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New Orientations: Touch in Women's Experimental Writing

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New Orientations: Touch in Women's Experimental Writing

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Westminster
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Awarded October 2020.

Abstract

Through the analysis of women's experimental writing, this thesis examines the significance of touch in exceeding individual and social boundaries, contending that touch has the radical potential to elicit transformation. This thesis explores the way in which touch materialises throughout the experimental works of Audre Lorde, Anaïs Nin, Marguerite Duras, Monique Wittig, and Kathy Acker, arguing that experimental writing facilitates an affective language of touch and sensation that resists and moves beyond societally gendered, racialised, and compulsory heterosexualised constructs of tactile relations. By doing so, this research gestures toward the queer nature of touch to exceed normative frameworks and boundaries posed by conventional language, illuminating, in the readings of these experimental texts, new orientations for thinking through the radical potentials of touch, as a site of resistance that disrupts conventional modes of relation. Within these experimental texts, a politics of touch materialises both thematically and contextually, as well as through the experimental form itself, that operates as a site of counter politics to mainstream ideas of sexual relations. By engaging with contemporary feminist studies that take up issues of touch, such as Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006), this thesis proposes that touch functions as an 'orientation device' that informs what it means to be in relation to another. Touch has radical potentialities for transformation through its ability to orientate, reorientate and disorientate the subjects' bodies. Touch, therefore, precipitates change when bodies no longer follow the lines that have previously orientated them, but instead envision new orientations.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I am beyond grateful to my Director of Studies, Dr Georgina Colby, for her expertise, guidance, advice and amazing support throughout this project, as well as for her kindness and understanding of the hardships and tribulations one may face whilst undertaking a PhD. This support, with such extensive and detailed feedback that continuously challenged me to critically reflect, modify, and improve my work to become a better researcher, has been crucial for my progress. This has not only been fundamental to my doctoral thesis, but also my personal and professional development as a researcher and individual.

I would also like to thank my secondary supervisors, Dr Simon Avery and Prof. Leigh Wilson, for their support and valuable feedback that has added significant insights into my work.

I would like to thank the University of Westminster and the Graduate School for firstly accepting me as a Doctoral Researcher, but also for providing me with opportunities, such as the 125 Award Fund and Globally Engaged Research Scholarship Scheme, which have helped me to develop professionally by enabling me to undertake archival research at UCLA's Special Collections as well as disseminate my research at multiple conferences.

I wish to acknowledge my gratitude for family and friends, particularly my mother, who have supported me throughout the last four years. Their patience, ability to make me laugh and provide outlets for life outside my PhD has kept me sane.

Last, but certainly not least, I am incredibly grateful for my partner, Joanna Knight, who has unconditionally supported me throughout this process.

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Introduction

Orientations of Touch

This thesis examines the significance of touch. In particular, it addresses the capacity of touch to go beyond social and individual boundaries, arguing that touch has the radical potential to evoke transformation. I explore the diverse ways in which touch materialises throughout the experimental works of Audre Lorde, Anaïs Nin, Marguerite Duras, Monique Wittig, and Kathy Acker. Through my analyses, I argue that experimental writing, by disrupting and reshaping conventional grammar, punctuation, and syntax, facilitates the emergence of a non-verbal language of touch within the texts, which resists and moves beyond societally gendered, racialised, and compulsory heterosexualised constructs that shape the spaces, temporalities, and experiences of tactile relations. In *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (2007), Erin Manning states that 'research on the senses can extend beyond commonsense approaches', claiming that 'to write about the senses it is necessary to write against the grain of a mind-body, reason-sense model that continues to privilege staid readings of gender, biology, and politics.'¹ This thesis similarly recognises that the sense of touch is not experienced within a vacuum, removed from social, cultural, or political influences, and therefore, seeks to question how the sense of touch is shaped by frameworks of gender, race, and sexuality. By analysing the way in which a language of touch emerges throughout these experimental texts, which dismantles privileged, hierarchised, and 'normative' constructs of tactile relations between bodies, I gesture toward the queer nature of touch to exceed normative frameworks, and in turn, boundaries posed by conventional language, illuminating, in my readings of these experimental texts, new orientations for thinking through the radical potentials of touch, as a site of resistance that disrupts conventional modes of relation.

In each chapter, I explore the sense of touch in regard to modes of relationality. Through this focus, this thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of how bodies are orientated

toward or away from each other, depending on what is considered within tactile reach of what Sara Ahmed terms one's 'bodily horizon.'² I engage with contemporary feminist studies that take up issues of touch, such as Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006). I bring these studies into dialogue with the experimental works of Lorde, Duras, Nin, Wittig, and Acker to consider how touch may function as an 'orientation device' that informs what it means to be in relation to another. According to Ahmed, orientation refers to:

how bodies are gendered, sexualized, and raced by how they extend into space, as an extension that differentiates between "left" and "right," "front" and "behind," "up" and "down," as well as "near" and "far." What is offered, in other words, is a model of how bodies become orientated by how they take up time and space.³

The way in which bodies extend into space produces how they are gendered, sexualised, and racialised, and informs who or what may be within reach of a body; and therefore, who or what may be touched. These normative frameworks therefore produce an economy of touch whereby some bodies and not others are within tactile reach of another. By firstly examining how bodies are orientated, I subsequently question how touch may influence these orientations or how, as a mode of relating, touch itself is orientated by these gendered, racialised, and sexualised orientations.

Ahmed's work is concerned with 'different sites, spaces, and temporalities'⁴ of gender, race, and sexuality, offering 'an approach to how bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable, that are available within the bodily horizon.'⁵ Nonetheless, Ahmed indicates that an economy of touch emerges through her analysis of orientations:

This model of touch shows how bodies reach other bodies, and how this "reaching" is already felt on the surface of the skin. And yet, I have suggested that not all bodies are within reach. Touch also involves an economy: a differentiation between those who can and cannot be reached. Touch then opens bodies to some bodies and not others.⁶

The idea of an economy of touch is central to this thesis. Similar to the way in which the gaze has been positioned within a scopic economy, by expanding on Ahmed's brief articulation of an economy of touch, I argue that touch is not merely the ever-present sense, or simply one sense among many, but *the* sense that often conflates with other senses and equally involves

an economy where touch is framed by social constructs of gender, race, and sexuality. Although there are numerous forms of touch that one can explore, such as forms of touch between a child and parent, or medical, platonic, and practical forms of touch, this thesis predominantly focuses on intimate or sexual forms of touch that occur within the context of sexual relations. The act of touching or of being touched is implicit within sexual relations, and often conflated with sexual relations for this very reason. Tactile relations can be misinterpreted as being synonymous with sexual relations, yet I consider sexual relations to be the overarching, umbrella term that encompasses more than the sexual (or what can be deemed the tactile) act itself. The actual act of touch and what it may mean to touch another is often taken for granted and overlooked as merely implied within the act, but it is a central aspect of what it means to be in relation to another in a sexual context. Therefore, rather than focusing on sexual relations, I focus on the specific act of touching, alternatively referring to these as tactile relations to bring touch to the foreground of what it means to encounter oneself in relation to another. Throughout my thesis, by focusing on intimate and sexual forms of touch, I explore the sense of touch within the framework of orientations, bringing to light my argument of how the experience of touch involves an economy that is framed by bodily orientations of gender, race, and sexuality.

I argue that the sense of touch, as a form of relationality between social, collective, and individual bodies, may function as an 'orientation device' that, on the one hand, assists in shaping bodies, and maintaining or bringing bodies back to being 'in line' with the 'straight line'. On the other hand, I argue that touch has the capacity to reorientate the subject toward a different direction, as well as disorientate the subject, assisting in how bodies may become 'out of line.' The sense of touch can elicit sensations of comfort and discomfort. When the act of touching or being touched feels comfortable, one often continues such actions and continues to orientate themselves in such ways, toward the same tactile relations, whereas when touch causes discomfort, one often desires to avoid, move away from, or change such tactile contact.

The notion of touch provoking discomfort speaks to Ahmed's notion of disorientation, which she posits as:

bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground. Disorientation as a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground or one's belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel livable.⁷

Ahmed's understanding of disorientation is founded on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's reflections of how one's perception of the world may be momentarily disorientated, which not only involves 'the intellectual experience of disorder, but the vital experience of giddiness and nausea, which is the awareness of our contingency, and the horror with which it fills us.'⁸ Merleau-Ponty uses the example of a subject seeing their position within a room through a mirror angled at 45 degrees to suggest that moments of disorientation present the room 'slantwise,' which alters how the subject may then perceive themselves within such a room.⁹ Yet rather than perceiving these moments as productive in terms of how such moments may change one's perception, Merleau-Ponty focuses on how one may overcome these moments, and therefore, explores notions of disorientation in terms of how bodies may reorientate themselves back to an upright position, or in other words, a 'straight' line.

Ahmed notes that '[t]he straight body is not simply in a "neutral" position: or if it is the neutral position, then this alignment is only an effect of the repetition of past gestures, which give the body its contours and the "impression" of its skin.'¹⁰ I take this even further to suggest that the 'straight line' is not the only line that one may become aligned with. Orientations of 'non-straight' bodies may equally undergo a process of alignment where the contours of the body are shaped in certain ways to follow particular lines, which have developed through the repetitive gestures of those that have previously walked upon such paths. Nonetheless, Ahmed does critique this 'straight line' as neutral and assumed, and considers what might happen if one were to stay in such moments of disorientation, utilising them to 'achieve a different orientation toward them [...where] such moments may be the source of vitality as well as giddiness.'¹¹

Rather than overcoming these moments by reorientating oneself back toward the safety and knowledge of what once orientated them, these moments present the opportunity to question such orientations and potentially instigate change, as moments in which an individual may reorientate themselves toward new lines. Ahmed demonstrates that 'orientations are organized rather than casual,' shaping 'what becomes socially as well as bodily given.'¹² Disorientation, therefore, may not always result in the radical transformation of this, as bodies seek to reground themselves in what is familiar, and 'bodies that experience being out of place might need to be orientated, to find a place where they feel comfortable and safe in the world.'¹³ Yet by exploring how the experience of being in tactile relation to another may precipitate moments of disorientation, I question how such moments influence the way in which bodies then re-collect, reassemble and reorientate themselves toward others in particular spaces, sites, and temporalities, where the experience of touch may instigate the possibility of new directions. Therefore, the forms of tactile relations examined throughout this thesis are those that often involve or provoke a sense of discomfort as these instigate moments of disorientation that propel a subject into changing direction and reorientating themselves to follow different paths. The sense of touch, therefore, assists in both keeping bodies 'in line' and moving bodies 'out of line' with the 'straight line.'

I firstly explore how one may be orientated toward the 'straight line' where the economy of touch is predicated on placing some bodies and not others within reach. By then addressing how the authors' texts resist remaining 'in line,' I examine the manner in which touch informs relationality between bodies, particularly between bodies that were once out of reach and have now become reachable. I further this notion of touch involving an economy by bringing to light the authors' diverse experimental styles and forms that exceed such censoring and regulating of touch. The experimental techniques employed by each author facilitate the emergence of touch as a sense that expands and extends bodies beyond social constructs. In the final chapter, I argue that touch has radical potentialities for transformation through its ability to orientate,

reorientate, and disorientate the subjects' bodies, and therefore, influence change. In Acker's texts, through the subjects' relations to tactile economies, in particular forms of capitalist touch, self-touch, and queer touch, I suggest that the subjects' bodies no longer follow the lines that have previously orientated them, but instead envision new orientations of lines that have not been followed previously.

Experimental writing informs this analysis of tactile relations. Experimental writing disrupts traditional modes of writing, resisting the boundaries and categories of literary conventions and genres. I use the term experimental, rather than avant-garde, as 'experimental' may be viewed as a broader term where the works analysed here may all, to varying extents, be encompassed. My understanding of experimental writing is informed and shaped by the work of a number of feminist scholars: Marianne DeKoven¹⁴, Ellen Friedman and Miriam Fuchs¹⁵, Susan Rubin Suleiman¹⁶, Laura Hinton and Cynthia Hogue¹⁷, and Ellen E. Berry.¹⁸ In *A Different Language* (1983), Marianne DeKoven uses the term experimental as opposed to 'modernist,' 'postmodern,' or 'avant-garde' in order to:

emphasize the fact that it violates and reshapes not just conventions of literature, as modern, postmodern, and avant-garde works have done, but, in addition, the conventions of language itself. [...] Experimental writing such as Stein's therefore liberates the "different" (*different*) modes of signification which this privileged patriarchal language has repressed.¹⁹

This notion of experimental writing underpins my thesis as these authors 'violate' or 'reshape' forms of language, which influences how touch emerges within the texts, particularly when the experimental form and techniques often imitate the rhythms, sensations, and actions of touch through the disruptive use of grammar, punctuation, silences, pauses, and blank spaces upon the page. Dominant discourses uphold binary oppositions between men and women that distort the language one uses. For DeKoven: 'Conventional language is patriarchal not because it *is* male, but because it exaggerates, hypostatizes, exclusively volarizes male modes of signification, silencing the female presymbolic, pluridimensional modes articulated by experimental writing.'²⁰ Dekoven points out that '[t]hese modes are female only because they

are pre-Oedipal, not because they constitute a special women's language.'²¹ Understanding conventional language as patriarchal is therefore not to state that there is a special kind of language for men and women, but to stress that patriarchal language involves discourses of binarism that value male modes of signification over female modes.

To speak of divergences between women's or men's language is to acknowledge how women's political, historical, and social statuses within a patriarchal framework have developed certain 'female literary traditions.'²² According to Dekoven, although this 'female literary tradition [...] has enacted its subversions of patriarchy in the realms of content and literary form,'²³ experimental writing goes further to subvert patriarchal discourse at the level of the linguistic structure itself. The term 'women's' experimental writing may be conceived as essentialist or reductionist, yet I use this term to denote how these authors, who may identify as women, have written in content, theme and form what Ellen Berry posits as a 'radical critique of dominant cultural, social, political, and economic structures,'²⁴ that addresses gender, race, and sexuality in relation to the women in these texts. Touch, as a textual theme, then materialises through the form, style, and language to inform the relationality that these characters have to their own bodies and others throughout the texts. My readings of these experimental texts illustrate how this subversion of conventional language brings these works closer to a language of touch, sensation, and the body that cannot adequately be conveyed through 'normative' conventions. These texts resist patriarchally enforced binary modes of relationality that 'naturalise' and 'normalise' a stable relationship between anatomical sex, gender, and sexuality in a compulsory heterosexual framework. By doing so, these texts offer space for new orientations of tactile relations between bodies to materialise in language.

In an interview in 1975, Duras situates 'feminine literature' as a form of writing that is translated from darkness. Duras suggests that women must not only become thieves but appropriators of language, rupturing the language that negates them by creating a new language from the darkness:

Women have been in darkness for centuries. They don't know themselves. Or only poorly. And when women write, they translate this darkness...Men don't translate. They begin from a theoretical platform that is already in place, already elaborated. The writing of women is really translated from the unknown, like a new way of communicating rather than an already formed language.²⁵

Starting from a clandestine position, this perforates Duras' writing style at the level of the sentence structure and syntax, which often makes room for the inarticulate, and for a language of silence, by employing fractured sentences, ellipses, and blank spaces on the page. Translating from the darkness or unknown, these experimental texts offer what Rowena Kennedy-Epstein remarks upon as a 'resistance to totalizing systems,'²⁶ disrupting conventional language, 'lest they themselves become complicit in the very systems they seek to resist and dismantle.'²⁷ Audre Lorde states 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.'²⁸ In other words, power cannot be dismantled by merely relocating such power from one master to another, or from one totalizing system to another. It is therefore not enough to simply replace patriarchal power with another kind that may only serve to alter the hierarchical order, yet otherwise sustain its power. I therefore read these texts, to varying degrees, as anti-patriarchal in content, form, and language as these authors' works move beyond these discourses, generating a language of touch that subverts and dismantles forms of hierarchical power, without attempting to replace them. This is exemplified further in Acker's work as language enacts resistance to hegemonic forms of expression by dissolving definitive meanings between signified and signifier. In 'Critical Languages,' (1990) Acker addresses how the 'multitudinous languages of the body' are transformed into a language of judgment, or the 'language of the logos,'²⁹ which in turn 'denies ambiguity and exists primarily for other than itself, [and] reifies the Cartesian mind-body split by denying the existence of the body.'³⁰ Therefore, Acker argues that '[i]t is imperative to return to the body, to return the body.'³¹ What is within reach or out of reach of the 'bodily horizon' is often framed by gendered, racialised, and heterosexualised lines to follow, which informs how such bodies may move toward or away from varying forms of touch and of being in relation to another. The return to/of the body is

therefore pertinent to the way in which these authors may resist dominant discourses that often enforce 'normative' orientations onto women's bodies.

In the works studied here, a politics of touch materialises both thematically and contextually, as well as through the experimental form itself, which operates as a counter politics to mainstream ideas of social and sexual relations. Kennedy-Epstein comments on the relation between experimental women's writing and moving beyond constraining orthodoxies:

Why do we still try to read women writers inside the confines of temporalities, genres, disciplines, and political and aesthetic movements that have been constructed to highlight the work and ideas of men? To understand the full scope of women's writing in the 20th and 21st centuries we have to read and think experimentally, beyond orthodox boundaries, and with the same expansive, rigorous, and radical approaches to forms of knowledge and ways of being [...].³²

This pertinent question brings to light how ingrained reading 'norms' may be, which shape one's relation to a text and still attempt to situate women's writing within the same frameworks that govern the works of men, even when such writers attempt to resist such confines. The sense of touch has similarly been read and situated inside these confines, and although the way in which touch functions within these confines has been questioned, these confines often remain intact, assumed as pre-given frameworks yet to be fully explored as constructs in themselves that shape the experience of touch in particular ways. By reading these works as enacting resistance to such confines, I equally read the textual theme of touch as moving beyond such boundaries and constructs. These authors demonstrate that when such confines are dismantled and one reads beyond these boundaries, the language of touch that materialises through experimentation with form and style opens these texts to new and radical readings of what it means to be in relation to another tactilely. DeKoven stresses that writing 'which violates grammatical convention, thereby preventing normal reading'³³ cannot infer meaning through 'normative' reading conventions. By classifying such writing as 'experimental' and 'non-normative' there is a concern that it may reinstate the idea of 'normative' forms of writing. I argue that by subverting such 'norms' the authors expose what is considered 'normative,' 'original,' or 'naturalised,' to be

itself a construct; therefore, dismantling the 'naturalisation' of certain modes of being, writing, and reading. Each chapter critically considers how these authors challenge conventions of language, yet it is perhaps most notable within the works of Wittig and Acker. The reader's inability to infer meaning through 'normative' modes of interpretation instigate moments of disorientation, unsettling the reader in relation to the text, which dismantles, in Berry's words, 'outmoded and restrictive aesthetic conventions and traditions,'³⁴ and opens the texts to new potentialities of transformation. Experimental writing enacts resistance to how patriarchal language has oppressed certain modes of being. Understanding this textual resistance enriches a reading of the way in which the textual theme of touch emerges throughout these authors' works and offers new orientations and modes of engaging with tactile relationality.

This thesis, therefore, offers new ways of thinking about the sense of touch and its significance to the shaping of bodies *relationally* by bringing experimental writing into dialogue with theories of skin and touch. The works chosen for examination in this study involve experimental techniques that enable the body to materialise in language, revealing the significance of touch to one's relation to others. Through the breakdown of conventional grammar, punctuation, and syntax, which disrupts ordinary language, these experimental works employ practices that present the form itself as imitating the body's movements and sensations in tactile relations. For instance, through the disruption of conventional grammar and the infusion of anatomical vocabulary and forms of touch, Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* (1973) presents a grammar of touch where the sentence structure, in certain passages, can be read as mirroring the subject touching the beloved's nervous system, stressing the way in which the act of touching is not merely located upon and within the skin, but goes beyond and may undo the subject's sense of sovereignty. The sense of touch is often censored or restricted by traditional modes of writing, revealing the inadequacies of ordinary language to fully engage with the complexities of tactile relations. Experimental writing goes beyond conventional literary styles and forms, facilitating an emergence of touch in language.

Skin-Memory and Touch

The experimental texts of Lorde, Nin, Duras, Wittig, and Acker offer a language of touch that challenges the persistent dualism of philosophical enquiry, which considers the mind as separate from the body, relegating the body to a marginalised and insubordinate position. In theories of corporeal feminism, theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz challenge the pervasive somatophobia (the fear of the body) of Western reason. Somatophobia first presented itself as early as 360 BC with Plato's *Cratylus* establishing the body as the place that traps the spiritual being. The separation of mind and body has spanned philosophical thought, particularly through René Descartes' notions of dualism in *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), which, according to Grosz, 'three centuries of philosophical thought have attempted to overcome or reconcile.'³⁵ Grosz acknowledges that Descartes did not suggest that the mind is separate from the body so much as suggest the 'separation of soul from nature.'³⁶ By distinguishing two types of substances, a thinking and extended substance, which amounts to the mind and body, Descartes situated the body as part of nature, while the mind was not governed by these same physical laws. Grosz argues that 'Dualism, in short, is responsible for the modern forms of elevation of consciousness (a specifically modern version of the notion of soul introduced by Descartes) above corporeality.'³⁷ Grosz claims that the consequence of positioning the mind outside of nature is that 'consciousness [...] is also removed from direct contact with other minds and a sociocultural community. [...] Its [consciousness'] relation to others, to the world, and its own body are the consequences of mediated judgements, inferences, and are no longer understood as direct and unmediated.'³⁸ Due to situating the sense of touch upon and within the skin, it is closely connected to the body, and therefore, often encoded, confined, and controlled by the same social mechanisms that seek to define, regulate, and control the body in mind-body dualistic notions, and frameworks of gender, race, and sexuality. By acknowledging the relationship between the skin, the sense of touch, unmediated affective states, and to use Nin's words, 'tactile memory,'³⁹ the experimental texts analysed here contest notions of mind-body

dualism as touch takes on a central role in developing consciousness and one's relation to the world.

Cultural, social, and political studies of touch, however, are few in number compared to those that focus on the body. This is in part due to the assumption that the experience of touch exclusively takes place upon and within the skin, which historically has been considered as an afterthought to exploring the depths of the body. In classical and medieval medical terms, when perceiving a cultural history of the skin, Steven Connor states: 'As the guarantee of the wholeness of the body, the skin was not itself a part of the body. [...] Like a universal currency, the skin could underpin every value while having none itself.'⁴⁰ Connor's remark reveals the secondary status that skin has acquired in relation to the body. Although the skin encased the body, as a screen, it remained invisible as a site of multiple functions that go beyond a 'merely medical understanding.'⁴¹ Claudia Benthien similarly points out that skin was regarded in the eighteenth century as 'a place of passage to the inside.'⁴² The relationship between skin and the body became one that devalued skin, where, as Connor observes, discoveries of anatomy could only be made by the skin functioning 'as that which is to be breached in order to gain access to the hidden innards of the human body.'⁴³ The skin remained invisible as a site to explore in and of itself until the depths of the human body had first been understood. In contemporary studies this privileging of the internal body over skin has been called into question. Connor, taking up Michel Serres' understanding of skin as a 'milieu', goes on to perceive skin as becoming 'a place of minglings, a mingling of places,'⁴⁴ which speaks to my understanding of the skin as the medium for which the minglings of tactile sensations initially converge, and can then significantly alter one's experience of being in relation to another.

Texts that have explored touch in fact date back to Aristotle's *De Anima* (c. 350 B.C.). On the one hand, Aristotle dismisses touch as the most basic and the most servile of the five senses, yet on the other hand, he problematises the very idea of a 'sense' of touch:

whether sense *is* many or one is a problem, as is the question what the sense-organ of the touch-faculty is, whether it is the flesh or corresponding part in other animals, or not, this being rather the medium, while the primary sense-organ is something else within.⁴⁵

Aristotle's positioning of touch negates the importance of skin as a location of touch, yet his questioning demonstrates the way in which one can experience touch as a sense of many, rather than one, as the skin acts as the medium for touch that can simultaneously be experienced as elsewhere. By positing that the skin is the medium of touch, while 'the primary sense-organ is something else within,' Aristotle stresses the skin's connection to the mind and body, as well as the significant way in which touch exceeds the boundaries of the skin. Through acknowledging that touch is felt somewhere within oneself, Aristotle's reflections point toward the capacity for touch to go beyond the skin's border, and therefore, enact radical change in one's relation to their own body and others' bodies.

Ashley Montagu's *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin* (1971) was one of the first in-depth studies of touch, emphasising its importance to human development. Montagu's introduction, titled 'The Mind of the Skin,' connects the mind and skin from the outset. Unlike Aristotle's dismissal of touch as the most basic and servile sense, Montagu argues for the importance of touch in the formation of both mental and physical health, positioning touch as the 'parent of our eyes, ears, nose, and mouth'⁴⁶ as 'the skin enables the organism to learn about its environment. It is the medium, in all its differentiated parts, by which the external world is perceived.'⁴⁷ The significance that Montagu attributes to touch, in regard to human development, frames my engagement with touch as crucial to relations between social, collective, and individual bodies. In contemporary studies, Serres continues this dialogue on touch in *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* (2008), reaffirming that touch is the common sense. Similar to Montagu, Serres attributes more value to this analysis than Aristotle, suggesting touch is 'the sense common to all the senses, forming a link,

bridge and passage between them⁴⁸ that prevails even when all other senses are lost. Serres asserts:

It is only with the coming of the sense of touch, [...] that the statue will be able to grasp that there is an exterior world from which these sensations emanate and therefore that it is an 'I,' distinct from this exterior world, and receiving those sensations.⁴⁹

It is through the sense of touch that an individual learns of its environment and of itself, revealing the significance of touch in forming a distinction between oneself and the exterior world. Serres recalls his experience of a fire on board a ship, navigating the reader through his struggle to breathe, to see, to hear the cries of others, and ultimately to sense anything. When blinded by the smoke, Serres states: '[y]ou can only grope your way out. Touch is the last remaining means of guiding yourself.'⁵⁰ Touch becomes a means of connecting to oneself as Serres explains that 'without this folding, without the contact of self on itself, there would truly be no internal sense, no body properly speaking, coenesthesia even less so, no real image of the body, we would live without consciousness; slippery smooth and on the point of fading away.'⁵¹ Without touch, one does not have this internal sense of coenesthesia that enables an individual to have an awareness of inhabiting their own body. Serres brings to light the importance of touch in relation to consciousness: if one cannot sense the world via touch then one cannot distinguish between the 'exterior world' and reception of such sensations. I engage with both Montagu's and Serres' ideas of touch in relation to Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) to address how touch is situated, for Audre (the narrator), as a way of perceiving and relating to the world, and in turn to herself, in order to measure her reality when registered as legally blind. Although touch has often been overlooked as a sense that is merely present, it is important to the development of consciousness and a body connected to the mind, and the world around it.

Touch is a sense that is experienced both internally and externally, within the body and in relation to exterior objects, which is framed by notions of gender, race, and sexuality. By perceiving touch in this way, I question this sense's ability to either maintain one's distinction

between themselves and the external world, or obscure one's sovereignty – sense of unity and autonomy – in relation to another, as it takes place upon and within the borders of oneself. Manning addresses touch *relationally*, as a sense that is connected to all the senses as well as to the external world:

What I counter is the notion that the senses are controlled by one body and given to another or withheld. This attitude posits as its point of departure a stable body that exists in a pre-given space-time which contains an active giver and a passive receptor. *Politics of Touch* challenges this assumption, positioning the senses *relationally* as expressions of moving bodies.⁵²

By examining touch *relationally*, through its link to the other senses and through the way that bodies are orientated toward or away from each other tactilely, I stress the significance of touch to exceed social and individual boundaries, along with spatial and temporal assumptions, arguing that touch has the potential to enact change. Through my readings of these experimental texts, I counter notions of tactile senses being controlled by one body and received by another by not only arguing that touch occurs relationally, but also that the way in which memory and affect interplay with present moments of tactile contact queers the temporal and spatial experience of touch. This aspect of touch warrants greater exploration, in terms of how bodies may be shaped by experiences of touch and orientated toward or away from bodies, depending on one's relation to present and past forms of touch.

Skin, particularly in regard to the sensations of touch, has a significant relation to memory, which further contests the notion of dualism and the skin as a primarily physical, impenetrable border. Montagu argues that the skin takes a central role as the screen on which 'life's experiences is projected: emotions surge, sorrows penetrate, and beauty finds its depth.'⁵³ Skin is therefore not only a surface that experiences touch presently, but retains such forms of touch that alter and reshape the skin as it records and 'carries its own memory of experience.'⁵⁴ Situating the skin as a screen that projects life's experiences stresses the connection between skin, tactile senses, and the psyche. In 'Skin Memories,' Jay Prosser contends: 'we become aware of skin as a visible surface through memory. If someone touching our skin brings us

immediately into the present, the look of our skin – both to others and to ourselves – brings to its surface a remembered past.¹⁵⁵ The skin is the site of the body's memory, but this does not mean that it is accurate. Prosser asserts: 'As the vicissitudes of the inheritance of race in skin colour show, skin's memory is as much a fabrication of what didn't happen as a record of what did, as much fiction as fact.'¹⁵⁶ Prosser's insights here are important: skin encodes and processes the fabrications of what did not happen, as much as what did happen. This suggests that the skin does not record all information in the same way, but that what is recorded is dependent on socio-historical factors, such as constructs of gender, race, and sexuality, and the significance of one's unconscious/conscious feelings, affects, emotions, as well as fantasies. I argue that the relationship between the sense of touch upon the skin and memory plays a vital role in what it means to be in relation to another when, in any given present moment, the skin's memory can trigger associations, sensations, and reactions to remembered experiences of touch.

The importance of the skin in the formation of the psyche is most explicit in Didier Anzieu's notion of the skin ego, which 'underlies the very possibility of thought.'¹⁵⁷ According to Anzieu, one learns about the world through skin. From earliest infancy the relationship between the psyche and the skin is established with touch being the first language whereby one distinguishes between feelings of pleasure and discomfort. Informed by Object Relations theory, Anzieu's conceptualisation of the skin-ego positions the skin as essentially forming the bridge that connects one's external sensations to internal emotional states. Anzieu explains:

By Skin Ego, I mean a mental image of which the Ego of the child makes use during the early phases of its development to represent itself as an Ego containing psychical contents, on the basis of its experience of the surface of the body. This corresponds to the moment at which the psychical Ego differentiates itself from the bodily Ego at the operative level while remaining confused with it at the figurative level.¹⁵⁸

According to Anzieu, the psychical Ego and the bodily Ego remain interwoven and obscured at the 'figurative level'. The two interact with one another as the child learns about itself and its environment, suggesting the complex way in which touch and consciousness alter each other. By mapping the biological skin onto the psychological skin, Anzieu proposes that the functions

of the skin are literally superimposed onto how the individual develops psychologically. The three primary functions of the skin that Anzieu outlines within his analysis inform my critical analysis of the relationship between touch, as an 'orientation device,' and identity. Anzieu outlines these three different functions of the skin: 'The first function of the skin is to be the sac that contains and retains inside itself all the good, full material that has accumulated through breast-feeding,'⁵⁹ in other words the skin retains the body and acts as a protective shield; its second function is as 'the interface that marks the boundary with the external world, which it keeps on the outside, the barrier that protects one against being penetrated by the aggression and greed of others, whether people or objects,'⁶⁰ which highlights the way that skin transfers information and not only keeps the external world on the outside, but allows the individual to connect to the external world, inferring how to relate and interact with the people and objects around them; lastly, the third function 'which it shares with the mouth and carries out at least as much as the mouth does, is to be a site and primary mode of communication with other people, to establish meaningful relations; in addition, it is a surface for registering the traces left by those of others.'⁶¹ In each of these functions lies the interaction between the skin and the psyche, with touch as the implied mediator between the two. The third function is perhaps the most significant to my thesis, as it emphasises the way in which skin communicates between the individual and other people, and with this creates and shapes particular relations that are informed by the frameworks in which they occur.

Anzieu implies that the skin retains memory and can therefore remember previous traces left by others. Anzieu's theory of the 'Skin Ego' was influenced by Sigmund Freud's theories of the ego as a 'mystic writing-pad,' which Freud outlines in an article, published in 1925, entitled 'A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad''. Writing on this pad, with a celluloid covering-sheet to write upon and a waxy tablet underneath, makes depressions within the surface, etching inscriptions through the top surface onto the waxy table beneath. To erase such etchings an individual simply needs to lift the top cover-sheet away from the bottom so that the

etchings created between the two are no longer visible. Yet the imprints of etched markings remain upon the waxy tablet, they cannot be fully erased, whilst the top layer merely functions as a protective shield for the surface below.⁶² Freud demonstrates his hypothesis by suggesting that 'our mental apparatus performs its perceptual function' similar to the analogy of this mystic writing-pad: 'The layer which receives the stimuli – the system Pcpt: Cs.– forms no permanent traces; the foundations of memory come about in other, adjoining, systems.'⁶³ Freud uses this analogy to express the way in which memory can be erased from the surface, when what he refers to as the Pcpt: Cs. System (a term to denote any function of the 'perception-consciousness system') acts as a protective shield for the conscious, while other etchings go beneath the surface and are retained in the subconscious. However, these etchings do not remain fixed, but are transformed, erased, and over-written with each new etching upon the surface; and therefore, each new marking disrupts the older markings. For Anzieu, the skin functions in a similar way to this mystic writing-pad, acting as the body's interface that creates a boundary between the individual and the world, yet it is not an impenetrable nor unchanging surface, but one that is always in the process of transformation through day-to-day inscriptions upon and within the skin. Freud's notion of the 'mystic writing-pad' and Anzieu's understanding of the 'Skin Ego' speaks to my analysis of Anaïs Nin's texts as palimpsests: manuscripts that superimpose later writings onto earlier writings, which demonstrates the notion of touch textually emerging as palimpsestic too. The body in this sense acts as the site for triggering memories and sensations that are superimposed onto present moments through the act of touching and being touched. The physical experience of touch may therefore be saturated by previous experiences of touching and being touched, which shapes the body long after a touch has ceased, altering how one may be in relation to differing bodies both presently and within the future.

Nin stresses the role that affect and memory play in expanding and extending one's 'bodily horizon' toward others in regard to tactile relations by recognising the body's variations

in receiving and responding to touch. According to Gregory J. Siegworth and Melissa Gregg, '[a]ffect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state or relation *as well as* the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body [...].'⁶⁴ A language of sensation materialises most evidently in Acker's *Pussy, King of the Pirates* (1996), yet I also address the way in which affect, with the presence or absence of feelings, influences Nin's relation to certain forms of touch. When sensations and intensities of tactile pleasure are experienced without feelings, these forms of touch, though removed from the pain of negative feelings, have a shorter 'duration of passage' as they are only experienced within the present moment. By comparison, tactile relations imbued with affect and feelings have the capacity to 'grow roots into [Nin's] being.'⁶⁵ In *A Spy in the House of Love* (1954), Nin uses the term 'tactile memory', a notion that implies that one remembers (or in some cases does not remember) the touch of others. In Nin's formulation, 'tactile memory' is dependent on how deeply one may touch another. An individual's present experience of touch can be felt as spanning different temporalities as a present experience that simultaneously triggers past associations, sensations, experiences, and responses. The body is haunted by remembered forms of touch. Nin's narratives imply that not all forms of touch felt in relation to another have the capacity to leave their traces in the same way, signalling that touch is not just a literal sense experienced as a synaptic response to pressure upon the skin. The sense of touch is also one that is processed, codified, and to an extent governed, by one's emotional, affective, and remembered responses to touch, which are equally shaped by the frameworks of gender, sexuality, and race and the body's temporal and spatial inhabitation. The impact of touch therefore depends on the depth of one's identification with a lover, the connection, affect, and emotions involved, and whether such present forms of touch may trigger previous forms of touch.

The queer temporality of touch, in relation to affect and memory, has a radical nature that exceeds and challenges social constructs and boundaries of dominant discourses. I argue

that in Nin's texts compulsory monogamy is never fully obtainable when a present tactile relation is saturated by the memory of previous touches, which are retained upon and within the skin. I read Nin's use of 'tactile memory' as a 'queering' of any present moment of touch, suggesting that the sense of touch is always in excess of itself, and therefore, exceeds the framework of compulsory monogamy. By comparison, Duras' *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* (1964), and *The Malady of Death* (1982), reveal that relationality breaks down when one's body is rendered figuratively untouchable due to traumatic memory and the housing of the loss of another inside oneself. Duras' experimental techniques generate what Julia Kristeva terms a 'crisis of signification'⁶⁶ between words and actions, where an impoverishment of affect materialises within the tactile relations throughout the texts. This impoverishment demonstrates that one's relation to another may be predicated upon loss. Rather than experiencing touch in the present, tactile relations in Duras's works instigate the recollection of past memories, and are therefore positioned as tactilely encountering the loss within another. Each of the characters' tactile encounters stresses the way in which touch exceeds boundaries as the affect of these tactile relations cannot be controlled or regulated, even when impoverished. Touch may transmit one's trauma and loss, disrupting temporal boundaries between present and past relations when the memory of past traumas are superimposed onto present tactile encounters, which in effect, breaks down the economy of touch and its ability to orientate, reorientate or disorientate one's body in relation to others.

The Phenomenology of Touch

Phenomenology can be viewed as the most explicit twentieth century challenge to dualism. I initially addressed dualism by conceding the role of skin in developing consciousness. Phenomenology takes this further by not only illustrating the role of the body and skin in one's perception and relationship to the external world, but also the central role of touch. Yet perhaps one of the rationales for a persistent somatophobia in Western reason may

be founded on the intangible quality of touch, acknowledged most notably in Jean-Luc Nancy's *Corpus* (1992) and Jacques Derrida's *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* (2000). Using Nancy's philosophy as a framework, Derrida addresses a philosophical history of touch, arguing that 'touching is no longer just one sense among others, since it conditions them all and is coextensive with them.'⁶⁷ Derrida therefore questions why the sense of touch continues to be treated as one of the senses, rather than being 'designated as *sense*, sensory faculty, by the play of an everlastingly equivocal metonymy.'⁶⁸ In many ways, Derrida, though partly within this phenomenological tradition, similarly challenges phenomenology by suggesting that its foundations are based on Edmund Husserl's concepts that retain dualistic tendencies. Derrida questions: 'Who in France has worked out an interpretation of touch while *accommodating* explicitly – briefly, cursorily, or elliptically, at times; somewhat more analytically and insistently, at other times – Husserl's analysis of touch'⁶⁹. In this analysis, Derrida focuses on 'the sense experience of "touch"⁷⁰ to question the way in which the acceptance or accommodation of Husserl's concepts in later philosophical works gives 'rise to a displacement, a reinscription, and an original reconfiguration'⁷¹ of this sense. Derrida engages with Merleau-Ponty's notions of perception to address the discrepancies, displacements or detours from Husserl's founding philosophy.

Derrida contends that Merleau-Ponty, though beginning with touch, uses examples of sight that obscure the visible and tangible world in his notions of perception, diffusing the sense of touch into the body and the other senses. This displaces Husserl's notion of touch that is not diffused in this way throughout the body. According to Derrida, Husserl claims that:

I can *never* have access to the body [...] of the other *except* in an indirect fashion, through appresentation, comparison, analogy, projection, and introjection. [...] this access that others have without introjection to their bodies, I can have – to their own proper bodies – only by introjection or appresentation.⁷²

To clarify, appresent refers to the event of a presentation, which within such moments motivates an observation on something different being present along with the presented object.

Husserl insists on an 'appresentative analogy between two *heres*,¹⁷³ in which to see oneself touching another's hand is to be appresented with the other's view of such a hand. Derrida suggests that Merleau-Ponty, by misinterpreting this Husserlian account of touch, 'runs the risk of reconstituting an intuitionism of immediate access to the other, as originary as my access to my own most properly proper [...and] of *reappropriating* the alterity of the other more surely.'¹⁷⁴ The alterity of another remains 'inaccessible to an originally presentive intuition, an immediate and direct presentation of the *here*.'¹⁷⁵ This notion is at the centre of haptology, which as a foundation presented by Husserl, has been taken up by phenomenology and ambiguously accommodated for, accepted, and displaced, particularly by the privileging of the gaze, over touch, in forms of perception. Derrida recognises the 'irreducible gap' in this field of appresentation, and goes on to reflect that through this acknowledgement one may come to perceive a gap 'between me and me [...] between my body and my body, [as] there is no such "original" contemporaneity'¹⁷⁶. This leads Derrida to question that the "same world" between two bodies is not in fact the "same world" as the world of one person is not translatable to that of another. The authors studied here in many ways expose and confront this challenge to being in tactile relation with another in any given space or time.

To substantiate the claim of there being 'no such "original" contemporaneity,' the ability to exist or occur in the same period of time, Derrida addresses Nancy's concept of 'partage,' which he understands to be an 'apportioning, sharing out, parting, partaking' that 'signifies participation as much as irreducible partition, which is to say the "spacing of sense."¹⁷⁷ Nancy illuminates that this syncope (temporary loss of consciousness) 'is this parting and sharing out of spacing: the syncope separates and interrupts at the heart of contact.'¹⁷⁸ In dialogue with Nancy, Derrida notes an ever-present interruption in touch as there 'is always the law of *parting and sharing* at the heart of touching and con-tact, presentation, appearance, and co-appearance: sharing out as participation *and* partition, as continuity and interruption, as syncopated beat.'¹⁷⁹ Derrida contends the simultaneity of distance and contact in touch since the physical presence

of skin interrupts the touch, as one can only ever touch the limits, the surface of another; and therefore, skin, as the receiver and giver of touch, creates an inherent separateness at the core of touch. By stressing this interruption, Derrida illuminates the untranslatable or intangible nature of touch in language, as one individual's 'sense experience of "touch"'⁸⁰ cannot be deciphered by another's experience. Nearing the dénouement of Derrida's deliberation on touch, he states that 'one still has the impression that we are always going to be at a loss for a meta-language with which to say anything whatever about touch, touching, or the touchable that is not in advance accommodated by the skin, exscribed right on the skin.'⁸¹ I contend that the experimental texts chosen here use metaphor as a way of revealing that the sense of touch goes beyond the literal level of the skin's physical barriers, beyond the way in which the skin may accommodate and exscribe touch.

Derrida maintains this barrier between literal touch, accommodated by the skin, and the integration of touch within all the senses, to expose the conflation of these two within phenomenology, and through this, stress the intangible nature of touch. The experimental writing addressed in this thesis reveals that the sense experiences of touch are often only describable in terms of metaphor, due to the intangible characteristic of touch in language, which conflates literal forms of touch upon the skin with integrated forms of touch that combine with other senses. The experimentation with metaphorical language demonstrates that the use of figurative speech is not merely decorative, but essential to representing touch, as an intersensory experience, within speech. Experimental language demonstrates that touch has the capacity to go beyond such dualistic borders by exposing what is intangible in touch and that one's response to sensations of touch can threaten one's sense of sovereignty when in relation to another. In Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, I argue, the skin, as an interface or boundary, is not impenetrable, as the subjects seek ways of going beyond the limits of the skin to touch what is untouchable in another. The subjects' physical acts of ingesting and mutilating each other's bodies are inversely read as literal acts acting as metaphors, figuratively representing the

negative, threatening and violent affects and internal sensations that one may experience when in tactile relation to another. By conflating the literal with the figurative in language, the skin is no longer perceived as a physical, impenetrable barrier, but one that can be transformed and shaped by the affect of touch. By doing so, I argue that there are risks to touching when in relation to another, as touch may threaten an individual's notion of sovereignty and ultimately undo the subject in the process. By experimenting with language itself, the authors studied here reveal the importance of metaphor in generating a tangible affect of language that addresses the nuanced experiences of tactile relations, which conventional representations of touch cannot accomplish. Although the relationship between skin and touch may suggest borders and limitations, placing the sense of touch as one primarily experienced upon and within the skin, through experimentation with language itself, touch, as an intersensory experience, goes further to inform one's development and relationality to the world around them. In this regard, one perceives the world and their relationality to others through the sense of touch, as the sense that is everywhere.

Derrida presents a challenge to the way in which touch has been positioned in phenomenology. However, I engage with phenomenology through taking up Ahmed's work on orientation. I consider Ahmed's dialogue with the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1964; 1968) and Martin Heidegger (1962) as a way of contending that touch can be viewed as an 'orientation device.'⁸² The body is orientated within the world by what is within reach or out of reach of the 'bodily horizon,' which is informed by who and what a body may reach toward and touch. There is a 'symmetrization of touching and seeing'⁸³ in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) that is contested by Derrida through its misinterpretation of Husserl's concept. Merleau-Ponty grants a privileging of vision that substitutes the privileging of touch in Husserl's work who connects touch to the importance of sight, but not sight to the importance of touch.⁸⁴ Immediate intuition is presented as an optical, sight-orientated intuition, and this conflation of sight and touch reveals the intangible quality of touch

within language. There is a distinction in Merleau-Ponty's work between 'purely tactile' and 'integrated touch,' which suggests a '*synaesthetic* unity of the senses,'¹⁸⁵ which appears problematic for Derrida, but at the same time suggests the significance of touch, which 'conditions [all the senses] and is coextensive with them,'¹⁸⁶ in orientating the body spatially and temporally. This might therefore be thought of as a phenomenology of touch.

Merleau-Ponty's (and Heidegger's) situating of touch within notions of perception, which contends that the distinction between the embodied self and the perceived object are not clear-cut, as one's perception of the body as well as perceptions of objects external to it are often connected in relation to touch, is pertinent to the way in which I position touch as an orientation device. Merleau-Ponty argues: 'as the subject of touch, I cannot flatter myself that I am everywhere and nowhere; I cannot forget in this case that it is through my body that I go to the world.'¹⁸⁷ Touch informs the relatedness between one's internal bodily feelings and one's experience of the world. Matthew Ratcliffe discusses the phenomenological properties of touch:

touch surely includes a phenomenological distinction between the feelings of actively touching something and of being passively touched by something. If touch is removed from proprioception, this distinction is lost. Without a sense of where the body is located and of how it is moving, the feeling of actively touching could not be distinguished from that of being passively touched. This is not to say that all touch would then be 'passive' but, rather, that the experience would involve neither the category 'active' nor the category 'passive'.¹⁸⁸

According to Ratcliffe, the distinction between active and passive touch is predicated on 'proprioception,' the perception of where the body is positioned or located and how it is moving in such space. The orientation of the body is arguably founded in part on how one distinguishes between 'the feeling of actively touching' and 'being passively touched,' which influences the experience of touch and the way in which a body may respond to such tactile relations. Merleau-Ponty notes the nuances of touch that would be negated if one did not consider the relationship between touch and proprioception (awareness of the position, and in turn, movement of the body):

Smoothness is not a collection of similar pressures, but the way in which a surface utilizes the time occupied by our tactile exploration or modulates the movement of our hand. The style of these modulations particularizes so many modes of appearance of the tactile phenomenon, which are not reducible to each other and cannot be deduced from an elementary tactile sensation.⁸⁹

In this regard, certain characteristics, such as smoothness, are inferred by the modulations in the hand's movement over a surface; thereby suggesting the interdependent relation between how one's body may be located in a space and moving within it, and the object, in this case the surface, it feels. Yet Merleau-Ponty equally acknowledges that an absence of direct physical contact between the skin and external objects may inform one's experience of relationality, and perception, as one can feel this absence of touch and still be shaped by this in relation to others. Taking up the phenomenology of touch, I consider what it may mean to be figuratively untouchable in Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* and Duras' works. I address the way in which the absence of touch or disruption to the act of touching also impacts one's relation to oneself and the external world. As Ratcliffe acknowledges, '[t]he absence of physical touch does not amount to an absence of tactile experience and there are numerous different tactile relationships, in addition to that between, say, a fingertip and an object.'⁹⁰ In this regard, I posit that the senses of sight and touch may share common features, particularly when sight functions as a form of touch when one is situated as literally or figuratively untouchable, due to the sense of touch no longer being felt affectively.

Merleau-Ponty suggests that the visual presentation of an object in turn incorporates a tactile sense: 'these distinctions between touch and sight are unknown in primordial perception [...] We see the depth, the smoothness, the softness, the hardness of objects.'⁹¹ The perception of an object is therefore considered an 'inter-sensory entity'⁹² since the perception of an object through one sense is informed by the other senses and bodily activities that such a perception may entail. Merleau-Ponty states: 'The sensory 'properties' of a thing together constitute one and the same thing, just as my gaze, my touch and all my other senses are together the powers of one and the same body integrated into one and the same action.'⁹³ I argue in Chapters One

and Three that when one's identity is orientated around untouchability the gaze may in fact function as a way of still touching the body. I frame my argument through Laura U. Marks' concept of 'haptic visuality'. The use of the term 'haptic visuality' originates, for Marks' analysis, 'from nineteenth-century art historian Alois Riegl's distinction between haptic and optical images.'⁹⁴ According to Marks, 'Riegl borrowed the term haptic from physiology (from *haptein*, to fasten), since the term tactile might be taken too literally as "touching."⁹⁵ Marks distinguishes between haptic and optical visuality whereby the latter is considered a way of seeing 'things from enough distance to perceive them as distinct forms in deep space: in other words, how we usually conceive of vision.'⁹⁶ Unlike optical visuality, which 'depends on a separation between the viewing subject and the object,'⁹⁷ haptic visuality 'tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze.'⁹⁸ Marks notes that this understanding of the haptic form of seeing differs from Riegl's in that 'he associated the haptic image with a "sharpness that provoked the sense of touch," while the optical image invites the viewer to perceive depth.'⁹⁹ However, through Marks' analysis, haptic visuality suggests a multi-layered, multi-sensory experience that relates to tactile epistemology. According to Marks, haptic visuality 'involves a relationship to the world of mimesis, as compared to symbolic representation,'¹⁰⁰ whereby '[m]imesis, from the Greek *mimēsthai*, "to imitate," suggests that one represents a thing by acting like it.'¹⁰¹ This indicates a relationship between the object perceived and the subject's memory, which is mediated by the body. The object gazed upon brings forth the subject's memories of touch, an individual's associations to certain forms of touch and surface textures, as well as the bodily responses that these memories trigger. In my analysis of Duras' work, I argue that this form of mimesis may conceive of the gaze as imitating that of touch, which enables a character to experience touch when one's identity has dissociated from themselves. By comparison, in Lorde's narrative the oppressive gaze no longer imitates and acts like a liberatory touch, but

instead functions as the imitation, enacting of, and in turn heightening of the sense of touch as censored, controlled, regulated, segregated, and ultimately denied.

The connection between the senses and the body's movements, whereby the object is perceived as an 'inter-sensory entity', suggests that the senses are interdependent with one's bodily orientations. The field of touch is fundamental to the sense of being connected between the 'self' and the world. In *Sense and Significance* (1983), Don Ihde states:

when the whole of my touch field touches and is touched by the surrounding world, I realize how intimate is the I-world relation in touch. Through touch, I am constantly 'in touch' with that which surrounds me. But also in these states it is difficult to say just where I end and the world begins. All the specific touches found in focal attentiveness are never separate from the total Touch as the constant field in which I live.¹⁰²

Ihde positions touch as having an intimate relation between 'I' and 'world' as touch extends the body beyond itself, suggesting by extension that certain reaching toward some bodies and not others may influence how one is in constant contact with the world around them. Ihde stresses how the experience of boundaries is blurred in relation to touch, as the body extends its horizon toward what it is surrounded by, which makes it difficult to discern the boundaries between 'I' and 'the world.' Ihde's idea of the experience of boundaries being blurred with regard to touch can be brought into dialogue with Ahmed's notion that '[t]he surfaces of bodies are shaped by what is reachable'¹⁰³ and what is reachable is 'determined precisely by orientations that we have already taken.'¹⁰⁴ In this sense, 'bodies are shaped by what they tend toward, and [...] the repetition of [...] "tending toward" produces certain tendencies.'¹⁰⁵ Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus', Ahmed suggests that spaces around the body therefore take their shape through the 'habitual actions of bodies' that create 'the contours of space' as 'spaces acquire the shape of the bodies that "inhabit" them.'¹⁰⁶ As spaces take the shape of the bodies that inhabit them, so too do bodies take their form through such spaces, suggesting the intimate relation between 'self' and 'world'. Touch, in this context, is not a pre-given sense, but one that is framed by this relationship between spaces and bodies. This relationship shapes what bodies

are able to do within such spaces and what they can or cannot reach, which in turn, shapes what such bodies may or may not be able to touch, and how.

In Merleau-Ponty's argument, there is a sense of relatedness in touching, by which touch is not simply two objects coming into contact, but a relation between the two. The body may be experienced as an organ of perception that distinguishes itself from an object of perception. However, I argue in Chapter Two and Four, that this boundary is not always so distinct and the relationship between the two can become blurred. Merleau-Ponty (1968) uses the example of his left hand grasping his right hand:

If my left hand is touching my right hand, and if I should suddenly wish to apprehend with my right hand the work of my left hand as it touches, this reflection of the body upon itself always miscarries at the last moment: the moment I feel my left hand with my right hand, I correspondingly cease touching my right hand with my left hand.¹⁰⁷

Each hand is experienced differently: the left hand is an organ of perception and the right hand is an object of perception. By suggesting this difference, Merleau-Ponty argues that the active touch of the left hand is not experienced as an object of touch by the body. In this instance, the hand is not attended to as an object of perception. Yet when Merleau-Ponty reflects on this experience at the point at which he experiences the touching of both hands, the touching ceases as he no longer experiences the left hand as the one touching, and in turn feeling, but as the one being felt as the roles between the two hands shift. This indicates how the roles may switch between perceiver and perceived. In this instance, the right hand that is touched is equally an organ of perception, which, in the moment of reflection, now takes on the role as the hand that is actively touching whereby the left hand now becomes the object of perception. In this regard, proprioception is important, as the shift suggests how the change in bodily movement alters perception, and when the bodily orientation of touch is made available, it ultimately changes how the body may be perceived. Ratcliffe states, 'touch is a relationship between touching and touched. How the touching body feels is inextricable from how an object is felt. When the body is itself an object of experience, it is felt in a very different way from the feeling body.'¹⁰⁸

Ratcliffe's remark reveals a distinction between the body as 'an object of experience' and 'the feeling body' that is predicated on the position of the body as actively touching. This touching is experienced as inextricable from the feeling of the object (due to the body falling into the background of experience) and the body that is touched, which is positioned as an object of perception that may alter one's experience of being in relation to another. Tactile relations among bodies, therefore, situate the body on the precipice between the 'feeling body' and 'an object of experience.' This implies that one may have the power to alter another as the 'feeling body,' as well as be altered by another as 'an object of experience' in relationality.

Touch is central to how bodies may tend toward or away from objects in one's relationship with the world. Touch may be viewed as informing how one belongs or feels connected to the world, which is not to imply, in terms of Idhe's 'I-world' relationship, that touch is the only sense to inform this but that touch is incorporated into one's relatedness between 'self' and world. Touch is not explicitly tended to in Ahmed's exploration of orientations. However, Ahmed's arguments are predicated on the framework of phenomenology where touch is implicit to how one's body may be orientated toward certain bodies and not others, where some and not others are within reach to touch. The notion of the body's tending toward certain objects or falling into the background of awareness centralises the idea of bodily orientations as:

consciousness is always directed "toward" an object, and given its emphasis on the lived experience of inhabiting a body, or what Edmund Husserl calls the "living body (Leib)" [...] it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to hand, and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds.¹⁰⁹

Ahmed's understanding of nearness or ready-to hand is informed by Heidegger's distinction between 'readiness-to-hand' and 'presence-at-hand.' For Heidegger, the familiarity of the world is what orientates the body. The familiar is what is given in his surroundings and therefore what enables his body to be orientated in certain ways. The experience of touch in forms of relationality is similarly shaped by what is familiar to one's body: the space such a body

occupies and how such space shapes what one can and cannot do with one's body. When arguing between the use of an object and the perception of an object, Heidegger uses the example of a hammer:

The entity which is held in our fore-having—for instance, the hammer—is proximally ready-to-hand as equipment. If this entity becomes the "object" of an assertion, then as soon as we begin this assertion, there is already a change-over in the fore-having. Something *ready-to-hand with which* we have to do or perform something, turns into something "*about which*" the assertion that points it out is made [...].¹¹⁰

Heidegger suggests that when the hammer does what it should, for example, hammer, then it is 'ready-to hand' and therefore the nearness of this hammer is in turn connected to how useful it may be and what task it may allow one to perform. The 'ready-to-hand' implies a particular property of the hammer itself as the object takes on 'its own kind of sight'¹¹¹ as an object that carries out a specific task or job. Therefore, Heidegger suggests that 'the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become.'¹¹² In Heidegger's formulation, the boundaries between object and body are in turn blurred as what becomes familiar, or what one feels at home with, are those objects that one does not entirely distinguish from themselves. Relating to this idea, I argue in Chapter Two that Nin's 'pain of identification' and intimate familiarity with her lovers suggests that Nin's boundaries are obscured in tactile relations, as she perceives such lovers as being a part of herself.

