



Art / Knowledge / Theory

Senses of Embodiment: Art, Technics, Media

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Introduction: In Medias Res

New technologies affect sense perception, our most immediate access to the world, in ways that concern not only what and how we perceive, but the very conditions of perception itself. Transforming the sense of time and space as well as the meaning of the body inhabiting a place, new technologies in fact make us aware of those conditions in new ways. For a long time, the conditions of perception were held to be unchanging and universal, belonging to a natural or transcendental order, but have now proved to be functions of complex historical and technical processes. However, since our awareness of the ways in which technologies transform our sensuous access to the world is mainly non-reflective and practical, based on the everyday use of technological devices, our experience of the changing conditions of perception is essentially a mixture of familiarity and strangeness. In theoretical discussions concerning new media this ambiguousness is manifested in the polarity between technophilic and technophobic accounts.¹

At the same time, it has also become evident that we do not confront technologies merely as well-designed instruments serving us in our efforts to achieve particular ends. Especially mass media and information technology make us aware of the fact that new technologies organize and structure our experience in ways that are difficult to analyze and hard to evaluate. With reference to our perceptual life, technologies are there not simply as instruments at our disposal but, rather, as media of experience. Instead of offering us a neutral space of perception, these media situate the act of perceiving into a field determined in complex ways by technical as well as habitual, bodily and material factors.² Hence, the technological possibilities of perceiving and communicating are defined less by clearly identifiable functions than by effects of ongoing differentiations in medial fields characterized by conflicting forces. Our immediate experience of what is called reality is, in its seeming immediacy, constituted by media that clearly exceed our mastery.

It is no wonder, then, that we have become quite uncertain as to the appropriate ways of dealing with the effects of technology on our bodily existence. Fundamental questions arise that are irreducible to the technological means-ends-schema and that also seem to exceed the limits of traditional academic disciplines

1 For a concise overview of the most significant media theoretical positions and key terms see for example *Medientheorien. Eine Einführung*, eds. Daniela Kloock & Angela Spahr, Munich: UTB/Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1997 and *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, eds. W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen, Chicago: Chicago U.P., 2010.

2 Cf. for example *Modernisierung des Sehens. Sehweisen zwischen Künsten und Medien*, eds. Matthias Bruhn and Kai-Uwe Hemken, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008.

and even scientific objectivity as such.³ It is especially the arts and philosophical thought that have been alert to these challenges. Their recent developments make evident that one of the major tasks brought to us by new technologies is the urgent need to reconsider the very conditions of experience, starting from the notions of time, space, place, and the body.

Mediality of sense

Any discourse on these issues comes across essential terminological difficulties, starting with the words technology and medium. In English, the word ‘technology’ easily suggests the practical application of scientific knowledge. In comparison, for instance, to the German *Technik*, which covers the meanings of technique and skill, the word technology is often too theoretical and science-oriented to serve as an appropriate designation of the problematic at issue here. Therefore we will use here the less theoretical word ‘technics’, which refers to technical rules or methods, as well as to the theory and study of an art or process. Being also a less habitual word, it may perhaps serve better as the designation of a field that is at once familiar and strange.

More challenging difficulties pertain to the word ‘medium’ as well as its plural form ‘media’. The diversity of phenomena subsumed under the word media (both in everyday contexts and in theoretical discussions) makes any attempt at a univocal definition of media into a virtually impossible task. Depending on context, we can legitimately call media such diverse entities and phenomena as materials, vehicles, machines, tools, bodies, senses, languages and complex technological settings. In one way or another, however, all media involve at once sense perception, that is, our embodied experience, and an articulation of meaning. Therefore, what is at play in media are all the senses of ‘sense’: sense perception, meaning, and the ability to estimate, appreciate or feel something. At the same time, at play in media are also all the senses of ‘embodiment’: the technical, material, bodily, and habitual differences that in each case articulate sense by incarnating it, representing it or making it part of a system. Insofar as media articulate sense by gathering together the different senses of ‘sense’, the question concerns, generally, what we call *mediality of sense*.

