save LA's any money, it successfully projects a narrative of improved population control (Kumar and Wilson, 2019). Roberts argues that under President Clinton, the US welfare system ceases being a constitutional right and becomes a 'discipline and behaviour modulator' (Midwifery Conversations, 2019).

[60] For example, smart video doorbells are said to challenge human rights to privacy (BBC News, 2021).

powerlessness (the vanishing of force, energy) and impotence (the vanishing of potential) (Berardi, 2017). Hegemonic logic, however, is tactile: it legitimises inertia or poorly judged remedial measures. It consolidates the attrition of certain groups and wreaks havoc on our ecosystem. The same problematic logic could be said to pervade maternal discourse and the somatic discipline: its bodies, architecture, grammar and aesthetics. In turn, skewed logic and an overarching concern for one's own liberation – one's own primacy – expose a field of marginalisation and omissions that is symptomatic of US-Eurocentric epistemological tradition and orientation, as I explore in my contextualisation of fieldwork (Chapter 2).

**CONCLUSION**

Touch – the sensation of pressure and tension – is a powerful social and political tool with a capacity to bind people together as well as to disrupt relationships. The binding property of touch has the potential, when conducted with consent, to establish and promote a sense of kinship. However, considering the haptics of politics, touch is also found to homogenise a diverse society into one set of deemed shared characteristics, values, ideology and concerns which, problematically, flatten and erase difference and lead to exclusion and oppression. Touch is an economic preoccupation too, both historical and contemporary. As such, it is structured in order to regulate bodies and their experience. More broadly, touch (its materiality) is mostly illusive, ambiguous, latent, discreet and, sometimes, even invisible. Nonetheless, touch is energy, force, gravity, magnetism, direction and orientation. Touch performs. It orientates, shapes, traces and retraces the body, not just via skin-to-skin contact but across distance via haptics that exert and transform it. Because of the bipolarity and multi-directionality of touch, to investigate touch is to investigate the self/body, the object of touch – my collaborators, Amaia, Jae and Chloe, whose experiences are excluded from maternal narratives and whose predicament I propose to study; the neoliberal haptics that mediate our relationship and the somatic processes (the exchange and transmission) that are stimulated by our contact. This prompts me to explore in my fieldwork the performance of my own neoliberal, mainstream touch, including the school of thoughts that nourish my identity, that I have absorbed as my own and repeat in performance unwittingly within and without of this project (Anzieu's introjection). Through touch, my lineage and genealogy, that is, my sense of kin, are also in question.

I draw on an in-depth study of mother-child tactile communication, with a focus on the somatic phenomena of the feedback loop and the retracing of the body, to map out some of the haptic systems of exchange and transmission rooted in child development, that continue in adulthood, albeit subdued, and that neoliberalism could be said to exploit and benefit

from. Indeed, neoliberalism is tactile. Following Anzieu, the system envelops at the same time as its subjects sustain it. It is a site of pleasure, that is, erotic exchange and transmission between the capitalist regime and its people, as well as between people themselves. But it is also a silent and concealed site of violence and oppression. Departing from somatic belief in 'interconnect[ivity]' (Midgelow, 2015: 112), I hazard that the desire and gratification of a privileged segment of the population, which I admittedly belong to, might very well rely on the economic entanglement, subjugation and silencing of the most vulnerable groups – my collaborators at the forefront. My project, building on Mitra's assertion, explores the sticky power relations that unfold 'in and through' (2021: 10) my contact with them, albeit at a distance. Specifically, I draw on Baraitser and Anzieu's new conceptions of touch, extended via Rouch, Ettinger and Irigaray, in a bid to counter the neoliberal economies of touch and lay the theoretical foundations for my methodology and collaborations with Amaia, Jae and Chloe. Touching radical difference in each of my collaborators puts into motion my process of auto-deconstruction and crisis. We become tangibly entangled though physical contact is absent. Difference and the insertion of distance into touch are literalised by our email dialogue: a thinking space (Anzieu) and a reminder of our different geographies, contexts and, importantly, resources, be they economic, temporal, material and immaterial, which reveal further distances and differences across race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Fieldwork constitutes my experiment with and attempt at a more ethical touch practice: following Baraitser, it is a co-yet-separate emergence and a touch that does not deface (2009). It is also an epistemological experiment: an analysis in 'interpreting interpretation' (Montaigne) and challenging the haptics of genealogy that protect and reproduce kinship via the reproduction of the same or familiar rather than the new. I confront my own field of predeterminations and presumptions (Derrida's 'structurality of the structure', 1997) which I have inherited unknowingly as a movement researcher, mother, feminist and academic, simply, through my sense of belonging – my sense of touch.

Here, I have worked to establish principles that disrupt the conventional notion of genealogy with Anzieu's skin-ego theory, emphasising the intrinsic indeterminacy of the body gendering, lineage and role in reproduction: the undifferentiated multiplicities of external figures and thoughts internalised by one subject during their lifetime, alongside the equally undifferentiated reversibility of the ego's psychic envelope, that simultaneously gestates and is gestated.[61] Genealogy is also displaced by notions of mucous and viscosity, for the concept potentially invites *in* all bodies and gender identities. After all, if the present indicates that we are no longer all *Of Woman Born* (1977), our very origins remain within placental

[61] Though, this is not an argument that Anzieu makes himself (Segal, 2009: 72).

relations, within the viscosity of the womb. My project is an exercise in tracking and tracing how my mainstream thought and unthought subjectivity interacts with my collaborators' experience and the very production of new knowledge. Collaboration sees me delve into the tactile phenomenon and the conflicts that arise: the separation and the assumptions of sameness that shared touch exposes, situating touch's co-labour somewhere between the common tropes of symbiosis and individualism – never fully one, nor the other. Touch is indeed a tension, a pressure and a negotiation. I set out to investigate, through real-life interactions, its materiality.

# Chapter 2 A Contextualisation of fieldwork

## INTRODUCTION

How and what does touch communicate, that is, receive and transmit/pass on, especially at the level of politics, economics and hierarchies? Paxton's own study of mother-child touch, which influenced the development of CI and the feminist matriarchal thread that runs through somatics, demonstrate that the maternal and feminism are central to the question of touch within the discipline. Whilst this is a source of great inspiration to me as a feminist, mother, movement researcher and scholar, I also take stock of the sticky issues of power that afflict the discipline: non-consensual touch and exclusion. In my thesis' Introduction, I suggest that some of the causes might be rooted in mainstream feminist discourse and its offspring, maternal performance: specifically, the mostly fixed image of motherhood the latter continues to project, which excludes and marginalises individuals from a plurality of genders, races, ethnicities and sexualities – a set of exclusions found in both CI and maternal performance scholarship. To address meaningfully my research questions and the gaps in both fields, I recruit three collaborators with unconventional maternal experiences, that is, an experience different from my own, that of a heterosexual, white, cis and biological mother. They are Amaia, a nanny working in London; Jae, at the time of completion, a cis gay man who desires to gestate; and Chloe, a British trans woman of Chinese heritage who might adopt in the future but who already has a maternal practice towards her trans friends. My contact and dialogue with them aim to set in motion my 'self-hacking' (Paxton, 2018: 19) project and create new maternal narratives about touch for CI, and more broadly somatics, thereby extending notions of touch to make the discipline more inclusive and hospitable to performers of diverse identities.

As I outline in my Methodology chapter, my initial encounter with my collaborators already generated shifts. It pushed me to investigate touch and its communication outside the mother-child touch interaction which is the focus of somatics and feminist maternal performance scholarship. It saw me move beyond my own hegemonic experience: a shift that I align with Hay's somatic commands 'Turn Your Fucking Head' (TYFH) (2016: 103-5) and her invitations to 'enlarge [my] seeing'/horizon (2018) and 'dis-attach from my pattern of seeing' (2018; Hay, 2016: 105).[62] And so, the performative process of auto-deconstruction began: I question my 'orientation' (Ahmed, 2006: 6), that is, 'the way [I am] facing' (ibid: 7), 'inhabi[t]' the 'space' (ibid: 6), my position, the lens through which I perceive; but also, what

[62] Horizon means the limit of a person's knowledge and experience (its definition). Orientation is related to horizon because both refer to the position and 'point from which [one's] world unfolds' (Ahmed, 2006: 8).

my orientation makes ‘near […] or within reach’ (Ahmed, 2006: 54), what I extend towards without efforts, and what is pushed out of view – important somatic questions which I brought to Hay’s workshop in 2018 and have fed into this project. I will consider how the performance of my own touch, and through touch, my orientation, might exert upon them and contribute to their predicament both within and outside this project, via the interconnected nature of our social relations. As such, my fieldwork allows me to look for the power differentials that our remote touch excites, and which Mitra reports in the studio (2021: 10).

My fieldwork was found to illuminate touch’s intangible and invisible materials lodged in the sensorial, and to open new questions for feminism which, I suggest, might be brought back to the somatic discipline. For example, if CI touch is located in the maternal, we might ask what the difference is between the touch or contact of a legal mother like myself, and that of an egg donor, a surrogate, a nanny, a cleaner or a sex worker. Could a cis man or a transwoman ever legally be named ‘mother’? Who decides on the touch that acquires legal status, that is, that in the eyes of the law and medicine transmits, and that which does not? How might those different identities (presence and labours) transmit differently? Over the next four chapters, I work to extract the ‘structurality of the structure’ (Derrida, 1997) of touch: the dominant social, political, cultural, economic and medical discourse – the haptics – which animate such distinctions and conspire to exclude my three case studies from maternal discourse. I mean the myths, narratives, the subdued ideologies and mechanisms at macro and micro levels that lay still and silent beneath the tangible; and ‘orient[ate]’ and ‘limit’ ‘freeplay’ (ibid) – the production of new knowledge. Led first by my collaborators’ identities, I investigate how mainstream feminism’s orientation constructs the performance of touch in the Global North; equally, how touch, in terms of the performance of feminist identity and kinship, constructs orientation; and might be generative of divisions, hierarchies and violence on Amaia, Jae and Chloe. I do so by critically analysing contemporary maternal performance scholarship’s orientation and establishing its roots within hegemonic feminism. I then delve deeper into the origins of the movement’s orientation by studying the history of the suffragettes. Lastly, I turn my attention to Western processes of filiation: how the maternal kinship relation between a child and its legal mother is drawn medically and legally in the ambiguous, multi-participant fertility treatments that Artificial Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) often require; and how women with assets unwittingly benefit from pre-existing inequalities between them, for their own advancement.

## 1. MAINSTREAM FEMINISM'S ORIENTATION AS A HAPTIC FORCE

### 1.a The orientation of maternal performance

In *Maternal Encounter* (2009), Lisa Baraitser, a psychoanalyst and academic with a background in theatre, weaves personal 'anecdote' (ibid: 3; 12-13), 'theoretical investigation' (ibid: 13) and phenomenology (ibid: 17). In 'recounting' (ibid: 13), as she observes, she inevitably reconstructs her 'lived experience' (ibid: 12), and doing so, engages with performance (ibid: 3), specifically, the performance of self. Writing allows 'the personal' to emerge (ibid: 14). Since its publication, the book has been adopted as cult material by artist-mothers and maternal performance scholarship. Baraitser's contribution had a seismic impact on the feminist maternal performance discipline. It marked a turning point in how women, like myself, perform their identity and make sense of their experience today. In fact, so seminal is the book that it is spontaneously quoted during maternal performance events (Underwood-Lee and Šimić, ENGAGE*,* 2021). Baraitser has been truly elemental to my research, and I have embraced her theories and concepts. Nonetheless, I have also noticed some blind spots that, I believe, speak of maternal performance and mainstream feminism's skewed orientation, which is also mine. I do not wish to dismiss any of the innovative frameworks and notions which I have introduced in Chapter 1 and I build upon in my chapters. Rather, I am proposing to explore how and to which extent the acclaimed scholar, the maternal performance discipline and myself, might unwittingly be reproducing my collaborators' marginalisation. My critique forms part of my project of auto-deconstruction, that is, 'auto-vivisection' (Preciado, 2013: 359), 'auto-decapitation' (ibid: 424), 'derecognition' and 'disidentification' (ibid: 397); 'disruption' (Baraitser, 2009: 75-80), 'disjunction' (ibid: 17) and 'interruption' (ibid: 66, 68) in Baraitser's *Maternal Encounters* (2009); 'disorientation' (Ahmed, 2006: 157), and 'crisis' (ibid: 157; also in Baraitser, 2009: 52).

In *Maternal Encounters* (2009), Baraitser's phenomenology of motherhood is, she writes, enabled by and through the writer's own maternal body and experience (ibid: 23). Albeit briefly, and without revealing the exact terms, she acknowledges that her body's own construction, therefore her specific orientation, inevitably informs and limits her account of maternal subjectivity. Her outlook shapes her thinking and apprehension of materials (ibid). The theorist defends that this reality does not 'invalidat[e]' her experience, nor is it meant to be representative (ibid). While I respect her viewpoint, it is a concern that she does not contextualise her admittedly 'narrow' experience (2009: 23). Her choice contrasts greatly, for example, with Adrienne Rich's seminal work *Of Woman Born* (1977), with its outline of capitalism, patriarchal order, sexism, misogyny, homophobia and racism – important themes

throughout my thesis.[63] Baraitser's account refers to 'an experience that resides 'otherwise' than, or is excessive to maternal identities, thought of as emerging at the intersections particularly between gender, class and 'race'' (ibid); but an experience 'arising […] out of the mundane and relentless practices of daily maternal care' (ibid) (2009: 22). By focusing on her relationship with child, 'stuff' (ibid: 122) and the world, the theorist locates maternal subjectivity at the very boundary of the body – her skin, that is, paradoxically, her 'most public organ' (Preciado, 2013: 322) on which are projected socially defining categories in class, sex, gender, gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexual orientation (ibid; Segal, 2009: 45 in Chapter 1 of this thesis). Western feminist theorists, starting with French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir in 1949, have turned to phenomenology to imagine and construct a distinctive experience. Their focus on skin, however, has been noted to promote an implicit account of middle-class whiteness, and, often, though not exclusively, cis heterosexuality (Grosz, 1994; Irigaray, 2011: 137).[64]

This orientation in maternal scholarship goes broadly unchallenged and is even celebrated, as *Maternal Encounters* (2009), for which the author received an award from the Feminist & Women's Studies Association (UK & Ireland), illustrates. As Grosz argues, even at the margins of the body, phenomenology remains shaped by gendered and desiring bodies. (1994: 110, 156) Therefore, by stopping at the skin, Baraitser's account could be said not only to be limited in its interpretation (Grosz, 1994; Irigaray, 2011) but to exclude, because the academic bypasses the many plural identities located in the maternal. She evades queer bodies, trans bodies, bodies at the margins of society, like that of my collaborator Chloe (a trans woman), though they make a brief appearance under 'Terms and conditions: the gendering of the maternal' (Baraitser, 2009: 19). She avoids activist bodies who work tirelessly to resist binaries like that of my collaborator Jae (at the time of the project, a non-binary gay cis man) or, choreographer, Antonija Livingstone; bodies that nonetheless have a desire and capacity to mother, both in traditional and unorthodox ways, and, therefore, matter to maternal discourse. Maternal phenomenology also omits Global Majority bodies, namely, Black, Brown and immigrant like Amaia and Jae, and Chloe who is of Chinese heritage: the men, women and gender-diverse individuals who already perform or desire to perform 'mother-work' (Rodgers, 2020) and are left out of maternal narrative about touch. Cameron Lynne Macdonald, an American sociologist, also uses the terms 'Shadow Mothers' (2010) because their presence and labour is neutralised and erased.[65]

[63] I observe Baraitser's brief inclusion of the social regulation of motherhood (Notes, page 4/160) and its connection to race, class, gender and sexuality.
[64] See Grosz' critique of Merleau-Ponty, Lingis and Foucault (1994); and Irigaray's critique of Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and Levinas (2011: 137).
[65] While Rodgers and Macdonald refer to nannies, au-pairs and domestic workers, I extend their terms to include the many people who perform work traditionally assigned to the mother.

Contrary to the author's statement, Baraitser's orientation is not simply her own nor non-representative. It belongs to a well-established school of thought and its orientation leads the way for the discipline. To illustrate, Underwood-Lee and Šimić's recent publication, *Maternal Performance* (2021), which appeared twelve years after the publication of *Maternal Encounters* (2009), begins by stating their intention and framing their premise beyond essentialism (2021: 11-12), before almost immediately returning to it (ibid: 12), like Baraitser also does. To their credit, they acknowledge their conundrum: the 'complex negotiation between recognizing the ontology of birthing and mothering bodies, including the gendered division of care labour and seeking to de-essentialise mothering.' (ibid: 12-13) In the end, they admit with humility 'the white, cis-gendered, [ableist], academically and economically privileged' orientation of the book which is theirs (ibid: 14) and promise to 'do better' (ibid: 15) in the future. Their statement, as I read it, demonstrates the powerful orientating force or haptic that is mainstream feminism, which they have absorbed (Anzieu's introjection). So powerful it is, that it reproduces itself, even as the two scholars attempt to resist it, maintaining the type of divisions that are not, in fact, uncharacteristic of the second-wave feminist movement.

**1.b Second-wave feminism's orientation**

Indeed, it is well documented that the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, prominent in the USA, the UK and France, is mostly defined by its factions (Gamble, 2008). Out of these, a new type of critical thinking would arise. Intersectional thinking came about long before it was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 within a specific legal context, as a response to the new power relations that emerged within the movement, between women in the early years of its development (Olufemi, 2020: 17). In the USA, the feminist campaign, born out of the Civil Rights, anti-Vietnam war and student protests, soon split between Black feminism, lesbian feminism, liberal feminism and socialist feminism (Gamble, 2008).[66] In comparison, in the UK, women-led Equal Rights groups originated in industrial militancy, as a working-class movement: for example, the 1968 UK women's strike at the Ford car plant over equal rights and pay. Soon, however, it would be overshadowed by educated feminists whose activism mirrored that of their American counterparts.[67] Certainly, the lack of working-class women attending the first UK national Women's Liberation conference (Ruskin College) in 1970 evidenced a deep class chiasm within British feminism. In contrast, French feminism came out of the May 1968 Paris student revolts and did not follow the UK's Marxist

[66] Liberal Feminists campaigned for an egalitarian society through welfare, education and health reforms (Gamble, 2008: 239). Socialist Feminism is influenced by '[m]arxist, radical and psychoanalytic forms.' (ibid: 299)
[67] American feminists protested against the 1968 Miss America beauty contest; in 1970, British feminists demonstrated against the Miss World competition in London.

influence. It was also different because it drew on psychoanalysis, which gave French theory a distinct conceptual framework (ibid: 25-36; 291) though psychoanalysis rendered the movement and its discourse elitist and opaque to the laywoman.[68]

Mainstream feminist scholars and agendas were found to dominate discourse and overlook, sometimes even outwardly dismiss, important aspects of difference in the experience of women based on race, class, sexual orientation, disability and geography. For example, Anne Koedt, in response to the Radicalesbians manifesto 'The Woman-Identified Woman' (1970), argues that lesbianism is merely a 'small part' of the feminist fight against oppression, which rejected the specific predicament of lesbian women (Gamble, 2008: 28). Eventually, the Anglo-American and French movements came under severe criticism from Black activists and gender theorists for their hegemonic, white, middle-class, heterosexual-centric orientation – effectively, substituting patriarchy with an equal system of oppression and erasure (Gamble, 2008: 108-110). In the next decade, mainstreamists would be accused of performing 'heterosexism' (Butler, 1990: 84-85), Eurocentrism, essentialism, ableism, universalisation, exclusion and marginalisation, female privilege and of patronising (Lorde, 1984; hooks, 1981; Mohanty, 1984; Spivak, 1981, 1983 and 1988).[69] In effect, they resisted moving beyond their own subjectivity and reorientating themselves and their campaign to address their critics' concerns. Hegemonic feminism must, therefore, be understood as a force, exerting, in Chidester's words, 'unseen' 'haptic dynamics' (Chidester in Classen, 2005: 53; also, 49): 'bind[ing]' (ibid: 49-65) all women into one and the same, and, therein, neutralising the differences between them (ibid: 53). Its legacy is palpable today as I have discussed in relation to Baraitser (2009) and Underwood-Lee and Šimić (2021).

**1.c Maternal feminism's orientation: the conflation 'woman-mother'**

Mainstream feminists US/Eurocentric, essentialist and universalist orientation would also pervade the feminist maternal discourse of that era: for example, Dorothy Dinnerstein's *The Mermaid and The Minotaur* (1976), Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) and Michele Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (1979). The feminist conflation 'woman-mother' has perhaps been the most divisive amongst women, and between women and men. In 1949, when de Beauvoir asks '[w]hat is a woman?' she

[68] Early British feminism saw in 1970 the publication of two seminal works, both rejecting Freudian psychoanalysis: Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) and Eva Figes' *Patriarchal Attitudes* (1970); Juliette Mitchell, controversially, would be the first British feminist to engage with psychoanalysis in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* in 1974. (Gamble, 2008: 28-29; 33-34)
[69] On heterosexism, see also de Lauretis, 1994:198; bell hooks (1981) criticises mainstream feminists Betty Friedman and Naomi Wolf. For critiques of exclusion in feminist theory raised by American Black women, lesbians and by Third World theorists, see Rich, 1980; Hull, Bell, and Smith 1982; Frye, 1983; Lugones and Spelman 1983; and Omolade, 1987.

quickly concludes that she is defined by her reproductive capacity and organs: womb, ovaries and hormones (2015: 3-7), though social expectations also played out (ibid).[70] The maternal body is female and that of maternity the condition of womanhood encompassing both femaleness in biological attributes and femininity in culture, and thus opening the cis woman to social stigma.[71] It is no surprise, therefore, that hegemonic feminism has been more preoccupied with arguing the basic right for women to plan their pregnancies with abortion and other modes of contraception than challenging the conflation to achieve equality. In contrast, radical feminists such as Firestone (1970) and Allen (1996) dared to attack it. Firestone called for the end of biological pregnancy, welcoming instead ARTs to escape the sexual division of labour (1970: 181); while Allen would bluntly equate maternity with the 'annihilation of women' and argue for 'women's collective removal of [them]selves from all forms of motherhood.' (1996: 28-29) Others like Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Donna Haraway have worked to dismantle the binary foundations on which women's fate is built with deconstructivism and have developed in its place new provocative frameworks in which to locate female experience (Gamble, 2008: 46-53).[72]

Despite their efforts, leading feminists, including Irigaray and Kristeva, have continued to locate motherhood within the very constitution of the female subject, further essentialising the conflation and its implied heterosexuality. In 1993, Irigaray writes that 'we are always mothers just by being women' (ibid: 18). Her assertion recalls Chodorow's own 'Women mother' with which she begins her essay (1978: 3), playing with the double meaning of a plain sentence – 'mother' can be read as either a verb or a noun, the latter merging 'women' and 'mother'. In 2001, Kristeva argues:

> no matter how far science may progress, women will continue to be the mothers of humanity. Through their love of men, too, women will continue to give birth to children. That fate […] will remain an all-consuming and irreplaceable vocation. (2001: xiv)

This orientation or stance is not without consequences for my collaborators. Indeed, their creative writing will evidence that mainstream heteronormativity reproduces the prejudice and stigma against them.[73] Amaia reports that her womanhood is looked upon suspiciously by society, especially by women who employ her as a nanny, because she is not a mother and does not wish to have children of her own. Equally, in the heated debate surrounding

[70] de Beauvoir writes: ''*Tota mulier in utero*: she is a womb,' some say.' (2015: 3)
[71] Stigma is a set of negative and unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something. Etymologically, it refers to a mark, stain, a scorching or puncture of the skin, evidencing its tactility.
[72] Deconstruction is a form of analysis developed by French philosopher Derrida that challenges the conventional male-centred viewpoint of writing and language; and would be adopted by many feminist theorists (Gamble, 2008: 182-3).
[73] Heteronormativity is an ideology that assumes the naturalness of gender binarism (the existence of male and female genders only) and heterosexuality.

trans women's access to women-only spaces, it could be said that Chloe's feminine features are countered by the fact that she does not possess female reproductive organs, which throws into question her legitimacy and sense of belonging to the group 'woman'. Jae's heresy lies in not wanting to fulfil their deemed 'natural', male function in reproduction. So, Amaia's choice not to have children, Chloe's mastering of femininity but incapacity to gestate, even though many cis women are unable to conceive without fertility treatment, and Jae's desire for a uterus, bring disorder to the assumption 'woman-mother'. As de Beauvoir hinted nearly 80 years ago, social stigma continues to be cast into the twenty first century upon bodies who do not conform. Marginalisation, violence (physical, psychological, institutional) and ridicule are their punishment. And touch, physical and remote, is clearly implicated, as I develop further, over the course of this thesis.

### 1.d Maternal feminism: the orientation of the ethics of care

Feminism, not least Baraitser (2009), has invested considerably to tie the mundane, physical and tactile 'care' practice of mothering to a distinctive type of ethics anchored in cis maternity (2009: 26). In *Maternal Encounters* (2009), Baraitser briefly discusses American feminist, Carol Gilligan's concept of the 'ethics of care' (1982), a theoretical framing which would be fervently adopted by Western feminist scholars (2009: 26).[74] Though she is keen to reposition her project away from it, care (her daily maternal practice towards the child), nonetheless, stays central to the ethics she elaborates in turn. I, therefore, wish to linger on this element of discourse to unveil the issues, as it remains prominent in popular consciousness, art and across the field of performance, including somatics, as illustrated by the following publications: *Care Ethics and Art* (Millner and Coombs, 2022); *Performing Care* (Stuart Fisher and Thompson, 2020), *Movements of Care* (Hall, 2018); 'On Care' (*Performance Research*, van Baarle, Cervera and Grehan, 2022). Gilligan's ethics of care aims to 'valoriz[e]' the deemed feminine inter-relational qualities and tactile work within care and 'elevate' them to 'ethical work': the type of work that could escape the walls of domesticity and find purpose and legitimacy in the public arena (Baraitser, 2009: 26). Doing so, however, Gilligan further essentialises the assumption 'woman-mother' and fictional notions of innate female care attributes. Similarly, the ecofeminist movement links the female body to the care and protection of the environment based on women's presupposed universal oneness and identification with nature through menstruation, pregnancy, 'natural' childbirth (the pain of vaginal childbirth), and motherhood (Stearney, 1994).[75]

[74] See Noddings 1984; Ruddick 1989; Tronto 1993; Kittay and Meyers 1987; Held 1993; Larrabee 1993; Jaggar 1995; Shildrick 2001; Hollway, 2006; Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Williams, 2001; Roseneil, 2004.
[75] See also Razak, 1990; Salleh, 1984; Starhawk, 1989; for information on the construction of 'natural' childbirth in the twenty first century, visit Michaels, 2014.

Communication scholar, Lynn M. Stearney rightly observes that not only the maternal archetype simplifies complex socio-political and economic contexts to an ethic of care, it also reduces female identity to its reproductive capacity and sidelines men's most basic material investment in reproduction – their sperm (ibid). The discourse on care also excludes and taints female identities that may not experience menstruation or may not be able to reproduce, and that of others, who do not have the resources of time or money even to begin to think about the environment or those who simply do not wish to care for it (my provocation at Underwood-Lee and Šimić's ENGAGE, 2020).[76]

Noticeably also, the wider domestic labours attached to housework rarely form part of mainstream feminism's discourse around care – this orientation contradicts the 1970s Wages for Housework campaign. It is as if the mere mention might instantly kill that most fundamental feminist project of rendering the mother-philosopher intelligent, setting women back decades. Nelson talks of 'that wild oxymoron, the pregnant woman who thinks […] just a pumped-up version of that more general oxymoron, a woman who thinks.' (2016: 113) As a result, ethics of care theorists, including Baraitser, seemingly transcend the messy quotidianness of their very existence while the mother-child relationship is abstracted and other bodies and their labours invisibilised (Fig. 1 and 2). The contributions of my collaborators to maternal discourse, however, destabilise this narrative and orientation, most obviously, Amaia who works as a nanny, prompting new questions for feminism: who does the actual physical and emotional childcaring today? What demographic is employed to perform the labours traditionally associated with motherhood when the legal mother does not? And what biased orientation is reproduced when women recruit to achieve a semblance of equality and/or to break that infamous glass ceiling? In the everyday, the care of a child usually falls to varying degrees to one's partner if there is one and one's extended social network and community: family, especially grandmothers, whose labour is invisible and goes unremunerated (Woman's Hour, BBC Radio 4, 2021), friends, nursery, school, childminder, etc. A cleaner and/or nanny like Amaia might be recruited to release the working mother's time. The primary carer might also use the services of educators, like Jae and Chloe, by way of extra-curricular activity designed to extend the school day or school term, therefore providing a type of childcare during core working hours, all so she can work and accumulate capital. The many bodies that mothers lean on to continue to care, are absent.

[76] This is not to say that disadvantaged people do not have a regard for the environment but to emphasise that it takes resources that many individuals do not have in order to care for it, making it, predominantly a middle-class pursuit (Ipsos, 2003) For example, a 100% biodegradable bamboo toothbrush costs four times the price of a regular toothbrush.

Ahmed, in her inspired use of phenomenology, formulates 'the politics of housework' (2006: 30): a hierarchal system of relationships, simultaneously abstracting the figure of the philosopher, and erasing their very backdrop or 'behind[ness]' (ibid: 29). She draws the readers' attention towards the subjectivities and labours located behind the philosopher as well as the space and objects that enable the philosopher's very emergence (ibid: 30-31). Likewise, within the ethics of care, and other prevalent Westerner feminist work, including maternal performance, the very becoming of the maternal-philosopher-artist subject appears amiss. Ahmed addresses this asymmetry by redefining reproductive labour to include 'the labor of reproducing the conditions that enable others to live' (2017: 85). Therefore, the division of labour that feminism must fight is not just sexual, she states, it is also a class and racial division between women (ibid) because less privileged women 'become the arms for other women whose time and energy has been freed' (ibid). While I agree with Ahmed's progressive assertion, the divisions and hierarchies that exist in reproductive labour are more complicated, I suggest, because of the sheer range of services that are today commodified and eagerly outsourced by families, the working mother at the forefront. In fact, the problematic Western conflation 'woman-mother', endorsed by mainstream feminism, is an umbrella to many less valued conflations, traditionally assigned female, that make up reproductive labours: 'woman-sex worker', 'woman-womb', 'woman-egg', 'woman-breastfeeder', 'woman-cleaner', 'woman-nanny', 'woman-servant', 'woman-carer', 'woman-home educator', 'woman-assistant', 'woman-organiser', 'woman-personal shopper', 'woman-home cook', 'woman-family taxi', 'woman-fetcher-carrier' are some of them.[77]

This huge servicing infrastructure around the home and domesticity means that 'mother-work' (Rodgers, 2020), her tactile physical and emotional investment, is today 'dispersed' (Strathern, 1991: 32) and 'fragment[ed]' (Franklin and Ragoné, 1998: 119) across many different bodies and diverse genders, not just cis women. For example, while domestic cleaners, maids and nannies are predominantly designated female, in the commercial sector, delivery people (food shopping, Amazon, parcels etc.), taxi drivers, and cleaners are predominantly male.[78] They fall under what Haraway names, the 'feminisation of labour': '[w]ork […] redefined as both literally female and feminized, whether performed by men or women. To be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable'; to be turned into highly disposable and low value objects of 'exploitation' and servitude; and endure precarious living conditions (2016: 38-9) – I discuss further the maternal nature of this infrastructure in the chapter on Amaia. By excluding those many reproductive labours and individuals,

[77] I draw on the complex structuring of partnerships and participants sometimes involved in ARTs and extend it to tasks traditionally assigned to cis women and mothers, to propose this assertion.
[78] The split is almost even in commercial cleaning: 53% men against 47% women (British Cleaning Council, 2021).

mainstream feminism could be said to consolidate the damaging Western iconography of mother and child who alone exist, which invisibilises Amaia's nanny work, as Ahmed argues; but it also neutralises, even stigmatises the maternal touch and investment of male born individuals and male-to-female (MTF) individuals, like Jae and Chloe, thereby protecting the strict sexual division of labour in reproduction.[79] Popular culture makes it abundantly clear: the stay-at-home father is to be mocked and ridiculed by their own wives if they have one, other mothers and men. Such is the case of Kevin, the BBC television series *Motherland*'s endearing though emasculated character (2016-present). The stigma silences the male maternal desire like that of Jae, and complicates Chloe's wish maybe to adopt in the future, likewise, for her maternal practice towards her community to be legitimised. I discuss in Chapter 4 Jae's predicament, departing from the provocative performance research project by Fevered Sleep, *Men and Girls Dance* (2013-2020), which interrogates those anxieties. Mainstream orientation is indeed a powerful force: it marginalises, exploits, taints and erases and is clearly non-consensual. The power relations, by which I mean the field of pressure, tension, oppression and stigma which performs on my collaborators, are the effect of touch – between women marked different, like Amaia and Chloe, and between women and men/AMAB, like Jae – and are, therefore, part of the narrative about maternal touch.[80]

## 2. A STUDY OF THE WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT'S RISE AND ORIENTATION

In this section, I examine further the origins of mainstream feminism's skewed orientation. I argue that the suffragettes' astute manipulation of government's fears would shape the women's rights movement and lead to defining social reforms on both sides of the Atlantic: the right to vote and to contraception in the Abortion Act (1967 in the UK, 1973 in the USA) and the legalisation of the contraceptive pill (1961 for married women only until 1967 in the UK; 1965 for married women in the USA until 1972).[81] But their success came at a price. In fact, a price so high that today's mainstream feminism, including maternal performance scholarship as highlighted earlier, are still struggling to overcome it. I am speaking of the legacy of an orientation that historically divides in order to acquire power, and hold on to it. Indeed, contrary to popular narratives and feminist consciousness, women's rights were not gained through a fundamental recognition of women's status as equal to men and all women as being equal amongst themselves. On the contrary, they came from the movement's exploitation and consolidation of existing cleavages between men and women; and between

[79] The image of the mother and child is rooted in Western Christianity, though I acknowledge that it is also prevalent in the Global South because of colonisation and historical forced indoctrination. Global South countries, however, are beyond my area of research.
[80] Here, I refer to Chapter 1 of this thesis, which defines touch as a sense of force, pressure and tension. Likewise, the connection to skin and touch is evident in oppression, which means to press against and stigma which means a mark made on skin.
[81] I use the term 'manipulation' to emphasise the application of the hand and measure, therefore, the presence of touch.

women, based on class and race differential, the effect of which lives on in the twenty first century.

Here, I consider that each right is the result of specific historical and economic circumstances and, importantly, ideologies about the desirable bodies of reproduction – ergo, touch and transmission – which focussed and still focusses most ardently upon the female body. My research finds that the maternalist suffragettes – to whom I am indebted and from whose activism I benefit every day – actively collided with and drew on the state's white supremacist and sexist tropes in their campaign (Pfeffer, 1993; Davis, 2019; Olufemi, 2020: 12). Their advancement would be granted mostly with stringent caveats, in return of a service, a duty and a 'debt' (Ahmed, 2006) put upon women to fulfil, in reproduction. Within the logic of granting reproductive rights to women – indeed, women's right to vote is reproductive for it shapes society – laid the economic needs and ambitions of the ruling class that demanded to be realised. Women, like the maternalist suffragettes, embraced these in order to improve their conditions and to acquire some rights and some level of autonomy. In the 1970s, such a strategy would be re-evaluated and criticised by a new type of feminism that saw a better chance of achieving true freedom and equality within a completely reformed system. The biased orientation of early feminism, however, runs deep within the mainstream movement's DNA. It would pre-determine, I argue, the second-wave liberal feminism's trajectory and today's mainstream maternal feminist discourse. I set out to trace its historical development to show how hegemonic feminism's orientation constructs maternal touch; how touch, as an inherited sense of kinship and identification with the historical movement, might construct the same orientation which is my own; and is reproductive of the power relation between me and my collaborators. This approach aims to give clues to the more subdued tensions that might play out in CI/somatics contexts and at its margins, which Mitra observes (2021: 10).

It is easy to overlook the fact that the much-celebrated Suffrage movement was born out of the 'trailblazing' and 'pioneering' abolitionist and women's working-class industrial campaigns (Davis, 2019: 48) both in the USA and UK.[82] Angela Davis, an American feminist activist and academic, asks: '[w]hy did so many [white] women join the anti-slavery movement?' (ibid: 26) Indeed, during the nineteenth century both affluent women and those working in factories joined the fight (ibid: 28-9). The 'burgeoning' (ibid: 50) women's rights group identified with the anti-slavery struggle and saw the chance of a 'powerful alliance' (ibid: 29-30). Behind the tenets of 'sisterhood' (ibid: 38), however, the women's movement

[82] In the UK, for example, the Bryant and May Match Girls' strikes in London in 1888.

was afflicted by the racism and classism of its leading members (ibid: 50, 62, 101). One of the reasons is that the lobbying attracted women with privilege: women who did not need to work, therefore, with the resources of time and money to dedicate to the cause (ibid: 32). In contrast, working-class women had to work and 'contributed money from their meagre wages' (ibid: 29). Quickly, though, the agenda of prosperous women began to overshadow those of working-class women and Black women and men. And they were not the same. While wealthy married women sought education, career and voluntary maternity, neither working-class nor Black women would have had the means to access these even if they were granted (Davis, 2019: 187-88). Women in factories, for example, were more interested in concrete and pressing change related to wage, hours and working conditions (ibid: 126).

Through their neglect, it could be said that early middle/upper-class and bourgeois feminists exposed the fraught power relations behind the banner of sisterhood. They revealed their prime ambition, that is, to carve themselves a legitimate role in the public sphere (ibid: 34); but also their ruthlessness in that they borrowed, even appropriated, the language of 'slavery' to describe the institution of marriage and their predicament at the risk of jeopardising the abolitionist campaign (ibid: 29); and, finally, the racial and class hierarchies they drew on as they raced to gain the right to vote first (ibid: 63, 67).[83] In addition, the 'historical reluctance' of '[w]hite women' to consider how their class privilege, which afforded them domestic servants, made them part of both patriarchal and capitalist oppression (Davis, 2019: 84-5). Patriarchal, because they displaced and absorbed as their own its model and orientation rather than question it. And capitalist because they were always, as they/I continue to be today, leading players in the economic system of labour relations. They therefore reproduced the latter's values unknowingly. I investigate the 'sticky' power relations that my contact with Amaia bring forth in Chapter 3.[84] To understand the early feminist orientation or centering, which leads to blind spots today, it is important to examine the historical and economic context in which it emerged, specifically the rise of the 'cult of maternalism' (Pfeffer, 1993: 86; also in Davis, 2019: 27) and 'middle-class domesticity' (Pfeffer, 1993: 41; 89) that would propel it. This is the story of how it came about.