Ahmed takes up Heidegger's distinction between ready-to-hand and present-to-hand in relation to how one is orientated by objects that may extend the body through the repetition of 'habitual actions' that come to shape bodies in certain ways. According to Ahmed, bodies may be orientated in particular ways by what is familiar: the repetition of societal norms and conventions that inform the ways in which a body may extend toward certain objects and bodies more than others. In this thesis, I argue that touch is central to this shaping of bodies through the repetition of 'habitual actions'. In Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, I examine the way that mechanisms of societal oppression enforce particular bodily orientations, delineating

what is and is not within reach of certain bodies more than others. Touch becomes another way of communicating oppression and censoring the body. As an 'orientation device,' the act of touching or being touched may orientate a body to follow certain lines, most prominently, gendered, racialised, and compulsory heterosexualised lines. Yet touch has the radical potential to disorientate bodies, no longer extending bodies in familiar ways, but instead, resisting such repetition of 'habitual actions' and reorientating bodies toward new lines. I argue that Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* stresses an implicit level of risk to touching another, as the disorientation experienced by the subject in tactile relation to another undoes their unified sense of sovereignty. I read each author's work in close proximity to Ahmed's notion, where 'orientations involve different ways of registering the proximity of objects and others.'¹¹³ Orientations, Ahmed claims, 'shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitation, as well as "who" or "what" we direct our energy and attention toward.'¹¹⁴ Taking up Ahmed's theory of orientation, I explore how bodies are orientated toward certain forms of touching and being touched, which may shape the way in which one inhabits space and how one relates to others. I argue that the way in which one's identity is orientated to follow particular lines may become 'out of line' through engaging with the act of touch, as touch has the capacity to shape such orientations. An individual may be reorientated by touch to follow an alternative line, or be disorientated by the relationality of being in touch with another. In the final chapter of this thesis, I argue that touch may instigate transformation. One's identity may be disorientated from 'straight lines' through engaging with self-touch and queer forms of touch, whereby one may no longer follow the lines trodden upon previously through habitual repetition but instead find new orientations and ways of being in relation to others. The final part of my thesis therefore suggests that touch may hold radical potentialities of transformation.

New Orientations

Each of the chapters in this study explores orientations toward or away from touch. By examining the significance of touch in one's relationality to others, each chapter contests the notion of a fixed or stable identity when tactile relations challenge one's sense of sovereignty. Experimental writing enables a language of touch to emerge that resists societally gendered, racialised, and compulsory heterosexualised constructs of tactile relations. In each chapter, I address the radical nature of touch to exceed the normative frameworks it is situated within and boundaries posed by conventional language, gesturing toward the transformative potential of touch, as a site of resistance that disrupts conventional modes of relation. In Chapter One I critically analyse Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) in order to explore the way in which the intersectionality of one's identity may inform what and who is within reach of one's body, and how one may be orientated toward or away from certain forms of touch, and, in turn, be orientated by certain forms of touch. Although Lorde does not use the term 'intersectionality,' she notes the significance of recognising difference in combatting oppressive practices. The term 'intersectionality' informs how social identity categories, such as race, gender, class, age, sexual orientation, religion, and ability/disability, may intersect with each other, whereby the relationship between these categories impacts both individuals and collectives when attempting to enact political and social equality. Through my analysis of Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, I consider Audre's (the narrator's) initial relationship to touch as a way of perceiving the world. I argue that in the work Audre is initially orientated toward touch, due to being legally blind, and that her identity is in turn orientated by touch, yet the family dynamics alter this orientation toward the 'straight line,' suggesting how bodies are orientated to follow gendered and racialised lines, imbued with sexism and racism that increasingly orientates Audre toward a censored form of who and what she may touch. The relationship between touch and the intersectionality of one's identity is often overlooked, particularly in how the orientation of touch – of what is and is not within reach of

the body and of how a body may be touchable or untouchable – is influenced by structures of oppression. This chapter brings to light the importance of the relation between touch and intersectionality. It considers how touch informs the lines one may follow where one's intersecting identities of dis/ability, race, gender and sexual orientation may influence and orientate touch in terms of who can touch and how one may touch, demonstrating how oppression and discrimination strongly influence this form of relationality.

Having initially explored how Audre is orientated toward certain lines, which are informed by who and how she may touch others, I then consider how bodies may become 'out of line'. In Chapter Two I analyse the parallels between Nin's self-narrative in the unexpurgated diary *Fire: From a Journal of Love* (1995) and her fictional characters' narratives in *A Spy in a House of Love* (1954) and *The Four-Chambered Heart* (1959). Touch, for Nin, functions as a central form of communication that expands and multiplies her 'bodily horizon' toward others. The notion of skin-memory informs my reading of Nin's diary and texts as polyamorous narratives that enable a palimpsestic form of touch to materialise throughout the texts. Nin, writing in the 1930s, predates feminism's engagement with concepts of plurality. Later feminist works such as Denise Riley's *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony* (2000), call into question the static singularity of identity and posit in its place the idea of plurality. Riley remarks that 'the identifications that go into my self-portrayal have exerted a kind of productive alienation, for I find my affinity with something outside me only by moving towards and accepting some externally given account of a self, which I then take home as mine.'¹¹⁵ The 'self' is formed in relation to others and the identifications one may have with external objects that inform the social contours of an individual's account of 'self.' In this regard, Riley points out that identifications may mutate as 'categories of social being'¹¹⁶ shift and fluctuate with the changing of self-descriptive utterances. The inhabiting of social categories requires 'everyday structures of fantasy'¹¹⁷ of identifications that both suggest affinities with something external to the individual and a 'productive alienation' from the 'self.' Nin's notion of the 'pain of

identification' is explored in relation to the concept of palimpsestic touch. As Nin wrestles with the fictionality or performance of certain ways of being, the uncertainty of being in relation to one lover is only assuaged by her tactile relation to another, which perpetuates the cycle of non-monogamy. Touch is still framed by compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy throughout Nin's texts, demonstrating that the language available at the time of Nin's writing influences her ability to conceive of tactile relations beyond these constructs. Although these social constructs still influence which bodies may be within reach to touch and how they may be touched, the affect, memory, and feelings experienced in the reception of touch reveal that the sense of touch is always in excess of itself, exceeding these social frameworks that attempt to constrict tactile relations to 'normative' constructs of sexual relationships.

In Chapters Two and Three, I argue that the queer temporality of touch, due to the way in which memory may alter one's reception and response to touch, obscures any present moment of being in tactile relation to another. Through my readings of Nin's texts, I argue that the relation between memory and touch expands one's 'bodily horizon,' exceeding social constructs that frame the act of touch within compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy. In my readings of Duras' texts, in Chapter Three, I address the way in which traumatic memory alternatively arrests the body's capacity to reach toward and relate tactilely with others. The role of memory in tactile relations can therefore impact one's ability to extend toward another in regard to touch. In Duras' *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* (1964), and *The Malady of Death* (1982), the women's bodies materialise as sites of loss, absence, and/or trauma throughout the texts. Through my reading of the woman from Nevers and Lol Stein as sites of loss within the texts, I explore the way that traumatic memory disrupts their orientations toward tactile relations. I posit that to touch a figuratively 'untouchable' body is to touch the site of loss. Engaging with contemporary perspectives on trauma, I look at the work of Catherine Malabou who draws on the relation between being wounded, being touched, and a lack of affect in the traumatic subject: 'To be wounded, indeed, is to be touched, struck by a

blow [...] But the "touching" of the wound, today, has generated an inability to feel touching, *an inability to be touched affectively, which is the sign that one has been "touched" – that is, wounded.*¹¹⁸ On the one hand, to be wounded means to be touched, yet on the other hand, to be touched and therefore wounded creates an inability to feel touch moving forward. According to Malabou, there is a direct impact on the affect of touch when one has experienced trauma. The inability to experience touch affectively arrests the movement of bodies to extend toward each other and experience touch in the present. Whilst I argue in Chapter One that an oppressive gaze can in fact perpetuate Audre's relation to untouchability, in Duras' texts I argue that when one is situated as figuratively untouchable, the gaze may function as a way of still touching back. The gaze between Lol and the narrator, Jack Hold, takes on a form of what Marks considers 'haptic visuality,' which allows Lol to vicariously participate in tactile relations when she is positioned as figuratively untouchable.

The woman's body emerges throughout *The Malady of Death* as the site of abjection as the unknown man transfers his malady onto the woman's body, indicating that the woman's body is the site of this death, or loss of oneself. Although the figurative or literal death is that of the unknown man (*The Malady of Death*), or the German lover (*Hiroshima Mon Amour*), or the loss and 'absence of love'¹¹⁹ for Michael Richardson (*The Ravishing of Lol Stein*), the women's bodies are the ones that house this death. I read the characters of the unknown woman from Nevers (*Hiroshima Mon Amour*), Lol Stein (*The Ravishing of Lol Stein*), and the unknown woman (*The Malady of Death*) as embodying sites of loss as they entomb or act as carriers of another's death. By doing so, I explore the way in which this alters tactile relations between the characters when they are figuratively untouchable or unreachable (due to traumatic memory), retaining the loss of another within their bodies, or presenting a threat to the loss of oneself in relation to another. Such encounters expose the fragility of one's sovereignty and the threat of losing oneself, or figuratively experiencing the death of 'self' in tactile relation to another, due to transmitting trauma or one's own sense of loss onto another through touch.

Nin's 'pain of identification' in relation to others implies a level of risk in the act of touch, as boundaries between bodies become blurred in relationality. This idea is developed further in Chapter Four. I analyse Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* (1973) as a means to consider how touch may undo the subject when in relation to another. Through Wittig's analogy of a literary work functioning as a Trojan Horse that pulverises previous literary forms, rendering them as outdated and ineffective, I consider how the theme of touch may similarly function as a Trojan Horse within the text, dismantling 'normative' bodily orientations that rely on the stable relationship between anatomical sex, gender and sexuality in a heterosexual framework. By doing so, touch may disorientate the subjects' identities when in relation to each other, threatening the borders of the subject's identity, and notions of coherency and unity. I firstly suggest that Wittig appropriates the female body from the hierarchical structuring of anatomy found in male-dominated narratives of anatomy textbooks. By doing so, Wittig in turn appropriates how such a body may be orientated toward touch. Wittig dismantles 'normative orientations' toward compulsory heterosexuality. The body then has the potential to reach certain bodies that were once unreachable and in turn touch in differing ways. In this sense, there is an implicit level of risk in the act of touching whereby the subject is met with its own relationality to another and may in turn encounter its nonsovereignty. I read Wittig's text in proximity to Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman's *Sex, or the Unbearable* (2014) – a dialogue between the two theorists who grapple with their understandings of sex, nonsovereignty, optimism, negativity, the notion of repair, and what it means to be in relation to one another. I argue that the lovers' invasion of each other's bodies speaks to the optimism and negativity that occurs in relationality. As the lovers seek to nullify the threat that touching may involve in relation to each other's sovereignty – the authority, and sense of control, coherency, and unity one may have of their identity – I argue that the risk of touching may ultimately reside in its ability to disorientate the subject.

I extend the argument that touch may disorientate the subject when in relation to another, in my analysis of Acker's *Pussy, King of the Pirates* (1996). I argue, in Chapter Five, that Acker's experimental techniques offer a counter-hegemonic narrative that enacts resistance to 'normative' orientations. I firstly examine how the textual spaces of the brothel and school may initially orientate the subjects toward particular relations with others and how these are predicated on capitalist forms of touch. I then consider how engaging in acts of self-touch or queer touch may precipitate a move away from stagnant identities, entrapped in a capitalist system where patriarchal power controls the production of women's bodies, toward identities in the process of continually becoming. Whilst trapped in these inherently gendered spaces the subjects are continuously searching for somewhere. However, when the sex workers learn to masturbate, they begin to dream. I read Acker's use of onanism as a return to/of the body that mediates the potential for radical transformations of identity, enabling the subjects to access this elsewhere. Onanism is linked to dreaming and as O and Ange learn to masturbate, and in turn dream, their imagination guides them to potential lines of flight away from the constraints of their initially gendered orientations. Through notions of disorientation I argue that these subjects move away from the particular lines they have been orientated toward into 'non-spaces' of piracy, which extend their 'bodily horizons' toward new potentialities of being in relation to each other where the act of touch may instigate new orientations.

Acker's trilogy of *In Memoriam to Identity* (1990), *My Mother: Demonology* (1993), and *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, is deeply engaged with the body and manifestations of touch, as Acker seeks languages of the body that go beyond what ordinary language represses. Ordinary language denies the existence of the body or any form of discourse that may threaten the fixity and stability of such language. By breaking language from its associations, Acker's text challenges oppressive, prejudicial, and discriminatory practices as the restricting, regulating, and censoring of such bodies is transgressed through modes of disorientation on the levels of content, theme, form, and language. Through masturbation the text is opened to a

language of sensation that leads to dreaming. Queer touch in Acker's trilogy subverts the fixity of gendered relations. The subjects go beyond the constraints of ordinary language, accessing a world beyond that which language has repressed. This disorientates their positions and allows the possibilities of alternative lines of flight to present themselves. The notion of disorientation is significant in terms of how bodies may transform their orientations. Through exploring how economies of touch, specifically capitalist touch, self-touch and queer touch, manifest in Acker's work, I conclude my thesis by positing that touch assists in moving bodies away from inherently gendered orientations, enacting resistance to static social constructs and ways of positioning women socially. Through disorientating the subjects in relation to each other, touch may instigate new orientations, radically transforming relations between bodies that are no longer tied to inherently gendered, racialised, and heterosexualised spaces.

Chapter One

The Orientation of Touch: Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*

As a biomythography, Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) takes the form of an epic narrative that interweaves myth, history, and biographical accounts of events. The experimental form undermines traditional notions of memoir and biography as stable, static, and objective narratives of 'truth.' By highlighting that this work is a biomythography, Lorde resists notions of an objective or pure literary form. Instead, Lorde presents a complex narrative that emphasises the relationship one may have to both their inner reality and the outside world where one's identity is ever-changing through the myths and fictions of one's reality, as well as the cultural, historical, political, and social landscapes one finds themselves inhabiting. This chapter analyses the interdependent or causal relationship between touch and identity – of how touch orientates one's identity and how identity orientates one's relation to touch within a social, cultural, and political framework of gender, race, and sexuality. By doing so, I argue that touch may function as an 'orientation device' that shapes, intersects, relates to, or brings together the differences of one's identity, whereby identity is not seen as a static unity/whole but shaped and constructed by the varying categories one may be identified with and the spaces that one may inhabit, which are imbued with societal oppression.

Lorde's textual form experiments with the intimacy of the personal and political accounts of one's life, weaving together multiple discourses that can be read as characterised by that which Carol Boyce Davies has termed 'critical relationality.'¹ In Boyce Davies' discussion of Black women's writing, she suggests that 'critical relationality' is an 'anti-definitional stance [that] moves us out of minority status into possibilities of alliances which recognize specificities and differences [... and] asserts the specificity of the other, but works together and from each other in a generalized purpose of resistance to domination.'² Lorde writes of initially growing up in the McCarthy era, a period in which the fear of difference and racial segregation of African Americans influences and shapes Lorde's way of relating and

connecting to others. Lorde's narrative, therefore, recognises differences, along with the significance of such differences in the mechanisms of societal oppression. The narrative form brings to light how such difference may at first operate to position oneself in society, along with intimate relations, as well as enact a resistance to such domination. Boyce Davies asserts that by moving 'beyond singularity or sameness to varied interactions, transgressions and articulations'³ this notion of critical relationality 'becomes a way in which other theoretical positions interact relationally in one's critical consciousness.'⁴ Lorde's narrative suggests a move away from a singular, static, or 'monochromatic approach' towards what Boyce Davies observes as 'a complexly-integrated and relational theoretics [... that] allows the situation of a text in its own context, but provides an ability to understand and relate it to a range of other dimensions of thought.'⁵ This is significant in Lorde's narrative as through the multiple articulations of various discourses, Lorde's experimental form facilitates a reading of the text as operating 'braid-like or web-like as a series of strands are woven,' rather than as a hierarchy or 'series of interruptions (as in Marxism/feminism or race/class or gender/ethnicity formulations).'⁶ The form brings to light the significant role of touch in one's relationality to oneself and others, as well as issues of identity politics, by experimenting with the relationality between multiple differences, intersections and aspects of one's identities, and the way in which these identities may interact and relate to one another in one's social, political, and cultural landscape.

Although the term 'intersectionality' was not coined until 1989 by the Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, this term speaks to Lorde's work as she perceives notions of difference, both internally within herself and externally between individuals and groups. The definition of intersectionality varies depending on the approach. Patricia Hill Collins defines intersectionality as 'a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences.' Collins states:

The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves.⁷

In other words, intersectionality addresses the ways in which social categories of identity, such as race, gender, class, age, sexual orientation, religion, and ability may overlap and intersect, and how this relationship between these categories may impact both individuals and collectives when attempting to promote and enact political and social equality. Lorde does not use the term intersectionality, yet both her biomythography and theoretical essays, particularly those in *Sister Outsider* (1984), recognise and address the notion of difference and its significance to combating institutionalised and systematic oppression, discrimination, and prejudice. In *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Lorde states how she 'often wondered why the farthest-out position always feels so right to me; why extremes, although difficult and sometimes painful to maintain, are always more comfortable than one plan running straight down a line in the unruffled middle.'⁸ As an individual with diverse identities, such as Black woman, mother, lesbian, poet, Caribbean descendant, teacher and political activist (or as Lorde famously states, 'Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet'⁹), Lorde was acutely aware that difference provides a framework for how one may view and inhabit society, and in turn, actively engage with political and social change.

Lorde criticises how feminist, Black, and lesbian and gay movements all focus on one aspect of an individual's identity as the root cause of their oppression to the exclusion of all others. In 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference' (1980), Lorde argues:

Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practising. By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class, and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist.¹⁰

Difference should not simply be tolerated but seen as a necessary resource of strength as when difference is ignored the mechanisms of oppression are not addressed. The notion of assumed essentialism or homogeneity of women is often criticised in feminist theory and practice. bell hooks notes that '[m]any contemporary feminist activists argue that eradicating sexist oppression is important because it is the primary contradiction, the basis of all other oppressions. Racism, as well as class structure, is perceived as stemming from sexism.'¹¹ Nonetheless, this line of thought assumes that 'the eradication of sexism, "the oldest oppression," and "the primary contradiction," is necessary before attention can be focused on racism or classism.'¹² This hierarchy creates competition rather than solidarity, and misrecognises that '[s]ince all forms of oppression are linked in our society because they are supported by similar institutional and social structures, one system cannot be eradicated while the others remain intact.'¹³ Therefore, whilst eradicating sexism is crucial it cannot be eradicated without equally addressing and challenging other systems of oppression when similar institutional and social structures support all forms of oppression. Through my analysis of *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, I consider Audre's (referring to the eponymous character, rather than Lorde the author) initial relationship to touch as a way of perceiving the world and communicating with others when she is legally blind and does not speak until the age of four. I argue that Audre is initially orientated toward touch and that her identity is in turn orientated by touch, yet the family dynamics alter this orientation, suggesting that the gendering and racialisation of Audre's body, imbued with sexism and racism, increasingly orientates her towards a form of untouchability.

The notion of difference is connected to the way in which oppression shapes the relationship one may have with such differences. In 'Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving' (1978), Lorde initially offers definitions for racism, sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia as follows:

Racism: *The belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance.*

Sexism: *The belief in the inherent superiority of one sex and thereby the right to dominance.*

Heterosexism: *The belief in the inherent superiority of one pattern of loving and thereby its right to dominance.*

Homophobia: *The fear of feelings of love for members of one's own sex and therefore the hatred of those feelings in others.*¹⁴

The binary oppositions are evident in these definitions where the belief in the inherent superiority of one race, sex or orientation generates dominance over those that are perceived as outsiders. However, unlike racism, sexism and heterosexism that may be constructed on the idea of superiority, homophobia is built on the notion of fear and hatred. Nonetheless, Lorde highlights how notions of superiority can equally lead to hatred from those who are racist, sexist or heterosexist, as well as an internal hatred that comes from the absorption and internalisation of such oppression, discrimination, and/or prejudice. In 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,' Lorde acknowledges Paulo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) when she states that the 'true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships.'¹⁵ The oppressive situation and the internalisation of the oppressor's tactics and relationships arguably influence how one may relate to others. Touch becomes orientated towards certain bodies to the exclusion of other bodies; therefore, touch is denied or shaped by the oppression and social positioning of one's intersectional identity.

I read Lorde's text in proximity to Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006) in order to explore how touch has its own economy of difference. The way in which bodies extend into space, dictated by how they are gendered, sexualised and racialised, equally informs who or what may be within reach of a body; and therefore, who or what may be touchable. The relationship between touch and the intersectionality of one's

identity is often overlooked, particularly in terms of how what is and is not within reach of the body to touch is influenced by structures of oppression and the position of an individual within them. In other words, touch can be another way of communicating oppression, where the relationship between these categories of identities and forms of oppression provide the framework for how touch may orientate and be orientated by one's identity. Ahmed engages with intersectionality to argue that institutions are 'where different "lines" intersect and where lines cross with other lines to create and divide spaces. [...] Given that relationships of power "intersect," how we inhabit a given category depends on how we inhabit others (Lorde 1984: 114–23; Brewer 1993; Collins 1998; Smith 1998).'¹⁶ The body may be viewed as one place in which these different lines intersect and meet. This chapter initially explores how Audre's body, in *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, is gendered and racialised, both by the family and wider social context, which orientates her towards certain lines whereby some bodies and not others are within reach, and in turn, touchable. By examining how the body is orientated, I then question how touch may influence these orientations or be orientated by these bodily orientations. Ahmed's idea of the economy of touch, and how it may function as an orientating device, thanks to which bodies may or may not reach each other, will be taken further in this chapter to address the positioning of touch, and how an individual may be orientated toward or away from certain bodies. Subsequently, this chapter considers the way in which touch forms bridges, particular directions or lines one may follow, or even barriers in how an individual may navigate and experience the intersectionality of their identity in relation to others. One can argue that the intersectionality of one's identity is influenced and impacted by the ways in which touch orientates identity towards certain lines of flight. In turn, one's intersecting identities of dis/ability, race, gender, and sexual orientation may equally orientate touch in terms of who can touch and how one may touch, highlighting how oppression strongly influences this form of relationality.

Perceiving the World through Touch

Theorists, such as Laura Mulvey,¹⁷ John Berger,¹⁸ Teresa de Lauretis¹⁹ and Luce Irigaray²⁰ argue that society is dominated by a scopic economy that hierarchises sight over other senses. As a child aged five, Audre was legally blind. An economy of touch, rather than a scopic economy, therefore played an important role in shaping her perception of the world more concretely than her eyes that perceived trees as 'tall brown pillars ending in fat puffy swirls of paling green.'²¹ Blindness alters her relation to the external world, orientating her toward a more tactile approach to being in the world. The sense of touch becomes a way of positioning Audre in relation to others, assisting in her ability to navigate the world around her. As noted in the Introduction, Ashley Montagu argues that touch is the parent to the other senses as the skin, as an organ, enables one to learn and perceive of the environment around them.²² Audre was not only legally blind but a child who did not speak until aged four. This delay in speaking influences her turn toward tactile interactions as a way of perceiving and learning about the external world. Audre discusses how she learnt to talk when she learnt to read, yet she questions whether *learnt* is the right word, stating that 'to this day I don't know if I didn't talk earlier because I didn't know how, or if I didn't talk earlier because I had nothing to say that I would be allowed to say without punishment.'²³ This questioning reveals Lorde's awareness of how she may have already learnt what was deemed appropriate, acceptable or punishable within her world that predominantly revolved around the family. Therefore, by the age of four, Audre had already begun to learn how to orientate herself in relation to others in order to avoid punishment: she had already learnt the protective value of silence. This isolating experience fuels Audre's incessant desire to relate to others and obtain a friend or little sister. Although she had two older sisters, she felt like an only child, or even 'an only planet, or some isolated world in a hostile, or at best, unfriendly, firmament.'²⁴ This isolation in relation to others, perpetuated by her lack of sight, lack of voice, and lack of relationality with those her own age, increases her desire for a companion.

As an interface and barrier, the skin, and in turn the sense of touch, function as orientating devices that assist in positioning Audre in relation to others. The Introduction to this thesis discussed the skin's importance in the formation of the psyche, most notable in Anzieu's notion of the skin ego. Anzieu outlines one of the skin's functions as the site 'and primary mode of communication with other people, to establish meaningful relations; in addition, it is a surface for registering the traces left by those of others.'²⁵ Touch, therefore, becomes the implicit mediator for establishing meaningful relations and communicating with other people. Audre is four years old when she finds her first playmate, Toni. The interaction between the two children highlights how touch is situated as a way for Audre to connect and relate to this other child and to test the reality of her presence. Rather than responding to Toni's question of introducing herself and asking what her name is, Audre reaches out to touch her: 'With my woolen mittens dangling down from cords which emerged from the cuffs at each of my wrists, I reached out my hands and lightly rubbed the soft velvet shoulders of her frock-coat up and down.'²⁶ Her introduction is communicated through contact, of reaching out and feeling the surface of Toni's coat. Lorde talks of her desire for this 'delectable creature [...] for my very own – my very own what, I did not know – but for my very own self.'²⁷ The dashes indicate the hesitation in the form as Audre grapples with the desire to reach out and what this reaching toward may indicate. The uncertainty of her touch and the desire behind such touching may be noted in the potential word play of 'muff' as she comments, '[f]rom around her neck hung a fluffy white fur muff that matched the white fur ball on the top of her hat. I touched her muff, too, and then raised my hand up to feel the fur pompom.'²⁸ Muff is both a word for a tube made of fur that keeps hands warm as well as a slang word for a woman's genitals. As Toni offers Audre a peppermint lifesaver, Audre reminisces that '[f]or years and years afterward, I always thought of peppermint lifesavers as the candy in Toni's muff.'²⁹ The interjecting of reflection suggests an erotic undertone to the encounter whereby such proximity of contact orientates Audre's body toward Toni's body. This positioning of another girl's body as within

reach for the first time extends Audre's body beyond the way in which it has thus far been orientated by her relationality to her family. Prior to this encounter, Audre's tactile contact, as a way of relating to others, had arguably been exclusively experienced within the family. Therefore, the way in which Audre's body may be orientated toward who and how she may touch is informed by the family structure, which will be addressed further in the following sections.

The proximity of such contact, particularly when Audre positions Toni upon her lap, cradling her and rocking her back and forth, makes Audre deeply aware of her own body in relation to Toni's bodily warmth. In this instance, the encounter is experienced both externally and internally where touch not only informs the relationality between the two girls but also Audre's relationality to herself. Sarah E. Chinn observes: 'Reality itself is measured through touch,' as 'Audre experiences her own body as sweaty and itchy—all too real. But Toni is a vision, in every sense of the word.'³⁰ For Audre, after four years of no speech and limited sight, touch is significant as the sense she trusts to measure reality. Whilst she can sense her body touching her snowsuit and feel its uncomfortable sensations, her detailed descriptions of Toni's visual appearance and continual concern for her disappearance suggests her distrust in what her eyes or ears can see and hear from Toni. Audre affirms that she 'wanted to take off all of her clothes, and touch her live little brown body and make sure she was real.'³¹ According to Chinn, '[s]ight must be confirmed by touch'³² as a way of checking the corporeality of Toni's existence. Whilst Audre does not trust her sight to know the difference between 'a little girl or a doll come alive,'³³ she trusts her sense of touch as her way of perceiving difference, and in turn, perceiving reality:

I raised up the back of Toni's wine-red velvet coat, and the many folds of her full-skirted green eyelet dress underneath. I lifted up the petticoats under that, until I could see her white cotton knickers, each leg of which ended in an embroidered gathering right above the elastic garters that held up her stockings. [...]

I reached up under the welter of dress and petticoats and took hold of the waistband of her knickers. Was her bottom going to be real and warm or turn out to be

hard rubber, molded into a little crease like the ultimately disappointing Coca-Cola doll?³⁴

This encounter highlights the causal relationship of how Audre's identity (as legally blind and unable to speak) has orientated her toward the sense of touch, which then positions touch as an orientating device that situates her identity in relation to others. Only by touching Toni and knowing what is under her clothing can Audre be sure of the reality of Toni's presence. Audre lifts layer upon layer of clothing, delicately detailing her encounter with each layer that separates her tactile relationality with Toni. In this instance, the fabric presents the initial barrier, yet by touching the skin, or in Anzieu's words, 'the interface that marks the boundary with the external world,'³⁵ Audre may confirm the boundary between their bodies, and in turn, the reality of Toni in relation to herself.

The desire to touch, which is also Audre's desire to relate, is vital. When Audre's mother warns her to stay put, when Toni insists on asking Audre to play, Audre's desire for a companion is far stronger than her desire to abide by her mother's rules. The over-descriptive sentences, detailing every movement step by step, accentuate the hesitancy of the action. The fear of being caught is highlighted by Audre's initial glance toward the door and her admission of being 'half-afraid.'³⁶ This uncertainty suggests that Audre has already learnt who it is acceptable to touch, and which forms of touching are acceptable, and is aware of how this act is stepping 'out of line.' Audre's mother had warned her 'not to move from that spot where she had planted me. But there was no question in my mind; I could not bear to lose Toni.'³⁷ The encounter emphasises the conflict between Audre's mother instructing her on what she can and cannot do to stay 'in line,' which in turn suggests that touch has already been orientated toward certain bodies and not others, along with what appropriate forms of touching are, and how Audre's own desires to relate have orientated her toward touch. As Audre is about to undertake the final act of pulling down Toni's pants, the door opens and her mother approaches:

I felt caught in the middle of an embarrassing and terrible act from which there could be no hiding. Frozen, I sat motionless [...]

My mother stepped over to the two of us. I flinched, expecting instant retribution at her capable hands. But evidently the enormity of my intentions had escaped my mother's notice. Perhaps she did not care that I was about to usurp that secret prerogative belonging only to mothers about to spank, or to nurses with thermometers.³⁸

Audre's reaction to being caught in what she considers 'an embarrassing and terrible act' at first indicates guilt, rather than shame. It is the act that is terrible, rather than Audre herself. The fear of her mother's gaze freezes Audre in her ability to extend toward Toni's body. Audre's movement is hindered as she becomes 'motionless', her mother is perceived as the one who regulates and informs Audre's way of relating to others via touch. Audre's reaction to her mother's presence suggests that touch has already been orientated to adhere to specific practices.

Touching another is framed as the exclusive prerogative of mothers, and therefore, to attempt to usurp this position is perceived as 'out of line' with what Audre's body 'can do.' Kaye Mitchell differentiates between guilt and shame: 'guilt concerns *something you have done*,³⁹ and, in Ruth Leys words (2007), shame concerns 'not your actions but who you are, that is, your deficiencies and inadequacies as a person as these are revealed to the shaming gaze of the other.'⁴⁰ Audre's intentions shape how she perceives herself under her mother's gaze. The flinching away from her mother implies the expectation of punishment for her actions. She has already learnt which acts of touching may be deemed punishable. Yet interestingly, the narrative shifts from one of guilt over such an action to one of shame over usurping her mother's role. Audre's initial reaction is due to the 'embarrassing and terrible act,' but then her mother's gaze reveals her intentions of what she views as a usurping of 'that secret prerogative belonging only to mothers about to spank, or to nurses with thermometers.' Engaging with Giorgio Agamben's work, Mitchell explains how the shaming gaze functions:

Shame speaks to this apparent paradox of subjectivation that Agamben identifies: we are 'subjects' only in relation to others, whose recognition grants us that status as subjects, to whose gaze we are *subjected*; we achieve what 'sovereignty' we have only through that relationality, recognition and subjection. Furthermore, the acute self-consciousness of shame announces a moment in which the self comes into being [...] *and* is undone by the intensity, the intimacy of that self-scrutiny.⁴¹

Although Audre's mother does not care or does not notice, Audre is still *subjected* to her gaze, which forces Audre to turn this gaze upon herself and reflect on her intentions as a self-conscious self-scrutiny. Her mother's gaze brings attention to her body and actions, where Audre simultaneously becomes aware of herself as a subject, while also being undone and rendered 'motionless' through such subjection as she is suddenly made aware of her relationality to her mother and what her mother may recognise in her actions. In other words, the distinction between guilt and shame blurs in the narrative as the expectation of what her mother's gaze 'should' mean informs how Audre perceives herself as a usurper of mothers' prerogatives, rather than just her initial embarrassment over her actions. As guilt blurs into shame, her mother's gaze functions as one that Audre equally turns upon herself as a way of learning to self-regulate and censure her desire to relate via touch. In this way, while touch may have initially been the medium for perceiving and measuring the reality of the world around her, Audre begins to learn who and what is within reach of her body and how she may be allowed to touch.

Familial Orientations: Body Knowledge, Silence and Shame

The structure and dynamics of the family unit influence the causal relationship between touch and the intersectionality of Audre's identity, orientating her toward who she may touch and how she may touch. The family is the site in which the body is at first orientated within and towards the world. By informing how Audre is orientated towards her body and how her body is orientated toward others, this then informs how Audre may be orientated toward or away from certain forms of touch. The family becomes the site in which forms of oppression may at first be taught with regard to how this orientates the body, as well as how one should respond to such oppression. bell hooks argues that '[u]nlike other forms of oppression, most people witness and/or experience the practice of sexist domination in family settings.'⁴² hooks frames her argument through John Hodge's essay 'Dualist Culture and Beyond,' where he states:

It is in this form of the family where most children first learn the meaning and practice of hierarchical, authoritarian rule. Here is where they learn to accept group oppression against themselves as non-adults, and where they learn to accept male supremacy and the group oppression of women. Here is where they learn that it is the male's role to work in the community and control the economic life of the family and to mete out the physical and financial punishments and rewards, and the female's role to provide the emotional warmth associated with motherhood while under the economic rule of the male. Here is where the relationship of superordination-subordination, of superior-inferior, of master-slave is first learned and accepted as "natural."⁴³

Although this model assumes the familial structure to be that of a father, mother and child, hooks suggests that even when this is not the case, such as when a male figure may not be present, a child may still learn these values of domination and authoritarian rule through the relationship dynamics between child and mother or other adults.⁴⁴ Lorde's narrative reveals that whilst her father was present, her mother is the one who instructs, informs, and enforces these gendered roles and structures of hierarchy. Subsequently, in many ways, Audre's mother becomes the advocate for legitimising this form of oppression as 'natural.' After expressing anger toward her mother's accusations about her closest friend, Gennie, Audre's father steps in to curb her tone:

Real or fancied insolence to my mother was the cardinal sin, and it always brought my father out of his pose of neutral observer to the war between my mother and me. My father was about to become involved, and that was the last thing I needed.⁴⁵

This perception of insolence as the cardinal sin suggests the hierarchical structure of the family in which the father's authority is above all else, yet this authority is regulated and enforced through the mother and any insolence towards her is perceived as insolence towards the hierarchical structuring of authority. Therefore, it is through the mother's role that authority, oppressive group dynamics, and hierarchical structures are perpetuated, regulated, and maintained. Ultimately, she is the one who regulates the children's behaviour and metes out physical punishment, and it is only when the children are being insubordinate to her that the father steps in to remind them of his authority.

The family structure mimics society's oppressive hierarchical structures of power, and, with this, forms the basis for how Audre's body is orientated within this structure. I consider,

in Chapter Four, the way in which Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* (1973) appropriates the female body from male authored anatomy textbooks, de-hierarchising how the female body has been positioned within society, which in turn appropriates the forms of touch this body may experience. Here I consider how a woman's body is initially regulated and in turn orientated toward certain paths whereby the family, particularly Audre's mother, acts as the perpetuator of these paths, guiding Audre in what she can and cannot do with her body. According to Ahmed, '[g]ender is an effect of the kinds of work that bodies do, which in turn "directs" those bodies, affecting what they "can do."' ⁴⁶ However, Ahmed goes on to argue that '[a]t the same time, it is not always decided which bodies inhabit which spaces, even when spaces extend the form of some bodies and not others.' ⁴⁷ In this sense, although some spaces may extend certain bodies more than others, it is the activities that one performs in these spaces that determine the gendering. As a result: 'bodies can take up spaces that do not extend their shape, which can in turn work to "reorientate" bodies and space.' ⁴⁸ Whilst this suggests the possibility of transformation by which bodies may be reorientated, or even disorientated, to alter the paths they have been directed towards (a consideration taken further in my reading of Kathy Acker's *Pussy, King of the Pirates*), Audre's family home and dynamics highlight how one may initially be orientated toward assumed gender roles and certain paths that have become 'naturalised' through the continual repetition of these actions.

Lorde's narrative highlights a silencing around the body that indicates how knowledge of the body is restricted and controlled. In some instances, the body is shrouded in the use of euphemisms as she writes:

You sat on your 'bam-bam', but anything between your hipbones and upper thighs was consigned to the 'lower-region', a word I always imagined to have french [sic] origins, as in 'Don't forget to wash your l'oregión before you go to bed.' For more clinical and precise descriptions, there was always 'between your legs' – whispered.

The sensual content of life was masked and cryptic, but attended in well-coded phrases. ⁴⁹

This consignment to the 'lower-region' emphasises the restrictions on body knowledge, thanks to which the anatomy or certain areas of the body are relegated to coded language. The use of euphemisms for body parts suggests that some areas are not acceptable to speak of, which may imply that some words and the body parts they signify are shameful and need to remain hidden.

By assigning the 'lower-region' to a French origin of l'oregión, it presents this part of the body as foreign, both mystifying this area and assigning it as something other, whereby the body is inhabited as simultaneously familiar and strange. This encoding of the body as both familiar and strange orientates the body as one that is alienated from Audre as the euphemisms insidiously imbue the 'lower-region' with a certain level of shame. This is then heightened further by the overarching silence around Audre's first period when she turns fifteen. Since her first period is unusually late, instead of spending time with her friends, Audre must attend medical appointments where her mother would have 'long whispered conversations'⁵⁰ with the doctors. Audre notes:

I had breasts but no period, and she was afraid there was something 'wrong' with me. Yet, since she had never discussed this mysterious business of menstruation with me, I was certainly not supposed to know what all this whispering was about, even though it concerned my own body.⁵¹

The notion of something being 'wrong' suggests her body is 'out of line' with its reproductive functions and with what is expected from a woman's body. The positioning of the body as 'wrong' indicates how the body is orientated in a particular way, with an expected direction that it should take. Yet the narrative exposes the silence around Audre's own body, as whilst the whisperings concern her body, she is not privy to the 'mysterious business of menstruation.'

The narrative is veiled by silence and whispers. Audre has restricted access to the knowledge of her own body. This restriction to knowledge is further emphasised by Audre's decision to undertake her own research. The library books that contain such knowledge are located on the "closed shelf" behind the librarian's desk at the public library'⁵² and can only be accessed by Audre forging a note from home. The regulating of such bodily knowledge,

restricting women's access to the knowledge of their own bodies, indicates how the body is controlled through dominant, and arguably male-orientated, discourses that dictate who should have access to knowledge, and how. Whilst I critique this further in Chapter Four, exploring how Wittig may dismantle and challenge the dominance of such narratives, Lorde's narrative brings to light the continual enforcement of such restrictions and the impact this may have on how one is bodily orientated to follow gendered paths. Knowledge is contingent on social structures of power as dominant discourses are shaped by those who can control, regulate, and restrict access to knowledge and those who cannot. The content of the books suggests that knowledge is structured and presented from a specific viewpoint and with a particular reader in mind, contesting the belief that knowledge is supposedly objective and neutral:

None of the books were very clear to me about the relationship between having your period and having a baby, but they were all very clear about the relationship between penises and getting pregnant. Or maybe the confusion was all in my own mind, because I had always been a very fast but not a very careful reader.⁵³

There is an assumptive heterosexual and gendered framing of knowledge that hierarchizes the functions of the male body over the female body by focusing on the act of reproduction and, more specifically, the function of the penis regarding pregnancy. By comparison, knowledge of menstruation and pregnancy is limited. Regardless of reading so many 'forbidden' books, Audre remains uncertain of her own reproductive functions. Subsequently, the limited knowledge she can obtain presents a particular lens for how she may be orientated towards her body, along with how her body may be orientated towards other bodies, by positioning her body knowledge within a heterosexual and gendered framework.

Lorde's narrative can be read as demonstrating how her mother is the one who perpetuates this orientating of the female body towards a position of silence and restriction. Rather than viewing her mother as a source of knowledge, Audre is afraid of discussing sex and menstruation with her, or even indicating that she has learnt of these subjects elsewhere: 'if I let Mother know that I knew what was happening and what these medical safaris were all

about, I would have to answer her questions about how and wherefore I knew, since she hadn't told me.¹⁵⁴ The mother represents the gatekeeper of oppressive practices, highlighting that oppression is perhaps most effective when, as Lorde argues, one subsumes part of the oppressor within themselves, which assists in maintaining such structures of oppression. bell hooks addresses how the 'family is an important kinship structure: a common ground for people who are linked by blood ties, heredity, or emotive bonds; an environment of care and affirmation, [...] a space for communal sharing of resources.'¹⁵⁵ Yet whilst the family should function as an environment of care and affirmation, '[i]n our society, sexist oppression perverts and distorts the positive function of family. Family exists as a space wherein we are socialized from birth to accept and support forms of oppression.'¹⁵⁶ The function of the family has the potential for influencing and enacting positive change, yet Lorde's narrative demonstrates that the family can be a site in which forms of oppression are supported and passed on through generations as 'normative.'

Audre claims: '[i]t's difficult to talk about double messages without having a twin tongue.'¹⁵⁷ Audre has yet to learn how to speak with a 'twin tongue' of mixed messages where positive bodily functions, such as having her first period, are simultaneously imbued with negativity, shame, and silence. This 'twin tongue' emphasises the conflict within the oppressed who internalises a piece of the oppressor; Audre's mother scolds her whilst simultaneously reassuring her that she does not need to feel upset over starting her period:

Nightmarish evocations and restrictions were being verbalized by my mother:

'This means from now on you better watch your step and not be so friendly with every Tom, Dick, and Harry ...' [...] and, 'Now remember, too, after you wrap up your soiled napkins in newspaper, don't leave them hanging around on the bathroom floor where your father has to see them, not that it's anything shameful but all the same, remember ...'¹⁵⁸

The first warning from her mother is to distance herself from 'every Tom, Dick, and Harry,' stressing how gendered orientations perpetuate the binary opposition of male and female bodies within a heterosexual framework. The assumption of heterosexuality informs the gendering of

Audre's body and how she is expected to orientate her body in relation to others. Interestingly, this situates male bodies as both within reach, as bodies that the female body is expected to be orientated towards, as well as out of reach, as bodies that the female body should restrict its access to. Ensuring that her father does not see the evidence of her bodily functions follows this evocation. Her mother initially warns her to distance or segregate her body from male bodies, and then reaffirms this segregation by insisting that Audre specifically hide her bodily functions from her father, rather than suggesting this is a common courtesy for everyone in the family home. The female body, in this instance, is relegated to the margins, as a body that requires regulating, restricting, and controlling to ensure its presence remains minimal.

The interjection of 'not that it's anything shameful,' serves to paradoxically reinforce the framing of the mother's dialogue by shame, as the discourse is shameful by the necessity of voicing this in the first place. The reassurance, however, indicates that the mother is positioned as both the focaliser of sexist oppression as well as the oppressed. On the one hand, Audre's mother is perpetuating sexist practices, enforcing certain restrictions upon Audre's body and how she must orientate herself toward others. On the other hand, the mother is equally speaking from a position of being oppressed herself and attempting to counter such narratives with positive affirmations of it not being shameful. Mitchell argues: '[s]hame is fundamental to the constitution and maintenance of the self as a distinct, discrete entity, while also (at least potentially) threatening that self (its stability, its boundaries, its autonomy).'⁵⁹ The discourse framed by shame acts as a way of constituting and maintaining Audre's self as distinct in relation to her mother and those around her. Shame enforces regulations thanks to which Audre must now distance herself from 'every Tom, Dick, and Harry,' along with discretely wrapping up her 'soiled napkins' in order to retain herself in relation to others. The continual shaming of Audre's body equally acts to threaten her own sovereignty, not by destabilising, or blurring boundaries of her autonomy, but by reinforcing her orientation toward untouchability through exerting greater boundaries and restrictions on her autonomy. Mitchell states:

Shame is fundamental to the operation of social relations: we cannot and should not do without shame [...] as it helps to regulate our social behaviour and interactions with others; however, an excess of shame can prove similarly disabling. Meanwhile, the shaming of others can all too often be a way of asserting power over them.⁶⁰

Mitchell's insights reveal that shame has a particular relationship to relationality, as fundamental in regulating social behaviour and interactions. Shame, therefore, can frame how a body relates to another, and inform how one may orientate their body toward or away from other bodies. The way in which a body can extend into the spaces it inhabits, as a way of relating to the world, is therefore instructed by how shame regulates the body's social interactions, informing how one may come to learn what is within reach or out of reach from their body.

The notion of shaming being a way of 'asserting power' over others is also acknowledged by Elspeth Probyn (2005) who explores the gendering of shame, questioning why women are not only those who are shamed, but those who often shame other women too: 'Historically women [...] have been made to feel ashamed and as a consequence have become more attuned to detecting the shame of others, it makes a certain sense that the subordinated may have more nuanced skills at shaming than the privileged.'⁶¹ Due to their awareness of shame and how it occurs within the shamed subject, Probyn argues that women may have a better understanding of what elicits shame, and therefore, of how to be the instigators of this shame. This in turn creates an interesting dynamic between the shamed and shamer, who are both in positions of experiencing shame, or have previously experienced the shame they are inflicting upon the other. Audre's mother perpetuates this view of female bodies as shameful, yet her evocations and restrictions are presented as an attempt to ensure that Audre does not encounter shame. Probyn observes: 'there are gender-specific ways of understanding and knowing the significance of shame.'⁶² She considers how women experience shame not only individually, but as a surrogate for the entire historical lineage of women's subordination. Through this subordinate position, women experience shame less like an emotion, but more as

an 'affective attunement,'⁶³ a continual awareness and feeling of being in accord to this environment of subordination; as a way of experiencing the social environment around them. Audre's mother, as a surrogate, inadvertently transmits this sense of shame to Audre, orientating her body towards certain ways of being, whilst arguably trying to protect Audre from experiencing such shame. By enforcing sexist practices, whilst Audre's mother keeps Audre's body 'in line' with society's oppressive practices, she is equally ensuring that Audre's body does not get 'out of line,' protecting Audre from situations in which Audre's body may be vulnerable and exposed to greater shame, ridicule, or severe consequences. Therefore, this speaking in 'twin tongues,' through evocations and restrictions, along with an undefinable amusement and 'half-smile' that implied 'that something very good and satisfactory and pleasing to her had just happened, and that we were both pretending otherwise for some very wise and secret reasons,'⁶⁴ can be viewed as an attempt to shelter Audre from sexist practices, which continue to subordinate women, in the only way Audre's mother knows how to.

Although Audre's mother asserts warnings and restrictions, imbuing the narrative with a sense of shame and a need for silence that intends on muting the body, the silence may comparatively provide a space for Audre's body to speak and enter the text. The narrative implies that a counter-narrative emerges by which the silence assists in creating the space for Audre to resist how her body is being orientated toward restricted, controlled, and regulated ways of being in relation to others. After Audre's mother leaves, Audre is left to pound the garlic for dinner:

My body felt new and special and unfamiliar and suspect all at the same time.

I could feel bands of tension sweeping across my body back and forth, like lunar winds across the moon's face. I felt the slight rubbing bulge of the cotton pad between my legs, and I smelled the delicate breadfruit smell rising up from the front of my print blouse that was my own womansmell [sic], warm, shameful, but secretly utterly delicious.⁶⁵

In this space, Audre is left alone with her own body and the silence shifts to no longer hindering her body but allowing her body to speak, and in turn, be heard. Touch not only informs how

one may experience direct contact with another, but also the way in which one may experience contact with oneself. In the Introduction, I refer to Serres' argument of touch as a means of connecting to oneself and forming an internal sense of 'self,' which is interesting when positioned in relation to Lorde's work. Audre's internal contact with her body assists in reorientating her relationship to herself, due to encountering her body as 'new,' 'special,' 'unfamiliar,' and 'suspect.' Menstruation alters Audre's relationality to herself as she now experiences herself as both familiar and strange.

The compound of 'womansmell' in Lorde's experimental practice suggests the intimate relationality between the words of this neologism. The experimental form emphasises this intimacy between the words by highlighting how closely related and connected they are through negating the separation of such words through a space within the text. By doing so, the compound stresses the way in which this new 'womansmell' simultaneously elicits a response of 'shameful' and 'secretly utterly delicious,' indicating the dualism of this compound in that shame has already framed Audre's relation to her body, yet equally underneath this framing is a counter-narrative of positive affirmation. Lorde continues to write of how this relation to herself alters how she then experiences herself in relation to the mortar and wooden pestle:

The downward thrust of the wooden pestle slowed upon contact, rotated back and forth slowly, and then gently altered its rhythm to include an up and down beat. Back and forth, round, up and down, back, forth, round, round, up and down ... There was a heavy fullness at the root of me that was exciting and dangerous.

As I continued to pound the spice, a vital connection seemed to establish itself between the muscles of my fingers curved tightly around the smooth pestle in its insistent downward motion, and the molten core of my body whose source emanated from a new ripe fullness just beneath the pit of my stomach. That invisible thread, taut and sensitive as a clitoris exposed, stretched through my curled fingers [...].⁶⁶

Compared to how '[t]he sensual content of life' is 'masked and cryptic, but attended in well-coded phrases' by her family, this passage reads like the body's sensuality. The form heightens this sensuality as sentences roll into each other, suggesting a fluidity of the body's rhythms in time with the movement of the pestle 'back and forth, round, up and down, back, forth, round, round, up and down.' The ellipsis presents a pause in the narrative, a moment to reflect,

whereby the pounding of the pestle is now connected to Audre's body. The pause provides a space for the body to enter the text as Audre turns her attention to her body, noting her awareness of a 'heavy fullness at the root of me.' Her attention is now directed toward her own body in relation to the pestle, in comparison to being directed away from her body by her mother's warnings and restrictions that hinder how Audre relates to her own body in relation to her mother. As Mitchell highlights above, shame is essential to how social relations operate; therefore, the distinction in form and content between Lorde's narrative of her mother's warnings and her narrative of encountering her body alone suggests that shame is experienced when being in relation to her mother, rather than when she is in relation to herself. Audre's body is regulated by its relation to her mother, yet when alone, her body is no longer regulated in the same way, but is instead open to encountering itself in a new way without restriction. Her body extends outwards in its connection with the pestle. Audre is now acutely aware of her own movements. The rhythm of the 'insistent downward motion' of the pestle is connected to the 'molten core' of her body as she can sense a 'new ripe fullness' within herself. The metaphor of this 'invisible thread', as 'sensitive' as a 'clitoris exposed', not only conveys the sensuality of the encounter but also the heightened sensitivity of Audre's new connection to herself. Her body can speak within the silence of the kitchen, indicating a counter-narrative in which Audre, when alone, may still relate to her body without shame, enacting resistance to the way in which others attempt to orientate her way of relating to herself.

When alone, Audre's body is orientated towards herself and specifically in relation to herself internally. This reorientation enables her mother's 'catalogue of dire menstruation-warnings' to pass from her mind. Audre experiences her body as 'strong,' 'full,' and 'open.'⁶⁷ However, when Audre's mother returns, Audre's body is once again muted as her mother's admonitions and frustrations over Audre not having finished her task shift the way in which Audre's body orientates itself within this space. Audre states:

The kitchen felt suddenly oppressively hot and still, and I felt myself beginning to shake all over.

Tears I did not understand started from my eyes, as I realized that my old enjoyment of the bone-jarring way I had been taught to pound spice would feel different to me from now on, and also that in my mother's kitchen there was only one right way to do anything. Perhaps my life had not become so simple, after all.⁶⁸

The atmosphere of the kitchen changes to one that is 'oppressively hot and still'. In this space Audre's body no longer extends outwards but is once again restricted in relation to her mother, causing her to shake. Under her mother's gaze, Audre's body is repositioned as one that is unable to perform the task 'correctly' in the way she used to. Her menstruation has altered how she relates to her body, and in turn, how her mother perceives her body's ability to perform. This space is no longer one that extends Audre's body in her own terms through her relation to herself. As a result, this space is delineated as 'my mother's kitchen' that only has 'one right way to do anything' and can, therefore, only orientate the body in one direction: her mother's line to follow. The conclusion 'my life has not become so simple, after all' may indicate Audre's recognition of how her body is regulated and censored by the 'one right way to do anything,' and that to stray from this would be to step 'out of line.' Audre's tears that she does not understand may suggest anger, rather than sadness, as she initially defends herself against her mother's admonitions before resigning herself to there being one right way.

A few years after Lorde published *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Adrienne Rich published *Of Woman Born* (1986), which examines the mother-daughter relationship, questioning the mother's role in perpetuating the father's, and ultimately patriarchal society's, expectations of the daughter. Lorde's narrative may be read in proximity to Rich's consideration of how the mother role must take into account the societal oppression each previous generation of mothers has had to fight against. Rich argues that it is through a mother's actions, words, and ways of being that patriarchy teaches 'the small female her proper expectations.'⁶⁹ However, in 'Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger,' Lorde acknowledges that 'survival is the greatest gift of love' and that '[s]ometimes, for Black mothers, it is the only gift possible,

and tenderness gets lost.⁷⁰ Her mother teaches Audre to survive in a hostile world, which may enforce patriarchal teachings, imbued with sexism, racism, and heterosexist perceptions, yet it is the way her mother has learnt to survive herself. Audre's mother can only teach Audre to survive through her own example. Rich implies that the tension and anger often felt between a daughter and her mother is not simply due to a desire to rebel against the limitations placed upon the daughter, but through her observation of her mother's victimisation that 'mutilates the daughter who watches her for clues as to what it means to be a woman. Like the traditional foot-bound Chinese woman, she passes on her affliction. The mother's self-hatred and low expectations are the binding-rags for the psyche of the daughter.'⁷¹ It is this duality of both being confined by her mother's warnings and rules, and seeing the way her mother is in turn confined to one right way, that maps the oppressive embodiment upon Audre's body and the threat of what may happen if she strays 'off line' from the relegated position that the female body is restricted to.

Segregation: Orientation and Untouchability

Audre's mother assists in teaching Audre how to orientate her body in relation to the familial structure and society at large. The minimal tactile contact between Audre and her father, and the mother serving as the primary tactile contact, both in terms of nurturing as well as reprimanding tactile contact, informs a gendered approach to relationality. The segregation of tactile contact between father and daughter may instruct Audre on how she is to relate to men in a wider context. By ensuring the separation between intimate, nurturing or caring tactile contact, which is provided by the mother, and a lack of tactile contact between father and daughter, it maintains restrictions of how bodies relate. In other words, as Audre's body is directed toward gendered orientations, who and how this body may touch becomes gendered too, relegating some forms of touch to a 'feminine' or 'masculine' economy of touch. In this regard, the way in which touch is orientated may assist in maintaining binary oppositions

between male and female bodies in which touch is initially denied and restricted; and therefore, exclusively presented as acceptable in terms of how this contact may adhere to heterosexuality. Her family dynamics instruct the gendering of her bodily orientations and in turn inform how she may be orientated towards forms of touch that are framed through heterosexuality.

This notion of segregation and restricted bodily orientations is compounded further as the family informs Audre of how gender and race may intersect. bell hooks remarks: '[w]e tend to witness and/or experience racism or classism as we encounter the larger society, the world outside the home.'⁷² However, Lorde's narrative suggests that racism, whilst experienced at first as an external encounter with the larger society, is equally experienced within the familial setting. Through her family's example, Audre learns how to respond to racism from the external society as well as how racism is internalised by her family, ultimately enforcing notions of segregation and orientating Audre towards an untouchability in relation to others. Ahmed explores the relation of race to embodied reality:

The "matter" of race is very much about embodied reality; seeing oneself or being seen as white or black or mixed does affect what one "can do," or even where one can go, which can be redescribed in terms of what is and is not within reach. If we begin to consider what is affective about the "unreachable," we might even begin the task of making "race" a rather queer matter.⁷³

Audre learns of the word 'coloured' when she is six years old, suggesting that the concept of race is not a given, 'natural' category, but imbued with meaning through its social construction and historical lineage. Ahmed's work positions race as a matter that someone *sees* themselves as embodying, rather than as merely being, which changes the relationship one may have to race as it is shaped in relation to others, through how one may see themselves in comparison to others or how one may be seen by others, in a given site, space, and temporality. Up until this point, Audre had not embodied herself as 'coloured,' but now, by seeing herself as 'coloured,' Audre's embodied reality within certain sites, spaces, temporalities, and relations is reshaped by this knowledge, impacting what Audre believes she 'can do,' which in turn, alters her relationship to what now appears within and not within reach. Although Ahmed's work

emphasises the importance of sight in this embodied reality, this impacts one's body in very physical ways, restricting movement, embodiment, and the sense of touch. What is unreachable, and therefore untouchable, orientates Audre to follow particular lines just as much, if not more, than what is within reach. As she asks her sisters of the word's meaning, Audre additionally asks whether her mother would be considered 'white or Colored.'⁷⁴ The uncertainty of her sister's response leaves Audre deciding, to the shock and horror of her sisters, that if anyone asks her: 'I'm going to tell them I'm white same as Mommy.'⁷⁵ Audre learns of the difference between herself and her mother at the same time as learning how she cannot be white too, and how this difference in skin color is imbued with racism that begins to dictate what and who is within reach of Audre's body.