3 Over the past few decades, theoretical challenges related to new media have led to multifaceted reconsiderations of the status of verbal language in the humanities. Cf. Mika Elo, “Notes On Media Sensitivity in Artistic Research”, in *The Exposition of Artistic Research: Publishing Art in Academia*, eds. Michael Schwab and Henk Borgdorff, Leiden: Leiden U.P., 2014, 25–38 and Stefan Münker, *Philosophie nach dem “Medial Turn”*. *Beiträge zur Theorie der Mediengesellschaft*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009.

What is required of any attempt to question the senses of embodiment and the mediality of sense is that the questioning itself be sensitive to its own mediality. Both the arts and philosophy have made such a requirement their own: any veritable philosophical or artistic interrogation is essentially an interrogation of the very medium of that interrogation. If the arts and philosophy have indeed been alert to the aforementioned cultural changes, this is due perhaps less to the artists' and philosophers' personal sensitivity than to the historical process in which the relation of artistic and philosophical practices to their traditional media has become problematic. In fact, their alertness to the transformations going on with respect to technics is in various ways coupled with an awareness of a required transformation of their own practices. This means at once that, if the questions concerning the mediality of sense call for artistic and philosophical approaches, the role of these approaches must not be defined in advance. Moreover, the signs that point to the necessity of reconsidering the very nature of both art and philosophy in the face of these issues also point to the possibility of reconsidering their relations to each other.⁴

Technics and the question of presentation

At the historical moment when new technical modes of reproduction gave rise to wholly new art forms, first photography and then film, the traditional notion of art was put in question. As Walter Benjamin in particular showed in the 1930s, the aesthetic categories that up until the 19th century had powerfully delimited the field of art now began to lose their immediate credibility.⁵ In the case of photography and film, notions like "authenticity", "originality" and the "proper place" of the work of art proved to be questionable, because the idea of an original work situated in its own place became untenable: a photograph or a film is there from the beginning as a copy to be reproduced and reworked as well as to be distributed and shown in many places at the same time. What was at once made questionable, was the integrity of the work of art and, consequently, the governing aesthetic

4 As the present anthology shows, this involvement can take many forms. For Cecilia Roos, her own bodily practice becomes the key issue, whereas for Alex Arteaga, Anna Petronella Foulter, Esa Kirkkopelto and Miika Luoto it is the philosophical argument that makes up the testing ground of the senses of embodiment. Laura Beloff and Koray Tahiroğlu & James Nesfield make use of philosophical discussions in framing their artistic inquiries. Mika Elo and Tuomo Rainio, again, develop more strategic and performative modes of thought combining text and images.

5 Cf. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility", *Selected Writings*, vol.3, ed. Michael W. Jennings et al., various translators, Cambridge Massachusetts and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard U. P., 2002.

idea of the work as a unified, meaningful whole. The question now is, what becomes of art when its “work” is defined by the very relations that formerly were considered to belong to its “context”, that is, to be external or accessory, like the modes of its presentation, transmission and storage. As we now know, such questions have become even more urgent in the wake of digital technologies. And as Benjamin already clearly saw, the stakes of the problematic concern the whole of culture: the aesthetic questions are immediately also political.

According to Martin Heidegger (whose reflections on technics started approximately at the same time as Benjamin’s), the problem of technics exceeds all regional problems as it concerns the very being of beings.⁶ In order to approach “the essence of technics”, Heidegger argued, we must free ourselves from the instrumental-anthropological definition of technics. The reason for this is not the incorrectness of the definition, according to which technics are man-made means to ends. The definition is in fact correct to such an extent that it is able to hide the fact that there is something else at play in technics, something else that by far surpasses instrumentality and human mastery.⁷ According to Heidegger, the essence of technics is nothing technical. What is at issue in it, is a particular mode in which things come into presence, a particular mode of the uncovering of what is. He characterizes it as a process of “setting” or “placing” (*stellen*), in which everything is with reference to a total availability of being placed at will.⁸ To borrow Samuel Weber’s apt formula: in technics, “things are allowed to take place only insofar as they can be put in place”.⁹ Most importantly, this ontological demand affects not only technological or scientific modes of production and inquiry, but all modes of representation and presentation (*vorstellen* and *darstellen*), including those of the arts and philosophy.