Circa 1798, Thomas Malthus, an English economist, cleric and academic, develops a new system of analysis and forecast that linked for the first time the 'nation's economic health and political power' to women's reproduction (Pfeffer, 1993: 4). Malthus warned that uncontrolled population increase would 'outstrip' resources and advocated for population

[83] Women of status were deemed more deserving of the vote than Black men or women (Davis, 2019).
[84] 'Sticky' refers to the viscosity of our contact, a character and sensory experience of touch elaborated from Baraitser (2009) and Irigaray (1984) and Preciado (2013: 253-4; 412) (see Chapter 1 of this thesis).

control (ibid). Anguish over the spiralling growth in population soon turned into concerns over the quality of the growth. So eugenics would be introduced to counter 'the influence of degeneration on the quality of the nation's breeding stock', namely the perceived excessive reproduction of the deemed 'defective', lower class and non-white population and to 'encourag[e] the reproduction of socially valuable traits' embodied by the middle and upper class and the bourgeoisie (ibid: 14, 6, 89; also in Preciado, 2013: 170) – 'the backbone of Britain and the Empire.' (Pfeffer, 1993: 7)[85] This approach was grounded in the scientific model of 'inheritability': a belief that health, morals associated with class, 'intelligence and personal traits' are transmitted genetically (ibid: 115). I explore further the logic of transmission in my study of Western processes of filiation in ARTs. Birth rates and the health of men and women become the indicator of the nation's power, its capacity to protect and defend its territory (ibid: 5): the human body is assimilated to the body of the nation (Peffer, 1993; Brown, 2005).

Women's reproduction is reported to have informed key developments in the twentieth century including **'**the loathsome ideology of National Socialism in Europe' leading to World War II, 'coercive population programmes in the developing world' (Pfeffer, 1993: 4) and, more recently, climate change reforms. Amira Davis, a scholar in African-American studies, writes: '[s]tructural readjustment programs, development initiatives, neoliberalism, imperialism, global warming and its connection to population growth all act as code words to limit the reproductive ability of women across the globe.' (2009) They constitute political initiatives, which, under the guise of benevolence, are designed to extend the many ways that women's fertility is regulated, privileging that of some women and stumping that of others marked undesirable. The new economic focus shifts the regime's disciplinary mode from necropolitics to a 'techni[cal] plann[ing] of life based on population, health, and national interest' (Preciado, 2013: 68) – what Foucault would name, 'bio-power' (1998: 140). The programme was guided and legitimised by principles aimed at the normalisation and capitalisation of the living (Foucault): the organisation of life (the demography and the individual) and its insertion into a system of utility (1998: 25). The population required to be managed, administered and its full potential, maximised (ibid). Within it, sex and race would be objects of the most intense constraints and scrutiny (Pfeffer, 1993: 37; Preciado, 2013: 69).

Beginning in the eighteenth century, the existing 'system of similarities' between the sexes, where the female is deemed an inverted version of the male, is replaced by a 'system of

[85] Defective means: 'poorer, less healthy and, according to them, less intelligent sections of society [perceived to] have larger families.' (Pfeffer, 1993: 14)

opposition' and turned into 'facts of life', therefore natural and ahistorical. The move is said to be a direct response to the perceived threat of the freedom movements and the growing visibility of women, and Black and Brown people in public spaces (Preciado: 2013: 74).[86] The separation of the sexes was judged 'essential to an ordered society' (Pfeffer, 1993: 6). In turn, the classification and standardisation of human appearance and performance across sex and race facilitate the division and ranking of the population based on the human body's most basic biological features, the colour of their skin and their reproductive organs (Preciado, 2013: 75).[87] The 'cult of middle-class domesticity' (Pfeffer, 1993: 41) arises from this organisation: 'men did the brain work, their wives were the 'heart', the seat of morality and [maternal] tenderness, while the lower orders were the 'hands' who did the menial tasks' and 'were locked into their subservient positions for life' (ibid: 40-41).

By the early twentieth century, human reproduction was 'organized and administered according to modern principles of scientific management […] 'Taylorism' or 'Fordism'' (Pfeffer, 1993: 52): methods of mass production and increased productivity where sperm is designated 'sexual capital' (ibid). The maximisation of 'quality' reproduction followed the idea of selective and planned breeding and unfolded through scientific programmes which included the development of 'contraception' (ibid) to prevent the reproduction of the poor, and 'investigation into reproductive technologies' (ibid) to tackle the low fertility of middle-class women, which had become a governmental issue. It is at that time that the affluent, native woman was sanctioned the natural mother of the nation (Pfeffer, 1993: 86). This event was brought on by particular economic and political conditions. Indeed, the early twentieth century witnessed an outbreak of sexually transmitted diseases, and the army in particular was afflicted and weak (ibid: 82, 90). At home, men would transmit their infections to their wives, causing an epidemic of maternal infertility and infant mortality (ibid). Birth rates plummeted (ibid). National security and strength were under threat (Pfeffer, 1993: 81-3; 90) Wealthy women were not spared. They were 'especially […] kept in ignorance about the cause of their ill health and childlessness by their [male] doctors and husbands.' (ibid: 9; also 37) The suffragettes would capitalise on the 'scandal' (ibid: 9) by the end of World War I.

They exploited 'the crisis of masculinity' (ibid: 87), publicly denouncing 'men's flaws and weaknesses' (ibid): their 'uncontrolled lust' (ibid: 49), sexual promiscuity and low morality. They painted them as irresponsible, 'inadequate provider[s]' (ibid: 87), who put the whole nation at risk by spreading diseases (ibid: 49). They played on the 'cult of [middle-class]

[86] British Imperialism in India and the transnational trade in enslaved people meant that a small number of South Asians and Africans were brought to the UK for domestic work and established small communities. (Migration Watch UK, 2014)
[87] See also Pfeffer, (1993: 40).

maternalism' and perceived virtuousness (ibid: 86-7) to argue that economic autonomy within marriage through financial aid directly paid to women would ensure the safeguarding of children, their health as well as British morals (ibid: 9, 87). Giving them the vote to affect social policies, they claimed, was 'the only way for the nation to achieve its demographic ambitions' (ibid: 88). The suffragettes' clever address of the government's concerns around men's ill health and ill morality, and infant mortality, enabled them to forge themselves a function in the political sphere as 'saviours' (Davis, 2019: 107-8) and 'mothers of the race' (Davin, 1978: 13) and the nation (Pfeffer, 1993: 86). This position, though, made clear that the movement 'accept[ed]' and 'embrac[ed]' 'white supremacy.' (Davis, 2019: 101; also 107, 111) Indeed, women's right to vote in the UK in 1918 (to women over 30 with property until 1928) would consecrate her centrality, naturalising her touch and transmission over others'. In the USA, in contrast, the vote was given to all in 1920, though Black people were still blocked from exercising their right and the US suffragette movement did not protest about that (Davis, 2019: 133).

From 1920 to 1935, the government birth rate and population growth control shifted its attention to maternal mortality caused by illegal abortion (Pfeffer, 1993: 95-6). Campaigns began to decriminalise abortion in order to ensure that women had access to safe and effective contraception (ibid). The government's scope also included the chronic ill health of working-class women caused by mismanaged childbirth, DIY/back-street abortion, and the 'toll of […] repeated pregnancies' (ibid: 89), understood to affect their servant duties (bid: 95-8). Eugenic concerns with the reproduction of the nation, breeding stock and maternal mortality alongside the reorientation and unleashing of bio-technological industries post-World War II (Preciado, 2013: 30-3) would culminate in two key developments for women's rights: the legalisation of the pill in the early 1960s, and the Abortion Act (1967 in UK). Both became symbols of women's liberation. However, little is said about their eugenic origins and design, therefore, the hierarchies and divisions, which the leading movement necessarily endorsed in their advancement. There were clues though that women's reproduction and the racial profiling of the nation remained firmly tied together: in the UK, the relaxed legislations around the access to the pill (in 1967) and abortion law coincided with new restrictions on immigration (Pfeffer, 1993: 25).

Davis reminds her readership that the birth control movement is a movement born out of the practice of '[forced] sterilization – a racist [classist, and more broadly eugenic] form of 'birth control'. (2019: 183) By the same token, the Nazi sterilization and Ayrian fertility experiments provide the basis, after the war, for 'research into and treatment of sterility' (Pfeffer, 1993:

100-1), promoting motherhood of a profitable kind (Pfeffer, 1993: ibid).[88] As such, there always was historically an uncomfortable relationship between the blanket advocacy for women's right to choose voluntary maternity orientated towards wealth, and the prevention of the reproduction of the poor or unvalued to resolve social issues (Davis, 2019: 185). And this relationship remains to the present. Dorothy Roberts, author of the seminal book *Killing the Black Body* (1994), states that the recent overturning of Roe vs Wade in the USA (2022) exposed the fact that the mainstream women's reproductive agenda had ardently centred on abortion rights and cast out the different reproductive needs and 'experiences of Black, Brown and Indigenous women who have been' 'overpoliced' and 'sterilized, abused, or punished for bearing children [by the state]' (*The Guardian USA*, 2022). Likewise, the pill, a female oral contraceptive made of synthetic compounds (Preciado, 2013: 28), emerges from racial and eugenic USA research and unprecedented mass trials on (and risk to) the female population of Puerto Rico.[89] A purpose-made housing programme would be designed for maximum surveillance and control, turning the island into a 'neocolonial site of pharmacological development' (Preciado, 2013: 182-3) – also disturbingly referred to as a 'cage of ovulating females' (Mark, 1998: 208).

So, the two most resonant social changes in Western women's activism and history are, in fact, built upon the normalised practices of slaughter, mutilation, and extensive exploitation of bodies: most predominantly, marginalised women separated by race, class, ethnicity and disability (Preciado, 2013: 164, 168). In its embrace of the pill and right to vote, hegemonic feminism would sediment its alliance with the government and servitude to the nation, adopting as their own a eugenic, racist and colonial framewor[k]' (Chase, 2013: 312 in Preciado, 2013: 107), including most surprisingly perhaps, the institutional sexism and misogyny directed at them and other less privileged women. This orientation would facilitate the 'co-opting [of] feminist rhetoric into an extensive program of sexual normalization and social control.' (ibid: 106) And Preciado is clear that the liberal movement was also guilty of co-opting to gain political power.[90] Similarly, Olufemi asserts that the recent right-wing alliances instigated by the so-called Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists in the UK and USA reflects historical essentialist and racist strategies dating back to the suffragette movement (2020: 60).

[88] Abba's singer, Anni-Frid Lyngstad is famously the by-product of the Lebensborn programme, a Nazi programme designed to increase the birth rate of the deemed 'master race' (*Holocaust Encyclopedia*, 2020).
[89] The pill was discovered by accident via two US research groups: John Rock's worked to increase reproduction of white catholic families in America and Gregory Pincus' research into how to eradicate the hereditary transmission of genetic and mental diseases (Preciado, 2013: 174-5). Rock also pioneered IVF in the 1940s (IVF Worldwide, 2008).
[90] For a long list of alternatives that second-wave feminists could have pursued, refer to pages 230-2 of *Testo Junkie* (2013).

The legalisation of the pill would culminate in the 'administration on a vast scale of estrogen and progesterone' (Preciado, 2013: 231) on most girls and women; and with it, feminism's adoption of the 'fiction' of natural heterosexual 'biofemininity' (ibid: 167).[91] The revolutionary movement turns once again into a 'paragovernmental ideological devic[e]' (ibid: 230-1). From the suffragettes era into the twenty first century, a recurring pattern emerges: the government's outlook and economic priorities collide with the political ambition of a demographic marked by privilege. The repeated alliances define the movement and its orientation. In turn, the latter would come to legitimatise, normalise and naturalise the violent haptics targeted at individuals like Amaia, Jae and Chloe. It is easy to see that the sense of touch or kinship emanating from one's allegiance to liberal feminism is also generative of a power relation 'in and through' (Mitra, 2021: 10) touch. To understand the extent of its structuring, I turn to Western processes of filiation.

## 3. FEMINIST ORIENTATION: THE STRUCTURING OF LIBERAL FEMINIST TOUCH AND KINSHIP IN THE WEST

On 26 April 2019, I attended *Fertility Fest* (Barbican, London), a festival of arts, performances and talks which makes visible and celebrates the maternity struggles, joys and achievements of, predominantly, women with fertility issues and their experience of fertility treatment. Anna Furse and Nina Klaff's *Parenting After IVF: To The Moon And Back* (2019), commissioned by the festival, was performed by mother and daughter and followed by a talk. Panel members included the two performers, Victoria Macdonald (Channel 4's Health and Social Care Correspondent), Ann Daniels (record-breaking polar explorer and mum of IVF triplets) and journalist Jo Ind. Furse and Klaff's piece was refreshingly frank, escaping the impasse of sentimentality commonly associated with motherhood, which I have observed many times on maternal performance platforms (Underwood-Lee and Šimić, *ENGAGE…*, 2020; *Fertility Fest*, 2019) – I discuss the dark side of sentimentality, as a haptic that shuts down discourse and silences, in the chapter on Amaia. On the panel, the spotlight was on mothers who had undergone IVF and, alone, they sat in front of us to the exception of Klaff, who is a child conceived via IVF: in her case, with her parents' genetic materials and gestated by Furse, her biological mother.[92] In contrast, Daniels used a Spanish surrogate, an information that she discloses only when prompted by a member of the audience and is not lingered on. Macdonald and Ind noticeably do not talk about the nature of their IVF, though, an

[91] The generalised prescription of the pill to young girls to combat acne, stimulate breasts, libido, regulate mood etc. (ibid: 210) is also productive and reproductive of feminine homogeneity. The pill belongs to a 'world [that] has come to be completely catalogued and analysed and then artificially revived as though real' (Baudrillard, 1983: 16) – a world that can be reproduced an indefinite number of times' (ibid: 3). The hormone compound is also reproductive of heterosexuality because it assumes it. Preciado defends that if the aim of the pill was purely contraceptive, then lesbianism would be more effective; unlike the pill, 'it is 100% guaranteed' (Nottingham Contemporary, 2020).

[92] IVF does not always involve a third and fourth party.

article written by Macdonald reveals that she used egg donation from a Spanish student (*Mail Online*, 2012). I realised that the sperm and egg donors and surrogates that enable the motherhood of some women with fertility issues were absent from the discourse. Certainly, in the UK, it would seem that the menial workers of reproduction are made to disappear. They are pushed beyond the mother's and maternal discourse's horizon, perhaps to bury a painful sense of inadequacy and shame: the social stigma projected on women who biologically cannot live up to the conflation 'woman-mother' which I discussed earlier with de Beauvoir. In contrast, in the USA, the surrogacy industry is applauded and cheered by leading feminists under the problematic, though familiar, banner of sisterhood. Oprah Winfrey's gleaming praise still resonates: "Women helping women! I love it!" (in Lewis, 2019: 32) However, the reality could not be further from the truth.

In this section, I explore the power relation behind the headline. Referring to Davis (2019: 84-5), I explore how women with wealth might continue to collude with global capitalist forces for their own social advancement. In other words, how mainstream feminism-centric orientation exerts its own capitalistic haptics and exploits the predicament of marginalised individuals like my collaborators to hold on to and accrue power and freedom. I do so by analysing the Western process of filiation in 'cross-racial gestational surrogacy' (Harrison, 2016) (from thereon C-RGS). Coined by Laura Harrison, a scholar in gender and women's studies, in *Brown Bodies, White Babies* (2016), the term describes when a woman of colour is recruited to surrogate for a couple of a difference race, predominantly white (ibid: 2). In C-RGS, the surrogate only donates her womb, not her eggs. IVF takes place using the sperm and eggs of the intended parents or other donors.[93] The normalisation and naturalisation of the practice means that Black women in the USA, women in India, Mexico and more recently East Africa, have become increasingly popular choices among white couples in the Global North (ibid; Lewis, 2019).[94] Filiation, following medical historian and sociologist Naomi Pfeffer's concept of 'inheritability' (1993: 115) and Harrison's own definition (2016), refers to the presupposed *transmission* in reproduction of physical (racial and ethnic) attributes under genetics as well as social and moral traits under class that, from the viewpoint of anthropology and medicine ties – the effect of touch and connection – people together into family grouping and is ratified by law.

[93] In traditional surrogacy, the surrogate provides both her egg and her womb. She is impregnated via artificial insemination. In gestational (IVF) surrogacy which Harrison refers to in C-RGS, the surrogate's eggs are not used at all. She only provides her womb.

[94] I note that other predominantly white nations like Ukraine or the USA are also popular destinations. Here, I study 'cross-racial gestational surrogacy' as a mean to magnify the lines of differentiations that are drawn and, indeed, imbued in Western processes of filiation.

Because of ARTs interlace with science, commerce and the law (Franklin and Ragoné, 1998: 4-5), that is the public sphere, they more readily reveal the multitude of participants involved in reproduction/the making of a baby, unlike the domestic workers and helpers privately outsourced by the family studied under the 'care' section of this chapter. Scholars believe, therefore, that ARTs have a great potential to disrupt nuclear family models and complicate lineage and kinship (ibid): the traditional tropes about touch and what touch communicates. Despite this, research reveals that reproductive technologies mostly privilege the reproduction of white, affluent, heterosexual, married families (ibid: 2; Roberts, 2017: 246-8; Pfeffer, 1993: 155). So how does law and medicine distinguish between the many individuals involved and each of their emotional and physical investments? How do they disentangle the most obvious manifestation of connection, closeness and belonging between the surrogate and foetus? And how does mainstream feminism benefit from it? Certainly, the structuring of C-RGS evidences that proximity to and contact with bodies marked different brings with it tension and anxiety because touch generates doubt over legitimacy, that is, over transmission (what touch indeed communicates). Transmission, therefore, requires careful management at medical and legal levels and in everyday interactions: a process that further demonstrates that touch is both a technique and an art (Chapter 1). For example, Harrison connects C-RGS to the practice of cross-racial wet nursing during slavery (2016: 8): for both, she states, the negotiation of physical touch relies on ideologies around 'racial [and class] "transmission"' (2016: 12) which are not only constructed but conveniently 'adapted', manipulated (the presence of the hand) and naturalised to fit changing economic needs or orientation. (ibid) This means that touch as a process of distinguishing and separating in contact that brings some people close into the field of kinship/sameness and pushes others out of view, is hugely malleable. And the mother-employer plays a key role in safeguarding the crafted lines of likeness and difference both during gestation and after birth, as Amaia's nanny account will show (Chapter 3).

Harrison asserts that the phenomenon of cross-racial surrogacy in India is a form of reproductive tourism – 'international travel for fertility and reproductive services' (Harrison, 2016: 13) and links it to sex tourism (Harrison, 2014 engaged with Wonders and Michalowski, 2001). Reproductive tourism relies on very specific criteria: the racialisation of bodies and class disparity between Global North and South, also between prospective parents and surrogate; lax or non-existent regulations in the destination country; last, the recruitment and exploitation of people of colour and their cheap labour (Harrison, 2016: 165-198). Indeed, '[i]n cross racial surrogacy arrangements, whiteness can be ''commercially reproduced'' at an appealing price' (Cooper and Waldby, 2014: 65): at 'one-tenth of the cost' compared to American surrogates (Harrison, 2014: 152). Surrogacy brings the Indian

government an estimated revenue of 2.3 billion dollars per year (Hochschild, 2012). These conditions constitute haptics that are generative of movements because they orientate the market. Neoliberalism is said to be responsible for maintaining women's precarity worldwide and 'creating pools of 'bioavailable' women' (Pfeffer, 2011: 635), thereby lubricating global economic dynamics.[95] The opening of free markets in the 1990s has created the ripe environment for transnational reproductive tourism and the growth of an industry where 'excellent treatment in technologically sophisticated modern hospitals catering for foreigners and local elites' coexists with widespread poverty, insufficient healthcare provision (Pfeiffer and Chapman, 2010; Whittaker *et al.*, 2010 in Pfeffer, 2011) and anti-natalist measures (Lewis, 2019: 141). For example, India has one of the highest rates of maternal deaths in the world (ibid). The 'lack of care […] – perversely – legitimizes the medical appropriation of their motherhood.' (ibid)

The popularity of C-RGS in the Global North towards poor and dependant countries like India, those on the African continent and Mexico, is supported by a scientific discourse and logic that surprisingly reinforces rather than dissipates misconstrued popular beliefs and ideologies around the existence of distinct biological races (Harrison, 2016: 3, 13). This is illustrated by the fact that 'women of colour who act as surrogates for white families are [understood to] shar[e] a biological connection […] with the fetus, while still giving birth to babies who are understood to be white.' (ibid: 5). In order to distinguish between participants, science cunningly breaks down and 'compartmentali[zes]' gestation and genetics (ibid: 178), legitimising the latter over the other (ibid). The repartition is not consistent with other reproductive practices such as donor insemination (DI) and artificial insemination (AI), where gestation trumps genetics.[96] The model of cross-racial surrogacy sees the surrogate subject 'fragment[ed]' (Franklin and Ragoné, 1998: 119) and reorganised. Her personhood is erased and 'superimpos[ed] [by] a single body part (the womb)' (ibid: 177). '[T]he uterus is technically and legally isolated as a component that can be contractually ordered, detached from the selfhood of the surrogate and repositioned in a production chain at the behest of the clinic and commissioning couple' (Cooper and Waldby, 2014: 84). Such a mechanism of defacement is too active in the infrastructure organised around the surrogate. Indian surrogates are also commonly physically isolated and put 'in a closely regulated surrogacy hostel', affiliated to and funded by their fertility clinic (Harrison, 2014: 147) – an 'incentive' designed to attract wealthy foreigners to India (ibid). Surrogacy hostels in India are named 'surrogacy dormitor[ies]' or 'womb farms' (Lewis, 2019),

[95] Bio-available means people susceptible to cash offers in exchange for a kidney (or other organs) due to poverty and powerlessness (Cohen, 2005).
[96] Donor insemination involves the use of sperm from an anonymous donor. Artificial insemination is where the semen is placed directly in the uterus.

disturbingly recalling the pseudo-colonial complex of Puerto Rico related to the development of the pill – McCormick's 'ovulating cages' (1998).

Surrogates in the popular fertility destinations of the Global South are also customarily forced to undergo caesareans because they are seen to reduce, even eliminate, the risk of the surrogate bonding with the baby (Harrison, 2016: 57, 172; Hovav, 2020). In the Global North's convenience economy, the consumer control (the when, what and where) is paramount and having a child is no exception. Caesareans are performed for maximum efficiency and advantageous service delivery: unlike natural birth, they have a precise date and time which benefit doctor and intended parents who can combine their expectation to attend the birth with international travel and value for money (Rudrappa, 2014; Hovav, 2020). However, the surrogate incurs all the risks: the additional recovery time, potential complications, loss of income; and her reproductive and economic future as a mother and potential repeat surrogate (Hovav, 2020), the latter which commands higher status and fees (Hovav, 2020; Lewis, 2019: 86-7) under capitalistic rhetoric of empowerment and working-class feminism (Lewis, 2019: 84-109). The normalisation of the caesarean and the restrictions that it places on women to surrogate again make women's bodies and labour highly commodified and 'disposab[le]' (Wright, 2006). This strand comes to the fore in Amaia's nanny experience (Chapter 3). Science also taps into and revives the Western colonial fantasy about the Indian surrogate and her predisposition for having children, which makes her desirable to commissioning couples and, importantly, separates her from them because the logic requires that she must remain not-the-same: distant so that her touch and investment can be made distant too. She is perceived exotic, 'docil[e], hyperfertil[e]', endowed with a natural femininity and primitive 'Otherness' (Harrison, 2016: 9-10; 181; also pertinent to Amaia).

The fiction serves to legitimise her exploitation, turning her into 'a site of consumption for white intended parents.' (Harrison, 2016: 181) Meanwhile, the popular trope of 'women helping women' – a contemporary version of sisterhood problematically claimed by feminism in the 1970s – 'naturaliz[es] and justif[ies] an economic arrangement […] fraught with inequality' (ibid: 167).[97] Preciado stresses that this phenomenon is as old as the Bible. Indeed, the stories of Rachel and Jacob, Sarah, Leah and that of the Holy family, suggest that surrogacy has always been practised (Silver, 1998: 138).[98] Neither the Bible nor Silver, a scholar in biology, however, address the overarching narratives, namely, Bilhah and

[97] To list but a few: scarce or inexistent contact between surrogate and intended mother, difference in language, culture (2016: 189), the illiteracy of the surrogate and poor consent protocols in clinics (Lewis, 2019).
[98] Rachel, who was infertile, offered her maid Bilhah to Jacob so that Bilhah could give the couple a child. (Genesis 30, Bible in Silver, 1998:138)

Leah's pseudo-slave status (only described as maids), and the violence of rape commonly performed on enslaved or domestic bodies by historical (Davis, 2009) and contemporary standards (*Maid in Hell* documentary by Klovborg, 2018). In contrast, Preciado argues that biblical processes of filiation represent 'the founding myth of reproduction in the West' and points to the normalised use of enslaved bodies and organs which nonetheless does not 'caus[e]' the social mother 'to lose the recognition of her "natural maternity"' (2013: 299), and which C-RGS and Amaia's account confirm. The Western process of filiation, in effect, constitutes a haptic 'technology for producing [and reproducing] the material [flesh] and semiotic [signs] effect of natural kinship, of shared kind' (Haraway, 1997: 53).

As a matter of fact, gestational IVF surrogacy is now more common than traditional surrogacy, where the surrogate contributes her eggs, because of how the law establishes kinship. C-RGS particularly reduces the risk of custody dispute and undesirable outcomes, should the surrogate change her mind (Harrison, 2016: 28). Prospective parents know that the law and medicine side in their favour. Both privilege their genetic tie (ibid) based on the surrogate's 'poverty, their race and the massive power differential between [parties]' (Harrison, 2014: 148). Indeed, their rightful connection and belonging to the child over hers is perceived to manifest through the readable signs of likeness and difference, namely, the baby's skin colour (ibid) – historical principles of heritability (Pfeffer, 1993: 115), namely, the idea that race, ethnicity and national identity are expressed through genes and written on the body. (Harrison, 2014: 148)[99] Geneticization constructs the fiction of likeness, drawing lines of sameness and difference as proof of natural kinship. It is 'a type of identity with the self and separation between all that is a part of oneself and all that is not' (Franklin and Ragoné, 1998: 126) that hinges on the illusion of racial and ethnic certainty (Lane: 1998: 4; Balibar, 1991: 10, 49). 'Geneticization', Rapp argues, is 'the extreme [simplification] of all problematic differences to an individual and genetic basis.' (2000: 39) Notably, it also 'reduces the self to a molecular entity, equating human beings, in all their social, historical, and moral complexity, with their genes.' (Nelkin and Lindee, 1995: 2)

The logic of genetic essentialism and determinism in Western processes of filiation is a powerful haptic because it de-emphasises and distances the problematic cross-racial and lower-class contact. It pushes it beyond the parent's horizon, and naturalises their hegemonic orientation (their blind spot). The haptics of geneticization neutralise and erase the surrogate's biological investment despite evidence of microchimerism in biomothers undermining the rational. (Vora, 2015: 96; Rowland, 2012; Lewis, 2019: 127; 166) Certainly,

[99] On heritability, see also Browner and Press (1995: 307-322).

research emphatically suggests that gestators carry not just their own DNA, but their biomothers' and their baby's; they also transfer the cells from older siblings to younger ones and all remain in them beyond pregnancy (Rowland, 2012). It is a dynamic ecosystem that multiplies across generations (ibid). In addition, biologists Richard Lewontin and Richard Levins stress that 'DNA is not self-reproducing […] it makes nothing' (2007: 239). So, in fact, 'there is never any reproduction of the individual' because 'neither parent is continued in the child who is a randomly reassembled genetic package'; therefore 'literal reproduction is a contradiction in terms.' (Haraway, 1989: 352) Epigenetics, the study of how experience and environmental factors modify the expression of DNA, that is, how they are 'biologically incorporated' (Dubois et. al., 2020), complicate further economically-led conceptions of genetic touch and transmission. Epigenetics resonate with Ahmed's assertion that likeness is, in fact, simply the effect of shared proximity: being brought into contact (Ahmed, 2004a). She writes: '[t]he desire for connection [to one's chosen or given family group/tribe] generates likeness, at the same time that likeness is read as the sign of connection' (Ahmed, 2006: 122). Touch as the repetition of family traits, attributes, possessions, habits and patterns that come to be a shared way of inhabiting the body/the world, and form common ground (Ahmed, 2006: 129), therefore, materialises also through the desiring subject mimicking and (re)producing the very imaginary signs of connection (Ahmed, 2006: 123-4). Microchimerism, epigenetics, Ahmed's phenomenology, seamlessly cohere with Anzieu's process of 'introjection' (Segal, 2009: 46) of things and people 'out-there' (ibid: 17) necessary to the formation of self (Chapter 1). All point further to the clear tie (biological, genetic, psychological) between the surrogate and the child she carries, between Amaia and the child she cares for, even transmission from desperately marginalised groups/my three collaborators to the mainstream – the exchange that touch communicates.

**CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I have set out to evidence the potency of touch across distance better to zoom in on the invisible materials, processes and tensions that skin-to-skin touch might stimulate in CI and somatics. I have begun to draw on an intersectional framework in order to contextualise and examine the power relations located in the maternal, that unfolds in my contact with Amaia, Jae and Chloe. Specifically, I initially respond and reflect on our contrasting and interconnected identities to argue that my collaborators, though marginalised by mainstream feminist scholarship, are part of maternal narratives about touch. Before dialogue is properly established, my mere contact with Amaia, Jae and Chloe and their unconventional maternal identities already stimulate movement: it starts to unsettle and expose some of the founding Western myths buried deep under 'facts of life' – Derrida's 'structurality of the structure' (1997) – which are imbued within maternal touch/my own,

which I perform unknowingly. I am referring to the subdued narratives and ideology that shape my hegemonic feminist orientation, including that which runs through somatics and maternal performance. What emerges is a field of predetermination and essentialism carefully crafted and adapted, that serves to privilege the transmission and accumulation of white-inflected capital, namely wealth/class as well as racial, ethnic and moral attributes. As my study reveals, mainstream feminism has historically and continues to exploit hegemonic predetermination and essentialism for its own expansion which, in turn, marginalises the touch and labour of my collaborators and the plurality of genders who already perform or wish to perform maternal labours.

I have asserted that the touch which the feminist movement performs and reproduces is the effect of its historical orientation and position which inform, and necessarily limit, seeing/one's horizon, therefore, one's reflexive potential. Hegemonic feminist orientation is, indeed, a powerful force that is, as Underwood-Lee and Šimić themselves imply, difficult to resist and reorientate. It reflects – not without a little manipulation and acts of substitution – the wider Global North's orientation and imaginary position which it has absorbed as its own (Anzieu's introjection of external things and people, in Chapter 1 of this thesis). It is an organisation of the world, following economic historian Emmanuel Wallerstein's theory (1976), divided between a core (the middle-class mother); its semi-periphery (her child); and its absent periphery (those she leans on to mother and, sometimes, to become one). Such maternal world order and games of defacement would suggest that erasing others' touch, that is, blocking their capacity to transmit, is imperative to the feminist project because it usefully re-locates the signs of 'naturalness' and legitimacy in the mainstream female body – in her touch and transmission. In its process of abstractions and subtractions epitomized by the iconography of a single figure with child, hegemonic feminist discourse could be said to perpetuate a strange fantasy of cloning (sameness), even parthenogenesis (lone reproduction) which is not grounded in reality.[100] Rather, it speaks of displaced patriarchal and logocentric imaginings historically associated with male philosophy (Parker, 2012; Segal, 2009), which mainstream feminism has appropriated both wittingly and unwittingly, to some degree.

But orientation and position are also the effects of kinship and its performance: the group into which one is born and primary attachments one forms and might not question. It is also the family group or tribe one choses for oneself, which may be attached to a discipline, a particular school of thoughts like feminism, maternal performance and somatics are for me.

[100] Cloning means the process of generating a genetically identical copy of a cell or an organism. Parthenogenesis is the reproduction from an ovum without fertilization, especially as a normal process in some invertebrates and lower plants.

When I adopt a family group and vice versa, as in the micro-culture of the blood family, I too inherit its genealogy: its distinctive character, traits and attributes which I reproduce instinctively to evidence my connection and belonging to the group (Ahmed, 2006: 122-9). It is a 'performative feedback' loop (Preciado, 2013: 34–35 via Laplanche, 1997) that replays the primary carer-child communication and transmission, and hinges on touch and its derivatives: arousal, desire, pleasure, delight and gratification (Chapter 1).[101] In short, reproducing family traits is a means to locate oneself in the world of people and ideas and (re)affirm one's significance and characteristics – one's power – by affiliation. Identity – etymologically denoting the seeking of sameness – and attachment to identity or tribe, in turn, is generative of collective mechanisms or haptics. The latter brings some people close into the field of belonging and excludes others to safeguard and reproduce the characteristics of the tribe. Complex genealogies, like those that Anzieu's skin-ego theory implies, are therein simplified, reinvented and retraced as in the case of ARTs or CI's little known debt to the study of maternal touch communication or Lindy Hop, an African American dance. As such, orientation does not merely implicate the mind. Its touch performs a somatic (re)writing of the body (Chapter 1) because it accelerates the materialisation into flesh (molecular, aesthetic, performative, moral, sensorial, perceptive) of the hidden structure and ideology behind it. (Preciado, 2013: 117) This includes, for example, 'the certainty that maternity is a natural bond' (ibid: 120). Orientation is gravity and 'a magnetic field' (Ahmed, 2006: 85). Its haptics construct and reconstruct, write and rewrite, manipulate and direct the breathing, feeling, sensual, desiring and thinking body.

To counter my hegemonic orientation and tune in to the power relations that CI present, I have worked to construct a more ambiguous, complex and inclusive conception of touch and transmission in kinship and genealogy. I have built upon Anzieu's skin-ego theory (Chapter 1) and his assertion that the ego or Self is formed from the necessary psychic internalisation of external figures or multiple skins that contain and contain it (Segal, 2009: 17). Here, I have engaged with biology in order to propose that Amaia's investment towards the child she cares for is not just social and peripheral. It is also biological and genetic because the environment she fosters leaves imprints on the child's genes which, in turn, modifies how and what its DNA communicates; likewise, the child leaves an imprint on hers. This chapter sensitizes me to the huge forces at play around my collaborators and how power might unfold in our dialogue. In the following chapters, I examine in greater depth the prejudicial mechanisms that block reproduction and erase the reproductive labours of marginalised sectors of society who perform or wish to perform 'mother-work' (Rodgers, 2020), male,

[101] See also 'somatic conversio[n]' (Preciado, 2018: 34) or 'feedback' and 'translation' (Hay, 2016: 3) in my Introduction.

female and of diverse genders and identities. I plunge into touch, haptics and the sticky viscosity (Baraitser and Irigaray) between my collaborators and me.

# Chapter 3 Amaia

## INTRODUCTION

It only takes a quick search on the internet to discover that there is a huge appetite for horror and psychological thrillers that centre around the deemed 'dar[k]' and 'deviant' (Rodgers, 2020: 382) figure of the nanny – a central character who threatens the otherwise perfect plans of a traditional, wealthy, Global North, predominantly white, family.[102] It is 'a narrative of care, trust and [sometimes] love that mutates into the [most] gruesome act[s]' (ibid: 383). These intruders have in common that they are sought by the families they eventually turn against. They are recruited for domestic work and instantly thrust to the very core of the nuclear family. Their unusual position means that their kinship, that is, their connection and belonging to the family, is from the start ambiguous: they are in some ways members of the household and in others strictly not. Beyond the atmospheric gore and drama associated with the genre, I believe that it is the protagonist's ability to manipulate these boundaries over time, displace the legal mother and upset the distribution of power that draws the audience in. And here, the instability of maternal kinship/the category 'mother', and by extension the category 'woman', are implicit. In Moroccan-French author Leila Slimani's psychological novel, *Chanson Douce* (*Lullaby*, 2016), an unfulfilled stay-at-home mother of two and wife decides to resume a demanding career as a lawyer. Despite the husband's initial resistance, they go on to recruit Louise, a full-time nanny, to care for the young children. Soon, the employee becomes indispensable to the functioning of the family. Egged on by the couple's increasing asks and her need to be needed, Louise quickly takes over the running of the whole household as well as the children.

French theatre director Pauline Bayle who adapted the novel for the stage (2019) ingeniously cast two adult actors to play both parents and children, observing that 'the nanny also becomes the nanny of the parents who are struggling to grow up' (Comédie-Française interview, 2019). Both the theatre director and the author note that the intense 'dependency' and 'fusion' 'confus[es]' the adults' positions and roles in the family, including Louise's ties to it (ibid). And it does not take long before the new family bliss enabled by the 'perfect nanny' turns sour. The legal mother finds herself progressively sidelined by the strange insider-outsider figure who now replaces her: the legitimacy of her touch, that is her connection and potency of transmission towards her own children (and by association her husband) is

[102] Some examples related to the nanny or domestic carer include: *Lullaby* (Slimani, 2016), adapted into a film, *The Perfect Nanny* (2019); *A Judgement In Stone* (Rendell, 1977); *Nanny* (1965); *The Nanny* (MacMillan, 2019); *Nanny Dearest* (Collins, 2021); *The Turn of the Screw* (Henry James, 1898); *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* (Tine, 1992); *The Turn of the Key* (Ware, 2019); ***T**he Ocean at the End of the Lane* (Gaiman, 2013); ***W**here's Mommy Now?* (Krich, 1990), adapted into the film, *The Perfect Alibi* (1995).

thrown into question by Louise's very presence and the maternal – intimate, tactile – nature of her labour. Rodgers, a scholar in motherhood studies, asserts that the nanny is 'a site of conflicts and guilt between mother and child' (Scheftel, 2012 in 2020: 382). I go further, suggesting that it is touch and touch's capacity to communicate (exchange and transmit) that is the true site of tensions, conflict, even horror, because a stranger, we are told, can so easily and readily dislodge what is assumed to be fixed: the lines of kinship; or, thinking 'touch' and viscosity (Baraitser, Irigaray), the glue (medical, legal and social) that binds individuals into a family group and allows for the transmission of family traits in race, ethnicity, class/morality and wealth, in other words, heritability. In other words, what is at stake via the displacement of the legal mother is the nuclear family and the reproduction of its prized capital (discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis).