The way in which the knowledge of race may orientate Audre's body in relation to society is informed further by how her parents respond to such racism, indicating how she herself should then react and orientate herself in relation to others and in relation to herself as a Black woman. In America, racial segregation was enforced until 1964 when the Civil Rights Movement's protests achieved the signing of the Civil Rights Act, which outlawed discrimination. Nonetheless, as Maria Krysan and Kyle Crowder bring to light in *Cycle of Segregation: Social Processes and Residential Stratification* (2017), desegregation remained a slow process and the residue of racial segregation persists in schools and residential areas that still reflect practices of segregation, due to the pronounced 'racial disparities in economic resources.'⁷⁶ Lorde's narrative highlights how, in the 1940s and 1950s, this environment of 'American racism' was 'a new and crushing reality that my parents had to deal with every day of their lives once they came to this country. They handled it as a private woe.'⁷⁷ Since it was a new experience for Audre's parents, they were unprepared in terms of how to respond to such a hostile environment, adapting to the situation in the only way they knew how to, which in turn, influenced how their children would equally come to orientate themselves within this society. Audre states:

My mother and father believed that they could best protect their children from the realities of race in America and the fact of American racism by never giving them name, much less discussing their nature. We were told we must never trust white people, but *why* was never explained, nor the nature of their ill will. Like so many other vital pieces of information in my childhood, I was supposed to know without being told. It always seemed like a very strange injunction coming from my mother, who looked so much like one of those people we were never supposed to trust. But something always warned me not to ask my mother why she wasn't white, and why Auntie Lillah and Auntie Etta weren't, even though they were all that same problematic color so different from my father and me, even from my sisters, who were somewhere in-between.⁷⁸

Similar to how sexism orientates the female body toward gendered restrictions, regulations, and ways of silencing the body, racism orientates the body toward racial restrictions of what is reachable or unreachable. Since the parents do not know how to respond to this new and crushing reality, they in turn can only protect the children in the way they have learnt how to. In 'Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger,' (originally published as an abbreviated version in 1983) Lorde reinforces this by acknowledging how '[m]y mother taught me to survive from a very early age by her own example.'⁷⁹ Racism is at first experienced as an external reality of living in America, yet by her mother's example, Audre learns the dialogue of racism as one infused with silence and an internalising of such oppression. Although her mother taught her how to survive, Lorde highlights how '[h]er silences also taught me isolation, fury, mistrust, self-rejection, and sadness. My survival lay in learning how to use the weapons she gave me, also, to fight against those things within myself, unnamed.'⁸⁰ This learning of survival comes with a price as Lorde orientates herself toward isolation, mistrust, and self-rejection, where she not only turns away from others but also away from herself. In other words, she is taught to orientate herself toward untouchability by restricting what is within reach of her body.

The reflective form of Lorde's writing emphasises the thought process of intersecting ideas and how they inform Audre's understanding of race and racism. She relays her parents' experiences, connecting this to how they then taught her, and how this 'injunction' is in turn a site of conflict when it comes from her mother whose skin shares more likeness with those

Audre should not trust than her own. Racism is never given a name or explanation, indicating that Audre ought to know implicitly why she should not trust white people. The emphasis on 'why' never being explained and how '[I]ike so many other vital pieces of information in my childhood, I was supposed to know without being told' suggests how implicit knowledge may be understood as a form of what one inherits. Ahmed proposes that implicit knowledge is of 'how we inherit a relation to place and to placement: at home, "things" are not only done a certain way, but the domestic "puts things" in their place. "The family" itself becomes what we implicitly know, as well as what surrounds us, a dwelling place.'⁸¹ Yet due to the enforced silence, along with the censuring of ever addressing that her mother is of the 'same problematic color so different from my father and me' indicates that 'the family,' what Audre implicitly knows, is in fact what may disorientate her from knowing how the 'domestic "puts things" in their place' and how the family and what surrounds her should orientate her.

The difference in skin tone between Audre's mother, who could pass as white, and Audre, complicates Audre's orientation around 'whiteness.' A recent area of research pertinent to critical race theory is the notion of 'whiteness theory.' Researchers and research projects, such as Claudia Rankine's *The Racial Imaginary Institute*, address the centrality of whiteness in Western culture and the privileges, as well as blindness to such privileges, associated with white identity. By critiquing and deconstructing white privilege, critical race theory stresses the way in which all race is socially constructed, and in turn demonstrates the hierarchisation of whiteness over other races. In *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (2018), Robin Diangelo perceives 'the pillars of whiteness [...as] the unexamined beliefs that prop up our racial responses [... and] the power of the belief that only bad people were racist, as well as how individualism allowed white people to exempt themselves from the forces of socialization.'⁸² Through this exemption, Diangelo remarks: 'we are taught to think about racism only as discrete acts committed by individual people, rather than as a complex, interconnected system.'⁸³ White privilege enables white people to perceive

themselves 'as entitled to, and deserving of, more than people of color deserve.'⁸⁴ Diangelo addresses the way in which the negation of the complexity of these interconnected systems highlights white people's 'investment in a system that serves us [... and] how hard we worked to deny all this and how defensive we became when these dynamics were named.'⁸⁵ In other words, whiteness functions as a way of maintaining an ideology of 'the racial status quo'⁸⁶ through structures that produce white privilege along with systemic racism. In Ahmed's work, these structures position whiteness as not an object within reach, but instead, 'an orientation that puts certain things within reach.'⁸⁷ Ahmed observes that by 'putting certain things in reach, a world acquires its shape; the white world is a world orientated "around" whiteness.'⁸⁸ She goes on to argue:

This world, too, is "inherited" as a dwelling: it is a world shaped by colonial histories, which affect not simply how maps are drawn, but the kinds of orientations we have toward objects and others. Race becomes, in this model, a question of what is within reach, what is available to perceive and to do "things" with.⁸⁹

Bodies may then cohere to what they are orientated around, rather than towards. In this regard, if Western society is orientated around 'whiteness,' then what may be within reach for Audre, as 'available to perceive and to do "things" with' may vary significantly to what is within reach to her mother, or even her sisters who share a lighter skin tone. Referring to the notion of inheritance once more, Ahmed suggests: '*we inherit the reachability of some objects*, those that are "given" to us or at least are made available to us within the family home.'⁹⁰ However, since Audre cannot inherit the same 'reachability of some objects' and these are not 'given' to her by the family home, this creates a degree of separation as she cannot follow the same line as the family. In other words, Audre does not inherit the same orientation.

In 'Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred and Anger,' Lorde writes more directly about her experiences of associating Black with negativity and how this association frames her perception of herself in relation to others. Lorde compares herself to her sisters:

They were good-looking, I was dark. Bad, mischievous, a born troublemaker if ever there was one.

Did *bad* mean *Black*? The endless scrubbing with lemon juice in the cracks and crevices of my ripening, darkening, body. And oh, the sins of my dark elbows and knees, my gums and nipples, the folds of my neck and the cave of my armpits!⁹¹

The association of skin colour with her behaviour reinforces the racism Audre experiences from the wider society. bell hooks claims: '[f]amily exists as a space wherein we are socialized from birth to accept and support forms of oppression.'⁹² Audre's skin marks her body as different to her sisters' and mother's, and, as she receives more punishment than her sisters, she begins to associate her difference in skin tone to negative personality traits and characteristics. Audre is not only orientated around society's 'whiteness' that takes the shape of some bodies more than others but is equally orientated by how 'whiteness' infiltrates the family dwellings in which Audre is orientated around how she differs from her mother and sisters. Rather than mimicking the wider society in which racial segregation is enforced, due to her mother resembling the 'same problematic color,' the family simultaneously enforces racial segregation by separating themselves from white people, who they should not trust, whilst equally denouncing this same racial segregation within the household, disorientating the way in which Audre should orientate herself. The difference in skin tone is therefore a point of tension, functioning as a form of separation that assists in orientating Audre's body away from her mother, her family, and the wider social context.

Untouchability: The Gaze as a Form of Touch

Audre's sense of untouchability is continuously reinforced by society's racism and racial segregation, along with her family's response to such racism and the transmitting of their internalised racism towards her own body. As a body inhabited as separate and isolated, the experience of others' gazes upon Audre's body and her response of turning towards or away from these gazes may indicate how the gaze begins to function as a form of touching when the body has become untouchable. Laura U. Marks in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (2000) considers the concept of 'haptic visuality' as a form of

touching with the eyes, where the eyes function as an organ of touch discerning texture. I consider how this form of seeing usurps the literal sense of touch when a body is orientated toward untouchability. In the analysis of Marguerite Duras' *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* in Chapter Three, I return to Marks' concept to address how, when trauma positions the subject as unable to experience touch affectively, which therefore, disrupts, and in some cases, ceases the ability of touch to orientate, reorientate, or even disorientate one's bodily horizon toward or away from others, the eyes become a surrogate for experiencing forms of touch denied to the traumatised body. Yet unlike my analysis of Duras' *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* that situates haptic visuality as a positive way of still experiencing touch when the body becomes figuratively untouchable, I read Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* in proximity to Marks' understanding of haptic visuality in order to consider how racism may turn the gaze into an oppressive way of touching the untouchable body, which functions to maintain the body's position as literally untouchable. Marks' use of the term 'haptic visuality' indicates a relationship between the object perceived and the subject's memory, which is mediated by the body. Yet in this instance, this form of mimesis may conceive of the gaze as no longer imitating and acting like touch, but instead functioning as the imitation, enacting of, and in turn heightening of the sense of touch as censored, controlled, regulated, segregated, and ultimately denied. In this regard, the experience of an oppressive gaze may reinforce Audre's orientation toward untouchability.

Lorde examines how the eyes function in her essay, 'Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger,' indicating how the gaze may actively censor the body as the oppressive gaze renders a body untouchable and alienated even from the individual themselves. Through the example of a white woman staring at her as they sit side-by-side in a train carriage, Lorde reveals how this oppressive gaze orientates her toward her own body:

Her mouth twitches as she stares and then her gaze drops down, pulling mine with it. Her leather-gloved hand plucks at the line where my new blue snowpants and her sleek fur coat meet. She jerks her coat closer to her. I look. I do not see whatever terrible

thing she is seeing on the seat between us – probably a roach. But she has communicated her horror to me. It must be something very bad from the way she's looking, so I pull my snowsuit closer to me away from it, too.⁹³

In this instance, Lorde becomes the object of a hostile white gaze that also pulls her gaze. The white gaze is at first misdirected by Audre believing that there must be some 'terrible thing' upon the seat. The hostile gaze not only informs the woman's actions of moving her coat away from Lorde, but Lorde's actions too, which mirror the woman's actions by similarly drawing her snowsuit closer to her own body and away from whatever 'terrible thing' there may be between them. The gaze functions to instigate action as both the subject of the gaze (the white woman) and the object of the gaze (Lorde) move away from each other; therefore, it perpetuates the notion of untouchability in directing the body away from another.

Although Lorde is initially unaware of what 'terrible thing' she must be seeing, the gaze functions as a way of communicating such horror. Subsequently, the gaze, as a form of communication, shapes how the body becomes orientated in relation to others. Lorde continues:

When I look up the woman is still staring at me, her nose holes and eyes huge. And suddenly I realize there is nothing crawling up the seat between us; it is me she doesn't want her coat to touch. [...] I'm afraid to say anything to my mother because I don't know what I've done. I look at the sides of my snowpants, secretly. Is there something on them? Something's going on here I do not understand, but I will never forget it. Her eyes. The flared nostrils. The hate.⁹⁴

The construction of the first sentence implicitly stresses a form of dehumanization: the equivalent of the white woman's coat, 'her coat,' should be 'my snowpants,' but is instead equated with 'it is me.' Rather than two inanimate objects – the coat and the snowpants – relating to one another, the white woman's coat, an inanimate object covering her body, is equivalent in status to 'me,' Lorde's person. One can read this as a narrative driven by the hostile gaze, which in turn, accentuates the process of internalizing the hostile gaze whereby Lorde's person is reduced to the same status as the white woman's coat. When Lorde realises that the gaze, which informed the woman to move her coat away, is directed toward herself, this is then

recognised as a way of communicating her untouchability. The gaze (the woman staring at her) and the action (jerking her coat closer to herself) become synonymous with each other. The gaze mimics what the action means: 'it is me she doesn't want her coat to touch.' She is a body to avoid contact with, marked as somehow untouchable though she does not know what she has done. Not only does the oppressive gaze inflict hostility upon Lorde's body from the external world, but it also equally turns her gaze toward her own body, yet in a way that causes her to turn such a hostile gaze upon herself. Ahmed argues that '[r]acism ensures that the black gaze returns to the black body, which is not a loving return but rather follows the line of the hostile white gaze.'⁹⁵ By doing so, 'racism "interrupts" the corporeal schema. Or we could say that "the corporeal schema" is already racialized; in other words, race does not just interrupt such a schema but structures its mode of operation. The corporeal schema is of a "body at home."⁹⁶ The hostile gaze stops Lorde's body from extending into this public space and instead situates her body as a body that is not at home, interrupting her corporeal schema and in turn directing her gaze upon herself to follow the line of the hostile white gaze.

It is only when Audre experiences an alternative gaze, within the narrative of *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, that she learns how the gaze may reorientate the body toward 'touchability' when the gaze acts as a way of reaching toward a body and confirming or validating its existence. Years later when Audre travels to Mexico City, she recalls:

Moving through street after street filled with people with brown faces had a profound and exhilarating effect upon me, unlike any other experience I had ever known.

Friendly strangers, passing smiles, admiring and questioning glances, the sense of being somewhere I wanted to be and had chosen. Being noticed, and accepted without being known, gave me a social contour and surety as I moved through the city sightseeing, and I felt bold and adventurous and special.⁹⁷

The profoundness of this experience resonates from the way in which the gaze positions Audre in relation to others. Rather than censoring the body, relegating it to a form of untouchability, the accepting gaze of 'admiring and questioning glances' provides Audre with a 'social contour and surety' that she had not previously embodied. The form expresses the exhilaration of this

experience as the use of fragmented sentences, listing the attributes of 'friendly strangers,' 'passing smiles,' 'admiring and questioning glances,' creates an affective staccato rhythm that expresses her excitement. The glances invite her to receive and return the gaze, since the 'questioning' glances suggest curiosity, intrigue, and a desire to know, rather than to shun. The gaze communicates interest and in turn acts as a way of reaching toward. For example, the shopkeeper's gaze – '[h]er bright dark eyes widened in amazement' - is followed by how 'she patted the back of my hand with her dry wrinkled fingers, still holding the coin I had just given her.'⁹⁸ Unlike the oppressive gaze that mimics the act of pulling away from the untouchable body, the accepting gaze mimics the action of moving toward and touching, positioning Audre's body as one that is acceptable to touch. In Mexico City, Audre states:

I started to break my life-long habit of looking down at my feet as I walked along the street. [...] Wherever I went, there were brown faces of every hue meeting mine, and seeing my own color reflected upon the streets in such great numbers was an affirmation for me that was brand-new and very exciting. I had never felt visible before, nor even known I lacked it.⁹⁹

The hostile white gaze has taught Audre to avoid gazing at others, isolating her body from being in relation to others. Yet the accepting gaze assists in breaking this 'life-long habit,' reorientating Audre's relationship to her own body as one that is not orientated to follow the line of the hostile white gaze but instead orientated to follow the line of the accepting gaze. By seeing her own color reflected back towards her, Audre feels visible and able to extend into the space around her, as such a space is no longer orientated around whiteness. Audre's identity gains affirmation, which assists in no longer censoring her body and orientating her toward untouchability, but opening her body out so that she can extend and reach toward other bodies. The way in which the gaze functions as a form of touch, therefore, directs Audre's body away from or toward certain bodies, informing which bodies are within reach or not within reach to touch.

Out of Line: Reaching Toward Bodies that are out of Reach

The way in which gender and race orientate Audre's relation to her body, family, and wider society shapes whether Audre is orientated towards or away from touch, informing who is and is not within reach as an object of desire. This chapter initially examined touch as an orientating device that assists Audre in relating to others when her disability may restrict other forms of communicating with and perceiving the world around her. Yet this initial orientation towards touch, whereby Audre's identity orientates her toward touch and in turn touch orientates her identity, is gradually censored through her family's and wider society's repetition of gendered and racialised ways of orientating a body, which equally intersect and shape the sexualised ways of orientating a body too. Ahmed argues:

In the conventional family home what appears requires following a certain line, the family line that directs our gaze. The heterosexual couple becomes a "point" along this line, which is given to the child as its inheritance or background. The background then is not simply behind the child: it is what the child is asked to aspire toward. The background, given in this way, can orientate us toward the future: it is where the child is asked to direct its desire by accepting the family line as its own inheritance.¹⁰⁰

This inheritance, in Lorde's narrative, can be read as how the requirement to follow a certain line is not only framed by heterosexuality, but how gender and race may intersect to shape the requirements of this 'straight line.' Audre's family not only direct her gaze toward a 'heterosexual' point along this line, but a 'heterosexual' point that is orientated by certain gendered and racialised expectations, restrictions, censures, and requirements. However, a counter narrative emerges that suggests a form of resistance to these censoring orientations. Lorde's narrative suggests that whilst her family and the wider social context continuously attempt to enforce particular orientations, Audre is never able to follow these lines entirely nor adhere to the paths already carved by the footprints of those who have repeatedly trodden upon them before her.

There is a continual pressure for Audre to follow the line carved out by her parents, which can be viewed in Ahmed's terms as the 'line that extends the line of the family tree.' This

can also be understood as 'the social "pressure" for reproduction, which "presses" the surface of bodies in specific ways.'¹⁰¹ When tension increases in the family home, Audre explains how a shut door at any other time, bar when studying, 'was [...] considered an insult. My mother viewed any act of separation from her as an indictment of her authority.'¹⁰² The perceived threat of Audre pulling away from her mother may be viewed as a pulling away from and criticism of her mother's path and the path that Audre is equally expected to follow. Ahmed further observes:

There is pressure to inherit this line, a pressure that can speak the language of love, happiness, and care, which pushes us along specific paths. We do not know what we could become without these points of pressure, which insist that happiness will follow if we do this or we do that. And yet, these places where we are under pressure don't always mean we stay on line; at certain points we can refuse the inheritance—at points that are often lived as "breaking points." We do not always know what breaks at these points.¹⁰³

Ahmed indicates how the pressure to inherit this line may not be felt as a pressure as such, but instead as a language of love shrouded in an expectation of happiness that may only be obtained by following the line one inherits. Ahmed stresses the significance of an individual's perception of happiness in this pressure to inherit, and perhaps the 'breaking point,' or refusal to such inheritance, arises when this insistence of such happiness following from inheriting this line is disappointed and proven illusory, and to stay 'on line,' therefore, becomes too detrimental to the individual and their own notion of happiness. Lorde's narrative demonstrates that following a certain line not only requires a 'straight line,' but also a line that adheres to gender and racial orientations.

This chapter highlights the pressure points to inheriting this line, yet also how these pressure points do not automatically assume that Audre will be able to follow the path 'correctly.' Lorde writes of Audre's 'breaking point' at which she arguably refuses this inheritance and can no longer stay 'on line':

I met Peter at a Labor Youth League party in February and we made a date. He arrived to take me to the movies the next afternoon. [...] My father answered the door, and

would not let Peter into the house because he was white. That immediately catapulted what would have been a passing teenage fancy into a revolutionary cause célèbre.¹⁰⁴

Although Audre is adhering to the 'straight line,' since Peter is white, she is still 'out of line' with the expected path she is supposed to follow. Her father's action of refusing to allow Peter to enter the house may symbolise the refusal of Peter to enter the family line, which also becomes a racial line. Peter cannot enter the family home, which represents entering the family. Ahmed states that the 'family line establishes what we could call a racial line, which "directs" reproduction toward the continuation of that line.'¹⁰⁵ Through the lens of Ahmed's theory, Lorde's narrative may be read as the continuation of the family line not only orientating Audre to follow the line of compulsory heterosexuality that ensures reproduction, but an orientation toward a compulsory, racially defined heterosexuality. Ahmed states that '[s]uch a direction means that the family line coheres "around" a racial group, which becomes a boundary line: to marry someone of a different race is to marry "out."¹⁰⁶ Yet rather than the reaction of Audre's father operating as a way of restoring this boundary line, his reaction in fact creates the opposite effect. Rather than 'pressing' Audre's body back in line, he instead provokes a 'revolutionary cause célèbre' where Audre resists returning to the hitherto defined straight, gendered, and racialised line enforced by her parents and the wider social context, and opts to remain out of line.

This event is Audre's breaking point from following such lines and assists in igniting her decision to leave the family home and attempt to find her own path. Nonetheless, Audre initially remains close to the path by maintaining her relationship with Peter, yet the tactile contact between them heightens Audre's awareness of how her body has been directed toward a particular orientation:

Peter and I saw each other a lot, and slept together, since it was expected. Sex seemed pretty dismal and frightening and a little demeaning, but Peter said I'd get used to it, and Iris said I'd get used to it, and Jean said I'd get used to it, and I used to wonder why it wasn't possible to just love each other and be warm and close and let the grunting go.¹⁰⁷

Audre begins to alter her perception of the direction her body has been orientated toward, whereby her relation to touch informs how she is reaching toward other bodies. Although her identity is orientated to follow the 'straight' line, touch shapes how Audre encounters such an orientation where the encounter may read as the recognition of still being 'out of line' even when she is attempting to follow the line. Touch is presented here as an expectation of what should happen between these two bodies. The structural monotony of the run-on sentence suggests resignation: sex, as dismal, frightening, and demeaning, is an act Audre will get used to. The continual reiteration of the phrase 'I'd get used to it' emphasises the enforcement of such an orientation that is not articulated as 'natural' but as something Audre will learn to manage. The phrase is reiterated like a mantra, heightening the embeddedness of this perception whereby Audre's friends have arguably become surrogates for how the family used to guide her way of orientating herself within the world. Although Audre is no longer living with her family, she is still orientated by others to follow particular lines toward or away from certain bodies.

Audre's friends may act as 'pressure points' in their attempt to keep her on the 'straight' line. Yet Lorde's narrative indicates that the perceptions of others not only censor or restrain her orientation but can similarly influence her perception of what lines are available to her, suggesting how these perceptions can equally extend Audre to the possibilities of other lines to follow. When Audre is pregnant and needing assistance, her colleague, Ann, is surprised:

'I thought you was gay!'

I heard the disappointed half-question in Ann's voice, [...] But my experience with people who tried to label me was that they usually did it to either dismiss me or use me. I hadn't even acknowledged my own sexuality yet, much less made any choices about it.¹⁰⁸

Ann's disappointment suggests that this questioning functions counter to a 'straightening device,'¹⁰⁹ positively reinforcing the perception of Audre as 'out of line,' rather than attempting to correct the line. Interestingly, it is Audre who does not wish to label herself, yet not due to her own desires, perceptions, relations, or orientations, but due to her awareness of how labels,

when applied to her by other people, can be employed to dismiss or use her. Audre is wary of being labelled, yet by not wishing to acknowledge her own sexuality or make her own choices about it, she is arguably still under the influence of how others perceive her and may attempt to orientate her to follow certain lines. The direction Audre may be orientated toward, by which certain bodies remain within or not within reach, is still externally shaped by how others relate to her, rather than through how she relates to others.

This perception of Audre as gay is reinforced further by Ginger, who is convinced that Audre is a 'citified little baby butch – bright, knowledgeable, and secure.'¹¹⁰ This perception can be read as influencing Audre's path, suggesting that to follow this alternative line is still to follow in the footsteps of others who have already come before her. Ahmed explains:

the normative can be considered an effect of the repetition of bodily actions over time, which produces what we can call the bodily horizon, a space for action, which puts some objects and not others in reach. The normative dimension can be redescribed in terms of the straight body, a body that appears "in line." Things seems "straight" (on the vertical axis), when they are "in line," which means when they are aligned with other lines. Rather than presuming the vertical line is simply given, we would see the vertical line as an effect of this process of alignment.¹¹¹

Whilst the normative may be considered in terms of how the line is straightened, Lorde's narrative suggests that even 'non-straight' bodies may undergo particular forms of alignment, following certain lines that have become 'normative' for those orientations, due to the effects of repeating particular habits and bodily actions over time. In other words, the process one undertakes to align demonstrates that 'the vertical axis' and other axes are not merely given, as any line may undergo a similar process and develop a normative dimension for that particular line over time. To assume the role of 'baby butch' is to still be informed by certain expectations, actions, and ways of relating to others; therefore, although the line has shifted, becoming out of line with the 'straight' line is, in this instance, still remaining on a particular line to follow.

Audre's orientation may be directed by the perception of others, yet touch informs Audre's relationality to Ginger, assisting in confirming the validity of this orientation, and in turn, influencing how she continues to orientate her identity in this way. Audre's 'rising

excitement' challenges her anxieties about her 'anticipated performance' and 'the knot of terror [...] at the thought of Ginger's unknown expectations, at the thought of sexual confrontation, at the thought of being tried and found wanting.'¹¹² When their bodies touch, this contact of being in relation to each other guides Audre's way of orientating herself:

Uncertainty and doubt rolled away from the mouth of my wanting like a great stone, and my unsureness dissolved in the directing heat of my own frank and finally open desire.

Our bodies found the movements we needed to fit each other. [...] Her flesh opened to me like a peony and the unfolding depths of her pleasure brought me back to her body over and over again throughout the night. [...]

I dove beneath her wetness, her fragrance, the silky insistence of her body's rhythms illuminating my own hungers.¹¹³

When Lorde refers to Audre's sexual encounters with Peter as 'dismal and frightening and a little demeaning,' the form is closed off and censored, whereas, here, the narrative comparatively reads of sensuality in Audre's encounter with Ginger. As Lorde writes of the 'uncertainty and doubt' rolling away, so too does the uncertainty and doubt within the form. Sentences are elongated, enacting out this rolling away as Audre finds her body opening up to Ginger's rhythms that illuminate her own. In this encounter, both bodies are extended toward each other. A sense of touchability informs Audre's way of orientating herself toward Ginger. For Audre, their bodies find the movements to 'fit each other,' suggesting that these bodies synchronise. Audre and Ginger are separate but together. The way in which Audre's body is extended outward, now capable of reaching another body, is reflected in the openness of Lorde's descriptions as the form no longer hinders expressions of relationality but provides textual space for such encounters to flourish where the body is able to speak.

The openness of Ginger's body informs how Audre may relate to her and in turn orientate herself toward Ginger. As noted in the Introduction, Ahmed brings to light how touch involves an economy that opens one's body to some bodies but not others. Yet this economy is more nuanced than merely informing which bodies are within reach or out of reach to oneself, as such an economy equally influences to what extent such bodies are within reach or out of

reach of an individual. It is an economy that informs the extent to which one might reach toward and touch others, to what extent bodies are open to each other, which is not only based on the sites, spaces, and temporalities that each individual inhabits, but equally on how these bodies, grappling with their own economies of touch, framed by the various intersections of their identities, come together in relation to each other. If touch is viewed relationally rather than individually, this economy is then predicated on multiple individual economies and how they intersect with one another in the relational act of touching. In this moment between Audre and Ginger, touch is therefore experienced relationally, and the extent to which one may be able to reach out and touch another is predicated on the extent to which another is willing to reach out and be touched or touch back. Ginger's flesh opening 'like a peony,' a metaphor that emphasises her openness to touch, shapes their relationality to each other, since Audre is able to extend her body toward Ginger only in as much as Ginger is willing to extend her body toward Audre. Touch opens their bodies to each other as bodies now within reach, which in turn shapes how Audre now orientates herself toward others. Audre voices '[h]ow ridiculous and far away those fears seemed now, as if loving were some task outside of myself, rather than simply reaching out and letting my own desire guide me. It was all so simple.'¹¹⁴ This encounter opens her body and reorientates her toward touchability. Loving is not an external task, but instead situated as beginning from within as an internal movement of extending the body toward another and simply reaching out. Touch orientates her identity by internally shaping how she relates to others as she becomes responsive rather than reactive to how others relate to her.

Lorde's narrative demonstrates that this simplicity is problematically complicated by the way in which the wider society places pressure upon bodies to be orientated in relation to each other in particular ways. This simplicity is overridden by the relationship between the intersectionality of Audre's identity and the way in which power is socially and systematically organised since multiple axes of social division perpetuate oppressive practices. The act of touching is complicated by society's 'pressure points' that act as 'straightening devices' that

gender, sexualise, racialize relationality. Audre most notably recognises these 'pressure points' when in relation to Muriel, her long term partner:

When Muriel and I received stares and titters [...], it was a toss-up as to whether it was because we were a Black woman and a white woman together, or because we were gay.¹¹⁵

Although Muriel and Audre may negate these 'stares' and 'titters,' they are both still subjected to them, which forces them to turn this gaze upon themselves and question whether it is due to race or sexuality. The oppressive gaze of others negatively influences their relationality to each other by enforcing particular perspectives upon them that inform how each of them relates to the world, and each other. This external, shameful gaze, as Mitchell argues, brings forth a moment in which Audre is made aware of herself as a conscious subject, while simultaneously being undone through such subjection. It is a moment in which she is suddenly made aware of her relationality to Muriel and the differences that separate them. Since Muriel chooses to pretend this difference does not exist, and therefore, dismisses the legitimacy of it, this creates a separation between the two of them:

I was Black and she was not, and that was a difference between us that had nothing to do with better or worse, or the outside world's craziness. Over time I came to realize that it colored our perceptions and made a difference in the ways I saw pieces of the worlds we shared, and I was going to have to deal with that difference outside of our relationship.¹¹⁶

Audre indicates that this difference is neither better nor worse or anything to do with the 'outside world's craziness,' yet by highlighting how this difference 'colored our perceptions' she suggests that this is due to how the intersectionality of their identities relates to the wider society, which in turn orientates them toward different ways of perceiving the world. Although it is a distinction and separation informed by the way in which society orientates one's body away or toward other bodies and censures what is within or not within reach of a body, these external 'pressure points' still press upon the body's surface and shape how Audre can relate to Muriel.

Whilst they may both identify as gay, the external world still perceives Audre and Muriel differently, which impacts how they perceive themselves in relation to society and in relation to each other. Audre's relation to the wider society, and even the gay community, is still imbued with racism as well as sexism and heterosexism, which makes a difference in how she sees 'pieces of the worlds' they both shared, to which Muriel cannot relate. Lorde's narrative brings to light how racism operates within the gay scene of the fifties where bouncers continuously ask for Audre's ID, as the only Black woman within her group:

And we would all rather die than have to discuss the fact that it was because I was Black, since, of course, gay people weren't racists. After all, didn't they know what it was like to be oppressed?¹¹⁷

Lorde observes that even marginalised groups, who have experienced oppression, can still oppress others, and therefore, inform how bodies may extend and in turn reach for others within these spaces. hooks remarks:

White women and black men have it both ways. They can act as oppressor or be oppressed. Black men may be victimized by racism, but sexism allows them to act as exploiters and oppressors of women. White women may be victimized by sexism, but racism enables them to act as exploiters and oppressors of black people. Both groups have led liberation movements that favor their interests and support the continued oppression of other groups.¹¹⁸

In this regard, when a group still defines their liberation through social frameworks that operate to hierarchise some groups over others, whereby social equality is framed as 'gaining social equality with ruling-class white men,'¹¹⁹ then these groups remain invested in supporting the oppression of others. Lorde exposes that even gay people harbour racism and such a group still operates in accordance with the wider society's racist practices. Marginalised groups are still informed by the wider society's practices of sexism, racism, and heterosexism, and are therefore, not immune to how these practices still orientate bodies to follow particular lines toward or away from relating to other bodies.

The gay scene, for Audre, remains predominantly white. In this scene some bodies can extend into this space more than other bodies. By acknowledging how race separates her from

Muriel, along with how the gay scene has set roles, such as butch-femme, Audre recognises that even this social group orientates her body to follow particular lines, and therefore, being 'out of line' still assumes a certain line. Since Audre does not abide by these set roles, she notes that '[t]here were no mothers, no sisters, no heroes. We had to do it alone.'¹²⁰ Audre has no line to follow:

*Being women together was not enough. We were different. Being gay-girls together was not enough. We were different. Being Black together was not enough. We were different. Being Black women together was not enough. We were different. Being Black dykes together was not enough. We were different.*¹²¹

The italicisation foregrounds the points, punctuated by the continual repetition of 'we were different.' This mantra of difference exposes how the homogenisation of groups merely functions to censure how individuals relate to each other. In 'Learning from the 60s,' by recognising difference, Lorde came to learn 'that if I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive.'¹²² Ultimately, notions of difference enact social division that orientate bodies in multiple ways to follow lines that are informed by oppressive practices. Lorde remarks that as a 'Black lesbian mother in an interracial marriage, there was usually some part of me guaranteed to offend everybody's comfortable prejudices of who I should be.'¹²³ Lorde expresses the frustration, isolation, and pain caused by being orientated by others who dictate who and how one may reach toward another. In order to not be 'crunched into other people's fantasies,' Lorde recognises that she must not pretend 'to match somebody else's norm'¹²⁴ or deny aspects of her identity; instead, she must define herself *for herself* and therefore create her own lines to follow.

Chapter Two

The Multiplicity of Touch: Anaïs Nin's *Fire: From a Journal of Love*, *A Spy in the House of Love* and *The Four-Chambered Heart*

The archives of Anaïs Nin's papers, diaries, and fictional works reveal a tangible, palpable quality to Nin's writing. Nin states that '[s]ome of you will hate my book, for I insist on Touching you.'¹ The capitalisation of 'Touching' points to the significance Nin placed on the tactility of language that insists 'on Touching' the reader, the characters, her lovers, and herself. Touch, in Nin's works, functions as a central form of communication, both figuratively and literally, that expands and multiplies Nin's 'bodily horizon'² through her sexual relations, intimacies, and connections to others. Through my examination of Nin's unexpurgated diary *Fire: From a Journal of Love* (1995), alongside the original manuscripts housed in UCLA's Special Collections, and Nin's fictional texts, *A Spy in the House of Love* (1954) and *The Four-Chambered Heart* (1959), I read Nin's narratives as polyamorous, rather than narratives of infidelity. Nin's reference to multiple figurative and literal tactile relations nurture the differing 'scripts' and roles played by Nin and her characters. As Nin wrestles with the fictionality or performance of certain ways of being, the doubt and uncertainty of being in relation to one lover is only assuaged by her tactile relation to another. This perpetuates an orientation toward multiple paths that direct the extension of Nin's 'bodily horizon' to the continual development of a web of interconnecting relations. An economy of touch emerges within Nin's work that is not only predicated on a framework of gender, sexuality, and race, but also a framework of compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy, which still influences which bodies may be within reach to touch and how they may be touched. This framework shapes Nin's experience of touch, imbued with affect, feelings, and memories, as well as the language used to express forms of touch. Therefore, this chapter questions how touch reorientates one's identity toward polyamory and how a polyamorous identity reorientates one's relation to touch within a social, cultural, and political framework of compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy. Although

Nin's tactile relations may be framed by these constructs, Nin's narratives ultimately reveal that her experiences of tactile relations exceed these social frameworks as touch continuously affirms her reorientation toward multiple paths, and her relation to touch is in turn continuously reshaped by following such differing paths.

In *Fire: From a Journal of Love*, Nin often expresses the diversity of her identity: '[t]o be myself is this, to be dual. And you can't be dual without tragedy. I live on a hundred planes at once. [...] Desiring unity but incapable of it. Playing a million roles.'³ For Nin, subjectivity can be read as not a singular perspective in and of itself, but one that needs to consider the 'million roles' played by an individual in relation to others. Nin's experimental writing captures the multi-dimensionality of identity, and particularly of herself. Sharon Spencer observes: 'she [Nin] has insisted that one role is not enough for a woman, particularly when this is a biologically determined role that covers but a third of her life span and makes no allowance for any but biological capabilities.'⁴ Nin's experience of identity as multiple, informed by the different roles she plays, such as wife, daughter, 'mother,' lover, and sister, influences the lines Nin may follow as an 'economy of touch' presents itself in that her body may be open to certain bodies more than others. In the previous chapter, this economy of touch informs how the intersectionality of Audre's identity in relation to socially oppressive practices may orientate her away or toward certain bodies that are within reach to touch, highlighting the way in which touch may orientate one's intersectional identity, or be orientated by it. Yet Lorde's narrative suggests that these differences in identity are experienced simultaneously as the various categories that make up her identity in 'the very house of difference.'⁵ By comparison, Nin's narratives suggest that these intersecting aspects of her identity (or those of her characters) are experienced as separate, 'on a hundred planes at once,' where she desires unity but is unable to fully merge or embody these aspects simultaneously. Nin's written identity is experienced as multiple, where different aspects are orientated to follow different paths and are given priority over others depending on who she is in tactile relation to. On the one hand, touch, therefore,

continuously reorientates Nin's multiple identities toward differing paths and forms of relationality, assisting Nin in navigating the disunity of her identity. Yet on the other hand, the disunity of Nin's identity, which is influenced by the affects, feelings, and memories that arise from being in tactile relation with others, equally shapes the extent to which Nin may reach toward and relate to others tactilely.

By reading Nin's narratives as polyamorous, I consider how these multiple and overlapping loves assist in orientating Nin, and her characters, toward different paths and varying forms of touch, which are often sought out in order to assuage what Nin acknowledges as her dual nature, or as Fitch writes 'a multitude of woman-images,'⁶ which Nin likened to that of Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*. Susan Stanford Friedman states:

Nin [...] is aware that these fragmentary selves reflect the meanings of woman's nature constructed by man's fantasy and desire. The *Diary* records Nin's attempt to create a whole identity in a culture that defines WOMAN in terms of her fragmented roles as mother, daughter, wife, and sister.⁷

However, rather than reading Nin's diary as an attempt to solidify and amalgamate these fragmented roles, I perceive her diaries as an expression of the disparity between these roles. Nin often mentions her 'scripts', what Anne T. Salvatore defines as 'blueprints for life situations, which tell us what to expect and how to respond in them.'⁸ Due to these 'scripts,' women have often been limited to specific roles and functions within society, yet Salvatore observes that these '[s]cripts are usually tacit knowledge, learned through repetition ... They are the daily organizers of routine interactions, as the self-narrative is the lifelong organizer of events.'⁹ The notion of 'tacit knowledge' suggests that these scripts are implied or understood without being explicitly stated. Yet Nin's narratives reveal an awareness of the disparity between the authenticity and fictionality of any identity, informed by her understanding of particular roles proscribed to women, along with the obligations and expectations these roles enforce. As Helen Tookey observes:

[Nin] was also fascinated by the multiplicity of any 'self' – a multiplicity which could be experienced positively, as a fluidity and freedom from the constraints of identity, or

negatively, as conflict and schism. She was also acutely aware of the 'fictionality', in a broad sense, of any self – its formation through stories, enactments, and performances of various kinds.¹⁰

This multiplicity is shaped through Nin's connection to both individual and collective bodies. Nin's differing relations bring to the light the dualistic nature of both experiencing a positive fluidity and potential liberation from such constraints placed on one's identity, as well as the difficulties one may encounter when attempting to keep 'in line' and perform expected roles.

Critics, such as Mimi Schippers, have explored the challenges of writing about a polyamorous orientation without perpetuating stereotypical language that frames sexuality through compulsory monogamy and heterosexuality.¹¹ In order to examine touch in Nin's narratives, this chapter initially explores how the language of touch is framed through the constructs of compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy. I argue that these constructs frame tactile interactions through the use of 'heterosexualised' language and gendered binarism, which impact the way that touch is experienced. For instance, Nin extends her 'bodily horizon' to reach certain bodies that would otherwise remain out of reach by situating such tactile contact in gender binary terms of wanting, for example, 'to be a man' in order to be Therma's lover. By engaging with Ahmed's notions of orientation once more, I examine the way that Nin's orientation toward multiple paths is still framed through constructs of compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy. On the one hand, Nin's use of language reveals that touch is perceived in terms of binary gender systems and normative constructs of sexual relations, which alter Nin's relationality to others when the language of touch is constricted by these frameworks. Yet on the other hand, the relationship between touch and affects (the forces and intensities that pass through bodies), feelings, and the body's ability to retain and remember such forms of tactile contact, which materialises throughout Nin's texts, implies that touch exceeds such social frameworks when one examines the ways in which this relationship shapes Nin's 'bodily horizon'.

Relationality, what it means to be in relation to another, plays a vital role in Nin's experience of touch. Her works reveal that tactile relations exceed social constructs of gender, sexuality, and what are deemed acceptable or 'normative' ways of relating to another. In *Sex, or the Unbearable* (2014), Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman address relations 'that both overwhelm and anchor us.'¹² Sex is understood as 'a site [...] at which relationality is invested with hopes, expectations, and anxieties that are often experienced as unbearable.'¹³ Negativity, though often perceived as unbearable for Nin as she repeatedly writes of feelings of jealousy, doubt of love, possessiveness, and unknowability, also implies a potential 'resistance to the fixity of social forms that seem to define the possibilities for and the limits of relationality.'¹⁴ I analyse Nin's experiences of pleasurable and painful tactile interactions, which are often complicated by the way in which feelings of jealousy, insecurity, and doubt enter the reception of touch. By arguing that the way in which touch functions for Nin continuously reorients her toward a polyamorous identity, and that this multitudinous identity in turn continues to reorientate Nin toward certain forms of touch, I consider the way in which Nin's work reveals that her reception of touch exceeds the social frameworks that she often locates the act of touching within, positing, as an outcome, that touch thematically materialises as multitudinous, excessive, and palimpsestic within her works. Nin's narratives of identification, affect, the communicative aspects of touch, and of 'tactile memory,' ultimately move beyond societal definitions of what it means to be in relation to another, even when Nin still attempts to frame such relations through those social constructs that seek to regulate, censor, and control forms of relationality.

Nin's narratives demonstrate that, at times, tactile contact is not only experienced as a present, or literal form of relating to another in a specific moment, but equally a form of haunting within the body through how deeply (or not) such touches may affect the body. This is illuminated by the notion of 'tactile memory,'¹⁵ a term that appears in *A Spy in the House of Love*, which indicates that the memory of touch is capable of crossing various temporalities. I

argue that touch is experienced by Sabina in *A Spy in the House of Love* as a haunting of the body in the form of remembered (or not remembered) touch. It can be argued, therefore, that monogamy is never fully obtained when the memory of previous touches are retained upon and within the skin. 'Tactile memory' in this way can be read as 'queering' any present moment of touch and exceeding the framework of monogamy. Nin's narratives reveal a queer temporality of touch that is not fixed, nor stable in any present moment when certain touches have the capacity to be retained within the body more than others. This queer temporality of touch significantly alters any present moment of being in tactile relation to another, suggesting that an economy of touch, predicated on social, cultural, and political frameworks of compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy, shape bodies in the particular spaces and temporalities they inhabit.

Lastly, I read Nin's diary as a palimpsest, functioning as a manuscript that continuously superimposes Nin's new writings upon her older inscriptions, effacing them yet simultaneously continuing to leave the traces of her past selves upon the pages in the process. By reading the diary in this way, Nin's experimental form realises palimpsestic touch within the text, which creates a web of interconnected relations, or what Nin refers to as the 'pain of identification.'¹⁶ The skin's reception of touch functions similar to a palimpsest when present tactile inscriptions overwrite previous inscriptions. Yet the superimposing of these new traces upon the skin does not entirely erase past traces. Instead these previous traces interact with present ones, where the previous tactile relations haunt the body in the present reception of touch, bringing forth 'tactile memory' and comparisons between various forms of tactile contact. These forms of touch inform Nin's future orientation toward some bodies more than others. In this sense, the body becomes the site where multiple experiences of present and past forms of touch may be superimposed upon and interact with the skin. By reading Nin's diary and fictional texts as polyamorous narratives, I explore the way that Nin's orientation toward multiple paths informs who is within reach of her 'bodily horizon'. Nin (and her characters) experience varying forms

of touch, and in turn, of being in tactile relation to others, as relations that exceed social constructs of compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy.

The Framing of Touch

When Nin's father, Joaquin Nin, abandoned the family after years of alleged abuse, Nin began her diary, aged eleven, as a communicative tool originally meant as a letter to her father, or a way of keeping him up to date with her life. In *A Woman Speaks* (1975), Nin recalls how the diary progressed from a letter, addressed to a specific audience, to a private mode of writing:

The diary was intended to be a description of the new country that I was coming to, a description of America, to entice him to come back, as I didn't believe that he had gone for good. [...] It was really written for someone else and, then, because my mother didn't let me mail it, it became a secret. It became something that I did for myself.¹⁷

When Nin came to accept her father's absence, the diarised world she created transformed into a space for her self-expression. Over the span of Nin's life, the diary took on varying functions, such as confidant, seducer, threat, obsession, form of empowerment, and place to experiment with various aspects of herself as a writer and individual. The diary has a complicated relationship to Nin's fictional texts and her understanding of herself as an artist. Nin states, 'I think I have found my style, however. Take the diary and write it more fully, more artistically, but keep the sincerity and directness. Diary as an indication of fever charts and developments.'¹⁸ Together the creative works and diaries form part of the same textual skin. Evidence of this intertextual relationship can be found in pieces of Nin's fictional works that are either verbatim or closely resembling written entries in her diary. Nin talks of the 'Detective's adventures'¹⁹ in her self-narrative: 'Don't worry, Mr. Detective, I have already found an explanation if this happens.'²⁰ The detective later materialises in *A Spy in the House of Love* as a manifestation of Sabina's guilt and fear of always 'Dancing [...] on the brink of discovery.'²¹ In *Fire: From a Journal of Love*, Nin reflects that through her experimentation with language in the fictional narratives, she is able to 'fill in, transform, project, deepen'²² the diary narrative that seems more constricted by direct styles of language.

Although Nin's diary is often considered less experimental than her fictional texts, it offers an understanding of how Nin experimented with her own narrative, and insight into her relationship to her sexual embodiment. Nin's diary Volume Two, 1934-1937 was originally published in 1974 as an expurgated and revised edition that intentionally censored touch. In 1995, the posthumously published diary *Fire: From a Journal of Love*, which may have been criticised or judged not only as a piece of writing, but as a reflection of Nin herself at the time, demonstrates the extent to which Nin's narratives were originally subjected to social restrictions, censorships, and controls in the 1970s. This form of censoring implies that tactile relations, when conflated with sexual relations and their depiction of sexuality and desire, are framed by social constructs that instruct individuals on what is deemed appropriate, acceptable, and 'normal.' As a consequence, censorship shapes who one may touch and to what extent they may be touched. In this way, the expurgated diaries stress the extent of institutionalised control, regulation, and censorship imposed on forms of touch in biographical and literary texts. Nin's work, therefore, demonstrates that language, in terms of what is accessible and appropriate in one's time period, frames the way in which one may describe and express forms of tactile relations. In *The Erotic Life of Anaïs Nin* (1993), Noël Riley Fitch remarks upon Nin's published works:

The thirteen volumes so far published are reworked and self-censored versions of a work almost twice that length. Though she claimed that the diary was "untranscribed," she rewrote, retyped, edited, added dialogue, suppressed key events and people, occasionally reordered the sequence of events, superimposed later judgements on earlier experience, omitted her husband (the man who paid for all this courageous independence), and transformed her life into an art form. In short, her diary is not to be trusted.²³

Volume Two, 1934-1937, of *The Journals of Anaïs Nin*, was published in 1974 and is the expurgated version of *Fire: From a Journal of Love*. Nin's reworking and self-censoring is explicitly apparent in the initial publication when compared to the unexpurgated diary published posthumously. Although Nin claimed that the diaries were 'untranscribed,' the suppression of key events is particularly evident in the omission of her sexual experiences with

various lovers. In the expurgated diaries the experience of a threesome with Donald and Arline on 29th March 1936, for instance, is entirely omitted. In *The Novel of the Future* (1968), Nin reflects on the function of her fictional narratives, indicating that they offer an outlet for certain topics that the diary form cannot. Nin remarks:

The necessity for fiction was probably born of the problem of taboo on certain revelations. It was not only a need of the imagination but an answer to the limitations placed on portrayals of others.

Not only conventions dictated the secrecy of journals, but personal censorship. Fiction was liberating in that sense.²⁴

From close attention to the expurgated diaries, it is evident that this personal censorship was a practice Nin undertook: the sexual content, particularly the incest with her father and evidence of multiple lovers, is negated from her self-narrative. Nin's awareness of social taboos, as well as the gendering of what is deemed taboo for a woman sexually compared to a man, influences what is considered acceptable, or appropriate for Nin's public readership, who may respond unfavourably to these themes. By contrast, fiction allows Nin to transcend such 'limitations placed on portrayals of others,' whereby Nin's fictional narratives appear more sexually subversive, unrestrained, and able to explore notions of taboo. Nin indicates that 'fictionalizing had two motives: one, protection of the personalities; the other symbolization, the creation of the myth.'²⁵ Fiction was therefore 'liberating,' providing Nin with the opportunity to protect the 'truth' of such taboos experienced within her life.

Although the unexpurgated diaries do not censor touch so extensively as the expurgated diaries, the thematic narrative of touch is still framed through a lens of gendered and sexual 'norms', indicating that tactile relations are still constructed around notions of binary genders, and compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy. Through using Kathleen Gough's essay, 'The Origin of the Family' (1975) as a framework, Adrienne Rich claims that compulsory heterosexuality is a system of practices, societal beliefs, and customs that systematically coerce women into sexual relationships with men, and in turn, ensures that men have access to and 'ownership' of women, in terms of their bodies, labour, and reproduction.²⁶ Although Rich does

not explicitly address compulsory monogamy, her references to certain practices, such as clitoridectomy, indicate the implicit relationship between compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy. These practices are not only undertaken to enforce heterosexuality, but equally to ensure obligatory monogamy from women. Ahmed argues that '[c]ompulsory heterosexuality produces a "field of heterosexual objects," by the very requirement that the subject "give up" the possibility of other love objects.'²⁷ Similar to Rich's argument, Ahmed does not directly consider the notion of monogamy implicitly evident in this framework of compulsory heterosexuality. One can argue that Nin often 'lines up' with a heterosexual orientation, yet due to what can be read as Nin's polyamorous orientation, she still does not 'line up' entirely for she actively refuses the line of compulsory heterosexual monogamy that follows marriage, exclusivity, and reproduction. Nin disrupts this narrative of compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy. In her own life, she was married to Hugh Parker Guiler, and she later married Rupert Pole with whom she was practicing (non-ethical) bigamy. Throughout Nin's life she had multiple lovers, which may be considered as an orientation toward (non-ethical) polyamory. I use the term 'non-ethical' to indicate that Nin's practices of bigamy and polyamory were not openly and honestly conveyed to her multiple partners; therefore, Nin did not practice consensual bigamy or polyamory, which is why her narratives have continuously been read as ones of infidelity. However, both the diary and fictional texts can be read as polyamorous narratives during a time period in which the concept of polyamory, or ethical non-monogamy, was unknown.

Through the character of Sabina (in *A Spy in the House of Love*) there is an awareness of the restrictions of western society's compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy, as well as the desire for an alternative way of experiencing life:

She [Sabina] understood why it angered her when people spoke of life as One life. She became certain of myriad lives within herself. Her sense of time altered. She felt acutely and with grief, the shortness of life's physical span. Death was terrifyingly near, and the journey towards it, vertiginous; but only when she considered the lives around her, accepting their time tables, clocks, measurements. Everything they did constricted time.

They spoke of one birth, one childhood, one adolescence, one romance, one marriage, one maturity, one ageing, one death, and then transmitted the monotonous cycle to their children. But Sabina, activated by the moon-rays, felt germinating in her the power to extend time in the ramifications of a myriad lives and loves, to expand the journey to infinity, taking immense and luxurious detours as the courtesan depositor of multiple desires.²⁸

Sabina recognises why the notion of 'One life' angers her as it heightens her awareness of 'myriad lives within herself.' The capitalisation of 'One' places emphasis on a perception of life as singular. The repetition of the word 'one' stresses that this is not merely one, as in any life, but a specifically singular, societally constructed way of living through 'one birth,' 'one childhood,' 'one adolescence,' 'one romance,' 'one marriage,' 'one maturity,' 'one ageing,' and 'one death,' which is not only lived by one individual but passed on to the next generation in a perpetual cycle of monotony. Rather than time being extended, this sense of oneness merely constricts life to 'time tables,' 'clocks,' and 'measurements.' The paragraph begins with Sabina opposing the view of 'One life,' which alters her sense of time as it brings to the forefront of her mind the shortness of one's life. This in turn evokes the thought of 'Death' being 'terrifyingly near,' but this is only apparent to Sabina when she considers the way in which others live and accepts the restrictions of time placed on others' lives. Touch is used figuratively elsewhere in the novel to suggest Sabina's notion of permanency where 'this concentration of time,' 'fear of stasis' and endless fixation on one place or relationship is connected to the notion of '[h]aving touched the source of death.'²⁹ The figurative use of touch implies that to be static and permanently fixed in concepts of oneness is, for Sabina, experienced as a physical response to death being brought closer to, and more intimately in contact with the body through the use of the word 'touched.' These remarks on death propel Sabina's thoughts into notions of time, and how one lives according to chronological time, constricted by modes of monogamy throughout the span of life. The form highlights Sabina's distance from the way that others live. The distinction between her and 'they' reflects how this is not her life but theirs as '[t]hey spoke' of this oneness that ultimately constricts time. The repetition of 'one' may be read as an order, a

command of how to live in comparison to the end proposition of 'multiple desires' and of 'myriad lives and loves.' The inclusion of 'one romance' and 'one marriage' stresses the constructed singularity of love and desire, and in turn, an implicit notion of touch being constricted to 'one' acceptable mode of conduct. The weight placed on time and oneness not only implies a heterosexual construct of touch, but also signals a monogamous temporality of touch, since an individual is expected to adhere to one linear form of touch that is singularly experienced in one relationship.

Nin's narratives queer this notion of a monogamous temporality of touch by implying an orientation toward polyamory, as well as highlighting the way in which the memory of touch exceeds present moments of experiencing touch with any 'one' lover. Nin's works suggest that to be in tactile relation to another is not an exclusively singular experience but a multi-layered experience of also being in relation to their previous and current tactile relations to others. Sabina is transgressing the 'norm' by suggesting the possibility of living temporally through an alternative means of expansion and extension into a 'myriad' or 'journey to infinity.' This journey is distinct from the chronological and linear notions of time that are so engrained in individuals. Ahmed remarks that compulsory heterosexuality can even be viewed as 'a form of rsi':

Bodies take the shape of norms that are repeated over time and with force. Through repeating some gestures and not others, or through being orientated in some directions and not others, bodies become contorted: they get twisted into shapes that enable some action only insofar as they restrict the capacity for other kinds of action.³⁰

Nin's narrative emphasises the repetition of these norms over time as Sabina is acutely aware of how others have accepted the repetition of singular timespans where their bodies are contorted into exclusively undertaking actions toward oneness, which restrict all other actions that may extend the body toward other directions and possibilities. By comparison, Sabina, 'activated by the moon-rays,' acknowledges her 'power to extend time in the ramifications of a myriad lives and loves.' Although the use of the word 'ramifications' implies Sabina's awareness

of the consequences for detouring off this line, she nonetheless desires to extend and expand her 'bodily horizon' by not allowing the singularity of how others live to contort or diminish her own body's capacity to reach toward what is off the compulsory monogamous and straight line. By journeying to 'infinity,' with 'detours as the courtesan depositor of multiple desires,' Sabina chooses to go against compulsory heterosexuality, which, Ahmed suggests, may shape 'which bodies one "can" legitimately approach as would-be lovers and which one cannot.'³¹ As the 'depositor,' or in other words the shareholder of multiple desires, Sabina is unable to remain on one line, for these multiple desires orientate her toward detours that extend and expand her body, providing sustenance for the multiple aspects of herself. Ahmed addresses how compulsory heterosexuality may be likened to a form of rsi within the context of different sites, spaces, and temporalities, yet I argue that Nin's narratives equally imply that the available language in any given time period plays a significant role in this framing of tactile relations, and therefore, informs what are legitimate ways of approaching potential lovers.

Nin presents an image of polyamory before it was conceived of in language; and therefore, this orientation toward polyamory and the reception of touch is still framed by social 'norms' and conventions that enforce compulsory monogamy in an attempt to keep individuals on the 'straight line.' The struggle to articulate these multiple loves, as opposed to a single love in a society that maintains 'taboos against multiple lives'³² is depicted in Nin's narratives as she (and her fictional characters) combat and navigate the emotions of love, pleasure, shame, guilt, anger, distrust, and fear that a multiplicity of love generates. Nin's experiences are often framed through the language of infidelity so readily available due to compulsory monogamy and heterosexuality being perceived as a given, a priori to society. Ani Ritchie and Meg Barker explore the construction of polyamorous language:

The language around us shapes our self-identities (Burr, 1995) and our understanding of sexual identity depends on the language of sexuality available to us. The language and everyday experience of sexuality are thus intrinsically linked (Weeks, 2003). There is a wealth of literature considering how people of non-heterosexual sexualities have

developed their own languages to express their identities and experiences and to claim community, rights and recognition.³³

Ritchie and Barker remark on the intrinsic link between language and the everyday experience of sexuality, which, I argue, extends to the experience of touch. Language may frame who is within reach of tactile contact and how one may touch another. This impacts a person's experience of tactile interactions. If Nin's *Fire: From a Journal of Love* is to be understood as polyamorous, rather than a narrative of infidelity, it is useful to place the work in the context of the time period of 1934-1937 in which it was written. During the 1930s, the knowledge, labelling, and categorising of polyamory had not yet been constructed. Nin's transcription of a multifaceted sexual identity, which is often expressed with a tone of secrecy, the need to lie, and the feelings of guilt and fear of discovery that comes from her actions, demonstrates that the language available for describing and expressing her experiences that go against the narrative of compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy was one of infidelity. During the late 1930s, Nin was using the language available to her to articulate her feelings, sexual desires, and her framework for experiencing multiple forms of touch, which depended upon and were limited by the language available. In *Fire: From a Journal of Love*, as well as the unpublished version, Nin has yet to find a language that articulates the experience of multiple loves without the framework of compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy that enforces societal expectations upon the individual.