What both Benjamin and Heidegger started to bring to the fore is the fact that no interrogation of the articulation of sense in contemporary culture can avoid the unsettling effects of technics and media. What their works also point to, albeit in very different ways, is a limit of the theoretical as such with respect to the problematic at issue. The fundamental questions brought to us by technics concerning the relation between space and place, distance and proximity, presence and absence become manifest as problems that exceed the limits of existing theoretical

6 Martin Heidegger’s reflections on technics can be found in several writings; in this context, the two perhaps most important are “The Age of the World-Picture”, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, in Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2002, and “The Question Concerning Technology”, trans. William Lovitt, in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, New York: Harper, 1993.

7 “The Question Concerning Technology”, p. 312f.

8 *Ibid.* p. 324f.

9 Samuel Weber, *Mass mediauras. Form, Technics, Media*, ed. Alan Cholodenko, California: Stanford U.P., 1996, p. 79.

approaches and, perhaps, all attempts at pure theoretical mastery. What is common to the approaches of both Benjamin and Heidegger is their awareness of the peculiar demands that these problems put on thought as a theoretical practice. In their work, the essential possibilities of thought are not reducible to mere conceptual determination and logical argumentation, but remain connected to the performative and transformative character of discourse. The question of technics and technical media require that thinking attend in new ways to its own media and techniques, that is, language and its means of presentation. From our own historical distance we can perhaps see that, here, the question of the possible role of artistic practices in addressing contemporary questions starts to emerge.

Bodily capacities

With the rise of new modes of representation based on technical production, at first photography and film, and more recently a whole array of electronic and digital media, we have become aware of the complexity of our seemingly natural sense perception. “It is another nature which speaks to the camera as compared to the eye”, Benjamin pointed out with regard to photography.¹⁰ Today the question is, whether and how the algorithmic processes taking place on the subface¹¹ of complex media-technological settings still “speak” to our senses? How to relate our sense experience to technological processes that do not face the body in any phenomenal sense but nevertheless significantly contribute to our sense of reality?

In distinction to traditional arts, in which the representations offered by works are distinguishable from everyday reality, new media simulate our sense perception. Therefore, they are not merely means for the transmission of information. Much more fundamentally, they extend our bodily capacities in such a way that they detach the capacity to see and hear from its bodily place. Offering us new modes of access to the world, they also organize our experience of the world in ways that unsettle some of our most basic notions, such as the unity of body and its place, or the one-way relation between the representation and the represented. While new media offer us new modes of perception, they also allow us to experience the complexity and strangeness of perception, notably its dependence upon a vast apparatus that remains beyond our control.¹²

10 Benjamin, *Selected Writings* vol. 3, p. 117.

11 Frieder Nake, “Surface, Interface, Subface: Three Cases of Interaction and One Concept”, in *Paradoxes of Interactivity. Perspectives for Media Theory, Human-Computer Interaction, and Artistic Investigations*, eds. Uwe Seifert et al., Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008, p. 92–109.

12 Samuel Weber has addressed these questions in a challenging way in his *Mass mediauras*.

Today, as diverse sensations and faculties are combined in new ways with the aid of computers, the role of our sensorium and its inner hierarchies are, together with the whole notion of the body, once again undergoing fundamental changes. In the wake of recent media-technological developments, such as web 2.0, touch screen technologies as well as various mobile and ubiquitous media, the promise of infinite communicability and seamless functionality combined with relative independence from the physical environment, have become part of our everyday experience. For a long time, Western conceptions of the body were governed (and in many ways still are) by the principle of containment, according to which the body is a self-contained unit that takes its place by excluding other bodies from that place.¹³ This principle has become an increasingly untenable starting point for any discourse on the lived body.