In *Chanson Douce*, Slimani could be said to push this trajectory to its limit when Louise stabs the children to death in a frenzied attack – she takes them away from the legal mother for good, effectively terminating the mother's maternal kinship and transmission. The choice was influenced by highly mediatised real-life crimes: the cases of Louise Woodward, formerly a British au-pair working in the USA accused in 1997 of murdering the baby in her care; and that of Yoselyn Ortega, former nanny of the Krim's family in New York, who stabbed to death two of their children before turning the knife upon herself in 2012 (Rodgers, 2020; Comédie-Française interview, 2019). Into the twenty first century, women with care responsibilities who commit violence, especially 'infanticide' (Rodgers, 2020: 383), continue to be demonised by the public and the press.[103] Referred to as 'monstruous' (footnote 34 in Rodgers, 2020: 389), they are deemed 'unnatural and pathological' (ibid:384) because they challenge perhaps the most sensitive tenet of the 'facts of life' on which culture in the Global North, though not exclusively, is founded: the belief that women have a natural orientation towards having children and childrearing (Ahmed, 2006: 84-85); that they 'are givers of life, not takers of it', and that 'women desire, nurture, protect and love […] children instinctively' (Edwards, 2015: 174).[104]

Such an act upsets women's assumed 'biological prescription' (Rodgers, 2020: 384) and more to the point, 'the 'binding social rule of what it is *supposed to mean* to be a woman' (Downing, 2017: 107). Similarly, when the mother is left without children, without the very signifiers of motherhood, she also becomes, ironically, a kind of unnatural, monstruous being

[103] Rodgers clarifies that '[a]lthough technically the term infanticide refers to the killing of a child by its mother, [she] expand[s] the use of the term here to include those who carry out mother-work.' (2020: 383).
[104] Rodgers (2020) is referring to the interview titled 'From nanny to the figure of monster at the theatre' by director Pauline Bayle, who adapted *Chanson Douce* (2016) for the stage (comedie-francaise.fr, 2019). 'Orientation' means: inclination, disposition and urge; also a position, direction of thought and interest. In relation to women's natural inclination towards having children, see also Rich, 1993: 228; Wittig, 1992: xiii.

herself, for which there is no word.[105] This might explain to some degree why maternal performance insists on the presence of a child and a child-centred discourse, as evidence of motherhood itself and 'true' womanhood. Though I concede that more joyful and magical embodiments of the nanny in cinematography exist in multitude, for example, *The Sound of Music* (1965), *Mary Poppins* (1964), *Nanny McPhee* (2005) and *Mrs Doubtfire* (1993), the prolific representation of 'deviant' nannies, nonetheless, indicates that this particular Western narrative also runs deep in popular consciousness, making her the receptacle of deep-seated fears.

In this chapter, I aim to go beyond the often simplistic and reductive caricature of the nanny in Western representation and explore the unconventional maternal touch of Amaia, a Spanish cis woman who works as a nanny for wealthy London families. Her Othermothering complicates the traditional narrative about maternal touch and connection for CI and the somatic discipline and makes light of the power differentials inherent to touch because Amaia is a mere domestic worker and does not have any children of her own. Amaia's assertion of the maternal as an employee and woman without children broaches perhaps the most difficult question for feminism and the wider society: what happens when maternal touch is disassociated from the legal figure 'mother'? Who, then, might claim it for themselves? What forces are preventing a nanny like Amaia and the many gender-diverse low-paid workers who today fulfil roles associated with the mother, as I have argued in Chapter 2, ever be named 'mother'? Amaia's creative writing illuminates the complex nature of the contact that the nanny holds with the family and the child she cares for, and the creative frames that she has constructed to negotiate and resist an often-hostile environment: I suggest that those are valuable and transferrable to the somatic discipline where touch is a synonym of resistance (see the Methodology Chapter and Chapter 1 in this thesis). Led by Amaia's voice, I study the tensions emanating from her contact to the child; and the neoliberal haptics (social, political and economic) that are put into motion to make her touch – her tactile labour and presence – disappear and safeguard the legitimacy of the legal mother. I zoom in on the power relation between Amaia and her employer that manifests itself in their most mundane contact, including that which begins long before their first encounter. To do so, I investigate the cross-border commodification of maternal labours, namely feminist-led collective mechanisms all the way to the micro interactions within the family cell. Using a somatic and intersectional lens, I attempt to understand the forces that exert on Amaia and shape the nature of her touch or connection to the family, and, by

[105] Unlike 'widow' which describes a wife who has lost her husband, or 'orphan' for a child who has lost their parents, there is no word for a mother who has lost her child in the English or French language, though I note the very rare neologisms of 'parange' for parents and 'mamange' for mother in French and 'Vilomah' in English. The latter, pertinently to my argument, means 'against the natural order' (Holloway, 2009) so monstruous in character.

extension, the nature of our contact in this project. I propose that our entangled interconnectivity where sameness and difference interact not without difficulty, not only extends notions of touch, but also goes some way towards explaining some of the intricate tensions that the performance of touch, following Mitra (2021: 10), can present in CI and somatic contexts and at their borders.

## 1. COUNTER TOUCH: AMAIA'S ALTERNATIVE MATERNAL TOUCH

Amaia's story begins with counter touch: a self-constructed maternal narrative about touch that challenges conventions. Hers gives a glimpse into human processes mediated by the sense of touch, specifically, the creative strategies and perceptive lens that the nanny has fashioned, privately and quietly, in response to her unconventional maternal predicament and the mainstream environment to which she is subjected. I study the latter in-depth in part 2 of this chapter. This first compilation of extracts foregrounds touch as a medium of resistance and liberatory force: a very Western narrative that sits at the foundation of CI and somatics, which I discuss in the Introduction to my thesis and Chapter 1. Amaia's story, however, goes beyond the familiar tropes, shining a light on a dimension of touch that is much more complex and often escapes discourse. Here, touch is first and foremost a place of struggle, where the outer and inner converge, calling the nanny to make sense of her experience and generating internal conflicts which come to form the basis of Amaia's touch and projections: her relationship and interaction with the world.

**Extract 1 (Compilation of extracts)**

Amaia writes:

> *This maternal seems to live within me. It is my body itself, it is me. It goes beyond the outer experience of my physical body. It is spread over my tissues, muscles, bones, organs and liquid parts of my body. It shapes how I move and how I relate. It seeks to have a shape, a form, a body that flows and adjusts. It gives me an identity, a physicality that tells my story, tells who I am and probably how I am. It goes deep all the way to the cells. It's the way I move and live in the world. The way I encounter others and the way I pass information. It goes beyond that idea of being a mother. At times it's a woman and at times it doesn't understand this idea of gender. My body does not find any similarities to conventional ideas around the maternal and at times struggles with the outer experience imposed by society. At times I find myself having a maternal body that is more maternal than a woman who has given birth. At times this can be understood and at times this seems insane.* (Task 1, The Maternal Body)

*The intermittent time of the maternal flows, natural and organic. It inhabits my body and lives within, without taking over. It appears when needed and knows when to rest. It does not judge. It does not alienate. It is sustained and steady. It has sounds of laughter and breath and it is a time for reflection, love, and presence. The intermittent time of the maternal happens and arrives at any moment in life. It bonds, it helps to relate, and it is joyful and kind. And does not take anything from me, instead, it adds.* (Task 2, Maternal Time)

*The maternal is internal space, a massive flyway where many different systems work very closely to generate miraculously an intelligent grid that works on my behalf and that in some way creates also my maternal. It's the passing of information. The maternal is the space around me and the space between.* (Task 3 Maternal Space)

Fig. 13
Found image, World Wide Web, internet sourced.
Provided by Amaia. Removed due to copyright.

Fig. 14
Found image, broadband/fiber optics, internet sourced.
Provided by Amaia. Removed due to copyright.

Fig. 15
Found image, close-up photograph of skin (white), internet sourced.
Provided by Amaia. Removed due to copyright.

From Task 1, Amaia's creative writing introduces her unorthodox maternal touch. She uses a distinctive fluid, amorphic and organic palette: 'it goes beyond' the 'physical body' and 'beyond 'gender': it exceeds the confined idea of motherhood; 'it is spread over'; it is 'liquid', 'natural'; it 'flows' (Task 1 and 2). As words and found digital images cohere, they bring into unity the worldwideweb, an all-encompassing and all-enveloping information system (Fig. 13); the speed and immediacy of fibre optic transmission (Fig. 14); and the organic human body – its skin (Fig. 15). Skin is the medium of touch and interface: it mediates the human sensorial system which gives rise to perception (Anzieu, 1995: 83 in Chapter 1 of this thesis). The worldwideweb, here, constitutes another tactile interface through which humans access information, communicate and interact with the world. Like skin, it structures ways of seeing and, in turn, constructs the body – the self. In *Skin: on the cultural border between self and the world* (2002), Benthien refers to 'the […] world-spanning web that media prophets […] are calling the "new skin" of humanity' (2002: 234), suggesting that the nanny's

assimilation of both is neither far-fetched nor mere metaphor. Amaia paints a maternal touch that is at once biological and technological, human and machine: it is spurred by an entity evocative of Haraway's figure of the cyborg (1985). In her 1980s tale of fiction and social reality, the scholar already predicts a 'brea[ch]' (2016: 10) in the Western natural order. Haraway asserts that '[b]y the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs.' (ibid: 7) Like the cyborg, the maternal and its tactile labour could be said to live a somehow strange, bioprosthetic existence: 'ambiguously natural and crafted' (ibid: 6), both material and immaterial (ibid: 7).

In Chapter 1, I put forth that touch is an artform and Amaia's account of her maternal touch certainly corresponds and extends my findings. Material is the human body/its skin (Fig. 15), fibre optic (Fig. 14) and other implied technologies like a mobile phone, PC, keyboard, mouse, laptop, hard drive, cables, plug and sockets. Immateriality represents the internet, the human realm of the imaginary (Anzieu, 1995), mental maps (O' Shaughnessy, 1980, 1995), fantasy (Ettinger, 1997), and ideology (Howes, 2005) (Chapter 1 of this thesis). Amaia joins them into a dynamic system of communication. Homing in on its processes of exchange and transmission, in other words, communication, and the convergence of the physical and abstract in touch, Amaia describes the haptic system as 'a massive flyway', 'an intelligent grid' which 'creates [her] maternal', 'pass[es] information' (Task 3) and 'shapes' the physical body: its 'form', 'identity' and 'how it relate[s]'; and too its internality, 'all the way to the cells.' (Task 1) Maternal touch and its bodies, therefore, are made of connections: intricate, overlapping networks and pathways.[106] They map out Amaia's distinct embodiment and give form to her flesh. In 'flyway' (Task 3), maternal touch is also first and foremost movement: a sense that is reflexive and allows Amaia to 'adjus[t]' (Tasks 1). This phenomenon necessarily engages the somatic – both body and mind. I read here Amaia's earliest allusion to her own immigrant status, which I elaborate in section 2 of this chapter.

Maternal touch is 'intermittent': it runs 'sustained and steady'; 'does not alienate'; 'it appears and knows when to rest' (Task 2). It 'happens and arrives' (ibid). 'It bonds' 'without taking over' (ibid). Through the word 'intermittent', Amaia introduces the temporal dimension of the maternal, which she goes on to develop fully. She suggests that it is somewhat aroused, spontaneously stimulated by its environment. Like a let-down reflex, the maternal 'flows', 'natural' and 'organic', though Amaia's poetics expand the traditional Western iconography of the mother with infant at breast. She locates her unorthodox maternal touch and body in an

[106] Flyway means 'air pathways used by migrating birds', 'compass information by the birds' sense of the earth's magnetic field and their innate reading of it' (Oxford English Dictionary).

intriguing post-gender and post-capitalist world (Haraway, 2016: 8). The nanny is neither male nor female (Task 1). She is part-machine/part-living, nonetheless a breathing, sensing, sensual and reflexive subject. In addition, she cultivates, some might say, an illegitimate, even forbidden maternal touch practice towards the children she looks after, specifically because she is mere domestic employee. In other words, she does not have any medical and legal connection to the child nor the family; in Amaia's case, she does not even have any children of her own; significantly, in the eyes of the parents and society, she is regarded, as I will evidence, reductively as a low-value, low-skilled, low-paid, disposable worker (Rodgers, 2020: 391).

Amaia could be said to have constructed a maternal touch that seeks its own intimate 'revolution of social relations' (Haraway, 2016: 9) 'no longer structured by the polarity of public and private' (ibid) or by hierarchies, divisions and class systems between women, women and men and other gender-plural individuals. It is a world that is shaking the very ground on which Western culture rests – a world that, unbeknown to mainstream feminist consciousness/my own, has already disassociated maternal touch from the legal figure 'mother'. It dares us to imagine new possible futures where maternal touch and its labours stand separate from nature and away from the female body. Gone is the conflation 'woman-mother'. Maternal touch is no longer the exclusive territory of the legal mother. It is boldly reclaimed by Amaia and an army of low-paid workers who carry out everyday jobs of a cis maternal nature. And, presumably, the legal mother can also be freed from the assumption and expectation of maternal tactile labours. Through her creative framings, the nanny is observed performing a series of ingenious manipulations and reorientations: manipulation emphasising the application of the hand and measure; therefore the presence of touch. Reductive attributes – to a degree reminiscent of the Western colonial fantasy projected onto Global South surrogates (Chapter 2 of this thesis) and possibly absorbed unwittingly (Anzieu's process of introjection) – are 'positive[ly] reappropriate[ed]' (Degoul, 2011: 34). They include the capacity for intimacy (promiscuity) (Gottschild, 1996: 9; Roberts, 1997: 11), the flow of something wild and instinctive (primitivity) (Gottschild, 1996: 9; Roberts, 1997: 10-15), a body that is 'infinitely' plastic, shapable, therefore, exploitable (Jackson, 2016: 98).[107]

[107] While colonialism and imperialism are both connected ideologies, colonialism is a 'form of power that seeks to segregate and "improve" "backward" people(s) from within and "improve" "waste" lands, overseen by colonial authorities living among and/or in close proximity to the colonized'; In contrast, imperialism is 'a sovereign form of power that seeks to dominate "naturally inferior" subjects and vast territories from above and afar, justified […] through war and conquest.' (Arneil, 2024). Degoul's text relates to the Haitian revolution (1791-1804). Brenda Dixon Gottschild is an American dance scholar who socialised with the famous Judson group in New York in the 1960s (1996: 56): the Judson Dance Theatre (1962-64) is Steve Paxton, Deborah Hay, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Barbara Dilley, David Gordon, Carolee Schneemann to name a few.

Amaia would be in good company deploying such strategies. In his auto-experimental pieces, *Testo Junkie* (2013) and C*ountersexual Manifesto* (2018), Preciado hijacks the regime's tools of oppression that enable the control gender and sexuality, namely the administration of synthetic hormones and the prerogative of heterosexual coitus. Preciado harnesses theories around the malleability of gender and sexual desire, which historically justified the persecution and ill-treatment of homosexual and intersex individuals (2013: 27). He traverses genders, reorganises his own erogenous zones via the anus and invites us to join him in the revolution. Likewise, Amaia's emphasis on bodily discharge, traditionally associated with the female body, which 'flows' and generates from inside-out the connective 'bon[d]' or glue between Amaia and the world (Task 2) – another manifestation of touch – is reminiscent of Irigaray's concept of mucous (1984) and Baraitser's of maternal viscosity (2009).[108] Irigaray turns a source of deep shame – female uncontainable fluidity – into a point of ethics between two individuals (1984). Amaia goes further still. She complicates the essentialist metaphor with the figure of the cyborg. The bio-technological, liquid, plastic viscosity of maternal touch collapses the dichotomies of nature and culture, men and women, human and machines, inside/outside and the notion of a between. Her framing echoes Preciado's own call for a 'retur[n] to a cyberreptilian life, a regression, tasting the electrically viscous truth of being' (2013: 254).

Nonetheless, Amaia's vision is not all liberatory. She gives clues that the forces of conventions that marginalise her maternal identity both live outside and within her. In Task 1, she reflects: '[a]t times' the maternal is 'a woman', 'at times it doesn't understand this idea of gender'; 'at times' she 'can […] underst[and]' being 'more maternal than a woman who has given birth', 'at times' the very thought of it 'seems insane' (Task 1). Prejudice stems from 'conventional ideas around the maternal' which are 'imposed by society' (Task 1). They come from other people. But they also live within Amaia (Anzieu's process of introjection) and jar with her experience which she 'struggles' to make sense of. What Amaia emphasises in repetition, I believe, is a state of inner conflict and a desire deep inside to understand. The same confusion is present in Jae and Chloe's writings (Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis). In the words 'struggle' and 'insane', I denote haptics: the pressure, tension, oppression and violence of binary norms and conflations playing out against and through the body of Amaia. The skewed notion that the legal mother is the quintessential maternal figure and source of all maternal care towards her child, which invisibilises an enormous workforce, interact with the persistent stigmatisation of, and suspicion around women who do not have or choose not

[108] Though the latter's analysis remains strictly at the level of skin.

to have children of their own.[109] The Global North's anxiety reaches its peak if such women also work as nannies, like Amaia. Even Jo Frost/*Supernanny*, perhaps the most famous nanny on both sides of the Atlantic, does not escape this predicament, based on the number of newspaper articles asking her incessantly if she wants children and when she might have them (*Daily Mail*, 2020 and 2023; *Express*, 2020; *Mirror*, 2022 and 2023).[110]

And yet, insanity can be hugely exhilarating, dizzying and intoxicating because it defies. Amaia communicates an otherwise irrational, embodied, felt sense of knowing. Jae also talks of 'mothering delirium' (Chapter 4). Preciado's own introduction to *Countersexual Manifesto* (2018) carries a similar heightened and irreverent energy when he declares his own 'jubilant and apparently antiscientific affirmation of the irreducible multiplicity of sexes, genders, and sexualities.' (2018: 4) The word 'insane', nonetheless, also hints at the danger associated with deviating from the norm, for the insane gets locked up, shut down and silenced. Amaia, Jae and Chloe share, in different ways, that to know one's 'insan[ity]' means to live in fear, to think one is wrong, to know not to tell (elaborated from Chloe's Extract 1, Chapter 5 in this thesis). Amaia, responding to one of my prompts, writes that she normally 'keep[s] unspoken about this matter' because it 'can be harsh to hear' (Task 2, not included in Extract). Her statement indicates that conventions and popular beliefs are powerful silencing mechanisms. They are neoliberal haptics and coexist with other forms of oppression which together prevent Amaia and others being named 'mother' and recognized as performing maternal labours, a matter that I develop further presently. Amaia is drawn to explore this conflicted dimension of her experience again and again throughout our dialogue. She engages in a form of auto-inquiry which the project's creative framework facilitates, and which later culminates in a manifesto about the forces of marginalisation and divisions amongst the group 'women', based on their economics and whether or not they are mothers.

> ***No to…***
> *No to isolation of my maternal because I have no children.*
> *No to being overlooked by society.*
> *No to disrespecting my own bodily autonomy and personal experience.*
> *No to being treated as a second-class woman for my decisions.*
> *No to assuming I have no maternal.*

[109] During the conservative party leadership race in 2016, Andrea Leadsom attempted to destabilise Theresa May by targeting the fact that she is not a mother and therefore does not 'have a very real stake in the future of our country, a tangible stake' (*The Independent*, 2016). Kamala Harris has been attacked for the same reason by J.D. Vance in the 2024 US presidentials who called her a 'childless cat lady' (*The Telegraph*, 2024).
[110] In them, Frost never says that she does not want children. Instead, she reiterates diplomatically, perhaps to avoid stigma, that she is open to the idea and may in the future, though she has not yet despite a very successful career.

*No to opinions about my body.*
*No to dividing women.*
*No to creating class-based differentiation between women. (Task 5)*

Doing so, Amaia also implicitly directs my attention to our contact and the power relations that it stimulates in this project: I am a mother, she is not; we are separated by class, though like Amaia, I am also an immigrant and have worked in many underpaid and undervalued jobs which are traditionally designated female because of the care practice they require: as an au-pair, cleaner, care assistant for the elderly and the disabled, and foster carer. My immigrant identity and those experiences certainly shape the orientation of my project. They sensitize me to Amaia's unconventional notion of the maternal and the harsh conditions around her: we share or, at least, have once shared in our predicament, albeit to different degrees, which I will discuss. However, I am also reminded that today I am assimilated to mainstream feminism, that is, to the very group of working mothers who employ Amaia, exert oppression upon her for their own advancement and neutralise her touch. In this chapter and across the chapters dedicated to Jae and Chloe, I propose to explore the murkier and stickier (leaning on Baraitser's viscosity, 2009 and Irigaray's mucous, 1984) territory that touch propels and to attempt to hold firmly onto its complexity and tensions. Such a non-binary reconception might yet enrich the notion of touch in somatics and be brought back to the studio to foster more hospitable contact practices.

## 2. ALIENATING HAPTICS/ALIENATED TOUCH IN THE TEMPORAL

### Extract 2

In Task 2, Maternal Time, I direct Amaia's attention towards the temporal dimension of her experience. Amaia writes that the temporality of her maternal is 'alienation'. Alienation:

> *comes from experiencing the maternal as tool for survival, a skill for a job where the task was to look after children. However, the task was not that simple and came with many implications alongside childcare such as transference and countertransference of emotional material happening in the relationship with the adults of that family. Maternal time then becomes robotic, plastic and at times static. I suffer a transformation in my whole body, in my own self. The maternal time took everything and left me without time. But especially, maternal time detached me from my gender, sexuality, education, and life. It became the time of the maternal, without time neither space for anything else.* (Task 2, Maternal Time)

Alienation is defined as a state of being estranged: made distant, isolated from one's community or environment. It refers to subjective experience as well as the social relations and value system that govern human beings and their activity. In Marxist theory, it is 'the transformation of people's own labour into a power which rules them as if by a kind of natural or supra-human law' (Pateman, 2023). Following Marx, alienation constitutes the condition and point of transformation, that is, a conversion at which 'maternal time […] becomes robotic, plastic and at times static' (Task 2). It is the point at which Amaia observes: '[I] suffer a transformation in my whole body, in my own self. Maternal time took everything and left me without time' (ibid). The transformation of matter is engineered by the transformation of the body's own temporality. The latter is interrupted, harnessed for economic purpose. It is turned 'tool for survival, a skill for a job where the task was to look after children.' (ibid) Amaia's time is put at the service of another, but it is also appropriated. In turn, the body's incapacity to access its own time modifies the body/self. It sees the then liquid, plastic maternal that otherwise 'flows' like time itself (Task 1) harden and impede (Baraitser's viscosity that impairs the mother's movement in relation to child and objects in Chapter 1 of this thesis). Amaia's maternal becomes mechanical: 'robotic' and somewhat makes it recede from itself – disappear. 'Maternal time', Amaia writes 'took everything' and 'detached me from my gender, sexuality, education, and life.' (Task 2)

In this section, I discuss how both the spatial and temporal converge to generate a kind of touch or force around Amaia that alienates her touch. So alienation refers to the forces that prevent the maternal being dissociated from the figure 'mother' and protect the legitimacy of the legal mother's touch over that of the nanny. Alienation constitutes the haptics that make Amaia's problematic touch (her presence and labour) disappear and stump her transmission: the passing of her traits in terms of race, ethnicity, class, values which her proximity and contact to the child naturally sets in motion (as presented in relation to surrogacy and epigenetics in Chapter 2). Specifically, I demonstrate why putting the spotlight on the temporal might illuminate at once my collaborator's predicament and the slipperiness of hegemonic touch that escapes somatics, maternal performance and mainstream feminist discourse. The emphasis on time is acutely pertinent to my project because it reminds the reader that touch has both a temporal and spatial dimension (Chapter 1). It also usefully contrasts with the Western obsession on spatiality (Sharma, 2014: 12), itself a legacy of imperialism (ibid: 10).

**2.a Why zoom in on the temporal dimension of Amaia's alienation/alienated touch?**

In *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* (2014), Sarah Sharma, a scholar in Communication, Culture, Information and Technology, uses two concepts relevant to understanding Amaia's experience and the dynamics to which she is subjected: 'temporality' and 'recalibration' (ibid). Temporality, she writes, demands '[an] awareness of power relations as they play out in time' (ibid: 4); a 'recognition' of 'the complexity of lived time' (ibid: 6) and last, of how 'everyday material relation' (ibid: 7) is the product of a multitude of 'entangled' temporalities (ibid: 7, 8). Recalibration 'accounts for the multiple ways in which individuals and social groups synchronize their body clocks, their senses of the future or the present, to an exterior relation – be it another person, pace, technology, chronometer, institution, or ideology.' (ibid: 18) It denotes the manner those who, like Amaia, service the affluent demographic of domestic employers, are required to adapt, sync in and yield to hegemonic needs to make a living. So, recalibration refers to the somatic adjustment they undergo by necessity: to survive.[111] It may surprise the reader that, as in the case of my collaborator, a nanny working within the very *bosom* of the family home and life, 'the sharing of space does not guarantee the sharing of time' (ibid: 22). Sharma stresses that 'the spatial ideals of democracy' characterised by shared culture, identity, belief, values dictated by dominant religion and language find no equivalent in temporality (ibid). To the contrary, contact or proximity is most likely to stimulate different though intertwined 'lived time[s]' (ibid: 9). Sharma's assertion brings to my attention the interconnected yet separate nature of contact or social relations for which Baraitser's enunciation of the maternal-foetal relationality offers a useful foundation (Chapter 1). Amaia's account will provide a strong example of the phenomena.

Nevertheless, the common assumption that the sense of time is universal prevails and so temporal inequalities go mostly unnoticed. This suggests that the notion of a universalised time is another tenet that sits quietly undisturbed under 'facts of life', maintaining and reproducing capitalist labour relations whilst erasing difference in the field of temporality. The dominant view of the body's relationship to time is essentialised and goes broadly like this. The world has sped up since the internet. Time has both expanded, in that, we work longer hours, are connected to work, social media and e-commerce round the clock; and contracted, there is less time to do anything else apart from consuming and letting ourselves be consumed. And everyone experiences it in the same way. Sharma's concept of temporalities, however, challenges the 'tacit acceptance that the world is getting faster' (2014: 8). She highlights that 'the critique of speed is also a discourse – one that [advantages] certain populations and disavows others while it upholds normalizing

[111] Sharma's concept of 'recalibration' leans on Foucault's notion of biopower, that is, a regime where 'capital develops at the expense of bodies' (2014: 17).

conceptions of time.' (ibid: 8-9) The universalisation of time and belief in 'dangerously' fast-paced lives, perversely:

> makes the demand for the labor of others justifiable as a systemic need […] rather than the structurally excessive privilege that it is. We're all so tired and overworked that the mundane tasks of daily living and getting by are relegated as meaningless pursuits and increasingly outsourced to others. (2014: 19)

The notion validates mothers with means contracting out much of their maternal load to Amaia and others to get on and keep up. It legitimises their exploitation and the invibilisation of their labours. I argue that Amaia's requirement to 'recalibrate' or 'synchronise' (Sharma, 2014) to another is not the effect of a world speeding up, but is, in fact, pre-determined by historical and economic conditions that precede the nanny-employer's relationship. These constitute haptics that orientate both Amaia and her employer, that is, their respective movement or choices, what they are directed and move towards, and what is within reach (important questions of my somatic inquiry). It also shapes the nature of their contact – their touch. Like the Indian cross-racial gestational surrogate (C-RGS) previously discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the foundation of Amaia's alienated touch, and temporality within it, is embedded, I suggest, in the nanny's recruitment criteria and the Western sentimentality around maternity which I have observed at 'ENGAGE…' (2020) and *Fertility Fest* (2019). Together they cohere to distance and neutralise the nanny undesirable touch and transmission, thereby, protecting the rightful position of the legal mother who employs her – the primacy of her touch and lineage over that of Amaia.

**Extract 3**

Amaia writes:

> *I began to work as a nanny here in the UK. As I have taught drama to children in schools in my home country, someone thought, that could be a good idea, to get a nanny job. So I did. The first family I worked for was looking for a Spanish speaker and didn't care about my English skills, although they were more than good to deal with daily tasks. Parents/employers, position themselves in a higher and more powerful status. I have realised how other parameters built this relationship, such as race, nationality, social class or age. In a subtle way, a power game was created.* (Maternal Time, Task 2)

**2.b Pre-encounter haptics in the temporal: a long history of human migration**

The alienation mechanism is activated when the British family decides to seek a Spanish nanny, that is, someone visibly distinct from them. Alienation is structured first by the power

differential between the two countries. Indeed, Amaia's story belongs to a long history of human migrations: trends of bodies moving from the countryside to cities, from South to North Globally and across Europe in search of a better life, but also actively sought, coerced and sometimes seized, as in the case of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and modern-day human trafficking, for purpose of exploitation to cater for reproductive labours: the labours necessary to enable others to accumulate wealth (Ahmed, 2017: 85). These consist of traditional female work, predominantly, childcare, housework or sex work, often all three at once (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002: 5); and they fall under the category of 'intimate labours' (Harrison, 2016: 171), that is, 'low status "women's work" involving psychic and bodily intimacy.' (ibid) Both Amaia and I are part of this entrenched, normalised, exodus legacy led by economic disparities between countries, the labour power needs of that recruiting, and the promise of economic opportunity for the immigrant. Ehrenreich and Hochschild, authors of *Global Women: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (2002) name this phenomenon the 'global transfer of emotional resources' (ibid: 12). It addresses the 'care deficit that has emerged in the wealthier countries as women enter the workforce [which] *pulls* migrants from the Third World[,] post communist nations [and, more generally, those with high level of unemployment]; poverty [or lack of prospect] *pushes* them.' (2002: 8) The '*push*' and '*pull*' create a potent magnetic field which sets into motion. In turn, movement towards the more affluent Global North nations reinforces and actualises their imaginary centrality – ergo, that of families who recruit. This world view reduces lesser powers to mere semi-periphery and periphery and dictates that they facilitate the core's ever expansion (Wallerstein, 1976; Bartlett and Prica, 2016) at bottom prices (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002: 3).

When I moved to the UK in the early months of 1996 to work as an au-pair, France had just gone through an intense period of social unrest seeing cross-sector strikes mobilising millions nationally in response to proposed pension and tax reforms and, more broadly, the President Chirac government's embrace of neoliberal capitalism (ISJ, 2006). It is deemed the largest social movement in France since May 1968 (*The Conversation*, 2023). The social crisis of late 1995 coincided with an all-time high unemployment rate of 12.59% (macrotrends, 2010-2023). It was clear to my generation that whatever our level of education, finding and keeping a job was far from guaranteed. Today, it stands at 7.3% (Trading Economics, 2023). In comparison, Spain's unemployment rate reached a breath-taking 24.21% in 1994, 26.09% in 2013 (lowest figure 8.23% in 2007) (Macrotrends, 2010-2023) and in 2022, 12.6% (ibid). The UK, in contrast, was at 8.69% in 1995 with a downward trend hitting 4.7% by 2001 and 3.7% in 2022 (ONS, 2022) – significantly lower than France and Spain. It is important to note, however, that while:

> relative poverty plays a major role […] migrant women often do not come from the poorest classes of their societies. In fact, they are typically more affluent and better educated than male migrants […] [they may] have high school or college diplomas and have held middle-class – albeit low-paid – jobs back home […] the [recruitment] trend is toward increasingly better-educated female migrants. (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002: 10)

I am not dismissing Amaia's 'working-class' status reported in her personal questionnaire but aim to bring nuance to my discourse. How the attribute 'working-class' is and ought to be measured remains much debated (Beswick, 2021): whether it is based on income solely, a type of work, asset ownership, one's level of education or that of one's parents. Amaia's case suggests to me that it is based on low-paid, low valued work (the dichotomy of manual versus intellectual, or mind versus body); and the precarity associated with her employ which I explore later in this chapter. The same precarity that I suffered in my role as an au-pair and carer, though, I am middle-class by birth. In addition, France remains a bigger economic power than Spain. As such, France has exploited and continues to exploit the cheap labour of workers (declared and non-declared) many from Spain, like Amaia, Portugal and North Africa, who migrate in search of better prospects as well as in response to France's lack of manpower at various times in history and into the present. (Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration, 2022; Britannica, year unknown) And so, a power relation between us co-exists alongside a sense of kindred.

Amaia's alienation is already pre-determined by her Spanish identity, a sought foreignness, which will maintain her in the role of outsider both in relation to the family (thereby protecting the status of the mother), the child she cares for, and the UK. Long before she sets eyes on her employers and them on her, Amaia, that is, her future presence, her emotional and physical investment – her touch – is already made distant because of her native geography, economics, her ethnicity and 'olive skin' tone, her culture and language. Amaia's alienation also lives in the near-colonial fantasy about Spanish or mediterranean women: the lure of an 'exotic' body 'thought to embody the traditional feminine qualities of nurturance, docility, and eagerness to please' (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002: 9); a 'patient […] self-denying' (ibid: 12) body, particularly suited to hard physical work and maternal labours, with an implication of lower intelligence and primitivity that wealthy countries assimilate too readily with 'racial discounting' (ibid: 3). The perceived hierarchy between countries and their people, which is the effect of hegemonic orientation (Wallerstein's world order adopted by mainstream feminism), generates an inequal power between Amaia and her boss which touch and proximity further animate. The imagined hierarchy sediments an indelible distinction between them, making the Spanish nanny, like the Indian C-RGS, both attractive in attributes and price, and reassuringly remote or Other in relation to the family. The low currency of the olive

skin body coheres with a long history of lax regulations associated with the domestic sphere which fosters and normalises poor or inexistent consent protocol. In turn, 'the private "indoor" nature' of the work means that the migrant worker is particularly vulnerable to exploitation: 'behind closed doors', they are 'isolat[ed]' and 'invisible' (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002: 3-4).[112]

I use the term 'olive skin' to qualify Amaia's ethnicity, though she states that she is 'white' in her questionnaire, to emphasise normalised mechanisms of racialisation in the British culture in relation to mediterranean ethnicities which I also experienced. When I first arrived in England from the South of France, some thirty years ago, I was often commented under the guise of flattery on my 'olive skin', even though I have fair skin and, ironically, it is allergic to the sun. I deduce that the 'olive skin' is not simply the manifestation of what is physically there but of what is anticipated, therefore, imagined. And neither it is a neutral comment for to be ethnicized as a non-national carries significant socio-economic bearings. It affects and limits a person's movement: their position in the world, the work they are orientated towards, what is near or within their grasp and their sense of connection or kin (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991: 96) – all of which involves the sense of touch.

### 2.c Pre-encounter haptics in the temporal: the sentimentality around maternity

Amaia's alienation is already initiated by the enduring sentimentality around maternity in the UK and more widely the Global North. Sentimentality usefully distracts from the ruthlessness of capitalist labour relations which mainstream feminism participates in in the name of liberation, at least since the suffragettes movement (Chapter 2). As such, sentimentality must also be understood as a potent force that performs across space and time. For example, picking upon a passing comment from Amaia, 'someone thought that it could be a good idea to get a nanny job', I directed her attention onto the haptics that might have orientated her. She explained that well-meaning friends had suggested she should go into the nanny business because she 'taught drama to children in schools in [her] home country'. These words, like whispers and currents, set Amaia into motion. With the benefit of insight, she reflected that 'people have a sugarcoated' idea of the nanny role (Task 2, not included in Extract). Sentimentality certainly sustains the fantasy narrative of 'fun day[s]' (ibid) that is, no work and idleness, while neoliberalism promotes the fiction of flexibility and autonomy for the worker (Sharma, 2014: 55-80).

[112] See also Preciado, 2013: 312; Rodgers, 2020: 390-1; the television documentary, *Maid in Hell*, BBC, 2018.

Amaia writes: ‘how many times I heard employers saying how amazing it is to get paid “just for playing with their kids”.’ She observes: ‘I find this comment quite reductionist. As if the work you do is nothing.’ (Task 2, not included in Extract) Amaia continues: ‘I have encountered families that believed that they don’t have to pay my overtime because they thought I enjoyed being with their children, families who lied to me about my paid taxes. Or families who refuse to pay my last salary’. (ibid) The capitalist value system is epitomized by the, all too familiar to Amaia, opening pitch of the well-intentioned prospective families: ‘we want a nanny who will be a part of the family’ (Task 4, not included in Extract). For to become a member of the family means relaxing employment laws, not to pay, to devalue skills and rigour, and to create toxic employer-staff relations. Here, experience and skills which, in any other job, rightly warrant a higher pay, are thought to be expensive and leave the nanny unable to secure enough hours to make a living. Families and agencies via the twenty first century culture of apps – the Uber, Deliveroo and Grindr of nannying – cash in on the neoliberal logic that devalues domestic work: reproductive labours and their bodies.[113] They dissociate rates from actual economic value, that is, the absolute necessity of those very labours which, for example, kept the National Health Service running during the COVID-19 pandemic; and dictate always lower prices while crook employers, like those Amaia speak of, fail to be regulated.

Sentimentality around the nanny’s job and the fluffy fantasy of the nanny becoming part of the family is not just a blind spot for mainstream feminist. It is hypocritical and masks Amaia’s ‘harsh’ reality (Task 2, not included in Extract), further isolating and forcing her into silence: she dares not speak for fear of repercussion and, perhaps being perceived unwomanly.[114] More subdued still, sentimentality conceals the long history of alienated touch/labours which Amaia’s story belongs to, and which is perpetuated through her. Revealingly, the nanny’s precarity and relationship to time find some echoes in the account of Georgia, a Black nurse working in the USA in the early twentieth century. In a 1912 newspaper article ‘More Slavery at the South’, she states: ‘[t]ho today [Black people] are enjoying nominal freedom, we are literally slaves’; ‘I frequently work from fourteen to sixteen hours a day’; ‘I’m on duty all the time’; ‘I am the slave, body and soul, of this family’; ‘A lifetime bondage’ (*Independent*, 25 January 1912: 196–200). Mbembe (2003) asserts that Foucault’s conception of modernity overlooks the subdued necropolitical techniques still at play within liberal democracies. Sharma, in contrast, is clear that ‘[w]hen Foucault argues that biopower is the power to “make live or let die,” the temporal is explicit. Life is not taken.

[113] During the pandemic, Amaia reported being ‘ridiculous[ly]’ chased on apps and by agencies (email correspondence with Amaia, 2020).
[114] Slimani also talks of the hypocrisy of families in the common statement (Comédie-Française, interview, 2019). More generally, Preciado notes the hypocrisy of liberal left-wing feminism (Nottingham Contemporary, 2020).

It is “let to live” through investment or “let to die” through disinvestment, slowly.’ (2014: 18) To survive, Amaia is expected to fit seamlessly around the family’s needs and work around ‘60 hours a week’ (Task 2, not included in Extract). Though their historical contexts, races and ethnicities differ, Amaia and Georgia share to an extent in their economic predicament: to work and be made to work tirelessly, or not to work at all and die of poverty.

It is no coincidence that Global South women migrating to the Global North in order to work as nannies and maids leave their own children behind (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002: 2). Perversely, their interrupted motherhood, much like that of the surrogate, is attractive to potential employers: the domestic worker’s trauma of separation and isolation from her children suggests that she will naturally redirect the outpour of care and love that she cannot give them onto the family’s children (2002: 16). As such, the parents’ expectation that the nanny is a mother as true sign of womenhood (that she is both female in biology and feminine attributes) intersects with their paradoxical requirement for the nanny’s unbounded time and presence, as well as love and care. In her essay ‘Losing Manhood: Animality and Plasticity in the (Neo)Slave Narrative’ (2016), Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, scholar in feminist, queer and race studies, writes:

> New World slavery established a field of demand that tyrannically presumed, as if by will alone, that the enslaved, in their humanity, could function as infinitely malleable lexical and biological matter, at once sub/super/human. What appear as alternating, or serialized, discrete modes of (mis)recognition— sub/super/humanization, animalization/humanization, privation/superfluity— are in fact varying dimensions of a racializing demand that the slave be all dimensions at once, a simultaneous actualization of the seemingly discontinuous and incompatible. (Jackson, 2016: 98)

Indeed, the intense precarity and the long hours mean that having her own children, let alone being able to look after them, is not an option for Amaia, even if she wanted to. And yet she is stigmatised for it, including by the mother of the household (Task 2, not included in Extract). The paradigm inflected upon Amaia constitutes one of the many ‘racializing demand[s]’ and contradictory forces pressed upon Amaia to be, in Jackson’s words, ‘at once sub/super/human’, to ‘actualiz[e] […] the seemingly discontinuous and incompatible’ (2016: 98). Other contradictory forces will come to the fore in this chapter.