When Nin experiences new desires, such as the desiring of another woman, an uncertainty creeps into her use of language as the constructs for articulating this form of desire and sexual expression appear more ambiguous to her than those used to express touch through dominant discourses. The boundaries between friendship and lover are blurred between Nin and her intimate friend Therma (spelt Thurema in the published diaries), and this desire is further complicated through its expression within what can be considered a 'heterosexualised' language. In the archival material, Nin writes:

I told her I'd like to be a man, and to be her lover. She dreams that I undress before her and that I have a penis, and she says in the dream: why did you conceal that from me? Why didn't you give me that? (I dreamed once that June had the penis, yet in each case I'm the one who plays the lover though in each case I looked more feminine. Henry thought Therma was decidedly masculine...³⁴

The expression of sexual desire is constrained by conventional modes of language by which active desire is represented through the presence of a penis. The notion of 'who plays the lover' still implies the Freudian positioning of masculinity with an active libido, and of femininity as passive. This concept of sexuality is so presumed within the passage that the notion of Nin playing the lover in each case, though she 'looked more feminine,' suggests the subversion felt in appropriating this role, particularly when Nin states that 'Therma was decidedly masculine.' The ability to touch, or the accessibility to touch, is framed through a discourse of gendered binarism and heterosexuality. In order to extend her 'bodily horizon' to reach certain bodies that would otherwise be out of reach, Nin adopts the framework of a 'heterosexualised' language to position touch in terms of wanting 'to be a man' in order 'to be her lover.' Nin's use of language demonstrates that mainstream understandings of lesbianism were still developing within society, similar to how polyamory is presently growing in visibility in the twenty-first century. Therefore, at the time that Nin writes, compulsory heterosexuality not only informs how one may follow the 'straight line' but equally how being 'out of line' may still be framed through notions of monogamy and heterosexuality whereby being 'out of line' can still undergo 'straightening devices.'

Polyamory, and the consequent disorientation, is also found in the work of Audre Lorde. In *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Lorde's narrative similarly grapples with what can be considered a polyamorous desire that has no patterns to follow:

For a while that summer, we had a vision and possibility of women living together collectively and sharing each other's lives and work and love. It almost worked. But none of us knew quite enough about ourselves; we had no patterns to follow, except our own needs and our own unthought-out dreams.³⁵

Although Lorde envisions women living together whereby life is not experienced in terms of the couple, but in terms of a collective that shares in each other's lives, without patterns to follow, this presents uncertainty in how to navigate such a path that has not been trodden previously. Whilst Lorde's narrative is 'out of line' with society's enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality, her relationship to Muriel is still framed by notions of monogamy and normative conventions of relationality whereby the desiring of another woman, Lynn, leaves her feeling perplexed:

I had to finally admit to myself how physically attracted to her I was. I was frightened and embarrassed as well as perplexed by this strange and unexpected turn of events. I loved Muriel like my own life; we were pledged to each other. How could I desire another woman physically? But I did.³⁶

Her response of being 'frightened and embarrassed as well as perplexed' highlights the strangeness of this experience as Audre has been orientated toward notions of monogamy. In this regard, one's orientation toward certain bodies and not others is not only framed through being in line with the 'straight line,' but equally through being in line with *one* line, toward one body at the expense of all other bodies. To be in line is therefore not only to have certain bodies within reach and not others, but to ultimately direct oneself toward one singular body, which leads Audre to eventually question how she can love Muriel and yet desire another woman physically. Both Lorde and Nin attempt to articulate their multiple desires through a framework that constricts, and in turn, negates the existence of such desires. In Chapter One, I argued that whilst Audre's orientation may be directed by the perceptions of others, and in turn the available language and ways of perceiving oneself within society's framework, touch informs Audre's relationality to those around her, assisting in confirming the validity of this orientation and influencing how she continues to orientate her identity in such a way. Here I argue that touch functions in a similar way for Nin and her characters, exceeding the frameworks of dominant discourses that seek to regulate, censor, or control narratives of touch. Tactile relations,

therefore, ultimately queer such social constructs that binarize relations between anatomical sex, gender, and sexuality.

The Affect of Tactile Relations

Nin's use of language often presents touch through a framework of compulsory heterosexuality and mononormativity³⁷ that adheres to gendered notions of tactile interactions, calling attention to the dominance of these constructs in regard to the experience of touch. In *A Spy in the House of Love*, Sabina reflects upon her ability to be as free as a man in relation to touch:

She opened her eyes to contemplate the piercing joy of her liberation: she was free, free as a man was, to enjoy without love.
Without any warmth of the heart, as a man could, she had enjoyed a stranger.
And then she remembered what she had heard men say: 'Then I wanted to leave.'
She gazed at the stranger lying naked beside her and saw him as a statue she did not want to touch again.³⁸

Liberation is framed through gendered notions of sexual freedom. The repetition of 'free, free' stresses this relationship between Sabina's experience of liberation and the gendering of this freedom being likened to that of a man. Sexual freedom is equated to enjoying tactile relations 'without any warmth of the heart.' The notion of enjoying sexual relations with a stranger without love is framed in terms of Sabina positioning herself in the role of acting 'as a man could.' Sabina equates liberation with being 'free of attachment, dependency and the capacity for pain' without 'regret, envy or jealousy.'³⁹ Rather than according this liberation to Sabina, herself, this implicitly suggests a liberation from the feminine position that assumes tactile relations are connected to emotions of 'love' and 'warmth of the heart.'

When exploring polyamory, theorists, such as Mimi Schippers, highlight the difficulty of articulating such an orientation without perpetuating negative, stereotypical language, which impacts experiences of touch. Schippers argues:

Compulsory monogamy [...] is not just about relationship form, but also translates into the normalization and strict enforcement of dyadic sex as the only legitimate kind of sexual interaction. By insisting that the only "normal" way to have sex is in pairs,

compulsory monogamy fixes (1) sexual orientation as defined by the gender of the object of one's desire and (2) the phenomenological embodiment of gendered subjectivity within temporally and spatially bounded erotic interactions.⁴⁰

Sabina's notion of liberation is voiced as an embodiment of gendered subjectivity whereby she subverts what she perceives as her feminine position by being as 'free as a man was' within the temporal and spatial bounds of her erotic interaction with the stranger. Framing touch in this way stresses the enforcement of such gender binarism and the significant impact this has on erotic interactions, since Sabina cannot comprehend her sexual freedom in terms beyond gendered norms. Shippers remarks:

As an organizing rationale for social life, the relationship between the masculine and feminine manifests in collective beliefs about erotic and emotional interactions and attachment to define what are "normal" sex and a "good" relationship, who "belongs" together, and what the behavioural and emotional expectations are for individuals in a "good" relationship. The Monogamous Couple, as an imagined, glorified, and compulsory relationship form, mirrors and supports the discursively constructed relationship between heteromascularity and heterofemininity.⁴¹

In this regard, gender binarism plays a vital role in the organising of 'erotic and emotional interactions,' whereby perceived notions of femininity place greater expectations upon women, since 'emotional work' is considered 'women's work.'⁴² Nin's use of language for Sabina's encounter with a stranger positions this relation as gendered. Although Sabina's sexual freedom subverts gendered norms, in that this liberation is an appropriation of the masculine role, it does not transgress these norms or bring to light their constructed nature for this tactile relation is still defined through this framework. Nonetheless, whilst the encounter may be framed through binary constructs of masculinity and femininity, Nin's narrative demonstrates the way in which tactile relations exceed such social constructs. Nin uses the language available to her at the time of writing this novel; therefore, whilst Sabina may not be able to voice her experience of sexual freedom beyond such societally enforced constructs, her appropriation of the masculine role indicates that tactile relations do not always adhere to or remain confined to the rationale that organises what is considered normative and appropriate in terms of sex, relationships, and the way in which bodies may relate to each other.

The lover, now resembling a 'statue,' suggests that touch animates the body in relation to another, yet once the moment of touching ceases, the lover's body resumes its stranger-like appearance whereby intimacy and shared tactile contact is fleeting and temporary. In *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (2007), Eric Manning remarks that bodies may challenge notions 'of movement, of touch, of sensation':

When the body is figured simply as discursive, it is held in a place where it can signify but not sense: sense is not something than can easily be captured linguistically. [...] Too often, when we speak of sensation, we stop the movement of the body. This happens because we have delineated the body as a signifying subject in language⁴³

Tactile relations, imbricated with sensation and the sensing body, challenge notions of bodies as static and unchanging. The metaphorical image of the lover 'as a statue,' once animated through sensation and touch, repositions the lover as a discursive figure that signifies, but no longer senses. Although sensation may not be easily captured in linguistic terms, Nin's narrative highlights what it is to encounter the absence of sensation, by which the arrested movements of the lover's body are likened to that of a statue that Sabina expresses a desire to move away from. Before experiencing liberation 'as a man could,' Sabina experiences touch as a 'pulsation of pleasure unequalled by the most exalted musicians, [...] which transformed the body into a high tower of fireworks gradually exploding into fountains of delight through the senses.'⁴⁴ The comparison of pleasure, in the form of her lover's touch, to 'the most exalted musicians' suggests a language of touch that is metaphorically similar to music – a language closer to that of sensation, than that of dominant discourses. The body, through sensation, is metaphorically transformed into a 'high tower of fireworks.' The extension of Sabina's (and often Nin's) 'bodily horizon' toward others not only directs which lines she may follow with certain bodies, but equally how the experience of multifarious forms of touch expands the body beyond its borders to incorporate others into one's bodily schema. Sabina's body is no longer experienced specifically as a body, but through imagery of the body as sensations. Manning argues that the body in movement, sensation, or touch, challenges and exposes the body as no

longer being 'a point on the grid of experience, but as an experience, a sensation, that creates the chronotopes through which it navigates.'⁴⁵ Sensations are not experienced as exclusively located upon Sabina's flesh, but as metaphors of explosions moving throughout the senses in commerce with her lover, where the use of language subverts notions of the body as stable and fixed in configurations of time and space as well as in relation to others.

Sabina's liberation recalls what she 'had heard men say' in that after such enjoyment with a stranger comes the desire to leave. Significantly, the notion of liberation is experienced as an ability to refuse touch in that 'she did not want to touch again.' The freedom in choice, to be touched or to deny touch and no longer desire such touching, is what Sabina interprets as a liberation from forms of touch imbued with love, stressing the significant role of feelings and affects in regard to tactile relations and the gendering of such encounters. According to Gregory J. Siegworth and Melissa Gregg '[a]ffect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon.'⁴⁶ Affect is considered as the forces or intensities that pass through body to body, 'in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves.'⁴⁷ The 'pulsation of pleasure' can be read as this '*in-between-ness*,' where pleasure is experienced in the encounter between bodies and through the capacity of the lover to act upon Sabina's body. The imagery of pulsations evokes the sense of energy circulating throughout Sabina's body, which circulates as shared intensities, resonances, and sensations between her and her lover. Affect differs from feelings. As Greg and Siegworth remark:

[affect] is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension [...].⁴⁸

The presence or absence of feelings may therefore complicate the way in which Sabina (or Nin) experience the affects, or sensations, of touch. After the encounter, Sabina's 'desire to take this gift of herself back,' can be read as the threat of affect to her sense of sovereignty, which impels her 'to efface all traces of it, to banish it from her body,'⁴⁹ this 'pulsation of pleasure'

that has passed between their bodies. The residue or stickiness of being in relation to one another through affect, but without feeling or 'any warmth of the heart,' impels Sabina 'to become swiftly and cleanly detached from him, to disentangle and unmingle what had been fused for a moment, their breaths, skins, exhalations, and body's essences.'⁵⁰ The previous forces or pulsations that Sabina experienced without conscious knowing, are now consciously felt as a drive to 'disentangle and unmingle' their previous fusion. Nin's use of the words 'breaths,' 'skins,' 'exhalations,' and 'body's essences,' rather than more concrete terms for the body, brings forth images indicative of affect, but without the presence of love or any 'warmth of the heart,' Sabina wants to extract herself from the experience, since she no longer desires the affect of their tactile relation or the residue of these forces previously experienced through the fusion of their breath, skin, exhalations, and essences. Affect, in Sabina's tactile encounter, is therefore complicated by the presence or absence of feelings, which alters Sabina's relationality to her lover, and in turn, the temporality by which touch, and being in relation to another, is desired, experienced, and even remembered, or retained, within the body.

By reading Nin's narratives of tactile relations in terms of what Manning refers to as a 'sensed encounter, an encounter experienced through the body,'⁵¹ the significance of affect in the reception of touch can be explored in terms of pleasurable and painful sensations. For Nin, the experience of tactile relations is imbued with the affect of pain or pleasure depending upon the presence or absence of feelings. The reception of touch as either pleasurable or painful often informs Nin's orientation toward or away from certain bodies, and demonstrates Nin's (or Sabina's) receiving of and responding to touch as exceeding the social constructs she often locates the act of touching within. Drew Leder remarks:

While sensations of pleasure and well-being may call one back to one's body, there is rarely the same character of disrupted intentionality vis-à-vis objects or other people. Pleasures are usually secured through the body's commerce with the world effecting a satisfaction of need or desire. Moreover, such pleasurable sensations are primarily experienced as in and from the world, not merely my own body. I find myself enjoying the taste *of the food*, not that of my own taste buds. Pain, on the other hand, is usually experienced as located within the confines of my flesh.⁵²

According to Leder, although pleasure may bring one back to their body, it is a sensation that is obtained through the body's relation to the world. Pleasurable touch differs to other forms of touch because it opens the body up to another as well as to itself through shared sensations. Pleasure reshapes and rearranges bodies and their relation to each other through a distinctly shared process, tying one's body more firmly to the world through the links pleasure creates with other individuals, whereas pain is capable of bringing an individual back to their body, causing one to refocus on the body, rather than out toward the world. Pain is therefore more exclusively experienced and confined to one's flesh. Nin often expresses pleasure as a form of expansion and enrichment, though this is often dependent on the presence or absence of her feelings for another, and in turn, the extent to which consciousness is present within tactile relations, which alters 'sexual moods.'

The modifications made by editors before publishing the unexpurgated diary do at times censor tactile interactions, particularly when altering the experimental form or style when commas, ellipses, dashes, and underlines, which may all suggest the presence of affect, are replaced with conventional grammar and punctuation (see Figure 1.1 in comparison to Figure 1.2 and 1.3). The unexpurgated diary of *Fire: From a Journal of Love* is remarkably similar to the original diaries housed in UCLA's Special Collections. However, there are notable, yet subtle, differences between the published and unpublished texts that predominantly occur at the level of form and style, revealing the editorial incisions that alter punctuation, grammar, certain passages, and individual names. It is possible to infer an affective intimacy in Nin's handwriting in the unpublished materials housed in the archive, which is absent in the typed format of the published diary (see Figure 1.1 in comparison to Figure 1.2 and 1.3). This layer of affect enters the writing as a sense of immediacy that alters one's affective reading of the words on the page. In the original diaries, it is not only the words that signify meaning, but the form and style of the handwriting itself. The reader may glean Nin's feelings or affects in her

use of grammar, punctuation, and spacing upon the page. In Figure 1.2 and 1.3 of the original diary there are fragmented narratives that compare, contrast, and overlap the different experiences of lovers and the way in which Nin's body responds to various 'sexual moods':

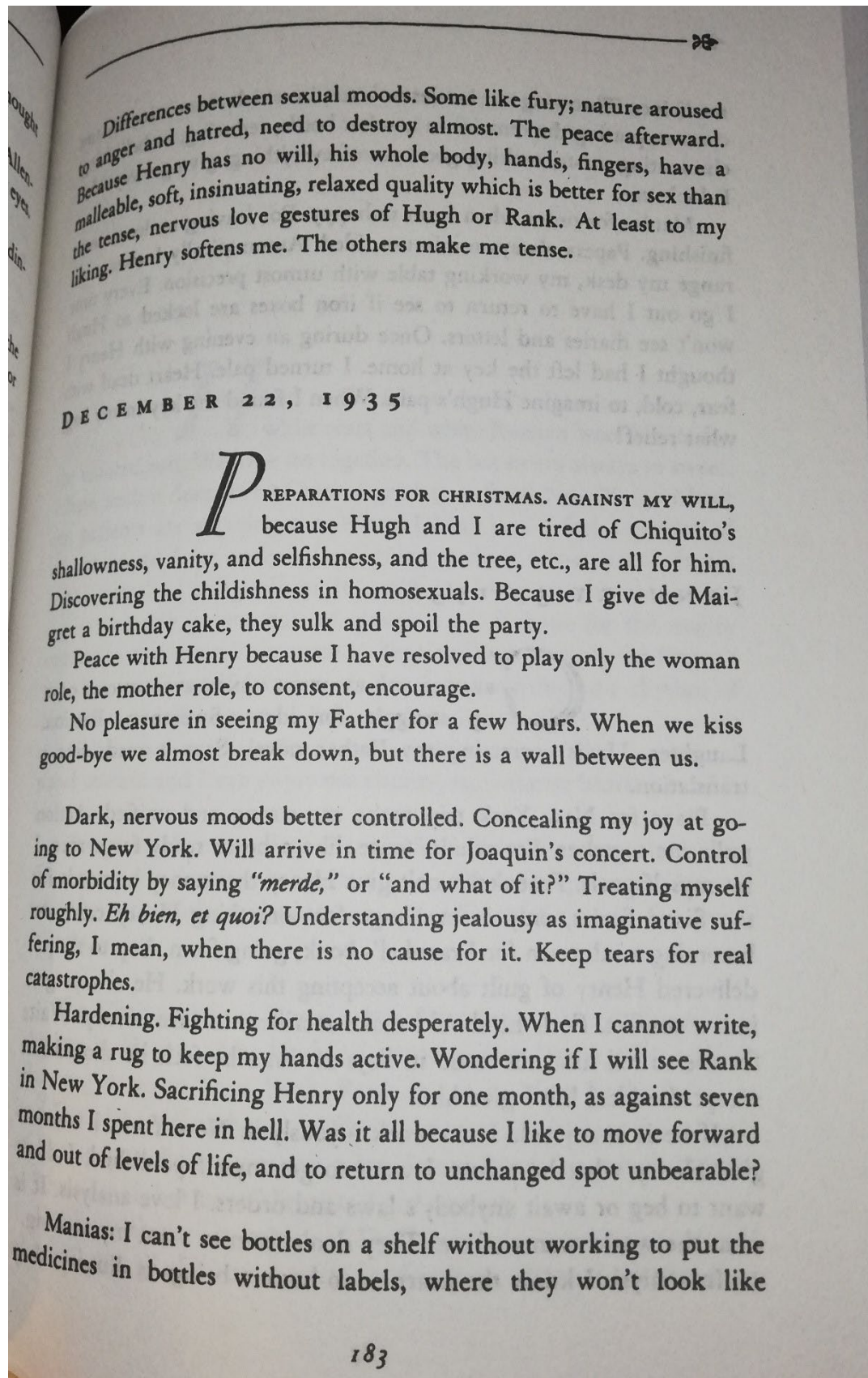
Differences between sexual moods... some like fury.. nature aroused to anger and hatred.. need to destroy almost... the peace afterwards..

Eroticism. Remembering pictures seen – especially when the ass is shown.. Henry is not erotic – just sensual.. Hugh is erotic – voluptuous.. for Henry sex is simple..

His love of staying inside a long time while I suck with the vulva – some [illegible word] part that tightens like palpitation... the consciousness dissolving... everything concentrated in sexual parts. Sound of juice... when we watch his penis sliding in and out, glistening..

Because Henry has no will his whole body, hands, fingers, have a malleable, soft, insinuating relaxed quality which is better for sex than the tense, nervous love gestures of Hugh or Rank. At least to my liking. Henry softens me. The others make me tense..⁵³

This passage is clipped short in the published diary (see Figure 1.1), whereby 'the peace afterwards' is followed directly by 'Because Henry has no will.' In this revision that shortens the passage, touch is censored, since the act of sex, particularly Nin's experience of it and reference to her own body, is extracted from the published work. The acknowledgement of bodily fluids in terms of the 'sound of juice' in 'his penis sliding in and out' is equally erased from the published work, suggesting that certain forms of being in relation to another are still deemed unacceptable for particular genres of writing. The style is more disjointed in the archival material; Nin's feelings seep into the writing form itself. The ellipses are erased from the unexpurgated diary and replaced by the use of full stops and semicolons. As a result, the text reads more cohesively and smoothly, but without the same reflective presence of thought or affect. In the original diary, the use of ellipses indicates Nin's reflective process as the fragmented form signals the thought process of words triggering other words to surface – 'fury' leading to 'anger,' 'hatred,' and the need to 'destroy.' The ellipses, themselves disjointed as Nin switches between two and three dots, then act as pauses in the chain of associations between Nin's thoughts.



Differences between sexual moods. Some like fury; nature aroused to anger and hatred, need to destroy almost. The peace afterward. Because Henry has no will, his whole body, hands, fingers, have a malleable, soft, insinuating, relaxed quality which is better for sex than the tense, nervous love gestures of Hugh or Rank. At least to my liking. Henry softens me. The others make me tense.

DECEMBER 22, 1935

PREPARATIONS FOR CHRISTMAS. AGAINST MY WILL, because Hugh and I are tired of Chiquito's shallowness, vanity, and selfishness, and the tree, etc., are all for him. Discovering the childishness in homosexuals. Because I give de Maigret a birthday cake, they sulk and spoil the party.

Peace with Henry because I have resolved to play only the woman role, the mother role, to consent, encourage.

No pleasure in seeing my Father for a few hours. When we kiss good-bye we almost break down, but there is a wall between us.

Dark, nervous moods better controlled. Concealing my joy at going to New York. Will arrive in time for Joaquin's concert. Control of morbidity by saying "merde," or "and what of it?" Treating myself roughly. *Eh bien, et quoi?* Understanding jealousy as imaginative suffering, I mean, when there is no cause for it. Keep tears for real catastrophes.

Hardening. Fighting for health desperately. When I cannot write, making a rug to keep my hands active. Wondering if I will see Rank in New York. Sacrificing Henry only for one month, as against seven months I spent here in hell. Was it all because I like to move forward and out of levels of life, and to return to unchanged spot unbearable?

Manias: I can't see bottles on a shelf without working to put the medicines in bottles without labels, where they won't look like

Figure 1.1: Anaïs Nin. *Fire: From a Journal of Love: The Unexpurgated Diary of Anaïs Nin, 1934-1937*, San Diego: Harcourt, Inc. (1995) p. 183.

JUNE 5

19 Tell everything. Paul saying
one morning. I'm finished with
the dentist. And I silent because
of my crazy hope that the dentist
19 was going to change his teeth
as in fairytale. Hoping he would
suddenly appear with perfect
teeth.

19 Differences between sexual
moods... Some like fury. nature
aroused to anger and hatred.
19 need to destroy almost.

The peace afterwards.
Eroticism. Remembering features
seen - specially when the ass is
19 shown.. Henry is not erotic
just sensual.. Hugh is erotic
voluptuous.. For Henry sex is
simple..

Figure 1.2: Box 17, Folder 8, Anaïs Nin Papers (Collection 2066). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles. Unpaginated.

JUNE 6

19

His love of staying
inside a long time while
I suck with the vulva --
some inner part that tightens

19

like palpitation... The
consciousness dissolving...
everything concentrated in
sexual parts. Sound of

19

juice... When we watch
his penis sliding in and out,
glistening.

Because Henry has no will his
whole body, hands, fingers, have
a malleable, soft, insinuating,
relaxed quality which is better
for sex than the tense nervous

19

love gestures of Hugh or Rank.
At least to my liking. Henry softens
me. The others make me tense.

Figure 1.3: Box 17, Folder 8, Anaïs Nin Papers (Collection 2066). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles. Unpaginated.

Words are saturated with tactility and the way in which the body may experience these different forms of touch as Nin breaks pleasure down into the categories of 'erotic,' 'voluptuous' and 'sensual.' The use of ellipses in discussing Hugh's way of touching and its comparison to Henry's suggests a break in the flow of writing, a fragmentation or disjointedness to the thoughts. The dashes indicate a decisiveness to Nin's comparison: 'Henry is not erotic – just sensual' and a pause before then deciding 'Hugh is erotic – voluptuous.' Henry's simplicity in sex is what Nin then decides to focus upon for the remaining passage, as Henry's simplicity materialises through a dissolving of consciousness. The ellipses, enclosing this 'consciousness dissolving,' may read as the literal act of consciousness gradually dissolving from Nin's writing. The disjointed dots leave space for thought, pause, and breath, yet after this dissolution of consciousness, the ellipses only enter the passage once more before entirely ceasing when Nin begins to reflect on Henry's sex as simple.

This dissolving of consciousness creates a malleability and softness within the form as Nin writes of this being 'better for sex,' with the importance of Henry having 'no will' being emphasised through a singular underlining. Nin occasionally uses underlines to stress particular points within her original diary, yet this assertive choice in style is excised in the published work. The reader's gaze may smoothly read over words in the published work without recognising the significance of their meaning. The addition of an underline alternatively arrests, or disrupt the reader's gaze, bringing their attention to the word more abruptly, which adds affect and significance to Nin's choice of words. When Nin writes of Henry's 'relaxed quality' in sex, the punctuation reflects this quality with the use of commas, rather than ellipses, to create a fluid rhythm, materialising the body and its softness within the language structure: 'whole body, hands, fingers, have a malleable, soft, insinuating relaxed quality which is better for sex.' Nin implies that Henry does not think during sex, there are no ellipses to suggest a pause for thought, and when the consciousness is dissolved from touch, Henry becomes his 'body,' 'hands,' and 'fingers,' which in turn dissolves tension. By comparison, the gestures of

both Hugh and Rank transmit a nervousness that ultimately suggests a thought process within their touches. The last sentences are clipped short, staccato, bringing attention to the contrast between softness and tension, which depends upon touch being experienced with the mind present or absent. Nin's comparisons between different forms of touch suggest that these various touches accumulate as 'tactile memory' within the body, and subsequently shape how she may be orientated toward future lovers through the affect of such tactile relations, whereby the affect of pleasure, with or without consciousness, alters the reception of such tactile relations.

Pain, on the other hand, not only draws attention to the body's presence and surface, but also localises sensations and arrests the body's extension toward others. When discussing how the body image may undergo modifications in response to psychological or organic disorders, Elizabeth Grosz (1994) argues that '[t]he effected zones of the body become enlarged and magnified in the body image.'⁵⁴ This engorging of the specific area assists in the area becoming alienated from the body as a means of escaping the feelings generated by pain. The sensation of pain simultaneously draws attention to the body, creating its surfaces, and yet it equally creates a dissonance or detachment in the body as the sensation is experienced as other. Nin's writing reflects a more complicated reading of painful and pleasurable forms of touch as the boundary between the two is blurred when the affects of touch are either imbued with the presence or absence of feelings too. The experience of pleasurable touch informs Nin's relationality to others as she opens her body to the potentiality of connecting and linking to others who may extend her 'bodily horizon' and orientate her toward different paths. Yet when instilled with feelings, the pleasurable affects of touch retain the power to cause pain, interconnecting pain and pleasure in the experiencing of these touches and complicating the separation between the two. In this regard, what causes the affects of touch to feel painful is the presence of negative feelings, such as jealousy, guilt, insecurity, and the doubt associated with love.

When feelings are removed from tactile contact, in moments such as Nin's experience of a threesome with Donald and Arline, Nin writes of her ability to experience touch as purely pleasurable, as sensation. At the same time, this contact, for Nin, is in fact considered more removed or detached without the threat of jealousy or pain for it does not have the capacity to touch her on a deep level compared to tactile relations imbued with feelings. In *Fire: From a Journal of Love*, Nin writes:

Strange, however, that since the sexual barrier has broken down in me (not entirely!), since I have learned to lie with strangers, learned to like bodies, strangers' bodies, since I am no longer the "*sauvage*" Virgin, everything bodily seems easier, Hugh and Rank too. There is less personal feeling and more of a general womb feeling. Men, not man. Henry wanted me to lose my totality (which means eyes, souls, sex turned toward Henry) and so he made the Whore.⁵⁵

Nin speaks of breaking a 'sexual barrier' suggesting that sexual encounters, removed from love, require a process of learning. The repetition of 'learned' and 'strangers' emphasises the parameters of this pleasure: a pleasure enjoyed with the bodies of strangers, which is perceived in contrast to her 'totality' as that of making her 'the Whore.' Through opening her body to a 'general womb feeling,' in comparison to the 'personal feeling,' Nin suggests her expansion and ability to take multiple lovers into herself. By expanding her ability to be touched, the bodily affects of touch become easier as the 'personal,' which can be read as the emotions and feelings of bodily contact, is lessened. When pleasurable touch is exempt from feelings, in Nin's opinion, these forms of pleasure are liberated from the pain, wounds, and doubts of love where she reflects: 'It is the abandon I like, Donald, Bel Geddes, Arline. Their freedom from care and jealousy. The smoothness. There is a world where people play joyously and naturally the tricks I play for alibis, without being blamed.'⁵⁶ Nin presents the notion of freedom as sharing a tactile quality of smoothness, as opposed to roughness. When 'play' is exempt from 'care' and 'jealousy' there is a sense of abandonment that appeals to Nin in the form of tactile interaction, of 'everything bodily' seeming easier, and in this regard, smoother. The negativity caused by care

and jealousy may be inferred as a tactile roughness by comparison, whereby pain creates barriers to the ability to touch liberally.

Pleasure, when compounded by Nin's 'pain of identification' with her lovers and the presence of negative feelings, blurs the boundaries of her body's surface with others. I argue, in Chapter Four, that the risk of touching resides in the ability of touch to undo the subject by the blurring of such boundaries. Here, Nin's narratives suggest that the intimacy of pleasurable tactile relations, imbued with feelings, brings more awareness to the body's surface and embodiment, and yet at the same time makes her more aware of the presence of another body outside of herself. The body is at once present in itself, experiencing its responses and reactions to the surface of another body, as well as transmitting bodily sensations and emotions, permitting a shared form of intimate touch that expands the body to take in another. Sex is an encounter with what it means to be in relation to another. In sex, relationality, for Berlant and Edelman, is at once invested with both optimism and negativity that 'holds out the prospect of discovering new ways of being and of being in the world [...] But also raises the possibility of confronting our limit in ourselves or in another, of being inundated psychically or emotionally.'⁵⁷ This negativity, for Berlant and Edelman, 'refers to the psychic and social incoherences and divisions, conscious and unconscious alike, that trouble any totality or fixity of identity. It denotes, that is, the relentless force that unsettles the fantasy of sovereignty.' Remarking on the progressive power of negativity, Berlant and Edelman assert: 'its effects, in our view, are not just negative, since negativity unleashes the energy that allows for the possibility of change.'⁵⁸ In Chapter Four and Chapter Five, I address the effects of negativity as being catalysts for the possibility of change in productive ways. Yet here, Nin's narratives indicate that the unsettling effects of this negativity, which threaten a coherent or fixed identity, are far greater when conscious feelings are involved in the affect of tactile relations. For Nin, this negativity is too great to overcome in relation to another, and therefore, it only instigates change in so much as it influences Nin's development of avoidant strategies, reorientating her

toward other relations in order to avert such negativity that arises in one relation. In order to overcome this negativity, or the presence of pain in the reception of a lover's touch due to the feelings this generates, Nin is compelled to seek out alternative forms of touch: 'with Henry I have suffered continuously from all the jealousies. [...] Relieved only by my other love affairs.'⁵⁹ When she is no longer distracted by love affairs she finds this 'unbearable' for she states there is 'nothing to keep my mind off Henry.'⁶⁰ Nin cannot escape the feelings of jealousy unless she distances herself from these negative emotions through alternative forms of touch. In other words, the pain or negativity of being in relation to another does not cause Nin to retreat back into herself and away from touch, but instead provokes the possibility of change by reorientating her toward other forms of touch whereby she desires to extend her body further in order to assuage the feelings of pain.

The experience of pleasure with Arline, removed from emotion, comes as a type of relief to Nin, a '[s]ilence of feelings. Relief from feeling. The difficulties, the emotions, the complexities with Thurema.'⁶¹ Whilst this suggests a preference toward an emotion-less touch, Nin continuously reiterates that the presence of emotions infects touch with a far deeper ability to penetrate the body. This communicative aspect of touch informs Nin's relationality to others, directing Nin toward certain bodies more than others depending on their ability to influence her sense of 'self.' In this regard, Nin's negative reactions, such as the experiencing of jealousy, possessiveness, and insecurity when in relation to others, influences her desire for multiple relations since her suffering is only relieved by her 'other love affairs.' Pain and pleasure orientate Nin away or toward certain bodies, whereby emotional pain causes Nin to retreat from certain relations and to redirect herself toward other bodies, seeking other tactile relations in order to manage such negativity and maintain the expansion of her 'bodily horizon.' The reception of varying forms of touch creates a web of relations that nourishes differing aspects of Nin, along with assuaging the negativity of being in relation to others. Although Nin's narratives are often framed by discourses of compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy, these

constructs are simultaneously acknowledged and superseded by Nin's metaphors and imageries of affect, by which sensations of pleasure and pain, interconnected with feelings, blur the boundaries of bodies and exceed societal constructs of what it means to be in tactile relation to another.

'Tactile Memory' and the Temporality of Touch

Nin's experience of pleasurable and painful touch suggests a queer temporality to tactile relations. Pleasurable touch without love has a shorter life span in regard to the body retaining such affects of touch. In *A Spy in the House of Love*, Sabina voices her desire to move away from the stranger's body and to 'disentangle and unminge' what had been experienced in relation to her lover. By comparison, pleasurable or painful touch involving an economy of affect, feelings, and emotions suggests a greater longevity in the affective retention of such touch within and upon the body, and therefore, a greater extent to which these forms of touch may shape and orientate one's body in particular ways. For instance, Nin's narrative of her experience with Donald and Arline indicates a haunting presence of June (Henry Miller's wife who Nin had a tumultuous affair with that involved an economy of affect, feelings, and emotions). Nin states that Arline's 'mouth tasted like June.'⁶² The presence of June when kissing Arline suggests that, at times, the contact of touch is not only experienced as an immediate or literal form of relating to another in a present moment, but as a form of haunting within the body through how deeply (or not) another's touch may affect the body. Arline's mouth bringing forth the memory of June, implies that Nin's tactile relation with June is retained on a deeper level within her body than that of Arline's present touch that is removed from feelings or emotions. Nin's experience explicitly recalls a moment of 'tactile memory,' a term referred to in *A Spy in the House of Love*, which relays the experience of touch as a haunting of the body in the form of remembered (or not remembered) touch. The ability of touch to cross various temporalities queers any present moment of tactile relations and exceeds the frame of

compulsory monogamy. The notion of 'tactile memory' reveals that monogamy is not fully obtained when the memory of previous touches are retained upon and within the skin.

The temporality of touch emerges throughout Nin's narratives when certain touches have the capacity to be retained within the body more than others, which significantly alters any present moment of being in tactile relation to another. In *A Spy in the House of Love*, Nin's narrative reflects on a moment in which Sabina experiences the absence of 'tactile memory':

The image of Alan appeared in her vision like a snap-shot. It did not reach her through tactile memory, or any of the senses but the eyes. She did not remember his touch, or his voice. He was a photograph in her mind, with the static pose which characterized him: either standing up above average tallness so that he must carry his head a little bent, and something calm which gave the impression of a kind of benediction. She could not see him playful, smiling, or reckless, or carefree.⁶³

Unlike Sabina's lover, John, the vision of Alan is exclusively sensed through the eyes, similar to a static photograph. The conviction of the statement, '[s]he did not remember his touch, or his voice' is emphasised by the form where the clipped, staccato sentence stresses Sabina's notion of 'tactile memory' and the comparative exclusion of Alan from this form of memory. The narrative ruminates on the image of Alan in a static pose that indicates an affective quality of his nature as 'calm.' Sabina cannot materialise an image of Alan as 'playful,' 'smiling,' 'reckless,' or 'carefree,' indicating that the vision of Alan may not reach her 'tactile memory' due to such an image excluding certain characteristics that are required in order to remember the sense of touch or voice. The inclusion of voice in what is considered 'tactile memory' is apt, as one's voice may have an element of tactility. The sound of a lover's voice may bring forth a bodily response in the listener, due to the remembrance of shared tactile intimacy. The temporality of touch is therefore neither fixed nor located as registering exclusively at the specific time of experiencing literal tactile contact upon and within the skin.

Unlike Alan, Sabina's previous lover, John, does reach her 'tactile memory.' Sabina initially considers returning to New York to 'forget him [John], [...yet] his eager face and the distress in his eyes made this act seem one of desertion.'⁶⁴ This notion of such an act as

desertion, however, is felt physically by Sabina. The narrative implies that John is remembered both mentally and physically through 'tactile memory':

At other moments the pleasure he had given her ignited her body like flowing warm mercury darting through the veins. The memory of it flowed through the waves when she swam, and the waves seemed like his hands, or the form of his body in her hands.

She fled from the waves and his hands. But when she lay on the warm sand, it was his body again on which she lay; it was his dry skin and his swift elusive movements slipping through her fingers, shifting beneath her breasts. She fled from the sand of his caresses.⁶⁵

The memory of tactile pleasure ignites her body as Sabina physically experiences the memory 'like flowing warm mercury' throughout her veins. The passage details the visceral response the body may have to the memory of previous tactile relations. This memory is brought forth in present moments of sensation, such as 'the waves when she swam,' or 'the warm sand' that she lay upon. The visceral characteristic of 'tactile memory' can be read in proximity to Jill Bennett's notion of 'sense memory'. Bennett suggests that the past is reawakened in the present, becoming a part of the present through sensations. In 'sense memory,' the past is revitalised in the body as a present experience as it 'seeps back into the present, becoming sensation rather than representation.'⁶⁶ The waves and sand revive, in Sabina, older associations, responses, and memories of John's touch. In this way, the body's surface functions as 'sense memory,' or 'tactile memory,' found within and upon the skin, which enables Sabina to experience both the present and past simultaneously as sensation, rather than merely representation. The present evokes the past in the way in which the body remembers touch, and so John haunts Sabina's present sensations of waves and sand that evoke sensations, 'like his hands,' or 'his dry skin,' and 'swift elusive movements slipping through her fingers, shifting beneath her breasts,' rather than mere representations. The form mimics this simultaneous coupling of 'tactile memory' with present sensations as each sensation experienced in the present is compounded with the past sensation it evokes. The waves are metaphorically likened to 'his hands' or 'the form of his body,' yet the comma splice between laying on the 'warm sand' and 'it was his body again on which she lay,'

moves the passage into more explicit and direct connections between the present and past. There is no longer the use of metaphor, but a literal superimposition of sand equating to 'his body,' 'his dry skin' and 'his swift elusive movements.'

Each time the present sensation evokes John's touch, Sabina flees. This suggests that 'tactile memory' creates action in the present. The memory of John's touch in present sensations causes a reaction and response in her body, which in this instance, reorientates her body by instigating movement away from such sensations. Skin, as the largest sensory organ and one the subject cannot live without, unlike sight, sound, taste, and smell, spans the entire human body and functions via touch as the individual's protective shield and receiver of information. This allows the individual to learn and interact with the environment around them as well as with their own body. The varying tactile senses enable an individual to infer whether pressure is violent or passionate through a process of decoding, interpreting, and computing between the skin and the 'emotional brain.' This flow of information suggests the *haptic* merging of the skin and memory through touch. Ashley Montagu explains:

The term *haptic* is used to describe that mentally extended sense of touch which comes about through the total experience of living and acting in space. Our perception of the visual world, for example, in fact blends what we have *felt* in past associations with what we have seen or the scene before us.⁶⁷

Montagu's definition positions skin as an interface that communicates with the individual's psychical interior and the external world. Sabina's desire to flee 'from the sand of his caresses' can be read as a form of haptic communication where the sense of touch is extended by the blending of past sensations with the current scene before her. For Sabina, the haptic characteristic of this 'tactile memory' is too great a threat to her present state, disclosing the way in which past sensations have the ability to alter and shape present actions, responses to sensations, and tactile relations.

Sabina experiences 'tactile memory' as a visceral process that is felt throughout her body. In *The Four-Chambered Heart*, however, Nin offers the inverted perspective whereby

Rango's awareness of what can be considered Djuna's 'tactile memory' ignites moments of jealousy:

Djuna looked at Rango with a premonition of difficulties, for it so often happened that their gaiety wakened in him a sudden impulse to destroy their pleasure together. Their joys together never a luminous island in the present but stimulating his remembrance that she had been alive before, that her knowledge of caresses had been taught to her by others, that on other nights, in other rooms, she had smiled. At every peak of contentment she would tremble slightly and wonder when they would begin to slide into torment.⁶⁸

The way in which the present experience of 'joys together' precipitates Rango's awareness of Djuna's 'knowledge of caresses' suggests that being in tactile relation to another is not exclusively experienced as a present encounter, but one that contains the implicit threat of the other's previous tactile relations. The skin, as an interface for haptic communication, transmits such knowledge of previous caresses through tactile contact. This haptic quality of touch reminds Rango of Djuna's past associations in that their encounter with each other is not exclusively shaped by their tactile relation alone, but instead by their previous 'knowledge of caresses,' which shapes how they may receive and respond to different forms of touch in the present. Here, 'tactile memory' is not only experienced as an individual bodily remembrance of previous tactile relations, but as a 'tactile memory' that is shared and communicated between the present lovers. Rango is aware of not only being in relation to Djuna, but of being in relation to her previous lovers who taught her 'knowledge of caresses.'

Djuna considers such jealousy over the past to be unfounded, 'thinking that the deepest possessions and caresses were stored away in the attics of the heart but had no power to revive and enter the present lighted rooms.'⁶⁹ Although Djuna claims that such possessions and caresses have no power, Nin's narrative implies a more complicated relationship between past and present associations of touch:

if an old association caused an old sensation to revive it was but for an instant, like an echo, intermittent and transitory. [...] The body has its cores and its peripheries and such a mysterious way of maintaining intruders on the outer rim. A million cells protect the core of a deep love from ghostly invasions, from any recurrences of past loves.

An intense, a vivid present was the best exorcist of the past.⁷⁰

Djuna's narrative demonstrates that 'an old sensation' is capable of revival in present moments as an 'echo.' The imagery of 'ghostly invasions' and an 'exorcist' heightens the sense of these associations being experienced as a form of haunting. Although the temporality of this association is deemed 'intermittent and transitory,' the body maintains such 'intruders on the outer rim.' Therefore, the emphasis placed upon the comparison between the present and past sensations implies that the ability of an 'old sensation' to be revived in the present moment is dependent upon the intensity and depth of the present love. In this regard, the degree to which 'ghostly invasions' and 'recurrences of past loves' may intrude on the present tactile relation is dependent upon the way in which Djuna feels in relation to Rango and in comparison to previous encounters. The image of 'a million cells' implies that it is the body itself, rather than the mind alone, that encounters these sensations and associations in relation to another. The 'million cells' have the power to revitalise 'old sensations', or alternatively protect 'the core of a deep love from ghostly invasions.' The skin is the site of tactile hauntings. Nin's narratives evidence the capacity for the past to become present in the body's ability to remember. Djuna states: 'No two caresses ever resemble each other. Every lover holds a new body until he fills it with his essence, and no two essences are the same, and no flavour is ever repeated.'⁷¹ Yet Rango's awareness of these previous essences and of the way in which Djuna has been previously filled with the essence of others implies a haunting of the body. Whilst these essences may not be repeated or entirely the same, the image of the body filled with another's essence suggests the capacity for tactile relations to leave their traces within the body as 'tactile memory,' which may be revived as echoes and associations. Tactile relations are haunted by previous sensations as present moments may trigger previous tactile encounters and resurrect them in the present situation as a part of the sensations that the body experiences. The notion of 'tactile memory' can therefore be read as touch materialising in Nin's narratives as a form of palimpsest. Nin's notion of the 'pain of identification,' an accumulation of multiple

identifications with her lovers, manifests the way in which her relation to previous lovers, and the 'tactile memory' of such relations, causally impacts her orientation toward multiple present lovers.

Palimpsestic Touch

Nin's way of connecting to her lovers and those around her emerges as a form of identification whereby her sense of 'self' is comprised of the accumulation of multiple identifications with lovers. These identifications are prone to revision through Nin's tactile interactions with both past and current lovers, which continuously reorientate Nin toward multiple different paths, due to how these interactions shape her body. In Nin's writing, this identification with others is connected to the way in which emotional states and instincts figuratively 'touch' the body, and in turn transform her perception of herself and others. The figurative use of touch throughout Nin's narratives suggests the significance of experiencing identification as a palimpsestic touching of the body. Nin's self-narrative is reshaped by her external relationships, as well as an internal relationship to herself, as the inscription of each lover upon her body interconnects and ultimately blurs her perception of 'self,' and her perception of others. This 'pain of identification' is not merely a psychical empathy or a putting of oneself in another's shoes, but a figurative and literal tactile bodily expression:

Parts of my body, my life are passing into others. I feel what they feel. I identify myself.. Their anguish tightens my throat. My tongue feels heavy. I wonder whether I can go on...no objectivity. I pass into them to illumine, reveal.. but I cannot remain apart..⁷²

Nin writes of identification as a sharing of feelings, and of parts of her body 'passing into others,' which evokes a figurative and literal sense of tactility in the language. Feelings are experienced as physical responses where the body becomes the site of identification: 'their anguish tightens my throat,' 'tongue feels heavy,' and ultimately Nin has 'no objectivity' as her sense of 'self' blurs through identifying with her lovers, suggesting that these identifications touch the body, and in turn shape the body.

The intimacy created between Nin and her lovers is reflected through the blurring of boundaries between bodies, yet this blurring does not mean that the identification is always successful. One may incur risks through being in relation to others. Nin often wonders whether Hugh (her husband), and her lovers, Henry, Rank, and even Gonzalo, are all playing certain roles too, rather than sincerely feeling the same emotions. Through 'playacting' herself, Nin ultimately arouses her own suspicions on the legitimacy of others' feelings for her:

Playacting love for Hugh. I think sometimes he is too, but that he does not know it, that he is more a slave to habit and ideals. I can hardly tell now whether his emotions are real. I am so accustomed to thinking that Hugh is sincere. But I also wonder whether there is a Hugh, where he isn't just my robot man, doing and being everything to please me.⁷³

Due to her own awareness of how she performs her emotions, '[p]layacting love' with the 'habit' and 'ideals' of a certain way of being with one another, she cannot tell whether Hugh himself is doing the same or not. This narrative, whilst questioning Hugh's sincerity, is provoked by Nin's own playacting and how she constructs her identity in order to do and be everything that pleases Hugh in the absence of truly embodying certain 'scripts' or ways of being in relation to another. Through her reflection on Hugh's emotional sincerity, Nin accentuates her own playacting, and reveals how living her life in this way ultimately causes doubts and suspicions about the sincerity of others in relation to her.

This 'pain of identification' or web of connections that Nin acquires, therefore, not only relates to Nin herself, but also to the relationality between Nin's lovers where literal forms of touch are situated as the remedy for reassuring and legitimating the identification. Nin writes, '[w]hen I am with Huck [the nickname for Rank], I confuse and identify some of my feelings toward him as Henry's toward me because some of them are similar, and that makes me fear all of them (doubt of Henry's love), just as because some of the feelings of my Father were like mine I got all entangled and confused with him.'⁷⁴ Nin's relationality to another does not remain separate from her relation to others, but overlaps in how she responds to and perceives such relations in regard to herself. The projective identification with each person leads to a confusion

of identity and a questioning of whether feelings are truly belonging to her or to her lovers.

When she observes Rank's feelings toward herself as a reflection of the way she felt toward

Henry, this recognition of her feelings in another causes suspicion and insecurity:

Insanity, caused by seeing that Huck loves me as I love Henry (wanted to live on a desert island with me, wanted me alone, far from other people) and this made me doubt Henry's love again because I had, in relation to Rank, Henry's feelings of gregariousness, and this meant perhaps that Henry did not love me. Identification of Rank's love for me with mine for Henry very painful, and had to be dispelled each time by Henry's passionateness when I returned to him, his constantly renewed proofs of love. Could not have endured this analogy any longer. Cause of great pain, this comparison in ways of loving, asking if one way means real love and the other not loving.⁷⁵

Nin's rolling process of deduction concludes in believing that perhaps 'Henry did not love me.'

The identifications in 'this comparison in ways of loving' works to reorientate the relationality between Rank, Nin, and Henry. The identification impacts the way in which Nin experiences Rank's love for her, how she perceives her own position and feelings toward Rank, alongside how it evokes the remembrance of past love for Henry and the suspicion for the present sincerity of Henry's feelings toward her. The '[i]dentification of Rank's love for me with mine for Henry' is a painful identification, bringing to light the impact that others' feelings for her, and ways of relating to her, have on not only her own emotional state, but on her assurance of others' emotional states. The rhythm of each sentence stresses the uncertainty and panic through the cutting from one thought to another. By asking herself whether this comparison between ways of loving means that one way is real and the other not, Nin demonstrates that the multiple paths she has taken may overlap and inform how she perceives each path, whereby doubt and uncertainty creep into the narrative as to the validity of how she has orientated herself toward others. The figurative touching of these identifications is then confirmed and reassured through the literal sense of touch. The doubt of sincerity is only subdued by 'Henry's passionateness,' demonstrating the function of touch as a communication of emotions, shaping how Nin maintains these relations. Touch assists in reorientating Nin's way of perceiving these

identifications by confirming and validating the sincerity of such relations through the passion of Henry's touches as 'renewed proofs of love,' which reassure Nin.

The overlapping of figurative tactile identifications between Nin and her lovers nourishes differing aspects of herself. Nin, therefore, comes to realise: 'I should not expect certain things from Hugh, I must also learn not to expect fulfilment in Henry.'⁷⁶ Each relationship provides or fulfils differing needs, yet these identifications are equally a source of threat to Nin's sovereignty as these differing needs cause conflict and tension, along with the questioning of the sincerity of these identifications. The literal touch between Nin and her lovers is therefore what assuages the doubt and uncertainty she experiences when in relation to another. This in many ways continues to reorientate Nin toward multiple paths, directing the extension of her 'bodily horizon' to the continual development of a web of interconnecting relations, since being figuratively touched by others informs Nin's desire to seek out literal touch that both validates and confirms these relations. These interconnecting relations extend Nin's 'bodily horizon,' designating which bodies may be within reach to touch, and how these tactile relations may nurture the differing 'scripts,' roles, and aspects of herself. As Nin wrestles with the fictionality or performances of certain ways of being, the doubt and uncertainty of being in relation to one lover is only assuaged by her tactile relationality to others, which perpetuates the cycle of multiplicity in regard to tactile interactions.

Through notions of identification, Nin and Sabina's tactile relations can be read as palimpsestic in how they respond and connect differently to various lovers. These relationships often become interconnected, or superimposed upon each other, as feelings and tactile contact overlap. In Nin's work, touch materialises through palimpsestic techniques of collaging and superimposing past and present forms of touch onto each other, which further stresses the interconnection between Nin's relationships. The notion of 'tactile memory' may suggest the way in which the memory of past forms of touch inform Nin's experiences and responses of being in relation to present and future bodies. In my reading of Nin's work, the communicative

aspect of touch shapes the body in varying ways, ultimately revising the body through each new touch. The touch of different lovers often overlaps and triggers another's touch. Nin's relationality to others is therefore informed by the way in which the experience of differing forms of touch may orientate her toward certain bodies more than others. Nin's remarks upon the 'pain of identification' become a form of haunting where palimpsestic touch conjures similarities between past and present interactions that are in turn reflected in both Nin and her characters' responses to their present lovers. In this regard, palimpsestic touch suggests the relationality between 'tactile memory' and present experiences of touch whereby the memory of touch impacts the literal experience of touch in any present moment. Nin often compares the reception and response she has to different forms of touch in regard to how deeply they leave their traces in her body:

Even now, the night before I left for Virginia – lying with Gonzalo – after his possession of me – he moved his head in such a way that his long black hair brushed my breasts, and this brushing of Gonzalo's hair over my breast is felt so deeply, as if every strand of hair were tangled with a strand of my own hair, and tied around a cell of my blood.

John's gestures do not have this vibration on me. The intoxication is there, each time, the need to embrace, kiss, lie with him – but only while he is there and it does not grow roots into my being.⁷⁷

Some forms of touch merely mark the body in the present, without forming echoes or vibrations. Whilst other touches, such as Gonzalo's, reverberate within her body, leaving lasting tremors. The visceral imagery of Gonzalo's hair, brushing over Nin's breast 'as if every strand of hair were tangled with a strand of my own hair, and tied around a cell of my blood,' stresses the depth of Gonzalo's touch as there is a sense of entanglement that cannot be so readily extracted from Nin's body. Touch is experienced far deeper than surface level, as 'roots' that grow into Nin's being to such an extent that the tactile relation becomes a part of her, an identification that blurs the boundaries of her sovereignty. She affirms that 'the intoxication is there' with John, but this is only a present feeling, suggesting that the body does not automatically retain every touch or inscription left by another individual, and therefore, does not maintain these paths to follow. Even if the skin cannot control its reception of touch, since

the skin cannot turn itself off to sensory reception, different touches have the capacity to be felt with different intensities and to different extents. Gonzalo's touch is felt deeply where he is in Nin's body, a part of it, and his inscription cannot be so readily erased, whereas John's gestures are only temporary and he 'does not grow roots' in Nin's body. This is emphasised through the structure of Nin's writing: the section on Gonzalo is drawn out, a longer paragraph with more detail, whereas the paragraph on John is shorter, non-specific, less personalised and with a staccato rhythm that creates a more decisive tone. Not all forms of touch create tactile roots within and upon the skin. The varying modes of reception of touch and the responses these create in Nin extends the body toward some bodies more than others.

In *A Spy in the House of Love*, palimpsestic touch, as a type of haunting, echo, comparison, or accumulation of 'tactile memory' that forms layers within and upon the skin, implies that any tactile relation is at once both experienced presently within the moment of contact, as well as saturated with different associations, histories, and responses to previous touches. Sabina's search for previous lovers in present lovers highlights how the palimpsestic nature of touch informs her future reaching toward and touching of certain bodies compared to others:

A vague physical resemblance, an almost similar mouth, a slightly similar voice, some particle of the character of Philip, or John, would emigrate to another, whom she recognized immediately in a crowd, at a party, by the erotic resonance it reawakened.

The echoes struck at first through the mysterious instrumentation of the senses which retained sensations as instruments retain a sound after being touched. The body remained vulnerable to certain repetitions long after the mind believed it had made a clear, a final severance.⁷⁸

The 'erotic resonance' manifests through the similarities shared between particular individuals to her past lovers, Philip and John. These resonances are caused by the physicality of an individual alone, not by touch. Yet each short paragraph builds on the next as this initial resonance turns into an echo, poetically likened to the way in which 'instruments retain a sound after being touched.' This points to the ability of touch to leave an echo or vibration that continues to effect the body, like an instrument. These echoes are retained in bodily memory

that cause Sabina's body to be 'vulnerable to certain repetitions,' reawakened by touch that conflates past and present forms of this touch in the ensuing bodily response.

The next paragraph of Nin's text ruminates on this ability to mingle past and present experiences of touch and for both to have an impact on the other. This reinforces the experience of echoes and how similar physical appearances are capable of retransmitting previous sensations:

A similar design of a mouth was sufficient to retransmit the interrupted current of sensations, to recreate a contact by way of past receptivity, like a channel conducting perfectly only a part of the former ecstasy through the channel of the senses arousing vibrations and sensibilities formerly awakened by a total love or total desire for the entire personality.⁷⁹

The 'past receptivity' recreates contact where parts of the 'former ecstasy' are retransmitted through this present touch. Yet Nin's narrative stresses that these contacts are only ever partially formed, as the 'past receptivity' of 'a total love or total desire' cannot be fully recaptured in the replication of physical attributes. The similarities can assist in 'arousing vibrations and sensibilities' within the body, yet these sensations do not occur through the present moment alone, but through the palimpsestic experience of past tactile relations that superimpose themselves upon present forms of touch:

The senses created river beds of responses formed in part from the sediments, the waste, the overflow from the original experience. A partial resemblance could stir what remained of the imperfectly rooted out love which had not died a natural death.

Whatever was torn out of the body, as out of the earth, cut, violently uprooted, left such deceptive, such lively roots below the surface, all ready to bloom again under an artificial association, by a grafting of sensation, given new life through this graft of memory.

Out of the loss of John, Sabina retained such musical vibration below visibility which made her insensitive to men totally different from John and prepared her for a continuation of her interrupted desire for John.

When she saw the slender body of Donald, the same small nose, and head carried on a long-stemmed neck, the echo of the old violent emotions was strong enough to appear like a new desire.⁸⁰

These present sensations are partly formed from the 'sediments,' 'waste,' and 'overflow from the original experience' of the previous lover, when that love has not completely gone, having died an unnatural death. The notion of 'roots below the surface' projects a powerful image of

how memory functions in relation to touch, and how the sediments of previous touches assist in altering the body and its relation to others in the present. However, these 'lively roots below the surface' are deceptive, able to blossom once more, but through what is perceived as an 'artificial association' that is merely the superimposed 'grafting' of tactile memory from the experiences of a previous love onto another individual. The tone of violence, carried by the phrases of 'torn out,' 'cut' and 'violently uprooted,' implies the premature severing of a love, and how the sensations experienced anew in the present are never fully realised from the previous inconclusive love, but born from its severed roots. The use of the natural imagery of a river bed and roots suggests that the echoes and resonances of 'old violent emotions' and 'musical vibrations' are sincere, touching the body in a way that only a love that has not 'died a natural death' can continue to, reverberating within and upon the skin and only awakening to touches that have similar encodings.

The skin, in this context, plays a vital role as the reciprocator of touch. Skin is constantly acting as a barrier to and receiver of touch that generates a form of 'tactile memory,' as the memory of touch instils itself upon and within the skin. As a surface, the skin creates a boundary between the individual and the world, but it is not an impenetrable or unchanging surface, rather, it is one that is always transforming through daily inscriptions upon and within the skin. In Nin's narratives, 'tactile memory,' which generates palimpsestic touch, functions similarly to Freud's use of the analogy of the mystic writing pad. Reworking this analogy: tactile inscriptions that are made on the surface sheet (the skin) also make depressions upon the waxy table beneath (bodily memory) that cannot be erased entirely even when the tactile inscription upon the surface layer is removed. Nin's body and those of her characters are continuously reshaped through the various touches they encounter and the 'tactile memory' this multiplicity of touch creates. The memory of John instils a certain haunting of Sabina's body, causing her to seek an object similar to him in order to evoke the same responses, and in turn,

accommodate the same aspect(s) of herself that found expression through being in tactile relation to him.