If sense perception and other bodily capacities have become questionable with the development of technics, to the extent that the body itself seems to be more problematic than ever, this situation has at once given rise to numerous attempts to interrogate the body in new ways. This side of the distinction between mind and body, the lived body is revealed as an original reference point of the articulation of sense – an original medium, as it were. What is of interest in the body, from this point of view, are for instance its expressive and mimetic capacities, its modes of communication that remain “below” the level of conceptual signification, its rhythmic and postural ways of engaging with situations, and its ability to “think” in ways that remain within the bodily medium, like dancing.

To speak of the body as an original medium makes it impossible to conceive of it as an original source. Therefore, a return to the original capacities of the body cannot be a return to an authentic element, to something natural or immediate. Instead, the body must itself be conceived of in terms of media, that is, with reference to all those technical, material and habitual structures that in each case articulate its capacities. Both new challenges and new possibilities of inquiry start to emerge here. We might follow Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s reflections on the “paradox of expression”, on what happens when the “still mute experience” is brought to the “expression of its own sense”. Being neither a statement *about* experience, nor the revelation of the experience *in itself*, an expression is a *passage* without a beginning or an end, and precisely as such, the moment of the birth of sense.¹⁴ Developed with respect to the question of the mediality of sense, this

13 For a first systematic articulation of this principle, cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, 208b–210b.

14 Merleau-Ponty developed the notion of expression in several writings, especially in those from the beginning of the 1950’s. A profound summary of the various aspects of expression in Merleau-Ponty is Bernhard Waldenfels, “The paradox of Expression”, in *Chiasms. Merleau-Ponty’s Notion of Flesh*, ed. Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor, Albany: State university of New York Press, 2000.

might mean that, in certain cases at least, the idea of knowledge about a sensible phenomenon articulated in signifying language gives way to the idea of a passage between different media of experience, or that the idea of theoretical knowledge about practical know-how gives way to the idea of a transition between two practices mutually dependent on each other.¹⁵ Hence, we encounter the question of translation in a broad sense, of a translation, moreover, which is irreducible to the idea of the transfer of significations.

The sense of aesthetics

The transformation of our perceptual access to the world through new technologies also concerns the field of aesthetics, although in ambiguous ways. While a rigorous delimitation of the field of aesthetic phenomena has become more and more suspect, the very questions to which aesthetics has tried to answer, emerge in new, challenging forms.

Some of the most important topics of modern aesthetics as first developed by Kant have been the following: the distinction between aesthetic and cognitive judgement, the definition of a properly aesthetic notion of form, the delimitation of the work of art through a differentiation between its internal and external properties, and the irreducibility of the aesthetic experience to conceptual analysis. For a long time, these tasks have proved to be internally problematic, and yet, they have continued to challenge theoretical thinking in ever new ways. Now, in a culture determined through and through by technics and media, their challenge has become even more ambiguous. When knowledge intervenes massively in the production of “aesthetic” objects, when aesthetic forms come to belong to the sphere of programming, when the “work” is more and more present as part of a “network”, and when conceptual analysis has become an almost necessary framework for the production and reception of aesthetic objects, we are confronted with the question: what is the very sense of aesthetics?

From the point of view of the arts, the role of aesthetics is no less ambiguous. Since the defence of the autonomy of art in the name of traditional aesthetics has become suspect, and since the institutional framework of art is all-pervasive today, art is easily understood as a form of cultural activity. This means that artistic practice is explicated with reference to structures of meaning that have their basis in social, political or economic demands, and that the work of art is reduced to being a vehicle of meaning. In this situation, a return to the basic questions of aesthetics in the Kantian sense would seem to be inevitable, if only in order to

15 In this volume, Alex Arteaga addresses these questions from an enactivistic point of view relating his approach to Husserlian phenomenology.

forestall the reductionist understanding of art as a cultural activity, of which it is legitimate to demand that it be culturally understandable, publicly imposing and economically successful. However, the expectation that aesthetics would be able to offer a legitimation for art has proved to be, especially through the intervention of technics and media into the aesthetic field, a fallacious idea, both illusory and ideological.