We might deduce that the nanny’s staticity constitutes the ultimate ‘neo-human’ slave technology.[115] Amazon’s Alexa, perhaps the most popular voice AI (Artificial Intelligence) in the UK gives an insight into the very attributes that the hegemony cannot live without. Endowed with female qualities, she is one’s very own personal assistant. ‘She can play

[115] Terminology in Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi (2017).

audio, control your smart home, answer questions and engage your favourite services to keep you organized, informed, safe, connected and entertained […] She's also your personal shopper.' (theAssistant, 2019) Importantly, she is static. Her presence is constant though invisible. She is available 24/7, always listening, ready to respond to our needs which also appeal to the normalised sense of paranoia induced by Global capitalism (O'Donnell, 2000): a discreet omnipresent workforce deeply weaved into our lives, but also neglected, undervalued and ill-treated which could easily become dangerous if it ever found consciousness and agency. The uprise of a robotic 'servile underclass' (Amazon, 2023) is a popular theme explored by the sci-fi genre: for example, *I, Robot* (2004), *Big Bug* (2022), *T.I.M.* (2023).[116] They are reminiscent of the nanny horror genre that I outline in my chapter's introduction and, partly, Amaia's narrative of counter touch. Always responsive and agreeable, with infinite patience, Alexa has no needs of her own. You can ask her anything anytime. And, unsurprisingly, sex is too on the menu (Cool Blind Tech, 2018) because sex is traditionally implied in female work (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002: 5).

Like Alexa and the army of low-paid workers who carry out jobs of a cis maternal nature, the nanny is merely part of an elaborate 'temporal architectures […] composed of built environments, commodities and services, and technologies directed to the management and enhancement of a certain kind of subject's time – a privileged temporality.' (Sharma, 2014: 20) Sharma also describes a 'scaffold [that] holds up' whilst remaining invisible (ibid: 30). Pertinently, she adds that 'the temporal infrastructure incorporates a component of care that is meaningfully linked to traditional forms of women's work or feminized labor. These technologies offer care in the most maternal of way' (Fig. 16, British Airways 1996 advertising campaign in Sharma, 2014: 44). Indeed, neoliberal economy is 'exceptionally high touch' (Sharma, 2014: 45-6). Like the surrogate, the nanny operates as a neo bio-techno 'womb' from which power and pleasure – that of the subject with capital – enfolds (ibid: 54). And I am not immune to the power and pleasure that my class affords me when 'capital […] makes clear which bodies will be taken care of. These technologies of time maintenance reinforce the idea that subjects of value […] cannot be easily replaced, but the secondary labour they depend on can.' (Sharma, 2014: 51) The temporal structure therein legitimizes the lack of care extended to Amaia, Indian C-RGS and many others who fulfil more subdued forms of maternal labours: put simply, the high disposability of lives deemed less valuable. Such predicament takes its toll on the worker's health, therefore their capacity to earn a living. The nanny role already generates its own 'stress[es]' due to the 'intensive', 'self-abnegat[ing]' (Rodgers, 2020: 385), 'isolat[ing]' and 'repetitive' (ibid: 383) nature of

[116] Citation from Amazon's *I Robot* (2004) synopsis.

labours associated with maternity. In addition, it does not 'come with any specific terms, conditions or even boundaries' (ibid: 387). These conditions invite abuse and can lead to severe depletion and sickness, both mental and physical (ibid: 383) which can impact future earnings. Amaia writes it is 'as if they lose sight of the truth that I am a human, a person […] leaving me burnt out' (Task 2, not included in Extract).

Fig. 16
British-Airways advertisement from 1996 for the New Club World Cradle Seat. June 10,1996. *New Yorker 4/5* (in Sharma, 2014: 45). Image removed due to copyright.

Amaia's work releases the time of her employers, specifically, that of the household mother, giving her the mobility and freedom – the democratic rights that liberal feminism has fought for (as discussed in Chapter 2) and that a woman of my class has learned to expect and demand (Sharma, 2014: 13). The capitalisation of the living therein draws lines of differentiation between those who can access democratic principles and those who cannot when it distinguishes those who own their time because they own the time of others and those whose time is owned. We might deduce that the nanny's relentless presence – her staticity – is not due to the family losing sight of her hours as she once presumed (Task 2, not included in Extract) but is, in fact, a necessary condition of the family's reproduction, that of the working mother, the quintessential feminist subject, at the forefront. Certainly, why get stressed about childcare or cleaning the house and, incidentally, get into an argument with your husband over it, when one can source ever more cheaply a Polish or Thai cleaner or nanny (often the same person) who will be more than eager to please because their life and that of their children back home literally depend on it? So, as well as caring for the children, Amaia, like the cleaner, is also found to function as a buffer in the heterosexual couple's relationship. She is implicitly called upon to cover-up, appease and resolve – no less – immanent tensions related to gender inequalities or the inequal distribution of free time, therefore power, in the household between man and wife, more generally, between breadwinner and lower income earner: statistically, still predominantly female (Our World in Data, 2024). Amaia's engineered 'robotic' 'static[ity]' (Extract 2), her infinite and indispensable presence, in effect, also sustains the couple's relationship. Doing so, it plays an essential part in the accruement of their shared wealth. This could explain why the exploitation of domestic workers remains a blind spot within liberal feminism.

Nevertheless, if Amaia's touch/presence is desired, sought and elemental to the working mother's emancipation, Amaia's account shows that it is simultaneously highly problematic for her. Amaia writes that 'affect[ion] and kind[ness] and resp[ect]' is perceived as

‘danger[ous]’ and elicit ‘competitiveness and jealousy (especially from mothers towards nannies, as in the majority of my jobs the father was quite absent due to their jobs).’ (Task 2, not included in Extract) The nanny’s touch and physical intimacy with the child, it would seem, induce a fear of maternal displacement, ergo a loss of ‘womanhood’, through a loss of identity and position in the family.[117] In other words, in communicating, Amaia’s touch is deemed to compromise the legitimacy of the legal mother’s touch and with it, the family’s protected heritability: the transmission of its capital. To recap, the latter encompasses genetics with its focus on race as seen in C-RGS; diseases and conditions epitomized by the Pincus’ research which would lead to the discovery of the pill; moral traits, physical and behavioural attributes, including those attached to sex, gender and sexual orientation; and last, wealth. Heritability is associated with notions of ‘health’, ‘strength’, ‘longevity’ and ‘lineage’ which characterise the bourgeoisie from the eighteenth century (Foucault, 1976: 124-5) and become then the racial code/ing of reproduction (Chapter 2). The haptics around Amaia would suggest that transmission remains a key concern into the twenty first century. One of the ways that the anxiety over transmission manifests itself is in the micro-interactions from the mother towards the nanny which Amaia describes in great detail. She lists: ‘judgements’; ‘demands’; ‘patronizing’ and ‘condescending’ remarks; ‘opinions and expectations’; ‘transference’ of family conflicts onto the nanny; ‘competitiveness and jealousy’; scrutiny of her age; her status as ‘non-mother’ even though the expectation placed on her would mean that if she had children she could not care for them; her gender, body attributes and shape; her health; her clothes; the way she speaks, that is, her non-native English, despite the fact she speaks an impressive three languages; scrutiny of her ‘aspirations and passions’; her ‘personality and character’. (Task 2, not included in Extract)

Every aspect of Amaia’s dimension is seemingly measured, commented upon and subjected to criticism. It is chipped at. Amaia brings to the fore, I believe, the paradoxical micropolitics and economics of touch, deriving from the very criteria sought and established by her boss: those differences based on her ethnicity, nationality, culture, social class, age and gender. I have no doubt that the mother is not aware of the micro-aggressions that she performs for I do not believe it to be a conscious process. Nonetheless, they are not anodyne. They replay an orientation or pattern of relating that is inherited as I argue in Chapter 2 and not without purpose: they demand of Amaia yet another somatic adjustment. Once she has recalibrated her time to the mother’s needs, she is made, by way of tension and pressure that the mother exerts upon her, to recalibrate the nature of her contact, that is, to insert remoteness into the

[117] Amaia’s story is not isolated. Indeed, Slimani’s *Chanson Douce* (2016) is part-inspired by the author’s own lived-in Moroccan nanny and the tense relationship she witnessed as a child between her and her mother; Slimani also interviewed many nannies to research the book (Comédie-Française, interview, 2019).

physical intimacy required of her labour – into her touch. Similarly to the 'Indian surrogat[e] who is 'explicitly trained to distance [herself] from the fetu[s] she carries', Amaia is also implicitly conditioned 'to distance' herself from the child she cares for and, simultaneously, 'expected to perform the affective labor of "loving" the [child] at the same time.' (Harrison, 2016: 171) Harrison points to the 'contradictory demand' (ibid). Leaning further on C-RGS, I deduce that, in effect, the micro-aggressions call for Amaia to somatically 'fragmen[t]' (Franklin and Ragoné, 1998: 119) and 'compartmentali[ze]' (Harrison, 2016: 178) her self and touch. Amaia's personhood is erased and 'superimposed by a single attribute' (ibid: 177). This time, not a bio-womb per se, but the holding and womb-like presence and function of her maternal caring touch. Her physical and emotional labour towards the child could be said to be 'isolated as a component that can be contractually […] detached from the selfhood of the [nanny]' (Cooper and Waldby, 2014: 84).

Fig. 17
Selected body photographs of/by Amaia, sent as individual files to accompany her writing (Task 1, The Maternal Body). Composition by Maud Lannen. Used with permission of the artist.

Amaia's account supports my assertion when she writes, referring to the parents: '[t]hey detached me from myself. I slowly felt divested from my own personality'; 'I became an ungendered, asexual, "something" that has no emotions but is still human enough to be

affectionate towards a child.' (Task 2 and 4, not included in Extract; also Fig. 17, photographs that emphasise a sense of fragmentation and compartmentalisation) In response, Amaia does indeed insert remoteness within her touch. To protect, Amaia withdraws and hides her self. She talks of 'hiding [her] personality, as if this was a punishment, although for [her], it felt more like a survival mechanism.' (Task 2, not included in Extract) In hiding, however, she also could be said to be maintained in a state of pre-emergence, a lagged temporality, consolidating historical markers of primitivity in contrast to the centrality and full visibility of whiteness (Lepecki, 2006: 92 engaging with Bhabha, 1994: 237).[118] Alienation – the implicit defacement associated with it which I describe – is a powerful distancing mechanism or haptic that generates and maintains a strict hierarchy and separation between parents/the legal mother and Amaia, even within the field of intimacy that Amaia's physical contact inevitably establishes. Alienated, the nanny's touch, that is her presence and labour, is pushed beyond the horizon of the family in a state of disappearance. Amaia's own potency of transmission is obliterated. The haptic simultaneously decentres the nanny's self as the latter integrates the monitoring, suspicious and regulatory gaze of the hegemonic other (Anzieu's absorption in Chapter 1). Its effect, Amaia recounts, extends beyond the timeframe of the job spilling across time and space. She states: 'I suffer a transformation in my whole body. This shaped and influenced my job and also my life' (Task 2, not included in Extract).

This is what I believe Amaia means by: '[her] task [as a nanny] was not that simple' and 'came with many implications alongside childcare' (Task 2, Extract 2); also 'the nanny/family relationship is a unique hybrid of personal and professional, and the line that divides the two is always shifting. The rules that apply to other relationships often don't apply here' (Task 2, not included in Extracts); 'parents come with their own problems, opinions and expectations, and with conflicts between themselves, and they pass this onto the nanny.' (ibid) But it also explains why those requirements remain unspoken because such needs are inarticulable, unavowable and plainly muddled. In fact, Amaia discloses her very own confusion when she writes: 'I have also worked for nice families but all of them were very classist. The main difference was that some of them were polite, and some others just weren't. Although as soon as I write this, I question if a person can be polite and nice, at the same time as being classist and/or xenophobe?' (ibid) I am in no doubt that the chronic exhaustion and sickness that nannies commonly suffer stem from being compelled to enact such series of contradictory and extraordinary demands and adjustments which come to form the basis of the nanny's ambiguous kin to the family she works for.

[118] Lepecki is discussing the African American performance artist, Pope. L.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I continue to investigate the nature of touch, specifically, the politics, economics and hierarchies that it communicates when placed in the maternal. My email dialogue with Amaia leads me to investigate the nature of the contact performed between the nanny and the legal mother, specifically the power relations that their contact make visible. Their rapport directs my attention towards the enduring power differentials and tensions between mainstream feminism and the unacknowledged workforce that performs maternal labours (Chapter 2); by extension, the silent power differentials and tensions that exist between Amaia and me in and out of this project. To study them, I build upon the ambiguities, intangibility and viscosity of touch which I have set out in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis. What is revealed are fictional stories with dominant inflections imbued within neoliberal touch and neatly hidden under 'facts of life'. They manifest through haptics that actively prevent the maternal being dissociated from the figure 'mother', and dispersed among the many workers she employs, to protect the legitimacy and primacy of the legal mother's touch over Amaia's (Derrida's 'structurality of the structure', 1997). Focussing on the temporal dimension of touch, I suggest that such haptics exert long before Amaia and her employer get acquainted to alienate, impede and invisibilise the nanny's touch and transmission (the passing of her own genetics, family traits and values). Certainly, Amaia's account demonstrates that historical haptics of alienation and defacement are alive and well in the twenty first century. They manifest in global economic dynamics, everyday interaction through the working mother's micro-aggressive impulses, and, more generally, the ill-treatment of the nanny and other menial workers by the families who employ them, and the wider society.

Under such forces, Amaia is called to perform a series of extraordinary and contradictory somatic adjustments to her touch which, as her writing evidences, trigger a retracing of her whole body (Task 2): to synchronise and recalibrate one's entire existence based on other people's needs rather than her own; to racialise, roboticize (fragment, compartmentalise, reorganise) and deface her touch; to actualise what is unspoken and unavowable on the part of the mother/the family; to appease conflicts in the couple's relationship; to be close and distant, sub and super-human; omnipotently present and vanishing in both presence and potency; to have a nurturing maternal practice towards the child but not elicit a meaningful bond with them that could displace the legal mother. To summarise: to touch and be transmitted, but not transmit herself. Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and its popular television series dramatize such complex unwritten dynamics, although as

British-German scholar in feminist, queer and trans studies, Sophie Lewis notes, the novel follows a recurring white, middle-class, 'eugenic feminism' (Nadkarni, 2014 in Lewis, 2019: 11) which appropriates a slave narrative and 'de-rac[es]' it (Lewis, 2019: 11-12).[119]

Somatic recalibration and retracing sit at the core of the somatic discipline.[120] But here, the event is not a playful, consensual, curious, light experiential experiment (Hay, 2018; Nelson, 2018). It is non-consensual, exploitative, relentless and depleting. As Amaia emphasises, it goes beyond the frame of the job. It impairs and stifles the whole self, all aspects of her life (Task 2). So, to survive and self-protect, Amaia has no choice but to bend to the forces and insert distance into her touch. Nonetheless, quietly and privately, she is also observed resisting and ingeniously reorientating them when she nurtures an unconventional narrative about maternal touch, specifically, what might be read as an inverted story of '[a]lienated labour' (Haraway, 2016: 8). There, maternal touch and transmission are reclaimed by a multitude of migrants and non-migrants, women and men, who have been locked into a type of feminized labour (ibid: 38) from which they find themselves instantly disenfranchised. Amaia's intimate account offers the somatic discipline some original frames in which to explore movement, affording an insight into the presence of touch in processes of manipulation and reorientation typical of the discipline. Importantly, she extends the somatic discourse on touch and resistance when she alerts us to the fact that the two forces (hegemonic and hers) do not cohabit easily, and bring about a range of sensations: delicious exhilaration, elation, unrest, confusion, sadness, distress, shame and anger – a complex state of inner conflict that touch enlivens.

In this chapter, I have drawn from Paxton's 'self-hacking' (2018: 19) technique and aimed to dialogue with Amaia's account and its findings from a somatic and intersectional perspective: that is, while working to throw into question the performance of my own touch and, through touch, my own identity and sense of kinship. I have exposed how the mainstream feminist collective, the group with which I identify, colludes in reproducing capitalist haptics to maintain hierarchies and divisions amongst the group of women, and accrue power. I have discussed the prominence and perverse violence of the Western sentimentality vis-à-vis maternal labours: a haptic that silences and shames. It is a truth that Amaia can seldom share, for fear of being perceived mad and, worst yet unwomanly, unnatural, even monstruous. But it is also others' sensibilities, mine and perhaps the reader's, that she

[119] In my project, unlike in the *Handmaid's Tale*, the legal mother and Amaia are separated by class, ethnicity and nationality.
[120] For example, Hay invites her dancers to move contemplating impossible questions: 'what if every cell in my body at once has the potential to dialogue with everything I see and cannot see?'; 'what if where I am is what I need?'; 'what if the depth is on the surface?'; 'what if I am being served by the space that is serving me?'; 'what if time in in my hand?' (2018)

protects in order to sustain herself in the context of a renewed anti-immigration and racist political climate intensified by a post-Brexit landscape.

Through the process of writing and our exchange, Amaia's awareness has grown, enabling me to push my line of inquiry and implicate myself to surprising effects. For example, leaning on the sensorial, I have stumbled unexpectedly upon and remembered my own immigrant journey, also discovering the haptics that have shaped and continue to shape my experience; whilst realising that my desire to belong must have been so strong that I had somehow supressed it, pointing to the unforeseen somatic reorganisation of my senses and body. Amaia's story presents a different narrative about touch and transmission: one that is complicated and uncomfortable. She narrates how reflexive bodies negotiate an unhospitable mainstream landscape which I and others like me could be said to fiercely safeguard. She tells the story of conflicts and forces that live both outside and inside her: a dimension of her experience which will be echoed in Jae's and Chloe's writings.[121] Understanding the part that I/mainstream feminism play/s in her predicament also illuminates the conflicts which live within me: the ambiguities within my own touch, and the struggles that are agitated when people with interconnected power differentials make contact in the studio. It brings my attention to the intricate and delicate field of relationality where sameness and difference coexist and unfold not without tension through touch. It forces me and maybe others into a different reflexive mode, calling me to make my own somatic adjustments and retrace my own body (Chapter 1 of this thesis) in a bid to generate more inclusive and consensual touch practices within somatics and beyond.

[121] Chloe writes, in relation to the trans community: 'They have conflicts within them, they have conflicts with people outside of them.' (Task 1)

# Chapter 4 Jae

## INTRODUCTION

A man attends a local fête. Among the celebrations, a group of kids 'chasing each other round in the rain and mud' catches his attention (Harradine, 2017 in Stuart Fisher, 2020: 49).[122] He pauses and observes for a moment their joyful and carefree play. Soon, however, a feeling of 'uneas[e]' (ibid) comes over him as he realises that his watching has not gone unnoticed. He, too, is being watched (ibid). It is not long before the anxiety around 'a solitary man, alone at a village bonfire watching someone else's children play' hits him (ibid).[123] This man was David Harradine, co-artistic director of the dance company Fevered Sleep. From this experience would emerge *Men & Girls Dance* (2013 to 2020) (*M&GD*), a collaborative research project and performance piece composed of 'five professional male dancers and nine girls who dance for fun'. (Perazzo Domm, 2019: 76)[124] The headline on the project's dedicated website reads in bold: 'Why don't we trust men to be with children?' (Fevered Sleep, 2024) *M&GD* tackles this question. It addresses the 'dominant social and media discourse which constructs men's relationships with children as overwhelmingly negative' (Harradine, 2020), even, 'predatory' and 'dangerous' (ibid: 4). In essence, it interrogates the politics by which a male's proximity to and touch of children, especially girls, is stigmatised, that is, read with 'suspicion' (Perazzo Domm, 2019: 67) and 'fear' (ibid: 80); therefore preventing men from being perceived as suitable carers, in opposition to women and girls (Stuart Fisher, 2020: 57).

Perazzo Domm, a dance scholar, writes that 'touch [in relation to children] is a delicate issue, often at the centre of welfare policies in educational environments.' (2019: 78) The *M&GD* newspaper features an extract from an "appropriate touch" policy issued by a school for girls in England (ibid) that emphasises the connection between touch and sexual feelings, touch and discomfort, touch and misunderstanding, touch and inappropriateness, including the parts of the body allowed to be touched with regard to men and girls (Moira House 2013 quoted in Perazzo Domm, 2019: 78-9). Focussing on the object of fear – male touch on girls – Fevered Sleep attempts to 'reconfigur[e]' (ibid: 77) Western narratives about gendered touch and its performance. With great sensitivity, *M&GD* weaves for its audience tactile games and displays that foreground closeness and touch between men and prepubescent

[122] Stuart Fisher's quotation from Harradine in Fevered Sleep's *Men & Girls Dance* newspaper (2017). Available at: www.menandgirlsdance.com/newspaper (originally accessed online by Stuart Fisher on 26 January 2018 and no longer accessible at the time of this project). Amanda Stuart Fisher is a scholar in contemporary theatres and dance.
[123] Same as above
[124] Same reference as Stuart Fisher's, this time from Perazzo Domm (no access date provided). 2013 to 2015 covered initial research and development of the project (Harradine, 2020).

girls within a context of 'care, playfulness and trust' (Harradine, 2020).[125] While physical touch takes centre stage, the act of looking, perceiving and reading one another equally implies a certain tactile 'sensual[ity]' (Perazzo Domm, 2019: 68). For example, male performers and girls take turns to peruse each other out-loud. One of the girls says 'I can see him looking at me, I can hear his breathing, I can hear his pulse through his wrist'; likewise, one of the males: 'I can see her freckles […] I can hear her breathe […] I can feel the warmth of her skin against my face' (ibid: 79), 'I can see her looking at me' (Stuart Fisher, 2020: 60), then facing the audience, 'I can see you watching me' (ibid). The touch which emanates from the gaze is laid bare: that of the male performers onto the girls, the girls' onto the male performers, that of the audience onto men and girls interacting with each other, that of the male performers reading the audience reading them. Harradine here would seem to be making reference to the local fête episode and, more broadly, the gaze of society projected onto men: the experience of being compared with someone who might harm or abuse children (Perazzo Domm, 2019: 77), and the devastating violence of that judgement.[126] The touch of *M&GD* certainly animates complex dynamics where assumptions and pre-determinations about male touch coexist with the 'tender' (Stuart Fisher, 2020: 49) aesthetics and social alternative of the work, and not without tension – perhaps most resoundingly so for the males involved in the project, as Harradine explains: the performers touching the girls, and Harradine himself, engineering the touch between them.

At the conference 'Researching (with) Difficult Feelings' (2017), Harradine spoke of the men's apprehension about which body part can be touched and by whom, and the discomfort at the idea of girls touching a sweaty man's body. He opens up about the fear of 'creepiness', 'feelings of shame, sadness, embarrassment, massive self-doubt' (2017). He also candidly talks about his own unease and 'suspicion' when observing the intensity of the friendships and intimacy developing between male performers and girls (CHASE, 2017): moments of reciprocated exuberance met, I deduce, with thoughts about the girls' 'emotional safety' (Perazzo Domm, 2019: 67). It is this messy landscape which can so easily be missed among the clean, 'exquisitely beautiful' (*The Guardian*, in *Fevered Sleep*, 2024), 'elegant' (*The Times*, in ibid) tactile aesthetics of the work and cheering headlines, which, in fact, imbues the touch showcased on stage: between men and girls.[127] It is a narrative about touch that often escapes discourse: a touch that is not simply one thing (tender from

[125] I use 'sensitivity' to mean tact, that is, another expression of touch, according to touch's etymology, which unfolds across distance rather than skin-to-skin, as discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis.
[126] On the fusion of vision and touch, see Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and The Invisible* (1968: 134), who notes the tactility of seeing, which 'envelops, palpates [and] espouses the visible things' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 132-3); also in Midgelow, 2015: 118. I use the term 'violence' based on the etymology of stigma which implicates the touch and skin. Here, I am describing haptics.
[127] Interestingly, in an interview Harradine alludes to the piece's aesthetics capacity to neutralise the charged politics of touch found in everyday life, which is my critique of CI and CI-indebted dance forms of which *M&GD* is one. (*The Guardian*, 2016)

men/legitimizing from the audience) or another (abusive/condemning) but one that is much more complex. It is the story of touch, picking up specifically on the hardship of stigmatisation on men in relation to children and their care, also clearly at war with itself because, as Harradine hints, men have internalised the cutting gaze of society as their own. I am not suggesting that the cheering liberal audience do not themselves feel a degree of discomfort in response to the piece. However, as I have argued previously, mainstream feminism, the group with which I admittedly identify, has a tendency due to its orientation, not to see and, indeed, to obfuscate the part it plays in maintaining oppression in its efforts to seek its own freedom, as I have already stated in Chapter 2 of this thesis.[128] The startling haptics around Amaia, a nanny employed by affluent working mothers, certainly demonstrate that liberal touch can be contradictory: confused and confusing. In this chapter, drawing on Jae's Othermothering practice, I continue my somatic project of auto-deconstruction, weaving new narratives about touch and the politics, economics and hierarchies that touch communicates when located in the maternal for CI and the somatic discipline.

Like Amaia, Jae is also an immigrant. They came to the project in 2019 as a non-binary, cis gay man who longs to gestate their own child. Jae would like the reader to note, however, that, since participating, her gender identity and modes of identification have changed. In 2024, she identifies as a non-binary trans woman and uses the pronoun 'she'. Jae explains that she always was a woman but made to believe that she was a man; as a result of this, she was assimilated to the homosexual body and experienced homophobia which forms the basis of her contribution and the focus of my chapter. I have therefore and with Jae's consent, maintained the pronoun 'they' and original gender provided to reflect her identity at the time of our dialogue while endeavouring to remain sensitive to her present identity as a transwoman. I have also worked to remind the reader of this by highlighting intersections between the two identities, where appropriate. In Amaia's chapter, I discussed the dominant haptics that divide women based on their class and whether they are mothers or not; and collude to invisibilise the labour/touch of less privileged women (including other gender-diverse, poorly paid, feminized workers of the maternal) to protect the primacy of the mother-employer's touch and transmission over theirs. With my next collaborator, Jae, I analyse the hegemonic forces that control the performance of gender, specifically those that divide men and women's roles in reproduction and prevent cis men, including transwomen like Jae, from performing work quintessentially maternal and female. With Jae, the male yearning for a physical care practice towards children, featured in *M&GD* and epitomized by *M&GD*'s own

[128] My connection of the piece with mainstream feminism is based on the evaluation report of *M&GD* (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2017), which shows that their audience was 93% white with 75% female versus 25% male (2017: 8).

protective and nurturing gesture, namely a man cradling a child in a foetal position (Fig. 18), is extended to Jae's non-binary desire to gestate in a male-constructed body. Though my analysis focusses on their creative writing alone, Jae's prosthetic pregnancy below, a still from their co-written show (2019-20) (Fig. 19), underlines clear issues around the misconception of masculinity in the Global North and the exclusion of male-born individuals, like Jae and Harradine, from maternal narratives.

Fig. 18
Photograph from one of the *Men and Girls Dance* performances
Book cover for *Performing Care* (Stuart Fisher and James Thompson, 2020).
Photograph by Matthew Andrews. Image removed due to copyright

Fig. 19
Jae's prosthetic pregnancy as part of their performance (2019-20).
Photo removed to preserve Jae's anonymity.

Departing from Jae's experience of being locked in a male construct, I ask: what does the notion of male gestation reveal about touch, its politics, economics and power dynamics? What discursive logic, myths and structures coalesce in order to block such progressive futures? I explore the haptics around Jae that enforce a fixed notion of gender; and look to

the tactile strategies or perceptive framings that my collaborator has fashioned to counter mainstream forces while attending to the conflicts and struggles that still pulse within their touch. Studying the forces that exert on Jae from a somatic and intersectional lens also means trying to grasp the interconnected nature of the contact and power relations between us: the tactile process of reading and perceiving that unfolds when we touch and encounter each other in dialogue. Here, I lean on Hay's 'noticing' practice (2016: 14; 85) as I attempt to trace the more elusive sensorial phenomenon that our contact stimulates to nourish the performance of touch in somatics and, importantly, expose some of the invisible materials immanent to touch that escape somatic discourse and might be exacerbated in CI contexts (Mitra, 2021: 10).

## 1. A PRELIMINARY OVERVIEW OF THE HAPTICS OPPRESSING JAE AND QUESTIONS FOR MAINSTREAM FEMINISM

**Extract 1 (Compilations of extracts)**

> *When thinking about myself as a maternal body the first idea that comes to my head is the desire to be able to gestate. It is an old wish that I can remember having since I was a teenager, probably before. Being a biological male makes this impossible. At times of reflection, there is even episodes of sharp pain and grief for the incapacity. I seem to recall just now a moment around my teenage years when I was thinking about all of this. I actively stopped myself from experiencing such pain, blocking it and pushing it away, because I'd never ever be able to conceive a child in my own male body. However, the fantasy still stays with me. At times I wish science was a lot more advanced nowadays, so that a womb/uterus transplant into a male body could be possible.* (Task 1, The Maternal Body)
>
> *I want to feel my child growing inside of me created from my own body.* (Task 4, Maternal Being With)

In this section, I argue that Jae's unconventional wish and modes of self-representation bring into question the touch of individuals assigned-male-at-birth (AMAB): how male physical closeness and contact to women and children are narrated in the Global North. It opens up to scrutiny the distinction and separation of roles, genetic and otherwise, in reproduction, and through it, the stability of the Western dichotomy 'man-woman'. Certainly, Jae's account challenges the construction of masculinity located in opposition to femininity: that which casts them as 'aggress[ors]' (Stuart Fisher, 2020: 57) and assimilates 'the penis as symbol of violence' (Olufemi, 2020: 59). They reveal the untold, painful discrimination associated

with such dichotomy – the subdued yet potent forces or haptics that shape Jae's predicament. In Task 1, Jae relays having experienced since childhood severe bouts of sadness and haunting due to not being able to gestate. Jae worked to suppress their desire, while silently hoping that one day science would enable cis male pregnancy. Jae is drawn to explore this dimension of their experience again and again throughout our collaboration. They engage in a form of auto-inquiry which the project's creative framework facilitates, and which later culminates into a manifesto against division and discrimination, predominantly, based on sex, gender, sexual orientation and genetic reproduction.[129] They write:

> ***No to…***
> *AARRRGGHHHHHH!!! (Burst into life roar).*
> *The children of the world want to be born free to express their full power and potential and celebrate being alive. To have space to feel, grow, experiment, make mistakes and learn. To be part of a supporting and loving group/family.*
> *Not to distinctions between people. All are born equal.*
> *Not to discrimination on gender or sexual orientation and/or on diverse parenting and family structures.*
> *No to unnecessary suffering. Society will take responsibility.*
> *No to governments, doctors and other institutions imposing particular modus operandi on reproduction.*
> *No to patriarchy, classism, sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and any other forms of discriminations.* (Task 5, Maternal Manifesto)

Jae therein forces important questions for feminism to consider: what happens when gestation is democratised and separated from sex, gender, sexuality and genetic reproduction? What would it mean to dissociate sex from gender, gender from sexuality, sexuality from reproduction (and modes of reproduction)? What would it mean to dismantle the ideological subtext and narrative imbued in touch, that is, to dismantle the cultural forces of conventions that pre-determine and insert in their place uncertainty?

In the twenty first century, the maternal continues by large to refer to cis women's 'natural' predisposition, orientation or gravitational pull and magnetism towards mothering (Ahmed, 2006: 85).[130] It remains presumed that maternity is the inextricable calling of women, those fitting the deemed 'real' women category projected by culture, including mainstream

[129] Discrimination means making an unjust or prejudicial distinction in the treatment of different categories of people, especially based on race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality, class, age or disability (its definition). Discrimination is connected to stigma and social exclusion (Reidpath *et al.*, 2005: 469). I elaborate on social exclusion in the chapter on Chloe.
[130] See also Kristeva, 2001: xiv.

feminism: the coming together of sex, gender, desirable/acceptable feminine and moral traits, reproductive power; mostly, heterosexuality; and all too often, as discussed in my previous chapters, middle-class whiteness (itself associated with morality). Ipso facto, children naturally belong in the tactile, physical arms and care of such women. And while the radical social shifts in the legalisation of same-sex marriages (2014, England and Wales) and adoption, including fostering, by LGBTQ individuals in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (effected 2005) today mean that gay men, as Jae identified at the time of the project, are now allowed to get married and adopt, some gender theorists are cautious. They argue that far from destabilising conventions and threatening the centrality of heteronormativity, the reforms, in fact, strengthen them because hegemonic society expects gay couples, even requires of them, to conform to the heterosexual model. Heather Brook, scholar in women's studies, talks of '(hetero)sexual performatives' in relation to same-sex marriage and other same-sex relationships (2000: 132-150); Susan B. Boyd, scholar in law, of an 'assimilation to heteronormativity' (2013: 273). In fact, Boyd asserts that much of the pro campaign in Canada centred on the idea that same-sex marriage would revitalise the declining institutions of marriage and the nuclear family, and increase the number of adherents (ibid: 274).[131]

The potency of such viewpoint in British Parliament and in relation to public opinion, and its capacity to singly sway the legislation towards change cannot be underestimated. I have analysed in Chapter 2 the suffragettes' clever stance in relation to Britain's dire post World War I economic context which led to women's right to vote in 1918. The reforms demonstrate that marriage and the nuclear family are still perceived to be at the foundation of a prosperous, economically and morally sound society in the Global North. Implicitly, the reforms reaffirm the heterosexual model as the only one that is natural (Halberstam, 2020), and through it, the naturalness and legitimacy of heteronormative ideology and capitalist labour relations. Heteronormativity constitutes tangible haptics to which the LGBTQ's community, in its search for freedom, autonomy and, not least, safety, subject itself, like the maternalist suffragettes once did, through performatives or *passing* mechanisms. 'Passing' refers to the ability to pass or to be read to conform to gender, racial, class, religious norms; the ability to blend in and appear to belong to the dominant group and ideology (more on passing in the chapter dedicated to Chloe). It denotes a 'somatic conversio[n]' (Preciado: 2018: 34), 'feedback' or 'translation' (Hay, 2016: 3) mediated by the sense of touch that retrace the body (Chapters 1 and 2). From an intersectional perspective, the capitalisation of the living and the insertion of the demographic into a system of utility are forces that exert on

[131] Canada was the third country to legalise same-sex marriage in 2005 after the Netherlands (2000) and Belgium (2003).

the LGBTQ community as well as cis women, like myself, requiring them to perform distinct social and reproductive roles. It could be advanced therefore that women and men share in oppression to different degrees though capital ownership, as I discussed with Amaia, creates further hierarchies between them.

The LGBTQ community (or half its population following the heteronormative model) is thereby absorbed into the capitalistic model of production and reproduction which Haraway coined the feminization of labour and poverty (2016: 38-9). Haraway's formulation complicates the traditional tropes around women's distinct gender work because it sees not just women, but men and other gender-diverse individuals turned into objects of exploitation and servitude, highly disposable, low value, and enduring precarious living conditions (ibid). The femininity projected on gay cis men like Jae identified for the largest part of their life, is not anodyne. It is sexist and misogynist, convoluted around the contempt for the female body and her reproductive condition (King, 2004: 31). As such, Jae's performative gender ambiguities, their juxtaposition of maternity onto the male body, reveal reductive stereotypes and enduring homophobia against the homosexual body, simultaneously sexism and misogyny against the female body. We might call it homomisogyny, expanding Serano's concept of 'transmisogyny' in *Whipping Girl* (2016) which the activist and scholar in gender and LGBTQ studies developed to address the transgender prejudice specifically faced by male-to-female (MTF) individuals. She explains that due to the perceived inferiority of women to men, people who 'desire to be female or feminine' are read as 'more perplexing or pathological than assigned-female-at-birth (AFAB) individuals who desire to be male or masculine.' (Serano, 2021: 868) I deduce that the same intense 'perplex[ity]' and 'patholog[y]' projected onto the MTF body which Serano describes, apply more to gay men than lesbians and draw a firm intersection between gay men, trans women as Jae identifies today and cis women like me.[132] Processes of feminization reinforce the power hierarchies and binaries on which the West is founded: man/woman, masculinity/femininity, intellectual/manual, civilised/primitive. Ultimately, as Perazzo Domm argues in relation to *M&GD*, the discourse about touch and definitive gender roles can be simplified to a discourse about who penetrates – deemed active/dominant, ergo, masculine – and who is penetrated – deemed passive/subjugated, ergo, feminized – (King, 2004: 31; Hermann, 1935: 219) both symbolically and literally, in sexual intercourse and reproduction.[133]

[132] Later in this chapter, I provide evidence that gay men have been historically the focus of intense prosecution and punishment where lesbianism has not.
[133] Hermann's perspective is grounded in psychoanalysis and King's, in Women's studies.

Such discourse conceals heterosexual men's intrinsic liking of penetration and the manner women have always performed it on them with fingers, tongue, other body parts or prostheses. To see this requires a queer lens. Preciado, whose trans feminist philosophy engages closely with somatic performance and is indebted to Paxton's CI, leads the way. In *Countersexual Manifesto* (2018) phallicism is democratised and dissociated from the biological penis. We are all phallic. Phallic is us.[134] It is fingers, dildo, arms, legs, feet and the whole body (2018: 31, 43; 51, 54-5; Figs. 20, 21, 22, 23). Similarly, in Livingstone's performance score *Male Breast Feeding*, a brainchild of CI and response to Preciado's manifesto, the traditional maternal practice of nursing is everyone's: it is dissociated from gender, organs and the child, the latter said to represent a phallic substitute in the Freudian symbolic order (Freud, 1985: 297-301). Male performers take turn to nurture and be nurtured, muddling narratives about gender.[135] In both cases, the sense of touch is made centre stage as the medium through which resistance can be enacted, even embodied; and everyday social relations, again departing from one's own touch/body, reconfigured. Preciado and Livingstone demonstrate through practice the primacy of the sense of touch and the key tactile function of perceptive frames to shift one's internal order and transform from within and without which is promoted in somatics: de-'conditioning' (Paxton, in Furse, 2011: 61) the self and 'reorganiz[ing]' the senses (Hay, 2016: 105), to stimulate new movements. Indeed, we are surrounded by perceptive frames: '[c]ommunications technologies and biotechnologies', that is, 'discourses', 'tools', 'myth' and 'instruments for enforcing [fixed] meanings' through which the self, its perception and mode of relationality are constructed, and experience is experienced (Haraway, 2016: 33). If fantasy narratives, embodiments and technological applications interact to impose a blue-print and meaning, Preciado and Livingstone show that they can also be hijacked and reorientated to offer different world orders with social and reproductive justice in mind. This is specifically what Jae's creative writing engineers. Jae draws on touch to perform their own intimate act of resistance and reconfiguration: they 'recraft' (ibid) their body through the tactile process of auto-experimentation and invite '[d]isorientation' (Ahmed, 2006: 166) and 'slip[periness]' (ibid: 172) – a manifestation of touch and its elusive materials – to our encounter.