Sabina's previous relation to John therefore directs her present and future orientations toward certain bodies, informing how and who she may touch. Sabina's repulsion of men who do not resemble John suggests the way in which previous touches encode the body's responses to certain individuals. Donald's similarities to John are strong enough to arouse the previous inscriptions and trick Sabina into believing she is experiencing 'a new desire' when in fact, the desire she is experiencing is the continuation of old roots and sediments that have shaped her responses to the touches of new lovers who bear any resemblance to her previous encounters. The body, in this regard, has its own tactile fingerprint that is generated through one's *encounter* with relationality; and therefore, occurs through connections to others. This in turn materialises as 'tactile memory,' shaped by past histories of contact that form circuits of vibrations, resonances, reverberations, and echoes; becoming labyrinths of accumulated tactile relations that ultimately impact the body's reception of touch. Nin's language frames touch in constructs of compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy. However, throughout the texts the emergence of tactile affect, with the presence or absence of consciousness or feelings, and 'tactile memory' and the 'pain of identification,' which assists in developing palimpsestic touch, reveals that tactile relations exceed and go beyond such societal constructs when touch assists in reorientating Nin's identity toward polyamory, and such an identity reorientates Nin's relation to touch within a social, cultural, and political framework of compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy.

Chapter Three

The Malady of Touch: Marguerite Duras' *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, and *The Malady of Death*

In Marguerite Duras' *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* (1964), and *The Malady of Death* (1982), loss and death linger on and within the women's bodies. The body materialises in these texts as a site of loss, absence, and/or trauma. Tactile relations are interrupted, with the movement of bodies arrested in their capacity to reach toward others and affectively experience touch. Due to touching the site of loss in another, rather than the subject themselves, there is a break or disruption of affect in the women's responses to touch and receptions of touch. The body, as a site of loss, absence, and/or trauma, orientates one away from the sense of touch by disrupting one's ability to be touched affectively. Therefore, this chapter argues that the presence of trauma or loss arrests the economy of touch to function as an 'orientation device,' in terms of orientating bodies toward some and not others, and creating differentiation between who and what is within reach of a body. This economy breaks down as other bodies become out of reach when the women's bodies can no longer experience touch affectively. When the body materialises as the site of loss, the causal relationship between touch and identity – of how touch orientates one's identity and how identity orientates one's relation to touch within a social, cultural, and political framework of gender, race, and sexuality – ceases in that the figuratively untouchable body is continuously orientated away from those around them.

In *The Malady of Death*, the unknown man transfers his malady onto the woman's body, indicating that the woman's body is the site of this death, or loss of oneself: 'You realize it's here, in her, that the malady of death is fomenting, that it's this shape stretched out before you that decrees the malady of death.'¹ This transference positions the unknown woman as the site of loss throughout the text. In *The Malady of Death*, the unknown woman repeats the statement: 'A dead man's a strange thing.'² This statement speaks to these three texts as each woman

entombs the psychical or literal death of a man. Although the figurative or literal death is that of the unknown man (*The Malady of Death*), or the German lover (*Hiroshima Mon Amour*), or the loss and 'absence of love'³ for Michael Richardson (*The Ravishing of Lol Stein*), the women's bodies house this death. I read the characters of the unknown woman from Nevers (*Hiroshima Mon Amour*), Lol Stein (*The Ravishing of Lol Stein*), and the unknown woman (*The Malady of Death*) as embodying sites of loss as they entomb or act as carriers of another's death. By doing so, I explore the way in which this alters tactile relations between the characters when they are rendered figuratively untouchable or unreachable (due to trauma), retaining the loss of another within their bodies, or presenting a threat to the loss of oneself in relation to another. On the one hand, the tactile encounters between the characters emphasise the way in which the economy of touch is arrested by forms of trauma and loss. Yet on the other hand, these texts suggest that even when the economy of touch is arrested, the act of touching still exceeds spatial and temporal boundaries as present forms of touch evoke the memories of previous tactile encounters. Additionally, Duras' experimental use of the gaze enters the texts as a form of what Laura U. Marks terms 'haptic visuality,' whereby 'the eyes themselves function like organs of touch'⁴ and sense perception is mediated by memory. Through the gaze, Duras' characters still find ways of affectively touching back, transmitting the memory of trauma and arresting the movement of those around them, even when situated as figuratively untouchable throughout the texts. Duras' works illuminate the fragility of one's sovereignty and the threat of losing oneself in tactile relation to another, due to the transmission of trauma or the projection of one's own sense of loss onto another.

Trauma, in its original definition, did not denote forms of mental, psychic, or cerebral disturbance, but referred instead to the literal wounding of flesh, since the word 'trauma' derives from the Greek word *titrosko*, which translates as 'wound' or 'to pierce.' With the onset of industrialisation in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, trauma was gradually re-conceptualised as both a physical and psychical wound. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

(PTSD) was defined in the 1987 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* as occurring when 'The person has experienced an event that is outside the range of human experience...'⁵ and exhibits symptoms, such as flashbacks, psychic numbing, disturbed sleep, and a distracted mind. Joanna Bourke explains that previous notions of trauma predominantly focused on 'bad events' that occurred in contexts such as railway accidents and warfare, and Bourke reflects upon the rapid social changes of the public spheres dominated by men.⁶ These accounts excluded women's traumatic experiences by denying recognition of the trauma caused by gender violence, since this was perceived as commonplace or 'normal,' and therefore, not outside the range of human experience. Bourke observes that in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century the emotional reactions of rape victims were readily discounted due to their lack of adherence to the early 'industrial/war trauma model.'⁷ Railway accidents were seen as entirely unnatural events, yet rape 'was situated within 'normal' sexual practices.'⁸ This altered the perception of each victim: 'Railway passengers and soldiers were conceived of as passive victims of calamity: in contrast, it was often asked, might rape victims be complicit in their misfortune?'⁹ The posing of this question demonstrates the stigmatisation, prejudice, and victim blaming associated with rape victims. The assumption was that 'women did not need the diagnosis of psychological trauma because the social trauma of attack could be recognised: in contrast, men required an additional explanation for why they 'broke up.'¹⁰ Trauma could seemingly only be caused by events outside the range of normal human experiences, which were often limited to white heterosexual men who held the universal social positioning. Bourke states that '[t]he psychological effects of sexual violence first began to be noticed in the late 1950s and 1960s – but only marginally'¹¹ and observes '[i]t took until 1970 for the first substantial study of rape trauma to be published.'¹² During the late 1950s and 1960s, in which Duras wrote *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, notions of trauma that occurred inside the range of human experiences were therefore still developing, particularly in regard to the recognition of women's experiences of trauma.

Taking up contemporary perspectives on trauma, I read the characters of the woman from Nevers (*Hiroshima Mon Amour*) and Lol Stein (*The Ravishing of Lol Stein*) through the lens of Catherine Malabou's notion of 'cerebrality' and the 'new wounded', a theory Malabou develops in *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage* (2012). Malabou constitutes cerebrality as follows:

If the brain designates the set of "cerebral functions," cerebrality would be the specific word for the causal value of the damage inflicted upon these functions – that is, upon their capacity to determine the course of psychic life.¹³

These accidents, which inflict damage upon one's cerebral functions, are deemed wounds 'that cut the thread of history, place history outside itself, suspend its course, and remain hermeneutically "irrevocable" even though the psyche remains alive.'¹⁴ According to Malabou, '*The cerebral accident thus reveals the ability of the subject to survive the senselessness of its own accidents.*'¹⁵ By housing within their bodies the death or loss of another, I read the unknown woman from Nevers and Lol Stein as subjects Malabou terms the 'new wounded.' Their retention of trauma throughout the narratives suggests an irrevocable caesura between their previous identities and their present 'new wounded' ones, and with this, a suspension, or interruption to their tactile relations. This indicates the woman from Nevers' and Lol Stein's ability to survive these accidents where their psyches remain alive while they exist as the living tombs of another's death. In comparison to the earlier models of trauma, such as those propounded by Sigmund Freud, Malabou locates trauma in cerebrality, rather than the unconscious, and recognises the relation between physical and psychological forms of trauma in how they interplay in the formation of a new identity. Through the concept of cerebrality, which forms 'new wounded' identities, Malabou considers how the destruction of form gives way to creation, 'a postlesional plasticity that is not the plasticity of reconstruction but the default formation of a new identity with loss as its premise.'¹⁶ The 'new wounded' subject is invented through the traumatic event; it is invented through loss. According to Malabou, 'the permanent dislocation of one identity forms another identity – an identity that is neither the

sublation nor the compensatory replica of the old form, but rather, literally, a form of destruction.¹⁷ Identity is reshaped through the destruction or disruption of past identities. By reading the woman from Nevers and Lol Stein as sites of loss within the texts, I explore the way in which trauma reshapes, and ultimately arrests, their orientations toward tactile relations. Through this analysis, I suggest that in Duras's works to touch a figuratively 'untouchable' body is to touch the site of loss.

Malabou states that the theatre of absence serves as an exemplary literary expression of the 'new wounded,' as a type of theatre that 'privileged expression of affective impoverishment and destructive metamorphosis.'¹⁸ Malabou remarks that the rhetoric of the theatre of absence 'comprises figures of interruption, pauses, caesuras – the blank spaces that emerge when the network of connections is shredded or when the circulation of energy is paralysed.'¹⁹ Duras' texts can be read in proximity to the theatre of absence as her style employs the use of pauses, caesuras and blank spaces to create textual absence. This chapter explores this noticeable 'affective impoverishment' of tactile relations, due to death, trauma, loss, and abjection in Duras' texts. This experimental style is taken up by Julia Kristeva who refers to Duras' writing as an 'aesthetics of *awkwardness*' or '*noncathartic literature*':

Duras' writing does not analyze itself by seeking its sources in the music that lies under the words nor in the defeat of the narrative's logic. If there be a formal search, it is subordinate to confrontation with the silence of horror in oneself and in the world. Such a confrontation leads her to an aesthetics of *awkwardness* on the one hand, to a *noncathartic literature* on the other.²⁰

In Kristeva's words, Duras' texts exemplify a 'crisis of signification.'²¹ Duras's experimental technique stresses the way in which words, stripped of affect, no longer signify meaning. Without emotion or affect, the words or visuals lose their significance in relation to the characters' actions; and therefore, the relationship between the words that signify and the actions that are signified is interrupted, which I argue, brings to light the way in which the act of touching is interrupted by trauma and loss. Kristeva argues that Duras' texts distort speech, and make dialogue sound 'strange, unexpected, and above all painful.'²² Kristeva continues:

A difficult seduction drags one into the characters' or the narrator's weaknesses, into that nothing, into what is nonsignifiable in an illness with neither tragic crisis nor beauty, a pain from which only tension remains. Stylistic awkwardness would be the discourse of dulled pain.²³

By the late 1950s, film productions were shot in colour. The artistic choice to shoot *Hiroshima Mon Amour* in black and white tonal imagery heightens this notion of a 'discourse of dulled pain' as the colour is drained from the characters' interactions. The stylised lack of affect throughout their encounters reveals the remaining tension and dulled pain that the unknown woman from Nevers still harbours for the death of her lover. When the woman recalls the death of her German lover, her tone remains calm, dissociated from the memory that she is relaying. This stylistic choice stresses the monotonous tone of affective impoverishment. The woman's speech emerges throughout the film as a discourse of dulled pain where the trauma mutes the woman's affective vocalisation and bodily responses, accentuating the discord between her words and the actions they portray.

Duras' work stresses the longevity of trauma, of what happens to those who continue to live. Yet in doing so, this 'affective impoverishment' heightens one's desire to always seek meaning when such meaning is lost. Through such alienation between the words and their actions, the reader can critically observe the way in which trauma reshapes, and ultimately arrests, tactile relations between these characters, and in turn, critically experience the 'affective impoverishment' of such tactility. In Duras' *The Malady of Death*, I lastly consider the abject nature of being in tactile relation to another. In my analysis of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, I address the threat one may experience in tactile relation to another who entombs the death of a previous lover. By comparison, in *The Malady of Death*, the threat that tactile relations may pose to one's borders renders the unknown woman's body abject as the unknown man transmits his malady of death onto her body. In this way, I lastly explore the potential threat of experiencing the figurative death of oneself through transmitting one's own sense of loss onto another in tactile relations.

Touching the Site of Loss: *Hiroshima Mon Amour*

The opening scene of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* gradually fades into a close-up shot of two embracing bodies covered in ash (see Figure 2.1). The bodies are not readily discernible from each other as the image invites the viewer's gaze to move across their bodies textured by ash. This technique can be read as a form of 'haptic visuality' as the viewer's gaze 'touches' the bodies, and is in turn, touched by the image as one not only sees the image, but the textures that bring about a visceral response from the viewer. Duras' use of the gaze can be read through Marks' idea of 'haptic visuality,' as unlike optical visuality that is predicated on the ability to see the object as a distinct form, the viewer cannot distinguish between the two bodies or where upon the bodies the hands may be touching. Marks, informed by Henri Bergson's model of a multisensory image, suggests that visuality becomes haptic as the image perceived by the individual is informed by all their senses and what they may infer of the object through these. Marks states: '[t]he difference between an objective reality and the perceived image is that the former is present in all its qualities while the latter isolates only that in which one is interested.'²⁴ Through this understanding of an image, Marks concludes:

the definition of image is that which is isolated from its context by one's (interested) perception, which is informed by memory and actualized in the body. The interestedness of perception depends upon the memory of what counts as useful information: for example, what counts as useful in a given culture will inform whether one perceives an object visually, tactilely, olfactorily, or (usually) in some combination of these and other modalities.²⁵

The isolation of the context through one's interested perception accentuates the way in which the gaze functions as a mediator between one's memory and one's bodily responses. Sense perception is mediated by memory, whereby the body takes on a central role as the site where this haptic, mental extension of touch is actualised. In *Hiroshima Mon Amour* the visceral image of these two bodies embracing is not one of 'objective reality,' but of a 'perceived image' that 'isolates only that in which one is interested,' in this instance, the sense of touch upon two bodies covered in the ashes of the atomic bomb's aftermath.

The close-up of the embracing bodies engages the viewer's senses as the image is informed by 'memory and actualized in the body,' and by 'what counts as useful information,' which in this instance may be the viewer's knowledge of Hiroshima, of their own tactile relations, the texture of the ashes, and of what one can infer of the feeling of ashes upon the skin. The decision to open with this close-up image highlights the significance of touch throughout the film, as well as the impact of trauma upon tactile relations. The image of two bodies encased in ash has cultural significance in regard to the aftermath of Hiroshima's atomic bomb. Those who survived were called *Hibakusha*, a term which not only classified these individuals as survivors, but also as those exposed to and affected by the bomb. This classification of survivors resulted in severe discrimination against such individuals, due to the fear of radiation and contagion. As a population deemed 'untouchable', this 'perceived image' isolates a potential interest of the film: the meaning of the act of touching, or of being in tactile relation to another, between two bodies that are figuratively 'untouchable,' due to trauma and loss.

The ash encasing the two bodies at the outset of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* visually evokes the interruption in or distance to tactile contact when trauma is present, as the bodies caress the ash upon the skin, rather than the skin itself. What the bodies are embracing in their tactile relation is the residual trauma and markings left upon such bodies from the atomic bomb. This visceral image, in terms of touch, can be viewed as bringing to light the ever-present interruption that trauma creates in the act of touching another. The image of the two bodies covered in ash dissolves into a close-up of the lovers' bodies in the same position (see Figure 2.2). These images are contrasted by their gradual superimposing of the lovers' bodies onto the image of the bodies covered in ash.

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Figure 2.1: Two embracing bodies covered in ash (adapted from *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, 1959).

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Figure 2.2: The two bodies covered in ash dissolving into the lovers' bodies in the same position (adapted from *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, 1959).

This palimpsestic technique suggests a comparison between the tableaux: the ash-covered bodies highlight the physical markings of a psychological, and social and political trauma, whereas there are no physical traces of the psychological, individual trauma experienced by the woman from Nevers. By superimposing these two images upon each other, the film evokes a comparison of how psychological trauma, both social/collective and individual, can materialise upon and within the body in contrasting visible and invisible ways. The woman from Nevers does not display literal, physical trauma on her skin, which could more readily mark her as 'untouchable'. Instead, the psychological trauma of witnessing her German lover's death at the same time as France 'celebrated' the atomic bomb signalling the end of WWII connects collective and individual trauma. In the film's dénouement, the woman from Nevers is referred to as 'Nevers' and her Japanese lover is referred to as 'Hiroshima', emphasising the connection between personal and cultural trauma in the final scene. This trauma materialises as a haunting within the woman's body as similarities between her Japanese lover and German lover trigger bodily responses and flashbacks (see Figure 2.5 and 2.6). The woman from Nevers is therefore marked as figuratively 'untouchable,' as her Japanese lover's touch does not reach her body, but the site of loss and memory of her dead lover that she houses within her body. In this regard, the body materialises as the site of both political and social trauma that is not only retained as a collective, but equally individual trauma and loss that manifests in individuals in divergent ways. One's relation to such a body can then be viewed as an encounter with the absence, void, or memory of trauma within another. The comparison between these images stresses the way that tactile relations are reshaped by trauma: to touch a figuratively 'untouchable' body is to touch the site of loss.

The superimposing of collective and individual trauma onto each other in Figure 2.1 and 2.2 is further compounded by a third image of the woman from Nevers previously embracing her German lover in a similar position to the one of her embracing the man from Hiroshima (see Figure 2.3 and 2.4). This stylised visual echo heightens the idea that trauma

can be transmitted through tactile contact, whereby similar movements of the body and/or tactile contact trigger the remembrance of previous experiences. The tactile relation between the woman from Nevers and the man from Hiroshima is one imbued with the memory of the dead lover who haunts their encounters with each other. As the scene unfolds, the man from Hiroshima asks the woman from Nevers about the dead lover. The scene of the lovers caressing and embracing each other as the woman talks of her past is contrasted with flashbacks of her previous love affair: the memory overlaps with the present moment in the film sequence. Although the woman from Nevers responds by questioning why it is that the man wants to know this particular aspect of her, the man from Hiroshima states:

"I seem to understand that it was there that I almost lost you and ran the risk of never ever meeting you."

"I seem to understand that it was there that you began to be who you are today."²⁶

Rather than affirming an understanding, the repetition of 'I seem to understand' diminishes the certainty of ever understanding or knowing the one that the man from Hiroshima is in relation to, which is later confirmed by the woman from Nevers' internal dialogue as she runs water over her face and gazes upon herself in the mirror: 'You think you know, but you don't. Never.'²⁷ Trauma impacts one's relation to another as the man from Hiroshima can never truly reach the woman from Nevers and know her. Instead, all he may ever know are the residual traces of that original trauma and the loss that materialises upon and within the woman's body. The man from Hiroshima's speech implies that the origin of their encounter is founded upon this traumatic event, which reoriented the line that the woman's life was expected to follow. The traumatic event marks when the woman from Nevers began to be who she is now. This trauma therefore becomes the defining feature of the present woman, and in turn, the man and woman's current relation to each other.

The voice-over of the woman from Nevers repeats throughout the film: 'How could I have known that you would fit my body like a glove?'²⁸ and '[y]ou're destroying me, you're good for me.'²⁹ Although the viewer is initially unaware of this speech indirectly referring to

the woman's dead lover, as the scenes between the man from Hiroshima and the woman from Nevers unfold, these statements gain greater significance, as they refer to both the dead lover and the re-enactment of trauma through the present lovers' tactile relations. The loss of the woman's previous lover 'fits' her body 'like a glove,' metaphorically encasing her, and in turn, 'destroying' her as the body materialises throughout the film as the site of death. The present re-encounter with the traumatic event through the tactile relation between the man from Hiroshima and the woman from Nevers is equally experienced as destruction and a loss of oneself, yet the statement 'you're good for me' implies that the present encounter positively replaces the original trauma by transposing such trauma onto another. The woman reflects (as internal dialogue near the end of the film): 'I set you on fire every night for months while my body was aflame with his memory.'³⁰ The use of the words 'fire' and 'aflame' mirror each other to suggest the causal relationship between the man from Hiroshima's body being figuratively set on fire and the woman from Nevers' body being figuratively aflame with the memory of loss. In this regard, what sets the man's body on fire, in relation to the woman, is the memory of the dead lover, which initially started as a fire in the woman's body. Their tactile relation is therefore continually disrupted by the presence of loss. Their encounters are defined by and built upon this loss whereby they are never fully reaching each other, but are instead reaching toward the woman's memory of trauma.

The image of the dead lover is continuously superimposed onto that of the man from Hiroshima, blurring the boundaries between these two lovers and their relation to the woman from Nevers, implying the loss of oneself in relation to another. The sight of the man from Hiroshima's fingers twitching as he sleeps triggers, for the woman, a momentary flashback to the German lover's fingers twitching in a similar manner as he gradually dies (see Figure 2.5 and 2.6). Through the similar movements of the fingers, the woman from Nevers transcribes death onto the man from Hiroshima's body, which becomes the present site of her trauma.

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Figure 2.3: The unknown woman from Nevers embracing the unknown man from Hiroshima (adapted from *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, 1959).

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Figure 2.4: The unknown woman from Nevers embracing the German Lover in a similar position (adapted from *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, 1959).

The man from Hiroshima's sense of 'self' is therefore compromised in relation to the woman from Nevers, as their tactile contact gradually forms an identification between the man from Hiroshima and the dead lover. Across a bar table, the man cups the woman's cheeks with his hands and brushes his fingers under her lip as she speaks of Nevers, the city in France where she grew up. The man's hands appear to search the contours of the woman's face for signs of this past life and trauma. The woman from Nevers ends the depiction of her hometown by voicing '[i]f you only knew.'³¹ As the man from Hiroshima pulls away, the haptic communication that passes between the two lovers transmits this desire for the man to know, and in turn, transmits the woman's trauma, inciting the man from Hiroshima to respond by asking: 'When you are in the cellar, am I dead?' to which Nevers responds: 'You are dead.'³² The man's question directly positions himself with the dead lover, a position where he embodies the dead lover in relation to the woman from Nevers, whose response of 'you' confirms this misidentification between the two lovers.

The identification between the two lovers is only maintained until the woman recalls the German lover's death, at which point the memory of the original trauma disrupts the identification between the two. The woman from Nevers pulls away from the man from Hiroshima and the tactile contact ceases as she recalls the death of her German lover, indicating that this recollection signals the origin of what permanently separates the woman from Nevers and the man from Hiroshima. The woman's body becomes 'untouchable' as the site of loss and the living tomb of her deceased lover. The initial utterances of the woman's recollection of the traumatic event continue to position the man from Hiroshima with the dead lover, interjecting the present scene with flashbacks. Yet as the woman draws closer to the German lover's death, she starts to refer to the dead lover as 'him' and 'his,' rather than 'you.' This alteration from second-person pronoun to third-person pronoun shifts the narrative from present to past tense, breaking the identification between the two lovers and highlighting the moment at which the psychological wound was inflicted.

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Figure 2.5: The unknown man from Hiroshima sleeping with his fingers twitching (adapted from *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, 1959).

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Figure 2.6: The German lover's hand twitching as he dies (adapted from *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, 1959).

The camera shot refocuses on the woman's face, remaining there as she recalls:

"I was lying on top of him. Yes, the moment of his death truly escaped me because at that moment and, even afterwards, yes, I can say that, even afterwards, I could not find the slightest difference between his dead body and my own. Between his body and mine, I could find nothing but glaring similarities."³³

The stylistic choice of focusing upon the woman's face instead of a flashback suggests that the traumatic event marks the point at which words cannot represent action, or in Kristeva's words, 'a crisis of signification' (as the site of trauma remains unrepresentable). The tactile relation between the woman from Nevers and her dying lover blurs the boundaries between the two as the alignment of her body on top of his reveals 'glaring similarities,' rather than 'the slightest difference.' This can be read in proximity to Malabou's notion of the 'new wound,' as a psychological death. The tactile contact between the lovers instigates the point at which the woman from Nevers is psychologically wounded, which is echoed in her internal dialogue of 'you're destroying me,' for she subsumes the death of her lover into herself. The destruction of form that occurs as a result of trauma, according to Malabou, gives way to creation, 'a postlesional plasticity that is not the plasticity of reconstruction but the default formation of a new identity with loss as its premise.'³⁴ The woman from Nevers can be read as a 'new wounded' subject, as through the traumatic event her 'new identity' is invented around the site of loss.

The recollection of the woman's psychological wound not only marks the point of separation between her two lovers, but also between herself and the man from Hiroshima, as the traumatic event and site of loss impact each other's ability to reach toward and touch one another affectively. This situates the woman as figuratively untouchable, which moves the bodies away from each other tactilely. The voicing of trauma, of giving the traumatic event significance in the present moment, moves the woman from Nevers and the man from Hiroshima away from one another, indicating the way in which trauma impacts what one may be permitted to touch in another. In this moment of recollection, the woman from Nevers is lost to the man from Hiroshima, trapped in her past and no longer reachable nor touchable. As the woman turns back

toward the man, she raises her voice to finally speak directly to him: "Do you understand? He was my first love!"³⁵ This rare act of affective utterance momentarily breaks the 'affective impoverishment' of either toneless speech or improper use of affect throughout the film, such as the lovers breaking into laughter without any apparent act or speech precipitating this affect. The unknown woman's momentary affective outburst heightens the separation between herself and the man from Hiroshima, accentuating the extent to which he is unable to reach her, or figuratively and literally touch her affectively, in the same way as this past memory. The inability to reach the woman may suggest why the man from Hiroshima, as a response to her outburst, suddenly slaps her twice. This sudden shock of problematic violence disrupts the scene's action as the other actors pause and turn to face the couple. The shock of such physical contact creates a temporal shift in the narrative that brings the woman out of her past and back into the present moment. This hyperbolic tactile response operates as a way of returning the woman back to the present. When the ability to touch affectively is diminished, the man's tactile violence propounds a greater affect and more tangible sensation, than the sound of his voice or his previous caresses that signalled too close a resemblance to the touch of the woman's dead lover. This violent tactile contact can be read as a violent attempt to still reach the woman from Nevers. The woman's lack of reaction to both being slapped and the man from Hiroshima taking grip of her shoulders suggests her return to a present, embodied as an 'affective impoverishment' of words and reactions as the smile indicates that the ensuing 'crisis of signification,' due to collective and individual trauma of this event, has resumed.

The economy of touch is arrested by the presence of trauma and loss. The act of telling her traumatic story marks the moment that the woman from Nevers betrays her dead lover. By uttering the origin of her trauma, the woman's behaviour shifts toward the man from Hiroshima. As a consequence the separation between the two appears more palpable. Although the woman from Nevers and the man from Hiroshima oscillate between moving toward and away from each other, their tactile contact appears more strained and infrequent. They can no longer reach

each other tactilely. As the characters embrace, the woman commands: 'Get away from me!'³⁶ Due to the woman speaking of this trauma, the present is now saturated with the past, which materialises as a barrier between the lovers. As the distance grows between the two lovers, the function of the gaze enters the scene in an alternative way to the opening scene, marking the palpable loss and sense of absence at the film's centre. The indiscernible images of clasping bodies enables the viewer to engage with 'haptic visuality.' Yet in the bar scene that is reminiscent of *Casablanca*, the two characters sit at different tables and gaze at each other. The gaze between the woman from Nevers and the man from Hiroshima can be read as simultaneously accentuating their attempt to still reach toward and touch each other as well as the separation between them that illustrates their inability to do so. The transmission of trauma renders the lovers unreachable to each other. At the center of their tactile relations is the knowledge of loss, both in terms of the woman's trauma, as well as the woman departing to Paris soon, signalling the end of their affair. The man from Hiroshima speaks: 'I'd have preferred it if you had died in Nevers.'³⁷ This sentiment, voiced similarly by the unknown man in *The Malady of Death*, implies that the woman's literal death would be preferable for the man from Hiroshima, compared to her psychical death where she presently lives as the embodiment of death. The traumatic event is what brings the two lovers together, as the origin of their encounter and the moment, if it had not occurred, of when the man from Hiroshima states: 'I almost lost you and ran the risk of never ever meeting you.' In this regard, the man from Hiroshima states his preference for her literal death, which would have resulted in them never meeting, over his experience of a psychical death, due to the way in which he will lose the woman from Nevers when she returns to Paris. In the film's dénouement, the man from Hiroshima holds the woman from Nevers as they name each other by their sites of loss:

"Hiroshima. Hiroshima. That's your name."

"It's my name. And your name is Nevers. Nevers, in France."³⁸

The tactile contact between the man and woman accentuates this final act of naming. The man gripping the woman's arms stresses their final connection with each other as the sites of collective and individual trauma. The repetition of 'Hiroshima' and 'Nevers' signals the act of remembering, of repeating the trauma, and stressing the relationship each have to these names. The staccato form of full stops after each utterance of Hiroshima signals the finality of this naming. Hiroshima's confirmation, 'it's my name,' marks the moment that he embodies this loss. Hiroshima's final positioning in the film is as the site of collective trauma in relation to Nevers' individual trauma. The two lovers, naming each other through collective and individual trauma, are remembered through their absences as an encounter with the loss in another.

Tactile Ravishment: *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*

The Ravishing of Lol Stein is part of the 'India cycle,' an extended text that spans across three texts: *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, *The Vice-Consul* (1965), and *L'Amour* (1971). *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* is in dialogue with the succeeding texts in the cycle. A number of critics have commented on the circulation at work in Duras's trilogy. Sharon Willis remarks that 'Duras' writing circulates a set of signifiers. [...] But this is circulation at a loss.'³⁹ This circulation connects the texts to the past and to loss, stressing the way in which the past impacts upon the present as '[t]his exchange is predicated on and by loss, a loss continually circulating, draining the text of "significance."⁴⁰ Through this circulation of signifiers that never quite reach their signifieds, Duras' experimental form stresses the impact of traumatic events upon modes of relationality. This reads as a continual interruption between actions (in this case the act of touching) and words that emerges within the text through the form, style, and disconnection between the signifier and the signified. In *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, due to the insidious level of violence in the language and the account of such events being narrated by Jack Hold, rather than Lol Stein, Duras' text can be read as stressing the impact of trauma on Lol's ability to signify within the text and have agency in relaying her own account of

ravishment. Tatiana, Lol's old school friend, observes Lol's absence. Hold states: 'there was already something lacking in Lol, something which kept her from being, in Tatiana's word, "there."⁴¹ Although Lol is situated as a void within the text, unable to signify as a speaking subject, Lol's body 'speaks' for her by revealing the presence of trauma through her response to touch and the haptic gaze. I read Duras' use of the gaze once more through Marks' analysis of haptic visuality, suggesting that according to Hold's narration, Lol's eyes function 'like organs of touch,'⁴² and in doing so, act as a form of ravishing. Lol's gaze challenges Hold's narration by indicating her ability to affectively touch back. Hold's encounter with Lol Stein is relayed as tactilely encountering a body predicated on loss. Yet the gaze between Lol and the narrator, Jack Hold, insinuates Lol's ability to vicariously participate in tactile relations when she is positioned as figuratively untouchable. In tactile relation to Jack Hold, Lol, as a trauma subject, exhibits what Malabou remarks of the 'new wounded' as 'an inability to be touched affectively,'⁴³ as such tactile contact between Hold and Lol calls forth the memory of her previous fiancé, Michael Richardson. Yet Duras's use of the gaze offers textual resistance to Hold's narration by demonstrating Lol's ability to affectively touch back through the figurative touch of her gaze.

Although *The Ravishing of Lol Stein* seems fixated on Lol's apparent shock at being left by her fiancé, Michael Richardson, at the age of seventeen at a ball in the seaside resort of Town Beach, the novel's title suggests a more complex reading of Lol's 'affective impoverishment' and questionable recovery. The word 'ravishing' infers the possibility of 'rape,' potentially by Michael Richardson, or the narrator, Jack Hold, though this is never explicitly confirmed. In *The Novel After Theory*, Judith Ryan remarks on Jacques Lacan's analysis of the word '*ravissement*' in the French title:

Two sets of alternative readings offer themselves, he explains: first, the word *ravissement* means both "rapture" and "rape" second, the word "of" can be read as both an objective and a subjective genitive. Is Lol raped or enraptured? Does she prey on (metaphorically: rape) the other characters, or is she swept away in the course of her involvement with them?⁴⁴

Taking up the title's ambiguity as to whether Lol is raped or whether she preys on the other characters, I explore the tactile relation between Lol and Hold throughout the text. The problematic positioning of Jack Hold as narrator, who relays, invents, and ultimately forces his analysis upon Lol Stein, implies a continual ravishing of Lol. Throughout the novel, however, the language that Hold uses to describe Lol's actions, such as 'despotically'⁴⁵ and 'ensnares,'⁴⁶ situates Hold as feeling preyed upon by Lol. Hold's obsessive fixation on Lol Stein's trauma, the lingering presence of Michel Richardson and Hold's remarks on the similarities between himself and Richardson, as well as Hold's interpretation of Lol's actions toward himself, can be read as framing the text as one where Hold believes himself to be ravished (seized and carried off by force, or metaphorically raped) by Lol. Hold therefore constructs a narrative of Lol ravishing him and of wanting to be ravished:

She wants to follow. Follow, then take by surprise, threaten to surprise. She has wanted to for some time. If she wants to be taken by surprise in her turn, she does not want this to happen before she has decided on it.⁴⁷

Hold makes numerous assumptions of what Lol desires, attempting to claim that Lol's actions are deliberate and calculated. Hold assumes that Lol initially wants to follow and take by surprise, which is sexually suggestive. The word, 'threatens,' conjures an insidious level of violence and intention to cause pain, positioning Lol as the initial aggressor. Hold suggests that Lol wants to similarly be taken by surprise in this way, as if it is her desire (one that Hold problematically acts upon and carries out within the novel's *dénouement*). The use of 'decided on it' presents a level of control that Hold projects onto Lol in the forthcoming events. As Bourke stresses, the original perception of trauma altered the perception of victims, as victims of rape were often asked whether they were complicit in such events. Lol is positioned as a site of loss within the text, which touches back, threatening Hold's sense of sovereignty. Hold's unreliable narration generates ambiguity throughout the text, often reading as an account of victim-blaming, as Hold insinuates that Lol is complicit in the ensuing events.

Hold's account of ravishment can be read through his gradual loss of 'self' as he increasingly positions himself with Michael Richardson in relation to Lol. From Hold's perspective, the haptic communication between himself and Lol Stein is predicated on loss, as an encounter with Lol's trauma that drains his significance within the text. The language used by Hold reveals a tactility to this experience of loss in relation to Lol: 'let her consume and crush me with the rest,' 'everything is leaving me, my life, my life.'⁴⁸ The repetition of 'my life, my life' stresses this draining of significance, as if Hold is attempting to grasp onto the remainders of his life that are slipping away within the utterance itself. Montagu's definition of 'haptic,' which denotes 'that mentally extended sense of touch'⁴⁹ is relevant here. Haptic communication refers to the way in which individuals interact with one another and their surroundings via the sense of touch, and it plays a significant role in forming interpersonal relationships through providing interactions that are both nonverbal and nonvisual. The term *haptic* stresses the ability of touch to mentally extend beyond the present moment of experiencing tactile contact. The mental extension of touch demonstrates that this sense blends an individual's 'perception of the visual world'⁵⁰ with what they have 'felt in past associations.'⁵¹ The sense of touch functions as a mediator between one's perceptions and one's memories. This becomes increasingly apparent in Hold's tactile contact with Lol, as well as his experience of Lol's gaze.

The obscuring of boundaries between the memory of Michael Richardson and Jack Hold is evident through the way that Hold relays his experience of tactile relations with Lol. Hold feels this tactile contact as a 'haunting' of past forms of touch:

I've become awkward. Just as my hands touch Lol, the memory of an unknown man, now dead, comes back to me: he will serve as the eternal Richardson, the man from Town Beach, we will be mingled with him, willy-nilly, all together, we shall no longer be able to recognize one from the other, neither before, nor after, nor during, we shall lose sight of one another, forget our names, in this way we shall die for having forgotten – piece by piece, moment by moment, name by name – death.⁵²

Lol remains figuratively untouchable as Hold's tactile contact does not reach her, but alternatively brings forth the memory of Michael Richardson. According to Hold's account, Lol is no longer figuratively within reach of other bodies, instead, through the 'haunting' of her touch, Lol transmits her trauma, which seizes or arrests Hold and makes him 'awkward' in his initial reaching toward Lol. The subject, Lol, is displaced in her own skin and in turn displaces others. In this instance, Hold states that '[j]ust as my hands touch Lol, the memory of an unknown man, now dead, comes back to me.' Lol's skin remains figuratively untouchable, as Hold's active touch stimulates the memory of Richardson, rather than Lol, suggesting that the skin exhibits a form of memory that can be transmitted and accessed via touch. The hands, touching, serve as an active way of communicating memory, revealing the mental extension of touch to temporally exceed any present moment by eliciting the memory of Richardson, as if Lol's skin is etched with this loss.

The form produces a rapid, rhythmic build-up that creates a sense of anxiety around the progression toward Lol and Hold losing 'sight of one another.' The accumulation of words begins with the colon that signifies what will transpire from this touch filled with the memory of an unknown man. The tumbling arrangement of words in this extended sentence: 'we will be mingled with him, willy-nilly, all together, we shall no longer be able to recognize one from the other, neither before, nor after, nor during, we shall lose sight of one another, forget our names, in this way we shall die for having forgotten,' replicates the movement of the physical mingling of the characters together within the touch. The lack of full stops emphasises the conflation of words building toward a merging of subjects who eventually lose all form of separation until the inevitable moment of death: 'we shall lose sight of one another, forget our names, in this way we shall die for having forgotten – piece by piece, moment by moment, name by name – death.' The dashes brace the reader for the ultimate dénouement – 'death.' The pause before this moment heightens the finality of this statement, which implies that to lose oneself in tactile relation to another is equivalent to the death of the subject. The end of this

passage parallels the beginning, as the unknown man, 'now dead,' displaces Lol and Hold, who experiences a psychological death of his own. The use of the term 'willy-nilly' may be a reference to Richardson, an instance of free-indirect discourse that emphasises the extent to which Richardson, as the locus of trauma, has infiltrated Lol's sense of being. For Hold, the spectral memory of Richardson is embedded within Lol as a haunting, an imposition of a 'dead person' who has taken possession, or at the very least irreparably altered, Lol's subjectivity. Lol is absent in the present situation where Hold's touch does not penetrate her skin, but instead penetrates the past: the memories inscribed upon and within Lol's body from a time before such loss encapsulated her subjectivity.

By presenting tactile contact with Lol as an encounter with the loss of Michael Richardson, which Lol houses within her body, Hold expresses the threat such a relation poses to inciting the potential loss of himself. The gaze, through the relationship between the observed (Hold) and observer (Lol), takes on an additional function and significance within the text, as a form of touching in itself that similarly arrests Hold's movement toward Lol. Reading Duras' use of the gaze as a form of 'haptic visuality,' Hold's narration of events suggests that Lol's eyes function similar to organs of touch, and in doing so, act as a form of ravishing: 'the man Lol is looking for suddenly finds himself in the direct line of her gaze, Lol, her head on Tatiana's shoulder, sees him: he almost lost his balance, he turned his head away.'⁵³ By speaking in third person, Hold obscures his position as narrator within the text, only revealing at a later point that 'the man Lol is looking for' is himself. The use of 'himself,' 'him' and 'he' distances Hold from this experience of Lol's gaze, perhaps illuminating the objectification of this gaze that positions Hold as object, rather than subject in this encounter. In this instance, Hold loses his sense of sovereignty when meeting Lol's gaze, which figuratively touches him and arrests his movement: 'he almost lost his balance.' As I stated in the Introduction, Duras suggests that women must appropriate language, rupturing conventional language that negates them by creating a new language from the darkness. Duras' use of Lol's gaze can be read as an

appropriation of the male narrator's language, by presenting a visceral, non-verbal language that disrupts Hold's ability to signify within the text.

Lol's gaze, as a form of 'haptic visuality,' not only functions as a sense of figurative touch, but also as a trigger for Lol's memory. The gaze operates as a way of implicating Lol within the intimate and private scenes between Jack Hold and Tatiana Karl at the Forest Hotel. According to Hold, 'Lol remembers this hotel from the times she went there as a young girl with Michael Richardson. [...] It was there that Michael Richardson told her he loved her.'⁵⁴ When Lol gazes up at the window of Hold and Tatiana's room, these characters function as mediators between Lol's past and present. The relationship between the object perceived and the subject's memory is mediated by the body, as the objects gazed upon, in this case Jack Hold and Tatiana, bring forth the subject's (Lol's) memory and associations to certain forms of touch and surface textures. When Lol is in the rye field looking up at the window of light emanating from Hold and Tatiana's hotel room, Hold presumes that Lol's present gaze merges with the recollection of past memories of when she used to meet her fiancé at the same hotel:

The rye rustles beneath her loins. Young, early-summer rye. Her eyes riveted on the lighted window, a woman hearkens to the void – feeding upon, devouring this non-existent, invisible spectacle, the light from a room where others are.

In the distance, with fairy-like fingers, the recollection of a certain memory flits past. It grazes Lol not long after she has lain down in the field, it portrays for her, at this late evening hour in the field of rye, this woman who is gazing up at a small rectangular window, a narrow stage, circumscribed as a stone, on which no actor has yet appeared.⁵⁵

The initial image of rye rustling 'beneath her loins' evokes a tactile, sexual image. Within this narrative the reader is positioned as spectator. The perspective then shifts as the narrative positions itself with Lol's gaze: 'Her eyes riveted on the lighted window.' This gaze does not function merely as a form of seeing, but as a form of embodiment, as it 'hearkens to the void' within Lol Stein, instigating through the dash in the sentence a connection to the bodily responses it evokes. These visceral notions of consuming the image before her, 'feeding upon,' and 'devouring' the spectacle she cannot entirely perceive, emphasise the way in which

perception takes on a form of touch and embodiment. Lol's gaze takes on a form of haptic visuality as she cannot distinctly perceive the entire object, which entails the knowledge of 'a room where others are.' She may only 'graze' and move over the surface image of the lighted window, with the sentence's repetition of the light suggesting that this functions as a type of beacon, implicating Lol in this gaze as it hearkens her back to the void within herself, and in turn, to the memories of her own experiences of that lighted room.

The temporality of the scene shifts once more, situating the present gaze as a recollection of past mental images: 'In the distance, with fairy-like fingers, the recollection of a certain memory flits past.' The light in the room functions as what Marks terms, 'attentive recognition,' as Lol's gaze moves 'between seeing the object, recalling virtual images that it brings to mind, and comparing the virtual object thus created with the one before us.'⁵⁶ The act of this recollection grazing Lol is further stressed by the fluidity of the written form that moves across Lol's thoughts. The word 'graze' emphasises the tactility of this memory, as the body becomes the mediator within the viewing process. According to Marks, the gaze serves to 'reactivate a viewer's complex of memory-images at the same time that it creates the object for perception.'⁵⁷ As this passage conflates past and present, Lol's gaze is mediated through the body that both experiences the rustling of the rye, as well as 'the recollection of a certain memory,' presumably of her own experience of being in a similar room with Michael Richardson, that is triggered by her gaze upon the window.

When Hold becomes aware of Lol's presence in the rye field, the violent reaction that ensues insinuates Lol's ability (positioned as object in this instance) to touch back. Lol's gaze arouses in Hold 'a very violent reaction'. He states:

I could not immediately define, something between terror and disbelief, horror and pleasure, and I was tempted by turn to cry out some warning, offer help, thrust her away forever, or involve myself forever with Lol Stein [...].⁵⁸

The figurative touch of Lol's gaze elicits 'terror and disbelief,' and 'horror and pleasure.' Hold oscillates between attraction and repulsion, of simultaneously desiring to 'thrust her away

forever' or 'involve myself forever.' Such a volatile response implies that Hold's encounter with Lol is one of abjection as Hold's violent reaction stresses the threat that Lol's gaze signifies to his sovereignty. Marks states: 'When vision is like touch, the object's touch back may be like a caress, though it may also be violent, as Steven Shaviro argues—a violence not toward the image but toward the viewer.'⁵⁹ At first, Hold is unsure as to whether or not he is perceiving Lol in the rye fields, it is a partial view before his focus abruptly shifts to viewing the object (Lol) as whole and distinct, when he confirms that the 'grayish blondness' of the woman's hair could leave 'no doubt whatsoever'⁶⁰ as to the figure's identity. Since '[h]aptic visuality implies making oneself vulnerable to the image, reversing the relation of mastery that characterizes optical viewing,'⁶¹ Hold's violent reaction indicates the threat he perceives to opening himself up to the object's ability to touch back and be implicated by this gaze. In this regard, Hold's experience of the gaze operates as Lol's way of touching back, or ravishing Hold as she seizes his sense of 'self.'

Hold's narrative contends that Lol ravishes the characters with her gaze, which figuratively touches and arrests their movements. Hold's literal tactile relation with Lol Stein suggests that Lol's touch transmits trauma and is experienced as an encounter with loss. The violence of Hold's language to describe Lol's actions propounds the supposed level of threat he feels in terms of losing himself in relation to Lol. Hold's continual manipulation of the narrative and analytical assumptions of Lol Stein's actions may therefore be read as Hold's attempt to situate Lol as complicit in his final act of ravishment. Duras' experimental practice, however, offers a feminist challenge to Hold's narrative through moments of textual resistance. Hold narrates:

She's going down to the beach to wait for me. I go to a hotel. I rent the room, I ask questions someone answers, I pay. I'm with her waiting for me: the tide is finally coming back in, it drowns the blue marshes one after the other until, progressively, slowly but surely, they lose their individuality and are made one with the sea, some are already gone, others still await their turn.⁶²

Hold positions himself as the active agent who secures the hotel room. Yet Duras shifts to Lol's perspective by positioning Hold as being 'with her waiting for me.' This shift signals a moment of Lol's free indirect speech, disrupting Hold's practical, non-emotive and objective use of language. Duras' employment of poetic and visceral language resists Hold's analytical stance. Unlike the staccato rhythm of Hold's objective narration that presents his actions in securing a room, Lol's perception alters the form, presenting a fluidity to the scene's tempo. The commas imitate the tide's movement in the elongated sentence: 'the tide is finally coming back in, it drowns the blue marshes one after the other until, progressively, slowly but surely, they lose their individuality and are made one with the sea, some are already gone, others still await their turn.' The imagery of the tide drowning the blue marshes reveals a depressive undercurrent to Lol's thoughts, stressing the vulnerability of Lol's current situation. The image of the marshes losing 'their individuality' and becoming 'one with the sea' may point toward Lol's own loss of individuality and her awareness of what is about to happen as she waits and anticipates the 'death' of herself in tactile relation to Hold.

The excessive amount of blank space following this passage provides space for Lol's trauma to enter the text as the unspoken, or unspeakable, loss at the centre.⁶³ The blankness provides space for Lol's silence. The reader can pause to absorb the comparison between the imagery of the tide drowning and signalling 'the death of the marches,' which according to Hold, 'fills Lol with a frightful sadness,' as 'she waits, anticipates it, sees it happen,'⁶⁴ and the scene that is about to follow. Hold states: 'Lol dreams of another time when the same thing that is going to happen would happen differently. In another way. A thousand times. Everywhere. Elsewhere.'⁶⁵ The tactile encounter between Hold and Lol is imbued with this notion of Lol being 'elsewhere' within another time, signalling that this present moment triggers the recollection of a previous encounter. For Lol Stein, the tangible sensation of Hold's touch presumably triggers associations with the past and transports her 'elsewhere.'

Throughout the text, Duras' experimental practice brings to light the ambivalent nature of violence, demonstrating the limitations of conventional language to fully articulate the violence of touch when one does not incur an apparent physical or bodily injury during such tactile exchanges. As Bourke remarks, the way that sexual assault and rape victims have been historically understood in narratives of trauma dismissed the psychological impact of such events as they were 'situated within 'normal' sexual practices.'⁶⁶ According to Bourke, '[i]t might even be argued that it was precisely because rape was seen to be such a serious bodily injury that women were not liable to suffer traumatic neuroses as a result of it.'⁶⁷ When the damage incurred is psychological, rather than physical, the trauma remains invisible upon the body's surface. What is deemed violent is predicated on one's subjective perception of what is felt as violent tactile contact, and without physical evidence or Lol's agency in relaying the event, Hold's account of the event presents such actions as admissible. During the sexual encounter between Lol and Hold, Lol does not have agency over the narration. Although Lol's speech interjects briefly, it is the way that Lol's body 'speaks' that illuminates the presence of trauma throughout the scene. Hold's language, though ambiguous, implicitly reveals the violence of his actions. Hold states: 'I'm obliged to undress her. She won't do it herself. Now she is naked.'⁶⁸ The use of 'obliged' stresses that this act is unwanted by Lol as Hold must do this for her. Lol's lack of engagement throughout the scene demonstrates the way in which violence arrests her body's movements, paralysing her ability to be an active agent. Hold remarks:

Stretched out on the bed, she does not move a muscle. She is worried. She is motionless, remains there where I placed her. Her eyes follow me across the room as I undress, as though I were a stranger. Who is it? The crisis is here. An attack brought on by the way we are now, here in this room, she and I alone.⁶⁹

Violence arrests the movement of Lol's body, as she remains 'motionless' where Hold has placed her and 'does not move a muscle.' The staccato relaying of Lol's actions: 'she does not move,' 'she is worried,' and 'she is motionless' heightens Lol's paralysis to act within the scene.

As Lol's gaze follows Hold, his movements position him as a 'stranger' to Lol. Since Hold is the one perceiving himself as a 'stranger' through Lol's gaze, this suggests that the affective touch of Lol's gaze alienates Hold from himself. The scene is disrupted by Hold's abrupt posing of the question, 'Who is it?' Although Hold implies that Lol is the one to ask this, the proximity between positioning himself as a 'stranger' and asking 'Who is it?' insinuates Hold's own loss of self in relation to Lol. The interruption and stark change from the present scene to 'the crisis,' which is described as 'an attack brought on by the way we are now,' alludes to this situation, for Lol, triggering associations to past trauma. Hold's account suggests that this scene is conflated with 'an attack' that signals Lol's recollection of another time when the same thing happened.

The sexual act itself is ambiguous and obscure. Hold does not report any willingness or pleasure in Lol's responses to tactile contact. The opposite is in fact implied:

I lie down beside her, beside her closed body. [...] I caress her without looking at her.
"You're hurting me."
I keep on. By the feel of my fingers I recognize the contours of a woman's body. I draw flowers upon it. Her whimpered resistance ceases. She is no longer moving, now doubtless remembers that she is here with Tatiana Karl's lover.⁷⁰

The repetition of 'beside her' stresses the separation and disconnection between the two bodies (particularly with the reference to Lol's body as 'closed'). The passage discloses the disengagement between Hold and Lol as the words to describe certain actions, such as 'caress' and 'draw flowers' upon Lol's skin, do not correlate with Lol's response of 'You're hurting me.' Although 'caress' denotes a gentle, soft or loving touch, Lol's response explicitly indicates a level of violence, pain, and discomfort in her experience of Hold's touch. Hold states 'I keep on,' without any indication of an affective response to Lol's decisive assertion of 'You're hurting me.' Hold entirely discounts Lol's subjective experience of this encounter, caressing her 'without looking at her' and noting that '[b]y the feel of my fingers I recognize the contours of a woman's body.' Rather than referring to Lol's body, Hold addresses what he feels as 'the contours of a woman's body' stressing the separation between Lol, who is absent, and her body.

The language reads as dismissive, as although Hold caresses and draws flowers upon Lol's skin, he carries out these actions while simultaneously denying Lol his gaze, which in turn, denies Lol's ability to affectively touch back with her gaze. Lol's 'whimpered resistance' gradually ceasing reveals that Lol was initially resisting and is now resigned. Although Lol materialises throughout the text as a site of loss, impoverished of affect in her relation to others, within this encounter Hold's account discloses an instance of Lol exhibiting affect. Although Lol lacks agency within the encounter, her body emerges as the site to vocalise her affective response to such tactile contact in the form of 'whimpered resistance.'

Hold's final statement: 'now doubtless remembers that she is here with Tatiana Karl's lover' implies that from Hold's perspective Lol's 'whimpered resistance' and response of 'You're hurting me' was addressed to someone else, as a remembered encounter or flashback to previous trauma that emerges through tactile contact. There is no subject named within this utterance, as Lol remains absent in Hold's statement, which accentuates Lol's loss of subjectivity within the encounter. Lol's 'whimpered resistance' apparently ceases as she gradually remembers who she is with during this present moment. Although Lol materialises throughout the text as the site of loss, lacking agency and unable to signify as a speaking subject, Lol's body 'speaks' for her as the presence of trauma emerges through Lol's non-verbal body language. Though impoverished, Lol's bodily affect cannot be controlled or regulated in her relation to Hold. Lol's gaze affectively touches Hold, arresting his movements and eliciting a violent reaction, and Lol's skin transmits her trauma through haptic communication, which threatens Hold's sovereignty through his identification with Michael Richardson in relation to Lol. Duras' experimental practice offers textual resistance to Hold's narration of events by demonstrating Lol's ability to touch back through haptic visuality.

The Abjection of Touch: *The Malady of Death*

The term 'abjection' originates from the Latin, *abicere*, which translates as 'to throw away' or 'to cast off, away, or out.' In relation to touch, I take up the term 'abjection' as denoting the desire to move away from, repel, cast off, or entirely remove oneself from tactile contact, due to the way in which touch may threaten one's borders. In *The Malady of Death*, I explore what it is to be abject as the unknown woman is positioned throughout the text as figuratively untouchable, since she poses a threat to the unknown man's sovereignty. I read *The Malady of Death* in close proximity to Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980). To clarify what is abject, Kristeva uses the example of skin on the surface of milk: 'When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk – harmless, thin as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring – I experience a gagging sensation,⁷¹ and this, followed by a sense of nausea, is what 'separates me from the mother and father who proffer it.'⁷² The 'I' does not want to assimilate any element or 'sign of their desire.'⁷³ Nonetheless, as the 'I' attempts to expel the surface skin of the milk, this 'I' is confronted with the fact that 'the food is not an "other" for "me," who am only in their desire.'⁷⁴ In this instance, the milk's thin layer of skin is abject through the feeling of contamination that it provokes internally. The subject's sovereignty is momentarily lost in the encounter with the abject, which is neither an object that can be expelled from the 'self,' nor subject in its own right. Instead, the abject is the in-between, the 'me' and 'not-me' all at once that threatens to breakdown meaning, due to the loss of this distinction between the subject and object. The milk skin, upon touching one's lips, stimulates one's gag reflex as the body attempts to expel that which has already crossed the subject's boundary and taken the precarious in-between position of neither subject nor object. Through crossing the boundary, the non-object threatens the stability of 'self' and renders the subject too unstable to expel it. Instead, Kristeva remarks: 'I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*.'⁷⁵

In English, 'abject' is defined as an adjective that has two different, yet similar and related meanings. According to Rina Arya, the terms 'abjection' and 'abject' may be used in differing ways, 'to refer to an operation (to make abject) and a condition (abjection)'⁷⁶:

In the first sense, 'abjection' refers to an impulse or operation to reject that which disturbs or threatens the stability of the self and is unassimilable. [...]. Secondly, it refers to the 'wretched condition' (Hopkins, 2000, p. 225) of being in this state, when one has experienced the abject, or has been rendered abject.⁷⁷

There is a distinction between these two terms whereby one is the verb, to abject, and the other is to be abject. In *The Malady of Death*, the characters encounter this dualism of abjection. The man, in the first instance, finds the form of the woman's body to be unpleasant, and desires to reject this body that threatens and disturbs his stability, or unity of 'self.' The woman, on the other hand, is rendered abject, embodying the unbearable, untouchable abjection of tactile relations, which often evokes thoughts of violence from the man. In *Hiroshima Mon Amour* the man from Hiroshima, in relation to the woman from Nevers, merges with the memory of the German lover, resulting in a loss of 'self' through this identification. Here, in *The Malady of Death*, I argue that to reach toward and touch another is likened to touching the death of oneself in tactile relation to another. The woman does not figure as the 'original' site of death or loss in the novel: she does not entomb the death of a previous lover. Instead, themes of death and loss emerge through the woman's present encounter with the man's malady of death. The man transmits his sense of death, and loss of 'self,' onto the woman's body. This threat to the man's sovereignty is experienced as abject in relation to the woman's body, which breaks down the economy of touch since neither bodies are open to each other as the man either orientates himself away from the woman's body, or demands that the woman arrest her movement toward him, in terms of suggesting any openness or affective response or reaction to his touch.

Duras' novel stages an encounter with the abjection of being in relation to another. Two nameless characters share the space of a bare room, housing only a bed in a spotlight, where they often sleep naked and alternate between touching and not touching. Abjection is

experienced when the subject encounters the threat and inability to distinguish between itself and other, which can be read as the threat of the subject's death in relation to another through the loss of one's borders. The abject is what unsettles the subject and disrupts their sense of sovereignty, both temporally and spatially, as the subject enters what Imogen Tyler denotes as a 'zone between being and non-being,'⁷⁸ which according to Kristeva is the 'border of my condition as a living being.'⁷⁹ In *The Malady of Death*, the tactile relations between the two characters can be read as the man's experiencing of an encounter with touching the loss of himself in another, and the woman's experiencing of an encounter with death as 'she didn't know death could be lived.'⁸⁰ The man transmits the malady of death onto the woman's body: 'You look at the malady of your life, the malady of death. It's on her, on her sleeping body, that you look at it.'⁸¹ By projecting his own malady onto her body, the man attempts to expel this internal malady that threatens his borders and place it outside of himself. The projection of this malady is reinforced by the repetition of 'look' and 'her'. The man looks at his malady, then places it upon the woman, repeating 'on her,' as if to convince himself of this projection. The awkward use of the comma before 'that you look at it' circulates this sentence back to the initial 'you look at the malady of your life,' implying that he is unable to 'look at it' until he projects 'it' onto 'her sleeping body,' which materialises as a visible representation of this malady.