According to Kant's classical analysis,¹⁶ my experience is aesthetic if, in the presence of an object, I feel a pleasure that is universally communicable, although without a concept. The aesthetic pleasure is not an immediate pleasure of the senses, but the pleasure of reflection characterizing my state in front of the object. Issuing from the free accord between understanding (the faculty of concepts) and imagination (the faculty of sensible presentation), aesthetic pleasure is the feeling of something meaningful, but precisely in the absence of any definable meaning. Aesthetics, then, refers not to my capacity of perceiving but, rather, to my capacity of feeling. More precisely, the aesthetic feeling is the sign of my receptivity to something not yet constituted as an object of knowledge, in other words, of my receptivity to the very donation of something.

Following the reflections of Jean-François Lyotard on the fate of aesthetics in the context of techno-scientific capitalism,¹⁷ we may bring up three topics worth noting here: 1. the non-conceptual communication defining aesthetic reception, 2. the passibility characterizing aesthetic sensibility, and 3. the paradoxical presence of matter in the absence of form. In ways that are most relevant today, they emphasize the irreducibility of aesthetic sensibility to knowledge and will, and the resistance of artistic practices to cultural production of meaning.

1. As Kant argued, before inducing understanding, the aesthetic object induces a feeling that is – constitutively and immediately – universally communicable. This universal communicability, which is not a fact but a demand, is original as it constitutes the receptivity of the human mind. Therefore, aesthetics in the Kantian sense is connected to a radical thinking of *non-conceptual communication*: as the receptivity of the mind, aesthetic communication precedes any act of communication and consequently all pragmatics of communication. Such communication in aesthetic feeling bears on the immediate community, in the name of which the work is received; what matters here is not the work's content or form, but its modality of presence.¹⁸

16 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2000.

17 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman. Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.

18 Lyotard, "Something like 'communication...without communication'", in *The Inhuman*, p. 108–118.

2. The presence of something is not an issue of objective knowledge, but of “passibility” (the capacity to suffer or feel) which is the very condition of experience. Most importantly, passibility is not passivity, which is determined by its opposite, activity. What matters here is that something is *happening to me* due to the fact that something is *given* to me without being controlled, programmed or grasped by a concept. The aesthetic feeling analyzed by Kant can be understood as the immediate welcoming of the donation, of what cannot be calculated but only received, and what gives matter for aesthetic reflection.¹⁹ However, there are strong contemporary tendencies that run counter to the notion of passibility and, consequently, aesthetics. Today, it is common that the encounter with the work of art is conceived of in terms of the self-constitution of the active subject in relation to what is addressed to him or her. Instead of judging the encounter with the work on the basis of being exposed, disconcerted, it is judged on the basis of the will to action. Even the presumed interruption of mastery by interaction – also a widespread tendency today – leads to neglecting the very problem of passibility, since the question still remains one of action. In order to give aesthetics its due, what must be interrupted is not a subjective attitude, but the means by which we think presence according to the modality of mastery.²⁰

3. Finally, with the topic of the sublime, Kantian aesthetics breaks with the aesthetics of form. Among many others, Lyotard has developed the notion of the sublime as one appropriate to the contemporary aesthetic sensitivity. However, in contrast to Kant, for whom the sublime feeling pointed towards the sphere of morality, for Lyotard it points toward nuances, timbres, incomparable qualities – that is, matter. This matter is not destined for form, or in other words, for the synthetic capacity of the human mind, and therefore it remains “immaterial”. What is at issue, then, in the context of the problematic of presentation without form, is presence itself, the “that there be something”, insofar as it is encountered only in the absence of the active mind, in a state of mind which is “a prey to presence”. What is, after the sublime, veritably aesthetic, is the presentation of the fact that there is the unrepresentable: the “touch” of a singular quality, the event of passibility, for which the mind cannot be prepared and which will have happened only by unsettling the mind.²¹

19 *Ibid.*

20 As Laura Beloff’s and Koray Tahiroğlu’s & James Nesfield’s contributions in this volume clearly show, artists working with interactive media settings and devices often look for possibilities of widening the frames of interaction in order to include playfulness and enjoyment.