Fig. 20
Illustration from *Countersexual Manifesto* (Preciado, 2018: 43).
Photograph by Maud Lannen. Image removed due to copyright.

[134] Turn of phrase borrowed from Jay Prosser (1998: 14 and cited in Chapter 5).
[135] See also, Nicole Bindler's somatic workshop *Clitoral Embodiment* which democratises female reproductive organs (2018). Bindler is a US Body-Mind Centering practitioner.

Fig. 21
Illustration from *Countersexual Manifesto* (Preciado, 2018: 51).
Photograph by Maud Lannen. Image removed due to copyright.

Fig. 22
Illustrations from *Countersexual Manifesto* (Preciado, 2018: 54-5).
Photograph by Maud Lannen. Image removed due to copyright.

Fig. 23
Illustration from *Countersexual Manifesto* (Preciado, 2018: 31).
Photograph by Maud Lannen. Image removed due to copyright.

## 2. PERFORMATIVE MANIPULATIONS: JAE EXPLOITS THE VISCOSITY OF TOUCH TO GENERATE DIFFERENT SOCIAL INTERACTIONS[136]

Based on the personal questionnaire, I note that, at the time of completion, Jae is a cis man and wishes to be referred to under the pronoun 'they'. Jae also identifies as gay though 'generally', 'not entirely' conforming neither to gender nor sexual orientation binaries (personal questionnaire, 14 September 2019). It is my hunch that Jae wants to affirm their male gender while inserting a certain gender ambiguity, 'preferr[ing] not to clarify what must categorically remain murky' about gender (Halberstam, 2012).[137] From the first task, they declare their desire for 'a womb/uterus transplant' (Task 1) and 'to gestate' their own child (ibid), to feel '[their] child growing inside of' them and 'creat[ed] from [their] own body.' (Task 4) It could be argued that the relatively new mode of identification, like that of Jae, through the concomitant use of the singular third person when named ('Jae wishes') and the plural third 'they' when unnamed ('they wish') is performative because it instantly blurs and densifies grammar and meaning. It establishes a certain grammatical uncertainty which is further layered by their non-conformist, non-binary sexual orientation and, unorthodox, male wish for biological maternity. In other words, Jae's mode of identification, as I perceive it, complicates contact and what contact communicates and transmits: the passing and exchange of information. Such grammatical uncertainty and unease would later be intensified by the fact that Jae identifies today as a non-binary transwoman and uses the pronoun 'she'.

Jae could be said to perform upon me 'interruption[s]' (Baraitser, 2009: 66, 68) 'disorientation' (Ahmed, 2006: 156), and 'crisis' (ibid: 157; also in Baraitser, 2009: 52): sensorial, therefore, somatic affects and effects. My contact with Jae somewhat jolts the flow

[136] I use the term 'manipulation' to emphasise the presence of touch and the hand.
[137] Jack Halberstam is a gender and queer theorist, self-proclaimed 'free floater' in terms of gender and pronoun (2012): comfortable being called by some 'Jude' (short for Judith – his birth name) and others 'Jack'; being referred by 'she' and 'he'. The scholar writes: '[I] consider my gender improvised at best, uncertain and mispronounced more often than not, irresolvable and ever shifting.' (ibid)

of what French philosopher Henry Bergson describes as a semi-conscious, mostly absent, and pre-determined attention (1988: 40) and makes me look again. Jae therein instigates the type of tactile phenomenon which Baraitser discusses in *Maternal Encounters* (2009) under the term 'viscosity' (ibid: 129), namely, a sensation of 'friction' (ibid) brought on by 'awkward' objects (ibid: 140) that 'resis[t]' the habitual 'flow' (ibid: 129) of a pre-programmed touch: in this case, Jae's non-heteronormative frame which contrasts with mine, that of a cis, heterosexual woman and biological mother. I find myself 'caught in tension between both heightened sensation and slowed down movement.' (ibid: 129) Such events, Baraitser asserts, are ethical in nature because they call for an 'adjust[ment]' (ibid: 127): an atypical somatic response. Jae could be said to play a game that confuses, disorientates and defamiliarizes and is reminiscent of somatic experiments, like that of Hay who foregrounds defamiliarization, 'discontinuity' (2018) and 'dis-attach[ment] (ibid; 2016: 105) as an artistic practice and technique.[138] In similar ways to the studio, my dialogue with Jae sees me – movement researcher, architect, collaborator, participant and onlooker – trip upon myself and necessary recalibrate somatically to continue being in contact.[139] Ahmed calls such experience 'queer phenomenology': 'moments of disorientation' that bring at once 'giddiness' and 'horror' as well as 'vitality', 'joy' and 'excitement' (2006: 4).

**Extract 2 (compilation of extracts from Task 1)**

> *I'm a fan of Sci-Fi literature. Some readings have been incredibly relieving and liberating! Especially when authors presume a future or alternative reality where people may be able to transition from a gender state that does not allow gestation to another that does!*
>
> *For example, Iain M. Banks writes on a galactic civilisation called the Culture where the humans or humanoids are able to change sex at will, in 1 to 3 years. And all of it by just wishing it! They have control over the manipulation of their own bodies to undergo such dramatic changes through an advanced technology that has been integrated into their bodies. Another example that I love comes from Ursula K. Le Guin's 'The Left Hand of Darkness'. The human like inhabitants of a remote iced world are in some way hermaphrodites that cycle periodically through states that are more female, and states that are more male, being receptive to conception in the*

[138] My use of the word 'game' does in no way reduce or trivialise the authenticity and seriousness of Jae's self-representation. 'Game' rather emphasises our respective physical engagement in this dialogue and is a nod to the state of playfulness, curiosity and being ready for action that characterises somatic experiments/invitations as I have experienced them during my MA training and many somatic workshops.

[139] Unlike Sharma's concept of recalibration (2014), I place the onus on hegemonic power/myself to adjust to Jae who is marginalised.

*former states and thus capable of bearing life. I find them extremely touching and beautiful.*

*I don't wish to be a woman, I wish to remain a man, but also become a woman.*

*For me, it is somehow all just very natural that I, a male, could have my own baby inside of me. It'd be amazing if it was possible and out of one's own choice!* (Task 1, The Maternal Body)

Science-fiction literature offers Jae a place of refuge. It is a place of carefree re-imaginings, outside the spectre of normativity. There, Jae constructs worlds where everyone can transform their bodies and reproductive organs freely and autonomously, simply based on their desire. They muse over the fiction of ambisexual beings travelling periodically across the gender spectrum and capable of conceiving biologically as one or the other. Jae holds an unwavering belief in the potency of science and technology to actualise the most daring futuristic vision, including their own. But is it 'naivety' as they believe (Task 1, not included in Extract) or, in fact, radical, progressive thinking? Feminists, particularly radical feminists, have long recognised the potency of sci-fiction and technologies to construct a reformed social order and resolve at once social and economic inequalities based on essentialist notions of sex and gender.

In *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Shulamith Firestone, radical feminist scholar and activist, argues that reproductive technologies would '[liberate] women from the tyranny of reproduction' (ibid: 185), giving them autonomy over their body and redistributing power: for example, both parthenogenesis (lone reproduction) and artificial placenta (ibid: 179) were thought to have the potential to disturb 'the *social* unit' that is the family (ibid: 185-6, original italics).[140] In feminist and anthropology scholar Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), 'we are all chimeras' (2016: 7). Technology, as Jae harbours, is already integrated to bodies. Haraway reconceptualises the human as a cyborg: a bio-technological 'hybrid' (ibid: 5), subversive, determinedly anti-essentialist and anti-natural to address oppression and discrimination (ibid: 7; 12). The mythology of the cyborg reorganises the world and tears down its Western binary foundations. In gender, technology and cultural politics scholar Helen Hester's *Xenofeminism* (2018), once again, the body and its future emancipation is inextricably linked to technologies. Trans and queer inclusivity lies at the heart of the manifesto. Hester calls for the abolition and dismantling of gender binaries, favouring instead

[140] Parthenogenesis means Reproduction from a gamete without fertilization, occurring most commonly in invertebrates and lower plants. Formerly also: asexual reproduction, as by fission or budding.

a limitless proliferation of genders and the intervention of reproductive technologies to secure reproductive justice for all (ibid). In *Full Surrogacy Now* (2019), technologies remain at the centre of human reproduction and social relations. Controversially, Lewis argues for not less surrogacy but more. She champions 'gestational communism' (ibid: 21) and 'queer polymaternalism' (ibid: 168) as a revolutionary practice of kith and kin that overturns capitalist value system, the nuclear family at the forefront.

Jae communicates: 'I don't wish to be a woman, I wish to remain a man, but also become a woman', to gestate their own children. The word 'become' is, of course, familiar. It describes transition, flux and movement. Jae's statement is, in my view, a great example of their subversive astuteness and agile reorientation, 'disassembl[ing]', pulling apart and 'reassembl[ing]' the body (Haraway, 2016: 38-9). Cyborg feminism meets de Beauvoir's famous concept: 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (1973: 301), an assertion that drew for the very first time a firm 'distinction between sex [as biology] and gender' as the expression of identity and the body's processes of 'acculturation' (Butler, 1986: 35). I am fascinated by Jae's phrase for it illuminates the opaque, 'murky' (Halberstam, 2012), ambiguous, that is, inherently ungraspable nature of gender. How can one wish not to be a woman and wish to become one simultaneously? Jae presents me with a puzzle and, referring back to Ahmed's 'queer phenomenology' and its said somatic effects (2006: 4), I can vouch that the experience is unsettling, disorientating, as well as delightful and exciting. Certainly, Jae's creative writing, the slipperiness, as I experience it, of their subjectivity which is so different from mine, which I cannot grasp, for as soon as I try, it evades me again, does not leave me unaffected. It produces a whole sensorial phenomenon. And every time I sense myself slipping, stumbling, that I try to catch myself and find new bearings, what I am left noticing is the force that is my hegemonic heteronormative touch and the manner it so readily pre-determines and assumes.

The sensation, as Baraitser argues, is potentially generative for it brings awareness and opens me up to the new (2009: 18). It compels me to 'enlarge [my] seeing' (Hay, 2018) and reorientate, that is, to 'Turn [My] Fucking Head' (Hay, 2016: 103-5), improvise new makeshift grounds on which to stand and somatically adjust my touch to remain in dialogue with Jae. This is the 'self-hacking' (Paxton, 2018: 19), auto-deconstructive process that Paxton speaks of: the somatic technique that seeks to uncover '[w]hat […] my body [is] doing when I am not conscious of it' (2018: 18) 'to adapt to new movements' (Paxton, 2018: 21). In his lecture *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* (University of Nottingham, 2020), Jack Halberstam uses the words 'enchantment' and 'amazement' to describe the generative character of being lost. He reminds his audience that etymologically 'amazement' comes from 'maze' which means

bewilderment, confusion of thought, also labyrinth, baffling network of paths or passages. He thereby establishes a connection between disorientation and the new, in the sense of the unexpected and wondrous. Equally, Ahmed writes '"getting lost" still takes us somewhere; and being lost is a way of inhabiting space by registering what is not familiar' (2006: 7). I propose that slipperiness or the unexpected resistance that makes me trip – the tactile affects and effects of finding myself lost or disorientated – is the stuff of everyday life and everyday contact. Both Irigaray via the concept of mucous (2011: 130-40; 1984) and Baraitser, via the metaphor of maternal '*viscosity*' (2009: 128-9), albeit differently, put touch at the foundation of and enabler of all interactions between humans and between humans and objects. They argue for the cultivation of such invisible matter and tactile phenomenon as a point of ethics because awareness of such material potentially prevents assimilation into sameness. It protects difference and unknowing (Chapter 1).

**Extract 3**

> *When I look at my body, at my belly, at my groin, I see a man's body, a penis, testicles, and I wonder: how could I fit a womb, a uterus, a vagina in all of that? I even imagine where could the uterus go, trying to feel inside of me for where a new gap could be open and shaped. It gets funnily more complicated when I try to decide where the opening for the vagina would go, whether right above my penis, or in the perineum. I usually opt for the latter, as it seems more functional. My train of thoughts then usually moves on to how pregnancy would affect my body, or my male body affect pregnancy, since the pelvic structure is different as are hormonal levels. And my spine would have to change shape! Are men capable of this too? I also face other ideas such as perhaps men are not ready for pain and bearing such responsibility. Sometimes I feel I'm crazy thinking about all of this. I am infected by the mothering delirium!* (Task 1, The Maternal Body)

In this wonderful section, Jae draws for the reader a wild and queer desire: a seductive, contagious, intoxicating and ecstatic lunacy, echoes of which can be found in Amaia's account. Jae tactilely explores their body. They paint a dynamic dialogue between touch, the body, imagination, the act of 'looking' (what their eyes, hands and attention are directed towards), feedback sensations (how the body feels and what it desires) and 'seeing' (becoming aware). Here, the reflexivity of touch via the skin clearly demonstrates 'the reflexivity of thought' as Segal discussing Anzieu's skin-ego theory puts forth (2009: 47 in Chapter 1). Jae's creative writing is highly performative, intimate and direct: they bring the scene to life. Their touch is visceral, dynamic, reflective, reflexive and charmingly DIY-

esque.[141] They ask: 'how could I fit a womb […]?' Jae occupies multiple spatial positions and roles simultaneously. They are at once object and subject, performer, artist, researcher and surgeon: 'I look', 'I see', 'my body', 'my groin', 'I wonder', 'I fit', 'I try', 'I opt'. Jae performs auto-experimentation. In his talk at the Wellcome Collection, London (2018), as part of *Transitional States*: *Hormones at the Crossroads of Art and* Science, Preciado emphasises that auto-experimentation was until the end of the eighteenth century the code of practice in science and saw researchers and surgeons try new substances and techniques on themselves, including surgery (also in Preciado, 2013: 350). The researcher's body was their primary epistemological site of experimentation, and many continued into the nineteenth and twentieth century (Fig. 24 in Preciado, 2018).[142] Somatics borrows from science in both methodology and language. Hay writes: '[w]hat if *this theater* is the laboratory and your body is the site where the experiment takes place within the laboratory?' (2016: 31) Jae's account speaks to this legacy. Doing so, they not only assert but actualise their autonomy and control over their body and the freedom to auto-manipulate: to touch oneself, to feel and to know.

Fig. 24
Dr. Leonid Rogozov: The Soviet surgeon who removed his own appendix while stranded in Antarctica, 1961 (Preciado's lecture at Wellcome Collection, 2018). Image provenance, BBC News (2015). Image removed due to copyright.

Auto-'crafting' (Haraway, 2016: 33) or auto-touch is be understood in this context as insurgent because it challenges the naturalised ownership of the body/individual by the state which rules it, namely, the regime's control of gender in the separation of the sexes and sexual labours, and the force which it exudes to conform (Chapter 2). As such Jae's performative touch recalls Preciado's own in *Testo Junkie* (2013) which he describes as a 'body-essay' (ibid: 11) or 'somato-political fiction, a theory of the self, or self-theory' (ibid). The AFAB scholar conducts 'a political [and performative] experiment' (ibid: 12) when he applies 'a testosterone-based' gel on their skin (ibid: 16) for a period of '236 days and nights' (ibid) as a mean to undo gender. Likewise, in their evocative section, Jae investigates and deconstructs gender via touch and their body. They attempt to mould the latter as if it was clay and give form and reality to their wish for maternity 'imagin[ing] where the uterus could go, trying to feel […] where a new gap could be open, shaped.' (Extract 3/Task 1) They cohere imagination, sci-fi, the sense of touch, the body and its intuitive and creative modes of being to make new discoveries. They are sensually improvising, feeling their way towards a new ontology. Jae could be said to arouse, excite, even summon the bodily transformation. Their touch is highly inquisitive, reflexive and considered. It calls for decisions and careful

[141] Charming is to mean captivating, engaging and entrancing.
[142] For example, Freud's cocaine experiments to treat mood disorders (Preciado, 2013: 354; others are listed in 350; 156).

selection, including a tracking of attention, demonstrated by '[m]y train of thoughts then usually moves onto' (Task 1, Extract 3). Practical considerations guide the experiment alongside ethical ones: Jae wonders about the impact of the pregnancy on the male body/its anatomy and vice versa, including the physical, emotional and moral undertaking for men that this involves. For this reason, it is important to situate Jae's wish and project into context to realise that their hypothesis is neither 'naive' (Jae's own qualifier, Task 1, not included in Extract) nor far-fetched.

### 3. MALE TOUCH AND THE MOTHER'S TROUBLING IDENTITY

In this section, I argue that the primacy of the cis woman touch over male touch in relation to maternal labours with its associated distinctive role in reproduction stands precarious and demands to be reassessed urgently. Indeed, the twenty first century is going through an unprecedented explosion and normalisation of gender and transgender discourses, like that which Jae presents. As previously noted, we have witnessed major social shifts that have opened up the institution of marriage and possibility to adopt and foster to the LGBTQ community. The reforms and the transgender phenomenon are coinciding with the boom of an already buoyant commercial sector offering a range of reproductive, cosmetic and aesthetic interventions (and convenient payment plans) to transition and/or start a family. Such a rapidly changing social and political landscape certainly 'troubl[es]' 'the mother's […] identity' (Parker, 2012: xiii). Scholar in French and Comparative Literature, Andrew Parker writes:

> philosophy and theory are confronting what may be their most perplexing challenge: a strangely queered, (im)possible maternity that – till now, at least - is not what we think. What is a mother when we cannot presuppose "her" gender? Were we ever able to? (2012: 2)

In *Maternal Encounters* (2009), Baraitser herself, seems uncertain about the body her phenomenology relates to. It is 'adult', 'identifies as female' (ibid: 22); potentially any adult body responsible for child (ibid). On the one hand, she refers to 'an experience that resides 'otherwise' than, or is excessive to maternal identities, thought of as emerging at the intersections particularly between gender, class and 'race'' (ibid); but an experience 'arising […] out of the mundane and relentless practices of daily maternal care' (ibid). On the other, she reimposes the maternal as female speaking of the 'philosophical and ontological conundrums' of a 'pregnant and lactating body that is both singular and multiple, disturbing notions of unity and the bounded self' (ibid).

Or is she? The pregnant and lactating body is no longer exclusively the territory of women as testifies the many transgendered men who have chosen to gestate since transition.[143] Two have in recent years received significant public attention. Thomas Beatie (USA) published his first book *Labor of Love* in 2008 and was immortalised by British artist Marc Quinn the same year (Fig. 25). Freddy McConnell (UK) featured in the British documentary, *Seahorse: The dad who gave birth* (Finlay, 2019). They would, no doubt, having undergone such extreme hormonal, surgical and legal processes, object at being identified by their birth gender. Nonetheless, their pregnancies suggest that they embraced their distinct masculine maternity.

Fig. 25
*Thomas Beatie* by Marc Quinn (2008). Image removed due to copyright.

Scholar in sociology, Robyn Lee, in her insightful and timely article, *Breastfeeding and sexual difference: Queering Irigaray* (2018) writes that 'it is commonly assumed that only women, in particular women who have recently given birth, are able to breastfeed' (2018: 78); however, induced lactation brought on by 'nipple stimulation and hormone supplementation' means that 'adoptive mothers, grandmothers, transgender and transsexual people can also breastfeed their children' (2018: 78). She also refers to 'adult nursing relationship [ANR], wet-nursing and cross-nursing' where the practice of breastfeeding is also present (ibid). [144] So, although 'breastfeeding is often regarded as a paradigmatic example of sexual difference', that is, 'a cultural signifier of both sexual difference and maternity', 'it [in fact] exposes the instability of binary categories of sex' (ibid: 78-9). Likewise, the notion of distinct sexual differences become muddled in British historian and academic Joanna Bourke's inspired lecture *The History of the Breast* (2020) during which she reveals that cis men have also been known to produce breastmilk spontaneously. For example, when soldiers returned from World War II, their starved bodies could not process the hormones from good nutrition which led them to lactate involuntarily. She also notes that during adolescence, the breast structure in boys and girls is the same: they may swell and produce milk (ibid). Therefore, pregnant and lactating bodies are not exclusively female but potentially multiple sex and gendered bodies. The specialness of maternity as indicator of femininity and womanhood, together with the privileging of female touch over male touch – mine over that of Jae who was born male in this project – are called into question by

[143] The only data available is for Australia with 205 between 2013 to 2018. As the process can be self-managed, trans masculine pregnancies might be more frequent than expected. (Margaria, 2020)
[144] ANR: 'where a person (male or female) is physically or pharmaceutically induced to 'feed' breast milk to his or her partner. The practice may take place without sex' (Sim, 2012: 53) or be a non-lactating practice (pairedlife, 2016); 'wet-nursing' means a woman who breastfeeds and cares for another's child; 'cross-nursing' means mothers who nurse each other's babies. (Krantz and Kupper, 1981)

instances of male lactation and pregnancy. Queer maternal subjectivity enables to rethink touch and kin anew for CI and somatics, challenging the founding myths and dichotomies in the West, including the myths that mainstream feminism has absorbed and made its own to acquire and maintain power. Beatie (US) and McConnell (UK)'s trans masculine pregnancies also bring to the fore that the reproductive technology of womb transplant (Uterine Transplant/UTx) in male born recipients, like Jae, is in fact already within reach.

## 4. THE FUTURE OF MALE GESTATIONAL TOUCH AND TRANSMISSION IN REPRODUCTION: MEDICINE, LAW AND MAINSTREAM FEMINISM

Here, I investigate the medico-legal narrative about the sexes and male biological touch imbued in the use of reproductive tools which prevents the innovative application that Jae seeks and reinforces the notion that AMAB (assigned-male-at-birth) individuals are not suitable for maternal labours. According to Karine Chung, Director of the fertility preservation program at the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine, transplanting a uterus into a human male would not be much different from transplanting one into a female (Yahoo! Health, 2015). 'Male and female anatomy is not that different' (ibid), she states. The uterus could either be donated or tissue-engineered and then implanted into his pelvic region (ibid). A standard IVF would insert the fertilised egg into the male's newly formed womb (ibid). In 2014, for the first time, a uterine transplant (UTx) recipient gave birth to a healthy baby in Sweden (Brännström, M. *et al.*, 2015: 607). The Swedish woman had received a uterus, aged 36, from a live 61-year-old donor in 2013 (ibid). UTx is still at experimental stage worldwide. Recent figures show that over 70 UTx's and 24 live births have taken place (Vali *et al.*, 2021: 590). Research in UTx addresses exclusively women who suffer from 'Absolute uterine factor infertility (AUFI)', that is, women with 'uterine absence or dysfunction' (Jones *et al.*, 2021: 138). However, it may surprise the reader that UTx is not the only means of achieving male pregnancy.

Lee M. Silver, an American molecular biologist, argues that the birth of Louise Brown, the first IVF baby, in 1978, proved that 'these microscopic entities were no longer the exclusive province of fertile women. Eggs fertilized in vitro could be picked up through a tiny glass needle and placed anywhere, including the space inside a man's body.' (1998: 193-4) Ectopic pregnancy, although rare, is an example of a fertilised egg developing in the abdomen, sometimes also in the fallopian tubes, rather than the uterus. Silver asserts that 'an embryo can implant itself into almost any living tissue' and 'the abdomen is filled with all sorts of tissues'; there, the embryo can grow to full gestation and the baby be 'delivered by a modified Cesarian section.' (ibid) While many clinical reports attest that 'extrauterine abdominal pregnancy' (Dahab *et al.*, 2011) can result in both healthy mother and baby,

others discount it as a viable area of research due to ectopic pregnancy presenting life risks because the abdomen does not allow the placenta to detach as easily from its lining as the womb does; therefore, its removal can cause 'severe internal haemorrhage' (Silver, 1998: 194-5). Back in 1998, Silver already suggests that '[w]hile most guys' (ibid: 195) will be relieved at never having to experience pregnancy, other men, for example, MTF (male to female) transexuals and, possibly married men wishing to surrogate for their infertile wives (one of the two hoax stories shared by the author) may feel otherwise (ibid: 191-2; 195).

UTx relies on organ transplantation and ARTs. The research, development and practice around any ARTs and organ transplantation (in the case of UTx) must be vetted and authorised by their official national boards to be legal. In the UK, the Human Tissue Authority (HTA) and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) decide what techniques are developed, legalised and who can benefit from them. Both the HTA and the HFEA are affiliated to the British Government and Department of Health and Social Care, though each emphasises the independence of their working through the 'arm's length' analogy (hfea.gov.uk, year unknown; hta.gov.uk, year unknown).[145] I argue that the case of Jae confronts that trans/gender discourse and freedoms are affected and effected by transplantation and reproductive technologies, specifically, their ideological orientation, and that of the medical-scientific and legal elite regulating them. My collaborator's desire exposes, as Haraway predicted in 1985, that technologies are, indeed, 'instruments for enforcing meanings' (2016: 33), that is for 'enforcing' and safeguarding the intangible 'structurality of the structure' (Derrida, 1997) that informs hegemonic touch or haptics, and through touch, organises social relations.

Bioethics scholar, John Robertson refutes the use of UTx on men and locates his argument within the legal constitution of procreative rights which assumes 'a man or women's mode of reproduction is determined by nature and does not take account of how [ARTs] undercut the authority of nature.' (2017: 636 in footnote) As such the 'right to gestate as part of procreative liberty' must coincide with and be 'integrally related to the gestator's own genetic reproduction' (ibid: 635). He stresses that 'the desire alone' to experience gestation is not enough to justify the procedure, cost and the use of 'scarce organ' because pregnancy is not part of male reproduction (ibid). Last, he adds that male pregnancy may 'confuse further' our 'basic assumptions about male and female identity' (ibid). In 2018, Amel Alghrani, Professor of Law, challenges Robertson. She argues that placing a restriction on UTx based on genetics contradicts the normalised practice of egg donation where women who are unable

[145] They are quangos.

to provide their own genetic material can still establish a biological connection with the child through gestation (ibid: 307); and The Gender Recognition Act 2004 which extends women's rights to transgender women (ibid: 320).

Bioethics logic also contradicts the 2017 European Court ruling, *AP, Garçon, and Nicot v France*, a landmark case which, pertinent to Jae's identity past and present, is related to three MTF citizens (ibid: 318).[146] The European Court overruled France's terms which made sterilisation a condition to gender recognition. By pronouncing that France had breached the applicants' 'right to a private and family life' which supports the positive right to procreate using one's genes, and 'a negative right against state interference' (ibid: 309), the Court thereby rejected the very principles on which sterilisation has historically been defended: 'legal certainty, child welfare and [significant to my argument] natural reproduction' (ibid: 318).[147] In addition, it is important to note that in 'child welfare', in this particular case male touch, is involved and deemed dangerous to the well-being of the child. Alghrani puts forth that the strict cis gender frame under which medicine and law operate with regards to reproduction discriminates. She calls for 'the debates and discussions surrounding ARTs such as UTx […] not [to be] confined to cisgender individuals and discourses [to] include transgender, non-binary and other gender plural individuals.' (ibid) My thesis aligns with her campaign.

Alghrani's argument is put into context against a stark European political landscape. At the time of the Court ruling, 20 countries in Europe still mandate the sterilisation of trans individuals as a pre-condition of legal gender recognition (Dunne, 2017: 554): a legislation based on the notion that loss of fertility is the 'price to pay' for transitioning (Alghrani, 2018: 317). Pfeffer, in her political historicization of reproductive medicine (1993), denounces doctors' double standards through which they lay blame and exercise moral judgement (1993: 40). For example, from the eighteenth century, infertility is considered 'the price paid' by lower class women for their assumed moral and sexual deviancies while middle-class women were considered 'innocent victims' (ibid: 33). Professor in Political Science, Wendy Brown reveals the root of medical and judicial bias by connecting etymologically *crisis* (Krisis) and *critique* (2005: 10). '[A] jurisprudential term' in Ancient Greece, it referred to 'the art of making distinctions […] essential to judging and rectifying an alleged disorder in or of the democracy' (ibid). The framework is adopted by medicine: doctors' judgement draws lines of distinctions to restore body-mind order and avert crisis (ibid: 11). The implication is

[146] ECtHR, Apr. 6, 2017.
[147] The right to a private and family life: Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights.

that the physiological body (its order) becomes a metaphor for the body of the nation (ibid: 7). The connection is clear in the eighteenth century Malthusian system which links the nation's economic health and political power to the control of gender and reproduction (Pfeffer, 1993: 4; 14 in Chapter 2). As such, Jae's desire for a pregnancy in a male-constructed body, that is, the performance of male touch in gestation and child rearing practice, is ultimately deemed to threaten the health, profile, wealth and longevity of the nation.

The 'price to pay' for transitioning, the reluctance of the medical body and the law to license and legalise research into male pregnancy which Jae could benefit from, exposes an entrenched medical and legal culture of discipline and punishment (in Foucault's sense) still exerting in the twenty first century.[148] For example, Beatie reports that during the process of seeking fertility treatment, he and his then wife, Nancy, encountered repeated and institutionalised medical prejudice which led the couple to opt eventually for a home insemination (Beatie in Advocate.com, 2008). Its manifestation ranged from being turned away based on doctors' religious beliefs; healthcare professionals refusing to call Beatie by a male pronoun or recognise Nancy as his wife; being laughed at; being asked to shave his facial hair; and the couple's mental stability being questioned (ibid). Similarly in the UK, following the birth of his first child, McConnell discovered that he could only be named 'mother' and not 'father' on the birth certificate (BBC News, 2019).[149] When it comes to children, biological sex and natural cis reproduction trump McConnell's gender recognition certificate that legitimises him as male. In other words, McConnell does not escape the brunt of heteronormative haptics. The legal definition 'mother' enforced on McConnell as the individual who carries pregnancy and gives birth, also contradicts surrogacy practice where the surrogate is not given any legal status in relation to the child (Chapter 2). The medical and legal bodies therein safeguard and promote a predominantly, though noticeably not entirely consistent, essentialist and determinist framework orientated towards cis heteronormativity and wealth (because the framework distinguishes between women based on economics as argued in Chapter 3). Doing so, the conflation 'woman-mother' and the mother-child's indelible tie are reaffirmed which mainstream feminism, I have argued, benefit from. Importantly, the medical and legal framework around reproduction naturalises her female touch (towards children) over that of the father and other male-assigned individuals. It thereby also implicitly naturalises the stigmatisation of male touch.

[148] I use the term 'exert' to denote haptics.
[149] McConnell is reportedly engaged in legal proceedings to revert the decision (BBC News, 2019).

The reluctance of the medical body and the law to license and legalise research into male pregnancy may very well suggest that interest from male individuals, gay or otherwise, is fundamentally lacking or inexistent. Certainly, surrogacy is now favoured by both heterosexual couples and gay men who are seeking the biological connection that adoption cannot give them (Blake *et al.*, 2017: 860; ABC News, 2008).[150] Nonetheless, heteronormative haptics also perform and exert, silencing and suppressing any rise of awareness in the male population, thereby neutralising any emergence of public campaign, commercial market, and publicly funded healthcare. A pertinent example is that, in Task 1, Jae is unaware of UTx medical advancements, and the bioethical restrictions imposed upon its use which prevent male uterus transplantation. Medico-legal resistance is not neutral. It signals, orientates and directs. It becomes gravity (nature itself) and 'magnetic field' (Ahmed, 2006: 85) with forces that attract and repel. These factors would explain why Jae's technological and progressive vision is not deemed, indeed, a worthy scientific advancement, and the question of gestation, by extension maternal touch and labours, remains a female-only-concern. Convoluted in the medical and legal protection of 'the authority of nature' (Robertson, 2017: 636, footnote) – an authority that dictates the orientation of womb transplantation/ARTs and preserves heteronormative social order – lies, I suggest, the protection of the medical and legal elite's own authority as if it was fixed, incontestable, even natural. It is not difficult to see that by endorsing and defending it, mainstream feminism basks in the elite's power and gains significantly, even though, in the end, women and cis men and transwomen who long to perform the tactile labours of maternity, like Jae, share in oppression, albeit differently. Our identities interconnect us.

Although Jae introduces to the project the notion of male 'womb envy' (Task 4, not included in Extract) which finds echoes in radical cyberfeminist thought, no one within hegemonic culture, mainstream or even radical feminism, has yet conceived that cis men might want to gestate literally.[151] And the notion that they might be ready to sacrifice the protector and breadwinner status associated with their gender to be a full part of their children's lives is seldom debated on women's platforms. One of those rare moments was on the BBC Radio 4 programme, *Women's Hour*, 'Intersectionality in Feminist Economics' (12 September 2019). The panel refreshingly discussed the enormous social and financial pressures on men which are affecting their mental health and their yearning to spend more time with their children to nurture a physical and emotional closeness. On air, Murray asks: '[w]ho is responsible for

[150] The following articles note a severe decline in adoption rates in the UK and across continents in recent years due to the increase popularity of IVF treatments and surrogacy (The Guardian, 2019; Rotabi, *et al.*, 2012)
[151] For example, Zoë Sofia, looking to popular sci-fi films and TV series, develops the notion of a male womb envy which he is said to overcome by creating futuristic technologies and technological apparatus that act as womb substitute (Sofia, 1984: 51; 1990: 136-7; 1992: 391, n.7).

changing [the] culture [of inequities]? Is it business or government?' What is missing from the discourse, in my view, is the realisation that liberal working mothers of which I am admittedly one – individually and collectively – play a pivotal role in confining men to the traditional roles of provider and protector. By ring-fencing all maternal work to themselves (or other women like Amaia) and making a virtue of it as true sign of womanhood, I and others unwittingly reinforce social pressures linked to maternity, as well as the anxiety around male touch.[152] This position notably contradicts the celebratory rhetoric from the same group of women around the performance project *Men & Girls Dance*. Them and I are in fact, guilty of reproducing our very own oppression and precarious conditions. Let us not forget that feminism acquired a place in the public arena by claiming their distinctiveness to man, emphasising the specialness of their maternal role in reproduction and vowing allegiance to the nation, that is, to the ruling masculine class. So, understandably, a lot is at stake in potentially losing our difference. And, though I recognise that the feminist fight against patriarchy is still ongoing, it seems that little work has been done to include men into the feminist project in a more meaningful way than 'asking them to do the washing-up once in a while' (Preciado, Nottingham Contemporary, 2019). This is where the tension and conflict lie in mainstream feminist discourse and the performance of their touch – mine included. Male born individuals, like Jae and Harradine, including transwomen, who desire to perform maternal work, care and play with children freely, pay the price for feminism's blind spots.

## 5. JAE'S LIVED EXPERIENCE: TACTILE FORCES OF CONVENTION

**Extract 4**

> *It has been troublesome in the past talking about my desires to other people, especially my family. The idea of seriously discussing this with my father makes me feel really uncomfortable, for I believe he'd be in utter shock. Being gay has brought a lot of confusion into the matter. Homophobic comments heard at an early and young age were really damaging. Ideas like 'all gays are really women', or obscene sexual remarks on how gay men behave 'like women' made it harder coming to terms with the idea of wanting to be like a woman, to be able to be pregnant and give birth. The confusion could or can make things really fussy in my head, creating a kind of cloud I can't see through clearly, and where gender dysphoria or integrated homophobia could/can be very harming. It is almost like being robbed of my body and its potentialities, for some other people have decided what my body is like, how it behaves and what can or cannot be done with it.* (Task 1, The Maternal Body)

[152] See the cult of natural childbirth in Firestone (1970: 180).

Much of Jae's embodied distress is related to how they might be perceived by others and the violent treatment, physical and psychological, of which they might fall victim. In Task 1 (Extract 4), they write that they have not felt able to open up to others about their wish for maternity, even their closest family relations. Jae seemingly knows intuitively that the bond of love is at stake. The biological touch or connection which unites the family is clearly unstable, therefore, ambiguous when it is conditional of a particular social/family order. In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Ahmed who is queer from a traditional mixed white British (on mother's side) and Pakistani (on father's) household (2006: 24) develops '[t]he concept of "orientations"' (ibid: 21). She writes:

> The concept […] allows us to expose how life gets directed in some ways rather than others, through the very requirement that we follow what is already given to us. For life to count as a good life, then it must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised as a social good, which means imagining one's futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course. A queer life might be one that fails to make such gestures of return. (ibid)

Like the debt of the maternalist suffragettes which locked mainstream feminism into performing cis maternal labours, 'debt' (ibid) in love exposes the transactional economy of the nuclear family that unfolds through touch and kinship: an investment determinedly turned towards the future for purpose of reproduction, that is, the transmission of capital (moral and physical attributes as well as wealth) which, in Jae's case, I discover also includes the performance of heteronormative gender, sexual orientation and modes of reproduction.

How would their father respond? Jae imagines 'utter shock' (Task 1): horror, trauma and disturbance. Who would not rethink inflicting such distress on a loved one? Jae's wish for maternity knowingly disturbs and interrupts their family's assumptions and their own desires for Jae – that of their father, another man, at the forefront. Jae considers with fair certainty that speaking out will be experienced as a violent attack: the 'utter shock'. I wonder whether Jae fears that their disclosure might literally kill or harm their father; or that their father might kill them in response. Maybe Jae imagines both.[153] The child fantasy of having the power to kill one's parents is common and just that, a fantasy: it may very well articulate Jae's repressed anger and sadness towards them for being forced silent and in part erased, that is, killed, themselves. Nevertheless, Jae also directs my attention to the continuing and all too real life and death consequences that come from being seen to transgress gender binaries. In Britain, in the last 12 months, one in five LGBTQ people have been the target of hate crime and a whooping two in five trans people have experienced it (Stonewall, date of

[153] Their comment alludes to the phenomenon of 'conversion' of psychological trauma into organic symptom, a theory first elaborated by Freud in his study on hysteria (Freud and Breuer, 2004).

publication unknown). Worryingly, while the number of reports continue to increase, figures show that the number of prosecutions is falling (PA Media, 2019).

The LGBTQ community is a highly vulnerable group. In their day to day, they will experience anything from verbal abuse to physical assault, torture, rape and murder fuelled by homo/transphobia (Turner *et al.*, 2009). The nuclear family remains in many cases the greatest protector of hegemonic values and order, the ultimate judge and executioner (Reuters, 2020). I am not suggesting that Jae's family would be capable of such act. Asserting the extent of the risk that my collaborator would incur is clearly outside my reach and any possible knowing, least of all, because Jae does not know themselves. I am bringing to the fore that which Jae is, I believe, tentatively hinting at: the stark reality of their predicament where liberty, bodily autonomy, that is, 'one's own choice'; 'control over […] their own bodies' (Task 1, Extract 2) and safety (affective, material and physical), that which constitute a basic human need and right, can so easily be withdrawn. Jae communicates that such right is not a given and, certainly, not distributed equally. Rather, it is arbitrary and fragile. If the family gives life, it also assumes the right to suppress it leading many, like Jae and Chloe to live in fear and remain silent.