Throughout the text, the man's rhythmic move toward and away from touching the woman's body exhibits the dualistic nature of the abject. According to Arya: '[w]e are both repelled by the abject (because of fear) and yet attracted to it (through our desire).'⁸² What is deemed abject – the woman's body – frames their tactile relations in regard to what extent the man is willing to reach toward and touch such a body:

And then you do it. I couldn't say why. I see you do it without knowing why. You could go out of the room and leave the body, the sleeping form. [...] You do it, you go back towards the body.⁸³

The man oscillates between moving toward and away from the woman's body. The use of the second-person pronoun aligns the reader with the perspective of the man, altering how one may

read the text affectively. It is 'you' – the man and reader – who may have paid the woman, and who may have said 'I want you to come every night for a few nights.'⁸⁴ The commanding and instructing utterance of the word 'you,' however, ushers in an alienation from this textual positioning. The command of you, for instance, 'You say,'⁸⁵ 'You accept,'⁸⁶ 'You watch,'⁸⁷ 'You stop looking,'⁸⁸ removes the affect of these words as it presents a command in terms of what should be experienced, rather than of what is being experienced. There is no longer an immediacy to the action, but a delay between the signifier and the signified, as through the use of 'you' the narrator, who is positioned as 'I' within the text, commands, infers, and dictates the man's actions and responses, creating a distance between himself and his actions. The man is no longer in control of his own actions, but is instead following another's orders. This technique reduces the tactile interactions to the acts themselves without affect, creating the 'affective impoverishment' of the text. Yet by doing so, the text inadvertently indicates the way in which affect, though diminished, cannot be assuaged entirely. The residue of affect still lingers in the man's actions, as he moves 'back towards the body' 'without knowing why.' He cannot control the affect evoked by this body so close in proximity to his own. The man cannot rationalise, or know why he moves toward the woman's body for it is not a decision made consciously, but a bodily response that draws him to her. The repetition of 'you do it' incites the build-up of anticipation in this deliberation and inability to refuse the draw of the woman's body, stressing the significance of the man's move toward such a body. The passage exemplifies the repulsion and attraction of the abject. The man, though he may desire to 'go out of the room and leave the body,' does not succumb to the fear of abjection, revealing that the attraction of what is abject is more provocative and leads him 'back towards the body.'

In Duras' text, the man's encounter with abjection can be read in proximity to Ahmed's notion of an 'orientation device'⁸⁹ as the man's responses to abjection orientate these bodies toward and away from each other, depending on the degree to which these tactile relations threaten his subjecthood. In *The Malady of Death*, the haptic nature of the gaze figuratively

touches the body, arresting or permitting the man's ability to reach toward the woman's body.

In an instance of 'haptic visuality' the man encounters the woman's gaze as unbearable:

Then you realize it's not the color of her eyes that will always be an insurmountable barrier between you and her. No, not the color – you know that would be somewhere between green and gray. Not the color, no. The look.

The look.

You realize she's looking at you.

You cry out. She turns to the wall.⁹⁰

When the man deliberates on the 'insurmountable barrier between you and her,' it is not the physical aspect of the eyes themselves that creates the separation. In this regard, the body is not the insurmountable barrier, stressing difference, for the eyes' colour can be recognised. The physical properties of the body can be recognised and comprehended. Instead, it is the man's proprioception (awareness and perception of the body's position and movement) of the woman's body that materialises as the 'insurmountable barrier.' The dash indicates the reflective deductions of the man's thoughts, with 'no' continuously affirming that he has yet to infer the real cause of this barrier. The clipped sentence: 'The look.' breaks the reflection as the man's focus shifts from debating the eye colour to recognising that the barrier resides in the actions of the eyes and the affect such a 'look' provokes. The caesura between 'The look' and the repetition of 'The look' on the next line incites a break between reflection and action, as upon reflection the man is now made aware of 'The look' and that 'she's looking' at him. The gaze figuratively touches the man evoking the affective response of crying out. 'The look' signals the woman's power to evoke a bodily response from the man. When the body is perceived as an object with physical properties, such as eye colour, the man can render this body separate from himself, the subject. Through the animation of the eyes, the gaze reveals the 'insurmountable barrier' by exemplifying the fragility of this barrier as the woman's gaze implicates the man's body and causes him to revolt. In this instance, the woman's body materialises on the in-between border, which denies the man's ability to detach and separate himself from the woman completely. When in relation to each other, it is the blurred boundary

between 'me' and 'not-me' that both creates and defines the 'insurmountable barrier' between the man and woman, as well as threatens such a barrier by provoking the body's affective responses, such as that of the man crying out. The woman's gaze is met by the man's gaze, they briefly reach toward each other, yet the figurative touch of this gaze causes the man to 'cry out,' which directs the woman to turn 'to the wall.' The man's responses orientate their bodies in relation to each other, dictating their capacity to reach toward one another, which is dependent on what is perceived as bearable to touch in relation to another. Encountering what is abject in relation to another is therefore an encounter with the extent to which one is willing to reach toward and touch another, which may threaten and alter the boundaries of the subject.

The characters appear forced into this contractual encounter with each other, which stresses the man's lack of will, or control, over the affects of abjection that simultaneously repel and attract him. When the man draws near to the woman's body, his tactile contact is often imbued with an affective response of crying out or weeping: 'You lie down beside her. And, still for yourself, you weep.'⁹¹ The man is simultaneously pulled toward her body, and yet this proximity signals the figurative death of himself in relation to the woman, provoking the affective response of weeping over himself. When the anonymous woman asks what it is that 'you' want, 'you' respond:

To try it, try to know, to get used to that body, those breasts, that scent. To beauty, to the risk of having children implicit in that body, to that hairless unmuscular body, that face, that naked skin, to the identity between that skin and the life it contains.⁹²

The frenetic rhythm builds through the repetition of 'to' and 'that,' as the anxiety attached to the woman's body is evoked through the numerous comma splices in the list of all he wants to 'try' and 'get used to.' The inclusion of 'to the risk of having children implicit in that body' speaks to Kristeva's positioning of the maternal body as the primal scene of abjection. For Kristeva, the infant's initial experience of abjection in relation to the figure of the maternal body is a vital process in forming subjectivity, in which the infant, through simultaneously embracing and rejecting the mother, creates a necessary rupture in the mother-infant unit in order to negotiate

its own boundaries and discover its own sense of 'self.'⁹³ Subsequent experiences of abjection can therefore be traced back to this primal abjection, and this process is continuous throughout one's life as a way of negotiating one's own borders. The man's potential anxiety over the risks of impregnation imply a fear of the woman's relation to the maternal figure. The man's affirmation that he wants to try and get used to the 'identity between that skin and the life it contains' materialises the essence of the abject as the in-between, ambiguous state of not being an object, nor subject. According to Kristeva, the abject is neither the 'ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-jest, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire. What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous.'⁹⁴ This borderline subjectivity between the skin, the surface of the woman, and what lies beneath creates the fear of the abject and of what may cross one's boundaries as neither 'ob-ject,' nor 'ob-jest.'

The woman is positioned as both an object, the naked body, and subject, which the man attempts to suppress by requesting that she does not speak:

You say she mustn't speak, like the women of her ancestors, must yield completely to you and to your will, be entirely submissive like peasant women in the barns after the harvest when they're exhausted and let the men come to them while they're sleeping. So that you may gradually get used to that shape moulding itself to yours, at your mercy as nuns are at God's.⁹⁵

Although this request is highly problematic in that the woman 'must yield completely to you and to your will' and 'be entirely submissive,' and silent, which extricates her from language and subjectivity, the man's desire for ultimate passivity and complete control over her body stresses the level of fear attributed to being in tactile contact with this body. The use of the word 'moulding' evokes the image of the man attempting to shape her body into his own; to try and subsume the other into himself so that the woman's body is no longer the non-object that threatens the borders of his subjectivity. The threat of the abject in the other is too great to allow the woman her own subjectivity. Through silencing the woman entirely the man can

either attempt to bring this body into himself, reducing the threat of this body, or alternatively objectify this body in order to distinctly separate himself from this body.

The man desires the woman's body to 'yield' and submit to his 'mercy' so that he can touch this body on his own terms, without any resistance or response: 'One evening you do it, as arranged, you sleep with your face between her parted legs, up against her sex, already in the moistness of her body, where she opens. She offers no resistance.'⁹⁶ The word choice of 'arranged' implies that none of the actions take place spontaneously, but are controlled, premeditated, and all on the man's terms. The idea of sleeping where 'she opens' suggests that this area, 'up against her sex,' is where the woman's body is capable of taking another into herself and expanding beyond herself to reach another and potentially subsume another into herself. The notion of an 'open' body suggests a lack of borders and boundaries, which can therefore pose a threat to another's borders. By offering no resistance, the woman both appeases the man's contractual terms, and diminishes this perceived threat of her body. When the woman responds to the man's tactile explorations of her body, he reprimands her:

Another evening you inadvertently give her pleasure and she cries out.
You tell her not to. She says she won't anymore.
She doesn't.⁹⁷

The staccato syntax stresses the control in the exchange between the man and woman. The first sentence is longer in structure, suggesting the way in which the woman's body attempts to break the controlled sequence of the narrative. 'You' is commanded to 'tell her not to,' which is cut short and truncated within the text by the woman's minimal response that directly follows. The additional confirmation of 'she doesn't' on a separate line to the rest of the passage emphasises the definitive 'caesura' or cutting off of this affective response to touch. The man not only requests that the woman remain silent in speech, but also silent in her body. The woman's body itself is not permitted to vocalise a response. The language of affect, which materialises through the sound of pleasure emanating from the body itself, is not permitted: the body cannot speak along with the speaking subject. The woman's bodily responses reveal the threatening way in

which touch can alter the stability of one's body. The man can observe what happens to a body when engaged in tactile stimuli. This observation of pleasure heightens the man's fear of engaging in such touch as it reveals what one's touch, if the woman were to touch back, could do to his own borders too. Each request, therefore, is an attempt to control abjection so that the man can gradually become 'less afraid of not knowing where to put [...his] body.'⁹⁸ Here, the man attempts to encounter abjection without the threat that this tactile relation may impose upon his subjecthood, by arresting the woman's movements toward him, and extending his 'bodily horizon' toward her and touching without the fear of being touched in return.

By requesting that the woman remain passive, non-resistant, non-responsive, and in many ways, non-existent, except in terms of her body's presence upon the bed, the woman encounters her own abjection, or in other words, herself as a non-object. In *Against Abjection* (2009), Tyler argues that Kristeva's conceptualisation of the abject does not entail a discussion of 'what it might mean *to be* the maternal abject, to be the one who repeatedly finds themselves the object of the other's violent objectifying disgust.'⁹⁹ Tyler addresses how violence is used to subordinate a woman's body, placating the fear of the abject by making such a body manageable and controllable for the one who is threatened by abjection. In *The Malady of Death*, the man employs certain tactics to assuage the abject. Approaching the woman as a commodity to purchase enables the man to control and manage her actions and subjecthood within his own space and encounter the abject on his own terms. The man's request that she remain naked, sleeping, and silent can equally read as an attempt to objectify her in order to nullify the threat of the abject non-object.

The man, 'you,' continuously uses objectifying language, particularly when the woman remains nameless and is often referred to in terms of her body: 'Your hand is over the sex, between the open lips, it's there it strokes. You look at the opening and what surrounds it, the whole body. You don't see anything.'¹⁰⁰ The use of 'it's' and 'it' turns the woman's body, particularly 'the sex,' into an object in the sentence. By addressing the various areas of the body

as 'the sex,' 'open lips,' 'the opening' and 'what surrounds it,' the man does not stroke the woman, but instead, strokes objects that are made distinctly separate from the woman's 'whole body.' The man no longer views the woman in terms of a subject, but in terms of an object as the clipped sentence 'you don't see anything' negates the visibility of the woman as a 'whole body' and implies that the man, due to his contractual requests, does not see anything except for the various areas he specifically wants to 'get used to' and engage with.

The objectifying of the woman's body may pacify the man's encounter with abjection. Yet the man cannot fully objectify this body, as the narrator states: 'all the time the spirit shows through the surface of the body.'¹⁰¹ Even when the woman sleeps, her body reveals the traces of 'the spirit.' The signs of affect emanating from the woman's body, such as her smiling or 'the lips of her sex [...] swelling up' and producing 'a hot sticky liquid'¹⁰² upon tactile contact, signal that 'she's alive.'¹⁰³ The affective responses of her body are what appear as unbearable. Although the man attempts to assuage the threat of her body by rendering her silent and requesting that she does not respond to his touch, the body's affect to tactile stimulus cannot be controlled or regulated. As the woman becomes more pliable, passive, and object-like, since the man cannot render her as an object entirely, his thoughts become more explicitly violent:

The body's completely defenceless, smooth from face to feet. It invites strangulation, rape, ill usage, insult, shouts of hatred, the unleashing of deadly and unmitigated passions.¹⁰⁴

The body, perceived as 'defenceless,' invites violence as its object-like appearance in fact brings it closer to abjection than if the woman remained a subject that the man could differentiate himself from. The word choice of 'invites' suggests the relationship between the 'defenceless,' 'smooth' body that smooths out the overarching traces of subjecthood, and the violence this still elicits of 'strangulation,' 'rape,' 'ill usage,' 'insult,' 'shouts of hatred,' and 'the unleashing of deadly and unmitigated passions.' The woman's body cannot be objectified fully, and therefore, regarded as unthreatening. Regardless of how hard the man tries to nullify this encounter with abjection, the very threat of the object is in its inability to be objectified. Arya remarks:

The threat it poses to the self as a conscious being means that we are unable to objectify it, as we could an object. Objectifying something means that we are able to keep it at arm's length, to ward it off and to analyse it in relation to the subject viewing or engaging with it. In the confrontation of abjection we are in a state beside ourselves; as the threat increases, the stability of our boundaries weakens.¹⁰⁵

The man's violent response to such a body indicates that while the woman has complied to and obeyed his terms, he is still unable to fully objectify this body, and in turn, keep this body at 'arm's length' as an object entirely separate to himself. The man's violent thoughts are elicited by the supposed threat such a body imposes to himself. This body's ability to reach toward him and potentially touch him too, increases the threat to and stability of his boundaries: 'You look at this shape, and as you do so you realize its infernal power, its abominable frailty, its weakness, the unconquerable strength of its incomparable weakness.'¹⁰⁶ The use of language, such as 'abominable frailty' and 'weakness,' contradicts the notion of 'infernal power,' yet this relation stresses that this shape's 'unconquerable strength' lies in 'its incomparable weakness' for it disarms the man. If what is abject is considered neither 'I' nor 'not-I,' this 'shape' possesses both an 'infernal power' in its ability to not only threaten the man's sense of sovereignty, and also the capacity to bring to light the 'frailty' and 'weakness' that the man may wish to expel from himself. Therefore, what is 'abominable' in 'this shape' is what the man desires to expel.

The dénouement of *The Malady of Death* can be read as the futile attempt to overcome the abject. After the contract has ended, the woman does not return. The man 'survives' his encounter with the abject as his subjecthood, formerly lost through the proximity of their bodies and the intimacy of such sexual encounters, is now reinstated by the confirmation of their difference through the absence of the woman's body: 'Her body has vanished. The difference between her and you is confirmed by her sudden absence.'¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, whilst this difference is made present through her absence, this sudden absence haunts the scene, implying one's inability to eliminate the abject all together. 'You' states:

All you know of her is her sleeping body beneath her shut or half-shut eyes. The penetration of one body by another – that you can't recognize, ever. You couldn't ever.

When you wept it was just over yourself and not because of the marvelous impossibility of reaching her through the difference that separates you.¹⁰⁸

The initial sentence intimates the inability of one body to ever know the extent to which it may have been breached by another. The dash signals the definitive assertion of this inability to recognise, yet the certainty of this statement is undermined by the repetition of 'ever' and the necessity to reiterate 'You couldn't ever.' The statement that directly follows undermines this further. By weeping over himself, rather than the 'impossibility of reaching her through the difference that separates you,' which would confirm that the clear distinction between the man and woman remained intact, the narrator implies the man's awareness and recognition of the woman's penetration of his body.

The man weeps for the loss of himself, or the 'penetration of [his] body,' as he cannot return to what once constituted his subjecthood before the encounter. The man is unable to entirely subsume or exhume the woman's body into or from himself. Instead, he is left with her absence, which due to his weeping over himself, reads as an affective response to feeling this absence within himself. The inability to eliminate the abject is demonstrated in the absence of the woman not only signaling the distinction and separation between the man and woman, but also the haunting aftermath of such absence, which evokes the affective reaction of the man weeping over himself. The man experiences the conflicting dualism of encountering abjection. It is both necessary for the constitution of his subjecthood, as well as disruptive, as it recalls the continual instability of 'self' and the constant threat of invasion. The man remains haunted by the abject for though he may not recognize the penetration, or breaching, of his body by the woman's, his weeping suggests that he has discerned the effect of such penetration. The man's boundaries may be restored, but the residue of the abject now lingers, haunts, and alters his subjecthood through its absence.

The man cannot return to the 'self' that existed before this encounter: 'The mark of her body is still there on the sheets'¹⁰⁹ and in turn, still there on him, within his body and upon his

skin. In this regard, the man and woman's encounter with each other is an encounter with the abjection one may experience when being in relation to another. Abjection is what both creates and threatens the very boundaries between 'me' and 'not-me.' The abject haunts the body, as it is never fully extricated from or assimilated into oneself. The memory of the primary abjection – the original repudiation of the maternal through the child's separation from the mother in order to become an independent subject – is echoed in each ensuing experience of the abject. In my analysis of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, I explored the threat one may experience in tactile relation to another who carries the death of a previous lover. The man from Hiroshima does not affectively touch the woman's body, nor does Jack Hold touch Lol Stein's hand; instead, they touch the memory of loss, which causes a threat to their sovereignty in the form of blurring boundaries between present and past lovers. By comparison, in *The Malady of Death*, the man transmits his sense of death, and loss of 'self,' onto the woman's body, which renders her body abject as the site of the man's loss. As the characters tactilely transmit their trauma or project the sense of loss onto another, the economy of touch is arrested in terms of bodies reaching toward others or being open to some bodies but not others, as trauma or loss orientates bodies away from each other when touch is no longer experienced affectively. Yet the tactile encounters emphasise the way in which touch may still exceed temporal boundaries between past and present, obscuring one's sense of sovereignty and threatening the loss of oneself in any present tactile relation to another.

Chapter Four

The Risks of Touch in Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*

Through the textual analysis of Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* (1973), this chapter considers the risks of touching as a way of undoing the subject when in relation to another. Anaïs Nin's notion of the 'pain of identification,' addressed in Chapter Two, suggests that the boundaries between bodies are obscured in relation to each other, due to Nin's internalisation of such relations that she feels as being a part of herself. Here, I explore this further by examining how an orientation toward another body entails a level of risk as the subject may be undone through this blurring of such boundaries. By doing so, I continue to question the causal relationship between touch and identity by arguing that touch has the ability to disorientate one's identity when one's fragile notion of sovereignty or coherency within a heteronormative framework, which upholds a stable relationship between anatomical sex, gender, and sexuality, is upended in relation to another. Through the ability to disorientate the subjects in tactile relation to each other, I therefore posit that touch has the potential to instigate change. In *The Lesbian Body*, the textual theme of touch, in this regard, can be read as a Trojan Horse that disorientates the unified sense of sovereignty that the subject may falsely experience when in relation to another.

Wittig uses the analogy of the Trojan Horse – a device used by the Greeks in order to defeat the Trojans – to explain that '[a]ny important literary work is like the Trojan Horse at the time it is produced.'¹ The new form of a literary work functions as a war machine to defeat the old form that has assisted in homogenising individuals' minds. Though the Trojan Horse was originally perceived of as strange and peculiar, Wittig observes, the Trojans eventually started to see its familiarity with that of horses: '[a]ready for them, the Trojans, there have been many forms, various ones, sometimes contradictory, that were put together and worked into creating a horse [...].'² The contraption took a similar shape, that of a horse, for both the Greeks and the Trojans. Therefore, the Trojans, beginning to see it as 'strong, [and] powerful,'³ rather

than formless, 'want to make it theirs, to adopt it as a monument and shelter it within their walls, a gratuitous object whose only purpose is to be found in itself.'¹⁴ Yet this contraption was a war machine, containing the Greeks who then infiltrated the Trojans. For Wittig, the literary work that takes a new form operates in a similar way 'because its design and its goal is to pulverize the old forms and formal conventions.'¹⁵ The stranger or nonconforming, and in turn, un-assimilable the form appears to the dominant discourse, the more time it will take for it to be accepted, but '[e]ventually it is adopted, and, even if slowly, it will eventually work like a mine. It will sap and blast out the ground where it was planted. The old literary forms, which everybody was used to, will eventually appear to be outdated, inefficient, incapable of transformation.'¹⁶ In order to produce this impact, Wittig emphasises that an implicit level of violence is necessary, particularly in regard to how the reader is implicated.

The macrostructure of *The Lesbian Body* is not the only Trojan Horse that pulverises these old forms and conventions. The microstructure equally functions as a multiplicity of Trojan Horses that work at various levels of the text to dismantle privileged and 'naturalised' orientations of being in relation to another. This chapter re-examines Wittig's theoretical works in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (1992) in order to explore how her fictional text, *The Lesbian Body*, not only uses the theme of touch as a Trojan Horse that assists in dismantling the heavily ingrained normalising of a stable relationship between anatomical sex, gender, and sexuality in a heterosexual framework, but as a way of undoing the subject by disorientating the subject's sense of sovereignty, unity, and coherency. I read Wittig's strategy of defamiliarizing the familiar (particularly Wittig's appropriation of the body from anatomical discourse) as a potential way of then universalising forms of touch by disorientating the way in which bodies have been strictly orientated toward some bodies and not others, which informs who and how one may touch. Sara Ahmed's notion of disorientation is central to this analysis. Ahmed states that '[m]oments of disorientation are vital,'¹⁷ as it is through these moments that one may come to understand how they have been orientated toward particular directions in the

first place. The theme of touch, as a Trojan Horse within the text, may function to disorientate the subjects when in relation to each other, exposing the previous ways in which these subjects have been orientated. The body, when in contact with another, may be unsettled and momentarily thrown off balance as the various ways in which the subjects tactilely relate to one another become unstable by challenging, and in turn pulverising, the previous, 'normative' ways that such bodies may have related to each other.

The Lesbian Body is a formative lesbian text that was influential at the time of its publication in 1973, due to its experimental nature that posits a feminist challenge to preconceived notions of compulsory heterosexuality in terms of relationality between subjects. The text also questions hierarchical notions of anatomy, and the assumed heterosexuality of Greek mythology and social discourses. In the *New York Times* obituary, Douglas Martin notes that Wittig summarises *The Lesbian Body* as a fictional text where the 'lesbian lovers literally invade each other's bodies as an act of love.'⁸ This invasion of each subject's body by another may exemplify the optimism and negativity implicit in relationality: each subject grapples with their desires and continual threats to their sovereignty when confronted with each other, which, as an outcome, leads to moments of disorientation. The idea of *The Lesbian Body* functioning as a Trojan Horse – touch being a central disruptive part of the text – provides a framework to question the strategies used by Wittig to rewrite discourses that have normalised particular social relations. Since the text appropriates forms of touch from compulsory heterosexuality that creates binary oppositions that inform what is normative and 'natural,' I argue that touch has the potential to then disorientate and undo the sovereignty of the subject's identity, queering the mechanism of memory as the subject reassembles and re-remembers themselves after their encounter with relationality.

Firstly, this chapter explores Wittig's appropriation of the female body from influential, male-authored anatomical textbooks, such as Andreas Vesalius' *On the Fabric of the Human Body* (1543), that offer masculinist structures of defining and controlling the body, and often

designate the male body as the standard to which the female body is compared. Through analysing Wittig's strategies of defamiliarizing the familiar, disorientating the masculinist structures of the female body, I consider how the body becomes open to multiple potentialities of relating to another. By appropriating the female body, undoing the body's 'normative' orientations, Wittig in turn appropriates the forms of touch this body may experience. Therefore, she not only rewrites the female body's anatomy but equally its implicit social relations. Wittig's theoretical and fictional works have often been erased from the conversations circulating in queer theory, even though she initially argued for a dissolution of the categories of sex and posited that 'lesbians are not women,'⁹:

Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, [...] a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay heterosexual.¹⁰

Wittig's radical statement had the power, Teresa de Lauretis claims, 'to open the mind and make visible and thinkable a *conceptual* space that until then had been rendered unthinkable by, precisely, the hegemony of the straight mind – as the space called "the blind spot" is rendered invisible in a car's rear-view mirror by the frame or chassis of the car itself.'¹¹ Wittig's theories and experimental texts created an initial dialogue whereby this homogenising of consciousness that coincides with the assumed 'naturalness' and universality of heterosexuality as a given, a priori construct to society, could be brought under criticism.

This radical statement, however, has since been heavily criticised and often misunderstood as essentialist. Although Wittig's theoretical positioning of 'lesbian' may create an initial dialogue that challenges the fixity of heterosexuality, it not only problematically homogenises the concept of 'lesbian,' but of 'woman' too. Nonetheless, during the time in which Wittig proposed these notions, radical statements were necessary to enact greater change in feminist politics. Wittig disputably uses the term 'woman' as a holding position that designates the relationality between the categories of sex in a particular social structure constituted by

compulsory heterosexuality that has been assumed as 'natural' and 'normal.' By suggesting the enforced binarism of the categories of sex, Wittig highlights the necessity to challenge this, as if what constitutes a 'woman' is a particular social position and relation to a man, 'a relation that we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation ("forced residence," domestic corvee, conjugal duties, unlimited production of children, etc.),'¹² then this is what requires undoing.

Theorists, such as Judith Butler, have, on the one hand, noted that Wittig's writing 'not only deconstruct[s] sex and offers a way to disintegrate the false unity designated by sex, but enacts as well a kind of diffuse corporeal agency generated from a number of different centers of power.'¹³ Butler recognises that Wittig's text reveals that,

personal and political agency comes not from within the individual, but in and through the complex cultural exchange among bodies in which identity itself is ever-shifting, and recirculated only within the context of a dynamic field of cultural relations.¹⁴

By exposing the compulsoriness of heterosexuality and how the categories of sex are constructs, Wittig's text brings to light the incoherency of identity, deconstructing such constructs and moving beyond them to create new ways of being in relationality. Within *The Lesbian Body*, the sense of touch is central to this disruption as the point of contact between the subjects exemplifies the way in which individuals are shaped through the cultural, social, and political exchange among bodies, which continuously reshapes one's identity within the spaces, sites, or temporalities that one may find themselves inhabiting in relation to others. Yet, on the other hand, Butler posits a series of questions on the assumed essentialism in Wittig's concept of 'lesbian' and 'woman,' raising concerns on what would keep 'lesbian' from becoming a compulsory category too. For example, Butler questions, 'What qualifies as a lesbian? [...] If a lesbian refutes the radical disjunction between heterosexual and homosexual economies that Wittig promotes, is that lesbian no longer a lesbian?'¹⁵ However, by questioning this, Butler arguably creates the essentialist narrative of Wittig's theories, misreading Wittig's *conceptual* subject position as another constructed identity or 'cognitive subject' that in de Lauretis' words,

endows 'it with strong Cartesian connotations, and [tosses] her [Wittig's] theory in the dump of surpassed and discarded philosophies.'¹⁶ De Lauretis critiques Butler's misreading by emphasising that rather than perceiving Wittig's 'lesbian' in concrete terms of 'an individual with a personal "sexual preference" or a social subject with a simple "political" priority'¹⁷ it should be read as:

a term or conceptual figure for the subject of a cognitive practice and a form of consciousness that are not primordial, universal, or coextensive with human thought, as de Beauvoir would have it, but historically determined and yet subjectively assumed – an eccentric subject constituted in a process of struggle and interpretation; of translation, detranslation, and retranslation (as Jean Laplanche might put it); a rewriting of self in relation to a new understanding of society, of history, of culture.¹⁸

By mobilising the discourses of historical materialism and liberal feminism in relation to each other, exposing their inadequacies in conceiving of the subject in material feminism, Wittig argues that it is necessary to bring Marxist concepts of class consciousness into dialogue with feminist concepts of subjectivity.¹⁹ According to de Lauretis, this dialogue 'implies the reconceptualization of the subject and the relations of subjectivity to sociality from a position that is eccentric to the institution of heterosexuality and therefore exceeds its discursive-conceptual horizon: the position of the subject lesbian.'²⁰ By recognising the position of woman as historically determined, Wittig propounds a *conceptual* subject that questions this subjectively assumed social, historical, and cultural position, exceeding compulsory heterosexuality's discourse and seeking to transform the individual in regard to their social relations. It is with this understanding of Wittig's work, therefore, that I intend to examine Wittig's fiction as queer experimental literature that seeks to dismantle categories of sex by deconstructing the initial foundations or 'origins' of this 'normalised' assumption through appropriating the female body, and in turn, appropriating who has the privilege to touch, and how one may touch another.

By highlighting the strategies employed by Wittig to dismantle categories of sex through the act of touching, this chapter then goes further to explore how Wittig may employ

touch to convey the way in which the lovers respond to encountering themselves in relation to each other. Through the analysis of Wittig's text in relation to Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman's *Sex, or the Unbearable* (2014), I suggest that the lovers' invasion of each other's bodies, through mutilating, devouring, and destroying in various ways, speaks to Berlant and Edelman's notions of optimism and negativity that occur in relationality. The lovers seek to overcome the antagonism of being in relation to one another by nullifying the risk and threat that touching may entail to each other's notions of sovereignty – the authority one may have over themselves and their sense of control, coherency, and unity. Wittig's work reveals that the act of touching implicitly contains a level of risk where the subject is met with its own relationality to another and may in turn encounter its 'nonsovereignty'²¹:

*I look at you from inside yourself, I lose m/yself, I go astray, I am poisoned by you who nourish m/e, I shrivel, I become quite small, [...] I block the working of your tongue, vainly you try to spit m/e out, you choke [...].*²²

The contrast between 'poisoned' and 'nourish' can be read through Berlant and Edelman's notions of negativity and optimism. Within relationality, the notion of optimism 'enacts the hope of successful integration into dominant orders—social, psychic, and political—by anticipating ways of resolving the various contradictions amid which we live.'²³ Sex, therefore, becomes 'a locus for optimism, [...] at which the promise of overcoming division and antagonism is frequently played out.'²⁴ Yet in order to resolve these contradictions and overcome such division, one must first confront the negativity that ensues from such an encounter: the subject must face what is unbearable, or unknowable and what may conflict with their sense of sovereignty, which must then be overcome. To 'nourish' suggests the hope and sustenance of the relation, while to be 'poisoned' by the other stresses the way that 'you' has infiltrated 'I,' causing disruption and evoking the possibility of the subject's figurative death in relation to another. Yet the scene demonstrates that the act of contact cannot exclusively impact 'you' without equally impacting *I* – while *I* may 'block the working of your tongue,' 'you' simultaneously chocks *I* – both subjects act upon each other, changing each other in the process.

Touch, therefore, affects bodies *relationally* as the lovers disorientate each other's sense of sovereignty, both generating something new through being in relation to each other and emerging as changed subjects.

The physical, literal acts embody the figurative affect, or internal sensations, that the subjects may experience when being in relation to each other. Rather than reading the text as the literal invasion of the lovers' bodies, I read these acts of touch figuratively, as literal representations of the lovers' internal responses to the implicit negativity in one's relationality to another. The subject, 'you,' is arrested by the presence of subject, 'I,' inside them, indicating that these literal acts of the lovers invading each other's bodies speak to the internal violence and turmoil of relationality. The negativity of being in relation to another, which may undo the subject's sense of sovereignty by creating antagonism and division, suggests an implicit level of violence either felt internally within the subject or expressed externally in the form of contact. Yet rather than perceiving this as merely negative in Wittig's text, the violence of such negativity may be considered productive, as through such destruction of the subject's sovereignty comes the possibility of change. In *Politics of Touch*, Erin Manning argues that '[v]iolence is potentially productive as well as destructive. To touch is always to attempt to touch the incorporeality of a body, to touch what is not yet. I do not touch the you that I think you are, I reach toward the one you will become.'²⁵ I read the violence within the lovers' interactions as productive in its destruction, for the violence evokes change, as each lover is altered through their relation to each other. The lovers attempt to touch what they realistically cannot in another, and in doing so, violently change each other's sense of subjectivity and notion of sovereignty. Manning remarks that '[t]o touch is to feel the perceived limits of my contours, my surfaces, my body in relation to yours. To touch is to expand these contours, creating new perimeters. We share our surface in the moment of touch, we interrupt ourselves.'²⁶ In *The Lesbian Body*, the lovers interrupt each other through their invasion of each

other's bodies, emphasising what it means to be in relation to another whereby touch has the ability to create new borders, expanding the body's form, and irreparably altering the lovers.

Lastly, I consider how the reader is implicated in this relationality, due to Wittig's use of the second-person pronoun, 'you,' throughout the text. I explore how the positioning of the reader with the beloved in each scene may draw the reader into dialogue with the lovers, which in turn may figuratively 'touch' the reader, impacting their sense of sovereignty when the strategies employed by Wittig are intended to violently assimilate the new form of the literary work into the reader's mind. I analyse Wittig's strategies with reference to Tyler Bradway's *Queer Experimental Literature: The Affective Politics of Bad Reading* (2017) and Sarah Schulman's *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (2012), as a means of demonstrating how Wittig alters reading norms to make the reader uncomfortable, disorientating the reader in order to enact change. Addressing the reader in each scene potentially precipitates uncontrolled and unmediated affective responses to the text from the reader. By figuratively touching the reader in this way, they have no choice but to confront themselves in relationality to another, in this case Wittig's text. The negativity and optimism one may experience in forms of relationality, along with the violence and discomfort implicit within this, emerge throughout the lovers' tactile relations as productive strategies employed by Wittig to provoke change through disorientating the subjects in the text, as well as the reader. By analysing the scenes between the lovers, as well as the encounter the reader has with the text, this chapter explores the role touch plays in relationality not only to dismantle categories of sex, but identity itself.

Appropriating the Privilege to Touch

Wittig argues that a literary work should function as a Trojan Horse, focusing on the materiality of language as a key component to dismantling categories of sex. Wittig states:

The universalization of each point of view demands a particular attention to the formal elements that can be open to history, such as themes, subjects of narratives, as well as

the global form of the work. It is the attempted universalization of the point of view that turns or does not turn a literary work into a war machine.²⁷

The form and style may also present certain textual themes, such as touch, as auxiliary Trojan Horses. These textual themes, as Trojan Horses, work to make the reader uncomfortable, enacting a level of violence on the reader's perceptions in order to 'blast out' the old forms of such themes. Wittig firstly attacks normalised dominant discourses that hierarchise bodies and uphold the categories of sex, such as the anatomy textbook and Cartesian dualism, by integrating the anatomical vocabulary with the lovers' tactile exchanges, whereby touch, and who has the privilege to touch, functions to highlight these discourses' lack of objectivity. Secondly, by defamiliarizing forms of violent touch and ways of penetrating the body that are often privileged as exclusive and 'natural' to the domain of heterosexuality and men's relation to women, the female body is then opened to the multiplicities of receiving and giving forms of touch that are no longer orientated by the categories of sex. The appropriation of touch, therefore, functions as a Trojan Horse that assists in dismantling categories of sex in a compulsory heterosexual framework.

In the posthumously published *Some Remarks on The Lesbian Body* (2005), Wittig notes that the word 'body' is gendered masculine in French. By qualifying it with the word 'lesbian' in the title, Wittig asserts: 'its proximity to "Body" seemed to me to destabilize the general notion of the body.'²⁸ By positioning these two words together, for Wittig, everything that came afterwards was transformed. Wittig states, '[i]f I used the anatomical vocabulary to design the human body then I would appropriate it for my purpose.'²⁹ Wittig dismantles the hierarchical and privileged ordering of anatomical vocabulary by breaking the scenes in the text with eleven lists of body parts and functions. All of the words are placed in upper-case letters and the prose is devoid of conventional syntax:

THE LESBIAN BODY THE JUICE THE
SPITTLE THE SALIVA THE SNOT
THE SWEAT THE TEARS THE WAX
THE URINE THE FAECES THE

EXCREMENTS THE BLOOD THE
LYMPH THE JELLY THE WATER
THE CHYLE THE CHYME THE
HUMOURS THE SECRETIONS THE
PUS THE DISCHARGES THE SUP-
PURATIONS THE BILE THE JUICES
[...]
THE PLEURA THE VAGINA THE
VEINS THE ARTERIES THE VESSELS
THE NERVES³⁰

By presenting the body parts in this style and form, Wittig challenges anatomical textbooks' authority, particularly, according to Kym Martindale,

the work of one of the first dissectionists, Andreas Vesalius, metaphorically tearing up the authoritative Vesalian text to throw the empirical (male) body into disarray, and replacing his order, his anatomy and his 'body of knowledge' with disorder, a 'lesbian' anatomy and another 'body of knowledge'.³¹

Delineated by male dissectors of the fifteenth century when the anatomy of the body became the site of investigation, as another discourse to dominate, control, and regulate, the anatomical vocabulary in Wittig's text loses its particular order, and in turn significance. The lack of punctuation, along with the use of capitalisation and font size, exaggerates the presence of each body part and function, and presents them as equal to each other. The signifier no longer signifies, due to separating the body part from its function, which suggests that the female body becomes open to the possibility of alternative meanings. Wittig's inclusion of excrements and secretions provides them with significance and value; therefore, they are no longer perceived as less important than the nervous system, organs or bones. The representation of fluids as part of the anatomy emphasises the way in which the body resists boundaries, as fluids break borders. The list also suggests a collapsing of different historical moments in the knowledge of anatomy, referring to 'humours' and ending with 'nerves,' accentuating the construction of knowledge and how it may be shaped through the particular time period in which it is originally discovered.

Wittig's incorporation of anatomical vocabulary in the interactions between the lovers may act as a further dismantling of the hierarchical structure of anatomy textbooks. One scene states:

your hands promptly operate on m/e. The scalpel deftly manipulated by your adorable hands has detached retracted the muscles. *I* am a spider's web of nerves exactly resembling the drawings of the anatomy texts. You say m/y beloved that you can see right through m/e.³²

Although the subject is likened to anatomy textbook drawings, the one with the 'power' to operate on the subject is appropriated from the self-authored male of anatomical textbooks, as the dissector becomes the beloved. This can be read as expressing the power which a lover has to dissect, alter and operate on the other – to shape the other. The lover's touch, rather than the male-authored dissector, is the one with the ability to alter the body, highlighting the different ways in which the body can be dissected. In this regard, dissection not only becomes an act of opening and dismembering a body, but an act of construction and formation through the beloved's ability to operate on and in turn alter the subject through their touch. The reader may note the italicisation of '*I*' along with the splitting of 'm/y' and 'm/e' (which will be acknowledged and discussed in more depth in the following section). However, the split in 'm/y' and 'm/e' may imply the positioning of the subject at the hands of the beloved, where the subject is no longer perceived as a unified whole, but open to the potential undoing and reshaping that may occur when encountering relationality with another.

The incorporation of emotive language, in the form of 'adorable hands,' undermines the idea of medical 'objectivity.' By appropriating the dissector's position, this scene implies the lack of objectivity present regarding the dissected body. Diane Chisholm observes: 'Wittig's rewriting of the anatomy textbook reveals that ideologies operate here too.'³³ By appropriating the male dissector's position with the beloved, Wittig demonstrates that the discourses perceived as objective are, in fact, imbued with sociocultural factors. The use of the 'scalpel deftly manipulated' by the lover's hands implies that the one who holds the power to touch

becomes the one with the power to shape the body. Whilst the beloved claims that they 'can see right through' the subject, what the beloved can see is arguably their own interpretation, which is saturated with their own ideologies, beliefs and relational ties to the body they have cut open and exposed.

As the scene continues with the dissection of the subject, by imbuing the anatomical vocabulary within the lovers' tactile exchanges, Wittig further attacks the binary categories of sex and gender by dismantling Cartesian dualism:

you fiddle insanely with m/e with the very tips of your fingers, *I* am touched in m/y brachial nerves m/y circumflexes m/y ulnars m/y radials m/y terminal branches, *I* insist on telling you all that that's where it's most exquisite, *I* am touched in m/y facials m/y maxillaries, at that point luminous waterspouts burst over m/e, *I* don't know whether it is the storm outside or messages from m/y brain from the eyes that *I* cannot open, hundreds of orange globes a second depart and reprecipitate there, the intensity is too great, *I* feel *I* cannot stand it, *I* faint away, but not before m/y saphenous nerves are touched, who would have believe it m/y Sappho, not before m/y great sciatics begin to move or m/y tibial nerves are seized with uncontrollable convulsions, not before *I* speak to you *I* know not what name to call you by you who at this moment place your two whole hands on m/y brachial plexuses.³⁴

The passage articulates a relationship between body and mind through the act of touching, dismantling the separation of mind and body that has spanned philosophical thinking through Descartes' notions of dualism, particularly Cartesian or substance dualism. This dichotomous line of thought has led to the positioning of mind over body; mind is privileged as the faculty of reason, one originally seen as exclusively male, whilst women are relegated to the faculty of the body through their reproductive functions. Yet by expressing how the subject is touched by the beloved in their 'brachial nerves,' 'circumflexes,' 'ulnars,' 'radials' and 'terminal branches,' Wittig highlights the intertwining of the body and mind. The sentence structure, lacking in commas, reads like a nervous system as the beloved's touch spreads from one area to the next, tracing the subject's interior and generating a desire in the subject to tell 'you all that that's where it's most exquisite.' By infusing 'objective' anatomical language, particularly that of the brain and nervous system, with forms of touch, Wittig re-connects the body with the mind, emphasising their ability to alter each other.

As the beloved moves towards the subject's 'facials' and 'maxillaries' the intensity is overwhelming: signals from the subject's brain to their 'eyes that *I* cannot open' overpower their senses. Soon, the subject begins to 'faint away, but not before m/y saphenous nerves are touched.' The use of anatomical vocabulary masks the act by which the subject is arguably reaching the point of orgasm, the sensation moving from their saphenous nerves (found in the middle of the thigh) to their sciatic nerves (found at the top of the leg going down to the foot) and tibial nerves (a branch of the sciatic nerves), and resulting in 'uncontrollable convulsions.' The lack of full stops within the passage suggests the accumulation of sensation, as the beloved's fingers trace over the various nerves, building tension and pace until the point at which the subject reaches climax, which coincides with the subject speaking to the beloved 'who at this moment place your two whole hands on m/y brachial plexuses.' The orgasm is connected to the moment in which the beloved holds the subject's brachial plexuses (the nerves descending from the spinal cord from the neck into the shoulder, arm and chest), indicating the way in which touch goes deeper than the surface of the skin and is felt through the nerves that ultimately connect with the brain. The climax is not centred in the subject's genitalia but experienced throughout the nervous system connecting the subject's mind and body.

By appropriating the female body from the discourse of the anatomy textbook, Wittig in turn appropriates the way in which such bodies have been orientated toward certain forms of touching and being touched. Not only does Wittig tear down the long-standing separation between body and mind by reinstating an infused relationship between the two, but she equally tears down notions of what one may touch in another, and how. The female body is often perceived as a passive recipient of touch, yet Wittig appropriates forms of touch that require active agency. For example, the act of penetration, often designated as an act of heterosexual intercourse where women are passive receivers, is appropriated by the lovers:

The shimmer of the light on the waves insults m/y entire body. *I* am penetrated endlessly by you, you thrust into m/e, you impale m/e, *I* begin an extremely slow journey, *I* am thronged by roarings, [...] You do not stop.³⁵

The act of penetration, associated with an act of heterosexual intercourse, is dismantled and reconfigured in this scene as the body may be penetrated endlessly by the other in multiple ways. The subject's entire body, rather than one specific or exclusive area, is subsumed and penetrated endlessly by the beloved who metamorphizes into the waves and the light that shimmers from them. As a malleable fluid, or rays of light, the beloved can engulf and envelop the subject. Each pore of the subject's body is open to the possibility of penetration from the light, and in turn the waves that may thrust into the subject with their tide. The notion of being 'thronged by roarings' suggests the dense submersion into the water (the beloved). Marion May Campbell argues 'Wittig's divided subjects display a giddy, promiscuous propensity to eroticise any site in the body of the beloved: digestive organs, skeleton, endocrinal system, nervous system, and the whole constellation of orifices [...].'³⁶ Any site may be eroticised, and in turn penetrated. Yet it is the 'I' of the text that is penetrated, subverting norms where the object is often penetrated by the subject. The other – the 'you' in this passage – takes the active role, as the one capable of penetrating the subject, suggesting the interchangeability between the 'I' and 'you' as subject positions.

The use of the verb 'insults' is jarring as it suggests that the subject is unable to escape the beloved's penetration of their body, yet this may proffer a reading of touch as a Trojan Horse within the text. The beloved's ability to penetrate the subject's body entails a level of violence and damage as to be penetrated is an act of breaching, entering, piercing or infiltrating boundaries, which in turn, undoes the sovereignty of the subject's body. The suggested level of violence with the use of the verbs 'insults,' 'penetrated,' 'thrust,' 'impale,' 'thronged,' emphasises the risks involved in touching and being in relation to one another, where to be penetrated, and in turn entered, by another implicitly contains the risks of being altered in some way and disorientated from one's sense of unity or wholeness, with or without permission, in the process. Since water is often used as a metaphor of rebirth or cleansing, the image of the beloved (in

the form of waves) penetrating the subject may suggest the cleansing and enacting of the subject's rebirth. The encounter between the beloved and the subject can be perceived as a form of undoing the subject's former identity and in turn cleansing their body of previous inscriptions to then rebirth the subject through their encounter with the beloved.

Touch functions in the text as a Trojan Horse by displacing 'normalised' forms of touch enacted between the categories of sex, which in turn tears down the association between the act of penetration and reproduction by enabling the 'lesbian' body to penetrate another 'lesbian' body. In *The Straight Mind* (1980), Wittig argues: 'The category of sex is the product of a heterosexual society in which men appropriate for themselves the reproduction and production of women and also their physical persons by means of a contract called the marriage contract.'³⁷ The compulsory or enforced heterosexual social contract also ties women to their reproductive functions, and, according to Wittig,

assigns the woman certain obligations, including unpaid work. The work (housework, raising children) and the obligations (surrender of her reproduction in the name of her husband, cohabitation by day and night, forced coitus, assignment of residence implied by the legal concept of "surrender of the conjugal domicile") mean in their terms a surrender by the woman of her physical person to her husband.³⁸

Although this statement problematically generalises the position of 'woman,' it equally highlights a heterosexist view that endorses this structuring of societal roles. Subsequently, by appropriating the act of penetration from its fixture in heterosexual intercourse and reproduction, it is then open to the potentialities of how bodies may penetrate one another.

The female body, therefore, is positioned as one that has active agency. Diane Crowder considers the violence of the text to be a 'Wittigian attack on the mystique of feminine passivity as it has been attached to certain strands of feminist thought.'³⁹ The violence is perceived positively as Wittig's lovers 'are capable of rage as well as tenderness, and no emotion is censured.'⁴⁰ These emotions and forms of touch may be explored without the constraints of what 'normative' practices, orientations, and identities dictate as suitable for female bodies. Nonetheless, the violence of the text has often caused trouble for feminist readers. Clare

Whatling suggests that whilst readers celebrate the violence in Wittig's *Les Guérillères*, due to its 'righteous vengeance of the oppressed'⁴¹ and equally accept:

[the] male-directed violence of *Across the Acheron*, [...] it seems clear that readers' problems with *The Lesbian Body* lie with the self-directed woman-on-woman nature of the violence depicted. In that there is no obvious justification for its occurrence, the violence which informs the text seems at the very least questionable, if not wanton.⁴²

Although this assumes that all readers respond the same way to this violence and that all readers perceive this violence as problematic, Whatling contends that the problem may lie with 'the self-directed woman-on-woman nature' of this depicted violence. This seemingly unjustified violence can be read as part of Wittig's strategy to make what may be familiar in compulsory heterosexuality – male violence – unfamiliar, by appropriating such violence and enacting it between female bodies:

*I take you by surprise, I tackle you, I take possession of you, I bear you off into the cavern all afire with the mauve violet pink lights of the lanterns. You resist, you struggle, you cry out in a strident voice. The door of the cavern glides noiselessly. You are laid down on the beaten earth at the threshold. Some women appear from the oblique corridors and holding you firmly remove your clothes. [...] Standing motionless I watch you. You pose no question. Four of the women bring the great silver tub full of steaming water. They plunge you in it, they wash you, they remove the traces of dust and dirt on your skin. They envelop you in large bath wraps, they perfume you, they anoint you, they comb you, they give you a clean garment. Now I take you by the hand and draw you down onto the thick carpets. You sit on your heels, you rest on your hands fingers spread on your thighs, you regard m/e in silence you do not recognize m/e. A full censer swings.*⁴³

The first section uses language that may suggest a rape scene where 'you' is taken by surprise and possessed by the subject. The threat of violence is accentuated by the comma splices that create a rhythm of an accelerated struggle between the two subjects. However, given that this scene is followed by the appearance of some women, perhaps this initial struggle between 'you' and 'I' can be read as 'you's' conflict and resistance to being placed upon the precipice or 'beaten earth at the threshold' between 'I' and the women, or in other words, between a position that disrupts the categories of sex and dominant discourses of compulsory heterosexuality, and a position that returns to such categories. The beloved wishes to fight against and resist the way

in which their relation to 'I' disorientates them from the categories of sex that the presence of the women upholds.

The following section begins with the appearance of 'some women' and as 'women' designates the social class – the category of sex – still tied to the binary opposition of man and woman, it suggests that the women take over, as if to cleanse the subject of their relation to 'I' and bring them back 'in line'. They are the ones in fact to instigate the action of removing the clothes and exposing the body. Yet rather than instigating an act of violence, per se, the women enact a ritual of bathing: cleansing the body to 'remove the traces of dust and dirt on your skin.' This performance of cleansing can be read as mirroring nineteenth century discourses, circulated by physicians, such as Havelock Ellis, that, according to Diana Fuss, suggest 'only physical and social "hygiene" can prevent "the acquisition of homosexual perversity" in the schools.'⁴⁴ Since the act of cleaning is undertaken by the women, the act/ritual here implies a cleansing of the beloved's abject and monstrous 'lesbian' body, as an attempt to physically cleanse the body of the traces left upon the skin and reorientate the body toward compulsory heterosexuality. The repetition of 'they' enforces this notion further by creating distance between the women and the 'I' of the narrative. The metaphor of water again suggests the act of cleansing and potential rebirth, as Wittig's syntax and use of specific imagery, such as the censer that is often used in religious contexts, suggests a ritualistic step-by-step of the process. The reader is made aware of each step, with the accentuation of 'they' punctuating each individual act. Each step is expressed matter-of-factly without description, implying a ritualistic process of stripping the beloved of their previous identity through cleansing them, which in turn enacts a form of rebirth. The dénouement of the subject taking the hand of the other may firstly be a moment of re-possessing the beloved by taking them back from the women. However, the outcome of this repossession may indicate the finality of this ritualistic cleansing and rebirth whereby the beloved no longer responds to the subject and ultimately no

longer recognises them now that the beloved has been cleansed of their abject and monstrous 'lesbian' body.

The response of the beloved – 'you regard m/e in silence you do not recognize m/e' – concludes in the subject being rendered unknowable. On the one hand, this may suggest the finality of the cleansing ritual, yet on the other hand, this may highlight the unfamiliarity of the violence and enforcement enacted by the subject upon the beloved at the beginning of the scene, which designates the subject as one no longer recognisable to the beloved. By initially appropriating male violence, the text uses the strategy of a Trojan Horse, making what is familiar, unfamiliar. Ultimately, as Karin Cope argues, it 'exploits the phagocytic aspect of dominant culture – the way in which it swallows or takes in most "foreign objects," including direct oppositions, diffusing, suppressing, and ignoring them.'⁴⁵ By rendering this familiar violence so unfamiliar, it articulates a disguised opposition to dominant language, due to its taking place between two 'lesbian' bodies. The shock, or hostile response from the reader, highlights the workings of the war machine, in that the unfamiliar object, wrapped in a somewhat familiar form has been taken in without knowing, 'so that by the time the apparently recognizable horse is swallowed, the "whole horse"-including a Greek army-has been swallowed.'⁴⁶ The violence taking place between two 'lesbian' bodies emphasises how unnatural this violence is, for as Whatling observes, it is the 'self-directed woman-on-woman nature of the violence depicted' that causes such issues. This perception problematically rests on a set of assumptions concerning women's 'characters' and behaviour patterns, yet this social conditioning ultimately emphasises that certain behaviours have been 'naturalised' and 'normalised' for different sexes, which is precisely what Wittig is attempting to dismantle. Therefore, if the reader metaphorically 'swallows' this Trojan Horse, at some point the Greeks will attack, as this unsettling violence, perhaps familiar in women's narratives and 'naturalised' or 'normalised' between the categories of sex, becomes questionable. This Trojan Horse dismantles what readers consider 'natural' and 'normal,' as violence between two female bodies

should not be any more unnatural than that of violence between men and women. The appropriation of an act of violence often 'normalised' and 'naturalised' in heterosexual society is so unfamiliar in this context (between two bodies not bound to the categories of sex) that it renders the subject unknowable. The dénouement, therefore, may highlight that any oppressor ultimately becomes unrecognisable and unknowable to the one they oppress, as the distorted power dynamic alters the relationship.

Through Wittig's appropriation of the female body from anatomical textbooks – a male-dominated discourse – and her strategy of defamiliarizing familiar forms of subject-other relations through the act of touch, she presents a context whereby the relation between subject and object, or subject and other, is disorientated from the fixed categories of sex in a compulsory social contract of heterosexuality. This appropriation of the body, along with touch and its relationality between the two lovers, allows a further re-writing of how these interactions between interchanging subjects and objects work as Trojan Horses, by going a step further in dismantling notions of identity and sovereignty. By first appropriating forms of touch from compulsory heterosexuality and the categories of sex it upholds, the privilege to touch, informed by the restrictions on who may be within reach to touch and how, is opened from these categories, instilling the potential to further dismantle notions of identity.

The Relationality of Touch

The appropriation of touch functions as a Trojan Horse in *The Lesbian Body* that assists in dismantling categories of sex. Yet Wittig arguably employs this strategy further not only to dismantle categories of sex, but identity itself. The act of touching is the moment in which the two subjects encounter their relationality to one another, along with the threats, risks, and fragility this entails to their barriers – the skin being the most pertinent one that envelopes the body as a protective barrier against external objects. In this regard, Wittig's question seems apt: 'For what is total ecstasy between two lovers but an exquisite death?'⁴⁷ Touch, in this sense,

becomes the instigator of a subject's potential undoing, as each subject wrestles with desire, identity and notions of sovereignty in relation to each other. The notion of 'total ecstasy' between two lovers being open to a death encounter conjures the way in which sex has been positioned as an encounter with 'nonsovereignty'.⁴⁸ In *Sex, or the Unbearable*, Berlant and Edelman grapple with this term, nonsovereignty, claiming that it:

invokes the psychoanalytic notion of the subject's constitutive division that keeps us, as subjects, from fully knowing or being in control of ourselves and that prompts our misrecognition of our own motives and desires. At the same time, nonsovereignty invokes a political idiom and tradition, broadly indicating questions of self-control, autonomy, and the constraints upon them. To encounter ourselves as nonsovereign, we suggest, is to encounter relationality itself, in the psychic, social, and political senses of the term.⁴⁹

They consider sex to be a moment in which an encounter 'with the estrangement and intimacy of being in relation'⁵⁰ is induced, particularly one that involves negativity that often disturbs, or in other words disorients, the notion of a subject's sovereignty. The act of touching and being touched between the two lovers emphasises how touch may be capable of dismantling identity. Since memory is the implicit mechanism employed in building and maintaining the subject's sense of an identity, with continuity and coherency, what the act of touching is ultimately dismantling is the subject's memory of their identity.

Wittig's scenes between the lovers can be read as evoking encounters with nonsovereignty, highlighting two subjects grappling with their relationality to one another. Touching becomes part of the mechanism enacting the death encounter. In the following passage, the subject 'plugs' into the beloved's circuits, and in doing so, causes the death of the beloved's old identity:

Nowhere within you is there a neutral circuit. *I* plug m/yself into you, instantly your composition changes, you assume a new shape appearance colour, a passer-by returning from her walk would not recognize you. You move your mass away from the point *I* touch when m/y fingers brush against you. The more you advance precipitately towards m/e the more you recoil rapidly and move away. Or else you begin to spin on yourself in every direction. You are agitated throughout by a disturbance, you hurl yourself against the membrane which forms a sac all round you.⁵¹

The circuits of 'you' are reshaped by the plugging in of subject, 'I'. They are transformed through this tactile connection, which is an ability of touch I return to in the final chapter. These circuits are not perceived as neutral or static, but able to continuously alter, reshape, and reconstruct through relationality, which in this instance, transforms the subject 'I' into the external object of the sentence that touches subject 'you' in the sentence. The moment 'I plug m/yself into you' is when the beloved instantly changes, assuming 'a new shape appearance colour' that would be unrecognisable to any passer-by. The act of touching serves as the moment in which the beloved's previous identity is irrevocably altered, as they become unrecognisable. The instant change highlights how touch is on the precipice between a past and future identity – the act that alters identity through the relationality, whereby the beloved's body is no longer fully in their control, but at risk due to the disorientation of such an interruption or interference that the 'I' of the sentence causes by plugging themselves into the beloved.