21 Lyotard, “After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics”, in *The Inhuman*, p. 135–143.

The pathic

During the last two or three decades, one particularly challenging approach to the problematic of the embodiment of sense has taken its orientation from the questions of touch and the “pathic”. To speak of the pathic (from the Greek *pathos*: to experience, to suffer, to be under the influence of something) means, with reference to the traditional fields of study, to attend to the close connections between aesthesiology and aesthetics. Moreover, since the question of the pathic pertains to a basic element of our sensible existence that is irreducible to both cognition and will, such an approach is situated this side of the distinction between the theoretical and the practical. Here, questions concerning the arts, technics and media come to the fore, related in challenging ways to the whole problematic of the body. With respect to our sensorium, the sense of touch proves to be prototypical of the sensible order in its entirety, so that its significance extends far beyond the limits of one particular sense modality. Furthermore, in its way of exceeding the tactile world, touch proves to be more than the physical sense of touch: as a designation for the paradoxical structure of exposure, touch marks experience as such.²²

To conceive of the experience in terms of pathic exposure epitomized by touching means to consider it as an event, without posing any subject or object preceding it or sustaining it. Through such an event, something *happens to me* because something *touches me*; the event singles me out. What is most important, however, is that the *event of touch* precedes both that which touches and the one who is touched. On the one hand, touching has already taken place when I react to it or act according to it. And yet, I encounter that which touches me first through my *response* to its particular way of touching, without ever being able to reduce the lead of the event.²³

On the risky stage of life, i.e. in our bodily being, to touch always also means to be touched, hence, exposure. Therefore, the reciprocal structure of touch is not symmetric but twisted out of joint by the pathic moment. The self is always preceded by something that touches or exposes the self. These encounters constitute the precondition of any response, since it is only the pathic exposure that makes the self turn to itself as sentient. The structure at issue is not a reflexive one, since exposure always involves the transitive formation of the self.²⁴

22 Cf. Mika Elo, “Digital finger: beyond phenomenological figures of touch”, *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, vol. 4., 2012, DOI: 10.3402/jac.v4i0.14982.

23 Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung. Phänomenologie – Psychoanalyse – Phänomenotechnik*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002.

24 Touching involves a “testing” of the limits with multifaceted modalities: contesting, detest-

As pathic, the experience is neither a subjective act or state, nor an objective process; instead, it surpasses all my activities as it befalls me, although it requires my contribution to take place. Generally, the pathic experience is characterized by a temporal deferral in which the foreign effect and one's own initiative are both set apart and tied together. Making up the surprise character of the experience, the pathic moment always comes too early for us to be ready for it, so that our response always comes too late to reach the experience at its peak. Most importantly, however, there is not *something* preceding my experience; rather, the one who undergoes the experience *precedes him- or herself*. To conceive of the experience as pathic means to consider it as an event that does not begin at oneself, at what is one's own, but elsewhere, at the foreign.²⁵

The self, in other words, does not establish itself but is formed transitively in contact with others. As pathic self-sense, touch is therefore an *alien sense* in two ways: as a predisposition to sense what is alien in oneself and as an ability that, because it relies on the other, is one's own only secondarily.²⁶ Although touching involves appropriation, the event of touch is not anyone's own or predictable. One might say that touch always arises between some and in the middle of everything.