In this matrix, the other and their touch is always present. Jae articulates so clearly the very process of internalisation first developed by Freud and elaborated by Anzieu with a focus on the skin organ (Chapter 1). The internalisation of good maternal care coexists with the internalisation of the other's cutting and hateful gaze: a real-imagined-other who has been absorbed and forms part of Jae internal world. This is evidenced by the use of reductive attributes such as 'crazy', 'ridiculous' and 'delirium' (Task 1, Extract 3).[154] If Jae presents desire as a form of intoxication or heighten state, the emphasis on madness, which are dotted throughout their essay, also points to the real danger of being perceived insane for the insane gets locked up, silenced and, sometimes, killed (also in Amaia and Chloe's accounts). Their attention then moves seamlessly from touching upon madness as an illness to childhood memory: everyday homophobic comments that surrounded Jae growing up. These, they explain, have complicated the 'legitima[cy]' (Task 1, not included in Extract) of their desire: was it truly theirs, or the logic and prejudice of others they were performing?[155] They report 'confusion', 'things [being] really fussy in my head', 'a kind of cloud I can't see through clearly', even 'gender dysphoria' and 'integrated homophobia' (Task 1, Extract 4). The use of the present tense indicates that Jae remains in conflict at the time of writing.

[154] 'ridiculous' is not included in Extract.
[155] Legitimacy is a coded word and signifier of validity. It is defined as the quality and signs of being legal, reasonable, and acceptable; the state of being fair, honest.

In invoking madness, ‘homophobia’ and ‘gender dysphoria’, Jae also connects their sensations to the historical medico-legal treatment of LGBTQ individuals. Indeed, homosexuality once was a criminal offence, a deviancy and an illness. It was pathologized and met with violent, invasive and life changing juridical and medical interventions. In England, homosexuality was sanctioned by capital punishment until 1861 and by life imprisonment or chemical castration until 1967 (parliament.uk, date of publication unknown). The computing pioneer, Alan Turing was famously subjected to the latter which drove him to suicide. It is important to note that the legislation targeted almost exclusively gay men rather than lesbians (King and Bartlett, 1999: 109). This confirms that homosexuality is perceived as more monstruous and ‘pathological’ (Serano, 2021: 868) than lesbianism and further explains the brutal stigmatisation of men who want to perform traditional women’s labours, in comparison to women who wish to work or undertake typical masculine pursuits. Despite its decriminalisation, ‘treatments to convert homosexuals into heterosexuals peaked in the 1960s and early 1970s (Smith et. al., 2004: 427). ‘[B]ehavioural aversion therapy’ could include: ‘electric shock aversion therapy’, ‘oestrogen’ administration, ‘psychoanalysis’ and ‘religious counselling’, ‘electroconvulsive therapy, discussion of the evils of homosexuality, desensitisation of an assumed phobia of the opposite sex, hypnosis, psychodrama, and abreaction.’ (ibid: 428)

Traces of the persecution that the LGBTQ community endured survive today in medical diagnoses such as gender dysphoria. This was recently brought to public attention by the Scottish Parliament which proposed to remove the need for medical diagnosis to acquire a gender recognition certificate. The Bill would be revoked by the British Parliament on 17 January 2023 through section 35 of the Scotland Act 1998 on the ground that it ‘would have a serious adverse impact […] on the operation of the Equality Act 2010’, specifically on the rights of ‘women and girls’ (Gov.uk, 2023). Preciado points to a neoliberal system which requires the individual to declare themselves ‘ill’ to access FTM (female-to-male) or MTF (male-to-female) hormones and surgery (2013: 250). Individuals must surrender their selfhood, their intuitive knowing, and mark themselves sick. Jae describes their embodied predicament: ‘[i]t is almost like being robbed of my body and its potentialities, for some other people have decided what my body is like, how it behaves and what can or cannot be done with it.’ (Task 1). In Task 2, Maternal Time, Jae zooms in further connecting the current restrictions around womb transplant on trans women and men to LGBTQ’s enduring fight towards equality: ‘this takes me back to the time when same-sex marriage wasn’t available […] also all my struggles of growing gay in a straight man’s world. So, it all feels like time is putting me again under emotional stress and making me vulnerable to hateful attacks of a

new kind [in relation to my desire to gestate]' (Task 2, not included in Extract). Time collapses into a continuing struggle against hegemonic forces that divide, marginalise, exclude and silence based on difference.

**CONCLUSION**

My contact with Jae and their desire for maternity in a male-constructed body unequivocally shatters traditional narratives and presuppositions about maternal touch. Like Amaia, Jae draws our attention to a lived experience and a type of touch and yearning that is pushed beyond hegemonic horizons. They compel me to confront the force of heteronormativity and conflicts that live within dominant touch, which I perform as a mainstream feminist, movement research and scholar, and that necessarily shape their experience. My sensorial experience of slippage, tripping, stumbling and recalibration certainly testifies to its great power and to the even greater difficulty I find in reorientating it. I discover that medical and legal genetic essentialism and predeterminism structure maternal touch and transmission: they orientate and regulate, naturalising and legitimising the performance of distinct genders and roles in reproduction. In effect, they coalesce to draw lines of distinction and separation (the etymology of 'discrimination') between legitimacy and illegitimacy, natural and unnatural in maternal touch and kinship: they bring into close contact the mother and child via the conflation woman-mother, and make distant, even condemn, male touch on children in gestation, social rearing and everyday gestures of care and play, as brought into view by Jae and Harradine.

Mainstream feminism gains hugely from the medico-legal framework. And while the regime's predetermination regarding the performance of gender and reproductive roles essentialises female touch on children, which constitutes a form of oppression – patriarchal in nature – it is important to remember that the framework also naturalises hierarchies, which affluent women continue to exploit in order to secure their freedom: hierarchies between women, between women and men, between women, men and other gender-diverse individuals who already perform 'mother-work' (Rodgers, 2020), but are dissociated from it (see Chapters 2 and 3 in this thesis). Liberal feminist touch with regards to this issue is at best, I suggest, conflicted and confusing because, historically, women have constructed their political power on the strict separation of the sexes and labours. This entanglement or debt bears a huge legacy in the present. So, through my performance of kin and identity, I am also the force that exerts pressure, orientates, silences, stigmatises, excludes and confuses Jae. Their creative writing reveals the violence and pain of heteronormative social order that lays deep in conventions, all the way to the family cell, thereby illuminating the ambiguities and contradictions of hegemonic kinship and Western utopian ideals running through CI and

liberal feminism. Simultaneously, as Jae lays bare reductive stereotypes against the homosexual and trans body, it also becomes clear that both men and women share in oppression to an indeterminate extent. Certainly, sexism and misogyny are central to the stigmatisation of male maternal labours towards children: it reduces women to their reproductive functions/organs; while the disdain towards the female body gets transposed onto the male-born individual in homo/transphobia. But as with Amaia, the narrative of touch and kin is not simple, directing my attention once again to the nature of contact and the intricate field of sameness and difference, reminiscent of maternal-foetal relationality, that both entangles and separates Jae and me.

As with Amaia, Jae's notion of maternal touch and resistance is expanded. They offer an innovative lens through which to feel, think, act and experience which I suggest is valuable to the somatic discipline and the timely project of making it more inclusive and hospitable to diverse performers. Jae constructs their own counter haptics, dismantling desire from organ, sex from gender, gender from sexuality, sexuality from reproduction and modes of reproduction – a framework that echoes the more radical feminist somatic practices of Livingstone and Bindler, and Preciado's textual and performative provocations (2013; 2018). But Jae's narrative and our dialogue also offer a cautionary tale: if the body's modes of subversion and resistance are tactile and lie in the form of 'interruption' (Baraitser, 2009: 66, 68), 'discontinuity' (Hay, 2018), 'dis/organization' (Ahmed, 2006: 158), and inserting slipperiness in touch, Jae reminds me and the reader that acts of resistance, far from the traditional Western avant-gardist tenets (white and middle-class), bare real life and death consequences for those whose stories are told and interpreted by distant, privileged scholars like myself.[156] Ambivalence, in relation to our contact, my apprehension of the material and representation of Jae cannot, and perhaps should not be escaped, but cultivated as a form of ethics, potentially generative in its capacity to hold together firmly at once some of the complexities of touch, as they might unravel in the practice of CI and, more broadly, somatics between unsuspecting performers.

[156] Burt discusses the typically western avant-garde and privileged position of the Judson Dance Theatre group of which Paxton was a founding member (2006: 11; 117; 126).

# Chapter 5 Chloe

## INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic and the imposed restrictions on physical contact, brought with them new modes of communication and forms of contact, therefore touch, via Zoom and Teams. Those became instantly mainstream and part of everyday professional interaction, though not without challenges. Carved in everyone's memory is the frustration and fatigue associated with their use: screens that freeze, delayed sound, poor or complete loss of sound or image or both, interrupted connection. "Have I frozen, or have they?" It always took me a while to work it out. I would be mid-sentence or engrossed in listening and left bamboozled. And then, amid the confusion, hyperactivity would take over as I tried frantically to re-establish connection. With the success of mass vaccination campaigns in the Global North, Zoom and Teams have now mostly been dismissed, at least for local meetings, as people sought a return to normality and a type of contact, deemed unobliterated by technology: one that felt familiar, real and satisfying – above all, one that could be trusted to transmit, that is, pass on information (the definition of transmission), or so people assumed. The difficulty of my interaction with my last collaborator Chloe and its total breakdown, however, prompt me to approach my analysis of the complexities and ambiguities of touch differently. With the experience of Zoom still fresh in my mind, I set out to bring to the fore the equally imperfect transmission of touch that is, in my view, overlooked in CI and somatics, and contributes to neutralising the latent power relations that play out in and through touch in the context of CI, and at its margins (Mitra, 2021:10).

Drawing on the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, I grapple specifically with the gaps and tensions between Chloe and me that manifest through language, that is, through our email-enabled *contact*. In Chapter 1, I discussed how hegemonic discourse is haptic: it can promote an illusion of sameness or kinship that erases difference (Chidester, 2005: 54, engaging with Durkheim, 1965), coercing and invisibilising the specific needs of marginalised sections of society, with very real consequences because this only exacerbates the reality of their lived predicament. Why is such tension, and, even more so, my email communication with Chloe, relevant to CI and somatics? Chloe and I are unlikely to find ourselves in the CI studio because of her apprehension of touch and the often bullish way, even by Paxton's standards, that touch is practised. I posit that this is due to the discipline's limited understanding of it.[157] So email becomes the interface or metaphorical skin which enables a

[157] In 2019, Paxton asserts: '[CI] has a physiological beginning, and […] it's much more microscopic, […] sensitive, […] delicate, much finer than the way we are dancing it as we go bumping into each other, touching each other.' (Culturgest Lisbon, 2019)

contact that is already fragile, and otherwise would not happen. The sense of touch across distance, as the chapter evidences, is nonetheless stimulated, generating its own sensorial phenomenon and 'somatic conversions' (Preciado, 2018: 34), 'feedback' or 'translation' (Hay, 2016: 3), as would be expected in the studio through skin-to-skin. Here, I zoom in specifically on the sensual relationship between language/discourse and somatic affects and effects that produce and reproduce the senses and reorganise the body to inform action (Hay, 2016: 3).

I am speaking about the touch between two distinct though intersecting identities. Chloe is British and of Chinese ethnicity. She comes to the project as a woman 'marked' trans by society, who contemplates adopting a child in the future, and already has a maternal practice towards her friends and community; also, her art. She lives and works in London as a freelance artist/educator, and reports being in a low-income band. I am a white European, middle-class, cis heteronormative woman, biological mother and scholar. Our dialogue draws my attention to the limits of language to ever perhaps fully articulate the complexity and all-encompassing environment associated with exclusion in first-person narratives; and simultaneously, to all that mainstream language articulates beneath the level of consciousness. It is within this field of tensions and gaps that I consider the power relation that I unknowingly exert on Chloe in relation to the maternal; and the generative potential of ruptures, glitches and falling (sensorial, therefore somatic phenomena emanating from touch), in the same way that I consider that of slipping, tripping and recalibrating in my contact with Jae. I will ask: what do these reveal about touch, especially (my) hegemonic touch, and the politics, economics and hierarchies that it communicates? And how does Chloe's resistant touch manifest and perform upon me?

Chloe's account consists of only two auto-ethnographic handwritten pieces of creative writing (Fig. 26, Task 1, The Maternal Body; and Fig. 27, Task 2, Maternal Time), complemented by straight questions and answers. After Task 2, however, the task format was abandoned due to a breakdown in communication. I contacted Chloe three months later and we resumed our email dialogue. Soon after, Chloe invited me to visit her exhibition and I met with her over coffee (28 February 2020): our first in-person contact. This chapter does not focus on Chloe's Othermothering practice as I did with Amaia and Jae. Instead, it traces our unexpected struggle and co-labour (the etymology of collaboration) as maternal agents, made possible, I argue, by a reciprocated sense of touch/contact in remoteness and the tangible transmission, however fraught, between us. Indeed, co-labour is evident in Chloe's deeply personal and vivid output in the project and the manner she so readily and unequivocally, as I will discuss, resists, 'disrupt[s]' (Baraitser, 2009: 75-80), 'disjunct[s]'

(2009: 17), ‘interrupt[s]’ (ibid: 66, 68); ‘disorientat[es]’ (Ahmed, 2006: 157), brings about ‘crisis’ (Ahmed, 2006: 157; Baraitser, 2009: 52) and reorientates my semi-conscious and pre-determined attention (Bergson, 1988: 40). She makes me look again. In fact, Chloe urges me in no uncertain terms to do so. In contrast, Amaia and Jae’s calls are palpable but not explicitly articulated. Chloe’s touch prompts me to ‘Turn [my] Fucking Head’ (Hay, 2016: 103-5) and ‘enlarge [my] horizon’ (Hay, 2018).

Our interaction is highly strained, laborious, difficult and undesirable. However, it also strangely sets in motion the auto/ethnographic, ‘self-hacking’ (Paxton, 2018: 15-19) somatic process I lay out in the Introduction to my thesis: a process of experimentation and ‘noticing’ practice (Hay, 2016: 14; 85) that I admittedly sought, but to an extent did not anticipate. Certainly, our dialogue and its rupture force a reconsideration of the nature of the contact or touch that I establish with Chloe, and by extension my other collaborators. It compels me to go further yet into the unforeseen narratives and ideology locked within (my) mainstream, feminist, heteronormative touch which, indeed, ‘orient[ates]’ and ‘limit[s]’ ‘free play’ (Derrida, 1997: 115) and exacerbates pre-existing power differentials in the CI context (Mitra, 2021: 10). It pushes my auto-deconstructive approach to a new level of self-reflection and reflexivity, enabling me to find within our uneasy touch, the generative potential for different actions – referring to Hay, an extended movement experience (2016: 14).

### 1. A BRIEF NARRATION OF MY INTERACTION WITH CHLOE

To reflect my dialogue with Chloe and give the reader the necessary insight into the events, I deviate from previous chapters and present three extracts in a chronological manner. Extracts 1 and 2 include Chloe’s poem contributions to Task 1 (The Maternal Body) and Task 2 (Maternal Time) respectively, and the ensuing email exchange until our contact ruptures. Extract 3 relays our dialogue when it resumes. An in-depth analysis follows, paying careful attention to the overall form, trajectory and content of our conversation, thereby, justifying the chronological, rather than thematic, choice of presentation. I acknowledge that it is a lot of information, however, I deem it essential for my study. I also value relinquishing my own control of narrative by protecting Chloe’s voice, implicating the reader and inviting their own interpretation.

**Extract 1**

**Task 1, The Maternal Body: Chloe's diary poem**

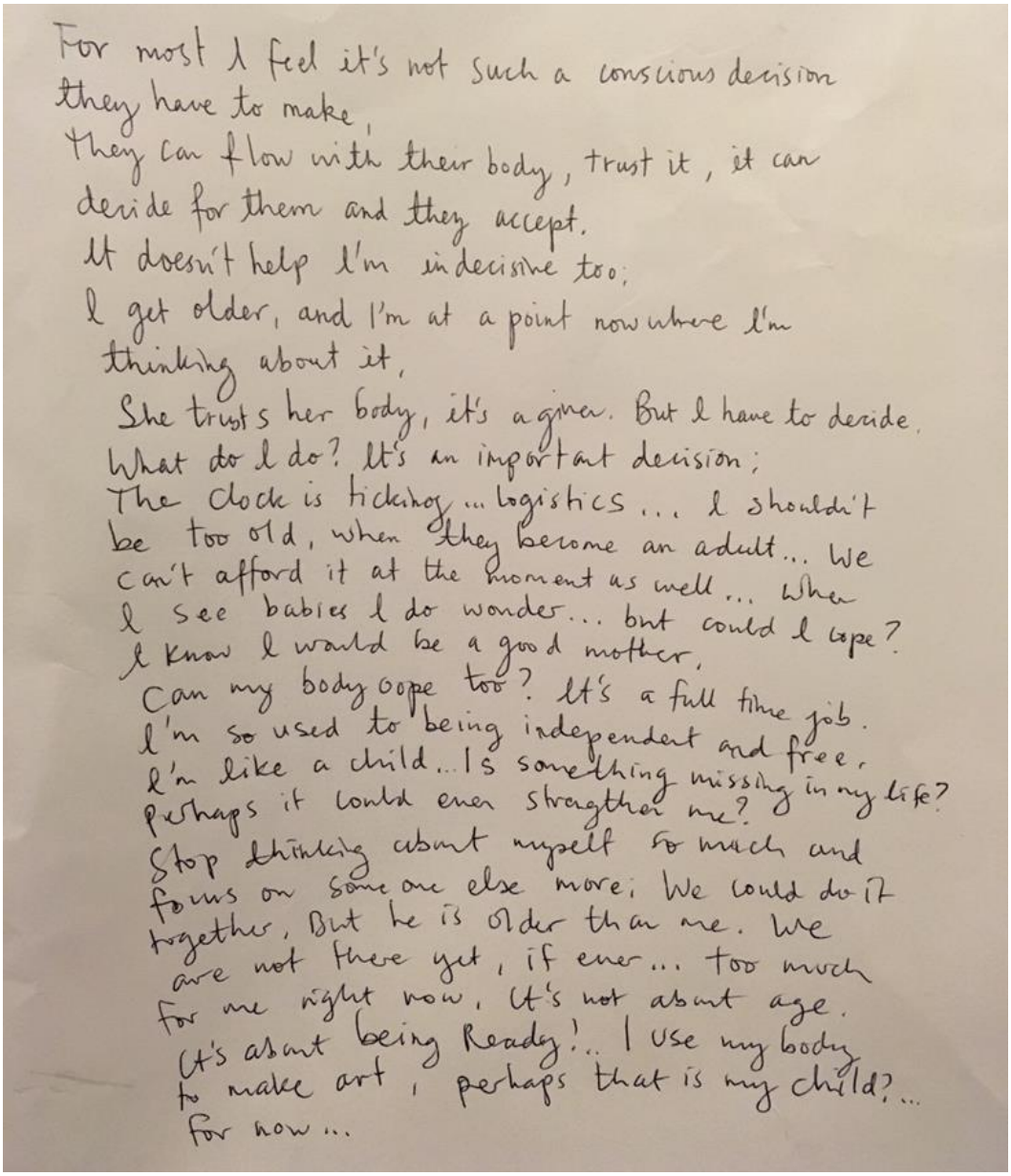

For most I feel it's not such a conscious decision
they have to make,
They can flow with their body, trust it, it can
decide for them and they accept.
It doesn't help I'm indecisive too;
I get older, and I'm at a point now where I'm
thinking about it,
She trusts her body, it's a given. But I have to decide.
What do I do? It's an important decision;
The clock is ticking ... logistics ... I shouldn't
be too old, when they become an adult... We
can't afford it at the moment as well... When
I see babies I do wonder... but could I cope?
I know I would be a good mother,
Can my body cope too? It's a full time job.
I'm so used to being independent and free,
I'm like a child... Is something missing in my life?
Perhaps it could even strengthen me?
Stop thinking about myself so much and
focus on someone else more; We could do it
together, But he is older than me. We
are not there yet, if ever... too much
for me right now, It's not about age.
It's about being Ready!.. I use my body
to make art, perhaps that is my child?...
for now...

Fig. 26
Photograph of Chloe's writing (Task 1, The Maternal Body) provided by the artist.

**Extract 1: Email exchange**

I follow Chloe's response with a prompt which leads to a series of emails between us and which I relay in this section. I have taken the liberty to reduce content where appropriate to focus on key elements. I have also aimed to maintain the form and some of the density of Chloe's emails as both are important aspects of my analysis.

**Me:** *Dear Chloe, I wonder whether you could tell me a bit more about your own body, its attributes, and reproductive freedoms or challenges. Would you be able to tell me*

*a bit more about how your body relates to your art as a physical and imaginary matter?*

**Chloe:** *Hi Maud, these are certainly challenging questions and ones that I have to face every day as many do in my position do. I think like my art I leave a lot to what the audience will interpret themselves. As a 'transwoman' I never speak about my body in that way, as I feel this is part of the struggle to be integrated normally into society and to seek autonomy. My art is very much about not attributing too much to physicality and it is perhaps a fight and an obstacle that in myself and for many others, is a social struggle and a fight for normalisation. I always divert attention from biology because that can be very misleading and give very little information about the person. My situation makes me wonder: does the body matter that much and why should it dictate my life and my decisions? A lot of my concerns are very much mental concerns. Social limitations placed upon us that make us question ourselves. I'm very concerned about the mind but it seems that people look to other parts of the body more. My question is why is that? That is very important to me. For if a person wants a child and is maternal, should their maternal be dictated by biology rather than personality, temperament, personal needs and expression?. I try to reprogram myself to think about that and not about binary concepts. Is that physical? I guess physical is more than just what we think it is and in my position I guess I should be asking more questions and question these ideas. For example, if a cis woman is infertile or not able to have a child biologically, there are some relationships here, especially emotionally and mentally. My concern is not to look at my body too much because to define myself that way is to further segregate and limit myself, but also to undermine my innate capabilities and needs. Art comes to me naturally. It is like a child to me because it comes from me. I nurture and produce my artwork and I let them go out into the world and I have no control of them anymore. They have a life of their own and they also interact with the world. Everything I create is hand made. I have a close and physical and emotional relationship with what I do, which is a contemporary form of the ancient Chinese art practice, paper cutting. It is a part of me just as any child is a part of their parent I suppose. I am very spiritual so I wonder: am I living vicariously through my art or by nurturing friends and family? Or am I actually having children in some soulful way? I think the answer has always been to not define or label things too strictly because I am on a path to be and if I want to be I have to allow that without thinking too much about it.*

*I Hope this does not seem too abrupt. I am just writing it as I feel and think.*

**Me:** *Hi Chloe, apologies for any misunderstanding. I never meant for you to describe your body in any way that is oppressive or binary. Quite the opposite in fact. You helpfully point to your creative practice as a 'touch' practice via the physical and spiritual dimension of the body, as I read it. Those were the characteristics both real and imagined that I was inviting you to reflect upon. I respect the line that you are drawing. And I apologise for upsetting you.*

**Chloe:** *Hi Maud, you did not upset me at all. I guess I was just voicing out things that I think are good to say in general especially in this area that is not very much talked about (trans and parenthood). And I hope that I did not sound negative in any way in my email. I think it is good to be open about these feelings because it is a relatively new thing to deal with in society. I think this is a good approach to the whole exercise for me and hopefully for others as well.*

*You say what you want to say and don't feel that you cannot. It is all a learning curve. I have been through a lot and I am becoming a tougher person for it. I also feel like I am being the woman that I am and have always been. And the real hurdle for me is to really accept that of myself, rather than seek it from others, which is such a common thing for anyone to want – acceptance and to belong.*

**Me:** *Thanks Chloe, I guess this is the 'collaborative' part of the project: the capacity and will to be in dialogue? You make some very good points about the social limitations placed on bodies. However, I notice that you speak often in general term. I wish you could come to the fore and explain what those social conditions are around yourself, if you felt able to. I am glad that we can continue this conversation.*

**Chloe:** *Hi Maud, For me I feel very awkward about being a woman. I have not been raised to believe in myself in that way. Trans people are educated to doubt themselves and mistrust their feelings, wants and intuition. And we are certainly not encouraged or made to believe that we can be parents. We are segregated from society in this respect. Trans people and LGBTQ+ are not free and not allowed to aspire to make very normal decisions like having children. We are taught very binary things and it all goes wrong from here.*

*For example, my cis friends and family of my generation think nothing of getting married and having children. I have never been encouraged to do so by my elders*

*and have in fact been discouraged because it is seen as complicated maybe, or abnormal. I would feel very awkward getting married as many members of my family would not be there for me in ways that they are for my cousin and sister. I would feel under a very negative spotlight.*

*The funny thing about being trans is that people focus so much on it being a physical dilemma and of course in some ways it is. But it is very much more than just this. It is about the difficulty of being a functioning human being: getting a job, finding a partner, marriage and kids, fundamental things are not fundamental to us. There is more awareness today but really there is far to go for myself and many of the trans people I know and have met. We don't live in a society yet where it is seen as normal. It is almost like we are another species and what does that do to our mental health when we are aware of this separateness? How can we raise children when we are so troubled, that is not a good place to be.*

*I have a friend who cannot be herself or transition because she has children and has sacrificed herself for their safety. What does that say about society? To ask exactly what the problem is, is not answerable. For myself I was brought up to think I was wrong. I knew at the age of three that I was a girl. I also knew not to tell anyone. So, I guess whatever that child felt and was taught was a kind of trauma, one that is still present. Even in London transpeople live in fear. They have conflicts within them, they have conflicts with people outside of them. Many have mental health issues as a result. Again, I know many who do. For myself, I feel I am not normal. This was engrained in me since I was a child.*

*What is society? It is everything: education, family, your peers, etc., and I speak in general terms because it is a very general problem for us. And then on top of that, do women have to have children? This is the very question I have now as well. My female friends inspire me and educate me about a lot of female issues today. I am a woman. Do I want children? Or is this the idea that I feel I should? I would make a good mother, but do I have to have children to be maternal? I feel maternal towards some of my friends, even family members. I also volunteer and help others in need. Am I being a kind of mother there? Do I feel pressure that I should have children at a certain age? There are many layers of social pressures and expectations I am dealing with here. And I feel this pressure now that I am 40. But why do I when it's not my body clock telling me this?*

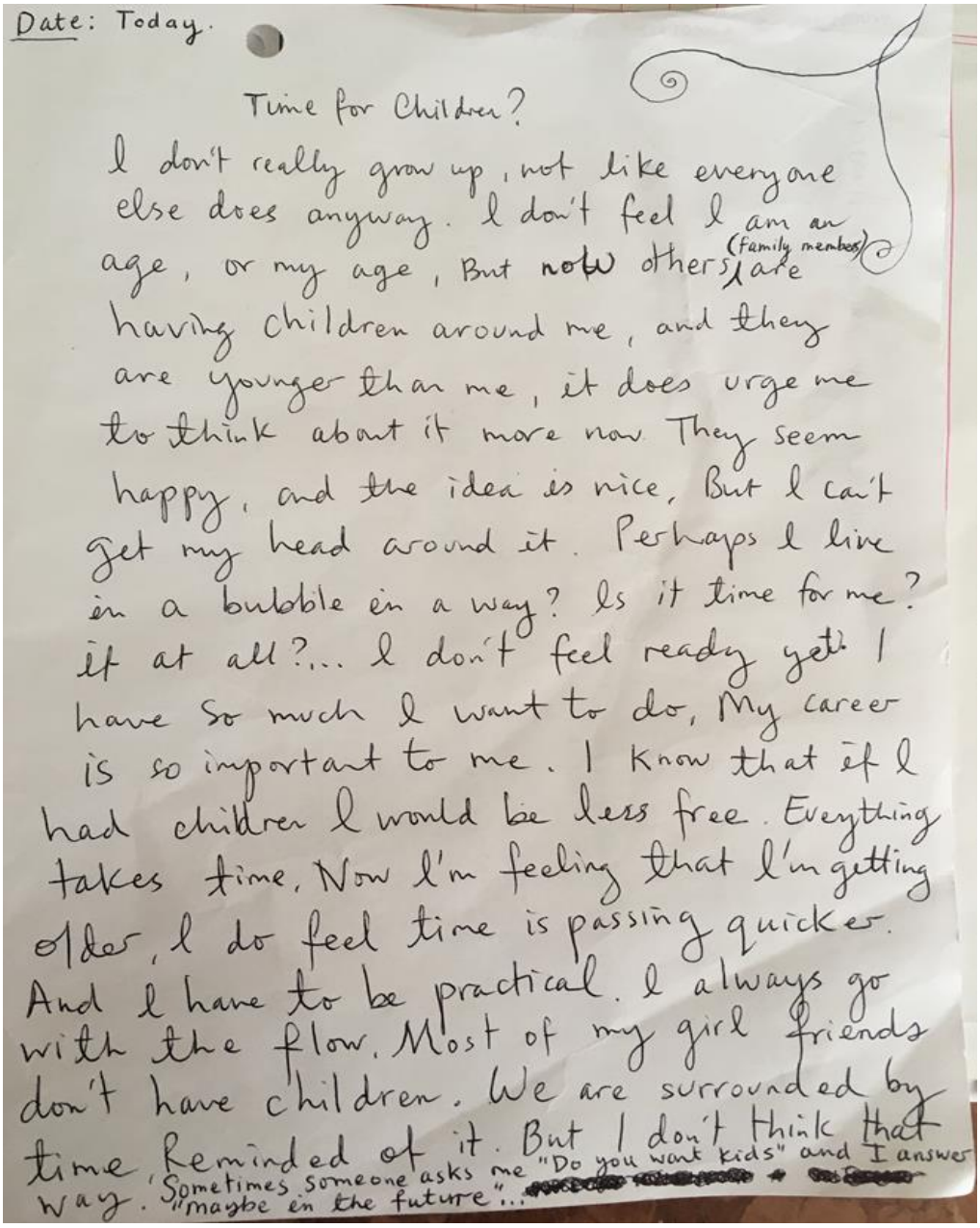
*For the new generations of LGBTQ+ it is getting better though it's not really good enough. If you feel alienated as a child, you feel that you are not a part of anything. So much has to change education-wise to fight everyday discrimination, prejudice and violence, but not many people would allow this especially for children who are seen as needing to be protected from it. And then any thoughts of marriage, kids, jobs, etc., are secondary concerns. The main concern will be to survive mentally and emotionally as an outsider.*

*Sorry I do write a lot here. I really can't write enough about it as more questions breed even more questions. It's a complicated situation because society just doesn't know how to fit us in neatly yet...*

*The main thing is that I'm learning to figure out what kind of woman I am. But I do feel that I have to get over my personal issues before I can even think about marriage, kids, jobs, etc.*

**Extract 2**

**Task 2, Maternal Time: Chloe's diary poem**


Date: Today.

Time for Children?

I don't really grow up, not like everyone else does anyway. I don't feel I am an age, or my age, But now others (family members) I are having children around me, and they are younger than me, it does urge me to think about it more now. They seem happy, and the idea is nice, But I can't get my head around it. Perhaps I live in a bubble in a way? Is it time for me? if at all?... I don't feel ready yet. I have so much I want to do, My career is so important to me. I know that if I had children I would be less free. Everything takes time. Now I'm feeling that I'm getting older, I do feel time is passing quicker. And I have to be practical. I always go with the flow. Most of my girl friends don't have children. We are surrounded by time. Reminded of it. But I don't think that way. Sometimes someone asks me "Do you want kids" and I answer "maybe in the future"...

Fig. 27
Photograph of Chloe' writing (Task 2, Maternal Time) provided by the artist.

**Email exchange**

**Me:** *Hi Chloe, my reading tells me that you are not inscribing yourself or your experience in your writing. Remember that the call-out was for unconventional experiences of the maternal. My initial understanding was that your creative art practice had a maternal character and also your transition was an unconventional and marginalised perspective that would enrich the project. However, neither feature in your writing. Would it be useful to skype each other to talk it through?*

**Chloe:** *Dear Maud, I appreciate your guidance, but I don't feel the initial criticism was founded, helpful nor constructive. I also have found some of your other emails to be quite abrupt in their tone, which has made me feel uncomfortable. You have said that I do not appear in my answer, nor my experiences and say it is "general". Can I not have mundane and general feelings? Am I meant to answer in such a way that is only 'unconventional' and 'marginalised'? I feel quite strange about this project because you say your project is inclusive, however I feel that you are quite segregating and restrictive in your language. I do not see myself as only unconventional and I certainly wouldn't label myself as such. It is almost like you are saying you want a uniquely artist or trans point of view, whatever that may be. Do you think they cannot be similar in many ways to people who are not artists or trans? Perhaps your expectations are something that is interesting to look into.*

*Judging by the tone of your emails so far, I fear that a Skype call could result in some sort of heated conflict and I would not like that at all. I think maybe it is best that I drop out of this project as it does not seem harmonious to me and I feel upset by it so far.*

**Me:** *Dear Chloe, I suggested a skype to avoid any possible misread of tone or content. You have said in past emails that you welcomed dialogue, hence I felt appropriate to share my thoughts. But my intention was never to upset you. It is important however to remain faithful to the project which called for 'unconventional' and 'marginalised' experiences. If it is the case that you misunderstood and/or do not self-identify as unconventional nor marginalised then, unfortunately, your experience does not fit the remit of the project, and I wish you the very best with your own projects and endeavours. [24/10/19]*

**Extract 3**

Three months later….

**Me:** *Dear Chloe, I wanted to reach out to you because I have thought a lot about our conversation in the last few months. I realise that there is a lot that I don't know and that a level of prejudice and assumptions were at play which I want to apologise sincerely for. I also realise that I was making demands of you and demanding huge work by asking you to put into language an experience for which, I suspect, words/language are not adequate and might not yet exist. You have shared generously on emails elements of your experience which I would love to incorporate*

*in the project with your permission. I feel that it's a hugely valuable insight that you bring. [21 Jan 2020]*

**Chloe:** *Dear Maud, thank you for writing about all this. I fully appreciate what you have said because I did feel very uneasy with it at the time. I feel you have learned a very important thing, that this is not so much a niche issue but rather a human right one. We are all human beings with human needs and ideas after all. It is vital to unite everyone rather than divide especially in these very uncertain times. I was shocked and surprised that you had these prejudices, but again maybe I made assumptions that you studying in one of the top forward thinking art colleges, as well as being a younger generation student that you would understand a lot more than you did. This proves that there is a lot to learn. You may of course include my contribution because it can only be a positive thing to have some voice. I am fighting a fight that you and many other people are not fighting, and although you care about the cause, you are not going through it and that does mean that many people do not really see what it's like or can even comprehend certain aspects. I wonder if you'd like to come to my next solo exhibition? Perhaps you would find it interesting or further enlightening. [21 Jan 2020]*

**Me**: *Dear Chloe, I would love to attend the exhibition. It would really be lovely to meet up and talk. I look forward to it. [26 Jan 2020]*

## 2. TACTILE AMBIVALENCE: CHLOE'S PUZZLE AND ASTUTE REORIENTATIONS

In this section, I relay my admittedly limited subjective experience of Chloe's writing when I say that The Maternal Body Task unravels from the start a puzzle that Chloe brings to the project. The call-out, to which Chloe responded, clearly stated a focus on unconventional and marginalised maternal experiences. However, Chloe's creative writing (Figs. 26 and 27), as I read it, eludes any sign of marginalisation, if not, for a furtive differentiation between her and, I deduce, cis women like myself, in the qualifiers 'they', 'she' and 'her' (Task 1, Fig. 26). In this respect, her contribution differs from that of Amaia and Jae who share so openly and willingly about their predicament. Chloe could be said to perform, instead, normativity. She raises common questions and concerns that most cis women contend with when thinking about starting a family. It is, of course, a life-changing decision often interwoven with thoughts about age, money, support network; how it will impact existing lifestyle, career and necessarily stretch one's physical and mental capacities (Extracts 1 and 2). When I probe, Chloe immediately stresses how challenging my questions are to her as a trans woman and to many in her community (Extract 1, email exchange). She quickly works to re-direct my

attention away from the body and biology, she explains, to resist Othering herself and re-claim 'autonomy' and humanity (ibid). The shift in focus constitutes an early manifestation of Chloe's touch, that is, Chloe's astute manipulation and attempt to reorientate my hegemonic discourse.[158]

I suggest that my collaborator articulates paradoxical movements which generate a certain tactile ambiguity between us, leaving me uncertain as to Chloe's suitability for the project.[159] Ambiguity, for example, lies in the fact that she brings herself voluntarily into view by instigating contact and participating in this project. On the other hand, she makes herself vanish in her writing. She is both seemingly reaching out and retracting. I also note that she addresses my questions generously and reports being open to them and, indeed, wanting herself to question more. In Extract 1 (email exchange), she states: 'in my position I guess I should be asking more questions and question these [binary] ideas'. In the next email, 'you did not upset me at all. I think it is good to be open about these feelings because it is a relatively new thing to deal with in society. I think this is a good approach to the whole exercise for me and hopefully for others as well. You say what you want to say and don't feel that you cannot, it is all a learning curve' (ibid). Simultaneously, I sense an uneasy undercurrent developing or 'sticky visco[sity]' (Baraitser, 2013: 412). Chloe emits signs that she is wary of and frustrated by my probing. She communicates this subtly, I believe, when she refers to 'being abrupt', 'becoming a tougher person', and no longer 'seek[ing]' 'accept[ance]' 'from others' (Extract 1). In the ensuing email, her exasperation is finally explicit. She makes two incisive statements: '[t]o ask exactly what the problem is is not answerable' and 'I speak in general terms because it is a very general problem for us.'[160]

Running parallel, my prompts are met with, what I would describe as, 'gush-like' emails in their flow, density and length, seemingly spurring straight from the body. They contain a deluge of questions, perhaps rhetorical, perhaps to herself, perhaps directed at me, I am unclear: 'why is that?', 'Is that physical?', 'How can we raise children[?]', *'*What is society?'*,* 'Do I want children?', 'Do I feel pressure [to have them?]' (Extract 1, email exchange). And while opening up her auto-inquiry in profound and, no doubt, unsettling ways, Chloe's emails also begin to feel like self-defence: an attempt to push back and push me back. In effect, Chloe's body, its physicality and forceful touch, performs: it comes to life in her email.[161]

[158] As previous footnotes, 'manipulation' means to emphasise the presence of touch. I realise that 'othering' has different definitions. 'Othering is a process whereby individuals and groups are treated and marked as different and inferior from the dominant social group' (Oxford dictionary). I use the term, however, as Baraitser (2009) does, that is, from a psychoanalytical perspective, to refer to other people, different from self, one is in relation to.
[159] By suitability, I mean Chloe's capacity to contribute of her own accord like Amaia and Jae, and without causing harm.
[160] By 'incisive' I make a node to Chloe's paper cutting art which some of her friends have described as violent and which surprised her (interview with the artist, 28 February 2020).
[161] Based on the etymology of performance as per the Introduction to my thesis.