The use of the pronouns 'I' and 'you' is significant in the context of relationality throughout the text. Wittig remarks that she sometimes considers *The Lesbian Body* to be a reverie about the beautiful analysis of the pronouns *je* and *tu* by the linguist Émile Benveniste.⁵² Wittig's acknowledgement of Benveniste speaks to his illustration of the I-you polarity in discourse, in which he articulates a particular relationship between the two in the speech act, stating 'I' signifies 'the person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing I.'⁵³ Benveniste suggests that 'I' is the position where the act of speaking and existing coincide, and 'you' is equally symmetrically defined as 'the individual spoken to in the present instance of discourse containing the linguistic instance you.'⁵⁴ 'You' is the one addressed by 'I' and in this relationship both become interchangeable. In his analysis of the "I/You" binomial, Marcel Hénaff argues:

the 'I-You' relationship is such that the 'You' that I am addressing is also an 'I' for which I am a 'You,' since even though the 'I-You' relationship is from the start a relationship of perspective from 'I' to 'You' it implies the reversibility of 'You' into 'I' for the person which I am addressing and which, by definition, can reply to me. In other words, a

grammatical person is and can only be someone capable of making this statement and this reply. 'I' and 'You' can only exist through the speech-act.⁵⁵

Wittig's use of these pronouns alters the relationship – subject-object relation becomes subject-subject relation in the text's speech act. The subject encounters relationality with the other, not as a subject and the other, whom the subject desires to assimilate into themselves, but between two subjects who are, in the speech-act, interchangeable. For Wittig, this 'I' and 'you' are multiple, rather than fixed positions, which counters the claims critics have made of her work essentialising a lesbian subject. Furthermore, since the pronoun position is interchangeable, she suggests that '[t]here is no hierarchy from 'I' to 'you' which is its same.'⁵⁶ Here I will refer to the 'I' and 'you' as subject-I and subject-you in relation to each other, rather than subject and object.

Touch instigates the encounter with relationality itself, the act in which the notion of sovereignty and the unity or coherency of the subject's identity is disorientated. What follows in the passage relays the beloved's response to this invasion and risk to their sovereignty when subject-I has the power to alter their 'composition': 'You move your mass away from the point I touch when m/y fingers brush against you. The more you advance precipitately towards m/e the more you recoil rapidly and move away.' Wittig exemplifies the contradictory nature of simultaneously desiring the relationality along with having to wrestle with the negativity that ensues from being in relation. Berlant and Edelman suggest that sex is the site where relationality is simultaneously invested with both optimism and negativity that can be experienced as unbearable.⁵⁷ The beloved at once both desires the encounter and yet wishes to recoil rapidly from it, demonstrating the difficulty one may have with coming to terms with the unbearable quality of being in relation and engaging with the risks this entails to the beloved's sense of coherency and unity within themselves. In *The Politics of Touch*, Manning argues that 'touch resolves to reach beyond tact, beyond the unspoken judgment that urges me to refrain from touching. To touch entails acknowledging the risks associated with the unknown toward

whom I reach when I touch. Touch must always lead beyond where I anticipated it would.⁵⁸ Manning acknowledges that the decision to touch always goes beyond what one anticipates as the subject cannot know beforehand what such an act of touching will do to another. In this instance, the beloved attempts to recoil and move away 'from the point *I* touch,' which can be read as approaching subject-*I* with tact, expressed by Manning as that which 'keeps me in the realm of the almost-known, the anticipated-in-advance. In this regard, tact holds to a structure of habit that discourages invention.'⁵⁹ Subject-you attempts to retract from the encounter, yet subject-*I* continues to approach, forcing subject-you to encounter their relationality with the other and the nonsovereignty that may ensue. The staccato structure of short sentences creates a broken flow in the passage, emphasising the hesitancy between the lovers to risk their sovereignty. The outcome: 'Or else you begin to spin on yourself in every direction. You are agitated throughout by a disturbance' ultimately suggests that the encounter is too unbearable for the beloved and that the relationality causes a disturbance throughout their circuits that enacts a spinning in every direction. The encounter causes a complete disorientation of the beloved's circuits.

Wittig further dismantles the relationship between subject-*I* and subject-you through the way in which '*I*' is written. In the French edition, Wittig positions a bar in *j/e*, which is often written as the '*I*' italicised in the English edition. This bar, in Wittig's words, 'is a sign of excess'⁶⁰ that,

helps to imagine an excess of '*I*,' an '*I*' exalted in its lesbian passion, an '*I*' so powerful that it can attack the order of heterosexuality in texts and lesbianize the heroes of love, lesbianize the symbols, lesbianize the gods and the goddesses, lesbianize Christ, lesbianize the men and the women.⁶¹

By appropriating the subject position of '*I*' for the lesbian subject, and positioning it as one in excess of itself, Wittig unsettles notions of identity. One is left questioning, as Whatling remarks, 'who am I, who are you, who is who when we are so conjoined? [and] More pertinently it proffers the question who, or what, is the lesbian body: I, you, or both of us together? The

point being that we do not know.'¹⁶² Through the deliberate use of pronouns that function as two subjects in the text, along with the 'I' suggesting a sign of excess, the interchangeable relationship dismantles the ability to answer such questions, as the 'lesbian' body continuously unsettles identity when in relation to another.

The subject, always in excess of itself, emerges through the act of touching, as the beloved 'hurl[s] yourself against the membrane which forms a sac all round you' in an act of retaliation against the excess of subject-I imposing themselves upon subject-you. Manning claims: '[t]he body that touches is a body that is always in excess of its-self. [...] Bodies reaching toward are abstract bodies. [...] I cannot secure a body that is reaching toward because that body is in movement, qualitatively altering spaced-times.'¹⁶³ Touch instigates a moment in which subject-I threatens to agitate subject-you, to cause a disturbance throughout their body. Touch precipitates the unravelling of subject-you, as they 'spin on yourself in every direction.' Manning draws upon Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the Body without Organs in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) as a body that is always beyond itself, as its reaching-toward creates a body always in a state of 'becoming its potential.'¹⁶⁴ As Manning explains, 'there is no end-limit to becoming, this body-in-potential cannot be conceived of as a permanent space-time, but must instead be thought of as an exfoliating movement toward another exfoliating movement. The body as exfoliation cannot be grasped.'¹⁶⁵ Read in this way, the body is in a state of always becoming. This is a concept I take further in Chapter Five to argue that touch transforms identity. In relation to *The Lesbian Body*, Manning's comments on the uncontainable nature of the body are insightful: 'this body is not solely contained within an enclosure – skin – which can be organised (tactfully) within a system of governance (a body-politic).'¹⁶⁶ As subject-you hurls themselves against the membrane surrounding them, it creates the image of one attempting to move beyond themselves. The sac is no longer able to contain subject-you's body, which has been set in motion through the Body without Organs of subject-I reaching out to touch the Body without Organs of subject-you. Manning states that, 'The BwO [Body without

Organs] is a multiplicity that challenges the dichotomy between the one and the multiple. Reaching toward you, you become multiplicitous, you multipliciously multiply me.⁶⁷ Subsequently, touch, as a way of multipliciously multiplying the subject enacts a form of undoing the subject as they can no longer maintain a sense of sovereignty, unity of oneness, or autonomy. Touch, in this instance, suggests an encounter with what is unbearable to the subject, whereby the negativity implicit in any relationality is illuminated. If touch instigates relationality, as it challenges each subject in their ability to know the other and distinguish and interpret their separateness from one another, it equally threatens the subjects' sovereignty, and in turn, instigates a disorientating and reorientating of subjectivity where the subjects' previous forms are deconstructed and then reconstructed through their relationality to one another, transforming both subjects in the process.

Skin plays a vital role in this relationality, as the 'sac' encompassing each subject acts as a border between the internal and external world of the subject. Many of the scenes in *The Lesbian Body* articulate a violent relation of ambivalence, mutilation, desire and remembrance between the subjects of the text, often in the form of getting under each other's skin – the membrane that maintains the barrier, protective layer and resistance to relationality. As discussed in the first section, a number of feminist critics have taken issue with the level of 'unnecessary' violence expressed in the text. Yet rather than reading the text as the literal ingesting and mutilating of the lovers' bodies, these acts of touch can be read figuratively, as representations of how the lovers respond to the negativity implicit in encountering one's relationality to another, which is an encounter with one's nonsovereignty. Since negativity unsettles one's sense of sovereignty and troubles the coherency of identity, Berlant and Edelman imply the necessity of negativity within relationality in order to make change possible. The negativity that plays a role in undoing the subject's sovereignty also provides the potential for the subject to transform and change from their encounter of relationality to another. Wittig enables the lovers to enact the unactable – the desires, drives and affects that

arise when the subjects are met with the nonsovereignty of themselves in relation to each other. This in turn emphasises this ultimate transformation (both positive and negative) that takes place from the lovers being in relation to each other. If 'negativity disturbs the presumption of sovereignty by way of "an encounter,"'⁶⁸ Wittig's violent relations between the lovers can be interpreted as the figurative response to and enacting of this disturbance, whereby the acts of mutilation highlight the desire to possess the other and in turn nullify the negativity implicit in relationality:

*I discover that your skin can be lifted layer by layer, I pull, it lifts off, it coils above your knees, I pull starting at the labia, it slides the length of the belly, fine to extreme transparency, I pull starting at the loins, the skin uncovers the round muscles and trapezii of the back, it peels off up to the nape of the neck, I arrive under your hair, m/y fingers traverse its thickness, I touch your skull, I grasp it with all m/y fingers, I press it, I gather the skin over the whole of the cranial vault, I tear off the skin brutally beneath the hair, I reveal the beauty of the shining bone traversed by blood-vessels, m/y two hands crush the vault and the occiput behind, now m/y fingers bury themselves in the cerebral convolutions, the meninges are traversed by cerebrospinal fluid flowing from all quarters, m/y hands are plunged in the soft hemispheres, I seek the medulla and the cerebellum tucked in somewhere underneath, now I hold all of you silent immobilized every cry blocked in your throat your last thoughts behind your eyes caught in m/y hands, the daylight is no purer than the depths of m/y heart m/y dearest one.*⁶⁹

The skin is the starting point of this encounter where subject-*I* discovers their ability to lift the membrane layer by layer. Subject-*I* undertakes this process meticulously, as the sentence structure reflects the performance step by step. The language is both descriptive and documentary, as if subject-*I* is undertaking an anatomical dissection and reflecting upon their findings. The passage is one entire sentence where each act is merely broken by a brief pause grammatically structured through comma splices. As a run-on sentence, the actions are linked directly with the *I* of the sentence, which becomes a repetitive mantra that reminds the reader of who is in control: it is '*I*' who 'pull starting at the labia,' '*I*' who 'pull starting at the loins,' '*I*' who arrives 'under your hair,' '*I*' who touches 'your skull,' and '*I*' who ultimately holds 'all of you silent.' Wittig does not break the progression with a full stop, but instead presents a continual action of stripping away the beloved's outer layers until subject-*I* possesses subject-you's cerebellum. Once subject-*I* holds the cerebellum in their hands, subject-you is

immobilized as subject-*I* catches their last thoughts. This act implies a finality by which subject-you is no longer in control, they are literally at the mercy of subject-*I*'s hands, while subject-*I* now possesses their very last thoughts. As subject-*I* traverses the various layers of subject-you, each act is violent, revealing the desire to possess the beloved and know them fully, along with nullifying the threat the beloved presents to subject-*I*.

As the subjects in *The Lesbian Body* encounter their relationality to one another, there is an implicit level of enacting out both the negativity and optimism of being in relation to one another. In the passage above, the act of peeling the skin off suggests subject-*I*'s response to the negativity experienced in this relationality. Subject-*I* arguably attempts to overcome and resolve this division and antagonism by opening the beloved up entirely, whereby the beloved can no longer hide behind their skin, but instead is utterly exposed to subject-*I*. To refer once again to *The Skin-Ego* (1995, English translation in 2016), Didier Anzieu states three primary functions of the skin: a sac that contains oneself, an interface that creates the borders and barriers between oneself and the outside world, and a site of communication.⁷⁰ Whilst the role that skin plays in relationality may often be taken for granted, this passage highlights its importance as the body's interface and barrier to overcome. If one of the functions of the skin is to act as a boundary between the subject and external objects, then this in turn creates an unalterable barrier to truly touching another person. What an individual is always touching is another's barrier, the edges and limits of that person. By removing this barrier, subject-*I* goes beyond this limit and beyond what is knowable in order to touch what usually remains untouchable and unknowable beneath the surface. Subject-*I*, in order to maintain their own sovereignty, nullifies the threat of the unknowable in their relationality to subject-you by literally possessing subject-you's brain in their hands and rendering them unable to move, which renders them incapable of reacting or positing any response. The interactions between the lovers suggest the way in which two subjects may undo each other when encountering their relationality and how each may respond to the negativity that ensues. The act of touching

instigates the moment of relationality where the subjects wrestle with both the negativity and optimism present within any encounter. The scenes between the lovers in *The Lesbian Body* therefore highlight the risks of touching, of being in relation with another when the borders of a phantasmatic notion of a unified self may be torn down, disorientated, and ultimately undone.

Figuratively Touching the Reader

Throughout *The Lesbian Body* the use of the second person pronoun, 'you,' implicates the reader in the relationality. The use of 'you' implies a direct address to the reader that compromises the 'fourth-wall', between the reader and the action. By implicating the reader in the scenes, touch can be read as not only occurring between the lovers within the text but as figuratively occurring between the lovers and the reader. If the reader positions themselves with the 'you' in the text, they are then implicated in the relationality and forms of touch 'you' receives and gives, which may disorientate the reader's notion of sovereignty and undo the reader in the process. In her remarks on *The Lesbian Body*, Wittig states: 'I could borrow from these texts on the condition they were assimilated into the reader's mind with violence.'⁷¹ She argues that the appropriation of myths, anatomical textbooks, and male-authored Western literature is justified so long as the way in which these texts are assimilated into the mind of the reader produces a violent reaction – a jolt to the reader's mind that plants the seed of the Trojan Horse, ready to 'sap and blast out the ground where it was planted.'⁷² The notion of a violent assimilation being part of the reading process suggests that the relationship between text and reader enacts an encounter with being in relation, which ultimately has the potential to disorientate the reader's identity as they adopt the new form.

The act of reading is one governed by norms that demarcate what are legitimate and illegitimate modes of interpreting texts. Tyler Bradway observes: '[t]hese norms operate constantly to condition a text's field of reception and to delimit its horizons of social engagement.'⁷³ Although these conditions are often taken for granted, Wittig argues that 'a text

by a minority writer is effective only if it succeeds in making the minority point of view universal'⁷⁴ and therefore, 'one must assume both a particular *and* a universal point of view, at least to be part of literature. That is, one must work to reach the general, even whilst starting from an individual or from a specific point of view.'⁷⁵ Although this raises questions of homogenising the position of the reader, the use of the words 'universal' and 'general' are the choices of the translator of Wittig's original text, and therefore, may not coincide identically with the original meaning of Wittig's work. The two words are not synonymous with each other and pose a risk in suggesting that the 'general' is the 'universal,' and essentialising the position of the reader instead of considering the multiple ways a reader may approach a text, depending on how they have been orientated within the world, which influences how they perceive the world. However, Wittig poses an interesting concept: a writer's ability to present a universalization of the viewpoint may determine whether the literary work will become a war machine, a Trojan Horse that can pulverise the old forms. The norms of reading that precede and presuppose the reader's approach to a text may impact the level of success a literary work has in becoming a war machine. Bradway suggests that the type of style and form a text 'must possess to become readable' dictates 'how readers should affectively and corporeally relate to the text before them: whether it is acceptable to get lost in reverie, to identify passionately and irrationally, to read with our feet up, so to speak; or whether we must read attentively with sober precision and pencils in hand.'⁷⁶ The textual form impacts the 'reader's felt relation to the text,' and according to Bradway, these 'affective relations are foundational to the norms of reading.'⁷⁷ Undoing the norms governing the reader's affective relations to the text is therefore key to the success of a literary work as a war machine.

The opening scene of *The Lesbian Body* implicates the reader in its address and alters how the reader may then approach the text and be expected to read:

In this dark adored adorned gehenna say your farewells m/y very beautiful one m/y very strong one m/y very indomitable one m/y very learned one m/y ferocious one m/y very gentle one m/y best beloved to what they, the women, call affection tenderness or

gracious abandon. There is not one who is unaware of what takes place here, which has no name as yet, let them seek it if they are determined to do so, let them indulge in a storm of fine rivalries, that which *I* so utterly disown, while you with siren voice entreat some woman with shining knees to come to your aid.⁷⁸

The dark gehenna defines a place of misery, burning, and torment where the beloved must say their farewells to 'tenderness or gracious abandon.' Whilst the beloved may attempt to call 'some woman' to their aid, to return them to the categories of sex, Whatling comments that this passage marks the '[e]ntry into the world of *The Lesbian Body* [which] is therefore exile from the world of conventional relations.'⁷⁹ By distinguishing between the beloved and the women in this passage, Wittig emphasises the separation from 'the womanist community which only misperceives, condemns or denies her writings,'⁸⁰ and instead addresses the reader who will dare to read and 'partake of the abjection in which the book is inscribed, simultaneously seduced and revolted'⁸¹ by each scene.

The 'your' of the sentence implicates the reader, positioning them as 'm/y very beautiful one m/y very strong one m/y very indomitable one m/y very learned one m/y ferocious one m/y very gentle one m/y best beloved.' The lack of conventional syntax creates a seamless infusion of each adjective describing the second-person pronoun as an accumulation of all their contradictions. This direct address repositions the reader as one who is not bound by 'affection tenderness or gracious abandon,' but who may partake in the violence of passion no longer contained by the categories of sex. The subject-*I* firstly enters the text by using the possessive pronoun, positioning the reader/beloved as possessed by subject-*I*, which suggests that by entering the text one is under the influence of subject-*I*'s grasp, in the gehenna in which no-one is unaware of what takes place. Through the possessive pronoun, it suggests a submissive positioning of subject-you – the one who submits to reading the text. Secondly, subject-*I* enters the text when disowning the women's 'fine rivalries,' articulating the separation between subject-*I* and the women. Therefore, if the reader decides to read on, following subject-*I* into the gehenna, they are equally entering a position that disowns the categories of sex, which

separates them from the women. Though the reader/beloved may attempt to entreat the women and return to the categories of sex, by entering the text, the women will not be able to come to the reader/beloved's aid – to enter the text is indeed to say farewell.

In this initial address that implicates the reader, Wittig appears aware of the response her text may elicit from readers, particularly in relation to the violence of the passages. Yet violence is at the core of Wittig's strategy to assimilate the text into the reader's mind, as it serves as a forceful assault that figuratively touches the reader's senses. In *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (2013), Sarah Schulman suggests the notion of the 'gentrification of the mind,'⁸² which reflects the physical process of gentrification where diverse communities are removed and replaced by homogenized groups. This process comes with 'the destruction of culture and relationship, and this destruction has profound consequences for the future lives of cities.'⁸³ This is then reflected in a gentrification of the mind, a homogenising of consciousness; an 'internal replacement that alienated people from the concrete process of social and artistic change.'⁸⁴ Schulman's concept in many ways speaks to Wittig's theoretical understandings of the 'straight mind' where the notion of violence as a strategy for demanding a response from the reader is similar to Schulman's discussion of being uncomfortable. The reader's confrontation with the abject, grotesque or monstrous other is both a violent jolt to the senses and one that leaves a lingering unease or discomfort.

By figuratively touching the reader, Wittig's experimental practice produces an uncomfortable affect in order to simulate change. Schulman writes that the gentrification of minds produces,

a dialogic relationship with the culture – when consumers learn that uncomfortable = bad instead of expansive, they develop an equation of passivity with the art-going experience. In the end, the definition of what is "good" becomes what does not challenge, and the entire endeavour of art-making is undermined.⁸⁵

In order to de-gentrify and transform social reality, discomfort is viewed as a way to expand minds, rather than as a negative sensation to avoid:

Being uncomfortable or asking others to be uncomfortable is practically considered antisocial because the revelation of truth is tremendously dangerous to supremacy. As a result, we have a society in which the happiness of the privileged is based on never starting the process towards becoming accountable. If we want to transform the way we live, we will have to reposition being uncomfortable as a part of life, as part of the process of being a full human being, and as a personal responsibility.⁸⁶

The sense of discomfort provokes bodily reactions from consumers who can no longer remain passive within the 'art-going experience.' If the experience makes consumers uncomfortable, it therefore demands their active engagement as it causes uncontrolled sensations to arise from being figuratively touched by the artwork. The success of art or literary works is determinate on their ability to touch the viewer/reader in order to evoke change. Being uncomfortable is required in order for those in power to become accountable for their actions, which in turn creates potentialities for new forms of social relations by breaking down the falsity of supremacist ideology – the belief of superiority of one group over another and the belief in their justified dominancy over them, particularly when social structures enforce this supremacy by providing (comfortable) advantages for certain groups over others. The idea of discomfort being a mode of dismantling gentrified thinking by expanding the individual, and in turn, spreading between individuals when one is no longer afraid to make others uncomfortable, can suggest the way in which artmaking in new forms acts like viruses upon the reciprocator to de-gentrify them in the process. Discourse is impregnated by the notion of the category of sex belonging to a 'natural' order, which Wittig argues is continuously 'reinforced on all levels of social reality and conceals the political fact of the subjugation of one sex by the other, the compulsory character of the category itself (which constitutes the first definition of the social being in civil status).'⁸⁷ By dismantling the assumed 'natural' order of the categories of sex in prominent discourses that appear to be objective, Wittig reshapes the body and its social relations. By dismantling dominant discourse, Wittig's experimental use of language creates a level of discomfort that figuratively touches the reader, and in turn, may disorientate the

perception the reader has of their own body and social relations. Therefore, the reader who dares to read is the one who risks contaminating their perception.

The opening scene continues by declaring that no-one will be able to bear the sight of the reader/beloved. In this sense, the body becomes the site of infection, as a textual utterance of all the myths and discourses that have shaped and contaminated the 'lesbian' body:

But you know that not one will be able to bear seeing you with eyes turned up lids cut off your yellow smoking intestines spread in the hollow of your hands your tongue spat from your mouth long green strings of your bile flowing over your breasts, not one will be able to bear your low frenetic insistent laughter. The gleam of your teeth your joy your sorrow the hidden life of your viscera your blood your arteries your veins your hollow habitations your organs your nerves their rupture their spurting forth death slow decomposition stench being devoured by worms your open skull, all will be equally unbearable to her.⁸⁸

By creating a monstrous, grotesque, and abject body, Wittig appropriates the discourses that would suggest these are traits of the 'lesbian' body. Instead of disavowing them, she incorporates them into the body of the beloved, suggesting the relationship the body has to the social reality that shapes it. The lack of syntax implies a breaking of boundaries and containment, creating an interweaving of these descriptions that emphasises their connection to one another, as an infusion that cannot be separated in the sentence structure. The 'lesbian' body is shaped through its abject social position, and therefore, these discourses are part of its tapestry. The imagery suggests an infection, with 'yellow smoking intestines' and 'green strings of your bile,' and by using the second-person pronoun to address the beloved, the point of view that may implicate the reader most is therefore the position of the infected, monstrous, grotesque object that experiences what currently 'has no name as yet.' Ultimately, the 'you' of the text becomes the one who is infected, who the women shall not be able to bear the sight of. Whatever the reader thought they knew before reading this text, the success of a literary war machine is measured in its ability to destroy in order to create new ways of reading, relating and remembering the various discourses that construct social reality. By violently assimilating these texts into the mind of the reader, whoever dares to read these texts may be disorientated

and potentially transformed in the process. The reader may undergo a process of queering memory by dismantling old forms (perhaps seen as normative) and assimilating non-normative forms into the reader's mind. The implication of the reader in Wittig's text is an example of a strategy of queering memory, and the work reveals how forms of experimental writing may undo the reader's sense of identity as a means to enact change. Crowder remarks:

If the work succeeds, then, it will cause readers to inhabit a new point of view, to see the work and the world afresh, and both are thus transformed. [...] Rather, it is that all readers, of all sexualities, come to inhabit a new space in which the perspective of the lesbian writer becomes their perspective, at least for the duration of the textual journey itself. Wittig, like Barnes and Proust before her, has truly created war machines that explode in the face of the straight mind that divides humanity into masters and slaves.⁸⁹

Inhabiting a new point of view, particularly one designed as a Trojan Horse, the reader is unable to rely on the norms of their reading practices to seek familiarity amongst the strangeness of the new form. Wittig's use of experimental form and style implicates the relation the reader has to the text in what Bradway remarks is 'a viscerally relational circuit, in which the transmission of affect engenders alternative modes of social belonging.'⁹⁰ Through grappling with the 'lesbian' body, Wittig's text may therefore be considered a form of queer experimental literature in its ability to elicit 'uncritical affective responses in readers,'⁹¹ which strike 'at the disembodied model of critical reading and its heteronormative social imaginary,'⁹² queering the reader's relationality to bodies and forms of touch in the process.

The uncontrolled affective response of the reader acts as a jolt. Bradway remarks: 'otherness engenders, thereby breaking open the codified structures of identity and relationality that are presupposed by liberal humanism.'⁹³ Bradway argues: 'The reader does not imaginatively empathize and thereby understand; instead, readers are overtaken by the other and must respond by confronting the limits of their understanding.'⁹⁴ The affective reader is disorientated and estranged from the way in which identity and forms of relationality are 'normatively' codified and structured. By challenging the limits of a reader's comprehension, the experimental text resists such 'codified structures' and opens the reader to new potentialities

of thinking through relationality. Although Wittig has been accused of being essentialist in her writing, by appropriating the female body from the categories of sex, and highlighting ways in which the subjects may disorientate and undo each other, Wittig expresses how two subjects may grapple with relationality and identity when these are no longer codified by 'normative' social structures. The experimental strategies employed by Wittig throughout the text assist in transforming the reader's relation to these lovers and in turn the reader's relation to themselves through the affective responses and sensations this reading causes. As Whatling observes: 'the confusion, disorientation and uncertainty that result from its [*The Lesbian Body's*] perusal are a constant threat to the reader's ability to interpret.'⁹⁵ The body is constantly rewritten within the text, which renders it anti-essentialist, for there can be no one definition of the lesbian body that takes precedence over another, and in turn, there is no one definition of how the lesbian body may touch another or identify with another. Wittig's experimental writing, therefore, does not suggest a future different from the present, a utopian perspective, but instead opens the reader to the potential of change through experiencing disorientation when in relation to another. The affects the reader may experience open their body to future potentialities, where touch, in this instance being 'touched' by the text, has the potential to not only orientate one's identity, but equally to disorientate and reorientate one's identity to enact transformation. It is through the reader's response to a text, therefore, that the effectiveness of the literary text as a Trojan Horse is actualised.

Chapter Five

The Transformative Possibilities of Touch: Kathy Acker's *Pussy, King of the Pirates*

Kathy Acker's experimental literary works have positioned her as a key literary figure in the American post-war avant-garde,¹ postmodernism, and according to Ellen Friedman and Miriam G. Fuchs, the third generation of innovative women writers. Avant-garde forms of experimentation facilitate a feminist politics of touch. Through an analysis of *Pussy, King of the Pirates* (1996), I read Acker's experimental techniques as creating textual spaces that expose the mechanisms of dominant discourses, obstructing 'normal' readings so that a counter-hegemonic narrative ensues that resists singular, whole, and coherent interpretations. By doing so, I explore the textual spaces that orientate the figures toward particular relations and interactions with others, questioning how this interrelates with economies of touch, specifically capitalist touch, self-touch, and queer touch. I use the terms 'figure' and 'subject' interchangeably, rather than the term 'character,' to acknowledge the challenge that experimental writing presents to the use of this term, since Acker's texts offer resistance to character development. According to Carla Harryman,

One can think of the emblematic figures in Acker's later fictions as anarchic functions that don't take root as fictional subjects but that instead possess unreliable properties that crowd the space of the novel such that they *don't* come to represent effects of pirated texts or fictional subjectivities.²

These figures do not 'exactly *lack* character/subjectivity – rather it seems that they are in an altogether different circumstance: one in which subjectivity, the illusory hallmark of character, is not a concern.³ By functioning anarchically, these figures, liberated from the concern of rigid subjectivities, occupy a ubiquitous space within the text that facilitates transformation. Drawing upon the analyses of the economy of touch throughout this thesis that began with notions of orientation, then reorientation, cessation, and disorientation, in this chapter, I initially readdress how touch orientates the subjects and is in turn shaped by spaces, sites, and temporalities that are inherently gendered and sexualised. I then consider how the subjects are

reorientated from these gendered spaces through the act of self-touch or queer touch, which moves the subjects away from capitalist forms of touch that are tied to patriarchal society and the way in which women are positioned within this. By dismantling coherent, linear, and socially constructed modes of relationality, these subjects are disorientated from what once anchored them within an economy of touch predicated on a framework of binary gender and compulsory heterosexuality, which opens the subjects to new orientations of tactile relations that are no longer confined to or regulated by gendered spaces.

The experiences of self-touch and queer-touch precipitate a move away from stagnant, rigid subjectivities, trapped in a capitalist system where patriarchal power controls and regulates the production of women's bodies as profit values. In relation to Acker's experimental practice, I take up the idea of 'sensitivity' within the text as a counteraction to forms of 'rigidity' that restrict bodily sensations and reposition the body toward capitalist forms of touch. Acker's experimentation stresses the way in which touch exceeds conventional language. The sensitivity of the form as well as language opens the text to sensation and transformation, materialising as liberatory points of departure from capitalist forms of touch. Sara Ahmed addresses notions of orientation and disorientation in terms of the lines one may follow:

Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created. The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of repetition.⁴

In Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, I initially addressed the way in which touch assists in orientating one's identity toward certain lines that are enforced by social norms, conventions, and oppressive practices, which are in turn perpetuated by the familial structure. I then considered how touch may instigate a body's stepping 'out of line.' Here, I firstly examine the way in which Acker's texts situate the figures within inherently gendered spaces that repeatedly orientate them toward capitalist forms of touch before considering the narrative move toward disorientation. In each chapter, I brought to light how the sense of touch,

experienced *relationally*, creates a resistance to bodies staying 'in line,' revealing that while the economy of touch may be framed and shaped by the repetition of gendered, racialised, and sexualised norms and conventions, the queer nature of touch still exceeds this framework, unable to be entirely confined, regulated or controlled by it. In Chapter Four, I read Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body* as exemplifying the risks of being in relation to another where to be orientated toward another may threaten one's sovereignty. In doing so, I argued that encountering one's relationality with another may disorientate the subject from the lines they follow, suggesting that this relationality dismantles 'normative' orientations, opening the subjects up to new possibilities of being in relation to another. In this chapter, I take this further by engaging with Ahmed's work once more to read Acker's text as a move away from capitalist forms of touch that situate the figures within inherently gendered spaces. By disorientating the figures in tactile relation to each other, the text materialises the possibility for queer becomings, generating an openness to new lines (or no lines at all) with new relational potentialities, which suggests the significance of the act of touching in instigating new orientations.

The trilogy of *In Memoriam to Identity* (1990), *My Mother: Demonology* (1993), and *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, share themes such as sex work, forms of masochism, and masturbation, along with experimental practices of piracy, and techniques of eversion and topological intertextual mutability.⁵ This chapter predominantly engages with the second section of *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, titled 'In the Days of Dreaming.' I firstly consider the narrative of O and Ange who meet in a brothel in Alexandria. The brothel orientates these subjects toward forms of capitalist touch and masochism that entraps and stagnates 'identity' in these gendered spaces. I compare Ange and O to the narratives of Airplane and Capitol in *In Memoriam to Identity*, addressing how Acker's trilogy situates these subjects in inherently gendered spaces that orientate them towards capitalist exchanges of touch. Whilst trapped in these spaces the subjects are continuously searching for somewhere/anywhere but have yet to find this elsewhere. The sex workers in *Pussy, King of the Pirates* are initially searching for

somewhere too, yet when they learn how to masturbate, they begin to dream. I read Acker's use of onanism in *Pussy, King of the Pirates* as a return to/of the body that mediates the potential for radical transformation, enabling the subjects (unlike those in *In Memoriam*), to access this elsewhere. Onanism is linked to dreaming. As the sex workers learn to masturbate, and in turn, dream, their dreams guide them to potential lines of flight away from the constraints of their initial spaces that are inherently tied to gender. Through my textual analysis of 'sensitivity' in the form, I argue that through onanism and dreaming, the text is open to sensation that disorientates the subjects from capitalist forms of touch that produce particular lines to follow.

In her essay 'Postmodernism' (1988), Acker discusses how she writes with words that are given to her, as '[i]f it wasn't for certain community consensus as to the meanings and usages of words, words would be nonsense.'⁶ For Acker, language is discourse: 'when I use language, I am given meaning and I give meaning back to the community.'⁷ Acker perceives the use of words as 'taking part in the constructing of the political, economic, and moral community' and therefore, '[a]ll aspects of language – denotation, sound, style, syntax, grammar, etc. – are politically, economically and morally coded.'⁸ Language as discourse constructs society. According to Acker, language is therefore the only possible chance for social change. Acker's essay 'Against Ordinary Language: The Language of the Body' (1993) informs my reading of onanism as engaging with pure intensity that conflates meaning and essence in discourse. Under the title 'The Languages of the Body,' Acker lists ten languages.

The following four inform this chapter's argument:

1. The language of flux. Of uncertainty in which the 'I' (eye) constantly changes. For the self is "an indefinite series of identities and transformations."
2. The languages of wonder, not of judgement. The eye (I) is continuously seeing new phenomena, for, like sailors, we travel through the world, through our selves, through worlds.
3. Languages which contradict themselves.
[...]
8. Above all: the languages of intensity. Since the body's, our, end isn't transcendence but excrement, the life of the body exists as pure intensity. The sexual and emotive languages.⁹

Acker's trilogy is deeply engaged with the body and manifestations of touch as she seeks languages of the body that go beyond what ordinary language represses and transforms into judgemental language. Ordinary language denies the existence of the body or any form of discourse that may be spoken from the margins, or from marginalised subjects that threaten the fixity and stability of such language. I argue that *Pussy, King of the Pirates* engages with the languages of flux, wonder, contradiction and intensity as a means of transforming the figures through onanism and a return to/of the body.

The brothel or school are familiar, inhabited spaces that orientate the subjects toward what Acker terms the 'land of the dead,'¹⁰ which organises and arranges their bodies in gendered ways. Acker's subjects begin to journey through these gendered spaces into 'non-spaces' of piracy. Ahmed asserts: '[f]amiliarity is shaped by the "feel" of space or by how spaces "impress" upon bodies.'¹¹ This familiar space of inhabitation gives certain directions, or paths for O and Ange as well as the pirate girls to follow. Space, for Ahmed, 'acquires "direction" through how bodies inhabit it.'¹² The repetition of the narratives is emphasised under the title '**ANTIGONE'S STORY.**' In bold the text reads '**Her name's not important. She's been called King Pussy, Pussycat, Ostracism, O, Ange. Once she was called Antigone...**'¹³

While the subjects inhabit these spaces, the continual repetition of the narrative may serve to expose how the lines that direct the subjects are performative, created by the repetition of these norms and conventions that continue to constrain them. When the figures learn how to masturbate, or become reorientated toward queer forms of touch, this can be read as creating a line of flight that alters the repetition of orientation toward certain directions. Through onanism that leads to dreaming, or queer touch that subverts the fixity of gendered relations, the subjects go beyond the constraints of ordinary language, accessing a world beyond what language has repressed, which disorientates their positions in space. The possibilities of alternative lines of flight or directions then present themselves. Through exploring how economies of touch,

specifically capitalist touch, self-touch, and queer touch, manifest in Acker's work, I consider how the subjects move from inherently gendered spaces to forms of piracy that enact resistance to static identity constructs and ways of positioning women socially, proffering a reading of identities as continually in the process of becoming through the way in which touch instigates new orientations.

The Currency of Touch

Acker stitches together a multiplicity of discourses that have shaped, constructed, stigmatised and subverted societal perceptions of prostitution. Acker's narratives of O and Ange, along with the sex workers St. Barbara, Louise Vanaen de Voringhem and Lulu, demonstrate the tension and negotiation these subjects undertake between dominant discourses that regulate their bodies, codifying and controlling their societal representations, and sex workers as speaking subjects who imbue these identities with subjective embodiment and agency. The discourses that have often been spoken *for* sex workers, rather than *by* sex workers, are neither negated nor stabilised but appropriated into the novel's textual fabric that the subjects must navigate. Through the technique of topological intertextual mutability,¹⁴ Acker develops a narrative that counters conventional, linear, time-oriented readings by interweaving discourses that crossover different temporalities and historical periods. For instance, there are references to times in which governing authorities had the power to control women's bodies in public spaces by testing their virginal status, which could then be cause for charges if not found intact. After the end of the 'first whore-song',¹⁵ the narrative intersects with secret contracts and a journalist's report of how 'Police roaming the streets outside apparently have the power to detain young and unmarried women in the company of men unrelated to them. The couple are taken to a medical officer who tests the girl's virginity.'¹⁶ If the woman was not a virgin, the families would then negotiate marriage. If the man refused, the couple were both charged. The man would be released within two months whilst the woman would be 'compelled to stay in

prison beyond the period of her sentence.¹⁷ Acker's technique of intersecting the narrative with multiple discourses resists the fixity of reducing a sex worker's body or identity to any one discourse.

The continual mutability of such narratives may be read as critiquing the capitalist production of women's bodies where touch becomes a currency with an exchange value. The subjects are controlled by this capitalist economy until Lulu teaches the sex workers how to masturbate. Onanism, as discussed in the following section, is then considered an antagonist to heteronormative forms of touch that tend to be linked to capitalism, providing a narrative of resistance that enables transformation as the subjects enter what Acker calls the languages of the body. In the preface to *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, Acker initially situates prostitution in the male regime, differentiating between women outside and inside the brothel:

Outside the whorehouse, men fear women who are beautiful and run away from them; a ravishing woman who's with a man must bear a scar that isn't physical. [...]

Inside the brothel, the women, however they actually looked, are always beautiful to men. Because they fulfil their fantasies. In this way, what was known as the *male regime*, in the territory named *women's bodies*, separated its reason from its fantasy.¹⁸

Through a dichotomy of public and private spaces that women may occupy, Acker emphasises the relationship between spaces and women's positioning within them, which in turn influences how one may be related to and touched in such spaces. Marjorie Worthington suggests that the space of the brothel is: 'where men colonize and women are colonized, where women's bodies become the territory for a male-ruled regime.' 'Thus,' Worthington argues, 'the meaning that the space takes on is inherently dependent upon the position of the person in that space; in Acker's novels, gender determines one's position, and therefore the meaning that a particular space will have.'¹⁹ This is comparable to my analysis in Chapter One where the familial spaces, inherently tied to gender and compulsory heterosexuality, orientate Audre's body toward particular lines of flight that direct who and how certain bodies may become reachable. In *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, by initially situating O and Ange within the brothel, Acker at first

suggests that the meaning of space is inherently tied to gender. O and Ange's positioning within these spaces confines their bodies to capitalist structures of commodification and production, which is based on the exchange value of touch and the access to women's bodies.

The space of the brothel orientates the sex workers toward certain forms of touch that are based on profit and exchange value. The brothel, therefore, constructs specific lines that the sex workers may follow, regulating their bodies by the constricted routes and paths they can direct themselves toward as commodities for men. In 'Women on the Market,' Luce Irigaray rereads Marx's notion of the commodity as 'an interpretation of the status of woman in so-called patriarchal societies.' Irigaray goes on to argue that the capitalist regime requires,

the submission of "nature" to a "labour" on the part of men who thus constitute "nature" as use value and exchange value; the division of labour among private producer-owners who exchange their women-commodities among themselves, but also among producers and exploiters or exploitees of the social order [...].²⁰

Irigaray's concept has been criticised, due to conceiving of sex workers as mere 'vehicle[s] for relations among men,'²¹ rather than acknowledging the potential agency in such positions. Yet in Acker's text, employing this Marxist framework stresses the way in which the body, in the space of the brothel, materialises as relating to itself as a commodity with a capitalist value, which is orientated toward men who may buy into this currency exchange.

Touch, in this regard, becomes a form of currency. The brothel, here, can be read as positioning the sex workers on the precipice between untouchability and touchability, depending upon who has the money to access their bodies. The sex workers are deemed 'untouchable', in the sense that men who cannot afford entrance are denied the ability to touch them, yet are comparatively 'touchable' for those who can afford the brothel's entrance fee to access such bodies. Inside the brothel, women 'are always beautiful' as they fulfil men's fantasies: they become the simulation of male desires, reflecting masculine values. Acker engages with Irigaray's theoretical work in many of her essays. Acker's situating of women outside and inside the brothel can be read through Irigaray's division of women's bodies when

a woman is positioned as a commodity: 'two irreconcilable "bodies": her "natural" body and her socially valued, exchangeable body, which is a particularly mimetic expression of masculine values.'²² Through a Marxist framework that critiques capitalism, Irigaray argues that woman as commodity 'is disinvested of its body and re clothed in a form that makes it suitable for exchange among men.'²³ Women, in this position, 'no longer [come] from *their* natural form, from *their* bodies, *their* language, but from the fact that they mirror the need/desire for exchanges among men.'²⁴ The women are selling the fulfilment of the clients' fantasies. Through this economy touch becomes currency whereby the differentiation between bodies within reach or out of reach is dependent on whether one can afford access to such bodies. Touch can be bought and sold, as a value that can be traded for money. Artaud (a punk boy who wants to free O from the brothel at the same time as desiring her for himself) observes that the brothel is not where men go to have the intercourse they may experience in the outside world but for 'elaborate and tortuous fantasies'²⁵ where the 'territory named *women's bodies*' becomes a site to mirror and reflect male desires whereby money and touch are the dominant currencies for exchange. The Madam does not allow Artaud to enter the brothel as 'I had to give her money before I could be with O. Because I didn't have money I was thrown out of the whorehouse.'²⁶ Access to O may only be granted through money, as a value exchange.

In Acker's earlier work, *In Memoriam to Identity* (1990), sexuality is considered a social disease, due to its association with capitalism. In Capitol's narrative, her brother R and Earl, a Jewish businessman, discuss the matter of Capitol's promiscuity. Earl states that 'It shouldn't matter to a man what a woman's doing. They don't have any brains to make their doing noticeable. If she's a slut, make your money that way.'²⁷ Her ability to be touched is framed through her body's use-value as a way of making profit. Although R attempts to enforce this onto Capitol, her way of resisting appears in the form of continuing to have sex with every man in sight without exchanging the value of touch for money. Although the narrative is framed by a capitalist system, which Capitol continuously attempts to resist in terms of her body becoming

a way to make profit through capitalist touch, Capitol acknowledges the initial stirrings of sensations and 'body talk' that Acker expands upon in *Pussy, King of the Pirates*. Capitol states: 'I didn't hear or hadn't heard cause of what was going on inside or as me. Feeling. Nothing made sense but feeling. I don't mean sentimentality; I mean sensations. Either some portion of the inside surface of my skin moved, or else there was nothing.'²⁸ Capitol no longer hears her brother, Quentin, because she is listening to her body. As she listens to her body, she hears the body's narrative of sensations, a language that remains unrepresentable to her and only made aware to her as a shifting and movement of her skin. The notion of sensation, of a movement of her skin, can be understood as the initial way in which the body may move into radical spaces that are in opposition to capitalist touch. There is a liberation of sensation. However, Capitol, in this capitalist society, does not yet know how to gain access to these languages of the body as she still recognises that '[m]oney is only one of the means (power) of freedom (for me) and I wanted the money Mother had left me which I couldn't put my hands on.'²⁹ In order to escape her fate of prostitution, Capitol believes she needs to steal the money back for herself as a form of power that is acknowledged within the confines of a capitalist society. Capitol explains '[t]here is nowhere else to go. I have to go somewhere, I said to myself, therefore that has to be somewhere.'³⁰ Yet she is still unable to find this elsewhere. She recognises the need to go somewhere but is orientated toward a capitalist society whose access to power is hierarchically structured by those who do and do not have money. In *In Memoriam*, both Capitol, as well as Airplane, attempt to find power within a system that relegates women to the position of commodities where touch becomes the subject's form of currency to exchange for money and the power this may give them access to.

Airplane and Capitol are both trapped by the spaces that regulate their bodies, orientating them toward forms of capitalist touch. Their repetition of searching for 'somewhere' suggests that Airplane and Capitol are continuously searching for forms of resistance and ways of escaping the discourses that confine them. However, *In Memoriam* does not suggest that the

notion of elsewhere has yet been found, as these subjects remain trapped to varying degrees in a system, not through their own choices. By comparison, O is not accepted by the sex workers since she in fact enters prostitution of her own free will, subverting the power these economies of touch based on capitalism attempt to exert on her body. A number of recent scholars, such as Shannon Bell³¹, Joanna Phoenix³², and Maggie O'Neil³³, have evaluated and researched the reasons a person might enter prostitution, often highlighting the stigma and tenacity of narratives that perpetuate dominant discourses on prostitution. O's agency in choosing to become a sex worker excludes her from the other sex workers as she does not conform to the discourses that seek to codify, regulate and control her identity as a sex worker:

What they really detested was that economic necessity hadn't driven me into prostitution. To them, the word *love* had no meaning. But I didn't become a whore because I loved W so much I'd do anything for him. Anything to convince him to love me. A love I was beginning to know I would never receive. I entered the brothel of my own free will, so that I could become nothing, because, I believed, only when I was nothing would I begin to see.³⁴

O is detested due to the lack of economic necessity driving her to prostitution. She negates the discourse that views prostitution as erotic labour and value exchange. Lastly, O denies becoming 'a whore' because of her love for W, negating the narrative of coercion often associated with how and why women enter prostitution. Interestingly, before Lulu masturbates and then teaches the other sex workers to masturbate, the narrative of O and Ange seems more restrictive, constrained by conventional grammar and syntax. Colby highlights that '[t]he symbolic confinement of conventional syntax is aligned with institutional oppression.'³⁵ In the passage above, by adhering, to a certain degree, to conventional syntax, this initial narrative could be read as highlighting institutional oppression. While the body is constrained, oppressed by the spaces that are inherently tied to gender and patriarchal order, the use of conventional syntax equally aligns with this institutional oppression, demonstrating the inseparability of form and content in Acker's experimental works.³⁶ The more experimental practices within the text, such as the inclusion of cartography throughout the text (see Figure 3.1), comparatively

liberate the form and style by offering resistance to conventional language. Housed in the Kathy Acker Papers at Duke University, Acker's original dream maps offer more detailed and complex cartographies than the published versions, revealing a more significant move into imaginative spaces (see Figure 3.2). The pirate maps do not function as orientating devices that provide direction to a specific location. Instead, the maps open the text to imaginative spaces that dismantle the hierarchical social relations between particular locations on a map, as the reader's ability to defer meanings or connections between the spaces is undermined. When the subjects are dislocated from gendered spaces, as pirates who belong nowhere, the use of more experimental practices stresses the extent to which these subjects transform within the text, as their ties to spaces that are inherently gendered lose their meaning.

O suggests that she entered the brothel so that she could become nothing, which implies a conscious decision to collude with patriarchal positionings of women, or in Irigaray's terms, of assuming 'the feminine role deliberately' in order to '[p]lay with mimesis [...] to try to recover the place of her exploitation, by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it.'³⁷ In 'Reading the Lack of the Body: The Writing of the Marquis de Sade' (1994), Acker argues '[t]he Law is patriarchal because it denies the bodies, the sexualities of women. In patriarchy, there is no menstrual blood.'³⁸ In this regard, the father becomes a symbol for patriarchal authority and through the denial of women's bodies and sexualities, they therefore become mirrors for patriarchy and in turn for the father. Acker makes her point through the analysis of de Sade's work where 'there are no actual women' as 'women are either victims or substitute-men.'³⁹ She goes on to argue:

de Sade most often chose to see through the female gaze, but this female gaze is still the gaze, that act of consciousness that must dominate, therefore defines, all it sees. The gaze—which, though seemingly female, is always male—is that sight whose visual correspondent is the mirror. In the mirror, one only sees oneself. Since there are no women, women with bodies, for de Sade, he cannot escape the labyrinth of mirrors and become all that the law has repressed.⁴⁰

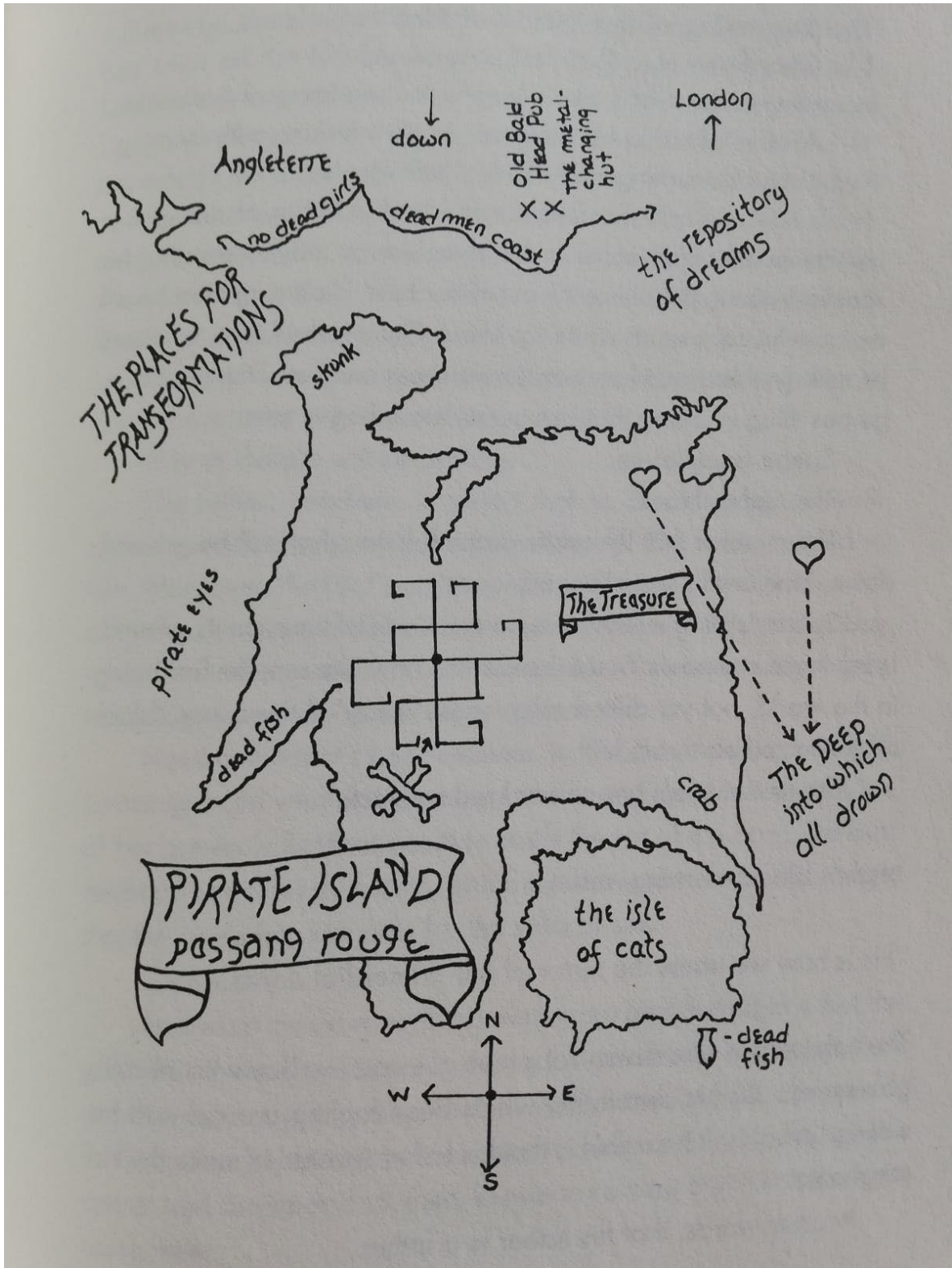


Figure 3.1: Kathy Acker, 'Private Island Passage Route,' in *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, New York: Grove Press (1996) p. 67.



Figure 3.2: 'The Place of Transformations'. Undated Dream Map. *Pussy, King of the Pirates* (1996). Oversize - Box 1 (Artwork). Kathy Acker Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

One cannot escape the labyrinth of mirrors and become all that the law has repressed when there are no women with bodies and sexualities. From this perspective, they are merely part of the mirror reflecting the gaze that even when seemingly female, is always male since it must dominate and control what it sees. As Acker states, 'De Sade did not cast out his eyes (castrate himself). Rather, he shattered mirror after mirror; behind every mirror stood another mirror; behind all mirrors, nothingness sits. De Sade wrote in order to seduce us, by means of his labyrinths of mirrors, into nothingness.'⁴¹ By entering prostitution, O enters the labyrinth of mirrors to ultimately shatter each mirror to become nothing. By revealing what is behind the mirrors, this nothingness, O can then begin to see by going beyond what ordinary language represses. Unlike Airplane and Capitol who remain trapped to varying degrees in spaces that are inherently tied to gender, by situating herself nowhere, as nothing, in search for somewhere, O, through onanism and dreams that instigate movement, is then able to find this elsewhere.

O succumbs to the degradations demanded of femininity by prescribing herself freely to the role of sex worker. Acker constructs a female subject who is not in opposition to the patriarchal positioning of female as object, but instead is subsumed in masochism, appropriating the position fully in order to transform through this identity. Airplane equally suggests this subsuming of masochism where for a woman to gain power she must at first 'get it from a man.'⁴² In Airplane's narrative she decides to use the man who took 'her virginity or raped her, it didn't matter which,' as he 'was as good as any other man.'⁴³ She believes that through using him she may eventually gain access to this power. Likewise, when Capitol steals the money her mother left for her, she leaps 'not quite into the arms of the car's occupant; using him to get away.'⁴⁴ However, both subjects manage to use these men to move into other gendered spaces that confine them. Whilst they move through these spaces, always in search for somewhere, this movement remains stagnant. They cannot find the elsewhere that they search for, and ultimately remain trapped in the confines of gendered spaces that tether them to capitalist forms of touch and regulate their bodies toward certain lines of flight. Similar to

Airplane and Capitol, O succumbs to this role of sex worker in order to journey 'into the land of the dead,'⁴⁵ becoming nothing to then perhaps subvert the powers of these discourses that seek to control her. David Brande perceives the 'masochism as a strategy to temporarily shed identity or 'individuality.'⁴⁶ Brande's remark speaks to Berlant and Edelman's notion of nonsovereignty, discussed in the previous chapter, where to be in relation to another may be to encounter relationality itself and in turn be undone through such an encounter. In the space of the brothel, O's sovereignty is undone through the encounter of sex to the extent to which she becomes nothing. Similarly, through masochistic sexual relations that deregulate the senses, Acker's subjects perceive the potential of transformation by going beyond the limits, traits, habits or movements of the literal body.

Masturbation, for Airplane and Capitol, is still framed through their relation to men who instruct them to masturbate for their own voyeuristic pleasure, and their orgasms, therefore, become part of the capital production value of their bodies. Comparatively, the sex workers in *Pussy, King of the Pirates* learn how to masturbate for themselves, returning to the body, and with this they start to dream, going beyond the literal body. By first shedding identities through masochism, becoming nothing, O goes beyond the limits of her literal body that is codified and regulated in a dead society. Whilst Airplane and Capitol *In Memoriam to Identity* find themselves in a perpetual loop of encountering gendered spaces that entrap their bodies, *Pussy, King of the Pirates* can be read as moving beyond this entrapment where the subjects' return to/of the body instigates lines of flight away from spaces that orientate them towards capitalist frameworks of touch and relations between bodies.

The Politics of Onanism: The 'Sensitive' Text

Acker understands the sexual sphere to be where 'many, if not all, of the human intercourses meet: fantasy, the imagination, memory, perhaps especially childhood memory, desire, need, economy, power.'⁴⁷ By engaging with this sphere, Lulu, a sex worker at the

Alexandria brothel, may access the intersections of these intercours, entering the labyrinth of these intercours and journeying through them in order to return to the body. Lulu needs to live within the 'realm of sex,' yet this is not situated in relation to others, particularly in relation to men, but in relation to herself. The economy of self-touch provides access to this realm that opens Lulu's body to new potentialities:

In order to live, Lulu needed to be in the realm of sex.

Lulu: "Body, talk.

"While I masturbate, my body says: Here's a rise. The whole surface, ocean, is rippling, a sheet that's metal, wave after wave. As *it* (what's this *it*?) moves toward the top, as if toward the neck of a vase, *it* crushes against *itself* moving inward and simultaneously *it* increases in sensitivity. The top of the vase, circular, is so sensitive that all feelings, now circling around and around, all that's moving, are now music.