Insofar as the consideration of the pathic implies a reassessment of the basic relations between subject and object, self and other, activity and passivity, proximity and distance etc., it challenges our accustomed notions of research and opens up new possibilities, including the possibility to reconsider the culturally operative opposition between theory and practice. Theoretical mastery as well as practical effectiveness come to be seen in a new light, starting from the fact that the pathic exposure precedes both mental and physical grasp. The body must now be reconsidered in terms of the pathic; it is not the physical or physiological body, but something like a bodily self. However, it is a self not by relating to itself, but by sensing itself sensing, that is, by opening to itself through being exposed to what is not itself, what is foreign to it. To sense myself sensing, then, means to sense a foreignness in myself that I can never appropriate. Without such an expropriation constitutive of my self, there would be no senses, no self and no sense: I can be affected, touched or addressed only insofar as I am not wholly in possession of "myself".

ing, attesting, etc. What is at stake is the experience of a limit which is at the same time the limit of experience. Cf. Elo, "Digital finger".

25 Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel. Modi ästhetischer Erfahrung*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2010, p. 232f.

26 Cf. Waldenfels, *Bruchlinien der Erfahrung*, p. 64.

The arts, too, have been the object of inquiries in terms of touch.²⁷ This is to attend to the fact that there is in the arts always something that essentially escapes both cognitive mastery and will of action. Since the event of touch cannot be calculated or preserved, mastery and will always come too early or too late. What I sense in being touched is my own capacity to feel, suffer, and enjoy, and perhaps also to create. To speak of art in terms of touch cannot mean the affirmation of an immediate contact with the work or a presentation; the seemingly immediate is always mediated, and the contact always involves an interruption. The interruption inherent to touch cannot but break the self-sufficient subject and give way to a fragile mode of being at the mercy of probing and groping. If “art” is conceived as a technique of touch, as a singular interruption of the significant order of the world, such a technique does not serve the production of meaning. Rather, it exposes us to the embodiment of sense and the senses of embodiment, which means, at the same time, to the mediality of sense.

Art and research

In this volume, the reader will find theoretical studies on the questions of art, technics and media together with practice-based approaches reflecting on the possibilities of artistic research and even technical innovation. As the editors of the book, it is our conviction that questions concerning the embodiment of sense in the context of art, media and technics require a novel and experimental research attitude. What is needed is a multiplicity of approaches that cross not only the boundaries between academic disciplines usually considered to be distinct, but the very boundary between theory and practice. In so far as artistic research takes the form of an activity undertaken in the borderland between the art world and the academic world, it can be called “boundary work”, which not only crosses boundaries but also has the potential to destabilize and even displace them.²⁸

The aim of this anthology is not a holistic understanding of a particular field of research, and its possible strength is not a strictly methodological one, issuing from the application of concepts, methods, or results of one particular field of study in the sphere of another. Rather, the multiplicity of approaches presented here must be considered both experimental and exploring, developing novel

27 A most challenging contribution is Jean-Luc Nancy, *Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, California: Stanford U.P., 1996.

28 Cf. Henk Borgdorff, “Artistic Research as Boundary Work”, in *The Conflict of Faculties. Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia*, Leiden: Leiden U.P., 2012, p. 130–138.

modes of approach for as yet unknown objects of research. Its starting point is analogous to Kantian aesthetic judgment: without the confines of an established discipline, both an artist-researcher and a thinker are in the position of one who needs to judge without, however, knowing the rule on the basis of which to judge. He or she has to reflect, without any other guide than the pleasure and exigency of reflexion, so that the rule of judgment can only be grasped after the fact. In short, it is simply a question of how to encounter a stranger.²⁹

MIKA ELO & MIKA LUOTO

29 Sarat Maharaj has aptly characterized artistic research in terms of *xenography*, the key challenge of which is to write the foreign, not about the foreign. Maharaj, "Unfinishable sketch of 'an unknown object in 4D': scenes of artistic research", in *Artistic Research*, eds. Annette Balkema and Henk Slager, Amsterdam/New York: Lier en Boog, 2004, p. 46.