Chloe 'write[s] her self' (Cixous, 1976: 875-893.). She is 'writing [her] body' in Nancy's terms (Komel, 2023). 'Writing not about the body, but rather writing the body […] Not the signs, images, codes of the body, but rather, again, the body.' (ibid)[162] And I sense that she is warning me not to come any closer.

I hypothesize that my collaborator's tactile ambiguities communicate, like I have discussed in relation to Jae, various degrees of conflicts, internal and otherwise. Indeed, Chloe lucidly explains that conflict lies in her trans experience, namely, her 'mental health' and 'personal issues' (Extract 1). By this, she means, I believe, her own sense of confusion and ambivalence as she negotiates in tandem the trauma of childhood (being born male and forced to perform this gender while always knowing herself to be female) and, now a woman, the new societal expectation pressed upon her to get married and have children as proof of her natural womanhood (ibid). In her own words, '[she is] learning to figure out what kind of woman [she is]' (Extract 2). So, though Chloe may seek to explore these aspects of her experience, and I never doubted that she did genuinely, it is conceivable that she may not be able to because they are deeply entangled with pain and distress. There is another site of conflict, however, which I did not foresee when I started this project and did not understand at first in relation to Chloe, because it sits outside my mainstream experience. It did not occur to me that any of my collaborators would not entrust themselves to the process and me. I realise now that I assumed the type of trust that is a pre-requisite of CI and somatics where physical touch and close proximity to other participants are omnipresent (Sarco-Thomas, 2020: 140); also the type of trust that I have observed in performance workshops, in and out of university and dance schools, where participants give themselves over to the teacher.

Guillemin *et al.* write that the institution is an important aspect of participants entrusting themselves to a research project (2018: 287); nevertheless, in targeting marginalised communities, the researcher may need to earn their trust (ibid: 290). As a matter of fact, Chloe does state that she perceives Goldsmiths to be a 'top' innovative and progressive institution and assumes, therefore, that I am much younger than I am, which may have been significant in signing up to the project (Extract 3).[163] I did not anticipate that Chloe might be cautious around those who do not belong to her community; that she might be wary of my cis heteronormative maternal touch upon her: of our contact. This facet of our interaction goes to the core of Mitra's critique of CI touch which frames my thesis because it homes in on how societal power differentials complicate and impair the capacity for touch and

[162] See also, Derridean 'writing': 'Writing isn't signifying' in Komel (2023).
[163] Chloe and I are, in fact, relatively the same age. I am two years older.

movement in and out of the studio, and the invisible materials immanent to touch. It may surprise the reader to learn that the trauma of oppression and discrimination has a somatic dimension: it 'play[s] out in sensory networks, the nervous system, and the vagus nerve that connect many parts of the body' and 'puts [the body] on constant high alert, a survival response useful to [shield] against additional trauma.' (Kraybill in psychologytoday.com, 2018)[164] As such, lack of trust and fear of being marked different, for it breeds harm and more fear of harm, are intensified by the fraught power dynamics that exist between us as women, maternal agents and scholar/non-scholar. Therefore, by focussing on expressing what I describe as 'general feelings' (Extract 1 & 2) that do not set her apart, Chloe, in fact, self-protects. She reminds me that our dialogue is not an abstracted discourse about difference: comfortably distant because merely intellectual. This is life where difference or, rather, being seen as different motivates brutality and kills. I realise this now.

Shortly after Task 2, our contact breaks down. Chloe reports having felt 'uncomfortable' and 'upset' by my emails which she felt were 'abrupt' (Extract 2, email exchange). She observes: 'I feel quite strange about this project because you say your project is inclusive, however I feel that you are quite segregating and restrictive in your language.' (ibid) She leaves me with a perplexing invitation of her own: '[p]erhaps your expectations are something that is interesting to look into.' (ibid) Though cutting, I posit that her intervention is above all courageous and generous. What Chloe's touch expresses, through the many layered contradictions, paradoxicalities and confrontations, as I experienced them, is that my methodology, which I sought to be inclusive and consensual, is inhospitable and that it further alienates and discriminates against her.[165] She tells me that my own touch is ambiguous and in conflict. She asks me to consider the manner that it too reaches out and pushes away. In turn, by taking in Chloe's tactile cues and reopening communication with her, what I communicate is that I consent to being touched, that is, being moved and altered by Chloe's contact (Preciado's 'somatic conversions' (2018: 34), Hay's 'feedback' or 'translation' (2016: 3)). This means that I consent to share equally in vulnerability, to experiment, 'notice' (Hay, 2016: 31) my senses reorganising (ibid: 85) and 'an infinite source of movement material already happening in my body' (ibid: 104). What follows is an unexpected narrative about touch and transmission that, I propose, might renew the understanding of touch in somatics and enhance its performance.

[164] Kraybill is an Israeli trauma therapist and scholar.
[165] Alienation means: made separate, estranged. Chloe uses the word 'segregate' (Extract 1).

## 3. HOLDING ON TO THE COMPLEXITY OF OUR CONTACT: STICKINESS, GLITCH AND FAILURE IN TOUCH

Although the decision to end the collaboration initially felt final, the event, not least Chloe's last invitation, left me with questions which stuck, lingered and called for my attention. Did I confuse probing and prodding? What were, indeed, my intentions and expectations? How ethical was the nature of my contact towards Chloe and my other collaborators? Then, other questions arose: what happens when contact fails? What does it reveal about touch? Can ruptures in dialogue ever be generative? The fraught contact between Chloe and I instigated the type of somatic phenomenon and lingering stickiness which Baraitser introduces in *Maternal Encounters* (2009) under the term 'viscosity' (ibid: 128-9) and Irigaray, under that of 'mucous' (1984) both of which I discuss in my dialogue with Jae. Baraitser and Irigaray, albeit differently, associate these invisible materials to touch and claim their presence in all social interactions. Baraitser particularly offers insights pertinent to my rapport with Chloe pointing in viscosity to the sensation of unease and 'friction' (2009: 129) that is brought on by being in contact with things and people that 'resis[t]' (ibid) one's habitual touch, and therefore, demands a unhabitual somatic response – a recalibration (borrowing from Sharma, 2014: 14). The latter, in turn, propels a retracing of the body, that is, new neural pathways to form and connect, leaving both parties altered (Freud's 'somatic compliance' (1905) and Grosz' 'plasticity' (1994: 54) in Chapter 1). The sensation of stickiness, tripping or slipperiness which I experienced with Jae is extended with Chloe to the sensation of rupture and failure: an abrupt fall that induces stillness.[166] It is the story of a strange, unwanted, jagged touch left flustered and restless for it both did and did not transmit. It stopped, yet it lingers across time. Stimulated by Baraitser's own inquiry into 'the "something" that may happen in the gap' or 'tiny interval' (ibid: 82) that 'crisis' (ibid: 52) precipitates which might be 'generative and enlivening' (ibid: 82), I turn to Lacan to explore indeed what happens somatically (at the level of sensorial experience) when the touch that manifests through language/discourse, in this case email communication, fails.[167]

Lacan writes enigmatically that 'language is meant to be misunderstood' (Perman, 2018). He argues that because we are speaking beings (Bailly, 2013: 41), language structures the subject's unconscious and experience (ibid: 42). The unconscious refers to the subject's thoughts which are repressed and, by definition, inexpressible. The realm of the unsayable, however, is not neatly contained. It lurks beneath the surface and emits signs, as it slips out and lets itself slip in everyday action/speech, giving clues into the unconscious' continuous,

[166] I thank Claid for sharing that failing and falling are connected etymologically (*Falling through dance and life* lecture as part of Performance Artistic Research Lab or PeARL, 2 October 2021)
[167] See also Ahmed who describes queer phenomenology as 'moments of disorientation' which might 'be the source of vitality', 'joy and excitement in the horror.' (2006: 4)

but neglected, presence and force (Bailly, 2013: 42). The Freudian slip of the tongue is a famous example (ibid).[168] For Lacan, desire is a dynamic, if elusive, 'by-product of language' (ibid: 109). In effect, he asserts that there is a gap between what is articulated in language and the desire laying behind the demand (ibid: 110-15). This fracture inherent to language is not overcome as the subject moves from child to adult and '[its] language becomes more sophisticated, because [the subject's] needs become increasingly complex too, and its ability to express them confounded by increasing internal conflicts.' (ibid: 113) What Lacan establishes clearly though is the pernicious narrative of desire which assumes that the Other has what one seeks, that is, the assumption that the Other does not lack as one does (ibid: 110).[169] Lacan assimilates such presuppositions, or movement towards the Other, to a call for 'love', but he also warns that it is too harmful for it transmits preconceived ideas which are the order of fantasy (Lacan, 2006: 524). Following Lacan, language and desire in language are mediated by internal conflicts and fictional narratives that leave an 'interval' (Baraitser, 2009: 82) or discordance between what one says and what one communicates. This is what Chloe, I believe, draws my attention to.

In digital technology, a rupture is associated with a glitch, the name given to 'malfunctions' (Betancourt, 2017: 2) and 'technical failures' (ibid: 3). A glitch is understood to be 'the result of aberrant and apparent "abnormal" renderings' (ibid: 3). 'It describes the transition from a world identified with continuity and the pixelated, sampled world' (ibid). Like misunderstandings or slips, '[glitches] are typically ignored when encountered' (ibid: 6) and 'cast out of consciousness' (ibid). They are seen as 'insignifican[t]' (ibid: 7) and a mere 'intrusion upon the idealized' (ibid: 6) smooth, continuous flow of digital transmission. Glitch Art moves 'these [technological] malfunctions' (ibid: 2) or 'blind spots' (ibid: 7) 'centre stage' to expose 'the established codes of perception and order' (ibid: 6) and 'their ideological foundations' (ibid: 7): Derrida's 'structurality of the structure' (1997). In our high-technological era, it is easy to overlook that language is too a technology, that is, a method, system and instrument for communication and exchange designed for the purpose of relating and interaction, in other words, contact. Similarly to Glitch Art, Lacan's statement 'language is meant to be misunderstood' puts forth that mishaps in communication are not only inescapable but opportunity rich because when language and the potential for touch and connection fail, what comes to the fore in the gap left by the event, and, into the light, is the subject's bare and its frustrated desire (Bailly, 2013: 110, 112) – as mine was. That is why gaps are 'meant to be' because glitches and failures in communication, as was in my previous chapter the sense of slipperiness and tripping with Jae, jolts the subject as it

[168] Also called 'parapraxis', the Freudian slip means a blunder in speech or action that reveals one's unconscious desire.
[169] The term 'Other' is capitalised in this section to reflect psychoanalytical discourse.

attempts to absorb the Other into sameness. They force it to move beyond mere repeatable and familiar signs to discover itself what it is that it does mean and desire, and steer it towards a state of self-reflexivity.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, a Portuguese scholar in sociology writes that '[s]elf-reflexivity [as] the discovery of hetero-referentiality, is the first step towards the recognition of the epistemological diversity of the world.' (2007: xxi) He argues that finding oneself unexpectedly in relation to difference potentially leads to a transformative moment, that is, a realisation of the huge variety of methods, tools and ways of being, already existing in the world and, perhaps, yet to be imagined. I want to suggest that self-reflexivity and desire are closely connected. For Lacan, desire, that is, its structure, mechanisms and expression, is shaped and 'rule[d]' (Bailey, 2013: 111) by the discourse of the Other, that is, the discourse of culture and representations the subject is immersed in and precedes it: mother, father, wider family, friends, colleagues, discipline, institutions, society and the legacy of history (ibid). As such, I deduce that the hetero-referential, self-reflexive movement that de Souza Santos speaks of and that I eventually experience following the breakdown between me and Chloe, does not solely put into question the preconceptions (and the desire that animates them) buried within my touch and which are unique to me. It also confronts, through me, the Global North epistemological project of academia, and its own haptics.

Looking back, I set out for my epistemology to account for various degrees of access. I recognised the need for a polyvocal discourse around maternal touch. I followed up early feedback from interested parties and gave consideration to my collaborators' resources to eliminate barriers to their taking part. This saw me move my studio-based methodology to digital email communication, an innovative decision taken before the pandemic, that is, before access became a mainstream concern.[170] By seeking contributions from others, my epistemology also assigned shared knowledge and expertise, though I can see that this point could and should have been emphasised both on consent forms and in early exchange, even maybe reiterated throughout to build and nurture trust, demystify the figure of the researcher/academic and its authority on knowledge, and thereby diffuse some of the power relations between us. My epistemology trips itself, however, by assuming the universality of language (Haraway, 2016: 34), that is, the presumption that my mainstream and discipline-specific language transposes easily to other strands of performance or social contexts; and promoting a one-size-fits-all framework which could be said to deny the diversity of meanings, instruments and approaches (de Sousa Santos, 2007: xxi) and the

[170] I redesigned my methodology in September 2019.

appropriateness of their application with different participants. It also takes, I realise, an uneasy, though quintessentially Western, interventionist and 'extractivist' (ibid) orientation that runs the risk of exploiting and alienating already vulnerable and marginalised individuals with scarce resources. Orientation, as I lay in the Introduction to my thesis, is of course, a key element of somatics, encapsulated by Deborah Hay's famous command: 'Turn Your Fucking Head' (2016: 103-5).

Livingstone is on point when she raises with me the often-fraught economy of research, itself reflective of the wider economy of academia, as other people's creative work and voices become artefacts, organised and neatly folded into another person's academic project (conversation with the artist, 14 May 2021).[171] She asked me: how does the artist benefit? How are resources shared equitably in that process? (ibid). Certainly, the assumptions I came unwittingly to the project with and desire of smooth uninterrupted transmission (Haraway, 2016: 34) would appear to communicate, in Haraway's words, a latent 'imperializing' and 'totalizing' dream (ibid: 19). It is a symbiotic fiction of unbroken 'unity' and 'whole[ness]' (ibid: 21) enabled by the 'matrix' (ibid: 21) of 'unity-through-domination' and 'incorporation' (ibid: 20) as 'an organic or natural standpoint' (ibid: 20). Essentialism and determinism render the matrix unquestionable and make it recede from the researcher's horizon: Derrida's elusive 'structurality of the structure' (1997: 115-20). These are some, I believe, of the unavowable narratives that laid dormant, structured and drove my sense of touch, succeeding, despite better intentions, in alienating Chloe. Such narratives are generative of the ambiguities and conflicts within my touch which Chloe lucidly confronts when she states '[p]erhaps your expectations are something that is interesting to look into' (Extract 2, email exchange) and, I propose, might be useful to bring to somatics to work through the prevalent issues of power relation exacerbated by touch in the studio and at the borders of the discipline.

Following de Sousa Santos, Haraway and Mitra, what my contact with Chloe exposes resoundingly is the hegemonic white and cis heteronormative privileged orientation and force which my own touch performs and exerts upon her. I am referring to the faint but potent traces of imperialism and colonialism that sediment hierarchies and the status quo my project reproduces, just as I attempt to foster an inclusive touch and make my collaborators' voice and presence appear – a conundrum and force equally encountered by my peers in the feminist maternal scholars Underwood-Lee and Šimić' (2021: 14-5 in the Contextualisation chapter of my thesis). In the next section, I zoom in further on this tension

[171] Livingstone is the choreographer of *Male Breast Feeding*.

within touch inflected by orientation: its capacity to make appear and disappear, to give and to withdraw, simultaneously. I turn to queer feminist discourse and mainstream culture to analyse how trans experience is represented and narrated, and how acts of appearance and disappearance on the trans subject might unfold.

## 4. WHEN TOUCH PERFORMS ACTS OF APPEARANCE AND DISAPPEARANCE ON THE TRANS SUBJECT

Chloe's scalpel-like observations '[t]o ask exactly what the problem is is not answerable' and '[p]erhaps your expectations are something that is interesting to look into' (Extract 2) draw me to Halberstam's meditation: 'I will be asking here what kind of truths about gender we demand from the lives of people who pass or cross-dress or simply refuse normative gender categories.' (2000: 62) How might society and academic research look upon, use and exploit trans experience and embodiment to produce new knowledge and shape human narrative? In other words, what might academia and society seek from trans people? And might mainstream benevolence, like my own project, hide other motivations, performing in its midst acts of appearance and disappearance on already marginalised individuals under the pretence of space and visibility? In *Second Skins: the body narratives of transsexuality* (1998) Jay Prosser, a cultural critic and scholar, reflects on contemporary gender theory on transsexuality.[172] Taking Halberstam as an example, he writes: 'for Judith Halberstam the transsexual is the apogee of postmodern identity, transition illustrating that the sex/gender system is a fiction […] We are all transsexuals and there are no transsexuals. Transexuals 'r' us, full of postmodern liberatory promise'. (1998: 14) He warns, however, that '[i]n readings that embrace the transsexual […], the referential transsexual subject [and their reality] can frighteningly disappear in his/her very invocation.' (1998: 14)

Prosser also responds similarly to Butler's provocative text *Gender Trouble* (1990). Specifically, he critiques Butler's praise of gender transgression in *Paris is Burning* (1990) trans character, Venus Xtravaganza, noting that 'Venus holds out for Butler the promise of queer subversion, precisely as her transsexual trajectory is incomplete', that is, because 'she doesn't get to complete her narrative trajectory and realize her desires' and 'still has a penis at her death.' (ibid: 49) He adds that Butler's commend of a Latina trans woman and sex worker who is unable to complete sex reassignment due to abject poverty, who therefore, 'oscillat[es]' between sexes and genders against her will, and whom, upon being exposed, is killed in a transphobic attack 'verges on critical perversity' (ibid). Butler not only overlays her own narrative and motives onto the trans subject, thereby obscuring it, but, disturbingly, as

[172] Prosser is himself transsexual (1998: 1).

Prosser observes, she 'locates transgressive value in that which makes the subject's real life most unsafe' (ibid) – the unfixed nature of her gender. Lewis points to a similar orientation in feminist anti-capitalist academic discourse in relation to non-normative forms of kinship or Othermothering arising predominantly in the 'trans, black, sex-working, migrant, and queer communities' (2019: 147): the predominantly, though not exclusively, female-led 'kinning' (ibid) practice originated during slavery and was designed to share the care of children so they would not die (Collins, 2022: iv).[173] The maternal practice that Chloe cultivates towards her trans community is an extension of that model born out of the need to survive. Therefore, upholding such traditions as revolutionary and liberatory tells a far too simplistic story and ignores that they emerged from 'distinct histories' of extreme violence, oppression and marginalisation, 'and not a desire to "abolish" or "queer" anything at all.' (Lewis, 2019: 148).[174]

Prosser argues that the trans subject must be freed from the burden of transgression that is assigned to them, the reality of which puts their life in great danger (1998: 49). They must be freed, in de Sousa Santos' words, from the Global North 'liberating and emancipatory projects' or 'creative destructions,' which he roots in colonialism and imperialism (2007: xxxiii). As Prosser demonstrates, in being brought into view, the other is subjected to the author's touch, that is, the scholar's desire, and the Western orientation and ideological legacy that pulse through it. This phenomenon gives hegemonic touch its stickiness: its inherent ambivalence and ambiguities. I am speaking of powerful haptics that exert, shaping discourse and neutralising Chloe's lived reality. In the next section, I turn to mainstream culture to examine how it narrates trans experience and might perform its own acts of appearance and erasure.

Similarly to Prosser, Michaela Rogers, a scholar in sociology, asserts that:

> The increasing recognition and positive attention given to trans people in the media and the increasing normalisation of trans in popular culture (Hines, 2013) may deflect attention away from trans people's well-documented experiences of inequality, discrimination and social exclusion. (2017)

In mainstream representation, the trans predicament is grossly reduced to mere bodily organs with an intense focus on genitals. For example, Channel 4 *Genderquake Season* Trailer (2018) promises to *shake* the layperson's assumptions about what is in another person's pants (Fig. 28 and Fig. 29). Fetishization, namely, the excessive focus on the trans

[173] Specifically, the transatlantic slave trade beginning in the sixteenth century.
[174] In relation to the black community specifically, Lewis notes 'distinct histories of violent settlement, dispossession, forced adoption, anti-natalism, and enslavement' (2019: 148).

subject, constitutes a powerful haptic that propels a paradoxical movement: it makes Chloe/the trans subject recede at the same time as the mainstream seemingly calls them into presence, that is, attempts to bring them close and into view. Chloe sees her personhood reduced to organs, 'fract[ured]' (email 21 January 2020, not included in Extract 3) and compartmentalised. I understand now that she would have experienced my questions as salacious, further 'undermining her personhood' and 'enclos[ing]' her in 'trans[ness]' and 'its association with sex and perversion' (interview with the artist, 28 February 2020, not included in Extract). Chloe's sense of entrapment runs through her artwork. Her video and paper cutting installations represent, she states, 'psychological cages' (*Wall*'s exhibition information, 2020). In them, the artist's body – face, hands and words – are veiled, hidden and muffled among white fabrics (Fig. 28) or black, thorny, barbed wire-like, forests. (Fig. 29) The sense of touch though is omnipresent. It could be said that Chloe is subjected to resembling haptics as surrogates and nannies like Amaia whose labour and organs are isolated from their personhood and contracted (Chapters 2 and 3); also, AMAB like Jae who are effectively reduced to their penis (and what it represents symbolically) when they are deemed not suitable carers of children compared to women. Such haptics cast Chloe's touch and presence out of the field of kin, that is, 'belonging' (Extract 1), legitimacy or 'acceptance' (ibid).

Fig. 28
Video still from *Genderquake Season* trailer (Channel 4, 2018): a moving image of a canoe moving across water, representing the vulva on male trunks. Image removed due to copyright.

Fig. 29
Video still from *Genderquake Season* trailer (Channel 4, 2018): a moving image of space rocket being fired into the sky representing the penis on female nickers. Image removed due to copyright.

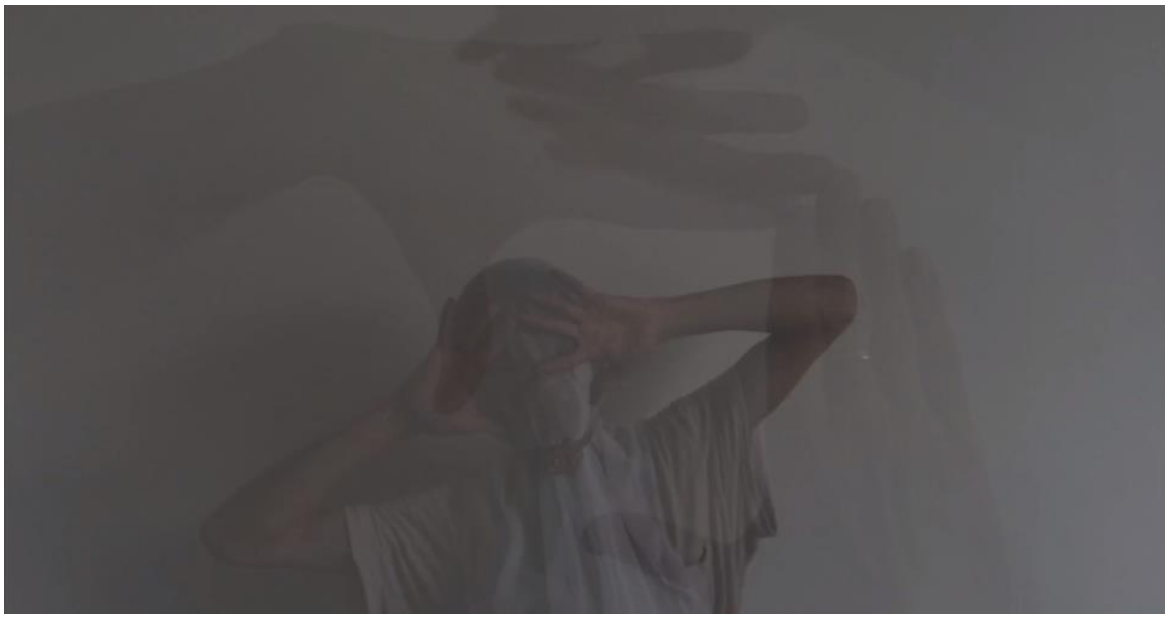


Fig. 30
Artwork title: *Surface*, 2019 (video).
Chloe's *Walls* exhibition, 2020.
Screenshot from the artist's website (chloewing.com, 2024).
Used with permission by the artist

Fig. 31
Artwork title: *Paper Cage*, 2014 (paper cutting installation).
Chloe's *Walls* exhibition, 2020.
Photograph from the artist's website (chloewing.com, 2024)
Used with permission by the artist.

Fig. 31a (close-ups/details)
Artwork title: Paper Cage, 2014 (paper cutting installation).
Chloe's *Walls* exhibition, 2020.
Photographs (close-ups/details) by Maud Lannen (2020).
Used with permission by the artist

Part of Channel 4 *Genderquake Season* (2018), the documentary *What Makes A Woman* (2018) tells the journey of trans model, Munroe Bergdorf. She is observed during extraordinarily gruesome facial surgery, focus group discussions, including harsh feminist debates and conflicts. The programme also sees Bergdorf recounting to the camera the harrowing story of her rape at the beginning of her transition, reminding viewers of the violence and real life-risks which trans subjects, especially those who have not fully transitioned due to economics, ideology and/or social constraints, endure, and which Prosser underlines (1998). It is such an important dimension to bring to mainstream audiences and feminist discourse because, in the heated toilet war between cis and trans, it is seldom talked about. Nevertheless, I am concerned by how the point is made, how little of the programme it occupies (1mn 50s out of a 55mns), and how quickly it is deflected to return to the model's sexual organs (this time via the brain); before manoeuvring neatly Bergdorf into a position of strength and defiance. Bergdorf sleekly delivers near the end: 'transgender women, like me, have always existed… Women, like me, have always existed, but it feels like, finally, we are getting seen and heard, and shaking things up, and we're not going anywhere.' (ibid)[175]

[175] Similar character arcs are played out in relation to racial marginalisation in *Anton Ferdinand: Football, Racism and Me* (BBC documentary, first aired on 30 Nov 2020; watched on 30 May 2021) and *Leigh-Anne: Race, Pop & Power* (BBC, 13 May 2021).

All in all, I question the economy of touch which requires, even prises out the full exposure of the marginalised subject under the guise of positive action, education and celebration of difference, for, what can only be described as, 'voyeuristic forms of consumption' (Driver, 2004); and goes on to weave a story of extraordinary hardship and as extraordinary human strength and survival for the camera to seemingly justify the person's very presence on our screens. Mainstream audience would be forgiven for thinking that Bergdorf and others like her, are ok now. She has transitioned and now adorns the irrefutable signs of femininity and womanhood. In the process, she has found her sense of agency and her voice, and this is what it was all about. Clearly, classic Western storytelling (the Greek mythology type depicting a hero's journey) over-simplifies discourse.[176] But they are also haptics that press upon the subject: press it to perform. And marginalised individuals do not escape them as the model, who co-directed the documentary, demonstrates. It is important to consider that Bergdorf might not want and/or that it might be too painful to investigate the extent of her and other MTF individuals' vulnerability, as was the case, I suspect, for Chloe.

The two forces, though, do not necessarily negate each other. In fact, play-acting a very Western narrative (the process of absorbing and reproducing values and system via Anzieu and Howes, Chapter 1 of my thesis), one that mainstream audiences can connect with and legitimise, not because of its content but because of its form/arc; and pushing away, even, casting out difficult feelings, serve the same purpose of keeping the subject safe, internally and externally. So, in reproducing the story-arc, Bergdorf makes herself appear – she is after all the central protagonist of her story – and disappear at once to self-protect and performs a type of allegiance to dominant culture. The object of this chapter is not to criticise Chloe nor Bergdorf, rather, to study the haptics or forces that they are subjected to to better understand the narratives and ideologies lodged within dominant touch and how they perform on the body. Reflecting on the many biographical attempts to retrace the lives of young trans individuals who have been murdered, Halberstam observes how brutally 'they were dismantled and reassembled' (2000: 62), to 'forc[e] the transgender subject to make sense.' (ibid: 67) He warns that 'we should be wary of overly rational narratives about lives and complex personhood filled with contradiction and tensions' (ibid: 67-8). Instead, we should favour tales that are 'not resolved, not neat, not understood.' (ibid: 79) I read Halberstam's plea as a comment on the Western requirement for intelligibility to be seen and valued. Indeed, Butler underlines the entangled relation between language and visibility when she asserts:

[176] I base my assertion on *A hero's journey creative writing workshop with Eve Makis and Anthony Cropper* which I attended in 2021 (Bonington Art Gallery/Nottingham Trent University).

> For feminist theory, the development of a language that fully or adequately represents women has seemed necessary to foster the political visibility of women […] This has seemed obviously important considering the pervasive cultural condition in which women's lives were either misrepresented or not represented at all.' (1990: 2)

So, what becomes of the person or group who 'doesn't make sense', and whom has yet to find a language to articulate their experience, like Chloe? What about the requirement pressed on the trans subject to mimic the structure and grammar of hegemonic language or narrative to make themselves intelligible? Chloe and Bergdorf could be said to be expected to play the game of intelligibility as if it was nature itself which seems perverse and ultimately, reinforces the status quo by denying their innate value and humanity as autonomous beings.

## 5. TOUCHING TOWARDS CHLOE'S PREDICAMENT: THE HAPTICS OF EXCLUSION

In this section, drawing on Chloe's frank and illuminating writing, I attempt to touch closer towards her lived experience, specifically, the structural touch or violence, that is, the haptics that exert upon her and in this project, I find myself unwittingly performing. Chloe relays that although 'people focus so much on [the] physical dilemma [of being trans]' 'it is very much more than just this. It is about the difficulty of being a functioning human being', that is, 'getting a job, finding a partner, marriage and kids, fundamental things are not fundamental to us.' (Extract 1, email exchange) She describes that her state of alienation as a transwoman is so intense that '[t]he main concern [is] to survive mentally and emotionally as an outsider'; 'any thoughts of marriage, kids, jobs, etc., are secondary'. (ibid) Chloe's social exclusion, the effect of stigma and discrimination, impacts all aspects of her experience with devastating and very real, tangible consequences.[177] Sara Matsuzaka and David Koch, clinical social workers and academics, note that employment, housing, health, social and medical discrimination is connected to poverty and homelessness, abuse, harassment, violence (sexual and otherwise), trauma, substance abuse, agoraphobia, depression, isolation, low self-esteem, sex work, health issues and suicidal thoughts (2019: 28-47; also in Rogers, 2017).[178]

[177] Reidpath *et al.* asserts that stigma, (the set of negative and unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something), discrimination (the unjust or prejudicial distinction in the treatment of different categories of people, especially based on race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality, class, age or disability) and social exclusion (the state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life) are interrelated: social exclusion stems from discrimination which is rooted in stigmatisation (2005: 469).

[178] While Matsuzaka and Kock's study (2019) is based on interviews of trans individuals in New York and Rogers' is UK-based, my use of data, as Rogers notes herself, is 'applicable to comparable sociocultural contexts found in the Global North.' (Rogers, 2017: 2)

Social exclusion affects everyday decisions about safety and curtails Chloe's ability 'to funct[ion]' (Extract 1, email exchange). The predicament is shared by cis women, gay men and lesbians, although public spaces, like public bathrooms, including, surprisingly, gay spaces (Matsuzaka and Koch, 2019; Rodgers, 2017), pose an intense threat to trans individuals.[179] Research finds that 'trans feminine individuals of colour experience violence at a disproportionate rate than [their white counterparts]' (Matsuzaka and Koch, 2019: 30). Chloe is particularly vulnerable as she stands at the intersection of transphobia, misogyny and racism. Social exclusion blocks Chloe's freedom, that is, the right to have a social and private life: it incapacitates her touch and movement. But it does not solely operate at the level of space (public and services). Social exclusion also has a temporal dimension because Chloe is denied access to time, that is, to simple, unremarkable life events and rituals (marriage, having children) that mark the passing of time and connect one to the past and the future. Korean-born philosopher, Byung-Chul Han writes that life rituals 'are symbolic acts' (2020: 1) and 'serv[e] the purpose of recognition' (ibid) which he describes as 'a perception of the permanent [through which] the world […] acquires durability.' (ibid: 2) '*Being-at-home'* in the world, rituals 'render time *habitable*. They even make it accessible.' (ibid) As such, Chloe is cast out – etymologically, 'made abject', 'socially despised' – of time. She is excluded from the otherwise shared sense of continuity, lastingness and belonging that is performed and imbued in rituals. She is denied access to both space and time and their tactile dwelling which I and others too easily take for granted.

As the result of intense stigma, discrimination, fetishization and social exclusion, touch and intimacy with self and others can also be highly problematic (Rogers, 2017). Internalised transmisogyny and sexism (Anzieu's introjection) generate internal conflicts and feelings of confusion. For example, Chloe may desire validation that she looks like a woman through attention of a sexual nature, while not wanting it simultaneously (Rogers, 2017; Matsuzaka and Koch, 2019: 38-9). Chloe writes: '[trans women] have conflicts within them, they have conflicts with people outside of them'; they have 'doubt[s]' and 'mistrust their feelings and knowing'; 'I feel awkward being a woman'; 'I feel I am not normal and this was engrained in me since childhood' (Extract 1, email exchange). She adds: 'I was brought up to think I was wrong.' (ibid) Amaia, Jae and Chloe all share differently that they are subjected to potent haptics that teach 'fear, shame, fixed ideas, restrictions' (not included in Extract 3): they are haptics that silence and lead to a great deal of confusion. In her email dated 21 January 2020 (not included in Extract 3), Chloe relays having suffered abuse at the hands of a boyfriend. The award-winning American TV series *Pose* (2018 to 2021) which showcases

[179] For example, the homophobic attack of Melania Geymonat and, her girlfriend, Christine Hannigan on a London bus (*The Guardian*, 2019).

New York's ball and LGBTQ subculture in the African American and Latino communities in the 1980s and 90s, expose that cis men who desire transfeminine individuals, have secret relationships with them and subject them to intense objectification. One article in *Them*, an American LGBTQ online magazine, reports that cis men exhibit a 'pseudo-phallo fixation' (2018). They have little regard for the complicated relationship that trans individuals might have with their bodies and will often turn to violence if their sexual advances are rejected (ibid). Actress and trans activist, Dominique Jackson, who plays Elektra in *Pose*, explains that dating cis men means being exposed to unsolicited and brutal sexual advances and prying but also never being introduced to the parents (2015). Not being able to have children biologically, also means that men leave (ibid). Jackson draws an intersection with cis women who are infertile and whom, she suggests, face the same stigma (ibid) which Chloe observes also in Extract 1. Journalist, Paris Lees writes: 'men travelled from all over the country to have sex with me', '[They] would rather pay for sex with transgender women than risk the shame of dating us.' (*The Guardian*, 2013)

In her talk at Nottingham Contemporary (2019), Sylvia Federici argues that structural violence validates and perpetuates intimate partner violence, like that which Chloe has endured from her boyfriend. It also promotes abuse on the street, like that which Chloe fears in her day-to-day (Federici, 2019). This knowledge, therefore, demands a move away from the term transphobia which focusses on individual acts and singular events, and an embrace of the notion of 'cisgenderism': coined by Rogers (2017), cisgenderism refers to a structural and systemic form of oppression based on ideology. Like racism and sexism, cisgenderism 'involves multiple intersecting assumptions that construct people's own designations of their genders as less valid' and 'constructs the world as having only two valid genders and sexes' (Rogers, 2017). Experiences vary depending on class (determining access to surgery), and on the diversity of their identification according to race, ethnicity, gender identity, citizenship status, marital/relationship status, employment status, housing status, pretransition experiences and ability to pass (Matsuzaka and Koch, 2019: 28-47). Passing is mostly associated with race and trans identity. It occurs when a person who belongs to a marginalised group is accepted – *passes* – as member of another, usually a mainstream one. In being perceived as one-of-the-same, their 'passing' identity is legitimised. The once marginalised subject can thereby access the same power and privileges.

When I visit Chloe's exhibition and meet with the artist in February 2020, she discusses the prevalence of hiding in the trans experience where fear of violence is bound up with embodied shame (interview with the artist, 28 February 2020). She observes, however, that she is lucky to have naturally feminine features unlike many of her friends who look very

masculine (ibid). Because of it, she feels a strong degree of responsibility towards them and her community which manifest in her Othermothering practice (ibid). Chloe is referring to her ability to pass, that is, manipulate or somatically adjust oneself to enter the heteronormative field of belonging she would otherwise be excluded from and acquire legitimacy – a process that, I argue, calls upon touch because Chloe exerts counter haptics and somatically recalibrates or mould herself. Passing offers those who can, like Chloe, the mean to stay alive and self-protect. Chloe's proficiency to pass, that is, emit the fluent signs of femininity, gives her physical intelligibility in the world. In turn, recognition makes acts of hatred recede.