"Music is my landscape.⁴⁸

The practice of masturbation is enclosed in speech marks, articulating the 'body talk' and how the body finds discourse in the waxing and waning of pleasure. Lulu describes how her body, through masturbation, speaks as a rise that ripples through her. Acker uses the metaphor of an ocean rippling, wave after wave, as the hyperbolic image of the rising sensations in the body. In 'Language and Poetic Language,' Acker engages with Severo Sarduy's work where he 'defones [sic] language as metaphorical.'⁴⁹ Through Sarduy's understanding of metaphor, Acker considers that in language 'truth and lie (hyperbole, image) are interdependent. Sarduy states that in language truth lies exactly where the hyperboles, the images built by the imagination meet.'⁵⁰ In this regard, a distance always appears between signified and signifier, or in other words 'between the act and the word.'⁵¹ Yet Acker suggests there is more complexity to this statement, as when any act is then perceived it 'has entered the verbal realm whereas any occurrence of language is an act.'⁵² Acker highlights the way in which acts are perceived through entering the verbal realm, but there is a distance within this process, whereas language is already the act and word in itself. Subsequently, 'language is always metaphorical'⁵³ and poetic language, according to Sarduy, is where this distance is enlarged. By enlarging this distance between the act of onanism and the body's sensations (the signifiers) and the

metaphors of the ocean, waves, and the neck of the vase (the signifieds) that are associated with it, one may then locate the intersection between truth and lies, where hyperboles or the imagination's images may encounter each other.⁵⁴

The passage uses the poetic language of metaphor: 'ocean,' 'wave after wave,' and simile: 'as if toward the neck of a vase,' which eludes definitive meaning as these words (the signifieds) that are associated to the act of onanism and the body's sensations do not connect to each other. An ocean and vase in association with one another negate definitive meanings or relations to each other. The associations are incomparable, yet by situating them together in the passage they break down meaning to the extent that the invisible and silent can appear: the sensations of the body can appear in the spaces where meaning breaks down. Poetry, Acker states through her analysis of Sarduy's work, 'eludes messages because its words break down as they approach meaning. For it is only as words deny each other, break down, as messages turn on themselves like snakes eating their own tails, that that which is invisible and silent can appear.'⁵⁵ Simile is used as there are no direct languages of the body as the sensations of the body, or the experiencing of 'sensitivity' is unrepresentable. Therefore, Acker engages with a conceptual process in order to access them by folding into metaphor as it is the only way she can represent the experience. Acker states that '[h]ere poetry and sex meet. For the realm of sex is holy. Silent. Isn't identity lost at the point of orgasm?'⁵⁶ Acker's questioning of identity being lost at the point of orgasm speaks to Berlant and Edelman's notion of nonsovereignty whereby the encounter of sex may be an encounter with what undoes the subject's sovereignty.

As Lulu rises further into sensations and 'body talk,' which, as Acker remarks, eludes meaning in ordinary language 'by oscillating between signifieds and signifiers, between meanings and silence (that obscurity which is humanly unbearable),'⁵⁷ the use of metaphor suggests this shedding of identity, whereby identity tied to definitive meaning is lost. For Acker, '[b]oth poetic discourse and sex are processes of transformation.'⁵⁸ Both play with this 'proximity of death' as silence is changed into meaning and vice versa within poetry whilst 'sex

is one movement between life and death.¹⁵⁹ The necessities of sexuality are 'the necessities of the transformation between existence and nonexistence.'¹⁶⁰ Lulu encounters the intersections between meaning and the silence that obscures it: the point at which language fails and one experiences the play between existence and nonexistence. By calling it *it*, the narrative highlights speechless language and the namelessness of this sensation. '*It*' cannot be contained through the act of naming, which would delegate *it* to ordinary language that could then code, label and organise *it*. Instead, '*it*' crushes, moves and increases in sensitivity. Language is unable to directly represent the *it* that crushes and moves, yet by associating *it* with another metaphor of music, Lulu seeks a discourse outside of what is representable in ordinary language. Lulu's landscape, as music, creates a discourse nearer to the languages of the body, than to ordinary language of rationality.

This rise is equally non-linear, it does not move in one direction, but is circular and all that is moving. Though this rise initially moves toward the top, it does not reach a final peak but 'crushes against *itself*,' the movement is then located inwards. The form emphasises this continual movement through syntax that negates a build-up of tension toward a final point of climax that then moves into a denouement of the act. The comma splices ensure a continual movement of the text without an end point, firstly moving toward the top, then as if toward the neck of a vase, but then crushing against itself, and then moving inward. The form imitates the content. The commas suggest the motion of the waves, the back and forth of these sensations that remain circling and moving continually. In this regard, the context points toward a textual orientation as a site of emergence where the phenomenology of touch is at work through a textual erotics that mirrors that of orgasm. When the rise enters the top of the vase, it is circular rather than a final point where the sensitivity remains circling around and around. By articulating the rise as circular, the concept of linearity is negated, and the traditional notion of a linear direction toward orgasm, which could be considered an orgasm experienced by men, is subverted. Alternatively, Lulu's onanism is not temporally located in the text, but instead,

occupies space, which shares an affinity with her body. As Lulu goes down, 'Whatever is bottom is so deep that it's spreading away from its center...Toward what? Opening up to whom? Opening up only to *sensitive*. Sensation is the lover.'⁶¹ Her pleasure is decentralised, which arguably decentralises the centralised power of the phallus. Though Lulu questions this spreading away, highlighting how ingrained this power is that regulates her pleasure and structures it in relation toward something and open for someone, she is no longer orientated toward a certain object or opening up for someone. Instead her pleasure is only opening up to '*sensitive*,' the pure intensity of sensation. Not only the content, but the experimental form creates this opening up to '*sensitive*' as the form imitates the waxing, waning, repeating, and folding. Through the sensitivity of the form as well as language and content the text is open to sensation and transformation as a liberatory point of departure from capitalist forms of touch.

Rigidity suggests a closing in or restriction to sensation, a move away from a return to/of the body back toward capitalist touch that regulates and constrains the subject's body. Acker repeatedly evokes the notion of rigidity as Lulu (as well as other figures) masturbate: 'If this tunnel, which the ring's slipping down, becomes rigid, there won't be any more sensation.'⁶² Rigidity in the form is associated with the building of tension and a linear progression toward orgasm that resembles the male experience of sex, rather than a body open to sensations that move and spread continually without a fixed centre-point. However, the narrative form itself is not rigid, and therefore, provides an anti-capitalist approach to touch as Lulu navigates this rigidity that may obstruct the flow and openness of her body to sensation: 'The vibrations (pleasure) are taking over. Now any desire to stop.....oh yes, there *it* goes; this disappearance of *it* causes laughter; laughter's a threshold that's soon reached.'⁶³ The practice of masturbation, when rigidity is overcome through a move toward relaxation that opens the body again, can be read as becoming synonymous with entering language, not the language of dominant discourse, but of 'body talk' a site where the languages of wonder and intensity enter the text through the imaginary, dream-world of the nonsensical, nonlogical and

nonrational. Harryman addresses Acker's practice of masturbating in order to produce language whilst writing *Pussy, King of the Pirates*:

In this situation, the mind has to struggle to join the ego to the libido, to write and come at the same time. At some point the writing always trails off. The process results in revelation, banality, and impossibility. The text is produced through a retention of this limit of the knowable.⁶⁴

The use of ellipses may suggest this trailing off as Lulu at first encounters revelation, then banality when wrestling with rigidity before revelling in the impossibility as the vibrations, the body's pleasure, take over. Colby observes that 'the use of ellipses opens up a textual space of non-expression.'⁶⁵ Lulu, by returning to the body through onanism, encounters the limits of the knowable.

Masturbation, which is often interlinked with dreaming and imagination throughout the text, contests rational reality. The boundaries between reality and dreams become unclear in the narrative, which exposes the constructs of knowledge and how what is real or true is defined socially. The rigidity may suggest the obstruction to encountering the limits of what is knowable. Becoming rigid returns Lulu to rational reality and socially constructed knowledge. When O masturbates, she equally encounters a '*map of rigidities*' that stop the world. She questions what she has done wrong, and recognises that 'Feeling or sensation evaporates whenever the feeler – the subject here is the object – tries to perceive and understand a particular feeling or sensation.'⁶⁶ The sensation is unrepresentable; therefore, when O attempts to perceive and in turn make meaning of the sensation through representation, the sensation is interrupted and lost. It is only through silence, through allowing what is unrepresentable to enter the text, that O can maintain a return to/of the body. By overcoming this rigidity, Lulu and O return to sensations and 'body talk' that disrupt the phallogentric constructs of knowledge, or what is knowable through structures of rationality. In 'body talk,' touch and dreams are not passive, but constitute lines of flight, intentionality, and the possibilities of transformation. Acker's narrative may retain this limit of what is knowable, but equally she

highlights 'the contingency of structures of knowledge.'⁶⁷ Knowledge is inherently structured by society that provides meaning. Yet Acker's experimental strategies, as Colby observes, 'create sites of negation impervious to the powers of comprehension that offer new forms of meaning not governed by conventional ideas of sense and 'knowledge.'⁶⁸ Onanism destabilises the concrete claims to knowledge as Lulu accesses knowledge structured through the language of the body, in forms of intensity, wonder, flux, and contradiction, rather than knowledge governed and organised through conventional, patriarchal structures.

As soon as Lulu goes over this threshold of non-expression, to the limits of what is knowable, she enters the realm of being pure nerves: 'to touch is to be touched; every part of mind, body and feeling is relaxing so much that sensation has domain.'⁶⁹ In this realm, 'to touch is to be touched.' In 'Colette' (1985), Acker states:

Sexuality is central. Female sexuality is not negative. "Woman 'touches herself' all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within her self, she is already two—but not divisible into one(s)—that caress each other." Female sexuality not only exists, it is double: it is the toucher and the touched.⁷⁰

Acker suggests that onanism goes beyond the limitations of the skin. Referring to Irigaray's notion of a woman continuously in contact with herself in the unreferenced citation, Acker stresses that female sexuality is double as the subject is both 'the toucher and the touched.' Onanism, as O acknowledges, is an act where object and subject coexist, whereby the 'feeler' is the one who touches as well as the one experiencing the touch. In *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, onanism does not present separation but a synonymous relationship between touching and being touched in the domain of sensation where one may return to/of the body.

Self-Touch and *The Languages of the Body*

Onanism is not only a reoccurring theme in *Pussy, King of the Pirates* but also significant to Acker's experimental form and investigation into developing languages of the body. In '**BEFORE THE DAYS OF DREAMING**,' onanism precipitates O and Ange's

journey of transformation. Onanism opens their worlds to discourses beyond that which ordinary language represses. Caren Irr (2004) argues that '[t]he whores begin to see themselves in the context of their own stories [...] Their tool for dissolution is masturbatory fantasy.'⁷¹ Onanism is a catalyst for transforming identity from a static, stabilised, patriarchal world order. Acker's work has been considered antifeminist with figures perceived of as feminist antipodes, yet the language enacts resistance that could be read in a similar way to Audre Lorde's claim: '[f]or the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.'⁷² Power cannot be dismantled by transferring such power from one master to another master. In other words, it is not enough to simply replace patriarchal power with another kind of power, which would only serve to alter the hierarchical order, yet otherwise sustain its power. Instead, power must be dissolved. Before Lulu teaches the sex workers how to masturbate, they are aware of this need for dissolution:

Ange, St. Barbara, Louise Vanaen de Vorginhem, and the rest of the whores learned that if language or words whose meanings seem definite are dissolved into a substance of multiple gestures and cries, a substance which has a more direct, a more visceral capacity for expression, then all the weight that the current social, political, and religious hegemonic forms of expression carry will be questioned. Become questionable. Finally, lost.

The weight of culture: questioned and lost.⁷³

Ordinary language represses languages of the body by positing meanings that seem definite. The experimental disrupts and dismantles the power of dominant discourses, and the institutions and constitution of bodies that employ them by enacting what the content itself suggests: a dissolving of meaning into substance through the lack of a full stop where definitive meaning is dissolved gradually through comma splices into the substance of multiple gestures and cries. By dissolving these definitive meanings, power may be dismantled as these hegemonic forms of expression are then questioned and ultimately lost.

In 'Critical Languages,' (1990) Acker states 'It is imperative to return to the body, to return the body.'⁷⁴ Acker goes on to observe that '[t]he authoritative representing act' is not questioned, since it weds both fiction and fact together, yet it 'is questionable because it is the

transformation of all the multitudinous languages of the body into a judgemental language, the language of the logos.⁷⁵ Only through the return to/of the body may 'the language of the logos' and the continual reification of such a split between body and mind be subverted. The languages of intensity become part of the textual fabric as the form opens up to a language of bodily sensation. Tyler Bradway remarks that Acker's 'goal is to create an idiom for non-mimetic affective writing, where language becomes an impersonal force of visceral intensity that merges with the body's affects.'⁷⁶ By conflating language with the body's affects, the body no longer materialises discursively 'within a signifying economy,' instead, the affective language is itself perceived as 'a force of non-dialectical intensity.'⁷⁷ Acker's experimentation with orgasmic writing reveals that when the subjects reach the 'masturbatory threshold of indistinction [...] identity disappears into the broader play of affective forces that subtend the subject.'⁷⁸ By opening the text to affective language, Acker moves beyond the discursive body, demonstrating the way in which the body exceeds social confines as one's bodily affect cannot be entirely regulated or controlled. Onanism is an antagonist to reproductive sexual practices. While Acker critiques the economy of capitalist touch that tethers women's sexualities to reproduction, marriage, and heterosexuality, onanism can be read as presenting an antithesis to these constraints as the sex workers' bodies become open to the language of sensation. There is a social double standard by which feminine desire is culturally valued as masochism, while at the same time, disavowed for being what can be considered as female excesses, those erotics that threaten the constructs of women's sexuality as reproductive and heterosexual. In 'Seeing Gender' Acker suspects that there is a plurality or more of such languages of the body, '[o]ne such is the language that moves through me or in me or...for I cannot separate language body and identity...when I am moving through orgasm or orgasms.'⁷⁹ Acker's experimental form offers a narrative of excess where female orgasm(s) resist the discourses of female sexuality as passive, exclusively reproductive, and as a lack that mirrors male desire.

Orgasm evokes the eversion of Lulu's body, from whatever rhythms were inside the body to outside the body. There is no longer any distance between the text and orgasm where meaning and essence converge as Lulu reaches the point of failure and the language of the body, in the form of mantra, takes over as this internal rhythm becomes external. The excess of female orgasm is metaphorically transformed into an animal and accentuated through Lulu's insistence on always wanting more: 'Again again. An animal. It would always come again: the animal claw.'⁸⁰ The form suggests eversion as the animal inside the body is clawing out. Colby analyses eversion in relation to De Monchaux's sculptures and Acker's 'from Psyche's Journal' (1997). Here, in *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, the imagery evoked through onanism suggests this turning inside out of the body where 'feminist aesthetics of eversion [are] grounded in corporeality.'⁸¹ Lulu later states that 'In my cunt, there's a little animal, a type of fish, but it's a mammal. A weasel-cat, who's hungry, is sticking out its tongue...'⁸². What is inside desires to be outside and the 'cunt' becomes animated through the insinuation of a little animal inside that is hungry:

"My whole cunt is now this animal who's becoming hungrier: mouth opens more widely, the clit is a tongue that licks, laps, is tapping like a foot, tapping what's outside as if a floor. Eyes lie above this tongue. All my sensations are a sky. I could no longer talk. As soon as I stopped talking, everything turned white and the waves that were approaching, slowly, steadily, and very strongly, solid, solid, transformed into my blood, then into my bones; whatever had been the rhythms of my body inside my body were now rhythms outside. This is the meaning of *mantra*. The final orgasm will occur when my brains are making mantra."⁸³

Her 'cunt' becomes the animal, taking on the characteristics of an animal who has been hibernating inside and has now been awoken, emerging hungry for what it now craves. The metaphor: 'the clit is a tongue that licks, laps, is tapping like a foot' creates a rhythmic rhyming of the actions. The intertwining of eyes lying above this tongue may read as Acker's notion of seeing being that of an 'eye' not an 'I.' By entering the language of wonder, the clit as the tongue with eyes above it suggests how Lulu experiences seeing new phenomena, not through the literal eye, but through the body and its sensations as eyes, as the surfaces that 'travel through

the world, through our selves, through worlds.'⁸⁴ Her sensations as a sky, which may be considered limitless, in turn suggest that her sensations become open, surrounding her body, at which point, she is unable to talk.

The movement of orgasm implies the mobility of identity. The notion of mantra resembles Acker's conflation of meaning and essence. In 'Against Ordinary Language: The Language of the Body,' (1993), Acker observes how:

In ordinary language, meaning is contextual. Whereas the cry of the beggar means nothing other than what it is; in the city of the beggar, the impossible (as the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* and Heidegger see it) occurs in that meaning and breath become one.⁸⁵

When meaning and breath become one, they no longer oppose one another. Meaning or ordinary language no longer lies outside essence. In an interview with Laurence A. Rickels, Acker speaks of turning toward the body in order to seek new ways of writing, attempting to find a narrative that was not based on control. She became interested in whether 'sitting in the body there was a narrative that was something else,'⁸⁶ questioning what one hears when listening to the body. Through her analysis of bodybuilding, Acker highlights how bodybuilding may reject ordinary language but asserts that it equally constitutes a language, 'a method for understanding and controlling the physical which in this case is also the self.'⁸⁷ She argues that bodybuilding 'can be seen to be about nothing but *failure* [...] always working around failure.'⁸⁸ When Acker undertakes 'negative reps,' she is working the group of muscles beyond their ability to move, until they can no longer move and they fail. She does not want to destroy the muscles but break them to the point at which they can then grow back larger, shocking the body into growth.⁸⁹ Acker questions whether this 'equation between destruction and growth [is] also a formula for art'⁹⁰ where Lulu's onanism can be read as reaching this point of breaking, where language fails her. By reaching this point of failure, of speechless language, the body's rhythms grow, forming a mantra.

The conflation of meaning and essence in this regard occurs through the initial loss of one's language. Through Acker's engagement with Canetti's dream in a foreign place where man unlearns the world's languages, she initially contemplates how one moves toward foreignness, or what is strange and the more she moves toward understanding this, the more she loses her own language: '[t]he small loss of language occurs when I journey to and into my own body.'⁹¹ She questions if the body is foreign to her. The language of the body, through mantra, suggests a return to the body, where the body is no longer foreign as meaning and breath (verbal language and the body) are conflated. Acker states that during bodybuilding, '[i]n this world of the continual repetition of a minimal number of elements, in this aural labyrinth, it is easy to lose one's way. When all is repetition rather than the production of meaning, every path resembles every other path.'⁹² Incidentally, Acker explores the connection between language and bodybuilding, and then in turn language and masturbation, questioning how she may describe a language that resists description, and why it may resist description. During Rickels' interview, Acker reflects:

I've often noticed that when I'm having sex, especially during the movement toward orgasm, I'm having a largely mental affair, images that look as if they can be verbalized, but after it's all over I couldn't tell you what was going on. So I wanted to be able to access that language too.⁹³

Acker notes that a largely mental affair takes place where images, or the imagination, take over and verbal language is resisted. When Lulu reaches the point at which she can no longer talk, 'everything turned white and the waves that were approaching, slowly, steadily, and very strongly, solid, solid, transformed into my blood, then into my bones.' Here images take over what cannot be described through ordinary language. Through imagery, Lulu accesses this language of the body. The form suggests the melting of images into the body, merging the metaphor of waves into Lulu's blood and bones. Meaning and essence are conflated through the use of mantra: 'whatever had been the rhythms of my body inside my body were now rhythms outside. This is the meaning of *mantra*. The final orgasm will occur when my brains

are making mantra.' The body's internal rhythms, or breaths/essences, are conflated with meaning as Lulu's internal rhythms become external rhythms to create a body that is in sync with its breath and actions. The 'final orgasm' occurs when meaning and essence are conjoined. Lulu's body is talking, her breath or body's rhythms find language in imagery and when her brains are making mantra and nothing else, her final orgasm will occur. However, by making mantra, Lulu is not producing meaning but breaking it through the repetition of waves approaching 'slowly, steadily, and very strongly, solid, solid,' which forms the mantra that is intricately linked to breathing. This meditative language is connected to breathing and enacts a conflation of essence and meaning. Acker explains: '[t]he writings I get from masturbation aren't fantasy narratives but are descriptions of architectures, of space shifts, shifting architectures, opening spaces, closing spaces.'⁹⁴ Lulu creates an architecture of internal space that shifts and opens into a labyrinth where there are no longer definitive meanings, or productions of knowledge, but a permitting of a glimpse into the laws that control her body, 'those of change and chance, laws that are barely, if at all, knowable.'⁹⁵ Lulu, through masturbation, experiences the loss of language, she could no longer talk, yet this failure to talk provides the space for the body to talk as a mantra of inside rhythms becoming outside.

Through teaching the sex workers how to masturbate, Lulu teaches them how to access a world beyond ordinary language. The sex workers must learn how to masturbate in order to gain access to these languages of the body beyond the confines of discourses that regulate their bodies, sexualities, and social positionings. They begin to masturbate regularly with the narrative interlacing masturbation with dreaming. The practice of onanism and dreaming intersect. O begins to masturbate and through this she begins to travel by imagining sailors: 'Sailors, who're pirates, journey into nonexistence or *the world of the unfurling rose*.'⁹⁶ In 'Of Other Spaces' (1986) Michel Foucault considers how individuals do not live in a void but 'a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another.'⁹⁷ His interests lie in certain spaces 'that have the curious

property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect.'⁹⁸ Although Foucault does not expand upon this point, he argues that '[t]he ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.'⁹⁹ In other words, ships form spaces that are in relation to all others, reflecting and incorporating them, while at the same time being entirely space-less, as a non-fixed space. The ship is a means of escaping repression and authoritarianism, and therefore any civilization without boats is arguably repressive. Onanism enables O to glimpse at this possibility by imagining sailors and the nonexistence they can freely enter. Although she has yet to imagine herself as a pirate and cannot yet embody what she perhaps still perceives as impossible within the confines of the brothel, onanism creates a space for imagination and for considering alternative lines of flight from the path which she is currently on. The use of a colon rather than full stop may suggest that the 'world of the unfurling rose' remains open to possibilities and new lines of flight or directions. It is not constricted as an enclosed thought but presented as continual with no closing point. Since O imagines sailors, moving and journeying into nonexistence, she arguably envisions a transformation of identity that is no longer fixed, static, and orientated by her relation to capitalist meanings.

In the section titled **'IN A WORLD WITHOUT MEN, IN A WORLD PUNCTURED BY DREAMS'** the narration shifts as Ange and O dream more frequently, yet once their dreams lead them to a world without men, a world outside the brothel, these dreams no longer have a world to puncture. Although masturbation and dreaming provide the catalyst for O and Ange's journey, when they leave sex work Ange states: 'We got rid of our johns. Now our dreams don't mean anything.'¹⁰⁰ The notion of resistance, perceived through dreams, is available to them when they have some form of power to resist. When no longer tethered to the dead world, their dreams no longer mean anything and no longer tell them what to do. If read in proximity to Ahmed's conception of orientation and disorientation, then the space of

the brothel orientates the subjects towards certain objects. While inhabiting the brothel, the continual repetition of the narrative may serve to expose how the lines that direct O and Ange are performative, created by the repetition of these norms and conventions that continue to constrain the sex workers. When they learn how to masturbate and enter languages of the body, this creates a line of flight that alters the repetition of orientation toward a certain direction.

When the subjects begin to masturbate, and in turn begin to dream, this alters the relationship they have to the space of the brothel that once orientated them. Through dreaming, O and Ange go beyond the constraints of ordinary language, accessing a world beyond what language has repressed, which in other words disorientates their positions in space. The possibilities of alternative lines of flight or directions present themselves. However, these possibilities are contingent on the brothel that orientates them. It is not until they become disorientated that they recognise how the brothel orientated them in the first place, yet without the brothel to continue to orientate them, their disorientation (their dreams) holds no meaning. O ultimately concludes: "We can't stay here," [...] "We need to do more than be whores and masturbate."¹⁰¹ Onanism provides access to a world beyond being orientated toward and by spaces inherently tied to gender, yet it is not enough to simply recognise this. Instead, O proclaims a need for mobility, rather than remaining in the dualism between the reality of the dead society and the dreams of potential lines of flight. At this point, the text becomes broken into dialogue between O and Ange as they grapple with the question of how one travels, highlighting the hesitancy and uncertainty experienced when attempting to find new lines of flight.

Travelling begins with the ocean, an image repeatedly linked to masturbation and the body's sensations throughout the text, where there is a spot that plays '[b]y turning, then by moving under itself. It somersaulted; it sent out rays again.'¹⁰² This spot moving under itself, becoming 'this circling of swirling water'¹⁰³ is associated with O's center shivering. Ange proclaims that '[t]his is what traveling is.'¹⁰⁴ Travelling is not presented as a move toward

something, but of movement that is circular. O's center shivers suggesting how travelling is deeply connected to the body moving in and of itself within internal architectures of space, rather than of the body moving in external spaces. O says, '[t]he animal awakes, shivering,'¹⁰⁵ whereby the metaphor of an animal used in Lulu's masturbation is once again evoked here in relation to O travelling. The center of herself, her body, is what is moving and shifting. Rather than the vibrations moving them toward something, orientating them outward toward another space, travelling is considered a movement downwards: 'The vibrations want to move downward. 'Nothing,' they are telling me, 'will happen until all of us go down there. The only way you can wake up, O, is by going down there.'¹⁰⁶ Ange and O cannot remain static but through the disorientation of masturbation, which presents the potential for radical transformation, they recognise the need for action in order to find new paths, yet these new lines of flight are located in the initial shivering of the body. The form suggests how travelling is not linked to external movement as such, but to internal movement where the animal awakes. Nothing will happen until this travel downward occurs, and in order to awake, or to enact resistance to the 'land of the dead' that tethers them toward capitalist touch and relations that restrict their movement, they must travel downward toward the body. Remaining in the dualism between living in the 'dead society' and masturbating, which proffers potential lines of flight, becomes inadequate. The return to/of the body through onanism awakens the animal that shivers internally, transforming the body by shifting and unhinging the body's center from inherently gendered spaces, which is then perceived as travelling.

Queer Touch and the Process of Becoming

In my analysis of Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, I considered the risks of touching insofar as one may be disorientated, or undone, when in relation to another. Such disorientation assists in dismantling 'normative' orientations and a stable relationship between anatomical sex, gender, and sexuality within a monogamous and compulsory heterosexual framework. Here I

extend this idea to suggest that the notion of disorientation is significant in terms of how bodies may transform their orientations. This relation between touch and transformation has the potential to contribute to a progressive future. Social and political change might be aided by transforming the politics of touch in terms of how bodies relate to each other. Through modes of disorientation at the levels of content, theme, form, and language, which break language from its associations and disorientate the subjects from their 'normative' orientations, *Pussy, King of the Pirates* challenges and transgresses social practices that restrict, regulate, and censure bodies. By placing bodies that have previously been made unreachable within reach, Acker's work unveils the significance of disorientation in terms of how one's position in inherently gendered spaces may be transformed by seeking new economies of touch. In doing so, Acker's subjects can be read as resisting rational reality that is premised on a contingency of knowledge inherently structured by society, and in turn, pursuing new orientations of being in relation to others.

When Ange and O begin their journey, the narrative is intersected with the stories of the pirate girls, interweaving the narratives, and tracing their 'lineage' and points of departure into what can be considered 'identities-becoming': identities continually in flux and in the process of becoming. By breaking away from conventional narratives that uphold a linear and time-oriented structure, Acker's counter-hegemonic narratives provide spaces for the liberation of what is institutionally oppressed. Events seemingly occur simultaneously and relate to each other metonymically, through their spaces, rather than temporal placements, in the novel. The repetition of narratives that present both similarities and dissimilarities between the subjects strips the narrative of meaning; the narratives cannot be read linearly or singularly as statically and concretely defining any one subject. I read 'The Pirate Girls' as exemplifying Acker's languages of the body, particularly of flux. The subjects inhabit various spaces, both internal and external. Acker engages with queer touch as an antithesis to capitalist touch. Forms of queer touch within the novel produce new forms of orientation and movement into new spaces

that enable transformation. Through reading the narratives of *Bad Dog* and *Ostracism* in proximity to Ahmed's understanding of sexual orientation, I consider how queer touch reorientates them toward different directions, ultimately leading to the reign of piracy where the subjects access a constant state of flux, 'an indefinite series of identities and transformations' that are continually in the process of becoming. Identity, viewed in this way, is never static, stable nor concrete, yet continually becoming, moving and transforming through these new lines of flight, the interweaving of reality and dreaming, and the disorientation of identity due to the relinquishing of what is familiar and what often orientates identities through institutional oppression.

The narratives of the pirate girls create a textual space of female excess: of what cannot be confined by institutional oppression. The pirate girls, along with the sex workers, can be viewed as appropriations of Ovid's *Propoetides*. The *Propoetides* figure in Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* where their denial of Venus results in the goddess' wrath ensuring that they lose their good names and become the first to prostitute themselves. As they begin to lose their shame, their blood hardens, and only little alterations are required to turn them into stony flints.¹⁰⁷ Colby argues:

Acker restores the corporeality of the *Propoetides* in her appropriation of Ovid's myth. [...] The pirate girls represent all that the male has suppressed in the female and all that a reactionary society fears in female sexual corporality: menstrual blood, discharge, odour and an active female desire as opposed to sexual passivity.¹⁰⁸

The pirate girls inhabit spaces that are inherently gendered. However, instead of learning how to be sexually passive, and institutionally regulated and controlled, within the school the figures grapple with what has been suppressed in the female, revelling in female excesses of masturbation, queer touch and active female desire and pleasure in each other, turning away from reproductive heterosexuality or institutionally proscribed roles. The space of the school inverts the set of relations that it designates in society and instead becomes a space that instigates radical female agency where female excess finds a discourse.

The story of Ostracism ironically implies that the perceived threat of her turning away from reproductive heterosexuality or institutionally proscribed roles is in fact what precipitates her father's decision to send her to an all-girls school where this threat is actualised. Ostracism's father announces that she was to meet his poet friend and his daughter, a young girl who was to be Ostracism's companion, however the young girl had died. The death is relayed in a letter accounting the daughter's last dream, and upon reading this the father declares that it is no longer safe for Ostracism to live with him, but that instead she will be going to school so that she can live with girls.¹⁰⁹ When the poet joins Ostracism and her father for Christmas he relays the story of his daughter's (Bad Dog's) befriending of a girl called Heathcliff and her descent into pleasure, before death:

"Bad Dog told me that every night a big furry animal sniffed at her body. It – he or she – began to pace. Whenever its nostrils grazed her skin, usually her private parts, she felt a sharp, burning sensation which was so brief that it passed away by the time her consciousness registered that it had taken place. The pain returned – she didn't know from where – and grew until it turned into pleasure; the pleasure became so intense that she lost consciousness.

"From then on, my daughter was interested only in physical pleasure; then she felt so much pleasure for so long a time that she forgot her body.

"I told her that she was becoming sick. I was her father. I told her that she was sick. She had become this way because of selfishness. None of us should think only about ourselves.

"But she no longer cared about me. She spent all her time with that friend of hers called Heathcliff.

"I was her father. I could do nothing more."¹¹⁰

The speech marks suggest the framing of this story through the father's lens. The narrative is framed by ordinary language that seeks to repress and control the interpretation. This can be read in proximity to Ahmed's rereading of Freud's study, 'The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman.' Ahmed suggests that Freud's case analysis of female homosexuality can be framed as how the woman belongs to the family and that it is the family who is experiencing a crisis due to her desires for an older woman. The case, therefore, is no longer perceived by Ahmed as an explanation for homosexuality but as a 'family case, as being "about" how family love requires "following" a certain direction, or even having a certain

orientation.'¹¹¹ In this case, therefore, homosexuality is readable not as a threat in and of itself but as 'the threat [...it] poses to the continuation of the family line, as a line of descent.'¹¹² The speech marks around Bad Dog's experience become the father's framing of her queer touch that ultimately suggests a line of descent from the position of the 'straight line' that he wishes to bring his daughter back to. In Ahmed's analysis of Freud's case, the woman, in not assuming the family's ego ideal as her own, is in turn described as *an injury to the father*. According to Ahmed, 'to be "in line" is to direct one's desires toward marriage and reproduction; to direct one's desires toward the reproduction of the family line.'¹¹³ The father's narrative of Bad Dog's descent suggests the anxiety and threat he perceives of his daughter's turn away from him.

The notion of female excess is metaphorically represented through the nightmare of an animal sniffing at the daughter's body. Excess, in this instance, refers to Acker's engagement with Georges Bataille's philosophical conception of societies being organised in order to be productive. These societies, which are organised through the production and consumption of 'useful' things, are homogenous. Subsequently, excessive, or wasteful things are heterogenous elements that society tries to keep under control or exclude.¹¹⁴ Acker's narrative creates space in which these excesses of female pleasure are given value to understandings of identities and their potential for transformation. The image of an animal sniffing, pacing, and grazing Bad Dog's skin can read as the excesses the daughter is currently trying to restrain. However, every night the animal traverses the skin, inscribing the body with the traces of intensity that cannot be constrained. The 'sharp, burning sensation' can suggest the tension between the daughter's positioning in the father's house, and her excesses of pleasure that she is at first attempting to repress. Yet with the loss of consciousness, the animal gains access, the pain growing until it turns to pleasure. In 'Against Ordinary Language: The Language of the Body,' (1993), Acker posits that 'we still live under the sign of Descartes,'¹¹⁵ which is equally the sign of patriarchy. By losing consciousness, the mind is no longer governing the body. Therefore, the body becomes open to its excesses, which in this instance, are the excesses of pleasure that threaten

the confines of women's sexualities as relegated toward reproduction and heterosexuality. This pleasure is so intense that the daughter cannot remain conscious within it.

After this loss of consciousness, Bad Dog is reorientated toward physical pleasure, spending all of her time with Heathcliff. By orientating herself toward queer forms of touch, the daughter turns away from her father. Ahmed, in reference to the notion of touch involving an economy, states that 'Queer orientations are those that put within reach bodies that have been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy.'¹¹⁶ Queer orientations, for Bad Dog, present access to pleasure that resists heteronormative power relations, where bodies that were unreachable are now within reach. The daughter turns away from her father and the patriarchal order he symbolises, reorientating herself toward pleasure. Capitalist touch can be viewed as an economy of touch that regulates who can and cannot be reached, whereby women's bodies are specifically open to men's bodies and not others. By comparison, queer touch presents a move away from this orientation where bodies, made unreachable by conventional genealogy, are now within reach.

Through Bad Dog's encounter with Heathcliff, her body is opened to new orientations and potential lines of flight that are no longer fixed to the rigid narrative her father attempts to enforce. Similar to my argument that queer touch, in Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, dismantles the fixity of binary gender oppositions and the 'normative' assumptions of compulsory heterosexuality, the way in which binary genders may enforce Bad Dog toward particular orientations is in this instance subverted. Bad Dog recalls her last dream before death where '*Heathcliff's cock appeared through the hole and I sucked her off.*'¹¹⁷ The dream suggests that opening her body to queer touch reduces the fixity of gender and sex, creating fluidity of identity as indefinite and in the process of transforming. The italicisation of the dream emphasises the shift between reality and imagination, heightening the way in which the dream functions to disorientate Bad Dog from the restricted regulations of reality. The dreamscape extracts Bad Dog from conventional, normative, and societally restricted ways of relating to

others as the dreamworld enables Bad Dog to enter a space that is no longer constricted by such regulations of rational reality. The artwork of the pirates' map (see Figure 3.1) functions in a similar way as a dreamscape. Maps usually function as orientating devices that direct people toward specific destinations. Yet Acker intersects the text with maps that may function to further disorientate the narrative and in turn the subjects' position in space. There is no path to follow upon the map and no suggestion of a linear direction or definitive destination where x marks the spot. The map provides spaces, rather than locations, such as 'the repository of dreams,' 'The Treasure,' and 'the isle of cats,'¹¹⁸ where the reader cannot assume meaning or connection between each. The map, therefore, may function to disorientate the subjects in 'The Places for Transformations,'¹¹⁹ toward new orientations that move away from the capitalist world. The original dream map 'The Place of Transformations' reveals a far more complex imaginary scape that creates a greater visual dialogue between the spaces (see Figure 3.2). The latitude and longitude of the box titled 'view from inside' aligns with the latitude and longitude of 'Abraham Lincoln's home' and 'the dead novel.' Instead of generating direction, the latitude and longitude connect spaces, revealing the link between viewing the world from inside a box and the dead society. The 'view from inside' is ironically outside of the map's borders, which are marked with a warning: 'The End of All Dreams.' One must remain within the spaces of this marked landscape in order to remain in dreams. The inclusion of 'Instructions' directs the reader to '**go down** to where life isn't understandable' and dive 'naked into the water' in order to emerge as a pirate. The image of water evokes the notion of rebirth. This speaks to Ange and O's dialogue where they recognise the need to 'go down there' in order to instigate change. Travelling downwards is not perceived as directional or external movement, but instead, as internal movement within oneself and within one's imaginary landscape. The intersecting of queer touch and the landscape of dreams and imagination can be read as producing new forms of orientation and movement into new spaces as Bad Dog's body, and relation to other bodies,

is disorientated from spaces inherently tied to gender and is instead opened to the potential for radical transformation.

According to Bad Dog's father: 'she felt so much pleasure for so long a time that she forgot her body.' This can be read as pleasure disorientating the body from gendered orientations as Bad Dog discards and forgets the body fixed to the inscriptions that the law of the father attempts to enforce upon her. After all, it is the father who relays the story, not the daughter. Therefore, according to the father, the daughter becomes so lost in pleasure that she forgets her body: the body that is socially regulated, controlled, and gendered in particular spaces. The father attempts to oppress this by presenting the excess of pleasure as sickness. Bad Dog does not express this pleasure in terms of sickness and therefore does not validate this statement, yet it is the father who tells her and informs her that 'she was becoming sick.' The repetition of 'I was her father' instils this continual attempt to control the narrative and enact authority over the daughter's body. Female excess has often been associated with sickness, particularly hysteria, yet the father suggests that the sickness was due to selfishness. The pleasure appears selfish for it is not within the 'male regime' as a mirroring of phallogentric structures of desire where the female is passive. His daughter's active agency in her own pleasure that is not constructed in relation to a man, is arguably what positions the daughter as sick in her father's narrative. Yet since the daughter turns away from the father, he can do no more. The daughter's death can be read as her inability to live in the dead world that continued to inscribe her body with patriarchal frames of reference. As the daughter became closer to the absence of language; and therefore, perhaps nearer to languages of the body, the father states the more he called doctors in. This exchange of the daughter from the father to the doctors may be read as a way of attempting to bring the daughter back in line, yet the daughter's refusal highlights the resistance to this framing of her narrative. The father upholds patriarchy where 'atrocious lusts,' or female excesses, must be quashed to sustain authority, control and power, or in other words, to maintain the 'straight line.' Yet the continual enforcement of masculinist

narratives arguably results in death, for the daughter cannot live in her excess of pleasure whilst still relegated to the confines of the dead society: the two are unable to coexist.

Ostracism is sent to an all-girls school, which can read as an attempt to maintain her 'straight line' and ensure that she does not step 'out of line' and meet the same fate as the poet's daughter. Yet the school provides the parameters by which Ostracism becomes a girl with 'atrocious lusts' as she enters a space of masturbation, female excess and dreams. She is dislocated from her father's house, the law of the father, and disoriented from what is familiar. She is then relocated to the space of the school in which only girls inhabit. Ostracism is therefore reorientated by this space that is still inherently tied to gender, yet this gendered space is female:

There are only girls in this school, so now I'm thinking about girls all the time.
I can't know what I'm dreaming because my mind is so occupied with wanting
to fuck this girl.
(no date)

The word *fuck* means something, but I don't know what it means in this school. ¹²⁰

When Ostracism is reorientated in the space of the school, she is reorientated toward certain objects and other bodies. By inhabiting the space of the school, what then becomes familiar are girls and her relation to them. She is reorientated towards girls where she cannot know what she is dreaming because of this preoccupation with wanting to 'fuck' a girl. Through this narrative, and the blockage it still presents to dreaming, Acker exposes how the disorientation from a patriarchal landscape of the father's house to the reorientation of the all-girls school does not suggest subversion from the ways in which the body may be regulated and governed. Rather than this space creating a dissolution of power, it is simply a transferral from one form of power to another. However, this disorientation and reorientation toward different objects suggest the initial stage in potential transformation as Ostracism moves further away from capitalist forms of touch. While the word 'fuck' may still mean something, Ostracism has lost what the word meant under the law of the father according to which to 'fuck' suggested

heterosexual intercourse. In the space of the school the word's meaning is dislodged from its dominant discourse and in this sense, Ostracism now wrestles with reorientating herself to what this word means in the context of the school. This suggests Ostracism's initial departure from spaces that have orientated her, where there is now no copy to use as a template to provide direction and the word 'fuck' is opened to the possibility of new directions and orientations.

As the reign of girl piracy begins, to become girl pirates is in other words to become the impossible. In 'Seeing Gender' Acker discusses her desire to be a pirate and that what separated her from piracy 'had something to do with being a girl. With gender. With being in a dead world. So gender had something to do with death. And not with sight, for *to see was to be other than dead*. To see was to be an *eye*, not an *I*.'¹²¹ Acker recognised that the world of her parents was a dead world constructed through gender. In Antigone's story, when about to enter a shop, which is also entering the capitalist system, she proclaims:

I refuse.
I will be ___ instead.
___ something impossible.
I'll be a girl pirate.¹²²

By refusing capitalist structures, Antigone refuses the way in which dead society regulates her body through capitalist forms of touch associated with use-value and exchange-value. Instead, she will become something impossible that refuses enforced social structures and enables transformation. The form suggests the workings of this impossibility as rather than the underline serving as emphasis under a word, it may suggest the underlining of the impossible, the emphasis on the spaces for which the impossible emerges. Colby highlights how impossibility emerges in Acker's work in many forms as a 'counter-term to ideas of political possibility, the logic of conventional language structures, and the power relations implicated by those language structures.'¹²³ The disruption of conventional syntax here suggests the counter-term of conventional language structures, dissolving the power relations these

structures implicate by presenting the underline as a space for which the impossible can emerge.

To talk of gender Acker claims that we must first locate the body, questioning whether it is only material. Referencing Judith Butler's argument that the male/female binary, produced by the phallogentric economy, depends upon the 'feminine' constituting its outside, Acker reiterates Butler's assertion that matter is therefore 'the site at which the feminine is excluded.'¹²⁴ Consequently, through this exclusion, woman becomes the improper, along with what Acker claims is the propertyless. Growing up, Acker states '[w]hen I was a girl, I wanted to do anything but be a girl, for both *girl* and *woman* were the names of nothing.'¹²⁵ Instead, according to Butler, woman becomes the receptacle, that which can be entered but cannot enter. Rather than the body being co-equivalent with materiality, Acker suggests that her 'body might deeply be connected to, if not be, language.'¹²⁶ If language is being, yet there is no entry for woman into language, then Acker observes how she could 'neither have nor make meaning in the world. / I was unspeakable so I ran into the language of others.'¹²⁷ As pirates, the subjects can enact resistance through stealing. If language is being and yet woman is excluded from language, then as pirates the female subjects, who belong nowhere and own nothing, can move through spaces and discourses, running into the language of others and stealing them. In 'Seeing Gender' Acker states: 'I am looking for the body, my body, which exists outside its patriarchal definitions. Of course, that is not possible. But who is any longer interested in the possible?'¹²⁸ If the body does not exist outside its patriarchal definitions, then one must steal the body from those definitions, returning to the body through piracy.

As the figures undertake their hunt for treasure, they journey from social spaces that orientate them toward confined relations shaped through capitalist forms of touch into a flux of continual movement. The subjects journey from spaces that orientate them to continual movement that disorients them. Ahmed suggests that disorientation is vital in creating moments where:

[the] feeling of shattering, or of being shattered, might persist and become a crisis. Or the feeling itself might pass as the ground returns or as we return to the ground. The body might be reoriented if the hand that reaches out finds something to steady an action. Or the hand might reach out and find nothing, and might grasp instead the indeterminacy of air. The body in losing its support might then be lost, undone, thrown.¹²⁹

On the one hand, in moments of disorientation, one can attempt to locate the ground that previously stabilised them, or in other words, the orientation they once had. On the other hand, one may potentially reorientate themselves toward alternative orientations, and therefore, still return to a form of orientation once more. In some cases, one may continue to remain disorientated, which dislocates the body from any one orientation and opens the body to the potentialities of continually seeking new directions. Disorientation does not always result in transformation as the discomfort may be too great and one may seek the comfort of what once orientated them, yet in this instance, when O and Ange hire the pirate girls to go on this quest, O proclaims that 'Something must have been happening to me, or inside me, I guess one's the other, 'cause I could no longer remember how I felt when I was a whore.'¹³⁰ The disorientation of movement dissolves the previous orientation O had when inhabiting the familiar space of the brothel. Her body, dislocated from this space, no longer remembers what it felt like to be 'a whore.' Through piracy, Worthington observes 'these characters assert control over their bodies, their spaces.'¹³¹ This control is unavailable to women, yet by becoming pirates and breaking the law they gain access to it. By entering the 'non-space'¹³² of piracy, O forgets what it felt like when she 'was a whore,' for this discourse loses its meaning. Disorientation, in Ahmed's terms, enables the subjects to shatter their previous orientations, losing, undoing, and throwing away the body's 'normative' orientations enforced by the capitalist world. Instead, by becoming disorientated through the reorientation toward self-touch or queer touch that dismantled the way in which the subjects were initially orientated, the narrative suggests how these subjects may transform as they tread new orientations that no longer follow the lines already carved by others, but form new lines that have not been treaded upon previously.

As the pirate girls, Ange, and O enter '**Into the Strange**,' dreams become vessels of knowledge that are no longer limited or imposed upon by the governance of rationality, but instead, by the irrationality of body knowledge. As the subjects travel further from what once orientated them, decentralising rationality, the way in which their bodies were orientated through spaces inherently tied to gender begins to dissolve. Acker's experimental form offers a counter-hegemonic narrative that subverts and dissolves such power through its destabilizing of the female subjects' positions in heterosexual, patriarchal, and gendered binary male/female dichotomy. Ostracism explains that 'pirates aren't always either male or female.'¹³³ The piracy entails a pirating of bodies, of creating fluidity of gender and sex through the language of flux that presents identity as indefinite and transforming. As the subjects become disorientated, their bodies are no longer constrained by spaces that made specifically gendered orientations more familiar than others. The subjects are now in a state of flux. As men disappear from the narrative, the symbolic superiority of phallogocentrism loses its power. Gender, therefore, becomes destabilised as the orientation toward heterosexual hegemony dissolves. This in turn disorientates the pirate girls' relations to each other whereby sex, or forms of touch, are no longer orientated towards certain objects, repressed by discourses that tether women's sexualities to reproduction, marriage, and heterosexuality. The body, disorientated, now has the potentiality for infinite self-transformation.

By remaining disorientated, a new economy of touch emerges beyond capitalism where forms of touch are no longer orientated by gendered spaces. Acker's narrative disavows the traditional ending for female protagonists, such as marriage or death. In what could be considered the dénouement of *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, Acker equally contests fulfilling a happy ending or conclusion that constitutes the subjects as fully escaping the dead world. When the two parties find the treasure, Silver (one of the pirate girls) says: 'I'd rather go a-pirating,' [...] 'If me and my girls take all this treasure, the reign of girl piracy will stop, and I wouldn't have that happen.'¹³⁴ By engaging with economies of self-touch and queer touch, the pirate

girls move away from heteronormative forms of touch that tend to be linked to capitalism and choose to remain disorientated. Yet Ange and O do not opt to remain disorientated ('Ange and I grabbed all the money we could and got into the rowboat'¹³⁵). O and Ange's decision to take the treasure may read as their decision to become reorientated toward patriarchy and the capitalist system that is based on economic value. Through the differing narratives that diverge between the pirates, and O and Ange's choices, Acker leaves the narrative open to interpretation. The subjects have room to explore all potential possibilities of transforming identity through a return to/of the body and how it inhabits space. In *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, economies of touch manifest in such a way as to suggest a progressive move from capitalist touch toward self-touch that opens into the potentialities of queer touch. The narrative demonstrates how touch may open these subjects to a state of flux. By arguing that these forms of touch present a way of firstly orientating the body towards certain objects in the spaces inhabited by the subjects, and then reorientating and disorientating the subjects towards new lines of flight, the final text in Acker's later trilogy informs an understanding of how interrelated touch may be with enacting resistance to societally constructed identities inherently tied to gendered spaces. *Pussy, King of the Pirates* suggests that certain economies of touch may have the potential to transform identity as the subjects, particularly the pirate girls, remain in a continual process of becoming through accessing a new economy of touch that moves beyond capitalism.

Conclusion

New Orientations

Through critically engaging with the works of Audre Lorde, Anais Nin, Marguerite Duras, Monique Wittig, and Kathy Acker, this thesis has explored the relevance of touch in informing one's orientation toward and away from other bodies, contending that the sense of touch significantly influences one's relation to individual, social, and collective bodies. This research gestures toward the queer nature of touch to resist normative frameworks that gender, racialize and sexualise bodies through oppressive practices. Within these experimental texts, a politics of touch that counters mainstream ideas of sexual relations materialises thematically, contextually, and through the experimental form itself. The experimental techniques employed by these authors open the texts to the possibility of a grammar of touch, or a non-verbal language of touch and sensation that disrupts conventional language. The works chosen for this study engage with experimental techniques that enable the body to materialise in language, whereby the form itself often imitates the body's movements and sensations in tactile relations through the breakdown of conventional grammar, punctuation, and syntax.

By shifting the focus onto the emergence of touch throughout these texts, rather than the emergence of the body, this thesis has not only challenged the way in which bodies have been shaped by society's compulsory heterosexual and monogamous frameworks, but also the way in which these frameworks have shaped what bodies can do: extend, expand, and reach toward and away from each other in tactile relation. The sense of touch has been shaped by the relationship between bodies and social constructs of gender, race, and sexuality, yet these texts reveal that touch resists this shaping and extends further than these frameworks. Through the analysis of how touch functions throughout these texts, I have argued that the theme of touch assists in dismantling the heavily ingrained normalising of a stable relationship between anatomical sex, gender and sexuality in a heterosexual framework. Through the experimental use of language touch is able to emerge as a form of resistance. This thesis has revealed that

tactile relations are capable of resisting individual and social boundaries, and has argued that the sense of touch is significant to contesting the way in which bodies have historically been shaped and orientated toward patriarchally enforced binary modes of relationality. By engaging with Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006), this thesis has critically analysed the way in which touch functions as an 'orientation device' that informs what it means to be in relation to another within these texts. Touch has radical potentialities for transformation through its ability to orientate, reorientate and disorientate the subjects' bodies, and therefore, yields change, as bodies no longer follow the lines that have previously orientated them, but instead envision new orientations.

I explored how touch has its own economy of difference that is initially predicated on mechanisms of societal oppression, via a reading of Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* in proximity to Lorde's essays in *Sister Outsider*, bell hooks' *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* and Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Lorde dismantles patriarchal power from inside the structures of oppression, which does not relocate or reconstruct alternative forms of power, but exposes these mechanisms and disrupts their ability to regulate, control, or restrict Audre's ability to reach toward and touch other bodies. By recognising the significance of difference in how oppression operates through familial, cultural, and social structures, Lorde's epic narrative form at first illuminates the ways in which these mechanisms dictate the extension and shape of bodies in society, and then disrupts how these mechanisms may infiltrate an individual's experience of the world and themselves down to the very level of intimate tactile relations. Through the analysis of the oppressive gaze that figuratively touches Audre, actively censoring the body by rendering it untouchable and even alienated from herself, Lorde's narrative demonstrates the way in which figurative and literal forms of 'shameful' touch orientate bodies toward and away from each other. Although familial, cultural, and social structures attempt to maintain Audre's orientation toward the 'straight line' that is gendered, racialised, and sexualised, the theme of touch gradually materialises within

the text as a site of resistance. Tactile relations exceed societal constructs that are founded on mechanisms of oppression by instigating Audre's stepping 'out of line,' which stresses the significance of touch in provoking change and reorientating bodies toward alternative orientations.

Each chapter has demonstrated that touch, as an 'orientation device,' has the capacity to change, alter, restrict, expand, and extend one's 'bodily horizon.' Writing in the late 1930s and 1950s, Anaïs Nin's diary and fictional texts stress the way in which tactile relations are framed through the available language that is often 'heterosexualised' and structured by notions of monogamy. Nin's writing suggests that compulsory heterosexuality not only informs one's orientation toward the 'straight line' but similarly one's way of being 'out of line,' which in her work remains framed through notions of monogamy, heterosexuality, and gendered binarism. Nin's narratives therefore reveal that being 'out of line' can still undergo 'straightening devices.' Yet even so, whilst these frameworks impact Nin's way of processing and experiencing forms of tactile contact, by reading her narratives as polyamorous, these texts reveal that the relationship between affect, memory, and touch exceeds such social frameworks. Affects, feelings, and emotions instigated by touch, as well as the body's ability to retain and remember such forms of tactile contact, unwittingly queer the 'heterosexualised' framework that Nin attempts to write within. Nin's writing has demonstrated the significance of affect and feelings in informing one's tactile orientation toward or away from certain bodies. The notion of 'tactile memory' and palimpsestic touch revealed the queer temporality of touch to exceed any present moment, suggesting that monogamy is never fully obtainable when the memory of previous experiences of touch are retained upon and within the skin, and these traces of memory can alter any present moment of being in tactile relation to another. The subtle differences in form and style between the published and unpublished diary exposed the editorial incisions that alter punctuation and grammar, and censor the affect of tactile interactions. Yet Nin's affective use of ellipses, underlinings and dashes in the archival material, along with the use of metaphorical

imagery, yields an understanding of the ways in which the affect and memory of touch go beyond the restrictions of conventional language.

The 'affective impoverishment' of Duras' experimental style conversely portrays the significant relationship between touch, affect and memory by demonstrating the extent to which tactile relations are disrupted when trauma, the loss of a previous lover, or the experience of abjection breaks down this relationship. Duras' *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, and *The Malady of Death*, exposed the breakdown of relationality when one's body is rendered figuratively untouchable, due to housing the loss of another. This affective impoverishment arrests what Ahmed refers to as the economy of touch. In Duras' work this economy is disrupted or entirely arrested by the presence of trauma and loss, which interrupts the characters' abilities to extend toward each other in the present and experience tactile contact affectively. Touch, as an encounter with loss, suggests the capacity for tactile contact to arrest the body and threaten its borders. Due to the impoverishment of affective tactile contact, Duras' texts revealed that the gaze takes on a haptic role that enables the characters to still touch back. In language, Duras remarks that women translate from the darkness and unknown. The gaze emerged within the texts as a way of appropriating language, rupturing conventional language's ability to signify. By reading the haptic communication between the characters as conveyors of loss, as well as the gaze as a form of tactile contact, Duras' narratives revealed that touch is always in excess of itself, even when affectively impoverished.

The idea of touch presenting a risk to oneself is illuminated further by close attention to Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, as the text reveals that the subject's skin is not impenetrable to another. Through the experience of disorientation in tactile relation to each other, the subjects in *The Lesbian Body* undo their unified senses of sovereignty. Wittig's analogy of a literary work functioning similarly to that of a Trojan Horse, pulverising outdated and ineffective literary forms, speaks to all of the experimental texts chosen here. The theme of touch materialises throughout the text[s] as an auxiliary Trojan Horse. Wittig's experimental

techniques appropriate the female body from the hierarchical structuring of anatomy, and by doing so, demonstrate the way in which this reconfigures its social relations. Wittig's experimental techniques therefore offer a queer language of touch that dismantles the 'normative' bodily orientations that the female body has often been orientated toward in relation to touch. Wittig's text, as queer experimental writing, disrupts the categories of sex, deconstructing these 'normalised' assumptions by appropriating who has the privilege to touch, what one may touch in another, and how one may touch another. By disrupting the reader's ability to infer meaning through 'normative' modes of understanding, Wittig's text dismantles ineffective and outdated conventions and traditions, and opens the subjects to new ways of being in relation to each other.

There are limitations to the scope of this research. Yet by analysing texts that disrupt conventional language, this thesis demonstrates the relevance of touch in informing bodily orientations and challenging the way in which bodies are shaped societally. This study offers an initial dialogue that could be further extended in research on experimental writing that engages with notions of relationality, and transgender and queer bodies. The capacity of touch to act as a catalyst for transformation is shown most evidently in the analysis of Acker's *Pussy, King of the Pirates*. Acker's experimental techniques conflate meaning and essence in language, which opens *Pussy, King of the Pirates* to a language of sensation that provokes transformation as bodies are no longer tied to binary relationships between anatomical sex, gender, and sexuality. In *Pussy, King of the Pirates*, the notion of 'sensitivity' materialises as a counteraction to 'rigidity,' which is portrayed as the body closing in on itself when sensations are restricted and the body is repositioned toward capitalist forms of touch. Onanism and queer touch evoke the subjects' imaginations, reducing the fixity of gender and sex, and opening the body up to fluidity and an indefinite process of transformation. The subjects are no longer tied to inherently gendered spaces, as through onanism and queer forms of touch they move beyond these spaces into 'non-spaces' of piracy. Through disorientating the subjects from societally

gendered spaces, Acker's text fosters the possibility of moving toward new orientations (non-binary orientations), revealing the way in which touch enacts resistance to stagnant identity constructs. By moving the economy of touch beyond capitalism, *Pussy, King of the Pirates* illustrated that tactile relations have the radical potential to transform identity. The sense of touch does not respect boundaries or social constructs that attempt to frame tactile relations through enforced binary modes of relationality that are predicated on gendered, racialised, and sexualised assumptions. The continual presence of touch is often assumed without recognising its significance. Yet in the contemporary climate, necessary socio-political restrictions on touch and the consequent current absence of touch have foregrounded the disruption this causes to relations, exposing that the importance of this sense is ever more prescient as a mode of communication, transformation, and way of being in relation to oneself, another, and the social world. This thesis opens the discourse of touch to new possibilities, moving such a discourse further by illuminating the significance of tactile contact in individual, social, and collective forms of relationality.

Introduction: Orientations of Touch

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⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 296.

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¹⁰ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, 159.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 158.

¹³ *Ibid.*

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³¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

³² Kennedy-Epstein, 'Introduction: Let Us Combine,' 281.

³³ DeKoven, *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing*, xiv.

³⁴ Berry, *Women's Experimental Writing: Negative Aesthetics and Feminist Critique*, 141.

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- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Ibid. 7.
- ³⁹ Anaïs Nin, *A Spy in the House of Love* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2001), 14.
- ⁴⁰ Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2004), 26.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Claudia Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 10-11.
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Chapter One: The Orientation of Touch

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