Other surprising instances of passing include sexuality (a non-heterosexual person passing for a heterosexual), faiths (a non-Christian passing as one), etc. (*The Guardian*, 2014) and voice. The award-winning movie *BlacKkKlansman* by film director Spike Lee (2018) tells the incredible, real-life story of Ron Stallworth, an African American police officer whom, in the 1970s, successfully infiltrates the Ku Klux Klan by manipulating his voice so to pass as a white man on the phone. Hidden in the narrative is that 'white voice' is 'a true minority joke' (*Vanity Fair*, 2018). 'White voice' has provided trenchant comedic material for the likes of Richard Pryor, Whoopie Goldberg and Eddie Murphy who have exposed it as an ideological 'fiction' to which white folks are also subjected to – **'**a matter of drag' (ibid), as Butler did with regards to gender (1990) but, also, let us not forget survival. Nevertheless, passing surprisingly performs, in turn, its own tactile ambiguity back onto those who pass: Preciado's 'performative feedback' (2013: 35) somatically rewriting of the body, and activating pleasure and desire (ibid: 34-5).[180] Chloe articulates this clearly when she alludes to the conflation 'woman-mother' now tangibly pressed upon her. She writes: 'And then on top of that, do women have to have children? This is the very question I have now as well. My female friends do inspire me and educate me further about a lot of female issues today. I am a woman. Do I want children? I wonder is this the idea that I feel I should? […] Do I feel pressure that I should have children at a certain age? There are many layers of social pressures and expectations I am dealing with here. And I feel this pressure now that I am 40. But why do I when it's not my body clock telling me this?' (Extract 1)

If passing as a counter haptic affords Chloe the sense of kin, belonging and legitimacy that she needs psychologically, emotionally and physically to feel safer, it does not come without fear, struggle and confusion. Indeed, cisgenderism governs and punishes, in Foucault's sense. It informs everyday touch. If found out, the risk to the trans subject and the degrees of violence she might incur, increases significantly compared to cis women: from rape,

[180] See also 'somatic conversions' (Preciado: 2018: 34), 'feedback' or 'translation' (Hay, 2016: 3)

beating, to, potentially, mutilation, torture and death (Matsuzaka and Koch, 2019; Rogers, 2017; Halberstam, 2000). For these reasons, 'transgender and gender nonconforming individuals [like Chloe] may choose to conform with sociocultural expectations of gender' (Matsuzaka and Koch, 2019: 31). Chloe's words 'reprogram myself' (Extract 1, email exchange) also bring in sharp focus the huge fight and life-long labour involved in re-educating oneself, that is, disentangling oneself from hegemonic haptics to discover what one is and wants. In addition, British political scholar, Arun Kundnani (2015) warns that passing mechanisms, that is, the tactile, somatic adjustment a person undertakes on themselves to enter the field of hegemonic kin and acquire intelligibility, are subject to history and the changing priorities of a nation. In *The Muslims Are Coming!* (2015) the scholar narrates how quickly, and brutally, political contexts can reverse passing criteria. For example, Muslims recruited by the US government in the 1960s to support the economy and efforts in the Cold War, subsequently, settled in white American suburbia, adopting American values and visibly demonstrating them in acts of, Kundnani describes, 'racial performance' (2015: 43-4). The social and political landscape would be forever altered by the September 11th attacks. Muslims became instantly a threat to the nation, and the wider West. No amount of performance – exhibition of patriotism, whiteness and docility (ibid: 49) – would appease the full force of hatred and violence now projected onto them. Similarly, the Chinese community prior to Covid-19 were noted for their work ethic, the wealth that they bring to the UK and role in the science, research and innovation sectors (*BBC*, 2023; Adams *et al.*, 2022; *The Guardian*, 2020; *The Economics*, 2022). With the pandemic, anti-Asian racism and xenophobic sentiment sprung globally (Human Rights Watch, 2020), generating additional life-threats for Chloe and the people she cares for: her family, friends, the Chinese and trans communities. This new dimension to hate crime, unravels the extent of which Global North touch, that is, the field of kinship, is conflicted, unstable and precarious.

**CONCLUSION**

Uneasy touch located in the maternal, like that between Chloe and me, has the potential to be generative because it exposes for CI and somatics that touch is complicated, ambiguous and ambivalent: touch/its communication, in some instances, is not smooth and does not flow, but ruptures and breaks. It gives a glimpse into more realistic, more grounded sensorial experiences that contact with difference propels. Such somatic phenomena open the discipline to a new understanding of touch, and alternative performances of touch that might account for gaps, failures and power play in its transmission. In this chapter, I have argued that hegemonic touch articulates various degrees of conflict that stem from the narratives and ideology buried within it and which orientate its performance. Touch maintains hierarchies between people: it brings some close into the field of kin and belonging, making

others distant. Chloe's making-distant unfolds through multi-layered and silent haptics that deface, fracture and silence, namely, structural and systemic violence: cisgenderism, racism, sexism and misogyny. Structural violence engenders and maintains Chloe's social exclusion and abjection at institutional, domestic and street levels. It blocks her from democratic principles and freedoms and entraps her in a state of terror and distrust. Passing could be said to hijack neoliberal haptics that oppress and segregate by manipulating the field of kin, that is, of sameness and difference. It offers Chloe a degree of safety and the means to access some privileges and some power. However, it is not all liberatory, 'neat' and 'resolved' (Halberstam, 2000: 79). Passing produces its own struggles: confusion about one's own desire and pleasure; it comes with severe risks; passing criteria are too highly erratic and unstable; and Chloe is very aware of the life-long work of disentangling herself from haptics that force a fixed idea of gender, woman and motherhood.

In attempting to be inclusive of trans experiences, the Global North/my own touch has the capacity to make disappear, at the same time as it invokes the subject into presence. The trans individual is subjected to typical Western modes of apprehension and projection, that is, a very binary storytelling that exploits, over-exposes, reduces the subject, and erases the uncertain, uncomfortable, unintelligible dimension of their experience. They are subjected to the other/the scholar's touch and their desire for transgression and liberation, giving touch its stickiness. Asking if anyone or any academic can ever truly and fully escape this phenomenon would be like asking if anyone can ever sit outside culture and their own distinctive experience. As I move towards the different other in Chloe, our communication failure reminds me that an indeterminate gap or distance, nonetheless, remains – like that discussed by Lacan or that expressed in the metaphor of mucous (Irigaray) or viscosity (Baraitser). It reminds me to protect a part of unknowing in all my interactions. Only then, perhaps, can I hold onto the complexities of touch – that relational state of being entangled yet distinct. With curiosity and humility, I can attempt to understand my impulses when they slip, that is, when the drive to know – the drive to touch and be touched – overshadows the other whom, following Lacan, I need and call for.

# Conclusion

In my thesis, I have noted and taken stock of the power relations (consent and exclusion) that are animated by CI touch, as reported by Mitra (2021: 10), Olaya and Skrzypczak (2019), Livingstone (interview with the artist, 2018), Hennessy (*Contact Quarterly*, 2019). Paxton's own methodology and research into mother-child touch communication, which led to the development of CI, and the feminist matriarchal thread that I identified as running through CI and somatics, would prompt me to turn to instances of Othermothering in order to expand the discipline's notion of touch and to enrich its performance in the studio and at its margins. Specifically, I looked to address the question of what touch is and the politics, economics and hierarchies that touch communicates when located in the maternal. I recruited three generous collaborators with non-normative maternal practices, with whom I established contact and entered into dialogue for a period of six months, unusually, over emails, after consultation, in order further to promote the inclusive framework of the project that I sought. I therefore created a dialogical environment of interactions with individuals whose maternal identities are not only different from mine but who movement researchers, performance artists and scholars like myself, would not habitually be in contact with, based on the predominantly heteronormative and white-inflected nature of those disciplines.

I have drawn from traditional somatic inquiry and techniques of deconstruction orientated towards micro movements, sensorial experience and awareness, supported by equally somatic and deconstructive theories borrowed from Preciado (2018; 2013), Baraitser (2009) and Ahmed (2006). I have introduced to the somatic technique of deconstruction, intersectional thinking as an experimental approach to research, and a mode of embodiment elaborated from the somatic notion of 'interconnection' (Midgelow, 2015: 112). This blended methodology, for which the anti-racist workshop (2019) planted the seeds, and which owes much to Preciado's writing, has allowed for an intimate dimension to movement research, typical of somatics, but which is determinedly turned outwards, something which the discipline is noted to lack (Kampe *et al.*, 2020). As such, the often solipsistic, internally reflective sensorial world of the dancer works to remain here firmly connected and critically integrated into the world of politics and economics. This methodology enabled me to situate and question the performance of my own touch, through touch, my identity and sense of kin, within the wider context of mainstream feminism and global politics and economics, in relation to my collaborators' respective experiences of oppression. Its affects and effects would sometimes be uncomfortable, and painfully arresting. For example, my interaction with Chloe brings home the fact that the inclusive touch that I thought my project to foster, in fact

segregates; she also reminds me that my collaborators' struggles are very real and not a distant abstracted discourse, therefore that my researcher-academic touch is at risk of further exacerbating her oppression.

So, the performance of (my) liberal feminist touch is challenged by my collaborators' Othermothering identities, accounts and the agency they each perform in our dialogue, which sets in motion my 'self-hacking' (Paxton, 2018: 19), auto-deconstructive project. Our contact has thrown into question the forces that I exert unknowingly when I perform my identity and sense of kinship to the feminist movement, and revealed the more discreet and inconspicuous 'structurality of the structure' of CI and somatics that, I suggest, contributes to the issues of exclusion and lack of consent within the form. The 'structurality of the structure', in Derrida's words, is the social, political, cultural, economic, medical and legal discourse and orientation endorsed by historical and contemporary mainstream society, which promotes a fixed notion of motherhood and conspires to exclude my collaborators from maternal narratives. I am referring to the myths, discourses and ideologies – the haptics – that unfold beneath the tangible, 'orient[ating]' and 'limit[ing]' 'free play' (ibid: 115-20), that is, the field of reflexivity – reflexivity being CI and more broadly somatics' prime interest, as I set out in the Introduction to my thesis. Attempting to touch upon the 'structurality of the structure' means, in Paxton's own words, trying to uncover '[w]hat […] my body [is] doing when I am not conscious of it' (2018: 18). It means working to understand the nature of the contact between me and my collaborators: the part mainstream feminism/I play in my collaborators' respective yet entangled experience; and the conflicts and ambiguities that live within liberal feminist touch and might be animated when people with interconnected power differentials make contact in the studio.

The realm of sensations that fieldwork propels is the locus where somatics and intersectionality meet, directing my attention towards touch's invisible materials and allowing for sensate and critical thinking/doing to cohere ('Anti-Racist Dance Practices' workshop, Mitra *et al.*, 2019). Sensations are the effects and affects of being in contact with difference, that is, being thrown into the complex field of relationality which my project engineers. I have leant on Baraitser's notion of viscosity and Irigaray's notion of mucous, to elaborate a landscape of somatic sensations, both organic and metaphorical realities (following Anzieu) that, I propose, begin to make tangible the intangible in touch, giving clues to some discreet somatic phenomena that touch stimulates in CI and somatics, which are seldom shared – an experience of touch that, I suggest, is yet to acquire intelligibility within the discipline. I refer to the sense of uneasiness, tension, slippage, tripping, stumbling, falling, rupture, disorientation and crisis – unforeseen moments of tactile interruption – which have exposed

pre-determinations and assumptions in (my) hegemonic touch and have called me to adjust (viscosity in touch that creates friction and pulls), that is, recalibrate, in order to remain in dialogue. Following Baraitser, I have argued that such events have the potential to open the self to the new and, if the subject chooses to, depart, even 'dis-attac[h]' (2018; 2016: 105), from the habitual that reproduces the same and performs, instead, unfamiliar responses. Hay's teaching, with its emphasis on orientation, insight and the power of choice (2016: 6), is foregrounded here; likewise, the key question that the 'Anti-Racist Dance Practices' workshop extended to its white and white-passing participants: 'what are you going to give up?' (2019) The very process of opting for atypical responses encourages new neural connections and pathways that produce and reproduce the body and its performance, thereby enhancing its touch and movement: I refer here to Preciado's 'somatic conversions' (2018: 34-5) and Hay's somatic 'feedback' and 'translation' (2016: 3).

So, what have my collaborations taught me about maternal touch, that expands the notion of touch and its performance for somatics? What have I learnt about the politics and economics of touch located in the maternal, which might respond to some latent power relations reported within the form?

Maternal touch is not natural and ahistorical

My collaborators' Othermothering practices, namely Amaia's nanny maternity, Jae's wish to gestate in a male-constructed body and Chloe's maternal practice towards her trans friends/community, have imploded traditional, fixed narratives about maternal touch and bodies. In doing so, they have blown away CI and somatics' presuppositions, which construct maternal touch as simply a natural, authentic, pre-cultural, truthful and ahistorical skin-to-skin contact (Papadelli, 2013: 82). CI's notion, I suggest, nourishes the fraught utopian ideals around kin that live within the discipline and have, to date, limited touch's scrutiny. Our contact has demanded of me to redefine touch, specifically to reintegrate into touch its historically specific political, economic and hierarchal dimensions. And this has first involved reintegrating into the idea of touch embedded in somatics, one that focusses excessively on spatiality and immediacy, therefore, the 'here and now', its distal and temporal character. Here, touch, the sensation of force (Weber, 1846: 196), pressure and tension, exerts along the continuum of skin-to-skin, proximity and, surprisingly, distance. The tactile 'labour of the entire history of the world down to the present' (Marx, 1967: 141), individual/collective fantasy, desire and trauma (Ettinger, 1997: 381), institutional and systemic exclusion, cisgenderism, racism, sexism and misogyny are all forces, or haptics, that press against my collaborators' bodies and shape their predicament. They are haptics that deface, fracture and silence. However distal and temporal, that is, intangible, its impact,

as I have discussed, is nonetheless felt and very real to Amaia, Jae and Chloe. As such, touch is both material and immaterial. Second, redefining maternal touch has meant understanding that it is central to politics and economics. And mainstream feminists, as I have argued, are leading players in, beneficiaries and protectors of the economy of touch as private employers, activists and, in my project particularly, CI/somatics practitioners. So, the collective that is mainstream feminism, to which I belong, constitutes a powerful force exerted on my collaborators.

Maternal touch as biotechnology

Maternal touch is not natural but is, in fact, a biotechnology: an art and a technique that implicate the body. It is crafted, hugely malleable and imbued by ideology buried under facts of life (Derrida's 'structurality of the structure') that discreetly but potently privilege the reproduction and transmission of wealth and desirable, white-inflected, middle-class, maternal heteronormative traits over others. For example, the nanny-employer relationship in Amaia's account and the reproductive technology of cross-racial gestational surrogacy (C-RGS) (Harrison, 2016 in Chapter 2 of my thesis) make visible the politics, economics and hierarchies that maternal touch communicates, and the somewhat adaptable genetic determinist and essentialist discourse that act as haptics to prevent the maternal being dissociated from the traditional figure of the mother.[181] I have zoomed in on the distal and temporal dimensions of touch – the historical legacy of the commodification of 'intimate labours' in Chapters 2 and 3, and the perverse culture of sentimentality around maternal work in Chapter 3 – that divide women based on race and class in order to invisibilise the nanny's touch and transmission long before they first become acquainted, and safeguard the primacy of the legal mother. The same haptics force Amaia to perform extraordinary and contradictory adjustments to her touch: to compartmentalise and fragment her personhood; to integrate distance into her touch; to be at once close and distant, present and vanishing. And so, as per the Indian surrogate who is employed to gestate for white couples, my research finds that, astonishingly, distance and separation can be inserted into the most blatant manifestation of physical intimacy: gestational or early-years maternal care which Amaia fulfils.

To enable the contact that is essential to the accumulation of capital without fear of displacement, maternal touch has been carefully built around narratives of 'racial [and class] "transmission"' (Harrison, 2016: 12), which the nanny (likewise the C-RG surrogate) is required to actualise – make real in the performance of her own touch and identity. Such

[181] Western genetic essentialism is adaptable because its logic and framework is inconsistent as I have argued. Rather, it proves to be orientated towards wealth.

narratives exploit historical and contemporary power differentials and lack of consent protocols between parties. They push the undesirable nanny contact out of view beyond mainstream horizons, in order to reproduce a very Western iconography in the abstraction of the mother and child, who alone exist. And this does not solely apply to the nanny or the surrogate: it applies to the huge workforce of women, men and gender-diverse individuals who service households, performing work traditionally assigned to the mother (nannies, cleaners, delivery people), who are dissociated from maternal identity. Certainly, my collaborators' accounts testify to enduring distinctions in the maternal between women based on their class and whether they are mothers or not, between women and AMAB individuals via the strict division of roles in reproduction, and between women and the army of workers that assist working mothers. Those distinctions structure maternal touch, specifically its legitimacy and illegitimacy.

Ambivalence and ambiguity in feminist haptics

Maternal touch also exposes the ambiguities and contradictions of mainstream feminist kinship (and its performance) and the middle-class, white-inflected epistemologies that gave rise to the collective. Closing in once again on the distal temporality of maternal touch, I have argued that mainstream feminist tactile ambivalence today, noted in the work of leading contemporary maternal and maternal performance scholarship (Baraitser, 2009; and Underwood-Lee and Šimić, 2021), stems from its historical orientation, which I have traced back to second-wave feminism and the early twentieth-century women's right-to-vote movement. Mainstream feminist orientation is based on an imaginary and skewed world order – a mere adaptation of the patriarchal one (Wallerstein, 1976) – divided between a core (the mother), its semi-periphery (the child) and periphery (the people she leans on to mother and, indeed, the many people who enable her motherhood). To advance their cause, mainstreamists across history have repetitively embraced hegemonic supremacist and sexist ideologies concerning the desirable bodies of reproduction – ergo, desirable touch and transmission – consolidating the conflation 'woman-mother' and exploiting divisions between men and women with regards to roles and labours in reproduction, and the distinctions between women based on their race and class, for example, in the race to gain the right to vote and the right to contraception, as I discussed in Chapter 2. Liberal feminists have therefore absorbed as their own a prejudicial and hierarchical field of predetermination designed to serve privilege. Their political efforts have thereby further naturalised both the marginalisation and stigmatisation of my collaborators: marginalisation of their unconventional maternal touch and labour; the stigmatisation of Amaia and Chloe as women who do not have children, and AMAB individuals, like Jae, who yearn to perform maternal work in gestation and social rearing.

Mainstream feminist orientation must be understood as constructing maternal touch. And touch, as the inherited sense of kinship and identification with the movement, in turn constructs (my) mainstream feminist orientation and is reproductive of the power relations between me and my collaborators and, I believe, underlie the more subdued tensions in somatic/CI contexts. Mainstream feminist orientation draws lines of kinship and filiation, discriminating between the touch and labours of a multiplicity of participants, and capitalising on pre-existing inequalities and the fixed notion of motherhood. The overwhelmingly hegemonic female audience noted for championing and legitimising the male yearning for a physical intimacy with children, especially girls, in Harradine's piece *Men & Girls Dance*, suggests that mainstream touch communicates a degree of ambivalence: as a collective, mainstream touch is torn between its liberal and progressive credentials, and aspirations and the historical debt that it bears and which women's rights and identity are tied to. The two contradictory haptics coexist and perform their own somatic conversion or feedback. I have concluded that I am also the conflicted, confused and confusing force that exerts pressure, orientates, silences, stigmatises and excludes my collaborators. My own mainstream feminist conflicts manifest, for example, in my interaction with Jae, specifically in the sensorial experience of slippage, tripping and stumbling (also relevant to my interaction with Amaia), which unknowingly confronts the force of heteronormativity that lives within my touch and proves so incredibly challenging to reorientate. And its presence is often revealed in the most furtive ways.

The binding character of touch, which erodes or excludes

As Chidester asserts, hegemonic touch, like that of mainstream feminism, 'bind[s]' (in Classen, 2005: 49-65). And in 'bind[ing]' (ibid), touch draws blunt lines of sameness and differentiation, connecting people into the hegemonic field (into family group/kin) and excluding others (ibid: 53). In the context of CI and my project, touch is found to have a propensity to either homogenise, that is, assume sameness which erase difference and further oppress in the studio as Mitra notes (2021): making disappear the lived-experience of already marginalised individuals, in my thesis, Amaia, Jae and Chloe; or separate which is a form of alienation and segregation, as with Chloe who challenges that she is made to feel solely different in my project. And so, the field of relationality which I discover in fieldwork is where sameness and difference interact sometimes with great difficulty, never fully one or the other, and makes situating the self and other – touching/being in contact – challenging and a precarious territory. Mitra's observation about CI touch which assumes a white privilege (2021: 10) and Chloe's comment that my project's framework which I thought to be inclusive, further alienates her (Chapter 5) insert moments of startling 'interruption'

(Baraitser, 2009), ‘disorientation’ (Ahmed, 2006: 157), ‘crisis’ (Ahmed, 2006: 157; also in Baraitser, 2009: 52 in the Introduction to my thesis), temporal ‘faltering’, a ‘abrupt suspension [of being]’,(Clément, 1994: 1 in Chapter 1) – to mainstream’s otherwise latent projections and mode of apprehension/my own which erode and threaten the other’s boundary. And while I draw many intersections between Amaia, Jae, Chloe and me which connect us, our respective position and predicament are not the same.

For example, Jae’s account testifies of reductive stereotypes against the homosexual as well as the trans body and the stigmatisation into the twenty first century of AMAB individuals who perform or wish to perform maternal labours towards children, which is rooted in sexism and misogyny, namely, the perceived inferiority of and disdain towards the cis woman body based on its reproductive condition. However, it would be an over-simplification to equate Jae’s experience to Chloe’s and theirs to mine. And while the medical and legal barriers for male gestation are relevant to both Jae and Chloe, their gender characteristics and performance, together with their level of social exclusion differ greatly. In contrast to them, I belong to the long lineage of hegemonic feminism which has built power on eugenics and the sexism and misogyny directed at them to acquire rights and political power. Another example is that Amaia’s immigrant story and mine connect us. As immigrants, we have both performed typically feminine low-paid, precarious ‘intimate labours’ (Harrison, 2016: 171 in Chapters 2 and 3). However, our class difference today, the fact that I am a mother and she is not (my female identity is validated by my motherhood; Amaia’s is thrown into question), and the economic dynamics between our countries also separate us, much like her relation to mothers who employ her as nanny. We/they could be said share in oppression, yet asymmetries remain.

Connected and distinct simultaneously, like the ‘foetal blood’ that ‘never mixes with maternal blood’ in gestation, and is separated ‘across a multitude of cellular layers’ of no more than ‘1 micrometre’ (Rouch, 1987), touch leaves even in the deemed most symbiotic contact, a distance and space of differentiation. I have turned to feminist readings of gestator-foetal and primary carer-infant touch communication to understand the nature of touch and somatic processes that neoliberal touch might enliven in and out of the CI studio. In this respect, I have followed a very Western tradition, which is to draw from child development theories to explore human relations, predominantly, a relation to difference in the different other, and imbuing them with an ethical, political and economic dimension: for example, Paxton’s mother-child touch and CI, Irigaray’s ethics based on concept of the mucous of womb origin (1984), Preciado with Laplanche although this is only insinuated (2013: 321) to develop his *‘somato political* analysis of “world-economy”’ (2013: 25), Anzieu’s skin-ego theories to

understand group dynamics in therapeutical settings (1999a; 1997). Mother-child gestational and early years have offered a template through which to apprehend the global economic system of pleasure, erotic exchange and asymmetries that shape capitalist relations and produce and reproduce the hegemonic body and its performance of touch, and the conditions around my collaborators.

Concluding thoughts

To begin to counter the issues of power and exclusion within CI and more broadly somatics, I propose that an understanding of the historical, economic and culturally specificity of touch which is practised in CI and somatics – its epistemology – is required and needs to form part of somatic practice and training. Specifically, I call for the reintegration of distance and temporality to touch and its performance. In addition, I view as important to continue to expand the discipline's relational field by inviting touch from beyond its hegemonic bubble while valuing and remaining attentive to the problematics of touch and the sensate for what they reveal, allowing for more reflexive and critical forms of embodiment and movements to emerge. Particularly, I encourage mainstream feminists within the discipline, including myself, to, following Hay, 'Turn [their] Fucking Head' (2016: 103-5), that is, reorientate and 'dis-attac[h]' (2018; 2016: 105) from its essentialist framework and liberatory project: 'hack' into (Paxton, 2018) and hijack the erotic economy of touch, that is, the feedback loop of seduction, magnetism and gratification that predetermine action to 'reorganiz[e]' its senses (Hay, 2016: 105).

My collaborators and I have provided a number of exciting and innovative frameworks in which to practise touch based on a non-essentialist, non-fixed notion of the maternal: for example, Anzieu's indeterminate gendering and role in reproduction and reversible envelope that gestate and is gestated pointing to the indeterminacy of genealogies (Chapter 2); the concept of the mucous (1984) and viscosity (2009) as a metaphor for touch's intangible materials; the cyborg maternal touch of Amaia that diffuses existing hierarchies between legal mother and the workers she employs and democratises maternal touch to all (Chapter 3); Jae's sci-fi inspired touch that dissociates maternal desire from organs, gender, sexuality and modes of reproduction (Chapter 4); Chloe's othermothering practice that dissociates the maternal from child and brings into view 'passing' – the performance of identity – as a technique that deserves further somatic attention from heteronormative groups (Chapter 5). Mainstream movement researchers might begin to explore such lens while honouring the communities from which they stem, that is, while remembering the political and economic contexts in which such tactile strategies of survival emerged; and investigate how such technique might be relevant to their own experience.

In addition, somatics might move away from its liberatory legacy and orientation, and integrate a notion and performance of touch that might account instead for, and indeed embrace with the same curiosity, openness and enthusiasm typical of the form, the sensorial experiences of struggle, unease, discomfort, slipperiness, gaps, conflicts, failures, power, desire, rupture and breaks – in short, the insertion of a touch that does not flow well and sometimes not at all, nonetheless whose resistant flow still communicates as my dialogue with Chloe demonstrates (Chapter 5). Such shift might actively counter the impulse for and expectation of smooth transmission that reproduces the same rather than the new. Feminist movement researchers might favour instead narratives, experiences and gestures that are 'not resolved, not neat,' and not intelligible (Halberstam, 2000: 79) and cultivate ambivalence as the capacity to hold together firmly at once all the complexities of touch as might unravel in CI practices between unsuspecting performers. We/movement researchers might apply to touch what Halberstam applies to gender: the indeterminacy, 'irresolvab[ility]' and illegibility (2012) of touch and transmission, and through touch, the body's identity, gendering, lineage, genealogy and role in reproduction. We might therein interrupt, discontinue, disorganise feminist mainstream identity and discriminatory lines of kinship in solidarity to make our touch more hospitable, joining other communities in the life-long labour that is to reprogramme the senses and retrace the body.

This brief manifesto constitutes a possible starting point for what must remain always a much wider, dynamic, cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary conversation. Returning to my research question as to whether a new feminist formulation by expanding the idea of touch, might inform a more inclusive and consensual performance of touch in CI and somatics, a new and potent beginning might be simply to explore what new forms and ethics emerge from the insertion of distance in touch, likewise, the insertion of touch in distance. Certainly, the manner practitioners have adapted the nature of their *contact* to continue to meet, share, collaborate, make and research during the covid pandemic, in a context where access became suddenly a mainstream and institutional concern, provides rich grounds for reflection and further investigation especially, as the discipline has now predominantly hastened back towards the familiar settings of the studio and stage.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Testimonies from collaborators

In this section, I have selected comments from my collaborators which evidence the project's impact upon them and the deep self-reflective work of collaboration.

Amaia

> *Please find here attached my responses to task 4. I am very sorry for the delay in sending my insights. I have to be honest and say that I found it extremely hard to reply to the task this time. I feel as if all my sensations, ideas, etc. about the topic are very mixed or as if my responses are intertwined all the time. At the same time, it is taking me so deep that throughout this project I have been able to reflect and explore many personal things, which I find very interesting but also exhausting.* (Task 4, Maternal being-with)

Jae

> *Your email made me feel included in a way I had never experienced. (*Pre-task communication)
>
> *The exchange of emails and having to do the first task are really revolutionising the way I see myself and is helping me feel reassured my own experience as a legitimate one.* (Task 1, The maternal Body)
>
> *Sorry for taking so long to reply. I think this time it has been one of the hardest for me to get through but I'm feeling a lot more positive and happier about it now.* (Task 4, Maternal being with)
>
> *The project was life changing. Our dialogue, the way you naturalised my desire to gestate, it was a gift.* (Skype conversation, 10 March 2020)
>
> *Always know that having helped you with your research has also helped me incredibly with personal matters.* (email correspondence, 1 March 2021)

Chloe

> *I feel more confident as a person and it was very kind of you to come and see the show and give me such an insightful feedback about it. It was such a lovely surprise and I have told many people about that moment, as it was really quite cathartic and also moving for me. I rarely get to talk about my work in such an in-depth way and for you to see so much in it was very powerful for me as an artist. I have since been more open about the content of my work though there is still shame there.* (email correspondence, 12 November 2020)

**Appendix 2 – Advert**

*Circulated during July and August 2019 through e-Digest (Artsadmin Newsletter), Facebook and SCUDD (The Standing Conference of University Drama Departments).*

**CALL OUT FOR COLLABORATORS WITH UNCONVENTIONAL EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERING/THE MATERNAL FOR A PRACTICE RESEARCH PROJECT**

I am a PhD researcher in the Theatre and Performance Department at Goldsmiths University. My project explores the maternal and 'othermothering'*. I am looking at the maternal as both an idea and a practice emerging from the body. I understand that those elements are potentially very diverse and that many maternal figures remain marginalised by our society. They may include individuals who have not necessarily given birth, or who do not conform with the traditional maternal body and gender, or whose practice does not fit with the popular understanding of the maternal role. It can be an individual who self-identifies as maternal, including someone whose identity is somewhat connected to an imagined notion of the maternal. I am interested in hearing from all ages, all genders (male, women, people who identify as trans etc.) and unique positions (e.g. donors, educators, nannies…)*

If you have an unconventional experience of mothering or the maternal, an experience different than my own (that of a heterosexual white cis woman and biological mother), I would love to hear from you and begin an informal conversation. Please get in touch with a short expression of interest via email at mlann001@gold.ac.uk by 31st August. I am also available on email if you have any questions of course.

* any individual who cares for children who are not biologically their own. Historically this practice has been linked with social activism.
* This is not an exhaustive list.

**Appendix 3 – Personal questionnaire**

Please confirm you are above the age of 18:
(This research project is aimed at and designed for adults only)

Are you a creative practitioner? (please specify)

Full Name:

Preferred name, if any:

Town/City & Country of residence:

Do you have children?

Gender:

Does your gender identity match the sex you were assigned at birth?
(if no, please specify)

How would you like to be referred to? She/her/his/him/they/them

Sexual orientation:

Nationality:

How would you describe your National Identity? (please note that this may not be the same as your nationality)

Disability (if yes, please specify the nature of your disability):

Income band (please choose between the following): Low/Medium/High

What class do you identify with?

Ethnicity (please indicate any mix heritage you are aware of):

Please choose from the list below the ‘maternal’ position you’re coming to the project with: (add more categories if needed)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stepmother | Adoption | Fostering | Miscarriage | Abortion |
| Lesbian | Gay | non-binary | IUI | IVF |
| Idea/imaginary | Child-carer | Educator | Nanny | Drag |
| creative/artistic practice | | Queer Person of Colour (QPoC) | | |

**Appendix 4 – First holding email template**
**(sent individually upon receipt of inquiry, early August 2019)**

From: Maud Lannen <mlann001@gold.ac.uk>
Sent: August 2019 12:27
To:
Subject: The Maternal - Collaborations

Hello, thank you so much for emailing. I am very touched by your interest in my project and very interested in your perspective. I think it's very rich in terms of opening up what the maternal is beyond traditional assumptions.

I am drawn to xxxxxxxx. I am interested in digging into the reality of your proposition xxxxxxxx, alongside tapping in the imaginary and playfulness of it, if you see what I mean.

Those are very rich territories to explore if you wanted to get involved in my project.

The major strand running through it is the deconstruction and denaturalisation of the maternal/reproductive labours (incl body, practice and ethics); by doing so, revealing the capitalist workings and ideology. I think this can be a potent springboard to re-formulating and re-imagining, allying poetry and fiction, what the maternal is and can become in the future.

At this stage, I anticipate that the research will take place through a series of workshops - I expect the project will attract a number of collaborators that will come and go over time, and I have taken this into account.

Looking further ahead, the project aims to focus on choreography and how choreography can embed this reformulation distinctively anti-capitalist of the maternal. At this stage though, the focus is on bringing people together and beginning conversation.

Let me know how that sounds. I am looking to set up our first group meet sometime over Sept ideally - if you have any preference (daytime, evenings, wkends) or any dates to avoid, please let me know. I am also available if you have any questions or fancy conversing further ofc xx

**Appendix 5 – second holding email, 31 August 2019**

From: Maud Lannen <mlann001@gold.ac.uk>
Sent: 31 August 2019 12:27
To: Maud Lannen
Subject: The Maternal - Collaborations

Dear all,

Thank you so much for responding to my recent call out. I am touched that the project resonated deeply for so many. Most of all, I am excited about the sheer breadth and diversity of perspectives. Your experience is important. It deserves visibility as it so pertinently challenges traditional essentialist and exclusionary ideology around maternity. Non-traditional instances of mothering allow, I believe, to go much further and shed light on what a maternal practice actually is/can become and who can, and indeed does, perform it, thereby challenging culture's construction and naturalisation of certain maternal bodies and labours over others.

Over the next couple of weeks, I will be developing and customising a methodology with a view to maximize our engagement with each other. After much thought, I have decided to leave the idea of a physical workshop for now. I propose in the first instance that the 'practical' research will take place online via email, skype and/or sharing of material online. This is to ease the process of taking part in the project in a way that doesn't put a strain on your time or finances and is not dependent upon geography. Later on, there will be opportunities to meet face to face in studio for those who wish to and are able to continue their involvement in the project.

I am very excited and I hope you are too.

I shall be in touch by 13th September. In the meantime, I would like to leave you with this quote from Didier Anzieu, a French psychoanalyst and leading theorist on skin and containment. Anzieu wrote it at the end of his life while suffering from Parkinson's disease. It is an account of human condition and the struggles towards individuation. I find it particularly evocative of the process/es and struggles involved in maternity. Let me have your thoughts.

‘To marry the masculine and the feminine in the mind, immobility and movement in the body. To tolerate anxiety and joy, hatred and laughter. To sustain love in the gap between abandonment to the other and abandonment of the other. To foil the seductions, perversions and ruses of the death drive. To turn the negative against itself. To deny, cut, tear and transgress in order to progress. To enwrap, unfold, unfurl, unroll, curl up, interleave, in order to exist and coexist. To give, indefinitely, to our human finitude, a form that is never definitive.’ (in Segal, 2009)

Speak soon

Maud

**Appendix 6 – Third holding email, 9 September 2019**

From: Maud Lannen <mlann001@gold.ac.uk>
Sent: 09 September 2019 16:56
To: Maud Lannen
Subject: Re: The Maternal – Collaborations

Attachments: The Maternal - Participant_Consent_Template.docx; The Maternal - Participant_Information.docx; The Maternal - Personal Details Questionnaire.docx

Importance: High

Dear All,

Thank you so much for your patience. I have drawn a great structure for our collaboration, which hopefully you will find nourishing and easy to engage with.

Before we start, it is essential that you review, complete and sign the attached documents. These include:

* Participant info sheet: which tells you about the structure of the project and in which ways you are protected.
* Participant consent form (self-explanatory)
* Personal Questionnaire: designed to collect some of your personal data, only those critical to thesis

Could I please ask you to return them via email by Friday 13th September.

As you will see from the documents outlining the structure, the collaboration will take the form of creative tasks (5 in total) focussed each on one particular element of maternal experience. They have been designed to tap into both embodiment and imagination. You are free to respond to the tasks using any medium that you already enjoy or would like to experiment with, e.g., writing (automatic/free writing, poetry, making lists), photographs, video, images, drawing, sound and movements/gestures. This is with a view to generate material that can be shared online and can be

inserted in an installation at a later stage. I have chosen those media because they allow for improvisation, spontaneity to emerge and a relationship to material that is not hindered by judgment and self-scrutiny, hopefully!

You will have 3 weeks to complete the task - I have written some guidelines and tips, those will accompany each task to remind you for example to start with no plan nor expectations; to engage with the task for a limited period of time (I suggest a 20mn session) each week over 3 weeks; to follow where your attention guides you without judging it; to be kind to yourself; and last, but important, that incoherence is great and I welcome it!

Here's the proposed timeline:

5 tasks
3 weeks each
15-week schedule to end of Dec/early Jan
Task 1 by 4th October
Task 2 by 25th October
Task 3 by 15th November
Task 4 by 6th December
Task 5 by 27th Dec/early Jan due to Christmas break
(I am considering the possibility of a physical workshop early Dec to bring the group together, take stock, view installation of materials generated as well as begin discussing final creative task together. I am aware that many of you have expressed the desire to meet others participating in this project and learn from the group - to be confirmed)

I shall be in touch with the first task on 13th Sept – please ensure that you have returned the paperwork by then. Thanks.

In the meantime, I would like to leave you with the following thoughts and questions:

*Drawing from both your embodiment/experience and imagination,*
*What is…. The maternal? What are its colours, tones, forms, gestures and sounds?*

Maud

**Appendix 7 – Guidance notes**

You are free to respond to the tasks using any medium that you already enjoy or would like to experiment with ,e.g., writing (automatic/free writing, poetry, making lists), photographs, video, images, drawing, sound and gestures, with a view to generate material that can be shared online, and can be potentially inserted in an installation at a later stage. I have chosen those media because they allow for improvisation, spontaneity to emerge and a relationship to material that is not hindered by judgement and self-scrutiny, hopefully!

Remember that you (not the children you care for, if you have any) are the subject as well as author of your writing, video, etc… This point is important as research on maternal relations has traditional been exclusively child centred. It may therefore require a little gymnastic to switch or even find one's voice. Be patient and kind to yourself. Engage with the tasks without any plan nor expectations. Give yourself 20mns maybe once a week or as often as you want to. The first session may very well unlock more material that will come pouring out. If so, do give in to the urge! I recommend that you find a quiet space to occupy and allow 20mns: begin and don't stop until time is up (you can use a timer for example). Follow where your attention or consciousness takes you without succumbing to the desire to review or judge it. And if in doubt, remember – incoherence is great!

If you're struggling in any way, you could use the tools below to 'direct' your attention. These can be used in any order or configurations whatsoever:

- Zoom in/zoom out (switch your attention between small and dominant aspects of your experience)
- Repeat (it's a great way to extend the train of thought or movement, I find, especially if you feel a bit stuck)
- Fragment
- Make lists
- Collage (put things together that may appear unconnected)
- Disrupt
- Reorientate
- Pause

**Appendix 8 – Task 1**

Drawing from both your embodiment/experience and imagination, tell me about…

1. The Maternal Body

   *This section may touch upon the physical character of your body and how it shapes your experience and perception; its gendering; its relation to conventional ideas around the 'natural' maternal body but also lineage, kinship; technology and medicine; law; objects that extend the body; sex and sexuality, etc.… (Those are suggestions only / this is not an exhaustive list)*

**Appendix 9 – Task 2**

Drawing from both your embodiment/experience and imagination, tell me about…

2. Maternal Time

*How is it structured? What everyday events structure your sense of time? Experiences of time can be structured by interruption, discontinuity, alienation, breakdown… Several things that happen at once might affect your sense of time.*

**Appendix 10 – Task 3**

Drawing from both your embodiment/experience and imagination, tell me about…

3. Maternal Space

   *For example, geography, architecture, place, environment, organ, etc.*

**Appendix 11 – Task 4**

Drawing from both your own embodiment/experience and imagination, tell me about…

4. Maternal Being With/relating

*This may include:*

- *Relational labours - haptic and otherwise - towards child and/or others, plants, environment etc.*
- *Conception of kinship – legal/medical, psychological or other; attachment, bond of love*
- *Relational practice – e.g. sexual, gestational, domestic, in private and public sphere;*
- *Relational ethics, including any objects (or other elements like tools or strategies) as prosthesis that facilitate this.*

*The list is only there as prompt, you are welcome to go beyond it. Follow your intuition!*

**Appendix 12 – Task 5**

5. Maternal Manifesto

   What does (maternal) refusal, disobedience and revolt feel and look like?

   *If you can, please use the manifesto structure of manifesto 'No to …' and creating a long list. Expand if you need to.*
   *A suggestion would be to think about the limits of the maternal – what are they? You could draw on the limitations imposed by cultural conventional idea of bodies and practice; the social/economic/political conditions around your own body and experience; the labours and exploitative dynamics of caring practices, etc.*